

Marko Juntunen & Osama Al Aloulou

Resettled refugees and asylum seekers in the Finnish housing market

Iraqi, Syrian and Eritrean experiences



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Preface

The so-called European Refugee Crisis of 2015 was a sudden population movement of large proportions in both numbers and, in particular, media attention. The seemingly endless flow of people across the Mediterranean was at the centre of political and public attention from September 2015 until early 2016. While the vast majority of asylum seekers remained in Southern and Central Europe, still a great many found their way to the Nordic countries.

This research report looks at a particular aspect of the events of 2015 and 2016, namely the housing pathways of newly arrived people from Iraq, Syria and Eritrea to Finland. Our three researchers looked at the housing opportunities and choices of recently entered asylum seekers, UNHCR resettled refugees and individuals who came to Finland through the European Schemes for Relocation and Resettlement. This empirical study provides a look into the different opportunity structures of almost forty individuals in their housing efforts in Finland.

The study reveals both already well-known facts about the lives of refugees — mainly restrictions in the availability of housing — but it also shows some new results, including the rapid growth of an ethnic housing market that took place when demand and supply in the official housing market available for asylum seekers and refugees was unable to provide needed housing alternatives. It became clear at the time that when the official system does not provide enough opportunities, alternatives will emerge.

Moreover, the research brings forth the agency of asylum seekers and refugees. They are individuals, families — often broken ones — and members of various groups with varying skills and abilities to navigate in Finland. The people in question do not make their own decisions in isolation, but rather within their own national and transnational networks. They have many ways to influence their own lives, however meagre or desperate the situation. Without acknowledging the agency of people in a vulnerable situation, it also becomes difficult to create meaningful policies to assist them or to help them overcome the downsides that their own efforts may lead to.

The research is part the Urbanisation, Mobilities and Immigration (URMI) research consortia led by Professor Jussi Jauhiainen at the University of Turku, Finland. The project is funded by the Strategic Research Council of the Academy of Finland in an effort to understand the complexities of current and future urbanisation trends; the contribution of our subproject at the Migration Institute of Finland is to show how an underprivileged group moves in creative ways within the Finnish housing market.

Tuomas Martikainen
1 December 2019, Turku

1. Introduction

The study of asylum seekers and resettled refugees gained momentum in Finland in the 1990s. The predominant interest during this stage was in the reception and care of refugees as well as the media representations of and popular perceptions concerning forced migration (Lyytinen 2016, 24–26). However, since the turn of the millennium the increase in immigration rates has led academic researchers to broaden their focus to include such subjects as the reception and integration of refugees as well as ethnic and religious identity (Pentikäinen 2005; Huttunen 2006; Kosonen 2008; Säävälä 2008). During the past fifteen years, the scope of refugee studies has further expanded to the point that it currently covers a variety of fields: experiences concerning different stages of forced migration (Juntunen 2016), integration and the labour market (Himanen 2012), health (Pirinen 2008; Kuittinen et al. 2014; Mölsä et al. 2014) and the different stages of the asylum process (Gothóni & Siirto 2016; Jauhiainen 2017; Jauhiainen 2018). The past five years have, furthermore, witnessed a growing interest in the Finnish reception centres (Kelahaara & Mattila 2017), asylum hearings (Saarikkomäki et al. 2018) and the voluntary and forced return of rejected asylum claimants (Könönen & Vuolajärvi 2016).

Despite this rapid revitalisation of refugee studies in Finland, studies focusing on the early housing experiences and settlement patterns of asylum seekers and resettled refugees are still rare exceptions within the Finnish research literature. Many questions, especially in the context of early arrival experiences and their local implications, remain largely unaddressed. As housing is one of the key social issues for asylum seekers and refugees, but also for the receiving society in general, there is a great need to understand what goes on at the level of everyday reality as these people enter the Finnish housing market.

In this study, our aim is to focus on to the actual processes and pathways of housing asylum seekers and resettled refugees following their arrival to the new country of destination. The approach has been developed theoretically since the turn of the millennium (Clapham 2002; Tsemberis 2010) and used in several research projects, including ones in Britain, Canada and Australia (Murdie 2009; Phillips 2006; Ghosh 2007; Kisson 2007; MirafTAB 2000; Robinson et al. 2007). The primary finding in these empirical projects has been that asylum seekers and resettled refugees already possess a great variety of experiences as they enter the housing markets, depending on their legal status, the circumstances of their arrival, their socio-cultural and political backgrounds, and experiences during their journeys.

This report is based on ethnographic fieldwork and a series of thematic interviews that the research team carried out in different parts of Finland in 2016. The informants

included thirty-seven Iraqis, Eritreans and Syrians who arrived in Finland in 2015 and 2016. The report is primarily interested in constructing an ethnographically informed understanding of the early housing careers and varieties of experiences of the people in question as they negotiate their ways from arrival in Finland, to temporary housing arrangements in asylum reception facilities and finally to longer term housing.

The main research questions are as follows:

1. What kinds of challenges and difficulties did the asylum seekers and resettled refugees in Finland encounter when moving to their first 'home' from the reception centres?
2. How does the Finnish housing system and housing market appear to them as they strive towards permanent settlement in local communities Finland?

Based on these questions, the study further addresses the following sub-questions:

3. What are the preferred places and areas of residence for them? What shapes their desire to move to particular areas in Finland?
4. What factors delimit their housing choices?
5. How do they counter the constraints they face? What kinds of informal services and social networks assist them in their pathways to finding housing in Finland?

2. Asylum in Finland

The fall of 2015 and the spring months of 2016 witnessed a major increase in the number of asylum seekers in Finland. The number grew nearly tenfold from the levels of previous years, from 3,238 in 2013, and 3,651 in 2014 to 32,476 in 2015,¹ and Finland became one of the main net receiver nations of asylum seekers relative to its population size in Europe.² The Finnish reception system was put under severe stress, but it overcame the sudden influx by growing quickly and enacting measures to spread the asylum seekers throughout the country. In order to better understand how that development took place, let us first briefly look at the Finnish asylum reception system and how we use the related key terms in this study.

2.1. Key Terms

Asylum seeker: An individual who has left the country of origin or residence and arrived in another country and applied for asylum in that country.

European Schemes for Relocation and Resettlement: A temporary European relocation scheme for people who are in clear need of international protection.³ Finland agreed to receive 2,078 individuals (transferred from Italy and Greece) under the programme by October 2017. The asylum applications of the persons entering Finland under the programme are processed by the Finnish Immigration Service, and thus they are not automatically granted asylum in Finland.

Finnish Immigration Service (Migri): Migri is the agency that processes and decides on matters related to immigration, residence, refugee issues and Finnish nationality. It is subordinate to the Finnish Ministry of the Interior.

¹ Finnish Immigration Service, asylum applications per year (entered in 21.01.2017).

² EUROSTAT: Asylum in the EU Member States; Record number of over 1.2 million first time asylum seekers registered in 2015. Retrieved from Eurostat news release (2016): <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/2995521/7203832/3-04032016-AP-EN.pdf>

³ For detailed clarification of the term, see: https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/background-information/docs/communication_on_the_european_agenda_on_migration_annex_en.pdf

Reception centre: Reception centre is a generic concept referring to all premises where asylum seekers are accommodated. A reception unit can refer to, for example, reception centres and temporary accommodation units (Migri).

Refugee: The 1951 convention relating to the status of refugees defines a refugee as a person who 'owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country'.

Resettled refugee: The term is used in this report as a generic term referring to a person who is identified as a refugee by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), or alternatively by the EU, and who is transferred from the country in which the person has sought protection to a third state that has agreed to admit the person as a refugee with permanent residence status.

2.2. The Finnish Asylum Reception System

The Finnish reception system for asylum seekers is mainly managed by Migri (Finnish Immigration Service).⁴ While an asylum application is under consideration, the applicant is enrolled at a reception unit, which helps him/her with accommodation and expenses during the waiting period. As an alternative to staying in the reception centres, the asylum seekers are allowed to arrange their own accommodation if they have the financial means to pay the rent for a flat. However, new asylum seekers often stay with friends or relatives. In some cases, Finnish individuals may offer them free accommodation. The individuals who choose to stay outside the reception centres offered by Migri are entitled to allowance money, the sum of which is similar to the allowance granted to those staying in reception centres.⁵

Migri is the sole responsible authority for all reception centres, except in the case of unaccompanied minors, who are placed in group homes and special housing units supervised and funded by the local municipalities. The asylum claimants who are granted a residence permit to stay in Finland have the right to stay at the reception centre until the responsible authorities (social welfare office) have found housing for them. They may also look for housing on their own.

Whether their arrival in Finland is based on individual initiative or organised assistance, the asylum migrants constantly face situations in which the central decisions concerning their everyday life, dwelling places and everyday activities are to a great degree determined by the Finnish state officials and NGO workers.

⁴ <https://migri.fi/en/asylum-in-finland>

⁵ <https://migri.fi/en/living-in-a-reception-centre>

The rapid increase in the number of asylum seekers in 2015 challenged the Finnish authorities and existing housing policies. The Finnish authorities rapidly expanded the number of reception centres by renting other forms of housing, such as hotels, hostels, holiday centres, old prisons and old hospitals. At the peak of the crisis, in September 2015, nearly 11,000 asylum seekers arrived in the country. By December of the same year, the authorities had opened 144 reception facilities to accommodate them.⁶

⁶ <https://migri.fi/documents/5202425/6772175/2015+Vuosikertomus>

3. Key Theoretical Terms: Constrained Choices, Housing Pathways, Homemaking

The position of resettled refugees and asylum seekers is in many ways disadvantaged in housing markets in the EU countries. Their housing choices are often constrained because of their lack of familiarity with language, bureaucratic procedures and social customs. Many furthermore lack sufficient social networks that can pave their housing pathways in Finland. It is thus understandable why a particular perspective, namely that of *constrained choices*, has to a great degree dominated research on the position of refugees in the housing market. Based on the existing research literature, the constraints can be seen to result from the following factors:

- *The movement of asylum seekers and refugees is usually forced; thus, the country of asylum is not necessarily their preferred or even chosen destination (Havinga & Böcker 1999; Day & White 2002).*
- *Their uncertain state of being often lasts for years. Many have survived long periods of instability and frequent regional mobility or displacement within the country of origin. (Yaghmaian 2006; Juntunen 2011.)*
- *The objectives of people centre on survival, safety and stability of life (Neumayer 2004; Middleton 2005; Brekke & Aarset 2009).*
- *After their arrival in the country of destination, they are barred or restricted from formal employment and their survival is largely based on limited welfare benefits (Valenta & Thorshaug 2012; Valenta & Thorshaug 2013). Due to these factors, they often end up in low-demand housing in unpopular neighbourhoods and suburban areas, where they find themselves in the least attractive housing situations (Phillips 2006).*
- *Their immediate social, physical and material context is largely determined by state authorities, as most people arrive with very limited financial resources (Flatau et al. 2014, 24–25).*
- *Negative popular stereotypes are projected onto especially people from Muslim-majority countries, making them unattractive clients in the housing market (Foley & Beer 2003; Carpusor & Loges 2006; Cole 2009; Lee et al. 2015).*
- *As a result of all these factors, a particular geography of settlement is currently underway in many towns and cities in EU countries (Bolt 2009; Pittaway et al. 2009). As elsewhere, in Finland the asylum seeker and refugee population tend to cluster in the peripheral suburban areas (Dhalmann & Vilkama 2009; Vilkama 2010; Rasinkangas 2010).*

Upon entering the housing market, many persons experience fierce competition among prospective renters, as the rental market in major European cities has been for several years dominated by owners and the rental prices have increased rapidly. It is often the case that the people seeking a first accommodation are simply pressured out of the housing market due to their weak economic position. Besides these more or less indirect forms of discrimination, many people also face more pronounced forms of discrimination from both realtors and landlords, which in many cases are linked with racial, ethnic and religion-based prejudices (Foley & Beer 2003; Carey-Wood et al. REF; Fozdar & Torezani 2008; Taylor 2004).

For all these reasons, finding one's pathway in the housing market, maintaining property and fitting into a neighbourhood is understandably a demanding process for many. However, studies that focus merely on the constraining factors people face in the housing markets have received due criticism. Harrison and Phillips (2003) and Clapham (2002), among others, argue that refugees must also be seen as active agents capable of transforming the constraints that surround and structure their experience. It is important to understand that both the nature of the constraints and the particular forms of agency people employ in order to counter the constraining elements vary both between and within groups and change over time.

One way to overcome the limitations of a constrained choices perspective, as we have attempted to do in this study, is to shift the focus to the actual pathways people take as they orient themselves within the housing market and attempt to overcome the obstacles involved. Along these lines, the empirical part of this report begins from our focus groups' experiences with violence and persecution in their countries of origin, followed by a detailed look at their strenuous journeys before arriving in Finland. As the reader will note, many elements concerning their first housing experiences in temporary housing units are directly linked to the political ethnic and sectarian fragmentation in their home countries. For these reasons, we dedicated several pages to our informants' social and political backgrounds and experiences of persecution before shifting the focus to their actual pathways from the day of their arrival to Finland to their first more permanent housing solution.

Housing pathways are to a great extent processes of *homemaking*. But what kind of process is homemaking for our informants? Especially within transnational and diaspora studies, much has been written about the ways in which people make their homes and attach meaning to them, and furthermore, how their practices and perceptions challenge and often collide with policy-driven understandings of home (Vertovec 1999; Faist 2000; Morley 2000; Hammond 2004; Mallett 2004; Van Hear 2006; Huttunen 2008; Korac 2009; Čapo 2015).

A common thread runs through this large body of literature; home emerges as a continuous and evolving practice that simultaneously involves processes of homemaking, which occur on different levels (Morley 2000; Hannerz 1996; Sandu 2013). First, home is much more than a physical dwelling. It is also communal in terms of belonging to

a community and, more abstractly, to a locality and nation. House/dwelling involves homemaking through material input, different kinds of economic and social investments together with a variety of efforts and activities. Dwelling is the site where ideas and projects defining the future course of life take shape. This level of homemaking also involves notions such as security, immediacy and togetherness (Dutch Refugee Council 1999; Zetter & Pearl 1999; Abramsson et al. 2002; Phillips 2006; Murdie 2008; Carter & Osborne 2009; Mullins & Jones 2009; Pittaway et al. 2009; Kissoon 2010; Robinson 2010; Sampson & Gifford 2010; Netto 2011a; 2011b). Secondly, on the communal level, whether the question is that of a town, quarter, suburb or village, homemaking centres on creating harmonious relations with the natural landscape and with the built cultural/symbolic landscapes (Čapo 2015, 25).

It is particularly important to understand that the people we met over the course of this study can only create a complete sense of home when they manage to construct meaningful connections between their dwelling in the destination country's immediate social surrounding and its wider social contexts (*cf.* Hannerz 1996, 17-29; Morley 2000, 48). Among most asylum seekers, these connections include complex transnational connections, obligations and social and material exchanges. In the case of more than half of our informants, even the immediate family connections extend not only to the country of origin, but also to neighbouring countries around their home country and to several countries of asylum in the West. Successful homemaking is largely about creating and finding positive connections between these different spatial scales.

4. The Research Process

The researchers participating in gathering and analysing the data for this study are thoroughly familiar with the practical realities as well as administrative and bureaucratic procedures surrounding asylum claimants in Finland. Osama Al Aloulou holds an MA in sociology with a specific interest in social and public policy. He worked in the summer of 2016 in a refugee reception centre in Finland as an adviser and gained deep insights into the life situations faced by asylum seekers in Finland. Yousif Haddad, a journalist and writer who worked as a research assistant for this study, has worked for over twenty years in several different roles in the field of refugee studies, journalism and social activism among asylum seekers and refugees in various migrant communities in Finland. Marko Juntunen is a social anthropologist with a PhD in Arabic and Islamic studies, and he has carried out numerous extended ethnographic fieldwork projects among irregular migrants and asylum seekers in different contexts in Europe and the Middle East. Thus, in many respects the practical realities encountered while conducting fieldwork among asylum seekers and refugees with traumatising pasts and uncertain futures were familiar to the entire research team. All the members of the research team are furthermore fluent in the major interview language, Arabic.

We believe that the best method for collecting the type of data that allows researchers to understand what kinds of factors shape our informants' housing careers is a retrospective research design that applies biographical recall techniques. Data collection in practice meant in-depth, face-to-face discussions with the interviewees, who were selected based on long-term previous relations and snowballing. The interview process included two central elements. First, by open discussions we sought to chart the interviewees' background, history of persecution and transit towards Finland. The second field of interest was the persons' housing careers.

4.1. The Interviews

In the interviews, we aimed to understand the informants' housing situation and experiences of persecution before moving to Finland, followed by their expectations concerning housing in Finland and arrival procedures in Finland. In the later parts of the interviews, we focused on their initial housing experiences together with a detailed summary of each informant's housing situation in Finland. In addition, we asked the interviewees to express their views on the ways in which Finland could improve the housing

situation for asylum seekers and resettled refugees in the future. The interviews lasted between two and ten hours, and some of the informants were contacted several times over a period of four months in order to follow the developments of their housing process.

During the interviews, we aimed at providing our informants with a neutral ground to talk about their experiences and future prospects. Much of contemporary knowledge concerning refugees' experiences is produced within state institutions that project forms of state power onto them, such as the border guard, police and immigration services. In contrast, we did our best to create a trusting atmosphere and expressed openly to each informant that we guarantee full anonymity and the right for them to choose freely regarding how to narrate their personal experiences and ideas. In order to guard their anonymity, we decided to change minor details about their lives, such as professions, ages (plus or minus two years) and their locations of dwelling in the country of origin and in Finland.

The informants were allowed to choose pseudonyms and to talk without strict time limits, and we used largely open-ended questions, such as 'how did you feel...' and 'can you tell us something about your personal experiences...' in order to spur the informants to give immediate and intuitive responses.

4.2. The Social Profiles of the Informants

We interviewed and observed the life situations of thirty-seven individuals for this research project. An overwhelming majority (thirty-three) of our informants were men; we managed to find only four women willing to participate in this research. The gender ratio, however, roughly matches the general gender composition of the asylum seekers who arrived in Finland in the year 2015. According to the Finnish Ministry of the Interior, approximately eighty per cent of the asylum seekers in 2015 were men. Six of the informants were Eritrean, eight were Syrian, twenty-two were Iraqi and one was a Palestinian who had resided for several years in Syria before departing for Finland. The fieldwork was carried out between September and December of 2016 in nine towns in different parts of Finland.

Half of the total number of our informants were young adults. The youngest of the informants at the time of the fieldwork was eighteen years of age, while the oldest was 47. The informants generally had a high level of education, as nearly a third of them had studied at university level. In total, ten individuals possessed a bachelor's degree and the remaining informants had completed their studies at the upper secondary level. All the participants in this study had dwelled for most of their lives prior to arriving in Finland in large cities in Syria, Iraq and Eritrea.

We are fully aware of the fact that our sample of interviewees can only partially represent the full range of experiences of the people who entered Finland during the

refugee crisis of 2015. While Eritreans, Syrians and Iraqis comprised more than eighty per cent of the total number of asylum seekers that year, considerable numbers of people also arrived from Afghanistan and Somalia in 2015. Due to time limitations and a lack of social contacts with the newly arrived Somalis and Afghans, together with budgetary limitations for hiring translators, we decided to limit our research to the aforementioned groups.

The informants had differing bureaucratic and legal statuses when entering Finland. All six of the Eritrean informants and the only Palestinian/Syrian informant had arrived in Finland under the European Schemes for Relocation and Resettlement programme. Under the programme, Finland had accepted 2,078 asylum seekers relocated from Italy and Greece by the end of September 2016. By October 2016, some 750 asylum seekers from Syria and Eritrea had entered Finland. Their asylum applications were processed by the Finnish Immigration Service through the same procedures as for any other asylum seekers. However, in practice Finland proved to be quite lenient towards individuals who were relocated under the programme. None of the Eritrean asylum seekers received a negative asylum decision during the years 2015 and 2016.⁷

Two of the Syrian informants, together with their families, arrived in Finland as quota refugees. Under the refugee quota system, Finland accepted 2,100 persons during the years 2014 and 2015 whom the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) had designated as refugees or other persons in need of international protection for resettlement.⁸ Upon arrival in Finland, these informants had been granted a residence permit and they were immediately directed to private housing, which was arranged by the social assistants at the receiving communities in Finland.

The rest of the informants arrived in Finland individually and without assistance and submitted their asylum applications to Finnish authorities.

At the time of our fieldwork for this study, thirty-five of our informants were granted residence permits to stay in Finland. Two informants had received a negative asylum decision but were waiting for the decision of the appeals court for their case.

All the Eritrean informants identified themselves as Christians. The Syrian and Iraqi informants were divided equally between Sunni Muslims and Shia Muslims with regard to their religious backgrounds. However, roughly half of them informed us that they did not practice religion in their daily lives. Two Iraqi informants had been active members of an Internet-based community disseminating ideas and press material critical of organised religion, including Islam.

None of our informants had travelled previously to an EU territory. All the people who participated in this study reached Europe by crossing the Mediterranean Sea, with

⁷ Finnish Immigration Service statistics: http://www.migri.fi/download/64994_Tp-paatokset_2015.pdf?41872243da75d488

⁸ Finnish Immigration Service on quota refugees: http://www.migri.fi/asylum_in_finland/quota_refugees

Italy and Greece being their first EU destinations. The journeys varied greatly in terms of the amount of time they took. While the shortest time spent on the road was only three to four weeks (Iraq – Finland), some, especially members of our Eritrean sample, had spent up to several years on the road. Nearly a third of the informants had spent roughly twelve months in route to Finland.

Sixteen of the thirty-seven informants were married at the time of the interviews. However, only six of the interviewees (four Iraqis and two Syrians) had entered Finland with their entire nuclear families. Six of the Iraqi informants had travelled to Finland with one family member. Of the Syrian informants, two had embarked on the journey with just one family member. The brother of one of our Syrian informants died on the way to Finland. All the members of our Eritrean sample arrived in Finland without any close family members. The overwhelming majority of our informants are currently applying for visas and residence permits for their relatives abroad for the purpose of family reunification in Finland.

5. The Journey

Crisis, social turmoil and a state of exception have become permanent features characterising many contemporary Middle Eastern and Eastern African societies. Iraq, Syria and Eritrea, the countries of specific interest in this study, are all contexts where crisis is deeply embedded in the social fabric of the society. In all three countries, the structurally violated, persecuted and in many ways socially marginalised people still attempt to make order out of the disorder and plan their futures as best they can. From this condition begins their journey abroad and experience as refugees.

By the term 'social navigation', the anthropologist Henrik Vigh refers to the ways in which people act in difficult and uncertain circumstances in order to escape towards better life situations (Vigh 2006a, 2006b, 2008). Navigation as a term invokes the idea of movement within a fluid and unsettled landscape, which characterises the experiences of millions of today's refugees before, during and after their strenuous journeys towards countries of asylum.

In our informants' experiences, arrival in Finland appeared as a step in the long struggle to overcome direct and indirect discrimination, whether in the home society, in transit countries or on the way to Europe. The hardships, uncertainties and insecurities experienced in Finland emerge in their narratives as just one more episode in a longer history of violence, suffering and social navigation.

Before observing their actual housing pathways, it is important to shed light on our informants' experiences of violence and persecution and the various practical obstacles they had to overcome while on route to Finland. We highlight the fact that the housing pathways of our informants began in a situation where they had arrived in Finland exhausted both physically and economically. The Eritreans, without exception, had defied death several times on their long and traumatising journeys across the Saharan Desert and the Mediterranean Sea towards EU territory. Besides experiencing the dangers of the journey, our Iraqi and Syrian informants talked frequently about another source of worry and stress: the sectarian, ethnic and political fragmentation that characterises their home societies. They told us that social tensions between different interest groups are in many ways present in the European diasporic contexts from the refugee reception centres to the suburban spaces where most of our informants found their first more permanent dwelling. All these issues are highly relevant for understanding the ways in which our informants navigated along their housing pathways in Finland.

5.1. The Beginning

One of our Iraqi informants, Adam, 25 years of age, illustrated his own and the struggles of other Iraqis to safely escape the country. As with most of our Iraqi informants, he had been threatened by the armed militias and forced to resort to providers of forged documents to get out of the country.

I was afraid that the militants would have their people in the airport [in Baghdad], so I paid a few hundred dollars and I got fake passport, which worked well, as you see, I am here in Finland now. Well, to tell the truth, you see, most of the Iraqis who came to Finland had bought fake documents, let's say passports, university certificates, professional certificates, medical reports. I even know a guy, who has claimed to be a doctor with his fake certificate. It is not only this; listen, many Iraqis have learned the Syrian accent, and when they came to Finland they submitted asylum applications as Syrians. They bought fake Syrian passports from Syria. This is because as a Syrian, Finland will guarantee you a residence permit for sure.

Like Adam above, all the Iraqi and Syrian informants who participated in this study considered themselves victims of the social and political fragmentation occurring in their home societies. In the case of Iraq, the present turmoil can be traced back to the toppling of Saddam Hussein's regime by international coalition forces in April 2003. The dissolution of the Iraqi regime's military and security apparatuses created a dangerous security vacuum, and as the following three years witnessed, armed militias that were organised along ethnic sectarian and tribal lines began to fight over social and political influence. The violence perpetrated against civilians increased rapidly. In Syria, the extremely violent civil war started in 2011 when the government of Bashar al Asad and his allies clashed with various popular forces opposing him. The conflict escalated into horrific warfare and destruction of property as large-scale protests calling for his removal were violently suppressed.

Against this background, it is understandable that all our Iraqi and Syrian informants had to confront severe obstacles in their everyday lives, as the state had failed to provide even minimal security and basic services. Religious and sectarian discourses, together with tribal and ethnic symbolism, fuelled the political battles in both countries that ranged from neighbourhoods to local- and state-level politics. In this general climate, as our informants in many cases expressed, people need to be alert to the ways in which they present their social identity, personal affiliations and political and religious opinions in public spaces. In the interview situations, all our informants mentioned factors such as general insecurity, the threat of sectarian and other forms of violence, or the actual violence perpetrated by armed militias as primary motives behind their departure from their home countries. Such an atmosphere of mutual distrust and tension, as we will see in the following pages, travelled among the heterogeneous groups of Iraqis and Syrians to the Finnish reception centres.

Among our Iraqi interviewees, there were those who had been pressured to collaborate with sectarian armed groups, those who had been temporarily kidnapped by them and those who had received direct threats of violence from armed groups aiming to cleanse urban neighbourhoods of 'unwanted' residents. The continuous threat of violence was most severe in the cases of those interlocutors who belong to local ethnic or religious minorities or who are members of households considered too 'liberal' in their behavior, worldview or professional profiles in Iraq. The security vacuum and general feeling of 'futurelessness' were also frequently mentioned as reasons for the departure from Iraq. Some, particularly younger Iraqi men, talked about migration as a 'youth mass movement'.

Adam's story was typical of members of Sunni Muslim families who had served the regime of Saddam Hussein that was toppled in 2003.

Shia militants threatened to kill me. They wanted to do it because I was working for the government and my father was a military general during Saddam's era. Once, as I was going back home from work, a car stopped me, and two masked men captured and threw me into the car. They punched me in the face and hit me in the head. I lost consciousness, and when I opened my eyes, I found myself in a dark basement surrounded by masked men. They threatened to kill me if I continued my work for the government. They kept me inside the basement for a few days, and then I was released. After this incident, I decided to leave the country.

Aqeel (44 years of age), a civil servant in the Iraqi Ministry of the Interior, was approached by members of the militia and asked to cooperate with them. Fearing for the lives of his entire family, he left Iraq for Turkey with his wife and two daughters. Aqeel shared his experiences in the interview we conducted with him:

I was born in Samarra in 1983. My life was good, I had a respectable job. I was a civil servant in the Ministry of the Interior. I had two cars, security guards and several houses. In general, I had no problem, but then I faced death threats and decided to leave. Terrorists threatened to kill me and my brothers. I wanted to continue my life in Iraq, but I was threatened because of my work position. I was against corruption, but the militants did not leave me alone and were pressuring me to take part (in their activities) and help them find out secret information about others (their opponents), but I refused. I studied in a military management school, and I graduated from there as an officer. I worked at the ministry, in a department that was responsible for gathering information relating to suspected terrorists. We provided information on a monthly basis to the ministry about people who had connections with terrorist organisations. I was also the responsible person for security data and an information committee.

So, my position was quite sensitive, and many militant groups were requiring information about certain people; I was opposed to such kinds of illegality. When I refused to give them what they wanted, they threatened to kill me. This all happened last year.

Our Iraqi interviewees also included people who had been active members in more or less organised social networks that criticised sectarian politics and called for secular political order. Two of our interlocutors had been active in an Internet-based community that is openly critical of Islamic organisations and organised religion. They identified themselves as *mulhidh*, an Islamic term referring to, besides atheists, also to apostates and heretics. They had received severe threats from armed groups due to their activities.

As mentioned previously, all our Syrian interviewees had lived through the violent chaos and open warfare that followed the popular uprising against Bashar al Asad's regime in March 2011. Nearly all presented their life situations before the uprisings as relatively or very prosperous. The accounts we heard stand in many cases in sharp contrast to stereotypical images of refugees as poor, marginal and lacking individual agency. The interviewees had direct personal experiences with violent detentions and torture perpetrated by the regime against the people it considered its opponents. All of the Syrian informants had lost immediate family members in the cycle of violence. Abu Khaled's (39 years of age) home had been demolished in the violence following the popular uprising. Abu Khaled told us the following about his experiences:

Before the eruption of the Syrian war, we had our life, we made trips inside and outside of our town. People were rich, I was rich, my family was rich. We were not used to seeing people in the streets, begging as we have seen in Jordan. People in Syria are not poor. We were very happy, but everything was different after March 2011. People there don't want the war. But everybody is fighting in Syria. Everybody. They are destroying the country now – the cities, the ancient things, the citadels. Imagine four years without electricity (...) I didn't want to be a soldier and fight for any of the conflicting parties. Even though I hate the Assad family, I didn't want to kill anyone. Assad killed my friends and relatives. I had no interest in religion or politics. We were all forced to take sides in the war, so I was waiting for the right time to run away with my family. I only packed a small suitcase and minor items (...) My friends in my hometown told me later that my house had been destroyed. Everything was rubble. There was nothing to go back to. I lost my house.

Among both Syrians and Iraqis, the majority of the interviewees are part of transnational families scattered between Syria, neighbouring countries and Western countries of asylum. Nearly all had at least one immediate family member (wife or child) in the country of origin. Adam, a 25-year-old man from Iraq, told us:

One part of my family is still in Baghdad and the other in Amman, Jordan. My sister, who lives in Amman, is waiting for an invitation from her husband, who is currently living in Germany as a refugee. He applied for family reunification. My sixteen-year-old sister and my mother are living in Amman; they left Iraq last year after being threatened by terrorists. My father is still working in Baghdad, even though it is not easy, but he just does not want to leave his home. Perhaps he did not want to leave my younger brother

alone. I did not also want to leave my younger brother alone; he was my love. Terrorists killed him when he was 16 years old. It happened in 2006.

The experiences of persecution by the members of our Eritrean sample differed considerably from those of the Syrians and Iraqis. As mentioned, in Iraq and Syria violence is linked with sectarian, ethnic and political fragmentation. All our Eritrean interviewees presented themselves as victims of state violence perpetrated by members of the Eritrean police force, army and border guard. Eritrea emerged in their experience as a giant and brutal prison from which everyone wanted to escape. In the interview situations, we sensed a very strong feeling of solidarity among the Eritreans who had arrived in Finland in the year 2015. This stood in marked contrast to the distrust and fear marking the Iraqis' and Syrians' perceptions of their countrymen and women, who were perceived to represent 'other' ethnic, political, religious or sectarian groupings.

Nineteen-year-old Majed described for us his experiences in Eritrea in the following manner:

To be honest, I have no life back home. Everything was horrible. As a young man, I was a target of the police and soldiers at any time. They wanted bribes all the time. They wanted to humiliate me always. I mean, it felt like I was not a human being. I used to always pay them in order to keep them away from my home. If I did not pay them, they threatened me with death! Well, treating people in a bad way is fun for them. They enjoy threatening people and making them cry. I mean, there is no one single reason why they do that. Perhaps it is because they have free hands to do anything they want? Or, they don't get a good enough salary, so they ask for bribes, and that is how they survive? I really cannot think of something else. Think of Eritrea as a big prison, and everyone wants to escape from it. Young, old, children, women, men: all want to escape the prison. No one is happy. The reason why only young people come to Europe is because they have the energy to run and withstand torture if they are arrested by gangs or soldiers. All young Eritreans think the same way as I do.

Musa, a 38-year-old Eritrean man, described his reasons for departure in a similar manner as Majed:

In my country, the police arrest anyone arbitrarily. The police have a free hand to kill anyone. A person in Eritrea has no dignity. You understand what I am talking about? I often ask myself, as a middle-aged man, why didn't I stay in my country and do everything within my power to make it a better place to live and build a better future for my children? I tried a lot, almost every day, but, at some point, I felt I cannot handle it anymore. I wanted to have a better life, a life with dignity and human rights.

Among the Eritrean interviewees, there were also two men who had escaped in order to avoid military conscription. Miron (22 years of age) told us the following:

I was forced to leave. I had no other choice. I was obliged to go to the army, but I did not want that. I hate the Eritrean army; they are very violent. I showed them documents proving that I am a student at the university, but they ignored them. They did not care about my future. All they wanted was to take me into the army. My family sold some livestock and my brothers sent me money as well. I paid a smuggler, and during the night I was smuggled from the capital city (Asmara) to the Sudanese border.

For some, like the eighteen-year-old woman Samarah, the persecution began as her husband fled from Eritrea to Uganda:

The police threatened me with prison in case I refused to help them find my husband. The story started in 2014–2015, when my husband, who was an official in the government, left Eritrea and sought asylum in Uganda. The police started to search for him, but they did not find out where he was [hiding]. They arrested me several times, and each time I told them, 'I don't have any idea about his location'. Then they threatened me, [saying] that I would spend my life in jail if I didn't help them. When I was released, I borrowed money from my relatives and family and escaped.

Although numerous individuals in our Eritrean sample are also part of transnational family networks, their transnational network differed considerably from those of the Iraqis and Syrians. The Eritrean families were typically divided between Uganda, Sudan and Eritrea, and only one individual had family connections to the Eritrean diaspora in Europe.

5.2. In Transit

While the majority of the interviewees embarked on a journey towards Europe from their home communities in Iraq, Syria and Eritrea, there were also those among the interviewees who had resided for extended periods in the neighbouring countries of Jordan, Turkey and Sudan, and upon seeing no possibility for permanent settlement, they decided to search for residence in Europe. Abu Khaled (39), who fled from Syria to Jordan, told us the following:

But I had nothing in Jordan either. I'd run out of money because the rent was high, and I could not find a job; it was difficult to find a job in Jordan. I didn't know anyone. I felt so alone that I wanted to kill myself. I applied to the UN refugee agency and waited for an answer from them for two years. They told me I would be moving to Finland. I did not decide or suggest to them the country I wanted to move to; it was their choice.

Muhammed, a 29-year-old Syrian of Palestinian origin, shared with us information concerning the initial stages of his journey from Lebanon to Finland. In Muhammed's case, his journeys in search of shelter had lasted for more than two years before he finally reached Finland in 2015:

I moved to Lebanon [from Syria] on 26 December 2012 with my family. The trip was quite easy. We stayed one month in Beirut at my cousin's house. I worked without a work permit for a Lebanese man in his slaughterhouse. After three months, we moved to a rented apartment. I paid 400 dollars for it and my salary was only 600 dollars. So, we had to survive on 200 dollars. Can you believe that? It was crazy! We lived in the Sabra wa Shatila camp; as you know, it is not a traditional refugee camp! I was not happy; Lebanese people were not kind because I was working illegally. Then, I decided to move on. I did not want to stay in Beirut. I had no chance to go back to Syria because the war had escalated, and no one was safe there. I decided to move to Sudan, because I did not have enough money to buy flight tickets for both of us, so my wife went back to my cousin's house [in Lebanon], even though it was not the best decision. We had to do something. I moved to Khartoum on the first of September 2013. I stayed there for two months by myself, and then I heard that my wife was pregnant. So, we decided that she could come to Sudan and live with me. So that is what we did. In general, it was good to live in Sudan. I worked as an accountant and in a restaurant. However, it was expensive to live in the capital, especially after my wife gave birth. I could not afford it. Imagine, a gang tried to kidnap my wife in Sudan because they think light-skinned people are rich!

5.3. Routes to Finland

Throughout the summer months of 2015, the international news media began to report on rapidly increasing numbers of migrants crossing the Aegean Sea. The rumours concerning the relative ease by which thousands of new migrants moved across the EU members states began to circulate among our interviewees. Given this background, it is understandable why all our Iraqi and Syrian interviewees had embarked on a journey towards Greece through Turkey. The Iraqis in particular resorted to Facebook and Twitter to share critically important information in Arabic concerning travel logistics, access to migrant smugglers, preferable routes and warnings against dangers and risks along the way. The central role played by social media was emphasised in many interviews, including the following one, which we conducted with Iskandar, a 28-year-old man:

We benefitted a lot from social media, as there are numerous groups focusing on refugee issues. These pages informed us about routes, how to leave from Iraq and the best

places of departure from Turkey to Greece. The information was constantly updated. For example, now [November 2016] the town of Izmir is not suitable for crossing [the sea], and movement has come to a halt because of stricter control by the police. All these Facebook sites are operated by volunteers. We also participated in their discussions and posted our advice.

There was a clear preference among the Iraqi interviewees to attempt to gain international protection from Austria, Belgium or Finland. In many instances, as in the cases of Yousif (28 years of age) and Abu Sari (26 years of age), the final target country was chosen after arriving in EU territory. The selection of a particular country was influenced by listening to other Iraqis along the way and following news on social media. Yousif clarified his and his friends' preference to travel to Finland in the following manner:

Our idea was to head to Belgium, Austria or Finland, but then Austria appeared to be full of refugees. We knew that in Belgium there are active Muslim radicals and we were basically fleeing from Iraq because of them. So, we finally chose Finland because it has fewer migrants compared to other countries in Europe and it has only a small community of radical Muslims. Furthermore, Finland is always at the top of the list of the most developed countries in many respects. It was also said that the asylum process is fast. For all these reasons, we chose Finland.

Abu Sari shared largely the same perceptions as Yousif:

I was in contact with members of groups of migrants that I met along the way, and they are now spread across different countries in Europe. I chose to head to Finland while I was in Austria. When I left Iraq, I had many options: Germany, Austria, Belgium. Then along the way, I decided to go to Finland.

The travel trajectories to Finland were highly uniform among the Iraqis and Syrians in our sample, but the individual travel experiences varied greatly. For most informants, Istanbul was the first milestone on a difficult journey. Our informants had in most cases crossed the Iraqi–Turkish and Syrian–Turkish border with official visas — and then in nearly all cases they continued to the coastal cities of Bodrum and Izmir on the western coast of Turkey and crossed to Greek islands near the Turkish coast. From these locations, they continued their journeys on buses, on trains and on foot along the Western Balkan routes (Greece–Macedonia–Serbia–Hungary, or alternatively, Greece–Macedonia–Serbia–Croatia–Slovenia).

Some individuals resorted to the services of organised smugglers only once during the entire journey — when crossing from Turkey to Greece. Others, particularly those who participated in the first wave of movement towards EU territory in the summer

months of 2015, preferred to secure their movement by resorting to smugglers. Adam (25 years of age) from Iraq told us the following story:

After we were registered [in Greece], we continued to Athens and from Athens to Macedonia and then Serbia, I think. I was inside a truck, so I did not know where I was. But after arriving to Vienna, Austria, I was transferred to the airport and from there I flew to Sweden, where I was received by a Palestinian man who worked for the Turkish mafia. And from Sweden to Finland by train ... The whole journey took some 2–3 months. It was full of fear and excitement, fear [mostly], but it was worth it.

For some interviewees, the journey towards Finland proceeded relatively smoothly after the dangerous crossing from Turkey to Greece. For those travelling with entire families and small children, the journey was an exhausting and, in some cases, extremely traumatising event. Abbas, a 40-year-old father of two children, told us:

We crossed the sea on a small rubber boat; there were fifty people on the boat. There were only six Iraqis and the rest were Syrians. When we arrived on a Greek island, we got lost for an entire day. It was catastrophic for my children and for my wife, who was pregnant. Perhaps it was my son Abbas, who suffered most on the way, because he was attacked on the way [attempted rape]. He was clearly in shock until we arrived here [Finland]. Now he seems to be improving psychologically.

Abu Saqar (38 years of age), who embarked on the journey towards Finland from Iraq with his four children and a wife, shared his story with us as well:

We continued straight away from Istanbul towards Greece with a group we met along the way. We embarked on a rubber zodiac, but it tipped over and we all fell into the sea. There were young men who saved my children, and we were finally rescued by some fishermen. There were 55 of us in the zodiac. We reached the shore, but in a nearby forest my wife twisted her ankle badly on the rocks. It swelled up, and I had to carry her on my back for three hours. The others [in the group] left us behind, and then we came across two Greeks who had a car. They took pity on us and brought us to a hospital, and after we had been treated, they took us to a reception centre for asylum seekers. These men really helped us; as we understood it, one was an army officer. He helped us to Athens and from there we continued to Macedonia without a problem. From the Serbian border, we continued to Belgrade, where we settled in a public park that already hosted thousands of Iraqis, Syrians and Afghans. It was also a site for smugglers and criminal gangs. Someone snatched our money — all together, six thousand US dollars. So, we were stuck in the park for eleven days. There were some relief organisations and individuals who provided help for migrants. They helped us to get to a bus and to cross into Croatia, where we were received by the Red Cross. My wife was still in great pain. We continued on to Hungary and then by

train to Austria. We had to walk some four kilometres, and by that time my daughter had lost nearly all her clothes; she was in her diapers and it was raining. We managed to get clothes for her only as we reached the Red Cross shelter. They gave us food and blankets.

The experiences of all our Eritrean informants were even more harrowing than in the case of the Iraqis and Syrians; they had survived the dangerous journey from Eritrea across the Sahara Desert and the Mediterranean Sea to Italy. Only in the year 2015, the route took the lives of thousands of prospective migrants.

The threat of death was present at every stage of the journey, starting from the initial phase: crossing Eritrea's international border, where the gendarmes and border guard routinely open fire on people attempting to flee the country. The journeys continued in most cases via Khartoum in Sudan, followed by a fast-paced and in many cases lethal hike across the desert to Libya with organised migrant smugglers. The most traumatising stretch of the journey for many was Libya, as thousands of migrants are kidnapped by terrorist organisations and militant groups and only released after the kidnappers have received ransom money from the members of the migrants' families, which in many cases totalled as much as several thousand euros. Our interviewees were then smuggled on large open boats across the Mediterranean Sea to Italy, where they were placed in large refugee camps and soon afterwards transferred to Finland under the European Schemes for Relocation and Settlement programme. The Eritreans and other refugees did not, however, receive asylum automatically as part of the transfer programme. Their applications were processed by the Finnish authorities similarly as any other asylum application. Miron (22 years of age) told us about his experiences in the interview situation:

I walked with other people around in the desert between Sudan and Libya for ten days. Although it was not dangerous, we suffered from thirst and hunger. But we finally made it to Libya. Upon our arrival, an Islamic militant group arrested us. They led us to a farm that was surrounded by strong fences. It was impossible for anyone to escape because we were in the desert. If anyone wanted to escape, he or she would die of hunger. The group members were Arabic speakers. I understand Arabic very well, even though I cannot speak it perfectly. They forced us to pray like Muslims. I told them I am Christian, but they did not care. They told me and the other non-Muslim people that the more we pray, the less money we will have to pay. They wanted five thousand dollars from each of us. They gave us the option to convert to Islam and join them, but I did not want that. I called my brothers and family and described the situation. They collected money and send it to France or Italy, where this group has a person who is responsible for this type of business. When that person confirmed that he had received the money, they let me go. I went to Tripoli and agreed with one smuggler that he would help me cross to Italy. I paid him two thousand euros. I waited for a few days and then with dozens of Somalis, Eritreans and members of other nationalities I crossed to Italy. It was not difficult — the whole trip took less than two

hours. The boat was in very bad condition. There were more than 60 people on it, and the boat was made to hold only 30 people maximum. We were all afraid that the boat would sink, but luckily it did not. [The boat was rescued by an Italian vessel.]

Twenty-year-old Majeed shared roughly similar experiences as Miron:

I paid five thousand dollars to be smuggled from Eritrea to Sudan and then to Libya. My journey was full of dangers. I was almost killed by Eritrean soldiers when crossing the border into Sudan. As soon as they noticed me and the rest of the group of Eritreans trying to cross the border, they started shooting at us. Two guys were killed and five, including me, managed to escape. When we entered Sudan, we travelled by bus to the capital, where we stayed one day only, until we were smuggled into Libya. We walked for 15 days in the desert between Sudan and Libya. It was very dangerous. Everybody was scared of wild animals and suffered from hunger and thirst. One woman died because she was wounded and bleeding. She had injured her head after tumbling down a rock. The weather was hot, and there was no one to help her; she was bleeding for a few days and then died.

Our entire group was then captured by an Islamic gang in Libya. They wanted money, but when I did not give them what they wanted, then they tortured me and left me bleeding for three days. They did not treat my bleeding hands and legs, even though there were skilled people among them, and they had medicine. They were brutal and wanted me to die. I decided to call my family and ask them to pay the gang; it was my last option to survive. My family sent three thousand dollars to the gang. After I was released, I continued on to the city of Misrata, where I took a boat with some 100 other people.

It was quite fine, but not for all people. Among the 100 people, there were children and women who did not know how to swim, but luckily, we did not have to swim because the boat was safe. Each one of us paid two thousand euros for the trip. When we arrived in Sicily, the Red Cross workers helped us. They gave us food and clothes and accommodation in a camp. The camp was not the best because it was overcrowded, and we did not have enough space to sleep. But I managed to stay there, and it was fine.

6. Initial Housing Experiences

The early arrival and housing experiences of those informants who entered in Finland on their own initiative followed a rather similar plot. Upon crossing the Finnish border (in most cases in Haaparanta, on the Finland–Sweden border, or in the coastal towns of Turku and Helsinki, which have ferry connections to Sweden), our interviewees were either received by the Finnish police at the border, or alternatively, they contacted the authorities immediately after their arrival. Following the registration and initial interview by the Police of Finland, they were then directed to temporary housing units (reception centres, hotels and hostels) After a few days, they were then dispersed between the nearly 200 reception centres that had been established since the summer months of 2015 to meet the extremely rapidly increasing numbers of new asylum claimants.

6.1. First Experiences

Maher and Aqeel, both from Iraq, described their experiences:

[After reaching Sweden] I was no longer afraid of police checks on trains. I was relaxed and I knew I would cross the final border (...) I was unable to recognise if I was in Finland or Sweden. The border is almost entirely unmarked. The train proceeded along the border, and all of a sudden I found myself being asked by the police for my papers. I told the police officer that I was from Syria and wanted to apply for asylum in Finland. He was friendly; they took me to the station and asked me to fill out some papers. I did so, and then I was transferred to Helsinki. I had finally made it. It was like a dream.

Aqeel, on the other hand, immediately became aware of the social tensions within the reception centres:

[Upon arrival] It felt great. The police received us at the harbour [in Helsinki]. They asked us general questions, and then they drove us to a camp called Number 10 in Helsinki. It was very small and full of people. There were plenty of problems among the residents. Luckily, we did not stay there for a long time. After three months, we were transferred to the Orimattila refugee camp.

The accounts concerning conditions in the reception centres varied greatly among our interlocutors, ranging from extremely positive (gratitude for the good material and administrative quality of the reception centres, the organisation of early arrival, material and social support, the feeling of being in a safe and secure place) to extremely negative (social tensions with immigration officials and personnel, dissatisfaction with unqualified and highly prejudiced interpreters, disagreements and social tensions among the asylum claimants). The most positive experiences we heard came from those who had been placed in lively urban settings.

Adam from Iraq told us:

As soon as I crossed the Swedish—Finnish border, I was transferred by bus to Helsinki and I was directed to the Helsinki reception centre, which was situated in Punavuori. I stayed there for three or four days, and after that I was transferred again to a hotel in the city centre, where I stayed for one week. Later, I was transferred again to the Stadion Hostel in Helsinki, where I stayed for few months.

All the places I was housed in were comfortable; I even think they were luxurious. The Stadion Hostel was amazing, it felt like being on a holiday. The financial aid I received was more than enough, and the location of the hostel was incredible. I think the days in the hostel were the best of my life. It had very big rooms. We were given the opportunity to cook for ourselves. There were 30—50 people in the hostel. The room sizes differed; in some rooms there were two persons, and in others there were three to four persons.

For others, especially those — in most cases Iraqis — who arrived during the early autumn months of 2015, their arrival was a shocking and at times chaotic event, not least because the Finnish reception system was pushed to its utmost limits due to the great number of new arrivals. Many accounts we heard also indicate that as the influx grew day by day, it was increasingly difficult for the Finnish state to meet the newcomers' immediate needs: to provide appropriate sleeping facilities, not to mention social services, such as basic information concerning the new surroundings, translation services and at times medical help.

According to our research data, the situation appeared most critical for those informants who were exhausted after the long journey, who had very limited financial and material resources (many arrived with just basic hand luggage) and who were placed in large reception centres in isolated areas that hosted up to several hundred people, mostly young men from different parts of Iraq, but also considerable numbers of Syrians. Iskandar shared his experiences with us in the following manner:

We were then transferred by minibuses [from Helsinki] to Kirkkonummi. The reception centre was like a summer camp facility: completely isolated. You needed to walk twenty minutes to reach the closest bus stop, then half an hour by bus to reach the town [Kirkkonummi]. There were more than three hundred people in the camp: mostly Iraqis, Syrians

and Somalis. It did not meet the basic requirements, especially for families. There was a large sports hall for us all. In the centre of the sports field, they were playing volleyball and basketball, and closer to the walls we were trying to sleep. A whole week like this: queuing to get food and to go to the toilet, as there were two toilets for us all. Sometimes at dinner time people were still queuing to get their lunch.

As noted previously, an overwhelming majority of our informants were from large metropolitan areas in their countries of origin, a factor that added to their feelings of alienation in the isolated camps. The social, political, ethnic and sectarian boundary lines in the camps reflected the fragmented nature of Iraqi, Syrian and larger Middle Eastern societies. The reception centres, especially those hosting great numbers of heterogeneous Iraqis and Syrians, were described as contexts marked by distrust, social tensions, extreme boredom and a lack of meaningful recreational activities and chances to study. The feelings of alienation were only furthered by deep prejudices, and even disdain, towards the other asylum seekers.

Gazwan, a 28-year-old man from Iraq, expressed his feelings in the following manner:

I like Finnish people, they are honest and direct, they never hide their intentions. Just the opposite of Iraqis. I always have problems with Shia and Kurdish people. I don't understand why they always lie and abuse our friendship or relationship. I just don't like to be in contact with them and other people from Iraq or Kurdistan.

Well, I don't know how to put it. Let me give you an example: when I obtained a residence permit, few of them congratulated me. They were jealous because they were still waiting in the camp, while others had been rejected. I think that my story goes back to Iraq. Once an armed militant group first came to our neighbourhood in Mosul, this after the fall of Saddam's regime. The group imposed a curfew, and no one could leave their homes. All people in the city were scared. We did not know what was going to happen. The group's leader announced that all young men had to get out of their homes, and we did so. They took us to a basement and tortured us. They were cursing us because we were Sunnis. After the fall of Saddam's regime [in 2003], they started to treat Arabs as third-class citizens in 'their own country'. Many of my relatives and family members were treated badly whenever they visited Kurdistan. And even nowadays in Finland, they don't like to speak with Arabs; they hate Arabs. I think history and Saddam's policies still influence their mentality and ways of treating us. They think all Arabs were / are supporters of Saddam; this is not true.

Muhammed Khalid Kredi from Syria, on the other hand, emphasised that prior to his arrival, he and his friend had had a very positive image of Finland. The reality proved to be very different from what he anticipated.

You cannot imagine how horrible life was in the camp. When we entered Finland and Europe in general, we were shocked by the things we saw. When we arrived, we thought

it was going to be all good and nice and fancy, and that people would be happy to see us. But the reality was different of course, especially in the camp. Everybody in the camp in Seinäjoki started to think, 'This is a horrible life; maybe I want to go back to Syria, maybe it's not for me ... maybe I can try to live somehow in Syria and survive. Residents in the camp were fighting every day, hating each other and even the Finnish police were angry with us. The camp was like an 'in-between' place for us all; the walls and floors were bare concrete, divided by a tarpaulin, with no comfort. Imagine that you leave your country, you are separated from your wife, you go through a weird journey and then you are stuck in a weird and disturbing place like the camp in Seinäjoki [in west-central Finland].

Maher, a 27-year-old man from Syria, told us that after gaining a first and largely positive experience of the Finnish reception system while staying in a hotel administered by the Red Cross, he soon came to understand just how tense the atmosphere between the asylum seekers was. Being the only resident of the hotel who spoke fluent English and several Arabic vernacular dialects, he begun to serve as a mediator between the administration and asylum claimants. As he reported in the interview setting:

I was somehow considered as a mediator between people in the hotel whenever there was a problem. The people were thrown together at random. They fled different conflicts and had different enemies, let's say in Ethiopia, Iraq, Syria. They all turned to me. Perhaps because I knew English and I was the eldest, I am not sure. Even though almost everyone in the hotel was a Muslim, there were deep tensions between Sunni and Shia, and it was really dangerous because they threatened to kill each other. They were enemies at home and still enemies here in Finland; I did not understand their mentalities.

Life in the reception centres was an especially disturbing experience for those identifying as sexual minorities and those considered by more conservative people as being too liberal in their relation to Islam. Due to fears for their personal safety, a special unit was set up in Helsinki for members of sexual minorities applying for asylum in Finland.⁹ Munir, a 23-year-old Iraqi man, told us the following:

I received a residence permit 17 days ago and am still living in the camp. I need to get out of there; it is like a hell. People tease me because of my homosexuality. They don't accept me. They hate me. I am really frustrated and want to find myself an apartment. This all took place last year: I arrived in Finland in September 2015. After I submitted my application to the police, I was transferred to Aavaranta refugee camp, and since then I have been living there. Well, to be honest, I hate it. I am discriminated against there by Iraqis. I have to hide my sexual orientation. Why do I do so? I came to Finland because it is a country that respects human rights. There's no tolerance in the camp. My daily routine is boring.

⁹ <http://yle.fi/uutiset/3-8961590>

I sleep, eat, and then sleep again. I chat with some friends, but rarely. I mostly stay in my room and sleep. I am waiting for the moment when I can get out of this hell!

The accounts of relocated refugees in our sample — i.e. Eritreans and Syrians who came under the European Schemes for Relocation and Resettlement programme and the Syrian quota refugees — concerning reception centres stood in clear contrast with those of Iraqis and Syrians who travelled to Finland unassisted. On the one hand, the different experiences can be partly explained by the fact that Finland did not reject any of the Eritrean and Syrian asylum seekers during the years 2015 and 2016, which reduced the stress of temporary residence in the reception centres. On the other hand, the Eritrean informants had experience with dwelling in extremely overcrowded and insufficient, and at times inhumane, conditions in refugee camps in Italy, and they could thus contrast their present experiences with the difficulties of the past. Furthermore, the Eritreans participating in our study, being Christians and unable to understand the dominant languages in the camps (Arabic, Kurdish, Somali, Dari), were largely outside of the tense and sectarian discursive space shared by the dominant groups of the camps. Majed, a 20-year-old Eritrean man, told us the following:

Well, it was not the best, but very good compared with the camps in Italy and other countries. I stayed six months in the camp, and every day was challenging for me, as I had to wait first for the interview by the police and then to wait for the decision. I also thought it would take a short amount of time to move out of the camp and live in an apartment, but that was not the case. To wait for six months is quite a long time.

6.2. Housing Outside of the Reception Centres

Unsurprisingly, the informants who felt most unwelcome and uncomfortable in the tense atmosphere of the reception centres attempted to arrange housing elsewhere almost immediately after their arrival.

Yousif, 28, from Iraq spoke of his memories:

I arrived in Finland on 8 August 2015. Because of the hardships on the way, I had lost eight kilos of weight. The reception centre in Helsinki was full, so we were directed to a hotel and then, soon afterwards, to Kirkkonummi. We were sleeping in a sports hall on the floor, but the others were playing sports there. The Iraqis stayed up late after midnight and the Somalis woke up early for their morning prayer, and in the evening they played sports. It was extremely difficult to rest. The atmosphere was tense, distressing; there were rumours circulating [about others], and I together with my friends began to look for accommodation outside of the camp.

Those without family members and friends, who had settled in Finland earlier, had few other options than to search for affordable rental flats with other new arrivals. The quest required social networks, guarantors, asking for tips and information from their compatriots in Finland and sending enquiries to social media sites frequented by Iraqi and Syrian asylum seekers in Finland. All our informants were well aware of the fact that without a residence permit and prior rental records in Finland, not to mention persons who could recommend them to the landlords, they were far from attractive clients in the Finnish housing market.

Most of our informants arrived with limited economic resources, and thus, had to make sure that they remained eligible for the monthly reception allowance of 263.78 euros granted by the Finnish reception system.¹⁰ To remain eligible, they needed documented proof of a permanent address outside of the camp.

From the point of view of the residents in the reception centres, moving out required not only contacts, but also the means to overcome several administrative hurdles. In order to move outside of the camp while awaiting an asylum decision, a person needed to provide proof of an official housing arrangement. The fortunate ones with family members and friends in Finland sought accommodation amongst them. Rami, a 23-year-old Syrian man, found a cheap accommodation at his friend's place:

After staying five months in the camp, it felt unbearable. I left the camp and stayed at the flat of a Syrian friend. He had already moved out from the refugee camp and had found a flat in Helsinki. I paid him 100 euros a month to stay there. But I did not report his address, because I feared that the social workers would find out and the consequences might be harsh.

Rami preferred not to list his friend's house as his official address because he feared that the social worker might consider the flat too small for hosting two people. In such situations, many asylum seekers preferred to contact middlemen, who provided them with an 'official address' in return for monthly compensation, but without the right to dwell in the flat. We will provide more detail on such 'key money' arrangements below.

The housing situation was considerably easier for those who arrived with spouses and children. They were usually directed almost immediately after arrival to the public housing market and were thus able to avoid much of the tensions of the reception centres. Despite the relative easiness of the process, finding comfortable temporary housing

¹⁰ The monthly reception allowance for single persons over 18 years of age is 263.78 euros in the event that the asylum seeker does not use the meal service at the reception facility. If meals are included, the allowance is reduced to 75.36 euros per month for a single person. Full information concerning the reception allowances of individuals, single parents, families and minors is available at <https://migri.fi/en/reception-allowance>

suitable for an entire family took time and considerable effort, as Abbas, a 42-year-old father of four children from Iraq, explained:

When we came to Finland, we were offered a room in a reception centre [in Kokkola] that had many separate buildings. After one week, they directed us to a small studio flat. This happened right after my wife had given birth to our [third] child. One and a half months after our arrival, as my wife was in the hospital, I demanded that the officials move us to a bigger flat. I said that I would not allow my wife to be transferred from the hospital unless we had obtained a larger flat. We needed two rooms and a living room. My wife was in her sixth month of pregnancy when we left Iraq. We stayed in that first flat from 23 December 2015 until June 2016. After that, the social workers moved us to the flat that we are now staying in. The social assistant at the camp had found us this place. I was also trying to find a suitable place from the Internet. I told her about the possible places, but she (the social assistant) said that the Finns do not trust refugees. I did not want to turn to unofficial housing brokers. The social assistant of the municipality in fact turned to the communal housing company and we made the tenancy contract in my name. Now, we pay 740 euros a month for it, but the entire sum is paid from the housing benefit we receive. They told us that our limit is 1,000 euros a month. I had written on Facebook in many Arabic sites that I'm looking for a flat in Kokkola. So many people responded to me from different areas, even Helsinki, and they offered us places. One of them had a flat in Vaasa and he required 200 euros for his service; he said that they would make the contract in my name, not his.

The news media reported that several hundred native Finns had offered free private housing for the newcomers.¹¹ However, the chaotic situation, with several hundred people arriving every day, left room for speculators and brokers in the housing field, as the excerpts above indicate. It was often the case that people paid up to 200 euros a month as 'key money' to persons who provided a document of housing without the actual right to live in the dwelling. In some cases, we heard from the Iraqi informants that the newcomers were met by unofficial brokers almost immediately after they had arrived in Helsinki. One of our Iraqi informants mentioned having been approached by a broker the moment his bus arrived in Helsinki.

After obtaining an address, the informants then resorted to other brokers (who were often themselves former refugees), who provided them with access to shared housing with other asylum seekers. This procedure was for many the only means to move away from the refugee reception centres. Most of our informants reported having paid 200 to 400 euros a month for just such a temporary housing arrangement. It was not exceptional that asylum seekers waiting for their asylum decision lived with ten other persons in a similar situation in a small flat.

¹¹ http://www.iltalehti.fi/uutiset/2015082820255822_uu.shtml

Jusif, a 28-year-old man from Iraq, described his struggle to move out of the reception centre in the following manner:

With the help an Iraqi man whom I knew, I managed to obtain an address for myself and two of my Iraqi friends. We each paid him 100 euros a month and he registered me and my friends as residents in his flat. So, we informed the manager of the apartment building that we live with this man. This meant that we could transfer our postal address from the reception centre. We were not allowed to live in this flat, though, but only in another flat.

We had been informed at the camp that we can only transfer our addresses and move out if the flat is considered big enough for three persons. We all obtained 267 euros a month as allowance money and paid 100 euros for the address. Therefore, we needed to turn to our families in Iraq for money for living expenses. The unofficial flat where we actually lived cost 400 euros. It was 22 square metres and did not have a toilet. There were three of us living in it. Then we soon found another flat that I shared with three others. It was crowded, too.

6.3. First Housing of the Resettled refugees

The assisted refugees of our sample (Eritreans and Syrians) encountered a very different reality immediately after arrival. In interview situations, they expressed openly their gratitude to their new host country, since they had been put up in fully furnished and well-equipped flats. Abu Abdo (45 years of age), who was repatriated as quota refugee from Syria, told us the following:

With my two children and wife, we flew from Amman to Helsinki and then to Kuopio. As soon as we arrived at the Kuopio airport, the social worker from the city's immigration service came to pick us up and transported us to our new flat. It was an incredible feeling; we all were happy because the journey was almost like a trip to heaven. As soon as we arrived at the new flat, we were surprised that it was furnished and big enough for all four of us. We even found food and drinks in the refrigerator. That was unbelievable.

Abou Khaled, a 39-year-old man from Syria, talked as well about his feelings of joy and gratitude upon arrival:

We flew to Finland from Amman [Jordan]. It took us the whole day to reach Vaasa. We had flown to Finland with dozens of Syrian families, some of whom were transferred to Vaasa, others to Turku, Joensuu and Helsinki. As we arrived at the Vaasa airport, the social workers and an interpreter came to pick us up. It was very good service. They drove us to

a district in Vaasa. The apartment, it was fancy. They even put food in the kitchen; it was great. Now when I look at the situation of other refugees, I feel sad.

The flat was big enough for me, my wife and my two children. Both children slept in one room, and there was another room for my wife and me. We also have a large living room. It is for guests. Imagine: the city bought a TV for us, furniture, everything we needed.

As we will see in the following section, many assisted refugees faced a bleak reality despite the care and help they received from social workers. Despite the comforts of the new flat, they felt uprooted and had very little say about the actual location where they were to live. Towns in central and northern Finland, such as Kuopio, Vaasa, Joensuu and Rovaniemi, were perceived as isolated and peripheral places. What further contributed to their feelings of alienation was the fact that they were unemployed and constantly on the 'receiving end', with few possibilities to offer compensation for the services they had received.

7. Pathways towards More Permanent Housing

As noted in the previous section, the feelings of insecurity and the social tensions in reception centres prompted the Iraqi and Syrian asylum seekers to search for housing elsewhere, even before they had received a decision on their asylum application from the Finnish Immigration Service, Migri. After receiving a positive asylum decision, our informants' pathways towards more permanent housing were largely determined by four key factors:

1. All the informants were aware of their disadvantageous economic and social position within the Finnish housing market, which restricted their access to preferable areas and housing choices. An overwhelming majority of the informants attempted to find housing on their own individual initiative (and in most cases in the capital region of Finland), but many soon realised that finding housing without the help of outside parties or individuals would prove to be very costly and difficult.
2. There was a shared understanding that turning to social assistants in the municipalities or to other sources of official help would enable them to find housing. However, they feared that official channels would lead them to settle in undesirable neighbourhoods and often in remote parts of Finland. Having said this, we must also highlight the fact that our interviewees also included persons (especially those who arrived with entire families) who were largely satisfied with the housing arrangements negotiated by the housing officials.
3. A majority of the informants realised that turning to unofficial housing brokers or other forms of unofficial help would most likely open pathways to housing in more desirable areas and locations. Nevertheless, they realised the fact that turning to the brokers and other providers of help requires considerable sums of money, social networking and time to build trust.
4. Among all informants, there was a very strong desire to live in the Helsinki capital region (the cities of Helsinki, Espoo and Vantaa) due to its cosmopolitan nature. Cosmopolitanism, rather than desire to gravitate towards fellow countrymen or other Muslims, were given as the prime reason for the preference to settle in the capital region. Many, in fact, expressed the desire to distance themselves from areas with high concentrations of compatriots or Muslim migrants.

In general, it can be said that the assisted Syrian and Eritrean refugees were more likely to accept the housing choices offered by the social assistants. Another central finding was that, among the three sample groups, the Iraqis were by far the most active in turning to unofficial housing brokers and other informal assistants, who, according to the interview data, were predominantly of Iraqi origin and members of older generations of Iraqi diasporans in Finland. On the other hand, the Iraqi informants were also highly aware of the fact that organised help (by housing officials, social assistants) would only rarely provide desirable housing outcomes for them. Given the relatively small size of the Syrian and Eritrean communities in Finland, the Syrian and Eritrean informants to a great degree lacked the key social networks that could lead them to trustworthy housing brokers. Thus, they displayed much greater readiness to accept the housing arrangements offered by the housing officials and social assistants. In the following subsection, we explore these themes in more detail.

7.1. Social Networking and Access to the Housing Market

During the course of the fieldwork period, we gained an understanding of the variety of unofficial services available in the housing market. Many of the interviews call attention to the vibrant unofficial sector largely operated by housing brokers, who, according to our informants, are primarily Arabic-speaking Iraqis. But members of other larger diasporic groups, such as Kurds from Iran and Iraq and Afghans, also operate in the market. They usually lead potential 'customers' to available flats, which are marketable because of a variety of reasons: in most cases, we heard that the availability of flats results from arrangements within extended migrant families with years of residence in Finland. For example, a larger migrant family that has gained access to several communal rental flats decides to redistribute its members in such a manner that one or more flats can be rented out. The 'owner' families may cover the rental costs via the housing benefit and receive extra income from the new 'tenant'. In other cases, the availability of the flat results from the aforementioned arrangement between friends. We also heard of cases involving a fraudulent divorce: a married couple divorces, but merely 'on paper', and thus both husband and wife gain access to new communal rental flats. They continue living in one flat and offer the other one for rent either directly or through a broker.

Haitham, a 32-year-old man from Syria, explained to us how he managed to find a flat in the Vesala district of Helsinki:

I have my contacts; I can pay a few hundred euros and find an apartment. I can tell you a secret: I have a Syrian friend who offered me his second apartment. His mother got an apartment for herself, but he wants to live with her. Basically, the second apartment is empty because his mother moved out and they live together now. The apartment is in the

Kontula district. He (the friend) asked for 500 euros, but I will bargain on the rent price. Hopefully, he will accept a lower offer. Let's see.

Ali, a 29-year-old man from Iraq, explained his dealings with a housing broker. The housing officials had requested that he move to Turku or to more remote locations in northern Finland. Through a broker, he found a flat in Lahti. However, as with most others we interviewed for this study, he prefers to live in the capital region of Helsinki.

I paid an Iraqi man called 'Ammar' to help me find an apartment. I paid him 250 euros. He, however, charged other people 400 euros. He gave me a discount because we have a mutual friend. I cannot afford to pay 2,000 euros to a middleman. So, 250 euros is not that large an amount. My friends from Yemen paid one man 2,100 euros to help them find an apartment in Myllypuro [Helsinki]. I had tried and tried, and finally through my friends I found a middleman in Helsinki who wanted 1,700 euros to arrange for me an apartment. I did not want to pay that much. The friends from Yemen asked their families in Yemen to send money [around 7,500 euros] via another Iraqi man who works in the Itäkeskus district of Helsinki. He charges 10 per cent of the amount of money [transferred through him]. Many Iraqis are doing the same as well. This is common and everybody knows about it.

As noted earlier, given the historical depth and size of the Iraqi diaspora in Finland, it is understandable why the Iraqi informants displayed greater readiness to turn to housing brokers and members of their social networks than did the Eritrean and Syrian informants.

It may perhaps come as a surprise that very few of the informants criticised the practices of the housing brokers and other unofficial assistants in the housing market. One reason for this may result from the fact that all our informants had been quite used to such a situation in their original home countries, where the size of the 'official' rental market is very small and usually limited to the tourism sector, especially over the major holidays, which witness the large-scale seasonal return of migrants residing in Europe. In all the major Middle Eastern and African cities, the services of unofficial housing brokers are usually an integral part of transactions in the rental market. One rare exception in this sense is Muhammad, a 29-year-old man of Palestinian origin who had lived in Syria. He criticised the brokers in the following manner:

I know that many of those who look for apartments without the [official] social assistants' help are forced to turn to expensive, unofficial brokers who charge a thousand euros to find an apartment. I know that there are many people who paid thousands of euros to middlemen in Helsinki just to find them an apartment. It is such a crazy thing; I always wonder why the Finnish police allow such things to happen? Why do they allow the middlemen to benefit from our poor circumstances? We came to Finland because we did not want corruption. That is insane. I moved to this country because it is a democratic, good

and safe country, where some people are able to understand our situations and, most importantly, there is no corruption; but with this kind of thing, the situation will get even worse.

7.2. Interactions with the Housing Officials

Most of the people we met during this study had resorted to their own initiatives to find housing rather than waiting for the social workers and housing officials to help them. By doing so, they could optimise their chances of finding suitable housing. They also trusted that they could achieve satisfactory outcomes individually more effectively than through 'official channels'. Many also felt that the housing officials had pushed them to settle permanently in the municipalities where their temporary housing unit — in most cases a reception centre — was located.

Aqeel, an Iraqi father who arrived in Finland with his family and spent several months at a reception centre in Orimattila, told us the following:

I did not want to live in Orimattila, I wanted to live in Lahti. The social workers told me that it is no longer permitted to live in a city other than the current municipality of residence.

Alaulddin, also from Iraq, had a very similar experience as Aqeel:

A social worker from the Red Cross told me that they would find an apartment for me as soon as I received my residence permit. I wanted to live in Vantaa, Espoo or Helsinki, but the social worker said that it is no longer allowed. The system had changed; people have to move to places close to the refugee camps where they are currently living. So, I had to accept that.

Those least ready to accept the housing offered by the different official assistants continued activating their social networks and posted announcements on Facebook or other social media, expecting the housing brokers to contact them directly. Facebook groups communicating in Arabic, most of which were established during the 2015 refugee flow, served as platforms for making contacts, especially for the Iraqis but also in some cases for Syrians. The Eritreans, however, to a much greater degree lacked such platforms for making contacts in Finland.

Interestingly, none of our Eritrean informants resorted to unofficial housing brokers. Without exception, they accepted the available housing offered them by the social assistants at the reception centres. Given their extremely traumatising travel histories, they were grateful for the material and social assistance they received in Finland. Musa's story is indicative of this:

I arrived in Finland in April, and at the end of September I received a residence permit. As soon as I received the permit, a social worker in the camp found an apartment for me in Hämeenlinna. I accepted it quickly and moved out the following day. The Red Cross helped me with furniture. I got a bed, refrigerator and some kitchen utensils and other household items. They gave me 1,000 euros to buy the rest. This amount was enough, and my neighbours gave me some furniture as well; they are friendly.

Suliman's pathway out of the reception centre was quite similar to that of Musa's:

I got a residence permit card and went to meet the Red Cross social worker on September 26, and she told she would arrange an apartment for me in Hämeenlinna. As I mentioned previously, I chose Hämeenlinna because I have Eritrean friends. I want to keep close relationships with them. We had a good time here in the centre before they got a residence permit and moved out. In fact, they recommended that I move close to them. I think they also want Eritreans to live close to them.

Especially among the Eritrean informants, there was a clear preference for staying in the areas where they first settled. However, the Syrian and in particular Iraqi informants showed a willingness to move to larger cities than the ones they had first settled in. These preferences can largely be explained by the fact that especially the Iraqis, and to certain degree the Syrians as well, are part of a larger Arabic-speaking diaspora that is located in the larger urban centres of southern and southwestern Finland. As noted earlier, they do not necessarily prefer to settle in areas where there are many Iraqis and Syrians, but rather look for a lively cosmopolitan urban setting where they can find 'like-minded' people, but not necessarily from their own language, ethnic or religious group.

8. Housing Outcomes

A positive housing career and successful homemaking require that a person manages to create and maintain meaningful everyday social contacts with neighbours and their immediate surroundings, but also with a wider transnational network of family and friends. During our fieldwork period, it became clear that nearly all of our informants were relatively or very satisfied with the material conditions of housing in Finland, but simultaneously unsatisfied with their overall homemaking process. Their everyday lives are marked by deeply divided feelings; they ponder questions of whether to stay in Finland or seek a better future elsewhere. They suffer from homesickness and they worry about the safety of family members and friends left behind. Many struggle with the bureaucratic and financial burdens concerning family reunification and the possibilities of finding work or a study place in Finland. Nevertheless, most interviewees said they are extremely grateful for the protection and the material and immaterial aid they have received from different functionaries in Finland. They are willing to fit in, to study the language and learn about the society, but uncertain as to whether they will ever be fully accepted as active members of Finnish society. Let us explore these themes in more detail through the life situations of our informants.

8.1. Between Gratitude and Uprootedness

As the civil war broke out in Syria, Abu Abdo (45 years of age), together with his family, fled to Jordan, where the social and material conditions soon proved to be extremely difficult for the family. In Jordan, the entire family was accepted as UNHCR quota refugees by the government of Finland. The family was transferred directly from Jordan to Kuopio and was granted a four-year temporary residence permit. While Abu Abdo, together with wife and children, is grateful for all the practical and material help he received from social assistants and immigration officials, he is deeply dissatisfied with his overall situation in Finland. In the interview setting, he did not hide his regret about moving to Finland, and at times he expressed a feeling of having 'been deceived' by his own high expectations for his new country of residence. Over the two years he had spent in Kuopio, he had not been able to create meaningful relations with the native population and his social contacts were entirely restricted to other Syrians in living Finland. He was growing more concerned about ever finding materially and mentally satisfying work in Kuopio, as he felt that the area had only the least attractive jobs to offer

refugees, such as cleaning. He wrestled between his wife's willingness to move back to Jordan and his own confusion: whether to move to another area in Finland in order to look for work and a more socially satisfying surrounding. He expressed the belief that his Syrian friends in Helsinki are much more satisfied with their lives there. At times, together with his wife, he seriously considers the option of moving back to Jordan.

Abu Abdo told us in the interview:

Here in Kuopio, there are no people. I see a few people, but they never say 'hi' to us or want to be our friends. I have friends in Helsinki, and they are happy there; they all recommend that I move to Helsinki. The weather is also another problem: we basically cannot handle it. We are tired and depressed here. (...) I am not sure what I am going to do. Things are not going well. I sometimes ask myself: Should I return to Jordan? My wife wants that, but I am not sure. I want my family to learn Finnish very well, which will help them succeed. It's also important that my children become active participants in Finnish society, but how can this happen if we decide to return to Jordan? I don't know. I know people are very nice and helpful, but that is not enough. They stay at home and don't interact with us.

Abu Khaled, another of our Syrian informants, also arrived in Finland together with his family as part of the Finnish refugee quota in 2015. The members of his family were granted a four-year temporary residence permit and they settled in Vaasa. Abu Khaled had worked as a driver in his native city in Syria, and he described his life prior to the Syrian conflict as materially and socially satisfying. He had fled to Jordan with his family with the intention of staying there a few months until the situation in his native city calmed down. However, the ongoing war made return impossible. Abu Khaled told us about his past and future plans:

We have been living in Vaasa for almost two years, and we have some Finnish friends. They are nice people. We have small chats whenever we meet, but never visit each other; you know, they have a different way of life. I respect that. My children speak Finnish and have many Finnish friends at school. One of the challenges I am experiencing here in Vaasa is that I am not used to such a life. Let me say that the culture is very different, and I don't know how to deal with that (...) There are many hardships that we face as refugees, starting from the challenge of adapting ourselves to the housing in this city and its climate. We have many things to complain about.

It should be noted that both Abu Khaled and Abu Abdo had arrived in Finland as quota refugees with their families. For the majority of our informants — as they arrived without their families or else left close family members behind — the family reunification process and constant worry about other members of the family are understandably additional hindrances in light of the quest for successful homemaking. Ahmad, an

18-year-old young man from Iraq, arrived in Finland with his mother, but he left his siblings and close relatives in Iraq. He described fleeing Iraq in order to escape the 'psychological death' that awaited him in his native country, saying that he could have followed in the footsteps of his two brothers and joined an armed militia so that 'no one could threaten me'. At the time of the interview, he had moved with his mother from the reception centre in Kirkkonummi to the small town of Kotka on the southern coast of Finland. Ahmed was very pleased with his new flat, only a twenty minute walk from his mother's apartment.

Ahmed shared with us his thoughts in the following manner:

In Finland, you can get a permanent residence permit, good housing, a job and take your family with you, they say. But after coming here, I think this is all fake; perhaps it is a business that the smugglers promote. I really don't know. First, I need my family here in Finland. I have my mother with me, but I have two brothers waiting there in Iraq. I don't care about the resident permit, but I need it because I need my family. When I go to the police and say I want [to be reunited with] my family, they say first you need to apply and wait. Wait until when? It is such a crazy system. I want to study at a university, but can I? I am not sure. And I need work. I need just to live in peace away from Iraqis and other bad people. I want my own privacy; I don't want anyone intervening in my life.

Haitham, a thirty-year-old father of three from Syria, arrived in Finland with his wife and children, but he had to leave his elderly mother and siblings in Daraa, in Syria. He felt burdened by the terrifying situation his mother and relatives were facing every day in Syria and his strong doubts that he could improve his overall situation in Finland:

I think about this question every day. I ask my wife this question every day. No clear answer. I go to language school with my wife. My children are at school. I am happy about that, but I have not yet started working; my life is dependent on the benefits I receive from Kela [the social insurance institution of Finland]. I am not really happy with that. Every day, I call my mother in Daraa, not to ask how she is, but to see if the rest of my family is still alive. I'm not sure if they will survive this war, when I see that so many have died. I spend my time thinking about my mother and other siblings; I cry and imagine myself living with them. I imagine touching them. I cry day and night. I want to rest. Please God, help me.

The everyday concerns of most of our informants, much like the concerns Haitham mentioned above, revolve around attempts to obtain visas and residence permits for the members of family they left behind. All our informants realise that it will be a long and costly process. Yousuf, a 28-year-old man from Iraq, told us about his attempts to reunite with his wife and infant child in Finland in the following manner:

Talking about family reunification ... now it is getting more and more difficult to obtain a visa from Iraq to Turkey. The Turkish embassies in Iraq are requesting bribes for the visas. The Finnish government issued a decision that the family reunification applications of Iraqis, Syrians and Lebanese will be processed in the Finnish embassy in Turkey, and this makes our situation [as Iraqis] very difficult. We are obliged to turn to the black market [to reach Turkey]. You must pay at least 650 US Dollars for a single entry visa [to get into Turkey]. For example, my wife went to Turkey for the first interview [at the Finnish embassy]. So, this was just the first meeting there. Now, she is waiting for an invitation for the second meeting there, and then there will be a third one. So, it will cost unbelievable sums of money. The application process costs 450 euros for an adult and 250 euros for a child. The documents will cost about 100 euros, and on top of that you have to pay for the airline tickets [Iraq to Turkey] and for accommodation in Turkey. It will require at least 11 000 US dollars in the case of my family.

Muhammed Khalid Kredi, 47, escaped with his eldest son from Syria. Due to the dangers of the journey and looking for shelter in Europe, he decided to leave his wife and other children waiting in Damascus. As with the other Syrians in our sample, he expressed gratitude to the Finnish authorities for providing him with a safe home and financial aid, but at the same time he had grown frustrated waiting for a reply from the Finnish authorities concerning his family reunification application. He described his experience in Finland as being very challenging. He, along with many others, had experienced great difficulties in his attempts to communicate with people. He told us that he was undergoing a 'cultural and religious clash with Finnish people':

Nothing is good here. I feel myself a stranger. I have no Finnish friends. Neighbours are always drunk; they talk to me only when they are drunk. That is scary. Even though I have quite a few Syrian friends here in Joensuu, I still sometimes feel strange and have a weird life. It's because I feel homesick, and this feeling becomes greater when I think about my family back home, of course [...] At this stage of my life, yes, I am disappointed with the Finnish government. They don't want to help me bring my family here; I don't understand their logic. They accepted my application, but then they don't care if I have a miserable life here or not. This is unfair. I paid a lot to reach Finland. [...] I left on my own, leaving my children and wife behind there in Damascus. Of course, I miss the real kind of contact I had with them. I miss their faces, voices, hugs, kisses, and their discussions. Sometimes, I feel very down when I think about what could be happening to them; at such moments, I try to get in touch with them — several times every day — and they tell me that they are afraid and want to get out of the country. In addition, another thing that is a major issue in our current life, that really brings me down, is waiting so long for family reunification with no information whatsoever on when everything will be processed.

8.2. Everyday Concerns

After obtaining their first more permanent housing, everyday reality is for most of our informants structured by studying the Finnish language, looking for future possibilities to work or study, and communicating with members of their social network of family and friends in the country of origin and in transnational spaces. While the interviewees were highly motivated to invest plenty of time and effort in learning the Finnish language, they were far from convinced that a willingness to integrate into Finnish society and mastering the language are enough. Many wondered out loud in the interview situations whether they will ever be accepted as active members of society. What furthers such feelings of uprootedness is the nearly complete lack of even superficial contacts with the native Finnish population.

Majed a 20-year-old man from Eritrea, received a four-year residence permit in Finland in the spring months of 2016. When preparing to move away from the reception centre in Kirkkonummi, he had a strong preference to move to the Helsinki area. However, the social assistant at the centre had found him a flat in Riihimäki, a town located 70 kilometres north of Helsinki, which Majed accepted. As we visited, Majed he told us:

At this moment, my life is going well. I meet my Eritrean friends on a daily basis. There are five other Eritreans living in the same neighbourhood, and we watch movies together, cook together, go out to the city centre together, and all in all we do different activities together. I have been attending Finnish language school since the beginning of November 2016, and I have been practicing it with my teacher and other people at the school. It is not an easy language, but I have a goal and I want to achieve it. I want to master the language and start working somewhere [...] As an uneducated person, I would accept any kind of job. Language and job are the keys to having a good life in Finland. I would also mention that I need to bring my wife here to Finland, and this can happen in only one of two ways: either by applying for family reunification or by saving money and paying smugglers so she can come to Finland. I have not yet had any kind of friendship with Finns. I will have when I learn the language. I am looking forward to it.

During the fieldwork process, Miron, a 22-year-old man from Eritrea whom we had interviewed at the reception centre in Kirkkonummi, found a suitable 47 square metre flat with the help of his brother, who had obtained a residence in Finland a few years earlier. As we visited him in his new home, he was seemingly satisfied with his housing situation. Shortly after moving to the new location, he started attending a Finnish language course in the neighbouring town of Espoo and commuted to classes by regional train each morning. At the interview, he was very eager to test his Finnish, which permitted him to have a basic conversation. However, regardless of his positive perception of his life situation, he was lacking relations with the people in his neighbourhood:

My social life in Finland is still zero. I cannot practice the Finnish language or communicate with Finns. I spend most of my time with Eritreans, with no chances to integrate or learn about Finnish life. I am disappointed, but I am patient as well. I go in the morning to language school. I study Finnish for five hours and then come back home. I already feel tired because the language course is not easy and also using transportation is tiring. I use two buses and the train to go and come back. But I am happy; I can cook myself, invite friends over and travel more often to Helsinki. I applied for family unification. I hope my wife will be able to come to Finland and we can live together. I am learning Finnish now. I would like to master it and then apply for university. I am not actually thinking to go back to Eritrea. I would like to stay in Finland and build a new life.

Abu Saqar, a 38-year-old man from Basra, Iraq, arrived in Finland with his wife and four children after a strenuous journey. The entire family received a positive asylum decision in June 2016. With the help of the municipal social worker, the family found a three-room apartment near Rovaniemi, in a suburb located some six kilometres from the city centre, where a number of other Iraqis have settled over the past two years. As we visited the family, Abu Saqar told us the following:

I turned to an Iraqi friend who has stayed for a while in Finland in order to find a suitable flat, but the social worker told us that we have to stay in Rovaniemi, saying that we have to accept the flat offered by her. This house is somewhat distant from the centre and the school. It takes about half an hour by bus. The winters are very cold in this area, and we'd prefer moving to Helsinki because there are more opportunities there. In this area, we don't interact — not with the other foreigners or with the Finns. I have no relation with the neighbours. When I greet them, they do not say anything in return. I started attending the language school, and it had a positive effect on my mood. I learn now many things and there are many refugees from different areas. I don't currently have any relations with the Finnish people, as I do not speak the language or English.

We wish to highlight in this report that the feelings of uprootedness and regret about coming to Finland do not apply in equal measure to all of our informants. The interviews indicated that homemaking in small towns is psychologically extremely challenging for those informants who come from large metropolitan cities. However, a limited number of Syrian and Iraqi informants and a considerably larger number of Eritreans have markedly more positive perceptions about their life situations, even in cases when they come from large cities and settle in small and relatively remote communities. As an example, the small town of Orimattila (16,000 inhabitants) appears, depending on the interviewee, both as a site plagued by racism and also as a warm and welcoming place.

Aqeel, a 34-year-old man from Baghdad, Iraq, arrived in Finland after a nineteen-day journey with his wife and two young daughters. After experiencing the tensions and outright hatred that prevailed between the Iraqi asylum claimants in the reception

centre in Helsinki, the family was transferred to another centre in Orimattila. There, Aqeel began making arrangements to move to the neighbouring city of Lahti with the help of an Iraqi middleman. However, after receiving a positive asylum decision, the social assistant in Orimattila informed him that the family would have to accept a flat located in Orimattila.

Despite the fact that Aqeel would have preferred to live in the larger town of Lahti, he felt fortunate for having helpful and welcoming neighbours in addition to a group of Arabic-speaking friends who eased his acclimatisation process to the small community of Orimattila:

People are friendly. They want to help. We have only one Finnish friend, but our neighbours are friendly. We also have friends from Iraq and other Arab countries. I never experience racism here in Orimattila, but bad guys will meet racist people. I am studying the Finnish language and my wife is as well, but independently. We will start going to the Finnish language course in January 2017. I concentrate now on the Finnish language, and I would like then to study at a university. After that, I'd like to start working somewhere. We also want to move to Lahti because we have no car and the bus takes 35 minutes to Lahti; the language course is there, as you know. We plan to move to Lahti after one year.

Alauddin, a 27-year-old man from Baghdad and a former medical student at the University of Baghdad, travelled to Finland without any family members. He described himself as the son of an academic family, liberal and atheist, who is 'for freedom of speech, freedom to choose one's own religion, sexual freedom and freedom to sell and buy alcohol'. He had chosen Finland as a country of destination because of 'its respect for human rights, peaceful people and rule of law'. After settling in Orimattila due to a similar pathway as in the case of Aqeel, he held largely positive views of the community. However, he had also personal experiences with racism and violence towards asylum seekers in the community, starting from the period when he was staying at the local reception centre. Alauddin told us:

After my arrival in Finland, exactly on February 2nd, 2016, I was transferred to Orimattila. In the new camp, the situation was not good. Racists were disturbing us. The camp was far away from the city centre. As life started to get more boring, I used different ways to keep myself optimistic. I tended to create a social life among other refugees from different countries because we had no activities at the camp. Rare outdoor activities, rare visits to the markets. It worked out. I had a good life there in the new camp. After seven months, I received news that my application had been accepted. Such news revived my life, my mind, my spirit. I needed it. I made it. A social worker from the Red Cross told me that they would find an apartment for me as soon as I received the residence permit. I wanted to live in Vantaa, Espoo or Helsinki, but the social worker said it is not allowed anymore. The system had changed; people have to live in places close to the refugee camps. So, I had to accept it.

People [in Orimattila] are good in general, but some are afraid of foreigners and another part hate foreigners. Well, I cannot really comment on this because I live too far away from the city centre. I spend most of my time at home, using social media and watching news. One of the reasons why I stay at home is that some locals have really violent attitudes towards us. It happened many times that Finns attacked the reception centre where I was living. Once, they tried to run me over with a car. Another incident occurred as I was leaving the store: some guys showed the middle finger to me from the car window; it was two weeks ago. Since then, I did not go out. In this town, I certainly don't go out after dark. Once, a policeman stopped us from going into the city centre — because it is dangerous, he said.

In general, life here is unstable; there is fear and hate in the eyes of people. But, of course, not all. Once, my neighbour invited me to visit her in her apartment; we have a good relationship. I left everything behind. I will start a new life here in Finland. I don't want to go back and live in that hell. My family like life in Finland; they are getting used to it. My wife wants to live in Finland; we are happy here. My child is happy but feels lonely sometimes. I have no idea how what Finnish life looks like. I need time, but I will integrate. I want to change their views about foreigners. It is a challenge. I trust in myself. I started from the building where I live. I made them say 'hi' to me after obeying the rules and smiling at them.

In short, the excerpts indicate that the homemaking processes vary from person to person to a great degree (Strang & Ager 2010; McMichael & Manderson 2004).

Our fieldwork material suggests that even a very small number of meaningful social relations and emotional exchanges — whether through friendship, dating, work or shared interests and hobbies with the local population — can considerably facilitate the homemaking process on the local level. The same applies to negative experiences. Incidents of disdain, rejection, racism and physical threat can severely distort the homemaking process.

An unanticipated feature of our interview material is the relatively positive visions and perceptions that characterise especially the Eritreans' experience of the places in which they now live, at least when compared with the general tone of the interviews carried out with the Iraqi and Syrian informants. As noted previously, all the individuals in our Eritrean sample survived traumatising experiences in their home country and especially along the various stages of their journey to the EU territory. All the Eritrean interviewees had arrived in Finland less than a year before the interview situations; thus, a sense of gratefulness and relief marked their experiences. The Syrian quota refugees in our sample especially had undergone equally traumatising experiences in their past and they talked about their first months in Finland in a very positive manner similar to the Eritreans. We should remind the reader that these Syrian individuals had stayed at the time of the interviews roughly two years in Finland and their perceptions concerning their lives in Finland were more nuanced and, at times, highly critical.

Whether a similar development over time occurs among our Eritrean interviewees will require a follow-up study.

8.3. Open Futures

The fact that our informants had in all but two cases received at least a temporary residence permit to stay in Finland by no means meant for them that they perceived their future in Finland as fixed. Nearly all of our informants expressed the belief that tomorrow is in many ways obscure and they feel that their minds are deeply divided between staying and leaving. As noted earlier, nearly all our informants invest several hours into studying the Finnish language, looking for job opportunities or the possibilities to study in Finland. At the same time, even their administrative status — being holders of a temporary residence permit — leaves the future open.

Rami, a 23-year-old man from Syria, voiced his current frustrations in the following manner:

I am learning Finnish, so I spend most of my days studying Finnish. But it seems that I am heading back to Syria, I cannot handle life here being a refugee. I feel myself a 10th-class citizen in this country. I need to live in accordance with rules and regulations set by the social [welfare] office. I am not used to that. This might happen in the near future, but at the moment I am focusing on the Finnish language. I am currently navigating within Finland's complex educational bureaucracy. In case I stay in this country for some reason, I would like to study at the university level. In the next few weeks, I will send my Syrian qualifications to the Finnish authorities for review: they will decide whether I need to sit for more exams or gain direct access to the university. It takes a long time. I have many friends who have similar experiences; they have been waiting for 5–6 months with no results. I have no real social life. I don't feel like I am integrated or will be integrated in the future. I have only Syrian and Iraqi friends. I spend my time with them; I cannot practice my Finnish. Even my neighbours never want to talk to me. I don't understand why.

What additionally burdens especially the informants who arrived with their entire families is the fact that the families are deeply divided with regard to the future. The children in most cases have acclimatised themselves to the new setting rapidly, gaining friends and improving their language skills. However, the parents have differing opinions as to whether to return to the home country or a neighbouring country or to move to another area in Finland. Furthermore, questions such as 'Will I be accepted and fit in to the society?' or 'Can I get my family members here?' or 'Will I always be on the receiving end in this society?' are all questions that appeared in a variety of forms in the interviews with our informants.

Simultaneously, what marks their experience is also the dream of moving to an ethnically diverse area, preferably the capital region of Finland, with a livelier and more welcoming atmosphere than can be found in the current setting. Given their current financial situation, our informants were well aware of the fact that moving to the capital region is financially impossible. Finding a suitable flat would require saving thousands of euros for transportation and moving furniture and household appliances. Furthermore, most of our informants realised that they would have to turn to costly housing brokers in order to find a suitable flat. Meeting all these costs while being largely dependent on the housing benefit would push them, even in the most fortunate cases, to peripheral suburban areas in the capital region. Umm Ahmad, a fifty-year-old Iraqi woman, told us in the interview about her feelings when she heard that she was being offered a flat in which to live in Kotka (54,000 inhabitants), the same town where her 19-year-old son was also being transferred:

I have now a problem with the social worker. She told me that I cannot move to Helsinki. I don't want to live in a town other than Helsinki. I am used to life in a big city. You know, I lived in Baghdad and Damascus; they both are big and everything is available. The social worker found an apartment in Kotka. This town is like hell. It is too far away; I cannot live there. I should pay somebody to rent me an apartment in Helsinki, that is the only choice for now. But you know, it will cost a lot. I am not sure if I can pay 2,000 euros only to find an apartment, and then pay 2,000 euros or more for the deposit. Oh God, help me please! [...] I live here in this small town, close to my son. We meet often. I go to his apartment to visit him and clean his clothes and also cook for him. I am looking for someone who could help me find an apartment in Helsinki, but it is very difficult. Can you help me?

As noted previously, the desire expressed by most of our informants to live in a multicultural setting does not necessarily mean that they want to be directly involved with other members of their 'own' group. On the contrary, nearly all our Iraqi interviewees, but also some of the Syrian interviewees, spoke openly against the forced or voluntary ethnic clustering of populations. They described their 'own' group as a context characterised by social tensions, and at times even open hostility, which is directly linked to the violent conflict in the country of origin. We also wish to speak out against forcing refugees and asylum seekers to settle amongst persons of their 'own' national, ethnic or religious group simply as a positive element that may enhance feelings of belonging and processes of homemaking and integration (Somerville & Steele 2002). The history of the diaspora plays a central role in this respect: given the fact that the Syrian and especially Eritrean diaspora in Finland lack historical depth and internal ethnic and political divisions, the Eritrean interviewees had experienced the diasporic community as less fragmented. Especially the Eritreans in our sample, as noted earlier, perceive everyone simply as a victim of state violence and all maintain firm social contacts with other members of the Eritrean diaspora.

However, the Iraqis, with nearly a decade of diasporic history in Finland, are aware of the contested discourses that divide the diaspora. 'You have to make sure that you have a *himaya*, [protector]', reported one Iraqi man in response to our enquiries on how to fit into a multicultural suburb that hosts great numbers of Iraqis with conflicting political views.

In the dozens of homes that we visited during the fieldwork period, we encountered both positive and negative homemaking processes. Many of the people we met, despite the difficulties they have encountered, manage to imbue their new dwellings with the meaning of home. Regardless of the surrounding economic constraints, they attempt to make their homes as cosy as possible with material objects, images and artefacts that communicate their multiple attachments with the past and an open-ended future. At the same time, finding harmonious relationships with the surrounding area, not to mention the larger communal and national context, appears to be a great challenge for nearly all of our interviewees.

In one Iraqi home we visited in the town of Rovaniemi, in northern Finland, these complex attachments were particularly pronounced and reveal much about what is currently underway in the thousands of homemaking processes experienced by the migrants of 2015 and 2016 in different parts of Finland.

With the 700 euro sum granted by the local authorities, the family had bought not only basic second-hand furniture, but also dozens of small statues, plastic flowers and images referring to the Middle East, which they had placed neatly on the bookshelf and by a wooden table next to the door leading out to the balcony. On the other hand, the entire front door of the refrigerator and the wall next to it were covered with most common everyday phrases and words in both Finnish and Arabic. Making the suburb feel like home had ultimately proved much more demanding for the family. As the four-year-old daughter of the family played in the backyard garden of the flat, she had picked a flower from a rose bush. The neighbour — an elderly woman, a Finnish native — saw the incident from her balcony and called the police. After considerable negotiation, the father of the Iraqi family apologised and said that he simply did not know that picking flowers was against the rules. The family decided to compensate for their daughter's error by offering an entire bucket of roses to the elderly lady. 'As I rang the doorbell, she grabbed the roses and slammed the door shut without uttering a word', the father of the family exclaimed.

9. Conclusion

During the course of this study, it became apparent that, for our Iraqi, Syrian and Eritrean interviewees, Finland represented the final destination in a long journey in search of shelter and security. While some had decided to travel to the far north of Europe before leaving their country of origin (or the neighbouring country where they had initially fled), others began to see Finland as the preferred destination after reaching the European continent. For the resettled UNHCR and EU refugees, the process of selection was reversed: they did not choose Finland — Finland selected them.

The accounts of most of our interlocutors with an asylum seeker background indicated that the decision-making process concerning the target country was made in a discursive space (including social media landscapes), where people fleeing violence and turmoil shared information, disinformation and rumours concerning the social and political conditions and asylum policies in the target countries. The information concerning the Finnish asylum system, the country's level of social and political stability, and good public education system made Finland seem like an attractive choice for many.

Our interlocutors had encountered various forms of violence, persecution and threatening situations in their countries of origin and on the way to Finland. Moreover, their administrative status upon entering Finland, as noted, varied greatly (asylum seekers, resettled UNHCR refugees, resettled EU refugees). Despite these differences, there are shared signposts that mark their housing pathways in Finland.

Given their experiences of vulnerability and instability, it is not difficult to understand why our interlocutors' first preoccupation of upon arrival in Finland was to ensure their personal and their family's survival in the new setting. As our data suggests, the traumatic experiences of the past do not end upon arrival in Finland: the dynamics of violent conflict at home and worry about those left behind are constantly present in their everyday lives. This is the starting point for our informants' housing pathways in Finland.

Those interviewees who were placed in reception centres or temporary housing units for asylum seekers invested plenty of energy in finding a way to leave those premises, as they were largely perceived as uninviting and at times hostile spaces reflecting the political climate at home. However, due to weak economic and social resources, strikingly many of our interlocutors had no other choice but to turn to an unofficial brokers in order to find a more satisfactory first place to live. Due to their vulnerable position, many fell victim to various forms of exploitation; they had to pay 'key money' to housing brokers who provided an official address without the possibility of actual room and board on the premises, and they often they ended up in overcrowded shared apartments inhabited by other asylum seekers.

Receiving a positive asylum decision marked the beginning of the second stretch in the housing pathways of our informants. Being in great need of peace (and privacy), in many cases they accepted accommodation that was not attractive to other 'customers' in the Finnish housing market. The interviewees indicated a widely shared distrust towards housing officials and social workers, who were perceived as pushing the asylum seekers to accept their first housing in the communities where they had first settled. Especially the informants who were accommodated in shared flats and reception centres in small and more remote communities began searching for contacts and information that could pave their way to more satisfactory housing outcomes. All participants in this study, regardless of their administrative status, desired to settle in the capital region of Finland, but once again, due to a lack of social and economic resources, it was essential for them to turn to the unofficial housing market and to the brokers operating within this field in order to optimise their housing outcomes.

Our data indicates that especially among Iraqis, it is common that finding the first 'official' home results from a wide variety of unofficial social arrangements. First, finding a suitable flat requires paying considerable sums of money, up to 2,000 euros, to brokers who have information concerning available flats. Second, the availability of flats results from arrangements within extended migrant families or groups of friends with years of residence in Finland. Families or groups of friends with access to several rental flats may redistribute their members and leave one flat fully or partly available for rent. The 'owners' may cover the rental costs via the housing benefit and receive extra income from the new 'tenant'. The availability of flats may just as well result from a fraudulent 'divorce', as a married couple separates merely 'on paper' and thus gains access to an additional (communal) rental flat. The couple then continues living in one flat, receives a housing benefit for both, and offers the other for rent either directly or through a broker.

As this study points out, numerous interviewees — especially Iraqis but to a degree also Syrians — are highly conscious of the more-or-less pronounced social boundary lines and tensions that cut across their diasporic national 'groupings'. Thus, settling within the same immediate location as one's national group by no means simply eases homemaking and enhances positive integration within the receiving society. All our informants reportedly share the desire to live in cosmopolitan, multicultural and lively settings and not within isolated and ethnicised contexts.

Regardless of the interviewees' arrival status, homemaking in Finland appears to be particularly challenging for those individuals whose households have been divided between several countries and those who have lived for long periods in hiding, in refugee camps, in transit locations or in captivity. While our data speaks of widely shared feelings of uprootedness and even regret about coming to Finland, these perceptions do not apply to all of our informants. Homemaking in small towns appears to be particularly challenging for those informants who moved to Finland from large metropolitan cities. Having said this, we must also note that some Syrian and Iraqi informants and a

considerably larger number of Eritreans have more positive perceptions about their life situations, even in cases when they come from large cities and have settled in small and relatively remote communities. Our data indicates the importance of social bonding in the process of homemaking. Even a limited number of social relations and emotional exchanges with the local population can considerably pave homemaking pathways on the local level. The same applies to negative experiences. Incidents of disdain, rejection, racism and physical threat can severely distort the homemaking process.

Appendix:

List of Informants (pseudonyms)

Eritreans

Majed, 20: from Erota, secondary school level of education, married, but travelled alone.

Miron, 22: from Asmara, high school, married, but travelled with friends.

Musa, 37: from Asmara, married, but travelled with friends, primary school level of education.

Osman, 19: from Asmara, single, primary school level of education, travelled with friends.

Samarah, 18: from Asmara, married, but travelled with friends, primary school level of education.

Suliman, 29: from Ghinda (small village), married, but travelled with friends, primary school level of education.

Iraqis

Abbas, 40: from Baghdad, holds university degree, married, travelled with his family.

Abdulrazzaq, 23: from Baghdad, single, travelled with his brother and friends, university student.

Abu Saqar, 38: from Basra, primary school level of education, married, travelled with his family.

Abu Sara, 26: from Babel, university student, single, travelled alone.

Adam, 25: from Baghdad, single, university student, came alone.

Ahmed, 19: from Baghdad (lived in Damascus), single, came with his mother, high school.

Alaulddin: from Baghdad, single, came alone, holds university degree.

Ali: from Baghdad, single, came alone, primary school level of education.

Aqeel, 44: from Samarra, married and came with his family, university degree.

Gazwan, 28: from Mosul, single, came with his brother, holds university degree.

Hanin, 26: from Baghdad, single, travelled with her sister, university degree.

Husein: from Mosul, single, came alone, holds university degree.

Hussein Ali, 27: from Baghdad, single, travelled with his friends, university degree.

Iskander, 28: from Baber, single, holds university degree, travelled with his friends.

Kazem, 43: from Baghdad, married, high school, travelled with his family.

Saher, 30: from Baghdad, single, travelled with her sister.

Talal, 22: from Mosul, 2nd year at university, single, travelled alone.

Um Mohammed, 50: from Baghdad (lived in Damascus), married and came with her son, primary school level of education.

Yasin and Alaa, 24: from Bagdad, came together, both single, high school.

Yousif, 28: from Babel, married, came with his friend, holds university degree.

Syrians

Abo Abdo, 45: from Homs, married, high school, travelled with his family.

Abo Khaled, 39: from Homs, married, high school, travelled with his family.

Haitham, 30: from Daraa, married, with three children, high school, travelled alone.

Maher, 27: from Aleppo, single (his brother died during the journey), primary school level of education.

Muhammed Khaled Kredi, 47: from Damascus, married, travelled with his son, primary school level of education.

Rami, 23: from Aleppo, single, high school, travelled alone.

Mohammed, 35: from Damascus, university graduate, married, but travelled alone.

Abdo, 22: from Damascus, primary school level of education, single, travelled alone.

Palestinian-Syrian

Mohammed, 29: from Damascus, married, but travelled alone, primary school level of education.

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Resettled refugees and asylum seekers in the Finnish housing market

Iraqi, Syrian and Eritrean experiences

The fall of 2015 and the spring months of 2016 witnessed a major increase in the number of asylum seekers in Finland. With more than 30,000 new arrivals Finland became one of the main net receivers of asylum seekers relative to its population size in Europe and the national reception system was put under severe stress.

Housing is one of the key social issues for asylum seekers and refugees, but also for the receiving society in general. However, the question what goes on at the level of everyday reality as new asylum seekers enter the housing market remains largely unanswered in the Finnish context.

Based on in depth interviews with nearly forty asylum seekers from Iraq, Syria and Eritrea this report sheds light on their experiences of arrival in Finland, living conditions in asylum reception facilities and finally it follows the steps they take in order to find long term housing.



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