Narrative of Forced Migration
Discursive Insights into Identity Representation and Construction by Syrian Forced Migrants

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Evaluator
Assoc. Prof. Dr. Eva-Maria Graf
Alpen-Adria-Universität Klagenfurt
Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik

Klagenfurt, February 2020
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Life can only be understood backwards; but it must be lived forwards.

Søren Kierkegaard
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Five years and four months ago, on October 15, 2014, life became wonderful. Thank you, Siba, for your faith in me; I am better because of your love, trust, and strength. I promise to get better at cooking… and to forever love you.
Dedication

To Myriam Robveille

For all of our “not-very-serious” discussions about Camus, Celine, Genet... and Camus.

For your unconditional friendship, support, and trust,

...

I’ve decided to “have a cup of coffee,” and

I owe it to you.
Abstract

This study investigates the impact of forced migration on identity construction in autobiographical narratives told by Syrian forced migrants (SFMs) through discursively examining how the authentic voices of SFMs are constructed in narratives and what these narratives might reveal about forced migrant identity representations. To this end, the aim of this thesis is twofold. First, by shedding light on SFMs’ narratives, the study investigates the themes SFMs tackle when they tell stories about their past, present, and future. Highlighting and examining the recurrent themes in SFMs’ narratives leads to the second research focus, which is to gain further insight into the kinds of identities SFMs construct in their narratives. The study aims to answer the following research question: which themes do SFMs topicalize in their personal narratives and what facets of identity do SFMs thereby co-construct in these narratives? Both research foci (themes and identities) will investigate whether there are recurring features of identity representation in SFMs’ stories that could suggest a shared “forced migrant identity.” The study analyzes 35 stories that SFMs contributed to the online platform I am a migrant (http://iamamigrant.org/). Each story is analyzed according to traces of individual and collective identity construction. The data are analyzed qualitatively within a narrative analysis framework in combination with a qualitative content analysis approach. In order to gain insight into the topicalized themes of the stories, the analysis relies on different protocols of narrative analysis (thematic and structural) to facilitate a thorough description of how SFMs understand the past, experience the present, and anticipate the future. In addition to narrative analysis, qualitative content analysis is applied to reveal the various identities the participants convey and how these identities are constructed through narrative. On this basis, the study aims to recommend more inclusion of and listening to the authentic voices of SFMs in particular and forced migrants in general. Becoming aware of aspects of identity as shown in and through narrative will increase the possibility of reaching a better understanding of the drastic changes that SFMs have gone through. In other words, a qualitative in-depth investigation of how forced migrants’ subjective perspectives are constructed and presented in narratives could enhance a smooth sociocultural transition—with fewer obstacles—for forced migrants into their new surroundings and could pave the way for host countries to assist en route.

Keywords: forced migration, identity, narrative, qualitative research, Syrian forced migrants
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1. Introduction

Forced migration is a phenomenon of increasing significance in today’s world of cross-border flows…and transnational networks; a world in which the difference between the rich and the poor can increasingly be seen as a difference between the rich minority, who are able to travel freely about this ‘space of flows’…and the poor majority who are prepared to take tremendous risks in order to escape the ‘the discomforts of localised existence.’

(Turton, 2003, p. 8)

The scope of this study is forced migrants’ narratives and the focus is identity (co)construction and representation. By investigating both major topics and identity facets as outlined in forced migrants’ personal stories, the study aims to highlight collective characteristics of forced migration identity. Through shedding light on narratives, the study will explore the themes that forced migrants emphasize in their personal experiences in order to underline the most recurrent themes. Highlighting and examining recurring themes in narratives allows insight into the kinds of identities forced migrants construct in these narratives. Underscoring themes and identities facilitates the contextualization of the self-perception of forced migrants and the common traits of their unique personalities in light of their new experience of forced migration.

This study is placed within the larger realm of migration studies and will investigate migration discourses by focusing on migrants’ narratives, in particular, the narratives of “forced” migrants, who are “subject to a migratory movement in which an element of coercion exists, including threats to life and livelihood, whether arising from natural or man-made causes” (European Commission, 2019, p.1). This particular type of migration has recently gained special attention in Europe from various fields of the humanities due to the debates that migration has engendered on various political, cultural, and economic levels (see Chapter 5). However, a large area of the phenomenon has been neglected, namely, the representation of the forced migrants themselves. Thus, this study acknowledges this gap in the existing research and examines aspects of identity as an expressive concept of forced migrants’ representation by investigating the place for identity (co)construction, i.e., narrative. In other words, identity and narrative will be discussed simultaneously from the perspective of viewing narrative as an entry point to forced migrants’ authentic representations and voices.

Introducing forced migrants’ authentic voices and focusing on their stories becomes increasingly important as the forced migrant population is still steadily rising and is likely to continue to rise since the factors engendering it are not going to diminish in the near future—factors such as armed conflicts and ecological and economic crises. According to the United
Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (2019), every two seconds, one person is forcibly displaced from his or her home, which has led to a population of 70.8 million migrants worldwide; the largest group, 9.4%, comes from Syria. While Syrian forced migrants (SFM)s currently represent a significant number of forced migrants, there is limited research into who they are and how they see themselves and others in the context of their new surroundings. Moreover, most studies are dedicated to conducting research only “about” SFMs, not “with” them (see Chapter 5). Closing this research gap by emphasizing genuine representations will result in a better understanding and enhance social acceptance from both forced migrants and their host societies. Presenting firsthand representations of SFMs’ identities, listening to their expectations, fears, and plans, and underlining their views on their host societies are essential elements for producing a more refined and detailed understanding of the people in question. Moreover, closing this research gap will facilitate a fully-fledged framework for future research in the field of forced migration and away from aggregate statistics and preset discourses that may ignore the individual characteristics of the studied group. That is to say, introducing features of forced migrants’ original stories and characteristics of their aspects of identity will encourage diversity among and dynamic contributions from forced migrants in their host countries. This, in turn, will hopefully lead to slowly eliminating feelings of estrangement among forced migrants and gradually encourage feelings of belonging in the new host societies. Thus, on this basis of the envisioned results, the study aims to recommend more inclusion of and listening to the authentic voices of forced migrants in order to facilitate better understanding and greater harmony among societies. After establishing the most relevant ethical considerations of this study (SFM’s authentic voices) and outlining the scope of the thesis (identity construction and representation), it must be highlighted that the research is placed within the domain of sociolinguistic studies, examining in particular the discursive characteristics and aspects of identity in the realm of forced migration studies. The study investigates the most recounted themes that SFMs tell in their narratives after escaping the Syrian crisis in 2011 and depicts identity representation and construction within the same narratives. That is, the three core axes upon which the study rotates are narrative, identity, and migration. More specifically, the study aims to find the most significant themes in the SFMs’ narratives and how the SFMs (co)construct and represent different aspects of identity while narrating their personal experiences. Uncovering prominent themes from the SFMs’ personal histories and unraveling the SFMs’ identity constructions, both foci are directed towards carving out a
possible “forced migration identity.” To this end, the study will analyze the SFMs’ stories that they have contributed to *I am a migrant*, an online portal through which the International Organization for Migration (IOM) encourages migrants to share their experiences with the world. There will be a thorough illustration of what SFMs topicalize in and through their narratives of personal history and a subsequent study on various aspects of identity construction, as shown in these specific narratives. Furthermore, studying SFMs’ narratives allows for making their authentic voices heard clearly as they share clues about their personal past, present, and future and investigating how aspects of identity are constructed in accordance with their exceptionally challenging migration experience. Hence, narrative is the focal point in this study as it serves two purposes: it acts as both the data for the research and the method of inquiry. In other words, the analysis relies on narratives as a collection of personal stories to find out about forced migration while at the same time considering these narratives as a means of constructing identities and navigating a sense of self for the narrators, namely, the SFMs. In placing this research in the realm of narrative, identity, and forced migration, an illustration of the playing field, so to speak, might illuminate the interrelated connection between the three concepts. That is, narrative is considered the field, identities are the players, and forced migration is the medium of playing. A qualitative analysis of the SFMs’ stories will shed light on the central topics they focus on and highlight which aspects of identity seem to carry special meaning in terms of the ways SFMs want to be represented. For this purpose, two qualitative linguistics approaches will be applied to extract the themes and identities from these particular stories; these approaches are narrative analysis and content analysis.

Before delving into the theoretical approaches, it should be briefly stressed that throughout the current study, attaching concepts such as narrative, experience, and identity to forced migrants should not be taken to mean that there are certain fixed features under which forced migrants can be categorized (see section 5.2). Furthermore, it is necessary to call attention to the uniqueness, as with all other individuals, of forced migrants’ identities and experiences as a counter-argument to any generalizing discourse.

Overall, this thesis has been divided into eight major chapters and organized in the following way. After the introduction (Chapter 1), Chapters 2 to 5 lay out the theoretical dimensions of the research; there will be a brief overview of the contemporary scholarly literature on narrative, identity, and migration, along with their sociolinguistic associations. Chapter 6 is dedicated to introducing the data collection and selection criteria as well as reviewing the two methods of analysis: narrative analysis and qualitative content analysis. Chapters 7 and 8
present the findings and a detailed discussion of these findings and include reflections and suggestions for future work.

In the following four chapters, narrative and its definitions, linguistic theories, and major approaches and types thereof will be discussed, and then different definitions and aspects of identity and their relationships to narrative will be highlighted. Lastly, there will be a general overview of migration studies, especially forced migration and its related methods, and discursive illustrations of forced migration’s relationships to identity and narrative.
2. Narrative and analyzing narrative

Narrative is present in…cinema, comics, news items, conversations…[it] is present in every age, in every place, in every society; it begins with the very history of mankind and there nowhere is nor has been a people without narrative. All classes, all human groups, have their narratives, enjoyment of which is very often shared by men with different, even opposing, cultural backgrounds.

(Barthes, 1977, p. 79)

Narrative has a ubiquitous presence in and enormous influence on human life; a fact that is shared and supported by most social researchers who rely on narrative in their studies. The concise statement, “Narrative is all around us” (Fludernik, 2009, p. 1) captures the pervasive presence of narrative in the lives of what Fisher (1984, p. 6) calls “homo narrans,” i.e., narrative beings, who “seem to have no other way of describing ‘lived time’ save in the form of a narrative” (Bruner, 2004, p. 692). Making sense of life and self “occurs, in significant part, through narrative reflection” (Freeman, 2010, p. 4); this reflection, according to Freeman (2010), is the outcome of hindsight, which represents the medium for performing narrative (p. 8). In addition to hindsight, the other direction of “sight,” namely foresight, also creates a space for self-awareness in anticipated situations. This paradoxical nature of being able to travel back and forth in time is illustrated elegantly in Barbara Hardy’s oft-quoted words:

We dream in narrative, daydream in narrative, remember, anticipate, hope, despair, believe, doubt, plan, revise, criticize, construct, gossip, learn, hate and love by narrative. In order really to live, we make up stories about ourselves and others, about the personal as well as the social past and future.

(Hardy, 1968, p. 5)

Narrative has numerous varieties of functions and categories, and as a result, it has different definitions. These definitions vary depending on the research field and the expected functions of narrative. The definition of narrative strongly diverges in and through the different disciplines that deal with the narration of events. Psychology, sociology, literature, and cultural studies, to name a few, each have a specific understanding of narrative and its mechanisms. In addition to these disciplines, Brockmeier and Harré (2001), when listing the challenges that accompany defining narrative, state that the diversity of “structures of narrative” in discourses such as “legal, historical, and religious or political texts” makes the task significantly more complex (p. 44). Taking as an example of one of these fields, narrative is the cornerstone of all written literary work, whether it is a play, poem, short story, or novel. In addition to works of fiction, nonfictional work depends, to a great extent, on narrative strategies in displaying
content. Additionally, film, music, and painting, all in their own ways, continuously try to find creative ways in which narrative can convey interesting new visions. What may add to the complexity of the multi-interpretations that involve defining narrative is the existence of different text types that represent different kinds of narrative, namely, written, verbal, or visual (and any combination of these types). That is, the colored forms of narrative and “[i]ts cultural phenomenology [are] amazingly manifold and open” (Brockmeier & Harré, 2001, p. 44). Needless to say, each of these narrative types should be dealt with differently, and this is one of the major reasons for the diverse approaches to narrative. A diversity of types leads accordingly to a diversity of data, which, in turn, leads to problematic methodological issues; that is, each and every approach to narrative analysis requires special treatment for data collection, the methods used to analyze the collected data, and the manner in which the results of the analysis are presented. Taking into consideration all of these challenging questions, narrative can still be approached comprehensibly when its types, components, functions, and approaches are sufficiently outlined.

2.1. Theorizing narrative

Before delving into the existing (socio)linguistics literature on narrative and its definitions from narrative analysts’ perspectives, it is worth briefly mentioning a basic general consensus of the etymology of narrative. Starting with the verb, “to narrate” is to relate a story or tell a sequence of events and present it as a unified experience by placing it in suitable setting (time and space) and connecting the experience with any possible character who happens to have a relationship to the story or storyteller. For a broader sense of the word, the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) further defines “narrate,” whose roots can be traced to the Latin narrāt-, as “to speak the commentary of (a broadcast, film, exhibition, etc.)” and “to give an account, recount a story” (OED, 2019). Thus, “narrating” entails practicing the action, i.e., the actual telling of a story, which leads to the noun of the event that is told, namely, the narrative. The entry for “narrative” in the OED, when the legal explanation is excluded, refers to the account that establishes relationships between connected events; these events can be fictional or nonfictional (OED, 2019).

One term in the previous dictionary definition that is associated with narrative is “story.” Storytelling lies at the heart of individuals’ interaction as a universal competence. Though stories are universal phenomena that people share collectively, they present only a subjective understanding of the world; in other words, reality in stories is simply the reality of the
storyteller. Moreover, the subjective perspective of these stories cannot be tested as right or wrong as they represent the authentic truth “of a specific location in space and time” (Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2000, p. 72). This subjective practice, namely, storytelling, has five communicative functions, as Sunwolf and Frey (2001) illustrate; these functions underpin the importance of storytelling as an essential practice that facilitates understanding people’s individual and social identities. The first attribute of narrative is being relational; narrative yields answers to the personal identity question “who am I?” and likewise to the social identity question “who are we?” (pp. 121–122). Narrative explains experiences; the explanatory function provides individuals with a sense of self-awareness in the world (p. 122). Narrative creates reality; creative narration facilitates recreating past experiences as well as building fictional situations (pp. 124–125). Narrative builds memory; historical narration constructs a collective past (e.g., ethnic and national), which might be, arguably, the cornerstone of any culture (p. 125). Finally, narrative predicts the future; forecasting narration provides a valuable mental space for speculating about possibilities in the context of old or recent personal experience (p. 125).

The preceding review of the dictionary meaning of narrative and its relation to story and storytelling functions have paved the way to introducing a more detailed definition of narrative and its connection to different disciplines. In De Fina’s terms, narrative occupies a distinguished position as “one of the privileged forms used by humans to elaborate experience” (De Fina, 2003, p. 6). Accordingly, narrative and narratology have been extensively studied and methodologically employed by, for example, anthropologists, sociologists, (socio)linguists, psychotherapists, psychologists, and literary theorists (for informative reviews on the meaning of narrative across disciplines, see e.g., Clandinin, 2007; De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2019; Hühn, et al., 2019). This interdisciplinary richness has led to the “well-known heterogeneity of narrative studies” (Mishler, 2006, p. 30). Nonetheless, time-based elements, successive events, and the correlations between the two are the central factors that unify, to some extent, the heterogeneous narrative studies across disciplines (Mishler, 2006, p. 31). Regardless of variations in use, narrative can be, broadly speaking, conceived of as a discursive practice that encompasses “ordering characters in space and time” (Bamberg, 2019, p. 3). Two qualities, then, are what distinguish the foundation of narrative: individuals and their “intentional states” (e.g., expectations, principles, and hopes) and the actions that are performed by these individuals (Bruner, 2001, p. 28). Besides characters and their interactions, narrative requires a third quality in order to be conceived of as a discursively united body, namely, consecutiveness. Temporal ordering, as De Fina (2003, p. 12) demonstrates, is “a
defining property of narrative” that acknowledges events are generated sequentially, one after the other in a given time and space. Likewise, Fludernik (2009, p. 6) stresses the importance of the spatiotemporal sense of narrative in its depiction of a certain reality; this reality has one or more characters at the center, and the events accompanying these characters are normally the subject of the narrative. To sum up, narrative accounts situate people (characters) spatially and temporally in relation to specific successive events, and they “attempt to explain or normalize what has occurred; they lay out why things are the way they are or have become the way they are” (Bamberg, 2012a, p. 85).

2.1.1. Narrative: A mode of understanding

Narrative is an approach, if not the approach, to understanding human existence. Through narrative, people identify with their surroundings, grasp them, communicate with them and, above all, live in them. Hence, narrative is a source of meaning; this is what Freeman (2019) explicates when he states the three different fronts of narrative: method, theory, and practice (p. 22). Starting with an explicit statement, Freeman claims that narrative is the most “appropriate vehicle for studying human lives” (p. 21). Presenting narrative as a method is built upon the fact that human experiences are accessible for inspection only “retrospectively” (p. 27). That is, the ability to look back, in a vivid flashback manner, at events and place them in the context of the here and now are what establish narrative as a method that is used “to look at people, at the lives of real human beings” (p. 28) and to comprehend life and its events. Considering the previous temporal feature of hindsight, the context of theory is directly applicable to narrative (p. 30). Analyzing stories provides, on the one hand, a rich source for questioning personal and social identity while on the other hand, it allows for investigating the relationship between individuals’ identities and actions and the present–past intervals of narrative. Finally, as a praxis, narrative is widely adopted in human interactions and most of people’s everyday communications (whether these take place, say, at home, in the workplace, or at a clinic) employ a certain type of narrative or another (p. 32); that is, narrative forms a basic component of daily life. It is also worth mentioning that, as practicing narrative differs across individuals and cultures, it also differs in the characteristic of the narrated story as being “big” or “small,” a distinction that will be discussed later in this chapter.

As stated above, it is difficult to imagine human life without the presence of narrative. Almost all explanations of life, across a variety of disciplines, come in a discursive manner. Examining life through narrative gives people the opportunity to individually reflect and
socially share continuously novel readings of personal experiences. In perceiving life as “enacted narratives,” experiences become strongly coherent when their meanings change, through the power of narrative, from being implicitly comprehended to being explicitly demonstrated (Goodson & Gill, 2011, p. 6). This abiding and pervasive presence of narrative in social life does not contain a unified content and form across cultures, however. Differences in cultures bring about varieties of narrative practices, as De Fina and Georgakopoulou (2012, p. 52) point out. They distinguish three approaches that relate narrative activities to social life, approaches that a) investigate the contexts of narrative practice, b) draw on narrative and social norms and traditions, and c) study the narrative event, i.e., communication designs. Regardless of the different approaches, the intertwined relationship between living life and telling about life has resulted in two practices that stand distinguished in the realm of narrative research. In her narrative lessons, Ochs (2004) underlines major features of narrative and outlines two practices of narrative that most people follow while “recounting narratives of personal experience” (p. 278). The first practice is related to the act of narrating an experience while the second illustrates how “[n]arrators question or dispute the meaning or accuracy of a recounted logic of experience” (Ochs, 2004, p. 276). Storytellers exercise one of these two practices, if not both simultaneously, while they are telling about their experiences, whether it is about an ordinary daily occurrence (e.g., my partner’s birthday party) or an extraordinary event (e.g., surviving an earthquake). Before delving into these two practices, it is worth mentioning that the three pillars of Ochs’ lessons have direct connections to the analysis protocol that is followed in this study.

Adopting the same line of argument of numerous narrative analysts (e.g., Bruner, 2002; Labov, 1966), Ochs connects narrative activity mainly to recounting the events—in a “temporal and causal orderliness” (Ochs, 2004, p. 270)—of an unusual, challenging, or even extraordinary nature that disturb the flow of life and its ordinary routines. Additionally, narratives are contemplated in the domain of human times; since events are set in the recollected past, the considered present, and sometimes in the envisaged future, this feature complies with Bamberg’s identity dilemmas, which will be discussed further in the Methodology chapter. Thirdly, narrative, through revealing life events, supports an increase in self-awareness and reinforces the sense of coherent and continuous self by means of reflecting on “experiences that upset teller’s life expectations” (p. 285). These three features of narrative rely on the “practice” that tellers aim to communicate in their stories.

To “do” narrative, either of the two different practices should be performed. In explaining how the telling of personal experiences facilitates a better understanding of the self, Ochs
(2004) accentuates two discursive practices: recounting an event logically and reflecting on the logic of the event. Although the first practice (recounting) would necessarily lead to the second (reflecting), the coherently logical presentation of an experience and setting it in its relevant time and space differs substantially from investigating “alternative understandings of experience” (p. 278) and their meanings. To both analyze narrative practices and to realize their logical contributions in constructing an authentic self, five main dimensions are employed. The first narrative practice (recounting an event logically) is the main focus of this study, and thus, the dimensional scope only of this practice will be outlined.

According to Ochs (2004), the first dimension of narrative practice is *tellership* (p. 281); that is, narrative in general and oral narrative in particular require an active teller and interactive listener(s) in order to construct the narrative. Then, the experience should carry a strong *tellability* (p. 282) quality that interrupts the ordinary course of life in order to be shared. Thirdly, the tellability of an event varies in the degree of *embeddedness* (p. 282) in the discourse of the surrounding sociocultural context. Whether closely embedded or vastly detached, narratives denote a sense of *linearity* that “present an orderly, linear temporal and causal progression of events” (p. 283). Finally, while narrating, tellers take clear stands towards a *moral stance* (p. 284) that adheres to their communities’ norms; that is, tellers tend to morally test life experiences and whether they meet the moral appropriateness of societal norms and traditions. These five dimensions of the narrative practice constitute the structural backbone of telling life events, and they are apparent in almost all types of narrative, whether written, verbal, or visual, and regardless of the length, whether it is a small or big story.

### 2.1.2. Narrative: Types

The two types of narrative that currently dominate narrative research are big and small stories (see, for example, Bamberg, 2006b; Deppermann, 2019; Freeman, 2006; Lucius-Hoene & Deppermann, 2000). The history of narrative analysis is dominated mostly by the strong presence of (auto)biographical (i.e., big stories) research (Bamberg, 2006b). Life history, biographical interview, or *big stories* are all terms that refer to “approaches that look toward significant episodes, portions of a life, or even the whole of a life,” which are recited, in verbal or written forms, in (auto)biographical settings (Freeman, 2010, p. 226). Big stories are approached through (auto)biographical writings and interviews, (semi)structured interviews, and client/therapist sessions (Freeman, 2006; Georgakopoulou, 2007). This particular type of recounting a personal experience displays a teller’s reflective self as well as a continuous stable
identity (McAdams, 2017, p. 34). Big stories are told from a distance; thus, people travel beyond the existing moment to deliberately reflect on their experiences. Biographical narratives detect how tellers articulate their experiences at the present moment and how they “make sense of themselves in light of these past events” (Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008, p. 378). On the whole, eliciting big stories necessitates thoughtful contemplation and being away from the daily business of life, two elements that establish the core quality of big stories, which this study is mainly looking at.

Small stories, as a concept, was first introduced by Michael Bamberg and Alexandra Georgakopoulou, two leading figures in small stories research, in order to challenge “an overemphasis on big story biography research…within the field of identity analysis” (Bamberg, 2010, p. 2). Small stories encompass a range of discursive practices “such as tellings of ongoing events, future or hypothetical events, shared (known) events, but also allusions to tellings, deferral of tellings, and refusals to tell (Georgakopoulou, 2006b, p. 130). To expand more on the contextual meaning of “small,” Georgakopoulou (2019) justifies using the term, concluding that “if ‘big stories’ had been analyzed extensively, now was the moment to look at the neglected stories, which, in some ways, happened to be literally small too” (Georgakopoulou, 2019, p. 256). Small stories display the conversational self as expressed in interactions between the teller(s) and interlocutors, they are recounted in the here and now, and they are analyzed at the present moment of communication. Narratives-in-interaction, or alternatively small stories (Barkhuizen, 2019; Georgakopoulou, 2006a), which are elicited in the context of conversational flow, are often related, more so than big stories, to the daily business of life. The domains of small stories are everyday interactions (Georgakopoulou, 2007) and focus groups (Bamberg, 2004). Small stories tend to highlight the very act of narrating, i.e., “what people do with their talk” and how they present their identity to reach a sense of self (Bamberg, 2006b, p. 168). Therefore, small stories researchers focus on identity in interactional contexts, namely, how identity is (re)constructed in social exchanges.

Whether big or small, “there is no more appropriate vehicle for studying human lives” than stories because they help in realizing identity construction and grasping a sense of self (Freeman, 2019, pp. 21–22). Small stories research prioritizes the interactional form of the conversational exchange (Bamberg, 2012b, p. 100) while big stories analysis focuses more on understanding recounted events in their entirety; events “in which speakers are asked to retrospect on particular life-determining episodes or on their lives as a whole” (Bamberg, 2006a, p. 64). Both types of narrative are situated in “different regions of experience;” small stories engage in detecting daily, routine conversations while big stories engage in reflecting
on past experiences (Freeman, 2006, p. 162). To put it plainly, big stories cover the past, and small stories involve the present, i.e., identity as contemplated in a continuum vis-à-vis identity as it is sketched in the here and now; in this regard, big stories research considers a narrated experience and its narrator to be the two focal points of interest while small stories analysts “center on the interactional process of storytelling as the focus of attention” (De Fina, 2019, p. 352). In other words, both types of narratives approach identity construction and representation differently, with the conversational small stories tending more to answer the who-am-I question in a current situation and big stories seeking specifically to analyze narratives in order to understand identities as reflected upon from a present moment.

Many narrative scholars (e.g., Bamberg, Deppermann, Freeman, and Georgakopoulou) acknowledge a chief resemblance between the two types of narrative, specifically the fact that big and small stories, each in their own way, offer profound insights into identity (co)construction and the role of the narrating activity in the process. In his attempt to reconcile the seemingly contradictory positions of big and small stories, Freeman (2006, p. 137) affirms that there is no superior, truer, or more privileged type between the two, and both shed light on experiences to facilitate understanding how identity works in and through narrative. That is, they complete each other in the field of narrative analysis as small stories are sometimes available to be elicited from a larger context. Moreover, and in later work, Freeman (2019, p. 27) argues that the retrospective dimension of narrative, i.e., the ability to inspect past events in the present, binds big and small stories together. As big stories are the ideal place to depict retrospectivity, small stories can also be looked at backwardly as they share the quality of a “story.” Another effort to draw similarities between the two types of narrative comes from Deppermann (2019). As retrospectivity is more acknowledged in the terrain of big stories, Deppermann (2019, p. 375) discusses the performative element and the positioning of self and other(s) as common features of small stories, which are strongly realized in conversational exchanges. Not only narratives-in-interaction, but also (auto)biographical stories show examples of performing and positioning as they are “informed by situated, hearer-oriented concerns that impinge on narrative design and function” (Deppermann, 2019, p. 375). Accordingly, whether stories are big or small, narrative-performative, retrospective, and positioning characteristics enable narrators to represent who they are and provide a unique site for identity construction. Bearing in mind these similarities between the two types of narrative, big stories approaches will inform the analysis in this research more than small stories approaches due to the aim of the research question to unfold identity construction in episodes.
of narrated experiences retold and contemplated from a distance; additionally, the nature of the data collected for analysis (i.e., a semi-structured interview) fits into the category of big stories.

2.2. Analyzing narrative

Narrative can be analyzed through applying qualitative and/or quantitative approaches (Elliott, 2005, p. 2). When analyzing narrative, analysts face a general concern that is generated during the process by two major characteristics: one indicates a sense of division while the second yields unification. There is a general consensus among narrative analysts (e.g., De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2012; Elliott, 2005; Riessman, 2008) that narrative analysis, as a method, has no single specific approach that fits all research; rather, it functions in accordance with various methods. In Schiffrin’s (1996, p. 191) own words, “there is no set of general sociolinguistic tools through which to analyze how narrative language reveals self and identity.” Thus, choosing how to analyze narrative depends solely on the studied case (Riessman, 2008, p. 539). However, and regardless of researcher interests, using storied texts is the shared feature that all approaches to narrative analysis have in common (Riessman, 2008, p. 539). Whether private or public, big or small, texts are the cornerstone of any analytical practice of narrative. When analyzing narrative, different types of texts can be processed; these texts can be written, oral, or visual (Riessman, 2008, p. 4). Besides the variations in types, collecting texts, i.e., data, differs in accordance with the study interest as well. Interviews, documents, official protocols, and (auto)biographies are some of the sources that narrative analysts may choose as data for research (Riessman, 2008, pp. 22–23), and these data can be inspected individually or collectively by covering specific groups. To cast light on these differences in methods, the similarities in implementing storied texts, and what solution narrative analysts have suggested, Riessman’s (2008) three approaches to narrative analysis and De Fina and Georgakopoulou’s (2012) five narrative analysis parameters will be highlighted next.

2.2.1. Three approaches to narrative analysis

To solve what might be considered a problematic absence of clear procedural components to undertaking a narrative analysis approach, Riessman (2008) differentiates between four analytic approaches of narrative analysis: thematic, structural, dialogic/performance, and visual analysis (p. 19). As this study is concerned with text produced only in verbal (written) form, only the first three approaches to narrative analysis will be discussed next.
According to Riessman (2008), the thematic form investigates what the content of narrative is about and highlights “what was told, and why, when, where, and by whom” (Barkhuizen, 2019, p. 99). This approach explores the sociocultural context through which the content of narrative is displayed and focuses “on the relationships between narrative and context and on the embedding of narrative in social life” (De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2012, p. 52). On the other hand, when narrative analysts pursue a structural protocol of narrative analysis, their goal is mainly to answer, “How are narratives organized—put together—to achieve a narrator’s strategic aims” (Riessman, 2008, p. 77). Through considering the structure of texts, this method focuses on the systematic inner building blocks of narrative and prioritizes the form over the content. There are varieties of structural narrative analysis tactics, such as Polkinghorne’s framework, Mishler’s typology, and Labov’s model (Kim, 2016, p. 195); all of these tactics “can generate insights that are missed when interpretation concentrates narrowly on ‘what’ is said, ignoring how content is organized by a speaker” (Riessman, 2008, pp. 100–101). Finally, the “dialogic/performance analysis” (Riessman, 2008) focuses on the interactional side of narratives, namely, how tellers present themselves, how analysts situate their roles, and how the interaction between the two happens during narration. Put differently, a dialogic/performance approach to narrative analysis should “pay attention to the roles of participants in the storytelling event and the local context of storytelling” (De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2012, p. 24).

2.2.2. Narrative analysis parameters

Narrative analysts suggest several technical outlines that can aid researchers in properly conducting their narrative studies (see for example, De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2012; Elliott, 2005; Kim, 2016). Although these techniques do not necessarily serve the same organizational goals, they enable analysts to take advantage of clear structural steps and employ the approach(es) they find most suitable for their research. That is, instead of labeling methods of narrative analysis by forced classifications, different approaches should be taken to “point to parameters that may vary in research methodologies” (De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2012, p. 24).

For practical procedures, De Fina and Georgakopoulou (2012, pp. 24–25) distinguish five parameters in the realm of narrative analysis research that analysts usually adopt. First, narrative analysts should set the object of analysis through prioritizing the aim of the research, i.e., is the prime interest the structure, context, or interaction process of the narrative? Drawing
on the main purpose of the analysis, researchers can then choose to implement a general methodological approach, i.e., is the research conducted qualitatively and/or quantitatively? The third research parameter that narrative analysts should decide upon is methods of data collection, i.e., are data elicited or non-elicited, or occurring naturally or experimentally? Next, and while deciding upon the method of data collection, researchers choose the types of data they are looking at, i.e., are the data oral, written, or both? Finally, data analysis is the empirical angle through which narrative analysts focus on examining data from a specific standpoint, i.e., is the focus on the style, theme, or practice of narrating? Considering Riessman’s aforementioned analytic approaches of narrative analysis, these parameters encompass almost all of the different parts of any narrative analysis research. Furthermore, these parameters assist researchers in analyzing narrative through holding a well-defined position on the focus of analysis and facilitating looking at wide range of topics, such as identity.
3. Identity: Conceptualization and aspects

Identity is a social process involving perception and differentiation. It can be defined as the ways in which individuals and groups regard themselves as similar to, or different from, each other. These perceptions can change over time, so identity is a fluid construct rather than a static one. Identity has both individual and collective dimensions; people identify as unique in certain respects and as members of social groups in other contexts. (Sherry, 2008, p. 415)

Cultures, societies, and individuals share a range of qualities that are contextualized and interwoven into varieties of social, historical, and economic contexts. The unique qualities of each of these entities have “identity” as a collective name. The personal (and scientific) search for general characteristics and building blocks of identity has never stopped; the questions about the nature of identity, how identity is formed, and why identity is articulated in certain ways have been tackled and are still discussed, from the Socratic “know yourself” to the Cartesian “cogito ergo sum,” finally reaching the postmodern notion of “the self and the other.” All of these questions and modes of thinking about identity begin from the same point: the individual. Additionally, as individuals consciously or unconsciously establish groups to feed their sense of belonging, the study of identity has also come to collectively examine the social features of groups. Thus, the study of identity covers individual and collective aspects, which may vary significantly across disciplines.

3.1. Theorizing identity

Several fields of study approach the phenomenon of “identity” (e.g., linguistics, philosophy, psychology, and sociology) from their own angles, and they all add to an interdisciplinary understanding of the concept, which is heavily loaded with different meanings and orientations. For instance, identity as viewed from a sociolinguistic perspective, is constructed by means of “discursive regimes” and interactional roles (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006, p. 21) and defined as established characteristics of individuals that “exist prior to any particular situation, and are dynamic and situated accomplishments, enacted through talk, changing from one occasion to the next” (Tracy, 2002, p. 17). In philosophy, psychology, and sociology, the concept of identity carries and explores different orientations. In The Shorter Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy, identity is related to the idea of similarity and difference, to being identical to or distinguished as “[a]nything whatsoever has the relation of identity to itself, and to nothing else;” in other words, identical entities are one thing, and this statement is rejected “if we can
find a property of one that is not simultaneously a property of the other” (Williamson, 2005, p. 435). While psychologists, generally speaking, have a different approach to identity as it is often defined with sets of characteristics, relationships, and affiliations that describe and demarcate a specific person (Oyserman, Elmore, & Smith, 2012, p. 69). As in psychology, the sociological understanding of identity takes the individual as the starting point and draws on processes of socializing and contextualizing human beings in society, and identity, according to The SAGE Dictionary of Sociology, “refers to the sense of self that develops as the child separates from parents and family and acquires a place in society” (2006, p. 144).

These definitions, which consider identity from different perspectives, display the outstanding richness of the concept and consequently reflect the difficulties in uncovering its nature and characteristics. Moreover, as each society deals with identity in accordance with its traditions and culture, reaching an agreed-upon understanding of the concept seems to be a highly challenging task. What remains is that, regardless of variations in definitions, features, and sociocultural-specific facets, identity as a notion will continue to be one of the most testable concepts that facilitates taking a critical look at the individual and collective nature of human beings.

To sum up, identity definitions differ vastly among disciplines. Moreover, even within a specific research field, identity can be approached through a variety of methods. In their general introduction on identity, De Fina and Georgakopoulou (2012) emphasize, from a narrative analyst’s perspective, the fact that features of identity “vary according to the basic theoretical assumptions inspiring the researchers who have proposed them” (p. 155). Across research fields, identity can be understood within or without its surrounding contexts, and thus it can be perceived as a static entity that belongs to the individual or as a dynamic object that emerges contextually. Through a sociolinguistic perspective, this study draws on the later assumption by looking at identity in its situated context.

3.1.1. Constructing identity

Identity, as viewed from a sociolinguistic standpoint, should always be attached to the quality of “multiness;” that is, identity is a multi-faceted, -voiced, -layered, and -dimensional concept. Its multivalent characteristics can be fully grounded and contested in discursive interaction. Before delving into the multi-sided connection between identity and narrative, it is worth highlighting an analytical discursive framework that combines different concepts of identity. Tracy (2002) distinguishes four concepts of identity that she categorizes into two competing
dimensions: the first dimension is “visible” and “brought to interaction” and the second is “built up in the interaction” (Tracy, 2002, p. 20). While Tracy’s (2002) labels can be comprehended as passive vs. active approaches to identity, an individual vs. social typology can introduce a more robust systematic sense of the nature of identity in Tracy’s model. The individual dimension of identity contains categories that are particular to individuals and categories that are fixed and stable, all of which exist prior to social interactions. On the other hand, the social feature of identity, which emerges in and through communication, has contextualized as well as socially identified traits. According to Tracy (2002), these two dimensions articulate four kinds of identities. A master identity is what is usually perceived to be unchangeable, given, and does not alter remarkably among different situations; master identity includes gender, nationality, and ethnicity (p. 18). Then, there is personal identity, which relates to the individual’s unique attitudes, beliefs, and characteristics, i.e., personality type (pp. 18–19). In contrast, the social dimension of identity has two categories: relational and interactional. A relational identity is dynamically positioned and communicatively situated in a given interaction between two or more people (p. 19). In the same social context, an interactional identity is a specific role that a person chooses to take from his or her own “role repertoire;” in other words, depending on a given situation, the same person can be a teacher, a son, or a volunteer in relation to that specific situation (p. 18). Tracy’s model clearly outlines the multiple facets of identity and how they contextually interact. In her model, language is the embodied medium through which these facets are displayed and constructed, which opens a space for a social constructionist understanding of identity to be discussed.

One of the most significant current discussions on the concept of identity is dealing with it from a social constructionist approach, as opposed to an essentialist one (for a detailed review, see for example, Burr, 2015; Gergen, 1999). In The Social Construction of Reality (1967), which is regarded as the seminal essay in theorizing social constructionism, Berger and Luckmann claim that social reality “is in fact built by human action and interaction and is not independent of it” (De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2012, p. 157). The term itself “refers to a tradition of scholarship that traces the origin of knowledge and meaning and the nature of reality to processes generated within human relationships” (Gergen & Gergen, 2008, p. 820). According to Benwell and Stokoe (2006), contrary to the essentialist approach, which translates identity as a fixed entity that is imposed from the outside and predetermined prior to any situation, the constructionist approach “examines people’s own understandings of identity and how the notion of inner/outer selves is used rhetorically, to accomplish social action” (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006, p. 4).
Social constructionism theory, which has its foundations in sociology (De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2012, p. 157), places identity in discourse (Bamberg, 2005, p. 221). That is, identity is a product of interaction with another interaction partner in a specific context. Thus, the idea of constructing and being constructed by interaction partners facilitates placing narrative as a chief component in conveying the socially constructed nature of self and identity. In line with this close connection between the social constructionist approach and identity (co)construction in language, De Fina and Georgakopoulou (2012, pp. 156–159) propose an “interactionist paradigm” of three principles that explain the interactional essence of identity. First, they discuss the relatively recent attempts to de-essentialize the self and disregard the views that consider the self as a solid, unchangeable category, explaining instead the fractured, unstable, fluid nature of the self. Consequently, a central notion that advocates against the essentialist view regards identity as social construction. In other words, identity does not emerge independently outside of a social context, but rather it evolves uniquely in linguistic communicative practices. Thirdly, contemplating its entrenched characteristics of being interactional and situated in context, identity as a relational phenomenon refers to the manners in which individuals (co)construct and (re)produce their identities in the “flow” of discursive interactions, “a flow that implies a constant work of mutual understanding and reacting” (De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2012, p. 158). In other words, identity is encoded in communicative contexts through being introduced as a representation of the self and as a dialogue with the other.

This chapter goes on to outline aspects of what Tracy (2002, p. 18) calls “master identities;” particularly, four facets of identity, which are the most relevant to the current study, will be highlighted, taking into account the social constructionist approach. Four examples of various aspects of identity and their sociocultural dimensions, namely, ethnic, national, occupational, and gender identities, are discussed as main features of both individual and collective traits of identity. Then, these same aspects will be discussed in terms of their relationship to narrative and discursive situations (see Chapter 4). These aspects of identity will be linked (see Chapter 5) to forced migrants’ sociocultural backgrounds as forced migrants represent the target group of this study.

3.2. Aspects of identity

Individuals exist in and through a variety of groups that constitute a wide span of social identities. These social identities emerge from people’s interactions and under the influence of
categories that society enforces upon its individuals by means of social heritage and ancestry (see, for example, Tracy’s concepts of identity, discussed previously). Belonging, for instance, ethnically, linguistically, or nationally to a certain group is a process that enhances social identification with that group’s norms and values; in addition, it creates a sense of connection between the group’s members. This sense of belonging refers to a specific social identity. In his study about group social identities, Spears (2011) defines social identity as the outcome of the “social categorization and of identification” that individuals practice within their groups (p. 203). These two practices of categorization and identification facilitate an inner portrayal of the self as a member of a specific group that shares one or more aspect of cultural heritage. Thus, social identity might be clarified by examining its major components. For instance, among the prominent features of social identity, ethnicity, nationality, and occupation stand out as clear examples. It is a valid attempt to define these facets of identity separately, even though a clear-cut separation does not exist as these facets, and many others, exchange impacts and emerge simultaneously. For example, both national and ethnic identity share the same paradoxical feature, which is the ability to define individuals who belong inside a group’s borders and simultaneously designate as outsiders all individuals who exist outside the group. Furthermore, as identities “intersect in multi-dimensional ways” (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006, p. 25), professional identity may be approached jointly and/or separately with, say, gender identity. Intersectionality, the concept that emphasizes “that subjectivity is constituted by mutually reinforcing vectors of race, gender, class, and sexuality” (Nash, 2008, p. 2), illustrates how people, as interactional portents, stage discursively and jointly certain facets of their identities as more or less prominent in a particular situation.

Following the interdisciplinary model, which draws on varieties of perspectives such as sociolinguistics, psychology, and political science (as suggested by Schwartz, Luyckx, and Vignoles in their encyclopedic volume Handbook of Identity Theory and Research [2011]), this study focuses on specific aspects of identity. The second volume of the Handbook classifies “specific identity domains” (p. 13) into five major categories: moral, gender, occupational, ethnic, and national identity (Schwartz, Luyckx, & Vignoles, 2011). Drawing on this as an encyclopedic reference, all of the facets of identity that are suggested by the Handbook will be discussed, with moral identity excluded. An investigation into “moral and spiritual” identities and their “general domains of morality and spirituality” (p. 18) goes beyond the intended purpose of this research as they belong to the individual’s own psyche and “personal values and goals” (Hardy & Carlo, 2011, p. 496), which consequently requires the researcher to ask the research participants for deep, thoughtful contemplations about their inner
selves. Thus, due to their relevance to the aim of this study, methodology, and data collection as well as their ability to be tested discursively without asking for special or deep reflections, only ethnicity, nationality, occupation, and gender identity are examined. However, this does not preclude the study from considering other aspects (e.g., age and religion) during the analysis, which, collectively with the four suggested examples of identity, will provide a holistic view of identity representation and (co)construction in narrative.

3.2.1. Ethnic identity

Language, geographical space, and cultural upbringing, with all of their attitudes, traditions, and values are some of the factors that generate an ethnic sense for a certain group, which all of its members share. The members of an ethnic group “claim descent from common ancestors and are usually united by a common language, religion, culture and history” (The Sage Dictionary of Sociology, 2006, p. 94). Thus, ethnic identity, as Umaña-Taylor (2011) explains, can refer to a broad spectrum of concepts starting with “simple self-identification labels” (e.g., German Turk), reaching more “complex and multifaceted typologies informed by…one’s ethnic heritage” (Umaña-Taylor, 2011, p. 792). Put differently, “[e]thnic identity is defined as a sense of belonging based on one’s ancestry, cultural heritage, values, traditions, rituals, and often language and religion” (Green, Sarrasin, & Fasel, 2015, p. 676).

Three major factors caught the attention of social psychologist John Edwards (2009, p. 157) with regard to ethnicity research. These factors may be termed as the majority/minority aspect, the boundary/content facet, and objective/subjective indicators. The first feature, which is particularly related to migrant groups, is concerned with a comparison, or rather a cohesion, between ethnicity and minority. That is, whenever ethnicity is mentioned, the focus immediately turns to minority groups. Since everybody belongs to a certain ethnic group(s), and most people share more than one ethnic background, then the sustained linkage between ethnicity and minority carries “no unique association” (Edwards, 2009, p. 157). Regardless of majority conventions and its prevailing discourses, ethnicity can never denote only one group in a given time and place.

Secondly, the boundary/content aspect reinforces the fact that cultural norms are liable to vary within the borderlines of a given group in comparison to the relative stability of these very borderlines of the same group. Accordingly, this aspect signifies the ethnocultural similarities that one group carries across generations, and at the same time, the differences that exist within the same group in light of its different generations.
Finally, the indicators of a subjective and objective sense of groupness illustrate the two sides of the ethnicity coin, i.e., the voluntary versus the involuntary characteristics. As both sides of a coin are existentially necessary to each other, the same status applies here to subjective and objective ethnic indicators. Speaking the same language, practicing the same religion, and/or belonging to the same geographical area represent some of the objective involuntary characteristics of ethnic identity. These objective markers convey an image of ethnicity that is unchangeable by nature, as if they had been given once and forever. On the other hand, the subjective voluntary markers, such as belonging to local associations or societies, exclude the inherited features of individuals and focus more on their choices of belonging (for a detailed discussion of essentialist and constructionist views, see Lytra, 2016). Both indicators, objective and subjective, should not be seen as quarrelling over primacy but as going hand in hand to constitute an ethnic sense of groupness for a particular group of people.

Among the many definitions of ethnic identity, Edwards’ (2009) definition stands out as the most explicit and dynamically operational. Edwards (2009) comes to his conclusion about ethnic identity by extracting it from the previous three major features (p. 158). Thus, ethnic identity, as Edwards explains, prevails when a sense of belonging to a specific group arises to refer to the people in that specific group and the socio-cultural boundaries in which they reside, in contrast to those who reside outside of these boundaries. A continuum over generations, denoting similar societal backgrounds, is not a prerequisite for ethnic identity. However, shared features as common as language and religion (“objective characteristics”), as unique as belonging to a local fitness gym (“subjective contribution”), or any mixture of objective and subjective attachments must always be present to establish the borders of the in-group vis-à-vis the out-group (Edwards, 2009, p. 158).

Needless to say, an equal view towards ethnic identity in a specific group is not expected. Belonging to one ethnic group is one thing, and acknowledging individually how that ethnic trait is idealized is something else. Societies will always label individuals in one group or another. However, this labeling is pointless when the opinions of the appointed individuals are missing.

3.2.2. National identity

Understanding national identity is a challenging task, especially because the term itself carries different dimensions (Neiburg, 2001, p. 10296). Nationality might refer to, for example, a
historical, geographical, or religious aspect, or to any mixture of these aspects, which necessitates a profound analysis of the social and historical transformations in a given geographical territory. A satisfactory definition of national identity requires a set of systematic considerations to introduce a theoretical framework through which a comprehensible perception can be developed in terms of the concept of national identity and its significance. In an important remark, Wodak et al. (2009) state that national identity is a dynamic body that consists of similar concepts, approaches, and “behavioural conventions” that a national group communally follows through multiple socialized practices, such as “education, politics, the media, sports or everyday practices” (Wodak et al., 2009, p. 4). Thus, multidimensional in nature, national identity is a concept that is confirmed on disparate individual, collective, social, and cultural levels. Moreover, the essence of national identity depends on a distinctive status between self and other; in other words, national identity is usually stressed to deliver a sense of uniqueness of one’s nationality in comparison to others’. This unavoidable categorization among national identities is what led Triandafyllidou (2001) to emphasis the “double-edged character” (p. 10) of national identity, explaining that it “can be defined as the self-awareness of a community that shares a number of features in common” (p. 30) and, on the other side, it is “defined through a process of differentiation from, and in contrast to, Others” (p. 30).

To draw on similarities between ethnic and national identities, it is noticeable that both aspects depend heavily on a sense of belonging that a specific group shares in a given time and place. Moreover, sociohistorical factors and sociocultural upbringing establish the sense of continuum that these two facets of identity require. On the other hand, the next identities, namely, occupational and gender, carry a strong individual feature in addition to their collective traits. Profession and gender, in comparison to ethnicity and nationality, ask for less of a communal history and necessitate more of a personal choice. In the following sections, occupational and gender identity will be discussed, respectively.

3.2.3. Occupational identity

This strong linkage between identity and occupation has drawn the attention of scholars from diverse research backgrounds to study the influences that occupation has on identity formation and (re)presentation (Christiansen, 1999; Kielhofner, 2002; Skorikov & Vondracek, 2011; Unruh, 2004). Skorikov and Vondracek (2011) clearly and directly define occupational identity as referring to “the conscious awareness of oneself as a worker” (p. 693). Elaborating on
different characteristics, when Christiansen (1999, p. 547) introduces “occupation as identity,” he highlights the strong bonds that occupations have in relation to being a “particular person,” to be a particular person in a group and, finally, to be well. He states (p. 547):

Occupations come together within the contexts of our relationships with others to provide us with a sense of purpose and structure in our day-to-day activities, as well as over time. When we build our identities through occupations, we provide ourselves with the contexts necessary for creating meaningful lives, and life meaning helps us to be well.

Occupational identity plays on the strings of personal and social identity. Identity presentation is closely related to the social occupation that individuals practice. Whether at home, at the workplace, or in everyday life situations, one’s profession contributes effectively to his or her identity formation. This effect becomes gradually stronger as a person’s sense of self intermingles with his or her belonging to the traditions and norms of his or her profession. However, private as it may seem, professional identity portrays a social type of identity more than it does on an individual level. That means, in addition to its influence on one’s personal life in general, occupational identity has its main arena in the domain of social life. Moreover, there is a significant association between the formation of professional identity and with more general social elements, “such as societal norms and expectations and economic and technological change” (Skorikov & Vondracek, 2011, p. 696). Borrowing the image of working and producing from the very word “professional,” individuals come to work their collective varieties of identities in accordance with their professions and subsequently produce a unique self-account in different frames and settings.

These assumptions draw heavily on the way individuals perceive, (re)present, and speak about their identity in the context of their occupational status, which in turn leads to emphasizing their belonging to a professional identity. This identity facet, as with all other facets, communicates a sense of belonging as individuals within a profession have the same work traditions and conditions and as they interact in the same community of practice with one another. This identity is enacted inside and also outside of the workplace, but with slight differences. Drawing on the social constructionist approach, the representation of occupational identity may vary with regard to context as identity, in general, “originates not from inside the person, but from the social realm” (Burr, 2015, p. 125); thus, an alteration in constructing occupational identity can be seen when inside and outside workplace identity representations are considered. Inside the workplace, people try to introduce themselves in particular ways to colleagues, bosses, and outsiders (in case the profession requires an interaction with, say,
customers). Outside the workplace, when the context has totally changed, the presentation of one’s professional identity is related to his or her own sense of their profession but introduced differently depending on how individuals of a profession want to be perceived. A linguistic example would explain this difference, namely, when people use their professional jargon to talk in everyday life situations vis-à-vis in-work situations. In sum, professional identity contributes to both self-recognition and social status, and in both cases it is interrelated to how societies value professions themselves.

3.2.4. Gender identity

Gender is one of the particularly apparent identity markers which, in most cases, needs no linguistic interaction to be identified. Bussey (2011) introduces a list of sociocultural factors and experiences that help in staging children’s gender identity. The proposed list contains children’s names and dress codes, the way their parents deal with them, the educational system, and the media. Adding children’s play, these gendered practices reveal how “gender stereotypes are learned and gender identity develops and transforms over the life course” (Bussey, 2011, p. 603). Be it a cisgender or transgender person, there is a general consensus that gender identity is the inner comprehension of having a specific gender. The American Psychological Association (APA) further explains gender identification as the feeling of being male, female, or an “alternative gender (e.g., genderqueer, gender nonconforming, or gender neutral),” which is not necessarily related to a persons’ biological sex at birth (APA, 2015, p. 862).

In line with these divisions that gender identity has, gender roles are anticipated and practiced. Cultural standards are the main source of “roles and identities [which] are considered to be appropriate for women or men” (Jones, 2016, p. 210). Bearing in mind the relatively prominent differences between cultures, gender roles have significant commonalities worldwide, regardless of their culture-specific practices. According to the APA (2015), gender roles are the culture-related traits of a person in a specific time and place that contribute to belonging to a certain gender. As these roles are closely related to social norms and stereotypes, these can noticeably shift in accordance with changes in social context and the prevailing discourse, and usually people react “to social change and particular circumstances in diverse ways” (Woodward, 1997, p. 269). Here, forced migration stands as one of the most prominent social changes that has a heavy impact on gender identity.
In a recent study in the field of gender and forced migration, Fiddian-Qasmiyeh (2016) considers the gendered understanding of forced migration through highlighting the legal and political status of forced migrants and their influence on gender identity. She studies the social interactions with forced migration, stressing the binary opposition that exists between the proclaimed intentions of gender equality and the policies of “empowerment in camp contexts” (p. 395). Furthermore, the study criticizes the strategies of dealing with forced migration, namely “local integration, repatriation, and resettlement” (p. 404) as they are not what they are introduced to be: gender neutral. However, little analysis has been conducted on the effect of forced migration on gender identity and roles as it is portrayed in migrants’ own narratives. Palillo (2018) examines the discourses of masculinity and vulnerability as it is outlined in two African forced migrants’ stories. The research depicts the use of different discourses of masculinity and vulnerability through asylum seekers’ narratives. Representations of masculinity (hero, soldier) are analyzed in the context of asylum seekers’ life history and contested with discourses of feminized victims as a core description of the “genuine refugee” (Palillo, 2018, p. 28). Still, more research is required on the authentic voices of forced migrants as these reveal a clearer image of gender identity and roles and support reducing gender inequality.

After discussing identity from a sociolinguistic perspective and introducing different aspects of identity and their relationships to individual characteristics and group belonging, the research continues to review how identity is discursively constructed, drawing specifically on the four aforementioned aspects of identity.
4. Narrative and identities

Narrative is a central element in identity research and plays a key role in exploring the significance of “self” and “other” (De Fina, 2003, p. 51; Freeman, 2010, p. 14). In the same manner that meaning is translated in language, identity is encoded in narrative. Recently (De Fina, 2019, p. 351), researchers have shown an increased interest in the mutual influence that narrative and identity have on individuals’ self-awareness, self-presentation, and self-construction. De Fina (2019) describes narratives as the central medium through which identity, whether individual or collective, is best expressed and acted (p. 351). These discursive practices improve people’s mechanisms for building “self” and “other” images. Taking a similar social constructionist standpoint to De Fina’s, Koven (2019) argues that recounting experiences allows people not only to introduce multiple facets of identity, but also to weave these identities “in narrative as multivoiced productions” (p. 388). Introducing the self through storytelling as a set of individual and social traits then “emerges through participants’ recognition of, performance of, and alignments toward” different facets of identity (Koven, 2019, p. 388). Hence, narrative analysts inspect tellers’ mechanisms of contextualizing their various identities and study the manners in which individuals claim their unique positions in their own social surroundings in comparison to the self and the other as well as in-group members and out-group others (De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2012).

Mark Freeman (2001) outlines the importance of narrative research, specifically its contribution to self and identity studies by discussing four essential dimensions: historical, cultural, rhetorical, and experiential; these dimensions are “involved in explicating the relationship between narrative and identity” (p. 284). The cultural dimension occupies a special place in narrative and identity relation because it demonstrates how a story is a teller’s own, almost exclusively on a discursive level (as the teller produces the story linguistically) since “we, and our stories, are culturally constituted” (Freeman, 2001, p. 289). In other words, multiple sociocultural factors, such as norms, traditions, national and ethnic backgrounds, family relations, and so on, contribute to the recounted experience and posit plain intermingling connections between how identities operate in the realm of narrative and what role culture can play in the process. In Freeman’s (2001, p. 287) own words,

“[my] story” can never be wholly mine, alone, because I define and articulate my existence with and among others, through the various narrative models—including literary genres, plot structures, metaphoric themes, and so on—my culture provides.
As this study seeks to investigate identity performance and construction in and through narrative, the connection between identity representation and discursive conceptions will be discussed next. Drawing on sociolinguistic approaches, the following section deals with linguistic perspectives explaining how identity is discursively constructed in narrative and the contemporary theories that underlie this conception. Then, three key linguistic theories will be highlighted to shed more light on how narrative reveals the identity building blocks; these theories are: identity dilemmas, positioning, and narrative identity.

4.1. Discursive context

Two key studies have paved the way for understanding identity as located and indexed in discursive contexts. In her seminal study on the discursive representations of identity, Schiffrin (1996) analyzes two interviews to investigate identity representations in different contexts. She focuses on the strategies through which tellers construct their identity, strategies that are performed on three levels: story form, story content, and story telling. Moreover, the study determines how stories show who a person is by identifying depictions of personal and social identity in narratives through “situating and verbalizing experience” (Schiffrin, 1996, p. 191). In addition, she acknowledges narrative to be the only tool that facilitates grasping identities in interactional acts; she discusses active acts, which are decision making and communicating with others, and reflective acts, such as asserting attitudes, emotions, and reactions. Schiffrin concludes with the value attached to narrative as a privileged domain for identity construction and representation (p. 200):

We are continually locating and relocating ourselves, defining and redefining ourselves and our worlds: telling a story about a personal experience is merely another example of a process that pervades our ways of speaking, acting, and being in the world.

In another influential paper on identity construction in linguistic interactive situations, Bucholtz and Hall (2005) analyze identity from a sociocultural linguistic perspective, from the view of being “intersubjectively rather than individually produced and interactionally emergent rather than assigned in an a priori fashion” (p. 587). They propose five principles as an analytical framework for studying situated identity in linguistic interactions. The emergence and positionality principles defy essentialists’ interpretations of identity by emphasizing that identity exists “in” not “pre” situation, and it encompasses wide range of interactional positions, respectively (pp. 587–591). Indexicality, the third principle, explains the link
between linguistic choices and how they are employed to index a particular social identity in context (p. 593). Fourth, *relationality*, the backbone of the framework, illustrates the nature of identity as being closely related to all possible positions and social factors (p. 598). Finally, the *partialness* principle indicates the fact that any contextual (re)presentation of identity is never completed, and it continually changes across discursive situations (p. 605). Detecting identity construction in discursive contexts can be better understood with the help of linguistic theories, three of which will be discussed next.

### 4.2. Discursive theories

To further investigate the place of identity from a (socio)linguistics perspective and to scrutinize its associations in discursive situations, the study reviews three major discursive theories of identity and their situational implications. These theories include *identity dilemmas* as navigated in and through narrative, *positioning* identity as represented in conversational and/or (auto)biographical settings, and *narrative identity* as indexed in discourse and contextualized in narratives.

#### 4.2.1. Identity dilemmas

Michael Bamberg’s theory of *identity dilemmas* has made useful contributions to the understanding of identity construction and analysis and to the essential role of narrative in this regard (for a detailed discussion of the concept, see for example, Bamberg, 2010; 2011; 2012b). It is important to first mention that Bamberg uses the term “identity” to refer to a discursive tool that supports individuals in the task of gaining a sense of self for “different social and personal dimensions” (Bamberg, 2011, p. 6). In light of this function, identity is the bearer of the different socio-cultural characteristics that are managed in narrative. Thus, according to Bamberg, narrative is perceived as the locus of identity presentation and construction (2012b, p. 102).

Bamberg (2011) proposes three aspects that narrators deal with discursively while they are “navigating” different facets of identity in and through narrative. These aspects, or in Bamberg’s terminology, *dilemmas* (Bamberg, 2011, p. 6), are the cornerstone of every narrating activity that we perform in the sense that they depict identity construction in narratives and capture the sense of self as displayed while narrating (Bamberg, 2012b, p. 104).
The three dilemmas are explicitly put into the *diachronic, synchronic, and agentive* domains (Bamberg, 2011, p. 8).

The *diachronic dilemma* describes the degree to which identity presents the self as a stable entity in the face of constant change (Bamberg, 2010, p. 5). No external factors can contribute to this dilemma, i.e., conveying a coherent image relies profoundly on the individual’s own inner feelings about him or herself. Thus, this dilemma belongs exclusively to the individual’s own psyche as his or her own interpretations of the change (or stability) that he or she has experienced in life up until the moment of telling. This personal feature of the first dilemma portrays a teller’s development over time while holding a sense of unity.

While the diachronic dilemma requires an intensified interior examination of the self, the second dilemma sets its foundation on both the individual and society, in other words, me and others. That is, a *synchronic dimension* facilitates a paradoxical vision of the self as independent and special on the one hand and as dependent and similar to everybody else on the other (Bamberg, 2012b, p. 105). Here, the teller conveys his or her uniqueness as an individual with special traits and attitudes and at the same time draws on the similarities that he or she has with everyone else in, say, a family, group, or society. Besides the clear contradictory positions of these two dilemmas, there is some resemblance between them, which derives from the paradoxical attributes of sameness and difference, in the same person, that both dilemmas convey. However, the former illustrates this paradox temporally while the later demonstrates the paradox spatially.

The last dilemma has a fixed connection between the person and the surroundings, or the “self and world” (Bamberg, 2011, p. 9). The *agency dilemma*, as its name suggests, refers to the role played by person to characterize him or herself as hero/heroine or as a victim while navigating a sense of self (Bamber, 2012b, p. 106). In other words, this dilemmatic realm investigates the responsibility of the person as presented in narratives and how he or she portrays it, mainly to answer questions such as whether there are there traces of agency or/and passivity, in which contexts, and why the teller holds him or herself responsible and in control in some instances, and in others as the “undergoer” who has no influence in the story? (Bamber, 2011, p. 9).

**4.2.2. Positioning**

In recent years, more specifically from the 1990s on, “positioning” has proven an important theory employed to “elucidate how identities are deployed and negotiated in narratives”
This concept formation derives from Michel Foucault’s “subject positions” to explain individuals’ perceptions of the inner and outer worlds by being positioned by dominant discourses (Deppermann, 2013, p. 64). In the early 1990s, the concept’s associations to discursive interactions were introduced and developed by Harré and his colleagues (see for example, Davies & Harré, 1990; Harré & Langenhove, 1999; Harré et al., 2009). With regards to identity construction and representation, the notion of *positioning* has become influential in the current understanding of identity in narrative, especially since the concept has been popularized by narrative theorists such as Bamberg (1997, 2011, 2012b) and Deppermann (2013, 2019). Additionally, in Bucholtz and Hall’s (2005) sociolinguistic definition of identity, they express the centrality of positioning in identifying identity as “the social positioning of self and other” (p. 586).

According to Bamberg (1997), analyzing narrative-in-interaction reveals the roles that people take and produce as social individuals. His approach does not exclusively focus on interactional situations, especially his three positioning levels (Bamberg, 1997), which can be applied to analyze conversational and biographical narratives alike. Before outlining the positioning levels, which are crafted as questions, it is important to mention that Bamberg’s three levels of positioning resonate immensely with his theory of *identity dilemmas* (see section 4.2.1). Now, the first positioning question that Bamberg (1997) asks is “How are the characters positioned in relation to one another within the reported events?” in order to investigate the schemes through which narrators place themselves in the narrated action world as a controlling agent or controlled observer (p. 337). The second analysis level, “How does the speaker position him or herself to the audience?” pursues the interpretation of discursive methods through which narrators position themselves vis-à-vis their interlocutors (p. 337). Finally, positioning examines how narrators understand who they are in the contexts of their recounted experiences by asking “How do narrators position themselves to themselves?” (p. 337).

Deppermann further investigates the dimensions that narrative provides for speakers’/narrators’ positioning in the study of (auto)biographical stories by pointing out narrative’s “powerful resources for positioning” (Deppermann, 2013, p. 67). First, narratives enable the uncovering of the biographical progressions and surrounding sociocultural categories and their attributions to individuals. Equally essential to positioning is the fact that narrative simultaneously indicates the present (the narrating activity) and the past (the narrated event), creating two arenas for positioning. Accordingly, the previous temporal feature of narrative allows for distinctive positions for the narrated and narrating self, outlining the mutual influences that both selves have on each other. Finally, positioning the identities that emerge
in narratives is highlighted in the current moment of the discursive action and is not necessarily organized in relation to any prior categorization. Whether in conversational or biographical narratives, positioning plays a central role in theoretically understanding identity politics and empirically constructing these identities in narrative.

4.2.3. Narrative identity

Narrative, as a medium of self-identification and identity development, assists narrators in constructing and presenting an image of themselves that is as unified as possible. This process of employing narrative as a medium of self-identification is what generates narrative identity. Put more straightforwardly, De Fina and Georgakopoulou (2012) perceive identity “as a process firmly grounded in interaction” (p. 155); as a result, narrative becomes a central “methodological tool” in the area of personal identities. Therefore, a life story could be profoundly considered as the founding principle of narrative identity.

Dan P. McAdams, one of prominent figures in the field of narrative identity, relates his study back to Erikson (1963) and introduces a definition that captures the essence of narrative identity, stating that it is “an internalized and evolving story of the self that provides a person’s life with some semblance of unity, purpose, and meaning” (McAdams, 2011, p. 100). Immensely contextualized in lifespan experiences, narrative identity develops a sense of unity as the life story is constantly (re)formulated; in other words, in Bruner’s oft-quoted statement: “In the end, we become the autobiographical narratives by which we ‘tell about’ our lives” (Bruner, 2004, p. 694). This autobiographical flavor of narrative identity is intensely present as it belongs individually to each and every person and it has its own elements, as with any story. Life narrative has the person “I” as the center of the story, and then different themes, characters, and settings emerge as the narrative flows and changes. The temporal elements are the space in which the narrative identity develops, expands, and ends. That is, remembering the past, relating it to the present, and then envisioning the future are solely realized in the realm of an individual’s narrative identity. In this context of a discursive identity, narrative is the stories people tell about their personal experiences, and through this narrative, people come to recognize the significance of their lives and grasp the meanings of their identities. Accordingly, the main role of this identity notion is to (re)construct life to reach a comprehensible understanding of personal experiences for the purpose of achieving a sense of unified identity.
Emphasizing the substantial contribution of culture and how it allows identity to flourish is ever-present in the literature of sociolinguistics. Drawing on this cardinal role, Schiffrin, who has profoundly influenced the field of discourse and identity, states that identities, as social entities in nature, develop “as we construct our own individual experiences as a way to position ourselves in relation to social and cultural expectations” (Schiffrin, 1996, p. 170). In accordance with this same line of thought, McAdams stresses the role of the cultural background as a co-author that works side by side with the individuals themselves to introduce a unique narrative identity that belongs to a specific person in a given culture (McAdams, 2011, p. 110). Ethnicity, nationality, gender, and other cultural factors contribute greatly to narrative identity formation because narrative itself is “powerfully shaped by social, cultural, and historical conventions” (Pavlenko, 2002, p. 214). Consequently, culture is a key player in the construction and production of narrative identity, and the way stories are told shows how the self resides in the dynamic network of sociocultural practices (Schiffrin, 1996). These cultural aspects are quite prominent when narrative identity is studied in the context of forced migration, the focus of this research. Studying aspects of identity as personal and cultural specifics, the next sections continue the discussion on identity and narrative from a social constructionist approach, focusing on the four previously discussed facets of identity and their relation to discursive practices.

4.3. Narrative and aspects of identity

The close relationship between identity research and narrative analysis demands a closer look at how the two approaches mutually affect one another. The next sections review the literature on the dynamic correlations between narrative and different aspects of identity, namely, ethnic, national, occupational, and gender identity.

4.3.1. Narrative and ethnic identity

Language and discursive practices play a decisive role in how ethnic identity is projected and shaped as a sociocultural indicator in a specific group (Edwards, 2009, p. 158). Taking a general linguistics perspective, Lytra (2016) questions the validity of discursive practices, the role of political and societal institutions, and the legitimacy of “genuine” linguistic and identity production in the (re)presentation of ethnic boundaries. She investigates how ethnic identity is illustrated in language and describes the close correlation between identity and language, which
offers a wide space for realizing various aspects of identity and their social limitations. Specifically, and as a product of people’s communication, ethnic identity and its margins are plainly acknowledged as “negotiated and constructed in discourse” (p. 142) while at the same time, ethnicity is perceived as a fixed quality “preimposed on individuals and groups in a given interaction” (Lytra, 2016, p. 133).

Delving more deeply into the interactive part of language, in her study of communication in “a rural tri-ethnic community” (p. 165) in North Carolina in the United States, Schilling-Estes (2004) examines the influence of linguistic features in (re)shaping speakers’ ethnic identity. Additionally, she inspects associations of positioning in a specific social context in relation to the communicative implications and how the manifold quality of ethnic identity noticeably fluctuates in context when it is navigated locally in comparison to globally. Thus, studying linguistic communications provides a distinct starting point to determine how ethnic identity, among other facets of identity, unfolds through language use. In the same national setting, i.e., the United States, but focusing on people of a different ethnic background (undocumented Mexican immigrants), De Fina (2006) studies the ethnic self-representations of group identity as revealed in narrative. She focuses on group membership and the strategies that members use to imply the fact of belonging to a specific society through looking at indications of self-identification, belief systems, and degrees of closeness towards others. What is important to ethnicity/identity relation in this study is the manner in which the narrators combine the fact of being “Hispanic” to their self-representation in the story-world and how narrators impose various readings of social categorization. It is crucial, in light of previous studies, to emphasize the role of narrative in outlining ethnic identity and defining the implicit classifications that tellers exercise when they explicitly distinguish their own socio-cultural backgrounds.

4.3.2. Narrative and national identity

Transnational movements, communication technologies, and all forms of globalization are “some of the forces determining the contemporary context of identity” (Gilroy, 1997, p. 303). These forces have a major impact on promoting collective national attitudes and how individuals feel, emphasize, and defend their national heritage through developing a distinctive stance towards national characteristics. Since national identity, as with most aspects of identity, clearly sustains the idea that “one identity is created in relation to another” (Woodward, 1997, p. 33), it becomes increasingly difficult to ignore the influence, whether direct or indirect, that nationality and national identity have in a globalized world. Drawing on Wodak et al.’s (2009)
statement that “national identities, as special forms of social identities, are produced and reproduced, as well as transformed and dismantled, discursively” (pp. 3–4), narrative occupies a dominant status in unfolding and understanding the construction of national identity. That is, narrative is one of the commonly adopted mediums through which individuals, institutions, and even countries share, justify, and promote their national identity. Through language use, people can present their national identity by proudly asserting their special heritage, food, or dress code, particularly when confronted with outsiders’ perspectives or surroundings, such as in the migration context; this means that a variety of topics can be approached through studying manifestations of national identity in language. There is a strong link, when, for instance, exploring identity indicators, between everyday social practices and how identities such as nationality and ethnicity are linked historically to one’s home country (Edensor, 2002, p. 64). Such a connection can facilitate exploring transnational traits when individuals migrate or are confronted with new cultural and/or political views (De Fina, 2016, p. 165).

In their study on how national identity is discursively (re)formed, applying “a hermeneutic-abductive approach,” Wodak et al. (2009) “identify the various macrostrategies employed in the construction of national identities” (p. 3). They explain how the impact of the variety of attitudes and cultural conventions that have been adopted collectively into a given society reinforce the sense of inclusion of same-group members and exclusion of other groups (p. 4). Most importantly, the main notion in Wodak et al. (2009) is that national identity is constructed through language; their work explores the (re)presentation of national identity in discursive contexts such as collective history (past, present, and future), communal culture, and shared regional origins. Whether in political, media, or everyday life discourses, national identity has situational fluid characteristics that are introduced differently in accordance with variables such as interlocutors, settings, and contents. Thus, “discursive national identities should not be perceived as static, but rather as dynamic, vulnerable and rather ambivalent entities” (Wodak et al., 2009, p. 187). In short, studying narrative contributes to a new perception of national identity. Analyzing it discursively, national identity can provide a more encouraging inclusive image, rather than its supposed exclusive nature.

4.3.3. Narrative and occupational identity

The workplace is another condition through which identity can be discursively attested (Christiansen, 1999, p. 550). Professional interactions allow for a special kind of identity representation that people practice when they communicate with their colleagues,
administrators, and clients. Holmes and Marra (2011) explain how small talk between coworkers helps not only in welcoming newcomers into a workplace and establishing companionship, but also assists in constructing the manners through which people prefer to be perceived at work. The discursive insights that the workplace narrative allows provide useful readings of how identity work and positioned. Johnson (2006) illustrates the close relationship between workplace requirements and workers’ objectives of revealing self and identity. She looks at teachers’ interactions, which provide an excellent basis for projecting different identities. Through analyzing a lengthy interview, Johnson inspects the multiple positions that the interviewee (a professional teacher) and the interviewer (the researcher) hold in the course of the interview and how the teacher’s occupational identity is revealed and developed to present a more agentive image as the interview goes on.

In the workplace, identities are performed on two levels—personal and public (Holmes, 2006, p. 167). Holmes (2006) examines the importance of the discursive interaction that is required to achieve different identities in the workplace. For example, the everyday talk that is practiced at workplace sites enables individuals to manage work-related and personal ties with coworkers, and at the same time, it maintains the daily professional routine that is expected in a given institution. Thus, the narratives in which people participate in workplaces reveal the wide range of identities that people (co)construct and also shed light on how these identities are introduced in this specific setting. In this regard, Holmes (2006) investigates the different (re)presentations of several identities elicited, at a certain workplace, from one interview. In that setting, one of the interviewees articulates different identity facets while recounting a work-related story, identities such as gender (female), professional (a female team manager), and social (a female team manager with membership a factory’s staff). That is, analyzing workplace narratives demonstrates that not only is professional identity internalized in discursive interactions, but also additional identities are contextualized, which allows people “to emphasize particular facets of their social identities and different dimensions of social meaning—professional status, team solidarity, authority responsibilities, gender category, group affiliations,… and so on” (Holmes, 2006, p. 186).

To sum up the argument about the importance of constructing occupational identity in narrative, it is important to refer to the four propositions suggested by Christiansen (1999) that highlight the discursive relationship between one’s identity and occupation. First, interactions and relationships with one’s surroundings are decisive factors in establishing one’s identity (p. 548). Secondly, the (inter)actions and “our interpretations of those actions” are strongly linked to the social performance of our identities (p. 549). Thirdly, in light of these (inter)actions,
identity manifestations “provide an important central figure in a self-narrative or life story that provides coherence and meaning for everyday events and life itself” (p. 550). Finally, the diverse experiences people have and live through “is an essential element in promoting well-being and life-satisfaction,” which facilitates realizing “life meaning…in the context of identity” (p. 550). Through stressing the importance of narrative as a dynamic site for constructing occupational identity, these four propositions introduce a general framework of how “occupations constitute the mechanism that enables persons to develop and express their identities…in an evolving self-narrative” (p. 556).

4.3.4. Narrative and gender identity

Central to the entire concept of identity and its intertwined relationship with narrative is “gender identity” as it “is entirely emergent and constructed afresh in each specific social interaction, dependent on factors other than a stable self identity concerning gender” (Guo, 2007, p. 182). According to Jones (2016), recent studies on gender identity and its representations in language focus on the variations of linguistic practices that language users follow to index, emphasize, and even intensify their masculine, feminine, or trans identities (p. 213). Numerous studies detect discursive practices and the mutual influences they have with regards to representing and navigating gender identity in different contexts (see, for example, Cameron, 1997; Coates, 2012; Davies, 2003). De Fina, Schiffrin, and Bamberg (2006) dedicate a complete section of their edited volume to male identities and the representations of masculinity, heterosexuality, and whiteness in interactive social contexts. Looking at a very specific context of performing gender identity in talk, Ehrlich (2019) focuses on women’s narratives in legal settings while Coates (2012) introduces broader insights into the analyses of different gendered discourses in everyday life through discourses of same- and mixed-gender talk.

Inspecting identity construction in and through narrative leads logically to attending to questions related to a social constructionist outlook of how masculine and feminine linguistic and non-linguistic practices are contextually performed (Guo, 2007, p. 182). Through analyzing discursive interactions among Chinese children, Guo (2007) studies the differences and similarities between 5-year-old boys’ and girls’ “communicative strategy repertoires,” outlining differences between the two genders in regard to specific discursive situations (pp. 183–184). Abolishing any attribution to “some essential characteristics of the two genders” or “the separate cultural worlds in upbringing,” the study indicates that both genders have similar
discursive strategies as, for instance, “both girls and boys can be very mitigating or aggravating in their communication” (pp. 183–184).

Research tends to focus on displaying and pointing out how the differences between the “two” genders’ discourses are done in and through language and discursive practices. According to West, Lazar, and Kramarae (1997), the most recurrently researched question focuses on the distinguishing features of the supposedly opposing strategies of talk between women and men. They highlight the stereotypical differences, which are drawn heavily from the work of Robin Lakoff, such as the idea that women’s talk is soft, indirect, and suggests a sense of hesitation and insecurity; moreover, men tend to use fewer fillers, intensifiers, tag questions, terms of endorsements, and standard pronunciations than women do (West, Lazar, & Kramarae, 1997). These comparisons are paraphrased based on the assumption that men’s talk is the standard variety, and as a result, how women talk is unfortunately considered a deviation from the norm.

In sum, and as “masculinity and femininity are effects we perform by the activities in which we partake” (Mullany, 2007, p. 23), narratives, whether spoken or written, big or small, represent a supreme medium through which gender identity is interacted with and revealed. Within the discursive constraints, how gender identity is realized and navigated owes a great deal to the social constructionist perspective as narrative allows identities to practice fluidity, flexibility, and movability.

The previous chapters have given an account of the different aspects of identity, their definitions, and their sociocultural associations with individuals from a social constructionist approach. Then, the influence of narrative on identity representations has been reviewed, specifically the four specific aspects of identity (ethnic, national, occupational, and gender) and how narrative assists possible identifications in their respective contexts. In the next chapter, migration discourses and methods are reviewed in accordance with identity and narrative.
5. Approaches to narrative and migration

Let him who has not a single speck of migration to blot his family escutcheon cast the first stone...if you didn’t migrate then your father did, and if your father didn’t need to move from place to place, then it was only because your grandfather before him had no choice but to go…

(Saramago, 2010, pp. 237–238)

Migration in general and forced migration in particular have recently become a widely discussed and researched topic across Europe; the interest is evident in the numerous international conferences (e.g., the 9th International Conference on Migration and Development, 2016; the Migration Conference 2019 in Bari; and the 16th IMISCOE Annual Conference, 2019), interdisciplinary summer schools (the 14th Migration Summer School, Florence, 2018; Europe, Migration, Refugees, Berlin, 2018; and the 7th International Postgraduate Summer School “Cultures, Migrations, Borders,” 2018), and extensive publications (e.g., Canagarajah, 2017; Ferreira, 2019; Fiddian-Qasmiyeh et al., 2016; Mannik, 2016; Menjívar, Ruiz, & Ness, 2019). To step across the threshold into forced migration, it is necessary to give a brief, general overview of migration in order to see the basis from which forced migration is derived.

Migration calls for a doer, i.e., there should be a concrete entity that is on the move, such as a living being, an idea, or a technological device. IOM (2011, p. 62) defines human migration as “[t]he movement of a person or a group of persons, either across an international border, or within a State.” Consequently, the subject of migration needs to be situated spatially and temporally, because “[m]igration…has to be fixed on certain times and spaces in order to make it possible to define and research it” (Meeus, 2013, p. 69). Then, in terms of the basic components and drawing on the aforementioned definition of human migration, there are three factors that constitute migration. Borrowing grammar terminologies, migration involves a subject, a spatial adverb, and a temporal adverb; simply put, human migration includes a person who moves within/at a specific period of time from one place to another.

Different disciplines of the humanities and social sciences have developed a keen interest in studying the motivations, mechanisms, and perspectives of migration, contributing to understanding it in various contexts such as “migration policies and the broader inclusion/exclusion dynamics that they generate” (Guillem, 2015, p. 1). In addition to the historical, political, and sociocultural contexts, sociolinguistics and discourse studies have established a different perspective in dealing with migration. For the intended purpose of this
study and throughout the thesis, given that a discourse-oriented perspective is applied, various concepts such as identity or migration are dealt with in terms of how they are constructed in and through language and discourse. The linguistic aspect will be discussed next. Following that discussion, the paper discusses migration discourse, its diverse characteristics, and its linguistic connections to identity and narrative. Secondly, focusing on one type of migration, forced migration, its methods and ethical concerns will be highlighted.

5.1. Migration discourse

Besides its well-established importance in (socio)linguistics, discourse is gradually becoming a central area of focus in migration studies (Heidenreich et al., 2019, p. 2). Before delving into an exploration of migration discourse, it is worth attempting to explain what discourse is. A straightforward definition of discourse is hard to embrace; for example, Van Dijk (2018) explains that what is usually discussed about discourse tends to be a collectivity of characteristics rather than clear-cut definitions. These characteristics introduce a) the structure of discourse as “a form and unit of language use” or as “an ordered sequence of words, sentences or turns—each with its own structures,” b) its function as a “form of communication” or “social interaction,” and c) its type as “spoken, written, images, sounds, music, gestures” (Van Dijk, 2018, p. 228). In the very general sense of the word, then, discourse might be defined as “[a] linguistics unit that comprises more than one sentence” (Fromkin, Rodman, & Hyams, 2018, p. 486); a short and “simple” definition can be completed by the entry of discourse in The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Linguistics, which reads: “Any coherent succession of sentences, spoken or (in most usage) written” (Matthews, 2014, p. 108). Discourse should be understood as the study of a sequence of sentences and the manner in which these sentences are contextually represented in society, whether in written, spoken, or visual form (Cook, 2008, p. 216). Thus, discourse is mostly attached to a specific language, which, in turn, refers to a specific social frame; in this sense, there are, for instance, political, religious, and national discourses. Accordingly, the different contexts (e.g., legal, cultural, economic) through which migration is debated constitute, broadly speaking, its discourse. To further explain the diversity of migration discourse, Van Dijk (2018) presents examples of its genres, such as “media,” “political,” “educational,” “administrative,” “social movement,” and “personal discourse” (Van Dijk, 2018, p. 231).

Moving on to discuss a specific type of discourse, migration discourse can be examined through looking at it a) as a specific discourse genre that stands on its own, or b) in relation to
other discourses such as political and/or media discourses. More specifically and according to Guillem (2015), when looking at migration discourse from a social interactional perspective, it encompasses the “lay,” or everyday discourses and the “elite” institutionalized ones (p. 1). The everyday migration discourses deal with, broadly speaking, short- and long-term migration, how migrants experience their life in new societies, and how the host countries perceive the newcomers (p. 2). This type of migration discourse usually includes studying the sociology of migration and its relation to transnationalism (Bass & Yeoh, 2019), the discourses of constructing nationality and ethnicity (De Fina, 2003), the inclusion and exclusion of newcomers and forced migrants (e.g., Fiddian-Qasmiyeh et al., 2016; Greussing & Boomgaard, 2017; Kallius, Monterescu, & Rajaram 2016), survival stories (e.g., Coutin & Vogel, 2016; Mannik, 2016), and migration and language (Canagarajah, 2017). On the other hand, studying migration in an institutionalized context aims to analyze the discourses of, say, media, political, and educational establishments in order to inspect “the power relations that are created, sustained, and/or challenged through migration discourses and their associated practices in institutional settings” (Guillem, 2015, pp. 5–6). This second type of migration discourse encompasses, for instance, analyzing media representations of migration (Allen & Blinder, 2013; Holmes & Castañeda, 2016), migration and political discourse (Dahinden, 2016; Heidenreich et al., 2019), and migration and (inter)national concerns (Hage, 2016; Thielemann, 2017). As this study investigates mostly the characteristics of the former type of migration discourse (i.e., everyday discourse), a detailed example of everyday migration discourse will be discussed next.

Based on an ethnographic study conducted in the United States, De Fina (2003) “advocate[s] for a discourse-based approach to identity” (p. 5) to investigate the extent to which individual characteristics and collective traits are highlighted in migrants’ discourse by examining Mexican workers’ own identity representations and “the role of the self with respect to social experiences as agency” (p. 8). De Fina (2003) concludes that Mexican immigrants tend to relate their stories using the first-person plural pronoun (we), even when the interviewees were asked questions in the first-person singular pronoun (you). Moreover, during interviews, Mexican immigrants were inclined to recount their experiences in a collective manner; in other words, they “shifted the focus from themselves as the center of the story to other characters, or to the interviewer” (p. 218). In the same manner, De Fina’s study reveals that the agentive side of Mexican immigrants’ identity was manifested more as a collective representation in comparison to a personal unique attribute (p. 219). This everyday migration discourse gives an
illustrated example of how migrants’ discourse is communicated among migrants and studied as a research topic within academia.

To sum up, migration discourse deals with either what migrants talk about when they reflect on their own migration experiences or how others (be it institutional and/or non-institutional others) talk about migrants and migration as a phenomenon. However, this distinction should not be taken as a representative of explicit divisions (Guillem, 2015, p. 1); migrants may employ a myriad of outer perspectives while reflecting on migration, and these outer perspectives can also benefit from first-hand anecdotes. As migration discourse has this close connection to the people in question and their experiences, the following sections will explore the role of identity and narrative in migration studies.

5.1.1. Migration and identity

Alongside the prime focus of migration studies stands the concept of identity as one of the most significant issues due to its close ties with migration and migrants, which is because identity is present in academic discussions and represents “an essential means of socio-political orientation for parts of the public who feel acutely threatened by an aggressive Other that is seemingly taking over their home and their existence” (Musolff & Viola, 2019, p. 3). Questions concerning which aspects of identity are the most recognizable (Schrover & Moloney, 2013), how identities are presented in migration discourses (De Fina, 2003), and what the sociocultural effects of transnational movements are on home and host countries (Schunck, 2011) are some of the main questions that migration studies pose with regard to its relationship to identity. Different factors determine the direct impact of migration on identity, such as the omnipresent existence of borders. As discussed earlier, identity aspects have certain boundaries within the individual (e.g., it is relatively clear where I should perform my professional or gender identity); in addition, identities can draw the lines for a certain group vis-à-vis other groups (e.g., my national identity as a Nigerian places me with all other Nigerian people and excludes me from any other potential nationality). Likewise, in the context of migration, borders function in the same manner; that is, to become migrants, people need to cross borders, whether national or international. Thus, migrants’ identities are shaped by border passage; in other words, since borders are an inner quality of identities and since identities are constantly co-constructed, migrants are “continuously engaged in bordering processes” (Madsen & Naerssens, 2003, p. 72). Physical and cultural borders have the power to classify people as
citizens, migrants, or forced migrants, and as a result, crossing borders leads to crossing identities.

In line with migrants’ identity representations, through answering the where-are-you-from question, Hatoss (2012) investigates Sudanese forced migrants’ experiences of daily interactions with Australians and illuminates interactive positioning as expressed in the interviewer-interviewee relationship. Analyzing semi-structured interviews, Hatoss explores the participants’ identity features as demonstrated in their host country and emphasizes the role migration plays in positioning identities. Therefore, “where are you from” is more important on the identity level in migration contexts than “who are you,” as it reveals degrees of acceptance and rejection of both migrants and host countries’ perspectives.

Examining identity and migration from another viewpoint, various studies look into migrants’ (re)presentations in the new sociocultural situation, for instance; in addition to Palillo’s (2018) study on asylum seekers’ gendered discourses, Bravo-Moreno (2006) examines the construction of national and gender identities of female Spanish workers who migrated to London and how their previous cultural backgrounds influence their self-identification in the host destination. Bravo-Moreno (2006) emphasizes the role of “institutions and their ideologies, accumulated cultural practices and the individual” in shaping and reshaping attributes of nationality and gender (p. 14). The study recommends a thorough consideration of both collective socio-cultural factors and individual experiences as central factors in constructing national and gender identity in the context of a life-changing experience such as migration (Bravo-Moreno, 2006). Studying another identity aspect, Schmoller (2016) inspects the religious aspect of identity as shown in the narratives of Syrian Christian forced migrants in Austria to examine the role of religion in forced migration in general and in the identity representation of forced migrants in particular. In a general remark, Schmoller (2016) downplays the impact of the religious aspect in the Syrian crisis, explaining that “it has become evident…that for Syrians, it is not religion that is a decisive factor when it comes to refuge, but rather lack of security and any prospect of change” (p. 434). Nevertheless, religion is considered a focal identity marker when it comes to individuals belonging to religious minorities and is especially relevant to personal experiences “in a migration and resettlement context” (p. 434).

On the whole, highlighting and inspecting identities in migration contexts can further the knowledge of how people cope with dramatic life changes and what strategies they follow to insure smooth and productive transitions in host countries. In addition, analyzing the identity building blocks in migration discourses will facilitate reaching several representations of
different aspects of identity and contribute to highlighting the collective characteristics of an assumption of migration identity, as represented discursively. In the migration domain, language and narrative contribute substantively to deep insights on migrants’ discourses and migration experiences; thus, the relationship between narrative and migration will be discussed next.

5.1.2. Migration, language, and narrative

Equally important to migration studies are language issues in general and in particular, the discursive production of identity, which can be empirically detected by analyzing the narratives of migrants and the significance narratives carry in identity representations. The connection between language and migration can be spotted from different perspectives, for example, Heugh (2017) considers one of the less-often discussed topics in migration, namely, internally displaced people. She inspects the psychological effects on people that result from a linguistic shift after dislocation inside their countries. Moving within national borders from one place to another, “may contribute to ethical understanding of” (p. 187) the connection between conflict and the role of language. Turning to an international type of movement, De Fina (2018) demonstrates the interrelated connection between undocumented migrants’ identities in the United States and their social surroundings and shows how these migrants can discursively present themselves in order to have more social recognition and clear and powerful voices. Looking at a larger context of migration, Tovares and Kamwangamalu (2017) introduce insightful remarks on the linguistic strategies that migrants use to (re)assert their identities in their host societies. Exploring migrants’ linguistics repertoires in number of migration trajectories, such as “south–south, north–north, north–south, return migration, circular migration, chain migration, and step migration” (p. 207), reveals the underlying impact of changing one’s own society on a personal level; in addition, it tells how the host society reacts to this new encounter with a “guest” language.

For a theoretical perspective on narrative analysis and migration, De Fina and Tseng (2017) propose a model of two fields that dominate narrative migration studies: self-representation and institutional representation. The first domain is dedicated to research about migrants’ self-construction, thus taking the content of narratives as a point of departure. This domain includes studies about migrants as language learners, migrants as members of communities, and the out-group perspective of migrants (De Fina & Tseng, 2017, p. 382). The second domain speculates on migrants’ institutional representation and accordingly focuses more on the function of
narratives. This research area depicts, for example, asylum-seekers’ stories and police interviews with trafficked minors (De Fina & Tseng, 2017, p. 389). The first field, i.e., self-representation, is of significant importance to this study and can be explored when migration studies are linked to the notion of narrative identity.

Narrative identity, in the domain of migration studies, can contribute to the illustration of different facets of identity. As stated earlier, identities are never separated, and they are contextualized according to variations in settings, backgrounds, and perspectives; a person’s national identity, for example, is not separated from his or her gender identity, but it shines or shies away contextually. In Hall’s (1996, p. 4) terms:

Precisely because identities are constructed within, not outside, discourse, we need to understand them as produced in specific historical and institutional sites within specific discursive formations and practices, by specific enunciative strategies.

Migration studies offer considerable space through which narrative identity can be detected. More specifically, forced migration, when it focuses on the “narrative identity” of the people in question, i.e., forced migrants, is best achieved through narrative that is elicited from them and which elaborates on their motives, justifications, and conceptualizations. Narratives of forced migrants have a great potential to aid the understanding forced migration through discursive practices and to grasp representations of identity and its building blocks. This is because of the rich experiences, positive or negative, of forced migration and also due to the cultural background that migrants bring and the new cultural forms they are confronted with. Thus, since varieties of narrative identities are altered when cultural contexts differ (McAdams, 2011, p. 100), the study of forced migrants’ narratives provides a key resource to the notion of narrative identity.

The aforementioned studies on migration and its sociocultural connections to identity and narrative have contributed extensively to understanding the relationship between migration and how narrative can be employed to inspect traces of migrants’ identity aspects. Still, an in-depth reading of forced migration’s impact on identity aspects and the shifts that occur in accordance with involuntarily leaving one’s home are still missing. As stated before, the aim of this study is to close this research gap by investigating the narratives of forced migrants.
5.2. Forced migration discourse

Honing in on human migration, the movements of people occur for several reasons, and it takes time to figure out the effects and results of these movements due to different social, political, economic, and ecological factors. The factors that lie behind the phenomenon have led to diverse forms of migration. Drawing on Kerswill (2006, p. 2272), there are four migration parameters, namely, *space, time, motivation, and socio-cultural factors*; as such, distinctions within migration can have four main axes: trajectory (e.g., national, international), reason (e.g., studying, working, seeking sanctuary, family reunion), motivation (e.g., voluntary, forced), and duration (e.g., permanent, temporary). These axes can also intersect within one person who might, for instance, be a partner of an international student who will return to his or her home country after his or her university studies are completed.

Returning to the focus posed at the beginning of this study, one particular type of migration has gained unprecedented importance lately, namely, forced migration. According to the IOM, forced migration is a compulsory movement that is evoked by life-threatening experiences, either natural or man-made threats (2011, p. 39). While the term seems to include only a specific category of migrants, a number of legal and methodological issues arise after closely examining forced migration, such as the distinctions between refugees, internally displaced persons, and asylum seekers, since all of these divisions can be sheltered under the “umbrella” of forced migration (Turton, 2003). To eliminate any source of ethical, legal, and/or methodological confusion, this study will use the term “forced migration” to refer to the phenomenon and “forced migrants” to refer to the people in question. However, using “forced migrants” should not, in any case, be taken as an inclusive term unifying all forced migrants into one entity while neglecting their unique identities and experiences. Dealing with forced migrants as a homogenous group and painting them all with the same brush deprives them of their basic right to be individuals with distinctive selves and identities and increases the gap between the alienated and estranged forced migrants and their host countries. This problem is also reflected in academia as forced migration research focuses, generally speaking, on specific issues and neglects others.

There are major contradictory discourses that govern the perception of forced migrants, though they serve to conceive a unified image of forced migrants, namely, a) they are a group with similar sociocultural, political, and economic backgrounds, b) they are passive and greedy, and c) they pose an active economic, cultural, and security risk and threat to their host culture (for analyses of discourses on and representations of forced migrants see, for example,
Abid, Manan, & Rahman, 2017; Holmes & Castañeda, 2016; Palillo, 2018; Vollmer & Karakayali, 2018). Discourses of unwanted burdens and threatening strangers lead to a classification of forced migrants under a single category, which deprives them of their basic right to individuality and distinctiveness. This study pursues an opposing agenda by looking at one specific nationality and outlining their diverse experiences and aspects of identity.

Focusing solely on security issues, for example, according to Braithwaite, Salehyan, and Savun (2019, p. 6), the aftermath of the Syrian crisis, which forced Syrians to seek sanctuary worldwide, has produced multiple security instances, such as attacks on camps along the borders of Syria’s neighboring countries and the United States’ ban on Syrians, among other nationalities, from entering the country. Braithwaite, Salehyan, and Savun argue that new measures should be adopted to challenge the “recent developments in international politics;” these developments call for “an urgent and timely need for more systematic research on forced migration” (2019, p. 6). Long before the Syrian crisis began, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (1993, p. 1) advocated against this highly problematic issue, shedding light on the diverse factors of migration that yield different experiences by stating:

Behind these phenomena lie deeper and often interrelated patterns of political, economic, ethnic, environmental or human rights pressures, which are further complicated by the interplay between domestic and international factors…[Thus] there are as many reasons for moving as there are migrants.

In sum, due to political, social, ecological, and economic factors and interests, forced migration has predominantly been framed and discussed in the context of particular discourses such as integration, a refugee crisis, labor markets, and/or border control (see, for example, Faist, 2018; Hage, 2016; Holmes & Castañeda, 2016; Kallius, Monterescu, & Rajaram, 2016). However, a vital and crucial facet of this phenomenon is largely missing in this framing and discussion: the voices of the forced migrants themselves. While economic challenges, political influences, and cultural transformations have been widely debated in the field of migration, the experiences, hopes, fears, and perspectives of the people involved, i.e., the authentic representations of forced migrants, are almost missing. Across international congresses and official meetings, activities are conducted for forced migrants without really involving the people in question. The need that arises here, then, is a greater involvement of forced migrants, and a need to hear their stories and know who they are. This is where the current study aims to contribute to the debate.
5.2.1. Forced migration research

Forced migration research is an interdisciplinary field of study that encompasses different social and cultural factors and involves questions such as “What are the causes of refugee movements? Where do displaced populations go? What drives host country responses to refugees? How do refugees impact host communities?” (Braithwaite, Salehyan, & Savun, 2019, p. 7). In his seminal paper, Castles (2003) defines the vast array of human sciences and their contributions that can effectively assist in understanding the mechanism and nature of forced migration through illustrating the reasons for the phenomenon (e.g., history, geography, and demography); detecting rules and regulations (e.g., political science and law); considering individual and collective experiences (e.g., cultural studies and anthropology); and depicting the relocation of newcomers and their relationship with the host community (e.g., law and policy studies). The contributions of these various human sciences overlap and interrelate when the research examines forced migration discourse and its methodological features. Thus, considering a sociologist’s perspective such as Castles’ (2003) can provide invaluable aid in utilizing different research methods, including narrative analysis, which is the main focus of this thesis. Castles outlines a list of “basic methodological principles” (p. 29) that offers theoretical guidelines for forced migration research. Among the nine methodological principles Castles (2003) proposes, five of them can be adequately applied to narrative analysis research and will be greatly drawn upon in this study. The most obvious fact that should always be present in any forced migration research is the interdisciplinarity of such research; researchers can benefit from all related human sciences to facilitate a detailed overview of any intended study (p. 29). A historical understanding of home and host countries helps in revealing almost all of forced migrants’ circumstances (p. 29). Not only historical, but also comparative studies of home and host societies have the potential to develop more fruitful approaches in the field (p. 29). The fourth methodological principle denotes human agency as a crucial factor in analyzing both forced migrants’ identities and home/host societies’ perceptions (p. 30). Finally, and drawing on human agency, participatory research methods are a necessary step to giving a voice to the mostly unheard forced migrants (p. 30). Considering the previous methodological principles in a study of forced migration facilitates a more robust analysis and understanding of the phenomenon per se and its effects on individuals and societies. Drawing on Castles’ (2003) methodological approach to forced migration research and incorporating it with narrative analysis, this study seeks to identify relevant themes and aspects of identity in SFMs’ narratives of personal migration experiences.
5.2.2. Research focus

Dealing with SFMs’ stories separately and detecting each and every narrative in relation to its own narrator will offer an authentic image of forced migrants and will allow for a considerable space for knowing who they are, i.e., it offers them the opportunity to have a personal identity, just as they deserve. In addition to examining the narratives as testimonies of individual speakers, the study will look at the common threads that govern the shared experiences and the (re)presented aspects of identity in order to offer a reading that is original and distinct from the dominant discourses of forced migration. Following this line of argument and taking a sociolinguistic perspective, then, the main research question addressed in this study is:

Which themes do SFMs topicalize in their personal narratives and what facets of identity do SFMs thereby co-construct in these narratives?

The themes outlined in the narratives and the salient aspects of identity are investigated in order to discover whether it is possible to come to any conclusion about the assumptions associated with forced migration identity. Searching for common features of forced migration provides an opportunity to find a solid understanding of the phenomenon and its consequences. In other words, forced migrants are all individuals who have had individual experiences, but there are, nevertheless, certain aspects of the forced migration experience that all forced migrants have in common; these common aspects will be highlighted in the course of this study. However, and as mentioned above, the aim is not in any way to arrive at generalizations that result from regarding forced migrants as a homogenous group. On the contrary, the objectives of the study are to acknowledge the differences and uniqueness of forced migrants and to point out the commonalities of the forced migration experience as a way to understand it better.
6. Research design and methods

6.1. Data and data collection

To detect dominant themes in forced migrants’ narratives and to highlight the aspects of identity forced migrants accentuate in their stories, the study analyzes narratives that SFMs have contributed to the IOM website. *I am a migrant* is an online platform (see Figure 1) launched by the IOM that seeks to “promote diversity and inclusion of migrants in society” (https://iamamigrant.org/). The prime intention of the platform is to advocate against the xenophobic discourses of which forced migrants are one of the main targets. Providing an authentic, albeit limited stage, through *I am a migrant*, individuals have the opportunity to tell the world who they are and talk about their experiences, difficulties, and aspirations.

![Figure 1. Homepage of I am a migrant (https://iamamigrant.org/)](image)

The stories have a unified structure regarding the outer form and how they are posted on the portal. The major components of the outer design of the *I am a migrant* stories, which most of the migrants have included, are a personal photo, name, current country, country of origin, and how many kilometers the storytellers are away from their home. The content of the texts themselves contain answers to a set of questions that migrants can choose to respond to. These questions cover topics related to the home country (e.g., “what do you miss from your
country?” and “why did you leave?”), transit country(ies) (e.g., “where did you go to?”), and host/current country (e.g., “what was your first impression?”) (https://iamamigrant.org/).

When telling their stories, migrants do not need to answer all of the proposed questions; instead, they can choose what they prefer to talk about and elaborate on. In addition, as participation in this portal takes the form of a semi-structured interview, it offers substantial flexibility for adding new topics that the questions have not embraced. In fact, SFMs have benefited from this opportunity by adding specifically one topic, among others, that has a significant impact on the story dynamics as well as identity and agency representations, namely “journey,” which will be discussed in the analysis section.

There are three different narrative styles through which the stories are presented on the website: the first person narrator, the third person narrator, and a mixture of the two. According to Vanessa Okoth-Obbo (personal communication, July 28, 2019), an I am a migrant staff member, using one or another of these styles is usually a narrative choice made by the writer. By “writer,” Okoth-Obbo does not mean the migrants who share their stories, but she is referring to the I am a migrant staff member who conducted, translated (when needed), and transcribed the interview before posting it on the website. This means that the narrative choices that vary between direct and indirect quotes are made solely by the writer. What is left to say in this regard is that these crafted stories can be fully considered as identical details of what the migrants wanted to say, and the “stories were published with consent from the subjects or in some cases at their request; the writers were not tasked with re-interpreting the quotes or re-writing testimonies to fit a particular agenda” (Okoth-Obbo, personal communication, July 28, 2019).

With regards to data collection, a total of 76 stories was first selected for analysis; these stories were retrieved in December 2018 (the time the empirical analysis began), including all of the SFMs’ stories. Dividing the 76 stories into the narrative modes in which they were told, the direct (first person) and mixed (first and third person) narrative styles were implemented in almost the same number of stories (35 and 36 stories, respectively) while the indirect (third person) narratives were used only in 5 stories.

The 35 stories that were told completely in the first person mode of narrative have no paraphrasing or extra information added by I am a migrant staff members. There is no structure imposed from the outside on these stories, which allows for a straightforward illustration of how SFMs go about narrating their forced migration experiences. Thus, given that the direct-quote stories include only the voices of the SFMs, and in addition to the considerable number these stories represent of the 76 total testimonies, the study will focus solely on the 35 direct-
quote stories examining the narrators’ choices of themes and varieties of identities. These direct-quote stories, which vary in length but are mostly less than 700 words, are all in English. The participants live in different countries and circumstances. Some of them live in Greece and Turkey because they want to stay there, because they are waiting to be relocated to a different country, or simply because they have no other choice. In addition to countries and situations, their identities differ as they belong to different ethnicities and religions, have different professions, and identify with different genders and age groups.

As for the analysis, each story is studied according to traces of individual and collective identity construction. They are viewed individually to depict the facts each participant relates to his or her own personal history, the reasons behind choosing these particular facts, and the identity characteristics that are shown in the process. In addition to speculating about each story-world individually, a collective consideration highlights the common factors that bring together the SFMs’ representations of constructed identities as they are illustrated in their own narratives. Studying the testimonies of personal experiences and detecting individual and collective traits of a specific group necessitate a high degree of ethical consideration, which will be discussed next.

6.1.1. Studying forced migration: Ethical considerations

Conducting research in the field of forced migration requires applying strict consideration for the sensitivity of the issue. Researchers working “with” (hopefully not only “about”) forced migrants must retain both a neutral stance towards their studies (as is the case with all research fields) and a special attitude that the specific incident, i.e., forced migration, calls for. Bilger and Liempt (2009) prioritize two sets of questions that researchers on migration should ask whenever they investigate “vulnerable migrants” (p. 1), and the two sets can be shortened to a why-question and a how-question. The why-question inspects the reasons behind carrying out the research and the justification for the methodology used, including questions such as “[w]hy is the research being conducted and why is it being conducted in this specific way?” (p. 4). The how-question, as the name reveals, demonstrates the method(s) and methodology of the research and the role and responsibility of the researcher with regards to the research participants; it inquires about “[h]ow do I represent their views and how is the quality and content of the data collected affected by participants’ vulnerable position?” (p. 5). The why- and how-questions provide, theoretically and practically, operational guidance towards more ethical considerations of migration research.
For this study, and given that there is no direct contact with the participants, most of the ethical considerations have been already taken care of by the IOM as the data analyzed in this research is collected from the IOM website. What remains is the manner in which the study is conducted and how to best deal with the stories for the greater welfare of the participants in particular and to the field of forced migration in general.

A direct relationship between myself, as a researcher, and the research participants is absent, as the interviews were already conducted and transcribed for purposes other than this study, though there is a relationship between myself and the research participants on a different level. What is highly relevant for the current endeavor is the fact that I (the author of this paper) share the same nationality with all of the participants and am very familiar with their socio-cultural backgrounds, which allows for an advantageous position in understanding, to a great extent, the difficulties they face, the overwhelmingly nostalgic thoughts they deal with, and the hopes they yearn for. That is, I have, as a researcher, personal access to the same discourses as those of the participants, as I am a Syrian migrant myself. Thus, I bring two different perspectives to the research: those of a sociolinguistics researcher and Syrian migrant. However, what remains challenging, in this case, is the danger of being too emotionally involved and the possibility of slipping into what Markova (2009) terms as “advocacy research,” in which a researcher who shares attributes with the researched enters “the research fields to ‘prove’ their pre-defined hypothesis” (p. 153). To avoid any hint of accidental advocacy, this study applies qualitative methods that carefully consider the sensitivity that emerges when personal experiences are examined; additionally, the researcher’s neutral intentions are shown by the underlying aim of paving the way for an under-represented group to become more visible and heard. Here, the question arises as to whether an insider’s perspective is more beneficial for a specific study than an outsider’s. This issue, however, is beyond the scope of the current research; nevertheless, it may be concluded that both perspectives have their pros and cons, and thus the responsibility lies upon researchers to decide how to best employ their positions in dealing with data and what methods they should apply to guarantee the credibility of findings and conclusions.

6.2. Methodological framework

A qualitative analysis framework will guide the research to lay the foundations for a new perspective on forced migrants’ narratives and to define the identity aspects of forced migrants and their social attributions. Applying qualitative methods will explicitly bring to the
foreground aspects of self-representation by forced migrants, which can contribute to a better understanding of forced migration as a phenomenon beyond what repetitive statistics and pure demographics can do. That is, in migration contexts, numbers have the capacity to categorize people under specific “cold” divisions but neglect their uniqueness. It is noticeable that the general tendency in forced migration studies is directed towards, for example, calculating the unprecedented number of illegal migrants, the statistics on dead bodies found, or questionnaires about the economic effects of forced migrants. These are quantitatively very informative, but they introduce only one side of the phenomenon (see, for example, Braithwaite, Salehyan, & Savun, 2019; Eberl et al., 2018; Greussing & Boomgaarden, 2017). In comparison, qualitative methods—the backbone of this study—contribute directly to the personal territory of people and shed a clear light on forced migrants’ experiences. The flexibility that a qualitative methodology has, along with its informative nature, analytical power, and descriptive characteristics (Dörnyei, 2007), qualifies it to be the first choice for dealing with questions of identity and personal narrative in the forced migration field. In the sections that follow, the two qualitative methods that will be applied in this study are outlined, namely, narrative analysis and qualitative content analysis.

6.2.1. Narrative analysis

As stated in Chapter 2, analyzing narrative can be practiced through applying a variety of methods. Drawing on Riessman’s (2008) division of approaches to narrative analysis (see section 2.2.1), this study’s main concern is the first two approaches, namely, thematic and structural analysis. Because of the aim of this research (which is not to detect discursive interactions) and the nature of the data collected (which are not visual and the analyses’ main foci are, to a great extent, what the SFMs talk about in their narratives and, to a lesser extent, how they talk about it). In what follows, highlighting the main characteristics, thematic and structural narrative analysis will be outlined and discussed.

6.2.1.1. Thematic and structural analysis

Thematic narrative analysis

Across qualitative research, all thematic strategies examine the dataset to divide it into smaller parts, classify it in sub-categories, summarize its content, and represent its significance in the context of the research objectives (Ayres, 2008, p. 867); these preceding steps are applicable
to the thematic narrative analysis. As the name implies, the thematic content of the data is the chief concern when narrative analysts embark on the thematic analysis of discursive data. Questions such as “[w]hat do we think a narrative means? What information is communicated that can aid exploration of our study issue?” are what a thematic approach to narrative analysis is concerned with (Riessman, 2008, p. 53). Contrary to structural narrative analysis, conducting the analysis thematically prioritizes “content” over “form” and highlights a narrative’s “thematic meanings and points as they emerge in the process of recapitulating the told in the telling” (Kim, 2016, p. 213). As is the case with all narrative analysis methods (see section 2.2), undertaking the thematic analysis approach varies in accordance with the “theoretical perspective, epistemological position, research questions, even in definition of narrative” (Riessman, 2008, p. 53). In other words, in the absence of a clear, step-by-step manual for thematic narrative analysis, the method is realized in and through practice. However, the thematic analysis of a narrative’s specific factors and procedures should be considered, and how the analysis itself is conducted varies among analysts. Factors such as recurrent themes and narrators’ contemplations (Barkhuizen, 2019, p. 99) are what most thematic narrative analysts build their research on, as does this study. Procedures such as categorizing themes into separate groups and speculating on the contextualized relationship between these groups and the story-world (Barkhuizen, 2019, p. 100) are common practices that narrative analysts apply when they seek to induce findings and conclusions from the given data; these two strategies will be followed throughout this study because examining the “language a speaker selects” is irrelevant while “thematic meanings” and “the act the narrative reports and the moral of the story” are the pivotal concerns of thematic narrative analysts (Riessman, 2008, p. 62).

**Structural narrative analysis**

While a thematic narrative analysis seeks to unravel what is said in a narrative, a structural analysis pursues an answer to how it is said. That is, a structural narrative analysis examines how the narrative is structured through shifting the focus “from the ‘told’ to the ‘telling’ and from exclusive focus on a narrator’s experience to the narrative itself” (Riessman, 2008, p. 77). Narrative analysts, who follow a structural approach, concentrate on the discursive strategies according to which narrators communicate the stories and convey “what the content of those stories tells us about people’s lives” (Elliott, 2005, p. 42).

As stated above and in the research question, the main focus of this study is the themes in the SFMs’ narratives, though the structure is examined briefly in order to learn what it might contribute to the understanding of identity representations within specific themes. Thus, the
structural narrative analysis in this study will draw on the pivotal work of William Labov. Looking closely at discursive strategies in conveying specific themes, Labov’s model (1972) of narrative elements can unravel the structural mechanisms that a storyteller uses to build up a variety of identities. According to Labov (1972, p. 363), a fully developed narrative consists of the following six units: abstract (outline), orientation (setting and characters), complicating action (plot and climax), evaluation (narrator’s comment), result or resolution (outcome), and coda (sealing the narrative). These six narrative elements do not occur strictly in the proposed order, and not all narratives necessarily include all of the components; the narratives of forced migrants are no exception. Nevertheless, applying Labov’s structural approach to investigate how certain topics are discursively communicated in a story form helps to reveal the structure behind the narrative, which supports the identity (co)construction of the SFMs.

6.2.2. Content analysis

As with thematic narrative analysis, content analysis is a research method that aims to categorize similar textual themes under wider labels in order to study their inferences and relationships (Julien, 2008, p. 120). Content analysis, whether it is part of a qualitative or quantitative approach, shares common research steps (Mayring, 2014, p. 6). These steps outline a framework that most content analysts apply. This framework contains, as Krippendorff (2004) suggests, six analytical components: unitizing, sampling, recording/coding, reducing, inferring, and narrating (p. 83). When unitizing a text, the analyst chooses unit(s) of significance to the study and states what exactly the unit(s) represents. The next step is to categorize the units into separate samples. Sampling strategies assist content analysts in reducing larger units to smaller subunits in order to facilitate studying them individually and collectively (p. 84). Recording/coding, the third procedural component, is needed to illustrate the concrete concepts of units and subunits, and accordingly, the data can be analyzed, applied, and compared using different methods (p. 84). Then, the data should be classified according to themes; practically, this requires an act of reducing data to a list of different thematic representations (pp. 84–85). After preparing the data, an act that is completed via the previous four components, the connections, relationships, and implicit meanings can be perceived clearly by the content analyst. This perception is referred to as inferring (p. 85). Content analysis is completed by narrating the inferences as answer(s) to research question(s), i.e., illustrating the findings, outlining “the contributions they make to the available literature” (p. 85), and presenting recommendations for future research.
6.2.2.1. Qualitative content analysis

As mentioned earlier, content analysis can have qualitative or quantitative groundings. This research will apply qualitative conventions. Qualitative content analysis is a research method that attempts to point out similar themes and topics in given data (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1278). The main materials for qualitative content analysis are recorded texts, which may be printed, verbal, or visual (Mayring, 2004, p. 266). The method applies a systematic analysis of textual frequencies in order to gain an overview of the overall intended research interest(s). Hsieh and Shannon (2005) point out three different techniques that are applied in the practice of qualitative content analysis and which this study will apply in an intersecting manner that benefits from all of these procedural practices These techniques are conventional, directed, and summative content analysis (p. 1277).

Conventional content analysis

This approach demands that the researcher thoroughly study the data and then develop categories and subcategories that directly emerge in the process. This means that the researcher will not impose any given classification for coding the data, and the codes are the result of clusters and labels that are derived from the data. Thus, this technique does not choose categories beforehand and deductively employ them to answer research questions; on the contrary, it leads inductive reasoning to first identify labels and subsequently study them (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, pp. 1279–1281).

Directed method

With the directed approach to content analysis, or what Mayring (2014, p. 123) terms as “deductive category application,” codes are highlighted according to a specific existing theory. In comparison to conventional methods, the researcher’s liberty in choosing codes is more confined to preconceived clusters and labels when using the directed method. However, the current research is strongly supported by an already-established theory that offers a clear structure to lead the discussion. After collecting the data, the key concepts of a prior theory are applied to define categories. Then, these categories are explained in light of the theory. After that, data coding starts in order to outline and study them (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, pp. 1281–1283).
**Summative content analysis**

The main goal of this approach is to investigate “how words are actually used” (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1285). Starting with a quantitative convention, the summative approach counts words or themes that are of importance to the research question(s) of the intended study. After extracting recurrent words and/or themes, the researcher qualitatively depicts the contextual use and meaning of these repeated instances in an attempt to offer an insight into their underlying meanings after classifying them into separate categories. The goal of the summative approach is twofold: first, it aims to study certain categories and infer their situated contribution to the content; and second, it aims to illustrate the relationships between these categories (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, pp. 1283–1285).

**6.2.3. Analyzing SFMs’ narratives**

The overall research methodology that is applied in this study is qualitative narrative analysis, drawing in particular upon De Fina and Georgakopoulou (2012) for the dynamics of narrative analysis and upon De Fina (2003) for identity construction in migration discourse. Narrative analysis considers narratives as a mode of understanding how personal histories are (re)presented and how a sense of self is thereby achieved. In addition to narrative analysis as the general framing method, in order to discursively analyze the narratives and gain insight into the topicalized themes of the stories as well as to collectively depict traces of a forced migration identity, the study applies specific methods for the two research foci. The analysis will therefore draw upon narrative analysis, employing the two aforementioned approaches in particular, mainly thematic and partially structural, and combine it with qualitative content analysis (Krippendorff, 2004; Mayring, 2014) in order to carve out a detailed picture of how the SFMs understand the past, experience the present, and anticipate their future. These two methods are not explicitly assigned to one research focus and not the other, meaning that both methods will be applied to investigate themes and aspects of identity concurrently. Inspecting both research foci with the same methods will clearly demonstrate the way the SFMs navigate their sense of self and further illustrate the different aspects of identity constructed in and through narrative, which can lead to identifying the general commonalities of the forced migrants’ own representations in narratives. On the whole, applying qualitative methods aims to uncover the impacts of the forced migration experience on SFMs, as revealed in their narratives and in terms of how the SFMs value their lives, past and present.
In sum, narrative analysis, with a special focus on thematic and structural analysis and qualitative content analysis while considering all three methods, is the main approach of analysis in this study. Thus, the data analysis follows a qualitative protocol as the central method, with the exception of using quantitative techniques when they are required to commence any of the three qualitative content analysis approaches. Narrative analysis will present a discursive overview of the most frequent themes in the stories and how SFMs represent themselves and construct an image of their forced migration experience. Qualitative content analysis will be applied to categorize the most recurrent themes in the SFMs’ narratives, to study the texts rigorously, and to generate the categories and sub-categories that emerge from the data. In this regard, the following section seeks to review and analyze the SFMs’ answers to the questions proposed on I am a migrant and organize these answers in terms of their relationship to time and space.
7. Results and discussion

In their contributions to the *I am a migrant* portal, the SFMs introduce several themes and construct various identities. A number of these themes and identities have been inspired by questions proposed on the portal. However, in their narratives, the SFMs have voluntarily addressed and individually represented a wide range of themes and identities in addition to what is suggested on *I am a migrant*. Restating the focus of this study, the aim in what follows is to explore these themes and aspects of identity by answering the following research question:

Which themes do SFMs topicalize in their personal narratives and what facets of identity do SFMs thereby co-construct in these narratives?

As stated earlier, narrative analysis and qualitative content analysis will be applied to outline the themes and aspects of identity that have been (re)presented in the SFMs’ narratives. Before delving into the data analysis, it must be stressed at the outset that, with regard to narrative analysis, a thematic form of analysis is the leading approach throughout this study. In addition, a structural approach to narrative analysis will briefly accompany the thematic protocol to a) investigate specific instances (see *Before exodus*) of structural outlining in the SFMs’ narratives and study what insight they contribute to the overall thematic view, and b) detect the general structure of answering (short vs. long answers) and its associations to identity representations and agency manifestations.

7.1. Direct-quote stories: Overview

As mentioned earlier, out of the 76 stories from SFMs, there are 35 told completely in first-person narrations; these stories will be the focus of the analysis (see the Appendix for a full version of the 35 stories). Specifically, the analysis will target the themes and identities that the SFMs (co)construct in their narratives. Taking as a point of departure the questions posted on the *I am a migrant* portal, there are certain topics that the SFMs are expected to deal with, such as previous/current occupations, geographical specifications, ongoing challenges, meanings of home, and expectations for host countries (https://iamamigrant.org/). However, not all of the SFMs talked about all of the suggested topics in their narratives; furthermore, in several stories, there are additional themes that the SFMs have contributed to the portal.
Specific questions have been addressed far more than other questions by the SFMs while narrating their stories of forced migration. Excluding the answers about “current country” of residence, which are displayed separately before each story, the SFMs have 12 questions to answer (voluntarily) in their narratives. While over 50% of the stories have dealt with these questions, 5 of the 12 questions seem to shape the context of the stories as they are repeatedly answered by the SFMs. The other 7 questions have a low frequency in terms of the percentage of participants that have responded to them. First, in Table 1, all of the questions are listed, shown in descending order with the number of stories that have dealt with each question and the percentage of the total number of direct-quote stories (35 stories) each question was addressed in. Secondly, the answers will be thematically and structurally analyzed in order to gain insight into the SFMs’ narrative construction and identity representation.

Table 1 summarizes the number of direct-quote stories that answered each of the proposed questions on *I am a migrant* and displays the percentage of the 35 stories in which these questions were addressed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answered in</th>
<th>Overall percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Why did you leave your country?</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Where did you go?</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>88.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Occupation</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>82.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Country of origin</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>What do you want to do/what do you actually do for your country of origin?</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Where is home for you?</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>37.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>What do you miss from your country?</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>22.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>What’s your greatest challenge right now?</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>At what age did you leave your country?</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>14.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>What do you think you bring to the country you’re living in?</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>What was your first impression?</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1 shows a summary of the 12 questions that the SFMs responded to in their narratives. As can be seen, questions 1–5 have been frequently answered while few SFMs presented their views on, for example, their first impression (question 11) and current challenges (question 8). The percentage of questions answered varies significantly between the first 5 questions (60% or more) and questions 6–12 (37% or less). Drawing on this division, it is worthwhile to note that the least frequently answered questions belong, temporally and spatially, to a new phase in the life of the SFMs, a life that is yet to be lived and experienced. Apart from the question about age (question 9), all of the least-answered questions investigate feelings that have not had time to grow properly (e.g., what do you miss?), or they inquire about present circumstances and future expectations, which are difficult to anticipate when considering the emotional state and sociocultural conditions of the SFMs. On the other hand, it is clear that questions about, say, profession or country of origin are more frequently addressed in the SFMs’ stories as these kinds of questions carry a great deal of significance to identity representation and construction because they are deeply rooted in the lives of the SFMs. This discrepancy between the first (1–5) and second (6–12) set of questions can be attributed to the nature of the answers required from the SFMs; the first set belongs to the experienced past, and the second set deals with the gradually discovered present.

### 7.2. SFMs’ narrative trajectory

Following the aforementioned two methods, namely narrative analysis and qualitative content analysis, the themes in the SFMs’ narratives can be grouped, generally speaking, into three spatiotemporal divisions: before leaving Syria, during exodus, and after arriving in the host countries. These three phases have emerged as a natural outcome of any migration story that entails leaving one’s own first home, moving through time and space, and reaching a particular destination. Each of these divisions has its own specific focus in terms of “when” and “where,” which the SFMs have shared. In terms of time and space, the themes are exclusively identified and distinguishable, meaning that it is distinctly traceable when: a) the SFMs talk about their recalled past, contemplated present, or envisioned future, and b) they mention anecdotes about
home, transit, or host countries. Identifiable as they are, however, the themes adhere to no chronological or sequential order while being narrated; there are vivid shifts in the stories as the SFMs leap backward and forward in time and space. Moreover, the thematic leaping in the narrative of before, during, and after exodus has certain topics assigned to it; these topics will be outlined and discussed in this chapter by focusing on their different themes.

The before phase, looking especially at reasons for leaving the country, will be studied in terms of the thematic and structural choices that the SFMs have followed in explaining their reasons behind leaving Syria. Aspects of identity in before exodus will be of special focus as they are more salient in this phase of the SFMs’ narratives than the other two phases. As the journey continues, the SFMs’ representations of agency (see section 4.2.1) begin to fluctuate upwards and downwards. Thus, during exodus will deal more with agency manifestation and its relation to space and time in the narrative playground. Finally, the after phase, in which the SFMs describe their current situation after their journeys end, will examine the narrators’ present conditions in view of the forced migration experience. Following a chronological and sequential order, the first phase to be studied is before exodus.

7.2.1. Before exodus

“Why did you leave your country?” is the main question that perfectly fits into the before phase as the answer is related solely to the SFMs’ time in Syria. Considering time and space, when the SFMs respond to this question, their answers are discursively situated in the period before the SFMs began their journeys out of Syria. Due to personal preferences, answers to the “why” question are constructed and approached in several discursive forms. Regardless of the thematic and structural variations in dealing with this phase, the SFMs were keen to relate their various reasons for leaving the country.

In all of the 35 direct-quote stories, the SFMs have given explanations of their decisions to leave Syria, i.e., they all chose to answer this specific question while skipping other questions. It comes as no surprise that this question was answered by all of the SFMs since justifying one’s actions is practiced by almost all people with different experiences, and forced migration is no exception. The interpretation of the thematic and structural choices that the SFMs adopted while describing their different reasons for fleeing their country will help in gaining discursive insights into identity representation and construction in the narrative that belongs to the SFMs’ time in Syria.
Looking at the data thematically and structurally, specifically by examining “what” the participants included and “how” they discursively expressed their reasons for fleeing their country, the SFMs’ answers can be grouped into two sets: the collective type and the personal type of answers. In what follows, collective general answers (under It’s war!) and personal answers (under This happened to me!) will be discussed.

7.2.1.1. It’s war!

I left with my family when the war broke out.

(Rafat, story 6)

With collective answers, narrators give a general “one-size-fits-all” response to their motivations behind fleeing the country; it should be noted at the outset that this general answer has a well-established logic and reasoning behind it. Having generic qualities should not be taken as a way to undermine the underlying cause of Syrians’ forced migration, i.e., war as it could be “simply” interpreted as a narrative choice. This narrative choice, as with all of the other discursive strategies used in the 35 stories (e.g., short/long answers, personal/general reasons, etc.), has several justifications and therefore facilitates an understanding of how the SFMs represent their identities in narrative. Table 2 shows all of the SFMs’ answers that fit under the category of a general response to: “Why did you leave your country?”

Table 2. General answers to the “why” question

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Story number</th>
<th>Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>We were in danger there and had no choice but to flee. We first moved to Afrin, but were forced to move once again in March 2018.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>If there was no war in Syria, I would go back to my country. We had to leave because the situation was getting worse.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>I left in 2015 at 19 years old because I was a mechanical engineering student and my university was bombed several times. I wanted to know what freedom tasted like.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>I started studying computer engineering at the University of Damascus, but in 2013, I had to flee my country before finalizing my degree because of the insecurity and the political situation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>But during the war they stole everything from me. I used to have it all: buildings, money etc., but during the war we lost everything. People were killed next to us, buildings were collapsing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>I left with my family when the war broke out.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>I left Syria in 2011, two months after the war started.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I was studying electronic engineering at the university in Tartus, Syria, but I could not finish my studies because of the war.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>It never crossed my mind to move before the war.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Before the war in my country, we used to come to Lebanon, but due to the ongoing situation in Syria, my family and I left Syria for good in 2013 and settled down here, in Lebanon.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>After many years of war, it became hard to lead a normal life so my family and I decided to move to Lebanon in 2014.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>I left Syria because of the war.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>The day I heard I had permission to move to Canada, I applied to three universities. I wasn’t able to go to university in Syria because of the war.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>My parents are still in Damascus, but they wanted me to leave so I could escape the war and find a better future for myself.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Since the war broke out in Syria and we had to leave to Irbid, I haven’t been able to practice my trade.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>The war drove me and my family away from our homeland four years ago.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>When the war arrived in our city, Deir Ez-Zor, we started moving from place to place around Syria up until it became too difficult and too dangerous to be there.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>I fled Aleppo together with my family and my wife’s siblings. Our aim was to get to Europe, to safety.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>We left our life in Syria as our beautiful city was ravaged by the war.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Most of the general answers mention “war” as the sole reason for leaving, but without including specific personal incidents that led to their decision. For example, Yusef (story 21), who has worked as a cultural mediator after settling in Italy, starts his story with the following short declarative sentence: “I left Syria because of the war.” After this statement, he continues to explain his journey and how he tried to reach England but ended up in Italy; he shares his views on the new country, but he does not give any further details about his motivation to leave the country as he does when describing his journey and cultural perspectives.

In another story, Ali (story 13) introduces the same general answer, with the same exact wording “because of the war,” which led him to stop his studies and eventually flee the country, stating:

I was studying electronic engineering at the university in Tartus, Syria, but I could not finish my studies because of the war.

Unlike the previous story and before giving his reason for fleeing Syria, Ali tells one significant fact about his personal history and shares one detail about his forced migration experience, which is not asked for in the *I am a migrant* proposed questions. Ali is a Palestinian Syrian
whose parents were forced to migrate (from Palestine), and now he has been forced to leave Syria. He considers leaving Syria to be his second time as a forced migrant and hopes that “this is the last time.” As such, his national identity becomes a central fact in his story of his identity more than any other fact, which is why he is keen to explain and present this side of his identity. Then, Ali recounts his journey, in detail, from Syria to Germany, explaining all of the obstacles he faced and how he overcame them. In doing so, he constructs an active agency image through narrating this episode. At that moment, he moves to present his reason for fleeing the country in one sentence, first by introducing first his professional identity (“studying electronic engineering”) and next by stating that the war in Syria prevented him from studying, so he left; he does not share a particular incident that led directly to leaving Syria.

Through relating their reasons for leaving, the SFMs focus on and outline specific aspects of identity, such as the national and professional identities shown in the previous quote. This thematic choice is followed, to a great extent, in most of the direct-quote stories. It reveals different aspects of identity and allows a space for the SFMs to introduce themselves in diverse discursive ways. This innate flexibility of narrative has uncovered the manners in which the aspects of their identities are (co)constructed and (re)presented. For instance, combining his ethnic and gender identity when presenting his general reason (it is war!) for leaving is what Ali (story 1, not to be confused with Palestinian Syrian Ali from story 13) co-constructs in his story. “We were in danger there and had no choice but to flee” is Ali’s answer to “why did you leave your home country?” However, he does not simply present his answer as a given fact that everybody should believe; instead, he constructs it by using the first-person plural pronoun “we” to refer to his family role as a caretaker and to his stereotypical gender role as responsible for the family, portraying a character with a high level of agency. In addition, he focuses on his ethnic identity by clearly stating it in the very first three words of his story “I am Kurdish” and referring to his place of birth, which is Kurdish majority (“originally from Afrin”). That is to say, he was threatened and forced to leave because of his ethnic background and his fears for the safety of his family. By weaving together these multiple facts when presenting his reason for leaving, he gives a general answer, and in the process, constructs his ethnic and gender identity, implicitly, as main factors for leaving Syria.

As stated above, in their narratives, one thematic strategy through which a number of SFMs have chosen to explain their reasons for leaving Syria is by giving a “relatively” general answer formulated in short sentences. The narrative that accompanies this general answer displays one thematic option in contributing to forced migration discourse and highlights different aspects
of the SFMs’ identity. This thematic choice of a general answer has, as motioned earlier, an opposite counterpart, i.e., a personal one.

7.2.1.2. This happened to me! If we didn’t go, I would have had to fight in the military. (Jacob, story 18)

Another type of answer emerges from the narratives in the SFMs responses to “why did you leave your home country?,” namely, a personal answer. Many participants shared their personal reasons for leaving their war-torn country; these answers are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3. Specific answers to the “why” question

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Story number</th>
<th>Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>It was not until my bride died that I decided to risk everything and cross the Mediterranean.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>… two bombs fell on our house. Everything was destroyed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Whether he was a student or not, he was forced to be part of the military action.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>The reason I left Syria is the compulsory military service that would drag me into a war that I refuse to take part in.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>But when I met him, he was broke. His family lost everything because of the war. They lost their business, and many lost their lives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>We had to leave Syria because there was nothing left where we are from. No home. No work. No hope. The town is ruled by ISIS.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>All of that changed when Daesh came. They destroyed the land and made our life one of constant fear.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Then the bombs began to fall. And then to make matters worse, Daesh came to Syria.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>If we didn’t go, I would have had to fight in the military.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>My husband was severely injured. We were living in an area affected by a lot of fighting and decided that it was a good time to leave and seek safety and medical attention elsewhere.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>We left because my husband was killed and my son was badly burned when a bomb exploded on our house.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>I had to leave Syria because if you are a young man there, everyone wants to recruit you.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>Men were forcibly recruited [in] to the government’s army and if I stayed, I’d have to kill people, but I don’t want to hurt anybody.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
When I lost my husband to the war, I took the decision to get my children out of Syria.

I was conscripted to fight for the regime, so we took the decision to flee.

My husband, Suleiman, and my daughter, Kinana, were at home when the bomb struck. Arriving at my destroyed house, with my loved ones buried underneath the rubble, I nearly lost my mind.

Table 3 shows a variety of reasons that eventually led the SFMs to flee their country; these reasons include, for example, fleeing because of newly existing terrorist groups, refusing compulsory military service, or seeking medical treatment for a family member outside Syria. All of the aforementioned reasons are created, of course, by the war, but some participants chose to be explicit about their specific situation and others chose not to.

The SFMs have articulated their answers either in one declarative sentence or in the form of a story. Both structural strategies, whether a sentence or a story, have informative discursive power showing how the SFMs wanted to be perceived as independent individuals. Amina (story 23), a mother of six, starts her story by saying:

We left because my husband was killed and my son was badly burned when a bomb exploded on our house.

As a matter of fact, Amina’s reason for leaving is four-fold: it was not safe for her life, her husband was killed, her son was severely injured, and her house was destroyed. In one sentence, Amina establishes the horror of the Syrian situation as well as the difficulty of her personal conditions. Ultimately, she had nothing left for her in Syria, and leaving was her only option. The rest of her story is dedicated to her plan for the future in Norway and assisting her children in their new life in a new country. Thus, after introducing herself as a single parent in the first sentence when she states why she left, she builds up her story by constructing a salient gender identity as she dedicates herself completely to the welfare of her children. This example indicates how the narratives of forced migrants, through answering a single question, offer a substantial space for identity representation and a sense of self.

7.2.1.3. Let me tell you my story.

One day, all my family was at home…

(Abdullah, story 8)

Unlike the previous quotes that have been thematically analyzed, the following examples represent a new discursive strategy while explaining the reasons that led the SFMs to leave
their country. Many SFMs narrate a complete story to retell their personal serious conditions and the direct threats they faced that eventually led them to flee the country. These stories range between being an account of one individual or a whole family; nevertheless, no substantial thematic or structural differences exist when the story is about one person or more.

Roula (story 35), a 31 year-old-mother, dedicated a substantial part of her narrative to recounting the conditions that prompted her and her family’s decision for fleeing Syria. Right at the beginning, she starts telling a story about why she and her family fled the country. By applying Labov’s structural framework (see section 6.2.1.) and by following his proposed order of narrative categories, it is clear that Roula’s narrative contains all six narrative elements, albeit in a different order. She starts with orientation by identifying the situation in which she was out with her son while her husband and daughter “were at home when the bomb struck.” With this beginning, Roula introduces the setting for her story as well as her gender identity. Next, she describes the horror she felt (evaluation) when she arrived at her ruined house and knew that her husband and her daughter were under the wreckage and seriously wounded (complicating action). Fulfilling two structural elements concurrently allows her to reinforce her gender identity and family role as well. At that moment in her narrative, Roula tells us what the story is about (abstract). Ideally, an outline of a story should come at the beginning, but she places it later by providing background information about her and her husband’s professional identities, how life started to become difficult for them, and how the situation rapidly deteriorated, eventually leading to their fleeing the country. Then, she states that with no home left for them and with a life that was in constant danger, they decided to flee the country (result). Finally, as Roula’s account encompasses all of Labov’s structural components, she concludes her narrative (coda) of leaving Syria by bringing us back to continuing her account of another aspect of her forced migration story.

The aforementioned excerpt of Roula’s narrative conveys a perfect image of how the SFMs associate their reasons for leaving the country with gender and family roles in order to tell a collective family story. Moving on to stories with a more individual grounding, where the use of the personal pronoun “I” is more prevalent than the “we” in the previous story, the following examples deal with stories of individuals who left alone. Abdullah (story 27) shares a story that covers all six of the structural categories, using Labov’s exact suggested order. In his story, there is a strong emphasis on evaluation as he comments on the critical situations and scenarios that he might have gone through had he stayed in Syria. He explains:
I don’t want to fight for any of them [any armed group], they’re all murderers. I hate their system and how the government treats our people, they take advantage of everything. And no one is fighting to free the people, they are just killing them.

This emphasis on presenting a thorough evaluation assists Abdullah, thematically and structurally, in establishing an explicit personal answer for his reason for leaving the country. Moreover, his personal identity, as he left Syria alone without his family, is remarkably prominent in the narrative because he focuses more on his own circumstances and how to deal with them, whether in Syria or later on. Thus, this extensive evaluation element of his story facilitates representing the two opposing sides of Abdullah’s identity: one is passive and the other is active. The passive side of his identity is shown through his description of the difficult situation in which he found himself and which he had no control over, and how “everyone [armed groups] wants to recruit you” and “military services that were chasing me.” However, he also shows his active and responsible character when he takes a stand against participation in the armed conflict and refuses to fight for any group, achieving a high level of agency when making the decision to leave the country. Through this part of his narrative, a robust representation of his agency (low or high) is emphasized, contributing to his identity construction on a more personal level compared to what Roula wrote in the previous example, in which she reveals instead a collective family identity.

It is interesting how structural choices in narrative can reveal personal and collective identity (co)construction when looking at a specific theme. In both of the previous examples, the storytellers have indirectly woven their identities to explain the direct reasons that led to their fleeing Syria. Directly, however, it is noted that some of the SFMs deliberately identify one or more aspect of their identity to emphasize it as their main reason for fleeing the country.

While sharing his reason for leaving Syria, adhering fully in his narrative to Labov’s structural elements, Jacob (story 18) emphasizes his religious identity to support his reason for fleeing the country. His story falls perfectly under the personal category of “reason” because he states that he refused to join the military service. What is remarkable about Jacob’s argument, however, is his conscious focus on being Christian:

... I am a Christian. In Syria, Daesh attacks Christians. It was very, very hard to be a Christian in Syria. I lived in a Christian area and bombs were dropped all the time near us.

Through referring four times in four consecutive sentences to his Christian background, he presents an intensified image of his religious identity and refers to the sectarian side of the
Syrian crisis. Religion, as a personal criterion, leads up to rejecting military service and formulates a vital factor for Jacob to seek sanctuary.

7.2.1.4. Summary

In answering “why did you leave your home country?,” the SFMs’ responses can be classified into two groups: thematic and structural. Thematically, answers have either a general statement (It’s war!) or a personal account (This happened to me!). In addition, the SFMs’ structural choices vary between short, one-sentence answers and full stories. These various narrative strategies (personal/general reasons and short/long answers) accentuate the manners in which the SFMs reflect on their life-changing decision and generate concrete images of the SFMs’ self-representation. Moreover, the SFMs’ before exodus stories show a high degree of stable identity representation and agency interaction as the participants are narrating about the times they were still in or close to their home country. In other words, the closer they are to Syria, the brighter their identity and agency representations shine; however, this is not the case for the during exodus phase.

7.2.2. During exodus

Two major themes capture the during phase in the stories of the SFMs. These two themes are closely related, and one theme is the natural outcome of the other. “Where did you go?” is one of the questions that the SFMs were more eager to answer; in the direct-quote stories, this question was answered by 31 SFMs out of 35. Second, in line with the “where” question, the SFMs voluntarily revealed details of their journeys, describing the different routes they took, the difficulties they faced, and the formalities they had to deal with. That is, answers to the “where” question and descriptions of the forced migration journey are the prevailing themes that come up in the during phase.

It is remarkable how the identity representation and agency manifestation of the SFMs fluctuate in this phase. Some aspects of identity went completely unmentioned (e.g., ethnicity, occupation) while gender identity and family roles were repeatedly stressed as parts of the individuals’ representations. It can also be seen that their agency was still active right before and during the journey as they indicated a high level of determination when planning and executing their escape. However, the level of agency gradually fades as they progress along their routes because of the circumstances surrounding the experience itself. Thus, as they
advance/walk in space, their agency decreases and their identities fade; the same applies to time, meaning that the farther away the story is from their time in Syria, the less their agency and identity shine through.

Analyzing the during phase will define some of the main discursive characteristics of both themes; the “where” question and the journey and will draw a clear picture of how the SFMs (co)construct their identities and agency in narrative. As stated earlier, since the “where” question led the SFMs to share accounts of the routes they took and invited them to expand their narratives to encompass a theme, namely, their journey (which is not proposed by the I am a migrant portal), this will be discussed first. In other words, the “where” question encouraged a natural discursive flow, leading the SFMs to talk about their “journey,” so these will be discussed respectively.

7.2.2.1. First, I went there.

The percentage of SFMs who answered this question is relatively high (85.7%); because the “where” question entails describing migration in action, it provides the opportunity for the SFMs to perfectly situate their experience in the realm of the forced migration domain. It also assists in following the chronological developments of both the narrative storyline and the identity continuum of the narrators. That is, the SFMs list where (and how) they moved first inside and then outside Syria, and in most cases, they mention the countries they crossed and whether they travelled alone or with their families. Moreover, in the 31 stories responding to the “where” question, the SFMs answered the question either explicitly or implicitly, either in short statements or extended texts, expanding, in some instances their answers to include details about the entire journey from Syria to the current country of residence. Setting aside the responses that describe the journey until the subsequent section (see 7.2.2.2), the following table summarizes all of the SFMs’ answers to the “where” question.
Table 4. Answers to the “where” question (excluding “journey”)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Story number</th>
<th>Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>It was my first time outside of Syria, and Iraq is the first and only country I have traveled to. I moved to [the] Qustabah camp in Erbil; leaving home is the most difficult thing I have ever done.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>We lived in Cairo, Egypt, for three years until we were relocated to Portugal in 2015.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>We went to Lebanon with all my family.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>I left Syria and moved to Istanbul, Turkey when I was 22, just after completing my bachelor’s degree at Aleppo University.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>When the war broke out in Syria, my family and I crossed the border to go to Turkey.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>So we moved to Turkey with our family.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>There wasn’t even a choice of living there anymore, and there was also no chance of building a life in Lebanon.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>So, Maha and I fled to Lebanon after we got married four years ago.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>My brother and I came to Turkey, back in June 2015.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Due to the ongoing situation in Syria, my family and I left Syria for good in 2013 and settled down here, in Lebanon.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>After many years of war, it became hard to lead a normal life, so my family and I decided to move to Lebanon in 2014.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>We drove south to Jordan where they sent us straight to [the] Zaatari camp.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>For two years, I have supported my children in Turkey.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Back in Beirut, I was living in a two-bedroom apartment with 25 other people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>We have been in Irbid, Jordan for more than three years now.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As Table 4 shows, the SFMs took different routes, crossed many countries, and travelled alone or with family. For instance, after explaining her reason for leaving Syria, Shereen (story 10) states in a short declarative sentence: “We left Syria and went to Lebanon.” Lebanon was the first country that Shereen, her husband, and her son fled to. However, she continues to mention all of the countries they had to cross till they reached their host destination. They went to Turkey, they were smuggled to Greece, and they finally settled in Estonia. Drawing this map allows Shereen to contextualize her personal involvement as an individual, wife, mother, and forced migrant in the story-world. Thus, dedicating a considerable part of her story to the countries that she and her family crossed allows her to represent various aspects of identity and
a high degree of agency; at the same time, she constructs a constant sense of self with a forced migration past that she can relate to.

Not all of the SFMs have recounted in detail all of the countries they passed through during their journey as Shereen has. In an indirect way, Rafat (story 6) answers the “where” question without giving explicit information. At the beginning of his story and very briefly, he states from which city in Syria he comes from and why he and his family left, and then he says: “We lived in Cairo, Egypt, for three years until we were relocated to Portugal in 2015.” As Egypt does not border Syria, it is not clear how Rafat and his family crossed/reached Egypt. Did they obtain an Egyptian visa while they were still in Syria? Did they cross first to Lebanon or Jordan? Rafat has not directly answered these questions; instead, he simply states where he used to live before being relocated to Portugal. Unlike Shereen, his answer presents a low level of agency and contributes less to the overall story of his forced migration.

Like Rafat, but alone and a year later, Samo (story 7), was relocated to Portugal. However, unlike Rafat, Samo contributes more to the “where” question. As stated earlier, some of the answers are framed in a story structure; Samo’s story falls into this category. He starts his story from the end: “I landed in Portugal on June 6, 2016.” Then, weaving his reason for leaving Syria into answering the “where” question, he continues:

It was not until my bride died that I decided to risk everything and cross the Mediterranean. During the first attempt, our boat capsized so we spent five hours adrift until we were finally rescued by the Turkish authorities. I could only reach a Greek island on my third attempt, in February 2016.

It is clear from the context that he left first to Turkey and then to Greece, and later in the story, he explains how he tried to reach Northern Europe (Norway in particular) but ended up waiting for relocation, which finally brought him to Portugal. His story/answer reveals several aspects of his identity, provides a paradoxical image of an active agent vis-à-vis a passive one and demonstrates, collectively, an essential part of forced migrants’ journey.

Samo, in the course of his narrative, states his national origin more than once, but he first refers to it implicitly (“my country”) while answering the “why” and “where” questions; he then explicitly talks about working in Syria, a hobby that he had there, and so on. In addition, he constructs his professional (“I had a career in interior design”) and gender (“my bride”) identity following the same strategy of personal referencing, using personal and possessive pronouns (I, my), establishing an active agency and asserting a continuous individual identity. However, his agency is not stable as he articulates low agency as well. He faced a number of
of incidents where he had no control and in which he expresses helplessness (“spent five hours adrift”), dependence (“being relocated”), and vulnerability (“we were finally rescued”). It interesting to note that whenever Samo’s agency (as an active doer) decreases, he uses the first person plural pronoun “we” in his story. There is a strong possibility that the “we” in “we spent five hours adrift until we were finally rescued” refers to Samo’s fellow forced migrants who were with him on the boat. That is, he combines his low agency with a collective depiction of other forced migrants, thereby framing the journey undertaken by SFMs (and all forced migrants) as uncontrolled events governed by outside forces. Displaying the two sides of agency representation, this pronoun switching (I and we) depicts the characteristics of the personal story and its active protagonist as well as the collective story with its vulnerable characters.

7.2.2.2. My journey

First I went to Lebanon, and from there I took the Balkan path to Germany—the whole journey took six days.

(Samir, story 3)

The “journey” theme comes as a logical sequel to the previous “where” question. In this theme, the SFMs had the opportunity to continue their stories by recounting one of the most dynamic episodes in their narratives. As already motioned, there is no question posted on I am a migrant inquiring into the forced migration journey; however, 16 out of 31 the SFMs who answered the “where” question also chose to voluntarily share anecdotes of their migration routes. These anecdotes contain vivid descriptions of the hardships that the SFMs encountered, how they dealt with them, and whether they reached their desired destinations or not.

Rich in detail as they are, the accounts of the SFMs’ journeys give profound insights into the aspects of identity that have been constructed and the uneven degrees of agency that have been represented in the narratives. The journey serves as a spatiotemporal transition from Syria to new host countries; this transition has two seemingly separated but closely related domains that direct the SFMs’ narratives: a discursive function and a collective trait. Moving in space and time from one place into another is what “journey” has discursively achieved through connecting two worlds (home and host) and bridging the past to the present in the narratives of the SFMs. Secondly, “journey” portrays a collective image of how the SFMs construct their identities and characterize degrees of agency when establishing points of reference between their past lives and present situations.
In his story, Yamman (story 30) presents a fully-fledged description of his journey from Syria until the moment that he knew that he and his family would be relocated to Sweden. His narrative builds a bridge from the past to the present, from Syria to Sweden, expressing different stages of agency and facets of identity. He fled the country alone, dropping his university studies, because he did not want to take part in the ongoing war. First, he went to Turkey, then to Egypt (for less than a year), but again he came back to Turkey. He started a family in Turkey as his fiancé, Fatma, followed him to Turkey; they got married there, had their first son, and Fatma got pregnant again before they left for Greece.

In this first episode of his (their) journey, the actual movement outside Syria is recalled and constructed alongside the discursive transition of the story. That is, the narrative assists in building a sequential ordering of his journey, allowing him to contextualize his self-representation as an active agent in the story-world. More precisely, his actions seem to be a result of conscious decisions that he determinately made in the face of the harsh circumstances he was confronted with. It is remarkable how Yamman, in this part of his journey narrative, has mostly used the singular first-person pronoun while retelling all of the steps that he took before leaving for Europe:

I left Syria 5 years ago, alone. At first, I stayed in Turkey for 4 months, and then I went to Egypt. I spent about ten months [there], and then I moved back to Turkey, where I stayed for 2.5 years.

In this short extract, and even more so before it when he explains the reason that led him to flee the country, Yamman expresses a degree of freedom in planning and acting for his life in accordance with his individual capacity. However, as he proceeds in his story, this capacity and, consequently, his level of agency, decreases significantly. For instance, when trying to cross into Greece with his family and other migrants, he was separated from his family (who were sent to Greece) by the Coast Guard and taken back to Turkey. He succeeded in reuniting with his family in Greece, and then he tried to continue the journey to Northern Europe, but he could not make it because the borders were closed when they arrived there.

The story shows, as Yamman continues his narrative and continued his journey, there are depictions of more restrictions and uncontrolled situations that were imposed on his movement and decisions; he was on some occasions completely powerless. Here, we can notice an apparent shift in using pronouns. From the moment he and his family embarked on the boat, there is a complete absence of his personal “I.”
Like so many others, we crossed the sea on a rubber boat and it was a terrifying adventure. The rest of the story is woven around the plural “we.” Even though he could have simply continued with his own individual referencing, he chose, instead, to draw a collective picture of all the characters on the journey. Moreover, it is frequently not clear, content-wise, to whom he is referring with “we” in terms of whether it is himself and his family, other forced migrants on the boat, fellow Syrians, forced migrants in general, or all of these groups. Thus, his role in the story seems to slowly vanish, and his agency gradually declines until he reaches a fully passive state, when he surrendered to a relocation program, where it was decided for him and his family where they would be settled next.

Considering Yamman’s story as an example, it goes without saying that the forced migration experience is loaded with tremendous ordeals and exceptional situations that are not usually a part of everyday life. Consequently, agency and identity representations should (and could) not be tested in comparison with normal life events. Bearing this in mind, however, studying forced migrants’ narratives, with all of the peculiarities they carry, can offer a better understanding of forced migrants’ self-conception and enhance interpretations of self-identification accordingly.

Examining another story with a protagonist of a different gender, Roula’s narrative matches Yamman’s almost identically. Roula (story 35), whose story extract was mentioned previously (see Before exodus), demonstrates in her narrative the same fluctuating degrees of agency and identity representation. When her narrative setting is still situated in Syria, she introduces a robust gender and professional identity. However, and like Yamman, the farther her story goes (and she moves) from Syria, the weaker her agency and identity manifestations become. When the boat journey starts and after arriving in Greece, her personal “I” converts to a collective “we.”

After we got registered, we were sent to [the] Ritsona accommodation [center] near Athens...We got in[to] the Relocation Program, hoping to settle [in] Germany. However, God or fate, you name it, decided that Portugal [would] be our new home.

Acknowledging that forced migration is an extraordinary, life-changing event, the stories of the SFMs’ journeys display narratives of complete dependence and surrender. Roula and her family had no control over the course of events they faced; they were uprooted from their homeland, they moved from one place to another, and they were sent to live in a country they did not choose. Consequently, her active role and personal characteristics fade as she advances in her narrative. There is a strong tendency to associate the narrative of survival that Roula and
all of the SFMs express with the narrative of passive acceptance. She was put into a situation where she had to accept anything, leaving her to attribute her life decisions to supernatural and mystic powers (god or fate) that direct her life from the outside.

7.2.2.3. Summary

Narratives of the during phase show a clear illustration of the agency trajectory, with agency starting off at a high level and decreasing as the SFMs proceed through time and space. It also indicates that the SFMs’ aspects of identity can be assigned to spatiotemporal factors as their strongest identity representations belong to their previous life in Syria, not to their current time in transit and/or in their host countries. In other words, the downward trajectory of agency and time-related identity, linguistically, shape and define the features of the SFMs’ narratives that fall between their past life and current situation, i.e., after exodus.

7.2.3. After exodus

The after phase in the SFMs’ narratives refers to the extracts in the stories that deal primarily with questions and themes related to the SFMs’ time until the end of their journeys. This means that in this phase, the SFMs either reached a country and settled there or were waiting for relocation through a European relocation program. Similar to the previous two phases, the analysis will focus on the SFMs’ answers in their direct-quote stories to the questions that suggest a relationship to this phase. In light of the narrators’ realization of their new situations, these questions can be categorized into two general groups; one group deals with perspectives of the home country as a remembered past, and the other explores expectations of life in the host country. The questions that give insight into the remembered past include “Where is home for you?,” “What do you miss from your country?,” and “What do you think you bring to the country you’re living in?” The second set of questions asks about their first impressions of the host country, their current and expected challenges in the new situation, and words of advice to people in the home and host countries.

As shown in Table 1, a very low percentage of these questions was answered in comparison to the questions related to the before and during phases. As a result, they occur in decreasing order in the table, indicating a quantitative feature of belonging together and resulting in a qualitative unity that shapes a thematic unity that expresses the present state. Although there are fewer answers to these questions, the answers about the after phase can assist in gaining
insight into how the SFMs contextualize their personal agency and the individual and collective aspects of identity in narrative. Based on their thematic features, the questions will be categorized into two sets, namely, the remembered past and the expected present. Each set will deal with the three questions that ascribe to its title in order to highlight how the SFMs perceive themselves after the end of their journeys.

7.2.3.1. My remembered past

In spite of everything, I still do not feel at home—life has to calm down first.

(Rafat, story 6)

Even with a small number of SFMs responding to these themes, the most-answered question in the after phase is still related, in one way or another, to life in Syria. The question is “Where is home for you?,” and the SFMs have given different thoughts and perspectives while replying in their narratives. For example, some narrators, explicitly or implicitly, stress the fact that Syria was, is, and will always be their home while other narrators refer to the host countries as their “new home.” In this way, they are dealing with “home” as its concrete physical notion, i.e., an existing place that people can literally move into or out over the course of their lives. On the other hand, a number of narrators deal with the notion of home in its abstract conception. For instance, Jory says, “For me, home now is where I can have freedom and where I can have a better life.”

In this respect, the narrators understand the question in a metaphorical sense, dealing with “home” as an idea of a space that ought to guarantee independence of thought and action, foster bonds of belonging, and provide future aspirations to all of its members. Similar to the concrete physical conception of home, the abstract notion is attached to both home and the host country. That is, the SFMs share a variety of meanings of “home,” and their interpretations alter as a result; nevertheless, whether metaphorical or literal, explicit or implicit, the presence of the country of origin is dominant in the SFMs’ narratives, either as a past life longed for or a previous home compared to the new one.

The second question in this category urges the SFMs to talk about what they miss from their home country. The answer, in the 8 stories responding to this question, can be summed up by stating that they miss life. The SFMs mention different collective aspects such as family and friends, culture-specific topics such as climate and food, and individual interests like “those little things that you never thought you could miss that much,” among the things they miss. While sharing what they miss, the SFMs outline some differences between the home and host
country and express a nostalgic yearning for their past lives. However, in order for them to gain a better emotional comprehension of their new situation, more time and experience are needed, as they haven’t been in the host countries long enough to process the new situation (see section 7.3).

“What do you think you bring to the country you’re living in?” is the last question through which the SFMs discursively demonstrate a connection to their past life in Syria. As this question allows considerable space to show agency, the SFMs take this opportunity to express a high degree of active selves that largely depend on their professional identities. They state that they are planning to, for example, continue studying, find jobs, and do volunteer work in order to actively participate in their new societies and be independent. Furthermore, they aspire to present a positive image of their culture as a way of introducing both societies to each other. By planning to be active members and cultural mediators, the SFMs reveal the aspects of identity and representations of agency that they “bring” with them from their past life in Syria in that they wish to benefit from identity and agency in their host countries.

This part of the after phase draws a clear distinction between, on the one hand, identity and agency depictions associated with the past and, on the other hand, a current situation that the SFMs need to discover and then evaluate. Thus, few of the SMFs elaborated on the “remembered past” theme because they need to have more life experience to grasp their new situation of a lost past and an unexplored present. In the same manner, the “expected present” resonates with the “remembered past,” but with differences in time.

### 7.2.3.2. My expected present

In spite of the difficulties of studying in Portuguese, this opportunity has been a great source of motivation.

(Samo, story 7)

In this last theme, the SFMs shared thoughts and anticipations about their own current situation in their host countries. In particular, three questions were introduced to explore the present state: a question about current challenges, another about first impressions of the host country/society, and finally, what piece of advice migrants would like to give to the people in their home and host countries.

The SFMs have underlined several challenges they faced after shortly arriving in their host countries. Finding a job, learning the language of the host country, and accepting the fact of being away from home (family and friends) are what the SFMs find themselves, to a large
degree, confronted with. Their first impressions are exclusively limited to being fascinated with a new place/city. Finally, for the piece of advice, they SFMs focus on advocating for peace and understanding in Syria, two virtues that “would bring an end to such a conflict, something all Syrians aspire to” (Yaman, story 11).

The questions related to this part of the SFMs’ stories were briefly answered by a small number of respondents. Taking into consideration the context of the stories, the SFMs have participated in the interviews only a very short time after arriving in their host countries. Thus, they have not experienced their new situations enough to be able to fully articulate an understanding of, say, cultural challenges, economic difficulties, or political viewpoints. By mentioning missing family and friends as one of their main challenges and by relating to their professional identities, the SFMs draw heavily on their past lives in order to share insights into their current situations. In this sense, it would be enlightening to reach out to the same SFMs and ask them these questions in the future, which opens an avenue for further research.

7.2.3.3. Summary

The general characteristic of the after phase questions is associated with themes that ask for interpretations of life in the here and now. Needless to say, then, this life is yet to be lived, i.e., the SFMs have not had the time and experience required to be able to formulate thoughtful and informed opinions about their new lives. For them to be able to answer such questions, it is necessary for the SFMs to digest first, for example, the consequences of their sociocultural uprooting and the impacts of their migration hardships in order to find a place for themselves in their new societies. Considering the smaller number of SFMs who answered the after exodus questions, the bottom line is that the SFMs need more time to have enough experience to figure out a way to comprehend their current situations.

7.3. Theme articulation and identity navigation

Drawing on Bamberg’s aforementioned theory of identity dilemmas, namely, diachronic, synchronic, and agentive (see section 4.2.1), these 35 direct-quote stories demonstrate three dimensions of how the SFMs navigate their identity in narrative while presenting specific themes in the course of narrating their forced migration experiences. The three aspects include the social, individual, and active domains.
The *diachronic* dilemma depicts how storytellers look differently at themselves and at the same time still hold on to a constant sense of self. This dilemma belongs exclusively to the individual and explains itself clearly in narrative. When considering the entire experience of the SFMs, from the moment in which the situation became exacerbated in Syria until the time of conducting the interviews, it is worth pointing out the diachronic development of the narrators’ sense of self. The stories start by staging clear identities and portraying a strong agency. However, as the stories and narrators move through time and space, new traits are gained and introduced by the SFMs as a sign of incorporating acceptance of the new condition. In the face of new challenges, change becomes an inevitable path if the SFMs aspire to start ambitious lives. For example, on one hand, the native language as a strong and permanent identity (national, ethnic, and cultural) marker is what the SFMs implicitly state that they miss; on the other hand, the SFMs constantly state the desire and necessity to learn the languages of their new societies in order to be able to start restoring a sense of their identity (e.g., occupational identity). Moreover, several hints are directed in the narratives towards illustrating an image of a new start of a new life in a new country, which all refer to, if not necessitate, a change in identity vis-à-vis the constant identity representations constructed from their past lives.

Secondly, the *synchronic* dilemma of identity necessitates, in the first place, a social surrounding to be investigated in the realm of narrative. The analysis of the SFMs’ stories shows how the individuals have presented certain themes and aspects of identity that unify them into one group under the same circumstances. In particular, as they are all Syrian nationals who were forced to leave their country in the aftermath of the Syrian crisis in 2011, they represent a sense of sameness to one another (in addition to nationality) as they construct a variety of aspects of identity when explaining their reasons for leaving the country. However, the same theme, namely, reasons for leaving, allows for a considerable space for introducing uniqueness and individuality within the same group, i.e., they all face the same condition of being forced to leave, but they differ in their reasons for leaving. For example, family tragedies, destroyed houses, and refusing to take sides in the crisis are some of the motives behind fleeing the country, although their particular reasons for leaving differ from one person to the next. Moreover, through sharing their reasons for leaving, they move on to describe the details of their journey, accentuating personal-specific characteristics of how they managed to survive the forced migration journey and reach the places where they are now. Thus, they have socially presented a sense of sameness with all fellow SFMs and at the same time, they have
discursively differentiated themselves by emphasizing their identity and the active (or passive) sides of their personality while narrating their stories.

The third and final dimension through which the SFMs reveal the degree of active and passive identities are the agency representations in the narratives. As mentioned before, agency follows the same pattern as identity in the analyzed stories. Agency starts as robust and determined but gradually weakens and fades as the stories continue to their end, i.e., to the SFMs’ current countries of residence. In other words, the closer the story (and the individual) is to Syria, the stronger the agency manifestations are. This disparity in levels of agency resonates with the very nature of the forced migration phenomenon. Forced migration carries in itself a paradox of agency as being forced to leave with no other choice available is one of the ultimate representations of passivity; contrary to that and as a consequence of “being forced to leave,” the SFMs’ stories show that the experience of forced migration allowed them to exercise agency in numerous situations. Put differently, the SFMs were forced, for example, to leave their home country, to stay in specific countries, and to be dependent and passive (e.g., not being able to work); as a result, their agentic state is affected. In contrast, in the SFMs’ narratives describing being uprooted and displaced, the narrators express high levels of agency in the ways in which they managed to escape conflict and save their lives (and their families’) and how they conquered the hardships of their journey. Thus, the narrative of forced migration, and because of the essence of the experience itself, introduces instances of alteration on the axis of agency from complete responsibility to high dependency.

As stated earlier, the principle focus of this study is the emerging themes in the narratives of SFMs. Furthermore, drawing on these themes, the study analyzes the representations of identity and agency that are underlined in the narratives. In answering the questions on the I am a migrant portal, the SFMs introduce a broad set of topics related to the personal and general circumstances that led them to flee the country as well as a brief overview of their current situation and future expectations. On a discursive level, the SFMs address and construct these themes differently, i.e., they do not follow, for example, a particular order while recounting the various aspects of their stories. Moreover, there is a variation in the length of the discussed topics depending on individual preferences, and as a result, some themes gain more importance and attention than others.

On a different level of analysis and for the purposes of this study, the themes in the SFMs’ narratives are organized chronologically, following the steps of the SFMs from Syria to their current host countries. Three major stages play a crucial role in shaping the stories, namely, their country of origin (Syria), the forced journey, and the host country. The themes as stressed
facets of identity and agency manifestations vary in the narratives by drawing a descending line from the past to the present. In other words, the analysis shows that themes about past events that happened in Syria have vivid and authentic representations of identity and agency. However, the trajectory of representations of identity drops gradually as the SFMs proceed in their narratives about the journey and the host country. That is, certain themes and consequently, variations in the representations, are determined in accordance with the SFMs’ exodus. For before, during, and after exodus, each space has its own defining characteristics, and these characteristics are more colorful and robust the more the story narrates events from the before phase. Thus, the themes and identities of the SFMs are more related to their experienced past than to their insecure present.
8. Conclusion

The aim of this study was to discursively review the narrative of forced migration by answering the following research question: which themes do SFMs topicalize in their personal narratives and what facets of identity do SFMs thereby co-construct in these narratives? Recurrent themes and aspects of identity are thoroughly examined, with the help of narrative analysis and qualitative narrative analysis, to investigate whether there are recurring features of identity construction in the SFMs’ stories that hint at a shared “forced migrant identity.” The study analyzes 35 stories that SFMs contributed to the online platform *I am a migrant*. Narrative analysis and qualitative content analysis were applied to review the overall themes of the 35 stories. Thematic narrative analysis directed the study to examine the significance of the themes and their explicit connections to the story-world. In addition, structural narrative analysis clarified the discursive structure of the themes in terms of the ways in which the SFMs chose to tell about specific events. The second method, qualitative content analysis, pulled out the themes and aspects of identity in the data. Furthermore, by singling out themes and identities, the qualitative content analysis revealed the discursive underpinnings of identity construction and how the SFMs (re)present themselves in light of this life-changing experience.

To investigate the themes the SFMs highlighted in their narratives while they recounted their forced migration experience and what aspects of identity they emphasized the most, the analysis in this study was divided into three subchapters, with the SFMs’ exodus as the focal point of these subchapters. *Before exodus* dealt with the SFMs’ answers to “why did you leave your country?” by exploring the thematic and structural choices in 35 direct-quote stories. The answers were categorized thematically into general statements and personal accounts and into structurally short statements and fully-fledged stories. What is remarkable about this phase is the prominent presence of identity and agency at their highest levels. Contrary to the other two phases, the SFMs discursively introduced a sense of determined personalities, staging at the same time various aspects of identity such as gender (and family role), profession, and nationality. In *during exodus*, the SFMs shared details of their forced migration journey and how they managed to get through it. This phase documented the course of agency and how it started to take a downward turn as a result of the SFMs being unwillingly uprooted and confronted with difficult circumstances. Finally, the *after exodus* phase inspected the SFMs’ current situation and inquired about their expectations and aspirations. Since it belongs to their as-of-yet unexperienced sociocultural surroundings, the SFMs have not interacted with this phase as much as they have with the others. However, it occupies an important place in the
SFM’s narratives and introduces a discursive perspective, alongside the previous phases, of how the narrators navigated different aspects of identity in their stories.

**Implications: Forced migrant’s identity**

In his attempt to explore English cultural and national traits, George Orwell asked around 80 years ago, “What have you in common with the child of five whose photograph your mother keeps on the mantelpiece?” (Orwell, 1957/1941, p. 64). This question can also be asked of the SFMs in the context of their forced migration experiences. If they saw photos of their previous lives in their home country, they would immediately identify themselves by saying, “This is me!” Drawing on the previous analysis of their personal stories, the SFMs have lost almost all connections to their home culture identities. Language, cuisine, religion, and even dress codes have acquired, in one way or another, different meanings and practices. However, the SFMs, in their host countries, are still carrying and feeling at least one of their ethnic markers (i.e., native language) and are consequently preserving a sense of individual and collective ethnocultural boundaries. In light of this, the SFMs’ answer to Orwell would not be much different than Orwell’s, “Nothing, except that you happen to be the same person” (p. 64).

Studying SFMs’ narratives can lead the discussion further and draw a general outline of forced migrants’ identity. In their narratives, the SFMs attempt to establish points of reference between their past and present identities as well as between home and their host cultures—in short, between their old and new lives. Thus, taken together, the three phases of the SFMs’ narratives and the three dimensions of identity navigation suggest that a forced migrant’s identity can encompass spatial and temporal aspects. What, then, are these spatiotemporal recurring features of identity construction and thematic presentation in the SFMs’ stories that hint at a shared “forced migrants’ identity?”

Spatially, the range of themes, aspects of identity, and agency manifestations acquire a new meaning in light of the forced migration experience. On the personal level, the SFMs have gained first-hand awareness of their present state as they are confronted with different situations, cultures, and societies. In the same manner, and as a result of this sociocultural confrontation, the SFMs’ identity representations may encompass new personal traits through the process of contesting and opposing host country individuals. Secondly, and since space plays a significant role in the studied narratives, the analysis revealed that the SFMs identify with three different places, and each place carries its own importance to their sense of self; these places are Syria, the transit country(ies), and the host/current country. Thus, the spatial dimension of a forced migrant’s identity presents place-related topics and projects similar
aspects of identity in line with the place the story is narrating and from where the story is being narrated.

On the other hand, the analysis throughout this study indicates that time has singled out the types of themes narrated in the SFMs’ narratives and has shaped the representations of the SFMs’ aspects of identity. The most prominent and effective phase in these narratives is the past. In their stories, the SFMs have conveyed a sense of longing for what they have lost, arguably, their old self, country, and culture. The indications for a past-related identity are displayed throughout their stories when they emphasize activities related to their identities in Syria (especially their professional identity) and engage in narratives recounting mostly past events (focusing more on the before phase than the during and after phases). From the past to the present, the narratives convey a state of gradually increasing passivity that the SFMs are confronted with; they seem to be suspended and trapped in time as their active side is greatly restricted. Drawing again on professional identity, which provides consistency to one’s identity and determines individuals’ relationships to the world, the current situation of the SFMs influences how they experience the present and construct their postponed identities. Completing the chain of time with the future, the temporal feature of a forced migrant’s identity embodies untested anticipation about the future. Because of the uncertainty of their situation, which comes as a result of their insecure present state, they might fear what is yet to come, creating weaker versions of their “true” past identities and less motivated agentic selves.

As the SFMs’ narratives display, aspects of identity and their discursive representations vary remarkably as a result of the many components that Syrian society consists of. The forced migration experience has contributed to this diversity as the SFMs’ identity representations have been altered, gaining new traits, which can add up to the assumption of a forced migrant’s identity. The forced migration experience has helped to reveal and (re)shape different layers of the SFMs’ identity in terms of how the SFMs deal with their sense of belonging to one or another component, what unites them as Syrians, and what divides them. It is not surprising that after the 2011 crisis in Syria, a significant change occurred, with the majority of Syrians, but with SFMs in particular, in defining and identifying with the different aspects of their identity before and after the crisis. What new meaning(s) Syrian identity carries now for its members, how it is formulated, and which influences may threaten it are some of the questions that have emerged in the aftermath of the Syrian crisis; these questions could equally be asked to Syrians as “stayers” and “leavers” as well. These questions exceed the limitations and purpose of this thesis, though they may provoke future research in the field of forced migration
studies in general, and at the same time pave the way for looking at contextualized stories of forced migrants from all nationalities.

In sum, the study has shown that narrative is a central site and transparent medium for constructing and navigating identity. It links, through the power of hindsight, different phases of life (clearly recognizable in narratives such as forced migration) and highlights the narrators’ own associations between the sense of permanence and differences in identity. Accentuating “journey” as one theme of the SFMs’ narrative, it is interesting to note how it serves as a bridge to identity and personal history through time and space. Thus, how SFMs understand the past, experience the present, and anticipate the future facilitates their ability to build bridges between, temporally, the past traits of identity in comparison to the present characteristics of identity, and spatially, between the home culture and the host culture.

**Future research**

The overarching aim of this study was to illustrate the recurrent themes and different aspects of identity that are constructed in and through SFMs’ narratives. Carving out themes and identities will facilitate a more holistic understanding of the forced migration phenomenon and illuminate how SFMs navigate their sense of self within a shared forced migration identity. Such linguistic insights into SFMs’ subjective interpretations of their new situations may assist in providing a more considerate perception from their host societies. The results could offer opportunities for a new perspective on identity (re)presentation and a thorough explanation of the ways SFMs (co)construct an image of themselves in their new societies. One implication of this is the possibility of encouraging the diversity and dynamic contributions of forced migrants in their host countries. Thus, on the basis of these results, the study’s main goal is to recommend more inclusion of and listening to the authentic voices of SFMs in particular (as they present a majority of forced migrants in Europe at the moment) and forced migrants in general. Speaking and researching ABOUT them instead of WITH them only widens the gap between forced migrants and their respective host societies. Moreover, it may strengthen migrants’ feelings of alienation and estrangement as long as they are not truly involved in matters that concern them. That is, more academic involvement is required to enhance the knowledge around forced migration issues and to develop an in-depth investigation of how forced migrants can best achieve a keen self-awareness of their new situations and how host societies can play a crucial role in this process.
References


Appendix

35 direct-quote stories (http://iamamigrant.org/)

1. "We want nothing more than security, safety and a better future for our children.”
Ali and his family
Current Country: Greece

“I am Kurdish and originally from Afrin, Syria, but my wife is from Aleppo, where we were living when the war started. We were in danger there and had no choice but to flee. We first moved to Afrin, but were forced to move once again in March 2018. That is when we started our journey to Greece.

After travelling for three months, we arrived in Moria, which is located on the island of Lesvos. Our third child, Mohammed, was born here. We are currently staying in the open accommodation site in Oinofyta while our asylum application is being examined. Our first boy is four years old and our daughter is two years old, and we want nothing more than security, safety and a better future for our children.”

2. "My life now is nicer, more quiet. I’m going to English and Greek classes in order to improve my language skills.”
Nechirvan
Current Country: Greece

“If there was no war in Syria, I would go back to my country. We had to leave because the situation was getting worse. Through Iraq and Turkey we reached the Greek borders and we are now staying at the accommodation center for migrants and refugees in Kavala, a city in northern Greece.

Even though I studied banking and finance, I have worked for NGOs in refugee camps in Iraq and Syria. Organizing activities for children was my favorite part. Refugee children have been continuously exposed to traumatic events and need special support because of their vulnerability. I find child protection great as it helps kids overcome their problems.

My life now is nicer, more quiet. I’m going to English and Greek classes in order to better my language skills. And I play at the football team we have put together! We’ve even played a few games with the locals. It was a good opportunity to meet with Greek people. It’s amazing that both communities mix and learn from each other and activities help a lot towards this direction.”

3. "Everything has an end, bad times and good times, no matter who you are. Enjoy being alone. Don't be afraid of your own company.”
Samir
Current Country: Germany
"I’m originally from Syria. I left in 2015 at 19 years old, because I was a mechanical engineering student and my university was bombed several times. I wanted to know what freedom tasted like. First I went to Lebanon, and from there I took the Balkan path to Germany – the whole journey took six days. When I first got to Berlin I was struck by how massive the city is. It’s a mix of modernism and dark history, like a party in a graveyard!

But there is still a lot I miss about Syria: my family, the climate, the architecture, my university library, the fresh juice sellers, and my favourite bookstore in the old city.

Right now my main goal is to carry out some scientific research, as a way of contributing to the country I’m living in now.

I also bring a liberal way of thinking, adding balance to the existing group of Syrians in the German society. After getting my post-graduate degree, I want to work on renewable energy sources in Syria, using German theoretical and practical experiences in the field. Nevertheless, going to the right university is my biggest challenge, and a step that I’ve been working on since 2016. I know am so close now.

My message to everyone in Syria is that everything has an end, bad times and good times, no matter who you are. Enjoy being alone. Don’t be afraid of your own company.

My definition of home is a place where you coexist with space for a long period of time, where you can see memories in every corner, and where you get that good feeling that comes with belonging."

4. "Leaving home is the most difficult thing I have ever done." (also, watch)

Jory
Current Country: Iraq

"My name is Jory al Hamed and I am Syrian. I started studied computer engineering at the University of Damascus, but in 2013 I had to flee my country before finalizing my degree because of the insecurity and the political situation. It was my first time outside of Syria, and Iraq is the first and only country I have traveled to. I moved to Qustabah camp in Erbil; leaving home is the most difficult thing I have ever done.

I grew up in Damascus, the best place to be and the city I love the most. I miss everything about it; my friends and my memories are there, and it is difficult to be a refugee. But I overcome these feelings by continuously improving my skills and holding on to hope for the future. I still hope that I can have a better life and finish my studies, and I dream that I can one day own a software company.

When the team from Re:Code [a humanitarian startup that trains conflict-afflicted youth to become tech leaders] came to our camp and announced that they would start a programme to teach coding and web development, I was very excited and immediately decided to join. It proved to be a good experience because I developed my programming skills, which were still lacking, and I am proud that I can now build web applications."
Discovering coding was an amazing experience. Re:Signed has not only given me computer skills, though: I have also made many new friends, from Iraq and abroad. I would like to help people learn more about coding, it is a fascinating science.

I have worked with IOM and Re:Signed under a joint initiative to teach children at Qustabah camp how to develop video games. It was totally new idea for the kids, I taught them the basics of scratch programming language to create interactive stories and animate them. They were very happy.

For me, home now is where I can have freedom and where I can have a better life. I now know that we learn from all experiences, whether good or bad, and wish everyone peace and a good life.”

5. "We are thankful to you and IOM because you help us."
Adbalsalam  
Current Country: Greece

“I want to eat what I produce from my own labor. I want to help others and not ask for help. I have learned in my life and in my village to do everything by myself. But during the war they stole everything from me. I used to have it all: buildings, money etc. but during the war we lost everything. People were killed next to us, buildings were collapsing. I am sick, but I keep on trying with these crops to produce something and help other people. We prefer to see the green color, I am happy to eat one onion with one piece of bread but form my own crop.

I will keep on going, as life goes on and I need to feel that with these fields I do something important. I know that it is difficult but God always helps us and we are fine. We need to live with dignity. We are thankful to IOM because you help us, you help people here at the Thermopiles camp. Thank God, and thank you for everything.”

6. "Every day I think about Syria. It seems that everything I knew there happened in another life — a life I miss a lot."
Rafat  
Current Country: Portugal

"I was born and lived for most of my life in Damascus, Syria. I left with my family when the war broke out. We lived in Cairo, Egypt, for three years until we were relocated to Portugal in 2015. This was the second time that we started again from scratch and this new beginning was more difficult because of the language and the cultural differences.

Cristiano Ronaldo, Nani, Sporting Lisbon, Benfica and FC Porto were all I knew from Portugal. I really enjoy football and I’ve already gone to the Sporting stadium twice to watch the football matches. I also like “pastéis de nata” (Portuguese custard tarts). I eat one every weekend.

My first year in Lisbon was horrible. I felt isolated because I did not understand the language. Life only became easier when I began to understand and express myself in Portuguese. It was also complicated to remain live a job for so long, not only because of the money, but also
socially, as I did not know many people. Support from the Pão-a-pão Association – which resulted in the opening of the Mezze restaurant – was essential to our reintegration.

The most beautiful day I have had in Lisbon so far was the day they opened Mezze – a restaurant which serves Syrian food and only employs refugees. This restaurant has given me motivation. At the beginning I was only waiting tables, but now I have more responsibilities because I am the only one who speaks Portuguese.

Despite being in Portugal for almost two years, I am still not used to some of the religious and cultural differences. According to my Muslim upbringing, women and men do not greet with kisses on the cheek. When this happens I always get nervous and step back, for fear of being misunderstood by other people.

For now I intend to stay in Portugal. I never wanted to go to another European or Arab country. I have been often asked about potentially going back to Syria once the war is over. Even though it is my country, we have lost everything: the house, the restaurant we had there, our friends, our family… It would be a completely new beginning in a post-war country. Every day I think about our neighborhood there, our street, our restaurant, our friends, and my father who died in the war – it seems that everything happened in another life, a life I miss a lot.

A migrant or refugee who arrives in Portugal needs to learn to speak Portuguese. There is no other way to understand how life functions in Portugal, because the language is the key to the country. In Syria we say that “if you have a tongue, you never get lost.”

I like Lisbon very much. Here the streets are clean and organized and the people are nice and welcoming. In spite of everything I still do not feel at home – life has to calm down first."

7. "Nobody leaves their country to seek help. Everyone wants to work and be independent."
Samo
Current Country: Portugal

"I landed in Portugal on June 6, 2016. I came alone through the EU Relocation Program. I left my country when the situation became unbearable, although I had never imagined I would have to leave Syria one day. It did not make sense. I had a career in interior design, I had my family and friends there, and I already had a planned date for my wedding. Life was good and I enjoyed living in Aleppo.

It was not until my bride to be died that I decided to risk everything and cross the Mediterranean. During the first attempt our boat capsized so we spent five hours adrift until we were finally rescued by the Turkish authorities. I could only reach a Greek island on my third attempt, in February 2016.

It was such a disappointment to reach the Macedonian border and realize that it was closed. When I began looking for alternatives, I was told about the relocation program, in which we could pick 8 countries and be eventually sent to one. Like many other people in the same situation, my dream was to go to Northern Europe, to Norway. After a few weeks, I got the news that my application had been approved by Portugal. I remember reviewing my collection
of stamps from 225 countries – one of the few items I had carefully brought with me from Syria – and looking for any Portuguese stamp. I had none, so I took it as a good opportunity to get one.

When I arrived in Portugal I felt really lonely. Speaking English helped me to make friends and communicate more easily. After two Portuguese courses I am now able to speak in Portuguese. Had I been told years ago that one day I would be speaking in Portuguese I would probably have laughed and thought it would be impossible. Today, I am surprised by the number of Portuguese words that are similar to Arabic, among those are sugar ( açúcar – as-sukkar), rice ( arroz – ar-ruz), or cotton ( algodão – al-kutun).

I miss working. I was an interior designer for 15 years in Aleppo. Nobody leaves their country to seek help. Everyone wants to work and be independent. I hope I will be able to do so in Lisbon one day.

This year I had the chance to start studying architecture in a university in Lisbon. In spite of the difficulties of studying in Portuguese, this opportunity has been a great source of motivation.

In order to fill my free time, I volunteer in homeless associations in Lisbon. I go there two times a week to help distribute food in Santa Apolónia, Rossio and Saldanha, with people who also need help and I take this as an opportunity to practice my Portuguese and meet new people too.

8. "I can’t forget my past but I do think of the future now. I want to fulfill my mother’s dream for me. I want to become a doctor."

Abdullah
Current Country: Turkey

“I had the unfortunate luck of being born in Idleb, Syria. Years ago, I never would have said that sentence. I loved living in Syria. But after the fighting started, our lives were ruled by people carrying weapons. Basic rights and necessities, like clean water, were being taken away. People would suddenly disappear or be forced to form a human wall to protect soldiers, forcing civilians to die instead of the soldiers. At one point, most of the city fled to the countryside. About a month later, the bombing spread to the countryside too, so all the same people returned back to the city. Bombs were going off everywhere. There was no difference, no safe place, in the city or in the country.

One day, all my family was at home. A bomb fell on a neighbor’s house. Terrified, my father gathered all of us and we hid outside in the field by the trees. Then it happened another day and then another. We used to either hide by the trees or in the basement. We prayed that it would protect us.

On April 20, 2015 my mother asked my older brother to go to the market for some bread for breakfast. About five minutes later, two bombs fell on our house. Everything was destroyed. I was in the kitchen when it happened, but when I woke up, I was in the basement. I had no idea how I got there. I tried to move, but it was hard. Everything around me was dark. I felt like I was in a cave with everything wedged in with me. I felt wood and cement around me. I tried
pushing it off. It took me hours to free myself and was finally able to see some light. I climbed towards it over the piles of stone that used to be my house.

As I was climbing out, I found my brother’s wife covered in blood. At first, I thought she was dead, but thankfully she was alive. Then I saw my sister stuck among the rubble. I tried pulling her out. I heard my older brother’s voice calling for us. I tried to answer him. ‘We are here’ but no one heard me. The sound of an ambulance drowned out all other noise. I called for my mother and father but still no one responded. No one heard.”

My older brother survived because he was at the market. He worked with other rescuers to free me, his wife and our sister. I have another brother with a learning disability. Somehow, he managed to escape the house with the help of our neighbors. We were taken to a small village hospital. That’s where I learned my father and mother had died. They were literally blown to pieces. The people who helped me were not able to find them in their entirety.

We stayed on a farm in Syria as we recovered. We were only four left. We heard that there were doctors in Turkey we could meet so we paid someone to help us cross the border into Turkey. We had to pay them a lot of money – more than most people because of my younger brother’s disability. It was a very difficult and dangerous journey. Each of us were only allowed to carry one light bag. It was okay with us as we didn’t have much left after our home was destroyed.

I’ve lived in Turkey for over a year now. When we first arrived, I wanted to register for school, but so many places required money for fees or transportation. We barely had enough money for food, so there was no way we could pay for school or buses. Then I heard about a community centre that offers Arabic-language education for no charge. I was so excited.

Here, at this community centre, I found a sort of home. I found friends who understand what I’ve been through. The staff are also so kind to me. The first day when I came back home I felt like I was dreaming. I had my dream come true to have such a good school. In fact, even in Syria, I’ve never had such a good school.

I can’t forget my past but I do think of the future now. Now, I want to fulfill my mother’s dream for me. I want to become a doctor.”

9. "I miss the daily family gatherings, the culture of my country."
Mohamed
Current Country: Mauritania

“I left Syria in 2011, two months after the war started. I lived in Al-Hajar al-Aswad, in the suburbs of Damascus, the capital city. We went to Lebanon with all my family; I found a job as a mechanic for offset printers. I had been in Lebanon for a few months when the company decided to open a book printing company in Mauritania and sent me here. It was not my choice to move again. Last year, they decided to close the company. I never received the allowances for housing, medical insurance that the management promised. My work is very specific and I was not able to find another job. In Mauritania, there are only two offset printers in the whole country. Before I lost my job, I liked my life in Mauritania, I had everything.
Seven months ago, I opened the small restaurant in a garage to earn a little money. Some friends lent me some money but I have not been able to reimburse them and they are getting impatient. Opening this restaurant was not a dream but I had no choice, we have to eat, I have to feed my children.

I have six children, they are 16, 14, 10, 8, 5 and 3 years old. My eight year old son fell down from the roof once because he was playing there alone. My wife and I work from 8 am to midnight, 7 days a week. We do not have time to take care of our children and we hardly ever see them during the week because they are asleep when we get home. They stay home alone, eat bread with some vache qui rit (cheese). They have forgotten the taste of fruits, or of playing outside.

My children did not go to school for the last two years. After many applications, UNHCR has eventually started paying for their school fees since the summer.

I have not been able to pay my rent for four months and I received threats of expulsion. I had to sell everything in the apartment to be able to eat for a few weeks. There is nothing left in the apartment, nothing to sleep on or sit on, just mats and a TV for the children. I challenge you to come to my house and stay there for 10 minutes. One of my friends says it lacks oxygen.

Since 2011, I have not seen my parents, brothers and sisters. For one year now, I have not been able to talk to the ones who stayed in Syria because there is no internet connection anymore. I miss the daily family gatherings, the culture of my country.

We have never thought of going to another country because we need visas everywhere. My wife and some of my children do not have a valid passport anymore. We cannot leave Mauritania.

I see no future here and we cannot continue living like this. My dream is that my children could go to a good school and that my wife could stay home and take care of them.”

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10. "We have been helped and we want to give back to this society.”
Shereen
Current Country: Estonia

“My husband Mustafa and I are from the Daria region in Syria, which suffered first from the war. We decided to go away from this region, moving from place to place within Syria. For 14 years before the war, I worked with orphans and Mustafa was studying. Because of this, he did not need to be part of the military. Soon the law changed. Whether he was a student or not, he was forced to be part of the military action. We saw over 3,000 people die in one day. This was hard, especially for our son.

We left Syria and went to Lebanon. We tried to start our life there. There were many barriers that prohibited us from working. In the work place, it didn’t matter whether we were there legally or illegally — because we are Syrians, the locals could come to our work any moment, take us outside and say we had to stop. Our son also suffered injustice at school.
It was hard to get a residence permit. Lebanon wanted us to have a guarantor – a local resident, who could vouch for us in Lebanon. With no residence permit and most of our money lost, the Lebanese government put stamps in our passports that indicated we had to leave. That same evening, we left for Turkey.

It was impossible to go back to Syria, it wasn’t safe. We couldn’t go to Egypt, where Mustafa has family, we weren’t welcome in Lebanon and we couldn’t manage in Turkey. The pressure was great and the difficulties were real. We saw no other option but to go to Greece. There was no legal way to do so, smugglers were the only option.

Life in Syria and this journey are different experiences. In Syria, we risked death or losing our child every day, this forced us to move.

We began reading about Estonia to know more about this country, which now gives us hope and welcomes us. It is secure and quiet here. People are genuinely sympathetic. They understand what we have gone through. This is humbling and gives us hope that we can make it.

From the expressions on the faces of some people, we see that they are worried about us being here. Once, when I was queuing at the bank, the cleaner started bothering me. I took some chocolate and gave a bit to my son and also to her. She started smiling and changed her attitude. Now, every time I now go outside, I take sweets with me.

We hope our son succeeds in Estonia. We want to show our culture to the locals and learn more about theirs in turn. I am skilled at cooking tasty meals and making handcrafts. We hope to open a café. We have been helped and we want to give back to this society.”

11. "I wish Syria peace, humility, and solidarity from the people of other countries. Only unity and understanding will end this conflict."

Yaman
Current Country: United Kingdom

"I left Syria and moved to Istanbul, Turkey when I was 22, just after completing my bachelor’s degree at Aleppo University. The reason I left Syria is the compulsory military service that would drag me into a war that I refuse to take part in. Istanbul gave me the feeling of belonging instantly since it felt like a modern version of Aleppo. The cultural values were similar however more cosmopolitan that what I have experienced.

The language barrier didn’t seem to be an obstacle as I thought it would be because of the many shared words and expressions between Arabic and Turkish. Also, most of the people I met there made an effort to speak English and help me comprehend Turkish. Then after three years of studying and working in Turkey, I moved to Durham, UK to pursue a master’s in Finance as a Chevening Scholar.

Durham first struck me as one of the calmest and most beautiful places I had ever been to. When you start meeting new students, the first question asked is “where are you from?” most of my colleagues (now friends) thought I am either Greek, Italian, or Spanish, which I find very interesting and later on funny immediately after I tell them that I am Syrian and the
expression of “I don’t know what to say” appears on their faces then they say “that’s cool, sorry I shouldn’t say cool”.

The people I met in Durham were very friendly and kind to me, their curiosity about the situation in Syria lead us to many interesting discussions and debates. I enjoy helping others in their studies and general life challenges. I have always been involved in student and community leadership roles, and I believe that education and hard work is what I need to bring back to Syria in the foreseeable future. My mission in life is to achieve my potential to the fullest.

Right now that means using my skills and knowledge to establish an international career in Finance. Later on, I want to employ my drive and experience to improve the economy of my country and serve its people in the best way possible. Every now and then, I think about Syria, and that I miss my parents so much and wonder what it would’ve been like if I were with them during this critical time.

My original home will always be Syria, but I am proud to say that I have multiple homes right now (Syria, Turkey, and the UK) since home to me is where my loved ones are. Whilst in the UK, I will do my best to contribute to the local community I am living in, assist charities and volunteer in my free time. As well as, providing my skills, knowledge, and expertise to the organisation I would work for, in order to be an active member in such a vibrant economy.

I wish Syria peace, humility, forgiveness, and solidarity from the people of other countries. Only unity and understanding would bring an end to such a conflict, something all Syrians aspire to.”

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12. "I think we will both be able to pick up our lives again where the war interrupted them."

Inas and Murat

Current Country: Canada

"When the war broke out in Syria, my family and I crossed the border to go to Turkey. My husband and I were both in Turkey when we decided to get married but most of our friends and family were still in Syria. So, we crossed back to Syria and had our wedding there. We wanted to be with those we loved the most. After the wedding, though, we came back to Turkey.

Back in Syria, my husband’s family owned an international business. He used to fly to China and Malaysia for work. But when I met him, he was broke. His family lost everything because of the war. They lost their business, and many lost their lives.

Moving to Canada is the best opportunity we’ve had since we left Syria; we can finally stop worrying. I just want to live, work and perfect my English. My husband wants to get a proper job, then we can finally have a baby. In Canada, I will have legal status. I will be like a typical Canadian.

My husband has a strong business head. He will study the Canadian market to see where the best opportunity lies for us. He can finally find a decent job where he will be paid for what he is worth – without legal status, we were not able to do that these past few years."
As for me. I studied English literature in Aleppo, Syria. I’d love to go back to school again to get my Phd.

In Canada, I will finally not be scared all the time. I want to feel safe, both physically and financially. I smile all the time now because I am happy. I think we will both be able to pick up our lives again where the war interrupted them.”

13. "People here have to keep in mind that what happened in Paris happens in Syria. Every day."

Ali
Current Country: Germany

I was born in Libya to Palestinian parents who fled to Syria when I was young. I was a refugee there, and I am a refugee here, for the second time. I really hope this is the last time.

I left Syria with the help of smugglers. It took me three days to go from Damascus to Turkey. Then from Turkey I boarded a boat at night with 50 other people. We reached Symi Island in Greece in the first attempt after two hours. We were really lucky.

I spent two months in Thessaloniki because it was very hard to get into Macedonia. I tried three times, and the last time I was already in a small village near Serbia when the police got me and sent me back to Greece. Later, I tried to go back there and reached Serbia again. I was so afraid they would get my fingerprints that I hid for two weeks.

Eventually I made it to Hungary, then Austria, and when I crossed the border into Germany, I was caught and they took my fingerprints. They let me go but told me I should go to a camp to apply for asylum.

I was studying electronic engineering at the university in Tartus, Syria, but I could not finish my studies because of the war. I want to finish it here, but first I have to learn German. I like it here, it’s funny to see our differences. For instance, in Germany, people only ask “How are you?” and then they stop. But in Syria we say “Hi, how are you? How is your family? How is your work? Where are you going?...”, we ask a lot of questions just to know if you’re ok.

I like everything here in Germany: the music, the parties, the law. And most importantly, people here know the difference between terrorists and refugees. Of course, I also liked everything in Syria before the war, but now everything has changed.

When I ask my family and friends how things are going, they tell me that every day things are getting worse and worse.

People here have to keep in mind that what happened in Paris happens in Syria. Every day.

14. My dream is to offer my wife the wedding party she never had in Syria. All I want is to make her happy."

Muhammed and Haneen
Current Country: Canada

“We are from the same town in Syria, but we never met before the war. When the fighting started our families moved to the same neighborhood. We instantly fell in love with each other. That was two years ago. Somehow war brought us together. “

“We didn’t have a party for the wedding. ISIS ruled our town and it was forbidden to organize any noisy event. If you did have a gathering, it had to be very quiet and locked in the house. It was dangerous. So we didn’t have a party. This was very hard on Haneen. Even now, every time she sees a wedding on TV or a wedding dress, she gets really upset.”

“We had to leave Syria because there was nothing left where we are from. No home. No work. No hope. The town is ruled by ISIS. So we moved to Turkey with our family and they decided to take a boat to Greece, and then went to Germany. As we didn’t have money to pay the smugglers, we stayed in Turkey, but, this was for the best because we are going to Canada. I’m glad we didn’t take the boat. Now, my family in Germany wishes they were moving to Canada with us.”

“One of the priorities I have now? Once we arrive in Canada, I want to have a wedding party for my wife. All I want is to make her happy, and that would really make her happy.”

15. "Arabs have a lot of potential, but no opportunities to develop their skills in their home countries. I hope to have that chance in Canada."

Ahmed
Current Country: Canada

“I left Syria when I was still in high school. I haven’t been able to complete my studies yet, but I want to. I’m really interested in IT and computer engineering.

I’m from a village around the city of Idlib. It’s mainly agricultural, tourists didn’t go there much. We lived a calm life, but we had everything we needed. Everything was so simple. I used to play football with my friends, always thinking of my favorite teams, Barcelona and Manchester United!

It never crossed my mind to move before the war. I had a happy life in Idlib. Everything is gone now. There wasn’t even a choice of living there anymore, and there was also no chance of building a life in Lebanon.

There are eight people in my family and we are all moving to Canada, but my case came up first so I am going alone. I know that Canada respects human rights and cares about people. That’s why they are running this program, and I hope they continue it. My biggest hope now is that I can go back to school. Arabs have a lot of potential, but no opportunities to develop their skills and capabilities in their home countries. I hope to have that chance in Canada.”

16. "Canada will allow us to move on with our lives without fear. I can’t tell you how much it will mean to feel secure again."

Farah & Suzy
Current Country: Canada

“My name is Farha, and this is my daughter Suzi. We are from the town of Hassekeh, which is famous for many things in Syria—most importantly the food! It is famous for its delicious food, particularly the kebabs.

Food brought people together in our community. Even though the town was very diverse, it had a very strong community spirit. Socializing was really important for us.

All of that changed when Daesh came. They destroyed the land and made our life one of constant fear. We were always afraid of car jackings, kidnappings and bombings.

I am a primary school teacher and Suzi studies pharmacology. Imagine, me as a teacher—having spent my day with 8 to 10 year olds—walking home with one eye on the sky and the other on the road to watch out for bombs and people who would threaten me.

We are so looking forward to the peace and security Canada offers. My sister and niece have been living in Canada for several years, and my other daughter went there four months ago. We are really looking forward to being able to move on with our lives without fear. I can’t tell you how much it will mean to feel secure again.”

17. "We want Canadians to know that we are like them; we can work and be productive too. All we want is a peaceful life.”

Tony
Current Country: Canada

“I’m Tony, and this is my wife Maha and son Habib.

Before the war, everything was normal in Syria. I worked in a church-restaurant for over ten years and life was good. We were surrounded by family and friends. That was when people still liked and trusted each other.

Then the bombs began to fall. And then to make matters worse, Daesh came to Syria. They don’t differentiate between Muslims and Christians—they just kill and destroy whomever they don’t like.

So, Maha and I fled to Lebanon after we got married four years ago. Maha hasn’t been able to see her family in several years. All the roads have been cut off—things are really bad there. Her family has never even seen Habib.

Life in Lebanon has been hard because working here is difficult.

We are really looking forward to the peace and security that Canada can offer. We’re really happy to be going, and we’ve heard Canadians are really nice.
Even though our families are still in Syria, we are ready to make a life in Canada, one that will
give Habib the opportunity to live in a safe, stable place. Maha and I want Canadians to know
that we are like them; we can work and be productive too. All we want is a peaceful life.”

18. "100 years ago, my people had to flee Turkey to Syria for safety. Now, my
brother and I are immigrating to Canada for safety."
Jacob
Current Country: Canada

“My brother and I came to Turkey, back in June 2015. We had to leave. If we didn’t go, I
would have had to fight in the military. That would have been even more difficult for me
because I am a Christian. In Syria, Daesh attacks Christians. It was very, very hard to be a
Christian in Syria. I lived in a Christian area and bombs were dropped all the time near us. In
my small town, over 30 Christians were bombed before we left. Who can live like that? So
we came to Turkey.”

“My people are Syriac – part of ancient Christianity. In Turkey, we stayed in the Syriac church
in Istanbul. I want to thank them as it was like a big home for us here in Turkey. They helped
us so much and I could not have lived without their help. I did try to find work, but it is hard
being both a Syrian and a Christian. No one would hire me.”

“In Syria, I studied to be an electrical engineer. When the war started, I had to stop my
studies. I have some certificates, but I need to finish my degree. My aunt already lives in
Canada, and her church is sponsoring my brother and I to go there. I am so happy to fly to
Canada today. I have family there and I will study again, finally.”

“Over a hundred years ago, my people had to flee Turkey to Syria for safety. Now, 100 years
later, my brother and I are immigrating to Canada for safety.”

19. "Today, the lives of 13 people fit into one suitcase apiece. This is what life has
become for us. A journey."
Mohammed
Current Country: Canada

“My name is Mohammed, and this is my family. I am from Aleppo, in the north of Syria.

I used to work in construction, building and smoothing walls. I have done this all my life, since
I was 15 years old.

Before the war in my country, we used to come to Lebanon, but due to the ongoing situation
in Syria, my family and I left Syria for good in 2013 and settled down here, in Lebanon.

When we first arrived here, UNHCR supported us and gave us around $300 a month. Now we
get less but fortunately, I have been able to work from time to time and do what I used to do
before. Since I didn’t have a proper ID, I couldn’t always accept job offers and could not travel
very far to work.
Today, the lives of 13 people fit into one suitcase apiece. This is what life has become for us. A journey.

I don’t really know anything about Canada, but... I’m not worried.”

20. "Canada will make life a bit easier. I will be able to offer a bright future to my children but also to myself."

Siba
Current Country: Canada

“My name is Siba. I come from Suweida, a town in southwestern Syria. After many years of war, it became hard to lead a normal life so my family and I decided to move to Lebanon in 2014. We used to come here very often, when we could still move around freely. Lately, we were scared all the time and the sounds of the bombs became unbearable. Eventually, it was too dangerous to go out.

In Syria, I was an electronics engineer—I used to work with all kinds of electronics. Unfortunately, since we arrived in Lebanon, I haven’t been able to work, but I haven’t asked for any assistance either. I didn’t want it.

My brothers and sisters are living in Canada, and we will be joining them. That will make life a bit easier. I will be able to offer a bright future to my children but also to myself. Both Nour and Jad want to be doctors. Canada gives them the opportunity to do what they dream of. For the moment, Jad is so excited to play sports again. He loves anything with a ball!”

21. "I love Italy. I love it because of the culture, which is very famous in Syria, for its history but especially for its football."

Yusef
Occupation: Cultural mediator
Current Country: Italy

"I left Syria because of the war. I spent seven days at sea. When I first arrived, I crossed Europe; my goal was to reach England. I was in Calais for almost two months but I didn’t manage to enter the UK, so I went to Sweden because winter had come in Calais and it seemed too cold to stay there. I stayed in Sweden. Then I came to Italy, where I currently work as a cultural mediator.

Arriving in a new country is always more difficult than you could possibly imagine. You need to go back to school as if you are 6 years old again. You come here alone, without friends, without a family. You have nothing, you have to start from scratch. You can even feel bored as a migrant, because you cannot see your kids and you cannot even speak to them over the phone. You miss all of it: your family, friend and your habits, those little things that you never thought you could miss that much.

Compared to France and Sweden, Italy feels closer to my culture. People are warm, they have this Mediterranean culture similar to ours. I feel less like a stranger, as if I was not in a foreign
country somehow. I love Italy. I always did, since I was a kid. I love it because of the culture, which is very famous where I’m from, for its history and for its football. But to feel fully at home I would need all the small things I had back home.

When I arrived I thought I had had an awful journey, but by talking to others who crossed the Mediterranean too, I found out that my journey was five-star compared to that of others. Nevertheless, it was a really traumatic journey... No, starting from scratch is definitely not easy."

22. “My friends tell me not to hesitate – moving to Canada will be the best thing that ever happened to us.”
Asmaa
Current Country: Canada

"My husband was a municipal employee in Daraa, Syria. On his way to work, one day, fighting broke out on the roadway and everyone panicked, and the result was a six car pile-up. My husband was severely injured. We were living in an area affected by a lot of fighting and decided that it was a good time to leave and seek safety and medical attention elsewhere.

We drove south to Jordan where they sent us straight to Zaatari camp. We hoped things would settle and we could return home, but it’s been three years now. I arrived in the camp when I was five months pregnant. After living the first winter in a tent, where it flooded to my waist, I sold my gold jewelry to buy my family a caravan that measures 3-by-5 meters. We had to buy a tarp to drape over it, but it still leaks. Life can be hard in Zaatari – like survival of the fittest.

The moment I set foot on the bus from Zaatari camp (to go to the resettlement processing centre), I was so excited. I just know things are getting better for us.

I don’t know much about Canada, but I know it will be safer for my children. I hope my husband and I can finally have our own bedroom again, that we can have a room for the boys and one for the girls. Our neighbors in Daraa had a small garden they would let us sit in. I would like to feel free to sit in the sun somewhere in Canada. I’ve only had nine years of school, and want to master the English language so I can continue my education.

It’s hard to leave everything we know behind, but this is a better future for all of us, especially the children. My friends tell me not to hesitate – moving to Canada will be the best thing that ever happened to us."

23. “What do I want most from a life in Norway? A place to raise my children where they are safe and where they feel safe.”
Amina
Current Country: Norway

“We left because my husband was killed and my son was badly burned when a bomb exploded on our house. For two years I have supported my children in Turkey. I sometimes found work
sewing here, but I was lucky to receive support from the local Turkish community. They showed me true generosity.”

“We are excited to move to Norway. I want to work, definitely, but the first thing I must do when I get there is to help my son find good medical treatment. When the bomb exploded on our house, he was very badly burned. He cannot open his mouth. He cannot eat properly. I have to feed him small spoonfuls of broth so he can eat. He had three surgeries in Turkey, but none were successful. I love him so much, but it has been hard on all of us. I am so tired.”

“In Norway, I want my kids to go to school. It’s time they all go back to school. I have a 16-year-old daughter who went to school up to 5th grade in Syria. But because of the trauma, forgot some of the most basic things. She doesn’t even know how to write her name anymore.”

“What do I want most from a life in Norway? A place to raise my children where they are safe and where they feel safe. I want my son to receive medical care and for all of my children to receive an education so that they will have a better life than I have had.”

24. "I hope to continue my studies but the thing I look forward to the most is being able to express myself freely."

Edy
Current Country: Canada

“The day I heard I had permission to move to Canada, I applied to three universities. I wasn’t able to go to university in Syria because of the war.

A Lebanese man contacted my family one day and told us about the Canadian resettlement plan. He was a refugee once himself and had come to Canada during the Lebanese Civil War. He wanted to do whatever he could to help us, so he got money to sponsor our resettlement to Canada.

In Canada, they have a real democracy. The people wanted to accept Syrian migrants and now it’s happening.

I’ve been studying violin for six years, but had to stop because of the war and the difficulties in moving around so much. Once I’m settled in Canada, I hope to continue my studies and my violin lessons, but the thing I look forward to the most is being able to express myself freely and have people listen.

I did all the research I could on my new home in Toronto. My family and I worked hard to come to Canada and we meet the criteria for eligibility, but I see myself more as a migrant because it’s not just about running away from war. It’s about becoming Canadian, and starting a new life with a real future.”

25. “When I first heard I was going to Canada, I couldn’t believe it. It was like a dream coming true. A chance for a new life!”
Halaa  
Current Country: Canada

“When I first heard I was going to Canada, I couldn’t believe it. It was like a dream coming true. A chance for a new life! I was laughing and crying at the same time. I can’t possibly express how grateful I am to the Canadian people to allow me to come to Toronto.

“Back in Beirut, I was living in a two-bedroom apartment with 25 other people. There was hardly any privacy, and life was too hard. My parents are still in Damascus but they wanted me to leave so I could escape the war and find a better future for myself. We have distant cousins in Toronto already, so when we heard we could be reunited as part of this resettlement programme, we were all so happy.

“In Damascus, I studied law. It’s my dream to become a lawyer. But in the last year of my education, I had to drop out because my university was too close to the fighting. It broke my heart as I have a real passion for law. I’m really looking forward to resuming my studies in Canada once my English improves.

“People here are so welcoming, and I’m sure I will find support. I heard there will be free English lessons and I can’t wait to start. I’d like to study immigration law and maybe help people who are migrants, like myself.

"It will be difficult to settle in at first, especially in the middle of winter, but I’m happy that I have family in Toronto already meeting me at the airport, and a community there to sponsor me and help me get used to life in Canada."

26. "We see how generous Canadians are, and how they welcome refugees. I know life will be difficult at first but we will do our best to adapt."

Abdelsater  
Current Country: Canada

“We have been in Irbid, Jordan for more than three years now, and it feels like our life has been paused since we arrived.

“My father was a chef, and for many years in Homs I had a shawarma shop with my brother. Since the war broke out in Syria, and we had to leave to Irbid, I haven’t been able to practice my trade. We had to move out of town because the rent was too expensive and my children had to leave school.

“We were so relieved when we heard we had the chance to go to Canada. On the news, we see so many people dying while crossing the Mediterranean in boats. They will do anything to get to Europe and have a second chance at life. This way seems much better: to be able to go legally and by airplane.

“We saw people on television in Canada demanding that their government take in refugees like us. It shows the generosity of the Canadian people. We think of Canada as a parent who is taking care of children and keeping the family together.

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“As Syrians, we can be respected and taken care of by an organized effort that will help us reach safety. We don’t have to throw ourselves in a boat and risk death to take our chance of a new life. I don’t want to beg anyone. I look forward to finding work in Canada, doing whatever I can to give back.

“Before the war, we were dignified in our country. I strongly feel that this process gives us a sense of dignity we haven’t had since we left Syria. I know life will be difficult at first in our new home, but we will learn English and do our best to adapt. My children can go to school again and have a good future.”

27. "And now I’m finally relocating to Spain, I feel really excited".
Abdullah
Current Country: Greece

“My name’s Abdullah and I come from Aleppo. On the 23rd of September 2015 I left Syria for Turkey. The situation of my family was really bad and it still is, it gets worse by the day. I had to leave Syria because if you are a young man there, everyone wants to recruit you, either Assad’s army or the Free Syrian Army or even ISIS. I don’t want to fight for any of them, they’re all murderers. I hate their system and how the government treats our people, they take advantage of everything. And no one is fighting to free the people, they are just killing them. I’m not going to say to you that one side is better than the other, no. All of them are murderers.

People are asking why people are fleeing Syria. It’s impossible for a human being to live in Syria anymore. You cannot walk in the streets because you will get a bullet in the head, or a bomb will fall on you, or chemical weapons will choke you to death. There’s no water, no electricity, no jobs, no future. Nothing. I was studying at the university but I couldn’t complete my studies because of the military services that were chasing me. I had also to work as my father was very sick, he was disabled and I come from a very big family: I have 6 sisters and 3 brothers and all of them have children of their own.

So, I decided to leave on my own. I stayed in Turkey for five months and crossed to Greece on the 20th of March 2016, I arrived on the island of Chios and stayed there for five days. Then, I went up north, to the border, where I stayed at the infamous gas station. There, I got to work for medical teams as a translator, first on a voluntary basis and then with a wage. I used to work as a tourist guide when I was 15 back at home, so I speak English with ease and that helped a lot.

Back in Syria I was studying economics and finance, I’m very much into it but I was also working, for instance as a carpenter. I left my country with no particular destination in my mind. I just wanted a safe country to live. And I’m not going to lie to you, Turkey might be safe but has a lot of political problems and as refugees we have absolutely no rights, so it’s impossible to settle there.

And now I’m finally relocating to Spain, I feel really excited, I can hardly wait. I have so many friends there, in Valencia, in Barcelona, in Bilbao, in Madrid and I’ve met them all here in Greece. I’m going to start a new life, I’m going to continue with my studies, doing my own projects, fulfilling my dreams. And I would like to bring my mother along. I don’t want to lose
her, too, without seeing her again. My father died on the same day I arrived on the island of Chios”.

28. "I see myself adapting easily to the Netherlands".
Noor
Current Country: Greece

“My name is Noor and I’m 20 years old. I come from the city of Deir Ez-Zor in Syria. The war drove me and my family away from our homeland, four years ago.

I graduated from high school but the war and being constantly on the move as a refugee have robbed me of the opportunity to get to the University. This is what I plan to do now, in the Netherlands, where I will relocate. I will apply for the medical school.

Ever since I was a little girl I wanted to study medicine, I remember dreaming about wearing the white robe. My inspiration are my two uncles, both medical doctors, and I see myself following their footsteps. I really haven’t decided yet what kind of doctor I’d like to become, but I still have time to make up my mind.

I like my life in Europe, despite the hardships. People are simple, just like in Syria and it’s a very safe place. I see myself adapting easily to the Netherlands, the way I have adapted myself here in Greece.

As much as I can’t wait to get to the Netherlands and a new beginning, I will definitely get back to Greece someday, hopefully on holidays, as I’ve seen so many beautiful places here that I’d like to explore”.

29. "We have friends and family in the Netherlands, so we are happy that we will relocate there".
Abdalsalam’s family
Current Country: Greece

“When the war arrived in our city, Deir Ez-Zor, we started moving from place to place around Syria up until it became too difficult and too dangerous to be there. We left our homeland for Turkey, where we spent 3 years, living in a camp close to the border with Syria. The location meant that we never lost contact with the war, we could see the bombings and hear the shelling on the other side of the border. Mentally, nothing had improved for us and physically, for three years, we were sharing a small tent between six persons. An ordeal, it was.

The living conditions at the camp and the fact that our children didn’t have a chance to further their education in Turkey, made me and my wife take the decision to leave for Europe. We crossed to Greece on a rubber boat, we stared into the face of death but we managed to arrive on the island of Lesvos. It was February 2016.
The Greek people have been really supportive to us during a difficult time, this is a memory that will stay. The worst part in Greece was the time we spent at the northern border, at the makeshift camp of Idomeni. There was no electricity, we were sleeping on the ground, the toilets were a mess and we could only cook on a fire, in the open. After seven months we moved to the accommodation centre of Koutsohero, close to Larissa in central Greece, which was a vast improvement for us. We left Koutsohero only last night and arrived here directly. Tomorrow, we will fly to the Netherlands.

We have friends and family in the Netherlands, so we are happy that we will relocate there. My wife’s siblings have relocated there about 2.5 months ago under the same EU scheme and we can hardly wait to meet them again. Our family says that the people of the Netherlands are kind to them, they treat them fairly and they are happy.

I used to be a farmer in Syria and I hope I will be able to find something similar to do in the Netherlands, I know that it has a very strong agricultural sector. My wife is a teacher and we have four children together: Noor is 20 years old and she wishes to attend university. Ammar, my boy, is 18 and the twins, Bashar and Manar, are 13.

The main thing for us is to finally have a sense of stability. We have been emotionally scarred by the war, the slightest noise makes us jump from our seats. For our young daughter it is even worse, she suffers from severe psychological trauma and she needs assistance. Furthermore, we wish that our children will be able to finally go back to school and as for us, we hope to find a job to be able to support them. It is very important to have some stability in life. Without it, how can one make plans for the future and set goals?”

30. “I’m so happy to relocate to Sweden, I really wanted to go there”.
Yamman’s family
Current Country: Greece

“I’m so happy to relocate to Sweden, I really wanted to go there. It is a good country, a safe place for our children and for us. Also, my brother is there for a number of years, so I will meet him again. Before the war, I was studying computer technology at the university in Syria. I wanted to continue with my studies, to do something more but the war broke and I had to stop. It was very difficult. Men were forcibly recruited to the government’s army and if I stayed, I’d have to kill people, but I don’t want to hurt anybody. I left Syria 5 years ago, alone. At first, I stayed in Turkey for 4 months and then I went to Egypt. I spent there about ten months and then I moved back to Turkey, we were I stayed for 2.5 years. At that time, my then fiancé, Fatma joined me there. Our first child was born in Turkey and by the time Fatma was pregnant on our second, we left for Greece.

Like so many others, we crossed the sea on a rubber boat and it was a terrifying adventure. About 30 minutes into the journey, the boat stopped, it was about 4 am in the night. We drifted for hours. We called the emergency number and the Greek coast-guard came with a boat and took only the women and children. They told us that they’d take our families to Greece and that they’d come back for us, the men. So they left, but it was the Turkish coast-guard that arrived instead, 30 minutes later. Maybe we had drifted towards Turkey, I don’t know. They told us that they had to take us back to Turkey. I got very angry. I speak Turkish, I explained to them that our families were already taken to Greece. But they insisted and they took us back.
and since they were really angry, we didn’t resist. In Turkey, they checked our papers and they let us go. However, I had all of the family’s passports and our only mobile phone. Fatma, terrified, ended up all alone with our child on a tiny Greek island. Fortunately, I was able to take another boat the next day and joined my family on the island of Kastelorizo. It was the 19th of February 2017.

Then, the coast-guard moved us to the island of Rhodes where we got registered. Another boat journey took us to Athens. We decided to continue to the border, which was still open. It took us five days to get to the makeshift camp of Idomeni. We crossed Greece sleeping rough, one night at a basketball court, another night at a restaurant. We spent three weeks at Idomeni, waiting to cross, to no avail. We were given the number 136 and the last number allowed to cross was 65. So, we came back to Athens and went directly to the Asylum service and applied for the relocation programme. We were given an apartment in the centre and waited for the news. In the meantime, our time here was well-spent. Greece is the most beautiful country I’ve ever seen. We visited the Acropolis, a lot of other sites, we took the kids to the beach. We have almost become locals. And the people here are simple and very supportive to the refugees, we never had any problems. Three weeks ago we got the news that we’re going to Sweden. We’ll have to learn the language, but I don’t mind since I love learning languages and meeting new people. I would like to continue with my studies and look for a job. I don’t want to sit around doing nothing. I need to update my training on computer technology, it’s been 5 years that I graduated and I really have to learn again, to follow the new developments. And Fatima, too, wishes to continue with her studies as well, she actually wants to be a nurse. I hope we will be able as parents to provide a safe, beautiful life to our children in our new home in Sweden”.

31. "We found out that we will relocate to Germany, a fact that made us really happy".
Mohammed and his family
Current Country: Greece

"My name is Mohammed and I’m 29 years old. I fled Aleppo together with my family and my wife’s siblings. Our aim was to get to Europe, to safety. It was a long and difficult journey, at times we thought we’d die, especially when crossing the sea between Turkey and Greece. From Syria, we crossed the border to Turkey, where we spent two months before arriving on the island of Chios. Very soon, we settled in Athens, in a central hotel.

Before the war broke in Syria, I was a professional cameraman, filming videos for weddings, receptions and the like. My wife, Nahed, didn’t work as she took up the upbringing of our two, very young, children. Her younger siblings, Mohammed and Amani were still going to school.

We found out that we will relocate to Germany, a fact that made us really happy, since my brother is already living there, in Berlin.

As soon as we get to Germany, we’d like to assess the situation first, to understand it. Our main priority is to get our children to school. As for us, we must learn the German language and get a job. The younger ones would like to continue with their education: Mohammad is 17 and wants to be medical doctor and Amina is 19 and would like to study and practice law".
32. "We only wish to live like normal people, to enjoy our lives".
Sawsan
Current Country: Greece

“On February 2016, I left together with my daughters, my son and other family. We crossed from Syria to Turkey, where we spent two weeks waiting to get into the boats for Greece. We arrived on the island of Samos and soon, we ended up at the northern frontier, at the makeshift camp of Idomeni. We spent three months there, it was really hard, we have really bad memories. Afterwards, we came to Athens, where we are until today. My family is from Deir ez-Zor, a beautiful city on the shores of the Euphrates River. I used to work at the city planning bureau. When I lost my husband to the war, I took the decision to get my children out of Syria. We’ve been through unbelievable hardships since the day the war broke. We constantly changed cities, schools, friends, life and communities. We spent six years living like this.

Now, all I want is to forget, to leave everything behind. The most important thing for me is the future of my children, after all, I left for their sake. My daughters are 16 and 18 years old and my son is 11. He is very keen on getting back to school. In Syria, he attended until the 5th grade and he got the chance to continue here at the Greek school for a while. And now the time has come to move to Croatia. Although my mother and my sister are permanent US residents, we were looking to settle to Switzerland, but it was not meant to be. At first, there were rumors that Croatia is not good for us, but then my brother reassured me that it’s a beautiful country and a very popular tourist destination, visited by people from all over the world. So, we’re happy to go there. I didn’t expect to survive the war but life goes on, in the end. Now, we only wish to live like normal people, to enjoy our lives”.

33. "I have a lot of dreams for my life in Germany".
Ilham and her family
Current Country: Greece

“Greece is very beautiful, we’d like to live here but we’ve found out that we’ll finally relocate to Germany.

We’ve spent one year and two months here. It wasn’t easy: at first, we were living in camps, in a tent and then we had to share an apartment with many other families, there was always a lot of fuss and no privacy whatsoever. Additionally, my teenage girl has been out of school for two years now, except for the last one month when she attended school in Axioupolis.

Before the war, my husband, Nehad, was working at the ministry, in the sector of urban planning while I was teaching French at a public school in the city of Deir Ez-Zor. We left our life in Syria as our beautiful city was ravaged by the war. My daughter, Leen, had to quit school as it was destroyed. In the meantime, our son, Mustafa, was born. He was only 4 months old when we fled. We had to cross dangerous territory on foot. We walked on the mountains, it was terrifying. One day, the police put a gun on my baby’s head, they threatened us. We spent two days at the police department. It took us two attempts to successfully cross the Turkish border and in a few days, we managed to arrive to the island of Chios."
Because of the war, our family got scattered. My parents live in Saudi Arabia, I have one sister in Damascus and a brother back home, in Deir Ez-Zor. My other three sisters are in Germany, the last of them arrived there only last week.

I have a lot of dreams for my life in Germany. First of all, I dream about living with my family in a proper house, all by ourselves! Certainly, I’ll need to get a job, as I’m very energetic. Leen needs to get back to school and continue with her education. And of course, I dream of a beautiful life for my boy. He needs to sleep in peace, he has never slept in a calm environment in his short life. I dream of the day that I will be able to buy new clothes for all of us, there’s so much I want to do!

I hope that my husband and I will be able to leave behind all the hardships and focus on our future. Since the day we left, not a day goes by without thinking of Syria. I loved my life, my city, my house, the school where I was teaching. I had my family, my friends and my students. I wouldn’t mind moving to France as I speak the language but in Germany, thankfully, I will reunite with my sisters”.

34. "In France, we’ll try to leave behind us all that we’ve been through".
Abdel and his family
Current Country: Greece

“It was a very difficult journey. We left Aleppo because of the war. War is a bad thing, there was death, fear, misery. I was conscripted to fight for the regime, so we took the decision to flee. I didn’t not want to have blood in my hands, to take another man’s life. They cannot make me do that.

When living in Syria, before the war, I had a good job. I was a skilled worker, making plasterboards, fitting wirings, usually for businesses, hotels or private homes. Amina, my wife, took up the upbringing of our children.

It was the journey of death, this is what we call it. Either way, staying in Syria would mean that we’d die. So, we took the risk, either we’d survive or we’d be gone. I undertook a tremendous risk, not only for myself, but also for my wife and my children. But, if we’d managed to make it, we’d have won a life far from the war. To us, it will always be the journey of death.

We crossed from Turkey to the island of Lesbos by boat, just like everyone else. Another difficult journey awaited, this time from camp to camp. From Lesbos, we went to Kavala, then to Herso, from there to Katerini and then to Thessaloniki until finally we settled in Athens. We’ve been through rough times but we’ve also had nice experiences. We’ve seen beautiful places but the worst part was the bad weather, when it as rainy or cold, or when it was very hot. Nevertheless, amidst all these hardships, we were always surrounded by really nice people who helped us and who we’ll never forget.

In the meantime, Amina got pregnant. Since she gave birth to our baby daughter Isra, things are easier, she’s 6 months old now. I cannot describe what relocating to France feels like. We are so happy, we’ll start again, we’ll find stability. Our life will be just like before the war, or even better. I’m certain that a new life awaits, the children will go to school, which is the most
important thing for them. I don’t know where we’ll settle yet, but I dream of living in Nice, what a beautiful city! I wish that we’ll love France and that France will love us back. We’ve already started learning French, not only with the help of IOM and the French Embassy but also at home, on our own, thanks to online courses. In France, we’ll try to leave behind us all that we’ve been through, we already try to help the children forget. We don’t want them to talk about it all, or ever go through such an experience again. We two, we’ll never forget, how can one forget such a thing. Our life was unbearable. But the children are still very young, at 9 and 6, so maybe in the end they won’t remember a thing”.

35. "God or fate, you name it, decided that Portugal will be our new home".
Roula
Current Country: Greece

Roula is a 31-year-old hairdresser from Daraa, Syria. Together with her family, she’s about to relocate from Greece to Portugal.

“I was out with my son, Moulham. My husband, Suleiman, and my daughter, Kinana, were at home when the bomb struck. Arriving at my destroyed house, with my loved ones buried underneath the rubble, I nearly lost my mind. Thankfully, the Red Crescent managed to get them out and transport them to a makeshift hospital at the buffer zone between the regime army and the rebels. My daughter had both her legs in plaster for a very long time and my husband’s back was badly damaged.

I used to be a hairdresser and Suleiman was a chef. When the war started, there were no jobs so Suleiman was working here and there to make ends meet. But we had our house so we didn’t plan to leave Daraa, our hometown. After the bombing, we spent another two months there, so that both Suleiman and Kinana could make the journey. It took us one month to get to the Turkish-Syrian border. We walked for 9 hours each night to avoid trouble and I was pregnant and carrying Kinana on my back.

In Turkey, it was the first time we ever saw the sea. It was terrifying, as well as the crossing to the island of Chios, on January 2016. After we got registered, we were sent to Ritsona accommodation centre near Athens. A few months later, I gave birth to my baby boy, Mohammad. We got in the Relocation Programme, hoping to settle to Germany. However, God or fate, you name it, decided that Portugal will be our new home. I hope that everything is going to be fine. I don’t care about me, I only care about the future of my children. My son Moulham is 9 years old and he has never been to school. He doesn’t know how to read or write, it’s very important for me that all of my children will have access to education. We didn’t leave out country because we were poor or hungry but to escape war. All we want is to live a life in dignity. Dignity is the most important thing for a human being.

Now that our adventure is drawing to an end, I have so many memories, some bad and some good. A fond one is Greece and its people. You have been so kind and generous to us. We’ll never forget you”.

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