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## **Belonging and Defensive Urban Citizenship: How the Arrival of Syrian Refugees Created Spaces of Solidarities and Competition with the Established Arab Migrants in Berlin**

***Subtitle: A Case study on Sonnenallee; The Arab Street***

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## MA Programme Euroculture Declaration

I, **Lina Mansour**, hereby declare that this thesis, entitled "Belonging and Defensive Urban Citizenship: How the Arrival of Syrian Refugees Created Spaces of Solidarities and Competition with the Established Arab Migrants in Berlin." submitted as partial requirement for the MA Programme Euroculture, is my own original work and expressed in my own words. Any use made within this text of works of other authors in any form (e.g., ideas, figures, texts, tables, etc.) are properly acknowledged in the text as well as in the bibliography.

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## **Abstract**

This research critically examines the urban encounter between the established Arab immigrant community residing in Berlin since the 1990s and after and the new Syrian refugees from 2015 onwards in a single neighborhood. It asks how the established group reacted to and received the arrival of newcomers in their urban space. By looking into Arab solidarity as defined through the Arab nationalist ideology that is based on shared ethnicity, language, history, and geography, it analyses how established Arab immigrants (re-)construct and (re-) define their relationship to a place and their sense of belonging in a neighborhood in response to newcomers. Through the conduction of an ethnographic study in the Neukölln district of Berlin, with a particular emphasis on the “Arab Street,” employing participant observation and interviews with the two migrant groups (long-term residents and the newcomers), this research studies the relationship between migrants and a neighborhood by linking two conceptual frameworks: migrant place-making and agency-related urban citizenship. It finds two spaces of existence between both generations. First, solidarity among Arabs arises based on a shared migration experience and a stronger regional identity strengthened by the German national rhetoric on Arab immigrants. Second, competition and threat developed through time as long-term residents reevaluated their position in the city based on the accessibility of the newcomers to different policies.

**Keywords:** Migrant Place-making, Defensive Urban Citizenship, Berlin, Syrian Refugees

**Wordcount:** 23,210 words

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This research was inspired by a conversation with a grocery store owner in Sonnenallee, infamously known as *The Arab Street*. As an Arab myself, I came to Berlin after months of living in the Czech Republic, yearning to speak to other Arabs and eat Arab food. Through this conversation, I came to the realization that life on *The Arab Street* was not what I expected it to be. Arabs did not bond with each other simply because they are all foreigners in Germany who speak the same language and come from the same region. There was a lot more behind the relationships between them. I was also fascinated to understand how the street came to be what it is today or how it used to be in the past. With this in mind, I set out on a journey to find the answers to my question. Throughout this journey, I came across wonderful stories of agony and hope, as people shared their migration experiences. I am immensely grateful for this topic and what I was able to unravel because of it.

## **Note on Transliteration**

Unless stated elsewhere, all translations of Arabic quotes, idioms, or texts have been done by me. Everything has been translated into English. However, some sayings were transliterated and then translated (e.g., *ahl el hetta*). I opted for the colloquial spelling of any Arabic term rather than the standard to keep the authenticity of the terms. Additional footnotes were added to explain any literal translation and the overall meaning of the Arabic sayings.

As for German, names containing umlauts (ö, ä, ü) have been kept in the original German form rather than the Anglicized form. For instance, Neukölln is not rendered Neukoelln. German words such as Stadtteilmütter have also been translated to English.

## Introduction

With the breakout of the civil war in Syria in 2011, many attempted to seek refuge in other countries to escape the violence and war. Since then, the United Nations reported almost six million Syrian refugees worldwide.<sup>1</sup> In 2015, with a refugee policy that would mark a new era in Europe and significantly transform the population structure of Germany, Prime Minister Angela Merkel opened the country's doors to all Syrian newcomers by adjourning the Dublin Protocol and declaring their acceptance, regardless of which EU country they first entered from.<sup>2</sup> This would make Germany the country with the highest number of first-time asylum seekers in Europe, recording almost one million in 2015.<sup>3</sup> Merkel's historical line *wir schaffen das!* (we can do it!) echoed across national television and demonstrations in the streets.<sup>4</sup> This policy would create what is now known politically, socially, and academically as the "Refugee Crisis" and continue an already long-existing debate on refugees' integration and social cohesion in Europe. In 2015, through the Königstein quota system, which was designed to settle refugees across the sixteen federal states of Germany, the Berlin State recorded the highest number of refugees per square kilometer.<sup>5</sup> In 2020, over forty-thousand Syrians were registered to be living in Berlin based on their nationality (not including Syrians who have already received German citizenship).<sup>6</sup> The overall general reception of refugees in Berlin has mainly been positive due to its vastly diverse population and history of different waves of migration. Support was spread across the city on a national, state, district, organizational, and voluntary basis. Public campaigns in support of refugees were very visible in the city. This has been helpful in facilitating integration for Syrian refugees. However, anti-immigration sentiments were not completely

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, "Eleven Years on, Mounting Challenges Push Many Displaced Syrians to the Brink," UNHCR, accessed May 12, 2022, <https://www.unhcr.org/news/briefing/2022/3/623055174/eleven-years-mounting-challenges-push-displaced-syrians-brink.html>.

<sup>2</sup> A. Hall and J. Lichfield, "Germany Opens Its Gates to Syrian Asylum-Seekers," *The Independent*, August 25, 2015, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/germany-opens-its-gates-berlin-says-all-syrian-asylumseekers-are-welcome-to-remain-as-britain-is-urged-to-make-a-similar-statement-10470062.html>.

<sup>3</sup> Bruce Katz, Luise Noring, and Nantke Garletts, "Cities and Refugees: The German Experience," *Brookings* (blog), September 18, 2016, <https://www.brookings.edu/research/cities-and-refugees-the-german-experience/>.

<sup>4</sup> Christoph Hasselbach, "Flüchtlingspolitik: Fünf Jahre nach 'Wir schaffen das!'" | DW | 25.08.2020," DW.COM, accessed July 7, 2022, <https://www.dw.com/de/f%C3%BCnf-jahre-fl%C3%BChtlingskrise-merkel-wir-schaffen-das/a-54649579>.

<sup>5</sup> Katz, Noring, and Garletts, "Cities and Refugees," 11 f.

<sup>6</sup> "Ausländer in Berlin nach Staatsangehörigkeit," Statista, accessed June 24, 2022, <https://de.statista.com/statistik/daten/studie/1094889/umfrage/anzahl-der-auslaender-in-berlin-nach-staatsangehoerigkeit/>.

absent. But on a smaller scale, spaces of competition and threats regarding the labor market, housing, or education were created, especially among different minority groups.

Against this backdrop, I ask how established immigrant communities in a specific neighborhood receive and react to the arrival of new immigrants and refugees. How does their shared ethnic and cultural background affect this interaction? This paper investigates the relationship between long-term residents from an Arabic-speaking country and the Syrian refugees post-2015 in the Neukölln district of Berlin. It additionally studies how established immigrant communities redefine and reconstruct their position in their neighborhood vis á vis newcomers. Migration and citizenship scholars have deconstructed the definition of ‘citizenship,’ claiming it to be exclusionary as it relies on the nation-state as the only unit of analysis to define who is and is not a citizen.<sup>7</sup> The nation-state dictates a territorial boundary with its native people, who share a common heritage, language, and culture and are then deemed citizens. This results in a limited understanding of practice, participation, and inhabitants’ rights in different states.

Therefore, urban citizenship moves beyond the nation-state and focuses on cities as a way to understand citizenship. In other words, it studies how residents assert their authority and identity in a place, practice their social, economic, and political rights, and become active participants in their community regardless of whether they possess the legal documents to become citizens.<sup>8</sup> Studies have shown that non-citizens are capable of mobilizing themselves, creating various forms of formal and informal initiatives to practice their rights, and lobbying for their positions within society.<sup>9</sup> Other scholars have also shown how this constructed position is dynamic and is everchanging in the face of newcomers inhabiting the same urban space as an established community.<sup>10</sup> There tends to usually be a pattern for solidarity amongst subgroups of migrants, one that is mainly based on a shared migration experience.

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<sup>7</sup> Ayse Caglar, “Citizenship, Anthropology Of,” in *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences* (Elsevier, 2015), 637–42, <https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-08-097086-8.12180-4>.

<sup>8</sup> Monica W. Varsanyi, “Interrogating ‘Urban Citizenship’ *Vis-à-Vis* Undocumented Migration,” *Citizenship Studies* 10, no. 2 (May 2006): 230, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13621020600633168>.

<sup>9</sup> Yasemin Nuhoglu Soysal, *Limits of Citizenship: Migrants and Postnational Membership in Europe* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1995), <https://press.uchicago.edu/ucp/books/book/chicago/L/bo3683837.html>; Ernesto Castañeda, “Urban Citizenship in New York, Paris, and Barcelona: Immigrant Organizations and the Right to Inhabit the City,” in *Remaking Urban Citizenship*, by Andrew M. Greeley, ed. Michael Peter Smith and Michael McQuarrie, 1st ed. (Routledge, 2017), 57–78, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315128436-4>.

<sup>10</sup> Burcu Togrul Koca, “Urban Citizenship and the Spatial Encounter between Turkish Migrants and Syrian Refugees in Berlin,” *Raumforschung Und Raumordnung | Spatial Research and Planning* 77, no. 6 (April 5, 2019): 567–81, <https://doi.org/10.2478/rara-2019-0023>.



However, competition and an impending feeling of threat and defensiveness surface as established communities reassess their hierarchical position in a specific place and the extent to which newcomers affect this power position. There has been little to no emphasis on how ethnic and cultural ties play a role in this hierarchy. The emphasis on the social, economic, and political differences that migrants bring with them prior to leaving their home countries plays a minor role in these lines of research. I argue that the extent to which a shared culture, language, religion, and history can impact the power relations between migrant groups is significant and has been overlooked. When it concerns Arab immigrants, in particular, the majority have utilized the term ‘Arab’ as a hegemonic title that encompasses a large ethnic population that is similar in its social markup.<sup>11</sup> As a result, there has barely been any study focusing on the dynamic relationship between Arab migrant groups outside of the Arabic-speaking region. Such scholarship does not look into the origin and past of Arabs before arriving in a new country and how such heritage affects the interaction of Arabs among themselves. For these reasons, this paper further contributes to how long-term resident communities redefine their position in an urban space when faced with newcomers by specifically studying Arab migrant groups (Lebanese, Palestinians, and Egyptians) and questioning the impact of Arab nationalism on the patterns of solidarity and competition between them and Syrian refugees. The setting of the study is focused on a single neighborhood within Berlin that has dominantly been inhabited by different Arab communities since the 90s and early 2000s and is now a host to what is colloquially known as “The Arab Street” (Figure 1).

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<sup>11</sup> Arab is defined here as any person coming from an Arabic speaking country (one of the 22 countries in the Arab League). The charter of the league does not define who is and isn’t an Arab, however, there are two prerequisites for membership; 1) Arabic is the official language of the state, 2) Islam is the majority religion. This paper does not attempt to contribute to the on-going literature in defining Arabs and uses the term critically to avoid falling in the methodological nationalism trap.



Figure 1. Street sign for Sonnenallee, written in calligraphic Arabic underneath is "Sharea al-Arab Sonnenallee" (Arab Street Sonnenallee). The photo was taken by Shaar (2021) on 8 April 2018.

Syrians' attraction towards the district of Neukölln has been mainly driven by the long-term presence of Lebanese and Palestinian migrants, who have been in Berlin since the late 80s due to the breakout of the Lebanese civil war and the gulf-war which resulted in thousands of refugees. This facilitated their integration and community feeling due to the widespread Arabic language and presence of other Arab grocery stores and restaurants.<sup>12</sup> According to the official district page, thirty-five percent of the inhabitants of Neukölln today are foreigners, and seventy percent of Sonnenallee, in particular, are migrants or have a migration background.<sup>13</sup> The official district page claims that over one hundred and sixty nationalities live in this district alone. Despite all this, prior to the arrival of Syrian refugees, Sonnenallee was still remarkably known for its Arab residents as the street was previously known as "Little Gaza" or "Little Beirut."<sup>14</sup> Therefore, its change to a more inclusive title encompassing all Arabs demonstrates a shift in the demographic of the area. I rely on two

<sup>12</sup> Malte Bergmann, "Die Sonnenallee in Berlin-Neukölln als hybrider Raum migrantischer Ökonomien," in *Migrationsort Quartier*, ed. Olaf Schnur, Philipp Zakrzewski, and Matthias Drilling (Wiesbaden: Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden, 2013), 154, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-01048-5\\_10](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-01048-5_10).

<sup>13</sup> "Einwohnerregisterstatistik," February 16, 2022, <https://www.berlin.de/ba-neukoelln/ueber-den-bezirk/zahlen-und-fakten/statistische-daten/einwohnerzahlen/>.

<sup>14</sup> Miriam Stock, "Falafeltrend - Männercafés - Willkommenskultur? Berliner arabische Gastronomien im Wandel.," in *Der Geschmack der Gentrifizierung: Arabische Imbisse in Berlin*, Urban Studies (Bielefeld, 2017), 50, [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/324919071\\_Falafeltrend\\_-\\_Mannercafes\\_-\\_Willkommenskultur\\_Berliner\\_arabische\\_Gastronomien\\_im\\_Wandel](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/324919071_Falafeltrend_-_Mannercafes_-_Willkommenskultur_Berliner_arabische_Gastronomien_im_Wandel).

concepts to answer the questions 1) how did the already established Arab immigrant community in Berlin receive and react to the Syrian refugees from 2015 onwards, and 2) how their arrival affected the established community's sense of belonging to their long-claimed neighborhood. The first concept is "placemaking": the process by which migrants assert their authority and identity in a place they move to and transform it into a home they inhabit.<sup>15</sup> I rely on placemaking to understand the difference in how the established Arab community maneuvered their presence in Berlin and founded their place in Neukölln during the 1990s and early 2000s compared to the Syrians in 2015. I analyze the migration and urban policies placed in Germany and Berlin at the time, with a special emphasis on the neighborhood as a unit of analysis and look into how it led to the isolation and exclusion of previous generations of Arab immigrants, unintentionally leading to spaces of contestation with Syrian refugees who had a more open policy.

The second concept is "urban citizenship": an approach to citizenship that foregoes the nation-state as the primary unit of analysis and focuses on how migrants mobilize to gain their rights in a city.<sup>16</sup> I rely on the conceptual framework of agency-centered articulation of urban citizenship to study the role of migrants in gaining their citizenship in a country through their social, political, and economic practices. The defensive urban citizenship framework is specifically chosen to explain the spaces of competition between the two generations of Arab migrant groups.

To investigate both notions, I conducted an ethnographic study for a period of five months in Sonnenallee. I divided my target groups into two: the established community, where I interviewed and interacted with Arab immigrants who have been in Berlin for 15 years or longer, and the newcomers, Syrian refugees from 2015 onwards. The thesis is structured as follows; first, I analyze the two concepts of placemaking and agency-related urban citizenship and explain why they fit to the objective of this research. I follow this by detailing my methodology. In chapter four, I discuss the ethnographic presence of Arab migrants in Berlin by presenting the two groups under analysis: earlier waves of migration from the Arab world - with a special emphasis on Lebanese, Palestinians, and Egyptians - and Syrian

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<sup>15</sup> Lynda H. Schneekloth and Robert G. Shibley, *Placemaking: The Art and Practice of Building Communities* (New York: Wiley, 1995).

<sup>16</sup> Dirk Gebhardt, "Cities and Immigrant Citizenship: A Comparison of Local Citizenship Policies in Barcelona and Munich.," *GRITIM-UPF Working Paper Series*, no. 26 (2015): 31, [https://www.upf.edu/documents/3329791/3455370/WPS26\\_gebhardt.pdf/7180b32c-1fd8-4769-a9be-124bf5633aa8](https://www.upf.edu/documents/3329791/3455370/WPS26_gebhardt.pdf/7180b32c-1fd8-4769-a9be-124bf5633aa8).

refugees from 2015. I follow this by looking into the urban policy surrounding the Neukölln district and the migration policy for the two time periods studied. The chapters that follow identify two spaces of interactions between the established community and the newcomers: solidarity and competition. I conclude with remarks on how this study helps in the understanding of different migrant groups and their urban citizenship.

## Chapter Two: Conceptualizing Placemaking and Urban Citizenship

In recent times, a flourishing amount of migration scholarship has emerged in an effort to critique the “nation-state” as a primary unit of analysis and its impact on perceiving migrants as “passive victims.”<sup>17</sup> There has been an urge to move beyond this conceptualization as it has been perceived as a “methodological nationalism” trap that many scholars fall into.<sup>18</sup> It is argued that methodological nationalists “confine the concept of society within the boundaries of nation-states and assume that the members of these states share a common history and set of values, norms, social customs, and institutions.”<sup>19</sup> In doing so, individuals are limited to one country and one identity, and it is, therefore, unnatural for them to leave the confines of their state. This has been central to literature on migration as the presence of migrants is perceived as abnormal and disturbs the existence of the nation-state. In order to move beyond the nation-state perspective, scholars have shifted their focus to the city as “an important, if not primary, context in which institutional policies and migrant practices over space-making interact, producing diverse outcomes.”<sup>20</sup> In doing so, however, some scholars have argued that the city becomes another unit of analysis, limiting migrants and their citizenship to legal rights and duties only. Critical migration and urban scholars argue that restricting the definition of citizenship to the national level portrays migrants as “victims trapped between an economic demand for their cheap labor and a political system that denies their rights.”<sup>21</sup> In other words, migrants are stripped of their agency to make decisions that impact the political structure around them. This has inspired a continued tradition of the ‘right to the city,’ which hypothesizes the city as a site of confrontation with

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<sup>17</sup> Tabea Bork-Hüffer et al., “Agency and the Making of *Transient Urban Spaces* : Examples of *Migrants in the City* in the Pearl River Delta, China, and Dhaka, Bangladesh: Agency and the Making of Transient Urban Spaces,” *Population, Space and Place* 22, no. 2 (January 2016): 128–45, <https://doi.org/10.1002/psp.1890>; Andreas Wimmer and Nina Glick Schiller, “Methodological Nationalism and beyond: Nation-State Building, Migration and the Social Sciences,” *Global Networks* 2, no. 4 (October 2002): 301–34, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1471-0374.00043>; Nina Glick Schiller and Ayse Çağlar, “Towards a Comparative Theory of Locality in Migration Studies: Migrant Incorporation and City Scale,” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 35, no. 2 (February 2009): 177–202, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13691830802586179>; Castañeda, “Urban Citizenship in New York, Paris, and Barcelona.”

<sup>18</sup> Ayse Simsek-Caglar and Nina Glick Schiller, *Migrants and City-Making: Dispossession, Displacement, and Urban Regeneration* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018).

<sup>19</sup> Ayse Simsek-Caglar and Nina Glick Schiller, *Migrants and City-Making: Dispossession, Displacement, and Urban Regeneration* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018), 3.

<sup>20</sup> Koca, “Urban Citizenship and the Spatial Encounter between Turkish Migrants and Syrian Refugees in Berlin,” 3.

<sup>21</sup> Castañeda, “Urban Citizenship in New York, Paris, and Barcelona,” 71

oppression. The Right to the City concept in urban studies was initially related to neoliberalism and capitalism.<sup>22</sup> When applied to migration, it aims to emphasize the disadvantaged communities and their continued endurance and fight for belonging. It was a way in which scholars reflected on the “gap between membership and substantive rights and how [migrants] mobilize for recognition and equal rights.”<sup>23</sup> This literature focuses on the idea of citizenship as a concept that moves beyond legal rights, such as voting, and demonstrates the different ways in which migrants acquire their citizenship. For example, Soysal (1994), in her study on guest workers in Europe, accentuates the success of guest workers in developing unique ways to incorporate themselves into society and, in doing so, go beyond our typical understanding of national citizenship.<sup>24</sup> In addition to Soysal, Castaneda (2012) has also emphasized how migrants are able to acquire “de facto” citizenship status through their active participation in the labor market or by creating their own organizations and paying taxes.<sup>25</sup> What is important about reshaping our understanding of citizenship is that it gives voices to minorities or communities who are generally overlooked in the national context. This includes undocumented immigrants, refugees, stateless people, and other vulnerable minorities. By using the term ‘resident’ instead, marginalized communities are placed on an equal level as the dominant group, ‘citizens’ or ‘natives’. They are capable of participating on a social and economic level and, to an extent, a political level as well. This is done through opening markets and shops, in other words, places where they interact and produce services that benefit them and their community, but also through initiatives such as organizations helping other residents to find housing, receive informal education, or receive services related to their documentation in the country. These practices help them define themselves as ‘citizens’ due to the active development of an attachment to a place, in this case, the city. Varsanyi (2006) argues that theories on urban citizenship can be summarized in three approaches; the transnational, the (re)scaling, and the agency-centered.<sup>26</sup> Avoiding the invalidation of the role of national citizenship yet discounting the binary ethnic lens that places migrants and “natives” as antagonists to each other, multiple scholars embraced this “relational” and “agency-centered” method of

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<sup>22</sup> David Harvey, *Rebel Cities. From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution* (London, 2012), 16.

<sup>23</sup> Gebhardt, “Cities and Immigrant Citizenship: A Comparison of Local Citizenship Policies in Barcelona and Munich.”, 31

<sup>24</sup> Soysal, *Limits of Citizenship*, 164.

<sup>25</sup> Castañeda, “Urban Citizenship in New York, Paris, and Barcelona.” 71

<sup>26</sup> Varsanyi, “Interrogating ‘Urban Citizenship’ *Vis-à-Vis* Undocumented Migration,” 232.

citizenship.<sup>27</sup> By understanding urban citizenship as a “socio-spatial institution”<sup>28</sup> and a procedure by which migrants/residents assert their authority in a place, such an approach allows one to “trace the role of agency and practices of migrants and residents regardless of their formal citizenship status, unequal power positions, and local, national and transnational dynamics, all of which are important intervening factors shaping the (re)articulation of urban citizenship relationally and hierarchically.”<sup>29</sup> For the purpose of this research, agency-centered citizenship helps in understanding how the established Arab migrant community maneuvered the bureaucratic hardships and migration and urban policy placed at the time of their arrival and were capable of developing an identity centered around their own urban space. Through this identity, they perceived themselves as citizens of Berlin on an equal level to natives.

Agency-centered urban citizenship is intrinsically linked to migrant placemaking. Placemaking is a primary point of research connected to the understanding of place. As a concept, it has been mainly associated with minorities and marginalized communities due to its focus on the agency of residents in a certain space.<sup>30</sup> For this research, I rely on Gil (2010)’s framework on the four stages that lead to either an ideal or pathological placemaking process, depending on the multiple factors in the chosen place of the migrant community.<sup>31</sup> According to Gil, the four stages of “ideal” placemaking start by an agreement from the migrants to project a common identity through a particular place. This includes places that make migrants comfortable enough to project their identity and cluster themselves without threat, for example, through raised national flags on shops, ethnic markets, or restaurants, etc.<sup>32</sup> The second stage is when the place represents a coherent image of the migrants that

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<sup>27</sup> Patricia Ehrkamp and Helga Leitner, “Beyond National Citizenship: Turkish Immigrants and the (RE)Construction of Citizenship in Germany,” *Urban Geography* 24, no. 2 (March 2003): 127–46, <https://doi.org/10.2747/0272-3638.24.2.127>; Nir Cohen, “Southern Discomfort: Defensive Urban Citizenship in Tel Aviv.,” in *Governing through Diversity*, ed. Tatiana Matejskova and Marco Antonsich (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2015), 161–80, <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-137-43825-6>; Koca, “Urban Citizenship and the Spatial Encounter between Turkish Migrants and Syrian Refugees in Berlin.”

<sup>28</sup> Nir Cohen and Talia Margalit, “‘There Are Really Two Cities Here’: Fragmented Urban Citizenship In Tel Aviv.,” *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 39, no. 4 (July 2015): 668, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2427.12260>.

<sup>29</sup> Koca, “Urban Citizenship and the Spatial Encounter between Turkish Migrants and Syrian Refugees in Berlin,” 3.

<sup>30</sup> AlHakam Shaar, “Finding the Center: Placemaking by Aleppian Migrants and Refugees in Berlin” (Central European University, 2021), [https://www.etc.ceu.edu/2021/shaar\\_alhakam.pdf](https://www.etc.ceu.edu/2021/shaar_alhakam.pdf).

<sup>31</sup> Nick Gill, “Pathologies of Migrant Place-Making: The Case of Polish Migrants to the UK,” *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space* 42, no. 5 (May 2010): 1157–73, <https://doi.org/10.1068/a42219>.

<sup>32</sup> Gill, 1160.

facilitates its recognition by new arriving migrants. This means that newcomers can easily associate themselves with the place and do not feel excluded from specific spaces. It also means they are able to project their identity as well without feeling the need to abandon any aspects of it. Stage three entails the acceptance and positive reception by the host community organizations. For this stage, there is an assumption that there exists a unified community (the dominant one) which has already established organizations ready to receive new migrants and is acceptant of their placemaking. This usually depends on the country's history of migration, their need for migrants to fill in a labor market gap, a resistance to a rise in right wing politics, or a city known for its cosmopolitanism. Finally, for the final stage to occur, new arriving migrants have to feel kinship with the existing migrant places. In other words, they can successfully project their identity as well and the place facilitates interactions and attachments between the different communities that did not exist prior, such as in their homelands. It is however worth noting that even with similar origins, power dynamics exist among migrants that affect their ability to shape place. This will be built upon further in the research. While the above four stages outline an ideal path to placemaking in a city, the pathway can sometimes progress differently and lead to a pathological alternative to each stage. The final result is that newcomers feel alienated and excluded from existing migrant places.

Both frameworks of placemaking and urban citizenship allow us to find new ways of belonging and understand further group formations, particularly those of subgroups of migrants. Therefore, some scholars have developed on both lines of literature to analyze the power positions and assortment of diversified groups in both urban citizenship and placemaking. A particular focus was placed on the relationship between established groups and newcomers, arguing against the idea that established groups are seen as a “cohesive group”<sup>33</sup>. In contrast, new immigrant groups are instinctively categorized as “homogenously poor, marginalized, and powerless.”<sup>34</sup> Instead, placemaking can be done by different actors whose positions differ in terms of space and time. Therefore, assumptions based on the nature of international newcomers compared to established groups are seen as reductionist. Agency-

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<sup>33</sup> Nir Cohen and Talia Margalit, “‘There Are Really Two Cities Here’: Fragmented Urban Citizenship In Tel Aviv: ‘THERE ARE REALLY TWO CITIES HERE,’” *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 39, no. 4 (July 2015): 669, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2427.12260>.

<sup>34</sup> Michael Peter Smith and Luis Eduardo Guarnizo, “Global Mobility, Shifting Borders And Urban Citizenship,” *Tijdschrift Voor Economische En Sociale Geografie* 100, no. 5 (2009): 619, <https://ideas.repec.org/a/bla/tvecsg/v100y2009i5p610-622.html>.



centered citizenship deconstructs the political impact on an urban space that causes imbalanced power relations and reflects on “the ways in which city residents articulate their identities relationally and hierarchically against new and old ‘others.’”<sup>35</sup> Smith et al. (2009) state that “the question of ‘inhabitation’ is often fought out along the lines of who has the power to decide who is an established resident, legitimate local actor, or who is acceptable as a new resident and, thus, who has the right to local socio-political, cultural, and economic space and who does not.”<sup>36</sup> This research further contributes to studies on established migrant groups vis-à-vis newcomers and reveals the varying dynamics that lead to different hierarchies within them. It proves that not every resident is in an equal position to practice their placemaking and rights to the city. By looking into subgroups of different Arab migrant groups, patterns of solidarity arise; however, tensions and feelings of threat and competition over the same urban space are also displayed.

As Painter (2005) puts it, urban citizenship is a “process of shifting alliances and antagonisms between groupings.”<sup>37</sup> Therefore, one possible reaction to new inhabitants of the same urban space can be forms of solidarity that are developed between different migrant groups, especially when it concerns similarly shared migration experiences. Regardless of their power status, different migrant groups can bond based on their similar situation regarding their grievances, discrimination, the refugee experience, etc. This allows them to form an alliance or mobilize due to shared solidarity. Feischmidt and Zakariás (2020) have studied the relationship between Hungarian migrants in Germany and their relationship with other refugees. They found that Hungarian migrants’ involvement with refugee support, whether on a voluntary basis or through paid work, is inspired and motivated by their own experience as migrants, emanating sympathy and support to those in a similar situation.<sup>38</sup> Hungarian migrants engaged in philanthropy work that portrays their active acceptance of refugees in Germany. Similarly, Koca (2019) analyzed the reaction and involvement of Turkish immigrants and citizens in Berlin to Syrian refugees and found that Turkish migrants felt a

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<sup>35</sup> Cohen and Margalit, “‘There Are Really Two Cities Here,’” July 2015, 666.

<sup>36</sup> Smith and Guarnizo, “Global Mobility, Shifting Borders And Urban Citizenship,” 620.

<sup>37</sup> J. Painter, “Urban Citizenship and Rights to the City.” (Durham: International Centre for Regional Regeneration and Development Studies., 2005), 12, <https://dro.dur.ac.uk/5435/>.

<sup>38</sup> Margit Feischmidt and Ildikó Zakariás, “How Migration Experience Affects the Acceptance and Active Support of Refugees? Philanthropy and Paid Work of Hungarian Migrants in the German Immigrant Service,” *Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies* 18, no. 4 (October 1, 2020): 481–97, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15562948.2020.1724353>.

shared responsibility towards Syrians based on their own migration experience.<sup>39</sup> They reflected on the hardships they faced upon arriving in Germany at a time when the country was not very welcoming of foreigners. In doing so, they believed they owed it to the Syrian refugees to make their experience better and more hospitable. In this respect, they organized themselves, whether on a political or a voluntary basis, and “promoted a more inclusive urban citizenship, calling for and defending the incorporation of refugees into the urban fabric as valid members.”<sup>40</sup> Additionally, Cohen et al. (2015) find that “left-wing” politically leaning migrants tend to be advocates of the “right to the city for all,” creating more solidarities with newcomers.<sup>41</sup>

On the other hand, solidarities are not the only way subgroups of migrants perceive newcomers. Spaces of contestation may also take place in the process of shifting alliances. This brings us back to the hierarchies and different political and socioeconomic positions occupied by the established groups compared to newcomers, which create competition over urban spaces and citizenship.<sup>42</sup> This is referred to as the “defensive urban citizenship framework” in which “groups marginalized by the prevailing urban economic and identity regimes attempt to fend off threats to their localities and resources.”<sup>43</sup> In this framework, established groups are usually the threatened ones as they perceive the placemaking procedures of newcomers to be more facilitated. As a result, they cultivate a “reactive place-based identity” that heightens the protectiveness over their urban space, leading them to use any kind of resource to ensure this protection, such as “formal state and urban affiliations, ethnic-racial and religious boundaries, as well as physical control over urban space.”<sup>44</sup> The defensive urban citizenship framework is crucial to this paper as it puts into perspective the ongoing tensions and envious feelings displayed by the established Arab immigrant groups towards the Syrian refugees, despite the spaces of solidarities exhibited at the beginning of their arrival.

Although the patterns mentioned above of solidarity and competition put into perspective ways to understand the relationship between established groups and newcomers, they tend to

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<sup>39</sup> Koca, “Urban Citizenship and the Spatial Encounter between Turkish Migrants and Syrian Refugees in Berlin,” 8.

<sup>40</sup> Koca, 8.

<sup>41</sup> Cohen and Margalit, ““There Are Really Two Cities Here,”” July 2015, 669.

<sup>42</sup> Smith and Guarnizo, “Global Mobility, Shifting Borders And Urban Citizenship,” 620.

<sup>43</sup> Cohen, “Southern Discomfort: Defensive Urban Citizenship in Tel Aviv.,” 162 f.

<sup>44</sup> Cohen, 170 f.

be based on individual or collective political identities and are naïve in the sense that they do not encompass more significant factors that play essential roles in the politics of belonging. Therefore, central to this paper and complementing the patterns mentioned above is the “role of intricate local, national and transnational interconnections” that are crucial in forming placemaking practices and impact the debates between diversified groups of migrants over the same urban space.<sup>45</sup> In other words, it is essential to understand the role of the state in shaping the discourse around migrants, citizenship, the integration and urban policies practiced by the state, and the media narrative on migrant groups and their neighborhoods. Çaglar (2001) argues that the model and discourse of national citizenship not only affect the legal, social, and political rights of migrants but also “the frameworks, key terms, metaphors, and language of immigration debates, and the representation of immigrants in the social imaginary.”<sup>46</sup> Moreover, the urban policy in place influences the level of participation of different residents, including natives as well. In principle, this means that the opportunities given for migrants to participate and feel included/excluded are limited to the political and urban structure surrounding them, which can cause a variation in their pattern of organization, participation, and belonging to a place.<sup>47</sup> For this reason, this paper further delves into the development of the German refugee policy and integration practices from the 1990s to 2015.

Additionally, taking the urban development policy into consideration, it attempts to give a comprehensive image of the (lack of) opportunities given to established Arab migrant groups and how this affected their claim-making practices. It is important to note that this perspective is not only limited to the national context of the country migrants reside in, but it also includes migrants’ transnational ties to their home countries. This is seen through the “networks of networks, linking migrants to the institutional structures of more than one state. . . [resulting] in multiple sources and dynamics of migrant agencies, socialites, and belongings.”<sup>48</sup> Accordingly, any attempt to analyze the dynamic between different migrant groups should consider the political structure, urban regime, and transnational ties in which

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<sup>45</sup> Ehrkamp and Leitner, “Beyond National Citizenship,” 129.

<sup>46</sup> Ayse S. Çaglar, “Constraining Metaphors and the Transnationalisation of Spaces in Berlin,” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 27, no. 4 (October 2001): 602, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13691830120090403>.

<sup>47</sup> Wolfgang Kil and Hilary Silver, “From Kreuzberg to Marzahn: New Migrant Communities in Berlin,” *German Politics & Society* 24, no. 4 (81) (2006): 95–121, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23742753>.

<sup>48</sup> Ayse Çaglar, “Still ‘Migrants’ after All Those Years: Foundational Mobilities, Temporal Frames and Emplacement of Migrants,” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 42, no. 6 (May 2, 2016): 953, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2015.1126085>.

they exist. In the context of Arab migrant groups, the Arab identity, in this case, plays a significant role in their perception of one another and is related to the patterns of solidarity that are shown among them. To attempt to define who is an Arab would be beyond the scope of this paper, as the debate is ongoing and is also encompassed within the nation-state and different models of citizenship that this paper discusses. However, a shared history significantly impacted by the colonial era is crucial to the Arab identity. Pan-Arabism was a reactionary movement in the 1950s and 60s against colonialism that called for the unification of all Arab states (North Africa and Western Asia) and the formation of a single nation.<sup>49</sup> It solidified a new ideology and heightened Arab nationalism across the region, which did not exist prior to that time period. Decades later, the idea of the “Arab people” still exists across the region. If one were to go by the definition of the Arab people based on the Arab League, it would mean that to be an Arab, one must 1) speak Arabic as a mother tongue and 2) belong to a country where Islam is the majority religion.<sup>50</sup> Hence, language and religion are essential factors of the definition. However, this narrow perspective excludes other ethnicities in the Arab world that are not Muslim but still identify as Arabs. While this paper does not attempt to reach a conclusion on the definition of the Arab people, it made it a point to ask all participants how they define the term Arab and whether they believe themselves to be one. All participants agreed that for them, an Arab is anyone who speaks Arabic, and therefore, they are all Arabs. This goes for both the established groups and the newcomers. Due to various regional political alliances and the rise of a new wave of Arab nationalism in 2011 that sparked the Arab spring revolutions, Arab identity is crucial to the discourse on solidarity.

In the following chapters, this research will study the German refugee policy and integration practices at two different periods and then study the urban development policy in the neighborhood of Neukölln to understand how it influences the self-perception of its residents. Based on this analysis, the following chapters engage in the literature mentioned above on patterns of solidarity and the defensive urban citizenship framework and how it can be applied to different Arab migrant groups in Berlin.

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<sup>49</sup> Barry Rubin, “Pan-Arab Nationalism: The Ideological Dream as Compelling Force,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 26, no. 3/4 (1991): 536, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/260659>.

<sup>50</sup> Tristan Mabry, “Arab Di-Nationalism,” *The Levantine Review* 2, no. 1 (May 31, 2013): 2, <https://doi.org/10.6017/lev.v2i1.5081>.

## Chapter Three: Methodology

This research is based on a qualitative field study conducted in Neukölln for a period of six months. It follows what Knoblauch (2005) labeled as ‘focused ethnography,’ which is the process of a researcher being in the field of his/her research for a shorter period of time than what is commonly typical for a regular ethnographic study.<sup>51</sup> As I directly approach people with the questions relevant to my research, I collect a more extensive set of data in a shorter amount of time. I use here a mixed-methods design relying heavily on participant observation and semi-structured and unstructured interviews. Having moved personally to Neukölln in Berlin, I had the opportunity to make myself familiar with the district. Through casual conversations, I was able to gather background information on the stigmatization of the neighborhood and build an understanding of its Arab immigrant community. Participant observation gave me the opportunity to be present with the participants in their places of leisure such as coffee shops, or in their workplaces and areas of residence. This allowed me to gain insight into the significance they attribute to a place, which is crucial to this research. For example, conducting an interview with a grocery store owner inside his store which he struggled for ten years to open ascribed meaning to the store and the neighborhood and his attachment to it. Additionally, I recorded field notes of any interactions, conversations, and observations in an ethnographic diary. As a resident of Sonnenallee, I observed, for example, two store owners that I interviewed, one Lebanese and one Syrian, whose stores exist side by side. I observed any morning interactions between them to further understand the relationship between both migrant groups.

This research includes two focus-group discussions and five semi-structured interviews with long-term residents from the Arab community. The first focus group discussion was held with two female Lebanese residents who work as intercultural bridge-builders in healthcare. The second focus-group discussion was conducted with nine women (one Egyptian, two Lebanese, three Palestinians, one Palestinian-Jordanian, and two Moroccans) who work for the district of Neukölln as “District Mothers.” The semi-structured interviews include one interview with a Lebanese project manager for the German-Arabic Center (DAZ), one Lebanese grocery store owner, two Palestinian residents, and an Egyptian resident. In total,

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<sup>51</sup> Hubert Knoblauch, “Focused Ethnography,” *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research* Vol 6 (September 30, 2005): No 3 (2005): The State of the Art of Qualitative Research in Europe, <https://doi.org/10.17169/FQS-6.3.20>.

sixteen people from the established Arab community were reached. Additionally, the research is complemented by participatory observations and informal conversations with Syrian residents and store owners. I was only able to conduct four semi-structured interviews with Syrian residents.

The selection was done at random and based on who I was able to get access to. I started by visiting different store owners and directly asking if they would like to be interviewed for the research. Although some agreed, others refused and seemed suspicious of my intent. The Palestinians have been primarily the hardest to access since every Palestinian store I reached out to (five in total) rejected the interview. I opted then to join Facebook groups and wrote posts stating my research question and the criteria of the people I was looking to interview and asked if anyone would like to volunteer or could connect me with someone who fits the profile (residents in Neukölln who have lived there for fifteen years or more or Syrians from 2015 onwards). The Facebook groups include Egyptians in Berlin, Palestinians in Berlin, and The Syrian House in Germany. I received some contacts to store owners or residents through my posts and was able to connect with them to set up interviews.

Moreover, I attended initiatives done by the district office, such as the collective Fast-Break, on the 1<sup>st</sup> of May 2022. Through this event, I got in contact with the German-Arab center, which was co-hosting the event with the Neukölln district office. I was able to set up three interviews with Lebanese immigrants through them. I also engaged with local cultural and sports clubs as well as events posted on the above-mentioned Facebook groups to observe and reach out to people. One event was hosted by an Egyptian sports club called “Horus” with the objective of integration through sports, and I was able to do my first interview with a Palestinian woman through it.

Since the sampling is random and limited, there is a gender bias. A total of thirteen women was reached, mainly due to the nine district mothers. The research lacks an age criterion, but since I interview first-generation immigrants (i.e., not born in Germany) who have been in Germany for over a decade, they have all been above the age of forty. All interviews were conducted and transcribed in Arabic and then translated into English. Interviewees were presented with a consent form (Annex A). For those who disagreed with being recorded, written notes were taken instead. Transcription of interviews was done manually, and I followed it by coding the interviews based on common themes. The thesis employs a thematic analysis combined with a discussion of the literature.

Throughout the fieldwork, significant differences presented themselves between different social classes. From small store owners to business-employed residents, their perception of placemaking and citizenship differed depending on their skill level and, surprisingly, their language level. Knowledge of English and German facilitated their initial stages of placemaking compared to residents who only knew Arabic.

## **Chapter Four: History of Migration from the Arab World to Germany**

This chapter is divided into two sections: the first details the migration of Lebanese, Palestinians, and Egyptians to Germany and discusses their ethnographic presence in Neukölln. The second is a short description of Syrian refugees and their presence in Berlin, stating Sonnenallee as an arrival infrastructure that facilitated their integration into the city.

### **4.1. The Established Community: Migration Waves from Lebanon, Palestine, and Egypt to Germany**

Migration from the Arab world toward Germany took place in four different stages. The first stage took place right after the second world war and the end of the colonial era and continued until the end of the 1950s.<sup>52</sup> This wave was mainly characterized by students coming from different states.<sup>53</sup> Around three thousand students came, mainly from Palestine.<sup>54</sup> The second stage took place in the 1950s and '60s in the form of low-skilled labor agreements that Germany made with various countries in the wake of its Economic Miracle and the need for labor to rebuild the country. Migrants mainly came from Tunisia and Morocco as these were the two countries involved in bilateral agreements with Germany.<sup>55</sup> Until the end of the 1960s, migrants from Palestine, Egypt, and Lebanon were known to either be students who continued to receive higher education, or they were low-skilled migrants. Wari (2015) claims that many Palestinian students settled in Germany upon

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<sup>52</sup> Shahd Wari, *Palestinian Berlin: Perceptions and Use of Public Space*, Habitat - International Schriften Zur Internationalen Stadtentwicklung, Band 22 (Wien Zürich: LIT, 2017).

<sup>53</sup> Katharina Koch and Nora J. Ragab, "Mapping and Study: The Palestinian Diaspora in Germany," *Palestine-Israel Journal*, Israel-Germany-Palestine History and Responsibilities, 24, no. 3 (2019): 21.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Wari, *Palestinian Berlin*.

receiving higher education, qualifying them to work as doctors and engineers. As a result of this, family reunification migration also increased as workers sent for their families to join them in Germany.<sup>56</sup>

However, the presence of Arab immigrants in Germany would only become significant with the third wave of migration. The third wave was profiled mainly with refugees as various wars and conflicts took place in the region beginning of the 1970s, such as The Black September massacre in Jordan, the break-out of the civil war in Lebanon, and the destruction of various refugees camps, including Te-Al-Za'atar and Al-Nabatiyeh.<sup>57</sup> Thousands of Palestinian and Lebanese refugees started fleeing the countries. It is important to note that Lebanon has a population of 4.5 million people, out of which over 450,000 are Palestinian refugees. This means that one in every ten people comes from Palestine.<sup>58</sup> This is significant in the categorization of Palestinian refugees in Germany as they are often mistaken to be Lebanese. According to Dorai (2003), most Palestinian and Lebanese refugees entered through East Berlin and made their way to the west of Germany.<sup>59</sup> Upon entry, they were recognized as *de facto* refugees, not political ones. Dorai (2003) argues that this allowed for flexible asylum policies and easy access to employment opportunities.<sup>60</sup> This was followed by the fourth wave, stimulated by the gulf war when Iraq invaded Kuwait. Thousands of Palestinian refugees residing in Kuwait fled and escaped to Germany to avoid persecution, detention, and harassment.<sup>61</sup> Migration from Lebanon continued due to the ongoing civil war and deteriorating economic and political situation in the country. Unskilled youth and irregular migrants from Lebanon were also part of the fourth wave.

While migration from Egypt to Germany is included in the waves mentioned above, patterns of Egyptian migrants to Germany are limited to economic and education migration.

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Koch and Ragab, "Mapping and Study: The Palestinian Diaspora in Germany," 28.

<sup>59</sup> Mohamed Kamel Dorai, "Palestinian Emigration from Lebanon to Northern Europe: Refugees, Networks, and Transnational Practices," *Refuge: Canada's Journal on Refugees*, February 1, 2003, 25, <https://doi.org/10.25071/1920-7336.21287>.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Maya Rosenfeld, "The Palestinian Diaspora: Formation of Identities and Politics of Homeland," *Contemporary Sociology: A Journal of Reviews* 34, no. 5 (September 2005): 523–25, <https://doi.org/10.1177/009430610503400540>.



Throughout the '60s, as Egypt gained its independence from British colonization, education in Europe was promoted. However, emigration was harshly frowned upon and was enforced by complex state procedures upon return. Egyptian migrants during the first four waves of migration were looking for “ways out of economic and political crises, educational and status mobility, labor and marriage migration, and escape from religious and political discrimination.”<sup>62</sup> Accurate numbers or data are challenging to come upon as scholars have mainly studied migration from the “Middle East” towards Germany or Europe in general, therefore not detailing the number of migrants from each country or making a distinction between different states. There is only an exception for Turkey, Morocco, and Tunisia, as they were involved in bilateral agreements with Germany during its guestworkers and deals with various Mediterranean countries. However, German official data on Egyptian demographic find that over forty thousand people from Egypt are currently living in Germany.<sup>63</sup>

Migration from Palestine, Lebanon, and Egypt is still present today, with mainly education and family reunification being the primary factors.<sup>64</sup> The most recent wave includes flows of Palestinian refugees that have been residing in Syria. Only Palestinians issued travel documents by the Syrian Arab Republic that prove they are arriving from Syria and not anywhere else are granted asylum and undergo the same procedures as Syrian refugees in Germany. Accordingly, the number of Palestinian refugees from Syria is unknown as they are not counted separately.<sup>65</sup>

Berlin is considered to be the host to the largest number of Palestinians and Lebanese migrants in Germany. The Federal Statistical Office of Germany (Destatis) estimates about one hundred and sixty thousand people with a Lebanese background to be residing in Germany, with Berlin being the largest host city for the Lebanese community.<sup>66</sup> However, the

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<sup>62</sup> Cordula Weißköppel, “Study and Mapping of the Egyptian Diaspora in Germany” (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH, 2015), 8, [https://diaspora2030.de/fileadmin/files/Service/Publikationen/Studien\\_zu\\_Diaspora-Aktivitaeten\\_in\\_Deutschland/giz-2016-en-diasporastudy-egypt.pdf](https://diaspora2030.de/fileadmin/files/Service/Publikationen/Studien_zu_Diaspora-Aktivitaeten_in_Deutschland/giz-2016-en-diasporastudy-egypt.pdf).

<sup>63</sup> “Ausländer in Berlin nach Staatsangehörigkeit.”

<sup>64</sup> Wari, *Palestinian Berlin*.

<sup>65</sup> Koch and Ragab, “Mapping and Study: The Palestinian Diaspora in Germany,” 29.

<sup>66</sup> “Bevölkerung in Privathaushalten nach Migrationshintergrund im weiteren Sinn nach ausgewählten Geburtsstaaten,” Statistisches Bundesamt, accessed April 29, 2022, <https://www.destatis.de/DE/Themen/Gesellschaft-Umwelt/Bevoelkerung/Migration-Integration/Tabellen/migrationshintergrund-staatsangehoerigkeit-staaten.html>.

report also finds that only over forty-two thousand people have Lebanese citizenship.<sup>67</sup> As for Palestinians, Berlin International (2010) claimed that at least thirty thousand Palestinians were living in Berlin and that “Berlin is said to be home to the largest Palestinian community outside of the Middle East. . . Palestinians referred to Berlin as the biggest ‘Palestinian Refugee Camp’ outside of the [region]”.<sup>68</sup> However, accurate statistics on the Palestinian diaspora in Germany are hard to come by. This is because:

Since Palestine is not a recognized state as yet, Palestinians are stateless and exist in the world with different statuses, which makes their numbers difficult to determine. Their entry is recognized based on different definitions that have been changing in the last three decades. They have entered Europe as Palestinian refugees, stateless persons, persons of undefined nationality, and/or as illegal/undocumented immigrants. In many cases, they have been associated with the countries they migrated from rather than their country of origin, so some were recognized as Lebanese, Syrian, Jordanian, Iraqis, etc. This is not to mention Palestinian immigrants with Israeli citizenship who are registered as Israelis.<sup>69</sup>

As of 2022, the Federal Statistic Office’s report regarding Foreign Population by Place of Birth and Selected Citizenship estimates over one hundred and twenty thousand stateless people living in the country.<sup>70</sup> Studies on the Palestinian diaspora argue that over half of this number is made up of Palestinian refugees. The numbers do not include Palestinians who have long received German citizenship. As the above quote emphasizes, data concerning Palestinian numbers are important in this context as they are usually mistaken to be either Lebanese or Syrian. According to interviewed participants from the Lebanese community, they believe that the Lebanese immigrants are the smallest minority from the Arab world and that the number of one hundred and sixty thousand people with a Lebanese background is composed mainly of Palestinians, Kurdish, and Turkish-Lebanese.

In terms of residence, Berlin is the main entry point for Arab immigrants, and a majority have remained in the city since then. The district of Neukölln in the west of Berlin has been a significant arriving and establishing point for the Arabs. One of the factors that played a role

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<sup>67</sup> “Ausländer in Deutschland bis 2021: Herkunftsland,” Statista, accessed June 26, 2022, <https://de.statista.com/statistik/daten/studie/1221/umfrage/anzahl-der-auslaender-in-deutschland-nach-herkunftsland/>.

<sup>68</sup> Wari, *Palestinian Berlin*, 67.

<sup>69</sup> Wari, 59.

<sup>70</sup> “Foreign Population by Place of Birth and Selected Citizenships,” Federal Statistical Office, accessed June 26, 2022, <https://www.destatis.de/EN/Themes/Society-Environment/Population/Migration-Integration/Tables/foreigner-place-of-birth.html>.

in Neukölln being their chosen district was, first, the presence of other immigrant communities, mainly the Turkish, and second that “much of the housing was dilapidated and lacked modern conveniences, rent was cheap. There was less competition from Germans and less discrimination by landlords.”<sup>71</sup> At the time, there were high unemployment rates among the men, and the women relied on the social assistance received by the government (those who could access it at least). Talks about parallel societies emerged as the Lebanese and Palestinians were not properly “integrated” and avoided interaction with the Germans. Slowly, the rise of small Lebanese restaurants, shisha lounges, and grocery stores spread on the Sonnenallee street, and its first title, “Little Beirut,” was locally given.

#### **4.2. The Newcomers: Arrival of Syrian Refugees in 2015**

In the summer of 2015, 1.3 million refugees entered Europe to request asylum due to the outbreak of the civil war in Syria, “the most in a single year since World War II.”<sup>72</sup> As the numbers became increasingly overwhelming and horrific images of refugees at the Mediterranean border and pictures of them traveling through Central and Eastern Europe surfaced, the Federal Republic of Germany made a significant decision that would alter the population structure of the country and change the trajectory of migration in the region; it dropped the Dublin Protocol<sup>73</sup> and developed an open policy approach allowing any refugee to apply for asylum in Germany, regardless of whether or not they have previously applied for asylum in another EU country.<sup>74</sup> This led thousands of refugees in southeastern Europe and Hungary to attempt to make a move to Germany. The arrival of Syrian refugees in Germany started in 2011 with the beginning of the civil war. It reached its peak in 2015 and continues to this day in smaller numbers. Prior to the civil war in Syria, the presence of Syrians in Germany was barely noticeable, and many belonged to the above-mentioned waves of students and professional migrants. Due to the naturalization of Syrians as a result of facilitated integration policies that are discussed in chapter six, the actual number of Syrians in Germany and Berlin is unknown. It was reported that the naturalization of Syrians

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<sup>71</sup> Kil and Silver, “From Kreuzberg to Marzahn.”

<sup>72</sup> Jean-Christophe Dumont and Stefano Scarpet, “Is This Humanitarian Migration Crisis Different?,” Migration Policy Debates (OECD, September 2015), <https://www.oecd.org/migration/Is-this-refugee-crisis-different.pdf>.

<sup>73</sup> The Dublin System was implemented to determine the member states responsible for examining asylum claims. The responsibility usually lies with the first entry point, in other words the first country of asylum.

<sup>74</sup> Hall and Lichfield, “Germany Opens Its Gates to Syrian Asylum-Seekers.”

into German citizens was three times higher in 2021 than in 2020.<sup>75</sup> In 2020, there were 40,000 Syrian nationals residing in Berlin, those who have not yet naturalized.<sup>76</sup> However, the actual number of Syrians is a lot higher. As mentioned before, Berlin was the city-state that accepted the highest number of refugees in Germany. One decisive factor that made Berlin a preferable residential place for Syrians was the established presence of an Arab community. Seen as an “Arrival Infrastructure,”<sup>77</sup> Syrian participants in this research claimed that the presence of the Arabic language and a street like Sonnenallee, where other Arab immigrants opened restaurants and grocery stores, provided Syrians with a sense of belonging and eliminated feelings of foreignness. Since their arrival in 2011 and in the following years, Syrians have mainly resided in the street, and many claimed that they would not want to live anywhere else in Berlin. As a result, the district of Neukölln is now known to be the biggest host of an Arab community in Berlin. This has signified an even larger expansion of Sonnenallee, with multiple new stores and restaurants opening in the area. In a 2021 study, it was found that the quality of life among Syrian refugees in Germany was low across all domains: socioeconomic (housing, labor, asylum procedures) and psychological.<sup>78</sup> This mirrors studies on Neukölln and its inhabitants, which is an area mainly characterized by marginality, cheaper rent, and poor infrastructure (as will be seen in the following chapter). This leads to an understanding that the Syrian community is still undergoing transformation, and more efforts of integration and social cohesion are needed to enhance the living conditions of Syrians in Germany. However, from the perspective of the established Arab migrant community, Syrians have already been favored by the German government and are perceived by the older community to be on a higher level than them. It is therefore important to understand that despite the length of stay in Berlin, a factor favoring the long-term Arab community, urban and migration policies (discussed in the next two chapters) lead them to believe that the newcomers have established stronger urban citizenship than them.

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<sup>75</sup> Clarence Fernandez, “Number of Syrians Becoming German Citizens Tripled in 2021,” *Reuters*, June 10, 2022, sec. World, <https://www.reuters.com/world/number-syrians-becoming-german-citizens-tripled-2021-2022-06-10/>.

<sup>76</sup> “Ausländer in Berlin nach Staatsangehörigkeit.”

<sup>77</sup> Arrival infrastructures are neighborhoods that facilitate the arrival of newcomers and become their choice of long-term residence. An example of these infrastructures includes migrant-run businesses providing different services such as translation, restaurants, mosques, language schools, grocery stores etc.

<sup>78</sup> Feras Al Masri et al., “Quality of Life among Syrian Refugees in Germany: A Cross-Sectional Pilot Study,” *Archives of Public Health* 79, no. 1 (November 29, 2021): 213, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13690-021-00745-7>.

## Chapter Five: Neukölln, Urban Development, and Migration Policy

In this chapter, I look into the neighborhood planning of Neukölln and the national rhetoric surrounding it as a “ghetto,” leading to the social exclusion of its residents.



Figure 2. Photo from Sonnenallee. Taken by author, 4 May 2022.

On the 1<sup>st</sup> of May 2022, the district office of Neukölln in Berlin, in cooperation with the German-Arabic Center, celebrated the end of Ramadan with a total of five events (a flea market, festivals and live music, and a public fast-breaking to mark the end of Ramadan) taking place from Hermannplatz all the way to the middle of Sonnenallee. The official press release on the district’s website called this event the “first of its kind,” stating that this day “stands for diversity and peaceful coexistence in Berlin’s most colorful district.”<sup>79</sup> Mayor Martin Hikel stated that the objective of this event was to portray what Neukölln was all

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<sup>79</sup> “Neukölln Feiert Den 1. Mai,” April 20, 2022, <https://www.berlin.de/ba-neukoelln/aktuelles/pressemitteilungen/2022/pressemitteilung.1197663.php>.

about; “we want to show Neukölln as it is: cosmopolitan, solitary, and peaceful.”<sup>80</sup> What was particularly astonishing about the public fast-breaking was the speech given by mayor Hikel where he discussed the one hundred and sixty nationalities that live in the district and the eighty religions followed. He still, however, gave a particular acknowledgment to the Arabic community and what it means for Sonnenallee to be titled “The Arab Street.” Afterward, special recognition and thanks were given to the two eldest Arab immigrants who have been in Sonnenallee since 1959 and 1960, respectively. The acknowledgment highlighted that what we now know as an Arab neighborhood did not in the past have the strong community it now holds, the struggles that both these men went through as first immigrants in a country that had yet to label itself as an immigrant land intended to make the audience reflect and appreciate the community that they now have access to. However, the district has not always been openly accepting of its inhabitants, and the neighborhood was widely known as an area with special development needs. It has been undergoing different urban development programs since the 1990s, which, as argued by Kraft and Freiheit (2016), leads to enmity and conflicts between groups the more the urban space changes.<sup>81</sup> As mentioned in chapter two, local and national policies and urban development policies play a crucial role in shaping the narrative on immigrants, which affects their placemaking process. In this chapter, I look into the neighborhood planning of the Neukölln district and parallel it to the discourse on the district by the media and political officials to have a further understanding of the factors affecting placemaking and urban citizenship by the residents of the district.

### **5.1. Neighborhood Planning and Management in Neukölln**

This research believes that what one understands as ‘ethnic neighborhoods’ and much of the debates around them are affected by two things: migrant patterns of settlement and local histories of urban development and policymaking.<sup>82</sup> In other words, much of what results in the ghettoization of places and their image as low and poor neighborhoods is related to the state’s official involvement in the area. In 1999, the German Federal State made a national agreement with the *Länder* (states) to give disadvantaged neighborhoods in the country the

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Kristina Kraft and Manuela Freiheit, “Gruppenbezogene Menschenfeindlichkeit vor Ort. Perspektiven auf Konflikte und Potentiale in einem sich wandelnden Quartier.” *Positionen zur Urbanistik II*, 2011, 147–66, <https://pub.uni-bielefeld.de/record/2471631>.

<sup>82</sup> Ares Kalandides and Dina Vaiou, “‘Ethnic’ Neighbourhoods? Practices of Belonging and Claims to the City,” *European Urban and Regional Studies* 19, no. 3 (July 2012): 254–66, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0969776412438328>.

visibility they need. This national program was titled “The Socially Integrative City,” and its main aim was to address the gap found in the standard urban support programs that were only meant to focus on the built and surrounding environment.<sup>83</sup> These existing programs did not address the rising social inequalities or the various forms of exclusion which can be summarized as follows:<sup>84</sup>

1. *Economic*: restricted access to the labor market
2. *Institutional*: a barrier preventing the people from accessing the political and public organizations
3. *Cultural*: discrimination and stigmatization leading to a loss of self-confidence
4. *Social*: social isolation leads to people living in closed-off communities and the link with normal society being destroyed

According to the above, the Socially Integrative City program identified three points of focus to work on:<sup>85</sup>

1. *Work*: low-paid jobs and unemployment
2. *Interpersonal relationships*: social isolation and lack of networks
3. *Welfare rights*: access to institutions and facilities

The intention of the federal government with the program was to “set new urban development policy trends... and aims to link urban planning measures with schemes from other policy areas more closely than has been the case to date.”<sup>86</sup> In doing so, a more thorough district management plan has been set in motion and continues to exist to this day. This district management is intended to help neighborhoods with special development needs by allowing stronger cooperation between the local actors and the existing administration (such as the district offices). The cooperation would help in mobilizing the inhabitants and in promoting their participation and networking with other local actors. How and why each neighborhood was chosen is explained as follows:

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid, 148.

<sup>84</sup> Kalandides and Vaiou, 256.

<sup>85</sup> “Strategien für die Soziale Stadt,” Text, Difu (Deutsches Institut für Urbanistik, September 7, 2003), <https://difu.de/publikationen/2003/strategien-fuer-die-soziale-stadt>.

<sup>86</sup> Michael Krautzberger and Birgit Richter, “»Die soziale Stadt« – Neuorientierung in der Stadtentwicklungspolitik und in der Sozialarbeit,” *Theorie und Praxis der Sozialen Arbeit* 1: 37.

Less mobile groups of the population who are acutely dependent on the district and its social fabric, facilities, and institutions tend to congregate in Socially Integrative City neighborhoods. This raises the importance of the neighborhood as a resource for coping with life. The spatial dimension is generally perceived to be the product of physical conditions, a site of experiences and learning processes, a matrix with orientation, symbolization, identification, reception, and utilization functions, and hence a status indicator and a focus of social self-definition.<sup>87</sup>

These programs were implemented differently by each state. In Berlin, there is a total of thirty-four neighborhood management areas; eleven out of them exist in Neukölln alone, with one program dedicated specifically to Sonnenallee.<sup>88</sup> This is because Neukölln is “characterized by social marginality and spatial disadvantage,” leading to widespread disintegration across the district.<sup>89</sup> With over 350,000 residents in the district, fifty percent of the population were said to receive social security benefits, social welfare was additionally claimed by sixty percent of the people under the age of 25, and the voter turnout was regularly under forty percent.<sup>90</sup> With this in mind, a ‘district management’ as a primary aspect of the Socially Integrative City was implemented for the district. In this program, the emphasis is on increasing the education and qualification level of the residents, strengthening neighborly cooperation, and making the neighborhood safer for its residents.<sup>91</sup> In order to achieve its objectives, an organizational framework was set in place, governed by the neighborhood council. This neighborhood council is an elected body of local representatives (people, businesses, or institutions such as schools, cultural centers, etc.), and local residents should represent at least fifty percent of the total council. This framework maximizes residents’ participation and emphasizes the presence of immigrants as it allows the residents to form this committee and be active in making decisions for smaller projects and allows them to choose representatives and stakeholders to discuss the neighborhood’s strategic development goals. The district management of Neukölln additionally launched a private provider called the ‘agency for interim use’ in order to find solutions for the vacant shops

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<sup>87</sup> “Strategien für die Soziale Stadt, 172”

<sup>88</sup> “District Management High Deck District: District Management,” accessed May 4, 2022, <https://www.high-deck-quartier.de/info/quartiersmanagement>.

<sup>89</sup> Kraft and Freiheit, “Gruppenbezogene Menschenfeindlichkeit vor Ort. Perspektiven auf Konflikte und Potentiale in einem sich wandelnden Quartier.,” 148.

<sup>90</sup> Kraft and Freiheit, 149.

<sup>91</sup> “District Management High Deck District: District Management.”



across the neighborhood.<sup>92</sup> This allowed for better rent conditions and affordable space, leading to abandoned retail shops being rented out by local residents. However, persistent gentrification of the neighborhood and an observable change in the population structure took place, affecting the residents' claim-making and intensifying their feeling of threat.<sup>93</sup> Neukölln, which is predominantly known for its Arab and Turkish migrants, was witnessing the arrival of students, artists, and academics, "who generally have a low or precarious income rather, but are characterized in contrast to the long-term residents by factors such as having high formal education and high level of professional prestige."<sup>94</sup> As a result, abandoned retail shops were reopened by newcomers and turned into coffee shops, galleries, and spaces for cultural events. It was reported that since 2005 "eighty of the one hundred and twenty or so vacant shops have been 'reactivated' by new users."<sup>95</sup> Despite such a trend, Neukölln is still characterized as an area with a very low social status and associated with high rates of unemployment, especially among the youth, and lower levels of education.<sup>96</sup> The state of Berlin has not dedicated enough specific resources for the neighborhood, and the financial aids are not well-directed. As Kraft and Freiheit (2016) put it, Berlin's passivity has led it to become "non-interventionist."<sup>97</sup>

To sum up, urban planning in Neukölln has not succeeded in effectively uplifting or transforming the neighborhood. It is still marginalized and gentrification has further alienated the migrant groups and intensified their defensiveness.

## 5.2. Ghettoization and German National Rhetoric on Neukölln

Due to Neukölln's classification as an area of social marginalization, poverty, and lack of education, the German national rhetoric on the neighborhood is mainly associated with its residents and their migration background. As mentioned before, thirty-five percent of

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<sup>92</sup> Kraft and Freiheit, "Gruppenbezogene Menschenfeindlichkeit vor Ort. Perspektiven auf Konflikte und Potentiale in einem sich wandelnden Quartier.," 148.

<sup>93</sup> Defne Kadioğlu Polat, "'Now the German Comes': The Ethnic Effect of Gentrification in Berlin," *Ethnicities* 20, no. 1 (February 2020): 155–76, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468796818810007>.

<sup>94</sup> Kraft and Freiheit, "Gruppenbezogene Menschenfeindlichkeit vor Ort. Perspektiven auf Konflikte und Potentiale in einem sich wandelnden Quartier.," 149.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Polat, "'Now the German Comes,'" 159.

<sup>97</sup> Kraft and Freiheit, "Gruppenbezogene Menschenfeindlichkeit vor Ort. Perspektiven auf Konflikte und Potentiale in einem sich wandelnden Quartier.," 160.

Neukölln's inhabitants are migrants, and the majority come from the Middle East (Arabs and Turks). Islam is the majority religion of the region and the factor leading debates on why such districts are marginalized. In a report by Foroutan (2013), it is argued that "the emotional public discourse often presents German society as a homogenous one, in which those with a migration background cannot fully belong."<sup>98</sup> Lack of acculturation plays a key role in discussions on the integration of migrants into German society, and the question of their incorporation is linked to the "acquisition of cultural and social competencies, solidarities and loyalties."<sup>99</sup> The fundamental question is thus "how to culturally incorporate immigrants into the German polity without endangering the national and social cohesion of German society."<sup>100</sup> Thus, a conversation prevailing on 'ghettos' and the spatial presence of immigrants prevails on the topic of integration. It focuses its attention on the image of ghettos and how they are feared by society, which is based on the idea that immigrant communities are seen as a "spatial and temporal extension of a poor, natural identity rooted in locality and community."<sup>101</sup>

The focus of this emotional and national discourse has been directed towards Muslim migrants, particularly with terms such as "fanatic, backward, intolerant, and undemocratic" being commonly associated with them, as found in a study by the German Institute for Human Rights.<sup>102</sup> National rhetoric has a significant impact on the formation of public opinion, and it is intertwined with the impact of urban policy. As seen in the above section, urban policy in Neukölln is limited and has not led to development in the area since the beginning of the District Management program in 2003. Coupled with this has been an ongoing political discourse that targets Muslim migrants. For example, German Chancellor

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<sup>98</sup> Naika Foroutan, "Identity and (Muslim) Integration in Germany," March 1, 2013, 5, <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/identity-and-muslim-integration-germany>.

<sup>99</sup> Çaglar, "Constraining Metaphors and the Transnationalisation of Spaces in Berlin," 603.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Liisa Malkki, "National Geographic: The Rooting of Peoples and the Territorialization of National Identity Among Scholars and Refugees," *Cultural Anthropology* 7, no. 1 (February 1992): 7, <https://doi.org/10.1525/can.1992.7.1.02a00030>.

<sup>102</sup> Heiner Bielefeldt, "Das Islambild in Deutschland," in *Islamfeindlichkeit: Wenn die Grenzen der Kritik verschwimmen*, ed. Thorsten Gerald Schneiders (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2009), 167–200, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-531-91692-7\\_12](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-531-91692-7_12).

Angela Merkel claimed that the *Multikulti* way of life in Germany was a complete failure.<sup>103</sup> She declared that immigrants have a burden to share with the state in the sense that they themselves have to show effort to integrate. In the same year, the highly controversial book *Deutschland schafft sich ab* (Germany Abolishes Itself), written by the then member of the Social Democratic Party, Thilo Sarrazin, was published. Sarrazin refers to Germany's biggest problem; parallel societies, in which poor immigrants come to Germany with their lack of education which they continue to pass on to their children, unable to integrate into the country, and creating more "little girls with headscarves."<sup>104</sup> This was followed two years later by the book from the then mayor of Neukölln, Heinz Buschkowsky, titled *Neukölln ist überall* (Neukölln is everywhere), in which he blames the Turkish and Arab immigrants for failure to integrate and assigns them the responsibility for their situation.<sup>105</sup> Ghettos are perceived primarily as the fault of immigrants and their refusal to assimilate into German society. However, urban policy in Berlin since its reunification was responsible for the high-density concentration of immigrants in specific areas of the city.<sup>106</sup> In addition to urban policy, the migration and integration policies at the time of arrival of Muslim migrant communities did not leave much space for Muslims to become active participants in society, as is shown in the next chapter. The political, urban, and social exclusion of Arabs in the '90s and early 2000s heavily impacted their claim-making and urban citizenship, resulting in their marginalization and a stronger emphasis on their Muslim religious identity.

## **Chapter Six: Placemaking and the impact of integration policies**

This chapter outlines the refugee and integration practices of Germany in the 1990s and early 2000s. It compares them to the policies put in place in 2015 and sees the kind of influence they had on the placemaking and integration of established Arab immigrant groups in Berlin. It mainly focuses on the four stages of ideal or pathological placemaking processes.

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<sup>103</sup> Christine Barwick, "Are Immigrants Really Lacking Social Networking Skills? The Crucial Role of Reciprocity in Building Ethnically Diverse Networks," *Sociology* 51, no. 2 (2017): 411, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26558638>.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Katharina Schmitz, "Buschkowsky kann keiner kommen," *Die Zeit*, October 5, 2012, sec. Politik, <https://www.zeit.de/politik/deutschland/2012-10/heinz-buschkowsky-buchpraesentation-berlin-rassismus-integration-neukoelln>.

<sup>106</sup> Çağlar, "Constraining Metaphors and the Transnationalisation of Spaces in Berlin," 604.

## 6.1. German Refugee and Integration Policies 1990 vs. 2015

Germany has had a disparate relationship with immigration that never reflected its reality. With its claim, up until 2004, that it is not a “country of immigration,” Germany has witnessed perhaps the highest number of immigrants and most influential waves of migration in Western Europe since the Second World War.<sup>107</sup> Consistently, migration has been a significant feature of the country’s social, political, and economic markup. The problem was Germany’s delay in catching up with its reality of immigration in terms of a comprehensive and legislative procedure (*Ausländerpolitik*) that appropriately manages the income of foreigners in its land.<sup>108</sup> It wasn’t until the second half of the 2000s that Germany adjusted its laws to reflect that reality. This paper does not attempt to summarize the different waves of migration that Germany faced in the postwar period, nor does it analyze its migration procedures.<sup>109</sup> It simply outlines in this section the essential features of its refugee and integration policies that have affected the established Arab community upon their arrival in the late ‘80s and ‘90s. This is because these policies played a crucial role in the perception of established immigrant communities toward newcomers, as comparisons were made to the policies of 2015 and allowed them to reflect on their power position in the city.

Until 2000, immigration policy neglect was the standard mechanism for the Federal Republic of Germany; the implementation of integration practices was the responsibility of various actors, including local governments and civil society organizations. Although the government was funding different integration programs, “national policies lacked coherence and failed to provide a long-term rationale or legal framework either to match the country’s immigration needs or to maintain social cohesion.”<sup>110</sup> Due to the misconception that Turkish guest workers and refugees were to remain on a “temporary” basis, Germany did not emphasize the importance of integration and social cohesion policies.<sup>111</sup> This mistake would haunt Germany for the following decades as a continuous rise in social inequality became a phenomenon, and

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<sup>107</sup> Christin Hess and Simon Green, “Introduction: The Changing Politics and Policies of Migration in Germany,” *German Politics* 25, no. 3 (July 2, 2016): 316, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09644008.2016.1172065>.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Germany’s post-war immigration history includes the ethnic Germans from Eastern Europe that took up refuge in Germany upon the fall of the Soviet Union and the Iron Curtain, Jewish Immigrants, asylum seekers from former Yugoslavia and the Middle East, Jewish Immigrants, and Turkish guestworkers.

<sup>110</sup> Rita Süßmuth, “The Future of Migration and Integration Policy in Germany” (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, 2009), 2, <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/future-migration-and-integration-policy-germany>.

<sup>111</sup> Süßmuth, 2.

the government refused to address it. Such negligence was seen through the rights accessible to asylum seekers and immigrants from non-EU countries. According to the Federal Agency for Civic Education, until 2005 and the creation of the National Integration Plan, there were no comprehensive integration plans and courses that the government followed.<sup>112</sup> There were no official government-funded language learning programs, so non-EU immigrants were unable to access German courses unless they were capable of paying for them themselves. Additionally, those with asylum applications had no access to the labor market and were not allowed to occupy any paid positions; they were relying mainly on the government's support through the assistance of the social services that come from the job center or through health care.<sup>113</sup> Not only that, but children up to the age of sixteen had access to public schools. However, those sixteen years and older were not allowed to continue their education path as they would not have access to further education or universities. This meant that both the elders and the youth in a single family were excluded from formal educational opportunities. An additional movement ban was placed on asylum seekers; they were not able to leave the municipality in which they were residing. That meant that for the entire duration of the asylum process, asylum seekers could not leave the state and not even return to their home countries if they decided to withdraw their applications. For these reasons, the inability to learn the local language, work, or study, many needed to find alternative ways to maneuver life in Germany.

According to the interviewees, Germany's lack of cooperation in providing participation opportunities played the biggest obstacle to their placemaking in Berlin, leading them to feel excluded and directing many to the black market.<sup>114</sup> All participants from the established community blame the German government for the rise of crime and clans, or what is nationally known as parallel societies, as the majority were not given the opportunity to engage in other activities. "We were not allowed to work, learn, or do much in the country. We only stayed at home and waited for them to give us money every month," stated a

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<sup>112</sup> Vera Hanewinkel and Jochen Oltmer, "Integration and Integration Policies in Germany," Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 2018, <https://www.bpb.de/themen/migration-integration/laenderprofile/english-version-country-profiles/262812/integration-and-integration-policies-in-germany/>.

<sup>113</sup> Hanewinkel and Oltmer.

<sup>114</sup> The black market is a market where the exchange of goods and services is done illegally and away from the government's supervision.

Palestinian participant. The limited access to basic rights has prevented many from fully participating on a political and social level. One Lebanese participant described those years as “living in an open prison,” and another echoed it by saying, “in these first ten years, I remember more tears than I ever remember laughing. It was like living in prison. I really have no other way to describe it.” They attribute the biggest difference between them and the Syrians to the migration and refugee policies at the time. They were aware that they were not needed, as a participant explains it:

Merkel herself, when she spoke to the people in 2015 about why they are opening their doors wide open for the Syrians, she said, ‘The Syrians that are coming, we need them, our labor market needs them’ she made the people feel like they were coming to help Germany not just themselves. That was the biggest difference; when we came in the ‘90s, they did not need us.

Despite it not being a direct question, participants felt it important to explain why ghettos, criminalization, and lack of education are falsely associated with their community. One can detect a tone of pain as they reflect on how difficult life was for them back then, especially when the sacrifice some have made to come to Germany holds significant weight for them. Some participants share how they had to sell their assets, homes, and cars and pay large sums of money to smugglers to be able to escape. Yet, when they arrived, not only was Germany not welcoming of them, but their passports were also taken for years and years during the asylum procedure, and they were not allowed to go back. As one Lebanese participant puts it, “what would they even go back to? And how? They no longer have money. *Eid men wara w eid men odam* (an Arabic idiom that means empty-handed).”<sup>115</sup> According to him, this is why so many lived in parallel societies or started engaging in illegal activity as they wanted to secure enough money in case they were deported and had to go back home. Due to the nature of his work, his organization tries to create rehabilitation programs for Arabs who have been in the country for a while but have yet to integrate properly. However, he highlights how challenging it is, as many have given up on having such a life. He states:

For years, they were left ‘waiting’ for a decision from the government on whether they could stay legally in Germany or not. So, when the rise of criminality happened, who was to blame? The psychological damage that happens when you live an uncertain life for over ten years, not knowing whether you will stay in this place, knowing you are not able to leave, and can’t even return, is immense. Every day, a family would be taken from the shelter any time between three and five in the

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<sup>115</sup> The literal translation of the idiom is ‘One hand from the back, and one hand from the front’ commonly used to describe someone who has absolutely no money, he is in a situation to beg.

morning and told, ‘you can no longer stay here. You have to return.’ None of this was humane.

A participant shared a story of a family member who had been in Germany for thirty years before he was given his legal status. During those years, he was unable to visit his family back home and had to witness the death of many through letters and later social media. When his sons, who he left at a very young age, came to Berlin through Syria, they received their permits earlier than he did, and a relationship with them has long been forgotten. This relates to the psychological impact mentioned above. Other participants shared how they had to learn the language by being on the streets. As they could not afford to pay for classes, nor could they work, there was no proper way for them to acquire it except by interacting with others. A grocery store owner who is over the age of sixty says that he can speak German now, but he can neither read it nor write it. Waiting for twenty or thirty years to acquire your legal right to work and learn is a specific point of anger. For this grocery store owner, by the time he acquired that right, he was almost fifty and had been in Germany since he was twenty-five. At fifty, he neither wanted to go back and finish his education nor start reading and writing the language. At least seven participants echo this sentiment and find it very demotivating as adjusting to life as it was had already been exhausting enough.

In addition to exclusionary policies and lack of opportunities, participants furthermore express the hardships of discrimination. “We faced a lot of discrimination. If a school had a bad reputation, it was because there were a lot of Arab kids in it. If the neighborhood had high rates of crime, it was because we lived in it. They blamed everything on us,” stated a participant. Additionally, many faced discrimination in official German institutions or places like the Foreigner’s Office, the airport, and even in the labor market. A Lebanese participant claims that:

In the past, we lived as a minority that faced discrimination on a daily basis. I mean that literally, every day and everywhere, we were discriminated against, whether at work or in schools, with children or without. Even the foundation funding our work right now<sup>116</sup> never hired Muslims as a rule until 2008, when they decided to change direction and started offering services to immigrants. But not just our donor; all German companies and institutions were not hiring Arabs. For Turkish people, yes, but Arabs were treated differently no matter how long they’ve been in the country.

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<sup>116</sup> Foundation name has been kept anonymous, as per the request of the participant.

Another participant agreed and also claimed that the reason the Turkish people might be perceived at a higher level than Arabs is that they came as guest workers and helped rebuild Germany. Due to this, when they hear the term *Araber* (Arab in German), they automatically feel spoken to in a negative way.

On the other hand, the open policy of 2015 in Germany facilitated access to basic rights for Syrian refugees, which was perceived by many as Germany's attempt to fix its past mistake when it concerns the integration of its foreign residents. Syrian refugees were granted permits within three months of their arrival, and they were also eligible for citizenship within three years. All Syrian refugees had access to nine hundred free hours of German courses, and children could easily access German schools and kindergartens.<sup>117</sup> Additionally, the government facilitated the accreditation of certificates from foreign universities to allow Syrians easier access to the labor market. With such facilitation, Syrians were quickly and seamlessly capable of overcoming bureaucratic procedures in Germany in comparison to the established immigrant community. However, struggle in itself is perceived by the established Arabs as an essential step of placemaking that strengthens their belonging to a place. In other words, they believe that as a result of their resilience in the face of exclusion and discrimination, their place-based identity is superior to that of the Syrians as they did not fight to earn their place in the city. This can be explained through Gil's (2010) ideological and pathological pathways of placemaking.<sup>118</sup> In stages two and three of an ideological placemaking process, migrants should be able to associate themselves with a place and not feel excluded from any specific spaces. Moreover, there should be a positive reception by the host community. Because the established Arab migrant community was excluded from various spaces in Berlin and the host community's reaction was negative, their placemaking process became a pathological one instead. Since this relies heavily on the host country's migration policy, such as their need for migrants to fill the gap in the labor market, the placemaking of Syrians compared to the long-term Arab residents is paradoxical. It is important to understand that urban and migration policies played a crucial factor in the development of the relationship between both migrant communities and the creation of spaces of contestation.

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<sup>117</sup> Hanewinkel and Oltmer, "Integration and Integration Policies in Germany."

<sup>118</sup> Gill, "Pathologies of Migrant Place-Making."



## 6.2. Alienation and Belonging: Life in Neukölln Before the Arrival of Newcomers

While the above section explains stages two and three of the ideological and pathological placemaking process, this section includes two factors that affected the initial placemaking of the established community upon arriving in Berlin that reflect stages one and four and highlights the alienation feeling and adjusting to a new country:

1. Places allowing Arabs to cluster themselves and project their identity (e.g., yearning for homeland food and the opening of the earliest Arab restaurants)
2. Community building within the existing places (lack of Arabs and the language of Arabic).

Due to the hardships mentioned in the section above, establishing a sustainable life was difficult for the older Arab community as their future remained uncertain and undecided. Participants who arrived in the late 80s and early 90s found it very difficult to make a place for themselves or imagine Neukölln to be the home they now describe it as. The participants reminisced on the foreignness of the city back then and the difficulty of adjusting to it. Reasons such as lack of community, language barriers, and a yearning for homeland food all played major factors in accentuating their alienation. In terms of community building, a Lebanese participant described finding other Arabs back then as “winning the lottery,” it did not matter where they came from as they were all a minority compared to the Germans, so being together gave them a “community” feeling. She recalls being the earliest to ever move there and how, when two other Arab families moved into her building, she befriended the little girls around her age, and she felt for the first time that the neighborhood had become her place. “It gave me the feeling of *Ahl el Hetta*<sup>119</sup> that people back home spoke about,” she shared, with a smile on her face as she recalled the feeling. Another Palestinian-Jordanian participant shared that she had been living in Spandau till 2002, which is in the far East of Germany on the other side of Neukölln. “It was a different lifestyle. I used to dream of just hearing a single Arabic word. By 6:00 PM, everything in Spandau would close. It was so foreign from where we come from because, in the Arab world, our streets are alive well into the middle of the night. This is what makes The Arab Street special nowadays,” she said. Another Lebanese described the alienation as a lack of a cultural bridge. She notes, “we

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<sup>119</sup> Ahl el Hetta is an Arabic saying that is translated literally as “The family of the neighborhood” but is commonly used to refer to a community living in a certain neighborhood long enough, with tight ties to all residents, that they’re seen as a family/owners of the area

arrived in a country where there was no cultural bridge; food you're used to, familiar places to go out to. Everything was foreign. We were one of the earliest people, so we had to make all of that ourselves.”

This can also be seen in the way all interviewed Arabs from the older community remember clearly when the first Arab restaurant and grocery store opened and how significant it was for their community. A Lebanese participant remembers that before the opening of the first Lebanese grocery store, they would “try to buy from the Turkish similar ingredients and cook at home, especially the meat. But the Turkish cuisine is drastically different from ours, so we could not find the majority of the ingredients we wanted.” If they heard that anyone they know, or an acquaintance of someone they knew, was traveling back home, everyone would ask this person to bring them bread or spices. “This person was obligated to travel with a list of requests from strangers all over Neukölln, and all of us would wait for their return impatiently,” shared one participant.

In 1996, *Al Farrouj*, a Lebanese restaurant, opened in Sonnenallee, marking a new era for the established community. Participants stated how it became the “spot” for Arab families to go to on the weekend, a place connecting the community and introducing them to each other. The Palestinian-Jordanian participant claimed that, “I used to commute long ways from Spandau just to come to Neukölln and find the other Arabs. When *Al Farrouj* and *Azzam* opened, it felt like our lives had changed. Our families had somewhere to go eat and be happy about.” *Azzam*, which is now the largest well-known branch of restaurants and stores in Sonnenallee, started back then as a grocery store only in 2003. Nowadays, the owner owns a *Shawarma* restaurant, a seafood restaurant, a coffee shop, and multiple grocery stores, all under his name. The interviewees highlighted how when his grocery store opened, they had to visit every week just to see what ingredients he was able to import from Lebanon and what variety was available to them. “Everyone, whether from Palestine, Lebanon, or Egypt, everyone went there regardless of where they lived just to see what products they were selling that came from the Arab world. Anything to eat, anything to cook with,” shared a Lebanese participant, “the idea that we could cook at home the food we used to cook back in our home countries was the one thing we looked forward to all week. The joy of seeing the *Shami*<sup>120</sup> bread back then still rings within me”. There was no variety, so they bought whatever was available, regardless of its quality. They will further draw on this in the

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<sup>120</sup> Typical Arab bread mainly used in the Levant area (Syria, Jordan, Lebanon and Palestine)

following section, as one of the advantages of the arrival of the Syrians was the diversity of products. They then had a category of where to go based on their needs; *Al Farrouj* when they wanted to eat in a restaurant, *Azzam* for their groceries, and *Al Habib* for Falafel. One by one, as different Arab residents started acquiring their permits or documents allowing them to open their own stores, the neighborhood started flourishing with coffeeshops like *Um Kalthoum* and *Al Salam*, or *Risa'a*; a well-known Arab chicken restaurant referred to as Arabian KFC by the locals. All sixteen participants from the established community mentioned the opening of *Azzam* in the interviews, signifying the importance of the grocery store to the community back then.

According to Gil (2010), the first stage that allows for placemaking to take place is when migrants agree on a place to project a common identity on, and that place is non-threatening.<sup>121</sup> As can be seen from the testimonials of the participants, the first ten years or more were difficult as they were unable to find such a place. Arabs were still a minority, even in Neukölln, and finding familiar places, such as restaurants, was challenging. Additionally, the previously mentioned aspects of discrimination made the non-threatening feeling of a place more difficult. However, in the middle of the 2000s, as one restaurant and grocery store started opening up, projecting a place-based identity became much easier, and the placemaking process started taking a form. The final stage for placemaking was also hindered and delayed due to the lack of presence of a strong Arabic community and the formation of kinship with other existing migrants.<sup>122</sup> The power dynamic between natives and newly arrived migrants was imbalanced, leading Arabs to feel much inferior. Although, with time, this obstacle was overcome and Arabs were able to assert a powerful position in Sonnenallee, claiming it for themselves, the process itself was not ideal. This leads to the conclusion that all four stages of placemaking did not take an ideal pathway for the Arab community. It was instead a pathological one, in the sense that the Arab community was excluded and alienated from existing migrant places. This explains the possessive and protective behavior of their neighborhood, as they struggled to claim it for themselves. Chapter eight further builds on this pathological placemaking and how strongly connected it is to defensive urban citizenship.

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<sup>121</sup> Gill, "Pathologies of Migrant Place-Making."

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

## Chapter Seven: Arabs and Patterns of Solidarity

This chapter analyzes the engagement of the established Arab community with the Syrian refugees and the forms of solidarity that took place upon their arrival. It looks into the overall sentiment among the community members and how this sentiment translated itself into supportive action. Whether individually or collectively, members of the community engaged and volunteered to express their support of Syrian refugees. This helped the established community to feel like a significant element of German society.

### 7.1. Initial Response: Refugees Welcome!

The Syrian civil war started in 2011 with a widespread revolutionary reaction, now known as The Arab Spring, around the Middle East and North African region. While for other countries, such as Egypt and Tunisia, the revolution ended within the year, and they were able to topple the ruling regimes at the time, the Syrian war did not witness this success. Although Syrians have been fleeing to neighboring countries (such as Lebanon and Turkey) since the beginning of the war, some have also found their way to Germany and other European countries long before 2015. According to the interviewees, they were aware of the ongoing conflict, especially since their home countries had to host a large number of refugees. Because of this reason, when the German open policy was implemented in 2015, they were extremely supportive and particularly wanted to push this agenda further. Support was done across various levels, whether individually, through the creation of organizations, or on a voluntary basis. In other words, the established community “developed empathy with their (refugees) concerns, struggles, and sufferings”<sup>123</sup> and translated this empathy into forms of action. “They were escaping war. We (referring to Palestinians) of all people have lived and escaped war all our lives. In fact, not only Syrians were escaping the war at the time, but the Palestinian refugees living in Syria as well. . . We were sympathetic to their situation,” said Yasmine, a Palestinian interviewee. She and others expressed a sense of solidarity with the Syrians, knowing they needed a supportive voice in Germany to counter the opposing anti-immigration sentiment. Another Palestinian woman emphasized the sympathizing feeling they felt towards the Syrians by saying, “Syria was known in the Arab world as a civilized country with rich literature and heritage. Seeing what was happening there was

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<sup>123</sup> Byron Miller and Walter Nicholls, “Social Movements in Urban Society: The City as A Space of Politicization,” *Urban Geography* 34, no. 4 (June 2013): 460, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02723638.2013.786904>.

heartbreaking for all of us.” The reference to a past Syria being quite known in the Middle East highlights two interconnected factors: first, as explained through the politics of belonging theory, identification and an emotional attachment to “particular groupings and collectivities.”<sup>124</sup> This is related to transnational networks and their presence in host countries. Second, this particular collective identity is related to Arab nationalism and an attachment to the Arab region as a whole in which individuals from other Arab countries are capable of developing a sense of belonging to Syria as if it was their own.<sup>125</sup>

It has been argued that underlying factors that prompt solidary responses are “experiences with racism, marginalization and the failure of local and national integration policies.”<sup>126</sup> This has also been the case for all the established community interviewees, as they reacted to the arrival of the Syrians based on their self-perception and experience of their own arrival as refugees in Germany and created a response based on that. The majority reflected on the discrimination and hardships they faced as new refugees: alienation from the native community, lack of accessibility to bureaucratic procedures, language barrier, and socio-economic status. All these factors affected their initial place-making in Germany and, in return, created a solidary response that rejected the repetition of their experience with the Syrians. This reflects an important aspect of solidarity; relation to one’s own migration experience. In one of the focus group discussions, a Moroccan interviewee expressed that “times like this make you realize that we have no one but each other. A lot of us felt protective of them as well because we did not want them to face the discrimination we faced.”

When interviewing a member of the German Arabic Center (DAZ), he said that the overall sentiment across Berlin was positive; not just among Arabs, but the Turks, other immigrants, and a majority of the Germans were all willing to help. He said:

Seeing the people escape the war and the images of the refugees at the borders of southern Europe like Greece or what was happening in Hungary and the Czech Republic from their authorities made us all furious and upset. These images still ring in my mind. When the Syrians arrived, everyone wanted to help in any kind of way.

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<sup>124</sup> Nira Yuval-Davis, “Belonging and the Politics of Belonging,” *Patterns of Prejudice* 40, no. 3 (July 2006): 202, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00313220600769331>.

<sup>125</sup> Rubin, “Pan-Arab Nationalism.”

<sup>126</sup> Koca, “Urban Citizenship and the Spatial Encounter between Turkish Migrants and Syrian Refugees in Berlin,” 8.

My family and I and other families started collecting old clothes and giving them out to the shelters where they were staying, especially the ones in Turmstrasse. We would bring them pots with food and go back to collect the pots and give them more food every day. Everyone was gathering and finding ways to help. Some translated, some brought food and clothes, and some fought back any racist security guards. There was a sense of shared responsibility.

This reaction was echoed across fourteen of the fifteen interviews from the established community. It is important to note that the interviewees did not just express support as an internal feeling or as a statement. They translated that feeling into different forms of action. In one of the focus group discussions, the women talked about how they accompanied the Syrians to the job center or the foreigner's office to interpret and translate for them, and as the member of the DAZ stated, they were also offering them food and clothes. In this sense, one can interpret how the established community felt like they had the power to impact the lives of the incoming refugees. This change of positionality accentuates the transformation of the community from one that was marginalized, voiceless, and powerless during their early days to one with a voice strong enough to make the statement that the Syrians will be accepted into their urban space. As Koca (2019) puts it, "this can be an expression of the very sense of belonging to this urban space," in this case Neukölln, as they are capable of participating politically, economically, and socially and acknowledge their participation as a definition of their role as residents in the neighborhood.<sup>127</sup> The active participation and involvement of the Arab migrant community, especially on a voluntary basis, in helping and facilitating the arrival of refugees is a significant statement regarding the political agency of the community vis-à-vis the Germans. Participants felt it important to highlight their roles in interpretation and translation as a gap in which the German government had to rely on Arabic-speaking natives, and in this sense, they were not just a cultural element in the German society rather also a functional and an essential element.

While this kind of support was done on a community and individual level, on an organizational level, there were multiple programs prepared and offered to help Syrians to settle in Berlin. The DAZ was accepted for funding by the government to run two different projects targeting Syrian refugees. Salim notes that this was an initiative pushed for by the center. The first was called *Welcome to Berlin*, a project funded by the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees that provided community awareness sessions on a city-wide level. Its

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<sup>127</sup> Koca, 9.

aim was to help the refugees understand the different services available to them, such as housing, job-searching, or health care. It also addressed a cultural element aimed at introducing the refugees to German culture. The second project was titled *Welcome to Neukölln* and was primarily focused on refugees living in the neighborhood. It focused on the coordination between the people, the managers of the refugee camps, and the refugee office. The programs received funding from 2016 until 2018. Additionally, Salim also claimed that they “had teams of people at different locations sent to provide assistance in translation and interpretation, or to preserve the dignity of refugees that were subjected to mistreatment by security guards.” Similarly, two Lebanese interviewees worked as intercultural bridge builders in healthcare and claimed that right after the arrival of the Syrians, the government was sending them all the information regarding the healthcare policies available for Syrians. They noted that the majority of their cases in 2016-2017 were Syrian applicants. They stated that they were capable of developing a close relationship with some of the applicants, and information between both parties regarding legal rights, community events, school registration, etc., was shared.

As can be seen throughout this chapter, the initial response by the established Arab community in Berlin to the arrival of Syrian refugees was very welcoming and supportive. It is argued that “people develop relationships and networks based on their practical and emotional needs. Whether it is mutual support, the exchange of services or the security of familiarity among neighborhood residents, everyday lives are marked by these relationships.”<sup>128</sup> This can be verified through the ways the established community empathized with the newcomers in terms of their experience as new arriving refugees in the past. The sentiment was widespread on an individual, community, and organizational level. On an individual level, Arab migrants volunteered to help refugees by providing food baskets and clothes, as well as offering interpretation and translation services. The community itself organized trips to shelters to ensure that communication between guards and refugees was smooth. What prompted this support and empathy was previous experiences with discrimination. On an organizational level, multiple funded projects were running on a city-wide scale of which interviewed participants were a part. This goes in line with previous research on solidarity patterns, showing how a shared migration experience creates room for

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<sup>128</sup> Kalandides and Vaiou, “‘Ethnic’ Neighbourhoods?,” 260.

solidarity endeavors.<sup>129</sup> Moreover, when it is concerned with urban citizenship, participants activated their political agency through different ways of participation, elevating their self-perception of their power position in a place. By emphasizing discrimination and ensuring Syrians did not face a similar experience to the one they faced back then, participants created a safer space for the refugees. As argued by Karakayali (2019), “helping refugees is a symbolic form of political articulation, particularly against mobilization efforts from right wing extremists on the local level.”<sup>130</sup>

## Chapter Eight: Defensiveness and Spaces of Competition

This lengthy chapter details various factors that lead to the feeling of competition between both groups of immigrants and relates to the defensive urban-citizenship framework. In this section, I will explain how in the years following the arrival of the Syrians, the relationship between both generations of migrants has developed into one filled with tensions. I will discuss how the established community perceived the impact of the Syrians on Sonnenallee and how they do not believe they owe them any favor for the current situation of the neighborhood. I will also discuss the problems that arose in the area since their arrival and how the Syrians react to such problems, and what their opinion is on the matter.

### 8.1. The Syrian Has Come and Taken Everything

*“We received the feeling that they were here to **occupy** the street. Like they are here to impose their authority on the existing residents.” – quote by a Palestinian participant.*

Yiftachel and Cohen (2021) define Defensive Urban Citizenship as “a symbolic, material and political identity. It is based on a ‘cry for help,’ and a series of coalitions, mobilizations, and manoeuvres for survival, instigated by those threatened with being robbed of whatever little bundle of urban necessities they still possess in the city.”<sup>131</sup> Despite the initial reaction to the arrival of Syrian refugees being a positive one, a particular distinction between the

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<sup>129</sup> Feischmidt and Zakariás, “How Migration Experience Affects the Acceptance and Active Support of Refugees?”

<sup>130</sup> Serhat Karakayali, “The Welcomers: How Volunteers Frame Their Commitment for Refugees,” in *Refugee Protection and Civil Society in Europe*, ed. Margit Feischmidt, Ludger Pries, and Celine Cantat (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2019), 221, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-92741-1\\_8](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-92741-1_8).

<sup>131</sup> Oren Yiftachel and Nir Cohen, “Defensive Urban Citizenship: A View from Southeastern Tel Aviv,” in *Theorising Urban Development From the Global South*, ed. Anjali Karol Mohan, Sony Pellissery, and Juliana Gómez Aristizábal (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2021), 151, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-82475-4\\_7](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-82475-4_7).



established community and the Syrians became visible throughout the years. A widespread discontent was felt among the established community, which was triggered mainly by a feeling of threat and rivalry. This goes in line with the defensive urban citizenship theory in which the established community felt an ongoing competition with the Syrians over the housing market, the labor market, education, and other state-provided services. According to them, the number of government-funded programs was massive. “The government-funded so many support programs as well. I mean, some were offered to Iraqis too. But funded programs were so many. Nothing has ever been done like this to any other Arab country. I do not mean just Palestine and Lebanon, even Libya had a war at the time, but they received a different policy,” said one of the women.

The reference to the number of programs and projects that the German government provided for the Syrians comes with a feeling of envy, which was a common underlying theme in all interviews. As the programs increased in numbers and better integration policies were implemented in 2016, a shift in the solidarity discourse took place. The interviewees compared in detail the reception done by the government when they arrived versus when the Syrians arrived. Once the initial wave of support and empathy waned off and they came in direct contact with the Syrians, the response developed into a feeling of threat, and competition became a central topic for the existence of the Syrians within the same urban space as the established community. Yasmine shared that the initial response “was just the beginning though, so many problems came up after that, especially when we came in direct contact with them... till now it was just us supporting them before they even arrive, but suddenly they were living next to us and changing everything around the area, and everything was happening so fast.” The usage of the terms *so fast* embodies a rejection of the surrounding change in the environment they have inhabited for so long. However, the response further developed into one of shock and surprise at the level of awareness the Syrians had upon arriving. A Palestinian-Jordanian woman, during one of the focus group discussions, claimed that once they arrived, she realized that “they did not need any help. They knew their rights like they had them in a book and memorized them all before coming. You would go with them to interpret and hear a woman saying, ‘I have five children, and according to the rules, I shouldn’t receive a house with less than four rooms.’ It was surprising how they knew exactly which areas to live in, which jobs to take, or where to go to learn German.” She was not the only person who felt this shock or mentioned it. The Lebanese participant from the healthcare providing service also stated that “the Syrian

coming from Syria knew the law before he even arrived,” to which her coworker stressed with “Exactly! And he knows exactly where to receive each penny from the government support.” She also felt it important to emphasize that the information was available to them in Arabic, meaning the government put effort into providing official information in Arabic, which she, as a refugee, did not experience in the 90s. In Koca’s (2019) research, one sees that the Turkish community perceived these efforts as a good sign of the development of the German government and its attempt to fix its past mistakes.<sup>132</sup> However, since the Turkish migrants were not subjected to the same policies as Arab refugees, particularly since the same policies still apply to Palestinians and Lebanese immigrants in this current day, they are not as appreciative of the improvements Germany is making for others.

According to different interviewees, social media had a big role to play in the spread of information across the Syrian community, a form of accessibility that was also not available in their early days. Because of social media, Syrians created Facebook pages and Whatsapp groups in which information was being shared and forwarded quickly. “They were very connected; the spread of information was done so well it made sure no one in their community was left unaware,” expressed a Palestinian-Lebanese woman in the focus group discussion. The availability of information made the established community feel like the Syrians were favored and in an upper league than they were. The Lebanese healthcare participant shared that she has been living in Germany for thirty years, yet her Syrian applicants would inform her of things she had the right to that she was never aware of before, and they have been there for not even a year at the time.

By offering their help, the established community was asserting their power as the group of people who would facilitate the arrival and integration of Syrian refugees. They saw that it was within their hands to translate and interpret, to defend their *dignity* from discrimination by the authorities and security officers, as was stated above, and to eliminate any hardships facing the refugees by providing food or clothes. However, upon the realization that this help was not needed, at least not to the extent imagined, the established community expressed shock, a sign of an imbalance in the expected hierarchy. Additionally, it was unpleasant for them to realize that a newly arriving community was more aware than they were. The initial

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<sup>132</sup> Koca, “Urban Citizenship and the Spatial Encounter between Turkish Migrants and Syrian Refugees in Berlin,” 7.

feeling of redefining their position as residents with an active, impactful voice was reconstructed as they questioned their position against the new residents.<sup>133</sup>

The interviewees have stated directly and indirectly that the threat they felt was persistent. During the focus group discussion with the nine district mothers, a Palestinian-Jordanian interviewee expressed a conflicting feeling toward the Syrians; she said, “They have better houses, more money, higher education. I entered a Syrian woman’s house before, and I just remember feeling *joy*<sup>134</sup> from all the decorations and jewelry. I was also receiving government assistance, but how come I did not have that kind of money? My house doesn’t look like that.” Throughout this discussion, the women laid blame on the Syrians for being one of the factors affecting the housing crisis in Berlin. According to them, since the Syrians arrived in huge numbers and there were already many people on the waiting list to receive apartments and houses, the Syrians brought with them the culture of “bribery” in order to speed the process for themselves. The interviewees stated that the Syrians started paying real-estate agents large amounts of money starting from 3000 Euros and above to receive apartments in the areas of their choosing. One of them claimed that it was unfair how they were also waiting to receive apartments for ten years and some even longer, yet because the Syrians paid money, they were able to get them faster. The participant from the German Arabic Center mentioned this in his interview as well: “They also paid bribes to real estate agents to get apartments or have them sign contracts for them. Of course, this was happening before, but on a smaller individual scale. However, the scale with which they were doing it, I believe, affected the housing market in Berlin greatly.” This culture of paying real-estate agents persists in Berlin; if you are unable to pay an attractive sum of money, the chances of finding a place to live become slimmer.

In addition to competition in the housing market, the established community referenced a competitive feeling toward labor as well. They viewed the Syrians as a community that was hungry for work and willing to accept any kind of money by doing any kind of work just to put their name out there. The Palestinian-Jordanian interviewee stated that “the Syrians were offering services for lower prices, and this took the business from other people like my husband. If he offered repair services for fifty Euros, a Syrian would come and say, ‘I can do

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<sup>133</sup> Varsanyi, “Interrogating ‘Urban Citizenship’ *Vis-à-Vis* Undocumented Migration.”

<sup>134</sup> Emphasis by the author based on the emphasis by the interviewee

it for you for thirty instead.’ They created enemies that way.” Despite this feeling, the participants were not shy about praising the Syrians for being hard-working people. Many were adamant about repeating that they have a well-earned reputation for being hard-working and ambitious. One Lebanese woman noted that “Syrians are a working people, nobody can deny that. Wherever you put them, they will work.” All interviewed women also made a note of the working culture of Syrian women. As mentioned before, social media played an important role in the facilitation of the migration process of the Syrians, something that the established community did not have. Therefore, Syrian women were capable of utilizing social media to their favor by opening different Facebook and Instagram pages and offering different types of products; homemade food, desserts, and *Abayas and Hijabs*<sup>135</sup>. An Egyptian woman shared that “Facebook pages of that kind were never a thing before they arrived, at least not on that kind of scale. Nowadays, if you have a big gathering, you can easily order food that usually takes hours to cook from them, and they will make it for you in five kilos or more.” The well-earned reputation of being a good, hardworking refugee has been explained in discussions of deservingness. The good migrant is one who provides the image of a refugee who deserves to stay in the host society because he has earned his place. This is because of his hardworking mannerism and willingness to learn and improve, and he benefits the country in multiple ways.<sup>136</sup> By praising the Syrian community for their hard work, the established community claims itself to be one that gets to judge whether or not newcomers deserve to stay in the country. In other words, they practice their citizenship status by having a similar voice to that of the natives.

However, the praising stopped here. What came afterward were contesting feelings that were somewhere between replacement – the Syrians replacing the original community that built Sonnenallee – and the need for validation – that the established community is owed for making Sonnenallee what it is today. The defensive fight over their urban space was most visible here, portraying a strong feeling of ownership as the established Arab community explained in detail how Sonnenallee, now known as the Arab street, was already well-established before the arrival of the Syrians, and it played a big role in the facilitation of placemaking for them. One Lebanese participant argues that “the Syrians claim that they have

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<sup>135</sup> Traditional clothing for Arab and Muslim women

<sup>136</sup> Ildikó Zakariás and Margit Feischmidt, “‘We Are That In-Between Nation’: Discourses of Deservingness of Hungarian Migrants Working in Institutions of Refugee Accommodation in Germany,” *Sociology* 55, no. 2 (April 1, 2021): 400–420, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038520941690>.

‘revived the street,’ how would they have done that if there wasn’t already a foundation and a magnet attracting them to this specific street? They revived it by increasing the number of customers, yes, but they did not establish the street.” Repetitively, the statement “we do not owe them any favor” was echoed in multiple interviews. Additionally, when asked about life in Sonnenallee in the ‘90s and early 2000s, all participants would start their answer by saying, “The Palestinians and Lebanese were always there. We have always been here, and we were a growing community.” They find it significant to highlight that there was an Arab presence all along that should not be forgotten. Another Palestinian participant stated that the Syrians were aware of their favored treatment by the German government, and that gave them a sense of superiority. He said:

I tell them this to their face, by the way, that they did not do the street any favor. I tell them, ‘You came to Sonnenallee because others have already established the path for you. Why didn’t you make a community for yourself elsewhere in Berlin? Mariendorf or something? Why here? Because the work has already been done for you. The Arabs were there. You knew the language, and its people were there, that you would have customers here.’ They owe their success to us.

This entitlement to be *owed* success is an example of “reaffirming ‘our’ citizenship... and defending material place-based resources.”<sup>137</sup> It emphasizes a dwelling sense of displacement, in which the established community reasserts over and over that their “turf” exists because of their hard work, and they fear such an aspect will be forgotten.<sup>138</sup> In discussions with the Syrians, many have mentioned that they did bring life to the street, and they are the reason it is a famous Arab street now. They believe that the street would not be what it is today if it were not for them. Thus, one can understand why the established Arab community feels an ownership of the urban space they have been inhabiting and establishing for years. From the perspective of the older community, the hard work was done, and the street was prepared for more Arab business. The Syrians started providing services in the street that were not there before, such as jewelry, second-hand stores, spices, *hijab* shops, and Syrian regional food. When it comes to grocery stores and restaurants, the big names and the majority belong to the older community. However, the lack of variety that the street had during their early days disappeared as they were now capable of having a variety of products. One participant stated, “In the past if you found a bad cucumber, you bought the bad

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<sup>137</sup> Cohen, “Southern Discomfort: Defensive Urban Citizenship in Tel Aviv.,” 170.

<sup>138</sup> Yiftachel and Cohen, “Defensive Urban Citizenship,” 154.

cucumber. You had no other option. Now, you can go to one store to buy one thing and then to the other to get another thing. You can spend the whole day going up and down the street choosing whatever you want.” Some have argued that this is because the Syrians increased the number of customers on the street, and the demand was greater than the supply, making it easy for other businesses to open and become fruitful. Only one Palestinian participant argued that it was not just because of the increasing number of customers, but rather that the nature of the Syrians themselves is hard-working, and they would have been able to succeed regardless.

From conversations with the Syrian community, they deny that the established community provided them with any sort of help. In fact, they argue that they hindered their success and presented them with many obstacles upon their arrival. When it comes to opening restaurants, in particular, the Syrian community claims that Arabs were threatened by the success of their business and that they shut down at least two restaurants by threatening them. There is a special contradictory account of an instance with *Al-Dimishqi* restaurant told from the perspective of the two communities. Two Lebanese participants claimed that *Azzam* was the one who helped *Al-Dimishqi* to be established by investing in the restaurant and helping the owner acquire the right documents. The Syrians, on the other hand, argue that *Al-Dimishqi* was threatened to close its business by *Azzam* and others from the Lebanese and Palestinian community, and the only condition to keep it open was if the owner agreed to make *Azzam* a shareholder. This narrative seems to be the dominant one as the Syrians have spread it among their community. On the other hand, not many from the established community knew of the real events, or they refused to elaborate further on the story. Regardless of the details of the incident, there was this widespread feeling among the Syrians that the Arabs had control over the street and were willing to practice it in any form.

This section portrayed various forms of ownership and defensiveness among the established Arab community. In order to fend off threats to their urban space and halt the claim-making practices of the newly arrived Syrian refugees, the established Arab group developed a reactive place-based identity and utilized different resources to practice physical control over their urban space.<sup>139</sup> This can be seen through the ways the Arab community claimed that the Syrians were taking all that was *theirs*, and so they reacted by claiming ownership of the

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<sup>139</sup> Cohen, “Southern Discomfort: Defensive Urban Citizenship in Tel Aviv.,” 170.

place based on their long-term status. They threatened Syrian refugees and prevented them from participating in their established places. Additionally, they raised national flags on top of their stores as a sign of the presence of numerous other nationalities in the street than the Syrians to assert some dominance. In the following section, defensiveness and identities over places are further contested in the form of cultural habits and differences.

## **8.2. Culture as a Significant Exclusionary Practice**

As discussed before, Arabs do not only share a common language and religion, but they also have a shared history that led to the creation of a common culture and traditions. The background of where the migrants come from is similar. Between the established community that comes from different Arab countries, cultural differences are barely visible and are usually seen between different social and education classes. However, despite the visible differences among the interviewed participants, all pointed out a stark contrast in the culture of Syrians who moved to Berlin compared to theirs. Participants, as stated in the methodology section, were selected at random and came from different education, social, and economic backgrounds. Yet they have all agreed that they find it difficult to adjust to the cultural transformation of the Syrian community upon their integration into Germany. They drew upon the following major themes: the secularization of Syrians, difference in mindset, high divorce rates in marriages, and a shocking increase in LGBT members in visible Arab spaces.

### **8.2.1. Secularization of Syrians**

Against the backdrop of conversations revolving around the integration of migrants, especially Muslim migrants, the established Arab community in Berlin believes that most Syrians have abandoned their religion and culture and assimilated to the extent that goes beyond what an Arab person can accept. One Palestinian participant elaborates on this by saying:

They (Syrians) do things that are just not acceptable to how we were raised. It is like they have let go of all their traditions since they arrived. I mean, I understand wanting to fit in... but I feel uncomfortable with their lack of supervision (over children), and I always worry if my children get too close to their children.

Another Lebanese participant echoed the above sentiment by claiming that “the youth is just extremely hard to recognize. I can’t tell my children who to interact with, but I fear them more than the Germans because their morals are very hard to understand or respect.”

Moreover, multiple participants also claimed that the behavior of the girls and women did not

match the “way they were brought up.” They criticized the way they dressed; “immodest” as opposed to the usual attire of the Arab woman. Some participants claimed it was “indecent.” Additionally, they argue that they display behavior in public spaces with men that is not appropriate such as “kissing and hugging,” which is unusual, especially for “unmarried women.” One participant shared a story of a Palestinian man who told off a woman in the street for kissing her boyfriend, and the woman took him to the police because “she knew she could.” This shows a clash of different cultures. The Syrian woman has a right to show public display of affection in the street as she pleases. Legally, the man has no right to interfere in her public life. Yet the participant was telling the story claiming him to be a victim as he was doing the right thing by defending their culture and traditions. The other present participants agreed with her as well. As one participant puts it, “they have become more opened than the Germans themselves.”

In addition to public behavior, there were complaints of “vulgar language” on the street. The female participants claimed that they avoid going to Sonnenallee on their own and prefer to have their husbands with them when they are shopping. They claim that, walking down the street, women experience catcalling and offensive looks from men. One Lebanese participant notes that they equate westernization<sup>140</sup> with civilization. “Some of them think wearing earrings and revealing clothes makes them European and ‘civilized.’ This is not civilization; civilization is how you behave around and treat other people. Trying to look more ‘European’ will not give you class. Money also does not make you civilized. They buy cars and dress in a western style, but the old men will go marry girls 10-15 years younger than them.”

This last point presents a contradiction. While the above claims relate to an openness in culture and behavior presented by the Syrians, participants contradict some of their arguments by saying that some Syrians exhibit “backward” behavior. Examples of this relate, as demonstrated in the above statement, to how some men act “cave-like,” as one participant stated, and believe their women should be completely dependent on them. They attribute this behavior to a difference in the social classes they come from in Syria, as well as the city (urban/rural). A participant claimed that Syrians in Berlin have two extremes; “either they are extremely educated, or they are extremely backward where the woman cannot do anything without her man or is living under his threat.” Another one also noted a difference in

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<sup>140</sup> Participants used this term themselves referring to European culture that is starkly different from theirs. I, however, refer to the Syrian culture being referred to as secularization



behavior between Syrians based on where they came from back home and said that it should be obvious that they are not generalizing. It is clear that there is not a specific agreement on the overall culture of the Syrians. It is rather a justification for the established group to distance themselves from the Syrians.

During an informal conversation with a Syrian person, he shared an experience that happened to him three months after his arrival in 2015. He saw a man in front of a restaurant in Sonnenallee beating his daughter, which looked no older than four years old and grabbing her by her hair. He claimed the man was Palestinian based on his dialect. “Nobody was interfering, everyone looked on, and I couldn’t help but say something,” he said. When he interfered, the man screamed at him, but what was appalling for him was the reaction of other people. “She is his daughter. What is your business with him? Do you think yourself in Syria?” he was told. “I didn’t understand what this meant. In fact, I knew we weren’t in Syria. We are now in Germany, which means I have the right to interfere when I see someone abusing his daughter. Only an older Syrian man stopped me and told me, ‘do not mind them. These people hate everything that is Syrian.’” This story shows the cultural conflict that both communities have with each other. It neither relates to secularization, as some exhibit one extreme while others exhibit another. It can be interpreted that envy and hatred translated themselves into various forms of rejection of the Syrian community.

### **8.2.2. Exclusionary Discourses: High Divorce Rates and Rise of LGBT People**

In addition to secularization and different mindsets, the established community believes that divorce rates among the Syrian community are extremely and “unusually” high. From their perspective, the Syrian women are taking advantage of the popular narrative that Muslim women need to be emancipated from Islam, as it oppresses them. They shared, “the women go to the police knowing they will help them out of the need to ‘save them from Islam.’ Women will tell them, ‘I don’t want to wear the hijab or be married to my husband,’ and they will respond right away.” Because the interviewed women conduct social work with the Syrian community, they hear the stories directly from them. They argue that the women request divorce so they can receive even more help from the government. One participant stated that “I have always been someone that said, ‘always believe the woman,’ but from my work and some of the stories I heard, I started feeling pity towards the men. The divorce rates among Syrians are so high, and this also affects how the children are raised. Do the women only care about themselves?”

Among the interviewed women, there seem to be multiple issues that they have with Syrian women; public display of affection with partners (also when they're not married), asking for a divorce, how they raise their children, indecency in their clothes, and multiple mentions towards their obsession with buying jewelry. One can interpret this as another form of envy, as it can be assumed that such *freedom* is yearned for by the established community. On the other hand, it could be valid reasons of concern that this impacts their own children whom they are trying to raise in the culture and traditions they grew up on. This brings an important piece of discussion that a Palestinian participant shared. She asked if this research included the second-generation, in other words, the children of the participants. One would see that much of the behavior the established community resents in the Syrians are also present in their own children, who were actually born and raised in Germany. However, the research did not address second-generation immigrants, so this is therefore beyond the scope of this paper.

Another mentioned phenomenon that the Arabs believe is unique to the Syrian community is the rise of LGBT people. While the participants relate the rise of Arab queers to “westernization,” I am discussing this as a point in this section as such a claim would deny the presence of Arab queers in the Arab world and would make the statement that it is a phenomenon pertinent only to the migration of Syrians to Europe, which is not true.

According to at least ten participants, the visibility of Arab LGBT people in the Neukölln district is one of their “biggest shocks” and a major cultural difference between the established Arab community and the Syrians. It was claimed that the Syrians “tarnished Sonnenallee by allowing gay men to walk freely in the street” and that “it is almost like they want to provoke us because they know we cannot do anything. The police will intervene and always be on their side,” as stated by two participants. There were additionally mentions of organizations opening that specifically help Muslim LGBT people.

The reason why it is important to mention these two factors: freedom of women and the rise of LGBT people, is because they are not actual phenomena unique to the Syrian community, but they are rather discourses that justify the established group's exclusionary attitude. The defensive urban citizenship framework claims that threatened groups tend to utilize exclusionary discourses to implement spatial differentiation.<sup>141</sup> In this case, the established Arabs created discourses about the Syrians to portray their incompatibility with their group.

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<sup>141</sup> Cohen and Margalit, “There Are Really Two Cities Here,” July 2015, 667.

By linking the Syrians to the German society and culture, they become associated with the group that antagonizes the presence of the Arabs in Germany, so Syrians are therefore further excluded from their space. When stating that established groups “utilize all the resources at their disposal” to fend off threats, exclusionary discourses are one of these resources.<sup>142</sup> Additionally, as argued by the theory on politics of belonging, imagined communities are constructed with different boundaries that “depend on people’s social locations, people’s experiences and definitions of self, but probably even more importantly on their values.”<sup>143</sup> The established Arab group, based on their experience of marginalization, created an identity that is connected to their neighborhood but also transnational in form, as they held tightly to their Arab and Muslim identity. Their exclusion from German society has directed their attention to their heritage, making their relationship with their traditions even stronger. Therefore, their definition of self, one that is highly shaped by their values, played an important role in their perception of the Syrian group based on how they antagonize these same values.

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<sup>142</sup> Koca, “Urban Citizenship and the Spatial Encounter between Turkish Migrants and Syrian Refugees in Berlin,” 4.

<sup>143</sup> Yuval-Davis, “Belonging and the Politics of Belonging,” 204.

## Chapter Nine: Us vs. Them: A Dynamic Relationship

*“Me and my brother against my cousin, and me and my cousin against the stranger.”*

– Arabic Proverb

Yuval-Davis (2006) stated that “the boundaries that the politics of belonging is concerned with are the boundaries of the political community of belonging, the boundaries that separate the world population into ‘us’ and ‘them.’”<sup>144</sup> What this research unraveled is the fragility of the concept of *us* and how it can easily change depending on group formation and values. Despite participants heavily emphasizing their Arab identity throughout the interviews and highlighting it as one of the reasons why they showed solidarity with Syrian refugees, they also utilized it as one of the reasons why Syrians do not belong to their Arab group. The above-mentioned proverb was mentioned in all interviews when asked about the relationship of participants and their interactions with Syrian residents. As newcomers, Syrians are perceived in this context as *cousins* while the established Arab group are brothers. They present them with challenges and are seen as a threat to their existence within a specific space. Yet, when anti-immigration or Islam discourse is prominent in Germany, especially in the face of Arab/Muslim refugees, Syrians are considered to be their cousins in the fight against the strangers, the Germans. The proverb contains dynamics of *us* and *them* for the group as they believe their solidarity with Syrians is conditional. Racism and discrimination put them all under one umbrella, so they might compete among themselves, but in the face of a stranger, they come together as one. They still hold onto the bloodline and Arab nationalism ideology stronger than they do to the west, despite it being their place of residence. Additionally, solidarity is politicized through whose side the community takes when it comes to the Syrian revolution. Transnational politics in Lebanon and Palestine lead different participants to take sides with the situation in Syria, some are pro the revolution, and some are against. This further affects their interaction with Syrian residents. Across Sonnenallee, revolution flags can be seen and were a potential conflict point during the district’s event on the 1<sup>st</sup> of May. Two participants mentioned how whenever they try to interact with Syrians, they are first asked to state their position regarding the revolution or to say which city from Lebanon they come from, as the South and North are divided on Syria’s situation. They claim that they always lie to avoid any conflict and that the answer is crucial to future interactions

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<sup>144</sup> Yuval-Davis, 204.

with Syrians. Identification and collective grouping is shaped by such circumstances. One can see that beyond spatial conflict and residency in Berlin, Arabs are shaped by transnational dynamics and an undefined and unspecified definition of Arab nationalism.

## Conclusion

By studying migrant placemaking and agency-centered citizenship, this research attempted to understand the dynamic relationship between the established Arab migrant community in the district of Neukölln in Berlin and the newcomers (Syrian refugees from 2015 onwards). It found that the relationship took two forms: an inclusive, solidary response that was based on similar migration and discrimination experiences and a defensive form based on a threatening feeling that the Syrians were occupying the long-term residents' urban space and accessing more services than them. As a result, the established group developed a reactive place-based identity and raised all their urban boundaries in order to protect their space. Two factors are crucial in understanding the relationship between the two generations of Arab migrant groups. First are the migration and integration policies of Germany during the 1990s and early 2000s in comparison to that of 2015. The research found that the German government's strict policy limited the established group's accessibility to multiple services, which could have led to an easier integration process. This includes the lack of access to the labor market, language courses, educational institutions, and limited access to the housing market. This resulted in the exclusion and marginalization of the established residents and their clustering in a specific neighborhood which fed into the national rhetoric on ghettos. Moreover, their lack of contact with German society further alienated the community and created talks of *parallel societies*. By following Gil's (2010) four stages of placemaking, one can see that all four stages leading to an ideal process of placemaking were negatively impacted, and in return, the established group developed pathological placemaking instead.<sup>145</sup> In contrast, the 2015 refugees were welcomed with an open policy, allowing them to access all of the above with facilitated support from the government. Their fast integration and claim-making process threatened the established group as they feared they would be replaced in their own urban space. Second, the urban policy meant to maximize residents' participation and uplift residents living in socially disadvantaged neighborhoods like Neukölln was not effectively implemented and lacked a governing body to ensure funds were

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<sup>145</sup> Gill, "Pathologies of Migrant Place-Making."

rightfully allocated. Furthermore, gentrification in the area threatened long-term residents and displaced many leading to group-focused enmity between newcomers and established groups. Additionally, the national rhetoric on Neukölln and Muslim immigrants played a crucial factor in the claim-making process of established Arab groups, especially since various political leaders, district officials, and media reports claimed that Muslims were incompatible with German culture and were to blame for their own social exclusion.

As a result of these various factors, the reception of the established Arab group towards the newly arriving Syrian refugees developed from one that is welcoming and inclusive to a relationship defined by tensions and envy. This explains the disputed nature of the urban citizenship-making process and how it is one filled with “shifting alliances and antagonisms between groupings.”<sup>146</sup> It is a process shaped by “the interplay between the practices/agency of residents/migrants, their power positions and local, national and transnational dynamics.”<sup>147</sup> As demonstrated, the shared experiences of migration and discrimination were the initial factors leading to the established community’s welcoming attitude towards Syrian refugees. As the community reflected on their own experience as newly arriving migrants in Germany, they acknowledged that they had a responsibility towards new refugees and wanted to help make sure a negative experience similar to their own would not be repeated. This was shared across all the participants regardless of their age, background, or occupation. Additionally, an ethnic, religious, and linguistic identity strengthened their feeling of solidarity as they felt a special kinship for Syrians due to their Arab heritage. Arab nationalism played a significant role in shaping the discourse surrounding Syrians. This is because the established community felt that all discourse on Muslims and Arabs was general and did not differentiate between the different Arab nationalities. They felt that they were a collective group and when one is attacked, all are attacked. Therefore, Syrians belonged to the “us” (Arabs) against the “them” (Germans).

On the other hand, different power positions and a growing, facilitated claim-making process led by the Syrians developed spaces of competition between both groups. As the defensive urban citizenship framework suggests, when power positions are at play, long-established groups create exclusionary spaces and discourses to fend off threats from newcomers. The

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<sup>146</sup> Painter, “Urban Citizenship and Rights to the City.,” 12.

<sup>147</sup> Koca, “Urban Citizenship and the Spatial Encounter between Turkish Migrants and Syrian Refugees in Berlin,” 13.

first exclusionary space was shaped by the government-funded projects for Syrians and national statements claiming that Syrian refugees were needed, especially for the labor market. This led the long-established group to rethink their position in German society, especially as they felt they were not needed. Additionally, due to the rise of Syrian shops in Sonnenallee, a street that the established Arabs believe they founded, the long-term group felt that the Syrians were trying to replace their position or that they were owed for the establishment of *The Arab Street*. Moreover, participants mentioned competition over the labor and housing market, access to services, and education. Another exclusionary space created by established Arabs was one related to cultural differences. The established group claimed that Syrians' secularization did not reflect the Arab identity and traditions that were taught in the region, and therefore they believed that the Syrians did not belong to their space. In doing so, a redefinition of Arab identity was produced, and Syrians were excluded from it. As explained through the politics of belonging theory, the concept of *us vs. them* is dynamic and changes according to who is at threat. Arabs perceived the Syrians as part of the "us" when they believed them to be weaker and in need of the superior position of the Arabs in Berlin to help them integrate. They were also included when discourse against Arabs or Muslims by German society took place. They were, however, a "them" when the question of who had been there longer and deserved more rights was at play. Syrians were, in that case, an enemy to fend off, and the only way to do so was through reasserting their power position, excluding Syrians from their urban space, and creating discourses that define Syrians as another in cultural terms.

In sum, long-established Arab migrant groups in Berlin practiced urban citizenship by creating inclusionary and exclusionary spaces for Syrian newcomers. This helps us understand the dynamic nature of urban citizenship and how the agency of migrants leads to an even wider definition of urban citizenship, one that is affected by multiple factors, including national, transnational, and urban policies. The research also demonstrates an interconnected relationship between placemaking and urban citizenship when discussions of old and new residents are involved. When the placemaking process of older residents is negatively affected, it shapes their reaction towards the placemaking process of newer residents, especially if it is more of a positive one. Finally, politics of belonging helps us understand that despite the collective identity of Arabs and its strong relationship to religion (Islam), Arabs are not hegemonic in their perception of one another, and the relationship to a specific place, in this case, Neukölln, is stronger than cultural ties.

# Annexes

## Annex A: Consent Form



### Interview Consent Form

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**Participant's Name**

**Date**

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#### Description of Project

This research investigates the relationship between two generations of Arab migrant groups in Berlin. It asks: how did the established Arab migrant community residing in Berlin since the 1990s react to and receive the Syrians in 2015?

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- I confirm that my participation in this research project is voluntary.
  - I understand that I will not receive any payments for participating in this research interview.
  - I agree to my interview being audio-recorded
  - I understand that I have the right to decline to answer any question or to end the interview.
  - I understand that the researcher will not identify me by name in any reports using information obtained from this interview and that my confidentiality as a participant in this study will remain secure.
  - I have read and understood the explanation provided to me.
  - I have been given a copy of the consent form.
  - I agree that the researchers may publish documents that contain quotations from me
- 

By signing this form, I agree to the terms indicated above.

**Participant's Signature**

**Date**

**Researcher's Signature**

**Date**



## **Annex B: Interview Questions**

*Since interviews were semi-structured or unstructured, these questions were only meant to guide the conversation. Not all questions were asked, and some questions were changed or added based on the background of the participants.*

### **Personal Information**

1. Age and nationality
2. What was your occupation in your home country prior to migrating?
3. How do you define “Arab”? Who are Arabs to you?

### **Migration History**

1. When did you come to Germany and why?
2. How did you come to Germany? (Asylum-seeker, student, work, etc.)
3. What was your first entry point in Germany?
4. What was the general reaction of Germany to migrants/refugees at the time?
5. Can you tell me a little bit about life as a migrant/refugee back then?

### **Life in Neukölln**

1. Have you always lived in Neukölln? If not, where did you previously live prior to coming to the neighborhood? Are there any specific differences?
2. Why did you choose Neukölln as your place of residence?
3. Has Neukölln always been dominated by Arabs? How was it back then?
4. What was the most visible change in the neighborhood since 2015?
5. What aspects of the local neighborhood are important in making you feel at home?  
What makes you want to stay/leave the neighborhood?

### **Response to Syrian refugees**

1. What was the general response after Germany announced its open-door policy to the Syrians? How did the Arab community feel and react?
2. Did this initial reaction change over time? If so, how?
3. How did you react as an individual? What forms of action did you take?
4. How would you describe your relationship with Syrians? Are there any commonalities/differences?

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