



Integration and Capital

A Study of Young Syrians' Ability to Integrate in Denmark

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Abstract

The objective of this thesis is to study the process of integration that refugees go through in Denmark, and the determinants that constitute their prerequisites for achieving successful integration. This is done by conducting participant observation at Venligboerne's language café in Helsingør, where refugees and Danish volunteers meet once a week to speak Danish, as well as life-history interviews with three participants at the café, who represent three stages of the integration process.

Using a phenomenological research method, the experiences and perceptions of the informants from their own point of view are examined. An abductive approach is utilized, and the observations and interviews give rise to the selection of a theoretical framework in the form of Ager and Strang's framework on integration, as well as Putnam and Bourdieu's work on capital. Applying this framework to the empirical data, allows for an exploration of the different dimensions of the integration process in relation to the forms of capital and their components – economic capital, cultural capital, and social capital including bonding and bridging social capital – while placing these in the context of the Danish notion of integration based on the ideology of the welfare state.

The thesis concludes that the three forms of capital are accumulated over time, and that the sum of capital that refugees bring with them from their home country and develop in their country of settlement, plays an important role in their ability to integrate. Moreover, their priorities in relation to integration and for their future vary from that of the standpoint of the Danish integration policy. Employment and education are seen as stepping-stones and not end goals – the end goal becoming the dream of a “good life”.

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Introduction

Denmark's first integration law was initiated by the Social Democratic government in 1999, and introduced mandatory placement of refugees in municipalities for three years, mandatory intensive Danish language and culture courses, and "introductory benefits" similar, though slightly lower, to social welfare benefits. The mandatory placement policy was seen as a way to secure the dispersion of refugees across the country, as well as to promote integration into Danish society by avoiding the creation of "ghettos" (Larsen 2011: 334). In 2001, the Conservative Liberal government reduced the introductory benefits to 60% of ordinary welfare benefits, and if refugees moved away from the municipality they had been placed in within the introductory three-year period, they would lose their benefits all together. They argued that the low benefits were necessary in order to motivate refugees to pursue employment (Larsen 2011: 334).

The onset of the so-called "refugee crisis" brought thousands of asylum seekers to Denmark and the rest of Europe. In 2015, 10.900 refugees were granted asylum in Denmark, and 8.100 received family reunification (Kvist 2016: 1). With the intention to reduce the number of asylum seekers, as well as to improve integration of refugees, the Liberal minority government has introduced a series of policy changes since September 2015. In 2015, the new and much lower "integration benefit" replaced the previous introductory benefit for all persons who have not been in Denmark for at least seven of the last eight years. The government introduced a 34-proposal asylum package, which was adopted by a parliamentary majority. The package includes more relaxed requirements for refugee housing, confiscation of valuables from asylum seekers, shorter residence permits, and a three-year waiting period before family reunification cases can be opened (Kvist 2016: 1). In February 2016, the government started a "three-party negotiation" with trade unions and employers' associations, with the aim to improve refugees' labour market integration. The goal of the Danish integration policy hereby shifted, from mandatory introductory classes on language and culture before employment, to a focus on securing employment sooner in a workplace where refugees would be able to learn these things in practice (Kvist 2016: 2).

The two main components of the Danish integration law, the mandatory placement policy and integration benefits, have the intention of steering refugees in the direction of becoming contributing members of Danish society, which is a central core value in the Scandinavian welfare states. The Danish welfare state, along with its Scandinavian neighbours, is based on the Universalist Nordic Model, in which services are provided through national institutions integrated into the public sector and funded largely by general taxation (Olwig 2011: 180). The right to these services is based on citizenship or residency, which means that the integration of immigrants and refugees can be defined as a collective good, and the financial burden of poor integration is substantial (Nannestad *et al.* 2008: 607). Unlike its Swedish neighbours, Denmark seems to have rejected the idea of multiculturalism and has become increasingly assimilistic over recent decades. There has been an increasing tendency to portray immigrants as a threat against “Danishness” in an otherwise homogenous society, and the introduction of the low integration benefits can hereby be seen as a selective incentive for immigrants to become fully immersed in society through integration. This means that the notion of integration in the Danish welfare state is not only a term measuring levels of social incorporation against parameters such as employment and education, but also an emic term revolved around the ability to conform to cultural values in a homogenous society (Olwig 2011: 180).

Problem Area

While the official focus of the Danish integration policy is highly focused on employment and language, the overall objective of integrating refugees in the context of the Danish welfare state, is for them to become incorporated members of a cohesive society, defined by cultural and political standards. Although there are political and academic discrepancies around the perception of integration in the Danish public debate, the focus seems to be on the outcome of becoming socially, economically and politically contributing members of society. The process through which this becomes possible, however, and the facilitators which influence this process, do not seem to be as heavily discussed, and public debate lacks the perspective on integration from refugees themselves.

With a focus on a two-way approach to integration, through cooperation between refugees and local Danes, this thesis seeks to examine the process of integration as it takes place in a social setting, in order to study a microcosm of the large subject of integration, and to examine how refugees themselves navigate in the complex process of integration on a daily basis. This will be done using the case study of a local initiative in Helsingør, in which refugees and Danish volunteers meet once a week to speak Danish. The observations made at the language café are supported by three in-depth interviews with participants from the café.

Having conducted this research, I noticed a pattern concerning the background and resources of refugees, and the effect of these on their experiences with integration. I therefore hypothesized that the sum of capital possessed by refugees is highly influential on their ability to integrate. Moreover, precisely the concept of integration became another focal point in my research and my hypothesis.

Combined with the pattern of the sum of capital as mentioned above, another pattern that started to emerge was the difference between the criteria of “success” in integration, from the perspective of policymakers and the official policies, in relation to the perspectives of many refugees. Based on this notion and my empirical data, I started working from a hypothesis that, not only is the capital of refugees highly determining to the level of integration, but also their own indicators of successful integration are vastly different to those, which they are required to meet through various stages of the process of integration.

Ager and Strang (2004) present a framework of the *Indicators of Integration* in which they propose an operational definition of integration that “reflects commonalities in perceptions about what constitutes ‘successful’ integration in a range of relevant stakeholders” (Ager & Strang 2004: 166). This framework, presented on page 26, can be used to analyse the dimensions of integration emphasized by refugees themselves throughout the research, and determine the ability with which the informants have been able to navigate in these dimensions in their overall integration process. Along with a theoretical foundation on the concept of capital by Bourdieu and Putnam, the ability with which the informants have been able to go through the integration process

in Denmark based on the capital they possess, the framework of Ager and Strang was used to analyze the phenomenon of the language café.

This leads me to the following problem formulation.

Problem Formulation

Using the case study of Venligboerne's language café in Helsingør, how does the capital of young refugees affect their ability to integrate, and how do their priorities in the integration process differ from official policies?

Research Questions

- How do the economic capital and socioeconomic backgrounds of refugees influence their priorities and their current integration process in Denmark?
- How does social capital, in the form of bonding and bridging, play a role in integration?
- In what way is cultural capital important in relation to integration?
- Which social processes of integration take place at the language café, and how are these reflected using the theories of Bourdieu and Putnam?

Methods

This thesis is a qualitative explorative study, which, based on field observations and interviews, seeks to discuss the ability of young refugees to integrate based on an analysis of their resources. Using an *abductive approach*, empirical data was initially collected through participant observations at the language café. These observations were followed by in-depth interviews with three participants, whom I considered particularly interesting as discussed below. This provided me with a general understanding of the phenomena of the case. From this understanding I was able to select a theoretical framework, which supported my findings and could be used to account for the themes that were extracted from the interviews. Correspondingly: “abduction starts with consideration of facts, that is, particular observations. These observations then give rise to a hypothesis which relates them to some other fact or rule which will account for them. This involves correlating and integrating the facts into a more general description, that is, relating them to a wider context. [...] For any intriguing observation there is an infinite set of possible explanations. [...] Abduction is not just choosing *any* hypothesis, but selecting one as more plausible than the other” (Svennevig 2001: 1-2).

Based on an *interpretivist* research strategy, the thesis will incorporate the tradition of *phenomenology*, which denotes that social reality has meaning for human beings and that there is meaning to human action (Bryman 2008: 16). A phenomenological method highlights the experiences and perceptions of individuals from their own point of view, and can hereby be used to challenge normative or structural assumptions. Although I may have had a preconceived idea about the integration process of young refugees and of the phenomena taking place at the language café, the phenomenological approach was used to contain my own assumptions so as to allow myself to explore the subjective perspective of the interviewees. Adding an interpretivist dimension to phenomenological research, further allowed me to support or challenge policy and action, meaning that the theoretical policy of integration can be held against the perceptions of individuals (Lester 1999: 1).

Participant Observation

Participant observation is a qualitative research method with the objective to build familiarity with a group and their activities and practices, through direct involvement with the group over a period of time. Barbara Kawulich (2005) defines it as “the process enabling researchers to learn about the activities of the people under study in the natural setting through observing and participating in those activities. [...] Observations enable the researcher to describe existing situations using the five senses, providing a “written photograph” of the situation under study” (Kawulich 2005). Participant observation requires researchers to be open-minded and nonjudgmental when mixing with the group, however, it is impossible to avoid personal bias, as the outcome of the observations are a direct product of the perceptions of the researcher who is immersed in the specific context. The method allows for observations, which are not possible to obtain through interviews and other methods, such as expressions of feelings, nonverbal actions and reactions, communication patterns between participants, and an overall understanding of characteristics of the group (Kawulich 2005). When conducting this form of research, it is important to predetermine the setting of the study, the representativeness of the participants of the group, and the availability of data at the chosen setting. These will be discussed in the Case Study chapter.

Kawulich presents the four stances available to the researcher in participant observation research introduced by Gold (1958): 1) the complete participant – the researcher is a member of the group under observation, but does not inform the group of the research so as to avoid disturbing normal activity; 2) the participant as observer – the researcher is a member of the group, but participants are aware of the research taking place; 3) the observer as participant – the researcher participates in the activities of the group, but the participants are aware of the research and the main objective is to observe; 4) the complete observer – the researcher only observes, and the research is concealed from the group (Kawulich 2005). According to Kawulich, the stance with the most ethical approach to observation is the observer as participant, as the researcher’s objectives are known to all members of the group, while the emphasis is on collecting data, rather than participating in activities. This is the stance

I have taken in my observations at the language café. The participants of the café were aware of the fact that I was there to conduct research, and although I participated in several conversations, my main concern was to observe.

Interviews

Life history research is used in various disciplines as a method for capturing people's own perceptions of their lives. Robert Atkinson (2002) defines it as a qualitative research method for gathering information on the subjective essence of an individual's entire life. In his own research, he has been "interested in having the person tell his or her story from the vantage point that allows the individual to see his or her life as a whole, to see it subjectively across time. [...] This is what constitutes the individual's reality of his or her world. Storytellers are the first interpreters of the stories they tell. It is through their construction of their realities, and the stories they tell about those realities, that we, as researchers, learn what we want from them" (Atkinson 2002: 124). According to Goodson and Sikes (2001), life history research is not merely an individual's account of their life, but a way for the researcher to explore the patterns of different life stories and how they are related to their political, social and historical context. This perspective perceives the life history as a constructive collaboration between the researcher and the interviewee, and highlights the story as a situational construction during the interview rather than the entire subjective truth. However, one of the strengths of life history interviews is the notion of holism. Giving an individual the chance to tell his or her own story, lives are seen as a whole. In reality, lives are contextual and the private and public cannot be separated, and this method allows for it to be understood this way (Goodson and Sikes 2001: 7).

The life history interview is conducted using a series of guiding questions. However, the overall objective for this type of interview is to let the interviewee tell the story on their own terms, so the questions should merely be used as a tool in case the story does not flow. Goodson (2005) argues that the best life history interviews are conducted with as few interruptions from the researcher as possible: "in life history work, the aim is to get the subject talking and above all to listen closely. [...] This is

not to say that a well-timed question will not help - it often will - but the point is to help the life storyteller to tell their story, not to get them to help you tell your story or answer your questions” (Goodson 2005). As shown by the length of the interviews, two of the participants did not talk as much as the third. Because it was difficult for Kareem and Moaz to talk freely, partly due to language barriers as discussed below, I had to use more questions to keep the flow of the conversation.

The interview guide (Appendix A) should therefore be seen as a suggestion for how the interviews might take shape, but the questions may not be asked, depending on how the storyteller decides to tell his story. In writing these questions, I have been careful not to use too many objective concepts, so as to not steer the interviewees in a certain direction, as the aim of this form of interview is to obtain the individual’s own story.

Selection of Informants

The three informants presented below were selected based on the observations made during the initial research phase. The purpose of the selection was not to be representative, as the participant observations made in the initial research covers the entire group, but it was made with the intention to get a deeper understanding of young people who are in different stages of the integration process. I have chosen these specific informants based on how far along they are in the “integration package” that newly arrived refugees go through in Denmark – i.e. attending a specialized language school in a specific municipality while on integration benefits. One of the informants is still enrolled in this school, while one has recently “graduated” and has started in a Danish high school, and the last decided to leave the school early to attend a different programme of his own choice. While making this selection, I have decided to focus on young refugees from Syria, so as to be able to compare their cultural backgrounds, which would not have been as possible if they were from different countries. It is not intentional that all three informants are male, but merely an outcome of the fact that most attendees at the language café are either male or have recently arrive din Denmark. I have hereby selected three young men who I believe to represent three stages of integration:

- 1) Kareem is 22 years old and from Homs, Syria. He has been in Denmark for three years and lives with his brother and cousin. He is studying Danish level 2 at the language school and has a part-time job. Kareem is still enrolled in the introductory Danish language and culture classes, but no longer receives integration benefits.
- 2) Moaz is 20 years old and from Hama, Syria. He has been in Denmark for three years and lives with his cousins. He is waiting for his parents and siblings to arrive, as he was recently granted family reunification with them. He has recently started high school and has a part-time job. Moaz has completed his introductory Danish and culture classes, and is no longer receiving integration benefits.
- 3) Saleh is 21 years old and from Aleppo, Syria. He has been in Denmark for two and a half years and lives on his own. He has no family in Denmark. He is enrolled in a Danish high school, from which he graduates next summer, and has three part-time jobs. Saleh decided to leave his introductory language and culture class, as he was unhappy with the conditions, and attended a different language school. He does not receive integration benefits.

The transcripts of the interviews can be found in Appendix B, C and D. Following the interview process, the transcriptions were thoroughly reread and, combined with the general observations made at the language café, the theoretical framework was chosen. Having established a foundation for the analysis, themes in the form presented in the Theory chapter, were extracted from the transcriptions, and can be seen as the highlighted parts.

Limitations and Ethics

Before initiating my research at the language café, I contacted one of the administrators of Venligboerne's Facebook group, and asked if I was able to conduct my research. She suggested that I write a public post in their group, so all attendees were aware of my research. I did as she suggested, and received very positive feedback. All members of the café were therefore aware of the objective of my presence. I attended the language café once a week over a period of two months, where I met several different people. I did not inform anyone directly at the café of

what I was researching, as I assumed most people had seen my Facebook post. To account for this lack of direct consent, I have decided to anonymize my observations from the language café. No names will be used in that part of the thesis.

Consent was necessary for the interviews, however, and I made sure that my informants were given very clear information about the purpose of the interviews and the objectives of the thesis, although I was not able to give a full description of the direction of the thesis due to the process using the abductive approach. The three informants agreed to state their full names in the interviews, but to comply with ethical guidelines only their first names will be used.

According to Kawulich, “participant observation is conducted by a biased human who serves as the instrument for data collection; the researcher must understand how his/her gender, sexuality, ethnicity, class, and theoretical approach may affect observation, analysis, and interpretation” (Kawulich 2005). Although I have attempted to be objective in my observations, my personal background and previous experiences are bound to affect the way I view other people. By using life history interviews, I have avoided to impose my own views on my informants.

Language

Another important factor to mention is language. The majority of people at the language café are from Denmark, Syria and Eritrea, and the languages spoken are Danish, English, Arabic, Kurdish and Tigrinya. I speak Danish, English and some Arabic, and was therefore able to observe on conversations taking place in these languages, while I did not understand conversations taking place in Kurdish or Tigrinya. A portion of the events taking place at the language café was therefore not included in the research. The interviews with Saleh and Moaz took place in Danish. Although they are both very good in Danish, it is of course their second language, and there is an inevitable barrier. The interview with Kareem took place in Danish and Arabic, as Kareem is not as strong in Danish and is able to express himself better in Arabic. This means that there was a language barrier for both of us as Arabic is not my first language. All transcripts have been translated into English, and in order to account for these different language skills, I have chosen to correct errors in their

speech, so as to make the transcripts appear more fluent. According to Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) the publication of incoherent literal transcripts with repetitions and grammatical mistakes can lead to an unethical stigmatisation of a certain group or nationality, and I have hereby avoided this (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009: 210). The structure of the interview, as seen in the interview guide in Appendix A, means that the informants were asked to touch upon periods of their lives that may have been traumatic. I asked very direct questions about the war, their escape and their feelings concerning these periods. All three participants were able to answer the questions very honestly, but were clearly emotionally affected by talking about these sensitive topics. This was seen in the form of long pauses, nervous laughter, and the need to take breaks. I have also chosen not to include these parts so as to avoid an unethical presentation of my informants. The period of the war and their escapes, however, are not used in the analysis.

Secondary Empirical Sources

Although the majority of the research used in this thesis is based on my personal observations at the language café, as presented below, as well as the three interviews attached in the Appendix, a number of secondary sources have also been used to back up the analysis. They consist of anthropological and sociological studies related to integration and social capital, and are: Birgitte Romme Larsen's *Becoming Part of Welfare Scandinavia* (2011), Nannestad *et al.*'s *Bridge Over Troubled Water* (2008), Nee and Sanders' *Understanding the Diversity of Immigrant Incorporation* (2001), and Karen Fog Olwig's *Integration: Migrants and Refugees Between Scandinavian Welfare Societies and Family Relations* (2011).

Case Study: The Language Café

Using a case study design has allowed me to gain insight into a group of people in a specific context. Studying the integration of refugees in Denmark is a very wide research field, which is why I have decided to choose this particular design, as it has given me the opportunity to witness the social aspects of integration as it occurs in a natural setting. As there are many types of initiatives set up by volunteers, larger organisations and state institutions with the aim to create social relationships between Danish people and refugees, such as the language café, I believe this to be a *representative case*, which is suitable to answer my research questions (Bryman 2008: 56). To provide an overview of the case, the setting of the café, the contextual aspects of the participants and their respective relationships will now be discussed.

The Space of the Room

The language café in Helsingør was established by Venligboerne in September 2015, with the intention to give refugees a space to practice their Danish speaking skills, get help with their homework and establish social relationships with each other and with the Danish volunteers.

It takes place in a house, which has been donated by Helsingør municipality once a week, every Wednesday from four pm to six pm. It consists of one large room with tables and chairs arranged in smaller groups. At one end of the room there is a table with coffee and tea, biscuits and fruit, or what the volunteers in charge on the particular day have decided to bring. There is also a donation box, where volunteers are expected to contribute to buying these supplies. The large room has access to a garden, where participants go out to smoke, the children play, or, on nice days, conversations move outside. Next door there is a smaller room, where participants can have private meetings or study in a more quiet setting. There are three volunteers in charge of the language café, and they take turns to open and set up.

The Participants

The nature of Venligboerne (or “The Friendly Inhabitants” in English) as a movement is not of importance in this thesis. It is relevant to mention, however, that Venligboerne centres on the notion that all members are equal, and their objective is to create friendships between people of Danish and refugee backgrounds. They exist all over Denmark, and have several initiatives, including the language café, in Helsingør. On their Facebook page they write: “Venligboerne is a group of volunteers who consider refugees sources of inspiration and knowledge. We aim to build bridges between people by use of kindness. We are not a political organization and have but one fundamental ambition: to bring out the best in each of us” (Venligboerne Helsingør 2016). This means that, although there are volunteers at the language café, and there is someone in charge of organizing it, everyone is there on the same terms, all are considered equal participants and everyone is welcome regardless of nationality, race, gender, etc. Having said this, however, it is clear from my observations that there are several distinctive groups within the participants.

First of all, there are the Danish volunteers. They are predominantly women – over the two months of my research, I encountered three different Danish men, two of whom were husbands of female volunteers. The majority of them are over the age of 65 and are retired. In terms of employment backgrounds, they are a very varied group including artists, teachers, lawyers and journalists. There are widows, divorcés, singles and newlyweds, and some have both children and grandchildren who sometimes come along. What they all have in common is that they are a part of the Venligbo movement in Helsingør, and they are there because they want to help refugees.

Second of all, the refugee participants consist of several different groups. Most of them are from Syria or Eritrea, but there are also people from Afghanistan, Iraq and Iran. Some have been in Denmark for years, while others have just arrived. Some have arrived on their own, while others have travelled together, and some are here due to family reunification. The ages range from new-borns to pensioners. The refugees who use the language café are generally the ones who have a wish to learn the language and to meet Danish people. Some are there every single week, while some

only come once in a while. Volunteers have told me that there used to be a large majority of men, but since many have now been able to bring their families to Denmark, more women and children are participating. What they all have in common is that they have been granted refugee status in Denmark, and have hereby fled from conflict zones and have lived through more or less traumatic events, and they have started new lives in Denmark, which they all attempt to navigate in.

The Relationships

During my observations I have noticed several interesting aspects regarding the relationships between participants. When a group of people meet regularly over a period of time, relationships are bound to be formed, and it is clear that most participants know each other quite well and are friendly with each other. However, some bonds are stronger than others. As I would have expected, the different nationalities have formed very close relationships, and there tends to be a natural divide between the groups at the beginning of the meetings each week, where Syrians sit with other Syrians, Eritreans sit with other Eritreans, etc. The Danish volunteers are aware of this, and have agreed on consciously mixing the tables by placing themselves in the middle of the groups and disrupting this division. Within the national groups, ethnicity, religion and place of origin also play an important factor, as these subgroups seem to be more closely related. One participant put his arm around his friend as he introduced me to him and said: “he is also from Afrin, so he is my brother.”

An interesting observation I have made is that there seems to be a social hierarchy within each group, and that the ‘leader’ in each group seems to be the person who is most successful in their new life in Denmark, and the most confident when speaking with the Danes. The ‘leaders’ of the different groups have formed friendships with each other, and I have often observed them talking to each other about their ‘responsibilities’ with the rest of the group. I overheard one conversation, for example, between two young men from Syria and Eritrea, in which one asked the other for advice on helping a friend with going to dentist and having to translate for him.

While the relationships formed within the national groups are clearly very close, the relationships between the Danes and the refugees are varied. Some seem superficial and are limited to meeting at the café once a week and only talk about homework, some are more personal and conversations involve talk about each other's families and private lives, and a few have become very close friendships.

The Interactions

As in any social setting, the interactions between people are plentiful and complex. During the course of two months, I have witnessed many interactions, and I am not able to describe all of them. I will therefore include examples, which I find relevant to this thesis, and which will be utilized in the analysis:

- Several Wednesdays I arrived early to the café, and helped the volunteers to make coffee and tea. During this time, I found the conversations between the volunteers interesting. They often use the words “us” and “them”, and tend to generalize when talking about “them”: two women were getting the room ready, when one looked at the time, “oh, it’s almost four o’clock, we have to move faster,” to which the other replied, “no, they are always late anyway, we have time.”
- When conversations take place between Danes and refugees who are not very good at Danish or English, a few people appear to be the designated translators who always take on the responsibility of facilitating these conversations. Everyone seems to have accepted this, and the ‘translators’ take pride in this. It is of course the people who are strongest in Danish, but not necessarily the aforementioned ‘leaders’. An example of this is when a volunteer, who is a retired lawyer, was helping an Eritrean refugee by looking through his family reunification application. They had agreed to meet at the language café to go through the application, and the volunteer wanted to suggest some changes and give advice. When they wanted to start the meeting, they both looked around for the man who always helps with translations in Tigrinya, but since he had not arrived yet, the two of them agreed to wait for him before they began their conversation. This was interesting to me, as other Eritreans with quite adequate Danish skills were also present.

- An issue, which I have seen on occasion, is the ability to understand humour from other cultures. Generally, there is a very humoristic atmosphere at the language café, and most are able to make jokes and laugh with each other. Some Danish people tend to be very sarcastic in their humour, however, and this can be problematic if the recipient is not familiar with this concept. In a particular example, I was talking to a young Kurdish man from Syria and a Danish woman. We were speaking about his Danish level, and I complimented him on how much he had improved his speaking skills, to which he replied, “no, I’m not very good yet.” The woman then smiled and said to him, “well, that’s because you are not very smart.” They both laughed, but as the woman walked away, the young man looked at me and asked, “why would she say that? Do you not think I’m smart?” I explained to him that she was only joking, and that sarcasm means that she said the opposite of what she meant. He understood this, but was still very shocked by her statement.
- On several occasions I witnessed Danish volunteers facilitating employment opportunities for refugees. This was done by helping with CVs and job applications, by putting people in contact with prospective employers, and once, a Danish woman actually hired a Syrian man she had met at the café.
- Many refugees come to the language café with letters from the authorities that they need help with understanding, and other practical matters that the Danes can help them with. As they are not fully familiar with the Danish system, having Danish acquaintances at the café seems to be extremely helpful. There are several areas that the volunteers are not able to influence, however, and most of these are concerned with complaints about housing conditions, distance to school and work and the obligations put on refugees by the municipality integration workers.
- When refugee children arrive as unaccompanied minors, the municipality usually offers them a stay at a Danish folk high school, which helps them increase their language skills and meet more people their own age. A boy from Eritrea, who has come to Denmark with the rest of his family through family unification with his father, had a strong wish to attend one of these schools, but the municipality

would not pay for it since he was not an unaccompanied minor. The family had become very close with a Danish couple at the language café, and the Danish woman was helping the boy apply for dispensation. She arrived at the café one week, and told the other volunteers that their application had been denied. She felt so bad for the boy, that she decided to pay for his entire stay out of her own pocket, but had asked the municipality not to tell him this, but to let him believe that the application had been approved.

- There seems to be a very high consciousness of each other's cases with the Danish Immigration Services and the municipality between participants across groups. Whenever a refugee has news, for example about a family reunification case, the majority of the participants seem to be familiar with the case already, and all are able to celebrate each other's victories. When a new family arrives, volunteers and refugees alike get together to organize the journey, plan a welcome party, donate clothes and furniture, and new family members are always received very warmly at the language café. An example of this is when a woman arrived to the café with the very happy news that she had been granted family reunification with her two children, whom she had had to leave behind in Syria. Everyone instinctively got up to hug her, and a small group of women started writing a list of what needed to be done. The following week, the woman told me that they had managed to get enough money donated to pay for the children's plane tickets, and people had come by her house with clothes and furniture all week – both her Danish and Syrian friends from the language café.
- The language café has been used as a space to link refugees with contact families, who have volunteered to be a part of a newly arrived refugee's life. One of the administrators of Venligboerne Helsingør is in charge of this, and has successfully matched several families. Almost all volunteers at the language café are also a contact person/family for one or more refugees. When new volunteers sign up for the café or as a contact person, a few refugees are very quick to 'claim' them as their own, and this is a concern for the volunteers. Two volunteers explained to me that those individuals always "steal" contact persons from the others because they have a strong need for a large network. It is understandable, but very

frustrating, as they lack volunteers, and there are several refugees who have asked for a contact person, but have not been able to get one.

- When conversations are taking place around the tables, they seem to either be very focused on specific homework assignments and reading, or they are more social in nature. A particular topic, which often comes up, is what constitutes “Danishness”. I have participated in many of these conversations, and several different ideas have come up. There has been talk about religion and Christian holidays, about humour and sarcasm, about whether or not it is rude to arrive late to a social gathering, and about many other things, and these are always compared to Syrian or Eritrean customs. I find it interesting how aware the refugees are of the differences in cultural norms, and their need to discuss these. I overheard a conversation between a Syrian family and a Danish woman. The Syrian man asked the woman, “why do you never come to visit us?” to which the woman replied, “because you haven’t invited me.” They then discussed the difference between Syrian and Danish norms, and the family understood that it is not common for Danish friends to visit unannounced, where after they agreed on a date that the woman would visit them.
- There is a very relaxed attitude towards languages in the language café. Mistakes are made, but people are never made fun of. Many refugees who have not been in Denmark for very long are more comfortable with speaking English, and this is accepted. The longer they have participated in the café, the more Danish they understand, and I noticed that many conversations consist of the Danes speaking Danish and being understood, but the refugees answering in English.

Theoretical Framework

Based on my observations and conversations with participants in the language café, it is clear that there is a big variety in the resources of the participants, in the form of their cultural backgrounds, previous education and employment, etc. My observations, along with the in-depth interviews with three participants, show that this disparity in resources has a noticeable effect on the participants' success with integration in Danish society. In order to analyse this correlation, this chapter aims to create a theoretical framework to link the concepts of resources and integration. This will be done by using Putnam's and Bourdieu's theories on *capital* as well as Ager & Strang's take on *integration*.

Capital is most commonly defined in terms of *resources* – a concept widely acknowledged in sociology since the work of Weber (1946). Two of the most prominent approaches to capital are the works of Bourdieu and Putnam. The former introduces three different forms of capital, while the latter expands on one of Bourdieu's forms, social capital, and introduces the concepts of bonding and bridging.

Integration as a concept is one that is widely discussed and used politically as an official policy related to the resettlement of refugees. Public debate and policy development, however, are highly influenced by the vague definition of integration as a term, and it is used with widely different meanings in different contexts. The diffuse nature of the concept means that it is highly subjective and dependant on context, which is why I have been careful not to use the word 'integration' during my observations and in the interviews, as I believe it would steer the subjects towards a biased opinion of the term, be it either positive or negative. It is, however, necessary to define how the concept will be used in this thesis. As the problem formulation states, I am interested in exploring young Syrian refugees' 'ability' to integrate in relation to their capital, and to do this I will use Ager and Strang's (2008) framework on integration and their definition of what constitutes 'successful' integration. They define this in terms of domains, which are supported by the theories of Putnam and Bourdieu alike, and my overall theoretical framework therefore provides a coherent view of refugees' ability to integrate.

Bourdieu's Forms of Capital

Pierre Bourdieu (1986) introduced the notion of capital as being an important factor in how society is arranged, and proposed three forms of capital: economic, cultural and social capital. Bourdieu argues that capital can generally be understood as an accumulation of assets within the economic, cultural and social spheres, and that individuals do not have equal access and opportunity to these assets, which is what determines one's social status and explains inequalities in society (Bourdieu 1986: 241).

Bourdieu's stance on economic capital stems from a Marxist view on labour as well as a Weberian take on power, in that he claims that "economic capital is at the root of all other types of capital" (Bourdieu 1986: 252), and that only through people's labour are social and cultural capital developed (Grossman 2013: 31). Generally speaking, economic capital is the ability of individuals to obtain and exchange resources for economic and monetary gain. It is a measurable form of capital, and therefore the most tangible of the three, as it can be directly convertible into money and assets, and can be institutionalized in the form of property rights (Bourdieu 1986: 247). As the subjects of interest in this thesis are refugees, they often do not have substantial economic capital, as they have lost or left behind their monetary assets and do not have property rights in their country of resettlement. However, over time they are able to develop new economic capital, and this is an important aspect in the integration process, as discussed by Ager and Strang.

Cultural capital, a much less tangible concept than economic capital, concerns knowledge and skills in the form of educational status and societal norms. Bourdieu proposes three states of cultural capital: the objectified state, the institutionalized state, and the embodied state (Bourdieu 1986: 247). Objectified cultural capital, as the name suggests, refers to material objects in the form of cultural goods, such as photographs, mementoes, personal belongings, etc. (Bourdieu 1986: 250). In the case of refugees, these are often left behind. Institutionalized cultural capital is the credentials one holds or academic qualifications one possesses. It is, in contrast to self-taught skills, unquestionable and can be measured and exchanged in, for

example, the labour market (Bourdieu 1986: 250). Refugees in Denmark often find themselves in a dilemma with regards to their institutionalized cultural capital, as the qualifications previously obtained in their native country, are not equally recognized as qualifying to Danish educational institutions or the labour market. Embodied cultural capital is the inherent cultivation embedded in an individual. It can be immeasurable in the form of norms and traditions acquired unknowingly through upbringing and family ties, or more tangible in the form of language and other skills learned over time (Bourdieu 1986: 248-49). Bourdieu has further elaborated on this concept in his writings on *habitus* (1984; 1980), or what he calls taste or style, and is described as the way in which an individual perceives their social world. This thesis will not explore the concept of habitus, but it is important to mention here, as it reflects the adaptive nature of cultural norms, and the way in which human habits and actions change over time parallel to their cultural capital (Swartz 2002: 625). As embodied cultural capital is usually acquired in a specific context of a family or a culturally homogenous group, it can be difficult to navigate with this form of capital in a different cultural setting. Refugees from Syria, for example, may find that their embodied cultural capital is useless in Denmark - i.e. in a country with a different language, different cultural traditions, and different cultural norms - and feel required to adopt new capital. This is complex though, as the informants in this thesis keep ties with people from similar cultural backgrounds in Denmark, while simultaneously attempting to adapt to Danish culture.

The final form of capital, social capital, is the resources linked to having a network of relationships with other people in which one is considered as belonging to a group. This can range from informal social groups such as a family or interest groups, to a larger scale such as belonging to a nation (Bourdieu 1986: 251). In a later publication, Bourdieu has defined social capital as the “sum of resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition” (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992: 119). Bourdieu looks at social capital in the context of a field within a social space, where fields are defined as patterns of relations between positions, such as a political field or an educational field (Bourdieu 1984). He argues that the three forms of capital are linked and can be exchanged, but the success of the exchange depends on the field (Bourdieu 1986: 254-55). Social capital, according to

Bourdieu, is the key to obtaining economic and cultural capital, as the ability to mobilize an already existing network of relationships, enables individuals to exchange social capital into resources that can lead to economic or cultural assets (Bourdieu 1980; Grossman 2013: 30). With a focus on inequality, Bourdieu argues that social capital is highly influenced by context, and that there is an unequal distribution of social capital due to an uneven distribution of resources available to obtain it. A well-educated person with a high-paying job is considered to have more social resources than an uneducated person with a minimum-wage job. In other words, one person's social capital has more value than another's, as "pre-existing conditions affect the quality of one's social capital which, in turn, leads to a lower position in the social hierarchy" (Grossman 2013: 32). This is interesting in the case of the language café, as individuals from different backgrounds (refugees versus volunteers) who, objectively speaking, may have very similar resources, tend to find themselves in very different positions in the social hierarchy.

Putnam's Bonding and Bridging Social Capital

Robert Putnam (1993, 2000) introduced the concepts of bonding and bridging capital, in terms of the type of relation that exists between two actors (Grossman 2013: 15). Putnam argues that of all the variations of social capital, the most important distinction is the way in which social networks are formed, and he suggests that different forms of social capital can be compared by explaining the two dimensions of bonding and bridging (Putnam 2000: 23).

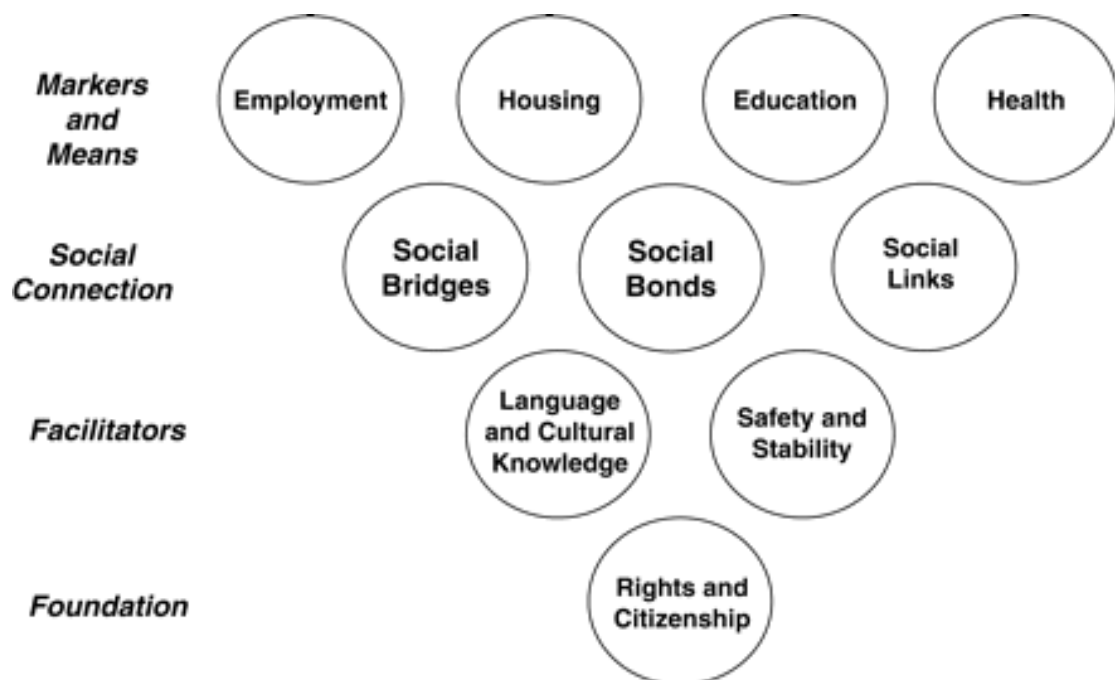
Bonding social capital is "inward looking" and reinforces the exclusive identities of a homogenous group (Putnam 2000: 22). It takes place when, for example, people of similar ethnicity, religious affiliation or cultural background get together, and bonds are created based on these similarities. For the sake of this thesis, I can define several examples of bonding social capital within the setting of the language café: the Danish volunteers and the ethnic groups of refugees from Syria, Eritrea, etc. Bonding social capital is defined by the social resources within one's community and can be characterized by strong bonds and close relationships (Grossman 2013: 16).

Bridging social capital deals with “outward looking” networks which include people from diverse social groups (Putnam 2000: 22). The language café as a whole can be seen as one of these networks, where people from different homogenous groups get together and create bridging social capital. Bridging social capital is equivalent to networking in groups that are considered inclusive (Grossman 2013: 17).

Putnam argues that the “weak” ties found in diverse networks and within bridging social capital, are actually more valuable when, for example, seeking jobs or political allies, than the “strong” ties to a homogenous group or bonding social capital. In other words: “bonding social capital is [...] good for “getting by”, but bridging social capital is crucial for “getting ahead”” (Putnam 2000: 23). Putnam suggests that the two dimensions are not exclusive of each other, and that groups have the ability to create bonding and bridging social capital simultaneously. However, he implies that there may be an inverse relationship between the two, and having more bonding social capital leads to one having less bridging social capital (Grossman 2013: 18).

Ager & Strang’s Domains of Integration

Ager and Strang (2008) propose a general framework for understanding integration, which is determined by ten domains illustrated by the following figure (Ager & Strang 2008: 170):



Markers and Means

First of all, Ager and Strang highlight a number of indicators, which are widely suggested to lead to successful integration in other research and policy making, dating as far back as to the 1951 Refugee Convention concerning the social rights of refugees in terms of employment, education, social welfare and housing (United Nations 1951; Ager & Strang 2008: 169). While being clear markers of integration, Ager and Strang also suggest that these indicators serve as potential means that support the achievement of integration, and consider them to be important in the operational definition of integration. However, there is a conceptual challenge in perceiving integration solely in terms of the areas of employment, housing, education and health, given the variation in these areas across a population.

Employment is one of the most researched areas of integration (Castles *et al.* 2001), and one that is emphasised in most integration policies including the Danish. Employment is considered a dominant factor influencing many areas, such as gaining economic independence, meeting members of host communities, providing opportunities for developing language skills, planning for the future, and encouraging self-reliance (Ager & Strang 2008: 170). Unlike other groups of immigrants, refugees are often highly educated, but many face obstacles in obtaining employment due to the non-recognition of qualifications and previous work experience. And, therefore, Ager and Strang recommend vocational training and further education as key aspects of integration, “to the extent that such measures foster employability either in general terms or through enhancement of specific language or work skills” (Ager & Strang 2008: 170).

Housing has a well-established effect on the ability for refugees to feel ‘at home’, and appropriate housing conditions range from a measure of the physical size, quality to the financial security of tenancies or ownership (Glover *et al.* 2001). Ager and Strang, however, emphasize the social and cultural impacts of housing as being more important in the integration process, as refugees value the “continuity of relationships associated with being ‘settled’ in an area over time [...] and the significance of neighbours and neighbourhood in providing opportunities for learning from established members of the community” (Ager & Strang 2008: 171).

Education delivers the skills and competencies needed to obtain employment, which enables refugees to become active members of society. Furthermore, it can function as a place of contact with members of the local community and lead to relationships that support integration (Ager & Strang 2008: 172). However, isolation and exclusion in educational institutions may take place, and this hinders the process of learning the local language and the integration process as a whole. Furthermore, the creation of special language units for refugees, with the aim of specializing education to meet their needs, is observed to limit interaction with the local community (Ager & Strang 2008: 172).

Good health is seen as an important resource for engagement in society, and hereby a key factor in integration, and a reliable access to health services is therefore an important objective. There may, however, be obstacles for refugees in terms of language difficulties in communicating with health professionals, lack of information about available services, variations in the cultural perceptions of health, etc. (Ager & Strang 2008: 172-73).

Foundation

In creating a framework of indicators of integration, Ager and Strang argue that it is vital to take into account the foundation of what constitutes a refugee in the given context, and to focus on the extent to which they are given the basis for equal engagement in society. The rights of refugees hereby become the foundation of integration policy to which a specific government should be held accountable. Although these rights do not define integration directly, they serve as a basis for assumptions about integration, and, accordingly “the proposed framework includes a ‘foundational’ domain which prompts discussion about citizenship and rights to be made explicit in whatever situation the framework is being applied. Notions of nationhood, citizenship and rights will vary across settings, but in all cases such ideas are fundamental to understanding the principles and practice of integration in that situation” (Ager & Strang 2008: 176).

According to Saggar, introduced by Ager and Strang, the definition of integration adopted by a specific nation depends on the sense of identity and cultural understanding of nation-hood of that nation, which will inevitably incorporate certain values that shape the way integration is approached in policy-making (Saggar 1995: 106). Following this logic, governments need to clearly articulate concepts as nationhood and citizenship when developing an effective policy on integration, by defining the rights of refugees, in order to present their normative understanding of successful outcomes (Ager & Strang 2008: 175). In Denmark, policy clearly reflects an understanding of integration:

- (1) An object of the Act is to ensure that newly arrived aliens are given the possibility of using their abilities and resources to become involved and contributing citizens on an equal footing with other citizens of society in correlation with the fundamental values and norms of Danish society.*
- (2) This must be affected, through an effort of integration, which: -*
- (i) Takes into consideration the individual alien's responsibility of his/her own integration;*
 - (ii) Assists to ensure that newly arrived aliens can participate in the life of society in terms of politics, economy, employment, social activities, religion and culture on an equal footing with other citizens;*
 - (iii) Assists in making newly arrived aliens self-supporting as quickly as possible through employment; and*
 - (iv) Imparts to the individual alien an understanding of the fundamental values and norms of Danish society.*
- (3) Another object of the Act is to promote the possibilities of citizens, enterprises, authorities, institutions, organizations, associations, etc., of society of contributing to the effort of integration.*
- (4) Finally, an object of the Act is to ensure that newly arrived aliens are aware that successful integration is a prerequisite for granting a permanent residence permit.*
- (Udlændinge- og Integrationsministeriet 2017, free translation)*

The normative nature of the integration framework makes it difficult to accommodate the assumptions and values of different settings while maintaining conceptual

coherence. Ager and Strang therefore propose to address this by articulating the notions that shape policy and public debate on the integration of refugees in that given context, and determining the indicators within the domain of Rights and Citizenship accordingly (Ager & Strang 2008: 185). The above definition of integration policy from Danish legislature will therefore be used in the analysis to determine the Danish indicators of successful integration.

Social Connection

The processes which provide the “connective tissue” between the foundation of citizenship and rights and the outcomes in the areas of employment, housing, education and health, are divided into two main groups of factors: social connection and facilitators (Ager & Strang 2008: 177). Ager and Strang highlight the importance for a “two-way” approach to integration, in which social connection between refugees and members of the local community is achieved through mutual accommodation. At the basic level, the absence of conflict and presence of toleration between groups can be considered to reflect integration. However, many have expectations that go beyond this, to a community where different groups are able to mix, and a sense of “belonging” is therefore considered the ultimate factor of living in an integrated community (Ager & Strang 2008: 177).

The concept of social capital, as discussed in the previous two chapters, has been influential in identifying the outcomes of social connections. As proposed by Putnam (1993) and Woolcock (1998) there are three forms of social connection: 1) social bonds – with family, ethnic groups, etc 2) social bridges – with other communities and 3) social links – with structures of the state. The establishment of relationships with co-ethnic groups in the form of social bonds is considered to have varying benefits leading to effective integration, such as health benefits, a higher quality of life, and the ability to feel “settled” (Ager & Strang 2008: 178). Social bridges also function as a way of making refugees feel “at home” in a community, and, moreover, this dimension is important in terms of participation of people from different groups in shared activities. The assumption is that an integrated community will have people participating equally in activities available to them (Ager & Strang 2008: 180).

There is a distinction between social contact merely seen as “friendliness” of the local community and one that reflects deeper bonds and relationships. The former is linked to a sense of safety and security for refugees, while the latter is crucial in creating long-term social and economic benefits to the community as a whole. As argued by Putnam in the previous chapter, bridging social capital hereby facilitates employment opportunities for refugees (Putnam 2000; Ager & Strang 2008: 180).

Social links describe connections that link individuals to structures of the state, such as government services. In the case of refugees, who lack familiarity with the local surroundings, do not speak the language, etc, social links require additional effort from the community as a whole, if equality of access to services is to be achieved. Ager and Strang recommend that an acknowledgement in policy of the need to connect refugees to public services is vital in supporting the integration process (Ager & Strang 2008: 181).

Facilitators

Facilitators, which are seen as factors that remove barriers from integration, are associated with the concepts of “inclusion” and “exclusion”, as economic and social participation in society is central to the understanding of integration. Ager and Strang present an assumption that this participation is inhibited by factors that act as barriers to successful integration. They suggest that the role of the state is to eliminate these barriers, in order for integration to occur. They suggest two main areas that include such barriers: language and cultural knowledge; and safety and security (Ager & Strang 2008: 181).

Cultural competence is seen as a key to successfully integrate, and it includes being able to speak the local language as well as a broader cultural knowledge of the community. Again, Ager and Strang suggest a “two-way” approach to this dimension. In terms of language, it is assumed that refugees are able to participate in language programmes and that they actively participate in order to learn. It is also recommended, however, that receiving communities reduce the barriers to information, such as in health services, by providing material translated into the languages of refugees. Although some theorists have critiqued translation and

interpreting as an inhibitor of learning a language, Ager and Strang argue that “translation and interpreting supports are crucial in the early stages of settlement, and – given the length of time required to develop proficiency – are likely to be of ongoing significance” (Ager & Strang 2008: 182). In terms of a broader cultural knowledge, both refugees and local communities will benefit from developing knowledge of each other’s procedures, customs and facilities, and hereby enable both integration processes and outcomes.

Safety and security are important factors in the overall quality of life of any vulnerable group, and a lack of physical safety is proven to be an inhibitor for integration. Moreover, stability is a significant aspect of the integration process, as refugees having to relocate hinders the ability to create strong ties with the local community. This has implications in specifically the housing area, where short-term accommodation and insecure tenancies cause great instability for refugees (Ager & Strang 2008: 184).

Integration and Social Capital

The overall framework by Ager and Strang provides a series of domains, which are considered significant in achieving successful integration. With a focus on Danish integration policy, their framework can be used to address the domains of integration articulated by the informants themselves. Ager and Strang highlight that a common rhetorical misconception in the integration debate is the notion of social cohesion as a necessary aspect of an integrated community – a notion that has also been greatly debated in the Danish context with Søren Pind’s policy of assimilation in 2011 (Hjortdal 2011). By including the concept of social capital, this framework allows for the maintenance of the ethnic and religious identity of refugees without limiting wider integration, and this is supported by the work of Bourdieu and Putnam. In Ager and Strang’s model, “social capital is presented in the context of an overall framework of interrelated domains, ensuring that the other resources essential to integration are acknowledged. This avoids the assumption implied by some policy statements that integration and social cohesion can be achieved through social connection alone” (Ager & Strang 2008: 186).

Analysis

The observations made at the language café, as well as the three life-history interviews found in the appendix, highlight three main areas, which will now be discussed in relation to the theoretical framework: the socioeconomic status of participants before and after becoming refugees, social ties made between participants, and the cultural knowledge they possess.

Socioeconomic Status

The socioeconomic status of the participants at the café – by which I mean an individual's economic and social position in relation to others, based on the factors presented as markers by Ager and Strang – clearly varies greatly both overall and within the different ethnic groups. This is highly contextual.

Hierarchy and Class Structures

As suggested by Bourdieu, there is an unequal distribution of resources available to obtain capital, which causes inequality: “pre-existing conditions affect the quality of one's social capital which, in turn, leads to a lower position in the social hierarchy” (Grossman 2013: 32). The social hierarchy at the language café clearly demonstrates this. As highlighted in the observations, there seems to be ‘leaders’ in the different national groups, and these most prominent characters are the ones with the highest socioeconomic status, as they are the ones who appear to be most successful in the Danish community in terms of the markers of employment, housing, education and health. I believe this status gives them the confidence to be more dominant in their group. Furthermore, there is a clear distinction between refugees and volunteers. Although a refugee may be better educated and have a better job than, for example, a volunteer who is a pensioner, the volunteer is on a higher level in the social hierarchy at the language café. However, over time these lines are blurred. Saleh, for example, now only attends the language café to help others to learn Danish, and has hereby transitioned to a volunteer.

Nee and Sanders (2001) propose a forms-of-capital model, based on Bourdieu's, in which they argue that financial and human-cultural capital is something that refugees bring with them from their home country, and it influences how well they fare in the country of settlement: "human-cultural and financial capital are the forms of capital preferred by elite and middle-class immigrants. The stock of these forms of capital, which immigrant families bring with them, is an objectification of class advantages which they enjoyed in their home country. [...] According to the forms-of-capital model, immigrant families who arrive with a high stock of financial and human-cultural capital fungible in the host society are likely to have trajectories that lead to careers in the mainstream economy" (Nee & Sanders 2001: 407). This is very interesting in relation to the backgrounds of the three informants. Saleh and Moaz appear to be from middle or even upper class families – their fathers are well educated and had high-paying jobs, Moaz attended a private school, and both were encouraged to focus on their studies while attending afterschool activities – while Kareem appears to be from a lower class – he lived in a Palestinian refugee camp and his father was a welder. Clearly they have not brought this class structure with them to Denmark, as they are all in the same social class in the Danish structure, however, they do bring with them the attitudes from their privilege or lack thereof. Moaz says, "let me say, if I wanted something, I would get it," and Saleh says, "I was raised like we are not the same as everyone else." These attitudes appear to affect the determination with which they wish to succeed in Denmark. Although Moaz and Saleh both elaborate on the difficulty of learning Danish and meeting the Danes, they do not hesitate in their determination to become integrated. Kareem, although having a strong desire to be successful in his integration, seems to accept that he will not reach the goals that he had for his future before leaving Syria: "But I don't think I will study anymore, it's too difficult for me here. So maybe I will get a licence in something more practical, like a bus driver or something like that." A possible reason for this could be that Kareem arrived with less overall capital, and thus seems to be struggling more in the process.

Employment and Education

The main objectives of the Danish integration law are employment and education. Employment is considered to be a crucial aspect, as it not only means financial

stability for the refugee, but also promotes knowledge about culture, language and the labour market. All three of my informants have secured employment within the first two years of their arrival in Denmark, and most participants at the language café seem to be in some kind of employment. However, the ambition for a successful career is varied. Although Kareem was actually the most educated of the three informants when he left Syria, he is now the one with the least ambition in relation to employment. This is in contrast to Moaz and Saleh, who are both highly motivated to continue their education in Denmark, and have the same goals for their future as they did in Syria. I believe this difference links back to the attitudes mentioned above, and that Kareem does not possess the same level of social confidence that Moaz and Saleh have been given in their upbringing.

Mandatory Placement

The mandatory placement scheme in the Danish integration law, which places refugees in a local municipality and forces them to stay there for three years or lose their integration benefits, is of great importance to the lives of the participants. Firstly, it intervenes deeply in people's lives, as they do not have the freedom of movement that other residents in Denmark do. This has been an issue for both Kareem and Saleh, who were not placed in the municipality they wished for. Secondly, they do not have a choice when it comes to important aspects of their daily lives, such as distance to schools, day-care facilities, jobs, and the type of housing facilities they live in. This is of great concern to many, and is a topic that is often discussed at the language café. It does, however, provide a sense of stability, as belonging to a municipality for at least a period of three years, gives people the time to settle down, become familiar with the community, and most seem to stay in the same area after the three-year integration period.

Integration Goals

As Olwig (2011) argues in her study, there is an interesting distinction between the emphasis of integration programmes and the actual outcome of integration from the point of view of the refugees themselves: "the idea of improvement that leads people to leave their place of origin may be quite different from the social and economic

achievements that the receiving societies – and many migration scholars – expect to see in a ‘successful’ and ‘well integrated’ immigrant population” (Olwig 2011: 188). When asked about the future, all three informants answered that their future is in Denmark, both Kareem and Moaz say, “yes, always” and Saleh says, “yes, I don’t think about anything else,” which highlights the notion of stability, determined an important facilitator by Ager and Strang. Furthermore, they all focus on several aspects concerning their goals for the future: Kareem says, “for me language is the most important thing. Of course I want to get a better job, and better pay. But I need to speak the language first. And I want to make friends. It’s important to have many friends in Denmark.” Moaz says, “I don’t know what will happen, but I still want to study something to do with medicine. [...] And of course I want to get married, have a family. You know, have a good life here.” And Saleh says, “I’m looking forward to get permanent residency. I’m looking forward to finishing HF next year, to finish high school again. And then I’m thinking about studying to be a physiotherapist [...] I’m looking forward to having a family in Denmark. Buying a house. That’s how I think about the future. I’m thinking about a good job, a girlfriend, family.” These answers show that their goals for the future are not only about economic capital, but are highly influenced by the notion of a “good life”, something which is not included in the Danish integration model.

Thus, as can be seen in the first part of the analysis, the socioeconomic status and economic capital of refugees seems to have a large impact on their integration. For instance, when the mandatory placement policy has obstructed the paths for both Saleh and Kareem, Saleh has managed to find a way around it while Kareem has not, and is hereby stuck in an economic bind. This ties back to their different levels of capital from their upbringing as well as their resources available now. However, it is interesting to highlight that all three informants have the same notion of being integrated, which, in some parts, vastly differs from the Danish policy, such as setting family values above employment.

Social Ties

Social ties, or social capital, is a central concept in this thesis. The foundation on which the language café was built revolves around the connection between people, and the integration taking place is of a social nature. Putnam's concepts of bonding and bridging social capital will now be used to analyse this phenomenon.

Bonding Social Capital

Bonding social capital, as defined by Putnam, deals with the ties within a homogenous group. This is seen on various levels at the language café: between the different national groups, e.g. Syrian refugees, between subgroups within these national groups, e.g. Palestinians from Syria, and on a smaller scale between people from the same city in Syria. As supported by Putnam, I have observed these bonds to be very strong and almost family-like, as the example given on page 17 where a Syrian man calls his friend from the same hometown his "brother".

In a study by Nannestad *et al.* (2008) about the social capital of refugees in Denmark, they suggest that bonding social capital has both a positive and a negative form. Positive bonding takes place when newly arrived refugees utilize family members or kinsmen to get settled in the country. All three informants show variations of this: Kareem and Moaz both mention their uncle as someone who has helped them a lot, and Kareem says, "my uncle helps me so much. I don't know what I would do without him. He has been in Denmark for 14 years, so he knows how everything works." Saleh, on the other hand, does not have any family in Denmark, and does not mention being helped by kinsmen. An interesting statement, however, is when he talks about Hashem, his friend with whom he travelled to Denmark: "he is my swimming coach and my neighbour, but I call him my brother because we have become very close, and I really care about him. We have been through so much together." This shows that, because of the experiences they have had together, they have developed a family-like relationship, which Putnam defines as necessary for "getting by" (Putnam 2000: 23).

Negative bonding occurs when a homogenous group “can get to know and trust each other ‘too much’, not granting other people access to their network (what Putnam termed ‘superglue’). Thus, the radius of exchange of information, knowledge and reciprocal services is restricted, leading to negative externalities and zero-sum games” (Nannestad *et al.* 2008: 612). Saleh mentions this phenomenon several times, for example, when he talks about the “old generations”, by which he means immigrants who have been in Denmark for many years but have not learnt the language, and refers to them as “bad people”. Hereby he distances himself from negative bonding. Moaz also attempts to distance himself as, when asked about whom he spends most of his time with, he says, “my Danish friends of course. Because I don’t like to speak Arabic too much.” Kareem, however, has not managed to distance himself from negative bonding, as his family member currently employs him – without Kareem being paid a salary. However, he does continually express his desire to gain more bridging social capital, and gives an example of the difficulty in using family members in the integration process: “I have my uncle and his family, and they try to speak Danish with me, but I always change to Arabic.”

Bridging Social Capital

Bridging social capital occurs when people of different backgrounds form bonds with each other through activities or mutual interest. The language café is a perfect example of this phenomenon taking place. As mentioned in the Case Study chapter, the relationships formed between the participants vary in strength, however, there is a definite feeling of belonging shared between participants, and I think this is illustrated by the example of the woman who received family reunification and was celebrated by all. Although not all bonds become friendships, the sense of community that is felt for two hours once a week, is enough to create bridging social capital.

Both Nannestad *et al.* and Putnam emphasize the positive outcomes of bridging social capital, and Nannestad *et al.* highlight the benefits it brings to integration: “trust in others is probably the best indicator of social control and valuable social structures that facilitate cooperation. [...] In these social networks, relations are established in which reciprocity is reinforced so that individuals contribute to collective goods that are contingent on others doing likewise” (Nannestad *et al.* 2008: 609). The woman

who received news of her children coming to Denmark, collected donations in the form of money for plane tickets, clothes and furniture from both Syrian and Danish members of her social network, which is a very good example of a positive outcome of bridging social capital.

The three particular informants used in this thesis are young men, and their ability to create friendships at the language café has been limited, due to the fact that most of the Danish participants are older women. As Kareem says, “I don’t have any Danish friends. I know people. From the language café and from work. But they are old. They want to help me, but I can’t talk to them like I talk to my friends, you know? So it’s not the same.” For other participants, it has been possible to build strong ties, as the example of the woman who paid for a young Eritrean boy’s opportunity to go to a Danish folk high school. Their relationship is very close, and the Danish couple acts almost as grandparents to the children in the Eritrean family. For Kareem, Moaz and Saleh, however, the language café has not been the right place to create friendships, and Moaz and Saleh have both met their Danish friends when they started working or studying in places with people their own age.

Individual Social Abilities

Although the examples of both bonding and bridging social capital are very clear in my research, the extent to which individuals are able to utilize this form of capital is of more importance in relation to their integration ability. Saleh is a very good example of this, as he has been able to use his network for his own benefit several times. He is aware of this himself: “I caused so much drama. I talked to so many people. I started using my small network back then...” He is very consciously using his bridging social capital, which Putnam highlights as a valuable ability and defines as “getting ahead” (Putnam 2000: 23). Nee and Sanders argue that the quality of social capital can be linked back to the socioeconomic status discussed in the previous chapter, and that “social networks of elite families are likely to be more powerful than those of working-class families” (Nee & Sanders 2001: 390). This is an interesting point, as Saleh actually talks about a similar incident in Syria (“it was really difficult, I couldn’t live with it. So I moved 3 times to 3 different schools from 7th to 9th

grade”), which suggests that this behaviour is something he has learnt in his upbringing.

Olwig suggests the influence of caseworkers in the municipality as an important factor as well: “while a specific country’s laws and policies clearly have a great impact on immigrants and refugees, the ways in which bureaucrats use their discretionary powers in the administration of these official regulations will strongly influence how newcomers will experience life in the receiving society” (Olwig 2011: 181). This is demonstrated by the conflicting experiences of Kareem and Saleh, who both wished to be moved to a different municipality. Because Saleh had a relationship with a caseworker in Helsingør municipality, she was able to help him and he was moved within days. Kareem, however, who does not have any personal bonds with his caseworker, was not able to get any help and had to move on his own, and as a consequence, he no longer receives integration benefits: “because I got a job, then I’m allowed to change my municipality. So I live in Helsingør now. But because I moved, they don’t help me anymore. I don’t get any money from them, so I have to work so much.” This makes it very difficult for Kareem to seek other opportunities leading to integration, such as attending cultural and social events, because he is forced to work enough hours to support himself.

As Putnam suggests, bonding and bridging social capital are not mutually exclusive, and, as Moaz portrays very well, it is possible to have strong networks of both kinds of social capital, as he mentions both his close Arab friends in Helsingør and Hillerød, and his two close Danish friends that he knows from high school. My research shows that bonding social capital may actually lead to bridging social capital, as watching a family member putting trust in the local community can improve the views of the individual on the community from which he feels excluded. As Kareem says, “I have asked Venligboerne for a contact family. My cousin has one and it’s very good. But they don’t have anyone available. I think that would have helped me a lot, so I have someone to speak with in Danish and to know some Danish people better.” Nevertheless, Putnam argues that there is an inverse relationship between bonding and bridging social capital, and that more bonding social capital leads to less bridging social capital, which is also evident in Kareem’s case.

Cultural Knowledge

The cultural knowledge possessed by the participants at the language café plays an important role in how they interact with each other. Bourdieu proposes three states of cultural capital discussed on page 23: the objectified state, the institutionalized state, and the embodied state. Objectified cultural capital is not relevant here, as material cultural objects have not been mentioned in the interviews, and refugees often leave these behind. Institutionalized cultural capital, or academic credentials, has been discussed in the chapter on Socioeconomic Status. This chapter therefore deals with the final state, embodied cultural capital, which concerns the knowledge of language and cultural norms in the specific context.

Cultural Practices

Cultural norms and practices, and the knowledge hereof, are key to achieving successful integration in a community, according to Ager and Strang. They propose a “two-way” approach in which both refugees and local communities benefit from learning about each other’s cultures in order to facilitate integration processes and outcomes (Ager & Strang 2008: 182). The example of the conversation between the Danish woman and Syrian family, about having to be invited for a visit or showing up unannounced, is a very good representation of this. The outcome of their conversation was that the family understood how this social interaction is culturally practiced in Denmark, and the Danish woman was not only able to help them with this understanding, but also acquired knowledge about the Syrian practice and why she had not been invited sooner, which increases their mutual trust.

When there is a lack of understanding between two groups from different cultural backgrounds, problems tend to arise. The example of sarcasm being used as a form of humour illustrates one of these problems. When a woman wished to make a funny statement by using sarcasm, it came across as insulting, because the Syrian man was not familiar with this form of humour. Although I explained it to him, and he was hereby familiarized with the concept, he remained emotionally affected by the situation. Nee and Sanders argue that the accumulation of human-cultural capital is an

ongoing process, and that refugees bring capital with them from their home country and continue to build it when they learn new customs. Having less cultural capital upon arrival hereby means that the sum of capital while going through the integration process is less than those that have accumulated more while in the home country. This is shown by the three informants, who have varying levels of understanding of different cultures. Saleh and Moaz have both travelled in their childhood, Moaz has lived in Dubai, and both have learnt from their fathers who have lived and worked in other countries. As Nee and Sanders argue, “the connection between social-class position and human-cultural capital is in the resources afforded by financial capital in initiating investments in cultural competence, with middle-class and elite families starting earlier and allocating resources to foreign language tutorials, music lessons, foreign travel, concert attendance, and so on” (Nee & Sanders 2001: 393). Kareem, on the other hand, does not mention any investment in cultural capital during his childhood, but speaks of his life inside a Palestinian refugee camp: “my school and my job and my friends and every, it was all inside the camp.” In some ways, it hereby becomes more difficult for Kareem to build new cultural capital in relation to the others, as he may not have had the same access to cultural capital in his upbringing.

Bourdieu touches upon the ways in which individuals perceive their social world in relation to cultural norms, and argues that cultural capital is highly adaptive. Moaz vocalizes this when he says, “I’m not the same person because here is not like in Syria.” The cultural capital acquired by the three informants has been accumulated in specific cultural contexts in Syria and Denmark, as well as in various European countries on their journeys, and the sum of these experiences are reflected in the ways in which they perceive their cultural life in Denmark. Kareem speaks rather negatively of this: “I think I’m still me. But I don’t know how to be me with the Danes. Because if I talk with my Arab friends, I can make jokes and have fun. But I can’t do that in Danish, so the Danish people I know haven’t seen me like that.”

Language

Learning the language is a dynamic process, which not only takes place in the classroom, but at all levels of daily life. The language café shows people at all stages of this process, and it allows for people to be comfortable at their individual stage by

letting them speak in the language they want – Danish, English, or their native language with the help of a translator – while accepting errors and misunderstandings. The initiative of the language café – as reflected in the name – is to facilitate the process of learning the language in a social setting. As a facilitator proposed by Ager and Strang, language is a key concept leading to participation in society and is hereby central to the understanding of integration. All three informants emphasize the importance of the language, and are fully aware of the need to speak Danish to become successfully integrated.

An important difference in the ability of learning the language of the three informants is that Saleh and Moaz spoke English when they came to Denmark, while Kareem only spoke Arabic. As Saleh says: “It was a good advantage that I spoke English.” This means that they not only had gone through the process of learning a foreign language once before, but they were also familiar with the Latin alphabet and a Germanic language. I believe this highly facilitates the process of learning Danish. This refers back to the notion that Kareem may have had less cultural capital to draw on whilst starting his new life in Denmark, thus finding it more difficult to learn Danish and developing bridging social relationships to achieve this goal.

The Scandinavian Welfare Model

Presented as the foundation in Ager and Strang’s framework, the context in which integration is taking place is vital when defining what constitutes successful integration. The objects of the Danish Integration Act, shown on page 29, reflect the normative understanding of integration in the Danish context. It states that the main objective is to “ensure that newly arrived aliens are given the possibility of using their abilities and resources to become involved and contributing citizens on an equal footing with other citizens of society in correlation with the fundamental values and norms of Danish society,” and that the outcome of integration policies lead to an understanding that “successful integration is a prerequisite for granting a permanent residence permit” (Udlændinge- og Integrationsministeriet 2017). In other words, it is assumed that the ultimate goal of newly arrived immigrants and refugees is to obtain permanent residency and become Danish citizens, and this can only be achieved by conforming to the fundamental values and norms of Danish society. Although the

ability and resources of aliens are mentioned, the ways in which these can be utilized to reach successful integration are not touched upon.

Larsen suggests that the focus on cultural competence in Scandinavian integration policies is closely related to the ideology of Scandinavian welfare states in which equality is considered “sameness”. She argues that, “whereas there is a clear distinction between equality and similarity in English, this distinction is blurred in the Scandinavian languages where the term *lig* or *lik* can refer to both being equal and being alike. The Scandinavian logic of ‘equality as sameness’, furthermore, is reflected in every life, in the sense that people often feel a need to experience themselves as alike in order also to feel equal” (Larsen 2011: 336). In a Danish context, where homogeneity is considered the norm, the difference that refugees bring with them can hereby be considered as a threat to society. This means that the focus on understanding Danish values before being considered contributing members of society, according to the Danish Integration Act, portrays refugees in terms of what they are lacking rather than what they can bring to society. The conversations about “Danishness”, which often take place at the language café, reflect that the refugees are very aware, consciously or subconsciously, of the importance of cultural understanding in the Danish context. Saleh mentions several times that he wishes to be a part of society, to be a contributing member, and to “understand the country, the mentality and the politics in Denmark.”

This is also highlighted by Ager and Strang, but they suggest a two-way approach and underlines the importance of the local community also understanding the norms and values of refugees, so as to facilitate both integration processes and outcomes. Saleh gives an example, when he was invited to participate in meetings about integration at the municipality as a refugee: “It was really good. It has done something good for my personality. The fact that I am important, that I am worth talking to. Someone listens to me, to my ideas and what I think, that was important to me.” In this way, his cultural capital was used to achieve mutual outcomes in a Danish setting.

Conclusion

Having observed the act of integration taking place in a social setting, and having listened to the experiences of going through the integration process of three young men from Syria, I have been able to analyze the dimensions which constitute the integration process and the resources and abilities that refugees use to facilitate this process.

I have discovered that the accumulation of capital, in the form of economic, social and cultural capital, that refugees bring with them from their home country and develop upon arrival and throughout the settling process, plays an important role in their ability to integrate. Based on a framework of integration by Ager and Strang, I was able to determine how the indicators of successful integration are relevant in the different stages of the integration process of my informants. Implementing the theories of capital by Putnam and Bourdieu, further allowed me to elaborate on these indicators, by reflecting on the ability of refugees to use their resources as facilitators in their integration. There seems to be a clear correlation between the class status that refugees had in their home country, and their ability to navigate in a new setting. As capital is distributed unevenly and has different values in the social hierarchy, the three informants are not able to go through the integration process on equal terms. The two informants who come from upper-class families in Syria had a higher sum of capital when arriving in Denmark than the one from a lower class background, and hereby had better prerequisites for being successful. Having had privilege in the home country has an effect on the attitude towards one's own abilities, which impacts the determination to be successful in the country of settlement.

Social capital, termed social connection by Ager and Strang, is a central theme throughout this thesis, and arguably the most important factor in the ability to integrate successfully. Bonding social capital comes in a positive and a negative form, which is also reflected in the research. Positive bonding, which Putnam calls "getting by," involves the relations with family and kinsmen and is useful for familiarization with the local community and placing trust in society. Negative bonding, however, occurs when these relationships prevent individuals from forming bonds with

members outside their homogenous group and hereby advancing in the integration process. Bridging social capital, which is perfectly illustrated at the language café, creates a sense of belonging and social inclusion, and allows for “getting ahead” according to Putnam. I argue that the most important aspect of social capital, however, is the way in which individuals are able to utilize their capital for their own benefit. This ability is closely related to the attitude created by one’s social class, as mentioned above.

I have further discovered, that the specific context in which integration takes place is highly influential when it comes to the normative nature of what constitutes successful integration. The Danish welfare state, which is built on the Universalist Nordic Model with public services funded by taxation available to all residents, relies on refugees becoming integrated members of society in order to be contributing rather than benefitting from public goods. The Danish Integration Act reflects this ideology as its overall objective, and assumes that the way to reach this goal is by conforming to the fundamental norms and values of Danish society. In a Danish context, equality is closely linked to the idea of “sameness”, and refugees are hereby seen in a context of what they are lacking in relation to Danish cultural standards, rather than what they can contribute with in terms of differences. The refugees under study in this thesis, seem to be aware of this aspect of integration in the Danish society, and are very interested in learning about “Danishness” and how society works, while becoming independent and contributing members of the community.

It is assumed in Denmark that the overall objective of refugees is to obtain permanent residency and become Danish citizens. Although all three informants express that they wish to stay in Denmark for the rest of their lives, the answers they give when asked about the goals for their future, portray that their focus is on developing a “good life”, rather than the objective goal of citizenship. My research shows that the priorities of refugees in terms of “successful” integration varies from what seems to be the priorities of the government. Focus is much more on social values, making Danish friends, having a family and a life, than the aspects of employment and education and ultimately citizenship.

Lastly, I have discovered that a two-way approach to integration is very beneficial when it comes to facilitating the process, and the language café in Helsingør is a good example of this. Initiatives as the language café create a space that allows for refugees to be in the different stages of the integration process while feeling socially included. In relation to both language and cultural knowledge, the participants at the café are able to learn from the volunteers and make mistakes without judgment, and the Danish volunteers are able to learn about the norms and values of refugees in order to guide them in the respective ways necessary to learn the Danish culture.

Therefore, in conclusion, the sum of capital that refugees bring with them matters greatly in the integration process and in their abilities to move forward in their new lives, but also the priorities of refugees for their integration and for their future have a different focus than that of the Danish Integration Act and the Danish normative perception of integration. Whereas employment and education are seen as important measurable goals in Danish integration, with an overall objective of becoming contributing members of society, these are merely seen as facilitators in the opinion of refugees, and the end goal is more heavily influenced by the dream of having a “good life” in Denmark.

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Appendix

Appendix A – Interview Guide

Childhood in Syria

1. Where were you born?
2. Tell me about your family - how many brothers and sisters do you have?
3. What did your parents do for a living in Syria?
4. What was your economic situation?
5. What were your parents' religious background? How was religion practiced in your family?
6. Describe the house you grew up in.
7. Describe the neighborhood and community you grew up in.
8. Did you like going to school? What was your favourite subject?
9. What did you do in your spare time?
10. Who were your best friends? What did you do when you were together?
11. What did you want to be when you grew up?

The War and the Escape

12. Do you remember when the war started? Do you remember how you felt?
13. Describe how your life changed when the war started.
14. Do you remember the moment you / your family decided to leave Syria? What were your thoughts / concerns / hopes?
15. From the moment you decided to leave until the day that you left, what preparations did you make? Describe this time.
16. Tell me about your trip from Syria to Denmark.

The Arrival

17. How was your first time in Denmark? What were your first thoughts? Were your expectations met?
18. When you got your papers and moved to your new city - how did you feel?
19. How long did it take for you to feel at home in Helsingør / Denmark?
20. Do you remember any moments that were especially difficult or good in the beginning?
21. Did you think about Syria or ever long to go back?

The Present

22. What is your situation today? Who do you live with? Do you go to school? Do you work?
23. What are your thoughts about your life in Denmark?
24. Describe a normal day for you.
25. Who are your best friends? What do you do together?
26. Do you miss your friends / family?
27. When you think back to your life in Syria and to who you are now - how have you changed as a person?
28. How do you think you got to where you are today? Has it been difficult? Have you had any help?
29. How do you feel when you think about Syria?
30. What are your thoughts about the future?

Appendix B – Kareem

Interviewee: Kareem (K)

Interviewer: Julie (J)

Date of interview: 5/11/2017

J: So we will start by talking about your childhood. Can you tell me about that? Did you have a good childhood?

K: Yes, it was good. I think I had a normal childhood, I don't know.

J: Do you have a big family?

K: I have 3 brothers and 1 sister. I'm the youngest. I'm the baby in the family [laughs]. And then of course my mother and father, and my uncles and cousins and all that.

J: How was the house you grew up in?

K: It was an apartment. 100 m². Yes, it was nice.

J: Okay. What did your parents do?

K: **My father is a welder.** I don't know how to say it in Danish, but he has a licence as a welder and he works for a company. He works with iron, you know. My mother she didn't work.

J: Are your parents religious?

K: They're normal, I think. Medium. Like they are both religious, but they don't care so much what we do. So it wasn't like I wasn't allowed to do anything. But yes, they are Muslim and I am Muslim.

J: Okay. What about your school?

K: Yes, I went to school. **I finished high school actually, and then I studied for a year.**

J: What did you study?

K: Business

J: At university?

K: No it wasn't the university. I don't know what it's called, but it's like a vocational college. It takes 2 years, but I was only there for 1 year.

J: What did you want to be when you grew up?

K: I wanted to be a businessman [laughs] something to do with that.

J: What else did you spend your time on? What did you do in your spare time?

K: I was just with my friends. We liked to go to cafés and just talk and hang out. And I had a job too.

J: What was your job?

K: I worked in a perfume shop. It was for 5 months before I left Homs.

J: Okay so it was during the war?

K: Yes, the war started and it was boring. So I wanted to change my routine, so I got a job.

J: It was boring? How was it boring?

K: **Well, I'm Palestinian. And we lived in a 'mukhaim' [camp] for Palestinians.** It's like that in all the cities in Syria, there are Palestinian camps. It's not closed, but it's an area where there are only Palestinians. So there was no war inside the camp, but we were stuck inside, because the war was outside.

J: Okay, so you didn't feel the war in the camp. Could you still go to school?

K: Yes, because **my school and my job and my friends and everything, it was all inside the camp.** So we just stayed inside the whole time. So that's what I mean by boring. We couldn't leave.

J: So what made you decide to leave?

K: When I was 18 they said I had to go to the military. My brother too. They said we had to go to the army or to prison. It was very dangerous. So we had to leave.

J: Can you tell me about the journey?

K: Yes. We talked to a smuggler and he took me and my brother and our friend Mahmoud to the border. There we met another smuggler, who said he would take us across the border. We had to run for 2 km through a tunnel and hide from the police. On the other side there was a white car waiting for us. And then we took a bus to Istanbul. And my friend who had left before us, he gave me a number to another smuggler. So I called him, and we agreed to meet with him. He said we had to look for a man with black clothes and black hair, and we followed him to an apartment. We lived in that apartment for a month. We tried to go to Europe 5 times, but the police came every time. The last time we made it. We were 40 people who drove in a van to the ocean. And then they took us, me and my brother and Mahmoud and 2 other people, in a small boat, which took us to a bigger boat. There were 90 people. And it took 6 days to get to Italy. It was hard of course. And then we had to wait for 3 days in a camp in Italy before we could leave. Then we took a bus to Milan and waited for 2 days. Then we called another person and said that we wanted to go to

Denmark. So we paid 700 euro per person and he drove us in a car from Milan to Kolding in Denmark. And we took the train to Copenhagen.

J: Okay, and then you applied for asylum in Denmark?

K: No [laughs] Then we went to my brother in Sweden, he was waiting for us in Malmö.

J: Oh, so why did you come back to Denmark?

K: We just went to visit our family. **I have 2 brothers and my sister in Helsingborg. So we stayed with them for 6 days because we wanted to spend some time with them.** But then we went back to Denmark. Because we wanted to live in Denmark.

J: Okay. And then you went to an asylum centre?

K: Yes. We went to Sandholm for 2 days and then Ebeltoft for 6 months. And then Helsingør municipality after we got our residence permits.

J: Do you remember the first 6 months in Denmark? How did you feel?

K: In the beginning it was so bad. The camp was in the middle of the forest, and you had to walk 30-40 minutes to the closest shops. So it was so boring. You just have to wait. **I didn't go to school because it was too boring.**

J: Yes. But then you got your residence permit and moved to Græsted.

K: Yes, I got a small room in Græsted. Next to my brother.

J: How was that?

K: It was okay. **But there was no school in Græsted, and we had to go to Helsingør every day to go to school. So it was a long way. And I was a bit sad, because I told them I wanted to live in Helsingør, because my uncle is here, but they didn't listen.** But after 2 months, my cousins came to Helsingør and I moved into their apartment with them. So then it was better because I had my family and I had friends. But because I still belonged to Helsingør municipality, it was difficult for me.

J: Have you managed to change that now?

K: Yes. **Because I got a job, then I'm allowed to change my municipality. So I live in Helsingør now. But because I moved, they don't help me anymore.** I don't get any money from them, so I have to work so much. And soon I have to move because my cousin's family is coming, and they will not help me with that. So I don't know what I'm going to do.

J: Yes, that must be hard. How was it in the language school in the beginning?

K: It was so hard. For me it is so difficult to learn Danish, so in the beginning I didn't want to go to school. It's better now, but it's still not good. In the language school it's only refugees, so everyone speaks Arabic. So we can help each other to understand, but we can't speak Danish together.

J: Yes, so you only speak Arabic with your friends?

K: Yes exactly. I have my uncle and his family, and they try to speak Danish with me, but I always change to Arabic. I don't have any Danish friends. I know people. From the language café and from work. But they are old. They want to help me, but I can't talk to them like I talk to my friends, you know? So it's not the same.

J: Yes. But you are still in school now? And you work?

K: I'm doing Danish 2 Module 5. I have one more module and then I'm done. Then I will take 9th grade at VUC, and then I will be done with Danish I think. And yes, I have a job where I clean. I clean apartments and the stairs in apartment buildings. And I also work for my uncle's wife's brother at his pizzeria. I deliver pizzas. But I don't get paid, I just help him. I will get paid later when the business is going well.

J: When you think back to your life in Syria before the war, and to today – how do you think you have changed?

K: I think I'm still me. But I don't know how to be me with the Danes. Because if I talk with my Arab friends, I can make jokes and have fun. But I can't do that in Danish, so the Danish people I know haven't seen me like that. Do you know what I mean? But of course I have also changed, because of everything that has happened in my life.

J: How do you think you got to where you are today? Has anyone helped you?

K: My uncle helps me so much. I don't know what I would do without him. He has been in Denmark for 14 years, so he knows how everything works. I have asked Venligboerne for a contact family. My cousin has one and it's very good. But they don't have anyone available. I think that would have helped me a lot, so I have someone to speak with in Danish and to know some Danish people better. But I can't do that now.

J: Do you miss Syria? Your friends and family?

K: Yes of course. I miss my parents so much. I still see some of my friends, they are in Germany. But Syria as a country, no I don't miss that.

J: And what is your goal? What do you want to do next?

K: **For me language is the most important thing. Of course I want to get a better job, and better pay. But I need to speak the language first. And I want to make friends. It's important to have many friends in Denmark.** It's a boring life if you don't have friends. **But I don't think I will study anymore, it's too difficult for me here. So maybe I will get a licence in something more practical, like a bus driver or something like that.**

J: Yes. Is your future in Denmark?

K: Yes, always.

Appendix C – Moaz

Interviewee: Moaz (M)

Interviewer: Julie (J)

Date of Interview: 9/11/2017

J: Can you tell me a little about your childhood? Did you have a good childhood?

M: Yes, **I actually lived in both Syria and Dubai. My father worked in Dubai as an engineer, so we went back and forth.**

J: Okay, so you lived both places? How long each place?

M: Well for 6 years we were back and forth. Then my father finished working there, and we came to Syria in 2010.

J: And then you were only in Syria?

M: Yes.

J: And he was an engineer?

M: Yes, he is still an engineer.

J: Okay, is he working now too?

M: Yes. **He has a lot of degrees actually.**

J: Okay. Do you remember the house you lived in when you were little?

M: Yes actually, we lived in an apartment. It was around 140 m², 4 bedrooms and a big living room, 2 balconies...

J: A nice apartment?

M: Yes, very nice. I lived with my family. My mother, my father, my little sister and my big brother.

J: Okay, so you're 3 children, 3 siblings?

M: Yes, 3 siblings.

J: Okay, what about school? Did you like going to school?

M: **I went to a private school. It was nice.** And I almost finished high school in Syria. I didn't take the last exam, because I came to Denmark in October 2014.

J: Your father worked... What about your mother?

M: Yes, **she's a schoolteacher.**

J: Okay, so financially you were doing quite well...

M: **Let me say, if I wanted something, I would get it [laughs]**

J: Are your parents religious?

M: My father is a little, but in reality he isn't really. He accepts everything except drinking and taking drugs. But talking to girls and all that, that's okay. He doesn't say anything at all [laughs]

J: Okay, so you could do what you wanted?

M: Yes, except alcohol and drugs, that was the only thing.

J: Are you Muslim?

M: Yes, I am Muslim because my whole family is Muslim.

J: What did you do when you weren't in school? What did you do in your spare time?

M: I was with my friends. That's all. **I didn't have to work because my father told me "you don't need to work, you just have to study."**

J: What did you do with your friends?

M: We went to cafés, restaurants... Just like you and your friends, you know? We just had fun together. We didn't do anything special.

J: You didn't do any sports or...?

M: Sport? No. I don't like football... Well, I played basketball for 6 months with my best friend.

J: Your best friend, where is he?

M: He's living in Germany now.

J: Do you remember what you wanted to be when you grew up?

M: **Something to do with medicine.** Like a dentist or... anything to do with medicine. We were 4 guys in the class who all decided we wanted to study something about medicine. And it actually happened. I'm the only one who hasn't done it, the others are all dentists [laughs]

J: Really? That's good... But then the war started in Syria...

M: Yes, in 2011. Or no, in my city it started in 2013 or 2012. It wasn't there in the beginning, not in 2011.

J: Okay, it came later to Hama?

M: Yes exactly.

J: Do you remember how it was in the beginning?

M: It was only small groups of people who got together. Some of them got money from other people. But they didn't really have weapons or anything like that. But after a year... wow!

J: Then it started for real?

M: Yes, every day every day. Because I lived on a street with a military school. So the rebels came every single day.

J: Oh, right next to you?

M: Yes, right next door. Every day at 4 o'clock. Every day every day...

J: Why 4 o'clock?

M: I don't know. I just remember that when I came home from school, I couldn't go outside again. Not until the next day.

J: Do you remember what you were thinking? Were you scared?

M: It was funny.

J: Funny?

M: Yes. Because I couldn't really see anything. I heard that they were shooting at each other, but I didn't see any of it. But afterwards... wow!

J: Yes, then you saw?

M: I saw so many situations, where people were lying in the street. They were all dead... yes.

J: Yes. And then it wasn't funny anymore?

M: No, not anymore.

J: When it really started in Hama, how did your life change? Were you able to go to school?

M: Yes, but it was a little annoying, because they stopped me every day to check my ID, "do you have anything in your bag? Where are you going? When are you coming back?" Stuff like that. And if you live right next door, you have to make coffee for them. They were like "can you make coffee for us?" "Okay" ... you can't say no.

J: Who was that for? The rebels?

M: No to the military. You can't say no. I just had to say "Yes, of course! Do you want me to make food too?" [laughs]

J: Okay, wow. How long did it take before your brother and you decided to leave?

M: 3-4 years

J: Okay, and how did you...

M: For me it's... **I'm Palestinian, okay? So a big part of our population in Syria get money from the government because they can't work.** That's why they support the Syrian regime.

J: Okay, so you had to as well?

M: **Yes they told me to, but I actually said no.** They told me again and again, until I told myself “no” because I was about to turn 18, and then it gets dangerous.

J: Because you had to join the army?

M: Yes exactly

J: So that’s why it was you and your brother who left? Because the two of you had to join the military?

M: Yes

J: What did your mother and father say?

M: My father said no. My mother said yes. You know, mothers they worry. But my father said “no, what are you going to do? It’s not good”. Actually in the beginning it was only my brother who said he wanted to leave. I didn’t want to. But after a year I told my father “I need to go”. After exactly a week my father said to me and my brother “Khalas, you’re leaving in 2 days”.

J: Okay, so your father actually helped you to leave?

M: Yes

J: How did you do it then? Did he give some money to a smuggler?

M: Yes my father paid a man.

J: Can you tell me about the journey?

M: Yes. We talked to a man from the rebels’ side, and then we had to go to Aleppo. I was with my brother and my uncle. He’s not my real uncle, he’s someone from the family but far away. He was with his daughter and a boy, so there were 5 of us. We went to Aleppo and we waited 2 hours on the street. Then the man we had talked to came. He took us to the border between Syria and Turkey. We waited for 6 hours and then we were able to run. You have to run because the Turkish military is patrolling back and forth, and if they catch you they will hit you. They don’t kill you, but they hit you hard. So after 6 hours we were in Turkey. We went to Gaziantep and then to Izmir, and from Izmir to Istanbul. And after 7 days we went to Mersin. After 27 days exactly, we went from Turkey to Italy. It took 12 days.

J: On a boat?

M: On a tiny boat. It was 18 m and we were 250 people. Yes... But after 12 days we were in Italy. Then I took the train with the boy and my brother. My uncle went by car, but my brother was scared. So he told me “no, you’re coming on the train.” So we went on the train from Italy to Munich. From Munich to Hamburg. And in Hamburg ... [laughs] we saw a man from Pakistan. He came to me and said “do you know how

to buy a ticket to Italy?" I said "yes yes, but you have to wait until 6 in the morning". He said "okay, can I stay with you until then? Because I'm bored". And then my brother asked him how to get a sim-card, because it was 12 o'clock at night. He said "okay, I will help" and he left, but then he came back with 2 police officers.

J: No...

M: So the police officer came to me and said "hi, where are you from?" I said "Syria" and he said, "visa?" "No visa." "Document?" "No document." "How did you get to Germany?" "With the train." He kept asking how we got there and what trains we took. So we were there for 5 hours and left at 7 o'clock in the morning to go to Denmark.

J: So the police let you leave?

M: Yes, but they took my passport. He said that I could leave but he had to keep my passport. I said "fine, just take it." This was in 2014, the 14th of October. That we came to Denmark.

J: And why Denmark? Why didn't you stay in Germany?

M: **Because I have my family in Denmark. I have family in Germany too of course, but not like in Denmark. Most of my family is in Sweden, but I don't like to live right next to family.** Do you understand?

J: Yes, so close to them but not next door.

M: Yes, close to them. **And I have my uncle here in Helsingør. He helps me a lot.**

J: Okay. And then you came to the asylum center?

M: Yes, we spent 3 days at the old hospital in Helsingør, then we went to Herning for 24 hours, and then to Ranum in Aalborg. We were there for 5 months, or maybe it was 4 months.

J: Do you remember how the first 5 months were? What did you think about Denmark and how did you feel?

M: I actually didn't care so much. It was harder for my brother because he is married. His wife was in Syria and he had to wait before he could apply for family reunification with her. It took one year, so it was hard for him. But for me it was okay. **When I came to Ranum I saw one of my old friends, or someone I knew in Syria, so I thought "oh, that's good."**

J: Okay, good. And what did you think about Denmark in the beginning? Was it like you had imagined?

M: Yes. **They told me that it would be cold, and it was very cold. They told me that everyone goes home at 6 o'clock, and it's true. You don't see many people in the streets after 6 o'clock [laughs]**

J: Yes [laughs]. And then you got your residence permit after 5 months. Were you happy?

M: Yes, that was good.

J: And you moved to Helsingør.

M: Yes I came to Helsingør municipality. We lived in Espergærde first for 2 months, and then I moved to Helsingør.

J: And then you got your apartment, and you started school.

M: Yes I got an apartment, and some of my friends and my cousin they are living with me because they have a room far away. And I went to the language school in Hillerød in the beginning.

J: How long did it take for you to feel at home? Or do you feel at home now?

M: Yes I do actually. I don't know how long it took. **But before the war started in Syria, I always told my father "I don't want to live in Syria." He said "why?" I said "I just don't want to, I don't like it. Can't we just go to Saudi Arabia or Dubai or somewhere else? Just not Syria."**

J: Okay, so you always wanted to live somewhere else?

M: Yes

J: So it was okay to be in Denmark? You didn't miss Syria?

M: Of course I miss it a little. I have a lot of memories from there. Also some good memories. I have friends, family, everything.

J: Was there anything in the beginning that you remember as being especially good or bad?

M: Everything was normal. I don't remember anything good or bad.

J: What about school? Was it difficult?

M: When I was in the asylum center I also went to school actually. Every day. **Because I was bored, you never do anything there, you just sit and wait. So I told myself "just go to school and learn something."**

J: So you already spoke a little Danish when you came to Helsingør?

M: A little, yes.

J: You have learnt Danish fast. But has it been difficult?

M: Thank you. It's been very hard actually. It still is. But you just have to read and read, and it will come.

J: What's your situation today? What are you doing now?

M: **I work in Netto in Helsingør, and I'm a student at HF in Espergærde Gymnasium. I'm in my first year, so I just started.** That's all I do.

J: Is it good?

M: Yes it's really good actually. I like it a lot.

J: Do you think you have a good life in Helsingør?

M: I'm happy. **And I just got my family reunification application accepted, so my parents and sister are coming next month.** So I'm very happy about that. Because I was 17 when I came, I applied then. It took a long time [laughs] but they will come now. It's good.

J: Tell me about a normal day for you.

M: Okay. If I have work and a long day in school... I wake up at 7 o'clock. Then I take the train at 7.45 to school. And I'm in school from 8 until 3.30. From 4 o'clock until 10 at night I'm at work. That's a normal day with school and work.

J: And then you go home and do your homework?

M: Yes, if I have homework. The first 6 months at HF we don't get so much homework, we do it in school.

J: Okay. What about your friends in Denmark? Do you have mostly Danish friends or Syrian friends?

M: I know a lot of people, but real close friends I have 4 or 5 Arabic friends in Helsingør and 4 or 5 in Hillerød. But I know a lot of people. **But close Danish friends, I don't have so many. I have a few from school and from my uncle's wife's family.**

J: So who do you spend most time with, your Arabic or Danish friends?

M: **My Danish friends of course. Because I don't like to speak Arabic too much.** I hang out with a guy called Daniel, and someone called Frederik, but mostly Daniel. We're in the same class, so we sit together and we do everything together like homework, projects...

J: Do you miss your friends from Syria? They're probably living around Europe now.

M: Yes. I miss some of them.

J: Do you talk to them?

M: Only with the one who lives in Germany. Not really the rest. My best friend is still in Syria, the one who's a dentist, he told me "if you go to Denmark, don't talk to me anymore." And he meant it, I only talk to him maybe once a year.

J: Because he is angry?

M: I don't know, he says he's busy.

J: If you think back to when you were a child in Syria and before you left, and then think about now – do you think you have changed as a person? Are you the same Moaz?

M: Of course not, of course not. You can't be the same person.

J: You've experienced a lot of things.

M: Yes, I've seen so many things. And a lot has changed. And here is not the same as in Syria.

J: Is that a good thing or a bad thing?

M: It's a good thing, of course. I hope I have changed for the better.

J: So you have learned some things and...

M: Wow, yes I have learned so many things [laughs] that's true.

J: If you look at your situation now, you have done really well. You're going to school, you have a job, you speak Danish...

M: **Yes actually my uncle said the same thing to me. He said "there are many Danes who can't find a job, they don't go to school. You came to Denmark 3 years ago and you're already working and at HF."**

J: Yes, exactly it's very good. And you have worked hard for it. How do you think you got here?

M: Let me be honest. I don't study at home so much, because I don't like to study languages. I like other subjects like maths or science, but not language. So I just concentrate with the teacher when he or she is explaining something, and that's all. I've never really taken a pen and paper and started writing like "this means that" or whatever.

J: So you've never studied Danish?

M: No, I'm good at writing and good at remembering words. I just have to concentrate in school, that's all.

J: Has anyone helped you to get to where you are?

M: Yes. Like you, when you're talking to me right now, you help me. My uncle. Janne. Saleh. A lot of people have helped me actually. **And I have a Danish family,**

my contact family, who I have spent a lot of time with. I don't see them so much now, because they are busy and I'm busy with school, but in the beginning I saw them a lot. I went to their house 1 or 2 times a week and we ate food together, we spoke Danish together and they helped me with my homework. That was so good.

J: What are your plans for the future now? Are you going to be a dentist?

M: **Well I want to finish HF now. I don't know what will happen, but I still want to study something to do with medicine.** Doctor, dentist, pharmacist, or something. Just something with medicine. And of course I want to get married, have a family. You know, have a good life here.

J: So you want to go to university after HF?

M: Yes, I hope so.

J: Well you're still young, you have time.

M: **Yes, everyone says that.**

J: And you want to stay in Denmark?

M: Yes, always. Of course I'm going to travel in the summer [laughs]

Appendix D – Saleh

Interviewee: Saleh (S)

Interviewer: Julie (J)

Date of interview: 29/10/2017

J: Alright. As I explained, we will start by talking about your childhood.

S: Yes.

J: I have some general questions, and then you can talk freely afterwards, okay?

S: Okay.

J: So, where were you born?

S: I was born in Aleppo, Syria.

J: And can you tell me a little bit about your family? How many siblings do you have?

S: I have, as usual, a mother and a father. My mother's name is Ruba and my father's name is Mahmoud. **My father is a pharmacist, and he has studied in Russia and Lebanon. He speaks many different languages, like Russian, Arabic, English and French.** And my mother stayed at home, she wasn't educated. She had some problems with her family. And then I have 2 sisters, who are 19 and 17 years old. **Right now they are all living in Germany.**

J: So you're the big brother?

S: I'm the big brother.

J: And how was it to grow up with your family and in your house?

S: It has been very nice. We're a family that is very... **We compromise with each other, we show understanding and respect. We have always had the rule that we have to vote in the family if we want something.** So you could say that we were a democratic family. We love each other very much, we care about each other. Yes, so it was very nice.

J: How was your financial situation? Your father worked... Did he make a lot of money?

S: **My mother's family was very rich, and my grandfather was the first industrial man in Aleppo. So he travelled to a lot of places, and he made so much money in the 80's and 90's. My father wasn't as lucky as my grandfather, but they worked together, and he also made good money at one point.** Then our situation changed.

It was up and down right before the war. And during the war we were struggling because of the economy.

J: Yes, I'm sure a lot of people were.

S: Yes.

J: What about religion? Are your parents religious?

S: Actually, half of my family on my father's side, they're atheists, communists. They don't believe in anything, only nature and things. My mother's family is a Muslim family. A very religious Muslim family, old-fashioned, traditional. So it's a funny combination with my mother and father, because my mother is still religious but my father is not.

J: So how did you do it in your home?

S: Well in the beginning it was a bit difficult for my mother to get used to my father, but then my father became a little religious I guess. You could say that they both moved to the middle. So that was funny. **I was taught about Islam for 5 years. I have learned so much about the religion, but I didn't become religious.** I have always been critical about religion, and I never wanted to be a Sheikh or an Imam or anything. I didn't want that. Even though I was good at reading the Koran and understanding Islam.

J: And that's okay with your parents?

S: **My mother wanted that. But I was like "no, it's not my direction, it's not me."**

J: And it's okay?

S: Yes.

J: Okay. Tell me a little about the house you grew up in.

S: Okay. **We have had a permanent apartment, and then we had a villa, a huge villa that belongs to the whole family. I was a spoiled child because I was the only son.** And to my mother's family I was also spoiled, because I was sort of the special one in the family, who has many ambitions. So I had to live up to my grandparents' expectations. So I lived in the villa for many years. So I moved away from home kind of, and moved to the villa in the summer.

J: Alone?

S: **Yes, I lived with my grandparents in the villa. And then in the winter I came back home. But I still visited my grandparents on the weekends. It's been like that my whole life. And we all travelled together.** But yes... It was very nice to live in that villa.

J: Was it far away from the apartment?

S: It was about 10 km away from the apartment. It was right next to the city, in the countryside.

J: What about the neighbourhood and the society you lived in? How was that?

S: It has always been difficult for me to get used to the society and the neighbours. **I was raised like we are not the same as everyone else. We have to be different and we have to think reasonably, that's how I was raised.** For example, it was really difficult for me to get out of the house, I wasn't allowed out of the house sometimes, because my mother thought that if you grow up in the streets you become a street kid. **Instead you just have to stay home and read or learn something that can help you with your future.** So I have always thought that I had to be different, I can't be like them. So it was a bit like "us and them" in my childhood.

J: Okay. What about your friends then? Were your friends like you?

S: That was also a bit difficult. I was raised like you have to choose your own friends. You have to look at your friends in school and everywhere, and then you have to see if they're really good friends or not, if they're good people. So I was raised like I have to be nice to everyone, but I have to choose the right friends. I shouldn't be friends with someone who drags me down. I should be friends with someone who makes me better.

J: So who did you choose? Who were your best friends?

S: When I was little it was the ones who were good in school, because I was also really good in school, and I liked to compete with them. But they couldn't compete with me [laughs] I have to say. But when I became a teenager, I probably thought that I needed a bit of excitement in my life. There had to be some bad boys too. Then I got some new friends. It turned out that, if they don't behave badly, it doesn't mean that they're good people. Maybe they behave well but they're still bad people. So yes... They were all nice, all my friends were nice actually.

J: What did you do when you were together?

S: All kinds of things. We went out to restaurants a lot, we went out to eat, we went swimming together, we trained together, we looked at girls together [laughs] you know, normal teenage things...

J: Yes.

S: But it wasn't anything dangerous, like we were on the street causing trouble, or yelled in the street or anything like that. No, it wasn't like that. That wasn't my type

of people, I wouldn't hang out with them if they did that. They were a little wild, but nothing like that.

J: No, normal teenagers... yes. What did you do in your spare time? What did you spend most time doing?

S: I loved to swim. Because I had some problems with running when I was little. I had a weak body that couldn't run for even 5 minutes. Even though I was thin and in shape, I couldn't run at the same level as the others at my age. So I started swimming instead. **And then I became the Syrian champion in swimming, and then Syrian champion in triathlon, and then Asian champion in triathlon also.**

J: So you spent a lot of time on that?

S: Yes I trained a lot. There was a time in my life, during the war, where I trained 8 hours a day, and I got paid for it. I was professional.

J: What about school? Did you like going to school?

S: **Well from 1st grade to 6th grade, which we have in Syria, I was the best student in the school. I was also chosen to be the school president twice, in 5th grade and 6th grade.** I was very popular with the girls when I was little, and all the girls that were with me were blonde [laughs] yes, I had a very nice childhood.

J: What do you mean by blonde?

S: They were blonde... with blue eyes and blonde hair.

J: Okay [laughs]

S: I was like "you have to be my girlfriend". It was funny. But I was also very good in school. I got 200 out of 200 in 5th and 6th grade, when we started to get grades. In 7th grade it was very difficult for me to get used to us being split up in boys and girls. There were only boys. Wild boys, where I was kind of elegant, you know a gentleman, like I was raised. **So it was really difficult, I couldn't live with it. So I moved 3 times to 3 different schools from 7th to 9th grade.** It was difficult for me. I was very creative in primary school, and from 7th to 9th grade I was good academically, but I was not good socially. So I became very quiet, and I kept to myself and stayed away. But in 10th grade it started to solve itself, or started to get better.

J: What was your dream? What did you want to be when you grew up?

S: [Laughs] **That was very confusing for me, to find out what I should do, because I was good at everything. If I did sports, then I was good. If I studied, then I was good. If I do anything... I just had to study it, then I became good at**

it. I couldn't figure out what I was passionate about. **But I wanted to be a doctor, because it gives you a high status, and it gives you good money and a good future.** And you can get married. When you get married according to our traditions, then you will not get a no, you will not get rejected if you're a doctor [laughs] So it's really good to be a doctor.

J: Yes, so that's what you wanted?

S: Yes it was actually.

J: Then the war started in Syria. Do you remember the beginning when it first started? Do you remember what you thought and how you felt?

S: The war started in 2011, on March 15th in Dar'a, which is south of Damascus. My father got home one day and said "things are going to explode, it's going to get really dangerous". From that day I started to think reasonably, and to read about what democracy is, and why we have a dictator in charge, why we don't have a democratic system, why are we so limited, why can't we talk about politics in Syria? And then I found out that we actually have a very bad system, we have a bad regime in charge in Syria, you can't say anything, you can't do anything, and if you dare to do anything you will go to prison and get tortured in a horrible way.

Then some of my friends from school started planning some demonstrations. We all had an understanding that democracy demands that you take action, you have to be loud. So we started to arrange some demonstrations in school. The teachers and the principal were not happy, and they started to threaten us. At the same time I was on the national team, and it was dangerous for me. So when the government found out what I was doing, they took my passport from me, and I was forced to stay in Aleppo for 2 years, and I got fired from the team, and so many things happened.

So back then I thought that democracy is the only thing for my future. I thought about my future back then, I thought about a country like France. I thought that we have resources in Syria, we can use them, we can invest in them, if we get rid of the president.

J: So you thought it was a good thing there were demonstrations, and you could make a difference?

S: Yes, and it started out peaceful, there were no weapons, there was no danger.

J: No.

S: The first 6 months at least.

J: Yes. And how, practically speaking, did your life change? Did you still go to school?

S: I still went to school, and I used school to arrange the demonstrations. We were a lot of students in the school, we were about 1000 students, so we thought “1000 people can shout very loud”. And then we started to get together with some other schools in the area, and then with the university, and then we became huge. We were 100.000 people in the streets one time. It was really nice. It felt like all Syrians are being loud, all the students are loud, we don’t want the president. It’s them that are the future, I mean the young people are the future of our country. But then we got shot. Some of us got caught. My name was on a list, a blacklist. And we had to pay a lot of money to erase my name from that list.

J: So when the war really started, and it started to get dangerous – how did your life change?

S: It got so bad. I was so ambitious before the war. After the war started, I was surprised that it didn’t end. I kept thinking that maybe it will take a year, then it took 2 years, then 3 years. Then I got very desperate, because people got killed, I lost some friends. There were planes, and you kept fearing... You were starving... yes. It was horrible to live in Syria during the war. I lost... I got kicked out of school, so I started to study without electricity.

J: At home?

Yes: Yes, and for many days without water. There was no water in the house, and we had to go and carry it. It was horrible. I started having problems with my eyes, because there was no electricity but I had to study for my high school exams. **The last year of high school, I read all alone with no help. I just had the books and some notes from old students. But I took my exams. And I got 80%.**

J: Okay. You didn’t lose your motivation? You kept going and...

S: Well when the war started, after 2 years I started to think about leaving the country. Because I could see that there was no future in Syria. The war, and ISIS, and all the problems that came... they made me desperate in Syria, and I lost that passion that the country would change. **So I started thinking about leaving the country. But I just needed a proof that I was at least well educated.**

J: Okay, so you waited until you had finished school?

S: That was my idea, that I would wait for that, but then I got the high school diploma, and then **I started university for 5 or 4 months. I studied economics,**

which the government had chosen for me to study. And then I was invited to fight with them. Or they sent a letter to my parents, that I had to join the Syrian army, even though I'm the only son. So then I just had to leave. It was the right time to go.

J: Okay, so that's when you took the decision to leave the country?

S: There were so many reasons that I took this decision. I was the only one left on the national team, or the only one in Aleppo. I trained all by myself, and then I got shot while I was training. It was horrible. 2 years... I remember waking up in the morning and thinking "why don't I just die? It's horrible, I don't want this anymore." It was one of the reasons... yes.

J: Yes. And from you made the decision about leaving until you actually left, how much time passed? And how did you get ready?

S: I think it took 4 or 3 months. I made the decision when I finished high school actually, when I got my diploma. That's when I thought "it's time". But then I waited a bit, because my parents were like "no, you're still 18, and it's dangerous, you can't do it, we will miss you". And that kept me there. And then they said "you can go to university, like the others do, and maybe it will get better". But it didn't. So it took about 4 months until I said "okay, now I'm leaving. I can't do this". I was very limited because we got that letter, I had to hide.

J: So your parents said it was okay that you left?

S: Yes.

J: Can you tell me about the journey?

S: Yes. I think it was in November, that we left Aleppo.

J: Who is we?

S: **Me and Hashem. He is my swimming coach and my neighbour, but I call him my brother because we have become very close, and I really care about him. We have been through so much together.** But he was also eager to leave, I could see that, so we decided to go together. We went from Aleppo to Turkey, illegally. We saw ISIS on the way, we saw the Syrian army, we saw the rebels' army. And we paid so much money me and him. It was crazy that we had to pay so much money just to avoid going to prison.

But we ended up in Turkey for a month I think. We travelled from Mersin to Istanbul, Mersin is in the south of Turkey, and there's about 15 hours between the two cities. But we couldn't find an honest smuggler [laughs] it was really difficult, because the only way is to be transported to Europe illegally. But we found someone who

promised to take us to Romania. We would sail to Romania and then from Romania to another country, an Eastern European country. But then we were like “no, Romania... There’s the mafia, we don’t know the language. And it’s Eastern Europe, it’s dangerous. We can’t do that, they’ll kill us.” So we went back down to Mersin, and talked to a smuggler who said “okay, I guarantee that you will come to Europe, but it will be hard.”

And then we had to travel from Mersin to Italy in a huge ship, as he said. But it wasn’t. There were like 45-50 wooden ships. I don’t know how to explain it, but they were made of metal and wood, they weren’t modern, but very old boats. I think it was the 1st of December that we left Turkey. So we sailed in December 2014. And the first 2 days I was just thinking that the smuggler had told me it would take 7 days. “7 days and you will be in Europe” he said, “there will be food, water, there’s rooms, and everything”. But what I was in, I don’t know how to describe it, but it was horrible... I had to sit on the deck to sleep, because there wasn’t any space. People weren’t very nice to each other. Because I was a guy, I couldn’t sit with anyone else. Because they had families, women and children, they were afraid of me. So I had to sit on the deck. It was cold. It took 15 days. For 15 days I was wet, cold. I couldn’t pee for 15 days, there was no toilet. And the way I was raised... I couldn’t do it. I could feel that I had to pee, but I couldn’t get myself to do it.

J: For 15 days?

S: Yes... A whole week without food and the last 5 days without water. It was a very bad trip. And we paid so much money for it, we paid 6000 dollars to go on the boat with everyone else. Then the last day came, when the boat started to sink, and drown. We were about 100 miles away from Italy. Then we were surrounded by 4 big ships to protect us.

J: From Italy?

S: It was those ships that import goods, they have containers... they’re very big ships. They surrounded us from 4 sides.

J: They tried to help?

S: Yes, they tried to hold us, and keep an eye on us. And they talked to us and sent us water. And then they talked to the police in Italy, and they came to rescue us. After 15 days travel. It wasn’t very nice to travel. I actually lost my hair to get to Europe, by thinking about if I would survive, it was really hard to think about. Because I was

sitting on the deck... 4 storms, December, really cold... I was wet, hungry, thirsty, it was horrible.

But then it was like a dream came true when I landed, it was amazing. I told Hashem that day “I don’t care if I keep going, I’m in Europe right now, and I will find my way. If I stay in Italy, I can become something, be something good, as long as I’m in Europe”. I was really happy that day. But that didn’t happen. We were interviewed, or examined, by the police for a whole day – for 24 hours, me and Hashem and 4 others from the boat. They chose us to tell them the story and about the smuggler. It was so bad, because we were tired and sick and hungry. They gave us food, we kept saying “we’re hungry and we’re thirsty” it was so funny. Because they said “why do you eat so much?” so we said “because we have been sailing for 15 days without food”.

My problem with peeing continued. I couldn’t get my body to work, and I was very stressed. That was horrible too. I started saying to Hashem “we have to go, we have to go”. I just wanted to rest a bit before we could leave. So in Italy we decided that we would go to Sweden, because there are many opportunities in Sweden. **But my plan was to go to Sweden and then continue to Norway, where I have a friend, a good friend.** So we took the train to Milan. And in Milan we talked to another smuggler. We paid 700 euro to get transported to Denmark, to Kolding. And then we would take the train from Kolding to Sweden. Back then there was no passport control, it was easy.

So we drove from Italy, and I was really sick. I was exhausted, I was so tired, so I just sat in the back seat and slept. I remember waking up in the middle of the night when we were in Germany, and I asked which way we were going. They said we were going through borders in Switzerland and Austria, and then we came to Germany. And back then I wanted to say “stop, I want to stay here in Germany”. Because we were in Dortmund and Hamburg, it was so good. I loved these cities in Germany. But something inside me said “shut up Saleh, just continue, just be a man and pull yourself together”. So the next day in the morning, at 7 o’clock I think, we were in Kolding. Before we arrived in Kolding we were on the highway, and I woke up and the sun was shining that day. And it was so nice to see Jylland. Because it wasn’t all gray, it was green, it was like paradise. So I talked to Hashem about maybe it would also be nice to stay in Denmark. I said “if Denmark is like this, then I would like to stay in Denmark”. 5 minutes later we got caught by the police. It was so funny.

Hashem started saying “fuck you Saleh, don’t say anything else” [laughs] because we got caught by the police.

I was really tired. The smuggler got caught too. But then the police told us “you’re not in danger, you’re safe now, and you can stay in Denmark”. And then I said “can I sit in your car?” And they said “yes, you can”. So I went over and opened the door and got into their car on my own. Then we were taken to the police station, where we got some food. **And they said “we have bought chicken sausages for you, because some of you don’t eat pork”. And I thought, “wow, they are so nice, they think about that we don’t eat pork, they don’t force us to do anything, and they treat us so well. Denmark is a good country”.**

And then after all the examinations and everything with the police, where they had to check who we are and where we come from, then we were sent to Sandholm the next day. And something happened on the way, there was a bomb on the train...

J: In Denmark?

S: Yes, someone called the police that day and said that there is a bomb on the train. In Vejle, I think. And so we had to stop. Back then I didn’t speak Danish, I couldn’t understand what they said, so I had to speak English with a guy from England. **I wasn’t brave enough to ask the Danes about anything. But I could hear that someone was speaking English, so I asked him,** and he said that some idiot had called the police and said there was a bomb on the train, and we all had to move. So it was horrible, because we thought that we were refugees, we came straight from the war, to a bomb on the train in Denmark, which is a peaceful country. And it was raining so much, the weather was horrible. We had to wait in the church for 3 hours.

J: In the church?

S: Yes. And then some busses came to pick us up. It took so long. We only got to Sandholm at 10 or 11 at night. And then they started to check us and register us as refugees, and take all our information. Then we were sent to another place that we didn’t know. They ordered a taxi for us. And then I said to Hashem again “look, they ordered a taxi for us Hashem, isn’t it a good country?” And he said “it’s really good, I love it too.” On the way to Helsingør I asked the taxi driver where we were going, and he said “it’s called Elsinore in English”. I asked him how to say it in Danish and he said “Helsingør”. So I thought “wow I can’t even say it in Danish, how am I going to learn the language.”

Well, then we got to the asylum centre at the old hospital in Helsingør. And I slept like a rock that day because I was so exhausted. And my problem with peeing continued. The day after I had to go to the doctor to be examined. He gave me some pills and I had to drink so much water. There were so many things... I was sick for 2 months afterwards. And we stayed in the old hospital for 2 months before we moved to Holstebro, and then from Holstebro to Sommersted in Haderslev I think. That was my journey to Denmark.

J: Alright, then you came to Denmark. You moved around to some different asylum centres, but do you remember the first time? What did you think about Denmark? How did your thoughts about the future change?

S: Well it was a fun experience, but at the same time it was also a bit bad for me. **I was sick, and I was depressed from the war, and I started to miss my family so much after the trip. I had problems with my body, and I also had to get used to the cold Denmark.** But it was funny, I went outside in a t-shirt in January and February. It was so cold, but I still went out in only a t-shirt, because I couldn't feel the cold. My body was still affected by the trip and by my life in Syria, because it was also cold without electricity, so I had gotten used to the cold. So I couldn't feel the cold in Denmark for the first 2 months actually. Sometimes I came in with frozen hands and frozen arms without feeling anything. I talked to the doctor about it, and he said "you will feel again, just wait."

I remember I needed money. Because if you take the bus to the center of Helsingør, you have to pay 24 kroner there and 24 kroner back. And we didn't have any money. We got 130 kroner every other week, it wasn't enough to shop or buy anything. I came to Denmark without clothes, I came to Denmark without anything. So the first months in Helsingør were very difficult. And it was cold. But I could sense that I belonged in Helsingør somehow. I felt that there was a love for the town inside me. I thought that I liked this place. It was really good to go for a walk, I did that every day. I walked from the old hospital, which is 25 minutes from the town, and I did that every day. I walked from about 4 or 5 o'clock in the evening until 7 or 8 o'clock. I walked to the town and to new places. I did that every day.

Afterwards there was someone from the Red Cross named Petra – she was so nice to me. I talked to her, and she cried when I told her my story and how I felt. I told her about my ambitions and what I thought of Denmark, and that I wanted to learn the language and integrate and be a part of the community, and learn something that

could change my future. So she helped me to get some running clothes, and I started running every day. And I could feel that I longed to see her, because **she was like an angel that came out of the blue back then**. But it was hard to see her because she was busy. **I could speak English with her. It was a good advantage that I spoke English**. Yes, so it was both fun and nice, but it was also a hard life.

J: While you were in Jylland you got your residence permit. How did you feel when you got your answer?

S: I was actually scared that I wouldn't get my residence permit. I got the answer in May 2015, and I got 5 years temporary residence – I was so happy. But I wasn't happy that I had to live in Jylland. I had to live in Syddjurs, and that's in Jylland, while Hashem would live in Helsingør. And I wanted to live in Helsingør. I told them in the interview "I'm going to university, I need to finish my education, so it's good if I live in Helsingør or an area that's close to Copenhagen". **But then Petra was there again. She had become a case handler at the municipality in Helsingør. So I talked to her and she said "I can talk to my boss about it. You will be moved to Helsingør, don't worry."** So that's how I was moved. So I was really happy.

And I still remember the 28th of May, when I was on my way to Helsingør from Jylland. I put a public post on Facebook, where I said that I was moving to Helsingør and I'm excited to start my life again. And then I got a very nice comment from someone named Karen, who I didn't know. I didn't know she was a politician. She said "we should meet soon and we will be friends". **And then I was very motivated to meet the Danes. I lost contact with Danish people for 6 months, and I was depressed because I was stuck in the asylum centre. I couldn't talk to Danish people, I just had to learn about the Danes and what Denmark is and how the system works in Denmark, but it wasn't good enough**. But then I met Karen and we became friends, and I thought that it is possible to start a new life. It is possible to meet new people and get to know them and become friends with them. Yes, why shouldn't I do that.

In the 6 months I lived in the asylum centre I met so many bad people who came to the asylum centre from the old generations, who don't speak the language. They have lived in Denmark for 30 years and they don't speak the language, they don't speak Danish. And they talk badly about the Danes. So I was angry because I'm a refugee and Denmark has given me free food, clothes, money, and I went to the doctor. **I was an asylum seeker, I wasn't a resident, I wasn't anything. But I got a great**

treatment, like a real resident gets in Denmark. So that's why I was motivated to do something, to learn the language and be part of the country somehow.

J: When you came to Helsingør, you got an apartment, and you had to start language school and all that. Do you remember how you felt at first?

S: **The first meeting with my case handler Stine was a little awkward actually.** Because she works with a lot of refugees, but I was the only one who said to her "I want to learn the language in 1 year". She laughed, so I told her "okay, you're laughing at me... you shouldn't laugh at me because I'm serious! I want to learn the language in a year, but for you I will say a year and 3 months. I'll give you 3 more months." And then she laughed more, actually, she laughed and said "it's impossible, Danish is hard, but let's see". **In the very first meeting with her, I told her about my ambitions and that I wanted to work as a volunteer, because I needed a big network.** And back then I thought it was a good idea to volunteer, so I could pay Denmark back. For 6 months living in the asylum centre, and then after I got my residency, **I was a citizen, but I got social benefits, and I don't like that. Because I am a person that likes to be independent, not relying on the state. But I needed support from someone to start a new life in Denmark, so it was good that I got that. But I wanted to pay back, so I talked to her about that.**

Then I was sent to the language school in Helsingør, Nordsjællands Sprogskole, which wasn't very good. There were so many refugees, most of them were refugees actually, and some from Eastern Europe. And most were older than me. I was 18 or 19 years old back then. So I thought "why don't I go to a normal Danish school? Why am I not learning math and science and things? Why am I being treated like an adult? What's the difference between being 17 and 19? There is no difference!" **So I caused so much drama. I talked to so many people. I started using my small network back then** to say "I don't like my school, I need to be moved to another school that is better than this one." It worked in the end, after I talked to the head of the integration team in the municipality. She said "you will be moved, don't worry".

So I was moved to Studieskolen in November, or end of October in 2015. And then I had a great network. **I participated in meetings with the municipality, because I was a refugees and I had some good ideas about how integration should be.** It was really good. It has done something good for my personality. **The fact that I am important, that I am worth talking to. Someone listens to me, to my ideas and**

what I think, that was important to me. And then I met Janne after that, who helped me to find a club so I could start training again. And then everything fell into place.

J: In the beginning, do you remember anything that was particularly difficult or particularly good?

S: It was so good to talk to the Danes. I don't think it's hard to talk to people in Denmark, but generally it's hard to make friends. It's hard to have a relationship with people in Denmark. **And I understand that, because they don't know you, they don't know your background, and people hear so many things from the TV and from politics in Denmark. There is a lot of pressure on foreigners, and a lot of focus on what they're doing and who they are. So Danes are very careful when it comes to foreigners. We become friends with them, but we can't get a close relationship with them.** But I got a lot of friends. And I'm a person that likes to talk a lot. I wasn't like that in 7th grade, but I became that way when I came to Denmark, because I had to say something about myself. You have to introduce yourself all the time to a lot of people, otherwise you are not acknowledged in Denmark. **No one knows you, and they don't care. If you don't go up to them and say "hi, I'm Saleh" then they won't ask you your name. They don't care.**

And it was difficult to speak Danish. To learn the language. In the beginning I was surrounded by refugees who thought the same as me. **And it's hard, I understand that Danish is a hard language, but I thought that Danish is just some sounds I have to learn.** I try to learn it. Maybe I'm not as good as everyone else, but I try my hardest. I read so much and I started to learn Danish, but I couldn't speak it because I was good at speaking English. And I was also a little shy, because I was afraid that if I made a mistake then the Danes would laugh at me. Just like I do if someone tries to speak Arabic. If a foreigner tries to speak Arabic to me, but it sounds funny... and I think it's embarrassing if I laugh, I try not to laugh, and I try to correct them instead. But I think the Danes will also think it's funny when I speak Danish, so that's why I was shy.

One of the difficult things was to get friends my own age. There's a difference... I have experienced so many things in my life. I have seen violence, I have been shot, I became a champion in triathlon and swimming, I was good in school. I have seen many many things. I have talked to a human smuggler. I have seen the bombs falling down. Danes haven't experienced that. Especially the spoiled children in Denmark, which I call them. Even though I was spoiled in Syria, I have

never had the same opportunities that the children in Denmark have. So I was a bit hesitant with them. I couldn't get so many friends. But I did get a lot of female friends, both old and young.

J: When you had days where it was particularly hard, did you ever think about going back to Syria?

S: I never did. Because from the day I left Syria, I said to myself "it's over with Syria. I'm putting my past behind me, and only thinking about the future. There can't be anything that links me to Syria, nothing can force me to come back". If I say that I will go back to Syria, then I will never be integrated in Denmark. The life I had in Syria, it was a good life, but it's over. **I'm living in Denmark now, and my goal is to be a part of the country one day, a part of the Danish population.** So there's nothing called Syria in my mind right now. **There was only my family who were still living there, but they're in Germany now, and there is nothing tying me to Syria now.**

J: Don't you miss your friends and other family in Syria?

S: I miss the memories I had with them, the atmosphere, the vacations, but I don't miss the country as a country. Because I haven't been a citizen, my father was never a citizen either in Syria, as we are in Denmark and Germany. We were people who live for other people, who live to make money and pay this money to other people, who are in power in Syria. I don't want to be a slave again. That's what I mean.

J: What's your situation now? What do you do now?

S: That's a good question. When I came to Helsingør in 2015, I started volunteering with FrivilligNet, where we went around in Helsingør and worked with different institutions. I met a lot of people, and then I met Janne, who was the head of Venligboerne. I didn't know that at the time, I just knew she was a volunteer, I couldn't even pronounce Venligboerne. Her and her husband have become my contact family now. **I think that was the greatest event in my life, that I met her, because it changed my life completely.** Because it was always so easy to communicate for Janne and I, we had a good time and I've never had a hard time telling her what I thought. She made me calm, and we got very close. So I worked with Venligboerne and with her. We went to some schools and started telling my story, and people fell in love with it, because it was a good story. I worked a little with the Red Cross as a translator in the asylum centre. I ran a voluntary relay race in

Vejle for 24 hours. I ran with 6 other people from Denmark, and we made 15.000 kroner in less than 24 hours for refugees and homeless people.

I did so many things. I started in a work placement at Espergærde Ungdomsskole in September 2015. **There I started listening to the young people speaking Danish, and I made a lot of friends. I joined the musical. I got so many friends.** And then I started to get interested in the political system in Denmark. **So I met with Radikal Ungdom, which I think is a good place to be, and they have helped me so much to understand the country, the mentality and the politics in Denmark.**

I went to the Folkemøde in Bornholm in 2016, and I met Lars Løkke Rasmussen and a lot of other politicians. I was invited by Nasser Khader to a cup of coffee on Facebook. I had a lot of meetings with politicians. I have a strategy that I never say no. As long as I want to and I have the energy, I never say no, I just say yes to everything. I help refugees with learning Danish. I help them to do their homework, and translate from Danish to Arabic for them.

There was someone who was very sick, and he just died. He's been sick for many years, but the last 6 months of his life I was with him almost every day. **I took care of him and his wife, who didn't speak Danish, and helped them with a lot of things.** And it affected me a lot when he passed away. So there were so many things...

The first job I got was in Copenhagen, in Frederiksberg swimming pool and in Tingbjerg, as a swimming instructor for the kids. It was nice. The second job was in the Royal Smushi Café. I work there now as a barista and a waiter. I also work as a mentor at Espergærde Ungdomsskole, where I talk to the kids and listen to their problems. I also work at Helsingør Theatre. Because I worked with someone at the musical, I got a network there, and I met a stage director who works in Helsingør Theatre, so he got me the job.

J: So you have 3 jobs?

S: Yes. **And right now I'm studying HF at Espergærde Gymnasium. So I have fulltime school from 8 to 14 o'clock, and then I have work afterwards.**

J: Okay, so you're quite busy.

S: Yes, I am.

J: Describe a normal day for me.

S: On a normal day I wake up at 6 o'clock, if I sleep... I have problems with sleeping right now. I sleep around 4 or 3 hours a night, and that's not very much. It stresses me out a bit. **I think I will talk to a psychologist about it, because I'm scared there is**

something wrong in my life. Maybe I work too much... But I start by waking up at 6 or 6.30, and then I shower and stuff. Then I start school at 8 o'clock. It takes some time between Snekkersten and Espergærde with public transportation. Then I'm in school until 4 o'clock or 3.30, and then I go back home. At 5 o'clock I go to work until 22, or I go to Helsingør Theatre. It's either at the Ungdomsskole or the theatre on weekdays, and on the weekends I work at the café in Copenhagen. That's my days. And I always find time to do other things. For example, if someone needs help with Danish, then I just say "Okay, 22 o'clock I finish work, so 22.30 I will be at your house". That's how it works.

J: What about your friends? Do you have time for friends?

S: I always have time for my friends.

J: And who are your friends?

S: I have friends from the musical, I know so many people from there, both boys and girls. There were some girls that I was a little bit in love with from the musical, and we are still good friends. **I have my colleagues from the Royal Smushi Café. Especially the girls. It always starts with me liking them, and then we become friends in the end [laughs] but it's good, because I need friends. I need really good friends. In school I have 2 guys that I love so much, Magnus and Mads.** We have a lot of fun and do a lot of things together. We eat Arabic food together. They are interested in Arab culture and the language, so we ate "manaish" the other day, they loved it [laughs]

J: When you think back to the first thing we talked about, your childhood in Syria, and when you were in school in Syria, and to the person you are now – how do you think you have changed as a person?

S: Well, I've changed so much, I would say, since I came to Denmark. I'm still the nice and kind person, I'm still honest and responsible, but I've changed my view on life and how things work. Also my opinion about religion, traditions and family. It's all changed in me... When I talk to people and I say "I'm from Syria", then they expect that I'm at least a little bit religious, but I'm not at all. I live by my own values, which I have learnt from the religion Islam, which I have learnt from my family, which I have learnt from Denmark. I'm a bit of a multicultural person, you can say. I have changed so much in relation to politics, my view on life, how things work. I can see things from the outside, in relation to religion. So if I'm with someone who is

very religious, I say “you have to talk from the outside, not from the inside”. Because inside we can’t see anything, but outside we can see it all. I learnt that in Denmark.

J: So it’s positive changes that have happened in you?

S: Yes, I started being critical and reasonable. I started to learn that you have to be creative. Like in school, you have to be creative, you can’t just study and get good grades, you have to be creative and make demands and question things. You have to find the information you need yourself, you can’t just wait for it to be written in a book, like I learnt in Syria.

J: And what are your thoughts about the future?

S: In relation to?

J: To your life.

S: Well, I’m looking forward to get permanent residency. I’m looking forward to finishing HF next year, to finish high school again. And then I’m thinking about studying to be a physiotherapist, because that’s something I like actually. I have trained with the Danish national team, while I was studying Danish, but I stopped when I started school and working. But I have a lot of experience with that. **I’m looking forward to having a family in Denmark. Buying a house. That’s how I think about the future. I’m thinking about a good job, a girlfriend, family... yes.**

J: So your future is in Denmark?

S: Yes, I don’t think about anything else.