



“I Am Here”:
Intersectionality and Integration in the
Experiences of Women Refugees in Berlin

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Graphic on cover page by the author.

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List of Acronyms

BENN	<i>Berlin Entwickelt Neue Nachbarschaften</i> / Berlin Creates New Neighbourhoods
CDU	<i>Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands</i> / Christian Democratic Union of Germany
EU	European Union
GDR	German Democratic Republic
LADS	<i>Landesstelle für Gleichbehandlung – gegen Diskriminierung</i> / Berlin State Office for Equal Treatment and against Discrimination
LeNa	<i>Lebendige Nachbarschaft</i> / Lively Neighbourhood
LGBT	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender
NM	<i>Quartiersmanagement</i> / Neighbourhood Management
NSU	<i>Nationalsozialistischer Untergrund</i> / National Socialist Underground
SPD	<i>Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands</i> / Social Democratic Party of Germany
WANA	West Asia and North Africa

Abstract

This thesis examines the influence of the intersectionality of a group of women refugees in Berlin on their social and spatial integration. It draws on critical geographic discourses around *place*, *home*, and *identity* to re-imagine *integration* as a universal performance of individuals trying to root their translocal networks in a given locale. This definition is found to pose a strong contrast to the more functional conceptualisation promoted by existing integration policies in Germany and Berlin. To understand the effects of this disparity on the individual's experience, this thesis draws on interviews with women refugees as well as participant observations conducted during fieldwork in Berlin. The findings show that the women's considerable agency across the spatial, social, functional, and individual aspects of their integration performances is frequently underestimated. Its recognition, however, underlines the need to reconsider existing definitions of *integration*, *space*, and *place-making*. In addition, it leads to the realisation that a more inclusive approach to integration is required to reduce the different forms of discrimination these women suffer based on their intersectionality.

Keywords: critical geography, feminist geography, integration, intersectionality, home, place, identity

1. Introduction

Vignette 1: We Refugees

...
I am told I have no country now
I am told I am a lie
I am told that modern history books
May forget my name.

We can all be refugees
Sometimes it only takes a day,
Sometimes it only takes a handshake
Or a paper that is signed.
We all came from refugees
Nobody simply just appeared,
Nobody's here without a struggle,
And why should we live in fear
Of the weather or the troubles?
We all came here from somewhere.

– Benjamin Zephaniah (n.d.)

The discourses of the last decades surrounding the topics of immigration and integration have seen the former being securitised (see Huysmans, 2000; Karyotis, 2007) and the latter contested so strongly that no common definition remains (Castles et al., 2001, as cited in Ager & Strang, 2008, p. 167; Robinson, 1998, as cited in Ager & Strang, 2008, p. 167). Today, being a refugee means being ascribed a heavily stigmatised label which consequently exerts enormous influence on all areas of a person's life. Being legally recognised as a refugee may mean safety from the destiny which would have awaited the individual had they not fled but brings with it its own burden: the expectation to integrate. *Integration* is presented both socially and politically as the duty of the refugee while the exact parameters of the desired outcome remain varied and often vague. On the one hand, politicians promote a functional approach through their policies, focusing on the easily quantifiable areas of language proficiency and employment where 'progress' can be tracked through indicators (see Ager & Strang, 2008; Strang & Ager, 2010). On the other hand, the social context of integration is provided by the residents of a given place, usually referred to as a unified 'society', who expect refugees to *integrate* so they will fit *in* with the perceived identity of said place. This process can be of a cooperative, indifferent, or exclusionary nature (see Meier, 2017) but in all scenarios, integration is seen as an act to be performed only by the newcomer, the refugee. This thesis thus sets out to challenge

these commonly held perceptions to create an enhanced understanding of the *doing* of integration.

While the ‘summer of migration’ of 2015, fuelled by the civil war in Syria, has often been labelled a ‘crisis’, it has not been unprecedented in scale for most European countries as the only European Union (EU) Member States registering historically high numbers of refugees were Germany and Sweden (Lucassen, 2018, p. 384). Given Chancellor Angela Merkel’s infamous promise of “*Wir schaffen das*” [We can do this] in August 2015 (see phoenix, 2016), which sent a humanitarian message of open borders to those fleeing their homes and a simultaneous appeal to the German population to face the task of integration with a ‘can do’-attitude, Germany posits an interesting case study in this context. In 2019, the country was the only non-neighbouring state to a current conflict to appear in the global ranking of the five countries hosting the largest refugee populations, tying for fourth place with Sudan with both countries having taken in 1.1 million refugees (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], 2019). Moreover, Germany is home to the largest Syrian population outside of the West Asia-North Africa (WANA) region (Todd, 2019). This is reflected in the statistics of the most common nationalities among first-time asylum applicants in Germany between 2014 and 2018: Syrian citizens form the largest national group (32.8%), followed by Afghans (11.4%) and Iraqis (10.0%) (Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge, 2020, p. 91). While earlier years often saw the arrival of young(er) and male asylum seekers, the makeup of the group has changed, with more women and children being admitted into the country since 2017, often within the framework of family reunifications (Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 2020; Geldermann, 2018).

Despite its long history of receiving migrants, the arrival of guest workers in the Federal Republic since the mid-1950s and the hiring of foreign workers on temporary contracts in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) from the mid-1960s onwards, respectively, did not lead to the development of any integration policies. In fact, the German government only recognised the country as an *Einwanderungsland* [country of immigration] in 1998, eight years after its reunification (Terkessidis, 2017, p. 12). This is highly problematic as, until then, the denial of this recognition by those in power meant that no official provisions existed to accommodate incoming migrants. While educational programmes for all ages would have been needed to provide an opportunity to learn the German language and gain access to the labour market and society, a respective call for the establishment of publicly funded language courses from 1978 was only echoed in 2005 when the so-called *Integrationskurse* [integration courses] became available as part of the German integration system (“Es gab damals”, 2015).

Today, a policy framework exists which aims at structuring the integration processes of migrants, and particularly refugees, at the federal, state, and local levels. In the case of Berlin, these policies even recognise the special requirements of women, particularly of those travelling alone or being affected by violence, who are identified as a “vulnerable group” (Senat von Berlin, n.d., pp. 76-77, 2018, pp. 73-74). A certain determination to avoid the repetition of past mistakes made in the absence of official guidelines thus becomes apparent. But how does this declaration of intent translate into practice? How do women refugees currently experience their everyday lives in Germany? How do they navigate the mandated task of integration? And what are the areas which most significantly structure, enable, and support these processes? These are questions which this thesis aims to provide an answer to by focusing on the stories of settling into a foreign environment and creating a new life, and a new home, told by a group of women refugees from Berlin.

For reasons of readability and conciseness, this thesis generally refers to ‘women refugees’ when talking about the women who participated in this research. However, the interviews conducted for this research include conversations with two women whose applications for asylum had been denied. Within the framework of this thesis, the term ‘refugee’ at times thus goes beyond its legal definition as outlined in the 1951 Refugee Convention¹ to include women asylum seekers. Wherever clarification is needed, an explicit distinction between the two groups is made in the text.

1.1 Societal Relevance

The research conducted for this thesis focuses on women refugees and thereby gives voice to a group which is often overlooked and underestimated in both public and political discourses on integration. As outlined above, the policy framework guiding integration-related measures in Berlin does consider women as a group requiring more specific action. However, this only applies to those who match the above criteria and are subsequently identified as “vulnerable” (Senat von Berlin, n.d., pp. 79-77, 2018, pp. 73-74). Therefore, women refugees who arrive in Berlin with their husbands, children, and/or families are still not accounted for in the wider policy approach. This absence of a concrete consideration of individuals who play an important part in the integration of their families, as their tasks will usually include the creation of a new

¹ According to the 1951 Refugee Convention, Article 1(A)(2), a *refugee* is someone who, “owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it” (UNHCR, 2010, p. 14).

home and the raising of children in a new environment, is problematic. It mirrors the neglect of twentieth century-politics which failed to provide a support structure for the wives of guest workers in the Federal Republic. While social service providers and volunteers have painted in this blind spot by creating projects and activities specifically aimed at women migrants and, in recent years, women refugees, this does not reduce the importance of receiving formal recognition as well as more concrete policy provisions to accommodate the specific needs of women refugees.

This is even more relevant as women approach integration differently to men. While some consider their new environment to offer previously unattainable opportunities for personal development and education, thereby increasing their motivation to learn a new language, complete professional training, and seek employment, others are expected to prioritise their roles as mothers or carers, or choose to uphold their traditional values in the face of the ‘European way of life’, thereby rejecting many policy instruments aimed at what are perceived to be aspects of the male role in private and public life (Ahmad-Ghosh, 2015; Bretl, 2008, pp. 38-40; Espín & Dottolo, 2015, p. 4). Especially for the latter individuals, the transition can prove difficult and complicated, leading to a situation in which women refugees find themselves less likely than their male counterparts to access the labour market and learn German but also more likely than other women in Germany to suffer from mental health conditions (see Brücker et al., 2019).

By providing a platform for a group of women refugees to share their spatial and social experiences of living in Berlin, this thesis aims to form a local and personal perspective on integration. Moreover, these experiences illustrate the agency of the women who overcome adversities daily to create a new home and a better future not only for themselves, but also for the next generation(s). Their stories call into question the prevailing conceptualisations of integration as a quantifiable and steerable process to which refugees must submit themselves to fit *in*. This thesis hence suggests an alternative definition of *integration* which considers the relationship between the individual and place, normalises its performativity by removing the focus on a perceived ‘Other’, and advocates the adoption of a more inclusive mindset and policy approach recognising *integration* as a shared experience.

1.2 Scientific Relevance

Integration has become a much-debated issue not only in the political discourse but also in academic research. This thesis draws on two bodies of academic literature to identify a gap in

the state of the art as well as to form a theoretical framework for the analysis: studies based on single or multiple cases which illustrate certain aspects of integration processes and broader discussion pieces aiming at developing and shaping theory on integration.

First, the case-based literature shows that the local level forms an important tier of integration policy implementation while, at the same time, being the locale where interaction between established residents and refugee newcomers can best be observed (see Alba & Foner, 2017; Amin, 2002; Antonsich, 2018; Biesenkamp & Daphi, 2015; Heringa et al., 2018; Meier, 2017; Peterson, 2017; Platts-Fowler & Robinson, 2015). Moreover, it is at the local level that the newly arrived create their new homes and shape their environment through place-making (see Pemberton & Phillimore, 2018). By focusing on two projects in different neighbourhoods of Berlin, this thesis adds to the existing literature as it provides a new case study of the course of refugee integration in a local context. However, the approach at defining integration chosen here deviates from the ‘traditional’ indicators to create a more personal and holistic perspective which allows an enhanced understanding of the interplay of the private and the public at different spatial levels in the individual’s life.

Second, the last decade has seen a move in the literature to examine integration processes by looking at various indicators which go beyond the traditional focus on employment and language proficiency (see Amit & Blum, 2018, p. 124). The conceptualisation of integration in the literature is thus becoming increasingly comprehensive and considerate of the individual at the core of the process (see Ager & Strang, 2008; Fozdar & Hartley, 2014; Ralph & Staeheli, 2011; Robertson et al., 2016). This thesis builds on this strand in the existing research and provides the perspective of women refugees on integration to add a new layer to this promotion of policy (and conceptual) development. It thereby contributes to a call among scholars for a new kind of integration policies which recognise the diversity among migrants and refugees and aim at accommodating their varied needs (see Raco, 2018).

One important aspect in this regard is gender. However, not only is gender largely absent from the current policy framework, but it is also only rarely studied explicitly in the literature on migration and integration (Espín & Dottolo, 2015, p. 1; Kofman et al., 2015, p. 77; Lenette & Boddy, 2013, p. 73). Moreover, even when women are considered as a separate group, they often are portrayed as victims characterised by a certain passivity or other stereotypical inferior roles (Kofman et al., 2015, p. 77; Pratt & Yeoh, 2003, p. 159), thereby negating their potential as “active agents” (Espín & Dottolo, 2015, p. 11) of their own integration. While the studies referred to here offer valuable insights into the effect of gender on integration in general, they do not provide a more detailed analysis of women’s personal perspectives focusing on refugees

in particular (see Espín & Dottolo, 2015; Hancock & Mobillion, 2019) or beyond a connection to religion (see McMichael, 2002).

Building on the existing literature, this thesis aims to connect the two branches of case-based studies and wider conceptualisations of integration. By providing an insight into how integration is lived by a group of women refugees in Berlin, it deconstructs the division between public and private spaces currently existent in many studies on the concepts of *home*, *belonging*, and *place-making* and subsequently shows how these ideas can be combined to create a gendered understanding of integration through the acknowledgement of the agency of women refugees across different spatial levels.

1.3 Aim of the Research

Based on the above puzzle, this thesis asks: How does the intersectionality of women refugees in Berlin influence their social and spatial performance of integration? To fully explore the different aspects related to this question, the following set of sub-questions structures the approach taken by this thesis:

- How can the concept of *integration* be re-imagined to provide an alternative, more inclusionary approach to the individual's rooting themselves in a place?
- How do these women refugees perform their integration socially and spatially?
- What role do traditionally recognised aspects of integration, such as language proficiency and employment, play in these women refugees' experiences?
- What social and political lessons can be drawn from this alternative conceptualisation of integration?

To answer these questions, this thesis first reviews relevant academic literature and defines the key terms which form the foundation of its theory building before drawing on Doreen Massey's (1994) "global sense of place" (p. 156) to construct an alternative conceptualisation of *integration*, focusing on the individual's rooting of their networks in a place (see Chapter 2). Second, this thesis offers a contextualisation of the case study of Berlin and its respective integration policy framework which aims at structuring the integration processes of refugees from an administrative perspective (see Chapter 3). Third, the methodological approach outlines my role in as well as the different steps of the research process which led to the results presented in this thesis (see Chapter 4). Fourth, the analysis applies this alternative definition of *integration* to present the experiences of a group of women refugees currently living in Berlin concerning the spatial, social, functional, and individual aspects of their integration experience

(see Chapter 5). The subsequent discussion connects these four dimensions and points to the resulting social and political lessons (see Chapter 6). It shows that women possess a strong sense of agency which draws on their intersectionality and often remains overlooked. Moreover, their high levels of mobility and translocal interconnectedness challenge existing conceptualisations of space and place-making. Finally, this thesis concludes that a shift towards a more inclusive approach to integration is needed which normalises this performance and acknowledges the agency as well as the intersectionality of the individual with the aim of reducing discrimination (see Chapter 7).

2. Theoretical Framework: Integrating Concepts

The theoretical framework of this thesis is divided into three parts. The first section provides an overview of the literature which links to the research focus of this thesis. Second, the theoretical framework presents the definitions of key concepts which form the basis of the theoretical outline. Finally, the third part draws on existing literature to outline an alternative conceptualisation of *integration* as a performative act relating to an individual's attempts to reach a sense of belonging by connecting to or creating intra-local networks, and relates this definition to a gendered perspective on the experiences of a group of women refugees in Berlin.

2.1 Literature Review

As outlined in Chapter 1.2, the academic discourse this thesis links into can be divided into two different parts: case study-based explorations of specific aspects of people's integration trajectories, on the one hand, and theory developing pieces trying to better understand integration on a conceptual level, on the other. Within the former group, many studies underline the importance of examining integration at the local or sub-local level (i.e. the neighbourhood). Especially the latter qualifies as a level of analysis as neighbourhoods are thought to constitute the individual's immediate environment and largely shape their everyday experiences. Moreover, they serve as a point of reference for people's feelings of belonging (Antonsich, 2018). The extent to which particularly refugees can feel 'at home' in their new surroundings is found to depend on two main factors: the more practical aspect of housing and the social conditions of interactions with others. Housing has a significant impact on people's ability to settle into a new environment as it is often linked to concerns about safety and security (Carter & Osborne, 2009; Fozdar & Hartley, 2014). As for the social factors, the attitude of other residents towards the settlement of refugees in their neighbourhoods is important and can differ

significantly (Biesenkamp & Daphi, 2015). Lars Meier (2017) identifies three types of reaction documented in the literature: opposition, welcoming enthusiasm, and indifference. These findings point to high levels of dependency of integration processes on context and external factors. However, safety, security, and social interaction influence the individual across the private *and* the public sphere and can determine how a person feels inside of their own home as much as on the train crossing the city on their way to a regular activity. While certainly important at the neighbourhood level, this thesis therefore looks at broadening the spatial scope within which these elements are considered.

Creating opportunities for social interaction, be it at the neighbourhood level or beyond, is a central task for successful integration as it is only through coming into contact with society that newcomers can become a part of it. Scholars agree that communication between different groups influences integration; however, there is no consensus in the literature as to the precise nature of this effect. The validity of the *contact hypothesis*, i.e. the “thesis . . . that the best way to reduce prejudice and promote social integration [is] to bring different groups together” (Valentine, 2008, p. 323), forms the central point of this debate. Some authors argue that sharing a neighbourhood and engaging in common activities from time to time, as well as seeing diversity around suffices to create momentum for acceptance and integration (see, for example, Alba & Foner, 2017; Peterson, 2017). This effect is criticised by others who question, for instance, to what extent these encounters made in public urban spaces effectively reach into people’s private homes and lives (Peters & de Haan, 2011). Furthermore, Ash Amin (2002) points out that fleeting encounters risk the consolidation of prejudices. He introduces the concept of *micropublics* as locales within which different groups can engage meaningfully with one another. Such protected and ordered spaces can take the form of sports clubs, community centres, urban gardens, and other modes of organised interaction where members of different groups are interdependent on one another (Amin, 2002; see also Clayton, 2009). It thus becomes apparent that a bridging of the private and the public may be necessary to create a locale for sustainable interaction between groups.

By applying this argument to the integration of refugees, it seems that local-level projects organised for and by refugees have the potential to enhance their integration processes through meaningfully interacting with other groups (see, for example, Heringa et al., 2018). However, Tatiana Matejskova and Helga Leitner (2011) show that in the case of post-Soviet *Aussiedler* in the Berlin district of Marzahn, such activities have become exclusionary spaces within which only Russian is spoken, thereby fuelling segregation rather than integration. In addition, the encounters made at the community centres in the area do not contribute to the

reduction of stereotypes as they remain individualised: the impressions are linked to singular group members rather than the whole group (ibid.). Hence, this limiting factor usually associated with the contact hypothesis seems to potentially apply to micropublics as well, depending on the configuration of their specific parameters. This echoes the above context-dependency of integration as similar policies can lead to different outcomes depending on the neighbourhood within which they are implemented (Platts-Fowler & Robinson, 2015).

As for the second group of studies, one often-discussed conceptual framework of integration which aims to “provide a coherent conceptual structure for considering, from a normative perspective, what constitutes the key components of integration” (Ager & Strang, 2008, p. 167) based on the experience of practitioners is the work by Alastair Ager and Alison Strang (2008). While the authors admit that basic factors such as employment, housing, education and health still serve as the foundation for integration, they also add more detailed aspects, namely social connections (i.e. bridging, bonding, and linking social capital), knowledge of language and culture, as well as safety and stability to create a more comprehensive picture (see Ager & Strang, 2008, p. 170 for an overview). Especially the latter element is reflected by Farida Fozdar and Lisa Hartley (2014) who find that home, as a place of stability, constancy, and security, is at the core of refugees’ feeling of belonging and successful settling into a new environment (see also Ralph & Staeheli, 2011; Robertson et al., 2016). These examples illustrate an increasing sensitisation to consider integration not only as a macro concept which needs to be managed at the societal level, but also as a process with a strong focus on the micro level. Jenny Phillimore and Lisa Goodson (2008) echo this call that such a move towards understanding integration from an individual’s perspective is needed as “[o]nly through exploring refugees’ experiences of integration over time can we begin to understand the ways in which the process operates and the interactions between functional indicators and the harder to measure dimensions such as the social” (p. 322).

By thinking of integration as a largely individual experience, the literature draws attention to differences in how a person’s identity shapes this process. In the context of gender, for instance, women have been found to navigate their integration processes differently to men (Bretl, 2008, pp. 38-40; Brücker et al., 2019). Nevertheless, their experiences remain understudied and underrepresented in the wider discourse on integration (Espín & Dottolo, 2015, p. 1; Lenette & Boddy, 2013, p. 73). Moreover, especially for Muslim women, the victimisation of women in the integration discourse (see Espín & Dottolo, 2015, p. 11; Kofman et al., 2015, p. 77; Pratt & Yeoh, 2003, p. 159) has potentially dangerous consequences: on the one hand, they are victimised as submissive sufferers of a strict religious code of conduct; on

the other, they are securitised in the wider public discourse, discriminated against, and even violently attacked by members of the (host) society (Hancock & Mobillion, 2019; Listerborn, 2016, p. 261). Due to their perceived weaker position, they thus turn into doubly victimised individuals. However, while the studies referred to here provide valuable and important insights into the effect of gender on integration in general, they do not provide a more detailed analysis of women's personal perspectives focusing on refugees in particular (see, for example, Espín & Dottolo, 2015; Hancock & Mobillion, 2019) or beyond a connection to religion (see, for example, McMichael, 2002).

This thesis aims to feed into both sides of the academic discourse by first developing an enhanced theoretical framework which focuses on the individual experience of doing integration before examining the stories of women refugees' integration journeys across two different Berlin neighbourhoods. It thus approaches integration from the perspective of the individual and illustrates their interaction with the place within which they find themselves. Thereby, this thesis bridges the divide between the private and public spheres which is often upheld in public and academic discourses and offers a feminist, gendered perspective on integration which accredits women with the agency they possess and show in varied, nuanced ways.

2.2 Defining the Key Terms

Due to its linking of state-, local-, and individual-level research foci, this thesis touches upon a broad range of existing literature and merges these findings to form an alternative framework providing a gendered perspective on refugee integration. However, before delving into the theory building in Chapter 2.3, it is important to identify, define, and discuss a number of key terms.

2.2.1 Identity

A prominent way to express commonalities and differences among individuals and groups is through identity. Generally, *identity* can be defined as “a social category that an individual member either takes a special pride in or views as a more or less unchangeable and socially consequential attribute” (Fearon & Laitin, 2000, p. 848). A debate exists among scholars of the primordial (see, for example, Kaplan, 1993) and the constructivist (see, for example, Fearon & Laitin, 2000; Oberschall, 2000; Sen, 2006) strands concerning the nature of these social categories. This thesis follows the latter tradition and argues that, rather than a universal given,

the categorisation into ‘Self’ and ‘Other’ underlying identity-formation is a social construct. By identifying themselves and others with, or against, an existing group, individuals actively determine and shape their identities. People are likely to choose categories which trigger a feeling of belonging, a concept further explored below (see Chapter 2.2.6). However, there are limits to this self-identification, as Amartya Sen (2006) remarks, “Our freedom to assert our personal identities can sometimes be extraordinarily limited in the eyes of others, no matter how we see ourselves” (p. 6). When applied to the context of this thesis, this shows how the label ‘refugee’ can be forced on a person as this is the social category their host society considers them to be a part of. Concurrently, it becomes potentially impossible for these individuals to move beyond this label and to re-invent themselves as the stigma of being an outsider will remain.

Such limitations of the individual’s identification due to the conceptions others hold of them are further restricted by the linguistic ability to label preconceived categories, as “[w]e are interpreted by social means; the language we have for what is most intimately our own is already given to us from elsewhere” (Reddy & Butler, 2004, p. 116). Therefore, when being ascribed a label such as ‘refugee’ by others, the individual not only loses their ability to define *which* category they would rather identify with but their choices of identities are also limited by previous discourses of which the current array of labelled identities is the outcome.

Nevertheless, it is important to recognise that even a social category as politically and socially salient as ‘refugee’ does not constitute an individual’s complete identity. Rather, the individual is formed by a multitude of identities in the form of many different affiliations with various social categories. Depending on the context, one identity might be considered more important than others as a result of either personal choice or external situational factors (Sen, 2006, pp. 19, 25-26). Consequently, identities are always in flux, adapting to the environment the individual finds themselves in. How different identities interact under changing circumstances can be explained by the concept of intersectionality defined below.

2.2.2 Intersectionality

The idea of *intersectionality* builds on the above finding that an individual possesses multiple identities and draws attention to cross-cutting commonalities between groups divided along the lines of gender and ethnicity, “thereby challenging the assumption that there exist essential categories of subjects whose ‘mixing’ can be planned for and socially ordered” (Raco, 2018, p. 151). The concept is inextricably linked to the feminist tradition as related research focuses on

the effect which different identities have on the lives of women (see, for example, Espín & Dottolo, 2015, p. 4; Lenette & Boddy, 2013, p. 74; Valentine, 2007). Coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw and originating in legal studies, *intersectionality* previously referred to “the interconnections and interdependence of race with other categories” (Valentine, 2007, p. 12), using the intersection between gender and race as a prime example (see, for example, Crenshaw, 1991). However, the terminology evolved over time to become applicable in a broader context, thereby arguably losing some of its original vehemence, and now has come to be defined as “the way in which any particular individual stands at the crossroads of multiple groups” (Minow, 1997, p. 38, as cited in Valentine, 2007, p. 12).

Importantly, the concept “acknowledges the compound effect of interconnected issues such as gender, age, socio-economic status or religion, as opposed to aggregating them” (Lenette & Boddy, 2013, p. 74). The different identities are thus not assumed to be additive, piling disadvantages unto a ‘neutral base state’ (see Valentine, 2007, p. 13). Instead, as outlined in the section above, identities are conceptualised as fluid, context-dependent social categories; consequently, intersectionality, too, is situational and dependent on underlying power dynamics. It results from the individual’s simultaneous experiencing of their different identities, interacting at any given moment to a degree which makes these social categories inseparable and hence impossible to analyse individually (Valentine, 2007, pp. 12-13).

When considering the application of intersectionality in research, it becomes apparent that the overarching aim is to show that “relevant identities are never that of ‘a woman’ but a woman of a certain class, ethnicity, age, religion and migration history” (Espín, 2015, p. 38). For instance, Muslim women in Tehran, Iran, are found to express their diversity in opposition to the stereotypically unified image of their group in society (Bagheri, 2019), thereby showcasing their intersectionality. On the other hand, research shows that non-white, non-middle-class women are often subsumed under the broader female categorisation in discourses about safety in urban public spaces in Western countries (Listerborn, 2016, p. 252). This is highly problematic as their experiences go unnoticed although they often are much more likely to be the target of violent attacks, such as in the case of Muslim women in France (see Hancock & Mobillion, 2019). Therefore, considering intersectionality and its underlying power relations is essential, especially when listening to or analysing the life stories of women who belong to minority groups of any kind.

In the context of immigration and integration, intersectionality provides a valuable perspective since not only gender, but also other social categories, such as ethnicity and class, influence the integration trajectories of individuals (Espín & Dottolo, 2015, p. 11; Frazier, 2019,

pp. 3-4; Pinkster, 2016, p. 874; Ralph & Staeheli, 2011, p. 520). For this thesis, this perspective constitutes an important addition to the theoretical framework as it helps to illustrate the various identities which influence and shape women refugees' experiences of life in Berlin across different spatial levels. Especially being identified as belonging to the categories 'woman' and 'refugee' can help individuals to access public services and support, such as language courses (see Chapter 3 for a more detailed account of the policy framework for integration in Berlin). Since an identification with these identities is not always the individual's personal choice, this can therefore create difficult situations in which a predominantly negatively perceived label becomes a key factor in accessing help and successfully navigating one's daily life (see Ludwig, 2016).

At the same time, the effect of these social markers can potentially also pose a concrete danger to the individual: It seems that openly displayed xenophobia and racism are on the rise in Germany and people categorised by others as 'foreigners', 'Muslims' and/or 'refugees' are subjected to direct and indirect systemic and individual discrimination (Antidiskriminierungsstelle des Bundes, 2016, 2020; Nier, 2018; Sachverständigenrat deutscher Stiftungen für Integration und Migration, Forschungsbereich, 2018). In its most extreme form, this hatred of the constructed and perceived 'Other' serves as a motive for violent and sometimes lethal attacks, such as the multitude of attacks on refugee accommodation facilities across Germany, ranging from material damage to arson (see Blickle et al., 2015; "Zahl der Anschläge", 2019), as well as the crimes committed by the right-wing terrorist group *NSU* between 1996 and 2011 (see Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 2013) and the mass shooting in Hanau on 19 February, 2020 (see "Entsetzen, Schock und Trauer", 2020). Therefore, the examination of how the individual's experienced intersectionality interacts with the current policy framework as well as with society in Berlin is an important and timely undertaking.

2.2.3 Gender

Since this thesis focuses on the relation between intersectionality and refugee integration, it is important to define *gender* in this context for which this thesis draws on the work of Judith Butler. In *Gender Trouble*, she presents *gender* as a "performative" concept (Butler, 1999, p. 30). As such, "gender is always a doing" (p. 33) which sustains the very identities it is thought to determine. Importantly, for gender to create the illusion of a stable identity, this doing "requires a performance that is repeated" (p. 178). This performativity works within a given set

of political power structures which hide the performativity of gender itself and instead present it as a given category of identity:

Because there is neither an “essence” that gender expresses or externalizes nor an objective ideal to which gender aspires, and because gender is not a fact, the various acts of gender create the idea of gender, and without those acts, there would be no gender at all. Gender is, thus, a construction that regularly conceals its genesis; the tacit collective agreement to perform, produce, and sustain discrete and polar genders as cultural fictions is obscured by the credibility of those productions – and the punishments that attend not agreeing to believe in them; the construction “compels” our belief in its necessity and naturalness. (Butler, 1999, p. 178)

Building on this argument, the feminist tradition considers gender to be something fluid rather than a static binary categorisation (Bagheri, 2019, p. 309). Butler supports this interpretation as to her, “neither the social determinism view nor the classical liberal one” (Reddy & Butler, 2004, p. 119) apply.

When thinking of gender in the context of geography and space, it is seen to relate to its environment in two essential ways:

Gender is spatial. First, . . . [w]hile mobility and public space have been traditionally associated with male/masculinity, women have recently challenged the concepts of passivity and private sphere, often associated with female/femininity, and innovatively appropriated and navigated through the public spaces in urban areas. Second, how we interpret gender directly depends on the geographical locations. Indeed, gender can be socially, politically, and geographically (re/de) constructed. (Bagheri, 2019, pp. 309-310; for the latter aspect see Kusek & Smiley, 2014, p. 161).

Concerning the first part of this argument, Elizabeth Wilson (1991, as cited in Massey, 1994, pp. 167, 171) seconds the finding that women have been found to show agency and mobility in urban areas which defy the traditional conceptualisation of femininity and are difficult to control, thereby threatening the power dynamics of the patriarchy and exhibiting lower levels of fear towards the highly dynamic environment of big cities. Meanwhile, Doreen Massey (1994) echoes the second claim by stating “that gender relations vary over space” (p. 178). She finds that these differences can even be found “between quite closely related ‘local cultures’” (ibid.) and that this “undermines those arguments . . . which rely on attributions of characteristics as ‘natural’ to men and women” (ibid.).

This spatial conceptualisation of gender provides an interesting angle for the theory-building as well as the analysis below. On the one hand, since the social construction of gender

is highly context-dependent, there likely are discrepancies to be found in the discourses structuring genders and their attributive roles between the environment within which the women refugees were socialised and their current surroundings. These differences may pose a challenge for the individual's identity formation. On the other hand, this thesis places a strong focus on examining how different spatial levels interact and intertwine in these women's experiences of everyday life. The aim is to deconstruct the abovementioned divide between a female ('private') and a male ('public') space and to underline that women possess agency across this perceived spatial barrier as they actively, and successfully, pursue opportunities in both realms. Here, this thesis builds on arguments presented by Gillian Rose (1993), among others, who not only presents a critique of the perceiving of private space as 'female', but also echoes the calls by Feminists of Colour to acknowledge that the commonly accepted division between the 'private' and the 'public', especially with regard to "the analytical concept of reproduction[,] has been interpreted through the lens of white bourgeois cultural values" (Chapter 6, The Similarities of Women's Reproductive Labour, The Specifics of Solidarity section).

2.2.4 Place

In geographical research, there are few terms as widely discussed, defined, and applied as *place* which refers to "how we make the world meaningful and the way we experience the world. Place, at a basic level, is space invested with meaning in the context of power" (Cresswell, 2015, p. 19). This meaning, however, is not static or fixed. Instead, contemporary research defines *place* as "fluid and shifting" (Torkington, 2012, p. 75), "as process and as inter-connection (across social and biophysical spheres)" (Carter et al., 2007, p. 757). This connection also finds expression in the linking of locales to wider contexts, even to global dimensions, thereby making "places . . . always already hybrid" (Massey, 1995, p. 183). In fact, Massey (1994) considers places to be "processes" (p. 155) which "do not have to have boundaries in the sense of divisions which frame simple enclosures" (ibid.) and which, furthermore, "do not have single, unique 'identities'" but instead "are full of internal conflicts" (ibid.). Finally, she opposes the view that there is such a thing as an 'unspoilt', 'true', or even 'original' place identity and argues that such conceptualisations of the 'true nature' of places are linked to an imaginary, 'ideal' place identity which likely never existed, at least not in the recent past (1995, pp. 183, 186). Nevertheless, places do possess a certain specificity which "is continually reproduced, but it is not a specificity which results from some long, internalized history" (1994, p. 155). Based on these properties, Massey (1994) formulates her concept of "a global sense of place" (p. 156) which is further discussed in Chapter 2.3.1.

Due to the key role that power dynamics play in the experiencing of place, the concept is inextricably linked to factors influencing the power landscape, such as race, ethnicity, and class (Raco, 2018, p. 151), although it seems suitable to add gender to this list too, since it shares a context-dependent and power-shaping, or rather -shaped, classification. As a result of the interaction of these different factors, place produces a feeling of “ontic security – a sense of being that is recognised and valued in society” (Hoffstaedter, 2014, p. 877). For refugees, however, this can turn into “ontic insecurity” (ibid.) as they find themselves in a situation in which they potentially are not “recognised and valued” (ibid.) by societal structures in their new environment and thus experience their surroundings as an unsafe place providing little stability. It is thus within the context of specific places that people are socially defined as insiders and outsiders, as those who belong and those who are strangers. This shows that “place is not merely a setting in which social life unfolds, but also a medium through which social relations are produced and reproduced” (Platts-Fowler & Robinson, 2015, p. 478). However, social relations and identities can also interact with and shape place, and one of the ways in which this process manifests itself is a phenomenon defined below as ‘place-making’ (see Chapter 2.2.7). As put forth by Edward W. Soja (2008), among others, in calling for a ‘spatial turn’, the relationship between place and the social should thus be conceptualised as reciprocal since both have the potential to shape one another (p. 256).

2.2.5 Home

Before moving on to discussing the interaction between the individual and public space, this section highlights the relationship between people and private space. The notion of *home* has been linked to many different conceptualisations in geographical research (see Fozdar & Hartley, 2014, pp. 148-149). Fundamentally, it comprises two different aspects: a spatial locale and a transcendent emotional bond. Mark Holton and Mark Riley (2016) refer to both levels in their “definition of home as both a physical, material, space as well as a place of meaning to emphasize how much work goes in to making a ‘house’ a ‘home’” (p. 626). Consequently, “home must be conceptualised as both dynamic and moored in order to reflect the complexity and ambivalence that makes it such a tricky and slippery concept” (Ralph & Staeheli, 2011, p. 518). In both cases, however, referring to something or somewhere as ‘home’ always carries a relational and relative quality: home can only be defined by comparing locales and/or feelings; home thus becomes home because other places and/or bonds do not fulfil the relevant criteria (Skey, 2011, p. 237).

In the context of forced migration, *home* possesses slightly different qualities. On the one hand, it “is conceptualized as a mobile anchor that provides stability in the often unstable world of . . . refugees” (McMichael, 2002, p. 172). It therefore loses its deeply rooted, spatial characteristic to some extent and instead turns into something “plurilocal” (Rouse, 1991, p.8, as cited in McMichael, 2002, p. 172) which accompanies refugees on their journey across countries: “[H]ome comes to be found in a routine set of practices, a repetition of habitual interactions, in styles of dress and address, in memories and myths, in stories carried around in one’s head” (McMichael, 2002, p. 172). In her study of women refugees in the city of Melbourne, Australia, Celia McMichael (2002) finds these aspects to be true of Islam since the religion as well as its associated traditions and rituals serve as a ‘home’ for these women. On the other hand, home can also be lost in the process of migration, especially when people are forced to leave a place. There usually are certain objects which create a sense of familiarity, which are of great personal value, and/or which are essential for living one’s traditions. If these objects have to be left behind, home will likely feel far away, even if customs, stories, and memories are still present as “[t]he loss of objects is the loss of home” (Savaş, 2014, p. 189).

Similarly to the notion of place, home is linked to one’s feeling of security. The familiarity and stability associated with it are assumed to provide safety for the individual, as outlined by Fozdar and Hartley (2014):

One’s house becomes a home, providing ontological security, when it is a place of constancy (materially and socially), where day-to-day routines are performed, where people feel in control of their lives, and where it provides a secure base within which identities can be constructed . . . (p. 150)

While the aspect of security seems central to the creation of a ‘home’, Michael Skey (2011) points to a prominent critique of the feminist tradition that “the domestic home has often been used to sustain unequal gender and class relations” (p. 235). When talking about this topic, this thesis therefore aims to consider to what extent the place or emotional bond referred to as ‘home’ actually provides a safe space for the person labelling it as such. This is not necessarily the case since such a reference should primarily be seen as an expression of a feeling of *belonging*, an idea further outlined in the next section.

2.2.6 Belonging

Belonging is a relational concept and can be defined “as the affective relationship between individuals and their environment” (Hoekstra & Pinkster, 2019, p. 224). It is linked to the idea

of *home* as both form a connection between identity and place (Gilmartin & Migge, 2015, p. 90; Ralph & Staeheli, 2011, p. 523). However, unlike *home*, *belonging* is largely based on social connections and thereby necessarily triggers a debate about group membership and acceptance in society (Ralph & Staeheli, 2011, p. 523). Whereas a home can be chosen and declared by an individual based on their personal feelings of attachment, whether they belong to their place of choice is determined by the social forces and actors surrounding them. The concept is thus highly dependent on external factors and limits the individual's agency; this is especially relevant in the case of (forced) migrants:

Belonging thus incorporates the subjective feeling that one's identity is 'at home' in a place, but also the awareness of how social relations and categories position individuals and members of social groups. In this process, the construction of sameness and difference work together in order to position migrants as belonging or not to home. (Ralph & Staeheli, 2011, p. 524)

The 'Self'/'Other' divide underlying identity formation hence finds expression in the declaration of who does, and who does not, belong. Consequently, it seems reasonable to assume that a neighbourhood which reflects the presence of a specific (forced) migrant community will provide a more accepting environment for people belonging to this group to both feel at home as well as be seen to belong in such a place. Therefore, the process of place-making outlined below represents an important step in (forced) migrants' processes of establishing themselves in their new environments and is inextricably linked to their experience of creating a home.

2.2.7 (Migrant) Place-making

As places are not static, *place-making* too is "a fluid and complex process" (Breek et al., 2018, p. 909). It describes the interaction between the individual, or a group of individuals, and a place, linking this process "with belonging, meaning, attachment, inclusiveness and community" (Fincher et al., 2016, p. 518). In the framework of this thesis, however, the focus is on *migrant place-making*. This more specific term refers to how "an immigrant group is able to imprint a place with its own identity" (Kaplan & Chacko, 2015, p. 132). More specifically, it is "a way for migrants to forge and assert a collective identity amongst host populations, and particularly when faced with issues of discrimination" (Pemberton & Phillimore, 2018, p. 734). This "collective identity" is then "articulated through expressions such as monument building and festivals" (p. 736).

Of course, place-making is likely to be experienced differently by labour migrants who choose to settle in a new place, such as the EU migrants from Central Europe in Simon Pemberton and Jenny Phillimore's (2018) study of two UK neighbourhoods, when compared to the experience of refugees who have less influence on the determination of their place of settlement. Nevertheless, David H. Kaplan and Elizabeth Chacko (2015) state that "[p]lace-making may result from duress but is often considered to be an affirmative activity as a neighborhood becomes stamped with the qualities of a particular group" (p. 132). Therefore, the process of settling into a new environment and imbuing these places with one's own identity can have a positive impact on the lives of refugees as they find themselves asserted by a successful place-making process. As outlined above, this, in turn, will likely facilitate their home-building efforts and support integration.

2.3 Doing Integration: Conceptualising the Rooting in Place

Integration is a commonly used term as well as a heavily contested concept for which many different definitions exist. With this multitude of conceptualisations come a multitude of frameworks and indicators with the aim to make integration palpable and, ultimately, measurable. These varied ways of thinking about integration, however, are, at times, also contradictory (Castles et al., 2001, as cited in Ager & Strang, 2008, p. 167; Robinson, 1998, as cited in Ager & Strang, 2008, p. 167). Therefore, this thesis builds on existing conceptualisations of integration as well as on the different concepts of place, home, place-making, and identity outlined above (see Chapters 2.2.1, 2.2.4, 2.2.5, 2.2.7) to form a new theoretical framework for analysis which can provide the basis for a more gendered spatial approach to the individual's doing of integration.

2.3.1 (Re-)Defining *Integration*

Massey's (1994) "global sense of place" (p. 156) serves as the starting point of this theorisation of integration as she states: "what gives place its specificity is not some long internalized history but the fact that it is constructed out of a particular constellation of social relations, meeting and weaving together at a particular locus" (p. 154). Individuals finding themselves in a given location each bring with them different networks which spread beyond this particular locale. Therefore, a place comes to be defined "precisely through the particularity of linkage *to* that 'outside' which is therefore itself part of what constitutes the place" (p. 155, emphasis in original). According to Massey, it is thus sufficient for an individual to be located in a specific

place to be considered part of this place and to have the possibility to shape, and be shaped by, the locale. Consequently, on a spatial level, integration is not required to create a bond between the individual and place. The so-created state might be imagined as a ‘hub’ within which many individuals are located who all hold multiple connections to the outside which, in turn, shape this hub. However, for this place to thrive socially, a local network between the individuals must develop *within* the hub. On a social level, the individual thus needs to take action to create a sense of belonging; this, in turn, will allow for a rooting of their network in place and serve as a peg stabilising the tent represented by their outside connections which reach beyond the hub.

Integration conceptualised this way therefore describes the process of rooting oneself in a place, of making a home and a place in one’s location. Importantly, there are two main characteristics defining this act: First, integrating is an action undertaken by *every* individual present in a given place regardless of their personal history or background. To keep the internal network intact and to even create new connection within, all individuals within the hub must actively work towards interacting with each other. Of course, it is unrealistic to expect a person to create connections with every single other human being present in a given place, but in order to establish a feeling of belonging, smaller hub-internal networks are needed. These can either be pre-existing or newly developed but in either case, they must be maintained through social (inter)actions. This continuous act of reaffirming one’s sense of belonging through fostering intra-hub networks embodies the second main characteristic of *integration*: it is a life-long action and thus a *doing*, not unlike Butler’s (1999) conceptualisation of *gender*. Despite its linguistic implications, *integration*, thought of in this way, should be seen as a personal journey, as a process rather than an end state (see, for example, Ager & Strang, 2008; Platts-Fowler & Robinson, 2015; Strang & Ager, 2010). By acknowledging this, the concept illustrates the agency held by the individual who is integrating, a detail further discussed below.

This definition of *integration* responds to criticisms of other conceptualisations and aims to provide an alternative, more inclusive understanding. To begin with, the very idea that newcomers must integrate into a given society has been contested by Willem Schinkel (2017, 2018) and Mark Terkessidis (2017), among others. Schinkel (2018) argues that *integration*, in a more traditional sense, racializes the individual expected to undergo this process due to its exclusionary focus on those who are considered to be external to the unit or society they are meant to integrate into:

Lack of immigrant integration thus turns out to have to do with the being of immigrants, and the resulting picture of course ends up pitting ‘society’ over against individuals that are racialized in particular ways, because *in order for their being to affect their integration, that being must be somehow problematic*. (Schinkel, 2018, p. 3, emphasis added)

So what we end up with is a concept, and a practice, that is thoroughly purified both from notions of class and of race In order to understand this, one must consider. . . *dispensation of integration*. This is what is ‘granted’, so to speak, to white citizens. And this is the ‘positive’ way of describing the fact that these *do not appear on the integration monitor*. It is the active way to describe an omission that is consequential, and which *already does all the work of separating* those who are considered to make up ‘society’ and those who do not and who thus need to further ‘integrate’. (Schinkel, 2018, p. 4, emphasis in original)

While using the same terminology, this thesis conceptualises *integration* rather differently and significantly less exclusionary. It thus points to the importance of rooting one’s network in a place regardless of one’s nationality or ethnicity. As outlined above, this further implies that integration does not “[start] from the very first moment of arrival in a new country” (Strang & Ager, 2010, p. 595) but that it is an act performed by every individual who finds themselves in a given locale. Importantly, changing one’s location will lead to an adaptation of one’s doing of integration since the local parameters and the social layout of the new ‘hub’ will differ. Therefore, while being a newcomer to a place undeniably implies that the rooting of one’s network will consume more time and energy in the beginning, this applies to *every* newcomer, not just to those belonging to groups commonly featured in societal and political discourse and subjected to integration policies.

Nevertheless, by focusing on the integration experiences of women refugees, this thesis arguably feeds into Schinkel’s (2018) critique that the academic discourse (unintentionally) feeds into the above racist divisions as “those who are included in research constitute a perfect negative image of who are included in ‘society’” (p. 4). While his argument certainly holds true in some contexts, the reason for choosing to focus this research on women refugees was not motivated by the impression that this group constitutes a clearly perceived ‘Other’. Instead, as shown by the analysis below (see Chapter 5), the individuals who participated in the research for this thesis show a significant sense of agency and are forming strong bonds of belonging in their new place of living. However, their voices often remain unheard in the wider societal discourse due to patriarchal and racist structures within the ‘hubs’ they inhabit and are a part of. Therefore, dedicating this research project to presenting their individual approaches to doing integration is one small step towards raising awareness and, ultimately, changing the structures

which are muting people such as these participants. The effect is thus intended to be emancipatory rather than discriminatory.

2.3.2 Describing Performativity

This section outlines how this doing of integration can be conceptualised across different local contexts, specifically in the case of women refugees, based on a criticism of the work of Kaplan and Chacko (2015). While they do not share the same conceptualisation of integration as a performative act promoted in this thesis per se, their essay nevertheless sheds light on the rooting process of people who are settling into a new place after immigrating there from abroad. The two authors create a direct link between the individual and their spatial environment as with integration, “the question becomes how well the immigrant senses that he or she is indeed ‘home’ and the extent to which he or she can shape this new home to reflect his or her own sensibilities” (p. 129). To them, the local context significantly influences “[h]ow immigrants make their lives and how they incorporate into the local society” (p. 131) because “[a]lthough immigration policies determine how easily and successfully immigrants can enter and incorporate into a country, immigrants settle in particular cities or towns within the national unit” (ibid.). The authors thus seem to detect a difference between the national policy framework and the social reality of lives lived within a local context which echoes the importance of the intra-place interactions described above.

At the same time, however, the two dynamics which, according to Kaplan and Chacko (2015), most strongly influence the process of settling-in are *transnationalism*, on the one hand, and *integration* and *assimilation*, on the other (p. 131). While the former refers to ties to other countries or, in the case of *translocalism*, other “cities or other subnational localities” (ibid.), the latter assumes that “each entering group must contend with varied socio-cultural structures and opportunities, leading to segmented assimilation” (p. 132). In the example of immigrants to the United States “who hail from the West Indies or Sub-Saharan Africa[, these people] are more likely to gradually assimilate into the African-American community – not necessarily because that is their preference but because that is how American society structures these opportunities” (ibid.). Despite their insistence that local context matters and shapes the social aspects of life much more than national policies, the authors thus focus on dynamics at the level of the nation state. *Translocalism* is seen as “a form of transnational linkage” (p. 131), neglecting the fact that people, especially immigrants and even more particularly refugees who are often forced by the authorities to move around *within* their new country of residence, as shown, for instance, by the interviews conducted for this thesis (see Chapter 5.1), form

intranational translocal networks. This becomes even more relevant if neighbourhoods serve as the unit of analysis since movement between neighbourhoods in large cities can potentially also be seen as an expression of growing translocal networks. These networks, then, cover the city but, in turn, influence each neighbourhood as individuals located in these respective locales are connected to these translocal webs which serve as external links defining the places into which they reach. “[S]egmented assimilation” (Kaplan & Chacko, 2015, p. 132), on the other hand, seems to be assumed to take place largely identically within the same country as people are shown their place in society “[b]y virtue of their race, ethnicity, and class” (ibid.), raising the question of how this can be the case when the outcome of the integration process is simultaneously claimed to “be dramatically different depending on the local milieu” (p. 131).

Leaving this contradiction aside, Kaplan and Chacko (2015) present three different possibilities of how the newcomers “create uniquely local lives” (p. 132). First, in what should be regarded as a best-case scenario, there is the option of “place-making” (ibid.). Second, immigrants may be subjected to “further stigmatization and discrimination” (ibid.) in the case of “place victimisation” which refers to a local context impeding immigrants’ chances to successfully navigate their integration journeys (ibid.). And third, when “find[ing] themselves in milieus that provide much opportunity along with a number of unexpected psychological and material impediments” (ibid.), immigrants can experience “an uneasy accommodation to place” (ibid.). However, it is unclear how these concepts can be distinguished from one another as they ultimately all refer to scenarios in which immigrants are placed in a local context which seems to determine their integration trajectories and negatively affects their lives, ranging from stark discrimination and exclusion (place victimisation) to the manifestation of their own identities (place-making), potentially fuelled by “duress” (ibid.), with no clear indication of this process having a positive impact on people’s rooting in place.

In fact, the three options of interaction with place are effectively merely manifestations of national frameworks and societal structures at the local level: Assimilation and segregation are expected to significantly shape the outcome of integration processes in local contexts (Kaplan & Chacko, 2015, pp. 131-132). This conceptualisation of how immigrants can settle into a new environment leaves little room for the agency of the individual. Rather, it gives much power to extralocal factors which are expected to pre-condition the power dynamics shaping the places in question. Immigrants’ capabilities to create new structures which will see the identities of everyone affected by them evolve are touched upon by Kaplan and Chacko (2015) in discussing the concepts of *diaspora* and *hybridity*, the latter “refer[ring] to how immigrant groups subtly change their culture as they move into a new context” (p. 134). However, even

when incorporating these dynamics, it seems that the authors assume for change to only take place among immigrant groups. This perception is, of course, based on the assumption that integration necessarily requires assimilation and, in Kaplan and Chacko's (2015) line of argument, this seems to imply that although the local context (somehow) matters, newcomers will ultimately have to adapt to (national) standards, be they political or social, if integration is to take place.

There are, however, a number of dynamics which remain unaccounted for. First, while local policies may not be able to adjust naturalisation or other legal procedures covered under national law, they can nevertheless significantly shape the local context within which people perform their integration: A willingness of policymakers to listen to different groups, account for specific needs, and provide opportunities and access to public services for those who are denied this right by national guidelines can go a long way, as shown by the example of Berlin (see Chapter 3). It is thus important to consider provisions beyond (and below) the national level. Importantly, local policies are ultimately shaped by local actors who not only exist in the political arena but also form part of social networks within these places. These networks can be willing to open up to newcomers beyond any measures envisaged by policies at all tiers of government, such as in the case of the many *Willkommensinitiativen* [welcoming initiatives] which were created by civil society actors across Germany during, and in the aftermath of, the 'summer of migration' (Bendel et al., 2019, p. 12; Speth, 2018, p. 9). However, these networks may also be very critical of newcomers and close themselves off against outsiders, sometimes showing aggressive and violent behaviour towards these groups, such as in the case of repeated attacks on group accommodation for refugees in Germany (Blickle et al., 2015; "Zahl der Anschläge", 2019). Often, these two opposites even form part of the same local networks (see, for example, Aumüller et al., 2015, p. 8; Bellinghausen, 2018; "Mehrere Großdemonstrationen geplant", 2018; Preuß, 2016). A person's doing of integration therefore really does depend on the local structures and the individuals who form these networks, making it a highly individual and often non-linear process (see Platts-Fowler & Robinson, 2015, p. 487).

In addition to these criticisms, one central dimension which has been neglected so far is the incorporation of *home* and sub-local spatial levels. While Kaplan and Chacko (2015) reference the idea of 'home' multiple times, the concept and its deeper meaning for the individual remain undefined and abstract. As they are very explicit in labelling the spatial units considered in their theory (see, for example, p. 136), it becomes clear that their conceptualisation of *home* does not require engaging with the experiences of immigrants in their private spheres. However, as outlined in the definition of the term above, *home* refers to

something deeply personal which requires the consideration of the individual's private space. This thesis therefore argues for an enhanced perspective of the performativity of integration which manifests itself across different spatial levels. Such an adjustment is relevant, especially in the context of achieving a *gendered* approach to the doing of integration by refugees, for a number of reasons.

To begin with, it is not sufficient for the individual to be able to imprint a public place with their identity in an act of place-making if there is no secure private space within (close proximity to) this place for them to live in. While place-making may create a sense of belonging in a wider context, it is a home, in one of its many forms, which is needed to enable a person to fully anchor themselves in their new environment. Hence, finding (or creating) a safe space of one's own is a crucial step in the process of successfully rooting oneself in a place. It is thus not without reason that the accommodation of refugees features prominently on the agenda of many social actors and has been included in official provisions (for Berlin, see Senat von Berlin, n.d., 2016, 2018). Moreover, especially when looking at the social experiences of a person, it can prove useful to extend the analytical gaze beyond a place's public arena. As outlined above, interactions between the newly arrived and more established members of locales take place at, or below, the neighbourhood level. Importantly, the medium of micropublics, which provide a safe space for the interaction between different groups within a given framework, form an intermediate spatial level as they are protected, yet open to the public to join (see Amin, 2002). By merely looking at interactions at the neighbourhood level, an analysis of integration hence risks overlooking many social interactions with the potential of strengthening social networks by creating bonds and bridges across groups (see Ager & Strang, 2008; Strang & Ager, 2010).

In addition, the consideration of sub-local, private space is a necessary extension to achieve a gendered perspective on integration. While, traditionally, productivity has been assigned to public space, carrying male connotations, which left the unpaid (care) work conducted by women in their private spaces, often within their own homes, go unrecognised (Acker, 2004, pp. 19-20; Bagheri, 2019, p. 309), this work is not only economically relevant but, in the context of women refugees and this thesis, potentially shapes the performance of integration of whole families. By taking on household chores and, where relevant, child rearing, women can support other family members who, in exchange, have more time to take language classes, complete educational programmes or seek employment. At the same time, the interaction with other people, both from within and beyond their families, during or as a result of such work constitutes progress in the creation of or the connecting to intra-local networks by these women which are not reflected on any record of public activity. Furthermore, it is on the

personal level that gender roles are perceived and performed, making the private an important addition to gain a gendered perspective on the individual's position and actions. To fully understand the life experiences of women refugees, it is therefore essential to incorporate sub-local spatial levels into the analytical framework.

To summarise, this thesis advocates an intersectional perspective on the doing of integration by women refugees which considers their social and spatial experiences. The theoretical framework for the analysis sees integration as the performative act of rooting one's network which is a necessary condition of settling into a given place. Integration is a social phenomenon influenced by various external factors which shape the locale within which it takes place, such as national and local policies and guidelines as well as the individual's socio-spatial environment. To a large part, however, integration depends on the agency of the individual, which here refers to the women refugees interviewed for this thesis. As a personal experience, integration permeates all aspects of life. To fully grasp its form and implications, it is therefore necessary to include both public *and* private spatial levels in its analysis. This step also aims to remove any sexist bias which places a stronger emphasis on actions and achievements in the public sphere and thereby diminishes the value of any work done 'behind the scenes'. Only by considering all areas of personal life is it possible to fully understand how women refugees navigate the intense work of rooting themselves and creating a sense of belonging through an intra-local network that is integration.

3. Contextualisation: Integration Polic(y)ing in Germany and Berlin

The two sub-sections of this chapter present the historical and political context within which this thesis is positioned. Firstly, this chapter illustrates how *immigration* and *integration* have (not) been considered in social and political debates in Germany. In addition, it outlines the legal statuses currently available to asylum seekers in the Federal Republic. Secondly, this chapter considers the current policy framework for integration in Berlin and critically assesses its main arguments.

3.1 Citizenship and the Immigration Discourse in Germany

Germany provides an interesting case study in the context of integration as the country was rather late in developing its first national integration policy framework. Despite bilateral agreements aimed at recruiting guest workers from Italy, Greece, Spain, Turkey, Morocco,

South Korea, Portugal, Tunisia and former Yugoslavia to support the growing German economy in the 1960s and 1970s, the government in its official approach always denied that the Federal Republic of Germany was a country of immigration (Brodmerkel, 2017; Klusmeyer, 1993, pp. 85-86). This reluctance to acknowledge the need for national policies defining the structures in support of the process of settling in for the many immigrants living in the country is founded in the conceptualisation of German citizenship. With its link to *ius sanguinis* [right of the blood], “the [German] sense of nationhood has been historically based on a community of descent” (Ager & Strang, 2008, p. 174). Consequently, the integration of newcomers into this national community was for a long time seen as irrelevant, if not impossible.²

The history of integration in the German Democratic Republic echoes this marginalisation of immigrants. To compensate the shrinking of its labour force due to its citizens moving (and fleeing) to the Federal Republic of Germany, during the mid-1960s, the GDR government started to engage in hiring foreign workers based on bilateral contracts with other socialist countries, namely Poland, Hungary, Cuba, Mozambique and Vietnam (Pürckhauer & Lorenz, 2019). Unlike the guest workers in the Federal Republic, however, these people were subjected to a strict set of contractual rules which not only outlined their duties as a worker but also prohibited their families joining them and set out a largely isolated, socially segregated living environment during their temporary stay in the GDR (Bade & Oltmer, 2005). Their rights were thus heavily curtailed, and their presence largely hidden from most of GDR society (ibid.). Finally, over the course of its existence, the GDR did welcome refugees, the majority of whom fled from Greece, Spain, and Chile. However, their numbers were significantly lower than those of refugees welcomed to the Federal Republic over the same period (ibid.). At the time of German Reunification in 1989, only a few refugees remained in the GDR while many foreign workers, whose temporary contracts had expired, had returned to their home countries (or did so shortly after) (Pürckhauer & Lorenz, 2019). Overall, the legacy of the GDR thus cannot be considered to provide a more inclusive approach to integration compared to the denial of immigration still present in Germany for almost a decade after its reunification.

This sentiment of exclusivity is still reflected in expressions which underline the inherent ‘Otherness’ of those coming to Germany from abroad. For example, a prominent term in integration politics is “the oxymoronic phrase ‘unsere ausländische[n] Mitbürger’ – ‘our

² While German citizenship laws adhered to the idea of *ius sanguinis* many years, a reform which took effect in 2000 now allows for children born in Germany to non-German parents to be granted German citizenship through *ius soli* [right of the soil] under certain conditions (see Bundesministerium des Innern, für Bau und Heimat, n.d.).

foreign fellow citizens” (Brubaker, 2001, p. 538). In addition, mainstream media (as well as officials) frequently report on crimes motivated by *Rassismus* [racism] as cases of *Fremdenfeindlichkeit* [xenophobia], thereby indicating that those who fall victim to these attacks are foreigners rather than members of German society (Neue deutsche Medienmacher, n.d.; Schwarz, 2019). Such a (more) conscious approach to immigration and integration has been absent from mainstream reporting for a long time; this lack of differentiation arguably contributed to the ways in which German society saw refugees as one uniform group and was hesitant to interact with, or in some cases even openly hostile towards these newcomers (Aumüller, 2008, p. 147; Aumüller et al., 2015, p. 14; Bretl, 2008, p. 43). The effects of the long tradition of “ethno-cultural political exclusion” (Faist, 1995, as cited in Ager & Strang, 2008, p. 174) thus appear to run deep even today as German society is trying to deconstruct some of its deepest ‘us/them’-divisions.

While national-level politics were slow to acknowledge and join the discourse on integration, the local level, in the absence of national guidelines, recognised the need for policy frameworks and recognition already in the 1990s (Baringhorst, 2000, p. 168). Municipalities, neighbourhoods, and civil society organisations were thus central actors in the field of integration in Germany who have retained their importance even after national integration policies were introduced. Another factor which strengthens the role of local level actors is the German federal system which causes responsibilities to be distributed across different tiers of government. In the context of the integration of refugees, this division of tasks sees the legal procedures regarding the asylum claims being processed by federal authorities while the *Länder* [states] oversee the provision of accommodation and basic services. This differs in Berlin where the additional step of passing on the execution of this task to the local level is skipped and, instead, is dealt with at state level (Aumüller, 2015, pp. 21-22). Since the city is a *Stadtstaat* [city state], however, this is merely a provision of practicality – the local level remains central to the execution and application of integration policies. Linking this back to the theoretical framework outlined in Chapter 2.3, the importance of the local context for the integration of refugees is mirrored in the German policy framework which delegates much agency to local actors. Hence, both conceptually and administratively, local matters.

In terms of the legal status of a person applying for asylum, there are three different possibilities: First, if accepted, the individual receives legal recognition as a refugee and an *Aufenthaltserlaubnis* [residence permit] of one to three years. Here, a distinction is made between the ‘regular’ refugee status and the so-called *subsidiärer Schutz* [subsidiary protection]. While the former refers to the protection of the individual under the Geneva

Convention, the latter extends this protection under the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms to individuals threatened by capital punishment, torture, and warlike conflicts (Habbe, 2018). Second, the application for asylum can be rejected but if it is deemed impossible for the person to be deported to their home country at this point in time, they can receive a *Duldung* [exceptional leave to remain]. There are numerous reasons accepted for delaying a deportation, for instance the individual being unfit to travel or their home country being deemed unsafe. However, the *Duldung* is usually only given for a short interval and thus needs to be renewed regularly. Moreover, as soon as the reason for the delay ceases to exist, the individual still faces deportation (Judith & Robinson, 2020). Third, if no reason for a delay exists to begin with, a person whose application for asylum has been rejected is automatically ordered to leave Germany (Flüchtlingsrat Niedersachsen e.V., n.d.). The women interviewed for this thesis all fall into the first two categories (see Table 2). Their stories show that whether someone is fully recognised as a refugee, granted *subsidiärer Schutz* or living with a *Duldung* has a significant impact on their integration (see Chapter 5). The legal procedure thus places labels on people which strongly influence their opportunities and rights in Germany.

Overall, the status of asylum seekers has been strengthened after the Federal Constitutional Court ruled in 2012 that asylum seekers should be granted “the possibility to maintain interpersonal relationships and a minimal degree of participation in social, cultural and political life” (Bundesverfassungsgericht, 2012, 64). Following this decision by the Court, municipalities as well as different *Länder* and the Federal Government have started to create additional measures accessible for asylum seekers. In Berlin, this has resulted in the *Landesregierung* [Land Government] introducing their own language classes for asylum seekers (vhs – die Berliner Volkshochschulen, n.d.). In addition, the labour market was, at least theoretically, opened to asylum seekers although access to (legal) employment remains problematic (Aumüller, 2015, pp. 30, 80). However, also the integration measures offered for those whose legal status has been approved are not without their problems. The *Integrationskurse* “have been made mandatory for all unemployed migrants under the threat of a cut to their benefits” (Matejskova & Leitner, 2011, p. 718) and are largely aimed at achieving labour market integration of their attendees (ibid.) While the national policy framework and its local extensions are aiming to become more inclusionary, the measures thus adhere to a traditional conceptualisation of integration which considers language proficiency and employment to be its cornerstones (ibid.).

3.2 Integration Polic(y)ing in Berlin

Despite its pronounced history as a destination of immigration, it was not until 2005 that the city of Berlin established its first comprehensive guideline on integration, the so-called *Integrationskonzept* with the title “*Vielfalt fördern – Zusammenhalt stärken*” [Fostering diversity – strengthening solidarity]. A reviewed version, placing a stronger focus on participation in the newly recovered Berlin labour market, followed in 2007 (Bretl, 2008, p. 29). Today, there are two local policy frameworks which aim to influence the integration journeys of refugees in Berlin: the 2016 *Masterplan Integration und Sicherheit* [Master Plan Integration and Security] and the 2018 *Angekommen in Berlin: Gesamtkonzept zur Integration und Partizipation Geflüchteter* [Here in Berlin: Comprehensive Programme for the Integration and Participation of Refugees] (Senat von Berlin, n.d., 2016, 2018). The following section looks at these two documents and critically assesses their main points.

The first element which becomes apparent is the difference in framing the issue of integration in the title of the two policy documents. The 2016 *Masterplan* links integration to security and thereby feeds into an established discourse which securitises integration and immigration across Europe (see Huysmans, 2000; Karyotis, 2007). Further, the title of the *Masterplan* seems rather general despite the framework’s specific focus on refugees (see Senat von Berlin, 2016). However, there is a rather obvious shift in the naming of the 2018 *Gesamtkonzept*. The latest addition to the Berlin policy framework not only draws attention to the concept of integration in the context of participation, it also names its target group explicitly. This notable change can likely be credited to a change in government: While the Governing Mayor of Berlin, Michael Müller, member of the Social Democratic Party (SPD), has been in office since 2014, the *Senat* [Senate], the executive body similar to a cabinet of the *Land* of Berlin, was run by a coalition of the SPD and the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) until late 2016. After the state elections of 18 September, 2016, the majority shifted and is currently formed by a coalition of the SPD with the Greens and The Left (Senatskanzlei, n.d.). The two documents were thus drafted by two different governments, the first of which had a much more conservative approach; a fact which manifests itself not only in the titles but also in the content of the two frameworks.

The chapter titles of the documents already provide a good indication of how the situation and the corresponding needs of those involved have changed as well as which aspects seemed most important to policymakers. The first three areas of action in both frameworks concern the arrival and accommodation of refugees as well as their provision with health services. While the remaining chapters largely cover the same topics, the *Masterplan* appears

more straightforward and limited in its approach compared to the *Gesamtkonzept* which provides a more detailed overview of and a more comprehensive approach to the integration processes of refugees (see Senat von Berlin, n.d., 2016, 2018). In the case of education, for instance, the *Masterplan* is largely limited to different possibilities of accessing language courses and, for children, the German education system (see Senat von Berlin, 2016, p. 36). The *Gesamtkonzept*, on the other hand, extensively considers the potential of furthering the education of refugees through apprenticeships and university studies, in addition to the German language courses and *Integrationskurse* (see Senat von Berlin, n.d., 2018). It further includes the provision of new opportunities linked to the cultural sector and sports to a much larger extent than the *Masterplan* (ibid.).

The matter of security can be found in both documents. However, the securitisation of migration is mixed with a neoliberal focus in the *Masterplan* as the first paragraph of the section on security reads:

Berliners, just like people moving to Berlin and guests from all around the world, have the justified wish to live safely in our city. A safe Berlin is at the same time a prerequisite for the settling and staying of companies and therefore for the enabling of integration through labour. (Senat von Berlin, 2016, p. 63; translation by the author)

By contrast, the same section of the *Gesamtkonzept* states:

The Senate . . . intends to ensure the security of all refugees, take violence prevention measures to protect refugees and combat radicalisation of refugees through projects and measures. In addition, projects for promoting democracy will be strengthened and further developed through the *Landesstelle für Gleichbehandlung – gegen Diskriminierung* (LADS). (Senat von Berlin, n.d., p. 68, emphasis in original)

Thus, the tone and focus have changed and the *Gesamtkonzept* now regards its target group to a much larger extent as individuals whose integration process features a significant social aspect in addition to labour market integration and language proficiency. While the wording of the policies looks somewhat promising, their content, however, especially when it comes to the consideration of different needs and the translation of policies into action, is considerably more problematic.

On the one hand, many steps presented by the *Gesamtkonzept* under the headline of “further need for action” (for example, Senat von Berlin, n.d., p. 20, 2018, p. 14) were already pointed out in the *Masterplan*. Consequently, it seems that over the two years which passed in

between the publications of these documents, many projects remained untouched, or insufficiently processed by local authorities and other stakeholders. Most crucially, this seems to hold true for the development of an administrative guideline for dealing with vulnerable individuals (see Senat von Berlin, n.d., p. 20, 2016, p. 12, 2018, p. 14) and the provision of language assistance in the interaction between refugees and government agencies as well as the health care system (see Senat von Berlin, n.d., pp. 32, 35, 74, 2016, pp. 17, 20-22, 2018, pp. 26, 29-30, 71-72). Although the latter aspect has seen some improvement around health care (Senat von Berlin, n.d., p. 31, 2018, pp. 24-25), a statement by seven Berlin *Willkommensinitiativen* criticises this progress as still being insufficient (Braun et al., 2018, p. 10). On the other hand, the recommendations made by the *Gesamtkonzept* often remain vague, which is particularly problematic in the case of encouraging social and political participation of refugees in Berlin (see Senat von Berlin, n.d., pp. 65-68, 2018, pp. 61-65), as the following example shows,

In order to be able to better include refugees' perspectives, knowledge and concerns, and to inform the target group of offers and work methods, cooperation between the administration and refugee organisations and migrants, volunteer organisations, religious and world view communities, or associations must be expanded. (Senat von Berlin, n.d., p. 68)

This is one sentence among many meant to outline the “[n]eed for action” (Senat von Berlin, n.d., p. 66) which consists of a declaration of intent without providing any concrete measures aimed at the achievement of this goal. In addition, the framework lacks any clear set of goals, indicators, or any other means to hold actors accountable (for a similar criticism, see also Braun et al., 2018, p. 3). Finally, the *Gesamtkonzept* does not allocate any additional funding to these efforts and instead proposes a potential internal reshuffling of financing priorities to accommodate demand (Senat von Berlin, n.d., p. 81, 2018, p. 78). This, however, is criticised by practitioners as especially in the area of social and cultural projects, planning security is low due to limited and/or insufficient funding available (Braun et al., 2018, p. 3; L. Gilmozzi, personal communication, 24 October, 2019; S. Strätz, personal communication, 23 October, 2019).

With regard to the fostering of feelings of belonging and home-making processes, the *Gesamtkonzept* mentions three programmes which have been implemented across Berlin since 2015, 2018 and 2017 respectively: *Willkommenskultur* [Culture of Welcome], *LeNa – Lebendige Nachbarschaften* [Lively Neighbourhoods] and *BENN – Berlin Entwickelt Neue Nachbarschaften* [Berlin Creates New Neighbourhoods] (Senat von Berlin, n.d., p. 59, 2018, p.

55). The first, *Willkommenskultur*, aims to support existing community centres in the creation of interconnected and informed local communities and neighbourhoods by encouraging contact and exchange between ‘locals’ and newly-arrived refugees (Senatsverwaltung für Integration, Arbeit und Soziales, n.d., 2018b). It is complemented by the second programme, *LeNa*, which is designed to strengthen the intercultural work of these community centres, to encourage new and deeper cooperation between different actors linked to refugees and migrants, and to empower the latter groups to become active members of their neighbourhoods (Senatsverwaltung für Integration, Arbeit und Soziales, n.d., 2018a). The third element of this initiative to improve social cohesion at the neighbourhood-level is *BENN* which targets twenty areas around collective accommodation facilities for refugees (Senatsverwaltung für Stadtentwicklung und Wohnen, n.d.a). Through its core strategies of community building between ‘locals’ and refugees and the empowerment of the newly arrived, *BENN* intends to create new ways for interaction and (political) participation in a socially strong neighbourhood (ibid.). While these three programmes are important cornerstones of social cohesion and exchange at the local and sub-local levels in Berlin, their geographical focus on areas with community centres and collective accommodation facilities is not exhaustive. Combined with their recent implementation – *LeNa* and *BENN* projects had been initiated only one to two years before the research for this thesis was conducted –, the long-term effects of these measures, including their impact on the individual’s life after moving out of collective accommodation and into a flat of their own, thus remain to be seen.

Since this thesis focuses on women refugees, it is important to mention that both policy documents identify women, especially in the case of those travelling alone or with a history of trauma or abuse, as a group in need of special protection (see Senat von Berlin, n.d., pp. 76-77, 2016, p. 68, 2018, p. 74). Consequently, however, the *Gesamtkonzept* mentions women almost exclusively in this context – exceptions being when talking about the ‘traditional’ areas of integration: employment and higher education (see Senat von Berlin, n.d., pp. 52-58, 64, 2018, pp. 48, 50-54, 60-61). The only time women are not victimised, almost by default, in this way is linked to the presentation of a mentoring programme to enhance political participation (see Senat von Berlin, n.d., p. 73, 2018, p. 70). In conclusion, while there has been some significant improvement in the polic(y)ing landscape surrounding integration in Berlin over the past years, the current approach still falls short of mirroring the potential currently seen as well as provide a comprehensive and concrete vision of what could be achieved in the near future. Most importantly, however, the agency of (women) refugees themselves, while being hinted at in

some contexts, remains a neglected aspect, portraying *integration* as a process provided and structured for these newcomers by state and society.

4. Methodological Approach

This chapter outlines the methodology employed in this thesis research. It first presents my thoughts on how my position as a researcher has impacted the research process. Second, it justifies the case selection by explaining why the two organisations and their projects in Berlin were chosen. Finally, the chapter reports on the process of data collection during a period of fieldwork before finally listing the different steps of the analysis of this data.

4.1 Positionality

Similarly to any other (inter)action, research too is heavily influenced by the social and political context within which it is undertaken. One important variable which “sets the tone of the research, affecting its course and its outcomes” (Chacko, 2004, p. 52) is the positionality of the researcher, i.e. the way in which this person relates to the subject(s) of their analysis, and this thesis is no exception to this rule. As a young white German woman who is currently pursuing her university education in an international setting, my life looks and feels very differently to that of any of the women refugees I interviewed for this thesis. I have never been forced to flee my home, to leave my ‘old’ life behind and start building a ‘new’ one in a place which is completely foreign to me. I have never experienced oppression or prosecution based on my politics, religion, or sexual orientation. I have never lost loved ones to a conflict in the country I consider home. Even regarding life in Berlin, our experiences would have differed significantly: As a native speaker, I never faced any difficulties navigating various aspects of my daily routine in the city. And although I have, of course, noticed the societal and political shift which took place in Germany over the last couple of years (Decker, 2018; “Deutschland versucht”, 2018), I did not have to feel the consequences of this development on a personal level; the effects of the rise of racism, xenophobia, and right-wing political propaganda never negatively impacted my everyday life. Given these circumstances, my positionality might almost seem to become an obstacle which could obstruct the research process.

Nevertheless, I made the conscious decision that writing about the integration performances of women refugees would naturally entail interacting with this group rather than restricting myself to interviewing social workers and other professionals who are in contact

with women refugees on a regular basis. This decision was largely based on the conceptualisation of integration developed in the theoretical framework (see Chapter 2.3.1). On the one hand, this definition stresses the importance of seeing integration as an inherently individual performance. It therefore seemed logical to talk to women refugees directly to gain insight into their personal, subjective experiences of life in Berlin. On the other hand, the definition also indicates that integration aims at forming new or connecting to pre-existing intra-place networks; dialogue and exchange thus become central elements of its performance. Despite the potentially difficult power dynamics, I thus concluded that it was my duty, both from an academic and a human point of view, to engage with the people I wanted to write about. Finally, from a practical perspective, being a woman myself gave me access to activities and safe spaces which a man would not have been granted and hence made this research possible.

My initial discomfort and nervousness were based on not knowing how the women would react to the interviews. Some of the questions I used to ‘set the scene’ and ease into a conversation on their journey to and life in Germany, such as “How long have you been in Germany for?”, may have been asked by the authorities as well. Although I formulated them with a different purpose in mind, I could not exclude that the women might be reminded of the interviews which formed part of the procedures they underwent as part of their applications for asylum. I tried to be mindful of the fact that even unassuming questions could be triggering in ways I did not anticipate because they linked to challenging private issues close to the women’s hearts. Whenever this occurred, I provided space for the women to talk about these problems. One participant (Alya) remarked that she had felt rather “heavy” before the meeting but getting the story ‘off her chest’ made her feel better. In many cases, the women remarked that they had “talked too much” (Kyra) or were worried about having “wasted” my time (Layla). These examples illustrate the importance of deep and meaningful interaction between different members of society as well as of the valuing of people’s experiences for everyone’s integration performances.

Finally, the issue of racism was one aspect in particular with which I struggled during the interviews. Whenever the women talked about the different forms of racism they encountered in their daily lives, their references to ‘the German people’ and ‘German society’ (Abeba, Alya, Bushra, Layla, and Naima) implied my complicity in these acts. However, these statements were often accompanied by gestures or clarifications that the women did not, in fact, consider me part of the group they were referring to. Nevertheless, I acknowledge that I belong to a privileged group within German society and thus tried to check for this bias, thereby reducing the power dynamics as much as possible. Unfortunately, when analysing the

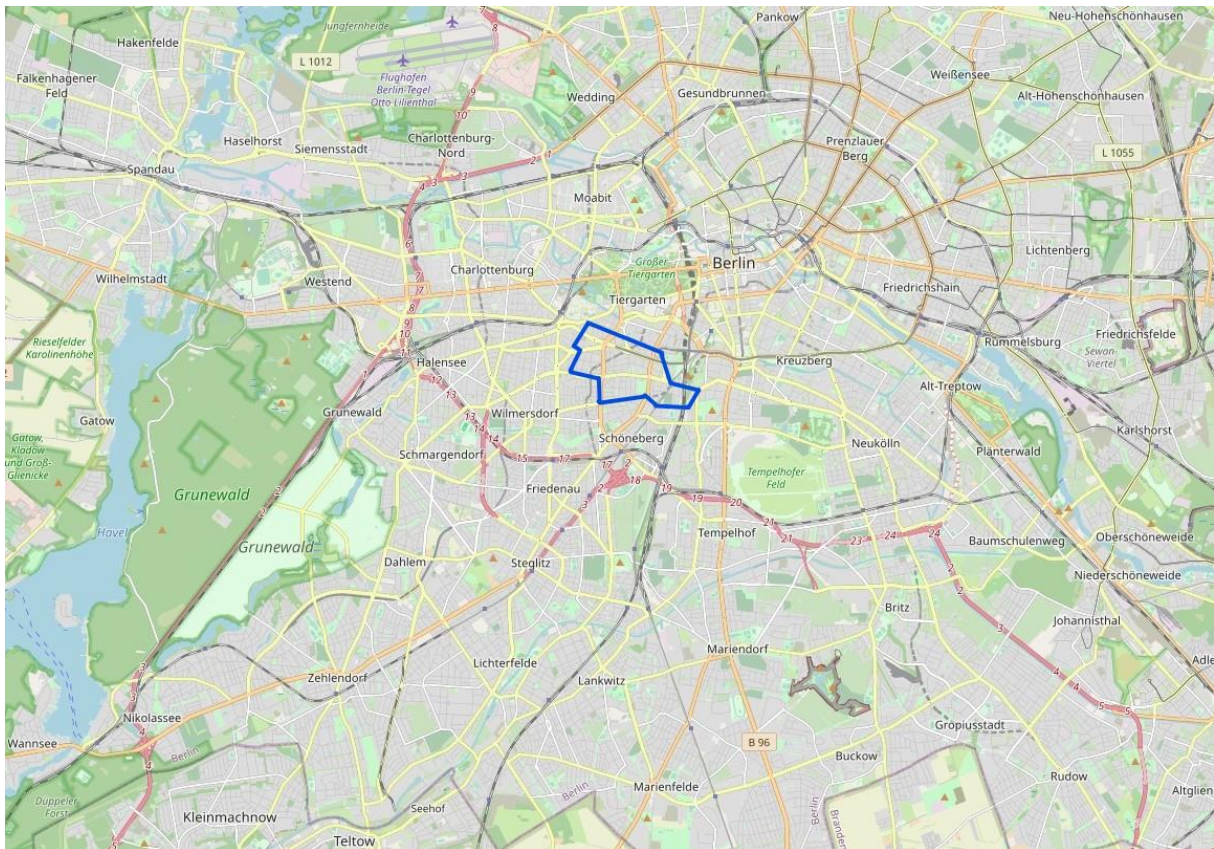
transcripts, I realised that there were at times some passages where this approach had not worked perfectly. None of these situations had any confrontational implications, however, and they did not shift the atmosphere or lead to the women disengaging. Contrarily, they often reacted by elaborating on their previous statements. As much as I regret these shortcomings in retrospect as they pointedly highlight my positionality and white privilege, they are part of my own integration performance. Despite these instances, however, the interviews provided an opportunity for an open conversation in a safe space and a lot of laughter.

4.2 Case Selection

The choice of Berlin as a case study was based on the countless public as well as private initiatives and organisations working with refugees and asylum seekers across many different neighbourhoods, forming a rich landscape of support on which this thesis could draw for the process of data selection. The multifaceted characteristics of the various parts of the city provided a wide choice of specific case studies. For the purpose of this thesis, the two neighbourhoods of Schöneberg Nord and Zehlendorf were selected based on their varied profiles.

First, Schöneberg Nord is an area in the south-west of the centre of Berlin. The neighbourhood is characterised by an urban feel due to its dense building structure with many multi-story residential buildings (Organisationseinheit Sozialraumorientierte Planungscoordination, 2019) and borders on the Gleisdreieckpark in the east, which serves as a recreational area for its inhabitants. Schöneberg Nord is intersected by the Potsdamer Straße, a main artery connecting the neighbourhood to Steglitz in the south and Potsdamer Platz and Mitte in the north. The neighbourhood's western border separates it from the Kurfürstendamm, one of Berlin's most well-known shopping areas. Some shops located to the east of this main tourist attraction, including the famous department store *KaDeWe*, however, formally still belong to Schöneberg Nord (ibid.). Moreover, the neighbourhood also comprises the area around Nollendorfplatz and Motzstraße which is famous for being Berlin's LGBT centre (Bezirksamt Tempelhof-Schöneberg, n.d.). The northern border of the district is formed by the Kurfürstenstraße, home to Berlin's red-light district (Piontek, 2019). The neighbourhood thus provides a diverse and challenging environment for its inhabitants.

Figure 1. Map of Berlin Showing the Location of Schöneberg Nord



Source: OpenStreetMap contributors (2020); marking by the author based on Organisationseinheit Sozialraumorientierte Planungscoordination (2019).

To foster urban and social development in the area, Schöneberg Nord has become part of Berlin's Neighbourhood Management (NM) programme which seeks to enhance participation through neighbourhood councils, workshops and conferences, and aims to increase civil involvement and self-organisation (Quartiersmanagement Berlin, 2020). In addition to a diverse space, Schöneberg Nord also offers a diverse population: At the end of 2019, more than half of its inhabitants were either foreigners or had a migration background³ (Organisationseinheit Sozialraumorientierte Planungscoordination, 2019; see also Table 1). The streetscape of Schöneberg Nord reflects this diversity through shisha bars, kebab shops, and local supermarkets catering to the Turkish and Arab communities.

³ In German population statistics, a three-fold distinction is made between Germans without a migration background (i.e. those who are German citizens and whose parents were German citizens from birth), Germans with a migration background (i.e. those who are German citizens though not from birth or who have at least one parent who was not a German citizen from birth), and foreigners (i.e. non-German citizens) (Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 2019).

Table 1. Sociodemographic Data for the Berlin, Schöneberg Nord, and Zehlendorf

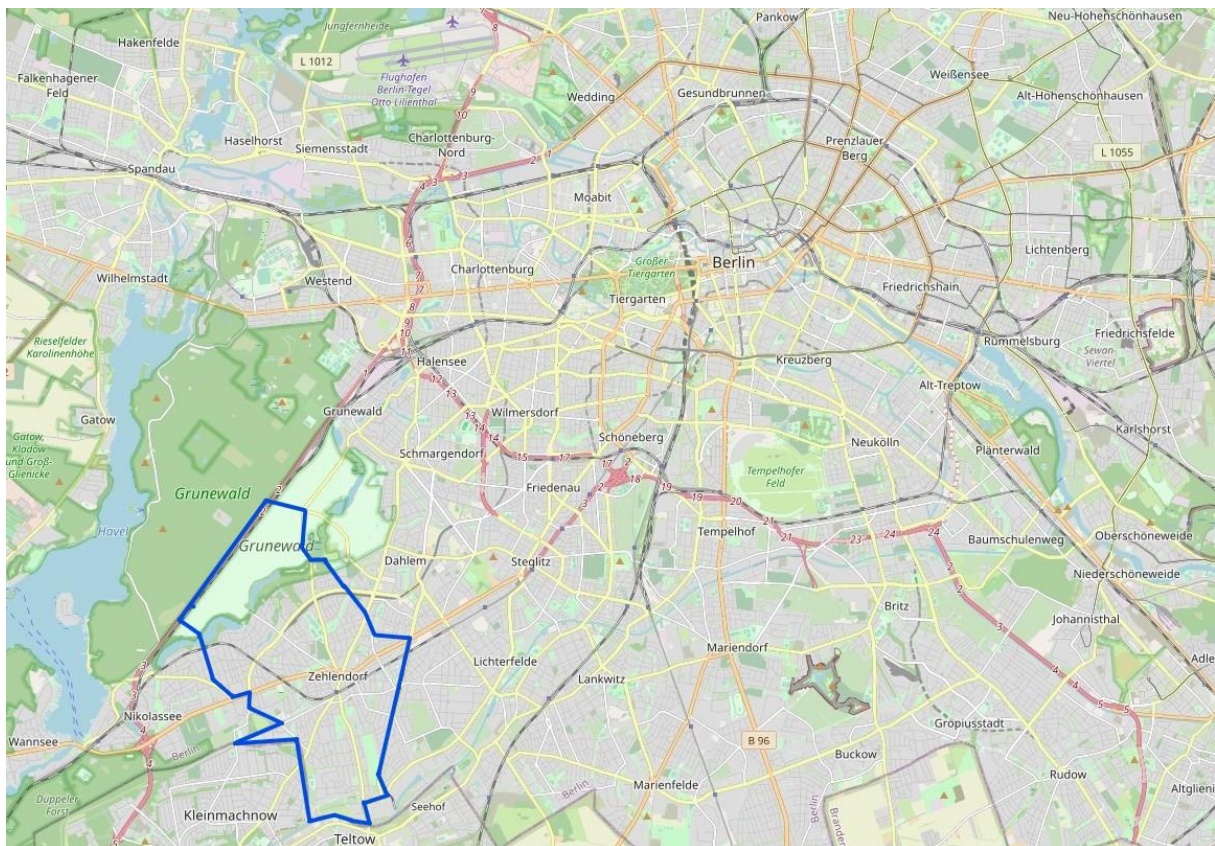
	Berlin (overall)	Berlin Schöneberg Nord	Berlin Zehlendorf
Area	891,1 km ²	2.84 km ²	18.81 km ²
Inhabitants	3,769,495 (2019)	51,915 (2019)	60,538 (2019)
Population Density (in inhabitants/km ²)	4,230 (2019)	18,280 (2019)	3,218 (2019)
Share of Population:			
- Younger than 18 Years	16.1 % (2019)	15.4 % (2019)	15.7 % (2019)
- 65 Years and Older	19.1 % (2019)	21.1 % (2019)	29.9 % (2019)
- Foreigners ("Ausländer")	20.6 % (2019)	31.7 % (2019)	12.1 % (2019)
- With a Migration Background ("mit Migrationshintergrund")	14.4 % (2019)	20.5 % (2019)	23,4 % (2019)
- Recipients of Welfare Payments ("SGB II")	13.3 % (2017)	16.8 % (2017)	5.2 % ^a (2017)

Note. Data for Berlin overall and Berlin Zehlendorf, unless otherwise noted, from Amt für Statistik Berlin-Brandenburg (2020), and for Berlin Schöneberg Nord, unless otherwise noted, from Organisationseinheit Sozialraumorientierte Planungscoordination (2019). Data for area of Berlin overall from Amt für Statistik Berlin-Brandenburg (n.d.) and for Berlin Zehlendorf from Senatsverwaltung für Stadtentwicklung und Wohnen (2018). Data for share of population receiving welfare payments for all areas from Senatsverwaltung für Stadtentwicklung und Wohnen, (n.d.b).

^a For *Prognoseraum* 0603 which covers most of Zehlendorf.

Zehlendorf, on the other hand, is situated outside of Berlin's city centre, towards the state border with Brandenburg in the south-west. The neighbourhood has roughly the same population as Schöneberg Nord but covers an area more than six times as big (see Table 1); its building structure is thus more spaced out and characterised by many detached buildings, with some of its residential areas featuring villas. The district comprises the Krumme Lanke lake in its north and borders on the neighbourhood of Nikolassee in the west which, in turn, features two lakes and provides additional recreational spaces. Zehlendorf, together with its neighbouring districts, is known for its affluent population, a large share of which consists of pensioners ("So viel verdienen", 2019); the data presented in Table 1 underlines this generally held preconception. Overall, Zehlendorf provides a rather bourgeois environment for its inhabitants who benefit from living in a green and spacious neighbourhood which is nevertheless well-connected to the city centre of Berlin by both private and public transport.

Figure 2. Map of Berlin Showing the Location of Zehlendorf



Source: OpenStreetMap contributors (2020); marking by the author based on Übersichtskarte Zehlendorf (2014).

Within these vastly different neighbourhoods, this thesis considers two organisations providing assistance and support for women refugees in particular: the *Pestalozzi-Fröbel-Haus* in Schöneberg and *Mittelhof e.V.* in Zehlendorf. The *Pestalozzi-Fröbel-Haus* runs multiple projects across Berlin with a focus on child and youth welfare services. As part of this work, the organisation is in charge of the *Nachbarschaftszentrum Steinmetzstraße*, a community centre in Schöneberg Nord which offers projects and activities for many different target groups and aims to foster social cohesion among and participation of the neighbourhood's inhabitants (L. Gilmozzi, personal communication, 24 October, 2019). The centre offers many activities which are open to all who are interested, rather than aiming its projects specifically at refugees as a target group. Due to the diverse structure of the neighbourhood's population (see Table 1), the groups thus often attract people from many different backgrounds. One of the guiding principles in the work of the *Pestalozzi-Fröbel-Haus* in this context is the fostering of multilingual and inclusive approaches (L. Gilmozzi, personal communication, 24 October, 2019).

For the purpose of this thesis, I attended the weekly *Mütterfrühstück* [breakfast for mothers] which takes place at the community centre on Thursdays between 10:00 and 12:00, outside of school holidays. The format is open to all women and attracts a rather diverse group of mothers of different age groups and backgrounds. Many of the attendees are locals who join the *Mütterfrühstück* on a regular basis. Attendance can differ greatly from week to week although usually between ten and twenty women take part in the activity. At the beginning of the meeting, the women enjoy a joint breakfast, for which each attendee is asked to pay three euros. Often, some women will bring homemade specialities to complement the spread prepared by a group of volunteers at the community centre's kitchen. Following the meal, the women engage in a discussion on a 'topic of the day'. Depending on the women's interests, Lisa Gilmozzi, the assistant director of the *Nachbarschaftszentrum Steinmetzstraße*, also organises guest speakers who present on specific issues or offer classes, for example on stress management or yoga. During the *Mütterfrühstück*, the community centre is exclusively reserved for the women attending the activity – it is declared a “*männerfreie Zone*” [“men-free zone”] and thus turned into a safe space for women. Although some bring their children to the meeting, this is usually restricted to babies and young toddlers; sons are not allowed to join once they reach their teens. Finally, the breakfast is also attended by a few representatives of other local initiatives who network with the women and thus use the meeting as a platform to win more attendees for their own projects. This also serves as a convenient opportunity for the women to hear about workshops and similar activities they might be interested in joining.

In Zehlendorf, *Mittelhof e.V.* has been helping those in need since its foundation by American Quakers in 1947 from whom it became independent in the 1950s (*Mittelhof e.V.*, n.d.). Today, the organisation operates at multiple locations across the district with the help of many volunteers in addition to its staff base consisting of approximately 300 employees (S. Strätz, personal communication, 23 October, 2019). After the arrival of many refugees in 2015, some of whom found temporary accommodation in schools' gymnasiums in the neighbourhood, *Mittelhof e.V.* decided to broaden its focus to include activities specifically aimed at this target group. This separation between the “regulars” and “newcomers” was deemed necessary as the profiles and needs of the two groups were too different to be combined in the same projects straight away (S. Strätz, personal communication, 23 October, 2019). Within the framework of my research, I attended three different activities at two sites of *Mittelhof e.V.* in Zehlendorf which all cater to different interests and groups.

First, the *Sprachcafé* [language café] is offered weekly on Fridays from 16:00 until 18:00 at *Villa Mittelhof*, an old mansion which was transformed into a community centre. The

ground floor of the building has been converted into a café where neighbours can socialise. In the summer, children can play in the spacious garden while their parents watch from the terrace of the café. However, there is also a large indoors play area in the main room. In addition, the layout features an old library which offers more privacy and a quieter atmosphere. The *Sprachcafé* is run by volunteers from the neighbourhood, almost all of whom are pensioners, many with a background in teaching, who meet up with their regular ‘clients’ and sit down in the café or the adjacent library to practice German for two hours a week. Many attendees bring their homework for German class or applications they have been working on. Although the format, in principle, is open for everyone looking to improve their German in a relaxed atmosphere, all attendees during my fieldwork were refugees. As most pairs meet up on a regular basis, the relation between many attendees and volunteers resembled something of a casual sponsorship. While the format was used by women, some of whom brought their children who could play while their mothers were studying, most of the attendees were men; by contrast, most of the volunteers were women. Overall, the *Sprachcafé* counted approximately twenty attendees per week during my fieldwork.

The second activity I participated in was the *Nähstube für geflüchtete Frauen* [sewing club for women refugees] (short: *Nähstube*) which takes place on Mondays from 15:00 to 18:00 in the cellar of *Villa Mittelhof*. There, the volunteers have created a fully equipped sewing studio over the course of four years since the club’s foundation in November 2016 (personal communication, 9 September, 2019). The format offers women refugees who know or wish to learn how to sew the possibility to make their own clothes. Attendance is free of charge and the women receive one complimentary piece of fabric every four weeks which they can turn into an item of their choice using the professional sewing machines at *Villa Mittelhof*. A group of volunteers, two of whom are retired dressmakers and initiated the project as well as one woman who acts as a translator for Farsi/Dari, support the women. Next to the sewing studio, another arts and crafts room is turned into a ‘coffee corner’ where those wanting to take a break from working on their garments can sit down and chat, receive support regarding problems they might be facing, or do their homework for German class. Both rooms are declared a ‘men-free zone’, similarly to the practice at the *Mütterfrühstück* in Schöneberg Nord. However, since the sewing club is located in the cellar and the rooms are thus shielded well from the outside world, some attendees even remove their hijabs if they are wearing one. During the time of my fieldwork, the sewing club was usually attended by ten to fifteen women, most of whom had fled to Germany from Afghanistan and/or Iran. Due to the homogeneity of the group, the conversations usually took place in Farsi or Urdu and many women had a low proficiency of

German, making interactions between attendees and volunteers, including myself, rather challenging.

Finally, the *Interkulturelle Gruppe für Frauen* [intercultural women's group] (short: *Interkulturelle Gruppe*) provides an opportunity for women to get together at *Mehrgenerationenhaus Phoenix* [multi-generation house] in Zehlendorf on Wednesday evenings between 17:00 and 18:30. The group is led by Barbara Dieckmann and Eitan Hussien of *Mittelhof e.V.* Eitan acts as a translator for Arabic and Kurdish, thereby enabling the women to talk freely about any issues on their mind while ensuring that Barbara can offer support where necessary. In general, however, there is no agenda for the meetings as the attendees are eager to talk about their everyday lives and current struggles they might be facing in a safe environment. During my fieldwork, I was invited to join the group for three sessions which were attended by two to five women, all of whom were refugees from the WANA region. Some of the women brought their children along who kept themselves busy playing in the background while we sat around a table and talked over hot drinks and snacks. In conclusion, the two neighbourhoods and organisations and the four activities considered for this thesis provided different environments for the women and thus allowed me to meet a diverse group of women who participated in my research.

4.3 Data Collection

The analysis is based on data collected in Berlin between August and October 2019. Over the course of ten weeks, I attended different sessions of the above described activities offered by the *Pestalozzi-Fröbel-Haus* and *Mittelhof e.V.* (see Appendix D for a list of all sessions attended). Here, I interacted with the attendees and formed relationships with many women (and some men), both attendees and volunteers, who were willing to share their stories with me. These encounters were recorded in my notes on my participant observations. In addition, I conducted a number of semi-structured in-depth interviews with eleven refugee women who I met during these activities. My selection criteria were as follows: First, the person had to be a woman since I wanted to gain insight on a gendered perspective of the integration performance of women refugees. Consequently, the women also had to be refugees, as the particular circumstances linked to the uncertainty of their legal status have a strong influence on their integration journeys and differ significantly, for instance, from those of someone coming to Germany on a work visa. Lastly, the women had to be willing to talk to me. Having been introduced by a representative of the organisation running the respective activity whom they trust helped in building a relationship with the women. I always made sure to engage in a one-

on-one conversation with them before asking if they were willing to talk to me on the record. It was stressed that this was by no means compulsory and there were a couple of women who decided that they did not want to be interviewed by me after all.

Table 2. *Overview of the Respondents (Interviews)*

Alias ⁴	Home Country	Age	Legal Status	Project
Abeba	Eritrea	31	Refugee	<i>Sprachcafé</i> (<i>Mittelhof e.V.</i>)
Layla	Syria	43	Refugee	<i>Mütterfrühstück</i> (<i>Pestalozzi-Fröbel-Haus</i>)
Daria	Afghanistan/Iran	30	Asylum denied	<i>Nähstube</i> (<i>Mittelhof e.V.</i>)
Fadila	Lebanon	~30	?	<i>Mütterfrühstück</i> (<i>Pestalozzi-Fröbel-Haus</i>)
Imani	Syria	50	Refugee	<i>Interkulturelle Gruppe</i> (<i>Mittelhof e.V.</i>)
Alya	Syria	64	Refugee	<i>Interkulturelle Gruppe</i> (<i>Mittelhof e.V.</i>)
Kyra	Afghanistan/Iran	20	Refugee	<i>Nähstube / Sprachcafé</i> (<i>Mittelhof e.V.</i>)
Shirin	Afghanistan/Iran	22	Refugee	<i>Nähstube / Sprachcafé</i> (<i>Mittelhof e.V.</i>)
Naima	Syria	38	Refugee	<i>Interkulturelle Gruppe</i> (<i>Mittelhof e.V.</i>)
Jamila	Iraq	31	Refugee	<i>Interkulturelle Gruppe</i> (<i>Mittelhof e.V.</i>)
Bushra	Egypt	40	Exceptional leave to remain (<i>Duldung</i>)	<i>Interkulturelle Gruppe</i> (<i>Mittelhof e.V.</i>)

The interviews were conducted on the organisations' premises during or after the respective activities. Initially, I had planned to meet the women outside of this setting but sticking to a standing appointment ended up being the most practical solution since childcare was a limiting factor in many cases. In addition to this organisational aspect, conducting the interviews within the framework of the activities also meant that they took place in a safe space where the women were free to talk and felt comfortable doing so. The conversations lasted between 40 and 80 minutes. Most of the interviews were conducted in German; only one woman (Abeba) preferred to hold the conversation in English. Another exception are the interviews with the attendees of the *Interkulturelle Gruppe* (Alya, Bushra, Imani, Jamila, and Naima) which were conducted in a group setting, thereby resembling a makeshift focus group rather than one-on-one interviews.

⁴ To protect the anonymity of the respondents, these individuals are referred to by aliases throughout this thesis.

Moreover, many of the women did not have a high proficiency of either German or English so the conversation relied on Eitan, a representative of *Mittelhof e.V.* who acted as a translator between Arabic and German.

As mentioned above, I also talked to volunteers and other attendees of the different projects to gain an additional perspective on the integration journeys of these women. In addition, I interviewed the three women in charge of the activities in question as representatives of the organisations. These conversations took place during my last days in Berlin and helped me reflect on some of the information I gathered during my participant observations. They further enhanced my knowledge of the organisations as well as of the development of projects aimed at facilitating the integration of refugees.

All interviews were semi-structured and thus based on a list of questions which I developed based on the key terms defined in the theoretical framework (see Chapter 2.2; see Appendix A for the full list of questions). When operationalising these concepts, I was mindful to avoid questions which were too theory-focused. Consequently, I attempted to break down the framework as far as possible and to enquire about small aspects of everyday life. This, I hoped, would allow a nice flow in the conversation. During the interviews, I adjusted the selection and order of the questions based on the interactions. Depending on the language proficiency of the women I spoke with, the questions required different degrees of explanations and re-formulations, and the answers also varied in length and depth.

In the process of operationalising the theoretical framework for the interview questions, I faced one particular challenge: When translating the idea of *home* into German, there are two possibilities: *Zuhause*, which refers to the place or house where one lives and feels ‘at home’, and *Heimat*, which denotes a person’s homeland or home country. The latter term carries with it a romanticised, idyllic image of rural Germany and has formed a central part of right-wing discourse. Since the creation of the *Bundesministerium des Innern, für Bau und Heimat* (BMI) in 2018, whose official English name, interestingly, is ‘Federal Ministry of the Interior, Building and Community’ rather than ‘and Home’ (Federal Ministry of the Interior, Building and Community, 2020), the term *Heimat* has become the subject of a larger societal discourse and is thus rather contested (Koppetsch, 2018). Nevertheless, I decided to include references to both *Zuhause* and *Heimat* in my questions for three reasons. First, as shown above, these two terms refer to different aspects of the concept of ‘home’. To cover all factors mentioned in the theoretical definition in Chapter 2.2.5, I thus wanted to offer both concepts. Second, my participants’ proficiency of German was impressive, but, overall, the women mastered the language at an intermediate level. While this allowed us to conduct the interviews in German,

it still meant that I often had to describe words and explain questions in different terms. By including both *Zuhause* and *Heimat*, I hoped the questions would be more accessible as the person I was speaking to might not be familiar with both terms. Finally, while the above discourse on *Heimat* was rather prominent in German society, I decided that it was unlikely the women I spoke with would be aware of the word's conservative and at times negative connotations and instead would have learned the word *Heimat* as a simple vocabulary in their language classes to refer to their homeland. This approach proved to work when asking the following questions about home:

- What does 'home' mean to you?
- Where is 'home' for you?
- Would you say that you have more than one home? Is one of them in Berlin? Why (not)?
- Is there a part of your 'old' home that you took to your 'new' home? Something that travels with you wherever you go?
- Do you feel comfortable in practicing your cultural or religious traditions?

When trying to enquire about their feeling of *belonging*, the questions were aimed at uncovering the women's social connections and their relationship with what is commonly perceived as 'society at large':

- Who are your closest social relations? How do they shape your perception of 'home'?
- How do you feel about German/Berlin society?

However, in addition to these social aspects, I also attempted to find out more about the relation between these women and the places they live in. To make the concept of *place* more accessible, I referred to *Nachbarschaften* [neighbourhoods] or *Orte* [places], the latter being conceptualised rather basically as a locale, a specific point within the city. The following questions are some examples of this inquiry into the interaction between the individual and place, some of which were influenced by the idea of *place-making*:

- To what extent do you feel at home or like you belong in your neighbourhood?
- Is there a place or building, for example, that is perhaps a reminder of where you came from?
- What is your favourite place in Berlin?

To gain a deeper understanding of the different aspects of these women's performance of integration, I asked a number of questions relating to the more administrative side of the process. By referring to *Integration* directly, I hoped to prompt the women to share their experiences more freely as *Integration* has become a 'buzzword' which they are confronted with in many areas. Often, it is implied that *Integration* is something that is expected *of them*, for instance in the case of *Integrationskurse*, the compulsory language courses for refugees. While the concept thus does not correspond with the definition of *integration* developed in this thesis, employing the term nevertheless constituted a clear reference to the (state-driven and socially accepted) settling into their 'new lives'. By adding some open questions about agency, however, my intention was to still invite some more critical remarks on the design of this process. The questions on *integration* which resulted from this operationalisation were, amongst others:

- What does 'integration' mean to you?
- What role does language play in integration? What role does work play in integration?
- What role does your neighbourhood play in your integration process?
- Who do you see as the main actors in integration?
- What has your experience been in dealing with the German authorities and the administration (for example, the *Ausländerbehörde*)?
- What activities have helped you in your process of settling into life in Berlin?
- Is there an activity you are missing (out on)? Why?

The last two questions were added to examine the role that the different activities offered by the *Pestalozzi-Fröbel-Haus* and *Mittelhof e.V.* play for the integration of the respondents. Moreover, I hoped to find out how these organisations could better support this process.

Finally, I included some questions to learn more about the women's hopes and dreams for the future, such as:

- What is your general outlook on your life in Germany?
- What are your plans for the future?
- Are there any educational or professional aims you would like to pursue?

These questions were also used to end on a more positive, outward-looking note as many interviews featured discussions about serious and often rather difficult topics.⁵

Originally, I had considered to include visual data in my analysis. One idea had been to ask the women to take photographs of the places which they consider to be ‘home’ to them. However, such a research design proved to be too elaborate as the respondents were rather busy and I hence decided that it would not be appropriate to burden them with such an onerous task. Nevertheless, the conversations proved intimate enough for me to gain valuable insight into the women’s lives and their spatial realities. Some attendees of the *Interkulturelle Gruppe* even decided to share some photographs with me of their journey to Germany as well as of family gatherings and wedding celebrations in their ‘old’ and ‘new’ homes. I valued such gestures immensely but preferred for them to occur organically rather than being induced by my request to take photographs of places which hold value to them. As a result, the analysis is based on the conversations and experiences I shared with these women in a familiar environment which formed a safe space for us.

4.4 Data Analysis

The majority of the material collected during my fieldwork in Berlin is linked to the interviews with women refugees. With the exception of Abeba who asked that I only take notes during our conversation, all interviews were recorded and subsequently transcribed in their original language using the transcription software *f4transkript*. This process was guided by a set of rules for transcription which can be found in Appendix C. Next, the transcripts were coded according to a four-step process, which was developed based on Johnny Saldaña’s (2009) recommendations for First Cycle Coding Methods (p. 48). He suggests four different steps within the first cycle of coding, some of which hold multiple options for the specific strategy employed. Here, I chose those coding methods which would complement each other well and lead to the most useful data for the purpose of this thesis, while being appropriate for the material collected, and consequently conducted the following steps:

1. *Attribute coding*: This first step allowed me to link statements to those individuals who made them, thereby enabling cross-references more easily at the analysis stage. This

⁵ The questions for the interviews with the representatives of the *Pestalozzi-Fröbel-Haus* and *Mittelhof e.V.* were developed based on the material collected during the interviews with the women refugees as well as my conversations with volunteers and participants during the participant observations. These interviews thus served as a means to gain a different perspective on some of my findings and to better understand the organisations’ approaches to *integration* and what this process should look like. The full list of questions for these interviews can be found in Appendix B.

was especially relevant in the case of group interviews at the *Interkulturelle Gruppe* which were conducted with the help of a translator as she sometimes translated statements ‘in bulk’, making it difficult to tell immediately which part of the translation referred to which woman.

2. *Structural coding*: By focusing on the topics talked about, this second step helped me gain a better overview and understanding of the material collected.
3. *Descriptive coding*: In a third step, I linked the material back to the concepts developed and defined in the theoretical framework (see Chapters 2.2, 2.3). This allowed me to uncover the richness of the material as often links were made beyond the topic at hand.
4. *Values coding*: The final step’s focus on the women’s beliefs and attitudes enabled me to ‘read between the lines’ and to include a more holistic representation of the women I had met in my analytical dataset. In addition to value-based data, I also included emotions in this coding step to provide a fuller insight into the personal aspects of these women’s integration journeys.⁶

The same process was applied to the interviews with representatives of the two organisations I worked with, although in their case, the values coding predominantly, but not exclusively, focused on values, attitudes, and emotions of women refugees which they reported on, rather than on their own values, attitudes, and emotions. Furthermore, I also coded the notes taken during my participant observation by following these four steps to allow the material to be used for cross-references with the data collected during the interviews more easily. The documents were coded using the qualitative data analysis software *ATLAS.ti*; the corresponding codebook can be found in the Appendix (see Appendix E).

Since the data which the analysis is based on was recorded in its original language, a large part of the material was kept in German during the process of analysis. I decided that this would allow for the most accurate analysis as the conversations were represented in the most authentic way. Only for the purpose of presenting direct quotations in this thesis did I translate selected segments of these interviews into English to allow for a better flow of the writing and avoid constant repetitions of quotations in both languages. As part of this process, the quotations were edited for syntax and basic grammar to enhance their readability.

⁶ Importantly, this does not refer to the emotions with which a statement was made but rather the emotions expressed by a statement. Naturally, however, these two interpretations overlap in some cases.

5. Rooting Oneself: Women Refugees' Integration Experiences in Berlin

As the conceptualisation of *integration* in Chapter 2.3 has shown, it is a constant doing, affecting many different aspects of life. The administrative view, however, still sees integration as a state of being which can be reached while the process leading to it can be measured by the language proficiency and employment rates of newcomers. The most recent Berlin policy framework additionally considers social aspects although their shape remains vague and, unlike the above aspects matching the more traditional approach, they are not accompanied by a set of indicators or an administrative body charged with overseeing the process (see Chapter 3.2). Upon arrival in Berlin, women refugees are thus presented with the need to establish their legal status by applying for asylum, followed by the expectation to attend several *Integrationskurse* and, ultimately, integrate into the workforce. Consequently, the official steps, which build on the legacy of a lack of integration efforts in both the Federal Republic and the German Democratic Republic, neglect the social side of integration. Despite this shortcoming, these policies act as external influences shaping the integration of individuals as they impact the place within which this doing happens. Moreover, while the policy-induced measures are by no means exhaustive nor universally applicable as integration is highly individualistic, they arguably can contribute to a foundation for an individual's efforts of rooting themselves in place.

The following four sections of this chapter present the experiences of a group of women refugees in Berlin of their doing of integration. They illustrate the ways in which these women navigate the spatial aspects relating to their accommodation and neighbourhoods, the social aspects of finding or forming networks to connect themselves to, the formal aspects of adhering to the state's polic(y)ing of integration concerning language and employment, as well as the personal aspects of defining their own identities in this new place. While doing integration is a personal endeavour, there are certain parallels between the women's lived realities which are examined here to support the development of a broader, more inclusive understanding of this performance.

5.1 Being in Place: Accommodation, the Neighbourhood, and Home

Upon arrival in a new place, the individual, on a very practical level, first requires one essential element: accommodation. As established by the academic discourse (see Chapter 2.1; Carter & Osborne, 2009; Fozdar & Hartley, 2014), housing can significantly influence the way integration can be done. The nature of the accommodation itself as well as the neighbourhood

within which it is located form the new environment of the individual. By attempting to root themselves in these places, the individual creates strong bonds, thereby linking place to notions of home. However, this act does not always succeed as this section shows. Since the three concepts are closely interlinked, it illustrates the women refugees' experiences concerning accommodation, neighbourhood, and home.

For many refugees, the accommodation initially provided was temporary housing in gymnasiums and other makeshift facilities. The women of the *Interkulturelle Gruppe* admit they felt let down by these circumstances as their expectation had been to build a new life by finding a flat and employment almost immediately. Being forced to live in a *Heim* [collective accommodation facility] or makeshift accommodation, often lacking privacy and separating families across different rooms within a facility, evoked strong emotions in the newly arrived. Those with small children even doubted their decision of coming to Germany as, unlike for those with children who were old enough to be drafted, the urgency of their leaving their conflict-torn home countries, though inevitable, was somewhat lower (personal communication, 25 September, 2019). However, some faced even more severe problems linked to accommodation, as Kyra recounts, who battled temporary homelessness with her family:

And for three days we didn't have accommodation, our money had run out and we had to wait for someone from our family to send us [some money] . . . and for three nights we slept rough on Torstraße. And that was so terrible for me, for my family, for everyone. After three days, we were happy that we at least had a bed to sleep in. (Kyra)

After the hardship of these initial stages, the insecurity surrounding housing continued three-fold. First, especially in the beginning, many refugees had to change *Heime* multiple times, frequently crossing district lines within Berlin and thus forcing these individuals to continuously start the process of settling in anew. A side-effect of these relocations was that frequent changes of schools affected the social embedding of both the children and parents concerned:

It's not just about us, but also about the school, our children [having to move] from one school to the next every time, depending on how they [moved] from one *Heim* to the next. And they attended so many schools, one month here and two months there. . . . That's why we still haven't settled in, so to speak, we still haven't arrived. (Jamila)

Second, in addition to these frequent changes of environment, the housing conditions vary significantly across different types of accommodation and often depend on the organisations running them. While some individuals are lucky to find themselves in housing with private

rooms and clean facilities (B. Dieckmann, personal communication, 31 October, 2019; S. Strätz, personal communication, 23 October, 2019), others describe their experience of the accommodation provided as “catastrophic” (Kyra) and putting them “into a very difficult position” (Naima). This uncomfortableness with their surroundings eventually causes limitations on important aspects of their daily lives. Daria, for instance, admits that she stopped cooking for herself as she shares the kitchen with approximately fifty people, and Kyra recounts an unpleasant memory of the last accommodation facility she and her family stayed at:

No, I didn't have a good feeling about accommodation at all. For example, at my last accommodation facility, there was security. You were not allowed to have visitors, also not overnight. You were not allowed to do anything there. It was my birthday and I wanted my friends to come inside – I had such big problems with them [security], that wasn't good at all. That was the worst birthday for me. (Kyra)

As these examples show, the women feel uneasy living within restrictive or limited housing facilities. The step of moving into a place of their own, however, forms the third challenge in this context since finding a flat proves to be a lengthy and difficult process for many. One common strategy seems to have been paying a contact person 4,000 euros in exchange for a rental contract. While this approach worked for Naima, Kyra's family fell victim to a fraudster, causing them to lose their savings. Another commonly described possibility of finding a flat is enquiring with social contacts, often found through activities such as the *Sprachcafé*. While some might be looking to let a flat themselves, others help by engaging their own social networks, as was the case for Imani whose friend's hairdresser is now her landlord. The importance of finding a place of their own is illustrated by the story of Shirin who had to move frequently with her husband and daughter but now feels more settled:

We lived three years in the *Heim* already, eight months in the gymnasium, and one year and two or three months in a hotel. That was very good but . . . there was no kitchen. . . . My daughter was born there too. And afterwards yet another *Heim*, oh, so many *Heime*. And there we had a room with a kitchen, that was also very good. And then we found a flat. We've been in this flat in Steglitz for one year now. (Shirin)

These examples show how important it is for these women and their families to find a flat where they can lead their lives independently and have their own, private space. Unfortunately, accommodation remains a problematic aspect of living in Berlin, especially for women with larger families as their flats are often rather small. Naima reports:

We're seven people [living] in two small rooms. All the children are in one room, and my husband and I and one son in the corridor. It's a small corridor. When we have visitors, it doesn't work at all. (Naima)

Her children describe having their own room as a “dream” (Naima), a sentiment echoed by Fadila as well as Jamila, whose adult daughter expresses the wish for more privacy. Despite these difficulties and limitations, Jamila states that “upon comparison, we much prefer having our own flat to our own room in a *Heim*”. However, it is not only the flat itself but also its surroundings which play an important role for the wellbeing and the integration of these women.

As shown in Chapter 2.1, the neighbourhood forms and defines a place and thus determines the ways in which the individual can integrate in each context. During the interviews, when asked about neighbours and neighbourhoods, the women mostly described their interactions with next-door neighbours. Abeba and Shirin, however, also mentioned their neighbourhoods in a wider sense although based on quite different impressions. Abeba explains that she feels excluded by her local community and states, “I don't have [a] neighbourhood. There is a neighbourhood but . . . [it's] not [that] I don't like them, but I don't feel connected with them”. Shirin, on the other hand, is happy with her move to Steglitz following years of moving around Berlin. She prefers her current neighbourhood to those she has lived in before as “there are many nice people and many *Sprachcafés* close to my flat”. These sentiments are reflected in the way these two women approach their integration: While Abeba expresses feelings of isolation and limitation, Shirin follows a more empowering and engaging path. The differences in their perceptions of their neighbourhoods can thus certainly be accounted with ‘setting the tone’ and exerting a strong influence on their respective integration experiences.

The interactions with next-door neighbours mentioned by the respondents further contribute to this setting and broadly fall into three categories: close personal contact, general indifference, and negative encounters. The second group is the most prominent, with interviewees speaking of houses where “no one talks to other people” (Layla) and interactions are largely restricted to picking up mail or greeting neighbours in the corridor (Kyra, Shirin). Despite this anonymity, some women are maintaining a basic form of contact with other neighbours through the sharing of food:

I have my neighbour. She is a little bit old but once we went to the park together and sometimes we exchange food. She loves Arabic food. Sometimes we prepare a lot of food, for example falafel or mainly Lebanese food, [when] I take it to her, she says, “Oh, so tasty!” (Fadila)

Because I know that he [a neighbour] likes falafel, I take him some when I make it. Or other dishes which he doesn't know, when I make them and I have a feeling he might like them, I take a plate to him but apart from that we don't sit and talk. (Naima)

According to Naima, this lack of interaction is caused by language-related communication problems. Although she would prefer to have more contact with her neighbours, “neither can they understand me, nor I them”. In some other cases, however, sporadic communication is a conscious choice instead. Another neighbour of Naima's, for instance, speaks with her family “only when there are problems”. When he felt bothered by the sound of people leaving and entering her flat, he applied oil to the hinges of her front door without any interaction or explanation. While she laughs when remembering the incident, it does not match Naima's above idea of neighbourhood communication. In another case, noise complaints have led to Jamila feeling uncomfortable about having visitors:

Only the neighbour on the floor below . . . can't stand [the noise] at all. We have to tiptoe around and are not allowed to have visitors. Then he bangs on the radiator and becomes angry and we are afraid. And because of that, visitors are not welcome at our place. (Jamila)

Despite these constraints, Jamila also shares a positive relationship with an elderly couple living on the floor above. These neighbours whom her children call “*Oma* and *Opa*” support the family by acting as ‘mediators’ within the house as well as introduce them to certain German traditions, such as leaving treats in her children's shoes for St Nicholas' Day. The interactions between neighbours are thus varied and their effects range from inhibiting to engaging. Since integration requires the individual to form and/or connect to a local social network, they can have a formative effect on these women's experiences of rooting themselves in place and of feeling ‘at home’ in their new environment.

The notion of *home*, both when referring to *Zuhause* and *Heimat*, is a difficult and contested topic among the interviewees. The main point of concern is to what extent these women consider Berlin, or even Germany more generally, to be their home. Many express a certain inner conflict related to feelings of belonging in this context. Some attendees of the *Mütterfrühstück*, for instance, consider their lives in their home countries and in Berlin to both be functional, yet fully separate from one another (personal communication, 29 August, 2019). Others, however, still consider themselves rooted in their ‘old’ homes which they were forced to leave. Here, Abeba refers to *home* as “a basic need of life” whose personal manifestation she considers to be located with her family in Eritrea. Daria and Shirin, too, miss members of their

families who stayed behind, making their conceptualisation of *home* a rather torn one. While some women echo this sentiment of longing for their former lives and homes, they also know that going back is no longer a possibility:

Sometimes I think, “I would like to return,” but then I think, “To whom am I supposed to return?” Those I knew, they’re either dead or dispersed; of some I don’t know their whereabouts. And so it isn’t feasible for me anymore, although I still always feel this longing for my home country. But it’s not easy to return anymore. (Alya)

It’s really important for us to have strong ties among the family, even with the neighbours we have a lot of contact. . . . When I think of my home, when I consider that they aren’t there anymore, then I’m alien there. Because I’m building these relationships here, I’m not as alien here as [I’d be] in my own country. (Alya)

Syria is a very sad country for me now, a very sad country. (Layla)

Unfortunately, although it’s our home, our country, it has left these bad memories, sad memories. (Imani)

These realisations and expressions of loss carry with them a prominent sense of grief, but they are combined with the strong will of these women to create a new home and a better future for themselves and their children in Berlin (Alya, Fadila, Jamila, Naima). Jamila even reports that she used to feel very homesick but after visiting Iraq again for the first time since she left, she now feels that “[o]ur future is here”. Despite this rupture, a connection exists between these ‘old’ and ‘new’ homes. Due to the hardship of their journeys, most women were not able to bring any memorabilia to Berlin. Apart from a few exceptions, such as Bushra’s prayer rug and the hijab of Jamila’s mother, they lost all of their belongings on their way to Germany. Consequently, it seems that the main way *home* travelled with them is through customs and routines (see McMichael, 2002, p. 172). Here, one common element mentioned by all interviewees is the preparing of traditional meals from their home countries which the women are happy to share with others, as shown above. Moreover, the celebration of religious holidays and family occasions forms an important way in which traditions are continued and passed onto the next generation (Fadila, Kyra; personal communication, 25 September, 2019).

Vignette 2: Homesickness, for what?

When I say “homesickness”, I say “dream”.
Because the old home barely exists.
When I say homesickness, I mean a lot:
What weighed us down for a long time in exile.
We are now strangers in the hometown.
Only the “sickness” stayed.

The “home” is gone.

- Mascha Kaléko (n.d., translation by the author)

When asked about *home*, one recurring element in the women’s responses was the linking of this concept to notions of security, stability, and rest:

Now home to me is sitting with my parents on the sofa and watching TV without fear. That’s home to me. And growing my plants. (Kyra)

It means calm, security, and it means . . . stability. My husband and I are living alone, without other people, and I have my kitchen and my things. And I can control my life, no one controls me and that’s very important. (Layla)

[There’s] so much movement all day in Berlin, so home is better. (Imani)

These associations are important since, for many, the reason for coming to Germany was a desire to live in a safe environment, as expressed explicitly by Fadila, Imani, Kyra, and Layla. The above statements show that this feeling of safety has spread to the more private aspects of place despite the manifold challenges surrounding the topic of housing outlined above. Unfortunately, however, this does not hold true for all interviewees as the women facing relationship problems describe home as a place they are trying to avoid:

Oh, so many problems. With my children, with my family, with my husband. (Daria)

Because I’m not at home, only at night or at the weekend. (Shirin)

As pointed out by the feminist tradition (see Rose, 1993, Chapter 6; Skey, 2011, p. 235), the more private dimensions of place thus do not provide the same level of protection and safety to everyone. The decisive element determining whether *home* can truly be a person’s safe space is the nature of their relationships with the individuals with whom they share this space. However, social connections also shape the doing of integration outside the home, as outlined in the section below.

5.2 Networking: Social Connections in a Global Place

At its core, integration relies on interpersonal connections which allow the individual to root themselves in place. The social aspect of everyday life thus plays an important role as it acts as the expression of the integration performance and illustrates the individual’s strategies and struggles. The first obstacle the interviewees faced in this context is the loss of their former local networks and the resulting feelings of isolation:

I can't bring my life from Syria here. That isn't possible. Here, there are new people, a new country, a new society. (Layla)

Whenever I was making preserves, my relatives, my sister or my neighbour came over and we made preserves together in large quantities. And that was fun, I felt different. Here, although I'm doing the same, [it's] in smaller quantities [and] I'm alone, no one joins me. I feel completely alone in that small room. (Naima)

To combat these moments of alienation and grief, the women try to create opportunities for social interactions: Fadila states that she does not like being at home as “without interaction or contact with others, I can't live”; Alya, who used to be a teacher and misses the daily conversations with students and parents, tries to converse with strangers on the bus; and Shirin explains that she too has many interactions with Germans on public transport. However, these fleeting encounters cannot be considered a substitute for a social network built on close personal relationships.

Here, the interviewees identify several constraints which inhibit the development of their networks. First, Fadila reports high levels of stress among migrant women who are burdened with chores and care work within their households. She believes that receiving help from their husbands, as she does, remains the exception and thus “the woman has to do everything . . . There is no time for relaxation for a woman”. Consequently, social interactions outside of their homes are largely limited to those linked to the running of errands. Moreover, a social worker reports that the German definition of punctuality places an emotional strain on these women who are not used to time being a strict social norm. A simple appointment can thus cause anxiety hours in advance (personal communication, 29 August, 2019). Second, some individuals refer to a lack of opportunity for interactions with other locals due to their personal circumstances. Layla, for instance, does not have any children and is therefore unable to meet other parents at kindergarten or school. Moreover, for the past years, she was focused on her (required) *Integrationskurs* which meant that she spent most of her time in class with other refugees and did not have many opportunities to ‘network’ in a relaxed setting. Her example shows how the polic(y)ing of integration structures the individual's life and limits their ability to employ their own agency in their doing of integration. Third, group pressure can lead to individuals not feeling comfortable to seek opportunities for interaction and contact. Daria, who has separated from her husband and is looking to find a German partner, suffered from the spreading of rumours and derogatory comments by a group of men at her *Heim*. This harassment started after she went on a date as such behaviour was not deemed “proper” for a woman. Daria consequently feels ostracised by her community and is consciously distancing

herself from other Irani and Afghani people. Finally, an unpleasant experience can potentially make a person much more hesitant in engaging in interactions as the case of Kyra shows. She was bullied at school in Berlin and now believes that she lacks self-confidence to approach others in group situations. While she has Afghani friends, she reproaches herself with not being able to meet people outside her own community. The experience has thus had a lasting impact as she still feels that “I don’t belong here”.

Despite these limitations, however, there are examples of women who have succeeded in forming small networks to support their lives in Berlin. On the one hand, Alya, Fadila, Layla, and Shirin mention that some of their relatives live in other German cities. While they cannot see each other daily, these interactions nevertheless create translocal links which sustain their family networks. On the other hand, some women build close relationships with volunteers at the different projects, thereby connecting to local networks and furthering their rooting in place. This point is best illustrated by Imani who met her close friend, a German woman, through an activity offered by *Mittelhof e.V.* The woman helps Imani with many aspects of Berlin life and, not unlike Jamila’s neighbours, she has become part of her family since Imani’s daughter says that she has two mothers now.

Activities of this kind, which formed the basis for this research (see Chapter 4.3), can be classified as micropublics (Amin, 2002): They are open to, yet protected from the public and form safe spaces for the attendees. All interviewees mentioned the activities as positive additions to their schedules, providing them with an opportunity to meet old friends and new acquaintances. For some, they also offered a welcome opportunity to leave their houses and socialise with others (Abeba, Daria, Shirin). The mothers in the group enjoyed being able to join an activity where their children were welcome and could play in the background. Furthermore, especially the *Sprachcafé* and the *Mütterfrühstück* seem to act as ‘meeting points’. The *Mütterfrühstück* is referred to mainly as a place where information about events and other opportunities is exchanged and social connections can be formed. By sharing a meal and discussing topics of common interest, such as stress management and the German educational system, the attendees engage in a communal experience which creates an atmosphere described by Layla as better and more interesting than at other community centres. The *Sprachcafé*, on the other hand, which is a format also offered by other organisations across Berlin, is popular among refugees due to it complementing the language courses. It thus offers an opportunity to discuss the material in a different environment and practice difficult exercises together with the volunteers. The nature of the format invites intimate interaction between volunteers and attendees, therefore providing a suitable setting for forming personal bonds. For some, these

exchanges result in lasting friendships, as was the case for Shirin who considers two *Sprachafé* volunteers her only German friends. By contrast, the *Nähstube* is largely focused on the women's sewing projects and the interaction between volunteers and attendees is more limited and technical (personal communication, 30 September, 2019).

Vignette 3: Conversations about home (at a deportation centre)

. . .

I hear them say, *go home*, I hear them say, *fucking immigrants, fucking refugees*. Are they really this arrogant? Do they not know that stability is like a lover with a sweet mouth upon your body one second and the next you are a tremor lying on the floor covered in rubble and old currency waiting for its return. All I can say is, I was once like you, the apathy, the pity, the ungrateful placement and now my home is the mouth of a shark, now my home is the barrel of a gun. I'll see you on the other side.

- Warsan Shire (2012)

Outside of the safe space provided by these micropublics, the women's experiences are heavily influenced by their exposure to racist structures, thoughts, and acts. According to Layla and Kyra, this discrimination across German society is less prevalent than anticipated. Nevertheless, the women tell of racist abuse ranging from harassment on public transport by both passengers and drivers (Alya, Imani, Jamila, Shirin) and discrimination on the job market (Fadila) to derogatory statements in conversations (Naima) and even physical attacks in the street (Imani). The latter category is especially critical as Imani suffered a nervous breakdown in the aftermath of such an attack, causing her to feel insecure about leaving the house and limit her own actions and mobility. As a result, she has lost any sense of ontic security (see Hoffstaedter, 2014, p. 877) which complicates the process of rooting herself in this place significantly. However, also the accumulation of microaggressions has a notable effect on the women who feel that they must prove their worth to others:

The point is that they see us as refugees and . . . we don't belong here. And that makes you feel a certain way and you tell yourself, "I don't belong to this country after all". (Imani)

I always have to try and be the perfect picture of a foreign woman. (Fadila)

We always gave them the advice that you have to contribute well to this society and show that we are good people too . . . And you have to behave and not engage in these criminal activities. (Alya, referring to young men in her language class)

First and foremost, I want to contribute to society here and, at the same time, I want for those who . . . think, “We are here but we don’t understand, . . . we are just savages who came and are a burden on society.” – I want to prove them wrong. (Naima)

Ultimately, these reflections lead Imani and Alya to consider how racism could be combatted and even prevented. While Alya believes that German people should use their platform and voice to act as advocates for refugees, Imani sees a certain duty on the refugees’ side to actively participate and work towards becoming a part of society, for instance by learning German. The latter view feeds into the political definition of integration, the women’s experiences with which are presented in the following section.

5.3 Integration Polic(y)ing: Language, Education, and Employment

Despite the recent turn towards more socially oriented policies, the measures proposed to support the integration of refugees in Berlin are still largely focused on the elements of language proficiency, education, and employment. For some interviewees, these elements also feature prominently in their personal conceptualisations of what integration entails:

Integration [happens] where you can work and know the language – that’s very important – where you can communicate. (Kyra)

Employment and knowing the language are the way to integration. (Alya)

For me, integration means going to school, being punctual – because German people are very punctual and so am I –, hardworking . . . and studying so much. And accepting other people, that’s very important for integration. (Layla)

For practical reasons, all interviewees mention that a basic proficiency of German is needed to navigate their daily lives in Berlin. As shown above, this is thought to enable interactions with neighbours, volunteers, and the public in general. Consequently, the women showed excitement in relation to their (next) language course and were proud of their achievements so far. Importantly, however, this strong focus on language is Janus-faced as it overlaps with the official vision of integration which additionally expects a certain degree of assimilation into German society (see Chapter 3). The *Integrationskurse* are mandatory requirements used to measure the progress of an individual’s ‘integration trajectory’. Therefore, the women attend classes providing them with essential tools needed for everyday communication and social exchanges. At the same time, these classes are highly time-consuming and the interviewees report having little to no time left in between language classes and household chores. Thus, the *Integrationskurse* are not as ‘unproblematic’ as they might seem – while they do present an

opportunity to acquire essential skills, they also limit the women's agency and largely bind them to the 'official trajectory' of integration during their first years in Germany.

Moreover, the women point to several limiting factors concerning these classes. First, mothers of small children frequently struggle to combine their care work with their education. Abeba originally joined an *Elternkurs* [language course for parents], which offers day care during class hours, but was forced to drop out for personal reasons. Since demand for these courses is high, she could not re-join at a later point and, as Fadila and Naima, had to wait until her all of children had started kindergarten to attend a regular *Integrationskurs*. Another problem in this context is the impossibility of accessing classes due to one's legal status. While Berlin does offer language courses for asylum seekers, Bushra reports that she was unaware of qualifying for this format, leaving her with no German proficiency after five years in Berlin. Meanwhile, Kyra learnt German by attending a *Willkommensklasse* [welcome class/transition class] at school and by actively searching for opportunities to practice the language herself, often within the framework of various *Sprachcafés*. Furthermore, Fadila recounts that her friends who came to Germany before the latest policy changes struggled since they did not have the option to attend any official language courses. While her husband encouraged her to learn German and take charge of her daily routine in Berlin, other women in less supportive relationships "still have problems to this day" (Fadila). Finally, while the mandated language courses help to increase the women's language skills and self-confidence, as they proudly shared their progress and results in our conversations, they do not notably contribute to the forming of social networks. Daria and Shirin explain that they did not interact with other participants outside of class and, based on the other interviewees' responses, this seems to be a rather common experience.

Having reached some proficiency of German, the women harness this knowledge in their daily lives to run errands without the help of a translator. One attendee of the *Interkulturelle Gruppe*, for instance, proudly recounts registering her child at the kindergarten by herself (personal communication, 25 September, 2019). Meanwhile, an attendee of the *Sprachcafé* admits that, despite her advanced level of German, she relies on a translator for her child's medical appointments as they both struggle to communicate with doctors (personal communication, 30 August, 2019). These problems of being confronted with different accents, dialects, and technical language prevail among the group and, according to Layla, even include and affect the interactions with native speakers during the activities. Kyra, on the other hand, underlines the importance of being immersed in the new language during the learning process. She tries to follow other people's conversations on public transport and find opportunities for

interactions with native speakers to enhance her language skills. This determination to learn is mirrored in the way she and the other women approach the areas of education and employment.

Especially for the latter, the interviewees are dependent on state agencies. Here, too, language proficiency is of importance not only for the required paperwork, but also for the interaction with various authorities. Overall, the women report that their exchanges with the respective representatives have not been overly friendly; the *Ausländerbehörde* [immigration authority] receives the heaviest criticism, with Kyra remarking:

I don't expect them to be nice to me, being polite would be enough. They should treat me how I treat them. (Kyra)

Generally, the women report that the longer they have been in Germany for and the better their own language proficiency has become, the better their experience of the authorities. Nevertheless, Fadila and Kyra also stress that the interaction, of course, depends on the individual person responsible. Interestingly, while the women generally seem to perceive the bureaucratic structure as a burden on their daily lives, Shirin mentions that she appreciates how the rigid requirements provide her with an incentive to become more active:

I was lazy, I didn't want to do anything, I just wanted to sleep . . . and the *Jobcenter* has many penalties. . . . And then I do something. That is good for me because I am sick without it. (Shirin)

She and her husband benefited from the tight schedule and numerous requirements of the *Jobcenter* which need to be met to receive financial support. Unlike the other interviewees who perceive this structure as a limitation of their agency, Shirin considers it an activating mechanism for her own agency.

In addition to language courses, the official structures also encourage other forms of education. These were the most prominent for Kyra and Shirin, who were the youngest interviewees. While Kyra obtained a nursing certificate even before her asylum application was approved and subsequently started the regular apprenticeship to become a nurse, Shirin was waiting for her daughter to start kindergarten at the time of the interview, before pursuing an apprenticeship herself. In the meantime, she attended different sewing clubs around Berlin to improve her skills. Both Kyra and Shirin are ambitious concerning their lives, and especially their educational trajectories. Many of the older interviewees, however, do not see the same opportunities for themselves. While most obtained degrees or other forms of professional education in their home countries, these qualifications are not recognised by the German

authorities. Therefore, the women focus on the education of their children instead, which is linked to another set of challenges. According to the attendees of the *Interkulturelle Gruppe*, many children struggle at school as they must often learn two new languages at once – German and English – and adjust to a different educational system while being expected to pass standardised final examinations. Naima and Jamila mention that their children prefer the German way of teaching to the stricter atmosphere at their old schools in Syria and Iraq and would refuse to go back. In general, their children seem to navigate their lives in Berlin more easily and dream of going to university and working in Germany. Fadila expresses this hope for her children to have a better life than herself:

No one knows what's going to happen tomorrow. You always have to see the positive, not the negative. I always say, "My children will have – we say *Inshallah* – a good future in Germany." Yes, I'm happy, the oldest is very good at school, "Mum, I want to be a police officer." And yes, the other one as well, police officer or doctor. . . . That's the future of my children. I think of my children, not of myself. (Fadila)

Despite showing a lot of interest, however, the women find it difficult to support their children as the German education system is foreign to them and bodies such as the parents' association not only require knowledge of the schools' structures but also a relatively high proficiency of German. Here, activities such as the *Interkulturelle Gruppe* and the *Mütterfrühstück* provide an opportunity for the women to ask questions and receive the support they need to better understand what is asked of their children and themselves as parents (personal communication, 5 and 12 September, 2019; B. Dieckmann, personal communication, 31 October, 2019).

The willingness to support their children is expressed by most mothers among the interviewees (Abeba, Alya, Bushra, Fadila, Imani, Jamila, Naima, Shirin). As outlined above, for many, a central reason for fleeing from their home countries was to save their children from harm and to build a new life in a more stable and safe environment where these children could grow up with the promise of a better future. Since child rearing is seen as a woman's duty in the context of traditionally defined gender roles, the mothers are responsible for questions relating to their children's education as well. According to Fadila, her friends are often forced to navigate the foreign setting of the German educational system on their own as their husbands withdraw from the situation completely. Equipping these women with the tools to expand their agency and actively contribute to their children's future thus has the potential to increase their self-confidence and invoke feelings of belonging where previously they had felt left out. Moreover, gaining access to school committees ultimately enhances local networks and enables the individual to further root themselves in place. Consequently, investing in their children's

education not only has a positive effect on the children's future but also on the mothers' present lives.

The third element promoted by official actors to structure the integration of refugees which also played an important part in the lives of the interviewees is employment. Since access to the job market requires a certain level of German proficiency, the women were either looking to join the workforce or still preparing for their first jobs in Germany at the time of the interviews. The only exception was Alya who stated that she would likely not be able to work anymore since she would qualify to retire once she reached the level of German required. In general, however, the group express a strong interest in working to earn their own money and become more independent. The latter aspect is especially relevant for Shirin who was not allowed to work before coming to Germany:

In Iran, I only stayed at home, I was just a housewife. Here it's difficult for me [because I can] also work or study something – but that's good. I can do something for my future now and earn money. (Shirin)

While the women enjoy having this sense of agency, Layla raises concerns about the new work environment. She is nervous that she will not get along with her co-workers and is conscious of her options based on her language proficiency:

I persistently studied the German language because I want to interact with others. It's important for the job and I want to work. Now I'm scared because I want to work with Germans and contact new people and without a good language proficiency I can't speak, understand or interact properly. And yes, I'm scared. (Layla)

Look, my language proficiency isn't good; I can't work as a secretary. I'd need to write letters, work fast, . . . and answer the phone – and maybe in five years I can do that but right now I can't. (Layla)

Unfortunately, the recognition of formal qualifications and language skills are not the only obstacles the women face. Fadila voices her suspicion that her chances of getting a job are diminished by her wearing a hijab:

I don't have any problems with the language, and I haven't found a job yet. Maybe the headscarf is a problem, I don't know. When I took German classes, two teachers told me, "Fadila, I don't know if you'll [be able to] find work later because of your headscarf." I said, "Why? You should always decide if someone is a good or bad person based on their heart, not on what that person is wearing." (Fadila)

Since these factors significantly limit the women's options, many choose to approach their next steps rather pragmatically by focusing on language classes and employment options with minimal requirements. Nevertheless, they still express hopes for their professional future which indicate that, despite putting their families first, these women are looking to advance their personal careers too. While waiting for her teaching degree to be recognised, Fadila is working to complete additional certificates in the area of education to support both her children and her career. To work towards her dream of pursuing an apprenticeship to become a waitress, Daria is looking to work as a cashier at a supermarket. Meanwhile, Imani's children are encouraging her to eventually open a shop selling Arabic food, and Naima hopes to one day own a bakery. These dreams are manifestations of the strong will and agency of these individuals who are building a new life in Berlin and see themselves ultimately connecting in a local network. Their businesses will shape the (global) sense of this place as they aim to bring elements of the sense of place felt in their home countries to Germany and thereby contribute to migrant place-making. In a similarly strong manner, the women speak out about their identities, the details of which are examined in the next section.

5.4 Defining Oneself: Identity

Living in Berlin challenges the women's identities, causing them to reconsider, and in some cases redefine, themselves. Focusing on intersectionality, these changes are most visible in the way these women conceive of themselves relating to the social label of 'refugee' as well as to (traditional) gender roles. First, as mentioned in Chapter 2.2, being recognised as a 'refugee' brings both opportunity and stigma. For the interviewees, the former includes access to the *Integrationskurse* as well as the provision of stability in their daily lives due to having a residence permit, albeit a temporary one. The security linked to the approval of their legal status can be seen in the women's responses as those who have been recognised as refugees tend to be more focused on the future rather than the present. Daria and Bushra who both had their asylum applications rejected struggled the most to begin settling into their lives in Berlin. In a similar fashion, Abeba, who only recently succeeded in having her little daughter join her in Germany, was still occupied with organising and navigating this new reality. Similarly, Kyra was feeling able to grow for the first time in years since finally obtaining refugee status shortly before the interview, after having been in Germany for three years already:

I have built my life here now, I now have my roots [in Berlin] – that will continue, actually only from this year onwards. (Kyra)

These examples form a strong contrast to Fadila's, Daria's, Imani's, and Naima's above plans for their professional careers and illustrate how being held in limbo freezes the individual in place, leaving them unable to successfully enmesh themselves into the fabric of the place or to form strong social connections with others. It also forces the individual to focus exclusively on the present in a highly energy-consuming manner.

On the other hand, there is a clear stigma attached to the label 'refugee' or 'foreigner' more generally which remains with the individual even after the burden of obtaining a safe(r) legal status has been lifted off of them. Despite Layla explaining that due to the diversity of its population, she does not feel like a foreigner in Berlin, the manifold examples of racism presented above reveal that this is not the full picture. These experiences illustrate the discrimination the women face on a daily basis because, although they blend into the diversity of people living in Berlin, they are still perceived of as an 'Other' by some individuals and are consequently explicitly shown that they do not belong. The women's race/ethnicity thus clearly subjects them to discrimination which people with white privilege do not experience.

However, the women also face struggles concerning their conceptualisations of gender and, more precisely, gender roles. Here, two aspects are of central importance: the interviewees' views of motherhood as well as their perceptions of women's role in society. Concerning the former, as outlined in the previous section, the mothers among the interviewees tend to prioritise their children over themselves and are determined to create a better life for them in Germany. In addition, many consider child rearing and household chores to be their 'duty' as women and mothers (personal communication, 5 and 25 September, 2019). And although, as outlined by Fadila, this work takes a notable toll on these women, they still have dreams for their own (professional) futures too. Therefore, it would be wrong to conceive of them as passive, closed-off individuals who submit to traditional gender roles. Instead, these women show agency and ambition by not only creating a home for their families and supporting their family members' integration, but by also working on their own educational and professional achievements despite facing many obstacles and constraints. To varying degrees and in different ways, the interviewees seem to find opportunities to express themselves in their new lives in Berlin. Nevertheless, they face both internal and external identity struggles.

On the one hand, the women of the *Interkulturelle Gruppe* admit that being confronted with more independent ways of life for women in Germany posed a significant (internal) challenge for them as they felt a certain pressure to conform (personal communication, 25 September, 2019). On the other, there is an additional, twofold external challenge to the

women's identities. First, some women readily embraced the newly found space and freedoms, yet face repercussions within their communities from having 'broken with tradition':

In Iran and Afghanistan, many people don't attend school. For women that's quite bad. But in Germany, I wish to go to school, I can work, [and] I don't ask my husband, "[Please,] give me some money." I can do everything [here]. (Daria)

He [her husband] thinks, all Persian men think that I'm not a good woman because I discard my headscarf. I also believe that all men think this way but that's not important to me. Because here in Germany, there are many women without a headscarf, [so] it's not just me. (Shirin)

Daria separated from her husband and family and was looking to start over anew at the time of the interview while struggling to have her application for asylum approved, whereas Shirin had to threaten leaving her husband for him to accept her independence. Further, she strongly questions the religious structures in Iran due to the gender roles promoted by Muslim leaders. According to Shirin, the Muslim faith can be lived more liberally, but she fears that her parents may think that coming to Europe has made her 'godless'. The above manifestations of self-confidence thus come at a high personal cost. At the same time, due to being perceived of as 'traditional' and 'conservative' by others, the women also must defend their agency and strength against mislabelling by (white) Germans:

There is this idea among German people that all Arab women work in the kitchen. And I don't like this idea. I don't just cook, but I also study and I do so much. . . . I'm not just a housewife but also a worker, I've attended school and university and I can do everything. (Layla)

I always try to open this door. I have to open this door. . . . You don't have to see me as a 'foreigner'. No. I'm here in Germany, I have [to be] like a German. I can speak [the language] and I can do everything. . . . I'm a strong woman, I'm a strong mother and I'm here. (Fadila)

These statements illustrate the effects of conflicts relating to identity, racist preconceptions, and the undermining of feelings of belonging. They epitomise the women's intersectionality and thus point to the importance of the consideration of the individual's specific position in examining their doing of integration. Before relating these findings back to the research questions of this thesis, the following chapter discusses their theoretical and social implications.

6. Discussing the Network of Theoretical Conceptualisation and Lived Experience

The four different dimensions of integration examined above – the spatial, social, functional, and individual – cannot, in fact *must* not, be thought of separately. They intertwine in the daily life of the individual and shape not only their spatial and social experience of place, but also the “global sense” (Massey, 1994, p. 156) of that very place. This discussion relates the above findings for these four dimensions to the key concepts outlined in the theoretical framework (see Chapter 2.2) as well as to the definition of *integration* as a doing (see Chapter 2.3). It thereby aims to outline lessons to be drawn from the empirical data for the theoretical discourse on intersectionality, place, home, and integration.

To begin with, the spatial perspective provides an insight into the role of neighbourhoods and *home* for a person’s rooting in place (see Chapter 5.1). Both aspects, as well as the concrete housing conditions, have a direct effect on the wellbeing and comfort of the women. Interestingly, the neighbourhood itself, while contributing to feelings of (un)ease, falls short of the importance indicated in the literature on migrant place-making (see Kaplan & Chacko, 2015; Pemberton & Phillimore, 2018). Having been forced into mobility since their arrival in Berlin due to frequent mandated moves between housing facilities, the women’s social contacts, their closest local connections, are spread across the city and are often linked to specific organisations. They thus maintain their high levels of mobility in everyday life and commute to their favourite activities, sometimes spending more time on public transport than at the event itself.

This behaviour has two effects. On the one hand, since the women are mobile and often venture out from their immediate locale, their neighbourhood no longer holds the same importance as a source of identity. Combined with the fact that many interviewees describe their surroundings as diverse or, alternatively, clearly identify themselves as the ‘Other’, there is little to no space for them to perform explicit acts of place-making around their neighbourhoods. Instead, the women gravitate towards different places in Berlin, such as the Sonnenallee, where their community identity becomes visible, without feeling the need to live close to these areas. Visiting these places rather serves as a ‘remedy’ for homesickness and a small escape from everyday life. In this capacity, these places, too, serve a different purpose than the traditionally imagined neighbourhood. Moreover, by frequenting these community spots, the women contribute to migrant place-making, albeit not in the locale within which they live. The identity-formation and -manifestation connected to this process are hence imbued with

a translocal element while the women are part of the external (global) factors shaping the sense of place in these neighbourhoods.

On the other hand, their mobility enables the women to maintain relationships with people living across the city. This finding is reflected in the perception of the women's social lives by representatives of the organisations:

I consider spatial proximity to be less important [for the social networks of women refugees] than the connection with people. (B. Dieckmann, personal communication, 31 October, 2019)

Rather than relying on a closely knit local community structure in their neighbourhood, they thus form social networks spanning across all of Berlin – and beyond. Terkessidis (2017) attributes this behaviour to expatriates (p. 7) although, given the above findings, this idea can be extended to the group of women refugees. Similarly to expatriates, these women thus mostly draw on social connections external to their immediate surroundings to create feelings of *belonging*. These findings indicate the need to rethink the conceptualisation of the space within which these women live and act and therefore contribute to the arguments presented by Soja (2008) and other scholars of the 'spatial turn'. The women's pronounced mobility, translocal social networking, and distinct place-making strategies challenge existing definitions of spatial containers, such as the neighbourhood, and indicate the intertwining of social, temporal, and spatial aspects in an "*espace vécu*" (Lefebvre, 1974, as cited in Soja, 2008, p. 255, emphasis in original). This 'lived space' influences, and is influenced by, the women's agency which becomes apparent in their construction of *home* and of micropublics as safe spaces as well as in their (re)shaping of identity labels.

First, as outlined by Rouse (1991, as cited in McMichael, 2002, p. 172), the concept of *home* has become "plurilocal" for these women refugees since many consider more than one locale to be their home. Notably, while their old homes may be lost in a material sense (see Savaş, 2014), they do not cease to invoke feelings of belonging and nostalgia in the interviewees. Even where few social connections remain, other aspects, such as customs and traditions or local cuisine, have been transported to the women's new homes. These elements not only support McMichael's (2002) argument that *home* travels with forced migrants but also raises the question to what extent it can truly be lost as its essence stays with the individual even outside of the original locale. Importantly, however, the women's experiences underline another aspect of the theory: Home is not always linked to feelings of security (see Skey, 2011). Part of the appeal of the activities examined within the framework of this thesis, especially

those aimed specifically at women, is that they create safe spaces where the participants are free from the manifold discriminations in the public sphere as well as from duties, expectations, and pressure imposed on them in their homes. Many attendees joked about enjoying time away from their partners and children though these remarks, when linked to statements about the burden women endure at home due to traditional gender roles and the effects thereof, reveal that, contrary to Fozdar and Hartley's (2014) conceptualisation, the locale of *home* does not provide a safe environment for everyone defining it as such. This does not limit its sense of familiarity but underlines the importance of considering power relations connected to specific spaces.

These dynamics are equally as important in the public sphere where the women face the contestation and/or stigmatisation of their identities. While the individual's options for self-identification are constrained by societal discourse and external validation, the women show how, even within these limitations, they can succeed in unfolding their agency. Naima's determination to "prove wrong" those who think of refugees as "savages" as well as Layla's vehement refusal to submit to the stereotypes commonly associated with the label 'Arab woman' are two examples illustrating this dynamic. These women accept a certain identity, yet nevertheless shape these labels to better suit the parameters of their self-identification. This display of agency is important since it shows that individuals do not lose their ability to determine their sense of self, even when faced with highly stigmatised, and often victimised, identity labels.

Furthermore, this agency of re-defining and self-affirming applies to the diverse conceptualisations of gender promoted by these women. On the one hand, Daria and Shirin express a desire to break with the gender roles traditionally ascribed to women in their home countries. For them, the new environment provides an opportunity for emancipation and a move towards a more liberal idea of 'womanhood'. Fadila's reflection on the way in which her relationship enables her to foster her agency and shape her life trajectory and arguing that many of her friends do not have the same opportunities due to their husbands' strict(er) definitions of gender roles underline the important role of men in this process. While emancipation and a re-defining of one's own gender (role) is possible for these women without the support of their spouses, the stories of Daria and Shirin indicate that, in these cases, a change in the woman's behaviour will likely lead to relationship problems. The fluent and performative nature of gender places a strong emphasis on the individual and changing one's doing of gender necessarily impacts relationships and networks. To maintain existing social bonds, including marriages, a certain degree of allyship by those affected by these changes hence appears fundamental. Importantly, however, the women who did not question traditional gender roles

as openly also expressed a notable sense of agency regarding their life trajectories. Similarly to the way in which the identity label of ‘refugee’ was redefined, here, too, prominent stereotypes were called into question.

Regardless of their way of doing and defining gender, the experiences of all interviewees point to the many challenges posed by the women’s intersectionality. Importantly, it is not the intersectional construction of their identities itself which is problematic but rather the reaction of others to the respective categories. The women’s stories show how different identity categories invite various forms of discrimination based on their gender, ethnicity, and religion, among others. They underline the prevalence of individual and systemic racism which these women, as well as many other individuals, face daily. At the intersection of the interviewees’ ethnicity-based identification with their identities of ‘woman’ and ‘refugee’, but also, where applicable, of ‘Muslim’ or ‘mother’, these manifestations of racism are combined with sexist or Islamophobic forms of discrimination and thus create a difficult situation for these individuals to navigate. However, the women also reveal that their intersectional identities serve as a source of pride and self-affirmation. Especially Fadila’s remark that she is both a strong woman and a strong mother illustrates this point. Nevertheless, the positive richness of these characteristics and their potential remain largely ignored by policies and society. This group of women hence express a remarkable perseverance by re-defining the connotations of their identity labels and creating new avenues for the personal and professional development of themselves as well as their families despite the hardship and pain imposed on them through intersectionality-based discrimination.

Vignette 4: women of color

our backs
tell stories
no books have
the spine to
carry

- rupi kaur (2020)

Intersectionality not only matters for the individual’s identity formation but also for their doing of integration. The effects of the negative labels as well as the idea that integration is a linear and gradual process as outlined by the state’s functional approach can cause confusion and uncertainty for the individual, as the following statement by Kyra shows:

When I came here, I thought, “Well, all the people sitting on the underground know that I’m a refugee and they think, ‘You’re a refugee, you’re reliant on the state.’” And I’ve tried [once I was] eighteen, nineteen, twenty, now that I have a job and I earn money, I could feel part of society. I’ve been earning money for one year now, but I still don’t feel that way. I like it here and I know it’s multicultural but when I sit down with a German person – old, young, it doesn’t matter – I sit and I think, “Yes, I don’t belong here.” . . . But I’ve also seen many who came [to Germany] three years ago, like myself, but they probably have the self-confidence and they now really are part of society – not me. I don’t feel it. Maybe it’s me or it’s society, that’s the big question mark for me still.
(Kyra)

Kyra’s reflection on her place in society, or rather her place in this new place within which she finds herself, illustrates the effects of internalising notions of being different, being ‘Othered’, and being discriminated against. The label ‘refugee’ and its stigma are causing her to expect that other individuals will likely believe that she does not belong. Because of this mindset, combined with the experience of discrimination, she does not feel confident to expand her local network beyond her community, despite having worked hard to create a future for herself in Germany.

As impactful as her words are in illuminating her individual perception of the struggle of integration, they also point to the responsibility of others. While the focus of this thesis has been on the experiences of women refugees, integration is a life-long act performed by every member of society. As shown in the theoretical framework (see Chapter 2.3), being in a place is to be a part of that place; no individual needs to justify their presence. By excluding a person, by making them feel unwelcome and showing them that they do not belong, individuals try to uphold a perceived ‘perfect’ or ‘authentic’ group identity, often linked to a particular conceptualisation of the spatial unit around this group – the person is thought not to fit *in*. However, believing that the women who shared their stories within the framework of this thesis can be excluded from the social group which forms ‘Berlin society’ is based on a fallacy. This discrimination builds on the idea that these individuals do not fit *in*, that they are too different to conform to the ‘essence’ of Berlin. While Massey (1995) shows that such ‘unspoilt’ place identities do not exist (see also Chapter 2.2.5), these women shape Berlin and the sense of this place by means of their presence. Consequently, however the ‘identity’ of Berlin is currently constructed, the interviewees are already a part of it. Any perception of this place which discriminates against these women refugees is therefore not rooted in reality. In the words of Judith Butler:

National or regional identities are much stronger if they accommodate the existing diversity and complexity of those who live there – or try to live there. Forcing people into a falsified picture of “unity” in the name of solidarity is a sure way to undermine any legitimate claims to solidarity. (Reddy & Butler, 2004, p. 118)

Rather than contributing to the stigma attached to certain labels by underlining the ‘Otherness’ of their carriers, singling them out, and further ostracising them, there thus must be a shift – socially and politically – towards the recognition and rethinking of integration which normalises its doing.

7. Conclusion

In conclusion, this thesis argues that existing conceptualisations of *integration* should be challenged in favour of an approach which inextricably links the social to the spatial. This re-imagining of *integration* as a doing, a rooting in place of the individual’s external network by forming or finding local, intra-place social connections provides a more inclusive perspective and normalises the performance – everyone integrates. When applied to the experiences of a group of women refugees in Berlin, this conceptualisation illustrates the interconnectedness of four different aspects of integration: the spatial locating of the individual in place through accommodation, neighbourhood, and the making of home; the connection to local networks through the building of social relationships with other individuals; the functional polic(y)ing of integration by the state and its effects on language proficiency, education, and employment; as well as the individual expression of identity which is shaped by and shapes place. As the individual navigates the private and public moments of everyday life, they draw on and are moved by all internal and external processes presented in this thesis. The definition of *integration* suggested here is thus not only socially, but also spatially inclusive. It shows how different levels of space are re-defined through the way the women navigate the city and push the boundaries of common preconceptions of neighbourhoods as well as mobility.

Moreover, the women’s stories point to the importance of a gendered perspective of the individual’s integration which considers their intersectionality. Across all four aspects, a commonly found limitation to the women’s agency is discrimination based on one of the many labels these individuals chose and/or were assigned. Hence, to *understand* how these women do integration requires acknowledging these manifold and multidimensional obstacles and the complicity of individuals and structures in upholding them. To *transform* how these women can do integration, on the other hand, implies a fundamental change in the way *integration* and

these individuals are thought of. It asks for a recognition of the agency, strength, and potential of refugees in general and women refugees in particular. It highlights the importance of providing opportunities for meaningful exchange in safe spaces which shield individuals from the various forms of insecurity and discrimination they are subjected to in the public space as well as within the confines of their homes – and for those who consider themselves to belong, to be ‘locals’, to participate in these exchanges and thereby expand and root their own networks as well. It means deconstructing commonly held preconceptions in a joint effort to create inviting senses of place which thrive on the global connections fostered by their diverse inhabitants. Finally, it asks policymakers to retreat from the notion of polic(y)ing integration by measuring and managing the individual’s trajectory based on indicators which neglect the majority of the above four aspects. Instead, marginalised voices must be heard and their needs and concerns considered when designing guidelines which structure the living together in a place and, in turn, shape this locale.

7.1 Limitations

Although the research design was thoroughly considered, there are a number of limitations to this thesis. First, the purpose of this research is not the generalisation of its findings but instead a comparison between stories, a broad categorisation and illustration of trends and common strategies or problems. Nevertheless, the diversity among the experiences of this relatively small group of individuals indicates that by broadening the scope of this research, a multitude of new perspectives could be added to its narrative. This holds true for both the inclusion of more interviewees from Berlin as well as for the geographical expansion of the research focus to other places. The former could aim to incorporate younger and older women, individuals who do not have family in Berlin, or voices from the LGBT community, whereas the latter might take into account the experiences of women refugees in places whose “global sense” (Massey, 1994, p. 156) feels rather local compared to that of Berlin.

Further, on a practical level, a language barrier limited the interviews to varying degrees. In some cases, the support of a translator might have facilitated the sharing of the women’s stories, while it is unclear whether they would have felt as comfortable to express themselves with a third person present. Moreover, the operationalisation of the theoretical framework was too complicated at times, with many interviewees asking for clarifications and explanations of the questions. Despite being linked to the first point about language, this is an aspect worth considering in its own right in the design of future research. In addition, due to these limitations, it could be beneficial to conduct multiple interviews with the same person, potentially also

mixing different formats, such as one-on-one and group settings. This would give the individual more space to share their thoughts and stories, an approach which worked well for some members of the *Interkulturelle Gruppe* who attended more than one of the sessions during which I was present.

7.2 Suggestions for Further Research

There are multiple avenues for future research which build on the findings of this thesis. First, as outlined in the discussion (see Chapter 6), the way in which the women refugees interviewed for this thesis enact place-making differs significantly from the conceptualisation of this process currently proposed by the academic discourse. Therefore, further examination of place-making strategies across migrant, and especially refugee, communities promises an interesting opportunity for theory development. Second, the agency of women refugees remains largely underestimated or ignored. From a governance perspective, future research could contribute to the development of an enhanced policy framework as well as a range of more participatory and inclusive policymaking tools which consider and employ the women's intersectionality and the resulting potential for agency, but also aim to eliminate the discrimination linked to it. On the other hand, the effect of external factors on an individual's agency and intersectionality offers a multitude of possibilities for academic studies. For instance, the findings of this thesis show that women refugees' emancipation and development of agency in their new environment is influenced by the support of spouses and (male) family members. Therefore, future research might examine in more detail the impact of men, as well as of patriarchal structures, on the agency of women refugees. Finally, this thesis has largely focused on the social side of the relationship between the individual and place. Therefore, future geographic research might adopt a stronger spatial perspective and examine how the local rooting of its residents in turn shapes place and how this process can be thought of in terms of 'lived space'.

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