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To all those displaced

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Nubin Ciziri

(Dis)Integrating Families

Refugees' social histories and their encounters with education in Sweden

Summary:

Familjer i (des)integration

Flyktningars sociala historier och deras möte med utbildning i Sverige

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Abstract
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Refugees are often perceived as a homogeneous group and defined by their present conditions; the diversity of their social histories is thus overlooked. *(Dis)Integrating Families* explores the extent to which the backgrounds of Kurdish refugees from Syria shape their encounters with education in Sweden, as the key vehicle of state-led integration.

The thesis breaks with the mainstream perspective on integration by emphasising refugees as products of their social histories. Family interviews are used to analyse parents' backgrounds based on their individual, family, and social background, including the Syrian context. The focus is on Kurdish refugee families arriving in Sweden from Syria after the war in 2011 as parents encounter the constraint to further educate themselves and their children. Kurds in diaspora work hard at keeping their past alive, despite lacking a Kurdish education system and the disruption of migration. This particular case provides sociological insight into how individuals' social histories shape their response to constraints from 'receiving societies,' drawing on Abdelmalek Sayad's holistic view of immigration as determined by emigration in critique of 'State thought,' and Pierre Bourdieu's concept of *habitus*.

This thesis helps understand how forced migration challenges parents' former dispositions. While in some respects, class background determines their strategies in Sweden, in others, their social status as refugees blurs the differences related to class and reinforces their national identity, which they relate to their sociopolitical history of oppression and statelessness. Their present status thus challenges family dynamics in terms of generation and gender, thereby highlighting the constraints they face in Sweden. While acknowledging the weight of these constraints on parents, the thesis shows how their engagement with education is shaped by their social histories and how their Kurdish identity becomes a source of unity beyond class.

In contrast to the normative view that integration is the ultimate goal for refugees, this thesis reveals a constant process of negotiation between present and past social ties; between integration and (dis)integration. This suggests that integration in specific domains of social life in Sweden entails the (dis)integration from past identities previously internalised as ways of existing in the world. In summary, the dynamic between integration and (dis)integration can be seen as *habitus clivé* in the making.

Keywords: refugees, integration, Sweden, Kurds from Syria, family, education

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Stockholm, August 2024
Nubin Ciziri

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

> We wanted to rebuild our lives, that was all. In order to rebuild one's life one has to be strong and an optimist. So, we are very optimistic. […] We lost our home, which means the familiarity of daily life. We lost our occupation, which means the confidence that we are of some use in the world. We lost our language, which means the naturalness of reactions, the simplicity of gestures, the unaffected expression of feelings.[1]

This quote by Hannah Arendt resonates with an interview I conducted with a Kurdish family from northern Syria who fled the Syrian civil war in 2015 and ended up in Sweden. Throughout the conversation, we discussed several topics including the journey on an overcrowded plastic boat to flee war, the ongoing separation of the family, difficulties learning Swedish, financial constraints and social challenges. While the themes raised in the interview were related to their refugee experience, their past lives remained unknown or unseen until I explicitly asked about their family histories.[2]

Refugees have become 'a third world problem', and they are stripped of their histories, making it 'difficult for people in the refugee category to be approached as historical actors rather than simply as mute victims.'[3] Their specific histories are 'leached out', and they are often reduced to a particular category and discourse that presents them as homogeneous.[4] However, following Kurdish families, one might

[1] Hannah Arendt, 'We Refugees', in *The Jewish Writings*, ed. Jerome Kohn and Ron H. Feldman (New York: Schocken Books, 2007), 264–75. Hannah Arendt was one of the most influential political philosophers. This quote portrays her experiences as a Jewish stateless refugee during the Second World War.

[2] In this study, the term *migrants* refers to general human mobility; a diverse group encompassing individuals moving for various reasons, including economic opportunities and family reunification. *International migrants* are those living in a country other than where they were born. Among them, *forced migrants* are those who are compelled to leave their homes involuntarily. *Asylum seekers* are individuals who have left their home countries, seeking international protection due to well-founded fears of persecution. *Refugees* are those who have successfully gained asylum in another country, formally recognised for fleeing persecution or violence.

[3] Liisa H. Malkki, 'Refugees and Exile: From "Refugee Studies" to the National Order of Things', *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24 (1995): 503; Liisa H. Malkki, 'Speechless Emissaries: Refugees, Humanitarianism, and Dehistoricization', *Cultural Anthropology* 11, no. 3 (1996): 378.

[4] Malkki, 'Refugees and Exile'.

ask to what degree the fundamental aspects of their lives in Syria were really lost, as Arendt put it, and whether their life aspirations, perceptions and social interactions with education in Sweden were impacted by their social histories, i.e. their class backgrounds and internalised historical experience.

The refugee condition is characterised by loss. Indeed, adapting to a new life in a 'host' society necessitates leaving behind the familiarity of daily life. Refugees are often seen as the most disadvantaged among those who migrate, as they are forced to leave their homes due to war, natural disasters or fear of persecution. They have suffered and lost what they have left behind and are forced to 'start from scratch' and build a new life.

Yet, how new can this life really be? Is there a clear-cut distinction between the past and the present for someone who has been forcibly displaced? What does integration in Sweden entail and mean for them when their internalised histories – which have been second nature to them – have been uprooted from Syria?

This study provides an understanding of integration from the perspectives of refugee families through parents' encounters with education in Sweden. Taking Sweden as a case of a knowledge society where education has become a precondition for the integration of migrants, I use education as an entry point to analyse parents' experience and responses to integration. This study treats refugees as products of their own history – referring to the lived experience and socio-economic and political influences that shape their attitudes and perspectives – rather than looking at the experience of refugees solely from the point of arrival, where they lost their previous lives and lacked various linguistic, educational and occupational assets needed to integrate. Thus, I also explore the significance of their lives before forced migration. By shifting the perspective in this way, I provide a comprehensive view of their experience in Sweden. This approach not only historicises the figure of the 'refugee', too often reduced to their eternal present, but also draws attention to the relationship between nation states, migration, and integration as it reflects on the role of education in the integration of migrants, in this instance, migrants who are refugees. Accordingly, the refugee families presented in this study illustrate the extent to which a person's past can live on in the present, despite forced migration, impacting parents' perceptions and strategies regarding their own and their children's integration in Sweden.

Refugees as products of their histories

The sociology of international migration has explored what happens to migrants upon their arrival in a new country, where their integration has become a

prominent theme.[5] In early studies (early 20th century), the term 'assimilation' was commonly used, which assigned 'ultimate homogeneity' to the dominant culture.[6] Yet this shifted to the broad use of the term 'integration' as it was 'more ideologically neutral'.[7] However, integration has been a 'loaded notion', often designating an end state that is a particular point of arrival.[8] Consequently, there has been a distinction between people who integrate and people who do not integrate.[9]

According to Abdelmalek Sayad, a sociologist whose ideas are central to this study, *integration* is a word that shares similar meanings to adaptation or assimilation. Surely, these words have been conceptualised and can mean different things. Essentially, integration 'presupposes the integrity of the individual who is absorbed but not dissolved into the group, whereas assimilation is, […] equivalent to the negation and disappearance of that integrity.'[10] However, they are just 'different expressions, in different moments, in different contexts and for different social purposes, of the same sociological process.'[11]

Sayad emphasised that studying integration as a 'sociological process' means breaking with the 'State thought', which refers to the state's classification of immigrants as 'non-nationals', fostering a sense of 'otherness' and reinforcing nationalist categories.[12] Accordingly, he criticised the tendency to treat 'immigrants' as a homogenous category that is culturally different and defined by their degree of integration. To him, this can only reinforce the 'State thought' which permeates society, shaping subconscious assumptions and institutional norms and creating a perpetual sense of 'incompleteness' for migrants.[13] The migrant presence thus is seen as temporary, subordinate and in need of constant legitimation.[14] Consequently, he argued that reducing migrants to their eternal presence, without a focus on the social histories that immigrate with them can only give a partial view of the migrant condition, which includes their experience and integration.[15]

In his book *The Suffering of the Immigrants*, Sayad wrote that the migrant is an *émigré* before becoming an *immigré*.

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[5] For a review on this, see David Scott FitzGerald, 'The Sociology of International Migration', in *Migration Theory*, ed. Caroline B. Brettell and James F. Hollifield, 4th ed. (New York: Routledge, 2023), 168–78.
[6] Frank Kalter, 'Integration in Migration Societies', in *Handbook of Sociological Science: Contributions to Rigorous Sociology*, ed. Klarita Gërxhani, Nan De Graaf, and Werner Raub (Glos, Massachusetts: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2022), 138–40.
[7] FitzGerald, 'The Sociology of International Migration', 168.
[8] Abdelmalek Sayad, *The Suffering of the Immigrant*, trans. David Macey (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2004), 221.
[9] Lea M. Klarenbeek, 'Reconceptualising "Integration as a Two-Way Process"', *Migration Studies* 9, no. 3 (2021): 902–21.
[10] Sayad, *The Suffering of the Immigrant*, 221–22.
[11] Ibid., 221.
[12] Ibid., 278–94.
[13] Ibid., 283.
[14] Ibid., 297.
[15] Ibid., 1–6.

> To immigrate means to immigrate together with one's history (immigration itself being an integral part of that history), with one's traditions, ways of living, feeling, acting and thinking, with one's language, one's religion and all the other social, political and mental structures of one's society – structures characteristic of the individual and also of the society, since the former is no more than the embodiment of the latter – or, in a word, with one's culture.[16]

Pointing out a paradox wherein migrants are simultaneously absent from their society of origin, becoming culturally distant, while also absent from the 'receiving society' due to their subordination, Sayad further argued that this leads to their 'double absence.'[17] Shedding light on migrants as products of their social history therefore becomes crucial to break with the 'receiving society' point of view and to understand how integration is experienced by migrants.[18]

Studies of transnationalism have contributed to migration studies by moving the focus beyond 'receiving societies.'[19] This includes diaspora studies, which shift the focus away from viewing migrants solely in terms of integration into nation states, emphasising instead the transnational connections, fluid identities and ongoing ties to their homelands.[20] They have moved beyond 'methodological nationalist' approaches, i.e. the tendency to analyse social phenomena solely within the framework of the nation state.[21] Diaspora, thus has also been a useful way of studying the social reality in which refugees live.[22]

From a transnational perspective, migrants are no longer 'uprooted', but rather move between different cultures and social systems.[23] Despite this, as the

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[16] Ibid., 3–4.

[17] See also, Emmanuelle Saada, 'Abdelmalek Sayad and the Double Absence: Toward a Total Sociology of Immigration', *French Politics, Culture & Society* 18, no. 1 (2000): 28–47.

[18] Sociologists have primarily worked on the 'receiving society', with some notable exceptions starting with *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America* by Florian Znaniecki and William I. Thomas and other works by Douglas Massey, David Scott FitzGerald, Hein de Haas and Thomas Faist.

[19] Peggy Levitt and B. Nadya Jaworsky, 'Transnational Migration Studies: Past Developments and Future Trends', *Annual Review of Sociology* 33, no. 1 (2007): 129–56.

[20] For a short review on the concept of diaspora, see Robin Cohen, 'Diaspora', in *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences*, ed. Neil J. Smelser and Paul B. Baltes (Oxford: Pergamon, 2001). Although diaspora studies have contributed to the understanding of cultural differences and identities, class differences have been understudied.

[21] Wimmer and Schiller, 'Methodological Nationalism and beyond: Nation-State Building, Migration and the Social Sciences.' *Global Networks* 2, no. 4 (2002): 301–34.

[22] Östen Wahlbeck, 'The Concept of Diaspora as an Analytical Tool in the Study of Refugee Communities', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 28, no. 2 (2002): 221–38.

[23] Alejandro Portes, Luis E. Guarnizo, and Patricia Landolt, 'The Study of Transnationalism: Pitfalls and Promise of an Emergent Research Field', *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 22, no. 2 (1999): 217–37; Steven Vertovec, 'Conceiving and Researching Transnationalism', *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 22, no. 2 (1999): 447–62; Steven Vertovec, *Transnationalism* (London: Routledge, 2009); Eva Østergaard-Nielsen, 'Transnational Migration', in *An Introduction to International Migration Studies: European Perspectives*, ed. Marco Martiniello and Jan Rath, 2 vols, IMISCOE Textbooks (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2012), 107–30.

anthropologist Unni Wikan points out, migrants are perceived as '*products* of culture', which reduces migrant groups such as refugees to be representatives of a particular culture.[24] In fact, as Sayad puts it, this interconnection is precisely what the process of integration entails, as it is about 'moving from the most radical alterity to the most total *identity*', and it is closely bound with the notion of culture.[25] This can explain the dominance of identity studies in questions of migration and integration (such as ethnic and cultural integration), where ethnicity, culture and migration are interconnected.[26]

To put it in other words, in migration studies, there is a large focus on other forms of social difference than class, such as ethnicity, gender, generation and recently religion.[27] As summarised by Gülay Türkmen, 'scholarly analyses suffer from the mixing up of different identity categories (e.g. ethnic, religious, racial and national identities), and an overemphasis on certain categories (e.g. religion), to the detriment of others (e.g. class).'[28] This is especially true in cases of forced migration.[29]

By drawing on Sayad and shifting the focus away from a pure culturalist approach where migrants' ethnic and cultural identities become the focus of the migrant experience, I study the refugee families as products of their social histories. This means that rather than focusing solely on their ethnic and cultural identities, I take their social class backgrounds into consideration, including how they identify, ethnically and culturally.

Given this background, this study aims to show the extent to which refugee families' social histories shape their experience and responses to Swedish education, which is the key state-led integration process in the country. Following Sayad, I highlight refugees' lives before they experienced forced migration in order to discuss their present as an extension of their past – rather than a removal from it. This involves breaking from the common perception that defines them solely by their present.

[24] Unni Wikan, *Generous Betrayal: Politics of Culture in the New Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 81.
[25] Sayad, *The Suffering of the Immigrant*, 216–17.
[26] M. Kearney, 'The Local and the Global: The Anthropology of Globalization and Transnationalism', *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24 (1995): 559.
[27] Nicholas Van Hear, 'Reconsidering Migration and Class', *International Migration Review* 48, no. 1_suppl (2014): 101.
[28] Gülay Türkmen, 'Categorical Astigmatism: On Ethnicity, Religion, Nationality, and Class in the Study of Migrants in Europe', *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 47, no. 9 (2024): 6.
[29] Christian Hunkler et al., 'Spatial and Social Im/Mobility in Forced Migration: Revisiting Class', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 48, no. 20 (2022): 4829–46.

Integration in welfare states: the case of Sweden

We live in an 'age of migration'.[30] Whether this is the outcome of globalisation or war and crises, migration will continue.[31] Although only three per cent of the world's population were international migrants in the last decade, and approximately 0.4 per cent were refugees, we know that the narrative of a global migration crisis has destabilised countries and entire regions.[32]

Various indicators are used to measure migrants' integration. Educational and labour market integration are the two most studied themes for analysing migrant integration, not only in official state reports and international European statistics,[33] but also among scholars, often highlighting certain structural problems that migrants and particularly refugees face in this regard.[34] Unlike countries that are unable to integrate children into national education systems,[35] we know that high-income countries such as England and Sweden are viewed as 'resettlement countries', 'as refugee children are likely to view their futures with a sense of permanency.'[36]

National responses to immigration links us to historical experience of nation state formation.[37] Indeed, managing migration challenges nation states, especially

[30] Hein de Haas, Stephen Castles, and Mark J. Miller, *The Age of Migration: International Population Movements in the Modern World*, 6thed. (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020).
[31] Anja Van Heelsum, 'Why Migration Will Continue: Aspirations and Capabilities of Syrians and Ethiopians with Different Educational Backgrounds', *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 39, no. 8 (2016): 1301–9.
[32] International Organization for Migration (IOM), 'The World Migration Report 2020' (Geneva: United Nations Migration, 2019); James F. Hollifield and Neil Foley, eds., *Understanding Global Migration* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2022).
[33] 'Migrant Integration Statistics', Statistical office of the European Union, Eurostat Statistics Explained, accessed 20 November 2023.
[34] See, among many others, Sarah Dryden-Peterson, 'Refugee Education in Countries of First Asylum: Breaking Open the Black Box of Pre-Resettlement Experiences', *Theory and Research in Education* 14, no. 2 (2015): 131–48; Sarah Dryden-Peterson, 'Refugee Education: A Global Review'. Geneva: UNHCR, November 2011; Sarah Dryden-Peterson et al., 'The Purposes of Refugee Education: Policy and Practice of Including Refugees in National Education Systems', *Sociology of Education* 92, no. 4 (2019): 346–66; Mary Mendenhall et al., 'Quality Education for Refugees in Kenya: Pedagogy in Urban Nairobi and Kakuma Refugee Camp Settings', *Journal on Education in Emergencies* 1, no. 1 (2015): 92–130; Maurice Crul et al., 'How the Different Policies and School Systems Affect the Inclusion of Syrian Refugee Children in Sweden, Germany, Greece, Lebanon and Turkey', *Comparative Migration Studies* 7, no. 10 (2019); Hasan Aydin, Mahmut Gundogdu, and Arif Akgul, 'Integration of Syrian Refugees in Turkey: Understanding the Educators' Perception', *Journal of International Migration and Integration* 20, no. 4 (2019): 1029–40; Jan O. Jonsson, Carina Mood, and Georg Treuter, *Integration bland unga: en mångkulturell generation växer upp* (Stockholm: Makadam Förlag, 2022).
[35] Sarah Dryden-Peterson, 'Civic Education and the Education of Refugees', *Intercultural Education* 31, no. 5 (2020): 592–606.
[36] Joanna McIntyre and Sinikka Neuhaus, 'Theorising Policy and Practice in Refugee Education: Conceptualising "Safety", "Belonging", "Success" and "Participatory Parity" in England and Sweden', *British Educational Research Journal* 47, no. 4 (2021): 798.
[37] Stephen Castles, 'How Nation-states Respond to Immigration and Ethnic Diversity', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 21, no. 3 (1995): 293–308.

welfare states because of their ethos of equal treatment and social equality.[38] Sweden offers an informative case in studies of migrant integration with a focus on experience and responses towards strong integration policies. Considering Sweden's welfare state model, with its aim to establish an egalitarian society based on principles of social cohesion and ideas of 'sameness and consensus',[39] it can be claimed that welfare states have achieved a high level of social integration. This can be observed in the way that Sweden's strong 'state interventionist model' integrated different ethnic groups (such as the Sámi and Roma) and class backgrounds within its national unity, which was an approach that was also applied to promote the integration of immigrants in Sweden.[40]

Historically, Sweden had been working to establish an egalitarian society based on a social democratic welfare state model, an approach that had been applied

[38] Pieter Bevelander and James F. Hollifield, 'Managing Migration in Modern Welfare States: One-Size Policy Does Not Fit All', in *Handbook on Migration and Welfare*, ed. Markus M. L. Crepaz, Elgar Handbooks in Migration (Cheltenham, Glos: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2022), 13–44.

[39] Karen Fog Olwig, '"Integration": Migrants and Refugees between Scandinavian Welfare Societies and Family Relations', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 37, no. 2 (2011): 192. For further discussion on this, see pages 23–26.

[40] Tomas Hammer, 'Sweden', in *European Immigration Policy: A Comparative Study*, ed. Tomas Hammar, Comparative Ethnic and Race Relations (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 17–49; Castles, 'How Nation-states Respond to Immigration and Ethnic Diversity', 305. In commonality with other countries, education in Sweden has been an important state tool to foster a shared national identity and social cohesion, e.g. Henrik Edgren, *En kungsådra för nationens samhörighet: Läsebok för Folkskolan i det sena 1800- och tidiga 1900-talets skola och samhälle* (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2024). Historical studies have shown how national minorities became part of the national education system in Sweden and how different educational reforms impacted Sweden's approach to different social groups. For example, from the 1950s onwards, in the case of Roma, we see strong attempts by the Swedish state to shift the discourse surrounding the Roma population from a 'racial' problem to a 'social' problem (see Sjögren, 'Den säkra zonen: Motiv, åtgärdsförslag och verksamhet i den särskiljande utbildningspolitiken för inhemska minoriteter 1913–1962'. Doctoral thesis, Department of Historical, Philosophical and Religious studies, Umeå University, 2010.). There were strong state initiatives to understand and thus integrate Roma into Sweden. However, there were challenges in understanding how to integrate a population whose majority were illiterate and perceived to be socioculturally different from 'Swedish'. See Departementsserien (Ds), 'Den mörka och okända historien: vitbok om övergrepp och kränkningar av romer under 1900-talet' (Stockholm: Arbetsmarknadsdepartementet, Regeringskansliet, 2014). Another example is the education offered to Sámi people in Sweden. Given the history after the post-war period, we see that despite the equality ideals aimed at providing more inclusive education for the Sámi population and Sweden's multicultural framework, the 'us' and 'them' divide persisted between Sámi and Swedes as Sámi-ness remained subordinate to Swedish-ness. See Svonni, 'The Swedish Sámi Boarding School Reforms in the Era of Educational Democratisation, 1956 to 1969'; Svonni and Spjut, 'Swedish School Curricula and Sámi Self-Identification'. Accordingly, it is not surprising that the Swedish school system's approach towards minorities, including immigrants, reveals an ethnocentric approach as it departs from a 'homogeneous majority society'. See Thom Axelsson, Lotta Brantefors, and Lars Elenius, 'Utbildning och minoriteter', ed. Esbjörn Larsson and Westerberg (Studentlitteratur, 2015), 377–400. These examples indicate that the integration of different ethnic groups through Sweden's 'strongly state interventionist model' has been a highly debated topic in its history. The relation between states and integration further reveals how and why nationalistic discourses and ethnic nationalism can flourish even today. See Anne Berg, 'Nationen i historien', *Historisk Tidskrift* 138, no. 3 (2018): 383–90.

since the Second World War.[41] The welfare state model that emerged during the mid-20th century was influenced by the earlier People's Home [Folkhemmet] concept. This model aimed to create a sense of collective welfare based on the principle of social inclusion for all members of society. Over time, it extended its benefits to refugees, providing them with access to education and other services.

Sweden had a liberal policy of family reunification and refugee admittance, and it provided a welcoming climate for minority and marginalised groups, which indicated the recognition of group differences 'with an expectation of conformity to certain key values.'[42] Starting in the 1970s, when immigrants started arriving in Sweden from around the world, ethnic and national differences were celebrated under the umbrella of multiculturalism, where Sweden became 'increasingly tolerant' and introduced pluralist policies.[43] Attempts to promote equality also strengthened minority rights, which can also be seen in the liberalisation of citizenship policies in Western Europe.[44]

Accordingly, refugees in Sweden have the same access to welfare services as any other social group, including free education. In fact, as education is seen as a prerequisite for all forms of work and social order, the state-initiated language and adult education programmes are part of the Swedish welfare model and the Swedish education system. Sweden is thus a knowledge society where education has become a precondition for the integration of migrants. This means that education is key to entering the labour market; it is a place for socialisation, and state-led education is central to state integration politics.

Given this background, municipalities immediately enrol refugee children in schools upon arrival. For those who are over sixteen years of age, who have not completed compulsory or upper secondary school or are at risk of unemployment, it is possible to attend adult education programmes after receiving a residence permit.

Adult education serves a compensatory function by providing an opportunity for those who would like to build on their educational background and has been a key

[41] Gøsta Esping-Andersen, *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1990). I am not claiming that Sweden's self-image has changed based on immigration. The changing economic and educational reforms of the 1990s have also shaped Sweden. For the sake of my argument, I only focus on the migration aspect. For more on how the reduction of the welfare state and increasing market liberalisation contribute to wealth inequality, see Göran Therborn, 'The "People's Home" Is Falling down, Time to Update Your View of Sweden', *Sociologisk Forskning* 54, no. 4 (2017): 275–78.

[42] de Haas, Castles, and Miller, *The Age of Migration: International Population Movements in the Modern World*, 327; Olwig, '"Integration"'.

[43] Mats Wickström, 'Making Multiculturalism Work: Policy and Praxis on Moulding Attitudes and Public Discourse on Ethnic Diversity in Post-War Sweden', *Nordeuropaforum*, 2014, 11–32. For a review on refugees and their legal rights before and during the Second World War in Sweden, where the purported focus was developing a welfare system, see Mikael Byström, 'When the State Stepped into the Arena: The Swedish Welfare State, Refugees and Immigrants 1930s-50s', *Journal of Contemporary History* 49, no. 3 (2014): 599–621.

[44] Christian Joppke, 'Transformation of Citizenship: Status, Rights, Identity' 11, no. 1 (2007): 37–48.

integration policy instrument in Sweden.[45] Therefore, it has been a tool for integrating migrants into the labour market and Swedish society at large.[46] Following the influx of refugees to Sweden, Swedish for Immigrants [SFI] has become a first step for many migrants in their encounter with the Swedish education system and society.[47] Municipal adult education [Komvux] encompasses not only SFI, but also foundational courses such as Swedish as a Second Language [SAS], preparatory courses for higher education, and vocational programmes [yrkesutbildning].

From this perspective, refugees who 'educate' themselves can achieve integration, i.e. learn to speak the primary language, find work and 'adhere to' the social and cultural values of the dominant society. It is therefore assumed that education plays a central role for families that have crossed borders. In this study, I explore integration through families' encounters with education in Sweden.

Consequently, in this study, I treat education as a tool for social integration. This means that I treat education as an institutionalised system provided by a nation state where the transmission of knowledge takes place. Furthermore, I see education as a broader aspect of socialisation, where the social processes of adaptation to a new country, such as learning the language and the social and cultural codes, take place.

By encounters with education in Sweden, I do not refer to a chance meeting. Rather, I refer to the unexpected dimension of forced migration, regardless of whether Sweden was a voluntary choice for settlement. Therefore, I see it as a forced encounter. Refugees come in contact with Sweden, a country with a highly educated population and a knowledge economy with a strong emphasis on schooling for children and adult education programmes for parents. Their encounter thus entails an inevitable introduction to the education system. This introduction cannot be avoided, otherwise refugees will face exclusion from the larger society's socio-economic structures.[48] This being said, I do not assume that an encounter that is unexpected strips the refugees of their agency.

I interview families to analyse their experience and responses to their integration. These interviews allow for a richer description of encounters with education as parents and children experience it simultaneously, which creates rich material for understanding the effect of these encounters on the family. With a focus on parents, I study refugee families' engagement with education, the meaning attached to it, and how parents navigate it by discussing their various assets, internalised

[45] Statens Offentliga Utredningar (SOU), 'En andra och en annan chans: ett komvux i tiden: slutbetänkande', Slutbetänkande av Komvuxutredningen (Stockholm: Norstedts Juridik, 2018), 104.
[46] Andreas Fejes, Per Andersson, and Maria Terning, 'Vad är komvux?', in *Om vuxenutbildning och vuxnas studier: en grundbok*, ed. Andreas Fejes, Karolina Muhrman, and Sofia Nyström (Studentlitteratur AB, 2020), 53–73; Swedish National Agency for Education (Skolverket), 'Komvux – Utbildningsguiden', 2023.
[47] New regulations on adult education are frequently introduced and are often complex. Discussing the details is beyond the scope of the study. If relevant in my case, clarifications are made in empirical chapters.
[48] The Swedish sociopolitical context is discussed in relation to the migrant population later in the study. See pages 23–26.

perceptions and motives that they have carried with them. Accordingly, I use these encounters to study how families experience and respond to their new social order, its mindset and the central role education plays in integration.

Devalued histories

In the context of Sweden, Carl-Ulrik Schierup and Aleksandra Ålund have previously argued, in line with Sayad, that emigration, immigration, and integration cannot be separated from each other.[49] Although the experience and response of refugees to the process of integration has already been studied, including in Sweden, the broader question of how refugees' social histories impact the experience of integration and responses to this remains relatively underexplored. By focusing on refugee families' encounters with education, I have reviewed existing literature that intersects the sociology of migration, education, and family.

Generally, in the context of migration, there has been a primary focus on how family background shapes parents' encounters when their children enter the education system. Consequently, social reproduction theories within the sociology of education highlight the significance of social background in understanding how families relate to different national education systems, showing that various educational practices are class-based. However, in this field of study, migrant families are typically not studied in terms of integration, while refugee families are primarily analysed through the lens of integration when it comes to how they relate to education, and the impact of their social backgrounds remains underdeveloped. [50]

In the following, I will limit the focus on existing studies in Sweden and engage with the existing literature on three levels. In the first section, I discuss how a range of studies have approached the integration of migrants in relation to Sweden's current sociopolitical climate, which I discuss to provide further context with regard to the case of Sweden. In the second section, I move towards studies that explore integration in relation to the education of migrants, which is related to children's education and adults' education. In the last section, I discuss the critical approaches that challenge the perception of migrants as a homogeneous category through the lens of 'identity' and diaspora studies in Sweden.

As Sayad points out, the term integration can be understood as a 'loaded notion', carrying certain political implications and discourses with it.[51] Therefore, there has

[49] Carl-Ulrik Schierup and Alexandra Ålund, *Will They Still Be Dancing? Integration and Ethnic Transformation Among Yugoslav Immigrants in Scandinavia* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1987).
[50] For a broader discussion on the existing literature relevant to this study, see Chapter 2. The discussion in this chapter focuses on the relevant literature in Sweden.
[51] Sayad, *The Suffering of the Immigrant*, 221.

been a change in terminology over time, which is also dependent on the academic tradition. Considering this, the terms integration, acculturation, incorporation, belonging, inclusion – exclusion appear interchangeably below, which reflects the conceptual ambiguity of the terminology.

Experience of migrants in Sweden's sociopolitical climate

In Sweden, conformity to prevailing social norms and cultural values is a strong determinant of who belongs – and who does not belong – in Swedish society.[52] Sweden's strong emphasis on 'integration', 'social cohesion' and 'core national values' is no surprise.[53] This can be observed in Sweden's ambition to promote dominant social and cultural norms, where integration has become a term denoting 'the ability to conform to social norms and cultural values defined in dominant discourse as basic to proper citizenship.'[54]

When it became the most welcoming country in Europe for refugees, the majority of whom had fled Syria during the 2010s,[55] Sweden faced a number of political and social challenges. Given the fact that welfare states such as Sweden attract more immigrants compared to other countries, especially those who experience forced migration, migrants' integration is an important topic.[56]

Research on refugees' experiences of integration in Sweden highlights the struggle to socially integrate in the country. As Marita Eastmond concluded, despite efforts to integrate in Sweden, refugees struggle to become part of their new

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[52] Olwig, '"Integration"'.
[53] de Haas, Castles, and Miller, *The Age of Migration: International Population Movements in the Modern World*, 329.
[54] Olwig, '"Integration"', 180.
[55] François Héran, 'Demography and Migration: The Wildcard in Population Dynamics', in *Migration Theory*, ed. Caroline B. Brettell and James F. Hollifield, 4th ed. (New York: Routledge, 2023), 78–130.
[56] Bevelander and Hollifield, 'Managing Migration in Modern Welfare States'. Even though the majority of people who experience displacement tend to migrate internally (i.e. within their countries of residence) or to neighbouring countries, there is still a statistically small number who seek refuge and are able to migrate from countries that are geographically distant. Among these groups, it is mainly those who can financially afford to migrate that are able to migrate, despite the distance. For a discussion on this, see Héran, 'Demography and Migration'; Nicholas Van Hear, '"I Went as Far as My Money Would Take Me": Conflict, Forced Migration and Class.', in *Forced Migration and Global Processes: A View from Forced Migration Studies*, ed. Delphine Nakache, Michael Collyer, and Crépeau François (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2006), 125–58. Therefore, as stated by Bevelander and Hollifield, although Scandinavian countries, especially Sweden, attract many forced migrants, those who arrive are mainly 'highly-skilled' and financially better off compared to others who migrate internally or to neighbouring countries. This is even more relevant in the case of refugees from Syria who migrated to Sweden, as migrants are often required to make long journeys across multiple borders, through countries with different threat levels. These journeys are financially costly and, in the case of illegal journeys, often involve the risk of death. This gives us an idea of the socio-economic profiles of people who arrive in Sweden, who tend to be those who can afford to migrate, the majority of which are 'highly-skilled'. Further, it is important to remember that the population that arrived in Sweden due to forced migration have mainly been from Middle-Eastern or African countries.

society as their former position and status seem irrelevant.[57] Or, as pointed out by Branka Likić-Brborić and Li Bennich-Björkman, even well-educated refugees who are 'successfully integrated' economically and politically, and who share cultural similarities with 'native Swedes', often perceive themselves as not socially integrated due to experience of discrimination.[58] Despite perceptions among different migrant groups that they are 'well-integrated' due to their high engagement within the national labour force, marriages with people from the 'local' community and significant educational achievements, they often have family relationships that are based on social and cultural values that differ from the family relationships in Scandinavian societies, which can be seen as one of the main barriers to 'successful integration'. This influences the attitudes of refugees towards engaging in transnational practices, i.e. 'various forms of direct participation in the politics, social and cultural activities, and economic activities aimed towards homeland.'[59]

To further understand the integration experience of refugees in Sweden, this experience must be placed within the larger context of the sociopolitical climate that shapes it. One of the key aspects has been the changing notion of Swedish exceptionalism, where the country is seen as a model of a tolerant, egalitarian and multicultural welfare state.[60]

Minority rights and the impact on refugee integration in Sweden have been a highly debated topic, where scholars have questioned whether the goals of the welfare state can coexist with those of multiculturalism, as the celebration of ethnic and cultural differences goes against the welfare model's goal to establish 'sameness'.[61] For example, mother tongue tuition in schools has been a reflection of multicultural ambitions in Sweden,[62] yet it has been argued that these efforts reveal an ethnocentric

[57] Marita Eastmond, 'Egalitarian Ambitions, Constructions of Difference: The Paradoxes of Refugee Integration in Sweden', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 37, no. 2 (2011): 286–87.
[58] Branka Likić-Brborić and Li Bennich-Björkman, 'Swedish "Exceptionalism" and the Integration of Refugees from Bosnia-Herzegovina in the 1990s: Acceptance and Strategies of Citizenship', in *Citizens at Heart? Perspectives on Integration of Refugees in the EU after the Yugoslav Wars of Succession*, ed. Li Bennich-Björkman, Roland Kostić, and Branka Likić-Brborić, Uppsala Multiethnic Papers 56 (Hugo Valentin Centre, Uppsala: Uppsala University, 2016), 87–115.
[59] Roland Kostić", 'Ambivalent Peacebuilders? Exploring Trends and Motivations in Transnational Practices of Bosnians-Herzegovinians in Sweden', in *Citizens at Heart? Perspectives on Integrations of Refugees in the EU after the Yugoslav Wars of Succession*, ed. Li Bennich-Björkman, Roland Kostić, and Branka Likić-Brborić (Hugo Valentin Centre, Uppsala: Hugo Valentin Centre, 2016), 120.
[60] Carl-Ulrik Schierup and Aleksandra Ålund, 'The End of Swedish Exceptionalism? Citizenship, Neoliberalism and the Politics of Exclusion', *Race & Class* 53, no. 1 (2011): 45–64.
[61] Peter Kivisto and Östen Wahlbeck, eds., *Debating Multiculturalism in the Nordic Welfare States*, Palgrave Politics of Identity and Citizenship Series (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).
[62] In Swedish schools, the right to mother tongue tuition emphasises the importance of providing students with the opportunity to learn and develop proficiency in their native language alongside Swedish. This is not exclusive to refugees but is available to anyone in Sweden who speaks a language other than Swedish in the home. For details on mother tongue tuition in Sweden, see Anne Reath Warren, 'Developing Multilingual Literacies in Sweden and Australia: Opportunities and Challenges in Mother Tongue Instruction and Multilingual Study Guidance in Sweden and Community Language

approach to the education of minorities.[63] This dichotomy is not surprising, as scholars have also argued that multiculturalism can lead to further separatism.[64]

In fact, according to Stephen Castles, the pluralist policies introduced after the 1970s have been re-examined due to growing anti-immigration sentiment.[65] Migrants are often racialised, and as recent studies have shown, one of the major reasons for this is the recent migration influx and Sweden's political shift in this regard.[66]

The rising migrant population in Sweden has made 'integration' a key concern for researchers, politicians and other members of society. Over the last decade, views on immigration to Sweden have shifted, with Sweden going from an 'exceptional country' for minority groups and minority rights to a place where changing migration policies now lean towards anti-immigration views;[67] over the past decades, these changes have concerned the population of immigrants that arrived in Sweden.

The majority of refugees arriving in Europe over the past decade have migrated from Muslim countries, generating a 'politics of fear' and Europe-wide panic about 'the Muslim'.[68] In the Scandinavian context, this manifests as a 'cultural anxiety' which is highly racialised.[69] This has raised questions regarding the end of Swedish exceptionalism, which has surely had an impact on the integration of migrants to Sweden.[70] In addition to integration through education, this perception of refugees, which is based not on a migration crisis but a political crisis, ultimately shapes the experiences of refugees in Sweden.[71]

Given the backdrop of the Swedish capitalist welfare state, which is 'generalist and authoritative with [a] rather low tolerance for difference', and the changing

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Education in Australia' (Doctoral thesis, Department of Language Education, Stockholm University, 2017). And, for a discussion on this topic in relation to this study, see pages 212–225.

[63] Axelsson, Brantefors, and Elenius, 'Utbildning och minoriteter'.

[64] de Haas, Castles, and Miller, *The Age of Migration: International Population Movements in the Modern World*, 297–330.

[65] Castles, 'How Nation-states Respond to Immigration and Ethnic Diversity', 301.

[66] Dahlstedt, Magnus, and Anders Neergaard. 'Crisis of Solidarity? Changing Welfare and Migration Regimes in Sweden'. *Critical Sociology* 45, no. 1 (2019): 121–35; Schierup, Carl-Ulrik, Aleksandra Ålund, and Anders Neergaard. '"Race" and the Upsurge of Antagonistic Popular Movements in Sweden'. *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 41, no. 10 (2018): 1837–54.

[67] Anders Hellström, 'How Anti-Immigration Views Were Articulated in Sweden during and after 2015' (Malmö University, Malmö Institute for Studies of Migration, Diversity and Welfare (MIM), 2021).

[68] Ruth Wodak, *The Politics of Fear: What Right-Wing Populist Discourses Mean* (London: Sage, 2015).

[69] Olwig, '"Integration"'.

[70] Schierup and Ålund, 'The End of Swedish Exceptionalism?'

[71] de Haas, Castles, and Miller, *The Age of Migration: International Population Movements in the Modern World*. The framing of the migration flow into Europe since the beginning of 2014 as a 'migration crisis' or a 'refugee crisis' impacts the integration of the migrating population. Given European politics, this suggests that the crisis relates to factors such as the rising population in Europe, changing employment demographics and increasing criminal activity. These issues have contributed to the rise of the far right in the last decade, not only in Europe but also in other parts of the world. See Hein de Haas, 'Changing the Migration Narrative: On the Power of Discourse, Propaganda and Truth Distortion', Working paper, PACES Project Working Paper No. 3 (University of Amsterdam: International Migration Institute (IMI), 2024), 10.

sociopolitical climate, the integration of refugee families' presents a paradox where egalitarian ambitions have been transformed into mechanisms of exclusion.[72]

The following section reviews the existing literature on refugees' encounters (and the larger category of migrants) with the Swedish education system by exploring integration politics related to the country's knowledge economy and the experiences of refugees in Sweden.

Encounters with education

In a large study conducted in Sweden, Jan Jonsson et al. discussed various aspects related to the integration of migrants, showing that integration in different areas (structural, social, cultural, political and health) evolves differently. Furthermore, they assert that it is meaningless to refer to a fast or slow integration process without defining what type of integration is being studied.[73] With a focus on the literature on refugees' experience and responses to processes of integration, I study integration from the bottom up. In acknowledging the significance of education in questions of integration in Sweden, encounters with education provide a lens to study the integration of refugee families.

Although existing studies in the sociology of education have emphasised the significance of family backgrounds in shaping parenting styles, strategies and children's educational trajectories within the migration context, they often overlook refugees.[74] Refugees are primarily viewed as individuals whose assets are devalued, leading to struggles with integration. A growing number of studies have highlighted the significance of education for the integration of migrants in Sweden. This is based on a distinction between children in Swedish schools and adults in adult education programmes.

With regard to children, findings reveal a clear risk of ethnic marginalisation for young migrants.[75] Hassan Sharif has emphasised that learning Swedish and participating in Swedish education is associated with increased respect for the 'new arrivals'.[76] However, a prominent theme is the exclusion of migrants from mainstream school and its culture. It has been shown that Swedish schools and different educational organisations targeted towards refugees do not acknowledge students' different cultural backgrounds and previous knowledge, thus impeding

[72] Eastmond, 'Egalitarian Ambitions, Constructions of Difference', 292.
[73] Jonsson, Jan O., Carina Mood, and Georg Treuter. *Integration bland unga: en mångkulturell generation växer upp.*
[74] For an extensive discussion on the existing literature on this theme, see Chapter 2.
[75] Jonsson, Mood, and Treuter, *Integration bland unga: en mångkulturell generation växer upp.*
[76] Hassan Sharif, '"Här i Sverige måste man gå i skolan för att få respekt": Nyanlända ungdomar i den svenska gymnasieskolans introduktionsutbildning' (Doctoral thesis in the Sociology of Education and Culture, Department of Education, Uppsala University, 2017).

inclusion.[77] In fact, Ann Runfors argues that the ideal of producing integration by levelling out social differences between individuals and groups became, in the name of goodwill, a question of eradicating differences in relation to 'Swedish children'.[78] In these schools where 'immigrant background is devalued and Swedishness is desirable',[79] children strategise their inclusion by emphasising their agency and autonomy despite facing structural constraints and discrimination.[80] This process involves negotiating their identities, i.e. 'Swedishness.' Anna Lund and Andrea Voyer have pointed out that Sweden's ethos of 'equality' and individualism presents a paradox, as it simultaneously facilitates the acceptance of refugees and establishes a divide between belonging and non-belonging.[81]

Building on findings that emphasise the social and cultural aspects of integration (i.e. identity and belonging), I turn the focus on how parents experience and respond to encounters with their children's education by analysing these individuals as products of their histories.

A number of previous studies have highlighted a 'struggle for recognition' among refugees (in the case of this study, this would be the parents). This is often related to difficulties learning Swedish, validating their previous degrees to access the labour market, finding a job, experiences of discrimination, etc.[82] These studies have highlighted the 'devaluation' of migrant assets, which has been demonstrated

[77] Nihad Bunar, 'Inclusion of Newly Arrived Migrant Students in Swedish Schools: Organizational Models and Support Measures', in *Research Handbook on Migration and Education*, ed. Halleli Pinson, Dympna Devine, and Nihad Bunar (Glos: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2023), 83–97.

[78] Ann Runfors, 'När blir man svensk? Om hur skilda möjligheter skapas i skolvardagens samspel.', Statens offentliga utredningar från Arbetsmarknadsdepartementet, Kunskap för integration. Om makt i skola och utbildning i mångfaldens Sverige (Stockholm: Integrationspolitiska maktutredningen, 2004), 49.

[79] Andrea Voyer, '"If the Students Don't Come, or If They Don't Finish, We Don't Get the Money." Principals, Immigration, and the Organisational Logic of School Choice in Sweden', *Ethnography and Education* 14, no. 4 (2019): 460.

[80] Stefan Lund, ed., *Immigrant Incorporation, Education, and the Boundaries of Belonging* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 122–24.

[81] Anna Lund and Andrea Voyer, '"They're Immigrants Who Are Kind of Swedish": Universalism, Primordialism, and Modes of Incorporation in the Swedish Civil Sphere', in *The Nordic Civil Sphere*, ed. Jeffrey C. Alexander, Anna Lund, and Andrea Voyer (Polity Press, 2019), 180.

[82] Among many others, see Magnus Carlsson and Dan-Olof Rooth, 'Evidence of Ethnic Discrimination in the Swedish Labor Market Using Experimental Data', *Labour Economics* 14, no. 4 (2007): 716–29; Per Andersson and Ali Osman, 'Recognition of Prior Learning as a Practice for Differential Inclusion and Exclusion of Immigrants in Sweden', *Adult Education Quarterly* 59, no. 1 (2008): 42–60; Marko Valenta and Nihad Bunar, 'State Assisted Integration: Refugee Integration Policies in Scandinavian Welfare States: The Swedish and Norwegian Experience Special Issue: Critical Reflections on Refugee Integration: Lessons from International Perspectives', *Journal of Refugee Studies* 23, no. 4 (2010): 463–83; Inge Dahlstedt, 'Occupational Match: Over- and Undereducation Among Immigrants in the Swedish Labor Market', *Journal of International Migration and Integration* 12, no. 3 (2011): 349–67; Maja Frykman, 'Struggle for Recognition: Bosnian Refugees' Employment Experiences in Sweden', *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 31, no. 1 (2012): 54–79; Nubin Ciziri and Ida Lidegran, 'Long Time in the Waiting Room: Migrant Physicians in Sweden and Their Struggles to Mobilise Cultural Capital', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 2024, 1–16.

across class backgrounds.[83] Martin Nordin believes that this can be explained by Sweden's 'lack of assimilation'.[84] Others have shown that this devaluation can relate to the quality of the language lessons, and that there is a heavy focus on cultural competence.[85] A study that explored refugees' perceptions of adult education found that among the population relevant to the present study (Syrians in Sweden), perceptions varied based on educational level. Those with high levels of education were critical of the reliance on mixed-skill-level groups and lack of quality teaching, whereas those with lower levels of education internalised the criticism and their own 'incapabilities'.[86]

In sum, the literature on the educational and occupational integration of migrants has primarily highlighted the opportunities education provides to build new lives and the struggles migrants face in schools and adult education programmes. In other words, there is a primary focus on new possibilities and constraints after migration, where education plays a key role for integration. Although studies have also highlighted respect for agency in negotiations of belonging and identity, Alireza Behtoui et al. illustrated the general tendency to disregard heterogeneous backgrounds and treat migrants (including refugees) as a single category.[87] Behtoui and Erik Olsson also emphasised that the resources available to families before and after migration and their backgrounds play an important role. The authors explored the heterogeneous backgrounds of migrants and the impact on outcomes such as education and employment prospects.[88] An analysis of educational encounters through families' social histories broadens the discussion of their experiences in Sweden. Rather than positioning the families

[83] See, for example, Maja Povrzanovic Frykman and Magnus Öhlander, eds., *Högutbildade migranter i Sverige* (Arkiv förlag, 2018); Micheline Van Riemsdijk and Linn Axelsson, 'Introduction "Labour Market Integration of Highly Skilled Refugees in Sweden, Germany and the Netherlands"', *International Migration* 59, no. 4 (2021): 3–12; Ciziri and Lidegran, 'Long Time in the Waiting Room'.

[84] Martin Nordin, 'Immigrants' Returns to Schooling in Sweden', *International Migration* 49, no. 4 (2011): 160. *Assimilation* was used in a US context when research on migration began there due to the wave of migration into the US in the late 19th and 20th centuries. After the Second World War, researchers in Europe and some US scholars preferred the concept 'integration'. The way these concepts and terminology have evolved is significant to consider as they evolve for a reason. For a discussion on this, see Caroline B. Brettell and James F. Hollifield, 'Introduction', in *Migration Theory: Talking across Disciplines*, 4th ed. (New York: Routledge, 2023), 4–9.

[85] Gregg Bucken-Knapp, Zainab Fakih, and Andrea Spehar, 'Talking about Integration: The Voices of Syrian Refugees Taking Part in Introduction Programmes for Integration into Swedish Society', *International Migration* 57, no. 2 (2019): 221–34; Lika Rodin, Andre Rodin, and Susanne Brunke, 'Language Training and Well-Being for Qualified Migrants in Sweden', *International Journal of Migration, Health and Social Care* 13, no. 2 (2017): 220–33.

[86] Bucken-Knapp, Fakih, and Spehar, 'Talking about Integration', 232.

[87] Alireza Behtoui et al., 'Sweden: The Otherization of the Descendants of Immigrants', in *The Palgrave Handbook of Race and Ethnic Inequalities in Education*, ed. Stevens Peter A.J. and Dworkin A. Gary, 2nd ed., vol. 1 (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 1011.

[88] Alireza Behtoui and Erik Olsson, 'The Performance of Early Age Migrants in Education and the Labour Market: A Comparison of Bosnia Herzegovinians, Chileans and Somalis in Sweden', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 40, no. 5 (2014): 792.

within a homogeneous category focused on their struggles navigating inclusion in Sweden, this study explores the extent to which families' responses are shaped by their class background and internalised historical experience.

A critique of reductionist approaches

As previously mentioned, the interconnection between integration, culture and identity could explain the dominance of 'identity' studies in migration.[89] Often reduced to pure 'products of culture,' migrants (including refugees) are situated in an ethnic and cultural category that defines them based on their differences and 'cultural distance'. This creates a tendency to assume that any 'problems' associated with successful integration are related to their culture (which is associated with their identity).[90]

Following Stuart Hall, who views identity as a process of identification rather than a fixed identity,[91] Behtoui has noted that migrants' self-identification in Sweden is not fixed, but 'a relatively fluid, situational and dynamic process.'[92] Whether one identifies as 'Swedish', or by the parents' birth country or religious affiliation is thus determined by different individual and social indicators, i.e. class background.[93] Additionally, research intersecting migration, family, and gender has explored various identities, such as culture and gender, contributing to the critique against static approaches that reduce migrants and refugees in Sweden to a single, traditional, and backward culture.[94] Ålund contends that a more comprehensive recognition of migrants' historical experience and present situations is needed.[95] Otherwise, there is a risk of downplaying the impact of cultural and class differences within particular national contexts.[96]

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[89] Sayad, *The Suffering of the Immigrant*, 216–17; Kearney, 'The Local and the Global', 559.
[90] Wikan, *Generous Betrayal*, 81; Irene Bloemraad et al., 'Unpacking Immigrant Integration: Concepts, Mechanisms, and Context', Background paper prepared for World Development Report (Washington: World Bank, 2023).
[91] Stuart Hall, *The Fateful Triangle: Race, Ethnicity, Nation*, ed. Kobena Mercer and Henry Louis Gates Jr, Unabridged edition (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2017), 127. For a detailed theoretical and empirical discussion on 'identity' classifications in relation to my case study, see Chapter 5.
[92] Alireza Behtoui, 'Constructions of Self-Identification: Children of Immigrants in Sweden', *Identities* 28, no. 3 (2021): 356.
[93] Behtoui, 'Constructions of Self-Identification'.
[94] Ålund, Aleksandra, and Carl-Ulrik Schierup. *Paradoxes of Multiculturalism: Essays on Swedish Society*. Research in Ethnic Relations Series. (Aldershot: Academic Publishing Group, 1996), 53–67; Mulinari, Diana, and Åsa Lundqvist. 'Invisible, Burdensome and Threatening. The Location of Migrant Women in the Swedish Welfare State.' In *Reimagineering the Nation. Essays on Twenty First Century Sweden*, edited by Alexandra Ålund, Carl-Ulrik Schierup, and Anders Neergaard, 4:119–41. Political and Social Change. (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang Publishing Group, 2017); Olwig, '"Integration"', 192.
[95] Ålund and Schierup, *Paradoxes of Multiculturalism*, 67.
[96] Ibid., 58.

Historically, cultural studies theorists and scholars in ethnic and race relations have viewed diaspora as a means to challenge the notion that migrants are merely eternally present. Instead, they embraced diaspora as a departure from essentialist perspectives, recognising 'identity' as fluid, hybrid, and negotiated. In Sweden, Fataneh Farahani has shown that identities can be both 'here' and 'there,' emphasising that migrants articulate sometimes divergent identities rather than merely experiencing a clash between two cultures.[97] Additionally, studies by scholars such as Ålund and Minoo Alinia can be seen as critiques of definitions of integration as emancipation through encounters with Sweden.[98]

The above studies have advanced our understanding of experiences of integration in Sweden and countered the reduction of migrants to their cultural identities. I build on these studies to highlight refugees' cultural identification by analysing refugees as products of their histories and individuals who are also shaped by class backgrounds. This allows for an approach that actively incorporates a detailed analysis of social histories beyond a pure cultural dimension, which remains understudied.

In other words, by building on literature that studies integration through the possibilities and constraints faced by migrants and by shifting the focus to migrants' social histories, rather than the sole focus on the 'suffering of the immigrant' (see Sayad), this study treats integration as a phenomenon that is not a form of social promotion, but an adaptation process shaped by social histories that presents new possibilities and constraints after migration.

If one of the key paths to integration in Sweden is through education, and we consider the current social and political attitudes towards migrants, how can we understand refugee families' – perhaps the most politicised categories among migrants – experiences of education in Sweden as a process of 'becoming Swedish' by embracing 'Swedish' values? Furthermore, how do their encounters differ based on their varied social histories? These questions are significant for shifting the focus to the integration experience and responses of refugee families and what integration means for them considering their diverse social backgrounds. To answer these questions, I work with Kurds from Syria as an empirical case.

[97] Fataneh Farahani, *Gender, Sexuality, and Diaspora* (New York: Routledge, 2017), chap. An Epilogue: Inside Looking Out/Outside Looking In.

[98] Ålund and Schierup, *Paradoxes of Multiculturalism*, 53–67; Aleksandra Ålund and Minoo Alinia, 'I skuggan av kulturella stereotypier: perspektiv på forskning om genus, jämställdhet och etniska relationer i Sverige', *Sociologisk Forskning* 48, no. 2 (2011): 43–64; Minoo Alinia, 'Spaces of Diasporas: Kurdish Identities, Experiences of Otherness and Politics of Belonging' (Doctoral thesis, Department of Sociology, Göteborg University, 2004); Farahani, *Gender, Sexuality, and Diaspora*.

Kurds from Syria

In this study, I work with Kurds from Syria who arrived in Sweden during the 2010s, the majority of whom once lived in the northern region of Syria.[99] Following the Syrian civil war that escalated in 2011, millions of people were displaced both internally and across borders. Therefore, one of the largest refugee groups in the world consists of people from Syria who fled their homes in the last decade.[100]

After Germany, Sweden hosts the largest number of Syrian refugees in Europe and is considered the most welcoming country on the continent for refugees.[101] Although this provides a compelling reason to study all Syrians living in Sweden, my focus on Kurds from Syria allows me to carefully explore the intersection of education, migration and integration.[102] First, Kurdish diaspora studies have long shown the significance of social histories on current living conditions. Second, the heterogeneous backgrounds of Kurds have rarely been the focus of these studies. Third, as a stateless group, Kurds provide an informative case for studying how families relate to state education after migration, which is an understudied area.

As previously mentioned, studies of transnationalism, which include diaspora studies, have contributed to our understanding of how integration processes are shaped through social connections with countries of origin. Diaspora as a concept thus bridges the gap between pre-migration and post-migration, two processes that cannot be separated from a sociological standpoint.[103] Diaspora studies show us that Kurdish refugees continue to relate to their countries of origin in various ways, keeping their social histories present. Given this, Kurds represent an informative case study, as they have made their past exist in the present through their complex history of national struggle and an established diaspora.[104] In fact, Kurds have maintained their ethnic affiliation after migration.[105]

Given their national history, migrating Kurds have been defined as a community, mainly as a diaspora based on their ethnic identity, struggle and politics of

[99] While I consider 'Kurds from Syria' the most accurate identification, for the sake of convenience and brevity, I commonly refer to this group as 'Syrian Kurds' in this study.
[100] UNHCR, 'Global Trends – Forced Displacement in 2018' (Geneva: The UN Refugee Agency, 2019).
[101] Héran, 'Demography and Migration', 113. According to the UNHCR 2018 report, Germany has hosted 532 100 refugees while Sweden has hosted 109 300.
[102] With a population corresponding to 30–40 million, Kurds have been minorities under the nation states they reside, including Syria. Their 'minority' status is not a matter of numbers, rather it is related to their subordinate positions. For an extensive reading on the Kurds, their history, politics, religion, society, culture, language and their larger diaspora, see Hamit Bozarslan, Cengiz Gunes, and Veli Yadirgi, eds., *The Cambridge History of the Kurds* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021).
[103] Östen Wahlbeck, *Kurdish Diasporas: A Comparative Study of Kurdish Refugee Communities*, Migration, Minorities and Citizenship (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999), 179.
[104] For a detailed discussion on Syrian Kurds' national and political history, see Chapter 5.
[105] Wahlbeck, *Kurdish Diasporas*, 141.

nationhood,[106] or in other words as a 'stateless diaspora'.[107] Kurdish diaspora studies in Sweden have shown that the memory of repression in 'Kurdistan' is claimed to evoke diasporic consciousness and the practice of long-distance nationalism.[108] For example, cultural production by Kurdish filmmakers, musicians, artists and intellectuals in Sweden is a strategy that has been used to restore the Kurdish collective heritage and cultural identities and to achieve visibility for the Kurdish cause.[109] Kurdish refugees also form social communities that become places to exercise self-governance.[110] This is visible even among the second-generation Kurds where their collective memories of oppression and national struggle fuel conflict-generated diasporas and are transmitted to the following generations.[111]

Living in a world of nation states, Kurds' statelessness has created a sense of continuity in their quest for national self-determination, not only in a national context but also in migration contexts.[112] The political activism of diaspora and the strong attachment to Kurdish identity are rooted in the political oppression Kurds faced, and continue to face, in the Middle East. This fuels their struggle to achieve recognition, which Barzoo Eliassi argues can lead to resistance to pressure to 'assimilate' into the 'West'.[113] According to Östen Wahlbeck, by distinguishing between assimilation, which he associates with personal identity, and integration, Kurdish refugees did not view assimilation as a possible outcome but saw integration as both achievable and a goal.[114]

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[106] Martin Van Bruinessen, 'Shifting National and Ethnic Identities: The Kurds in Turkey and the European Diaspora', *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 18, no. 1 (1998): 39–52; Amir Hassanpour and Shahrzad Mojab, 'Kurdish Diaspora', in *Encyclopedia of Diasporas: Immigrant and Refugee Cultures Around the World*, ed. Melvin Ember, Carol R. Ember, and Ian Skoggard (Boston: Springer, 2005), 214–24; Wahlbeck, *Kurdish Diasporas*; Östen Wahlbeck, 'The Kurdish Refugee Diaspora in Finland', *Diaspora Studies* 5, no. 1 (2013): 44–57; Minoo Alinia, 'Spaces of Diasporas: Kurdish Identities, Experiences of Otherness and Politics of Belonging'.

[107] Barzoo Eliassi, *Contesting Kurdish Identities in Sweden: Quest for Belonging among Middle Eastern Youth* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

[108] Bruinessen, 'Shifting National and Ethnic Identities'; Alinia, 'Spaces of Diasporas: Kurdish Identities, Experiences of Otherness and Politics of Belonging'; Khalid Khayati, 'From Victim Diaspora to Transborder Citizenship? Diaspora Formation and Transnational Relations among Kurds in France and Sweden' (Doctoral thesis, Linköping, Department of Social and Welfare Studies, Linköping University, 2008); Eliassi, *Contesting Kurdish Identities in Sweden: Quest for Belonging among Middle Eastern Youth*; Charlotta Zettervall, 'Reluctant Victims into Challengers: Narratives of a Kurdish Political Generation in Diaspora in Sweden' (Doctoral thesis, Department of Sociology, Lund University, 2013).

[109] Veysi Dag, 'The Politics of Cultural Production: Exile, Integration and Homeland in Europe's Kurdish Diaspora', *Diaspora Studies* 15, no. 3 (2022): 271–96.

[110] Veysi Dag, 'Self-Governing from below: Kurdish Refugees on the Periphery of European Societies', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 49, no. 15 (2023): 3920–29.

[111] Bahar Baser and Mari H. Toivanen, 'Inherited Traumas in Diaspora: Postmemory, Past-Presencing and Mobilisation of Second-Generation Kurds in Europe', *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 47, no. 2 (2023): 297–320.

[112] Barzoo Eliassi, 'Statelessness in a World of Nation-States: The Cases of Kurdish Diasporas in Sweden and the UK', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 42, no. 9 (2016): 1403–19.

[113] Barzoo Eliassi, 'Kurdish Diaspora: A Transnational Imagined Community', in *The Cambridge History of the Kurds*, ed. Hamit Bozarslan, Cengiz Gunes, and Veli Yadirgi, 2021, 867.

[114] Wahlbeck, *Kurdish Diasporas*, chap. 1.

Previous studies on Kurds in Europe, particularly in Sweden, reveal that Kurds as an ethnic category have rarely been studied in terms of the diversity within this group. Instead, they have mainly been studied as a diaspora in the context of migration, which implies a degree of collective identity. This 'collectivity' can possibly be attributed to their nationalism, which to some extent helps overcome the differences among Kurds.[115]

That said, aside from political affiliations, gender has served as a distinguishing factor within the Kurdish community. Alinia has pointed to a gendered divide in the experience of Kurds, where women are 'more positive' towards Swedish society and are 'more successful' than men.[116] However, she has also shown that women in this group have suffered under oppressive racial and class conditions that exclude them from Swedish society. These findings enhance our understanding of how integration is experienced by Kurds in Sweden.

There are numerous studies on the Kurdish diaspora, including their transnational networks, language, national and political history. However, if we set the Kurdish migration and diaspora aside and look at the education of Kurds outside of their 'homelands', little research is available. The 'assimilation' or 'integration' of Kurds through encounters with education in the 'West' has not been studied as much as their 'Kurdish identities'. Based on the findings of a study in the United Kingdom, Kurdish families struggle to maintain the Kurdish language as a result of historical oppression against the group.[117] Further, we know that much like other immigrant children, Kurdish students stand between their 'home culture' and 'school culture', negotiating their 'identities' situationally.[118]

The cultural differences among Kurds and the oppression they have faced as a group have therefore been prominent themes in their encounters with education in Europe. Rather than approaching Kurds through a culturalist approach, where their national and cultural identities are analysed through the group's specificity, I will provide further context by focusing on the sociopolitical and economic histories of Kurds in Syria.[119] This allows me to go beyond the role of Kurds as mere representatives of their 'culture'.

Despite the discussion above, Syrian Kurds do not have a long history in Sweden compared to Kurds from other nations (Turkey, Iraq and Iran). Therefore, they have

[115] Ibid., 182.
[116] Alinia, 'Spaces of Diasporas: Kurdish Identities, Experiences of Otherness and Politics of Belonging', 284; Minoo Alinia, 'Gendered Experiences of Homeland, Identity and Belonging among the Kurdish Diaspora', in *Negotiating Identity in Scandinavia*, ed. Haci Akman, Women, Migration, and the Diaspora (New York, London: Berghahn Books, 2014), 120.
[117] Alice Bloch and Shirin Hirsch, '"Second Generation" Refugees and Multilingualism: Identity, Race and Language Transmission', *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 40, no. 14 (2017): 2444–62.
[118] Sabine Mannitz, 'Pupils' Negotiations of Cultural Difference: Identity Management and Discursive Assimilation', in *Civil Enculturation: Nation-State, School and Ethnic Difference in the Netherlands, Britain, Germany, and France*, ed. Werner Schiffauer et al. (New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2004), 242–304.
[119] See Chapter 5 for a discussion on this.

been an under-studied population. Thus, Syrian Kurdish refugees provide a good case for studying the extent to which the social histories of refugee families shape the experience and responses to state integration in Sweden. This is due to their status as a stateless group without a national education system, their efforts to continue their national struggle and the fact that the group's history of migration has predominantly been studied through the lens of diasporic communities rather than the group's heterogeneous background.

Aim and research questions

This study aims to understand the extent to which refugee families' diverse and unified backgrounds shape their experience and responses to Swedish education, which is the key state-led integration process in the country. Refugee integration is often studied from the perspective of the 'receiving society', treating refugees as a homogeneous group representative of a particular culture and defined by their eternal presence. In contrast, this study views refugees as a heterogeneous group with different social backgrounds, and products of their own histories that are deeply ingrained in their perceptions and strategies of integration. Accordingly, I am interested in refugees' margin of freedom given their social histories (past) as well as their social positions in Sweden (present).

Sweden presents an opportunity to study a knowledge economy where education is central to integration. In this case, I study families' encounters with education in Sweden, i.e. parents' experience and responses to their own education and that of their children. I discuss the parents' capacity to improvise within and adapt to their new national context, where they are presented with new possibilities and constraints after migrating to Sweden.

Drawing on insights from Sayad and focusing on parents' experience and responses to education, I employ Pierre Bourdieu's analytical framework, particularly his concept of *habitus*. Originating from Bourdieu's collaborative work with Sayad, habitus refers to the inherited and acquired dispositions shaped by one's historical and social context, as well as the structural possibilities and constraints one encounters.[120] These dispositions retrospectively shape perceptions, actions and orientations, influencing habits, preferences and social interactions.[121]

In this study, habitus is therefore reflected in various terms such as social origin, social histories (of parents), acquired skills and knowledge, encounters, experiences, strategies, *émigré*, capacity to improvise and adapt, various practices (i.e. educational

[120] Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 56.
[121] For a detailed theoretical reflection on the concept of habitus and Bourdieu's analytical framework, see Chapter 3.

and occupational), individual and collective identity, and dispositions. Considering the Kurdish case discussed earlier, I analyse families through the lens of the parents' habitus, with particular attention to their citizenship status, educational level and occupational background, social contacts, spoken languages, gender, family structure and composition (number of members, their age and gender), and the sentiments associated with their Kurdish backgrounds in Syria. In other words, I delineate these aspects of the emigrated habitus during the analysis.

The study consists of four sections with questions derived from the overarching aim. The four sections are as follows: the first section serves as a background chapter and presents a discussion in relation to the empirical material. This chapter outlines and discusses the social histories referenced throughout this study by highlighting Syria's socio-economic and political history. Accordingly, I look at families' social origins and ask, *what unites and divides Kurdish families in Syria?*

The second section provides an analysis of parents' encounters with adult education in Sweden. Drawing on previous studies on transferring educational and occupational assets in the context of migration and studies of gendered experience, I ask, *how can we understand the approaches parents use to improvise and adapt their acquired skills and knowledge from Syria to Sweden?* In answering this question, I focus on educational and occupational spheres.

The third section turns the focus on parents' encounters with their children's education in Sweden. Supported by literature in the sociology of education, which elaborates on class-related educational practices, this chapter explores strategies refugee families use to adjust to their children's education. I ask, *what shapes parents' experience with their children's education in Sweden considering families' class backgrounds (i.e. parents' citizenship status, educational backgrounds and occupational backgrounds)?*

Finally, the fourth section continues to follow parents' encounters with their children's education by focusing on how parents respond to Swedish integration. Starting from previous studies emphasising the ethnic and cultural identities of migrants with regard to integration and focusing on the history of Kurds from Syria, I ask the following question: Considering past experiences of oppression and social exclusion as Kurds in Syria, *how do Kurdish parents view and respond to their children's education in Sweden, given its role in fostering social and cultural integration?*

In line with these questions, I view migration and the migrant condition as a 'total social fact'. This means that the experience of migrants is not solely based on 'social suffering', but is embedded in the social context that exists outside individuals, therefore involving the totality of society.[122]

[122] Sayad, *The Suffering of the Immigrant*; Saada, 'Abdelmalek Sayad and the Double Absence'.

Outline of the study

This study comprises nine chapters, beginning with an introduction to the overarching themes and contexts, which highlights the case study of Syrian Kurds in Sweden. Accordingly, I discuss the main starting point in order to situate the study within the existing debates on the schooling and integration of migrants in Sweden.

Following this introduction, Chapter 2 offers a review of existing literature to provide a contextual foundation. I present the previous literature relevant to this study and conclude by summarising my intended contributions. In Chapter 3, I define how I study refugee families' integration, providing the conceptual underpinning for subsequent analysis. In Chapter 4, I outline the research methods, addressing ethical considerations and reflexivity.

Chapter 5 is a hybrid chapter including background, theoretical reflection, and empirical material. I discuss Kurds from Syria as a unified yet diverse ethnic group and reflect on studies of ethnicity and social group categories and classifications. I address the group within a historical context and explore the sociopolitical history of Kurds, as well as the (un)availability of different assets (educational and occupational) in Syria. In this chapter, I explicitly explore their history and its impact on their social profiles as well as perceptions.

In Chapter 6, I examine parents' perspectives on their own education in Sweden, discussing the ways they manage their experiences with adult education based on their perceptions, which are shaped by the possibilities available to them in Sweden, and the social histories they have carried with them from Syria.

In Chapter 7, I analyse parents' approaches to their children's education, investigating parents' educational practices in light of their class backgrounds. Accordingly, I ask whether becoming a refugee has shaped these practices.

In Chapter 8, the final empirical chapter, I examine parents' approaches to their children's education in Sweden, discussing how statelessness influences the formation of a stateless disposition.

The study concludes with Chapter 9 in which I offer a summary of key findings, reflections on contributions and suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER 2

Migration, education and families

This chapter presents a discussion of the relevant literature in order to place the case study in a larger research field and highlights the contributions of this study. Having already established that refugees' heterogeneous backgrounds and histories are rarely explored in depth, this chapter engages with research within the sociology of migration, education and family, which complements and expands on the discussion in the previous chapter.

In the first section, I discuss research that explores the migration of educational and occupational assets across national contexts, going beyond research concerning the category of refugee. As I will proceed to analyse the educational and occupational backgrounds of Kurdish parents, this section is relevant as it offers insight into the extent to which it is possible to migrate these assets. In the second section, I acknowledge that refugee research often overlooks the background of refugees and turn to literature within the sociology of education, where social backgrounds form central themes in interactions with national and international education. I focus on studies of families and show that encounters with education are shaped by families' social class and ethnic indicators. In the third section, I delve deeper into studies on family and family dynamics. This illustrates how migration and integration potentially challenge family dynamics. Lastly, I summarise the contributions I aim to make with this study based on my approach and the literature discussed in the previous and current chapter.

Migrating educational and occupational assets

In its promises of internationalism and cosmopolitanism, globalisation suggests that economic capital and information flows freely across borders, and the world is interconnected and integrated. However, the notion that family or individual assets transcend national borders implies that there is no struggle in mobilising these assets. As the historian Frederick Cooper states, the positive connotation of such concepts hinders the limits of capital flow and global interconnections.[123] In

[123] Frederick Cooper, 'What Is the Concept of Globalization Good for? An African Historian's Perspective', *African Affairs* 100, no. 399 (2001): 189–213.

her work, the sociologist Umut Erel has engaged with the conversion of assets in different spaces and across geographical contexts, showing how cultural assets, including educational and occupational assets, do not easily transcend national borders.[124] This can be observed in the experience of migrants who wish to access national labour markets, which is part of the integration process.

Although research by demographers and economists has shown that attracting migrants is a way to boost national economies and labour forces,[125] accessing work is not always an easy task for migrants. As people migrate, many rely on finding work in another country to financially support themselves. Some manage to continue working in their field of expertise by transferring their various assets, while others attempt to acquire new occupational skills. As refugees are individuals who are forced to migrate, they can face challenges regarding official paperwork that could assist them in securing employment in a new country. This may be due to the loss of documentation or lack of documentation during displacement, which contrasts with individuals who have greater mobility and the ability to travel to their former countries to retrieve the necessary paperwork.

As they often struggle to transfer educational and occupational skills to a new national setting, people who migrate generally experience 'de-skilling' and are in relatively more disadvantaged positions in comparison to 'natives'.[126] This is because there are disparities between their actual skills and the jobs migrants are able to obtain. Their educational and occupational assets are often not recognised, as they were accumulated and embodied in their national settings, where they became a significant part of the way they existed in the world.

Despite the additional challenges refugees may face concerning paperwork, refugees in Sweden are afforded the right to education and work. This being said, the extensive policies and integration assistance provided to refugees with regard to access to the labour force have not necessarily made it possible to 'even out' the initial inequalities between refugees and the rest of the population.[127] If we look at the disparities between migrants' actual skills and the jobs they are able to obtain, we see that they are forced to accept jobs for which they are 'overeducated', leading to the 'devaluation' of their educational assets.[128] Completing education in Sweden, either

[124] Umut Erel, 'Migrating Cultural Capital: Bourdieu in Migration Studies', *Sociology* 44, no. 4 (2010): 642–60.
[125] Héran, 'Demography and Migration'; Philip Martin, 'Economic Aspects of Migration: Philip Martin', in *Migration Theory*, ed. Caroline B. Brettell and James F. Hollifield, 4th ed. (New York: Routledge, 2023), 130–60.
[126] Barry R. Chiswick and Paul W. Miller, 'The International Transferability of Immigrants' Human Capital', *Economics of Education Review* 28, no. 2 (2009): 162–69; Carlsson and Rooth, 'Evidence of Ethnic Discrimination in the Swedish Labor Market Using Experimental Data'.
[127] Valenta and Bunar, 'State Assisted Integration'.
[128] Nordin, 'Immigrants' Returns to Schooling in Sweden'; Dahlstedt, 'Occupational Match: Over- and Undereducation Among Immigrants in the Swedish Labor Market'; Andersson and Osman, 'Recognition of Prior Learning as a Practice for Differential Inclusion and Exclusion of Immigrants in Sweden'.

during compulsory school-age or as an adult, has a significant impact on the types of job immigrants do and the wages they earn.[129]

These findings demonstrate that refugees may be employed in jobs where they are 'over qualified' and that they may experience wage disadvantages. It also highlights the emphasis on academic qualifications in Sweden in terms of finding a job that matches a person's educational background.

These findings are unsurprising considering the structures of each nation state regarding the national language, labour market and education system. Returning to Erel's findings, we know that migrants engage with dominant institutions and migrant networks in order to validate their existing assets and accumulate new assets. She argues that migrants develop bargaining activities with institutions and people in relation to their skills, rather than looking for a 'fit'.[130]

This underscores the role of social ties for migrants in findings jobs, which is well established in the migration literature.[131] We know, for instance, that when it is not possible to mobilise educational and occupational assets, or when these assets are lacking, social ties can function as a key to accumulating such resources.[132] Migrants use networks to transfer and accumulate the economic, social and cultural resources and gain national recognition.[133] Social networks, including membership in various social organisations, are crucial for migrants, not only to re-validate their resources into different types of capital,[134] but also to access skilled work.[135] Therefore, migrant networks are valued and can function as social capital in contexts of migration.[136]

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[129] Nordin, 'Immigrants' Returns to Schooling in Sweden'. In fact, the average salary earned by members of stigmatised adult immigrant groups is known to be lower than that earned by native-born workers. See Alireza Behtoui and Anders Neergaard, 'Social Capital and Wage Disadvantages among Immigrant Workers', *Work, Employment and Society* 24 (2010): 761–79.

[130] Erel, 'Migrating Cultural Capital'.

[131] For a discussion on social capital and its analysis among immigrants in Sweden, see Alireza Behtoui, 'Social Capital, Immigrants and Their Descendants – The Case of Sweden', in *Revisiting Migrant Networks: Migrants and Their Descendants in Labour Markets*, ed. Elif Keskiner, Michael Eve, and Louise Ryan, IMISCOE Research Series (IMIS) (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2022), 121–38.

[132] Maja Cederberg, 'Embodied Cultural Capital and the Study of Ethnic Inequalities', in *Migrant Capital: Networks, Identities and Strategies*, ed. Louise Ryan, Umut Erel, and Alessio D'Angelo, Migration, Diasporas and Citizenship (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

[133] Louise Ryan, Umut Erel, and Alessio D'Angelo, eds., *Migrant Capital: Networks, Identities and Strategies*, Migration, Diasporas and Citizenship (MDC) (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

[134] Alireza Behtoui and Anders Neergaard, 'Social Capital and the Educational Achievement of Young People in Sweden', *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 37, no. 7 (2016): 947–69.

[135] Louise Ryan, 'Migrants' Social Networks and Weak Ties: Accessing Resources and Constructing Relationships Post-Migration', *The Sociological Review* 59, no. 4 (2011): 707–24; Louise Ryan, 'Looking for Weak Ties: Using a Mixed Methods Approach to Capture Elusive Connections', *The Sociological Review* 64, no. 4 (2016): 951–69.

[136] Floya Anthias, 'Ethnic Ties: Social Capital and the Question of Mobilisability', *The Sociological Review* 55, no. 4 (2007): 788–805; Ryan, Erel, and D'Angelo, *Migrant Capital*. Not all social ties function as capital when migrating. See Maja Cederberg, 'Migrant Networks and beyond: Exploring the Value of the Notion of Social Capital for Making Sense of Ethnic Inequalities', *Acta Sociologica* 55, no. 1 (2012): 59–72. Having ethnic ties, for instance, can become a source of comfort, support and control to limit the exclusion many migrant groups are facing. For instance, refugees can become a part of an exiled political community and

In the case of Syrian refugees in Sweden, we know that some of the strategies used to access the labour force are building on social networks and cultural skills, such as learning typical Swedish social and cultural values, manners and language skills.[137] Despite facing challenges, refugees manage to build on the various assets and skills they acquired in Syria, leverage their embodied skills by turning them into assets that can be recognised in Sweden and access the social positions they occupied prior to migration. It is therefore argued that refugees are able to manage and overcome their constraints by building on their education and social networks.[138] In some cases, this can also be established by moving into an existing ethnic enclave where migrants can create new job opportunities or reproduce their previous occupational status.[139]

Although such findings shift the perspective away from depictions of refugees as powerless and instead help us see the 'power of refugees' through integration,[140] they are surprising considering the literature presented above, which typically addresses the struggles refugees face and the 'devaluation' of their skills and assets.

When these findings are applied to immigrant groups that are not refugees and not related to research on immigrants, who are instead referred to as 'internationals' or 'mobile families', we see that even highly skilled or internationally 'mobile' middle class families can struggle with their resources in hand, as they are often not recognised in other national settings.[141]

Leonora Dugonjic-Rodwin has shown that crossing borders and benefitting from class privilege is possible for those whose status enables them to profit from it, such as those who 'become' international and can transcend their immigrant 'identity'.[142] However, even though certain assets can transcend national borders and become

active in political organisations as a coping mechanism against downward mobility. 'Ethnic specific bonding networks' are not exclusive to migrants who are disadvantaged but are also available to those who are highly skilled, as a way to reinforce cultural and linguistic identity. See Ryan, Louise, and Jon Mulholland. "'Wives Are the Route to Social Life": An Analysis of Family Life and Networking amongst Highly Skilled Migrants in London'. *Sociology* 48, no. 2 (2014): 251–67. Yet again, this does not necessarily mean that these social ties correspond to social capital. See Anthias, 'Ethnic Ties'.

[137] Dalia Abdelhady and Akram Al Ariss, 'How Capital Shapes Refugees' Access to the Labour Market: The Case of Syrians in Sweden', *The International Journal of Human Resource Management* 34, no. 16 (2023): 3144–68.

[138] Ibid.

[139] Michael Jones-Correa, 'Different Paths: Gender, Immigration and Political Participation', *International Migration Review* 32, no. 2 (1998): 326–49.

[140] Abdelhady and Al Ariss, 'How Capital Shapes Refugees' Access to the Labour Market', 3164.

[141] Claire Maxwell, Miri Yemini, and Mary Gutman, 'National Cultural Capital as out of Reach for Transnationally Mobile Israeli Professional Families – Making a "Return Home" Fraught', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 50, no. 10 (2022): 2667–87; Jennifer Waddling, Emil Bertilsson, and Mikael Palme, 'Struggling with Capital: A Bourdieusian Analysis of Educational Strategies among Internationally Mobile Middle Class Families in Sweden', *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education* 40, no. 5 (2019): 697–716.

[142] Leonora Dugonjic-Rodwin, 'Becoming "International": Transgressing National Identity as a Ritual for Class Identification', *Ethnography* 25, no. 2 (2022): 17.

international, the assumption that assets are solely cumulative lacks nuance.[143] In her article, Erel criticises the tendency to reify cultural assets in 'rucksack approaches'.[144] Following this argument, it is problematic to treat cultural assets (including educational assets and occupational assets) as solely cumulative assets that naturally increase over time.[145] Aspects such as citizenship, work and social networks are crucial for different resources to be recognised in other national contexts.[146] It is therefore important to have a critical approach to the accumulation of capital in contexts of migration, as has been empirically shown by Dugonjic-Rodwin and Ivica Mladenović.[147] Accordingly, it should be remembered that capital, as Anne-Catherine Wagner once stated, 'circulates and accumulates, but it can also deteriorate.'[148] This has clearly been shown in a previous study that presents the case of migrant physicians in Sweden, whose embodied occupational assets and skills weakened due to the long waiting period for academic qualifications to be validated.[149]

Based on the literature discussed so far, it is not the possession of different types of educational and occupational assets that matters for migrants, but their composition, mobilisation, value and recognition. The value of these types of qualifications varies 'according to the worlds in which they find themselves, the forms of domination that prevail there, and the other resources that may be available and legitimate there'.[150] The findings presented so far discussed further also suggest that bringing carrying educational and occupational assets into national labour markets can potentially hinder job opportunities within highly national structures. They also partially clarify the reasons refugees may encounter barriers in transferring their educational and occupational skills when engaging with adult education programmes in Sweden, particularly if these skills are not valued as they are among 'international' recruits, expatriates, or civil servants, but are rather instead devalued as 'immigrants' skills.

In the analysis of the case of Kurdish parents in Sweden, I rely on research illustrating the struggles associated with transferring educational and occupational assets from one national context to another. Furthermore, I have explored how

[143] Umut Erel and Louise Ryan, 'Migrant Capitals: Proposing a Multi-Level Spatio-Temporal Analytical Framework', *Sociology* 53, no. 2 (2019): 246–63; Garance Clément et al., 'Migration and Inequalities: The Importance of Social Class. An Interview with Anne-Catherine Wagner', trans. Oliver Waine, *Metropolitics*, 2021.
[144] Erel, 'Migrating Cultural Capital'.
[145] Erel and Ryan, 'Migrant Capitals'.
[146] Ibid.; Erel, 'Migrating Cultural Capital'.
[147] Leonora Dugonjic-Rodwin and Ivica Mladenović, 'Transnational Educational Strategies during the Cold War: Students from the Global South in Socialist Yugoslavia, 1961–91', in *Socialist Yugoslavia and the Non-Aligned Movement*, ed. Paul Stubbs (McGill-Queen's University Press, 2023), 331–59.
[148] Clément et al., 'Migration and Inequalities'.
[149] Ciziri and Lidegran, 'Long Time in the Waiting Room'.
[150] Delphine Serre and Anne-Catherine Wagner, 'For a Relational Approach to Cultural Capital: A Concept Tested by Changes in the French Social Space', *The Sociological Review* 63, no. 2 (2015): 445–46.

different backgrounds and margins of freedom shape the way parents improvise and adapt their acquired skills and knowledge from Syria to Sweden.

Family encounters with education: the significance of social backgrounds

In studying the experience and responses of families to their integration in light of their social histories, the families' backgrounds were significant points of departure in my analysis. Acknowledging that education is central to state integration policies, research concerning family background and family assets that significantly affect experiences with education are highly relevant. This experience includes parents' educational aspirations for their children, strategies used when selecting schools, parental involvement in a child's education, children's educational outcomes and several other factors.

I will present two sub sections regarding families' encounters with education. In the first section, I focus on research on national contexts, which illustrates different practices in education in relation to class. Although this is not the focus of this study, it enriches the second section, where I discuss how parents relate to education in the context of migration. This reveals how these two strains of literature (within national and migration contexts) move in parallel in their findings as they highlight social class divisions and emphasise the significance of class backgrounds in relation to education, which are topics that are rarely discussed in cases of forced migration.

In national contexts

Pierre Bourdieu, a sociologist whose theoretical concepts have been useful for this study (see Chapter 3), showed that family background and assets, which are not only economic but also cultural, shape educational experience and outcomes, and reinforce social inequalities. Mainly known for his contributions in studies of the upper classes, where he has explored the way power and domination are exercised, he has argued that the upper classes possess assets that can be used to solidify their status, impose their cultural norms and values, and perpetuate their dominance over other social groups. In his view, education systems are significant mechanisms, where social and cultural classes are (re)produced within societies.[151]

In other words, based on his works, we know that an individual's social background and experience shape their behaviour, perceptions and educational

[151] Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron, *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*, 2nd ed., Theory, Culture & Society, trans. Richard Nice (London: Sage Publications, 1990).

outcomes, and that educational institutions perpetuate social inequalities by transmitting cultural assets, habits and norms that favour certain social classes, that is the dominant classes.[152] Family interactions with education would, accordingly, be shaped by and subsequently shape family's social class.

Thus, families from higher social classes navigate the educational system, and leverage their different assets. They employ educational strategies that not only impact school choices, but also cultural practices and tastes to establish social distinction from other social classes.[153]

Extensive welfare policies following the Second World War (especially the comprehensive school reform in the 1960s) made Sweden an 'exceptional case' for its 'egalitarian' education system, and the applicability of Bourdieu's results can thus be questioned in Swedish cases.[154] However, a large sociological study in Sweden explored whether class positions matters in an 'egalitarian society' and looked at different aspects of class, such as education, income differences and occupation, lifestyle and consumptions, cultural interests and political ideologies, concluding that class position still plays a significant role in modern Sweden.[155] Furthermore, studies in the sociology of education have shown that Bourdieu's findings are relevant in the Swedish case.[156] Following Donald Broady's work, several scholars looked at elite education in Sweden as a way to study social and cultural reproduction. These studies can help us understand the existing differences in families' interactions with the education system as they provide a behind the scenes look at Sweden's egalitarian system.

For example, studies have confirmed that although elite tracks are more or less hidden within the education system, their existence is evident.[157] When we look at studies of the upper classes, we see a strong emphasis on educational assets that can

[152] Marxist works by sociologists such as Paul Willis, who built upon Antonio Gramsci, discussed this as well. I mention his work in the following pages.
[153] Pierre Bourdieu, *The State Nobility. Elite Schools in the Field of Power*, trans. Lauretta C. Clough (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 263–300; Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (London, New York: Routledge, 2010), pt. 3.
[154] Jan O. Jonsson, 'Education, Social Mobility, and Social Reproduction in Sweden: Patterns and Changes', *International Journal of Sociology* 23, no. 1 (1993): 3–30.
[155] Maria Oskarson, Mattias Bengtsson, and Tomas Berglund, eds., *En fråga om klass: Levnadsförhållanden, livsstil, politik*, SOM-Institutets Bokserie 49 (Liber, 2010).
[156] Donald Broady, *Sociologi Och Epistemologi: Om Pierre Bourdieus Författarskap Och Den Historiska Epistemologin*. (Stockholm: HLS, 1991); Elisabeth Hultqvist and Ida Lidegran, 'The Use of "Cultural Capital" in Sociology of Education in Sweden', *International Studies in Sociology of Education* 30, no. 3 (2021): 349–56.
[157] Mikael Börjesson, Donald Broady, and Mikael Palme, '"In Our School We Have Students of All Sorts". Mapping the Space of Elite Education in a Seemingly Egalitarian System', in *Researching Elites and Power: Theory, Methods, Analyses*, ed. Francois Denord, Mikael Palme, and Bertrand Réau, vol. 16, Methodos Series (Springer International Publishing, 2020), 179–91; Ida Lidegran, 'Utbildningskapital: Om hur det alstras, fördelas och förmedlas' (Doctoral thesis in the Sociology of Education and Culture, Uppsala, Department of Education, Uppsala University, 2009).

lead to admission to selective institutions and disciplines.[158] Accordingly, elite study programmes result in the production and reproduction of a dominant culture through the educational system as the programmes exhibit distinct associations with culture and cultural practices, a phenomenon that can best be understood in connection to the professional careers for which they prepare.[159] This is crystallised in the dispositions of students who develop a 'natural willingness' due to the influence of their parents and whose selective educational choices lead to higher education assets.[160] Students' strategies in higher education can in fact be interpreted through their parents' intense educational investments, thus enabling the parents to establish intergenerational transmission through a family mode of reproduction.[161]

Given that education systems reinforce the existing social hierarchies in societies and that this is also the case in Sweden, the studies discussed below are even more relevant for this study.

At the other end of the spectrum, Paul Willis' ethnographic work *Learning to Labour* showed that working class children resisted formal education, as they did not believe it served them. He argued that working class children leaned towards manual labour, rejecting academic or white-collar professions. By failing to recognise cultural differences and integrate working class children, the education system thus reproduced social inequalities in society. The study showed that working class children ended up in working class jobs, thus establishing a distinct working class identity and culture. Willis' study revealed that among groups for whom upward mobility through education was not possible, there was a culture that was resistant to schooling; we may ask how this is relevant in today's world.[162]

After studying British working class boys and their rebellion against capitalist schooling, Willis became known for the resistance theory. Yet, scholars have also claimed that resistance theory does not depart from the theory of reproduction, rather it is a form of it.[163] Therefore, it is a great example to consider in exploring resistance among social groups whose aspirations may be poorly served by the

[158] Börjesson, Broady, and Palme, '"In Our School We Have Students of All Sorts". Mapping the Space of Elite Education in a Seemingly Egalitarian System'; Andreas Melldahl, 'Modes of Reproduction in the Swedish Economic Elite: Education Strategies of the Children of the Top One Per Cent', *European Societies* 20, no. 3 (2018): 424–52; Mikael Börjesson, 'Sociala kartor över utbildningslandskapet: Installationsföreläsning, professuren i utbildningssociologi', *Sociologisk Forskning* 53, no. 4 (2016): 421–37.

[159] Mikael Börjesson et al., 'Cultural Capital in the Elite Subfield of Swedish Higher Education', *Poetics* 56 (2016): 15–34.

[160] Lidegran, 'Utbildningskapital: Om hur det alstras, fördelas och förmedlas'.

[161] Melldahl, 'Modes of Reproduction in the Swedish Economic Elite'.

[162] Paul Willis, *Learning to Labour: How Working Class Kids Get Working Class Jobs* (Hampshire: Saxon House, Colombia University Press, 1978).

[163] For a detailed reading on this, see Ken McGrew, 'A Review of Class-Based Theories of Student Resistance in Education: Mapping the Origins and Influence of Learning to Labor by Paul Willis', *Review of Educational Research* 81, no. 2 (2011): 234–66.

prevailing education system. It is also a useful lens when analysing the experiences of Kurds, who are known for their resistance, national struggle and quest to have their language, social identity and cultural identity recognised.

Based on the classic works of researchers such as Bourdieu and Willis, sociologists have repeatedly shown that education reproduces social and cultural inequalities. Inspired by this line of research, sociologists have argued that parents' practices in raising their children and engaging with their children's education differ among different social classes.

The works of Annette Lareau have been highly influential in this field of study. In her ethnographic book, *Unequal Childhoods*, Lareau worked with working class and middle class families in the United States to analyse parents' daily activities, their educational aspirations for their children, the way they pursued these aspirations (such as engagement with extracurricular activities) and experiences within the education system. It could be said that she analysed different parenting styles.

Together with her team, she conducted interviews with African American and white families with children around ten years of age. She identified differences in class practices and found that working class families were characterised by 'natural growth' and middle class families by 'concerted cultivation', where she observed much less relative interaction between parents and children in working class families. She claimed that working class parents were dependent on school and teacher instruction, and parents allowed their children to have more unstructured time with greater independence to manage what they do in their free time In comparison, middle class parents tended to take the lead and have more control over their children's schooling through structured activities and active parental involvement in their children's schedules. In retrospect, the children of working class families often had a lot of free time outside schooling and had more autonomy and family responsibility. The children of middle class families, however, were mainly occupied with extracurricular activities organised by the parents, which, in the long term, was a trait that was valorised by schools and different institutions. In her analysis, she argued that socio-economic class determined practices in terms of children's schooling and therefore their future educational trajectories, regardless of race as an active factor.[164]

In the book *The Colour of Class* edited by Nicola Rollock et al., which looks at black middle class families in the United Kingdom, the authors build on Lareau's findings, highlighting the interplay between race and class. The book shows that the parenting styles often deployed by middle class families do not only serve as a tool for social reproduction, but also as a way to foster strong racial identity and disrupt stereotypes and discrimination. However, regardless of their relative

[164] Annette Lareau, *Unequal Childhoods. Class, Race, and Family Life*, 2nd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011).

position among the middle classes (relatively high economic, cultural, and social assets), parents deal with anxieties and fear related to their schooling choices. The book also emphasises the differences over time regarding experiences with the education system. It shows that first-generation migrant black families placed a lot of trust in schools, which the authors attribute to their unfamiliarity with the British school system and institutionalised racism. Over the years and across generations, the book shows that black families experience upward class mobility, inhabit 'white spaces' and may become colour-blind to their social position in British society.[165] Based on these findings, it is significant to acknowledge racial and ethnic indicators in processes of childrearing.

In a more recent work, Lareau et al. drew on interviews with black American middle class parents and argued that parents were restricted in their school choices due to structural constraints and had to make compromises due to the intersection of racial and class segregation, leading to institutional mistrust and fear of discrimination. The study thus emphasises that families can employ strategies with regard to their children's schooling to strengthen ethnic and racial identity and limit experiences of exclusion. The authors demonstrated that parents preferred schools that were populated by ethnically diverse middle class students. However, regardless of their strategies, parents were unable to meet this aim, as schools with these characteristics were rare. Overall, we see that racial inequality restricts parents, regardless of economic, cultural and social resources.[166]

This reveals the importance of considering Kurdish parents' class backgrounds and their Kurdish identities in relation the way they experience and respond to their children's education in Sweden. Although the above studies provide some insight into the different interactions families of children have with the education system, it is important to expand on the previous literature by including research within migration contexts. Therefore, the following section offers a discussion of encounters with education among families that are geographically mobile.

In migration contexts

Families who experience forced migration are often understudied in terms of their diverse backgrounds and educational experience, with most research focusing on the urgency of integration or related policies. Existing studies have shown that refugees face a number of challenges regarding their children's education. Besides economic

[165] Nicola Rollock et al., *The Colour of Class: The Educational Strategies of the Black Middle Classes* (New York: Routledge, 2014).
[166] Annette Lareau, Elliot B. Weininger, and Catharine Warner-Griffin, 'Structural Constraints and the School Choice Strategies of Black American Middle-Class Parents', *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 42, no. 4 (2021): 490–505.

challenges, language barriers and difficulty understanding and navigating school systems can prevent parents from engaging with their children's schooling.[167]

This being said, education is highly valued among refugee families despite their initial focus on survival.[168] It plays a role 'premised on belief in creating future opportunities'.[169] Parents provide educational support for their children by engaging with their schooling. Many parents therefore express that their children's education is the one thing that cannot fall behind.[170] Among refugee groups, this can lead to 'family pressure' to succeed in education, especially in the case of girls – indicating a gendered expectation or dynamic.[171]

Despite interest among sociologists of education regarding the significance of different assets and how they impact the education of children, refugees have occupied a limited place in the research, as migration has mainly been studied with regard to 'the internationalisation of higher education and consequent global movement of students in higher education.'[172] 'Migration for education' has therefore been a large theme, where the 'reproduction of (dis)advantage' through education has gained attention.[173] In the dominant discourse among sociologists of education, international education serves as a strategy for class distinction, allowing upper and middle class families to convert their economic and cultural assets into transnational capital, thereby contributing to their social reproduction.[174] Families from disadvantaged backgrounds

[167] Alice Bloch and Shirin Hirsch, 'The Educational Experiences of the Second Generation from Refugee Backgrounds', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 43, no. 13 (2017): 2131–48; Max Antony-Newman, 'Parental Involvement of Immigrant Parents: A Meta-Synthesis', *Educational Review* 71, no. 3 (2019): 362–81.

[168] Maria Gandarilla Ocampo et al., 'We Are Here for the Future of Our Kids: Parental Involvement in Refugee Adolescents' Educational Endeavours in the United States', *Journal of Refugee Studies* 34, no. 4 (2021): 4300–4321.

[169] Dryden-Peterson et al., 'The Purposes of Refugee Education', 360.

[170] Dryden-Peterson, 'Refugee Education: A Global Review'; Rebecca Winthrop and Jackie Kirk, 'Learning for a Bright Future: Schooling, Armed Conflict, and Children's Well-Being', *Comparative Education Review* 52, no. 4 (2008): 639–61; Sharif, '"Här i Sverige måste man gå i skolan för att få respekt": Nyanlända ungdomar i den svenska gymnasieskolans introduktionsutbildning'.

[171] Min Zhou and Carl L. Bankston Iii, 'Family Pressure and the Educational Experience of the Daughters of Vietnamese Refugees', *International Migration* 39, no. 4 (2001): 133–51. This study shows that 'family pressure' to succeed in education can lead to higher educational achievement among women due to traditional gender roles, which means that family pressure has a greater effect on the behaviour of young women than men.

[172] Halleli Pinson and Madeleine Arnot, 'Wasteland Revisited: Defining an Agenda for a Sociology of Education and Migration', *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 41, no. 6 (2020): 834.

[173] Johanna L. Waters, 'Geographies of International Education: Mobilities and the Reproduction of Social (Dis)Advantage', *Geography Compass* 6, no. 3 (2012): 123.

[174] See, among many others, Mikael Börjesson, 'Transnationella utbildningsstrategier vid svenska lärosäten och bland svenska studenter i Paris och New York' (Doctoral thesis, Department of Education, Uppsala University, 2005); Johanna L. Waters, 'Transnational Family Strategies and Education in the Contemporary Chinese Diaspora', *Global Networks* 5, no. 4 (2005): 359–77; Anne-Catherine Wagner, 'The Internationalization of Elite Education. Merging Angles of Analysis and Building a Research Object', in *Researching Elites and Power*, vol.16, ed. Francois Denord, Mikael Palme, and Bertrand Réau, Methodos Series (METH), (Springer International Publishing, 2020), 193–200; Pere Ayling, 'International Education and the Pursuit of "Western" Capitals: Middle-Class Nigerian Fathers' Strategies of Class Reproduction',

can also accumulate 'transnational cultural capital' by investing in education abroad, enabling them to overcome their class positions.[175] Becoming 'internationals' can thus enable some individuals to transgress their national identity and become 'cosmopolitan' rather than being labelled as 'immigrants' due to their class privilege.[176] Based on this stream of research, integration discussions often exclude families labelled as 'mobile', 'international', or 'global' as opposed to refugees. These families transcend national identities and are seen as part of a global category where integration is considered irrelevant. This raises the question of whether Syrian Kurdish refugees who come from relatively upper class backgrounds can also transgress their national identities.

In general, these studies have not captured experiences of education in cases of forced migration and cases where education is not primarily used as a means to utilise and reproduce privilege. Due to the limited amount of literature exploring the intersection of refugee family background and refugee interactions with education, research on this theme that does not explicitly focus on refugees provides insights into the experience of families.

These studies indicate that regardless of class background, children's education becomes a compensation strategy for parents, or in other words an investment.[177] This can result in high aspirations among parents, where they encourage their children to 'work with a pen' rather than a blue-collar job.[178] Further, it can result in gendered education experiences, where older sisters may become sources, sharing their financial, cultural and professional resources with their younger siblings.[179]

When migrating to Sweden, refugees become a part of a particular schooling system, as families are allowed to choose which schools they would like to send their children. Therefore, literature on school choice has been a popular theme used to study migrants' encounters with education. In exploring migrants'

British Journal of Sociology of Education 42, no. 4 (2021): 460–74; Leonora Dugonjic-Rodwin, *Le privilège d'une éducation transnationale: Sociologie historique du baccalauréat international*, Le sens social (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2022).

[175] The social reproduction approach is not always evident. In Don Weenink's argument on 'cosmopolitan capital', he showed that families' ambitions to become international and 'global' are not necessarily related to their social class and social reproduction strategies, but are rather related to processes of globalisation where this can be observed among social classes considered to be lower than the upper middle class. See Don Weenink, 'Cosmopolitanism as a Form of Capital: Parents Preparing Their Children for a Globalizing World', *Sociology* 42, no. 6 (2008): 1089–1106. Accordingly, even families from 'disadvantaged class backgrounds' can 'overcome' their disadvantaged class positions by, for example, sending their child to study a year abroad, thus accumulating 'transnational cultural capital'. See Sören Carlson, Jürgen Gerhards, and Silke Hans, 'Educating Children in Times of Globalisation: Class-Specific Child-Rearing Practices and the Acquisition of Transnational Cultural Capital', *Sociology* 51, no. 4 (2017): 749–65.

[176] Dugonjic-Rodwin, 'Becoming "International"', 17.

[177] Susanne Urban, 'University Education as a Compensation Strategy among Second-Generation Immigrants', *International Migration Review* 46, no. 4 (2012): 919–40.

[178] Stéphane Beaud, 'The three sisters and the sociologist: Ethnographic notes on social mobility in a sibling group born to Algerian immigrants', *Idees economiques et sociales*, no. 1 (2014): VII.

[179] Ibid., XIV.

practices of school choice in the highly decentralised school market in Sweden, some scholars have claimed that navigating the school market is not problematic for minorities, but is instead a 'white middle class problem'.[180] In fact, rather than focusing on choosing the 'right school' for their children, migrant families' school choice practices can be adapted to increase the chances of social mobility and eliminate chances of 'othering'.[181] Migrants are therefore 'in an ongoing struggle for recognition'.[182] This can also be observed in the case of parental involvement in children's schooling. In Sweden, parents' engagement in their children's schooling is seen as important, which can result in the exclusion of migrant parents as they are not considered 'ready' for a 'modern Sweden'.[183]

Despite this struggle, it is also possible that families with a relatively higher social class are better able to engage in a child's schooling. Well-educated parents are indeed more likely to devote resources and time to facilitate the educational achievements of their children.[184] In fact, a study has shown that middle class parents may even be able to resist discrimination due to their status as migration.[185] Considering the studies discussed above, it is uncertain whether middle class migrant parents can truly resist discrimination. These studies suggest that the ability to avoid discrimination is based on strategies employed by parents, rather than something parents can simply achieve. The outcome of parental strategies and experience may depend on the characteristics of migrant families, including factors such as whether they are white, their country of origin and whether migration was 'voluntary' or forced.

Therefore, parents who fled to Sweden due to forced migration may not be able to employ the same practices with respect to their children's education. For instance, a highly educated father may not be able to demonstrate the same level of engagement in his children's education if he is no longer working in his professional field after

[180] Nihad Bunar and Anna Ambrose, 'Schools, Choice and Reputation: Local School Markets and the Distribution of Symbolic Capital in Segregated Cities', *Research in Comparative and International Education* 11, no. 1 (2016): 34–51.
[181] Sara Forsberg, 'The Symbolic Gift of Education in Migrant Families and Compromises in School Choice', *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 43, no. 5 (2022): 700–717.
[182] Ibid., 15.
[183] Magnus Dahlstedt, 'Parental Governmentality: Involving "Immigrant Parents" in Swedish Schools', *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 30, no. 2 (2009): 200.
[184] Behtoui and Olsson, 'The Performance of Early Age Migrants in Education and the Labour Market: A Comparison of Bosnia Herzegovinians, Chileans and Somalis in Sweden'; Behtoui and Neergaard, 'Social Capital and the Educational Achievement of Young People in Sweden'; Karolina Barglowski, 'Migrants' Class and Parenting: The Role of Cultural Capital in Migrants' Inequalities in Education', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 45, no. 11 (2019): 1970–87; Olav Nygård, 'Educational Aspirations and Attainments: How Resources Relate to Outcomes for Children of Immigrants in Disadvantaged Swedish Schools' (Doctoral thesis, Linköping, Department of Culture and Society, Linköping University, 2020).
[185] Barglowski, 'Migrants' Class and Parenting'.

migration. The extent to which educational assets are embedded in dispositions when geographical mobility occurs can therefore be a complex issue.

In the case of Syrian Kurds, elaborating on class-related educational practices will clarify what characterises parents' experience with their children's education in Sweden in light of families' class backgrounds, i.e. parents' citizenship status, educational background and occupational background. The studies discussed suggest that parents' class backgrounds may shape their experience and responses in these encounters. Furthermore, the national struggle of Kurds may be expressed in the narratives regarding their children's education in Sweden, where ethnicity and class intersect.

Being a family: relationships and dynamics

Family provides one of the most important contexts for the formation of habitus, and also provides a place where different family members' habitus meet each other and interact or repel. As such, it is not only children who encounter an education system, but the whole family, and this affects both the family and its relationships. Although this study departs from parents' individual habitus, it provides an analysis of Kurdish families through the perspectives and experiences of parents when navigating their own education and their children's education, which is an arena for socialisation for both parents and children. This means that as a family, refugees learn how to become a 'Swedish family' through their interactions with the education system. Otherwise, from the welfare state's point of view, the family relations of refugee families are seen as needing intervention because they do not adhere to Swedish social norms of family relations.[186]

Concerned with the migration of families across different societies, various studies have revealed the changing family dynamics upon migration. To understand what this change can entail for families from Syria that arrive in Sweden, I will provide a brief context on the 'Swedish' family structures that constitutes the social norm. I will then discuss how migration to Sweden can change family dynamics due to the changing roles of its different members.[187] These

[186] Olwig, '"Integration"', 192.

[187] The division of labour among couples has been a prominent theme within family sociology, as different tasks have been attributed to one or the other sex based on social and cultural considerations. See Claude Lévi-Strauss, 'The Family', in *Man, Culture, and Society*, ed. Harry L Shapiro (London: Oxford University Press, 1960), 274–75. For a feminist perspective, see Gayle Rubin, 'The Traffic in Women: Notes on the "Political Economy" of Sex', in *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, ed. Rayna R. Reiter (New York, London: Monthly Review Press, 1975), 157–210; Eleanor Leacock, 'The Changing Family and Lévi-Strauss, or Whatever Happened to Fathers?', *Social Research* 44, no. 2 (1977): 235–59. The symbolic and economic value of the tasks assigned to men and women has led to a gendered division of labour and gender inequality. Despite women's participation in the workforce and the changes in status over time, gender inequalities still persist in many societies. See Richard Breen and Lynn Prince Cooke, 'The Persistence of the Gendered Division of Domestic Labour', *European Sociological Review*

studies inform my analysis in the following chapters as I place the families from Syria within the context provided below.

The definition of a family surely varies across societies. Different societies have their own 'rules' and structures of what constitutes a family and what it entails.[188] When we look at Sweden, the impact of the welfare state and its egalitarian features have made it a popular global example due to the transformative policies introduced in the 1960s and 1970s, including generous parental leave shared between couples, affordable childcare and policies that encourage women's participation in the workforce.[189] Family politics and policies played a central role in constructing 'the Swedish model' that we know today.[190] As gender differences in education and employment weakened over time, the traditional male breadwinner and housewife status vanished in Sweden. This held across social classes influencing the gender dynamics among couples, and the gap between men and women concerning the distribution of domestic work and childcare began to close. The 'gender equal family' was not only related to increasing women's rights, but also men's relative adaptation over time. The role of the father in the family was one of the main focuses in policies of family and gender equality, signalling that fathers must share the responsibility for unpaid labour and childrearing with women.[191] This can be observed between the fairly 'equal' distribution of parental time granted for children's care.[192] Unifying the ideals of equality and togetherness,

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21, no. 1 (2005): 43–57; Felix Bühlmann, Guy Elcheroth, and Manuel Tettamanti, 'The Division of Labour Among European Couples: The Effects of Life Course and Welfare Policy on Value-Practice Configurations', *European Sociological Review* 26, no. 1 (2010): 49–66.

[188] There is a common principle of vision and division as 'family' exists not merely as an objective social category, but also as a subjective social category – both feeding each other. Therefore, anthropologists and sociologists have considered family as a social institution and a realised category, making families units of analysis. See Lévi-Strauss, 'The Family'; Pierre Bourdieu, 'On the Family as a Realized Category', *Theory, Culture & Society* 13, no. 3 (1996): 19–26. The discussion of what makes a family is still relevant today. It is also political in many countries, especially concerning single parents and same-sex couples. Although the unity of family is seen as being in crisis due to the shift from nuclear families to other forms, sociologists have shown how families transform historically and that there is no crisis as such. For reviews on this, see Elizabeth Bortolaia Silva and Carol Smart, eds., *The New Family?* (London: Sage Publications, 1998); Gøsta Esping-Andersen, *Families in the 21st Century* (Stockholm: SNS Förlag, 2016). I will not delve further into the discussions on what constitutes a family here.

[189] Esping-Andersen, *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism*; Åsa Lundqvist, 'Normative Foundations of Nordic Family and Gender Equality Policies: Developments and Challenges', in *Globalizing Welfare* (Cheltenham, Northampton: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2019), 184–98.

[190] Åsa Lundqvist, *Familjen i Den Svenska Modellen* (Umeå: Boréa Bokförlag, 2007). For an English discussion, see Åsa Lundqvist and Christine Roman, 'Construction(s) of Swedish Family Policy, 1930–2000', *Journal of Family History* 33, no. 2 (2008): 216–36.

[191] Lundqvist, 'Normative Foundations of Nordic Family and Gender Equality Policies'.

[192] Esping-Andersen, *Families in the 21st Century*, 40–53. Although gender equity has been established in Sweden concerning the participation of women in education and workforce, and various policies around parental leave, childcare etc., the definition and meaning behind 'gender equality' can impact the arguments described. For example, even though domestic work is shared among couples, the type of work done can have an impact on the reinforcement of gender inequalities. This, however, is not

the progress made in Sweden has caused tension within families with regard to the autonomy of its members.[193]

Further, the role of children in families has historically changed where children have become the focal point of family life over time.[194] In Sweden, children have gained a central role in family lives, which has been reinforced based on parental leave policies that encourage parents to care for their children, take time off work and establish a work-life balance.[195] The central role of children has also been embedded in Sweden's education system through an approach based on a child-centric ethos.[196] Children are encouraged to express their opinions, needs and emotions, which can foster a sense of autonomy and independence. This is not surprising as Sweden, which is known for its social welfare system, has moved towards a greater emphasis on individualism in economic, social and cultural contexts, thus influencing parenting styles and the upbringing of children.[197]

The potential contradiction between Syria and Sweden in terms of gendered roles between couples and childrearing traditions raises questions on how migration to Sweden can change family dynamics, or whether it actually does. Considering that a big number of refugees arriving in Sweden during the last decade have come from the Middle East and African countries,[198] and these families relations can contradict the dominant dynamics in Sweden, parents' encounters with education through their own and their children's education (a significant arena for socialisation) can challenge the family dynamics that existed prior to migration. It has been shown that unfamiliarity with Swedish parenting norms leads to a sense of disempowerment and passivity among parents and a shift in power dynamics between parents and children.[199] I therefore place the Syrian Kurdish families within the literature that has explored the changing roles of men, women and children following migration.

These experiences can be gendered. Men can lack employment, feel powerless and struggle with their identity, while women in Sweden can achieve a better position through opportunities for education, employment, state subsidies and support,

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relevant here, as my aim is to show the common 'Swedish' family structure. I acknowledge that this can change based on social class indicators.

[193] Ulla Björnberg and Anna-Karin Kollind, *Individualism and Families: Equality, Autonomy and Togetherness* (London: Routledge, 2018).

[194] Hugh Cunningham, '"The Century of the Child"?', in *Children and Childhood in Western Society Since 1500*, 2nd ed. (London, New York: Routledge, 2005), 171–201; Philippe Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life* (New York: Vintage, 1965).

[195] Lundqvist and Roman, 'Construction(s) of Swedish Family Policy, 1930–2000'.

[196] Alfred Oftedal Telhaug, Odd Asbjørn Mediås, and Petter Aasen, 'The Nordic Model in Education: Education as Part of the Political System in the Last 50 Years', *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research* 50, no. 3 (2006): 254–55.

[197] Björnberg and Kollind, *Individualism and Families*.

[198] UNHCR, 'Refugee Population by Country or Territory of Origin – Sweden (1994–2023)', 2023.

[199] Zara Baghdasaryan, Elin Lampa, and Fatumo A. Osman, '"Let Us Understand Each Other and Work Together in the Child's Best Interest" – Exploring the Narratives of Newly Arrived Refugee Parents in Sweden', *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* 81 (2021): 234.

liberal legislation and norms, and higher status.[200] It is therefore not surprising that women from Syria stated that life in Sweden is particularly difficult for men from Syria as opposed to women, as Swedish gender norms do not favour men as much as the gender norms in Syria.[201] Such gendered experience can lead men and women to adapt new gender roles, which includes mothering and fathering practices within families.[202] This can even be seen in changing roles of children within the families. As clarified previously, children (especially older sisters) often take more responsibility within the family to share their resources and become 'drivers of mobility.'[203]

Nevertheless, the experience and responses of Kurdish families towards integration in Sweden will not be discussed in terms of how family dynamics change due to cultural differences, which are also gendered. Instead, this study goes beyond such a dichotomy, acknowledging the complexities inherent in migration rather than merely presenting it as a clash between two cultures.[204] The focus thus lies in how integration through encounters with education in Sweden is experienced by families, which indicates a gendered divide according to previous studies.

Intended contributions of the study

In chapters 1 and 2, I have attempted to frame the present study. Accordingly, I identify several contributions that I aim to make with my analysis of Kurdish families from Syria and their experience and responses to state-led integration processes, i.e. education in Sweden.

One of the main contributions I aim to make is to apply a critical approach to the concept of integration. This study takes refugees out of a dominant discourse that portrays them as fuelling a 'migration crisis' and further removes them from a discourse that portrays them as a group who lacks assets, who therefore has to start

[200] Mehrdad Darvishpour, 'Invandrarkvinnor som bryter mönstret: Hur maktförskjutningen inom iranska familjer i Sverige påverkar relationen' (Doctoral thesis, Stockholm, Department of Sociology, Stockholm University, 2003), 185–86.

[201] Bucken-Knapp, Fakih, and Spehar, 'Talking about Integration'. This being said, migrants' femininity and masculinity have been racialised regardless of gender, which can impact experiences with integration in Sweden, as it situates migrants in vulnerable positions socially and culturally. See Fanny Ambjörnsson, 'Svensk, fri och jämställd', in *I en klass för sig: Genus, klass och sexualitet bland gymnasietjejer* (Stockholm: Ordfront förlag, 2004), 239–65; Fataneh Farahani, 'Diasporic Masculinities: Reflections on Gendered, Raced and Classed Displacements', *Nordic Journal of Migration Research* 2, no. 2 (2012): 159.

[202] Darvishpour, 'Invandrarkvinnor som bryter mönstret: Hur maktförskjutningen inom iranska familjer i Sverige påverkar relationen', 187; Farahani, 'Diasporic Masculinities'; Disa Bergnehr, 'Mothering for Discipline and Educational Success: Welfare-Reliant Immigrant Women Talk about Motherhood in Sweden', *Women's Studies International Forum* 54 (2016): 29–37; Disa Bergnehr, 'Adapted Fathering for New Times: Refugee Men's Narratives on Caring for Home and Children', *Journal of Family Studies* 28, no. 3 (2022): 934–49.

[203] Beaud, 'The three sisters and the sociologist', XIV.

[204] Farahani, *Gender, Sexuality, and Diaspora*, chap. An Epilogue: Inside Looking Out/Outside Looking In.

from scratch. Considering Sayad's contribution, where the *émigré* is included in the analysis, I study Kurds based on their social backgrounds and history.[205] This allows me to examine the extent to which integration presents challenges and disruptions to the history, traditions, ways of living, feelings, actions and thinking of Kurdish refugees.

In other words, by highlighting the role of national education systems in the processes of *social integration*, I do not solely analyse migrants' experience based on their 'social suffering' but show that they are embedded in the broader social context that exists beyond individuals. I therefore contribute to the existing literature by moving beyond the 'State thought' that defines migrants as 'non-national' and explore their 'suffering' based on the structural possibilities and constraints they face. Furthermore, this study contributes to the literature that looks at refugees and education. This is an area that has not been studied extensively, where the existing studies have mainly applied a policy lens that lacks a historical perspective or an approach that focuses solely on the 'suffering of refugees'.

In addition to historicising refugees, I break from the common understanding by approaching refugees as any other group who migrates, including studies on upper classes and elites, by maintaining a dialogue that includes that body of literature. This is not to disregard the exclusivity that refugees hold due to their forced migration, rather, it is to bring attention to their relevance in studies of globalisation, transnationalism, internationalism, cosmopolitanism or any other phenomenon which is often dominated by literature on the upper classes or student mobility.

The literature on family encounters with education, social class and social backgrounds includes clear indicators of differentiation. I aim to contribute to the discussions within these studies with the case of refugee families, as they have not gained much attention despite their increasing numbers all around the world.

Furthermore, looking particularly at parents' encounters with adult education, I contribute to the discussions on globalisation and internationalisation by studying educational and occupational assets and skills, exploring what happens in cases of migration. If we look at a comparison between forced migrants and highly skilled immigrants in particular, we know that the former group is 'harder' to integrate.[206] The rhetorical question here, which also challenges these categories, is whether there are no 'highly skilled' refugees, and why they are hard to integrate. Is it the weight of forced migration that makes integration difficult, or is there more to explore?

For refugees, work is not only a means to secure an economic foundation and gain access to the wider Swedish society, it is also a way for refugees to assert themselves as people worthy of respect and regain their social identity within their family.[207]

[205] Sayad, *The Suffering of the Immigrant*.
[206] Bevelander and Hollifield, 'Managing Migration in Modern Welfare States'.
[207] Olwig, '"Integration"', 193.

Therefore, looking at parents' experience with adult education programmes can generate significant information on how family dynamics are impacted as parents face certain challenges concerning their social identity within their families.

Furthermore, I aim to make several contributions with regard to the exclusivity of the Kurdish and Swedish cases. Within Kurdish studies, Kurds have often been analysed based on their diaspora, national identities and struggles related to ethnic oppression. This study contributes to the existing literature by bringing the different backgrounds of the Kurdish people to the centre of the analysis rather than solely focusing on their 'Kurdishness'.

Finally, considering that Sweden has received a wave of refugee families from Middle East over the past decade, this study aims to contribute to the ongoing discussions of integration and the policies that are implemented to 'achieve' this.

Overall, I attempt to bridge domains, such as the sociology of education, the sociology of migration, and to some extent, the sociology of ethnicity and the sociology of family.

CHAPTER 3

Theoretical concepts

Refugees are often stripped of their histories and their existence is reduced to their present lives. In my analysis of the specific case in this study and my attempt to recapture the social histories of refugees, I was inspired by the sociological works of Abdelmalek Sayad. By examining how refugee parents experience and respond to their own education and that of their children in light of their histories, which are an inherent part of them, this study employs Pierre Bourdieu's analytical framework, particularly his concept of habitus, which acknowledges the extent to which the past lives on in the present in the form of dispositions. Furthermore, treating education as a tool for social integration, this chapter provides a theoretical discussion on integration outside its migratory context. In this way, I aim to break with the predominant 'receiving society' view on the integration of refugees.

Habitus and the *émigré*

Abdelmalek Sayad has contributed to the field of migration by criticising the fact that there is only one perspective on the integration of immigrants, which focuses on the receiving countries and reduces immigrants to a 'problem.' According to Sayad, the migrant is an *émigré* before becoming an *immigré*. Studying the *émigré* allows a departure from the one-sided approach critiqued by Sayad, thereby deepening our understanding of social belonging. It is therefore crucial to acknowledge the total trajectory of the immigrants, that is, including their emigrant condition in the analysis.[208] When I refer to Syrian Kurds as *émigrés,* it is not to analyse the consequences of their departure from Syria. Rather, to consider the context of emigration is a way for me to reconstruct their lives before the war. This reconstruction, which includes their individual, family and social background as well as the larger political context, is what I refer to as their social histories.

As refugees adapt to their new national setting, they are part of a dynamic process that often involves negotiating between their pre-migration state (be it social status or occupational status) and the new setting. Experience of the transition and integration to a new setting differ depending on the degree of

[208] Sayad, *The Suffering of the Immigrant*, 3–4.

rupture, which is often implicit in studies of migration. As previous studies have shown, refugees are mainly studied from the perspective of their integration in their new setting and the degree to which they struggle or succeed. This study makes the implicit transition from one country to another explicit, thus shedding light on how the process of transition and integration is experienced by Kurdish families from Syria.

Understanding Sayad partly requires an understanding of Pierre Bourdieu, even though he did not address migration as a social phenomenon. The two sociologists worked closely together in Algeria to study the consequences of French colonisation.[209] This collaborative work was the origin for some of Bourdieu's main concepts. While Sayad continued his work and studied Algerian immigrants in France, Bourdieu extended his focus beyond Algerian society's encounter with colonisation. Bourdieu's early years in Algeria (1950s) as an ethnographer shaped his sociological perspective and led to the development of the notion of habitus, which I use to analyse individuals (parents) and Kurds as a social group in light of them as *émigrés* and their emigration context.

Following his studies on wartime Algeria with Sayad, Bourdieu has theorised habitus as 'a product of history.'[210] This includes individual, family and social histories, which are all 'internalised as a second nature.'[211] In this quote, 'internalisation' is common sociological jargon for what Bourdieu considers as the central question of social science: the correspondence between social and mental structures, i.e. how the former express the latter. According to Bourdieu, once an individual's history is internalised, it is no longer remembered as the history it once was. Instead, it is perceived as a personal characteristic or trait, or as he nicely puts it as 'second nature'.[212]

Furthermore, habitus is the embodied form of capital. Bourdieu mainly identified four forms of capital, namely economic (money, property, wealth), cultural (education, mannerisms, language mastery), social (networks, memberships, alliances) and symbolic capital, which is recognised and can be 'exchanged' in other fields – which we can refer to as prestige. Although Bourdieu viewed economic capital as the most privileged as it is 'the medium into which any other acquisition can be reconverted,'[213] he stated that cultural capital is the only form of capital that does not have to justify its existence as it is part of nature,

[209] For the best documented work on their collaboration, see Amín Pérez, *Bourdieu and Sayad Against Empire: Forging Sociology in Anticolonial Struggle*, trans. Andrew Brown (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2023).
[210] Pierre Bourdieu, *Habitus and Field: General Sociology, Volume 2: Lectures at the Collège de France (1982–1983)*, trans. Peter Collier (Cambridge, Medford: Polity, 2020), 124.
[211] Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, 56.
[212] Pierre Bourdieu, *Pascalian Meditations*, trans. Richard Nice (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000).
[213] Pierre Bourdieu, *Forms of Capital: General Sociology, Volume 3: Lectures at the Collège de France (1983–1984)*, trans. Peter Collier (Cambridge, Medford: Polity, 2021), 161.

i.e. second nature, or habitus.[214] However, the kind of migration that entails international mobility, i.e. beyond a national field where that capital has been acquired and also recognised, questions the legitimacy and thereby the existence of the acquired capital.

This study does not address whether the different assets parents possess constitute capital. Instead, I analyse how these are embodied as habitus. For my analysis, I consider families' economic assets in Syria in the form of money, property such as houses, cars, land, investments, and debts. I refer to this when relevant in the analysis. That being said, cultural assets play a larger role in this study. It is important to highlight the different forms of cultural assets: its incorporated state (an embodied asset, a form of 'cultivated habitus' such as accents, gestures, body language), its objectified state in the form of cultural goods (books, musical instruments, artworks), and its institutional state (in the form of titles, credentials, and certificates.). Particularly, the incorporated state related to the parents' education and occupation, which can also exist in a symbolic form and takes considerable amount of time to acquire, is central to my analysis of their habitus.[215]

Based on the definitions above, habitus captures individual history and shows how it is embodied by assets, which fundamentally shapes present dispositions. Moreover, habitus inherently contains a margin of freedom within the space of possibilities that it provides, despite the structural constraints it imposes. Following Bourdieu, the concept of habitus allows us to place the subject at the centre of our analysis without supposing that the subject is free from any objective structures.

Referring to different dimensions of individual social identities, I delineate particular aspects of the emigrated habitus that are relevant in analysing the experience and responses of parents to integration in Sweden. These are their citizenship status, educational level and occupational background, social contacts, spoken languages, gender, family structure and composition (number of members, age and gender), and the sentiments associated with parents' Kurdish background in Syria.

Based on these characteristics, habitus has allowed me to analyse the extent to which the transition from Syria to Sweden is experienced (referring to parents' forced encounter with their own and their children's education) and to study how parents respond to integration in Sweden, considering their margin of freedom. For example, habitus has allowed me to observe how and why parents (and therefore families) manage their new setting differently by employing new strategies to adapt to Sweden. Furthermore, it has enabled me to observe how people's perceptions and daily practices are challenged in the integration process. After all, habitus is exposed to changes that need to take place for the individual to integrate into a new national setting.

[214] Ibid., 3:171.
[215] Ibid., 3:156–69.

This brings me to the notion of *strategy*, which is a derived part of habitus. The notion of strategy represents 'a constant invention, an improvisation that is absolutely necessary in order for one to adapt to situations that are infinitely varied.'[216] In considering parents' margin of freedom, I will analyse how they shape the strategies they use in encounters related to their own education and their children's education, despite the structural constraints they may face in Sweden.

Bourdieu's definition of reproduction strategies includes, among other things, educational strategies, marriage strategies, inheritance strategies and economic strategies, which are essentially aimed at maintaining and possibly improving a person's position within a social field.[217] The practices and strategies individuals and families use to reproduce their social positions are founded in habitus who navigates the field that consists of space of possibilities. This does not suggest that strategies are a result of rational calculation or strategic intent, rather they are products of habitus.

As summarised by Gisele Sapiro, the notion of strategy refers to 'the extent to which agents are able to improvise according to the exterior constraints they must contend with and to their dispositions.' Accordingly, she continues, 'the concept of strategy aims to describe the *encounter* between a social trajectory and a space of possibilities. This trajectory is largely determined by an individual's habitus'[218] and the ability to improvise according to the 'new' exterior constraints.

Indeed, habitus is a concept that refers to individuals, and no individual is the same. However, it is important to emphasise the collective aspect of habitus (i.e. a collective identity), especially given the essential role it plays in analysing the Kurdish population. According to Bourdieu, 'different conditions of existence produce different habitus',[219] yet 'there are classes of habitus, in so far as there are classes of social conditioning.'[220] He essentially points out that individuals belonging to the same social class or who share similar social conditions may develop similar practices and dispositions. Therefore, a class habitus, (where people from the same social class perceive and navigate the social world relatively more similarly compared to people from different social classes),[221] a national habitus (the embodiment of a national identity)[222] or a particular occupational habitus may exist.[223]

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[216] Pierre Lamaison and Pierre Bourdieu, 'From Rules to Strategies: An Interview with Pierre Bourdieu', *Cultural Anthropology* 1, no. 1 (1986): 112–13.
[217] Bourdieu, *The State Nobility. Elite Schools in the Field of Power*, 272–74.
[218] Gisele Sapiro, 'Field Theory', in *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences*, ed. James D. Wright (Oxford: Elsevier, 2015), 141. [My italics]
[219] Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 166.
[220] Bourdieu, *Habitus and Field*, 2:30.
[221] Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, 60; Bourdieu, *Distinction*.
[222] Norbert Elias, *The Germans: Power Struggles and the Development of Habitus in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, ed. Michael Schröter (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 2.
[223] Such as 'peasant habitus', which was studied by Bourdieu and Sayad in their works in Algeria. See Pierre Bourdieu and Abdelmalek Sayad, *Uprooting: The Crisis of Traditional Agriculture in Algeria*, ed. Paul A. Silverstein, trans. Susan Emanuel (Cambridge, Medford: Polity Press, 2020).

In sum, it is clear that the relationship between habitus and the *émigré* includes an important historical dimension. In studying parents' experience and responses to integration in Sweden through their habitus, this study acknowledges that refugees are products of their own history. As a result, habitus as a concept is useful in my analysis and is reflected in various terms, such as social background and origin, social histories (of parents), acquired skills and knowledge, encounter, experience, strategies, *émigré*, capacity to improvise and adapt, various practices (i.e. educational and occupational), individual and collective identity, and dispositions.

The war between dispositions

At times, habitus may experience a *hysteresis* effect, or in other words a cleavage (*habitus clivé)*, which highlights the disruption, thus causing a 'mismatch' with the social space in which it was formed.[224] We find these discussions in Bourdieu's early works.

As Bourdieu showed in the Algerian case, war created a crisis where new capital emerged and field disruption took place, thus challenging longstanding cultural dispositions.[225] As Sapiro recalls from Bourdieu's writing, the discrepancy between Algerian workers' dispositions and the capitalist mode of production imposed by colonialism evoked the existence of a cleaved habitus which, as stated by Bourdieu generates 'all kinds of contradictions and tensions.'[226] In the context of migration, these contradictions and tensions may be observed because of the 'cleavage between two cultures'.[227]

In the case of refugees, a hysteresis effect can be detected as they experience forced migration which in itself leads to disruption and change due to geographic mobility. Especially in the case of this study, the environment refugees actually encounter is radically different from the one to which they are 'objectively adjusted.'[228] According to Sayad, this relates to the 'misrecognition' migrants experience during their social transformation as they 'integrate'. He elaborates on this notion as follows:

[224] Cheryl Hardy, 'Hysteresis', in *Pierre Bourdieu: Key Concepts*, ed. Michael Grenfell, (Stocksfield: Acumen, 2008), 139.
[225] Pierre Bourdieu, *Algeria 1960: The Disenchantment of the World, The Sense of Honour, The Kabyle House or The World Reversed*, trans. Richard Nice, Studies in Modern Capitalism (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979); Bourdieu and Sayad, Uprooting; Hardy, 'Hysteresis'.
[226] Gisele Sapiro, 'Habitus Clivé', in *Dictionnaire international Bourdieu*, ed. Gisele Sapiro (Paris: CNRS, 2020), 805–6; Pierre Bourdieu, *Science of Science and Reflexivity*, trans. Richard Nice (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 111.
[227] Sapiro, 'Habitus Clivé'.
[228] Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, 62.

> *Hysteresis* is an inevitable factor here [meaning in the 'integration of the whole'], as it takes time to complete profound social transformations which involve society's whole being, as is the case with integration. If such social transformations are to be completed, there must also be a relative misrecognition, a relative collective blindness.[229]

Based on Sayad's quote, three points can be emphasised with regard to the relationship between habitus clivé and integration. First, migration entails a social transformation for refugees, and *hysteresis* is an inevitable part of such a social transformation and the subsequent integration process. Second, time plays a critical role, as the disruption and transformation of habitus require time due to its deeply ingrained and internalised nature. Third, for integration to happen, 'there must also be a relative misrecognition'.

With forced migration, there is a high risk of a loss of position, power and wealth linked to hysteresis.[230] This indeed accentuates that hysteresis can be experienced at a personal level and cause 'social suffering'.[231] In relation to Kurdish refugees, I discuss the 'misrecognition' or 'mismatch' they experience throughout the empirical chapters. I do so by emphasising the social and cultural values families have attached to their habitus, thereby going beyond the limited usage of the habitus clivé 'concept', which has later been studied solely as a consequence of social mobility and its 'emotional imprint', thus conforming to Bourdieu's description during his self-analysis.[232]

To put it in other words, habitus is indeed 'endlessly transformed' because it is 'a product of social conditionings'.[233] Migrating from Syria to Sweden presupposes a change in social conditions. Furthermore, migration can cause 'former' dispositions associated with habitus to be challenged due to the 'cleavage between two cultures'.[234] Based on Bourdieu's self-analysis of his social mobility, some might claim that the cleaved habitus presupposes a total disconnection from a 'former' habitus, as if habitus clivé were solely a product of total rupture. To me, disruption (which is what essentially creates the cleavage) is different from total disconnection. Based on this thought, I come back to this 'concept' in my concluding chapter to reflect on how refugees' integration in Sweden can reveal a process of *clivé in the making* due to their experience with misrecognition.

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[229] Sayad, *The Suffering of the Immigrant*, 222.
[230] Hardy, 'Hysteresis', 148.
[231] This has been discussed by Sayad along with various sociologists. See Pierre Bourdieu et al., *The Weight of the World: Social Suffering in Contemporary Society*, trans. Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999).
[232] Sam Friedman, 'Habitus Clivé and the Emotional Imprint of Social Mobility', *The Sociological Review* 64, no. 1 (2016): 129–47.
[233] Pierre Bourdieu, *In Other Words: Essays Toward a Reflexive Sociology*, trans. Matthew Adamson (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 116.
[234] Sapiro, 'Habitus Clivé'.

Before finalising this chapter, I offer a discussion of the theoretical view of integration used in this study, which includes an understanding of integration as a process that indicates a relative (dis)integration.

Social integration and (dis)integration

To bring refugees' social histories to the fore and analyse the extent to which their past guides their experience and responses to integration, this study treats integration as a process of adaptation shaped by parents' individual habitus as well as the new possibilities and constraints they encounter after migration. Accordingly, I explore the experience and responses of parents to their own and their children's education, which is central to state-led integration policies in Sweden.

Delving into the integration of migrants as a sociological process, this study removes their integration from its migratory context and situates it within a larger social context.[235] This shift of focus not only diverts attention away from its politically loaded understanding, but also from the 'receiving society' point of view that is dominant in studies of refugees' integration.

Against this backdrop, analysing refugees' experience of integration as a sociological process involves viewing education as a tool for social integration, which is closely linked to establishing social cohesion and order.[236] This view can be applied to small units, such as families, or larger social units, such as ethnic communities or a national society.[237] Social integration fundamentally relies on cultural cohesion and social unity.[238] As put by Bourdieu, 'the state is an instrument of social integration, an integration based not only on affective solidarity, but also on the integration of mental structures as cognitive and evaluative structures.'[239]

Fostering social integration among the masses within nations can be viewed as a complementary strategy for nation-building that is aimed at strengthening institutions and structures of governance.[240] Therefore, it is important to note that integration 'reinforces the domination of the State and the groups linked to it, by

[235] This is in relation to Sayad's discussion on breaking with the 'State thought', which he defined as states' classification of immigrants as 'non-nationals', fostering a sense of 'otherness' and reinforcing nationalist categories.
[236] Émile Durkheim, *The Division of Labour in Society* (New York: The Free Press, 1984).
[237] Richard Münch, 'Integration: Social', in *International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Science*, ed. Neil J. Smelser and Paul B. Baltes (Oxford: Pergamon, 2001).
[238] Philip Corrigan and Derek Sayer, *The Great Arch: English State Formation as Cultural Revolution* (Oxford, New York, 1985).
[239] Pierre Bourdieu, *On the State: Lecture at the Collège de France, 1989–1992*, ed. Patrick Champagne et al., trans. David Fernbach (Cambridge: Polity, 2014), 169. This was Bourdieu's definition based on the neo-Kantian and Durkheimian perspective.
[240] Andreas Wimmer, *Nation Building: Why Some Countries Come Together While Others Fall Apart* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018).

legitimising their point of view.'[241] States emphasise inclusivity and social cohesion by cultivating a shared national identity and nationalism.[242]

States therefore create categories of perceptions of reality, agreeing on certain values, and becoming an instrument of cultural, economic and linguistic unification, as well as the main foundation for the logical and cultural integration of the social world.[243] This can be achieved through national education systems, where the domination of a particular nationality and culture is reinforced and reproduced.[244] In this context, nation state education can serve as a platform where ethnic differences are harmonised through 'enculturation', thus achieving social integration.[245] This process involves 'propagating and inculcating the country's dominant civil culture', and 'delegitimising ethnic group identity' to remain a nation state.[246]

The link between social integration and establishing social order presupposes the existence of disorder.[247] In this regard, social integration goes hand in hand with (dis)integration. They exist on a continuum, making it difficult to determine where integration ends and (dis)integration begins.[248]

Furthermore, as integration holds a degree of 'internal homogenization' of different ethnicities and cultures, it imposes 'a central culture on peripheral cultures, of the domination of a central ethnicity on peripheral ethnicities'.[249] From this point of view, the precondition for a social group (whether a small unit such a family or an ethnic group) *to integrate* to a national society indicates *(dis)integration* from its former social unit.

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[241] François Denord, 'Intégration', in *Dictionnaire International Bourdieu*, ed. Gisele Sapiro (Paris: CNRS editions, 2020), 931.

[242] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Revised edition (London, New York: Verso, 2016); Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1983); Anthony D. Smith, *National Identity*, Reissue edition (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1993); Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

[243] Bourdieu, *On the State*; Denord, 'Intégration'.

[244] Émile Durkheim, *Education and Sociology*, trans. Sherwood D. Fox (New York: The Free Press, 1956), 78–81; Detlef Müller, Fritz Ringer, and Brian Simon, eds., *The Rise of the Modern Educational System: Structural Change and Social Reproduction 1870–1920.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), chap. Introduction; Bourdieu and Passeron, *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*, bk. 1; Andy Green, *Education and State Formation: Europe, East Asia and the USA*, 2nd ed., Education, Economy and Society (EDECSO) (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2013), chap. 3.

[245] Werner Schiffauer et al., eds., Civil Enculturation: Nation-State, School and Ethnic Difference in The Netherlands, Britain, Germany, and France (New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2004).

[246] Ibid., 13; Bolette Moldenhawer and Trine Øland. 'Disturbed by "the Stranger": State Crafting Remade through Educational Interventions and Moralisations'. *Globalisation, Societies and Education* 11, no. 3 (2013): 416.

[247] Münch, 'Integration: Social', 7593. In his discussion, Münch defines the relationship between social integration and social order through their opposite, by referring to disorder and *anomie* in Émile Durkheim's terms.

[248] Ibid., 7592.

[249] Ibid., 7594.

A more concrete example of integration and (dis)integration, where integration implies a form of conformity to the dominant norms,[250] is the tension between the traditional economic norms within a traditional society and its members' social integration into a capitalist economy.[251] This is clearly seen in Bourdieu and Sayad's individual and collaborative works in Algeria where they showed the impact of French colonialism in the 'de-peasantisation' of the peasant communities in their social transition. They discuss how this process was intended 'to *disintegrate* the native social order in order to subordinate it, whether it be under the banner of segregation or assimilation.'[252] The change in society caused by French colonialism, and the subsequent displacement of Algerians, required its members to adapt to a relatively new structure. Accordingly, integration into the new society necessitated a relative (dis)integration from the former society.

The work of Eugen Weber on the transformation of peasants into Frenchmen offers clarity on the impact of national education systems on establishing social integration and (dis)integration, which enables me to elaborate on my previous example on the theme of peasants.[253] In this work, we see how national education systems in France integrated diverse peasant populations from rural areas to achieve national unity. Through integration and the process of change, we observe 'the *disintegration* of local cultures by modernity and their absorption into the dominant civilization of Paris and the schools.'[254]

Drawing on this example, the establishment of social cohesion does not have to take a brutal physical form, but can take a *symbolic* form through education systems as a means to exercise state power.[255] From the social integration perspective, national education systems have been important channels for migrant integration, as they form a national system through which migrants become 'nationals' (inspired by Sayad's discussion on defining immigrants as 'non-nationals') by adapting to the dominant social order and dominant culture. It is therefore no surprise that the integration of migrants is often measured by their educational and occupational incorporation, not only in official state reports and international European

[250] One can think of it in terms of the 'moral conformism' described by Durkheim, see Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, Abridged edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).
[251] Bourdieu, *Algeria 1960*; Denord, 'Intégration'.
[252] Bourdieu and Sayad, *Uprooting*, xiii. [My italics]
[253] Eugen Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870–1914* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1976).
[254] Ibid., 486. [My italics]
[255] Bourdieu, *On the State*. Sayad's interpretation on the 'State thought' was inspired by Bourdieu's interpretation on the state power and classifications.

statistics,[256] but also among scholars, who often illustrate certain structural problems that migrants – refugees in particular – face in this regard.[257]

The discussions and examples on integration and (dis)integration highlight that these processes, while not exclusive to migrants, are deeply intertwined with social change. For migrants, especially those who have experienced forced migration, social change and encounters with education provide a lens for understanding their experience of integration. Does integration into Sweden mean that refugee parents in this study must leave behind parts of their past? This question underscores the complexities of integration and informs my analysis in the empirical chapters, where I explore the extent to which refugees can maintain their past while adapting to their present circumstances.

[256] 'Migrant Integration Statistics'.

[257] Dryden-Peterson, 'Refugee Education in Countries of First Asylum: Breaking Open the Black Box of Pre-Resettlement Experiences'; Dryden-Peterson, 'Refugee Education: A Global Review'; Dryden-Peterson et al., 'The Purposes of Refugee Education'; Mendenhall et al., 'Quality Education for Refugees in Kenya'; Crul et al., 'How the Different Policies and School Systems Affect the Inclusion of Syrian Refugee Children in Sweden, Germany, Greece, Lebanon and Turkey'; Aydin, Gundogdu, and Akgul, 'Integration of Syrian Refugees in Turkey: Understanding the Educators' Perception'; Jonsson, Mood, and Treuter, *Integration bland unga: en mångkulturell generation växer upp*.

CHAPTER 4

Methodology

This chapter is a summary of the methodological steps I follow to explore the experience of refugee families with integration in Sweden. The research strategy entails the analysis of parents' habitus through family interviews, which are supplemented by literature on the sociopolitical and economic context shaping habitus in Syria. I begin with personal reflection by objectifying my own practice as a researcher and objectifying my presuppositions.[258] After finalising my reflections on my positionality, I then introduce the empirical material I have collected and discuss its strengths and limitations with regard to my analysis. Third, I reflect on the ethical aspects I considered during this study. Finally, I highlight how I classify families in Sweden for the purpose of my analysis.

Confronting my blissful ignorance

Bourdieu distinguished his views from earlier definitions of reflexivity in the social sciences by reflecting upon the 'knowledge specifically associated with the analyst's membership and position in the intellectual field.'[259] Based on field theory, he argued that sociologists can only escape their biases as long as they study the field they are a part of, namely the intellectual field. In this section, I apply Bourdieu's thoughts on reflexivity.

Drawing on Émile Durkheim's take on the rules of the sociological method as a methodological principal, Bourdieu argued that one of the obstacles to scientific knowledge is the 'illusion of immediate knowledge', which should be critically questioned by the sociologist by studying the 'self' as someone who is the product of the social facts (naturalised by individuals) that have been imposed on them and studying the conditions that exist independent of the individual. Failing to do so may result in dogmatic thinking, which can lead the researcher to evaluate the social world

[258] Bourdieu, *Science of Science and Reflexivity*.
[259] Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc Wacquant, eds., *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), 39.

based on preconceptions. Consequently, the decision to be methodologically ignorant of the immediate knowledge can be considered a precautionary measure.[260]

As precisely summarised by Loïc Wacquant based on his reading of Bourdieu, there are three possible types of biases that may blur the sociological gaze. The first is the social origin of the researcher, which encompasses characteristics such as class, gender and ethnicity, which can be controlled through self-reflection. The second is the researcher's position and situation in the academic field, 'where all define themselves in part in relational terms, by their difference and distance from certain others with whom they compete.'[261] In addition to an awareness of the methods and approaches used in the field the researcher is a part of, Wacquant also notes that reflexivity requires the researcher to search for 'the scientific unconscious embedded in theories, problems, and (especially national) categories of scholarly judgement', which brings us to the third possible bias.[262] It is by scrutinising this 'scholastic disposition' (a disposition evoked by being a part of – and shaped by – an academic field) that the researcher can overcome biases.[263] Establishing effective 'sociological imagination', enables 'doing sociology'.[264]

The first possible bias, which concerns my social origin, will be discussed in the following section.[265] This is because I would like to shed light on potential sources of bias with regard to my advantages and obstacles. Furthermore, I believe this is the section that will receive the most attention due to my background. This attempt at 'epistemological vigilance' is done not only to highlight aspects with the potential to escape my 'sociological gaze', but also to make explicit what is not apparent by performing a self-reflection.[266]

I confront possible sources of bias, which I define as 'my blissful ignorance', as it would have been easier to avoid such an exercise. Indeed, ignorance would have been

[260] Bourdieu, *Science of Science and Reflexivity*; Pierre Bourdieu, Jean-Claude Chamboredon, and Jean-Claude Passeron, *The Craft of Sociology*, ed. Beate Krais and trans. Richard Nice (Berlin, New York: Walter de Gruyter & Co., 1991), sec. Preface; Pierre Bourdieu, *Homo Academicus*, trans. Peter Collier (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), sec. Preface.
[261] Bourdieu and Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, 39. The book is a collaborative work between Bourdieu and Wacquant. This reference is from Wacquant's part.
[262] Ibid., 40.
[263] Bourdieu, *Pascalian Meditations*.
[264] C. Wright Mills, *Sociological Imagination*, 40th anniversary ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).
[265] Although I also would like to discuss the second and third possible biases presented in the previous paragraph, I believe delving into my 'scientific habitus' and describing my conditions of knowledge production (such as being part of a research group that has evolved using Bourdieu's theoretical framework, being Donald Broady's student, or writing about refugees from Syria in a research group that has mainly worked on student mobility and higher classes) would be excessive. This being said, such an analysis has been an active part of my process in writing this study, which can be implicitly or explicitly observed throughout the chapters based on my choices, analyses, or writing.
[266] Bourdieu, *Science of Science and Reflexivity*, 89.

bliss. However, in acknowledging the necessity of confrontation and interrogation, I cannot ignore potential sources of bias.[267]

Magnifying the (in)visible

> Sociologists can overcome the antinomy of objectivist explanation and subjectivist understanding and account for the very world within which they live on condition of turning upon themselves the scientific tools for objectivation that they routinely employ upon others.[268]

This is far from an attempt to perform a thorough self-reflection that explores every detail of my own life. Rather, I aim to shed light on potential sources of bias, treating myself as an object of analysis. This, I must confess, was a difficult and unsettling exercise. It not only asks for the particularities of the arts of sharing, but also demands a sociological analysis of the self. I do not aim to overshare, burdening the reader with elaborate details, which risks devolving into the kind of 'narcissism' Bourdieu criticises.[269] Instead, I see this as a necessary step in the research, which also provides an opportunity to critically reflect on my social characteristics, describing the essence of my personal position and 'point of view' as a researcher in a practice that avoids self-indulgence. In other words, I want to avoid being 'entirely blind, […], to the space within which [I] am situated, […], and within which is the source both of [my] insights and of [my] oversights.'[270] I therefore am cognisant of what I choose to share, which are only the parts that I find relevant to my positions and analyses.

In this section, I describe my relation to the object under construction, that is, Kurds from Syria in Sweden. In an attempt to objectify my preconceptions, I acknowledge that I undertake this task as a researcher with a Kurdish background who is conducting research on Kurds in Sweden. Asserting objectivist epistemology is not my goal, nor is it possible to achieve. An objectivist point of view is far from reality. In fact, it 'destroys part of the reality it claims to grasp in the very movement whereby it captures it.'[271] However, objectifying certain aspects of my personal trajectory allows me to theorise and think about my research and research object in relation to sociological tools, beyond my own 'self', rather than adapting a subjective perspective shaped by my structural and individual constraints. I define

[267] I take inspiration from specific sections of *Science of Science and Reflexivity* (2004) when writing the next section concerning my own social background.
[268] Loïc Wacquant, 'For a Socio-Analysis of Intellectuals: On "Homo Academicus"', *Berkeley Journal of Sociology* 34 (1989): 1–2.
[269] Bourdieu, *Science of Science and Reflexivity*, 89.
[270] Bourdieu, *Homo Academicus*, xvi.
[271] Bourdieu and Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, 8.

personal characteristics, as well as factors that have shaped my 'point of view' and their possible relation to my decisions, actions and practices as a researcher. I thereby justify my choices and highlight their consequences. This enables an objective analysis through the practice of reflexivity. This is not to say that it is possible to neglect my relation to the object under construction. The tendency to run away from what is too familiar seems like a missed opportunity to me. I prefer to indulge in my familiarity and the intimacy it provides, so that I can use it to my advantage when needed. Thus, the following discussion is also an attempt to show how I put this into practice.

Born to a Kurdish family in Sweden, I spent my childhood years in the southern outskirts of Stockholm and all of my teenage years in a south-eastern district in Turkey where my parents are from. My father arrived in Sweden in the late 1970s, completed his master's degree in the history of ideas and later worked as a political figure in Swedish politics in the 1980s and 1990s. During those decades, Sweden's political climate was relatively more favourable (to say the least) towards multicultural politics, in contrast to Turkey, which was feeling the effects of the military coup in 1980 and political conflict precipitated by the expansion of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), an armed guerrilla movement and political organisation. Following the coup, the Kurdish language was prohibited in the public and private sector.[272] Sweden was therefore a place where 'home politics' could be discussed.

Given this political climate, my father was involved in establishing the Kurdish politics and diaspora in Sweden due to his own social background and networks within the 'Kurdish space', and he remained in the country for twenty-five years. Having written over ten books, mostly covering his own profession (history and oral literature), he has also become a public figure in promoting minority rights and mother tongue education. My father's educational background, career and migration to a Western country, together with our family's return to Turkey, distinguished him from members of his extended family (some of whom have not completed primary education or changed their geographies), as well as those who migrated to a Western country and never returned.

My parents and grandparents were from the same area and were involved in Kurdish politics to varying degrees (unsurprising considering Turkey's political history and relationship with Kurds and the south-eastern part of the country where the majority of Kurds reside). I was surrounded by political discussions from an early age. However, this is not to say that I was involved in politics. Rather, from an early age, I was cognisant of the social consequences (such as discrimination and fear of speaking one's own language) of the tensions between the dominant and

[272] Philip Robins, 'The Overlord State: Turkish Policy and the Kurdish Issue', *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944–)* 69, no. 4 (1993): 662.

dominated social groups, which were based on national and political structures in the country. This was an awareness that arose due to my surroundings and personal experience as a Kurdish woman in Turkey.

My parents' upbringings were not so dissimilar from each other. Besides the sociopolitical and cultural similarities, both had fathers with high social and symbolic status in their communities, albeit for different reasons. While one of my grandfathers was a highly respected leader of a large community, the other had high status thanks to his large landholdings, which he had appropriated by marrying my grandmother. Thanks to this history and my uncle, who still manages a portion of this land today, I obtained intuitive knowledge that shaped my understanding of certain social values and morals related to social status, honour, social norms, gender norms, etc.

I would argue that my mother's extended family, as well as my father's family and personal educational background, shaped my dispositions towards the social world. Further, I had embodied the moral and cultural codes of living in a rural area with no cultural activity or events, and where material conditions were limited. Being born and migrating away from a Western city such as Stockholm to a rural district most Turks associated with terrorism was therefore a crucial event in forming my habitus.

To elaborate on this further, the choice to migrate away from Sweden to Turkey at the age of 10 was my father's decision, as he wanted to 'return home' and raise his children among Kurds. My father's decision to return to Turkey and my return to Sweden at the age of 25 enabled me to experience the social norms and culture of both societies. My educational trajectory and introduction to sociology has made me question what I have internalised through migration and experience living in two different societies. This is to say, my habitus has been shaped by and challenged by migration, much like the families I analyse, though I have never been a refugee. Based on my self-analysis and the experiences of members of the extended family, relatives and friends, I have observed the effects of migration on habitus over time.

I cannot say that I come from a typical middle class family, with the associated dispositions. My readings of classical sociology and relatively recent works within contemporary sociology, as well as my own social background and observations, have allowed me to realise that social class is determined by geographic origin and political capital as much as it is determined by social origin and factors such as ethnicity and race, and the well-known aspects of occupation and financial status. Within the 'Kurdish space', my family can be defined as upper middle class due to my father's educational and occupational background as well as by my parents' (and their extended family's) political capital. However, outside the national space, one can argue that my families' social class is conditioned by existing material conditions, affiliation with a marginalised group and the embodiment of the social and cultural consequences that come with this.

Although many detailed examples are available, I would like to turn to language. For instance, learning to speak 'proper' Turkish was an aspect of 'becoming' a part of the dominant society as to socially exist in Turkey. When I spoke Turkish, my accent distinguished me from my classmates during my time in higher education, as the majority were of Turkish descent and associated people from south-eastern Turkey with 'causing political conflict' and terrorism in Turkey. This reminds me of Bourdieu's work on principles of vision and division, where he discusses ethnic identity (which he rarely did) and groupness. It is indeed the 'power of imposing a vision of the social world through principles of di-vision' that reinforces the recognition of the dominant groups.[273] In this case, having an accent (depending on what that accent represents) *a priori* distinguished me from the majority and classified me as the subordinate, thereby reinforcing the view of my subordinate position in the social world.[274]

Coming from a family that was embedded in Kurdish politics and a Kurdish cultural profile, together with my upbringing, shaped my view of the social consequences of being an ethnic minority. In retrospect, I came to understand that my own migration from Sweden to Turkey and my ethnic identification were defining aspects of my habitus. The contradiction and tension of 'becoming a part of' and 'resisting' the dominant culture caused me to view the education system I was a part of in Turkey with a critical eye, generating a strong interest in the discipline of sociology and, in particular, the sociology of education.

In the following section, I reflect on my experience based on my own profile and social position while accessing the group of Syrian Kurds and the dynamic between us during data collection. The following section is thus where my background and self-analysis become relevant for this study.

My ease and struggle

Familiarity with a particular social group, culture and social relations brings a dual perspective to the table. On the one hand, there is an ease that demands adherence to the rules of the social group, given the relatively natural context. The ability to speak the native language and familiarity with cultural values and social interactions creates an advantageous position. However, this familiarity and ease also generates methodological challenges, whereby a researcher's perspective can be blurred or even blinded. In other words, certain aspects that can be observed and acknowledged by someone outside the social group and place may not be considered notable by the researcher in question. By being aware of

[273] Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, eds. John P. Thompson, trans. Gino Raymond and Matthew Adamson (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1991), 221.
[274] This is complementary to my discussion on groupness in Chapter 5.

internal pre-conceptions based on the personal depiction of the study object, a researcher can overcome these pre-conceptions and navigate around them. The contrast between my ease – coming from a similar background as those I aimed to analyse – and my struggle to distance myself from this group were recurring themes throughout the data collection and analysis process.

As I describe further in this chapter, I conducted interviews with families in this study. During these interviews, there were three factors that facilitated access to the target families, the interview experience and the analysis process. These were my ethnic identification (Kurd), my geographic origin (south-eastern Turkey) and my gender (woman). As interviews were conducted with Kurds from Syria and I am a Kurd from Turkey, my ethnicity caused families to perceive me as a source of familiarity and reliability, inviting me into their homes and freely telling their stories.

One of the main 'eases' I encountered was my experience accessing families. I started the recruitment process by contacting the leaders of a couple of Kurdish Associations in different Swedish cities and asking whether they were aware of any Syrian Kurds who would be interested in participating in this project. I then called Kurdish mother tongue teachers who I was able to contact through a snowball effect. As the teachers usually have students who are Kurds from Syria, it enabled me to access several families. My ability to speak Kurdish and earn the trust of the people I called was an 'ease', as it expanded my immediate network. Among the families with whom I shared a similar geographic origin, stating my surname usually broke the ice, resulting in a friendly and personal conversation. The families therefore wanted to collectively contribute to my project as a matter of national pride. This enabled me to contact various people and expand my network.

Although this methodological step facilitated access to numerous families, I did not want to continue, as it restricted the profile of the families in my interviews. I was aware that I had contacted families that may be similar to each other in terms of their social profiles, as they were members of the associations (or known by those who were members) or had children who were taking Kurdish as a mother tongue in the schools (both of which can be an indication of political interest).

To diversify the family profiles, I became a member of private social media groups in which I briefly wrote about my research while providing my contact information in Kurdish, Swedish and English.[275] I found that my Kurdish background and Kurdish skills facilitated connections, as I received reactions such as 'meeting Kurdish PhD students makes me happy,' or 'I am contacting you because I appreciated that you had written in Kurdish.' In order to become a member in one of the biggest Facebook groups, for instance, I had to declare which part of 'Kurdistan' I come from and why I wanted to join the group. The aim was

[275] See Appendix A.

mainly to strengthen Kurdish networking in Sweden. After posting in social media groups, I realised that my access to target families was often conditioned by my Kurdish background and skills.

Besides having the ease in accessing families, my experience with the families was also framed by my own profile. For instance, the kitchen was a comfortable space where women would open up separate from their partners, often discussing their children or views on their personal experience in Syria and Sweden. This enabled me to connect with them individually and not be limited to fathers as a source of information, especially in cases where fathers were the dominant figures in the family. In some cases, mothers wore loose hijabs and were not comfortable letting their guard down around foreign men. However, they did not change their appearance or behaviour in my presence. In fact, on several occasions, I was invited to spend the day with them, which in some cases ended up with us sitting together for breakfast, lunch or dinner at their homes. Upon my introduction to the parents, fathers, mothers, or occasionally, the grandparents, I would be told, 'whoever you are, you are one of us'. This signified that I was a stranger that they did not know, but that they could trust me because of our common Kurdish background. I was occasionally invited to stay overnight or return to visit after the interviews, being told that 'from now on', I had another family than my own to count on in Sweden. Families often referred to me and my personal education as something their children could aspire to, frequently expressing pride and gratitude that I am 'at university' in Sweden. As they were keen on welcoming me, it was almost as though I was already part of the family.

I was fortunate to be a Kurdish speaker and did not need to hire an interpreter for my research. My ability to speak Kurdish with the interviewees and awareness of cultural codes facilitated a dynamic conversation, which could not have been achieved if I had to work with an interpreter. An interpreter may have created more formal, question-answer oriented interactions between me and the families, thus limiting our time together. In fact, it may have resembled the experiences the families had during the asylum-seeking process in Sweden, where interviews through an interpreter created a formal question-answer setting, rather than leading to a casual conversation where the whole family participates. In my case, for instance, children would feel comfortable jumping into the conversation, expressing their opinions and providing their narratives without necessarily having been asked a question. There were occasions where children would join our conversation as they pleased, but also other occasions where they would leave to meet with their friends. There were also occasions when mothers would invite me to the kitchen, taking a phone call from their families back in Syria, and so on. It was these types of occasions that made it possible for me to observe the families outside of a formal interview structure and enabled me to interact in a way that would not have been possible with an interpreter.

Due to my own social background and 'insider' perspective, I was constantly aware of language and the way I spoke. Due to the fact that south-eastern Turkey (my geographic origin) shares borders with northern Syria (families' geographic origin) and the political and national history of the region, Kurds from both regions speak the same dialect and have closer relations compared to Kurds from other regions (such as Iran and Iraq). Most of the time, this facilitated access to families. However, it was also one of the main struggles when seeking to access and interview families. I was aware that the impression families had of me could have been shaped even before our meeting due to the sociopolitical presuppositions Kurds from Turkey and Syria have about each other.

For example, on multiple occasions, the parents were contacted by the mediators who communicated my interest in meeting the families for my work. Some were informed that my visit would be an informal occasion where I would join them over the evening for a cup of tea and ask them questions about their lives and children's education. Others were informed that they would participate in an interview that could lead to inclusion in my study. I realised that this was dependent on the educational level or political perspectives of the people that were contacted. While those with a relatively higher level of education and political engagement in the Kurdish national struggle were given more details, others were told about the research in less detail. This was a strategy based on from the mediators' personal knowledge of the families, as well as their knowledge of cultural codes and norms. I was told by the mediators that I could provide more details when I met the families face to face. It was the fathers who were initially contacted, and in the eyes of the families, I was a woman introduced to them by a man. I realised that my permission to visit the families was therefore limited, depending on the way the mediators introduced me and my research. I was thus cognisant of the implications this created for the individual families and our subsequent encounter. I provide more insight below.

As I made a conscious attempt to access different families, I realised that I could have been perceived as a Kurdish political figure. I knew that representatives from the Kurdish guerrilla movement occasionally visited homes to raise awareness of their cause, which is based on nationalistic strategies. This could, under certain conditions, lead to a request for financial support for their national struggle. Members of the movement who visit homes are usually part of a political mobilisation with 'advanced' skills in the Kurdish language, which is not common as Kurdish is not the language of instruction in Turkey or Syria. Families who receive these individuals provide an open space within their homes and allow the guests to stay overnight. With this in mind, I realised that my visit could have been mistaken for a politically motivated visit. Families could have taken me inside their homes out of fear of rejecting a political representative and supporter of the guerrilla

movement. As a researcher, this left me in a situation where my relationship with the families was conditioned, by default, on their perception of me and my intentions (as a possible guerrilla). This may also have been one of the reasons some families did not want to be interviewed, even though it was rare that I was not welcomed into the families' homes.

Despite my efforts, my social origin in terms of where I was placed by the families in the 'Kurdish space', was designated by my geographic origin. The fact that I am a Kurd from south-eastern Turkey and speak a certain dialect (Kurmanji), which is considered standardised within the 'Kurdish space' and spoken by the majority, caused several families to associate me with a certain Kurdish political party. The fact that I come from the northern part of 'Kurdistan' and speak Kurdish in a certain way may have been seen as an indication of a certain political stance. As a result, some of the parents occasionally politicised the conversation during the interview, even though they were not asked any political questions.

In my ethical application, which is discussed later in this chapter, I clarified that the interviews with the families could take a political turn despite my intention to stay within the framework of my research questions. I described the reasons for this, such as the Kurdish national struggle, the Syrian civil war, the potential that families were members of the Kurdish guerrilla movement or sympathised with the movement, that families lost a family member in the mountains, and the families' status as refugees. As I clarified in my (approved) ethics application, this was more or less consciously or unconsciously mediated at the time of the interviews. On the other hand, this unique dynamic facilitated the analysis process as it enriched my understanding of the families in relation to their sociopolitical place in the 'Kurdish space'. In fact, it enabled me to understand their social ties in Syria and Sweden to a greater extent, which enriched parts of my analysis.

Further, at times my 'insider knowledge' limited my ability to retract information I needed parents to elaborate on. I frequently heard statements like 'as you already know'. This would mainly be in relation to topics or texts on social and cultural codes, gender norms, political dimensions and the implications of Kurd's national history on individual trajectories, being an immigrant, or the reasons for some parents' relatively low educational level (as if the reasons were self-explanatory). I often heard, 'you know how it is there'. I therefore found myself being unable to elaborate on certain topics as they already knew I was aware of these topics due to my background. Insisting that I wanted to hear their views anyway would have disturbed the flow, as my awareness was already obvious to everyone in the room.

Given this background, during the interviews, I would formulate my questions differently depending on who I was talking to, based on the family profiles and their geographic origins. For example, the nuances and particularities of the way parents would talk were dependent on whether they were highly educated or illiterate. The

same applied to whether they were from Ayn al-Arab or Al-Qamishli (known in Kurdish as Kobane and Qamişlo). These changes in the way I formulated the questions enabled me to clarify what I wanted to express and the extent to which we understood each other.

During my analysis, I made sure to seek the assistance of people I thought could enrich the material (especially during my numerous visits to south-eastern Turkey). For example, although I had intuitive knowledge on the condition of peasants due to my own background (which helped my analysis in Chapter 6), I made sure to make use of my social network to ask about the particularities of owning land and certain Kurdish agricultural terminology.

As I conclude this section, I would like to end on a positive note by devoting the last paragraph to one of the major benefits of studying a 'familiar' social group. We live in a world where geographic mobility is the norm. Considering the current state of the world and the dominant political and academic topics in social sciences, refugees need to be studied in greater depth. And especially given the war in Ukraine, more people have realised that it is not only those who flee from Middle East or North African (MENA) countries that can become refugees, but also those in relatively more privileged positions in terms of their 'whiteness'. Although the Global South is proportionately more affected by the environmental crisis, and war is mainly taking place in MENA countries, refugees are a global concern due to their rising numbers. My ability to conduct research and have access, in terms of extent and proximity, to a group that is not well known beyond their national and political struggle, is mainly due to my personal social background. My social origin, as well as my cultural and social resources, has allowed me to access this group in a way far beyond that of the majority of sociologists, anthropologists and geographers. This is not to say that it is only possible to conduct this type of research when one is already a part of a targeted group. It is simply an acknowledgement of the leverage it provides and the depth or different type of data one can obtain once already embedded in a group.

In the following section, I present my empirical material. My awareness of the aspects discussed so far was created through an exercise of reflexivity. I continue this exercise throughout this chapter, starting by defining my empirical material and a few key ethical aspects that are relevant to such research.

Empirical material and analysis

Based on my interest in Kurdish refugee families from Syria who fled to Sweden after the war that escalated in 2011 and their experience and responses to integration, I emphasise three distinct characteristics that were important to the

collection of the empirical material: identifying as Kurdish, being a family (parents with at least one child in school in Sweden) and having fled to Sweden from Syria due to the war in 2011. I chose parents who arrived in Sweden as refugees or who arrived through family reunification with a family member recognised as a refugee under Swedish law.[276] These characteristics were the only attributes consistently shared among the families in the empirical material. Some were in the process of applying for citizenship (especially in the case of children), and the majority held temporary residence permit.

In this section, I begin by describing the interviews, which were my main source of empirical material. I discuss the methodological steps in accessing, organising and analysing the data. I then define the statistical data I used from Syria and Sweden to define the methodological steps that further enabled me to analyse the group in focus.

Family interviews

In investigating parents' experience and responses to encounters with their own and their children's education, I determined that the most suitable method was family interviews. The interviews were semi-structured, as this allows for a free discussion rather than limiting the respondents within a certain framework.[277] The strength of the format relies, to some degree, on the presentation of broad questions, which allow respondents to elaborate on the topics that are most relevant and important to them. In this way, the same question elicits different perspectives from different people, perspectives that may otherwise be neglected. The ambition was to interview families from different socio-economic backgrounds to enrich the material and capture the nuances among the Syrian Kurds as a group.

I conducted twenty-five family interviews in Sweden. The families had arrived in Sweden from different villages and cities in northern Syria between 2013 and 2018.[278] The parents' ages varied, with the majority being in their 40s. Although there was an exception in terms of the number of children in two families, the majority had between three to five children. The children's ages varied from preschool to higher education. No families had children who were only preschool

[276] Critical literature is available that historically analyses the refugee category. For a review of this, see David Scott FitzGerald and Rawan Arar, 'The Sociology of Refugee Migration', *Annual Review of Sociology* 44, no. 1 (2018): 387–406.
[277] Marilyn Lichtman, *Qualitative Research in Education: A User's Guide*, 2nd ed. (Los Angeles: Sage, 2009), 141.
[278] Due to the relatively short time families had been in Sweden and lack of substantial differences between families arriving in 2013 and 2018, time was not a key measurement in the analysis. This being said, as clarified with habitus clivé earlier, time is a determinant factor for observing the disruption of habitus. This was a limitation that I did not manage to address in this study.

age or only attending higher education, thus making all families relevant for the population I aimed to interview (i.e. at least one child in compulsory school, so that the parents had some connection to the Swedish school system).

Looking at the differences in the educational trajectories of parents based on the lives of their parents in Syria in the 1940s–1950s, it is clear that the majority had experienced social mobility. Among the parents interviewed, many were the first generation to start schooling (even though the majority dropped out). The parents came from heterogeneous educational backgrounds, ranging from illiterate to higher education degree holders.

Of the twenty-five women, two had higher education degrees, one in economics and one in Arabic literature. Two had dropped out of university studies due to the war. Eight worked in Syria; two worked in agriculture and the others mostly worked in schools, as they were qualified to be teaching assistants thanks to their post-secondary education. Those who had no schooling or dropped out were unemployed or stay-at-home mothers.

Of the twenty-five men, four had higher education degrees, one in medicine and three in law. Three had dropped out of university due to the war or political activism. The rest had either never attended school or dropped out. All men were employed, regardless of their educational levels. It was rare that both partners in the family worked, and men were generally the sole breadwinners. They worked in different jobs in Syria, including manual labour, such as drilling and welding; trade, owning and running a clothing or grocery store; or agricultural work. The agricultural workers (whether they owned the land or worked on other people's land as peasants) accounted for most of those who were illiterate or had low levels of education.[279]

All of the interviews were conducted between August and November 2020, with the exception of one interview in 2019 (I called this family in 2020 to follow up). Although I could have easily increased the numbers of families interviewed, I had already captured a diverse range of families from different social backgrounds. Furthermore, the narratives became repetitive. Despite the Covid-19 pandemic, I managed to arrange all of the interviews in person at the families' homes. In most cases, both parents and children were available during the entire interview. Although I directed questions to the parents, I informed the children in the beginning that the interview would ideally be a conversation where they could participate when they felt comfortable. The interviews therefore often resulted in a dynamic conversation with all family members. Despite this, there were also occasions where I would talk to a single parent for an extended period. In these cases, I made sure to include the other partner and obtain their perspective.

[279] See Appendix C for the social characteristics of parents. For further information that provides historical context regarding parents' educational and occupational backgrounds in Syria, see Chapter 5.

I acknowledge the limitations of interviewing families as a group rather than individually. It is possible that children felt that they had to respond in a certain way in the presence of their parents, or vice versa. This being said, I also benefitted from observing which family members were the more dominant speakers, building the narrative for the whole family and uncovering the gender dynamics within the family. Furthermore, the group interview format facilitated communication on topics of cultural norms, traditions and values within the context of family, as it emphasised the relational aspect of meaning making, which enriched my analysis beyond the individual.

The duration of the interviews varied between one and a half hours to four hours, depending on the time of the day, time constraints and the situation at the families' homes. Conversations with family members before recording was started are not included in the interview time. The same applies to conversations during my time with families after the interview questions were complete.

In some cases, when the families became aware of my intention to interview them to learn about their lives, I spent time in their homes beyond the interview. This created opportunities, such as being able to follow some women into the kitchen where we were alone, which resulted in valuable information. They talked about their experience in Sweden and provided details about their children and their lives that did not come up during the interviews, either because they did not feel entitled to talk as much (in specific cases) or they did not want their partners to be upset or hear certain things.

The mediators

In addition to meeting with families, I also prepared a document with notes related to my meetings, discussions and travels with mediators. During the initial weeks I attempted to access families, I was in contact with leaders of Kurdish Associations, mother tongue teachers in different Swedish cities and social media groups for Kurds in Sweden. I talked to many people that either connected me with families I could interview, shared suggestions for finding families or connected me with their social network. Based on these contacts, I managed to work with five mediators with Kurdish backgrounds. Four were Kurds from Syria who had arrived in Sweden as refugees after 2011, and one was from Turkey and had strong contacts within the Kurdish diaspora.

Conversations with the mediators covered their views on the situation in Syria, the condition of families who migrated to Sweden, families' personal profiles, the cities and neighbourhoods the families lived in, social and cultural activities, and political agreements and disagreements within the Kurdish groups. I prepared a separate document with notes that were exclusive to the mediators and my discussions with them.

I worked more closely with two mediators, spending several days with them. We talked about different families and their own experience as Syrian Kurdish refugees in Sweden. We talked about different families and their own experience as Syrian Kurdish refugees in Sweden. We visited cafes and restaurants where other Syrian Kurdish refugees worked. These two cultural mediators stated that they would not have contributed to the study if they believed I was politically affiliated. They were happy to participate by sharing their network, perspectives and knowledge, as they viewed my work as a means to advance a greater Kurdish cause, even though I did not present my study in this way. They occasionally joined me for the family interviews if the families insisted. In these cases, the mediators often remained silent during the interviews. However, they occasionally joined the conversation when asked a question by one of the parents or children.

The presence of the mediators during the interviews could have impacted the answers of the different family members. For example, it could have caused the families to omit details they would have otherwise shared. On the other hand, the mediators' presence could have caused the family members to share more due to the sense of trust. In any case, I remained aware of the limitations and strengths of this situation during my data collection. In the empirical chapters, I have ensured transparency regarding the presence of the cultural mediators when I deemed it necessary.

In addition to the two key mediators, I spent several hours with the three other mediators. One was a Kurdish mother tongue teacher who allowed me to join one of his lessons, where I introduced myself and observed the classroom. I was able to talk to the pupils, who later introduced me to their parents. On another occasion, I met with a mediator who was a Kurdish music teacher for refugees in Sweden. We discussed the social and cultural activities that he organised and his observations on children's progress in Sweden.

The mediators were a valuable resource. They enabled me to access families, and my conversation with them complemented my intuitive knowledge of Kurds as an ethnic group. In some cases, I analyse mediators' inclusion in the conversations with families.

Structure, organisation, and analysis of the material

I prepared a general guide based on the literature review, history of the group and theoretical framework for structuring the interviews. This guide was 'theoretically informed', which does not indicate that I took theoretical concepts and expected to find perfect results. Rather, it means that I was open to observations and questions that developed in a dialectical relationship, without generating pre-determined answers.[280]

[280] Paul Willis and Mats Trondman, 'Manifesto for Ethnography', *Ethnography* 1, no. 1 (2000): 13.

Accordingly, the guide comprised four main themes with a special interest in the families' backgrounds, migration experience and lives in Sweden. Here, the focus was on their perceptions rather than a search for facts. Working with the *émigré* and habitus concept in mind, I explored how parents internalised their different capital and how they perceived their possibilities and constraints, social status and socio-economic condition, rather than fact-checking whether they had capital or not. Therefore, the emphasis was less on the recollection of past memories and assets and more on the way they were perceived, described and internalised.

I acknowledge that the concept of habitus was developed based on years of work in Bearn and Algeria, and interviewing parents for a few hours does not yield the same kind of in-depth information I could obtain by doing ethnographic work in a village, or in my case, following families in their everyday lives. Although doing ethnographic work over a particular period of time would have enriched my understanding of individual reasoning, meaning making and social actions, which could have benefitted my analyses, I believe that my positionality fills in multiple gaps, similar to the benefits Sayad offered to Bourdieu during their collaborative work in Algeria.[281]

Below, I present a summary of the four themes in the interview guide. The first theme consisted of questions regarding each family's identification, where I sought to gain insight into the lives of parents prior to displacement. This included information on the parents' upbringing and family background; economic, social, linguistic and educational assets; and their daily lives in Syria. It also included questions regarding the children's education in Syria. Under this theme, I was interested in the families' social origin, characteristics and history. Secondly, I included questions regarding the process the families went through on arrival in Sweden, consequences of war in their home region, their possible stays in other countries, and their first years in Sweden. With this theme, I was interested in the degree of loss families had experienced, their experience in other countries prior to arrival in Sweden and the parents' perceptions of Sweden. Thirdly, the focus was on their lives as refugee families in Sweden, the education of their children and the parents' educational and occupational trajectories following migration. This theme was used to discuss details about the schools their children attended, their experience with the Swedish education system, social and cultural adjustments and differences they observed. The third theme was significant, as it entailed discussions on education and life in Sweden, which is the lens through which I analyse the families' encounters with the new social world. Lastly, I asked about future plans and expectations. This theme served as a way to understand their perceptions on life in Sweden, such as their aspirations, their desire to 'integrate' into Sweden and

[281] For Bourdieu's view on Sayad's positionality, see Pierre Bourdieu, 'Preface', in *The Suffering of the Immigrant*, trans. David Macey (Cambridge: Policy Press, 2004), xi–xiv.

how parents perceive and process their own future prospects in relation to their children's lives in Sweden.[282]

The questions I asked elicited narratives of statelessness and oppression. This included questions about parents' educational levels and their educational and occupational trajectories, which they connected to the history of Kurds in Syria (particularly during the period between the 1960s and 1990s), questions regarding Arabic language skills in Syria and Kurdish mother tongue courses in Sweden, and questions about plans to return to Syria, all of which touched on the theme of 'Kurdishness' and the subsequent oppression and statelessness of Kurds.

Although the guide has a structure of its own, which consists of a linear outline starting with the past, the journey to Sweden, the present and the future, the interview itself sometimes naturally led to conversations that jumped from one section to another dynamically. Despite the linear structure, the respondents were the main focus of the interviews. They were therefore free to lead the conversation through the themes within the guide, depending on how they preferred to talk about their lives.

As the guide shows, the interview consisted of questions about families' lives, which was particularly difficult for them to talk about. It was entirely possible that families would stop the interview process due to their complex circumstances, as the conversation often led to the war and displacement, resulting in material loss or even the loss of family members. In that case, the plan was to continue the interviews only if the family members saw the interviews as a way to express themselves and construct their own point of view, both about themselves and about the world.[283] Although there were several discussions that left both fathers and mothers in tears, myself included, they did not ask to stop the interviews nor did it become uncomfortable for anyone present. This was an occasion that I frequently reflected upon as I was challenged by my role as a researcher due to the emotional weight of some of the discussions.

All but three of the family interviews were recorded.[284] This allowed me to focus on the conversation rather than continuously taking notes. I followed each interview with a session of notetaking, writing down my reflections and observations. These reflections mainly consisted of significant observations during my time in the families' homes, such as gender dynamics (which were also tied to power dynamics and roles and responsibilities), physical reactions and facial expressions (with regard to my presence or reactions to the questions) and parent-

[282] See Appendix B for the interview guide.
[283] Pierre Bourdieu, 'Understanding', in *The Weight of the World: Social Suffering in Contemporary Society* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 615.
[284] For those who did not want to be recorded due to political reasons, which was mainly the choice of fathers, I took notes during the interview.

child dynamics (who talks more or less and the reactions of parents to their children's conversations). The notes also included conversations that occurred outside of the formal interview time. These were used when deemed necessary during the analysis.

As the interviews were carried out in Kurdish and lasted several hours, it took several days to transcribe and translate a single interview (from Kurdish to English). I was only able to translate and transcribe three interviews before I realised it would take around six months to complete the rest. For pragmatic reasons, I instead decided to continue by first identifying families based on their characteristics and profile, adding this information to a document for each family. Later, I went through each interview several times to transcribe the parts that were directly related to my research questions (preferably quotations). This resulted in sixty-five pages of transcribed test, including a summary of the three interviews I had already transcribed and excluding the notes and family profiles I had written following each interview.

After the fieldwork and organisation of my empirical material, I had no further contact with the families or mediators. This was a conscious choice, as I wanted to distance myself from any potential sources of bias and do my best to turn any potential sources of bias into strengths. This enabled me to relate the families to each other under the same document based on thematic codes, while simultaneously relating them to my perceptions, which led to the section on reflexivity presented earlier in this chapter.[285]

Although the process of analysis began during the interviews and organisation of the material, I began analysing families in greater depth by going over the recordings and my notes, where I coded the transcription based on several themes in line with my research questions. In the beginning, these themes were broad in order to relate families to each other based on their similarities and differences. For example, I would highlight conversations on the Kurdish language and observe how it was discussed in each interview. This broad theme was later categorised in more detail, such as the meaning of Kurdish language for different families (parents and children). Different themes, such as family dynamics, the Swedish language and education, discrimination, choosing schools and educational aspirations, community, statelessness and Kurdish nationalism were observed. Some themes stood out more than others in relation to the research questions. The analysis of the empirical material and the distribution of families across chapters 6–8 were based on these themes, some of which were elaborated in more depth for some families, which impacted their inclusion in the empirical chapters. The discussions with the mediators were analysed and complemented my intuitive knowledge of Kurds as an ethnic group. This information is occasionally used to provide supplementary insights in the empirical chapters. In other words, while the

[285] See pages 67–77.

mediators appear in some of the empirical chapters, they are not as prevalent as the family interviews.

Statistical data

Although my main source of data is the family interviews, and I am interested in the narratives, practices and dynamics within the families' homes, something that is relatively difficult to grasp using quantitative methods, I have used the statistical data to map out some of the characteristics of families in Syria and to locate families in Sweden geographically. These maps are based on two different data sources. One is a database from Sweden, and the other is public census data from Syria. Prior to discussing these databases and their usage within this study, I believe it is necessary to briefly reflect on statistical categorisations in national classifications.

Can the migration of ethnic groups be studied beyond nation-state categorisations? I have reflected on this question during the course of this project. An analysis of social phenomena primarily through the lens of nation states, assuming the naturalness and given nature of their national discourses and histories, embodies elements of methodological nationalism.[286] As Kurds reside in several nation states and are engaged in an ongoing fight for recognition, they are an interesting case for the analysis of nationally defined categories that challenges the presumed naturalness of these categories.

An attempt to study Kurds from Syria in Sweden is inherently complicated, as the registration of ethnicity is not allowed in Sweden. Syrian Kurds have therefore been categorised as Syrians. Kurds often remain unnoticed as a distinct refugee group because official statistics typically categorise people by their country of origin and citizenship, not their ethnic identity. As I am not conducting a statistical analysis, this did not concern me. However, I thought it would be useful to know certain social characteristics of this population (such as educational level and occupation before migration) to provide greater context regarding the families I interviewed. Prior to accessing families, I also thought it would be useful to situate the families on the Swedish map to observe which cities I should visit to conduct interviews.

This being said, considering the establishment of the Syrian Arab Republic and its post-colonial dynamics, I believe the impact on Kurds cannot be overlooked. I address this discussion in greater detail in the following chapter (Chapter 5), where I consider the Kurds in Syria from a historical perspective and present a theoretical discussion on 'groupness' in relation to the question of ethnicity.

[286] Wimmer and Schiller, 'Methodological Nationalism and beyond: Nation-State Building, Migration and the Social Sciences.'

Based on the two data sets, I proceed according to the two ambitions set out above, even if they come with considerable limitations. I will present these limitations below while describing the details of the databases.

I accessed statistical data from the Swedish Migration Agency [Migrationsverket],[287] which I requested to use in the mapping of the geographic locations of immigrants from northern Syria who arrived in Sweden after the Syrian civil war. I aimed to track where majority of the population was residing so that I could target specific cities for interviews. In the registered data, there are variables on the migration pattern of refugees from Syria in Sweden in terms of their geographic origin (Syrian city names, self-declared), year granted asylum, place of residency in Sweden (based on their registered address in Sweden), and variables on age and gender. I prepared a database so that I could work with the migration flow from northern Syria into Sweden, providing an overview of aspects such as city of departure, age, gender and current city of residence.

The data consists of Syrian nationals who have been granted asylum in Sweden between 2009 and 2019. The source consists of the total Syrian population in Sweden within the specified decade aggregated by town/city names. Accordingly, there are 106 295 Syrian nationals who were granted asylum in Sweden between 2009 and 2019. Departing Starting from with this large population, I first classified the cities within the region of northern Syria, which is where the majority of Kurds reside, to create an overview of the people from that region.

The population of northern Syria is dominated by Kurds in terms of population, and certain regions gained de facto autonomy during the civil war. Given this, I selected cities in northern Syria based on the map prepared by Michael Izady on the ethnic composition of Syria prior to the war in 2010.[288]

As the map shows, Kurds reside across different governates, mainly in Al-Hasakah and Aleppo, and some districts and villages in Raqqa and Idlib. The main cities within these governates that represent families' geographic origins are (from the northwest to the northeastern region) Afrin, Ayn al-Arab, Ras al-Ayn, and Al-Qamishli. As shown on the map, while the ethnic composition of certain districts is mixed, some cities have a high density of Kurds. Using the map by Izady as a basis to work with the data from the Swedish Migration Agency, I map out the number of people in Sweden who migrated from one of the above-mentioned cities or its villages. Taking into consideration the missing data, and

[287] The Swedish Migration Agency describes itself as 'the authority that considers applications from people who want to take up permanent residence in Sweden, visit, seek protection from persecution or become Swedish citizens.'

[288] Michael Izady, *Syria: Ethnic Composition in 2010 (Summary)*, The Atlas of the Islamic World and Vicinity (New York: Columbia University, 2000). I believe this map is relatively more reliable compared to the map of *Rojava* (Federation of northern Syria), as this map changes due to the ongoing conflict and is based on border politics rather than a historical analysis of the region. In other words, the map of *Rojava* is based on territorial war among different groups whereas the map prepared by Izady is based on the history of Syria and ethnic identification, which is how I classify families.

by excluding it, at least 8 800 Kurds (with Syrian nationality) from northern Syria were granted asylum in Sweden between 2009 and 2019. The majority of these were granted asylum in 2016.

There are gaps due to missing data. These gaps can be defined under three categories. First, the data provides information about people that have not been registered under any city, but are registered as '(blank)', which includes 30 320 persons from the total population of 106 295. The number provided also includes those whose names were registered with abbreviations or diacritics excluded. The people belonging to this category are considered as missing data. Secondly, the names of the Syrian cities registered have been written as reported by the individual. Consequently, some of the city names have been written in different ways with minor changes to letters. Given that this is self-declared data, the same applies when the same city is registered in its Arabic or Kurdish name.[289] For the purpose of clarity with regard to the Syrian national map and the city names therein, this has been adjusted by grouping those names under their Arabic version.

However, the majority of city names were registered in Kurdish, which may be for various reasons. These reasons may include national pride or a lack of awareness of Arabic names among illiterate participants. In addition to the statistical data, all of the interviewees used the Kurdish city names as opposed to the Arabic names. In order to respect the participants' self-identification during the interviews, I keep the Kurdish city names in quotations (if it was mentioned) and write the Arabic names in brackets. Lastly, the data also consists of names of cities in other countries, including Sweden, which are the cities that the persons concerned have declared as their place of departure. These cities, as well as the names of small neighbourhoods and villages that are not possible to detect, have not been considered in this methodological step.

Given that the data was self-declared and was organised based on my knowledge of Syria and the map showing its ethnic composition, I believe that the usage of the data requires justification. Due to Sweden's registration policy, the state does not collect data on ethnic origin. Acknowledging this, I do not aim to represent all Kurds in Sweden who have fled Syria with the database I created. Rather, I provide an overview of the migration flow from the northern region in cities where Kurds represent the majority of the population. Apart from the missing data, there are several reasons why the data cannot represent the whole population of Kurds from Syria. First, the data cannot be legitimised since there are other ethnic minorities within the region, and second, there are villages outside the northern region with a dominant population of Kurds under the control of the Syrian government that have not been included in the data.

[289] The names of Kurdish villages and cities were changed to Arabic names during the implementation of the Arab Belt policy. For further discussion, see Chapter 5.

Apart from the challenges mentioned above, the database serves as a methodological step, providing essential knowledge on the geographical location of my target group in Sweden. I acknowledge that the cities of residency were self-declared and may have changed due to individuals' geographic mobility within Sweden. However, it is generally unlikely that refugees will change their region of residence in Sweden.[290] Taking this into consideration, I used my methodological analysis as a step to gain an overview of the approximate number of people from specific cities in Syria residing in specific cities and regions in Sweden. To preserve the anonymity of the specific districts I visited to meet the interviewed families, I classified the districts under their region name.

Sweden consists of twenty-one regions, and I conducted interviews in five of them (in nine districts). After establishing contacts in specific regions and visiting these regions, I mainly enriched my material using snowball sampling.

Based on the data, the general picture reveals that the majority of Syrian refugees from the northern region arrived from Al-Qamishli, primarily residing in the Stockholm region. To create a better visualisation, I worked with the data-base further to show the population of Syrians who migrated from the northern region of the country to Sweden over the last decade in relation to the total population of Sweden in 2020. While Figure 1 represents the regions, Figure 2 shows the population of Syrians from the northern region of the country who reside in Sweden at municipal level.

[290] Louisa Vogiazides and Hernan Mondani, 'Geographical Trajectories of Refugees in Sweden: Uncovering Patterns and Drivers of Inter-Regional (Im)Mobility', *Journal of Refugee Studies* 34, no. 3 (2021): 3065–90.

Figure 1. Population of northern Syria in Sweden at regional level, 2009–2019.

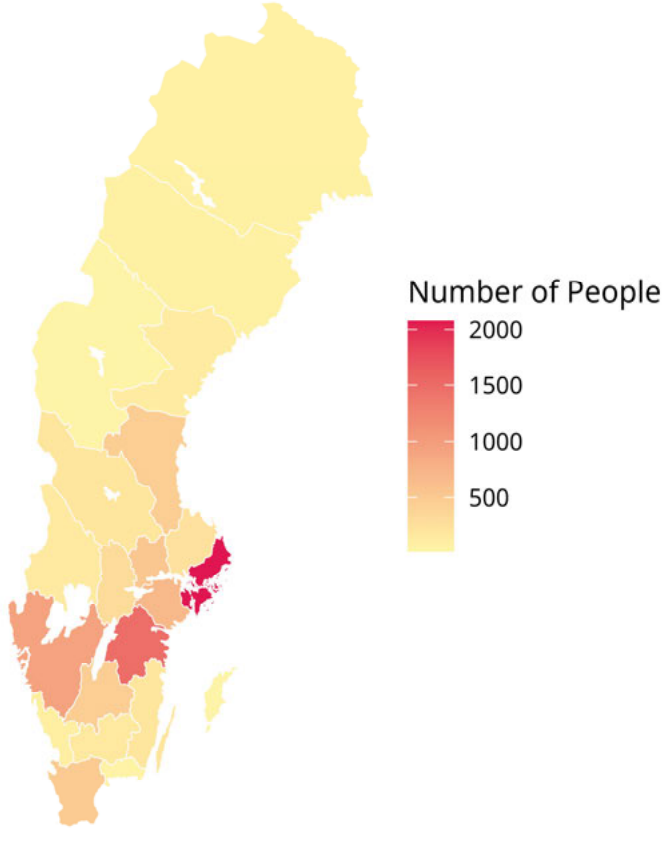
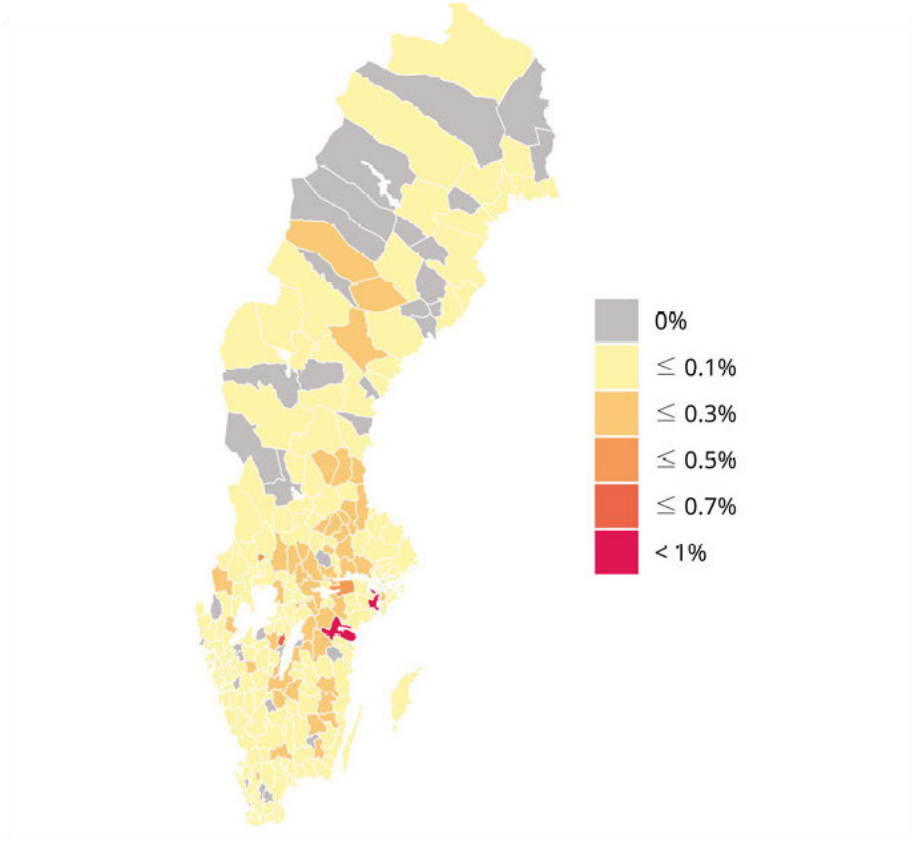


Figure 2. Distribution of the population from northern Syria as a percentage of the total population in Sweden at municipal level, 2009–2019.



Given both maps, the population from northern Syria seems denser in southern parts of Sweden, especially in the regions of Stockholm, Östergötland, and Västra Götaland with a population around 1 000, whereas northern parts Sweden has the lowest number of people from northern Syria. This may that there are stronger ethnic communities in the southern regions of Sweden.[291] I prioritised Stockholm, as there were more than 2 000 people from northern Syria living there. After conducting a couple of interviews in Stockholm, I established contact with several Kurdish institutions, political activists, and Kurdish mother tongue teachers in Östergötland. However, I was unable to meet any Kurdish families from this region, and was told that the majority of the population from northern Syria in that region were Assyrians. Instead, I considered visiting the Skåne region where I managed to access families who were willing to meet me and where the population of people from northern

[291] These regions include some of the largest cities in Sweden, featuring major urban centres with many job opportunities and a significant immigrant population.

Syria did not exceed 500. This difference was significant compared to Stockholm. Still, the population was relatively large. Visiting Skåne allowed me to meet families from different cities through a snowball effect. I followed this step by conducting some interviews in the Gävleborg region as it offered similar numbers to Skåne, but in a geographically different region. I was faced by a divide: the families I met in Gävleborg were mainly from Al-Qamishli, whereas the families in Skåne were mainly from Ras al-Ayn.

The second statistical data set I worked with for this project was the 2004 public census data from Syria.[292] This year was chosen arbitrarily and does not necessarily hold any significant relevance to this study. It is the public data that was available and captures detailed information with regard to the socio-economic conditions in pre-war Syria while the families were living there. Furthermore, considering the age span of the parents interviewed, the year 2004 also provides an idea of the conditions in Syria during their education or working years. The data consists of various information from all Syrian cities with regard to several variables that have been categorised by gender. The relevant variables include the rate of educational attainment, the rate of illiteracy, the rate of unemployment, the rate of school dropouts, the rate of workers in the public and private sectors, the rate of workers in agriculture and the percentage and average number of those living in rented versus owned houses. Findings from this data analysis are mainly used to identify certain characteristics of the population from the cities in the northern part of Syria, where the interviewed families resided prior to migration to Sweden. I 'cleaned' the census data based on the Syrian cities I am interested in for this project and the variables that contribute to an understanding of the prevailing socio-economic conditions prior to war. I retrieved some figures from the data, which I use in Chapter 5, supplementing these statistical findings with the interview material. Although this may imply and impose a homogeneous profile to specific cities, I believe it provides significant information that creates a general overview.

As mentioned, my main analysis does not derive from the statistical databases. Rather, one database is used as a methodological step to indicate relevant Swedish cities and regions for the study, and the other is used to provide an overview of the geographical categorisations and socio-economic profile of families associated with specific cities in Syria.

Ethical considerations

In late 2019, I prepared an ethics application with my main supervisor, which we submitted to the Swedish Ethical Review Authority in early 2020. Due to the delays

[292] Central Bureau of Statistics in the Syrian Arab Republic, 'Syrian Arab Republic – Population Statistics' (Syrian Arab Republic, 2004).

caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, the application was approved – later than anticipated – on 29 May 2020, which caused me to postpone my data collection.

The application process was rewarding, as it enabled me to review my methodological steps in detail, challenging me to formulate and consider certain ethical aspects that could have been overlooked, such as topics on ethnicity and political views. As I would be working with a marginalised ethnic group that had fled war, I realised that interview participants may feel vulnerable talking about their past and present experiences. Writing this application allowed me to prepare for this and be diligent when formulating my questions and writing my analyses. Additionally, it enabled me to be more careful regarding data storage and processing.

Before each interview, families were informed about the process, how I would store data and how I would use it in my research. Some families expressed they did not have anything to hide and that I could reveal further details such as their names, city of residence in Sweden, school names and any other personal data that could reveal sensitive information about them. However, to maintain privacy and consistency across all families, efforts were made to minimise identifiable characteristics for each family. Pseudonyms are used throughout this study, and further measures were taken to protect any particularly vulnerable participants.

The families were informed and aware that I would visit their homes to ask questions and discuss topics with the purpose of writing about their experience as migrants in Sweden. Therefore, they had given their consent regarding my presence and observation. The observations I noted before and after recording the interviews were not discrete.

Despite the benefits of a formal process, I found that there were also certain aspects that clashed with my research practice.; I followed the ethical guidelines prepared for a Swedish context, which represents and adapts a 'Western perspective' on ethics. In some cases, these guidelines did not necessarily correspond to a similar representation and interpretation for the object of my study. For instance, one of the biggest problems I faced with the ethical process was having parents sign a consent form.

Due to my familiarity with the group, I realised that a written consent form could cause problems building trust. In the ethics application, I specified that having a signed paper consent form would be unrealistic for several reasons. In fact, handing out consent forms may have undermined my data collection. The ethnic group that is the focus of the study has struggled for decades because of their ethnic identity and national politics. This struggle has, among other things, led to political repression in the nation states where they live. Signing documents may therefore be associated with danger, such as being reported to Syria, deported from Sweden or being stigmatised for their political ideologies among Kurds. Additionally, acknowledging that I would be interviewing stateless participants some of whom were illiterate, I was aware of the challenges a written consent form could cause

during the fieldwork, as well as the symbolism a written form could have for such a group – for instance, disrespecting or belittling their lack of education. I clearly indicated this aspect in my ethics application.

Initially, before entering the field to collect data and visit people in their homes, I aimed to briefly explain the project and obtain verbal consent for recording. I planned to press the record button and capture their consent before beginning my questions. However, my experience unfolded differently than expected. At times, I would spend up to half an hour explaining my intentions, the project, and my own background, often revealing my family name to build trust. This lengthy process, necessary for establishing rapport, made repeating it for the purpose of recording consent impractical, as families found it strange. If I didn't record the consent, however, trust might be undermined, leaving room for ambiguity. As a result, I primarily obtained verbal consent without using written forms.

I tried using written consent forms, but I soon realised they raised concerns, especially among illiterate families. Despite recognising the limitations and potential anxiety these forms could cause, I continued to present them during my early interviews. However, several fathers and cultural mediators advised me against this, warning it could erode trust. In response, I switched to verbally requesting consent while outlining the project. Since the families had already welcomed me into their homes, which was a sign of trust, they often found the detailed explanation irrelevant. This in itself reveals the clash of cultures.

I believe consent is a crucial part of research. However, as I anticipated, written consent was impractical due to the families' backgrounds and the importance of maintaining trust. Insisting on written forms would have excluded illiterate families and limited my ability to interview a broader range of participants.

Classifying families

As discussed in the previous chapters, migration studies has a significant focus on other forms of social difference than class, such as ethnicity, gender, generation and in recent years, religion.[293] This is especially the case in the context of forced migration.[294] This is mainly because refugees are only analysed from the time they become an *immigré*, rather than considering their entire life trajectories.[295] There are practical reasons for this, one of which is that class analysis is highly national, for example, in capitalist societies, labour markets and economic relations are structured on a national basis.

[293] Van Hear, 'Reconsidering Migration and Class', 101; Türkmen, 'Categorical Astigmatism', 6.
[294] Hunkler et al., 'Spatial and Social Im/Mobility in Forced Migration'.
[295] Sayad, *The Suffering of the Immigrant*.

In this study, I seek to distance myself from common classifications in refugee studies that focus mainly on ethnicity or religion and classify families based on the parents' educational level and occupational status in Syria. This allows me to analyse the diverse backgrounds among the Kurdish refugees rather than considering them as a homogeneous group. I start by offering a historical analysis of the geographical region from which the families migrated (northern Syria) and consider socio-economic and political developments in the region (see Chapter 5). I consider parents' structural possibilities and constraints, such as access to schooling and citizenship status (acknowledging the legally stateless population in Syria).

Further, instead of identifying a family as lower or upper class, I consider parents' individual trajectories. This is particularly evident in Chapter 6 where I discuss how parents adapt their acquired skills and knowledge from Syria. In Chapter 7, where I discuss class-based educational practices, I look at parents' citizenship status, educational backgrounds and occupational backgrounds and consider the parents with the highest educational level as the indicator of the family's class. However, I discuss this relationally, where the families are compared to each other. A family would therefore have *relatively* more or less educational assets. The same goes for financial and social assets, if this was discussed by the families during the interviews. This means that if the parents mentioned that such assets were crucial to different strategies towards their children's education in Syria and Sweden, I considered it in the analysis.

I categorised parents' educational level as follows: those who lacked formal education were classified as illiterate. Individuals who completed schooling up to grade six (age 12 in Syria) were categorised under primary education. Those who completed up to grade 12 (age 18 in Syria) were considered to have attained secondary education. If relevant to the analysis, I specify whether parents have completed lower secondary education (grades 7–9, ages 12–15) or upper secondary education (grades 10–12, ages 15–18). Individuals who pursued further education, such as training to become teaching assistants, were classified as having post-secondary education. Those who obtained university degrees were categorised as degree holders. Finally, anyone who dropped out of school in Syria was categorised according to the level of their education at the time of dropout, such as 'primary school dropout', 'secondary school dropout', or 'university dropout'.

The category of illiteracy needs further clarification, first, regarding its official definition, and second, due to what it corresponds to for my sample population. In official reports, illiteracy is defined as the inability to read and write, typically measured by the incapacity to comprehend a short, simple written statement.[296] This

[296] UNESCO, 'Number of Illiterates', Organisation, Institute of Statistics, 2024.

is to say that illiteracy is not necessarily measured based on educational level. In this study, however, I categorise those who lack formal education in Syria as illiterate.

My sample relied on self-reported educational backgrounds. Based on my sample, I realised that those who dropped out before grade seven considered themselves as lacking education, with limited reading and writing skills. This was partly associated with their language, reading and writing skills. This was also justified by their attendance in schools, where some attended school simply for the sake of being present in the schools in their rural villages. This was often a consequence of limited school availability, where students could only complete up to grade six. The continuity of education depended on whether their parents sent them to urban areas with secondary schools (secondary school catering to students approximately aged 15 and above, which corresponds to the minimum age for classifying the adult illiterate population in official reports).[297] Therefore, the differences between the illiterate population and those with low education were difficult to detect.

Recognising potential differences in skills between those who never attended school and those who dropped out early is important. Interviewees who had never been to school were unable to read and write and often relied on communal events, cultural rituals and generational storytelling. For instance, religious celebrations, harvest cycles and historical narratives passed down through oral tradition served as reference points for estimating years. Those who had completed several years of schooling were in a different stage. They recognised years and were familiar with the Latin alphabet. They had low reading skills and often struggled with writing. They had some basic skills but lacked the ability to understand and use written information effectively in their daily lives. They may struggle with comprehending complex texts, filling out forms or interpreting instructions. This was intensified among Kurdish families, as Arabic was not used unless they had extensive schooling.

A significant aspect to the classification of illiteracy was language. All family members were Kurds and fluent in Kurdish. Their daily language was Kurdish. This being said, none had any education in Kurdish.[298] They all frequently mentioned the difficulties they experienced in learning Arabic in Syrian schools. Even for those who had been to school until grade seven, they mentioned that reading and writing in Arabic was difficult and slow.[299]

For the sake of clarity, those categorised as illiterate in this study are individuals who never attended school, even if some participants with primary education could also be

[297] Ibid.
[298] In northern Syria, Kurds speak the Kurmanji dialect, which is written in the Latin script rather than the Arabic script.
[299] It is important to note that the language of instruction in Syria is Arabic, which uses the Arabic script, as opposed to the Latin script used in Sweden.

categorised illiterate due to their disconnection from 'schooling', their education level and inability to read and write in general, and particularly in the Latin alphabet.[300]

In sum, although parents' educational levels and occupational backgrounds are taken into consideration and used as the main principle for classification (as criteria that unites and divides families from each other), this study also takes into consideration their history as a group of Kurds in Syria and the implications this had on their social trajectories. This is to say, I acknowledge that due to their political struggle, factors such as ethnicity and marginalisation seem to be crucial to determining the life chances and opportunities available to Kurds in Syria.

[300] Among the fifty parents I interviewed, six had never been to school in Syria and the majority dropped out before completing grade six. For further discussion on the level of education in Syria, its history, and the implications on parents' language skills, see Chapter 5 and Chapter 6.

CHAPTER 5

The Syrian Kurds as *émigrés*

This chapter outlines and discusses the 'social histories' referenced throughout this study by unpacking Syria's socio-economic and political history. Kurds in Europe have commonly been studied as a unified group, mainly as a diaspora, based on their politics of nationhood,[301] or as a 'stateless diaspora'.[302] I am interested in what unites and Kurdish families in Syria based on their social origin. I will lean towards an emphasis on what divides Kurds as an ethnic group with regard to their heterogeneous backgrounds, while emphasising signifying how this well-studied 'groupness' is formed based on their sociopolitical histories. Thus, I will present the various resources held by families in Syria, their social status and how they are related to one another based on a historical analysis of what has united and divided the Kurds as a group.

I will begin by using a historical understanding of ethnicity to analyse what has united Syrian Kurds. Taking an ethnic group as a unit of analysis, I find it crucial to challenge the way I approach ethnicity, ethnic groups and categorisations. Rather than essentialising an imagined community and groupness, I discuss how Kurds can be perceived as an ethnic group, or a community, in their national and transnational contexts. By studying Kurds from Syria as *émigrés*, I aspire to apply a historical understanding of their ethnic struggle, which necessitates an analysis of their 'ethnicity'. The purpose is not to take an ethnicised approach of the social world,[303] but to acknowledge a strong variable that can be considered to also define and clarify certain aspects that may otherwise be overlooked.[304]

I will then show that individual educational levels and occupational backgrounds have historically divided Syrian Kurds. I discuss this by analysing the interviewees' narratives and using them to reconstruct their history. This is where the empirical investigation begins. In this analysis, I engage with Kurds' sociopolitical history in Syria to provide a comprehensive overview of their

[301] Bruinessen, 'Shifting National and Ethnic Identities'; Hassanpour and Mojab, 'Kurdish Diaspora'; Wahlbeck, *Kurdish Diasporas*; Wahlbeck, 'The Kurdish Refugee Diaspora in Finland'; Alinia, 'Spaces of Diasporas: Kurdish Identities, Experiences of Otherness and Politics of Belonging'.
[302] Eliassi, *Contesting Kurdish Identities in Sweden: Quest for Belonging among Middle Eastern Youth.*
[303] Rogers Brubaker, *Ethnicity without Groups* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 12.
[304] Andreas Wimmer, *Ethnic Boundary Making: Institutions, Power, Networks* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

subordinate position and emphasise the availability of different assets (starting from the 1960s), which are also gendered.

Syrian Kurds as a unified ethnic group

When discussing the nationalism of a dominant group and its rule-setting power, Craig Calhoun argued, 'that is one of the privileges of being dominant that you are able to see what you do as natural rather than see it as dominant. But if you are subordinate you do not have that privilege'.[305] Viewing the relationship between 'the dominant' (i.e. the Ba'athist Syria) and the subordinate ethnic minorities (the Kurds) through a historical lens, we can reveal what 'unifies' Kurds based on the socio-economic and political backdrop influencing their status within Syria. Furthermore, this provides a deeper understanding of the implications of migration on the perceptions of Syrian refugees.

In this section, I begin by introducing Syrian Kurds through their history, outlining the implications of their marginalisation in Syria. This not only provides a perspective that defines the 'groupness', it also reveals important aspects regarding family resources. I continue by discussing relevant literature by sociologists and anthropologists regarding ethnicity, ethnic and collective identification, and 'groupness' by taking the Syrian Kurds as a point of departure.[306] In this way, I further clarify how Kurds in Syria can be taken as a unit of analysis that is based on their 'we-ness' despite their heterogeneity with regard to their different backgrounds.

Statelessness, political history, and the war

> The writing of history as it occurs is a problematic task. […] the memory of recent events is extremely volatile and fragile. It is deceiving because it is saturated with emotion and passion, exposed to the effects of disinformation or misinformation.[307]

In light of the quote above from historian Jordi Tejel, exploring the history of the Kurds in Syria can only be an attempt to situate them within their national context. My positionality as a researcher with a Kurdish background who is

[305] Barzoo Eliassi, 'Nationalism, Cosmopolitanism and Statelessness: An Interview with Craig Calhoun', *Kurdish Studies* 2, no. 1 (2014): 74.
[306] I acknowledge that Kurds in Syria are a specific part of the overall Kurdish population. However, I do not want to include Kurds from Turkey, Iraq, or Iran into the discussion on 'groupness', as this would require considering the history of Kurds residing in different states, which is beyond the scope of this study.
[307] Jordi Tejel, *Syria's Kurds: History, Politics and Society*, trans. Emily Welle and Jane Welle (London, New York: Routledge Advances in Middle East Islamic Studies Series, 2009), 115.

conducting research on Kurds may be problematic in this context.[308] However, I aim to describe historical elements by discussing some key moments and developments in the history of Syria that have determined what opportunities are available to Kurds in Syria.

The Kurds living in today's Syria, Iraq and Turkey continued to live without any borders dividing them until the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire and the establishment of nation states in the Middle East in the early 20th century.[309] The borders of the contemporary Middle East are mainly the result of colonisation and nation state building following World War I through the British and the French received the British Mandate of Mesopotamia and the French Mandate of Syria.[310] The mandates caused people belonging to the same clan and families to be 'artificially separated'.[311]

The estimated Kurdish population varies depending on the source. Providing exact statistics on the Kurdish population in the nation states they inhabit is difficult. An estimated 18–20 per cent live in Turkey (up to 25 per cent in some sources), 15–20 per cent in Iraq (up to 27 per cent), 10 per cent in Iran (up to 17.5 per cent), and 9 per cent in Syria (up to 15 per cent).[312] Thus, it is unsurprising that Kurds are considered ethnic minorities despite numbers reaching 30–40 million people, which makes Kurds not only the fourth largest ethnic group in the Middle East, but also the largest ethnic group without a state in the world. And if we look at the numbers of Kurds outside of their 'national context', based on recent estimates by the Kurdish Institute of Paris published at the end of 2016, up to 1.7 million Kurds lived in Western Europe, and there are also many Kurds living in other parts of the world.[313]

A substantial number of Kurds have been living in the northern part of Syria since today's borders were established in the Middle East. Following France's departure, post-mandate Arab nationalism ensued and 'Arab unity' was popularised,[314] making Kurds a major threat to the success of an Arab Syria.[315]

Before discussing the experience of the Kurdish population from the period after the French mandate until the Syrian war in 2011, the socio-economic changes Syria has undergone must be described in brief.

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[308] For a discussion on my positionality, see pages 65–75.
[309] For a detailed view on the Kurdish history, see Bozarslan, Gunes, and Yadirgi, *The Cambridge History of the Kurds*. For the specific context in Syria, see Dawn Chatty, *Syria: The Making and Unmaking of a Refuge State* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).
[310] The border between the Ottoman Empire and Iran was drawn much earlier, in 1639, with the treaty of Qasr-e Shirin.
[311] Hanna Batatu, *Syria's Peasantry, the Descendants of Its Lesser Rural Notables, and Their Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 134.
[312] Fondation-Institut kurde de Paris., 'The Kurdish Population', 2017. Accessed 20 November 2023.
[313] Ibid.
[314] Batatu, *Syria's Peasantry, the Descendants of Its Lesser Rural Notables, and Their Politics*, 133–34.
[315] Tejel, *Syria's Kurds*, 13.

New classes in Ba'athist Syria

There have been multiple policies and reforms throughout Syria's history. These can be divided into particular phases, such as the United Arab Republic (1958–1961), the traditional civilian phase (1961–1963), the traditional Ba'ath phase (1963–1966), the radical Ba'ath phase (1966–1970) and the liberal Ba'ath phase (1970s onwards).[316] These economic policies mainly shaped the agricultural and industrial sectors, and while the former was reminiscent of a feudal system, the latter was dominated by free private enterprise with limited state control before 1958. Over the subsequent decades, this picture of Syria shifted as radical changes in socio-economic policies impacted the country's class structure.

Syria's economy reached an important point in 1958 when a land reform policy was enacted. Agriculture was the country's biggest source of revenue, and as the Ba'ath party was 'coming out of the village',[317] the modernisation of rural farming and peasantry became part of the state policy, where strict amendments were introduced that favoured peasants over landowners.[318] The big landowners transformed from pre-capitalist 'feudalists' into agrarian capitalists and started to invest in technology to maintain their incomes, while poorer peasants were incorporated into state-supported cooperatives.[319] These cooperatives provided no alternative to capitalist mechanisms of accumulation and investment.[320]

Thus, in 1958, political power was exercised based on the collaboration between the landed aristocracy in rural areas and the commercial-industrial bourgeoisie in urban areas. The landed upper class, however, lost its power due to the land reforms in the 1960s, as the Ba'ath military coup (1963) introduced reforms that determined how much land an individual could hold. The radical Ba'ath represented the petite bourgeoisie in provincial towns and small-sized landowners, which formed the new Syrian elite, consisting of army officers and young politicians. These agricultural reforms continued in the 1970s, where the Ba'ath regime redistributed agricultural land from large landowners to tenant farmers and peasants, which mainly went to peasants from the Alawi minority, as Hafez al-Assad was influenced by his Alawi background and the Sunni majority as he sought to broaden his base of support.[321]

The reforms led to a decrease in the social power of landowners and strengthened the relationship between peasants and urban businesses. Not only were landholdings limited, providing farm labourers with more economic and

[316] Syed Aziz-al Ahsan, 'Economic Policy and Class Structure in Syria: 1958–1980', *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 16, no. 3 (1984): 301–23.
[317] Raymond Hinnebusch, 'The Ba'th's Agrarian Revolution (1963–2000)', in *Agriculture and Reform in Syria* (Fife: University of St Andrews Centre for Syrian Studies, 2011), 14.
[318] Ziad Keilany, 'Land Reform in Syria', *Middle Eastern Studies* 16, no. 3 (1980): 222.
[319] Hinnebusch, 'The Ba'th's Agrarian Revolution (1963–2000)', 9–10.
[320] Ibid., 11.
[321] Ahsan, 'Economic Policy and Class Structure in Syria', 308.

legal security, labourers were also able to organise unions. Peasant unions enabled the organisation of an articulate class; peasants received a political education and became involved in the political arena. The state cooperatives were therefore 'arguably generators of a petty peasant capitalism.'[322] The regime had 'vested class and ethnic interests [particularly, the Alawis] in the well-being of small landowners'.[323] The head of The General Union of Peasants (GUP) called this era 'the peasants' golden age.'[324]

Given the reforms, the class structure of Syrian society between 1960 and 1970 changed radically compared to the profile of the population before 1958. The power of the landed upper class (rural bourgeoisie) decreased, while a new middle class emerged (teachers, scientists, lawyers, technocrats, civil servants).[325] This new middle class, however, grew by only one per cent in a decade. After the 1970s, merchants, real estate businessmen and construction contractors benefitted most from the reforms.[326] Despite the reforms, the regional and religious ties were more significant and stronger in comparison to class ties.[327]

In the 1990s, land ownership became less prestigious, especially in comparison to those who could bring new capital and technology to the region.[328] The public sector did not live up to the state's ambitions, and agricultural production mainly moved to the private sector with small peasants organised in service cooperatives.[329]

A new state bourgeoisie was formed after Hafez's son Bashar came into power in 2000 where Sunnis and Christians who had proven their loyalty to al-Assad, in addition to the Alawites, were included.[330]

Political disposition remained a defining aspect of social status in Syria despite the changing class structure. This was rooted in the politico-economic strategies adopted under the Ba'ath regime, as only those with a personal connection to the state regime were able to attain positions of power.[331] In Syria, the patrimonial approach of the state caused the landowners and the urban Sunni elites, considered the bourgeoisie, to be replaced, mainly by traditional Ba'athists. The whole power structure rested on 'the politically relevant regime-shielding elite

[322] Hinnebusch, 'The Ba'th's Agrarian Revolution (1963–2000)', 11.
[323] Ahsan, 'Economic Policy and Class Structure in Syria', 315. The writing inside the brackets is not part of the original quote, but added for clarity.
[324] Batatu, *Syria's Peasantry, the Descendants of Its Lesser Rural Notables, and Their Politics*, 328.
[325] I will not delve deeper into the Syrian class structure of this decade. For detailed information, see Ahsan, 'Economic Policy and Class Structure in Syria'.
[326] Ibid., 319.
[327] Ibid., 321.
[328] Batatu, *Syria's Peasantry, the Descendants of Its Lesser Rural Notables, and Their Politics*, 37.
[329] Myriam Ababsa, 'Agrarian Counter-Reform in Syria (2000–2010)', in *Agriculture and Reform in Syria* (Fife: University of St Andrews Centre for Syrian Studies, 2011), 83.
[330] Alatassi Siham, 'The Role of the Syrian Business Elite in the Syrian Conflict: A Class Narrative', *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 49, no. 3 (2022): 433–45.
[331] Ibid.

military units whose commanders [were] Assad's hand-picked appointees and [had] little independent standing.'[332] Despite drastic changes after the year 2000, that deprived Ba'ath party members of their privileges, government officials and those belonging to the upper and upper middle classes were provided (neo)patrimonial initiatives. Furthermore, loyalty provided socio-economic privileges, as those who remained neutral or spoke out against the regime faced terrorism charges, which could also lead to the confiscation of property.[333]

The census, the Arab Belt, and *Rojava*

For many Kurdish peasants who worked the land but did not own it, the new agricultural policies could have been beneficial. They would have ostensibly had the opportunity to acquire land and become landowners themselves, which could have improved their economic and social status. However, in addition to the economic policies described above, the 1960s also saw the introduction of the Al-Hasakah census and the Arab Belt policy.

A census took place in 1960 as Syria underwent a transition period following the departure of the French troops from the region. Then, in 1962, a special census was conducted in the Al-Hasakah region, which is mostly inhabited by Kurdish people.[334] The census was to be carried out in one single day. The reasoning put forth by the Damascus government was that only 60 per cent of the Kurds in Syria were 'true' Syrians, as opposed to Kurds from Turkey and Iraq.[335] Kurds had to be able to prove their residence in Syria dating before the year 1945. However, even some Kurds with documentation lost their citizenship, and others paid large bribes to retain it. In some cases, people from the same family ended up having a different legal status with respect to citizenship. Consequently, one of the most decisive periods for Kurds in Syria was in 1962, when 20 per cent were stripped from their citizenship. This number comprised those who were registered as *ajanib* (foreigner/alien), also referred to as red cardholders. They had limited access to basic human rights, such as the right to education, employment, property ownership, political participation and legal marriage. Those who were not registered during the census were called *maktumeen* (concealed/hidden) and considered to be non-existent. *Maktumeen* were completely deprived of any rights, while *ajnabi* only had limited rights. After 1962, those who were born from marriages between 'non-citizen foreigners' could no longer be registered, which meant that they did not exist in the official records. Therefore, the numbers presented in different documents are not accurate given the number of unregistered people. The crucial aspect is that some

[332] Batatu, Syria's Peasantry, the Descendants of Its Lesser Rural Notables, and Their Politics, 327.
[333] Siham, 'The Role of the Syrian Business Elite in the Syrian Conflict'.
[334] The census is known as the Jazira or Al-Hasakah census.
[335] Tejel, *Syria's Kurds*, 51.

Kurds in Syria were defined as stateless under international law, which includes some members of the families interviewed.[336]

In 2011, the government offered to reinstate citizenship to those who lost their right to carry papers; not all accepted the offer. The application status of most of those who did apply remains pending, although some acquired citizenship at the end of 2018.[337] This historical decision still affects a large number of Syrian Kurds and reveals aspects that must be considered. This is especially true when considering the resources available to the group, as they previously had no rights within Syria. For instance, the census reveals how being stateless equates to being without educational resources, occupational status and financial assets.

Following the census, in 1963, the Ba'ath regime took over Syria through a coup d'état, and its directors defined Kurds in Syria as a foreign group that was a menace to the unity of the Arab nation. Tejel divided the Ba'ath policy against the Kurds into two phases. The first phase was from 1963 to 1970 and the second was from 1970 to 2000, the year Hafez al-Assad died and his son became president, who remains the current leader of the Bashar al-Assad party.[338] The first phase is referred to as the 'years of ideological purity', and a land reform policy was a major aspect of that period (see discussions of the land reform above). This reform later expanded into the Arab Belt policy, referring to the second phase, which is defined as the 'years of exploitation'.

The aim of the Arab Belt, according to the Arab press, was to displace Kurds (most of whom had been deprived of their citizenship) along the Syria-Turkey border, from Ras-al Ayn to the Iraqi border.[339] In the Arab Belt policy, the government aimed to distribute the land, predominantly in the Kurdish region, to Arab agricultural farmers whose lands were destroyed as a result of the construction of the Euphrates dam. When he entered into power in the 1970s, Hafez al-Assad implemented the plan to build an Arab Belt spanning approximately 350 kilometres by 15 kilometres along the Syria-Turkey border. Kurds inhabited this area, and consequently, many Arabs settled in Kurdish villages with the aim of changing the region's demographics. Tejel states that, in

[336] Kerim Yildiz, *The Kurds in Syria: The Forgotten People* (London: Pluto Press in association with Kurdish Human Rights Project, 2005); Maureen Lynch and Perveen Ali, 'Buried Alive: Stateless Kurds in Syria', Country Reports (Refugees International, January 2006); Khayati, 'From Victim Diaspora to Transborder Citizenship?'; Tejel, *Syria's Kurds*; Zahra Albarazi, 'The Stateless Syrians', Report of the Middle East and North Africa Nationality and Statelessness Research Project (Tilburg University Statelessness Programme, May 2013); Syrians for Truth and Justice (STJ), 'Syrian Citizenship Disappeared: How the 1962 Census Destroyed Stateless Kurds' Lives and Identities', 2018.

[337] Syrians for Truth and Justice (STJ), 'Syrian Citizenship Disappeared'; Haqqi Bahram, 'Too Little Too Late? Naturalisation of Stateless Kurds and Transitional Justice in Syria', in *Statelessness, Governance, and the Problem of Citizenship*, ed. Tendayi Bloom and Lindsey N. Kingston (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2021), 264–75.

[338] Tejel, *Syria's Kurds*, 59–68.

[339] Ibid., 61.

addition to the Arab Belt, 'the census of 1962 and its social consequences, a chronic lack of investment by the state, mechanization of agriculture, and between 1995 and 1999, a major drought which caused great difficulties for the thousands of families who relied on the cotton harvest.'[340] Although the country's overall situation had an impact across Syria, parts of the northern region and its inhabitants were disproportionately impacted by the land reform.

With the constitution that was in place up until the revised version in 2012 during the civil war in Syria, excluding the Kurds was part of the state doctrine to 'save Arabism'. Consequently, Kurdish political parties, including the Kurdish Democratic Party (al-Party al-Demokrat al-Kurdi), were banned in Syria. The Kurdish language remained prohibited, prohibited, whereas Assyrians and Armenians had the right to exercise and teach their language in private schools and cultural associations. Moreover, the names of villages were changed from Kurdish to Arabic, anything associated with Kurds was taken out of school books, people with Kurdish surnames were pressured to replace them with Arabic names,[341] police harassment and arrests occurred, and those possessing and distributing Kurdish language publications and teaching in secret Kurdish schools were imprisoned.[342] These are several examples that illustrate the social standing of Kurds in Syria during the Ba'ath regime.

As previously discussed, those who were not loyal to the regime faced terrorism charges.[343] For Kurds holding on to the ambition of attaining recognition, this aspect was particularly significant. In the case of Kurdish families from northern Syria, even those owning land were excluded from dominant positions because of their ethnic identity, or more specifically, because Kurds were perceived as being a foreign group that was a menace to the unity of the Arab nation.[344] Discrimination against Kurds can therefore be interpreted as collectively unfolding in Kurdish economic marginalisation.[345] The same applies for cultural producers of Kurdish descent. One can assume that Kurdish cultural elites were only recognised as such within the Kurdish domain, not by the Syrian state.

Throughout Syrian history, Kurds have resisted marginalisation. Under Bashar al-Assad, the ruling party sought legislative changes, releasing statements about political freedom and freedom of speech. There were also discussions about adding an article

[340] Ibid., 120.
[341] It has been argued that this sort of forced implementation is the state's attempt to standardise and legitimise its power. For further information, see James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 1998), 64–72.
[342] Tejel, *Syria's Kurds*, 110.
[343] Siham, 'The Role of the Syrian Business Elite in the Syrian Conflict'.
[344] Tejel, *Syria's Kurds*, 57; Harriet Allsopp and Wilgenburg Van Wilgenburg, *The Kurds of Northern Syria: Governance, Diversity and Conflicts* (London: Bloomsbury, 2019), 27.
[345] Allsopp and Van Wilgenburg, *The Kurds of Northern Syria*, 35.

to the constitution about a Kurdish nation. During this period, Kurds organised demonstrations to raise awareness of their stateless condition and ongoing oppression. One of the most memorable uprisings took place in 2004 during a football match, where political tension erupted in Al-Qamishli between the supporters of the football teams. The conflict started when the Arab group raised pictures of Saddam Hussein, who was the president of Iraq between 1979 and 2003 and was the leader of the country when a chemical attack targeted Kurds in Halabja at the end of the Iran-Iraq War.[346] Following the revolt in Al-Qamishli, many people, including children, were arrested regardless of their involvement.[347] At least thirty Kurds were killed and more than 2 000 Kurds were arrested for their role in the violence.[348] The revolt marked the beginning of a new era for Kurds in Syria.[349]

Despite armed struggles in other parts of 'Kurdistan', the Kurds in Syria had not yet adopted such a strategy up until the Syrian civil war. The Syrian civil war led to the establishment of the People's Protection Units (YPG), which were assembled to defend 'the Kurdish region', i.e. northern Syria. The YPG, together with the women's branch, the YPJ, have been at war against different opposing groups, including ISIS, and the Syrian regime was relying on Syrian Kurdish fighters to defend Syria's north-eastern region. In 2014, the armed struggle resulted in the elimination of ISIS from the city of Ayn al-Arab (referred to as Kobane by Kurds), leading to the creation of a *de facto* autonomous region called the 'Federation of Northern Syria–*Rojava*'. Declaring the YPG part of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) (primarily based in Turkey), Turkey organised several attacks on the region. According to the Turkish press, the Turkish government's objective was to create a 'safe zone' within Syria to replace the Syrian refugees under temporary protection status in Turkey and to fight against the Syrian Democratic Forces, which was militarily led by the YPG and had a stated mission to fight to create a secular, democratic and decentralised Syria.[350] Since 2018, Turkey has controlled the north-western city Afrin.

The dynamics of war had immense implications on the financial and social lives of people residing in the city. Those who crossed the Syrian border as migrants were also impacted as most experienced loss, losing people they knew, their property, villages and so on.

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[346] The massacre was recognised as an act of genocide by the Iraqi Criminal Court, and as a crime against humanity by the Parliament of Canada due to the considerable number of casualties and loss of civilian life.
[347] Yildiz, *The Kurds in Syria: The Forgotten People*, 42.
[348] Amnesty International, 'Syria: Mass Arrests of Syrian Kurds and Fear of Torture and Other Ill-Treatment' (Press release, London, 2004); Amnesty International, 'Syria: Amnesty International Calls on Syria to End Repressive Measures against Kurds and to Set up an Independent Judicial Enquiry into the Recent Clashes' (Public statement, London, 2004).
[349] Tejel, *Syria's Kurds*, 108–10.
[350] Allsopp and Van Wilgenburg, *The Kurds of Northern Syria*.

With the *de facto* autonomy of the northern region in Syria, the educational system in the region underwent changes to its school curriculum, making Kurdish the language of instruction.[351] Nevertheless, the region's public schools follow a bilingual policy, where both Kurdish and Arabic are mandatory and English is taught as a third language. In addition to compulsory education, the region has also established several institutions for higher education. The establishment and changes in the educational domain were developed as one of the first steps of the 'federal government' in 2014.[352] However, after Turkey gained control of the north-western city of Afrin in 2018, the school curriculum in the city was subsequently changed, making Turkish the language of instruction, while the remaining cities in northern Syria remain under heavy conflict.

The discussion above reveals why Kurds have been a marginalised group based on their ethnicity and political history, putting them in a subordinate position in Syria. We already know that their ethnicity and language are common to them as a group, and we also know that they share a common struggle due to their subordinate position in Syria.

Based on the historical timeline, it is clear that ethnicity can be a significant aspect to consider when taking a group as a unit of analysis. Exploring some works on ethnicity and ethnic grouping is therefore a fruitful way to further contextualise the case of Kurds from Syria. In the following section, I discuss how Syrian Kurds constitute 'groupness' by highlighting what unites them from a theoretical standpoint.

It is important to note that this brief historical timeline only represents the Kurds in Syria. This means that Kurds residing in south-eastern Turkey, northern Iraq and north-western Iran have been ruled under different nation states, and thus have different experiences.

A strengthened unitary Kurdish identity

> All Kurds, irrespective of where they are from, share in different ways, on the one hand, experiences of otherness and treachery, and on the other hand experiences of resistance and community maintenance. These experiences have become 'engraved' on their collective consciousness and collective memory that transmit over generations.[353]

In an analysis of Kurds in Sweden based on notions of identity, belonging and home, Alinia argued that the imagined Kurdish community arises from an effort and desire to become 'located', (which has a symbolic meaning in terms of

[351] Mohammed Al Hessan, 'Understanding the Syrian Education System in a Context of Crisis.', Vienna Institute of Demography Working Papers (Austrian Academy of Sciences, 2016), 27–30.
[352] Allsopp and Van Wilgenburg, *The Kurds of Northern Syria*, 109–13.
[353] Alinia, 'Spaces of Diasporas', 158.

'belongingness'). As Alinia has shown, the diasporic movement in Sweden has strengthened the idea of a unitary Kurdish identity through a national discourse, which has been made possible through Sweden's multicultural policies and the fact that Kurds were not seen as a threat to the security of Sweden's national boundaries and solidarity as they were inside the countries they consider their homelands. She further states, 'for people who see themselves as stateless, as many Kurds do, the questions of homeland, origin, and territorial belongingness, articulated in nationalist discourse, becomes attractive'.[354] Thus, the notion of a homeland is revived through the idea of Kurdistan, which is a political construction rather than a reality. Given the way Alinia defines Kurds in Sweden, I would like to expand on the specific history discussed above by adopting a theoretical point of view with regard to the Kurds in Syria. This characterises the 'unitary' aspect of Kurds' ethnic and national identity.

One of the pioneers of discussions on ethnicity is the anthropologist Fredrik Barth. In his famous work *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, he responded to the prevailing perception of ethnicity that is based on a shared culture. He suggested analysing ethnic boundaries outside of cultural traditions. In other words, as Rogers Brubaker puts it in his interpretation of Barth's work: ethnicity is a matter of 'practices of classification and categorization, including both self-classification and the classification of (and by) others',[355], which was later supported by Hal B. Levine in his work *Reconstructing Ethnicity*.[356] Further, Richard Jenkins, in his well-known book *Social Identity*, interpreted Barth's work through his model of collective identification as a matter of ascription '*by* individuals of themselves, and *of* individuals by others', which is also valid in a collective understanding.[357]

Barth further stated that one should avoid including the cultural aspect ('the cultural stuff') in the understanding of ethnicity, as culture arises from boundaries that are not only ethnic, but class based. Thus, it can be problematic to consider ethnic identity, ethnicity or ethnic groups in general as cultural traditions. Rather, as Barth claimed, ethnicity is a social category.[358] Despite the tendency to define 'us' and 'them' based on biological traits, geographical habitat, language and various other factors, ethnic boundaries emerge through social categories, interactions and categories of 'we and they' distinctions. For the Kurds in Syria, their 'we-ness' and distinction from 'them' can be attributed to their ethnic struggle and subsequent marginalisation, which generates ongoing political tension. Their collective

[354] Ibid., 209.
[355] Brubaker, *Ethnicity without Groups*, 65.
[356] Hal B. Levine, 'Reconstructing Ethnicity', *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 5, no. 2 (1999): 165–80.
[357] Richard Jenkins, *Social Identity*, 3rd ed. (London, New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2008), 131.
[358] Fredrik Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference.* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1969).

identification, or classification, can therefore be ascribed *to* 'we', as those who suffer the consequences of their ethnic identification. Additionally, it can be ascribed *on* them because of what their ethnicity *represents* to the nation states in which they reside. This can contribute to and reinforce their sense of 'we-ness.'

Ethnic categories are not necessarily universally agreed upon due to struggles over power.[359] Since the establishment of nation states, the concept of the nation has dominated the understanding of ethnicity, often leading to the formation of 'multi-ethnic' nations where one dominant ethnicity or class holds power. As described by Barth. in order to become a part of a new social system, non-dominant groups may employ three different strategies: first, they may become incorporated into the dominant cultural group; second, they may accept minority status and seek to mitigate the shortcomings it brings; and third, 'they may choose to emphasize ethnic identity'.[360]

Following the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire and the period after World War I, new nation states were established, which led some ethnic groups to be subordinated, including Kurds. Given the sociopolitical history of Kurds among these different nations, they cannot be generalised as a single group within one of Barth's categories. In the following section, I will draw on the example of the Kurds in Syria, as they are the focus of my research.

Emphasising ethnic identity

Under oppressive violent regimes, ethnic groups can be dependent on their community for their own security, which can strengthen their identity, as inter-ethnic contact is constrained.[361] This phenomenon is particularly noteworthy when examining the Kurdish population in Syria.

The third strategy described above, which is based on the idea of emphasising ethnic identity by creating new patterns, results in popular movements that develop from nativism and lead to the formation of new states. The war in Syria following the Arab Spring, which has displaced millions of people, has also enabled a space for the Kurdish ethnic minority to reclaim their ethnic identity through nativism. However, the current situation is not only rooted in a struggle for nationhood, but also a history of isolation, discrimination and exclusion. Kurds in Syria have occupied a minority status that has been shaped by a struggle for dominance. Therefore, they align with the approach of reinforcing a collective identity, which has allowed for the assertion of 'we-ness'.

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[359] Richard Jenkins, *Rethinking Ethnicity: Argument and Explorations* (London: Sage Publications, 1997); Andreas Wimmer, 'How (Not) to Think about Ethnicity in Immigrant Societies: A Boundary Making Perspectives', Working paper (University of Oxford: ESRC Centre on Migration, Policy and Society, 2007), 11.
[360] Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference.*, 33.
[361] Ibid.

Although Barth's work mainly focused on anthropological works about minorities in rural areas, his description of the 'concept' minority is different than the one I use in my analysis. In the nation states in which Kurds mainly reside, namely Turkey, Iraq, Syria and Iran, they are considered minorities. Despite being dominant ethnic minorities in the nations that govern them, Kurds represent the largest ethnic group without a nation, with a population of approximately forty million.[362] They are considered ethnic minorities due to the political history of the nation states in which they reside. Thus, it is rather a political description which derives from the structures of power, domination or even oppression. In other words, those who were not considered to be 'true' members of the nation were exposed to policies of exclusion and domination,[363] which categorised Kurds as minorities despite their large numbers. This perspective calls for a more critical look at the meaning of the term 'minority' and its usage in sociological and anthropological studies.

Having an ethnic identity that is associated with minority status, that is, not in terms of population necessarily, but in terms of being dominated by the majority and subjected to discrimination, segregation, and persecution, inherently carries disadvantages.[364] People may define this identity collectively based on self-identification, or even as a form of resistance, in order to claim 'recognition for ethnicity'.[365]

Drawing on works inspired by Bourdieu's idea of symbolic power and its exercise by modern states, Brubaker looked at studies on censuses and their effects to shed light on the creation of exclusive ethnic, national and cultural groups. This, in turn, led to the creation of new categories.[366] Brubaker's discussion on 'classification by others', and the subsequent 'creation of a group' underscores the different categories of exclusion. The census in the region of Al-Hasakah in 1962 is a clear example.

While it could be argued that a census does not necessarily create an exclusive ethnic category, I believe it plays a crucial role in fostering a sense of 'groupness.' This exclusivity arises from a shared experience, including the loss of citizenship and the generational implications, as well as factors such as language, struggles for nationhood, resource deprivation (such as land following land reform) and status as an ethnic minority. The 'self-understanding of the classified',[367] in this case those classified as a result of the census in 1962, enables a classification of self and a classification by others.

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[362] Fondation-Institut kurde de Paris., 'The Kurdish Population'.
[363] Andreas Wimmer, 'Dominant Ethnicity and Dominant Nationhood', in *Rethinking Ethnicity: Majority Groups and Dominant Minorities*, ed. Eric P. Kaufmann (London, New York: Routledge, 2004), 35–52.
[364] Steve Fenton, 'The Sociology of Ethnicity and National Identity', *Ethnicities* 11, no. 1 (2011): 14.
[365] Ronald Cohen, 'Ethnicity: Problem and Focus in Anthropology', *Annual Review of Anthropology* 7 (1978): 402.
[366] Brubaker, *Ethnicity without Groups*.
[367] Ibid., 68.

Surely, not all Kurds in Syria were a part of the census. Nevertheless, it serves as an example, illustrating how Kurds were perceived by the Syrian state. A similar argument can be made on a broader scale with regard to language. The Kurdish language was forbidden in public offices and schools, and publications were restricted. Identifying as a Kurdish speaking person could thus easily be stigmatised.[368]

Considering an ethnic group as a unit of analysis may presuppose and promote a notion of homogeneity, that is, not only a sense of 'togetherness', but also a shared culture, common values and shared understanding of the world. However, treating Kurds from Syria as an ethnic group in this study does not equate to a homogeneous understanding. As defined by Brubaker, one should avoid the 'groupism' and the tendency to treat ethnic groups as substantial entities, as if they are homogeneous and collective actors with a shared understanding of the world, by acknowledging the diversity within a group itself.[369] By analysing families with different resources, diversity is already established. Moreover, it is not possible to talk about common values, a common understanding, etc. when referring to a group consisting of forty million people, or in the case of Kurds from Syria, approximately two million. Surely, this group consists of people from different socio-economic classes, with different purposes, motivations and by extension, different practices. Yet, due to the historical and continuing struggle, especially over the past century, it is fruitful to analyse Kurds as a group, as this struggle has strengthened a unitary Kurdish identity.

I discussed how Syrian Kurds constitute 'groupness' by highlighting their shared history with regard to the way their oppression and marginalisation could strengthen the idea of a unitary Kurdish identity which is often studied in diaspora studies. Following Brubaker, I will now shift the focus towards a discussion on how Syrian Kurds are 'not a homogeneous and solidary *group* but a heterogeneous *category*.'[370] I will do this by focusing on the families that I met, discussing their diverse backgrounds in Syria. This is where parents' diverse educational and occupational backgrounds will be presented in relation to Kurds' sociopolitical history in Syria.

Syrian Kurds as a diverse ethnic group

While promoting his new book *Neither Settler nor Native: The Making and Unmaking of Permanent Minorities*, Mahmood Mamdani defined ethnicity as 'a cultural construct, not a territorial one. People in an ethnic group live in many places.

[368] Similar examples can easily be given for Kurds in Turkey and Iraq. However, I will not discuss such specificities in order to avoid overcomplicating the discussion.
[369] Brubaker, *Ethnicity without Groups*.
[370] Rogers Brubaker, 'Categories of Analysis and Categories of Practice: A Note on the Study of Muslims in European Countries of Immigration', *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 36, no. 1 (2013): 6.

They share the same culture without sharing the same territory.'[371] This resonates with the Kurdish case, as they live under different nation states, and generally share 'the same' culture. However, defining Kurds as a 'group', without necessarily understanding how they can constitute 'groupness', seems problematic. The discussions in the previous section touched upon this. This being said, defining Kurds as a social group without acknowledging the heterogeneity within the group poses similar problems. The following discussion is thus based on an analysis that attempts to emphasise the diverse backgrounds of Syrian Kurds as an ethnic group. I discuss this by relying on the backgrounds of the parents I interviewed and the 'reconstruction' of their history through their narratives.

In this study, I classify families based on the parents' educational and occupational backgrounds, as these are significant indicators, showing that they are a diverse group. The history of Kurds in Syria and the implications it can have on their social trajectories are also acknowledged. Looking at the educational backgrounds of the parents I met in Sweden, I noted that their various educational levels, ranging from illiterate to highly educated, were determined by their geographic origin and the political context of the areas from which they emigrated, as well as their social origin. As I discuss the details of the parents' social origin and the relevance of this in the following chapters, in this section, I will focus on providing a general picture of their geographic origin and the associated sociopolitical dimensions. This will serve as a basis for understanding the significant impact the families' backgrounds have on their perceptions and the availability of the families' educational resources and other resources in Syria. Furthermore, it will set the tone for a discussion of the families' encounters with education in Sweden based on their unique backgrounds and the differences and similarities in their experiences.

I collected information about families' geographic origin from various sources. This includes the family interviews and additional informal interviews with younger people from Syria who worked as mediators, Syrian public census data from 2004 and the Central Bureau of Statistics in the Syrian Arab Republic.[372] Indeed, taking a city as a unit of analysis can lead to generalised statements. Yet, the purpose is to highlight the differences among families from different cities, as well as to draw on the similarities with regard to their educational levels. Thus, the diversity and varied educational backgrounds among this group will become clearer.

[371] *Neither Settler nor Native: The Making and Unmaking of Permanent Minorities | SOAS*, Webinar, SOAS Middle East Institute's Lecture Programme on the Contemporary Middle East Series (Youtube: SOAS University of London, 2021).

[372] For further information, see Chapter 4. Any argument that refers to percentages of the aforementioned criteria under this section is based on the census data from 2004, while the rest is based on family interviews and previous literature.

Educational level in northern Syria

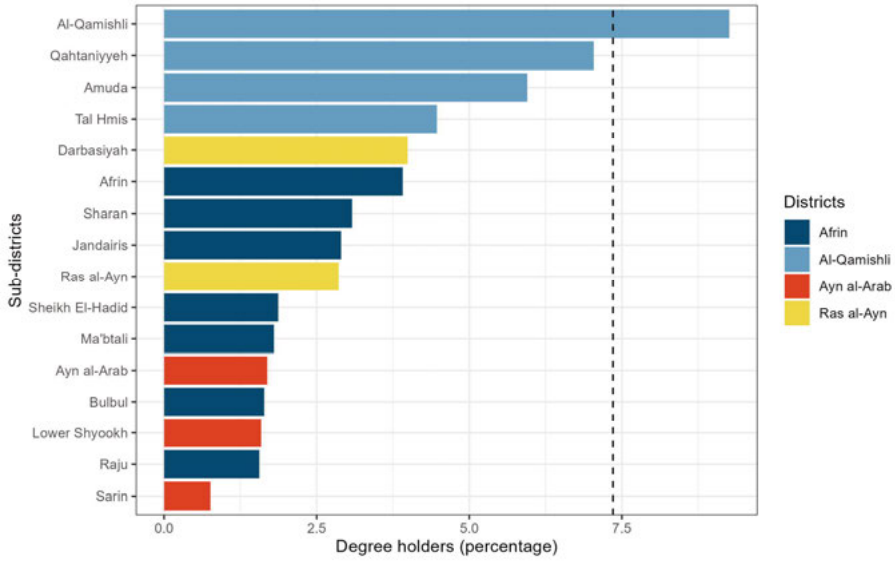
The educational level of parents in my sample (and their parents) was mostly relatively low, with a few exceptions where men had obtained higher degrees. Some never went to school, while the majority dropped out. Families traced the reasons back to the socio-economic structure resulting from the strong ethno-nationalism that characterised the history of the Syrian state, especially the attitude towards minorities such as Kurds. The lack of schools in villages and higher education institutions in northern Syria was attributed to a lack of government investment. Parents cited this as one of the reasons they dropped out of school or did not pursue higher education.[373] Other reasons mentioned by parents included the language of instruction (Arabic), lack of governmental jobs for Kurds and financial constraints.

The families I met were from the districts of Afrin, Ayn al-Arab, Ras al-Ayn, and Al-Qamishli, or their respective sub-districts.[374] To provide some context regarding the average educational level in these cities, I analysed the percentages of the population with higher education degrees in the northern region in Syria for both women and men. While the national average in 2004 among men was 7.35 per cent, the corresponding percentage for women was 4.92. Considering the cities from which the majority of families emigrated, the majority of the districts, including their sub-districts, were below the average (see Figure 3 below for the percentages for men).

[373] The University of Rojava in Al-Qamishli and the University of Afrin were higher education institutions that were only established after the region gained its *de facto* autonomy in 2012, yet the University of Afrin was shut down after the Turkish military occupation in 2018.

[374] The names of the sub-districts have been anonymised and categorised under their district names. See Appendix C for an overview of the parents' social characteristics.

Figure 3. Percentage of men with higher education degrees in northern Syria, 2004.



Remark: The vertical line represents the Syrian average in both the Figure 3 and Figure 4.

As the figure reveals, the population with higher education degrees among men is higher in Afrin compared to Ayn al-Arab, which can also be seen based on the education levels of parents. According to Mihemed (Ayn al-Arab, Family 13), the low educational level in northern Syria was related to the cities' infrastructure as well as the political instability in the region, which resonated with- the reports of other families on this topic.

> The everyday living situation for we Kurds is that of farmers. I mean, they usually do agricultural work. I can say that eighty to ninety per cent of our Kurds in Kobane (Ayn al-Arab) are working in agriculture. Education was really low because the ones dominating there did not want Kurds to be educated. Forget 'wanting'. It was their aim to prevent Kurds from reaching a certain level of knowledge, keeping them busy, living their daily life to support their family and raise their children. (Ayn al-Arab, Family 13)

The reasons he cites for the low educational level in the region can be seen through his political narrative, which is framed by his background as a son of landowners from Ayn al-Arab who were illiterate.

Prior to the Syrian civil war, Ayn al-Arab has mainly been a tribal community with a population of approximately forty-five thousand. Due to the city's infrastructure, lack of schools (especially in villages), lack of a private sector and other elements, Ayn al-Arab has remained an underdeveloped city.

The city, which, according to the interviewees, had a large tribal family, was later separated. This suggests that families from Ayn al-Arab are highly likely to recognise each other based on their family names. It further suggests that people are relatively more connected to each other compared to families from urban centres. The parents from this city mainly worked in agriculture (either as landowners or peasant workers) trade or in drilling.

Comparing Ayn al-Arab with a larger city such as Afrin makes the distinction even more clear. The town of Afrin developed during French-administrated Syria, like Al-Qamishli, and its economy was based on olive production, making it well-known for its agricultural land and revenue. It was a developed city where different sectors integrated into the city life. Levels of education were relatively high, and the private sector was well developed.

Throughout the discussions with Mihemed, he elaborated on the differences between the two cities, expressing that the differences were related to Ayn al-Arab's communal living and Afrin's progress in terms of education. Several parents made this comparison when describing the education levels of Kurds in Syria and how Kurds related to each other based on their different geographical backgrounds.

> The Kurds from our home, Kobane (Ayn al-Arab), are a little different from all of our Kurds in Syria. Our Kurds from Kobane are very strict. [If you ask me] In what way? Well, our Kurds from the Efrin (Afrin) region, for example, have passed the tribal community for thirty-forty years. For example, in the Jazira region, there are tribes, but there is no killing. [followed by a description of the political effects in Kobane and its tribal community] [If you ask me] What does this tell us? Well, it shows the lack of education. As the levels of education increase, there are fewer problems. You cannot compare a farmer to someone who is studying at university. (Ayn al-Arab, Family 13)

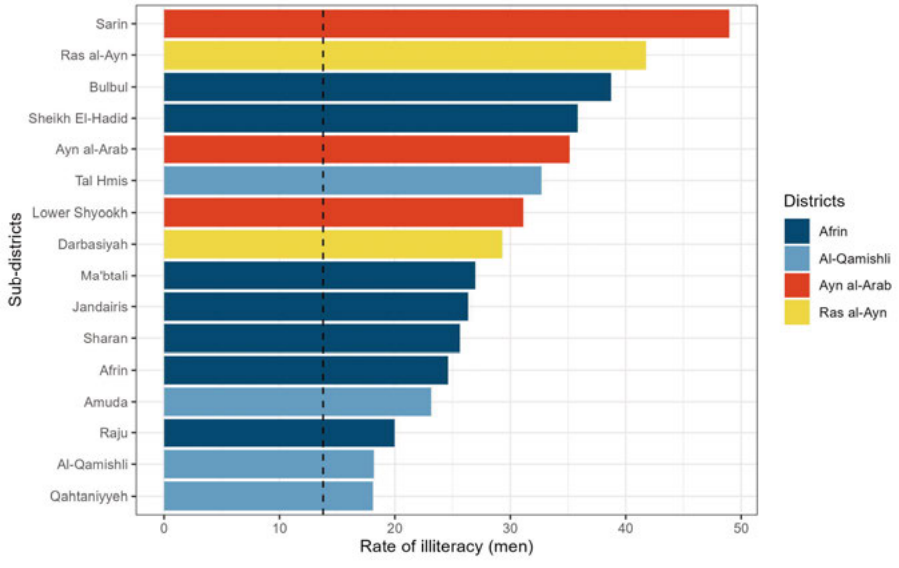
Mihemed wanted to distinguish between different cities in northern Syria to establish a link between living in tribal communities and different levels of education. He emphasised that Kurds from Ayn al-Arab were more involved with their tribal communities and values compared to Kurds from Afrin. Dara presented a similar argument:

> The society in Efrin (Afrin) is a developed one. Now in Kurdistan, generally, in the majority of places, society is usually tribal. […] go and ask people from Efrin what their tribe is, they wouldn't know. They all belonged to tribes, but they wouldn't know [their tribe names today]. It is because Efrin has gone beyond that level, that period. What does Efrin know now? They say, "I am from this family [names]." They know their family, but not their tribe. This is a more developed level than the tribal. As it is close to a big city [Aleppo], Efrin developed. All its people are educated. They are knowledgeable. (Ayn al-Arab, Family 12).

Both Mihemed and Dara related Ayn al-Arab and Afrin's tribal history to the educational levels associated with these cities, claiming that a large proportion of the population did not attend school, they rather worked in agriculture.

Given this, and looking at the rate of illiteracy as opposed to the educational levels of the population in the specific Syrian cities, I found that in some of the northern districts in Syria, illiteracy rates were above the national average among men and women overall, suggesting that there is a very high proportion of the population with no formal education. In this data, illiteracy refers to those who were not literate from age 15 and above. Illiteracy rates were almost always found to be double in women compared to men, suggesting a clear gender divide in parents' levels of education. To illustrate, the figure below shows the rate of illiteracy among men in several districts, including Ayn al-Arab, Al-Qamishli and Afrin with detailed information about the cities' sub-districts.

Figure 4. Rate of illiteracy among men in northern Syria, 2004.



Remark: The rate of illiteracy was almost always double for women compared to men.

As the above figure shows, the illiteracy rate in northern regions (the districts from which the families emigrated) was higher in comparison to the national average, which was 13.78 per cent. In fact, in some of the sub-districts, the illiteracy rates were as high as 30 to almost 50 per cent. We can therefore safely presume that there was a high concentration of illiterate residents in the northern region of Syria.

The ages of the parents I interviewed varied. One of the oldest parents was born in 1964, and the youngest was born in 1996. The oldest parents began school in the beginning of the 1970s, whereas the youngest started school at the

beginning of the 2000s. Considering the age range and the high illiteracy levels during their years the parents were school-age children in Syria, it is not surprising that seven of the 50 parents had never attended school, and the majority dropped out before middle school (approximately 12 years of age).

When speaking with Kawa about his educational background, he discussed how times have changed, and children no longer drop out of school:

> There were no schools during our times. Schools were available in villages far away. There was one school for two or three villages. Children went to school when there was snow, rain, when it was winter [difficult conditions]. It was only recently that more schools were available so that people could go. I mean, what made Kurds, our people, uneducated during a certain time? There were no schools. People did not have the means to take their children to cities; for example, to rent a house and spend money on them. It is not the same now. Now, people are prepared to compromise on food and clothing so that children can get an education, go to school and learn. Back then, science [and] wisdom [were] lacking. (Ayn al-Arab, Family 19)

Differentiating his time from the time when his children were living in Syria, Kawa attributed his low level of education to the restrictive conditions in his region and the 'wisdom' of his parents due to their constraints. Kawa's story reveals a common thread among those who were illiterate, providing an insight into certain structural constraints related to the high rate of illiteracy.

If we consider the historical evolution of the educated population in Syria, we see that the Syrian state's educational efforts intensified following its independence in 1945, and the literacy rate gradually increased during the early Ba'athist period. The majority of the population – including the children of agricultural workers – were enrolled in schools. While 66.4 per cent of the Syrian population were illiterate in 1960, this number decreased to 20.1 per cent in 1991.[375] Over the years, we also see an urban–rural divide and a gendered divide. The number of illiterate residents is higher in rural areas compared to urban areas. The same goes for the percentages of illiterate men and women. For example, levels of illiteracy among women reached 84.2 per cent in 1960, whereas this number was 49.1 per cent for men.[376]

Looking at the situation during the following years, we still observe a gradual decrease in illiteracy levels (see Table 1 below).

[375] In this data, illiteracy refers to those who were not literate from age 15 and above.
[376] Batatu, *Syria's Peasantry, the Descendants of Its Lesser Rural Notables, and Their Politics*, 72–73.

Table 1. Percentage of the illiterate population in Syria aged 15+

Year	1994	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
Men	15.4	10.8	10.0	9.1	8.3	8.3
Women	39.7	29.6	27.7	26.1	24.8	23.7
Total	27.4	20.0	18.5	17.3	16.4	15.9

Source: Central Bureau of Statistics in the Syrian Arab Republic, 'Education Indicators', Statistical Indicators and National Accounts Statistics (Syrian Arab Republic Office of Prime Minister, 2004).

The gendered divide remains strong over the years. In 2004, 23.7 per cent of women aged 15 and above were illiterate, while the average for Syria as a whole was 15.9 per cent. As Table 1 shows, at the beginning of the 2000s, approximately 96 per cent of the population lacked a higher education degree.

Changes in these numbers eventually impacted women's participation in the workforce. In 1960, women comprised only 7.1 per cent of the total workforce, most of whom worked in agriculture.[377] The General Union of Syrian Women educated approximately half of all women who became literate outside of formal schooling between 1973 and 2004. This reduced illiteracy among women by two-thirds and enabled women to be less dependent on their male relatives.[378] However, the economic recession in Syria in the 1980s led to high unemployment rates, which disproportionately impacted women, reinforcing their roles as mothers and wives in society. Islam is also cited a reason for the disproportionate impact of the recession on women.[379]

The educational level of parents also impacted their Arabic skills, and by extension, their cultural resources. When Kurds from Syria had not attended school, or dropped out from an early age, this inevitably influenced their Arabic skills, since formal education often formed the introduction to the language. Low educational assets therefore determined parents' linguistic assets. As Zana (Ayn al-Arab, Family 17) mentioned, Kurds from Ayn al-Arab struggle to speak Arabic without revealing their Kurdish accent. This was not a problem for those who completed formal education, especially in urban cities such as Al-Qamishli and Afrin, where levels of education among the parents were relatively high. In describing the struggles associated with a lack of education, and thus a lack of linguistic assets, Dara compared the people from Ayn al-Arab to Afrin as an example:

> People from Efrin (Afrin) speak Arabic. It is in their nature. They like Arabic. […] We, the people from Kobane (Ayn al-Arab), do not know Arabic anyway. I mean,

[377] Esther Meininghaus, *Creating Consent in Ba'thist Syria: Women and Welfare in a Totalitarian State. Library of Modern Middle East Studies.* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2016), 46.
[378] Ibid., 186. There should be scepticism concerning the inclusion of Kurdish women within this union.
[379] Sara Lei Sparre, 'Educated Women in Syria: Servants of the State, or Nurturers of the Family?', *Critique: Critical Middle Eastern Studies* 17, no. 1 (2008): 11.

> even if we want to speak Arabic, we don't know how to. But, for example, people from Efrin are speaking in Arabic, like our Kurds from the North (Turkey). I mean, they see that they are more established, successful. The Turkish language is a developed language, so they speak in that language. People from Efrin see Arabic as that. Of course, these are Afrin people that are in Aleppo. People from Efrin that live in Efrin are like the ones from Kobane. They also speak Kurdish. (Ayn al-Arab, Family 12)

Dara was referring to the differences in Arabic skills among people from Afrin by pointing to the differences with those in Aleppo, meaning in an urban city where the educational level was relatively high compared to Afrin. He elaborated on the impact that speaking Arabic had on the Kurdish population in Syria by relating it to Kurds' marginalisation. According to Dara, the reports of other families and other people I encountered, speaking Arabic could be associated with being closer to 'the dominant', in this case Syrian Arab. As someone from Ayn al-Arab, he wanted to distinguish himself from Kurds in urban cities outside the northern region in Syria, such as Aleppo, whom he defined as those who assimilated to the 'dominant language'.[380]

So far, I have shown that the educational levels of parents have been determined in part by their geographic origin, emphasising their structural possibilities to pursue education, such as availability of schools. I have shown that the educational background was gendered, where men had relatively higher levels of education compared to women. Furthermore, the discussion above also clarifies the differences in the language skills (Arabic) of those who attended schools in Syria as opposed to those who did not.

In the following, I will briefly place the gendered differences in educational attainment and employment within a larger context. This will demonstrate that gender is a significant indicator of different trajectories, making it a primary source of variation within the Kurdish population in Syria.

Gendered trajectories and family dynamics

As mentioned earlier, the levels of education among the parents I met were relatively low and were determined by their geographic origin and political context of the areas from which they emigrated. Moreover, educational and employment trajectories were gendered which is no surprise given Syria's history.[381]

[380] This comment is valuable as it perfectly captures the issue, contributing to an overall interpretation of the sociopolitical dynamics between Kurds from different regions, including different nations, such as Kurds from Turkey versus Syria.
[381] For an overview, see Appendix C.

This can be interpreted based on the sociopolitical history in Syria. Despite the secular ambitions of the Ba'ath party, the regime faced challenges from the Sunni bourgeoisie who disagreed with their ideology, which led to forced 'amalgamation'.[382] This further impacted actions taken to prioritise men's employment and allow for controlled religious activity, thus reinforcing women's role in society as mothers and wives.[383]

We can see this in Syria's family law throughout history, which has included patriarchal notions of difference between the sexes through religious laws. Despite changes to the law in 2003 during the political regime's liberalisation efforts, Rania Maktabi has shown that patriarchal norms were still reinforced, leading to ideals of male dominance over subordinate women and children.[384] Educated women have been shown to have a margin of freedom despite these structural constraints,[385] which is also strengthened by their older age.[386]

Against this backdrop, it is no surprise that men are generally the breadwinners in the family, thus reinforcing patriarchal norms within Syrian society where women are often relegated to the role of wife and mother.

To contextualise this further, I briefly looked at the agricultural sector due to its historical dominance in Syria's economy. Here we see that agricultural employment has also been impacted by the relatively higher educational attainment and employment among men. As men pursued higher education or found better paid, higher status industrial or service jobs, the number of women in agriculture increased significantly from the 1980s onwards. However, women's growing labour force participation did not indicate improvement in their employment status relative to men, which extended to women who own land.[387] Therefore, the participation rate has not necessarily challenged intrahousehold gender power relations.[388]

Despite this, the idea that women have only indirect power in families has been challenged.[389] As Annika Rabo states, family dynamics and power struggles continue to vary based on urban-rural differences, religion, class, ethnicity, and so on.[390] The

[382] Raymond Hinnebusch, 'Syria: The Politics of Economic Liberalisation', *Third World Quarterly* 18, no. 2 (1997): 263.
[383] Sparre, 'Educated Women in Syria', 11.
[384] Rania Maktabi, 'Gender, Family Law and Citizenship in Syria', *Citizenship Studies* 14, no. 5 (2010): 557–72.
[385] Sparre, 'Educated Women in Syria'.
[386] Michelle Lokot, 'Gendered Power Struggles beyond the Male-Female Dichotomy: Syrian Mothers-in-Law Exercising Power within Patriarchal Structures', *Anthropology of the Middle East* 18, no. 1 (2023): 35–55.
[387] Malika Abdelali-Martini and Jennie Dey de Pryck, 'Does the Feminisation of Agricultural Labour Empower Women? Insights from Female Labour Contractors and Workers in Northwest Syria', *Journal of International Development* 27, no. 7 (2015): 898–916.
[388] Ibid., 907.
[389] Susanne Dahlgren, 'Introduction: The Middle Eastern Family Revisited', *Hawwa* 6, no. 1 (2008): 5.
[390] Annika Rabo, '"Doing Family": Two Cases in Contemporary Syria', *Hawwa* 6, no. 2 (2008): 129–53.

degree to which internalised gendered roles transfer to Sweden among Kurdish families will be clear in the analysis of their encounters with adult education.

I now turn to the sociopolitical dimensions associated with families' geographic origins to further discuss the structural aspects of access to education. This paints a more detailed picture of the families' profiles as the availability of other types of resources, such as property and occupation, will also become clearer. The following discussion will also show that sociopolitical history is not only an indicator that unites Kurds as an ethnic group (which I have discussed previously), it also creates conditions that distinguish parents from each other in terms of their educational assets and occupational trajectories.

The sociopolitical dimensions

Families attributed the relatively low educational level in northern Syria and lack of resources available to them to the Syrian state's political strategy to marginalise Kurds. Some of the aspects that often came up were the Al-Hasakah census, the land reform and their exclusion from governmental jobs.

Almost none of the parents interviewed in Sweden worked in governmental jobs in Syria. The interviewees explained that their socio-economic profiles as Kurds in Syria were related to political struggles in the region and the lack of governmental investments, which was a way to exclude Kurds from governmental jobs. Several of the interviewees explained that their ethnic identity limited their chances of getting a governmental job, unless they openly supported Ba'athist policies. Kawa elaborated on this by highlighting the discrimination Kurds experienced in Syria.

> We always used to say that it was not our language, Arabic, back when we studied in school. They did not give you anything even if you finished upper secondary school and started university if you were a Kurd from Kobane (Ayn al-Arab). I mean, they would not put you in any governmental work even if you finished your education. They would not let you become anything because you are Kurdish. You have to support the government's security forces, serve for the benefit of the government for them to provide you with work. You would have to talk behind your neighbours' backs, report people, go to Arabic courses and support their regime – then they would provide you with work. […] There are many people back at our place that were physicians, but could not get a job.

Kawa was not alone in the way he described Kurds' experience in Syria. Others framed the lack of education or occupational trajectory as a result of the Ba'ath state regime. For example, Alan (Afrin, Family 7) cited the regime as one of the reasons he never became a teacher and opted to become a real-estate lawyer. The

social and political history of Kurds in Syria shaped Alan's ambitions, as he did not believe he would ever be hired in a school as a teacher; however, he could find work by opening a private practice as a lawyer.

In addition to economic aspects, the interviewees also mentioned the difficulties they experienced in their social lives. In relation to the land reforms and the fact that rural areas were more affected than the cities, a family from a village in Al-Qamishli stated that their village had been populated by Arab families, yet for political reasons, they did not form any personal relationships with these families. Mizgin (Al-Qamishli, Family 6) mentioned that 'Arabifying the Kurds was a policy of destruction'.

Indeed, if we look at specific cities, while the percentage of workers in the governmental sector in Afrin is lower than the Syrian national average, there are more workers in the private sector and agriculture. Similarly, Al-Qamishli has an above-average percentage of workers in agriculture, whereas the percentage of workers in the governmental sector is below average in all the sub-districts including the city.[391]

However, no direct connection can be made between the low percentages of governmental workers and a politically motivated strategy to exclude Kurds. In the early 2000s, Bashar al-Assad introduced a new economic policy, which opened the country to the world market, while the state retained control over foreign trade. As Volker Perthes describes, it was a limited open-door policy where public investment increased with the ambition of achieving rapid growth and structural modernisation that would enable a shift away from the agricultural economy. Perthes suggests that this strategy resulted in dependence on the outside world, where the wage-earning middle class oriented toward Western lifestyles. From 1980 onwards, especially in the later years, private exports increased considerably. As Perthes stated, 'despite its socialist orientation, the government pursued a policy that was rather friendly toward private importers.'[392] Although the state still played a leading role in controlling industry, increasing privatisation in Syria can serve as an explanation for the low percentages of governmental workers in the northern region.

Although the intention was to promote development in rural areas and cities, the various economic policies did not improve conditions in Al-Qamashli – the place that the families considered to be the most developed city in northern Syria. According to the historian and sociologist Tejel, the Kurdish suburbs were not upgraded in the same way as the traditional Christian and Arab quarters in terms of paved roads, electricity, streetlights and waste collection. In a book he published in 2009 (a few years before the Syrian conflict), he expressed that 'the Kurdish suburbs still resemble large third-world villages suffering from lack of sewers, potable water,

[391] This is according to the census data from 2004.
[392] Volker Perthes, 'The Syrian Economy in the 1980s', *Middle East Journal* 46, no. 1 (1992): 47.

and electricity.'[393] This can mainly be seen in the more rural areas connected to the city. Health-related indicators also support these arguments. For example, in 1993, the Hasakah region was one of the worst provinces with regard to the distribution of doctors, despite being 'less unequal' than the 1939–1963 period.[394]

The above arguments did not align with the families' and mediators' descriptions of the city of Al-Qamishli, which referred to developments in infrastructure, its railway, international airport, private companies and hospitals. This being said, the city was often defined in relation to its problems, as well as its role as a political hub for the Kurds' Al-Qamishli revolt, the administrative capital of the Hasakah region and *de facto* capital of northern Syria (*Rojava*, Kurdistan), and a cultural hub and home of well-known Kurdish writers and musicians. When we look specifically at how the shift from the agricultural economy impacted the population in the northern region (especially the north-eastern region of Al-Jazira), the land reform is also relevant in shaping some of the population's resources.

Due to the agricultural reforms and their lasting effects, land distribution led smaller farmers to become heavily dependent on landowners, lose their land or be forced to migrate from the countryside. During one of the interviews, Bilal described social and economic changes that he believed were politically motived and which resulted in tension in northern Syria:

> It was even before el-Hafiz [president of Syria 1963–66]. They took the people's land. Let's say I had land measuring one thousand *dönüm*.[395] They took away my thousand *dönüm* and placed some Arabs there. Do you understand me? […] The Arab Belt, you know, is placing Arabs between us and the Kurds from the north [Turkey]. They also placed them between us and the Kurds from Qamişlo (Al-Qamishli). As they were against Kurds, the Arab Belt was to separate Kurds from each other. It was implemented in Jazira [Hasakah region] in 1973–74. […] the people in Jazira were poor and afraid. They couldn't resist. The Arabs came and took away their lands, and what did they say? They said, "you are ajnabi, you don't have any identification". They took away their land and only let them have their houses. They became workers on their own land working for Arabs. They worked to water their land, to collect cotton. We went to work for them with our combine harvesters, and they [the people in Jazira] used to cry. When asked why, they said "this is my land. This land is one hundred per cent mine, and I only earn 10 per cent now with my work. And even that is by begging. I beg them so that we can at least put our goats here." If they don't want to, they can refuse to let his goats in, or even let him harvest the land. (Ayn al-Arab, Family 8).

Bilal touched upon two themes in our discussion. One was the land reform, and the other was the Al-Hasakah census, both of which were implemented by the government within the framework of the land reform and construction of a new

[393] Tejel, *Syria's Kurds*, 119.
[394] Batatu, *Syria's Peasantry, the Descendants of Its Lesser Rural Notables, and Their Politics*, 68.
[395] 1 *dönüm* is equal to 0.1 hectare.

economic framework for the country. Eventually, the socio-economic and sociopolitical dynamic of the northern region were impacted (see previous section for more detail).

Among the families I interviewed, there were some who had been impacted by these policies, as they had lost their land. There were also some who were stateless – without citizenship – as they were impacted by the results of the census. Among these people, some had managed to acquire citizenship over the years, whereas others were affected by their statelessness on a daily basis, over generations. For example, those without citizenship or any documented existence had no form of identification, access to education, property registered in their name, bank accounts, legal employment, etc., and their children were also born stateless. This determined the resources they had, including their educational and occupational resources.

Among families who were not impacted, their financial assets depended on their parents' inheritance and occupation. Owning land and property, being in manual work or earning salaries determined their assets in Syria. Therefore, I met families where fathers were wealthy landowners with no educational background, and I also met parents who earned salaries based on their educational or occupational trajectories.

All the interviewed families owned their houses in Syria regardless of their financial assets. Some families owned their house in their small villages, while some owned homes in cities. This, however, did not correspond to a similar asset profile. For example, living in an underdeveloped city or owning property in a rural place such as Ayn al-Arab did not necessarily correspond to a high degree of economic capital, as all families owned a house and a car. This is in contrast to urban cities such as Al-Qamishli and Afrin, where owning property corresponded to relatively high economic resources. Land ownership showed a similar trend, as the type and size of land were important aspects in assessing a family's financial assets. Ultimately, the above characteristics were significant factors that differentiated the families in my analysis in combination with the parents' educational and occupational trajectories.

Given the discussion so far, growing up in an urban or rural city or village determined access to schooling, the parents' level of education and the availability of other resources. In fact, location shaped families' views in terms of how they categorised other Kurds who emigrated from different cities. This was also partially related to what the cities represented to families in terms of their sociopolitical history.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I set out to discuss Kurds from Syria within a historical contextualisation in two sections. In the first section, I discussed how Kurds can be considered a social group based on their ethnicity, or in other words, a unified ethnic group based on their statelessness and political history in Syria. In the second section, I explored the diversity within this group by looking at the educational and occupational backgrounds of the parents I interviewed and relating them to geographic origin and sociopolitical history.

I addressed some of the key historical developments that shaped Syrian society and discussed how this predominantly impacted the Kurds living in the northern region. I showed how the Kurds in Syria held a subordinate position based on their ethnicity and political history, which was also impacted by various economic policies and the ambitions of the Ba'athist regime to shift class structures in Syrian society.

Further, I emphasised the importance of the families' access to different resources, such as educational, occupational or financial resources. I showed that within the region, illiteracy levels were high and few people had a higher education degree. This revealed a gendered divide that persisted over time, a divide that favoured men in the areas of education and employment, which can also impact the linguistic assets of individuals (i.e. Arabic skills). Placing this in larger context showed that religious aspects and economic reforms in Syria reinforced gendered trajectories, which could also shape family dynamics.

In summary, the discussion in this chapter covered the history of Syria by bringing the experience of the Kurdish population to the centre. This chapter provides a foundation for the following chapters, as it sets a fundamental basis for a deeper understanding of Kurds from Syria before migration to Sweden. The (un)availability of certain assets, and therefore the educational, occupational and social trajectories, as well as the narratives of the families I interviewed, can thus be viewed in relation to the historical context of these families. After all, the Syrian Kurds in Sweden were *émigrés* before they became *immigrés*, and they are indeed the products of their own history.

CHAPTER 6

Gender and class disparities in migrating assets

Historically, education has been a way to integrate different populations into society. Sweden has thus adopted an education-centred view in its efforts to integrate the arriving refugee population from Syria. When a population arrives that has left their educational trajectories behind, it is common that some will start from scratch and some will try to hold on to what they left behind. In either case, integration entails a process of being moved until one has the key to integration in Sweden – Swedish education.

In this chapter, I set out to analyse the extent to which the past of individual parents influenced their experience and responses to integration in Sweden by delving into their initial encounter with the structured adult education programmes that are aimed at promoting integration into Swedish society. In light of the existing research, which emphasises the struggle to migrate educational and occupational assets, and the gendered experience with integration in Sweden, this chapter explores how refugees improvise and adapt their acquired skills and knowledge from Syria to Sweden. Accordingly, it shows that when refugees had acquired different skills and knowledge in Syria, they tended to have different attitudes, highlighting the diverse experience and responses to the state-led (and gendered) integration processes in Sweden.

I emphasise the transitional nature of refugees' encounters with education in Sweden. As products of their history, refugees have different experiences based on what they have carried with them in the migration process, such as their traditions, ways of living, feelings, actions and thinking, as well as all the other social and mental structures they have internalised from the society they have left behind.[396] In analysing this encounter based on discussions exclusively from the empirical material, I conclude this chapter with a summary of my findings, providing a sociological analysis in relation to the existing literature. I argue that integration and (dis)integration are two parallel processes, emphasising that Sweden's focus on integration (particularly through education) overshadows the social histories from which refugees (dis)integrate, giving us only a partial view of their condition as migrants.

[396] Sayad, *The Suffering of the Immigrant*, 3–4.

The initial encounter: learning Swedish and 'becoming' educated

For the individuals in this study (i.e. parents), the first interaction with the Swedish authorities was always discussed in relation to their language learning and education, emphasising Sweden's strong faith in education. I observed that their educational backgrounds and social status in Syria influenced whether they struggled to complete Swedish for Immigrants (SFI), sought ways to preserve their social status from Syria or built on their previous education by finalising their adult education in Sweden.

Given their historical origins, SFI and adult education programmes are aimed at supporting refugees, among others, where education is seen as a key aspect to the introduction to Sweden and 'successful' integration. This suggests that the group of immigrants who struggled to complete SFI were failing to integrate into Sweden. Therefore, I begin by presenting this group's experience with SFI, illustrating the contrast between different individual's relationship to education and work in Syria and their perceptions and experience of classrooms in Sweden.

Remaining stuck: making the illiterate literate

Learning Swedish and passing SFI seemed out of reach for those who lacked education. For those who were unfamiliar with the Latin alphabet and had a history of work as a peasant in Syria, sitting in classrooms was not something they had embodied. 'Becoming' educated was not a priority in Syria due to their socio-economic backgrounds and their need to work from an early age to support the family. In Sweden, however, they had to sit in the SFI classrooms.

A Kurd from Syria, Murad (father, age 45, Family 21), described his experience with SFI by drawing on his memory of learning Arabic, a language he had to learn to 'integrate' in Syria.

> Sometimes I read something, but I do not know what it means. I learned some of the Latin alphabet through television. I paid attention and learned by myself. I also learned some Arabic words, occasionally. Sometimes there would be a foreign movie on the television in Syria, when there was text [subtitles]. I would be able to read one word, and then two words, and then it would be three words, four words.

Murad's experience with literacy is not unfamiliar to those who were illiterate. Within this group, everyone enrolled in SFI classes either to receive social benefits or with the hope of learning Swedish and continuing with vocational training and finding a job. However, they were usually unable to progress and stayed at

the same level for years. Complaining about this, they often described how strange it was for them to 'go to school' after a certain age.

Coming from a poor family background in a small village 20 kilometres from the closest big city in northern Syria, Murad spent most of his childhood working. He had never been to school. As he lacked identification and documentation due to his statelessness, finding employment was also difficult. That is why his family worked on other people's land to gather and carry wheat. In Syria, education was neither a priority nor an interest for Murad. Suggesting that they 'would not have suffered this way' had they not belonged to a marginalised ethnic minority in Syria, Murad was living with the consequences of being stateless in Sweden.

Murad compared his experience learning to read Arabic to his experience learning to read and write in Swedish. He felt that his ability to speak Swedish was the only way to access the labour market, and he was excluded from the labour market in Sweden by default. Living in a small town in Sweden that was populated with Syrian refugees from the northern part of Syria,[397] Murad was not confident that he would ever be able to learn Swedish. His older daughter (age 14) also shared the same concern.

> Daughter: Everyone is Arabic and Kurdish in school [SFI] dad. You speak Kurdish and Arabic with each other.
>
> Murad: Yes, we are all Arabs and Kurds. The other day I told my teacher that I would never learn Swedish. She asked why, and I said 'Dila is my cousin, my wife is here, and Armanc is my brother.' I sit there and it feels like I am sitting at home.

His attitude towards learning and language was shaped not only by his status as a stateless and illiterate refugee, but also by being surrounded by his family and Kurdish peers. In his SFI classroom, he was expected to engage with Swedish language and culture, yet being among others who spoke his native language made it feel like a second home. However, this familiarity became a barrier to learning Swedish and ultimately securing a job.

> I have to go to SFI to receive social benefits. I have told the school a thousand times, "look, even if I go to SFI for a million times, and go to […], I would still not learn the language." What I am saying is that it would be better if I work. I want a job. A job that is with Swedes where there is no Arabic and Kurdish.

Murad's wife Fatma (age unknown) talked about her experience with SFI and sounded hopeful when talking about the 'extra services' for which she was

[397] This is based on Figure 2 on page 88.

registered that could possibly lead to work.[398] As she described that she would not be able to be in the mud working in the forest, I asked Fatma what type of work she would prefer, to which she responded, a tailor or 'taking care of children in schools.' These were skills she had as a mother of three who often tailored at home in Syria. The possibilities she saw for herself in Sweden were closely linked to her background, i.e. the knowledge and skills that were second nature to her, as they were part of her daily life for decades in Syria.

Majda (mother, age 53, Family 1) shared an experience with SFI that was similar to Murad. There were many moments where Majda could not answer questions regarding certain years, her children's ages, where her children worked in Sweden or what year she lost her husband. She relied on her two sons and 13-year-old daughter to answer certain questions on her behalf. For instance, when asked what year the family left Syria, Majda replied:

> Majda: Don't ask me difficult questions, I don't know. How would I know?
>
> Nubin: So, you can't remember the years, so I won't ask about them.
>
> Majda: I can't register years. I can't remember months. I have not been to school, so I can't acknowledge anything my dear.

As Majda could not answer certain questions, she often turned to her 18-year-old son Daryan to answer some questions. Daryan was always a part of our conversation.

When I asked about Majda's 'schooling' in Sweden, her 15-year-old son started to laugh. She realised her son was laughing at her because she attended 'school' and often 'ask[ed] him to help me with difficult [home]work.' Her son was amused that his mother was attending school at the age of 53. When asked what school Majda was talking about, she replied, 'it is so I learn the language, isn't it Daryan?' Majda wanted her son's approval regarding the function of SFI. As she explains in the following discussion, she would prefer to leave SFI, as she did not think she would be able to learn Swedish letters.

> Majda: They just work on making me learn the letters. I can read sentences, but I don't know how to learn letters. They tell me to learn letters. But I do not know how.
>
> Nubin: Do the children help you?

[398] Extra services are a form of labour market employment that aims to provide the long-term unemployed and new arrivals with employment. For the government decision, see Arbetsmarknadsdepartementet Regeringen, 'Uppdrag om utbetalning av 500 miljoner kronor till kommuner och landsting för arbete med extratjänster', Regeringsbeslut (Stockholm, March 2018).

Majda: Very little. They laugh at me. As you can see, he put his headphones on so as not to laugh [Son 2]. I can't learn the letters no matter how much I try.

Nubin: Then, isn't it difficult for you in the sense that you have to [learn] despite being illiterate?

Majda: Of course. It is difficult.

Nubin: I mean, if you could choose for yourself, what would you do?

Majda: If it was my decision, I wouldn't go.

Nubin: You wouldn't. I see.

Majda: As I said, I left school because it wasn't allowed.

Majda was not hopeful that she would learn how to read and write by learning Swedish. In fact, she kept reminding Daryan, 'son, I won't be able to learn it, even if I had hundreds of years'.

Majda's 50-year-old stepdaughter Delal (mother, Family 2), who is her neighbour in southern Stockholm, shared the same narrative. She talked about taking the same bus with her stepmother to go to SFI twice a week, comparing her situation to those who were literate.

Delal: Now, I am uneducated. Right now, it is very difficult for me here [in Sweden]. Both the words and reading. It is difficult for me. But the ones who are educated, I mean, it is good for them. Very much so. […]. I go to school here. It is not like I don't [go]. But it is difficult for me.

Nubin: What level are you at?

Delal: I have been at level A for two years. It is very difficult.

Nubin: In SFI?

Delal: Yes, SFI.

Delal had spent two years at the same level, as she was struggled to learn how to read and write in Swedish. With the ambition of becoming literate one day, she wanted to continue her language learning through SFI. However, she was not sure whether that would be possible. In Syria, she could not study, as she was the daughter of a stateless father. She and her siblings grew up hearing their father say, 'What will you become? We don't have any identification. Why are you

studying? It is in vain.' Even though she wanted to overcome her lack of education from Syria by enrolling in SFI classes and attending vocational education in Sweden, she remained stuck in SFI.

My conversations with Majda, Delal and Murad revealed common themes. They had given up on thinking that they would learn to speak Swedish or that they would ever pass the requirements for SFI. They were also suffering in Sweden from the consequences of not being able to learn Swedish. Majda expressed that she did not know which buses to take except the one that took her to her SFI classes, as she could not use the phone or read instructions, and Murad explained that he could not find work or make friends outside of the Kurdish community. Delal talked about her experience during her child's school meetings.

Delal's 11-year-old daughter wanted her mother to join the other parents at school meetings and communicate with the teachers. However, for Delal, this was not possible without an interpreter. In fact, she was happy that she did not have to sit with other parents during school meetings as she would not be able to understand them. On one occasion, she did not want to turn her daughter's request down, so she 'went to sit [with other parents], but they didn't understand me. Neither did I understand them.' She was happy that she had people that could 'make it easier' for her, such as her older daughter, Rojin (24), who had arrived in Sweden before her mother and could speak Swedish. In the family, Rojin was responsible for contacting her siblings' school on behalf of her mother and taking care of their paper work. She was studying to learn English, whereas her brother (in his twenties) worked. As he was illiterate like his parents, he could not manage the paperwork and his younger siblings' schooling in Sweden. Delal therefore expressed that, 'she [Rojin] knows better than us.' Delal suffered in Sweden due to her illiteracy on a daily basis and could not predict how she could find a job without speaking Swedish.

The experiences parents talked about were strange to them. Learning to read and write, learning a language and having to depend on their children were not a part of their daily struggles in Syria. Rather, they travelled within rural Kurdish majority areas where they were familiar with the social norms and expectations. Although they did not speak Arabic and in certain cases had to rely on others' help in Syria due to their illiteracy, this was not perceived as strange for children, as it was a common characteristic among these families and part of their reality. Children were a part of this reality too. Arriving in Sweden and seeing their parents in a school context, however, challenged this vision. In Sweden, illiteracy had become a significant constraint, as it fundamentally clashed with the social norms in Sweden with regard to the 'educated' society and emphasis on education for integration.

As the discussions above show, parents who lacked education from Syria found themselves 'studying' despite being unable to learn Swedish and doubts that they would

ever be able to learn Swedish. Being 'products of their own histories,' their abilities, perceptions and experience with education in Sweden were shaped accordingly.

To provide some context on the struggles of interviewees in relation to education in Sweden, one should consider the contrast between life in Sweden and the type of work people like Majda and Murad did in Syria, despite being illiterate.

Working as peasants in Syria

Majda (mother, Family 1) married into a family that became stateless after the Hasakah census and therefore could never own property. For them, working the land was family work, which they could do during specific seasons. They worked as tenant farmers. Majda was an illiterate field worker in northern Syria together with her husband, an illiterate *ajnabi* (stateless). They worked on other people's lands to plant 'everything from cotton to tomato, cucumber, zucchini. Anything that comes to mind.' They spent their days in the fields working, renting different gardens to harvest for the season and share profits with the owner. Even though Majda owned her house in her village, they rarely stayed there, as they spent their time in other villages for the season. Working in a different village each year, they moved around northern Syria, even after they first had children.

They had nine daughters and two sons together. Her husband also had children from a marriage with another woman, who lived together with the family. 'We all worked together. I mean we were all one family. We did not make it two separate families.' Having both of his wives and children under the same roof, it was possible for her husband to manage his finances and family business better. The children were included in their work, and usually studied until the sixth grade. After all, it was not possible to pursue their education further, as they inherited their father's *ajnabi* status. So 'they were not allowed' to finish their education.

In some cases, dropping out of school was not solely due to statelessness, but due to a family's economic situation. This was the case in Nolan's family. Even though Nolan's mother was stateless, he obtained Syrian citizenship through his father. However, he still dropped out of school after completing primary school. Nolan (32, Family 20) explained this with an account of his own childhood, which helps us understand the relationship between, in his words, 'being occupied with land as a family', and dropping out of school. It further explains how owning land did not necessarily correspond to wealth.

> Nolan: I went to school and I enjoyed it. But, you know, I probably changed six schools from grade five to grade nine.
>
> Nubin: How come? Did the village even have six schools?

> Nolan: No, I mean we wandered from one village to another based on the cotton season, cultivation. We even went to Hasakah to cultivate cotton. That's why I changed [schools] many times. And that's why I dropped out in the end. I made friends in one school, and within a year I had to leave and change schools. It was also because I went to work in the afternoon. School ended at noon, and I went straight to work from there. I mean on land with cotton, wheat and everything. Work and school were both going on together. I thought either this or that.
>
> Nubin: Did you have your own land as well?
>
> Nolan: Yes, we did have land in Kobane (Ayn al-Arab), but there is no water. It depends on the rain. And there wasn't a lot of rainfall, so it wasn't enough. We used to rent people's land in Hasakah, Sere Kaniye. We cultivated it and we earned ten per cent from it. That's how it went, so we all worked. The whole family worked on it. It is the reality of the poor.

When I followed up by asking about social life outside of work, especially during weekends, Nolan was surprised by the emphasis on the 'weekend'.

> What? We did not have [the notion of] a Saturday and Sunday. Do you mean the day we were free? After the day is over, it is all free. I mean, all the houses in the village belonged to us [meaning that they were all from the same tribe. He later clarified that there were 10 000 people in the village]. We are here at my uncle's house one day and there at my cousin's house another day. It was one house per day. You didn't even knock [laughing].

Nolan worked as a constructor in Sweden based on his completion of the adult education programme. Unlike the illiterate students in the programme, he had managed to finish. This was not the case for Majda.

Majda's older children migrated to different countries due the Syrian civil war, while she and her husband migrated to Turkey with their younger children. After a couple of their children followed their older sister on a plastic boat and later transited to Sweden, and her husband passed away in Turkey, Majda travelled to Sweden with her youngest two children in 2018. At the time of the interview, she was living with her three daughters (ages 26, 22, and 13) and two sons (aged 18 and 15) in southern Stockholm.

In Sweden, Majda relied on her children's income, the social housing in southern Stockholm and the financial benefits the state provided her. As a 53-year-old widow and mother who had never been to school, she did not believe she would ever become literate and find a job. She did not want a job either. She had worked in the fields for many years and was dealing with severe back issues due to her working conditions in Syria. Instead, she remained stuck in SFI.

For others who came from poor peasant backgrounds and had to find work, any job in Sweden was acceptable. However, illiteracy was a major constraint. For Aram (father, Family 16), for example, it was difficult to become literate in Sweden as a 41-year-old, as he had never finalised his education in Syria. 'When you have not been educated in your own country, it is difficult to become literate in another.' He had been in Sweden for more than five years, yet he could not speak Swedish. By relying on his network, he had found a job as a barber in a shop owned by another Kurd. This did not require any Swedish skills and became a way that he could provide for his family. He was grateful that he could provide for his eight children.

Preserving social status from Syria

Migration to Sweden was costly according to those who thought they had a high social and economic status in Syria, regardless of their educational backgrounds. They had left behind occupations that defined their social status in Syria and found themselves in a country where they had to navigate through adult education programmes targeted at them, or look for other ways to find a job. In Sweden, there was a strong desire to create opportunities to establish social status by finding work equivalent to one's work in Syria, whether the individual was a highly educated lawyer, or landowner who was less educated or illiterate. In other words, there was a strong desire for autonomy. Those who had high levels of education tried to use their education credentials in Sweden, whereas landowners had to improvise in different ways to compensate for their lack of education. I discuss this topic by providing various examples from families' stories and individual profiles below. I show that those who had a relatively high social status in Syria tried to preserve their social status in Sweden by attempting to transfer their higher education degrees or finding jobs equivalent to their social positions in Syria.

Azad (56, Family 3) was born into a large family, as his father married twice. He had four brothers and three sisters, and four brothers and three sisters from his father's first wife, most of whom were lawyers and engineers. 'Up until I was in grade nine, our house was in the village, but there were no schools in there.' His parents had to rent a house for him and his siblings so that they could be closer to a school. After all, his 'father used to say, "you just go to school, I will provide everything for you."' After finishing twelfth grade, he moved from Amuda to Qamislo [Al-Qamishli] with his siblings. 'In Qamislo, I wanted to study to become an agricultural engineer, so I enrolled in upper secondary school again to specialise in something better.' Back then, the Soviet Union was a popular destination for students aspiring to get an international education, so, at the age of 19, he 'went to Ukraine to study medicine' instead. Specialising in gynaecology, he worked in Ukraine for six years. 'In 2000, I returned to Syria' and 'stayed there for sixteen years.' He started a private clinic as a gynaecologist

in Syria, and was doing something completely different than his parents, who were landowners and learned how to read, not by attending school, but by studying the Qur'an.

His wife Daniela, an economist, whom he met during his studies in Ukraine, was a daughter of a secretary (mother) and an agricultural engineer (father) who had completed his university degree. She spoke Kurdish fluently with a slight accent and could also speak Russian, Ukrainian and Swedish. However, she did not speak Arabic. 'I understand very little. When he [Azad] talks sometimes, I understand what he is talking about, but I don't know much.' Living in Al-Qamishli for sixteen years, she did not find it necessary to learn Arabic, as she could easily get by speaking Kurdish. 'It was not necessary for work', especially considering she did not speak Arabic, so 'she was with the kids', meaning she was a home-maker.

In Sweden, they both began SFI. Daniela decided that she needed to work to contribute to the household finances. She and Azad were working in a hospital as nursing assistants after passing the required SFI levels to apply for a position in a Swedish hospital. They were therefore somehow 'making it work.' They wished that they were aware of how the process of validating their degrees worked in Sweden before arrival so that they could have come prepared. 'Nobody told me. My brother is here, but he didn't know *regels* [the rules] and these things. If I knew, I would have prepared' or they 'might not have come.'[399] After successfully completing certain steps to learn Swedish and secure employment, they now 'know how to ask for things', yet they still struggle with Swedish.

I met Azad as he was preparing for the proficiency exam that would allow him to receive validation for his medical degree. He wanted to become a gynaecologist in Sweden, as it was the profession he had studied and practiced for many years. He did not want to give up on this process nor his interest in medicine and identity as a physician, although he knew he may need to spend years in study programmes. He did not speak English, which was required to answer some questions in the medical proficiency exam prior to the practical exam, nor was his Swedish strong enough to pass the medical exam. He had been trying for almost five years. He also knew that he had to pass additional steps if he wanted to work in his previous specialisation. He was afraid of taking the exam and failing as 'it is the theory one that has many parts in English.' He did not know what else he could do in Sweden. He was a part of a study group, which allowed him to build a small network with physicians in Sweden, which also enabled him to work as a nursing assistant and stay in practice.

Azad appreciated the opportunity to work, as he enjoyed being in the hospital environment. That was a familiar space for him. However, after working as a

[399] By *regels*, Azad meant *regler* in Swedish, which translates to 'rules' or 'regulations'.

specialist physician for years in Syria, he struggled to see himself continuing to work as a nursing assistant. For Daniela's part, she had no particular interest in using her degree in economics. She had never worked in that domain even though she pursued the degree. Instead, she started an adult education programme to work as a nursing assistant. She believed that this would be a quicker way to secure a job. After not having worked in Syria, she continued to build on her previous education and join the healthcare sector with her husband. Even though Azad was still trying to validate his degree from Syria to become a physician in Sweden, they were both hoping that their contracts as nursing assistants would be extended, as it was their only source of income.

Arjin (49, Family 9) had similar opinions to Azad when it came to the process of validating his law degree in Sweden. In Syria, he owned his own firm and worked as a lawyer. After almost six years in Sweden, he thought he would never be able to practice his occupation again. When asked whether he aspired to work as a lawyer in Sweden, he responded as follows:

> Arjin: No, when I first came here, I thought I would of course.
>
> Nubin: Because you thought you could?
>
> Arjin: True, I thought I could. I thought I would study language [Swedish] for one or two years, and I would start right away. I did not know that it was as difficult as it is, and that it does not work.
>
> Nubin: Would you still come to Sweden if you knew?
>
> Arjin: I don't know. I swear, I don't know. I did not think like that. I thought, no matter how it was, I would make it work and succeed. But I did not know it was so difficult.

Despite completing the stages to finish his Swedish language studies and passing the 'fast track programme' to validate his law degree, he could not find a job as a lawyer in Sweden. When he 'realised there are no job opportunities' in law, he 'returned to education' to study childcare [barn- och fritidsprogrammet], which he completed a few months prior to our interview. This enabled him to apply for a teaching assistant position. He said that his six years in Sweden had been filled with studies and no work.

> Arjin: It has been five years that we have not stopped. I have not stopped at all.
>
> Nubin: How is your Swedish?

> Arjin: It's not bad. We have not communicated enough yet. We have not used it enough. I have studied a lot, and really well, but you are also in need of communication. You want to use it. That's why you forget what you learn.

He explained that his lack of employment was one of the reasons for his inability to professionalise his Swedish skills and did not believe he had good prospects to improve his professional Swedish skills.

> We are robots here; others are running us. Yes, we were robots there [in Syria] as well, but the key was in our hands. We were making it move. Everything was in my brain. But here, you realise that you are being moved. You don't move by yourself. (Arjin, Family 9).

He compared his social status as a lawyer in Syria to his status in Sweden. He said he was trying to maintain his status after migration, but believed he was 'being moved' without having control over his situation. Lack of access to 'the key' prevented him from having a similar social status to the status he had in Syria. Finding a job and earning money became a bigger priority for him, as he thought he could no longer rely on his background in law translating to work in Sweden after the years he spent trying. He had come to the realisation that he would no longer work in his former profession. He believed he could not 'move by himself', as the key to 'integration' was through Swedish education.

Unlike Arjin, Alan (54, Family 7) did not find it necessary to try to validate his law degree in Sweden. Being unable to pass SFI, Alan realised that he would not be able to practice his profession in Sweden. He instead become a driver. When I asked whether he would try to practice law in Sweden and whether he even wanted to, he said, 'no, that will require education.' As a 54-year-old, that did not seem like a realistic option.

In Syria, however, Alan had struggled to make a difference for his family. He had a different trajectory than his parents and siblings. He came from a village in Afrin where his parents were occupied tending their land and growing olives. They never attended school. Although he was not the only of his eight siblings to finish secondary school, he was the only one in the family who earned a degree. His older siblings worked on the family's land, but that was not what he wanted to do. After studying law in Aleppo and working as a lawyer since 1993, he had years of experience in his occupation. During our car ride to the train station, he mentioned that he worked as a teacher after finishing upper secondary school and continued to do so while studying law. Despite the desire to become a teacher instead of continuing to study law, he stated that it was not possible for him, as he was a Kurdish man living in Aleppo where the majority were Arabs. He continued his studies in law and was well-respected in the family, where he was the only one who had achieved such a high level of education.

As the experience of Azad and Arjin reveal, it has been difficult for Syrian Kurds with higher education to obtain an equivalent occupational status in Sweden. Alan realised this and did not want to be involved in a process that would 'require education'. Unlike the three examples above, Daniela had a different experience, as coming to Sweden brought her back to working life. She learned Swedish relatively quickly and completed her education. She was satisfied working as a nursing assistant, and it allowed her to contribute to the household finances. This indicated a gendered divide when comparing her experience to Azad and Arjin.

This was also evident in my meeting with Mizgin (36, Family 6). She too wanted to pursue a job in Sweden that she would enjoy rather than transferring her degree from Syria. In Syria, she had studied Arabic literature in a distance programme and her husband Serhad would drive her to Aleppo for exams. She finished her degree in 2011 and worked for six months as an Arabic teacher before migrating to Sweden. Mizgin appreciated that her parents, older siblings and husband supported her throughout her education. She mentioned that this was uncommon for women where she lived in Syria. Her parents were illiterate and her father worked on his own land. She had six sisters and four brothers. One of her older brothers had studied agricultural engineering and her sister had studied to become a teacher. Her parents financially supported Mizgin as she finished her upper secondary studies, as she had to live in Al-Qamishli and leave the village for school after sixth grade.

Mizgin enjoyed literature and culture and did not like being a teacher. She therefore asked the Swedish Public Employment Service to find work as a librarian as a temporary job [extratjänst] while she completed her studies. The school offered her work, as they needed someone who could speak Arabic and Kurdish. The Covid-19 pandemic meant that the school could not hire her full time. She did not see herself studying for another university degree in Sweden. She spent her time with her children, doing housework and learning how to drive. She wanted to finish her education programme and explore the opportunities available to her. As she was relatively young compared to others who had a higher degree from Syria, and her husband had a permanent job, Mizgin could afford to explore the options available to her based on her experience in the adult education programmes.

Syria landowners in Sweden

Holding a degree was not the only way to attain high social status in Syria. In the case of landowners, it was also common to discuss ways to preserve social status. Rather than going through adult education programmes like the highly educated, landowners navigated around them due to their relatively low educational backgrounds, which made it too 'costly' for them to sit in classrooms in Sweden. The cost was the loss of dignity in relation to their social status as landowners in Syria. The cases of Zana and Bilal illustrate this.

Zana (46, Family 17) defined his family as 'one of the many from Kobane [Ayn al-Arab] who work with agriculture.' He came from a family with two illiterate parents. He attributed his parents' lack of education to the general conditions of Kurds from that generation, who were a marginalised group in Syria. His father was a farmer who owned a significant amount of land. Being the youngest boy in the family, Zana followed in his older siblings' footsteps and worked on their family's land. He spent his childhood and teenage years skipping school. Despite attending school for six years, he could not speak Arabic well. This became problematic for him when he started his military service. After dropping out of school in the sixth grade, he started working on the family's land, driving the threshing machine and combine harvester. His father went to Algeria to work for four years, as the family specialised in specific machines for water wells. In 1998, when Zana was in his early twenties, he had to take his father's place in Algeria. Following his return from Algeria to his family's land in 2002, he continued cultivating wheat, lentils, cumin, corn and other crops. After the rainfall decreased, cultivation became difficult. Zana therefore started to plant olive trees, which was a big step for the family, as 'it takes years to generate revenue from them. You need to pay from your pocket for a decade, so it is a big investment for landowners.' The source of water had decreased, and due to the drought and changing climate conditions, many people from Ayn al-Arab started to shift from cultivating vegetables and grain to planting trees. However, this was only possible for those who could afford to do so.

As he was a landowner, his wife Sidar (39) did not have to work in Syria. She enjoyed being home and taking care of their children. They were financially well-off, owning their share of the land, their house and a car. After migrating to Sweden, Zana dealt with depression for three months, as he questioned why he did not stay in Turkey, a place closer to his home and land, or why he did not return to Syria. His parents insisted that he stay in Sweden as Syria was at war. Therefore, both Zana and Sidar started SFI, but neither learned to speak Swedish. For Zana, it was a way to enter the labour market as quickly as possible, while for Sidar, it was a path that aligned with what other refugee women were doing. She had two children in Sweden and never managed to finish her language education. Zana, on the other hand, finished the first stages. He had studied until sixth grade in Syria, so he had some reading and writing skills. However, completing SFI did not mean that he could speak Swedish. For him, it was a formal step that he did not wish to pursue with different types of educational programmes.

He tried opening a perfume business in Sweden with the money he made from leasing out his land, as doing paid labour was strange and humiliating for him as a landowner. His perfume business collapsed, as he was unfamiliar with managing such a project. He lost 15 thousand Euros. Instead, he decided to take lessons so that he could obtain a truck licence and work as a driver. He did not rely on social benefits

from Sweden (which he could have received as an unemployed resident). According to Sidar, he was 'too proud' as a landowner to take money from the Swedish state. He used his own financial resources for more than two years in Sweden until he could no longer afford to live that way. Despite having many financial assets and established social status in Syria as a landowner, Zana could not transfer them to Sweden, as it did not have the same value as it did in Syria. Owning land in Syria was not a resource he could use to sustain himself in Sweden. Working as a driver, however, was something he could do thanks to his management and driving skills.

Bilal's (age unknown, Family 8) trajectory provides further details about the life of a Syrian landowner as he attempts to navigate the labour market in Sweden. Bilal came from a large family, as his father married twice, and he had fourteen siblings. They were from a village in Ayn al-Arab. As a family, they could not stay in the village because they did not get along with the other families and it had become dangerous for them. Therefore, they migrated to the city of Ayn al-Arab in the 1980s. Bilal expressed that he and his siblings 'did not know how to read and write. We left school early. I went to school until seventh grade.' This was standard for that time. It was only his youngest sister that finished her schooling. While most of his younger male cousins had become doctors, pharmacists and engineers, Bilal was busy with the family land.

Bilal's father was the chief of the village so they owned the land there. The extended family owned approximately 4 000 *dönüm* of land.[400] However, it belonged to the extended family and was distributed among his father and uncles, and their uncles. Bilal's father only had 200 *dönüm*. Therefore, they frequently rented 'Arab lands in the region of Hasakah' to cultivate wheat and cotton. Bilal managed to buy land there so they 'were not sitting, [they] were floating,' meaning they had great revenue and constant work. His extended family had been financially well off since the 1970s because they 'made a lot of effort.' This took him away from his children and as the breadwinner of the family, he hardly saw them grow up. For him, it would have been more effort to be present at home and become the breadwinner outside of agricultural work.

Bilal married his paternal uncle's daughter at the age of 26.[401] His wife Adar also came from a large family, as her father (Bilal's uncle) married twice and had fourteen

[400] 1 *dönüm* is equal to 1 000 square metres. This means the family owned 4 000 000 square metres.
[401] Marrying cousins was common among those who owned large volumes of land shared throughout the extended family. The idea was that no stranger should benefit from the land and its revenue when there were daughters within the extended family. That way, although the land was not shared with daughters after they married and only passed on to sons, the daughters could still enjoy the honour and revenue the land provided through their husbands. Essentially, Bilal's wife Adar was 'with the task of transmitting the patrimony, which is the very basis for the continuity of the lineage.' Pierre Bourdieu, *The Bachelors' Ball: The Crisis of Peasant Society in Béarn*, trans. Richard Nice (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 135. Marriage strategies are common for the reproduction of class privileges. To read further on this practice among peasant communities, see Ibid., pt. 2.

daughters and five sons. They were a wealthy family. Her father, together with Bilal's father, owned land and gardens. Adar's father also moved from their village to the city (3 kilometres away) and settled there. The extended family were all in the city and bought houses close to each other. Besides their daily family gatherings, marriages and funerals were part of their social gatherings in the city.

Adar managed to finish upper secondary school and worked as an assistant pre-school teacher for 14 years. She had started university in Aleppo to receive a higher degree, and Bilal often drove her there to support her studies. This was a progressive step as 'women in Kobane (Ayn al-Arab) are not like the women in Efrin (Afrin) who are more open and liberated.' Bilal described his support for his wife as a rare situation considering many men surrounding their villages would not allow their wife to begin higher education.

Bilal left Ayn al-Arab in 2013, thinking the conflict would improve after a year and he would return. However, he later migrated to Turkey, and from there they arrived in Sweden where they sought asylum. The smuggler told him he would not have to travel by sea if he paid ten thousand Euros instead of three. Bilal was able to do this without going into debt. He stayed in a refugee camp for six months. He then sold a part of his land to obtain the paperwork for his wife and children who could then join him in 2014 after crossing the dangerous Syrian borders controlled by ISIS. The conflict in his hometown meant they lost their car, all of the houses belonging to the extended family and 150 thousand US dollars. He, however, still owned his part of the land.

In Sweden, Bilal arranged a studio apartment for his family. That was what he could afford. He relied on the Kurds around him for help with his paperwork. He worked as a barber and could not speak Swedish, and he did not need to, as his customers were Kurds and Arabs. However, he did not continue for long, as he did not think he could do just any sort of work in Sweden. It was a matter of honour for him. He did not want to receive social benefits from the state, nor did he want to work in a job that would 'jeopardise' his social status in Syria or among other Syrian Kurds in Sweden. After his seventh year in Sweden, he was studying SFI so that he would be able to obtain a driving licence to drive trucks and possibly establish a company. His wife Adar had already finished SFI and had applied to become a nursery assistant [barnskötare].

As the cases of Zana and Bilal reveal, not all refugees from very low educational backgrounds remained stuck in SFI, dependent on the financial aid it provided. The need to 'go to school' was perceived as dishonourable to them, as they were landowners in Syria with high social status that they wanted to preserve. They

searched for ways to understand their capacities in Sweden so they could adapt the skills they had in Syria, i.e. managing land.[402]

Receiving the golden key in Sweden

The implications of the initial encounter with Sweden for some individuals included a sense of being stuck or a focus on preserving social status. This was shaped by their gender and class backgrounds. In this section, I discuss the perceptions and experience of those who managed to build on their previous education by finalising their adult education in Sweden. Their experience shows that the adult education programmes targeted for refugees may be particularly suited for those who have not experienced a significant loss of social status or who do not face challenges reconciling their educational backgrounds. It further reveals a gendered divide in the perceptions and experience of men and women.

Zozan (53, Family 7) found the adult education programmes valuable as she could build on her previous education and become a cook in Sweden, earning money for something she did every day. In Syria, she dropped out of upper secondary school after two years. 'It was the circumstances. It wasn't easy for me.' 'How do they say it in Swedish? I was a *hemfru* [laughing, meaning *hemmafru* translated as housewife].' In Sweden, she started SFI and a programme to become a cook. Her time, even on weekends, was mostly spent working as she 'just want[s] to do the housework and finish both the language and professional training' to become a cook.

Zozan wished she had grown up in Sweden so that she 'could have studied'. 'I would have had a degree by now.' She thought that she had the opportunity to invest in her education in Sweden on something that she did every day for the family, that was cooking. She wanted to be able to see that she could succeed with her own eyes. She mentioned that she wanted to prove to herself that she could finish her training. Two of her daughters expressed that they were happy that their mother was doing something she enjoyed. After she completed the course, she 'would not want to leave [Sweden] at all', whereas this was not the case for her husband Alan who did not want to spend his time in educational programmes (see previous section) and wished he could return to Syria as soon as his children were old enough.

Zozan's sentiment of wishing she had been in Sweden since childhood was shared by Ferhad (45, Family 4). However, the way they expressed this was different. Ferhad's experience illustrates that for men enrolling in adult education programmes, pursuing studies can often be perceived as 'too late', whereas for women, as shown by Zozan's case, it is regarded as a valuable opportunity.

[402] For further discussion and analysis, see pages 147–160.

While Zozan was excited to enrol in educational programmes in Sweden, Ferhad mentioned that he realised it was 'too late' because of his age. Even though Ferhad was eight years younger than Zozan, he thought that studying for years to get into the Swedish workforce was too long, whereas Zozan thought it was exciting to go to classes and receive a certificate. It indicated that their expectations regarding progress in the educational programmes were different.

Ferhad was employed in a preschool as a teaching assistant after six years in southern Sweden. He spent the first few years attending SFI classes and working in a restaurant so that he could send money to his wife and children who were in Turkey waiting for their legal documents. He earned SEK 15 000 per month from his restaurant job and did not receive housing benefits. 'Years passed by because I didn't know about the regulations here.' After learning about a special programme tailored for recently arrived immigrants [etableringsprogrammet], he regretted that he spent so much time working in a restaurant. The programme provides financial support and helps migrants find work. He expressed that his time at the restaurant postponed the process of finalising his education and establishing an occupation in Sweden. His wife Nur (33) arrived in Sweden with the children two years after Ferhad. She immediately started SFI classes and finished her education within two years.

Both Ferhad and Nur worked as teaching assistants in Syria. They had decided to start university to become teachers. Ferhad had reached his final year and Nur had a couple of years left in her teaching programme, but they both had to drop out due to the war in Syria. They wanted to continue their higher education, but it was more urgent for them to receive their certificates in Sweden and work as teaching assistants for a while. Nur found a place to work as an intern after three years, but she was having a difficult time as 'students are making fun of her Swedish.' Ferhad, on the other hand, started working in a school six years after his arrival. He thought he was 'too old' to study.

> We are both working towards becoming teachers. We won't spend our lives being assistants. This is my wish. I was a teacher in my city [Syria], and I want to become a teacher here. I know I am too old for it, but what can I do?

Ferhad's situation demonstrates that it may be viewed as 'too late' for some men to enrol in adult education programmes and continue their studies. This is in contrast with Zozan's case, where adult education is seen as an opportunity for women. Their different backgrounds must also be acknowledged, as Ferhad was studying at university to become a teacher whereas Zozan was a homemaker in Syria. The perceptions of them in Sweden would ultimately be based on the relationship of their past in Syria and present in Sweden.[403]

[403] For further discussion and analysis, see pages 147–160.

Are men becoming 'burned trees'?

Laughing at his own description, Murad (Family 21) mentioned that 'in Syria, we have a saying that goes, "women are like broken trees." We came to Europe, and men became burned trees. They are beyond broken.' By this, Murad wished to express that the vulnerability traditionally attributed to women in Syria was something men experienced in an intensified form following migration to Sweden. He thought Sweden was a country that mostly benefitted women and children. When there was an issue with social benefits, he preferred to rely on his wife Fatma because he thought women were more valued. When he said that he felt that his children were secure due to the social rights they received, he did not think this applied to him. He felt sorry for men in Sweden based on his observations on refugees and their struggle to find jobs and maintain their social status. 'The one who is dying is me; it is the men.'

Murad's statement, 'women are like broken trees' and his comparison of men to 'burned trees' underlines a transition in gender roles due to migration to Sweden. My discussion with Sore and Yusuf (family 14) further illustrated this.

Sore (age unknown, Family 14) had the same experience as Zozan. She had the chance to build on her skills as a woman who cooked every day at home. She was *maktum* (lacking documentation) and therefore never managed to finish her education in Syria. But she had managed to study through lower secondary school, though she never received her diploma. According to her husband Yusuf, 'if you weren't a *maktum* [addressing Sore], you would have studied. You would have completed [your education].' As Sore states, she 'enjoyed studying very much. I like science. For example, pharmacy. I really enjoyed these subjects. I wanted to finish [my education].' Even though she could not pursue a degree in pharmacy upon her arrival to Sweden, she found the cooking classes to be a great way to build on her education now that she was in Sweden where women were encouraged to enrol in SFI, learn Swedish and join the workforce. Sore did not have the chance to finish her education in Syria, which motivated her to finalise her studies in Sweden. Her daughter Rojda was happy for her mother, 'she likes it, being engaged with kitchen work.' Being in Sweden created an opportunity for Sore that did not exist in Syria.

Her husband Yusuf's reactions mirrored Murad's depiction, drawing parallels between his own circumstances and those of his wife. According to Yusuf, 'she is successful. She is more successful than me.' He was 'stuck not knowing what to do after I finish SFI.' 'I am the one who is bad with the [Swedish] language among all of them [other family members].'

Yusuf was a university dropout and he worked as a bus driver and musician in Syria. In Sweden, however, he could not become a bus driver due to his severe back issues. Rojda clarified that her father had tried several times to become a

driver in Sweden, while repeatedly saying that he could not work. Yusuf described what he envisions for the family's future in terms of working in Sweden below. This also suggests that there may be changing dynamics within the family after migration with regard to the household finances.:

> We have both been receiving social benefits until now. The two of my children are now more than 20 years old. That's why they have to study [take] with student finance [CSN]. Both of them receive CSN now. This one [pointing to the younger son] will also get CSN. And their mother and I are receiving social benefits. I want to get off benefits. But I can't work. She [his wife] will finish [her education] in a month. In a month, she will start work. She will work as well. Probably in a preschool, in a school or in an institution. She will work. I will be the only one left. I will be on benefits, I mean what else can I do?

Yusuf expressed his pride in his children's success in their studies in Sweden despite their long journey and the interruption they experienced in their education while in Turkey, which was their 'transit' country. He was also happy that his wife could study, as she did not have this opportunity in Syria as a *maktum*. He lagged behind compared to his wife and children in terms of his Swedish skills and ability to work. This bothered him and left him desperate as he did not know what to do.

As the cases discussed so far reveal, changes in the educational and occupational trajectories among partners were common after migration. Women often reported feelings of happiness that they could contribute financially to the family. However, their 'success' also weighed on them, as they observed the effect on their husbands. Sara (upper secondary education dropout, Family 5) described this as follows:

> I finished SFI, and then I followed by completing compulsory [secondary] education. After that, I studied Swedish 1 and 2. I just wanted to finish SFI fast. Some people stay there for a year or more. I passed my exams and finished them in six months. I started level B when he [the husband] was at level C. It was because he already had a degree [referring to his degree in law]. I reached his level. We finished level C together, but then I continued and even finished compulsory schooling when he remained at C level. I finished before him and joked, saying 'I thought you were a lawyer; you should have passed before me.' I knew that the faster I finish, the faster I would get a job […] It works very well for me. But for him, it is very difficult. Being a lawyer and then ending up working in a supermarket... It is difficult for him, but what else can you do when there is no money?

In Syria, Sara dropped out after the eleventh grade. She said the reason was that she had difficulty after migrating to an urban area away from the family and

having to study in Arabic as a Kurdish speaker. In Sweden, she studied for one and a half years to become a nursery assistant once she had completed her Swedish course. She was offered a permanent position at a preschool in Stockholm. It was difficult for her to watch her husband struggle, as he could not transfer his law degree. Instead, he had to take work in a supermarket.

Her husband also completed his education and then enrolled in 'the fast track' programme so that he could possibly 'work at the Swedish Public Employment Service, the Swedish Migration Agency or a municipality'. However, he could not find anywhere to do his internship. While Sara had a permanent job as a teaching assistant in a Swedish state school in Stockholm, a job she found through the Swedish Public Employment Service, her husband was working in a supermarket. The requirements and educational qualifications he needed to meet to practice law in Sweden were higher for him compared to Sara. While she could build on her previous qualifications from upper secondary school in Syria, her husband spent several years trying to become a lawyer in Sweden, but ultimately had to settle for a job in a supermarket. He had given up on preserving his social and occupational status from Syria, while Sara aspired to obtain a degree. She regretted settling for a position as a teaching assistant when she could study more and become a pre-school teacher.

Sara and her husband had different experiences in relation to education in Sweden. During our discussion without her husband's presence, Sara described how the family found it hard that her husband could not work in a job that was in his field, and rather had to find a job just to make money. She expressed her sadness in seeing her husband's everyday struggles, keeping this to herself so her children did not hear her.

For some men, their wives' contributions to the household finances constituted a change they never imagined possible. Anter (47, Family 11), for instance, thought that he had changed in this respect due to his encounter with Sweden. In Syria, he married his wife when she was 18 years old, right after she finished upper secondary school. She never pursued higher education. Anter thought, 'she has a diploma in being a housewife, to serve me and serve to my children.' Seeing that his wife was attending classes and managed to finish her education to become a nursery assistant, Anter was amazed by the change he was experiencing. 'I'm telling you, I have changed a lot. If I was there now, with this changed mindset, I'd have my wife work. I have changed a hundred eighty degrees.'

Unlike his wife, Anter was unemployed. He dropped out of his SFI classes as he wanted to work instead of 'spending my time in education.' 'I don't like education and school. I want to work.' In Syria, he had dropped out of upper secondary school and worked as a welder. He did not have the temperament to sit in a classroom as he was used to performing manual labour. He did not want to be 'subordinate' to education. He had managed to work with a company that

built trucks in Sweden, yet he was made redundant during the Covid-19 pandemic. He had been in Sweden for seven years, and he had worked long enough to receive unemployment benefits. Even though Anter had an affirmative and reserved stance during the interview, which at some points turned irritable, he began to cry when he opened up about his unemployment and experience with discrimination in Sweden. His wife lowered her head. She was sad to see her husband cry because he was unemployed and because of the socio-economic impacts on the family.

Anter's wife Berfin was quiet and often remained silent even when I asked her direct questions. She deferred to her husband or was frequently interrupted by Anter who said, 'let me clarify it better.' I did not get to talk with her until she invited me to the kitchen to make sure I had a chance to try her food. I was struck by the contrast between Anter's evolving views on his wife's role due to her education in Sweden and her silence during the interview, where he spoke assertively. Anter had indeed shifted his perception of the division of labour with his wife. However, he also maintained control over her, which was evident in the way he made all of the decisions and dictated how she could work.

For other men, their wives' contributions to the household finances were nothing new. Zeyneb (age unknown, Family 10), for example, worked as a hospital receptionist in Syria, while her husband owned two clothing stores in Al-Qamishli. As a family, they were financially well off. Her husband Bahoz arrived in Sweden in 2014. He sold both of his stores in Syria and managed to obtain a bank loan in Sweden to open a pizzeria. He worked seven days per week, more than twelve hours a day. He was unsatisfied and unwilling to talk about his financial struggles. According to Zeyneb, it was because she was the one responsible for their household expenses. As Bahoz left for work at 10:30, his two daughters prepared breakfast for us. At breakfast, Zeyneb opened up about their financial problems, as her daughters described how bad they felt for their father. They were able to make their loan repayments each month using the revenue from the pizzeria, yet the family depended on Zeyneb's work for their other expenses. She earned SEK 16 000 a month after tax payments. She could not afford to furnish her apartment. Their large living room was bare besides an old red leather sofa and a television set. She did her food shopping from 'Arab shops' as they were relatively cheaper. This made Zeyneb uncomfortable, as it was drastically different from the way they had furnished their house in Syria and the amount of food they could purchase there in comparison to Sweden.

The transition that the families experienced was not solely due to the women's participation in educational programmes and their contributions to the household finances. As the case of Bahoz and Zeyneb shows, women occasionally contributed to the household finances in Syria, though this was unusual. The

change in status among the men in the family after migration was an aspect that impacted the families' transition. The fact that Bahoz had to sell his two stores in Syria to take out a loan from a Swedish bank had put the family in a situation where Zeyneb's work had become crucial for the family to survive financially.

In both cases, the family dynamics shifted due to migration to Sweden, leading to transformations in gender dynamics and economic contributions. Anter's (Family 11) transformation symbolises the potential for gender norms to evolve and for women to achieve economic empowerment, while Zeyneb and Bahoz's (Family 10) situation highlights the financial challenges that can arise when traditional gender roles are disrupted by changing circumstances in a new country. These cases offer valuable insights into the complex interplay between migration, gender dynamics and economic adjustments within refugee families in Sweden.

Even though the case of Ferhad and Nur (Family 4) discussed earlier does not illustrate a gendered divide and the impact on changing family dynamics that was dominant among other families, their case still shows how the perception of studying in Sweden is gendered. The cases above reveal that the families undergo a transition that changes the existing dynamics they carried with them from Syria.

Given the discussions in this chapter, the families encountered challenges related to their previous dynamics. This was related to parents' experience with the changes caused by migration to Sweden. Parents' habitus, which was structured in another social, historical and cultural context, had found itself in Sweden with a different history, socio-economic structures and cultural structures. Thus, integration into Sweden indicated a (dis)integration of certain dispositions and family dynamics. In the following section, I analyse this further.

Two parallel processes: integration and (dis)integration

After analysing the refugees' perceptions, experience and interactions with education in terms of how they are shaped by the possibilities available to them in Sweden and their social backgrounds in Syria, I found an underlying tension. This was related to the emphasis on education as a path to integration. For families, this was charged with different meanings, laying bare perceptions that were a product of their histories. The families' integration in Sweden through their (i.e. parents) encounters with education entailed a parallel process that required their (dis)integration from the internalised social (including gendered) hierarchies that shaped their family dynamics in Syria.

The drive to 'educate' is a key aspect of refugee integration in Sweden. Shaped by the legacy of the welfare state, the pursuit of high literacy rates and the requirement for migrants to participate in SFI (Swedish for Immigrants) and

adult education programmes have become central to the Swedish state's integration strategy, promoting social cohesion and economic participation among newcomers. Refugees therefore embark on a journey, where they attend Swedish language courses (SFI) and follow up with adult education programmes (i.e. *Komvux* or *etableringsprogrammet*).[404] The educational programmes provided by the Swedish state for Syrian Kurdish refugees exemplify a structured approach aimed at facilitating integration into Swedish society.

However, this structured approach was not 'suitable' for all people in the heterogeneous group of Syrian Kurds I interviewed here. The social status linked to their education, occupation and gender in Syrian society, which they had internalised as second nature, did not translate to similar social status in Sweden. Therefore, their experience with these programmes and their perceptions varied depending on their backgrounds in Syria.

This revealed itself in two themes within this chapter. I first observed a radical contrast between the educational background and occupational skills of agricultural workers and the demands of the educational programmes in which they found themselves. This further raises the question of the function of educational programmes that are intended to facilitate integration among refugees from heterogeneous backgrounds, as this approach places a strong emphasis on 'becoming educated' as a prerequisite for integration in Sweden.

Second, I observed a gendered divide in the perceptions and trajectories of the refugees' encounters with adult education. The educational programmes that aim to facilitate integration revealed opportunities for women that did not exist prior to migration, as some managed to build on their relatively low educational backgrounds and capitalise on their domestic care work (embodied assets based on their care-taking roles) by transferring it to paid labour. This was also apparent among the highly educated women. Men, on the other hand, experienced a drop in status regardless of their educational and occupational backgrounds. They approached adult education based on whether they held social status associated with their educational background and occupation that was now at risk.

I address these two points in detail below, exploring the nuances of our understanding concerning the (dis)integration of the Syrian Kurds in Sweden, further emphasising the changes in family dynamics.

[404] *Etableringsprogrammet* is the introduction programme that provides support through activities and training for some recently arrived immigrants. The goal is to allow immigrants to learn Swedish, find a job and financially support themselves as quickly as possible. It is different than usual adult education programmes [Komvux], which are not necessarily tailored for migrants and mainly focus on offering a wide range of courses and programmes for individuals looking to complete their secondary education, acquire new skills or improve their qualifications.

A radical contrast: the working body in schools

Confronting their exile, the parents faced an unexpected encounter – they had never imagined that they would be displaced and have to build a new life in another country with their children. This was the case for all families. This unexpected encounter, which required high levels of educational integration in Sweden, presented a stark contrast for families who previously worked in agriculture, either as landowners or peasants, many of whom had come from very low educational backgrounds. The strategies they used, where they would either stay in the SFI programmes to receive social benefits or drop out to search for ways to navigate around these programmes and find employment, were linked to their social status in Syria. I therefore analyse their encounter separately in this section. Turning the microscope on the existing social hierarchies in Syria that divide landowners and peasants – hierarchies deemed 'irrelevant' in Sweden as both groups would be classified within the same category due to their lack of education or low educational background – revealed the reason behind the different attitudes of Kurdish landowners and peasants in Sweden.

This group of refugees all worked in agriculture in some way in Syria, an occupation that was often handed down through generations. It was a family occupation, especially for those who did not own large amounts of land. Rather than become literate, their main objective was to earn money from agricultural work during the high season so that they could survive the winter. They invested their time and money into their land. For families who were peasant workers, all members would work, including children. For families who owned land (either through the men or the women whose land could be inherited by her husband), men would manage the land, women would be homemakers and children would attend school until they either joined their fathers (boys) or dropped out of school to help manage housework (girls). The division of labour was clear. This determined not only families' financial status but also their social status in Syria. Illiteracy was not an obstacle to achieving this status.

Agricultural work in Sweden, on the other hand, has been shaped by the ambitions of its welfare state policy, which led to changes in Swedish society from a rural society to a modern, urban welfare state.[405] Consequently, over the past decade, the agricultural sector in Sweden only employs one to two per cent of the population.[406] Although the land acquisition law at the start of 1990s allowed anyone to purchase land, sales are generally still within the family or their extended network.[407]

[405] Iréne A Flygare and Maths Isacson, 'The Tension between Modernity and Reality, 1945–2010', in *The Agrarian History of Sweden: From 4000 BC to AD 2000*, ed. Janken Myrdal and Mats Morell (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2011), 214–57.
[406] World Bank Open Data, 'Sweden: Employment in Agriculture (% of Total Employment) between 2012–2023', World Development Indicators, 2024.
[407] Flygare and Isacson, 'The Tension between Modernity and Reality, 1945–2010', 242.

These structural constraints regarding working on land or purchasing land prevented the families I interviewed from even considering working in agriculture in Sweden. They believed that the key was to complete 'Swedish education'. It was not necessarily what they believed, but a structure that was imposed on them through recommendations from government bodies and official mediators – register for SFI immediately and learn Swedish.

If I had considered parents' forced encounters with Sweden and its education system purely based on their educational backgrounds, I would have ended up classifying the families based on what they lacked. Instead, analysing the families based on their assets revealed nuances in how they experience and respond to their integration in Sweden, which was linked to their social status and relationship to land.

'Of all classes, the peasants are perhaps the least uniform' wrote historian Hanna Batatu.[408] In his comprehensive book *Syria's Peasantry, the Descendants of Its Lesser Rural Notables, and Their Politics*, Batatu showed how the category of peasant is a broad one. In Syria, a variety of social categories could be depicted under the heading of 'peasants'. Elements that differentiated peasant included religion, clan links and economics (landed or landless peasants).[409] The size of their landholdings was an indicator of wealth. However, even those who owned the same amount of land were classified differently based on their other resources or means of cultivation, whether their land received water and whether it depended on climate conditions. For small landowners, families could not exclusively depend on their land for income. In that case, the younger men would often work as mechanics, painters and decorators, metal workers, tractor drivers and repair men, either within or outside their villages.

The cases of peasants and landowners who migrated to Sweden revealed that the strategies used to find jobs were different based on socio-economic hierarchies they had internalised as their social status in Syria.

Based on their fieldwork in Algeria, Bourdieu and Sayad argued that a peasant being is a certain *manner* of being, 'a permanent disposition' which does not change even if he has left the peasant society and community.[410] Even if it is not convenient for the peasant to act like one, he can still remain a peasant. However, his permanent disposition is challenged when he is geographically separated from his peasant society, especially facing a social change that is western – a society defined as a welfare state where the peasant is far away from his 'manners.'

[408] Batatu, *Syria's Peasantry, the Descendants of Its Lesser Rural Notables, and Their Politics*, 139.
[409] Ibid., chap. 2.
[410] Bourdieu and Sayad, *Uprooting*, 72. I include landowners within the category of peasant in discussing Bourdieu and Sayad's analysis of peasant habitus. This is for the clarity of the argument and to avoid repetition.

In other words, while financial and social conditions transform, those who are affected by these changes must adapt in order to survive. However, there is a discrepancy between a Syrian peasant's habitus and the structure of the capitalist economy. Confronting the economic and social differences in Sweden, the peasant must adapt and ultimately transform his practices.

In the process of social transformation, holding the right type of capital and the capacity to improvise in terms of the existing structural possibilities and constraints become crucial. Yet, in the case of illiterate Syrian Kurds from peasant backgrounds, they found themselves at a disadvantage in a country like Sweden, where their lack of education became a constraint and their occupational skills were not recognised in the labour market. As illiterate peasants (whether owners or workers), their resources did not correspond to those demanded by Sweden, such as literacy and an educational degree. The awareness of having to fit into a 'social welfare state' and to find a job led to a sense of 'incapability' linked to their educational and occupational skills. This migration process, in essence, equated to proletarianisation, where these peasants experienced a shift similar to Bourdieu's proletarianised peasants in Algeria, moving from self-sufficient peasant life to a subordinate position in the labour market. Regardless of their age, they had to attend SFI classes and learn Swedish. Attending classes and doing homework, however, was not part of their reality in Syria, and hence did not play a role in the formation of their habitus. Children sometimes mocked their parents for attending 'school'.

As Bourdieu discusses in his essays from his studies in Algeria, 'the sub-proletarians tend to attribute their inadequacies to the inadequacies of their own being rather than to the inadequacies of the objective order',[411] which I find is directly applicable to this group of refugees in Sweden. The peasants became dependent on how much they were capable of adapting to the new structure of labour, which was structured in a completely different manner than what shaped their habitus. Their failure to adapt put further emphasis on their 'inadequacies'.

Given this, agricultural workers were disassociated with the demands of the 'welfare state', and were eventually compelled to 'de-peasant' their peasant manners. This meant that they had to reorient their way of working, as well as their relationship to money. They had to familiarise themselves with a new economic world and a work and labour organisation that were structured differently. In Syria, money and time were calculated based on the land. For example, the peasant worker could agree with the owner to harvest wheat in a certain area of land for the day without agreeing on the time of work. The peasant would therefore not earn

[411] Bourdieu, *Algeria 1960*, 61.

money based on the time of work, but the sacks of wheat collected.[412] The owners, on the other hand, spent their time with management work, making sure the work was done properly.

When I asked the landowners about their occupations in Syria, the answer was that they owned their land. Owning land was an indication of their occupation, i.e. management work. They were responsible for selling their products, the financial transactions, paying the workers, the water and electricity bills, and the machinery. They could also rent out expensive machinery to other landowners and earn additional money. They did not receive a monthly salary, instead, their income was based on the year's harvest. Their time was organised according to the climate and seasons. They worked when the land needed to be worked. In Syria, this would usually be most of the year, except for two to three months in the winter. Being in Sweden indicated that their relationship to the land and the associated 'qualities' no longer existed in the same way. Both owners and workers had lost the close association to their land and, 'to lose one's land is to lose one's quality as "master of the land" that once sufficed to make the peasant, whatever his actual activity was.'[413]

While their finances depended on land work in Syria, they had to find employment in Sweden. They needed to join a labour market foreign to them and distanced from agricultural work. They had to acquire new occupational skills, most of which required proficient Swedish. They had to become less attached to the land and the peasant community. They also had to change their attitude towards work and money. In Sweden, waged labour differed from the familiar agricultural work and the peasant conditions in Syria as it provided strong labour protections, such as fixed working hours, minimum wage regulations, workplace safety regulations and comprehensive social welfare systems, including healthcare and social benefits. The jobs available to them (e.g. working in a barber shop or restaurant) were nothing like their previous jobs working the land, which required intense labour in certain seasons or management skills in case of the landowners. Landowners could no longer refer to their land to indicate their occupation. Nor could they purchase property in Sweden. In Syria, even peasants who did not own land owned their house. It was part of their rural life. The landowners mentioned their attempts to buy property in Sweden. They would search for an apartment they could purchase, but they quickly realised that their savings from their land in Syria would not suffice to purchase an apartment in Sweden where property prices are relatively much higher.

In Sweden, it did not matter whether they were owners or workers on land in Syria. They were aware and constantly reminded that they were unemployed, and

[412] It was common that owners referred to their land in terms of the sack of wheat that could be collected within one hectare, if wheat was the main crop. If owners mentioned land corresponding to ten sacks of wheat, it indicated that they owned a hundred *dönüm*.
[413] Bourdieu and Sayad, *Uprooting*, 51.

they knew what types of work were available or not available to them in Sweden. As opposed to lawyers, teachers, doctors, store owners or workers, those connected to land had to go through a rupture that required a greater transition, since their relationship to work and money had to adapt to the economic order in Sweden.

In other words, compared to those who could pass SFI and establish an educational trajectory in Sweden, peasants' and landowners' social and economic transitions into Sweden were based on a greater rupture. This rupture was due to a greater contradiction in relation to the need to compensate for their illiteracy or low education – the greater the contradiction, the more difficult the social transition.

Not having their land as an occupation in Sweden, however, did not mean that landowners could not use their resources from Syria. It was important to somehow transfer the social status they had in Syria to Sweden, as opposed to those who were immediately dependent on any work they could find. The break with the land and its associated routines indicated that even wealthy landowners had to integrate into the conditions of the Swedish working class. However, instead of working as barbers in other people's shops, they preferred to manage their own businesses by becoming truck drivers, just as they used to manage and work their own land.

Selling their land in Syria was not an option. Even though they could sell parts of a small piece of land to cover their expenses in Sweden, giving up on being the 'master of the land' meant giving up on the status that came with it. Land was inherited, and therefore provided social status in addition to financial benefit. This depended on the size and type of the land, as these characteristics were indicators of wealth. Keeping the economic order and the symbolic status within the family (and often within the tribe) was therefore crucial to preserving wealth. The land often passed on to the next generation. The sons in the family would get their share so that the land did not end up with 'strangers', meaning their daughters' husbands and their extended family. Despite forced migration, the land therefore still remained the families' property instead of being sold. They could still benefit from their land by making sure it was managed by other members of the family in Syria.

In Sweden, the education system affects social structures, and it is where class structures evolve, given the significance of education in a 'welfare state'. In Syria, however, the families' social classes were defined by their wealth and the symbolic capital associated with their landholdings rather than the parents' educational levels.

All families associated with agricultural work came from municipal and tribal families where their social and symbolic resources in Syria were most important to them. On several occasions, they recalled gatherings in their villages and being among people they recognised. There were weddings, funerals and occasional political and cultural events, which all made up the social and cultural fabric of their lives in Syria. None of them travelled outside Syria, unless it was related to work in another Middle Eastern country. In Sweden, they had to maintain order by making sure to remain

in contact with their family, relatives and friends. Even if these were not people from the same peasant background, their class background did not matter. What mattered to the families were the Kurdish language, daily activities and social order. Their intention was to migrate their order from Syria to Sweden. They did not necessarily want to keep a peasant order, rather an order that was familiar.[414]

The experiences of peasants and landowners reveal the relationship between objective structures and subjective experience and their outlook on life. On the one hand, they see the world in their own way, which structures the world around them. On the other hand, they are part of a world they have to conquer and in which they have to operate.[415] Given that this group of refugees was uprooted from their traditional order and required to adapt to a new social order, where their occupational skills do not align with the 'welfare system', feelings of inadequacy are not unexpected, as these individuals are uneducated in a system where education is the prerequisite for all work and the objective order. This entails systematic transformations to the habitus. The peasant has to adapt to whatever job is available in the new economic order. However, as schooling increases opportunities, the illiterate and fairly low educated refugees have to compensate for their lack of schooling by passing SFI and the following programmes in Sweden. It does not mean that they will feel content or even adequate in Sweden, even if they manage to pass SFI. They have acknowledged that failing to adapt to the order might lead to hunger. It is a demand that needs to be fulfilled to survive both financially and socially, even if a person is unhappy. The transformation of their practices meant adapting to the social and economic order in Sweden rather than remaining in the Syrian order. In other words, they had to abide by an order imposed on them

Setting this group of refugees' agricultural backgrounds aside and focusing on literacy, we can find certain complexities, as the lack of an educational background, or low educational background, only created constraints for those who could not rely on their resources in Syria. For illiterate people and low-educated peasant workers, the ability to respond to the demand for literacy and labour market participation became an immediate necessity. In contrast, those who were capable of transferring their knowledge, skills and financial resources from Syria, such as landowners, possessed a habitus shaped by an awareness of the value of their social and symbolic capital. Transferring their social and symbolic status from Syria to Sweden required them to act like landowners, even though owning land was not considered an occupation in Sweden. Their efforts to find a job were thus not solely driven by economic considerations but by a broader awareness of what they needed to do to maintain their status and convert it into a form of capital that held significance in Sweden.

[414] See Chapter 8 for further discussion on this.
[415] Sayad, *The Suffering of the Immigrant*, 253–54.

Given the discussions in this section, illiteracy and low education undoubtedly remain a pivotal determinant of this groups' life prospects in Sweden. However, shifting the focus to the intricate interplay between those with agricultural backgrounds, particularly the distinction between landowners and non-landowners, revealed other important findings.

The social hierarchies those with agricultural backgrounds had to give up as part of integration in Sweden required them to become wage labourers, thus (dis)integrating from agricultural work and from being a self-owning peasant. Schooling was not part of their habitus, and 'becoming educated' was therefore not within their reach, thus exposing their 'incapability'. The experience of this group clarifies the 'cost' of (dis)integration for a group who had internalised their social positions based on social hierarchies that were not based on education and wage labour. It further nuances our understanding of how 'becoming educated' indicates a social and cultural change for families, which necessitates the (dis)integration of pre-migration family structures.

Transitioning realities: family roles in flux

The Syrian Kurds in Sweden revealed a gendered divide in their perceptions towards the adult education programmes and their subsequent trajectories. Before migrating to Sweden, it was common for the men to be the sole breadwinners in the families. Women's housework or any work that provided an income (such as agricultural work, tailoring, teaching assistant) was regarded as supplementary to the husbands' income. In Syria, the parents had established positions within their families and the larger society, either in relation to their occupational assets, or their social or symbolic status. These were internalised social (including gendered) hierarchies that shaped their family dynamics. The opportunities and constraints that resulted from the families' migration were related to the value these opportunities and constraints held for the individual parents (and thus the families) in light of their social histories.

In other words, migration changed the value of the families' assets and roles. After arriving in Sweden, the parents were constantly confronted with their inability to speak Swedish and their (un)employment. These were constraints that they had to navigate, entailing a struggle that did not exist for them in Syria. Families therefore faced challenges due to migration and the transition it entailed for their family dynamics.

Previous literature on transferring educational and occupational assets into national labour markets suggests that Syrian Kurds would have a similar experience to other groups, where these assets could be 'devalued', leading to the need to rely on

social networks and settle for jobs for which they were 'overeducated'.[416] In other words, refugees' struggles to mobilise their educational and occupational assets transcend pre-migration class backgrounds. This is also the case for 'higher class' occupations, where it takes years for an individual to mobilise their institutionalised cultural capital, leading to the risk of losing its embodied state.[417] Therefore, their experiences are radically contradictory to other immigrant groups who are considered high class and can transgress their 'immigrant' identity, i.e. the 'international' recruits, expats or civil servants.[418] Thinking in relational terms, this suggests that as forced migrants, Syrian Kurdish refugees were relatively *forced* to integrate through the educational programmes targeted at them, unlike the 'internationals'.[419]

Regardless of the ability to mobilise assets, as I discussed earlier in the chapter, enrolling in language and educational programmes after arrival in Sweden revealed opportunities for women that did not exist prior to migration. They had a chance to build on their educational backgrounds. Women viewed education in Sweden as an opportunity for professional growth, leveraging their existing knowledge and skills to enhance their socio-economic status. As they lacked the opportunity or motivation to pursue their education in Syria, possibly due to the low proportion of women in the Syrian workforce, migrating to Sweden – a country where women are highly educated – changed their perceptions. Different cases discussed earlier in this chapter reveal that this was true regardless of women's educational backgrounds.

The experience of women can be analysed based on the Swedish self-image, which is shaped by the welfare state and 'People's Home' [Folkhemmet] movement. Indeed, this image of Sweden is changing with the introduction of different social policies and reforms that have reduced the size of the welfare state and increased market liberalisation, which has resulted in greater wealth inequality.[420] This being said, gender equality has been constructed as part of the Swedish national identity.[421] Having women participate in the workforce and

[416] Nordin, 'Immigrants' Returns to Schooling in Sweden'; Dahlstedt, 'Occupational Match: Over- and Undereducation Among Immigrants in the Swedish Labor Market'; Andersson and Osman, 'Recognition of Prior Learning as a Practice for Differential Inclusion and Exclusion of Immigrants in Sweden'.
[417] Ciziri and Lidegran, 'Long Time in the Waiting Room'.
[418] Dugonjic-Rodwin, 'Becoming "International"', 17.
[419] The case of Syrian refugees complements previous studies on migrants' educational and occupational assets. These studies show that it can be a struggle to mobilise these assets, while potentially challenging the division between different migrant categories (i.e. refugees and expatriates and internationally mobile families) regarding the mobility of assets, as refugees struggle to mobilise assets despite their relatively high pre-migration class positions. However, considering the fact that the highly educated occupations in this study were law and medicine, which can be considered highly national, this remains a hypothesis.
[420] Therborn, 'The "People's Home" Is Falling down, Time to Update Your View of Sweden'.
[421] Elin Kvist and Elin Peterson, 'What Has Gender Equality Got to Do with It? An Analysis of Policy Debates Surrounding Domestic Services in the Welfare States of Spain and Sweden', *Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research* 18, no. 3 (2010): 188.

establishing a 'women-friendly' society were key principles of the People's Home that prevail in today's Sweden.

In Syria, women did not consider their domestic work (e.g. cooking, taking care of children and the family home) as an income-generating resource. In Sweden, they are able to capitalise on these skills by attending educational programmes. The women were therefore happy to study to become nursery assistants, cooks or nursing assistants. This did not mean that women did not have similar responsibilities in Sweden in terms of domestic work. However, men had become more aware of their symbolic position within the family, as they were no longer the sole breadwinners or sometimes had to depend on their wives to provide for the family.

The financial empowerment among women from Syria is not exclusive to Sweden, as we see similar trajectories among women in Germany, another European country with a high refugee density. Here, women also 'achieved a certain degree of economic independence, which would have also brought about social empowerment and changed the patriarchal structure of the family fundamentally.'[422] This indicates that women's participation in educational programmes and the workforce is not solely related to financial independence, but also carries the potential to challenge patriarchal family structures. Even though a few women in the study were members of the Syrian workforce, these numbers are generally quite low, especially in comparison to Sweden.[423]

Their experience further reveals that the complexities of 'here' and 'there' coexist, and it is the internalisation of and navigation within these complexities that women live.[424] It is thus problematic to reduce the Kurdish women's experience to their encounter with Sweden as something that liberated and modernised them, as shown in the case of other migrant women in Sweden.[425] Kurdish women in Sweden also experience exclusion from Swedish society due to oppressive racial and class conditions.[426] By acknowledging that their experience cannot be explained solely by women's geographical displacement and the process of westernisation, a more nuanced understanding of integration in Sweden can emerge.

Conversely, men perceived education as a challenge to their established social status in Syria. Men had embodied a dominant position, wherein they were respected

[422] Irene Tuzi, 'Renegotiating Gender Roles and Relationships in Displacement: Syrian Families in Lebanon and Germany' (Doctoral thesis, Department of Social Sciences and Economics, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, 2021), 283.
[423] Women's participation in the Syrian workforce in the decade before the war was approximately 17 per cent (whereas, in Sweden this corresponds to approximately 60 per cent of the female population during the same decade). See World Bank Open Data, 'Syrian Arab Republic-Sweden: Labor Force Participation Rate, Female (% of Female Population Ages 15+) between 2000–2010', World Development Indicators, 2024.
[424] Farahani, *Gender, Sexuality, and Diaspora*, chap. 2.
[425] Ibid., chap. 4.
[426] Alinia, 'Gendered Experiences of Homeland, Identity and Belonging among the Kurdish Diaspora', 120.

and acknowledged in Syria. Accustomed to positions of authority and influence within their families and society, educational requirements in Sweden became impediments to reclaiming their former status. There was therefore an element of 'loss of status' that they had to navigate. This was present in their narratives which reflected a sense of 'losing power'. This was the case among men regardless of their educational and occupational backgrounds, which indicated the weakening of men's traditionally strong role and social standing. Women found that life in Sweden was particularly difficult for the men from Syria as opposed to women, as Swedish gender norms did not favour men compared to Syria.[427] We know that men's class mobility and change of status as a consequence of their migration to Sweden eventually reshapes men's sense of themselves as men and fathers as they negotiate and reform their masculinities.[428] Through a historical comparison, this further draws parallels to the experience of working class men in western countries after deindustrialisation and the transition to a knowledge-based economy.[429]

For the individuals in this study, the impact of migration was related to the contrast between their daily lives in Syria and their lives in Sweden. The Swedish self-image, which is interwoven with notions of gender equality and social inclusivity, presented an inviting yet challenging backdrop. Their encounter with Sweden thus highlights the transformative potential of migration, where new roles emerged for women, while men experienced a loss of social status relative to Syria. These encounters indicate a (dis)integration of certain social (including gendered) perceptions and attitudes in the face of integration in Sweden.

We also need to look beyond women and men and look at the refugees in the study as families, thus acknowledging what these transitions mean for the family unit (and other individual members of the family). The discussions regarding children in the following chapter investigate this topic in more detail. To sum, encounters with education and the new society can impact children's role in the family, thus influencing family dynamics in the context of migration.[430] While parents with younger children reported that the transition to a new country challenged their former child-rearing habits, relatively older children became responsible for their siblings and parents. These findings further accentuate the transition that families

[427] Bucken-Knapp, Fakih, and Spehar, 'Talking about Integration'.
[428] Fataneh Farahani, 'Racializing Masculinities in Different Diasporic Spaces: Iranian Born Men's Navigations of Race, Masculinities and the Politics of Difference', in *Rethinking Transnational Men: Beyond, Between and within Nations*, ed. Jeff Hearn, Marina Blagojević, and Katherine Harrison (New York: Routledge, 2013), 147–62.
[429] Julia Marusza et al., '(In)Secure Times: Constructing White Working Class Masculinities in the Late 20th Century', *Gender and Society* 11, no. 1 (1997): 52–68.
[430] See, for example, Stéphane Beaud, *La France des Belhoumi* (Paris: La Découverte, 2018). For English sources, see Beaud, 'The three sisters and the sociologist'; Stéphane Beaud, 'An Algerian Family in France', *Le Monde Diplomatique*, 2018; Adèle Momméja, 'The Belhoumi Family and the Sociologist', trans. Oliver Waine, *Metropolitics*, 2021.

experience in the face of integration in Sweden. Integration in Sweden indicates that the 'former' family dynamics, rooted in an 'immigrant culture' that is associated with social problems,[431] must be (dis)integrated.

However, the relationship between integration and (dis)integration should not be perceived as a dichotomy, where Sweden represents modernity and Syria represents a traditional, patriarchal and backward culture. This overshadows the impact of cultural and class differences within particular national contexts.[432] 'Immigrant cultures' are formed based on pre- and post-migration antagonisms.[433] Associating immigrants with a culture that is in need of change through its proximity to what is considered Swedish, is to identify immigrants according to their shortcomings. This is precisely what Sayad showed with his analysis of the definition of immigrants as 'non-nationals', fostering a sense of 'otherness' and reinforcing nationalist categories.[434] In other words, integration becomes a pre-condition for an immigrant to become a 'national', illustrating that integration and exclusion are phases of state domination.[435]

As anthropologists have shown with regard to Sweden, 'egalitarianism can in practice become a demand for sameness'.[436] Gullestad called this an 'imagined sameness', where she discusses the link between the notion of equality and the idea that people have to feel the same in order to be of equal value. Therefore, commonalities are emphasised while differences are played down.[437]

Sweden's ambitions to establish an egalitarian society based on principles of social cohesion and ideas of 'sameness and consensus',[438] and 'the ability to conform to social norms and cultural values defined in dominant discourse as basic to proper citizenship',[439] presupposes the Swedish norm as the ideal norm. It problematises 'different, culturally backward immigrant women and their families as in conflict with the stipulated normality.'[440] Thus, it is the degree to which gender roles, norms and associated family dynamics from Syria (dis)integrate that enables refugees to successfully integrate. In other words, it is their capacity to adapt pre-migration skills, knowledge, perceptions and practices – an endeavour that involves remoulding their habitus – in order to conform to the 'Swedish' sociocultural norms that determines whether encounters with adult education and their subsequent trajectories succeed.

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[431] Ålund and Schierup, *Paradoxes of Multiculturalism*, 53–67.
[432] An example is the Yugoslav immigrants in Scandinavia, where Ålund showed the contrasting dispositions towards the 'equalisation' of gender relations. Ibid., 58.
[433] Ibid., 53.
[434] Sayad, *The Suffering of the Immigrant*, 279.
[435] Bourdieu and Sayad, *Uprooting*, chap. 1.
[436] Karin Norman, 'Equality and Exclusion: "Racism" in a Swedish Town', *Ethnos* 69, no. 2 (2004): 224.
[437] Marianne Gullestad, 'Invisible Fences: Egalitarianism, Nationalism and Racism', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 8, no. 1 (2002): 46–47.
[438] Olwig, '"Integration"', 192.
[439] Ibid., 180.
[440] Ålund and Schierup, *Paradoxes of Multiculturalism*, 62.

However, this presupposes a clear divide between the past and present, where integration is the precondition for 'becoming Swedish', requiring the (dis)integration of the parts of habitus that were constructed in Syria. Reducing individuals and their families' experience by viewing it through this lens risks overlooking the fact that understanding integration requires a nuanced and complex understanding of social trajectories. It is a dynamic process which involves challenges and transitions for families.

Given this, the promotion of integration and the perception of immigrant cultures in Sweden as 'traditional' and 'backwards' are contradictory processes. Within these contradictory processes, the experience of the fathers, mothers and children in the family reveals the urgency that is placed on (dis)integration from their internalised sociocultural norms, practices and values. This urgency has arisen due to the families' migration to Sweden, which has resulted in pressure to make immediate changes to the habitus. It is only by (dis)integrating from their social and cultural histories and internalising the sociocultural norms, practices and values in Sweden that integration can be achieved. Internalising Swedish social norms and values, as well as the structural possibilities and constraints, is to make them second nature. Therefore, the integration of habitus is the (dis)integration of habitus from its origin.

Indeed, as 'a product of social conditionings' that is 'endlessly transformed',[441] migration can cause 'former' dispositions associated with habitus to be challenged due to the 'cleavage between two cultures'.[442] This cleavage is due to a rupture. However, to assume that habitus can experience *total* disconnection from the social and structural history in which it was originally formed and its 'former' logic of practice due to a disruption overlooks the connection between (dis)integration and integration as two parallel processes. Rather, it assumes that they are two separate processes that cannot coexist.

Conclusion

With the aim of exploring how parents encountered adult education programmes in Sweden, which was part of their introduction to Swedish society and the subsequent integration process, I asked, how can we understand the ways parents improvise and adapt their acquired skills and knowledge from Syria to Sweden? In answering this question, I focused on the educational and occupational spheres. Accordingly, I showed the significance of the parents' past social existence prior to forced migration and the effect on their perceptions, experience and strategies. This revealed significant findings.

[441] Bourdieu, *In Other Words*, 116.
[442] Sapiro, 'Habitus Clivé'.

First, I showed that those who had high social status in Syria, regardless of their educational backgrounds, attempted to preserve their status by undergoing processes where they could validate their previous diplomas or skills. They were looking for a way to rebuild the social and occupational status they had in Syria after migration to Sweden.

Second, I discovered a gendered divide in terms of the parents' experience and perceptions. While educational programmes in Sweden were perceived as opportunities by women, even for those with higher educational backgrounds, men perceived these programmes as obstacles to work, even if they managed to find work related to the education in these programmes. The experience and perceptions were determined by men's and women's educational levels and social and occupational status in Syria.

Finally, I argued that the changing gender and generational dynamics of the families indicated that they experienced challenges due to migration to Sweden. Families' experience with education in Sweden not only entailed a change in family dynamics, where children gained more responsibility within the family compared to Syria (discussed in Chapter 7), it also challenged the parents' internalised perceptions and dispositions.

Adult education in Sweden conveyed a conflicting message: while the focus was on integration as a means of inclusion and social cohesion, experiences with these programmes suggested (dis)integration from their traditions, ways of living, feelings, actions, and thoughts, as well as from the social and mental structures of their previous society.

This chapter has revealed a multifaceted landscape, where refugees negotiated between their past and present circumstances, and between educational opportunities and systemic constraints. It emphasised the importance of analysing the existing hierarchies in different spheres prior to migration,[443] and further showed that the fundamental principles of division in the world, namely nation states and their national (and social) structures, shape individuals' perceptions and their subsequent capacity to improvise and adapt within existing structural possibilities and constraints.

[443] Sayad, *The Suffering of the Immigrant*.

CHAPTER 7

Blurred boundaries in class practices

When an illiterate mother says she does not know how to support her children with their education, and a lawyer father says that his role as a parent is not as strong as it used to be, what defines parents' experience regarding their children's education in Sweden? In this chapter, this question is considered in relation to families' class backgrounds, including parents' citizenship status, educational background and occupational background. Furthermore, I explore how parents adjust to their children's education based on these factors.

Regardless of their class backgrounds, all parents emphasised a wish that their children would pursue an education in Sweden.[444] Ensuring that their children received a degree remained a priority for all parents. However, how to achieve this priority was a question all parents struggled to answer as they engaged in their children's schooling in Sweden.

In this chapter, I look at the relationship between social class, educational practices and migration by specifically looking at the experience of refugees. This helps me assess whether becoming a refugee determines class practices. I begin by discussing parents' educational aspirations for their children in Sweden, specifically by highlighting how families sometimes adopt aspirations after migration. I also explore how parents' thoughts and practices around their children's education can be understood in relation to their experience in Syria, highlighting the contradictions families face due to various post-migration constraints. By analysing parents' class practices, I discuss how differences in class backgrounds do not necessarily result in distinct class-based educational practices after migration to Sweden. These discussions focus exclusively on empirical material, while the chapter concludes with a summary of my findings, which provides a sociological analysis in relation to the existing literature. Accordingly, I argue that the constraints encountered in Sweden disrupt former class-based educational practices and lead to a sense among parents that their influence over their children's education has been weakened. This chapter thus clarifies the

[444] For a discussion on how I classify families in this study, see pages 93–97. In this chapter, I refer to families' social class which I determine based on their educational and occupational backgrounds in Syria.

extent to which parents' experience and responses to their children's education were determined by their present constraints, rather than their past.

Parents' educational aspirations

> You are forced [to leave] because education is necessary for these children. These children need things, and it is not possible to have them lead a life with fear. I mean you look around and there is ISIS and this and that. The children hear about them. They start to feel afraid and you have to come up with a solution so that these children can become something. What is the solution? Well the solution became to flee [seek refuge] due to force. So, we became refugees by force. (Mihemed, Family 13)

Families gave several reasons when asked why they had come to Sweden (regardless of whether it was a conscious or unconscious choice, or an arbitrary outcome). These reasons included the relative ease of acquiring Swedish citizenship compared to other European countries, the fact that Sweden is a 'democratic country', that they already had friends or relatives in Sweden and last but not least, so that their children can pursue their education. Regardless of their class backgrounds, all parents emphasised the importance of ensuring that their children pursue their education in Sweden. Parents believed that their children would have a better chance of succeeding in life through education and access to higher education. They felt that education created a sense of security and chance for a better future. As they learned to speak Swedish, the children became part of a school system and grew increasingly familiar with the country.

It is often the case that educational aspirations are conceived as a part of an initial 'migration project'. Even if it is not an initial migration project, as in the case of refugees who experience forced migration, education can play a role 'premised on belief in creating future opportunities.'[445] Education can be a priority for refugee families,[446] meaning that their children's education can be the one thing they are unwilling to sacrifice.[447]

Had the families remained in Syria, the war would have deprived their children of education for several years. Children would have dropped out of schools, continued with a new curriculum at schools that were now run by the *de facto* Kurdish federation or migrated as a family to the southern regions of Syria where

[445] Dryden-Peterson et al., 'The Purposes of Refugee Education', 360.
[446] Gandarilla Ocampo et al., 'We Are Here for the Future of Our Kids'.
[447] Dryden-Peterson, 'Refugee Education: A Global Review'; Winthrop and Kirk, 'Learning for a Bright Future'; Sharif, '"Här i Sverige måste man gå i skolan för att få respekt": Nyanlända ungdomar i den svenska gymnasieskolans introduktionsutbildning'.

they could continue their education. According to the families in the study, these were the options available to the relatives and friends who remained in Syria.

Some parents supported the idea of a Kurdish education system even though it is not recognised by the Syrian state, emphasising that they would have sent their children to these schools had they remained in Syria. These parents mainly had political motivation and had financial constraints that limited their possibilities to migrate outside their region. This was a matter of national honour for them. Those who had relatively higher financial resources expressed that they would have had to relocate to a bigger city such as Damascus or Aleppo to ensure that their children could continue their education and earn their qualifications.

In Sweden, all children attended school and parents believed that education was valuable for their children's future. However, this was not the case for some families before their arrival to Sweden. In the following, I look at the case of two families to illustrate this. I show that in the case of Murad's family (Family 21), educational aspirations grew after arrival to Sweden due to his stateless status in Syria. And in the case of Helin's family (Family 25), their time in Turkey before arrival to Sweden disrupted Helin's aspirations for her children's education.

During my meeting with Murad and his family, he expressed that as a stateless person in Syria working in agriculture, his children would have followed the same path as he did, leaving school and working from an early age. They would not have had the chance to finish their schooling, as they would not have been eligible to receive credits due to their lack of documentation. Although his wife held Syrian citizenship, their children would not have benefitted from it because statelessness is patrilineal.

During the war, Murad fled Syria like many others. He sold his motorcycle to cover the costs of fleeing with his wife and three daughters. They ended up in an Iraqi refugee camp with many other Kurdish families. His two school-age daughters attended classes in the camp for three years. Despite access to schooling in the camp, he believed that nothing would change with regard to his daughters' education. According to Murad, remaining in a refugee camp in Iraq did not provide a chance for his children to obtain an education. They would 'eventually drop out and instead work as cotton pickers if they managed to find work.' He was also sceptical about whether his daughters would be able to work, as he believed that finding work was more difficult for women compared to men in Iraq, especially as refugees.

Murad's reasoning was framed by his 'customs', where he believed his daughters would work for the family until they got married. For him, having three daughters and no sons meant that he was the only man in the family and was therefore obliged to protect his daughters until they got married. Besides his 'customs', Murad thought his daughters would not be able to study because, as

stateless refugees, their education in the camp school would not give them an opportunity to pursue further education. His priorities were the safety of his daughters and ensuring that they could start a family. In his view, 'girls are innocent', and they 'are different from boys.' Therefore, women were not fit for qualified work.

Moreover, remaining in Syria or Iraq would have resulted in his children's lack of schooling and participation in families' workforce. However, he realised that his children would not be able to work in Sweden, and that they would have to attend school. He hoped this would enable his daughters to gain citizenship and no longer be stateless. His daughters could complete their schooling – something he had never even imagined for himself.

> When I was told that the road [border] to Kurdistan [northern Iraq] is open and that I should pass through there to go to Europe, I did not think of myself. I thought of my children. […] I want them to, and I hope they do what I did not want to do and could not do. Yes, they are girls, but I want them to do those things. For example, I wanted to have good qualifications. Qualifications to be proud of and find a good job with. […] I, myself, do not want citizenship. I want my children to get their citizenship, go anywhere they want, to be free, [and] build a future.

While he was describing his wishes for his children, his mother – who came to visit them later in the interview – nodded in agreement, hoping these wishes would come true. Murad and his wife Fatma valued education for their children, even though this was not valuable to them or their parents. This tendency in Murad, for whom work and helping the family was the norm, derived from the wish for his daughters to attain citizenship in Sweden and thus have their existence recognised. Moving to Sweden implied that his children would legally exist through state recognition and would even be able to obtain citizenship, receive an education and have legal rights.

Murad was not concerned with what his children would decide to study, as long as they were in school. According to him, 'children know [their studies] better than us. How are we supposed to know?' Fatma, on the other hand, had clear ideas.

> Fatma: I want them to get *good* qualifications.
>
> Nubin: What do you mean by good?
>
> Murad: Sometimes she says doctor, other times engineer, other times I don't know what.

> Fatma: I mean, I want something that is good for their future rather than a job that would be difficult and make them suffer like we did with manual work […] But it is not up to us. They know better than us.

Fatma declared her wishes while her children were in the room, also stating that she and her husband could not decide for them as they did not know what type of jobs would be best for their children in Sweden. Fatma therefore named the jobs she thought required 'good qualifications'. Based on their own backgrounds, the parents were convinced that their children should study so that they did not 'suffer' from their lack of education. However, their experience cannot be generalised to all parents with an agricultural background, who lacked education or had a fairly low educational background.

Despite their financial constraints in Syria, Helin and Rebin (Family 25) had agreed to educate their children. Their constraints differed from Murad's family, as they had citizenship and the right to educate their children. My encounter with Helin and Rebin illustrated how the education of children was one of the reasons families decided to migrate to Sweden, and how their educational aspirations were disrupted before their arrival to Sweden. It further highlights that not all children whose parents lacked education (or who had fairly low educational backgrounds) discontinued their schooling in Syria.

During my meeting with Helin and Rebin, it did not take long to realise that they had lived in Turkey before their arrival in Sweden. It was six in the evening when I visited their home, and it was a classic dark and cold Swedish winter night. They had insisted that I join them for dinner, but I wanted to join them afterwards. When I arrived, I was welcomed by the mother, the father, their daughter and two of their sons. Helin was making bread in the entrance of their small living room located on the ground floor on an open oven that she had brought all the way from Turkey. For her, the oven was a way to do something familiar in an unfamiliar country, which made her feel more at home. The oven had heated the living room. The sixteen-year-old daughter went to the kitchen to serve us fruit, and the youngest son was watching a Turkish cartoon, which immediately caught my attention. I was surprised and felt the urge to ask if he understood the language, to which Helin laughed and said 'this one [referring to the son] grew up in Turkey! He was one year old when we arrived in Turkey. We have only been here [in Sweden] for two years.' They had sought refuge in Turkey in 2012 and lived there for six years before their arrival in Sweden.

Helin often mentioned that children should be educated. 'In this day and age, no one would put their children to work. They would say all should study. This is because we would not want our children to see [experience] the things that we saw.' Helin and Rebin both agreed on this. They did not want their children to suffer from a lack education as they did.

Rebin (age 49) had dropped out from school in third grade and worked with his father on the land and with animals as a shepherd, while Helin (age 48) had also dropped out of primary school and became a homemaker. As the older brother, Rebin had to drop out of school to provide for his extended family. After he married Helin, he provided the only source of income for the family in Syria. They had three daughters and three sons, and they sent all of their school-aged children to schools in Syria.

While their village in Syria only had a primary and a middle school, they could go to the neighbouring village for upper secondary school. The parents described this as an advantage, and they were proud to say that all of their children were able to go to school.

Once they fled to Turkey, finding a job was difficult for Rebin, and staying in Turkey did not seem like a viable option due to the obstacles they faced. They were frequently discriminated against for being Syrian refugees. Their rent was high, which became difficult to afford with the minimal benefits they received as refugees from the Turkish state, and they lived in fear that their daughters would be kidnapped on their way to school. Helin kept hearing from other refugee mothers in the region that young girls were often kidnapped in this manner. That is why Helin decided that her 16-year-old daughter would leave school. The oldest daughter had already been working in a textile factory for two years to help the family financially until she got married in Turkey and remained there.

Despite their wish for their children to get an education, they were put to work in Turkey. Becoming refugees had distanced them from their life in Syria, where they had ensured that their children would finalise their education despite their financial constraints. The parents therefore decided it was not possible for them to stay in Turkey. Migrating to Sweden implied that their children could 'save themselves,' as Helin out it, and have the opportunity to build a future. According to Helin, the fact that her children dropped out of school in Turkey was an exception for the family. It would not have happened in Syria, nor would their children drop out of school in Sweden. According to Helin, 'I didn't let them work in Syria, why would I do it here? We were forced in Turkey, but here […] As long as we can put food on our table, our children should study.'

Their wish to come to Sweden was related to the continuity of their children's education. Helin therefore sent her 12-year-old son to cross the sea from Turkey to Greece with his uncle in 2015 and travel to meet her sister who had been living in Sweden for more than a decade.

> Helin: We sent our son for ourselves, so that he could call us here [to Sweden]. As I told you, Turkey did not work for us. We did not have a place. We did not have work.
>
> Rebin: And our children's education was all lost.

> Helin: They had no education there. It was like our children were drifting away. It was only our youngest who started school, but the others did not. My sister was here [in Sweden], and my son was small so we thought she would take care of him.

As revealed in the narratives and stories of Murad and Fatma (Family 21), and Helin and Rebin (Family 25), it was important for parents that their children pursue their education in Sweden. Despite their fairly low educational backgrounds and unfamiliarity with schooling, parents from both families showed educational aspirations, i.e. the determination to educate their children, which was later reinforced in their encounter with Sweden. Parents did not question the necessity of schooling in the Swedish context, it was taken as a given. For Helin and Rebin, it meant that their children could finish their education, which had been disrupted due to the Syrian civil war, and find work in Sweden. For Murad and Fatma, it also meant gaining citizenship (for the stateless children to obtain legal documentation).[448]

When a larger comparison is made with all the families, educational aspirations were expressed across different backgrounds. Among the interviewed family members, all believed that educating their children in Sweden was a chance for their children to secure a better future. They all valued education, as its role for social mobility was evident to them. Furthermore, they emphasised that being socialising in an oppressive context as Kurds from Syria strengthened these aspirations (see Chapter 8). For those who did not have educational aspirations in Syria, such as those who were stateless, the desire for their children to attend school was an aspiration they developed after migration. In other words, although the parents' lack of education and negative experience of schooling implied that they may not have hope that their children could overcome marginalisation,[449] Kurdish families held aspirations for their children in Sweden.

That being said, regardless of their backgrounds, parents were unable to support and guide their children as much as they wished. Neither could they align their practices with their aspirations for their children. I discuss the reasons for this in the following section.

[448] As discussed in the previous chapter, there were also certain aspects that were particular to some of the Kurdish families, such as those who believed that their children's education in Sweden was an opportunity to advance the Kurdish struggle by educating the Kurdish population (see Chapter 8).
[449] Daniela Sime, Giovanna Fassetta, and McClung, '"It's Good Enough That Our Children Are Accepted": Roma Mothers' Views of Children's Education Post Migration'. *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 39, no. 3 (2018): 316–32.

Managing constraints in children's education

A common concern expressed by parents during my interviews was their uncertainty about what their children were studying. Even though I did not ask a direct question on the topic, parents discussed their unfamiliarity with the Swedish education system. It seemed difficult for some to talk about why this was the case. Yet for others, the reasons were evident, and they were willing to openly discuss them.

The constraints faced by parents with regard to their children's education in Sweden were not surprising, as existing studies show that refugee parents struggle to 'integrate' as they often cannot speak the national language.[450] The language barrier therefore complicates their encounter with a new education system and the way they manage their children's education.[451]

My interview with parents revealed several reasons it was difficult for parents to provide guidance to their children in Sweden. Parents' limitations with regard to Swedish skills was a significant reason. In fact, during one interview, where the cultural mediator was present at the family home (also a Kurd from Syria with a refugee background), I asked what he thought about different families' encounters with schools, as he was working as a mentor in a state school in Sweden. He described the lack of school resources and how schools struggle to manage the students with just four staff members when ten staff members are needed. As a mentor who was working in a school that promotes itself as a school where 'many different nationalities are represented', he explained the lack of family engagement. He related it to their problems with the Swedish language, to which all family members agreed.

> There are no resources. If there were resources, parents could go to school talk to the teachers and principal every day and tell them their children need help. They can't speak Swedish. They can't go to teachers to confront them. In a Swedish school, parents go and fight with them. They speak Swedish, so they send an email and get help.

The parents' Swedish skills were often less advanced than those of their children, who attended Swedish schools and used the language on a daily basis. As a result, children had better knowledge of the education system than their parents. Even the parents with high educational backgrounds struggled to understand how the school system in Sweden functioned. Ferhad (father, post-secondary education, Family 4), an assistant teacher in Syria who had recently received his teaching assistant degree in

[450] See, for example, Dryden-Peterson, 'Refugee Education in Countries of First Asylum: Breaking Open the Black Box of Pre-Resettlement Experiences'.
[451] Dryden-Peterson et al., 'The Purposes of Refugee Education'.

Sweden, said that he was unaware that it was possible to choose which school a child would attend. During his process of registering his children for school, he explained that he did not know the Swedish system. Furthermore, he described how he was able to learn to assert his children's rights.

> How could I have known the system? When I had just arrived, I did not speak… We did not know their things [the Swedish 'way of life']. How was I supposed to know the differences? When we registered for language classes, we still did not know how the system worked. Now, I know *some* things. I studied children's education, and I gained some understanding that there are municipal schools and private schools, that the mothers and fathers have more rights with respect to teachers, that you can claim your rights. These things, we did not know no matter how much we tried. It was through my education that I learned them. When there were issues at school, I used to keep both my children at home. I just learned how you can file complaints to schools. I did not know how to file complaints. I used to go to the municipality, and they did not do anything for me. Now, I found out about a website, and you can email your complaints. I mean, I did not know this. No matter how much I called and visited the municipality, I did not learn how to file a complaint. It was after this education that I learned how to do it and assert my children's right.

Ferhad's learning process was related to his education, which was not available to many parents. Parents often mentioned that they sent their children to the closest school in the neighbourhood. For some, visiting schools and talking to neighbours and teachers were ways to assure the quality of the school. Parents often interpreted their lack of familiarity as losing power over their role as parents. They were less able to guide their children through their education and cultural lives.

Asmin (mother, post-secondary education, Family 15), for instance, believed she was able to create a future for her children in Syria, yet did not believe this was possible in Sweden due to the constraints they were facing as parents. According to her, the biggest reason was language.

> We don't speak the language [Swedish]. When your children are here, you can't help them. You don't speak the language. You accept whatever the school says, [and] whatever the law says. Even with simple things. You don't know the law, so you accept anything they tell you. Maybe someone will teach me something wrong about a law, but I accept it – because I don't know anything about this country [Sweden]. I knew everything in my country, about the studies of children and [in terms of], for example, how the law worked. I was helping my children. They were still small, but I was making them strong. I was creating a base for their studies and everything. I came to this country; I am lost myself. You can't do anything. You are lost for at least two years. Maybe even more. […] Yes, our

> children study here, but you don't know what will happen. I mean, you cannot see your future. But at home, we knew what was awaiting.

Asmin described how the less she knew about the education system and school-related obligations, the more she had to accept the system and its requirements. This was difficult for her, as she believed she could not help her children by 'making them strong', which was not the case in Syria, where she spoke Arabic and was familiar with the education system and the intricacies of parental involvement.

Asmin was a university drop out in Syria and worked as a primary school teacher in a non-governmental school. Her husband Arman had dropped out after primary school and became involved in politics from an early age. He mainly worked with the international spice trade. They had the financial resources and a political network in Syria to provide 'whatever was necessary' for their children, which also helped them find housing and learn about the labour market when they arrived in Sweden. What the parents meant by 'whatever was necessary' was, for instance, sending their children to take private classes to learn to play musical instruments, providing books and sending their children to English and Arabic classes. They were learning to play the violin and tambur [a musical instrument] and extracurricular activities were important to them, 'it was not only reading and school. We made them improve in multiple ways.' Since their home was three kilometres away from the main city in Syria, Arman had bought a motorcycle for his sons so that they could attend their courses outside of school hours.

> Arman: In terms of education, they had to their best. We did not hold anything back from them. I had also bought them a motorcycle that they used to take to the city and their courses by themselves.
>
> Asmin: We also registered them at the private school, not the public one, for the last two years. That was very good.
>
> Arman: We bought them whatever was necessary.
>
> Nubin: Was that the reason their English skills were good?
>
> Asmin: Not in that way. I don't know how good their English is. Maybe that school was good [for English]. But I don't know. We registered them at the [private] school so that they could receive support.

As parents, both Arman and Asmin were content in terms of what they could provide for their children in Syria. In Sweden, however, Asmin walked into the first school she saw in the neighbourhood and had to ask her Kurdish friends about which schools were good for her children. They lived in a city in Skåne,

southern Sweden. Once, when on the bus, she also asked 'a Swedish woman' who suggested that their children go to the closest school to their home, as all schools were similar in Sweden. That is what they did. Their oldest son Suleyman, however, got to choose his own school, as he had to register for upper secondary school [gymnasieskola] and was old enough to do it himself. He was told by his parents to check for the best schools in their district by searching the school websites. 'I told him that he should read himself and find one that is the most suitable for him and to register himself.'

They could not register their children for violin and tambur classes as they had in Syria, but they managed to find municipal guitar lessons. They relied on Swedish municipalities and complained about having to wait for years before their children could pursue their musical skills. They were proud to show off their son's guitar skills and ability to sing in English, which they attributed to their investment in their children's growth and cultural activities in Syria, as they had the financial resources. Asmin wanted to register her 11-year-old daughter for flute or piano lessons in Sweden, but she gave up after waiting for two years. The parents were not aware of private courses and believed everything was managed on the municipal level in Sweden, which limited their opportunities in terms of their children's musical skills.

Parents' limited Swedish skills and unfamiliarity with Swedish regulations also led to challenges dealing with discrimination when their children attended school. It was difficult for Arman and Asmin to reveal that their son was being discriminated against by his schoolteacher, but this was a common topic among refugee families. While talking about her children's experience in the refugee camps in Sweden, Sara (mother, upper secondary education dropout, Family 5), a mother of three, expressed that her children were discriminated against for being Kurds in Syria, and for being a Kurdish refugee in Sweden. 'My children experienced a lot of difficulties because there were Arab children with us. Arab children were treating my children very poorly, because we are Kurds. They'd say, "you are a Kurd, you are infidel." My son was beaten up once. During the breaks, they always fought with my son.' Sara thought this would end in Sweden as 'you have the right to complain […]. There are laws and regulations.' However, at the same time 'we did not know the law, or how to voice your rights. You don't know. We told the Swedish woman [mentor] that they are doing this to my son. She complained to the school and told them about the situation.' Having to rely on a Swedish guide for her son's experience of discrimination in school was difficult for Sara to accept. After moving away from the refugee camps, her son continued to be bullied, making him feel like 'he is not from here [Sweden]', so Sara ended up changing her son's school three times, which she thought was the only solution she could provide as a parent.

> Sara: 'You are like an immigrant. Leave.' has been a sentence that my children have often been hearing. And there has been a lot of troubles with my son. A lot of trouble has caused me to change his schools three times.
>
> Nubin: Oh… And it was because he was being bullied?
>
> Sara: Yes. Very much.
>
> Nubin: Were they all schools around your neighbourhood?
>
> Sara: Yes […] My son did not improve in his studies. If the teacher does not fix it, what can I do about it? I mean I can't do anything.

Sara asked her Swedish friend and was advised to register her son at a privately-operated school within the Swedish school system. 'They said they would send me there, and that it is a good school. They sent me information and I translated it.' After registering her son at the charter school, which was seven minutes by bus from their home, she was hopeful that he would be able to focus on his studies, as he was among Swedish students instead of Arabs. However, it did not take long until he was beaten up by other children. Somebody kicked his knee, leaving him unable to take the bus back home, and he had to call his mother. Sara was emotional while telling me about her son's experience, as she did not know how to approach the school to address this matter. Once again, she relied on her Swedish friend, who helped her email the school's principal. She went to the school with her Swedish friend and 19-year-old Swedish-speaking daughter, only to be told by the teacher that her presence was unwelcome and 'you have to educate your children how to behave in Sweden.' Her friend prevented her from reacting in the moment to 'avoid creating problems'. She was also sad that her son had to change schools again.

In the family, Sara was the one who was involved in her children's education in Sweden, as her husband Renas was impacted by his bad experience when trying to transfer his law degree to Sweden (see the previous chapter for further discussion). This was not the case in Syria, as her husband was usually the one who focused on the children's schoolwork. In describing her involvement with her children's subjects, school attendance and the friends they made in school, she said that she still found it difficult to fully engage as she was 'not part of the system', even though, with time, she had become a teaching assistant in Sweden and worked in a school in Stockholm. She referred mainly to the struggles she had regarding teaching her children certain school subjects in a language other than Kurdish or Arabic.

> Sara: We are afraid here. In Syria, if something happens, you can raise your voice a little. We can't do that here as you know. We just cannot. But I keep an eye on my daughters here. [I know] who they have relationships with and what they do. For example, I am aware of what is happening at school and what they need to do. I see if they have not been to school. I always see all of it. For example, what homework they need to do.
>
> Nubin: Was it similar for you in Syria? Or is it because of this fear that you mentioned that you want to have an eye on them more?
>
> Sara: In Syria, I could teach them more.
>
> Nubin: How do you mean?
>
> Sara: I mean, I can speak Arabic and I could teach my daughters. But I can't do that here. For example, yes, I know maths, but I can't teach them about it. You are not part of the system to be able to say, "I can do maths, let me teach it my son." I can teach it, but I am not a part of the system.

As Sara described, her son's experience at school caused concern and highlighted her unfamiliarity with the regulations in Sweden. She often found herself in situations where she had to rely on others for knowledge and to help her take action. She attributed this to her lack of language skills and 'not being part of the system'.

The cases of Asmin and Arman (Family 15), and Sara (Family 5) exemplify the constraints Kurdish families from Syria experienced with regard to their children's schooling in Sweden. Surely, not all parents could afford to send their children to extracurricular activities like Asmin and Arman, nor did everyone have a 'Swedish friend' that they could rely on, as Sara did. In any case, their experience illustrates changes in parental practices in relation to children's education by focusing on the constraints parents faced after their arrival in Sweden.

Further, their cases reveal how parents had to learn to manage the contrast between Sweden and Syria. Parents had to adapt their educational practices to their new national setting. Besides the limitations associated with their lack of Swedish skills, parents questioned the degree to which they could engage with their children's education through encounters with the Swedish school system and ability to understand unfamiliar requirements. They often mentioned what they could or could not do in Syria compared to Sweden. Parents were uninformed or sometimes misinformed on how their children could engage in the same schooling and cultural activities they participated in previously in Syria. Although they had prioritised their children's educational continuity, they had encountered a school system in Sweden where a great deal of responsibility fell

on the parents in terms of school choice and engagement in their children's schoolwork and meetings.

According to Roder (father, lower secondary education, Family 18), a parent's primary responsibility in Syria was simply to ensure their children attended school. However, in Sweden, parents have more responsibilities in this regard. During our discussion, he mentioned that he initially 'trusted' Sweden to take care of his children's education, a sentiment shared by other parents (see the following chapter). He then compared this with Syria, highlighting the contrasting expectations placed on parents.

> There [Syria], schools don't take the responsibility for your children. Here [Sweden], […] they go to school, and you trust it. You know that they are studying at school. […] For example, in Syria, we just dressed them and they went to school. Here, there is a responsibility.

Roder's example of 'just dressing them' and sending his children off to school contrasts with the experience of Asmin and Arman. Roder's experience may be associated with his relatively low educational background, still, he touched on a topic that was mentioned by other families, namely, the great responsibility of parents in Swedish schools. In a country where they did not speak the language fluently (or at all), the families had to establish their occupational status and survive financially and socially. The constraints parents faced made these responsibilities a heavier burden, causing dependency on others and the sense that their influence over their children's lives as parents was weakening.

To clarify how parents adapted to these constraints and the Swedish school system and requirements, I turn to two families with very different educational backgrounds. This situates the themes discussed so far in a larger context, as it shows how *parents* experienced similar constraints in their ability to engage with their children's education regardless of their background. This will further enable me to show how *children* had to take responsibility for managing their own schooling in Sweden, weakening the influence of parents over their children's lives.

In the following section, I begin by discussing the similar constraints faced by Zana and Sidar (Family 17) and Arjin and Zilan (Family 9), which serve as illustrations of the challenges experienced by other families. Zana and Sidar are parents with a fairly low educational background, while Arjin and Zilan have a formal education. These interviews provide details that best illustrate the types of constraints voiced by all parents, showing that these challenges were experienced regardless of class backgrounds. The section continues with a brief discussion of child-rearing practices that are perceived as different in Sweden, as illustrated through the narratives of Sara (mother, Family 5) and Serhad (father, Family 6).

The heavy responsibility of parents

Parents with relatively high educational backgrounds often mentioned that they helped their children with their schoolwork in Syria and had a specific vision for their children's educational future and careers. They were in contact with their children's schools and teachers and were aware of how the education system in Syria functioned, as they had been through the school system themselves as students. For parents with lower educational backgrounds, although they were not involved in their children's schooling as much as the highly educated parents, those who could afford it hired private tutors and arranged extracurricular activities for their children as a complement to their schoolwork. It is safe to assume that parents who were illiterate or had fairly low educational backgrounds lacked knowledge about the education system in Syria. Nor were they involved in their children's education. A factor that determined the extent to which they were involved in their children's education was the availability of financial resources, where those who could afford to do so could choose to hire private tutors to support their children's education, whereas others relied on agricultural work, and their children dropped out of school to work with the family.

Zana's (father, primary education, Family 17) family was a case showing that access to financial resources could facilitate the children's education, despite the parents' fairly low educational backgrounds. He was a landowner in Syria and had five daughters, the oldest being ten years of age. Despite his lack of interest in school, which caused him to drop out at the age of 12 and work on his father's land, he mentioned he had the money to support his daughters through their education in Syria and that he would have made sure they finished their education by arranging private lessons if necessary.

In Sweden, he could not afford to hire tutors, nor did he know whether this was possible. Zana was unsure whether schools were different from each other in Sweden, and he sent his school-aged daughters to the school in the neighbourhood. He made sure to visit his daughters' school once a week or every two weeks to ask about their grades, how they were performing and whether they had any problems. He was told by teachers that it was important that his children read at home. Zana reflected on his encounter with his children's schoolteacher and made sure his children listened to their teachers.

> Zana: I don't know if our children were lying or what it was, but people used to say that reading was only done in schools, not at home. But my children's school [in Sweden] says they should read at home. Last year, when the schools were closed for two months, the principal said, 'please have your children read at least five books during these two months.' […] Didn't we bring them 50–60 books this summer for the two months?
>
> Sidar [mother]: Yes, they read a lot.

> Nubin: They are very young; I assume their Swedish must be good as well.
>
> Zana: Yes. This is what we do: We tell them to read. I say, "if you don't read, I won't talk to you. You won't be allowed to have the phone." They come and talk to me, I don't answer them. I say, "If you don't read, we won't have anything to do with each other."
>
> Nubin: So, you punish them? [laughing]
>
> Zana: [smiling] Do you know what is beautiful about it, my sister? Their oldest sister is ten years old, and when she goes and grabs a book, she makes all the other sisters do it. For example, my three years old daughter follows her and picks up her book to read. This is the beautiful part.

Zana supported his children's schooling by buying them books, listening to what his children's teachers told him to do and occasionally helping his children with simple mathematics, which did not require him to have reading and writing skills. He did not know how he would continue once his children grew older and he no longer could help them.

His wife Sidar (primary education dropout) had less education than him and defined herself as illiterate. She was busy with her small children and therefore never managed to finish SFI. She could never enjoy school, as she was busy with housework and raising her children. She did not want to work in Sweden, and laughed when she said 'I want my husband to work, and I want to stay at home myself. I don't want to work.' However, she wanted to learn Swedish so that she could become more aware of her children's schooling and so that she could be able to help them.

> I want to learn the language [Swedish]. For example, when they come back from school and have something to say, or have a question, I would like to help them with it. I want to know what they are doing and know whether they are successful at school.

Sidar wanted to learn Swedish and guide her children in their education, while Zana contributed to his children's schooling to the best of his ability. Even though they were unfamiliar with how the Swedish education system functioned and whether they could choose their children's schools, and they could not hire private tutors in Sweden as they could have done in Syria, the parents paid close attention to communication from their children's school and had a high level of trust in the school.

Parents with higher levels of education faced similar constraints in Sweden. Swedish, which was the school language, made it difficult for parents to engage in

their children's schooling. Although they were more 'attentive' to their children's education in Syria, they struggled to keep up similar parental practices in Sweden.

Arjin (father, degree holder, Family 9) and Zilan (mother, post-secondary education, Family 9) compared being parents in Syria and in Sweden to show how 'attentive' they used to be in relation to their children's education in Syria. The parents registered both of their sons in a primary school in a village close to their residence in Skåne. When they arrived to Sweden, they had trouble arranging an apartment, so they had a different address registered in the system compared to the house they were currently living in. As they were worried that they might run into trouble due to this problem, the parents were reluctant to inform the school. Instead, the children had to take two buses and travel more than half an hour to get to the school in the village for the first weeks after arrival to Sweden. After solving this issue, the parents still wanted the children to remain in the school for a year, as 'there were not many foreigners' in the village. Avoiding 'foreigners' was a strategy they employed to avoid schools with a mix of ethnicities. However, once the school year was complete, the parents decided to register both of their sons at the international school, which was walking distance from their home.

> Zilan: My children are really successful at English. I used to take them to an organisation when we were back there, and their English was really good. They also learned from the internet.
>
> […]
>
> Arjin: It was for English, and we realised that there was Swedish as well. We checked it [the international school] and registered them there. We were told it was better. Their English would get better, and there is Swedish.
>
> Zilan: I told Arjin [the father] from the beginning that if there were English schools, I would prefer them. Really, since the beginning. To our luck, *subhanallah* [an expression of gratitude], they opened one right in front of our door. It is like it landed at our feet. It is close, and it is the one we want. My children like English.

Sending their children to an international school where the majority of the teachers were English-speaking, the parents aimed for 'internationalism'. The parents did not express that this was a conscious choice, rather explained it as a matter of 'luck' that happened to be 'right in front of our door.' In other words, this was not necessarily because they were informed by the particularities of the educational market in Sweden. Rather, it was a strategy of distinction to have their children learn an international language.

Opting for an international school implied that the parents could not be as involved in their children's education as they wished. They stated that they 'faced difficulties' as they 'did not understand them' and mentioned that they had to depend on their children as interpreters during school meetings. As they were worried about their role as parents, both the mother and father identified the Swedish language as the main impediment to their engagement with their children's education.

> Zilan: No, I mean, we were more attentive to their education there [Syria]. I mean, it was our language as well. I mean, when there was one student better than my son in the first or second class, I would be bothered. I was always, always, always with him. I would show him the way so that he would become the best. But here, we can't do it. We came here and we did not speak the language at all. We struggled with that a bit. We could not bring our children to that level, to become the best, I mean. There were difficulties, of course. And there still are [difficulties]. My son was in the second grade, and I swear he could write. I would let him hold the pen and write all the time. If we were there, my son might have become a writer. He would continue with his language, Kurdish or Arabic. But here, … I don't know. It is another language and… There, we would also have guided him. It is difficult here.
>
> Arjin: Our role [influence] in relation to our children is not as strong as it was in Syria.
>
> Zilan: It is weak. It is actually very weak. The main struggle is language.
>
> Arjin: The children are better than us when it comes to language. They learn quicker. They don't speak half-way like we do. They speak fluently. They speak English fluently as well. At times, they speak English with each other, and we don't understand them. In Syria, we were the leaders – we were aware of what they did and did not say.

Relating it to the 'power' they have over their children's lives, Arjin described it as follows:

> We had more power there. You should tell the truth, you know. When parents have power, they can hold their children, they can embrace their children. When parents do not have power. children can become lost.

What Arjin associated with power, in this case, was not only information about the Swedish school market and cultural codes, but also in relation to his social status as a lawyer and father in Syria, and an unemployed father in Sweden. His struggle to obtain the same occupational status in Sweden was a struggle that cost him several years and did not end in success (see the previous chapter).

Zana and Sidar (Family 17), and Zilan and Arjin (Family 9) came from different educational backgrounds in Syria and had different educational practices for their children, both in Syria and in Sweden. While Zana and Sidar relied on their financial resources in Syria to arrange private tutors for their daughters, Zilan and Arjin had invested in their children's language and musical skills. In Sweden, Zana expressed that he sent his children to the closest school, as that was the only option in his opinion, whereas Zilan wanted to make sure her children did not change schools often and were able to maintain their English skills, so the parents chose to register their sons at an 'international' school. Even though Zilan rationalised her choice to send her children to the 'international' school, she actually revealed that they sent their children to the school right next to their home out of convenience, just like Zana.

Furthermore, both families experienced similar constraints regarding the Swedish language and knowledge about how the education system works in Sweden. Similar to all of the other parents, they had to rely on their children's Swedish skills and knowledge about the Swedish education system. This impacted the family dynamics, as most parents felt that their parental influence was weakening and their children were given more responsibility regarding their educational choices and practices in Sweden compared to Syria.

So far, I have shown the difficulties parents encounter when engaging with their children's education and how they have managed these difficulties in Sweden. Despite their will to engage in their children's studies, parents are often challenged by the constraints that come with their situation. Those who had a relatively higher degree of involvement in Syria felt the need to compensate for their poor Swedish skills, illiteracy or lack of engagement. This need to compensate had become stronger, as they were often reminded of the constraints they face due to the requirements for children's schooling in Sweden, which were different than the requirements in Syria.

Keeping an eye on children

In Sweden, parents are expected to have a high level of autonomy and engagement with regard to their children's education. The parents I interviewed therefore had to be familiar with the school market and choose a school, attend parent meetings and be involved in their children's schoolwork by collaborating with teachers to support their children's learning. This was a difficult task for the parents who were simultaneously experiencing their own encounter with adult education (see the previous chapter).

Sara (upper secondary education dropout, Family 5) described the difficulty her husband Renas (degree holder) experienced when talking about her engagement with their children's education in Sweden. She attended to her children's problems at school and their responsibilities, but she could not rely on

her husband as he was struggling with his changing occupational status after migration. Sara expressed this as follows while reflecting on the differences between Syria and Sweden.

> Sara: For example, I trust my daughters here, but I don't trust the society and customs. If she goes and sees her friend and comes back at ten at night… If I was in Syria, it could not have been like that. It was not possible to come home at night in Syria. Here, they do certain things as they please. I do my best to explain things to them, saying that there are all sorts of people. I mean, [I tell them] not to trust everyone. Yes, it is Sweden, but at the end of the day, it is Stockholm. A lot of things happen here even though you don't see them. There is definitely a fear. There is a lot of fear. And when it comes to their education, there is not a lot of attention. Everything is easy here for the Swedish children. But it is very difficult for me. It does not work for us. There are different levels. For example, I hear that everything is easy for Swedish families.
>
> Nubin: How come? I don't understand. Do you mean that they are not attentive to their children?
>
> Sara: They don't allow their children to experience hardship. There is not a lot of discipline. I try my best to tell them [children] that they should study and that they should improve themselves. I believe Swedes think they are better than us. We can prove otherwise with our children's education.
>
> Nubin: How about your husband? Does he also keep an eye…?
>
> Sara: Definitely. But there is something that has impacted him, and that is that he used to be a lawyer there. And here… It is a…How to say… I mean, he does not talk about it, but I feel it.

Sara talked about how her husband's inability to use his law degree in Sweden changed the way he interacted with their children. He could not keep an eye on them as he used to do in Syria. She expressed that she could sense that her husband was not coping well, as he could not preserve the social status he had from Syria in Sweden.

Sara further expressed that children 'do certain things as they please' in Sweden and reflected on some of the strategies she used to keep an eye on her children, such as making sure they are doing well at school, asking her children about their day at school, checking the school's online platform and attending the school meetings. Sara's worries about raising her children in Sweden were closely linked to her idea about children's behaviour in Sweden. This was also voiced by Serhad.

When we discussed the differences between the education systems in Syria and Sweden during the interviews, some parents would mention that their children are 'acting like the Swedes', referring to their children's changing behaviour. Serhad (father, lower secondary education, Family 6) described this by pointing out the differences in parenting norms and family dynamics between Syria and Sweden.

> If I tell my daughter not to do something right now, she answers saying 'no, I will do it.' As I said, the culture we had in *welat* [homeland] doesn't work here. We talked about this issue with you as well. For example, in *welat*, children would be ashamed to rise up against their father. But here, *we* are ashamed to rise up against them. We have to do as *they* please here. I mean, the children do not lack anything here. We bring them whatever they want […] Here, you always have to stay on top of your children, taking them to the lake, registering them for activities and transporting them here and there. There, your children would grow up, and you wouldn't realise how they had grown [laughing]. Here, most of your time is spent with your children. [Continuous, jokingly] I sometimes say, 'if I had known that I would come to this country, I would have raised a dog and not have children.' I swear, we never have time.

Although Serhad's comment about raising a dog instead of children was meant to be taken as a joke, this particular example highlights that for some parents, raising children in Sweden was more work than it was in Syria. The quote indirectly illustrates the differences in parenting norms and family dynamics between Syria and Sweden. The increased involvement in children's activities and the desire to ensure their happiness align with Sweden's approach of prioritising children's needs and development. The daughter's response of 'no, I will do it,' reflects a sense of empowerment and autonomy that may align with the child-centric approach in Sweden, where they are often encouraged to voice their opinions and make decisions, fostering a sense of independence from a young age. Even though this can occasionally lead to cases where children pressure their parents by relying on the power of the social services in Sweden,[452] it was never an issue that came up during the interviews with parents.

Mirroring other parents' narratives, both Sara and Serhad touched on culture as an indicator of the differences between Syria and Sweden. The challenges they faced in relation to the new family dynamics were not only related to different experiences as women and men, as discussed in the previous chapter, but also with regard to parenting and child-rearing, which was discussed in terms of cultural differences.

[452] Annika Rabo, Paula Estrada Tun, and Emma Jörum, 'Syrians in Sweden: Constructing Difference Regarding Gender and Family', *Journal of Refugee Studies* 34, no. 2 (2021): 1291–1306.

Parents and children often described the Syrian education system as teacher-centred. When discussing the differences between the two different education systems in Syria and Sweden, the most common word I encountered was 'discipline'. Parents often stated that the Syrian education system is based on 'respect' and obedience, and said that teachers are 'more disciplined' and 'strict' in comparison to Sweden. They interpreted respect in terms of respect for your elders and authority, which was part of their cultural and social values. But they also referred to the fear of authority in relation to the political tension. They also defined the Swedish school approach to be based on 'respect', however, not towards your elders but towards children. This led them to appreciate Sweden's student-centred approach.

To sum, according to parents, schools required higher involvement and family responsibility in Sweden compared to Syria. As parents struggled to manage their constraints, this caused children to assume a greater responsibility for the family. Parents therefore expressed that their influence over their children's lives was weaker.

In the following section, I discuss how this has impacted *children* and their experience with schooling in Sweden. I choose to include parents from diverse educational and occupational backgrounds to expand on the narratives. This shows that regardless of a family's class background, children respond to their parents' weakening influence by taking more responsibility for their own schooling and their siblings' schooling, as well as for their parents' 'integration' into Sweden.

The heavy burden on children

Just like all parents I met, Zozan (mother, upper secondary education dropout, Family 7) stated that '[I] just want [my children] to study and finish their education.' She appreciated that her children were in Sweden. The family had considered going to Germany instead of Sweden as other relatives had fled there, but they settled on Sweden because 'you know, it is because of education.' As she heard from her sister and other relatives about the education in Germany, Zozan was happy to be in Sweden. 'They care about girls very much here [in Sweden]; language, lessons, attention, everything.' She liked the opportunity she had to become a cook and to invest in her education in Sweden. She did not work in Syria, and she wished she had come to Sweden when she was a child as she 'would have had a degree by now.' She was therefore happy that her oldest son was studying IT at a Swedish university, and that her two daughters in upper secondary school [gymnasieskola] were successful despite their difficult process (the family had stayed in Turkey for ten months, and the children did not attend school before arriving in Sweden). It was very important for Zozan and her

husband Alan (degree holder) that their children study at a university in Sweden, as they 'came here for them.'

The children would 'help with the language sometimes' when they attended school meetings, and guide the parents regarding the legal documents required by the Migration Agency or Swedish Social Insurance Agency. After all, 'language is always a problem,' and Zozan described this openly by referring to her children as the new parents in the family. 'They have become the parents' in Sweden, as they are the interpreters during their school meetings. The father, Alan, described his unease at being 'unable to help' his children, which was not the case in Syria as he 'knew Syria. When they [children] did not know something about their subjects, they would ask' him.

The daughter that was studying in secondary school mentioned her father's knowledge of history and how he still helped them in certain subjects as long as they discussed it at home 'either in Kurdish or Arabic, but not in Swedish.' Zozan did not hold back, finding a need to interrupt with a self-deprecating joke, stating she 'can only help herself' due to her educational background as an upper secondary school dropout, unlike her husband who had been a well-respected lawyer in Syria since 1993. As the parents could not offer guidance to their children, the children mostly helped each other with their school-related issues.

Viyan (mother, illiterate, Family 19) and Kawa (father, primary education, Family 19) did not have a very different experience compared to Zozan and Alan despite their different educational background and social status in Syria. Viyan had not been to school in Syria. Neither did any of her siblings. Kawa had finished sixth grade. He had to leave school to help his father on their land so that one of his younger brothers could study economics. He later owned a store in which he worked, which became the family's only source of income. Neither Viyan nor Kawa finalised their education in Syria, and this made it difficult for them to learn Swedish and help their children.

Although Kawa managed to find a job in a store as a worker rather than an owner, he did not participate in discussions at work due to his poor Swedish skills. When asked about the children's Swedish skills, they therefore said that they 'don't know. They [the children] say it is good.' 'They don't speak at home. It should be good. They speak Kurdish at home all the time.' As both parents (one with and one without primary education) had poor Swedish skills, their daughter at home, who was older than her two brothers, had become a key source of information. This was a relief for Viyan and Kawa, because they knew 'the girl is doing it,' meaning she was taking care of her siblings' school-related matters.

Shouting her daughter's name, the mother, Viyan, wanted her to be in the room so that she could answer questions about her and her brothers' education in Sweden. Evin, aged 19, who was attending upper secondary school [gymnasieskola], started

talking about where she and her two brothers go to school in Sweden. Her 14-year-old brother, who is in grade nine, was commuting to school every day by train. However, he was complaining, so Evin registered him at a closer municipal school in their neighbourhood.

> I went to the website [of the municipality] to check the primary schools that are close to us. There was one here and two others further away. I sent [the application] there and they confirmed it. […] No, I sent it to all three to see which would confirm.

Her 13-year-old brother, who is in eighth grade, did not want to change schools even though his current school was an hour away from their home. He was registered at this school because when they arrived in Sweden, they were placed at a hotel for refugees on the southern outskirts of Stockholm, where they lived for three months. During these months, the children attended school. Despite later moving, the youngest son resisted changing schools as that would mean changing friends. Instead, he chose to commute for four years until he finished his compulsory schooling. The parents did not have much information about his friends or schooling, nor did Evin. 'It is far away, so we don't go there. And he doesn't say anything.' When asked to attend school meetings for the children, the father would take the meetings for the 13-year-old girl and enlist a Kurdish interpreter, while the mother would take Evin to interpret meetings for the brother.

In Syria, the family could arrange private lessons for their children if they were falling behind in their studies. Even though their store did not generate a substantial income for the family, they believed their social network in Syria could help them provide that kind of help if their children needed it. In Sweden, however, they could barely afford their rent and groceries. Besides not having the financial resources in Sweden to supplement their children's education with private lessons or activities, the parents were not familiar with the norms in Sweden for navigating the education system. As they felt that they needed to focus on learning Swedish so that they could 'integrate' in Sweden, the parents had to trust their children to do what is best for them in school.

> Kawa: We can't help them.
>
> Viyan: We don't know the best way to help them. We don't know it ourselves.
>
> Kawa: Their studies are beyond what we can comprehend. We are barely managing the language like everyone else. There is no helping them. And they are not children anymore. They go to school and come back by themselves. What we

> do is, we tell them in the morning, at noon and in the evenings that they should pay attention to their studies so that they develop.
>
> Viyan: [We tell them] to see friends, to speak with Swedes and get used to the language, to read when they arrive home. What we can do is to say these things. Other than that […]
>
> [asking how it was in Syria]
>
> Viyan: I mean, the language was Arabic there.
>
> Kawa: There, we could pay money and receive help whether it was with Arabic or English and so on. But here, I cannot afford anyone.

As they were new to Sweden, Kawa and Viyan neither had the financial means nor the cultural means to navigate their children's schooling. The main hurdle the parents faced when encountering the Swedish school system was that they had low (or no) educational backgrounds. Even if they were able to speak Swedish, it would not change their degree of involvement, as the concept of studying and going to school was not a part of their background. They were struggling to adapt to their new conditions in Sweden. Therefore, they were dependent on their daughter as she had stronger Swedish skills. She also had the time to learn how to navigate within her new environment, as she would know 'what is good for her' better than her parents – according to the parents.

Leaving school-related choices to children was common among the families; this also came up during my conversation with Azad's family, further illustrating the complexities schooling creates.

Azad (father, degree holder, Family 3) and Daniela (mother, degree holder, Family 3) had high educational backgrounds. Azad had studied to become a gynaecologist and Daniela had completed her degree in economics. They migrated to Sweden as Azad's brother had been living in Sweden since 1988, and they knew they could rely on him. Azad had given his brother responsibility for his son, who managed his schooling for two years. Despite having completed most of his upper secondary education in Syria, Azad's older son had to start over in Sweden. After studying the Swedish language for three months, he was accepted to a well-known school where many of the students 'are children of the Swedish government.' After completing the ninth and tenth grade, Azad's son decided to change his school, as 'he said he couldn't tolerate it, [and] that he couldn't communicate with them. He didn't want to stay there.' He studied the eleventh and twelfth grade in another school where 'there were many foreigners […] so it was good there.'

As their oldest son arrived in Sweden a few years before them, Azad and his wife Daniela were unable to attend their son's school meetings in Sweden for a while. The school 'had told him [the brother of Azad] "how nice, your son-in-law is very successful. It seems like you are helping him."' After arriving in Sweden in 2016, Azad studied Swedish while he worked to transfer his medical degree to Sweden. Azad did not know how good his son's Swedish skills were. 'His Swedish, I don't know. They say it is good, but I don't know.' As parents, 'we don't know all the things they have to study, [or] the curriculum.' In any case, they wanted to stay in Sweden so that their children could study. 'Their studies are good. They have to finish it.'

Their oldest son was studying to become a pharmacist at a Swedish university, which was a success for the family despite his struggles in Sweden during his upper secondary education. Still, they did not have the required knowledge to contribute to their son's educational choices (i.e. in the decision to change schools) due to the language barrier and limited knowledge about the Swedish education system. Because he was studying at a well-known secondary school with children from families with a relatively higher social status, the parents preferred that their son remain at that school. But they had a limited ability to offer him guidance when he experienced discrimination at the school. The parents' high educational backgrounds did not necessarily enable them to understand the Swedish educational setting.

As they were unaware of 'all the things they [the children] have to study' and 'what the curriculum is,' their son took responsibility and chose a school for himself. He chose a school where there were more foreign-born students compared to his previous school, which was mainly populated with students who were born and raised in Sweden. His choice to change schools was not conditioned by the 'success' of the other school but his desire to socialise and his experience of discrimination. It is notable that as a refugee, the parents' son prioritised socialising, which he believed was only possible with students who also had foreign backgrounds. The parents could not intervene to impact their son's educational progress in Sweden, as they were restricted by their (lack of) knowledge.

All families illustrated similar patterns with regard to their children's role in the family, where children often made decisions on which schools they would attend, how they would meet school requirements and their educational path in Sweden. Parents relied on their children to take responsibility, which was not the case in Syria. Some parents could rely on siblings, while others could rely on personal contacts (friends, family members) to assure that their children were doing well in school and meeting the school requirements.

Relying on social networks

Besides family members, other types of social networks were also crucial. In the case of Kurdish families from Syria, this network mainly consisted of other Kurds from Syria. An example of this was revealed during my conversation with Murad and Fatma. Their case shows the difficulties the parents' 'unfamiliarity' with the Swedish school system can cause for some families who depend on their social networks to access information.

Refugees often rely on their social networks. In the case of children's education, I realised that in families that did not have other family members to help or other children who were old enough to help their siblings, parents often mentioned 'our Kurds' or a particular 'Swedish friend' that could help them navigate in times of need. During the interview with Murad and Fatma, the parents provided an example which I believe illustrates how social networks, which we can consider as ethnic networks in this case, can became a resource parents can rely on to manage constraints related to their children's schooling.

I was sitting in the living room with Murad, Fatma, three of their daughters (fourteen, eleven, and eight) and the mediator. There were two simultaneous conversations. On the one hand, I was talking with Murad about his lack of documentation as a *maktum* (stateless) in Syria. On the other hand, Fatma was sitting on the floor asking questions to the mediator about the school both of her daughters were attending. The mediator was working at the same municipal school near their home, where both of the daughters were enrolled. The conversation was as follows:

> Mediator: They really have many problems from grade one to six.
>
> Fatma: It is difficult, isn't it?
>
> Mediator: Rozerin [the eldest daughter] probably sees for herself how it is between grade seven to nine. I mean, it is a very good school from grade seven to nine.
>
> Fatma: I haven't heard a single complaint from Rozerin. Neither regarding her studies, nor from the school. So how are the manners and the education in the school? I hope it is good.
>
> Mediator: It is good. We can talk about it later if you want.
>
> Fatma: How is her English?
>
> Mediator: She has some problems with English.

> Fatma: It is difficult, isn't it? What can we do? Should we hire a special teacher or what?
>
> Mediator: I will arrange it at the school.
>
> Fatma: Really? *Wallah*, I presume she is a smart girl.

As a mother who defined herself as illiterate, it was difficult for Fatma to manage her children's education in Sweden. Several times throughout the interview, she asked questions to the mediator, me or her older daughter. These questions were about their rights as parents, the school regulations or how she could register her daughters for extracurricular activities. At some point during the interview, Fatma wanted to know how many more years her daughter could take Kurdish as mother tongue tuition.

After learning about the extracurricular performing arts school [Kulturskolan] in the region from the mediator, she initially asked her daughter if she recognised 'the thing' he mentioned. Without Murad expressing an opinion, Fatma followed up by asking the mediator whether he could help them register their children at the school. As she acknowledged that she did not know 'what to do' and often nodded to anything the mediator had to say, she depended on information and guidance from another Syrian Kurd, who was already familiar with schooling in Sweden. As he promised the parents that he would bring them the paperwork to register their daughters at this school, this dependency eventually became a key aspect of their children's education in Sweden.

Murad and Fatma were aware that their youngest daughter had problems in school, a municipal school located very close to where they lived. They were worried, as they were hearing complaints regarding conflicts between students. Even though the parents considered changing their daughter's school, they realised that she would have to commute by herself, as both parents were taking Swedish classes during the day. Instead, their solution was to move to another apartment so that their daughter could try another school. This was not based on a choice over a particular school, it was simply an option that was available to them, as they were already planning to move to a bigger apartment.

At first, Murad and Fatma lived in a small town in the northern part of Sweden with their children. As they came from a small town in Syria, they enjoyed spending their first two years there. However, they chose to move as they had relatives in another town in Sweden. During their stay in their relatively new town, their children participated in Kurdish activities and made friends by attending different Kurdish cultural groups, which enabled the parents to access other Syrian Kurds who were not necessarily part of their family. This became one of the main reasons they refused to move to a big city such as Stockholm,

despite being offered an apartment there by the state. Their social resources were a form of symbolic value that enabled the family to socialise in Sweden despite their inability to speak Swedish. The same applied for their encounter with the Swedish education system. It was only to the extent that their children or someone from the community could provide information that they could partially understand how the education system functioned.

The parents' state of ambiguity regarding their children's options within the Swedish education system, and their distance from Swedish society impeded their access to information. However, despite their limitations, their children (who were already part of the education system) and the Kurdish community helped them develop an understanding of their options within the Swedish system.

So far, I have shown that families with different profiles demonstrated similar patterns regarding the parents' limited ability to offer guidance to their children. This was revealed through their limited language skills, lack of knowledge about the education system, child-rearing practices and struggles with their own occupational status. Furthermore, I have discussed how this led to the parents' reliance on their children and social networks to manage their constraints.

In the following section, I finalise this chapter by discussing how we can understand these findings in relation to existing research.

Disruption of former educational practices

It is a significant observation that parents experienced similar constraints with regard to their children's education in Sweden regardless of their educational backgrounds. The relationship between educational practices and social class has already been established in sociological studies. This research shows that parents with high educational resources engage with their children's education and educational choices.[453] They develop strategies and actively over compensate for the sake of transmitting their resources and maintaining their social status.[454]

Parents with lower educational resources, on the other hand, support their children in various ways. Despite not having the resources to send their children to private tuition centres or activities, and lacking the knowledge to guide their children

[453] Lareau, *Unequal Childhoods. Class, Race, and Family Life*; Diane Reay, Gill Crozier, and David James, *White Middle Class Identities and Urban Schooling.* (New York: Palgrave, MacMillan, 2011); Lidegran, 'Utbildningskapital: Om hur det alstras, fördelas och förmedlas'; Carol Vincent and Stephen J. Ball, '"Making Up" the Middle-Class Child: Families, Activities and Class Dispositions', *Sociology* 41, no. 6 (2007): 1061–77; Stephen J. Ball, *Class Strategies and the Education Market: The Middle Classes and Social Advantage* (London, New York: Routledge, 2003); Agnes Van Zanten, 'Middle-Class Parents and Social Mix in French Urban Schools: Reproduction and Transformation of Class Relations in Education', *International Studies in Sociology of Education* 13, no. 2 (2003): 107–24.
[454] Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 125–69.

through schoolwork and school choices, parents can still invest in securing their children's educational performance.[455] Literature on the working classes has shown that parents are far less likely to adapt to the demands of educational markets.[456] Their children often have more autonomy and family responsibility.[457] Their relationship with school can be precarious; some parents may value school and others may value work and encourage them to finish school early. On the one hand, children can become distant to school due to low expectations that they will achieve upward mobility through education.[458] On the other hand, parents may have high aspirations for their children's education and future, and vocally express their wishes and support for their children's upward mobility.[459]

When migration is interpreted in light of these findings, a person's status as a migrant becomes a decisive factor. Studies that use the term migrants as an umbrella term complement the findings above, arguing that the level of education immigrant parents have achieved positively impacts their children's educational attainment and parental support.[460] A substantial number of studies have also focused on 'international' families, showing that children can become projects for capital accumulation, where education abroad can become a strategy of distinction for upper classes.[461] Among these studies, works on elites have shown that knowledge of languages and different cultures, the ability to build 'transnational' social networks, etc. are resources that become 'international capital', a form of cultural capital that is valued across national settings.[462] This creates a broader understanding of what differentiates migrants, as it highlights the significance of capital held at the time of departure, as well as the value of this

[455] Kristina Göransson, 'Guiding the Young Child: Trajectories of Parents' Educational Work in Singapore', *Families, Relationships and Societies* 11, no. 4 (2022): 517–33.
[456] Reay and Ball, '"Spoilt for Choice"'.
[457] Lareau, *Unequal Childhoods. Class, Race, and Family Life*, 238.
[458] Willis, *Learning to Labour: How Working Class Kids Get Working Class Jobs*.
[459] Tristan Poullaouec, 'An Unquiet Mobilization. Working-Class Families and School in French Contemporary Society', *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 42, no. 4 (2021): 537–54; Göransson, 'Guiding the Young Child'.
[460] Cynthia Feliciano, 'Does Selective Migration Matter? Explaining Ethnic Disparities in Educational Attainment among Immigrants' Children', *International Migration Review* 39, no. 4 (2005): 841–71; Jan O. Jonsson and Frida Rudolphi, 'Weak Performance-Strong Determination: School Achievement and Educational Choice among Children of Immigrants in Sweden', *European Sociological Review* 27, no. 4 (2011): 487–508; Behtoui and Olsson, 'The Performance of Early Age Migrants in Education and the Labour Market: A Comparison of Bosnia Herzegovinians, Chileans and Somalis in Sweden'; Mathieu Ichou, 'Who They Were There: Immigrants' Educational Selectivity and Their Children's Educational Attainment', *European Sociological Review* 30, no. 6 (2014): 750–65; Barglowski, 'Migrants' Class and Parenting'; Nygård, 'Educational Aspirations and Attainments'.
[461] Waters, 'Transnational Family Strategies and Education in the Contemporary Chinese Diaspora'; Weenink, 'Cosmopolitanism as a Form of Capital'; Sara Forsberg, 'Educated to Be Global: Transnational Horizons of Middle Class Students in Kerala, India', *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space* 49, no. 9 (2017): 2099–2115; Ayling, 'International Education and the Pursuit of "Western" Capitals'.
[462] Wagner, 'The Internationalization of Elite Education. Merging Angles of Analysis and Building a Research Object', 194.

capital in the new national setting, which creates a distinction among migrants that are more privileged than others.

In working class immigrant families, parents have high aspirations for their children's upward mobility in their new setting, and they often employ certain strategies to ensure that their children succeed in their schools. This often means being authoritative parents and having older siblings serve as close mentors to their younger siblings, as well as transmitting moral resources through stories on the sacrifices the parents have made due to migration.[463] As they become drivers of social mobility,[464] children feel obliged to 'give back' to their families, turning their success stories into collective advancement.[465]

In comparison to other geographically mobile groups, such as 'international' families, refugees are in a more ambiguous social position due to their forced migration. By looking at the educational practices of refugees, the cases discussed in this chapter show the complexities faced by families after forced migration. Parents struggled to maintain and transfer their educational practices from Syria to Sweden, regardless of their class background. The educational dispositions (or lack thereof) that they had embedded – a strong part of their habitus – were challenged by their forced migration. I will briefly return to the cases I have introduced in this chapter to expand on my argument.

Although studies have shown that class is an overpowering aspect in parents' school engagement – even in the context of migration, where middle class parents can resist discrimination– in Sara's case, the parents were unable to do anything about the discrimination their son was facing in different Swedish schools.[466] Although Sara activated her social resources in Sweden by asking for the help of her 'Swedish friend' who was more familiar with school regulations, she could not take control herself as she would have done in Syria. Furthermore, Asmin and Arman's case illustrates that the practices parents use to manage their children's education can change after migration. As they were unable to obtain the resources that would have enabled them to maintain practices similar to those they relied on in Syria, they could no longer provide their children with private tutors or arrange private music lessons. They did not know which schools were best suited to meet their aspirations for their children, nor did they know how to ensure 'what was awaiting' their children in Sweden. This was because of their limited Swedish skills and knowledge about the Swedish education system, which was in stark contrast to their Arabic skills and knowledge about the Syrian

[463] Shirin Shahrokni, 'The Collective Roots and Rewards of Upward Educational Mobility', *The British Journal of Sociology* 69, no. 4 (2018): 1175–93.
[464] Beaud, 'The three sisters and the sociologist'.
[465] Shahrokni, 'The Collective Roots and Rewards of Upward Educational Mobility'.
[466] Barglowski, 'Migrants' Class and Parenting'.

education system. Additionally, they had the required assets in Syria to 'create a base in their studies and everything [else]', whereas they had to rely on what they were told by schools in Sweden. Just like Asmin and Arman, other parents who had 'created a base' in Syria had difficulties accepting their weakening influence over their children's lives in Sweden.

If we understand refugees as another geographically mobile group and situate this group within the existing literature in the sociology of education, school choice also presents an illustrative example. Studies in the sociology of education have shown that the more education parents have, the more informed choices they will make. The relationship between family background and school choice has been discussed in terms of parents' social class, where it is argued that working class families choose schools based on necessity rather than emulation, which for 'disadvantaged groups', such as refugees, means that limitations are imposed by their objective conditions and they choose 'against the grain'.[467] Refugees thus do not make *less strategic* choices. Rather, their options are relatively more limited compared to those who have more resources.

Taking refugees as a heterogeneous group, I observed three categories that distinguished families with regard to their educational engagement in Syria, yet situated them within the same category after their forced migration. First, parents with relatively higher educational and financial assets in Syria strove towards similar ambitions for their children's education in Sweden despite forced migration and subsequent constraints. This was clear from the experience of Arjin and Zilan (Family 9). As parents, they wanted their children to remain in the school where 'there were not many foreigners.' Getting away from 'foreigners' was a strategy they employed to avoid ethnically mixed schools.[468] They later registered their sons at the international school located within walking distance of their home, as they wanted them to improve their English skills and accumulate 'Western capital', which is a typical strategy non-Western middle- and upper class parents use for their children.[469] This further highlights the dynamic relationship between class and school choice among refugees. This being said, Arjin and Zilan revealed that their children's registration to an 'international' school was a matter of 'luck' and not a conscious choice. They paid close attention to their children's extracurricular activities and made an effort to understand how the school system functioned in Sweden. Yet, they could not engage in their children's schoolwork, and their 'effect' on their children was not as strong as typical middle class parents, who often 'overcompensate'.

[467] Diane Reay and Helen Lucey, 'The Limits of "Choice": Children and Inner City Schooling', *Sociology* 37, no. 1 (2003): 121–42.
[468] For the French context, see Van Zanten, 'Middle-Class Parents and Social Mix in French Urban Schools: Reproduction and Transformation of Class Relations in Education'.
[469] Ayling, 'International Education and the Pursuit of "Western" Capitals'.

Second, in the case of those who had relatively lower educational assets but high financial and social assets in Syria, it was not possible to rely on similar educational and cultural practices in Sweden. As the case of Asmin and Arman (Family 15) shows, the parents could not compensate for their low educational capital by hiring private tutors and arranging extracurricular activities in Sweden. This was mainly because they did not know what was available to them in Sweden, and they did not have the kind of social capital that could provide access to these resources.

Finally, in the case of those who were illiterate and had fairly low educational backgrounds in Syria, the parents shared similar educational aspirations with regard to their children's education and future in Sweden. They all hoped that their children would finish their schooling, which had been disrupted by the Syrian civil war. This was also the case for the parents who performed agricultural work in Syria, where relying on family was the norm, thus part of their habitus, as well as the children who did not have the chance to finalise their education due to their lack of documentation, i.e. stateless children. This can be seen in the case of Zana (father, Family 17), who closely followed his children's schoolteacher's advice by buying them books to read, even though the need to read outside school came as a surprise to him. This is also evident from Sidar's (mother, Family 17) intention to learn Swedish, despite her fairly low level of education (primary school dropout), so that she could help her children with their schoolwork and have more knowledge about their academic progress. The education of children in Sweden was an opportunity for the them to 'save themselves', as Helin (mother, Family 25) mentioned, so that they did not have to struggle as their parents did in Syria. Parents had to adapt to Swedish demands to be involved in their children's schoolwork and meetings with teachers. This was a surprising aspect to parents with Zana's profile and those who had no education nor financial assets in Syria. Parents expressed that the children's school demands were more than they had experienced in Syria, and that they had to be attentive as parents by attending school meetings. However, parents relied on their children to act as interpreters, which gave children power over their parents, most of whom could not understand what they were being told by schoolteachers and principals. In Syria, parents were not required to be as involved in their children's education as they are in Sweden, and they therefore did not encounter the same power dynamic within the family, where the children became sources of information and guides for the parents.

The different types of educational practices the parents used in Sweden were related to their aspirations, assets and dispositions in Syria. In other words, parents' perceptions and dispositions regarding their children's education in Sweden were related to their habitus in Syria, which reveals the contradictions the families experienced due to migration. Those who could engage with their children's education, either due to their educational assets or financial assets in Syria, strove to maintain similar practices in Sweden. On the other hand, those

who were relatively more detached from their children's education in Syria (such as agricultural workers lacking education) strove for a 'better' future for their children, expressing the significance of keeping up their children's schooling and demonstrating efforts to engage – even if these educational dispositions did not exist for them in Syria. Despite the fact that these categories distinguished families with regard to their educational engagement and practices in Syria, they experienced similar constraints in Sweden, which caused children to take responsibility for their own education. These constraints impacted the parents' degree of engagement, even among those with high 'educational capabilities.'[470]

The parents' struggles with the Swedish language and lack of knowledge of the education system created significant limitations. For instance, although Azad and Daniela (Family 3) wanted their son to remain at a prestigious school where he was registered, they did not think they could make the best decision for him by providing different alternatives or offering 'more strategic' choices. Instead, they believed their son would decide for himself, considering that he had more resources at his disposal than his parents and knew more about the options available to him. Asmin and Arman (Family 15) faced similar constraints to Azad and Daniela and relied on their son to choose his own school based on his online research. The same scenario is seen in the case of Kawa and Viyan (Family 19), who relied on their daughter Evin to organise her siblings' school choice and other school-related matters. Family and ethnic networks became a significant asset to parents.[471]

These examples show that families across different class backgrounds found it necessary to heavily rely on their children, who 'became the parents' of the family. All families therefore had children who had more family responsibility than they did in Syria, which was difficult for parents to accept as they were used to having more social control over their children and their education.

The finding that forced migration challenged parental practices across class backgrounds does not necessarily mean that dispositions suddenly change. It is not to suggest that habitus can ignore its cultural embodiment after migration. I acknowledge that 'class practices' can be activated over time. Parents may be engaged with their children's education to varying degrees over time. The disposition of a lawyer will not be the same as an illiterate person once they have overcome constraints related to forced migration and radical change. However, in the initial phase of their arrival, class practices can become blurred, or in other words, overshadowed by the challenges parents encounter. As the refugees learn

[470] Annette Lareau, 'Social Class Differences in Family-School Relationships: The Importance of Cultural Capital', *Sociology of Education* 60, no. 2 (1987): 79.
[471] Sandra Tang, 'Social Capital and Determinants of Immigrant Family Educational Involvement', *The Journal of Educational Research* 108, no. 1 (2015): 22–34.

Swedish, acquire occupational status, obtain permanent residency and become embedded in Swedish social and cultural life, the existing class differences can become more dominant over time.

Furthermore, in the range of various parental practices that are relevant to children's educational trajectories, it is possible to distinguish between those that require knowledge of the 'receiving-country' and its native language and those that do not require this knowledge. The former can include practices such as meeting with teachers, making school choices and helping with homework. The latter can involve practices such as regulating bedtimes, controlling television and mobile phone use, discussing the importance of school and asking about the school day. Distinguishing between these practices can further reveal which practices are more or less class-dependent and can contribute to an analysis of cultural capital that seeks to determine what is nationally bound and what is easily convertible across international boundaries.

I acknowledge that the constraints mentioned in this chapter are not exclusive to refugees. Mobility involves constraints and opportunities for any social group. This being said, the social and economic conditions of those who flee war or any other forced situation are not similar to other mobile groups who become migrants. The migration of those who have fled war, such as the Syrian Kurdish refugees, is forced and 'unexpected', which often entails the loss of family, friends, property, financial investments, social status and occupational status. These conditions created radical changes for the families I interviewed, *forcing them* to experience these constraints.

Looking at children's education was one way to analyse families' encounters with education in cases of forced migration. By discussing it within the framework of the strategies families used to manage their constraints, I showed that the boundaries distinguishing different social classes in Syria were weakened due to the experience of forced migration. Regardless of the family's class background, they all relied on 'working class practices', where parents had aspirations for their children's upward mobility, struggled to adapt to the education system, employed certain authoritative strategies to ensure that their children succeeded in school and relied on older siblings to be close mentors to their younger siblings. Children had more responsibility in Sweden compared to Syria, which made parents feel that their influence over their children's lives was weakened.

The parents' weakened social and occupational status also contributed significantly to the change in family dynamics. Parents were tasked with navigating various educational levels simultaneously based on the differing ages and educational backgrounds of each child, all while managing their own educational pursuits or

career aspirations.[472] Therefore, acknowledging the individuality among the children in the families can provide a more nuanced understanding of the families' encounters. It is safe to say that when parents have their own educational paths in Sweden, the more children they have in different age groups and stages of education, the more difficult it becomes to coordinate their encounters with different schools and school levels. This situation can significantly affect their encounter with Sweden and intensify the differences between different families based on the number of children and their ages.

Conclusion

In terms of educational practices, the relationship between social class and attitude towards schooling has highlighted the distinction between the upper and lower classes. In this chapter, I attempted to investigate the relationship between social class, educational practices and migration by specifically looking at the experience of refugees. My ambition was to assess whether becoming a refugee determined class practices.

Refugees' struggle with integration and their children's schooling is an established topic within migration studies.[473] I explored parents' thoughts and practices in relation to their children's education in Sweden, analysing it in close relation to the parents' class backgrounds and practices in Syria. This revealed that the common constraints they faced in Sweden led to a weakening of parental influence over their children's education.

I discussed that the constraints parents encountered in the areas of language, knowledge of the education system and their own struggles 'integrating' in Sweden challenged their degree of engagement with their children's education. Parents expressed a greater sense of responsibility with respect to their children's education in Sweden compared to Syria. They became dependent on their children and immediate network, which often forced children into a 'parenting role'. This pattern was seen across different social class backgrounds.

Further, I showed that educational aspirations existed among families regardless of class backgrounds, and many had relatively high educational aspirations. In light of this, one of the contributions of this chapter was the emphasis on the significance of legal barriers, i.e. lack of citizenship and

[472] See Chapter 6.
[473] See, for example, Dryden-Peterson, 'Refugee Education in Countries of First Asylum: Breaking Open the Black Box of Pre-Resettlement Experiences'; Dryden-Peterson et al., 'The Purposes of Refugee Education'. For a detailed discussion, see pages 46–50.

statelessness, as determinants of educational aspirations and trajectories, beyond economic and cultural capital.

Finally, and probably most importantly, in this chapter, I observed what can be considered 'working class practices' in refugee families, regardless of class background in Syria. This is to say, first, the families show strong aspirations for upward mobility. Second, they struggle to adapt to the educational demands imposed on their children. Third, they rely on their older children to guide their younger siblings and become informants for the parents. This suggests that forced migration creates both possibilities and constraints for families, where they are required to adapt to their 'new' objective conditions, and based on that, form subjective aspirations and practices.

CHAPTER 8

Maintaining the stateless spirit

In the previous chapter, I discussed parents' experience and responses to their children's education by highlighting to what extent these were determined by their present constraints, rather than their histories. In this chapter, I continue to explore parents' experience with their children's education, focusing in particular on their responses to the experience of oppression and social exclusion as Kurds from Syria. I examine how parents perceive and react to their children's education in light of the role of the education system in social and cultural integration.

Parents often talked about their concerns regarding their children's integration into the Swedish culture and society. Although they trusted the Swedish state and education system with their children's future, they were conflicted by concerns that their children would become 'too Swedish'. Parents experienced fear concerning their children's participation in educational institutions, becoming a part of Swedish society through socialisation and internalising Swedish values.

In my analysis of the interviews, I found that the lack of a Kurdish nation state (statelessness) was a common theme in their narratives. Given my observations and attempt to understand the parents' encounter with their children's education after forced migration, I was left with certain questions, such as: What does it mean for families and individuals to be stateless in nation states with educational systems that reinforce existing social structures? How do parents handle their concerns about their children 'becoming Swedish'?

Accordingly, this chapter shows that Kurds' statelessness is a common theme in the families' narratives, as are their ambitions and dispositions, which is revealed through the parents' encounters with their children's education in Sweden. I show how the lack of a Kurdish state challenges class differences, as 'Kurdishness' becomes a source of unification despite the differences within the group of Kurdish refugees from Syria.[474]

[474] In this chapter, I use the term 'Kurdishness' as this word was used by the families as a way to refer to the Kurdish language, their Kurdish identity, national struggle and social and cultural values. Sayad, in particular, critiqued culturalist approaches that essentialised immigrant cultures and failed to consider the complex social and structural factors that shape immigrant experiences. He argues that traditionalism among immigrants should not be reduced to cultural conservatism but should be understood within the broader context of displacement and social marginalisation. See Sayad, *The Suffering of the Immigrant*.

This chapter begins with a detailed description of my encounter with Yusuf and Sore (Family 14), as I believe it best captures the themes discussed in this chapter. I then delve deeper into the emerging themes by discussing other families, occasionally providing detailed or brief descriptions. I describe the problems parents identify, that is, their fears as parents of children who are a part of Swedish society and the education system. I simultaneously discuss how parents address their fears and turn them into various dispositions. These discussions focus exclusively on the empirical material, while the chapter concludes with a summary of my findings, where I provide a sociological analysis.

Holding on to 'our roots'

When I asked Yusuf (father, university dropout, Family 14) and Sore (mother, lower secondary education, Family 14) about their hopes for their children's education in Sweden, Yusuf did not mention anything about Sweden, the Swedish language or what he defined as Swedish culture and values. Instead, his immediate reaction to my question was as follows:

> Yusuf: Above all, I do not want them to forget their language.
>
> Nubin: Their language as in…?
>
> Rojda and Yusuf: Kurdish.

Rojda (daughter, 21, Family 14) was already aware of his father's wishes. She joined the conversation, describing her parents' wishes together with them. She agreed with her parents and understood their reasoning. The following excerpt from the interview illustrates this further.

> Yusuf: They should not forget it [Kurdish]. It is important that they know…
>
> Rojda: …our old things [history], how it used to be.
>
> Yusuf: …who their family is, what their history is. I mean that they don't forget their grandfather, that they don't forget their family [relatives]. That takes precedence over everything else. On another note, in our home, we are not like those people who think we should become like Swedes just because we came to Europe.

This is what I attempt to do in this chapter in terms of my discussion regarding the 'Kurdish culture' or 'Kurdishness'. It is the meaning families attach to it that is discussed in this chapter, rather than a claim that a culture, as such, exists purely as a fact. The same goes for their interpretation of what 'Swedish culture' and society refers to.

Nubin: Do you mean you don't have such a wish?

Yusuf: Yes. I mean, as if we have to become like them, work like them. No.

Sore: It is good to learn the good things from them. That is no problem.

Yusuf: Yes.

Sore: But a lot of the things are not like ours.

Yusuf: And they have friends. They have Swedish friends. And they know the difference between good and bad.

Nubin: You think they understand?

Yusuf: Yes, they understand. They know the differences between right and wrong, and we tell them 'this is good', 'this is bad', 'this is wrong.'

Sore: I mean, many people who come to Europe will certainly face a lot of struggles in terms of children, in terms of home, in terms of how to show them the right way.

Nubin: Tell me more. What are these struggles that you face, or that you have faced so far?

Sore: For example, when they go to school, they are surrounded by Swedish friends. They see what they are up to and how things are. And we are not similar in many ways.

Nubin: In what ways, for instance?

Rojda: For instance, in terms of [the difference between] boys and girls, and relationships. For example, there were no relationships between boys and girls in Syria. But here, you can see that relationships between boys and girls are accepted as standard. That being said, my father and mother do not approve…

Sore: …There is no problem with them making friends with boys, communicating with them, talking to them. We trust them.

Yusuf: …communicating with them, building a life here in Europe.

Rojda: In fact, when we were in Erbil, Hewlêrê [Kurdish name for Erbil], I was working but they never had that [worry]. They had always put their trust in me.

> Sore: *Alhamdulillah* [expression of appreciation], our children have secured our trust up until today.
>
> Yusuf: We have put our trust in them. We have not had any issues with them. […] I can give you an example. There is no meaning in saying that they should not have any male and female friends, to go to events, to do an activity together. You see what I mean. That being said, I do not accept that my daughter will come to me holding hands with a Swede and say that they love each other. Neither our history, folklore nor our manners would have us accept this.
>
> Nubin: I see.
>
> Yusuf: They can communicate [with Swedes], work, come and go, and be successful in their work. We have come here, and that is it. This has become our place. We cannot go back to Syria again. We have to live life adapting here. But…
>
> Sore: You do as it is [done] here, and you do as you please as well.
>
> Yusuf: You do as you please as well. [After all] we are Kurdish.

The education of their children was important for Sore and Yusuf. They saw it as a way to become a part of Swedish society by learning the language, making friends and finding a job to financially and socially exist in Sweden. However, the parents prioritised their cultural and social values as well and wanted to ensure that their children understood that they were Kurdish and that their values were different from what they saw in Sweden. As Sore mentioned, it was necessary that their children 'do as it is [done] here' in Sweden to adapt to society, however, not to the point of forgetting that they were raised differently and are characterised by fundamentally different values.

The family background and migration trajectory

Yusuf and Sore arrived in Sweden in 2017 through the right to family reunification, as in 2015, their son Lawin had crossed the Mediterranean Sea at age 10 on a boat with his uncle. His uncle brought him to Sweden, as he had a friend here and had learned that citizenship could be attained relatively easily compared to some other European countries. Lawin and his uncle stayed in a refugee camp for 18 months. During the interview, he described what he could remember about his migration to Sweden. He talked about how he had to change schools several times before he finished grade nine. Lawin's biggest struggle was that he could not make friends due to changing schools frequently. He was happy, however, studying mechanics in upper secondary school [gymnasieskola] as he wanted to become an engineer in Sweden and work with his older brother who studied automotive engineering. They

had a close relationship and had just returned from their football match, where he was a player and his brother was a referee.

Yusuf and Sore had five children: Lawin; their oldest daughter (who was married and lived in Austria); their 21-year-old daughter Rojda and her twin brother (who studied automotive mechanics); and the youngest son who was seven (and too shy to join us in the living room during the interview).

Yusuf's parents were from Ayn al-Arab, but they had moved to Ras al-Ayn in the late 1950s. He came from a large family who had made a living in the music industry. All of his cousins were artists and played instruments, and none had a university degree. Yusuf's father had not gone to school, but had an interest in languages, teaching himself Kurdish, Arabic, Turkish and Armenian, and becoming a poet and songwriter. Although he was well-known for his work in the music industry, he started out as a barber in his own shop. Yusuf pursued Arabic literature at university but dropped out to join his father in their barbershop due to financial issues in the family. He turned the barbershop into a cassette shop, switching gears so he could follow in the footsteps of his family by playing music for events and weddings. In his last few years in Syria, however, he mainly worked as a bus driver.

Sore was born stateless to parents who were illiterate and had no right to education, healthcare, voting, property ownership, etc. She was *ajnabi*, which meant that she could only complete primary education. However, she was not officially registered for school. She could not receive a diploma and had to quit after grade nine. She applied for Syrian citizenship in 2003, as she already had children with Yusuf. They paid a substantial amount of money to make sure her application was accepted. After that, she received her identity card, arranged their marriage papers and transferred their children to her name.

The family left Syria in 2012, leaving for Erbil, Iraq, as Yusuf's parents were ill and needed hospital care. Neither Yusuf nor Sore could work to provide for the family, so Rojda took a job at a shopping mall while her twin brother worked in an automobile repair shop when he was 13. They could not go to school, not only for financial reasons, but also because they had plans to migrate to Europe. They did not find it necessary to start school there, as education in Erbil was not recognised outside the Kurdish region in Iraq at that time. As they managed to establish their musical career as a family in Erbil after a year, they extended their stay for almost five years. Sore, however, did not believe her children would have a chance to build a future in Syria or Iraq, as the children did not attend school. Despite having relatives in Turkey, they never considered staying there, as their relatives mentioned similar struggles in relation to their children. They relied on their Kurdish friends and family in Turkey to help with their documentation for

Lawin's application for family reunification in Sweden, staying in Turkey for six months before their arrival.

Although Lawin continued with his schooling once he arrived in Sweden with his uncle, Rojda and her twin brother had to financially support their family and drop out of school for six years before arriving in Sweden. Upon arrival, they immediately continued with their education by first taking Swedish language courses. Rojda started working in elder care while searching for opportunities to study to become a nurse, while her brother managed to start studying to become a car mechanic. Their studies enabled them to take out student loans. Yusuf was on sick leave due to his severe back issues, preventing him from working as a bus driver in Sweden. 'I am stuck not knowing what to do after I finish SFI.' He was receiving social benefits. Sore, on the other hand, managed to register for studies to become a cook. While social aid helped pay their rent, their other expenses were covered by their children's student loans.

Both parents were very proud that their children pursued their education in Sweden despite their interrupted education and struggles in Iraq and Turkey. Sore mentioned that because of her love for education, she was very involved in her children's schooling in Syria. According to Yusuf, who talked directly with her during the interview, 'if you weren't a *maktum* [lacking documentation], you would have studied. You would have finished [your education].' Sore could not finish her studies in Syria and wanted her children to be successful academically. As parents, both Sore and Yusuf had high hopes for their children to complete their schooling and establish a future in Sweden.

Setting their background and migration trajectory aside and returning to the parents' perceptions thoughts on holding on to 'our roots,' there was also a dimension of fear. Besides the trust they had placed in their children, they described their fears for their youngest son who had been in Sweden since he was four years old. According to the parents, he occasionally behaved in ways different from the boundaries of respect valued in the family and did not show respect verbally. Yusuf, Sore and Rojda talked together, remembering the moment when the son accused his father of 'lying to him' as he did not take him to the park as promised. 'We tell him, for example, "yes you are right. Your father forgot about it. But you cannot use this word with your [lying]."' According to Yusuf, being raised in a home with Kurdish-speaking older siblings who become 'good examples for their younger brother' makes him 'see how his older sister holds up to her manners, and what she and her brothers do at home. He will do the same eventually.' This assured Yusuf and Sore that they did not have to worry about their youngest son, despite their fears.

My interview with Yusuf and Sore as a family was a typical one that I had with all families. The fear was a theme often mentioned, not necessarily regarding 'losing'

their children, but regarding keeping the balance to the extent of their children's 'integration' in Sweden. Preserving children's Kurdish skills and what they defined as Kurdish manners were key aspects in ensuring they would not 'become like Swedes'.

'Acting like Swedes,' was a common narrative among families. According to Rojda, her brother is 'acting like the Swedes' by learning to stand up for himself as an individual in Swedish schools. This was clear in the middle of a chaotic discussion with Fatma (mother, Family 21), who described how shocked she was when visiting her sister's children, who grew up in Sweden, where she witnessed their 'disrespect' towards her. She wanted to make sure her children 'do not integrate culturally', as she was afraid that 'if my children hang out with Swedes, they will become like them.' This being said, Fatma, like Sore, was glad that her children were within the Swedish system. According to Sore, 'there were many good things about education.' 'They help you and show you what is ahead of you', which they thought was not the case in Syria, where they struggled to make sure that the resources provided by schools and teachers were sufficient for their children.

The parents emphasised the importance of their children becoming a part of the Swedish system by continuing their education and joining the workforce. They also expressed the need to take control over teaching their children what they defined to be their cultural and social values. They wanted to maintain and transmit their 'Kurdishness' to their children, mainly by preserving their Kurdish language skills and as they described it, holding on to 'our roots'. This can be interpreted as their ambitions and strategies to cope with their fears, and as a reflection of their stateless dispositions.

In the following section, I discuss this in greater detail, giving examples from my meetings with other families.

The persistent struggle to 'not be lost'

For parents, there were various ways they related to their children's education in Sweden. Besides the hopes they had for their children's futures, the other two themes that dominated my conversations with them were educating Kurds to bring awareness to Kurds' national cause and preserving their children's Kurdish skills, both related to their strong ambitions to preserve their 'Kurdishness'.

Speaking Kurdish was a major concern. They thought that they could reinforce their children's Kurdish skills within the family by teaching them about their social values. They often judged families who did not speak Kurdish with their children and emphasised the significant role language played in their national struggle for recognition as a stateless group.

In this section, I first define how, for some parents, the education of their children serves as a tool to reinforce national consciousness. Later, I discuss the

significance parents place on preserving their children's Kurdish skills, which relates to their fears. While I primarily focus on parents' aspirations to maintain their children's 'Kurdishness', I also explore parents' concerns about their children growing up in Sweden. I interpret these aspirations and parental practices in relation to the statelessness of Kurds.

I thereby define parents' conflicted state. On the one hand, they wish to maintain and transfer their values to their children by preserving the Kurdish language within the family, socialising with other Kurds, having their children marry other Kurds and living in small cities. On the other hand, parents find it difficult to implement these wishes due to their children's involvement in the Swedish education system and society, which they believe creates an opportunity for their futures in Sweden and even for the future of 'Kurdistan'.

Educating for national consciousness

One morning in a city in Skåne, where I had already spent several days on my fieldwork, I met the mediator, who was in his late 30s, who was to drive me to Mihemed's home after breakfast. During our drive, as well as many other occasions over lunch, walks and dinners, he expressed that he considered educated Kurds 'our future'. He wanted to help me, to make my doctoral study a collective project, and listen to what I had to say about different topics such as women's rights, religion and politics. Although I found our discussions out of place for professional reasons, they became part of our shared time. On one occasion, he mentioned that my views were important to him since I had been educated and he had a lot to learn from me. He was a stateless Kurd from Syria who had fled to Sweden and worked in a factory. Despite his stateless status, he was literate and enjoyed reading. He could speak Kurdish, Arabic, Turkish and Swedish. For him, education was very important, and he wished he could have studied to contribute to the Kurdish cause. He saw my project as a way he could contribute to the Kurdish cause, as he could help a Kurdish researcher who needed his assistance to access families.

This type of encounter was something I frequently experienced during my fieldwork. My meeting with Mihemed illustrates this. For Mihemed (father, lower secondary education, Family 13), his priority in life was the education of his children. Education in Sweden was not only related to acquiring social status linked to their future occupations, but also the Kurdish cause. The more Kurds are educated, he believed, the more 'maybe nations will get to know us and the oppression Kurds experience. Look at the situation in Efrin (Afrin) today. This should be told.' For Mihemed, his national struggle needed to be acknowledged and told. He mentioned that if he had spoken the language, he would have talked

to different people in Sweden to ensure that his story spread and his national struggle was not forgotten.

He emphasised the importance of frequently talking about the struggle of Kurds to gain recognition. Therefore, educating his children so they could reinforce this narrative was significant. To him, it reinforced the national consciousness. He insisted that the education of his children took precedence over everything else, calling educated Kurds 'our future', just like the cultural mediator. That is why his priority was strengthening his children's Kurdish skills, culture and values to make sure they could serve their 'own people'.

> I love education. Ignorant and uneducated people are nothing. […] [I would like my children to serve] their own people, the Kurds as well. We will never forget our *welat*, our roots.

During the interview with Mihemed, he elaborated on the politics of oppression, relating *welat* (meaning 'Kurdistan') to motherhood. For him, not having a Kurdish state meant he was without a mother to protect him. He expressed his sadness about lacking a state, which for him meant that his children would continue living the same struggles he encountered in his life as a Kurd.

> I don't have a mother. I don't have a *welat*. If I had a *welat*, why would anyone else bother [oppress] me? And I am without a mother. I am without a father. I am without *welat*. What is *welat* after all? It is motherhood and we don't have that. Our mother has died. One needs to rebuild human rights for her.

He continued by talking about the political climate in Syria and Turkey and the experience of the Kurdish population there. He had to stop himself, as he became overwhelmed by his own words. He finished what he had to say by taking a deep breath, saying he needed to go to the balcony to light a cigarette. 'My struggle is heavy. I don't have a *welat*.'

To him, one of the strongest ways to 'rebuild human rights' for Kurds was education. He believed this was possible in Sweden, where he thought Kurds were free to express themselves regarding their oppression in their homelands. He expressed that his children would learn about their freedom and human rights thanks to their education in Sweden. He defined this liberation in the following words:

> First, I will talk about Syria. In Syria, you are educated from childhood according to how the state wants you to think, so that you think like them. You can't think differently to them. As the state wants, you need to follow the regime and the system that the state is implementing. If you think outside that system, you will get lost. You can't think outside of it. They don't care that you are a Kurd. You have to think about Arab Syria. […] Here [in Sweden], they don't tell you to

> think like them. People have rights here. They don't say that "you have to think as my state wants you to [to think]". You find your freedom here. I can say anything I want here. I am free. I have no fear. What do you learn then? You learn about freedom. About freedom. Freedom to speak as you please. But there, at our place under the Syrian state, you… when somebody from the police department stops you, there's a fear in your stomach, thinking about what is going on, whether they will imprison you or whether you have something on you.

Although he did not express fear with regard to expressing his ideas freely in Sweden, Mihemed highlighted his fears as a parent due to his children's education in Swedish schools, which did not reinforce his social and cultural values. To him, the dichotomy between relying on the Swedish education system and state for his children's future in Sweden and fearing that his children or grandchildren could 'lose their Kurdish' was a big ordeal. Mihemed 'would like my children to serve the Swedish state, because this country is taking care of my children and raising my children.' However, serving the Swedish state should not indicate 'losing their Kurdish'. He did not only refer to 'Kurdish' as a language but also as a national identity and culture.

In Syria, this fear did not exist. After all, his family, like all the others, was living and mostly working on what they considered to be their land, among their friends and relatives, all of whom were fellow Kurds and shared their history of struggle and social and cultural values. They could speak Kurdish outside of their homes in public areas and on social occasions. Their children would therefore grow up in an environment with the values the families wanted to transmit to them.

Mihemed's interpretation of his children's education in Sweden was echoed in his desire to raise national consciousness, which came up in my conversation with families in different ways, such as follows:

> I think you want to hold on to your language and culture more because you have not become a state. You work a lot to do something for your people and nation. (Alan, degree holder, Family 7)

> We have told our children that we are here for their education. How will they serve Kurdistan without education? They have to. (Bahoz, lower secondary education, Family 10)

> They have to serve Kurdistan as we did. They have to. (Anter, upper secondary education dropout, Family 11)

> It is all about knowledge my sister. A country does not improve without educated people. I fled there. One doesn't know, maybe a *Rojava* [a representation of a Kurdish state] will exist. Maybe people who are educated would return there. Even if it is just

> five per cent of them, maybe they will accomplish some things. But now, if they don't study, become knowledgeable… If they can't write their names, what good would that country do? It is like that. (Zana, primary education, Family 17)

Educating children to 'serve Kurdistan', as explicitly mentioned by some parents, turned into a detailed discussion in my meeting with Dara and Selma (Family 12). They mentioned that they frequently reminded their children not to forget about their Kurdish backgrounds and that this was possibly because they lacked a state.

> Selma: We have told them, if you complete it [their education], and if you can serve your country [meaning Kurdistan], do it. And they have promised us. They have told us they would.
>
> Dara: For example, the other day I talked with my father. I told him "your [grand]daughter has finished upper secondary school, and she has been accepted into the dental school at university." And you know, he is old. He said, "why dentist and why not a doctor?"
>
> Nubin: Hmm. Is it because he didn't approve?
>
> Dara: No. That is not what he meant. He meant something else. He said, "so that she can come here [to Syria] and work with our people, for our nation, to help her people."
>
> Nubin: You should have told him that Kurds get tooth aches as well [laughing].
>
> [everyone laughs]
>
> Dara: True [laughs]. For them [grandparents], they are really thinking of how one can serve their people. My father, at his age, thinks like that.
>
> Nubin: Do you mean they relate education to serving one's country?
>
> Dara: Yes. Yes.
>
> Nubin: Do you think you would have thought similarly about education had Kurdistan been a country with its own borders and an education that was Kurdish?
>
> Dara: Maybe if Kurdistan existed, we would have not thought in this way. For example, if Kurdistan existed, I, as a citizen of Kurdistan, would have wanted my children to have a good education and do their job. That would be it. I would not have thought in a nationalistic way. Now, I insist that my children study in Kurdish [taking mother tongue classes] because my nation is subordinate. Had my *welat* not been subordinate, I would not have thought like this. Do you understand what I mean?

Dara and his father related their children's education to the idea of 'Kurdistan' as a way to build 'our future', which was also expressed similarly by Mihemed and others.

The liberation of expressing 'Kurdishness' in Sweden was often mentioned in relation to mother tongue courses provided for children during their education. Even though many parents believed that 'it all happens in the family' (Mihemed, Family 13), they found the mother tongue lessons to be a great opportunity to maintain and improve their children's Kurdish skills. In the following section, I discuss this in further detail by also continuing my discussion on the parents' fears regarding their children's education in Sweden. This is because preserving Kurdish skills was a strategy parents often mentioned to ensure that they did not 'lose' their children.

Children's Kurdish skills

> We are not thinking that there are more than twenty million Kurds in Turkey and we are invisible compared to that population, because there are three million of us [in Syria]. What I want to say is that the Kurds in *Rojava* are invisible [relative to the population of Kurds in other regions], but we still maintain our lives. We do not assimilate to Arabic [in Syria]. We hold on to Kurdish. When we go to schools [in Syria], we cannot just say that we will speak in Kurdish. It doesn't work. There are just three million of us, and the regime in Syria can easily dominate us […] It is because of that [statelessness] that we are more aware [careful] of our language, Kurdishness and our children. This surely impacts children's education in Sweden as well. They go to the Kurdish mother tongue, and we communicate in Kurdish with them at home. We have been aware of our language since we were born. (Soran, father, primary education dropout, Family 22)

The parents' encounter with their children's education in Sweden revealed strong ambitions to ensure that their children were well-educated. For some, this included raising awareness of the Kurdish cause and building national consciousness, which often involved preserving their children's Kurdish language skills. The importance of the Kurdish language was a recurring theme in my discussions with all families.

All children could speak and understand Kurdish, as it was the language spoken at home. After arriving in Sweden, parents expressed fears about their children losing their Kurdish language skills. To them, preserving these skills was crucial for maintaining their Kurdish identity, which was tied to the Kurdish national struggle, as well as cultural and social values. According to the parents, this had to happen in the family. For instance, Soran 'holds on to Kurdish,' as he expressed above, and relates it to the history of oppression experienced by Kurds. Similarly, Zana (father, primary education, Family 17) elaborated on this, further emphasising the strong influence parents have on their children.

> It all depends on the family, my sister. I can tell you now that when I see a Kurd who speaks Arabic, it frustrates me […] No matter the situation, one should not forget Kurdish. […] Parents are like school for children. If you say that Kurds are bad, and this and that, then you destroy children's Kurdishness. But if you say that we are oppressed, that people have done this, that we should study, become knowledgeable and that the day will come when we will be able to go back to *welat*… I mean, it is also wrong to cut them off from home. You don't know what awaits, but it is necessary to send your children home every two years if you can't do it every year. They should go there for twenty days, a month, to visit people, to learn about our Kurdish customs, get to know their relatives. Even if they don't like it, you should still send them. They should get to know the difference between here and there. No matter what you do, this is Europe. Everything is open [possible], but I belong there. I mean, no matter how much I develop myself, I will not be able to be like the Europeans. There are things that are red lines [impossible] for me. I can't pass them. If I don't show these to my children, and my children are young here, then they will be like Europeans. They won't have red lines.

As Zana expressed by mentioning visits back home, parents often discussed the different ways they ensured that their children's 'Kurdishness' was not lost. Taking advantage of the right to mother tongue lessons was just one way, a right that did not exist in Syria.

According to Mihemed, this was the best thing that the Swedish state provided for Kurds.

> Mihemed: The best thing in the Swedish state is that they say 'one should speak their mother tongue at home.' The children go to school, and the school tells them that they can provide Kurdish teachers for them. This makes you so happy. For me, this is when I became free.
>
> Nubin: You mean you became free in Sweden?
>
> Mihemed: Yes, I became conscious of my freedom here. It is a country where human rights exist. You become conscious of humanity. […] This never happened to us, even in our dreams and imaginations in Syria.

Parents were already trying to strengthen their children's Kurdish skills at home by speaking Kurdish with them and communicating their social and cultural norms and values on a daily basis. Mihemed viewed the right to mother tongue education as a way to support parents' ambitions.

Ferhad (father, Family 4) agreed with Mihemed's statement that he 'realised [his] rights' after arriving to Sweden. He clarified that sending his children to Kurdish mother tongue classes and speaking Kurdish at home were part of a strategy to resist

his past in Syria, where he could not speak Kurdish in the school environment. Ferhad was a teacher in Syria, and when I asked his opinion as a teacher who had worked in Syrian schools about the differences between the schools in Syria and Sweden, he gave an example from his childhood and elaborated on why his children were taking Kurdish as a mother tongue in Sweden.

> Ferhad: When I was a student, I remember in our school, they used to tell us not to speak Kurdish in class. But we were children and we did not see any issue with it. It was normal for us. We didn't question why they said that to us. We used to laugh about it. They told us not to speak Kurdish. Everything was normal for us until we went to university because we stood up, opened our eyes and Arabic was right in front of us. It is when I came here [to Sweden] that I realised just how oppressed we were, how we were nothing to them. I realised it here, I mean. On top of that, [should] I send them to Arabic, so they learn Arabic? No way. Nur [his wife] says she wants to send them to Arabic. I asked what they would do with Arabic. [She answered] "maybe we will go to Syria and Arabic will be necessary." I said "Arabic is totally not necessary." They will stay here [in Sweden]. We have come here.
>
> […]
>
> When we were in Syria, we went to school. There were our Kurds who got arrested. I mean, it was like you open your eyes as a Kurd among Arabs and Arabs treat you like that, and that was the norm. We came here and we realised our rights. A lot.
>
> […]
>
> They [Syrian state] don't want you to improve [yourself], and the others [Kurds and possible Kurdistan] want you to improve [yourself]. There is a big difference when one side wants you to improve yourself and the other does not want that. One is your real father, the other is not. There is a big difference. I don't know. I elaborated on my thoughts a lot, and they would not be useful to you.
>
> Nubin: No, it is really useful. Look…
>
> Ferhad: When you ask me these questions, I get into that atmosphere. I realise things as you are asking them. Do you understand? It pains me now. It pains me as I am telling you.

Ferhad, just like Mihemed, became overwhelmed by his own words during our conversations about language and mother tongue education.

My conversations with parents often became emotional when we touched on the Kurdish language and the rights families received in Sweden, which enabled them to speak and maintain their 'Kurdishness'. This is because language often brought up political discussions with families about the Kurds' oppression. This was apparent in our dialogue with Aram (father, Family 16) as well. He attributed his illiteracy to the political climate in Syria against Kurds, describing the difficulties he experienced due to the school language being in Arabic and not Kurdish. He elaborated on the experience of his parents, his own experience and that of his children in Syria as Kurds, comparing these experiences to their experience in Sweden.

> There is no problem in Sweden in that regard [school language]. When I want a Kurdish language teacher, they provide it. They don't object to it. They said they could arrange a teacher if there were ten students. And there were teachers here. There are Kurds here, and they came [to school]. We were told that you must speak Swedish and English, and that we could choose a third one. We said we wanted our mother tongue. They don't object. They helped us a lot. There wasn't anything missing on our side. From the time I was born until now, it is when I arrived in Sweden that I [first] realised that I am a human being. I mean, I realised I have things. I have rights as a human being. For example, in Syria and Turkey, as countries where Kurds are dominated, we can say on our behalf… I mean, there are many people in our region, in Qamişlo (Al-Qamishli), who are without identification [stateless]. How can I have land that belonged to my grandfather, and has been ours for a hundred years, but be without identification? I mean, how can I be without hope? I am lost, I mean. There were very few who were without identification in Kobane. Yes, we had identification, but what was it for? It was so that we would vote for them, so that we would make them stronger. My identification did not mean I had human rights. No. You would go to their school under the regime. Every morning, for example, everything we used to say was part of what the system imposed on us and what our teachers told us. It wasn't anything related to studying. No. This was the difficulty in *welat*. These were the difficulties we went through at home. […] It had its effects on our grandparents and parents. They were affected, we were affected, and now our children are affected as well.

Parents said the opportunity for their children to receive mother tongue tuition was a dream come true and they associated it with a kind of freedom they never had in Syria. To them, this meant that their mother tongue was recognised on a state level.

In Syria, the Kurdish language was forbidden and not a part of the state institutions, including the education system. The multicultural Swedish context, however, has assisted the Kurds in developing their culture and language. Sweden has become a central place for the Kurdish language, culture and politics. Kurds can express their linguistic struggle, which has led them to build modern Kurdish

literature. The large Kurdish diaspora in Sweden has made Kurdish one of the most requested and studied languages in mother tongue tuition.[475]

The goals of mother tongue tuition stretch beyond teaching communication in the language. It imparts knowledge of traditions and cultural phenomena. School boards offer mother tongue classes as a full subject throughout compulsory school if at least five students request a class and a teacher is available. Students who request a class must have basic functional competence in the language. In the case of families from Syria, this was not a problem, as all of them spoke Kurdish at home. Although schools sometimes slot lessons into students' regular schedules, classes are usually held after or before school hours, and the municipality decides on the length of classes. Most classes last one hour per week, but some classes are two hours long. Mother tongue teachers have hourly contracts. As a result, teachers may work in different schools and different municipalities.[476]

For parents, this opportunity was a recognition of Kurds and their national struggle. It provided an opportunity to meet Kurdish teachers who had resided in Sweden for over a decade and who had taught in different schools. Or, as Majda said (mother, Family 1), 'It is sort of a support. You know that your language exists.' It could also become an opportunity for parents to learn how to read and write in Kurdish, an education they never received in Syria. For instance, Ava (mother, Family 20), who was about to graduate from upper secondary school in Syria right before the war, described that it was a great chance for her to be able to engage in the Swedish education system and become a teaching assistant in pre-school, finalising her education. She was hoping to benefit from her children's Kurdish education in Sweden as well.

> Now, when they start school, they have the chance to study their mother tongue. I will definitely send them to Kurdish. Definitely. I think that I would also learn thanks to them. When they have homework, for example, I will learn with them. I mean, me and them together. This is what I see ahead.

Rojda and her twin brother (Family 14), similar to some of the other children, could not receive mother tongue education as they were the only two students who

[475] According to statistics for the years 2012/2013, Kurdish was the fourth language following Finnish, Arabic, and Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian. See Mikael Parkvall, *Språken: Den nya mångfalden*, Riksbankens Jubileumsfond 3 (Stockholm: Makadam förlag, 2019). Unsurprisingly, the two largest cities in Sweden, Stockholm and Gothenburg, have the most Kurdish mother tongue teachers and students in Sweden. According to a recent estimate, between 200–250 Kurmanji and Sorani teachers work in Sweden among the 3 000 mother tongue teachers who teach in 164 different languages. See Haydar Diljen, 'Modela Perwerdeya Zimanê Zikmakî Ya Swêdê û Kurdî', *Le Monde Diplomatique Kurdî*, November 2020.

[476] Furthermore, teaching mother tongue classes does not require a formal qualification, unlike all other teaching positions in Swedish schools. However, university courses exist to train teachers in several languages taught in mother tongue tuition. For a detailed reading on mother tongue tuition in Sweden, see Reath Warren, 'Developing Multilingual Literacies in Sweden and Australia'.

requested Kurdish classes in their school. Instead, they chose to take Arabic, as it was an easy way for them to receive school credits and they already spoke the language. According to Yusuf, 'they already speak Kurdish', and this was his way of 'justifying' his children's choice to take Arabic classes. Considering his children's education in Syria had been in Arabic, their Arabic skills in reading and writing were better than their Kurdish skills. Rojda expressed that she knew 'the verbs, nouns, and adjectives better in Arabic than in Kurdish because my schooling was in Arabic.' Evin (daughter, 19, Family 19) voiced similar thoughts.

> Evin: I already speak Arabic We studied in Syria. I mean, it is not difficult for us. We have already studied it. It is just to receive credits.
>
> Kawa [father]: For me, I do not want my children to study Arabic. I want my children to study Kurdish. My language is Kurdish, so why would I study the Arabic language. I would study my own language instead.
>
> Viyan [mother]: They were forced to study in Arabic in Syria, but they are not forced to study Arabic here [in Sweden].
>
> Kawa: I mean, if you have your own language, you don't go and study another language. Now, my daughter goes to Arabic, but it is not out of pleasure. She had no other choice [because she was the only Kurdish one in school].

The inability to study in Kurdish in Syria was seen as oppression and a violation of human rights. Therefore, being able to study Kurdish in Sweden was seen as an act of freedom and liberation. For families, the idea of freedom, that is, having the right to speak and use Kurdish freely in Sweden, was a way of reinforcing their social and cultural values and transmitting that to their children.

Azad (father, degree holder, Family 3) expressed the relationship between the Kurdish language and its role in maintaining their social and cultural values. He stated that 'if you do not speak your own language… I mean, your language is your identity. If you don't speak their own language, you feel incomplete. When you don't have a country, you feel even more incomplete.' For Azad, being stateless and not speaking his language meant he was 'incomplete', a feeling he did not want his children to experience.

Azad therefore highlighted the importance of Kurdish associations in Sweden. When I asked why he joined Kurdish associations in Sweden, he expressed that it was to ensure that his children were surrounded by other Kurds and involved in cultural activities where Kurdish was spoken. He believed the association could become a place for Kurdish children in Sweden to marry and be immersed in the Kurdish culture.

Nubin: Is it so that you have contact with Kurds? Do your children join you?

Azad: Honestly, you know, we have an association and we really wanted it to be stronger. In fact, we have met two, three times because of that. We mentioned that the association should arrange more activities, that our boys and girls should meet more often. A bigger reason is that we want that association to become a Kurdish home where all Kurds can go. Besides that, when our young people go to this association… We wanted some people to teach them the tambur [We wanted] some people to teach them songs in Kurdish. We wanted all this to happen because when there are songs, when there is tambur, our boys and girls would at least be able to meet. Maybe they would even meet and marry each other. It is better than finding someone from who knows where.

Nubin: How nice, yes.

Azad: Yes, we wanted to do all of these things. In fact, a while ago we sat together to discuss these things. I mean, I don't know. Sometimes there are certain things that necessitate a lot of involvement with Swedes, you know, for this work. You know, you have communication with the municipality. Sometimes there should also be someone who speaks the language. Many times, we try to request things, but we can't as we don't speak the language.

Nubin: Aren't the people who have been living here for thirty years a part of the association?

Azad: Most of them have suffered a lot. They can't deal with these things anymore.

Nubin: Have they had enough?

Azad: Some who have had enough, some who have worked with [political] parties for years and do not trust any party anymore, one who has retired and only wishes that he and his children are fine, that he looks after them, and his children wouldn't go the wrong way, do wrong things. I don't know, we are working on broadening the association for now. I don't know how it will go.

As he described, the effort to arrange activities through the association was a product of the work and requests of several families. For these families, it became a space for parents where their children could identify with their Kurdishness. Azad described this further in relation to his lack of a state by describing how hard it is for him to identify that he is Syrian rather than Kurdish.

When you say 'I am Kurd. I don't have a country', it hurts you very much. All the time. When they ask me 'where are you from?', sometimes I say 'I am from Kurdistan', sometimes I say 'I am from Syrian Kurdistan', sometimes I say 'I am

> Kurd, from Syria'. I mean, these things hurt when you say them all. […] I mean, these things are important for us to say. But it is a bit difficult. […] If we had a Kurdistan, we would have said 'I am from Kurdistan'. That is it. I mean, sometimes you need to explain to them what Kurdistan is. It is difficult for us.

Towards the end of our discussion, when I asked about a possible return to Syria, Azad defined his fears concerning his children 'becoming Swedish'.

> Nubin: Why do you want to return though? Is it more for the 'Kurdishness', or for your family and society?
>
> Azad: Honestly, it is everything. Society, family and Kurdishness. You know, it is, in the end, losing oneself here.
>
> Nubin: How about your children?
>
> Azad: That is what I am saying. It is the loss of your identity.
>
> Nubin: So, you think like that for your children as well?
>
> Azad: I don't know now if my children will [return]. I don't know if my son will find Kurds or not in the end when he grows up. Maybe, even if he marries a Kurd, he will talk Swedish with her. Then his children will become Swedish.
>
> Nubin: Hmm… So, there is that fear.
>
> Azad: Yes, it is like that. I mean, our people from Qamişlo (Al-Qamishli) who went to Damascus… After fifty years, their children became Arabs. You know, the fear is that there will be an assimilation here as well. There will be, for sure. Within one or two generations. It will be like that. After fifty years, with the second and third generation, the children will be gone. I mean, the Swedes don't say 'you are Swedish', nor are they authentically themselves [meaning Kurdish]. No matter how long they stay here, Swedes will not say 'you are Swedish'. They will say 'you are black-haired. You are not one of us'. But, they also lose their identity.
>
> Nubin: Their Kurdish one?
>
> Azad: Yes. They have no identity.

Azad and the other parents mentioned so far had the same fear regarding maintaining and transmitting their Kurdishness to their children. For Azad, besides ensuring that his children attended social and cultural events with other Kurds, expressed that it was important that his children study social sciences in

Sweden, so that they could 'talk about our problems and broaden [bring attention to] Kurdish issues.' He also ensured that the Kurdish TV channels were available so that his children could hear Kurdish music.

For Mihemed and his relatives and friends, maintaining traditional ways of socialising was a way to ensure that his children would not experience difficulties being in Swedish society where they were not part of the 'community life'. Therefore, as a family, they tried to maintain their social codes and values in Sweden as if they were still Syria.

> We experience social struggles. For example, we are used to doing *şevbêrk* [meeting at a friend or neighbour's place to spend an evening, a tradition that is a part of their community life], we are used to gathering together, we are used to a communal life. But here... Again, we try to meet with our relatives. We managed to gather together here. We thought if we remain close together, maybe we would not experience these [social] difficulties, and our children would not experience these difficulties. That way, they would not forget their Kurdishness either.

For other families, establishing a 'community life' similar to that in Syria was not possible to the degree it was for Mihemed. In those cases, parents often mentioned that their insistence on speaking Kurdish at home and reminding their children of their social boundaries in terms of their 'Kurdishness' became important. Roder (father, Family 18) elaborated on this by highlighting that these boundaries were strict in their family so that children remain 'in our system'.

> We want it to remain in our system at all the time. I mean, we are Kurdish. We have certain customs and values. When my daughter goes and visits the neighbours sometimes, even if they are Kurdish and she stays for a couple of hours, I tell her that we are Kurdish and that certain things must not happen. I mean, here, we always say the things we used to tell them in Kobane [Ayn al-Arab] so that we do not get on the wrong track, so that we do not lose our customs and values. Both for girls and boys.

According to Arjin (father, degree holder, Family 9) and Zilan (mother, post-secondary education, Family 9), who I visited in the evening after dinner and who claimed that they did not have a regular 'community life' in Sweden, my presence in the family had created the conditions for a *şevbêrk*. After I had finished our interview and as we were having fruit and talking with Arjin on the sofa, I witnessed one of the strategies Zilan used to build her daughter's Kurdish skills. Zilan was spending time with her daughter on the ground playing with the small toy piano they had bought for her. Her daughter started to mimic a Swedish song, which made Zilan smile. After humming the song with her daughter for a

while, she insisted that her daughter also sang a Kurdish song. 'Sing to me in Kurdish as well sweetheart.' This made her daughter laugh, which made Zilan turn it into a game, where they both sang in Swedish and Kurdish and played with the words.

Using Kurdish songs to help children maintain their Kurdish skills was not only a strategy deployed by Zilan, but also by Dara and Selma (Family 12). They were involved in the Kurdish political and cultural centres in Sweden. They often organised events in the cultural centres so that their daughter could sing for the 'community'. They showed me videos of their daughter singing in front of a crowd, while wearing traditional Kurdish clothes. Their daughter, however, had given up on singing for the past six months because she preferred songs that were not 'heavy [difficult] Kurdish songs.' She said that 'these songs are not the style I want to sing.' She used to love to sing those songs when she was little, so Dara attributed her daughter's unwillingness to her age as she was a teenager influenced by her peers in Sweden. They struggled for three years to find a school where their daughter could pursue her singing. Selma described the discrimination her daughter experienced in different schools and the difficulties they encountered finding a suitable school. 'We did not know which schools were good, and which schools took care of children when we arrived. Nobody helped us, no matter who we asked.' They also took advice from their activist Kurdish friends in Skåne and in Stockholm and were told to register their daughter at a school with a cultural focus. Although they were content with her finally going to a school that could support her musical skills, they were also afraid of 'letting things go' and described it in similar ways to Yusuf and Sore, who were not happy with their youngest son's unfamiliarity with the social values and boundaries in the family. Selma explained it as follows.

> Selma: I will tell you why they [their children] are open with us. It is because we did not force them. We didn't force them, but we showed them the right way. If we force them too much… We don't know here [Sweden]. You come here, and you get confused about how to approach your children. It is very difficult leaving a country after a certain age when you have already raised the children till this age. You come here to a country where the culture, customs, nothing is similar. We came to a free democratic country. The children came to these [conditions] after this age. It was difficult. When we force them, they resist us saying "this and that is the law here". They are children. They understand. They go to school and they know everything.
>
> Nubin: So, they teach you about the regulations here?
>
> Selma: Yes, they know it. This is the situation. So, you become afraid of letting things go where they do whatever they want. We don't have the courage [to let them go]. We are afraid because no matter what, we are Kurds. I mean, we are

> not, for example, like a European country that has established self-sufficiency [translation of "xwedi bune jiyanke"]. At times we hold on to them [the children], and at times we let them go. You understand what I mean.

By 'establishing self-sufficiency', Selma wanted to express the impact the lack of a state had on them as a family. Not having a state and being subordinate as Kurds impeded their ability 'have a life like a European', as their children could not be raised in 'a free democratic country'. They further had to ensure that their children did not get lost in Europe, where family values were different than the values they held as Kurds from Syria. Therefore, at times, Selma had to 'hold on to' her children to make sure they did not 'become Swedish', and at times 'let them go' so that they become part of Swedish society and socially exist in their relatively new order.

One day, when Selma's daughter arrived home from her studies at university, she was upset that she did not have any Swedish friends as 'they create their own separate groups', to which Selma replied that this was something her daughter had to accept 'because no matter what, this is not your country. They will never see us as one of them. No matter how much you say you are a Swede, you are actually not.' By saying this to their children, however, Dara and Selma acknowledged that their children were a part of the Swedish education system and were socialising with their friends from school. That is why they frequently reminded their children not to forget about their history and statelessness.

As mentioned, Kurds' national history and statelessness was frequently present in the parents' narratives. The feeling of liberation that came with being able to express their Kurdishness was internalised in different ways by the parents. So far, I have shown that having the right to send their children to mother tongue courses and the ability to retain social rights with regard to their ambitions enabled parents to adopt certain strategies. Besides language, cultural events, marriage and socialisation, some families also described their strategic choice to remain in a small city as a way to ensure they could rely on the Kurdish network.

It was important for some parents to ensure that they had other Kurds that could offer support. According to Bahar (mother, lower secondary education, Family 23), for example, 'we are Kurds and we support each other', and they did not want to leave the city in the Gävleborg region because they wanted their children to be like them, meaning that it was possible to raise their children the way they had been raised. Having other Kurds in their city was therefore a way to ensure social control over their children, which would have been relatively more difficult in a larger Swedish city.

Soran (father, primary education dropout, Family 22) described his decision to remain in a small city by emphasising that he had been to many different places in Sweden in search of stability through good housing and a good job, so that he could 'stay in one place, [and] bring together my family.' His decision to remain in a

small city was based on his realisation that 'there were a lot of Kurds here. I gathered everyone from my family here afterwards.'

Serhad (father, lower secondary education, Family 6) and Mizgin (mother, degree holder, Family 6) held the same strategy, as they were afraid of 'becoming lost'. Serhad described that once he knew that his children and wife were joining him in Sweden after two years of working to get them residence permits, he sought advice from his Kurdish friends by asking 'what to do in this country [in Sweden]. I said "you are here, you know the conditions, the culture here. [You know] what to do when you have children here."' When I asked who these people were, he responded that they were 'our Kurds' who were residing in Sweden for about thirty years and that he got to know them thanks to his sister who had already been in Sweden for years. Serhad described his exchange with his Kurdish friend as follows:

> There was one man to whom I used to tell everything. He showed me the right way. He said, "I would advise you to not live in a big city in the beginning since your family is arriving and your children are still small." Do you see? [He said] "go to a small city because studies [the education] in Sweden are the same between the small and big cities. But in a big city, you will have a difficult life in terms of finding work. You will have to have an eye on your children day and night. If you go somewhere else [to a small city], you will find housing quicker." Anyway, this man helped me a lot. And I did exactly what he told me to do.

Serhad further mentioned that he put on the Kurdish news to feel connected to 'home' and to make sure his children hear that Kurdish is a 'legitimate' language. Serhad and Mizgin often mentioned how they prioritised the Kurdish language within the family so that their children knew the difference between 'our culture' and 'theirs'. Remaining Kurdish and not becoming 'too Swedish' was done by ensuring that their children's Kurdish skills were not lost.

> Serhad: Our culture here… It is the same as it used to be. We have not changed. Our contact with the Swedish system and Swedes will eventually change our children a little bit. Our children see them, go to their houses and come [home] asking "dad, why are we not doing the same as them?" It takes time until we teach them who we are and who they are. It takes time. If there are good things, then we say, "we are learning [from them] slowly". My children say "dad you don't understand" sometimes. I tell them that we follow our culture and they follow theirs. They say that we don't understand [them]. When they say we don't understand, it becomes difficult for us. I mean, in terms of language, we are not the same. Their language is better than ours [referring to the Swedish language being part of the state system as opposed to Kurdish which is not standardised]. I see many families that speak Swedish with their children so that they can learn the language. They are not saying, "it is over. My children are forgetting Kurdish, and they are becoming Swedish now". We, no. As the mother of the children have

> said, Kurdish takes precedence over everything else. That is it. Now, if I take you among Arabs, you will immediately become involved in their nature, their education, you will learn Arabic immediately, you will learn their culture. But if you speak Kurdish at home, you do not lose your language easily. But if you don't speak Kurdish, then you will lose it in one or two years. Whatever family it is, this will happen. If you don't recognise yourself, you will be lost. And Europe is like a sea. You are lost as you enter it.
>
> Mizgin: We do our best to be aware of ourselves.
>
> Serhad: We show them [their children] our culture. We tell them "*our* language, *our* culture". We show it to our children. […] When we established the [Kurdish] association, we did so for many reasons. It was to make our children's education Kurdish, immerse them in Kurdish culture, Kurdish music, Kurdish dance. I mean, this was so that our children do not lose that culture.

Mizgin continued by giving an example, saying that her youngest daughter had not experienced the religious festivals in Syria. She celebrated Easter [Påsk], however, by going out to collect sweets, similar to trick or treating. Mizgin wanted to introduce her daughter to the festivals within the Kurdish tradition and agreed with another Kurdish family to make sure that their children knock on each other's doors and gather sweets like they used to do in Syria. 'We have to show them the Kurdish folklore.' According to Mizgin, 'this is not a way of distancing them from Swedish culture. We are happy when our children get together with Swedes. But they have to know… They have to have something in them knowing what makes us Kurds.'

Serhad and Mizgin held similar values to the other families regarding the place of the Kurdish language in the family and ensuring their children 'follow our culture'. They made sure that they had the Kurdish TV channels so they could follow the news and their children were exposed to the Kurdish language, and 'so that maybe there are things we can show them in Kurdish'. They spent time with other Kurdish families from the village, socialising 'together day and night. We go and see each other without notice, just like *welat*'. Serhad and Mizgin were thus not different from other families regarding their concerns about their children and their strategies to ensure they maintained social control over them.

Given the discussions so far, we see that regardless of the parents' backgrounds, political engagement and socio-economic status, all had similar fears regarding their children 'becoming Swedish'. For parents, this meant losing one's cultural and social values, which was a big sacrifice considering their history of national struggle for recognition as Kurds. I will conclude this chapter by providing a sociological analysis of the findings.

Mismatches between past and present

In analysing my interviews with the Kurdish families, I observed that there was a recurrent theme, where they had a persistent desire to 'not get lost' in Sweden, which was rooted in their statelessness and historical experience. This desire was also a product of the mismatch between their past and present that appeared after migration. They had to persist so that their present did not overshadow their past. In the following, I analyse this persistence in relation to their statelessness and views concerning the significance of maintaining and transmitting 'Kurdishness'.

Parents had a 'common' view concerning the significance of maintaining and transmitting their social and cultural values. As identified above (see Chapter 5), despite their different class backgrounds, the social conditions of Kurds in Syria shared certain similarities due to their marginalised position as an ethnic minority. The Kurds from Syria shared a certain idea of groupness, mainly in relation to their national struggle and marginalisation. Given this, class differences can be moderated when 'Kurdishness' becomes a source of unification despite the existing differences among Syrian Kurds. This implies a possible homogeneity to their existence, and therefore to the 'logic' they attach to their 'practice'.[477]

Based on the discussions in this chapter, I showed that parents' fears regarding their children's 'integration' into Swedish society were rooted in their distance from Syria. Accordingly, parents wanted to ensure that they had social control over their children, which resulted in wishes that were associated with the parents' desire to teach their children about their native language, national struggle for recognition and social and cultural values. Parents believed it was crucial for a group that was stateless in a world of nation states to preserve and transmit what symbolised a Kurdish state, because statelessness was a lived experience for them, as suggested by Eliassi in his previous study on Kurdish diasporas.[478] This can be analysed through the relationship between national education systems and nation states.

If we go back to question of why national education systems were established in the first place, we are quickly reminded that education was not a prerogative of the state until the construction of modern nation states.[479] The ambition with the construction of modern nation states was to create a sense of national identity and foster a shared sense of belonging among diverse populations. When stateless individuals, nations or subordinate groups cannot rely on a state for the recognition and reinforcement of their national identity, how can they maintain that identity?

Although Kurds mobilise globally and have formed transnational connections due to their political history of oppression,[480] they do not have a national education

[477] Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*.
[478] Eliassi, 'Statelessness in a World of Nation-States'.
[479] Green, *Education and State Formation: Europe, East Asia and the USA*, chap. 3.
[480] Khayati, 'From Victim Diaspora to Transborder Citizenship?', 228.

system that has been institutionalised into a comprehensive state system and that legitimises the reproduction of their national identity. Therefore, analysing Kurds without taking into consideration their statelessness would be to ignore 'statelessness as a lived experience' and the complexities that come with it.[481]

Given Syrian Kurds' statelessness, we see that similar to the Roma mothers in Europe, they were challenged by 'the tension between external pressures to engage and adopt majority values and inside pressures to stick to traditional norms and roles'.[482] On the one hand, they placed high trust in the Swedish education system and the opportunity for upward social mobility. On the other hand, they experienced fear and 'distrust' as 'Europe is like a sea. You are lost as you enter it.', as expressed by Serhad, a sentiment that resonated with other families.

This can be further analysed by considering that parents held on to ways to 'reproduce' their 'legitimate culture' *within* the family. Bourdieu's work emphasised the arbitrary power educational institutions hold in the reproduction of the 'legitimate culture' or 'dominant culture',[483] which can be defined as the culture that appears to be legitimate in a society and is recognised as valid by the majority.

In the case of the families I interviewed, the parents acknowledged that what they perceived to be their culture was not reproduced in the Swedish education system, and they believed that they had to take control by ensuring their social and cultural values were reproduced within the family instead. This was not easy, as their children spent their time integrating into the 'dominant culture' in Sweden by attending Swedish schools and socialising with their peers.

In fact, for the parents in this study, the culture that was reinforced through the Swedish education system was fundamentally different from the values families wished to transmit to their children. Some parents gave examples of behaviour in their children that did not agree with their family values. Some did not have any complaints, but emphasised their fear that in the future, their children's behaviour would clash with their parents' social values. It was therefore important for them to establish social control over their children, partly by resisting their children's 'integration' in Sweden.

In order to cope with their children's 'integration' in Sweden, parents' strategies of reproducing their own social and cultural values had become a strong part of how they socialised and exercised their values within the family after migration. For parents, these strategies were aimed at enforcing their lifestyles in Syria and their manners. This included social codes, where children were

[481] Eliassi, 'Statelessness in a World of Nation-States', 1406.
[482] Sime, Fassetta, and McClung, '"It's Good Enough That Our Children Are Accepted"', 328.
[483] Bourdieu and Passeron, *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*; Bourdieu, *The Bachelors' Ball*, 186.

expected to show a certain kind of respect towards their parents and elders, or respect for honour codes with regard to certain marriages.

My focus on parents does not suggest that only the parents are active in transmitting their values and that the children are passive family members. Surely, children have ways to accept or resist their parents. Children interpret their parents' wishes in different ways. In the case of the families I visited, the children's ages determined whether their parents' strategies were naturally deployed and regulated by children, or whether they had to become explicit rules (telling their children about the boundaries of respect, i.e. what is acceptable or not). While older children agreed and embodied their parents' priorities (as embodied by Rojda, for example), younger children experienced difficulties understanding their parents and abiding to their wishes (as was the case with Rojda's seven-year-old brother).[484]

Turning to the strategies parents used with regard to their fears, I showed that maintaining their children's Kurdish skills was a priority. Additionally, some parents highlighted the importance of socialising with other Kurds or taking part in cultural activities and engaging with Kurdish associations. Some emphasised marriage strategies or choosing to live in small cities and villages as strategies they used to maintain and transmit the families' social and cultural values, which they associated with their 'Kurdishness'. These were valued differently by families depending on their availability, accessibility and the intensity of their political and national values.

These strategies and related fears did not cause the parents or the children to resist education in Sweden. None of the families rejected academic achievement by believing they would end up in 'immigrant jobs' despite their education. On the contrary, there were high educational aspirations among parents (see also Chapter 7). Although children experienced constraints concerning their education, such as language barriers, discrimination and cultural differences, parents still placed high value on education and had high hopes.

Besides expressing their fears, parents also emphasised the importance of engaging with Swedish society. Sore (lower secondary education, Family 14) and Mizgin (degree holder, Family 6) mentioned that 'it is good to learn the good things from them.' They had a high level of trust and aspirations for their children to succeed in their education.[485] For the families in this study, this was mainly because they believed their children had certain rights in Sweden they never had in Syria, such as the right to mother tongue education or a 'more developed'

[484] This is a preliminary analysis based on the interviews and observations I carried out with families. Unfortunately, I was unable to talk to the children without their parents present. It is possible that the parents' presence impacted the children's behaviour and answers during the interview.
[485] Shahrokni, 'The Collective Roots and Rewards of Upward Educational Mobility'.

education system that is globally recognised. They therefore had hopes for their children's educational success, in some cases even more than they did in Syria. This was valid especially for those who spent several years in 'transit' countries and those who were *ajanib* and *maktumeen* (legally stateless), as Sweden provided an opportunity to pursue their education rather than dropping out of school. Parents placed a lot of trust in the Swedish education system and its welfare structure to 'take care of' children regardless of their background.

Their trust in the Swedish education system was justified by its emphasis on 'pedagogical' values and its difference in comparison to Syria. This justification was mostly not based on personal engagement with their children's schools, but rather their presuppositions on the Western system as progressive and 'the best education' system in the world. The families had transferred and integrated the ideas and presuppositions of the country of immigration (Sweden) from the point of view of the country of emigration (Syria).

Shifting focus to another marginalised group, the experience of Roma families offers a different perspective. Unlike Kurds, who express high levels of trust and aspirations in the Swedish education system, Roma families demonstrate more scepticism, despite their shared experience of marginalisation.[486] In a study concerning Roma mothers and their views on their children's education post migration, it was shown that their experience of poverty and the systematic exclusion from education and work made them question whether their children could overcome their disadvantages by attending schools, despite their awareness of the relationship between education and social mobility.[487] Similar to Roma mothers, parents in this study emphasised the importance of literacy (especially for illiterate parents) and encouraging their children to attend school. However, unlike the Roma mothers, the Kurdish parents did not question whether their children could achieve upward social mobility. Instead, they placed a great deal of trust in their children's future, as Yusuf and others explained, seeing social mobility as a means of securing their children's well-being and preventing them from being 'taken away' in Sweden.[488]

[486] While Kurds are the largest ethnic minority in the Middle East without a state, Roma people are the largest ethnic minority in Europe. See European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), 'Roma and Travellers in Six Countries' (Luxembourg: Official Intergovernmental Organisation, 2020). For a review of research on Roma and education, see Solvor Lauritzen and Tuva Skjelbred Nodeland, '"What Is the Problem Represented to Be?" Two Decades of Research on Roma and Education in Europe', *Educational Research Review* 24 (2018).

[487] Sime, Fassetta, and McClung, '"It's Good Enough That Our Children Are Accepted"'.

[488] What this 'distrust' caused in families' attitudes echoes Willis' findings with regard to the resistance certain groups can have towards education. Surely, Kurds' resistance is not similar to that of the working class youth in 1970s England. However, I believe, thinking by analogy, it helps us understand on what basis education in Sweden can cause fear and resistance to 'integrate' among parents. Having their children attend Swedish schools implies their 'integration' to Sweden and its social and cultural values to a certain degree. As a counterbalance, parents had to resist the power of schools in 'integrating' their children by ensuring they 'legitimised' their own language and what they referred to as their social and cultural values *within* the family.

In sum, the families' experience suggests that, on the one hand, they depended on Swedish society and education system for social mobility and 'integration'. They placed trust in their children's schooling in Sweden. On the other hand, 'integrating' implied distance from their family values, and the parents were confronted with a world that was different than the world where their deeply rooted dispositions were formed. They were conflicted by what they had internalised as 'second nature' to them.[489] Migration and statelessness had created a strong 'mismatch' between their past and present.

Migration itself had created a rupture for the parents as their 'old' social order conflicted with their relatively 'new' social order.[490] This conflict was directly related to their new 'conditions of existence' and the subsequent dramatic changes the families encountered in Sweden.[491] Given this, the geographic mobility experienced by the Kurdish families in this study created a 'culturally divided self' through the confrontation with a foreign culture.[492]

The question is whether the wishes and practices of parents discussed in this chapter, which they strongly associated with their statelessness across different class backgrounds, would eventually persist and become internalised. This is what would possibly distinguish Kurdish refugees in Sweden from other forced migrants, who came from states where they were not discriminated for their ethnic identity. Indeed, having wishes and 'strategies' to hold onto a national identity and culture is not exclusive to Kurds. This is common among migrants, as shown in diaspora studies that look specifically at political refugees. It is possible that parents associated their views on integration with their statelessness, when in reality, these views may be more closely linked to the fact that they are away from their homes due to migration.

This can only be analysed with the dimension of time, which is beyond the scope of the current study. In the following section, I will turn to diaspora studies to briefly discuss this limitation and highlight the strength of Kurds' historical experience with statelessness on their dispositions over time.

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[489] Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, 56.
[490] Sapiro, 'Habitus Clivé'.
[491] Bourdieu, *The Bachelors' Ball*, 182. In this book, Bourdieu defines how individuals who are shaped by their upbringing and experiences conflict with the 'new logic' of the social order. He describes how mismatches can exist between what is perceived to be 'second nature' and the structures. In these cases, he emphasises the significance of time. He claims that, 'the time needed to understand the new course of events is no doubt proportionate to the degree of the objective and subjective attachment to the old world, the interests and investments in the stakes that it offers.' Ibid., 184–85. In the case of migration and in the discussions in this chapter, one can think of this in terms of families' degree of attachment to Syria and the time needed to 'adapt' their 'second nature' to the new social world.
[492] Julie Andrews et al., 'Bourdieu's Habitus Clivé in Voicing, Feeling, Being Aboriginal', *Journal of Sociology*, Special Section: Fields, Capitals, Habitus: What Next? A Review Symposium, 1, no. 10 (2022): 3.

Reflection on consistency over time

Is there consistency in the families' wishes and subsequent practices to ensure their children 'remain Kurdish', or are these only wishes held by parents during their initial phase of migration, which will change over time?

Unfortunately, it is difficult to answer whether Syrian Kurds in Sweden will continue to uphold and transmit the social and cultural values they believe represent their 'Kurdishness'. Despite the lack of a straightforward answer to this question, I believe studies of the Kurdish diaspora help us understand this paradox, as the strong role it has played in the maintenance of a Kurdish identity over the decades is clear.

The established Kurdish diaspora in Sweden is firmly rooted in the 'common' national struggle for recognition due to the persistent politics of exclusion in the states where they mainly reside. The diaspora has therefore played a key role in the revival of the Kurdish language, culture and politics, which has enabled Kurdish nationalism and identity to be strengthened.[493] As 'a platform of resistance',[494] the memory of repression in Kurdistan has evoked diasporic consciousness and the practice of long-distance nationalism.[495] Political action and participation in 'homeland politics' therefore takes place Sweden.[496]

Further, cultural activities have been a significant part of Kurds' diasporic practices. The cultural producers in diaspora emphasise the role their work plays in maintaining their cultural heritage, including their language.[497] The first wave of Kurdish cultural producers in Sweden, dating back to the late 1960s, led the way for cultural production that maintains the cultural dimension of their Kurdish identity. The establishment of the biggest Kurdish library, giving shelter to a number of Kurdish television channels and local radio stations, several magazines, and Kurdish cinema and art are only some examples of their cultural production and activities in Sweden.[498]

Besides their political and cultural practices, Kurds have also established strong social ties, both nationally and internationally, where they have formed self-governing models to provide for the needs of Kurdish migrants without government interference or control, thereby developing their communities and forming collective

[493] Eliassi, 'Nationalism, Cosmopolitanism and Statelessness'.
[494] Khalid Khayati, 'Stigmatization and Racism in the Swedish Migration Talk and the Diasporic Resistance', *Sociologisk Forskning* 54, no. 1–2 (2017): 11.
[495] Bruinessen, 'Shifting National and Ethnic Identities'; Alinia, 'Spaces of Diasporas: Kurdish Identities, Experiences of Otherness and Politics of Belonging'; Khayati, 'From Victim Diaspora to Transborder Citizenship?'; Eliassi, *Contesting Kurdish Identities in Sweden: Quest for Belonging among Middle Eastern Youth*; Zettervall, 'Reluctant Victims into Challengers'.
[496] Khayati, 'From Victim Diaspora to Transborder Citizenship?', 253.
[497] Dag, 'The Politics of Cultural Production'.
[498] Khalid Khayati and Magnus Dahlstedt, 'Diaspora Formation among Kurds in Sweden: Transborder Citizenship and Politics of Belonging', *Nordic Journal of Migration Research* 4, no. 2 (2014): 58.

identities.[499] As 'one of the best organized diasporas' in Western Europe,[500] Kurds have maintained political consciousness that passes down intergenerationally.[501]

Considering the trajectory of the diasporic mobilisation and strong diasporic consciousness among Kurds in Sweden over the past decades, there is no doubt that there is a consistency that transcends at least two generations. Surely, it is important to recognise the hierarchies within the Kurdish diaspora, especially since Kurds come from heterogeneous backgrounds with differences that are not only related to class, but also different religions, dialects, territories and communities. However, diaspora studies in Sweden show how 'Kurdishness', which partly represents the national, social and cultural values among Kurds in Sweden, has become value that is consistently reinforced over time.

We cannot predict whether similar narratives will apply to those of the relatively newer wave of Syrian Kurds in Sweden over time. However, the established diaspora gives a sense of how maintaining cultural values and a stateless spirit is still a strong part of Kurds' social lives and existence in Sweden. This being said, a sense of 'in-betweenness' is also common among young Kurds in Sweden, where 'they negotiate the relationship between here and there, home and away.'[502] Therefore, children's perception of their parents' wishes and effort to transmit their 'Kurdishness' deserves further analysis. It is possible that over time, children will experience 'double absence', i.e. being culturally and psychologically distant from their home country while remaining marginalised and excluded from full participation in the receiving society.[503]

Moving beyond the dichotomy between 'assimilation' and 'resistance', literature within transnationalism suggests that the so called second generation Syrian Kurds in Sweden that arrived after the 2010s can forge what is commonly referred to as transnational or hybrid identities.[504] This can be interpreted as double presence. Regardless of the terminology, for the parents in this study, their understanding of integration in Sweden was shaped by their histories of oppression and statelessness, which in turn influenced their responses to the integration process.

This chapter revealed that, despite the limitations in analysing the consistency in parents' narratives over time and their strategies for reinforcing Kurdish identity intergenerationally, parents reasoned through their Kurdish identity regardless of their class backgrounds. For them, integrating into Swedish society meant

[499] Dag, 'Self-Governing from Below'.
[500] Barzoo Eliassi, 'National Conflict Reflected in Diasporas: The Quest for Recognition among Kurdish Youth in Sweden', *openDemocracy*, 2011.
[501] Baser and Toivanen, 'Inherited Traumas in Diaspora'.
[502] Eliassi, *Contesting Kurdish Identities in Sweden: Quest for Belonging among Middle Eastern Youth*, 117.
[503] Sayad, *The Suffering of the Immigrant*.
[504] Faith G. Nibbs and Caroline B. Brettell, eds., *Identity and the Second Generation: How Children of Immigrants Find Their Space* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2016).

(dis)integrating from parts of their Kurdish identity they were unwilling to lose – a reluctance deeply rooted in their historical experience as a stateless population.

Conclusion

As I analysed parents' encounters with their children's education in Sweden in this chapter, I departed from the question of how parents perceive and react to their children's education in light of the role of the education system in social and cultural integration, particularly focusing on their responses, which have been shaped by their experience of oppression and social exclusion as Kurds from Syria. Based on the interviews with families, I observed that parents had concerns about their children's integration into Swedish society. I explored how they interpreted these fears and discussed the strategies they used to work around them.

I argued that parents found themselves in a conflicted situation. On the one hand, they relied on the Swedish education system to ensure their children had access to social mobility, and they had a positive view of the opportunities it created to raise the national consciousness of the Kurdish struggle through education. On the other hand, they found ways to ensure that their children's education in Sweden did not indicate cultural integration to Sweden.

I analysed this dichotomy based on the principle of reproduction – which is fundamentally what the theory of reproduction has offered to sociological research. I worked with the argument that educational institutions aim at socialising, or 'integrating' individuals to the dominant society by reinforcing the 'legitimate culture'. I showed the tension this created for minority groups such as refugees.

The parents' wishes that their children would not 'become Swedish' strengthened their wish to maintain their social and cultural values and transmit these to their children. The parents' expressed these wishes in relation to the history of Kurds in Syria and their statelessness. The inclusion of the stateless status of Kurds in the analysis clarified how the reproduction of 'Kurdishness', or in other words, the maintenance and transmission of it, depended on the parents' capacity to improvise within their 'new' context. In contrast to the practices determined by structural constraints discussed in Chapter 7, here they had a margin of freedom in how they responded to their children's integration.

Families relied on their Kurdish network in Sweden by participating in social gatherings and cultural events, they ensured their children attended mother tongue education and emphasised the significance of their Kurdish skills, they made their social boundaries explicit to their children and in some cases, they chose to live in small towns in Sweden. They thus maintained the balance between 'letting go' of their children and ensuring they did not 'lose their Kurdishness'. These practices can

be viewed as products of their habitus, shaped by their internalised historical experiences and statelessness, and as responses to their fears of 'becoming lost'.

In other words, by focusing on the conflicted situation the families described, it was clear that there were mismatches between their habitus and the new structures due to the migration of the habitus. It was a product of the mismatches between their past and present that appeared to them after migration. They had to persist so that their present did not overshadow their past. However, as I clarified, the aspect of time needs to be considered for any further analysis of whether these 'mismatches' are consistent, and ultimately cause a disruption in the habitus.

As a final note, with this chapter I do not claim that Syrian Kurds will have trajectories that are starkly different than those of Kurds that arrived in Sweden before them and are perceived to be 'well integrated', i.e. those who actively participate in political and cultural life of Sweden as writers, journalists, artists, musicians and members of parliament. Their 'resistance' against 'becoming Swedish' should be understood in relation to the strong attachments Kurds have to maintaining their identity, which is not reproduced through a state, due to their absence of a state.

CHAPTER 9

Conclusion

In recognising that refugees' integration is often studied from the point of view of their arrival, i.e. the 'receiving society', this study departed from critiques of these reductionist approaches that situated refugees within a homogenous category, reducing them to representatives of a backward culture. By viewing refugees as products of their own histories – referring to the lived experience and socio-economic and political influences that shape their attitude and perspectives – rather than products of their own cultures – which implies adherence to static traditions and overlooks class dynamics – I was interested in bringing forward refugees' social histories (class backgrounds and internalised historical experience), as well as their present possibilities and constraints. Accordingly, the aim of this study was to understand the extent to which refugee families' diverse and unified backgrounds shape their experience and responses to education, which is the key state-led integration process in Sweden.

Sweden offers an informative case for this study, with its strong state-led integration policies, access to welfare for refugees, and a knowledge economy. In Sweden, education is regarded as the primary precondition for refugee integration, underscoring the country's high educational standards and the significant social importance placed on education. Integration in Sweden thus entails schooling for children and adult education programmes for adults, which extend beyond language learning to encompass a broader socialisation process that introduces refugees to the intricacies of the Swedish way of life.

Against this backdrop, I investigated refugee families' encounters with education in Sweden. I defined an 'encounter' as a forced encounter, through which I investigated the refugees' ability to improvise and adapt to their new national setting, grounded in their social histories and new possibilities and constraints following migration. This was analysed by studying the parents' experience and responses to their own and their children's education and the connection to integration in Sweden.

I worked with the case of Kurds from Syria who fled the country due to the Syrian civil war that escalated in 2011. As a population that has a strong connection with their national history, which is reinforced through their diasporas and struggle for the recognition of their national identity and status as a stateless group without a national

education system, their case offered insight into the experience and responses to integration in Sweden, where state-led education is central to integration policies and education is key to entering the labour market while serving as a place for socialisation.

In a review of the empirical material, I found two themes that were central to understanding families' encounters with education in Sweden. Education was partly a source of strength for families, where they put trust in the education system and aspired to find a stable and secure way of life, i.e. to improve their living conditions and preserve their class background. Moreover, education was a charged topic, as families interpreted it to contribute to the Kurdish struggle for nationhood and as a way to fight against the discrimination they experienced in Syria due to their ethnic identification. In some cases, migration to Sweden enabled people with limited or no access to education in Syria to have an opportunity to pursue an education.

Nevertheless, education in Sweden created a source of tension for families. Parents could not engage with their children's education as they did in Syria. Furthermore, they were concerned about their children's participation in Swedish schools and interaction with Swedish society, as they believed it could weaken the impact of the social values and norms that were tied to their ethnic struggle. Additionally, education was a source of tension, as different family members (fathers, mothers, and children) had different experiences with education in Sweden, which impacted family dynamics.

Based on this overview, I have shown that, for the Kurdish refugee families from Syria, parents' national identity, class background (measured by educational level and occupational status) and gender impact their experience and responses to Swedish integration measures. While in some respects, the parents' class background interacts with gender, in other respects, their national identity is more important in the way they shape their experience and responses.

This concluding chapter presents a summary of the findings of this study, which are discussed in relation to the research questions posed for each empirical chapter. These findings will demonstrate that a view of refugees as products of their histories, rather than products of their culture, offers a way to understand experiences of integration beyond a 'receiving society' point of view. Accordingly, informed by the empirical findings, I will finalise this study by pushing for a theoretically informed discussion of integration where I will argue that for refugees, integration suggests a (dis)integration from parts of the social histories that have shaped their social existence.

Refugees' diverse backgrounds

One of the tasks of this study was to highlight refugees' heterogeneous backgrounds, which subsequently served as a backdrop for an analysis of their experience and responses to integration in Sweden.

In answering what unites and divides Kurdish families in Syria based on their social origin, I began my analysis by exploring both their heterogeneous backgrounds and their shared experience in relation to their Kurdish identity, the latter of which is well-supported by existing literature on the Kurdish diaspora. Through an analysis of Syria's socio-economic and political history, with a primary focus on the implications this has had for the Kurdish population since the 1960s, Chapter 5 reconstructed histories based on refugees' narratives, which were supported by statistics and a discussion of some of the key historical developments that shaped Syrian society. It served as a hybrid chapter that marked the beginning of what follows, showing how refugees' histories shaped their social realities and existence, i.e. the (un)availability of different assets.

Previous studies have already treated Kurdish refugees as a diaspora, suggesting that there is a collective aspect to their identities, but Kurds from Syria remained an understudied population within this literature. Building on this, I departed from the question of what united Kurds from Syria rather than pre-supposing a groupness.

By analysing the economic policies and sociopolitical climate in Syria in close relation to a theoretical reflection on ethnicity and groupness, which pointed to a shared history in the experience of Kurds, I highlighted how this was forged by their marginalisation. I related this to specific events dating back to the 1960s, such as the Al-Hasakah census, the Arab Belt and Rojava (Kurdish semi-autonomous region), which mainly impacted the Kurdish population residing in the northern region.

Shifting the focus to what differentiated this group, which is a subject that lacks clarity in the existing diaspora literature (other than studies of national and political divisions), I turned to parents' narratives. The parents interviewed in this study predominantly referenced the census conducted in 1962 and the Arab Belt as examples of their marginalisation and the reasons behind their varied educational levels, occupational backgrounds and various assets, such as financial assets (including property) and linguistic assets (Arabic skills mainly obtained through schooling). This clarified why some parents lacked education and Arabic skills while others had high educational and occupational levels, resulting in their diverse backgrounds.

The census in 1962 resulted in the revocation of citizenship for around 20 per cent of the population residing in north-eastern Syria, predominantly Kurds. Their lack of citizenship meant that they had no legal documentation, no identification and no legal rights associated with citizenship. As a result, some of the parents had no identity cards, education, property, right to health care, right to marry or right to vote. Furthermore, during the same time period, the Arab Belt policy led to the majority of Kurdish landowners lose their agricultural land, which was property that was not only an

investment, but also a primary source of family income. This highlights the various class backgrounds among Kurdish families. Moreover, a gendered divide in the experience of women and men was observed, which is largely rooted in Syria's socio-economic history, which is characterised by disparities in educational attainment and labour market participation (to the disadvantage of women).

By focusing on the experience of the Kurdish population, the chapter laid a foundation for a deeper understanding of the refugees' pre-migration circumstances in Syria. It emphasised that the (un)availability of assets, such as education and occupational opportunities, and their current narratives are intricately linked to their historical background. The parents' diverse experiences and differing access to assets through their historical context illustrated what divided them as an ethnic group (mainly their class backgrounds and associated gendered experience), which provided a more nuanced understanding of their experience with integration. This enriches the dynamic within this population, revealing their different strategies with regard to integration.

Class and gender dispositions

A key contribution of this study was to bring forward the social histories of refugees in order to deepen our understanding of their various experience and responses towards integration in Sweden. Departing from this, I was interested in how parents' educational and occupational backgrounds – ingrained aspects of their social existence in Syria – influenced how they, given their dispositions, perceive and interact with adult education programmes, which aim to help them learn Swedish, access the labour market and integrate into Swedish society as a whole. This led me to ask how we can understand the ways parents improvise and adapt their acquired skills and knowledge from Syria to Sweden, acknowledging that the value of these qualifications could vary based on other resources that may be available and legitimate in Sweden.[505]

This differed from the previous questions, which were targeted towards refugees' experience with adult education programmes and employment in Sweden and mainly revealed the structural problems they encountered and their associated daily struggles.[506] Building on this, I highlighted their margin of freedom given their class

[505] Serre and Wagner, 'For a Relational Approach to Cultural Capital', 445–46.

[506] Among many others, see Carlsson and Rooth, 'Evidence of Ethnic Discrimination in the Swedish Labor Market Using Experimental Data'; Andersson and Osman, 'Recognition of Prior Learning as a Practice for Differential Inclusion and Exclusion of Immigrants in Sweden'; Valenta and Bunar, 'State Assisted Integration'; Dahlstedt, 'Occupational Match: Over- and Undereducation Among Immigrants in the Swedish Labor Market'; Frykman, 'Struggle for Recognition'; Elisabeth Hultqvist and Ida Lidegran, 'La Voie Courte, un programme d'intégration des nouveaux arrivés en Suède', *Éducation et*

backgrounds and internalised historical experience, as well as the structural possibilities and constraints they faced as refugees in Sweden (which was based on their forced encounter with a capitalist welfare society). Furthermore, I emphasised how the acquisition of different skills and knowledge from Syria resulted in different attitudes, pointing to the diverse experience and responses to the state-led integration processes among the refugees.

Through my analysis of the experiences of Kurdish refugees, I showed that those with a certain level of education perceived that they could benefit from the adult education programmes to a greater degree compared to those who I defined as illiterate. While those who were literate and had attended school for a number of years in Syria could progress in the programmes and possibly enter the Swedish workforce, the illiterate population's encounter with education was characterised by an attempt to navigate within or outside of system. I showed that those who remained stuck in these programmes were also excluded from society on the whole. I therefore worked with these two groups separately and analysed their strategies to improvise and adapt to the Swedish setting.

First, I showed that those who were literate and had an educational background either took action to preserve their occupational status from Syria or relied on the educational programmes in Sweden to establish occupational status they did not have in Syria. In this group, men who had higher degrees took years to reach their goal, which either resulted in settling for a position within their occupational field that required lower qualifications or starting a new, unrelated job. Women in this group, however, found these programmes to be valuable opportunities to enter the workforce, as they either did not work in Syria despite their high education or they worked in occupations they did not necessarily want to continue. For the group who were literate but did not hold degrees, education in Sweden was a way to establish a position within the workforce, thus contributing to the family finances.

Therefore, I argued that the perceptions were gendered. Women, regardless of their backgrounds, found the programmes to be opportunities to use their skills and turn them into capital, whereas men found them to be obstacles they had to overcome to enter the Swedish workforce.

Second, I discussed that those who were illiterate had to navigate their status as illiterate within a highly literate country that insisted on the value of the educational programmes for refugee integration. This was a population that never had to prioritise education or be exposed to their lack of education in Syria, as they could work as agricultural workers or, in the case of women, forego work as they could rely

Sociétés 42, no. 2 (2018): 157–68; Anki Bengtsson and Larissa Mickwitz, 'The Complexity of Professional Integration: An Investigation of Newly Arrived Teachers' Initial Process of Establishing Themselves as Teachers in Sweden', *European Educational Research Journal* 21, no. 2 (2022): 214–29; Ciziri and Lidegran, 'Long Time in the Waiting Room'.

on their husbands to be the sole breadwinners. In Sweden, however, their lack of schooling had suddenly become more apparent – a defining aspect of their identity that had become more visible, making it a priority to address. Otherwise, parents had to rely on social benefits, which for some became a way to deal with their financial insecurities in Sweden.

Based on the case of Kurds from Syria, I showed that illiteracy did not pose a significant constraint in Sweden for those who had the means to leverage their different assets, such as property or social and symbolic status in Syria. Considering that Kurds from Syria were products of their own history, I analysed the extent to which these assets, and the way they embodied them, influenced their approach to navigating language and vocational programmes in Sweden, as well as integration into Swedish society at large.

This became most apparent in my analysis of landowners, i.e. those who owned and managed a large amount of agricultural land in Syria. Being landowners, their land was associated with a sense of honour and pride for being the master of it. Therefore, it was more than just property that they could sell and benefit from while in Sweden. The continuity of being the master of their land brought with it longer-term financial security and a symbolic attachment to Syria, which was more valuable to them than the immediate financial benefits it could provide while in Sweden. Owning land, for some Kurds, was also a sense of national pride that connected them to their geographic origin and history despite their statelessness.

Landowners believed that attending adult education programmes in Sweden and being unable to progress due to illiteracy damaged the social status they acquired in Syria. To them, they did not belong in a school environment, nor could they 'afford to' rely on social benefits provided by the Swedish state. They viewed receiving money from the Swedish state as dishonourable. Therefore, they sought different ways to enter the Swedish workforce, where they prioritised finding occupational positions in Sweden that corresponded to their management skills.

Unlike others who remained in educational programmes for an extended period and relied on social benefits, the landowners devised strategies to safeguard their social status, ensuring that it was not compromised by securing positions in Swedish contexts that required comparable management skills, akin to managing agricultural land. As a result, they interacted with education in Sweden similarly to individuals with higher educational backgrounds from Syria, seeking ways to preserve the social standing they acquired in Syria and transfer it to Sweden. The key difference, however, was that they could not achieve this by staying within the educational programmes. This was particularly the case for the lawyers and physicians. Instead, they explored alternative strategies outside of these programmes, attempting to own their own business, manage a business with other Kurds and work for themselves.

Further, in looking at the population of refugees who were agricultural workers (regardless of whether they owned large amounts of land), for whom schooling was not a priority, I argued that integration in Sweden challenged their relationship with work, time and sometimes money. In Syria, they had deeply embodied and were embedded in their work conditions, and by extension, their class. Therefore, it had become a part of their 'normal', by which I mean a part of everyday life that they had unconsciously accepted. Their main objective was to uphold their way of life rather than 'becoming' someone else through schooling. I showed that in the process of trying to transition to Swedish society, the agricultural workers were challenged in relation to the manners and dispositions they had carried with them. They had to integrate into the Swedish order, and they were therefore dependent on how capable they were of improvising and adapting to their new working conditions because otherwise, they would be excluded from the larger society.

It was indeed possible to find work in Sweden without having to participate in the adult education programmes. In these cases, however, families had to rely on their social networks to find low- paying jobs, such as working in barbershops or restaurants. Many refugees used this strategy initially to earn money, but it was seen as a short-term solution, as the jobs generally did not provide social insurance benefits or a salary that was high enough to support a family. Therefore, education programmes were seen as the 'secure' way to become part of the Swedish workforce, and subsequently Swedish society. Alternatively, families could rely on whatever financial assets they could access to start and run their own business, whether it was a restaurant or other business. This, however, required access to a significant amount of money in Sweden, which led to substantial debt and therefore conditioned the socio-economic status of the families.

These finding on Kurdish refugees in Sweden support the existing international literature in relation to the migration of educational and occupational assets, suggesting that the devaluation of these assets due to the lack of nation-specific assets (e.g. language proficiency, knowledge of the labour market and recognised occupational certifications) often result in downward mobility and the resulting socio-economic inequalities. The Kurdish case further supports findings that migrants, as suggested by Umut Erel through a Bourdieusian lens, indeed develop bargaining activities with institutions and people in relation to their skills, rather than looking for a 'fit'.[507] They can thus reproduce their acquired skills and knowledge through social networks.[508] The present study contributes to the literature by highlighting the historical context and analysing how migrants' acquired skills and knowledge influenced the strategies they used to leverage their educational and occupational assets. This approach, in contrast to the usual focus on structural possibilities and constraints in the 'receiving society,' revealed variations in the

[507] Erel, 'Migrating Cultural Capital', 649.
[508] Cederberg, 'Embodied Cultural Capital and the Study of Ethnic Inequalities'.

experience and responses to integration in relation to class background and the intersection with gender.

A task of this study was to engage with literature within the sociology of education. This body of literature often overlooks refugees but focuses on mobilisation across national contexts, predominantly through the middle and upper classes or through student mobility. While acknowledging that this literature primarily concerns different types of migration, it includes concepts such as globalisation, internationalism, transnationalism and cosmopolitanism, which suggests that capital flows across borders, and the world is interconnected and integrated. In a dialogue with this literature, the case of refugees questions the positive connotations, as it highlights the limits of capital flow and global interconnections, as put by Frederick Cooper.[509] This can clearly be seen in the radically different experiences of refugees from other immigrant groups who obtain the privilege of transgressing their immigrant identity, i.e. the 'international' recruits, expats and civil servants.[510] Thinking in relational terms, this suggests that the experience of Syrian Kurdish refugees in Sweden can be interpreted as a *forced* integration through education programmes that are targeted specifically to them, as opposed to the experience of the 'internationals'.

Besides the class dimension, my analysis revealed the differences between the experience and responses of women and men. The women in the families I studied, whether they were mothers or older children, often started working in Sweden, therefore contributing to the family finances. Even if they had not started working, they were part of education programmes that they perceived as opportunities to build on their skills. In Syria, mothers were often homemakers, primarily taking care of housework and children. This also occasionally included helping children with their schooling, such as helping with homework or attending school meetings. These assigned roles and responsibilities, which were also historically legitimised through different laws and reforms, potentially restricted their opportunities for work outside the home in Syria. I showed that women's participation in the Syrian workforce was relatively low compared to men, which radically contrasted with the high percentage of the female population engaged in the Swedish workforce. In order to 'integrate' in this highly educated society, the refugee women had to make use of a system that was formed to incorporate them in the labour market. Through education programmes, they were encouraged to learn the intricacies of Swedish life. This, however, was observed in relation to women who were able to pursue their education in Sweden, whereas those who were illiterate often did not join the workforce or remained stuck in educational programmes, reinforcing their primary 'roles' within the families as homemakers. This being said, being women in Sweden

[509] Cooper, 'What Is the Concept of Globalization Good For?'
[510] Dugonjic-Rodwin, 'Becoming "International"', 17.

provided legal and social rights that did not exist in Syria, thus challenging their husbands' perceptions of gender roles and norms to a certain extent.

I also showed that fathers struggled with challenges maintaining their status after migration, as they were previously the dominant figures and decision-makers in the family and the main, or often the sole breadwinners. Considering this in light of the changing roles of their children and partners further highlights the complexities. Regardless of whether the fathers had an occupational background as a lawyer, teacher, landowner or peasant worker, men were often expected to fulfil certain gender roles. As the primary provider and protector of families, having these roles challenged after migration also challenged the family dynamics. In a country where their wives had legal and social rights and actively participated in education and working life, and where their children gained responsibility for their educational trajectories, fathers perceived that their dominant role had been weakened.

In line with previous findings, I do not claim that refugee women were emancipated through the integration process in Sweden.[511] Despite women's participation in the workforce and the changes in their status over time, gender inequalities still persist in many societies, including in Sweden.[512] And accordingly, women also suffer from oppressive racial and class conditions in Sweden that exclude them from Swedish society.[513] Therefore, these findings should be interpreted with a focus on the intended contribution of this study, i.e. raising awareness of the histories that shaped their refugees' social conditionings in Syria, and thus their perceptions of and strategies towards their integration in Sweden.

Even though men were in relatively more precarious situation in Sweden compared to Syria, where they had relatively more established positions (regardless of the social and legal rights associated with these positions in the two countries), they still maintained a strong role within the families. The social control parents had over their children was one aspect I explored. I showed that by emphasising what they defined as traditional values and social norms, thus acting as authoritarian figures by deciding which careers, friends and partners were suitable for their children, they could uphold social control over their children despite challenges to the family dynamics after migration.

[511] Ålund and Schierup, *Paradoxes of Multiculturalism*, 53–67; Ålund and Alinia, 'I skuggan av kulturella stereotypier'; Alinia, 'Spaces of Diasporas'; Farahani, *Gender, Sexuality, and Diaspora*, chap. 4.
[512] Breen and Cooke, 'The Persistence of the Gendered Division of Domestic Labour'; Bühlmann, Elcheroth, and Tettamanti, 'The Division of Labour Among European Couples'.
[513] Alinia, 'Gendered Experiences of Homeland, Identity and Belonging among the Kurdish Diaspora'.

Levelling class differences and strengthening national identity

In analysing parents' experience and responses towards their children's education in the context of migration to Sweden, I asked two questions. One was focused on parents' engagement with their children's education and aimed to assess whether becoming a refugee determined class practices. The second concerned how parents viewed and responded to their children's education in Sweden given the role of education in fostering social and cultural integration, and considering Kurds' history of oppression and social exclusion. Through these questions, I identified two recurring themes in their narratives. One was related to their changing degree of engagement with their children's education, an area where they perceived that their parental influence had weakened. The other was related to their statelessness, the Kurdish struggle for nationhood and their marginalisation. I discuss these two aspects below.

In Chapter 7, I looked at literature from the sociology of education (which has explored the intersection of class and educational engagement among families) to shift the focus to parents' engagement with their children's education, specifically examining refugees, a group who are frequently overlooked. This shift aimed to assess whether becoming a refugee determined class practices by exploring the relationship between social class, educational practices and migration. By analysing parents' practices in Sweden, I showed that common constraints weakened parental influence despite strong educational aspirations, thus levelling class differences. For Kurdish refugees, class backgrounds did not significantly influence their responses. They were rather shaped by the constraints they faced in Sweden.

Indeed, children's education in Sweden was charged with aspirations and hopes for a better future. After escaping the war in Syria, where they considered home, they had high ambitions to build a future for their children. They had a strong belief that they could achieve this through education, as their children were attending Swedish schools and learning the language.

Strong aspirations for children's education are common among parents in the context of migration.[514] By gaining insight into families' backgrounds in Syria, including citizenship status, one of the contributions of this study was to show that migration in itself can be a catalyst for increased educational aspirations. I showed that one of the determinants of educational aspirations and trajectories was related to legal barriers beyond economic and cultural capital. By analysing the context in which refugees lived in Syria, I identified that some people did not have access to education or did not initially have high aspirations for their children, as they did not

[514] Philipp Schnell et al., 'Family Involvement and Educational Success of the Children of Immigrants in Europe. Comparative Perspectives', *Comparative Migration Studies* 3, no. 1 (2015): 14.

believe it would lead to a 'better' future. For example, those who were legally stateless and lacked documentation to access education obtained this right upon arrival to Sweden. Therefore, having access to education in Sweden, to them, represented a foundation on which they could build these aspirations.

Further, I argued that parents exhibited 'working class practices' regardless of their class background, as families across classes were unable to overcome the constraints they faced in Sweden despite their aspirations. These constraints were mainly related to their Swedish skills, which impacted the degree of engagement with their children's education and their knowledge of the Swedish school system. They could not navigate their children's education (even if this was the case in Syria), which typically led to dependency on older children or reliance on ethnic networks.[515] Consequently, the boundaries distinguishing different social classes in Syria weakened due to the experience of forced migration. This is not to claim that diverse social backgrounds and subsequent class divisions disappear, only to emphasise that during times of geographic mobility (i.e. in cases of forced migration) and social transition, class divisions can become blurred for some groups, even though the existing class differences may reappear over time. Alternatively, their 'new' class positions in the 'receiving society' may reshape their educational practices over time.[516]

I found that while parents with relatively high educational and financial assets had more control over their children's educational and cultural activities in Syria, this became difficult to navigate in Sweden. They lacked the financial assets to uphold similar practices in Sweden, they struggled with the Swedish language, they were unfamiliar with the Swedish education system and they were in their own intense process of establishing occupational status in Sweden. Additionally, some of the parents had low educational assets but high financial assets in Syria. For this group, I found that they attended to their children's educational needs by paying for private tutors, language courses and different activities in Syria, none of which they could afford in Sweden. Finally, acknowledging that parental involvement in children's schooling is crucial in Sweden, there was a portion of the parents who had no educational assets or financial assets, for whom the encounter with education in Sweden was associated with new parental responsibilities and demands that did not exist in Syria.

This being said, in the range of 'parental practices' and degree of engagement that were relevant for this case, one can surely distinguish between those that require knowledge on 'receiving society', its school system and language, as opposed to those that do not require this knowledge. In a more detailed study, it might be possible to detect which 'practices' would be more or less likely to be class dependent in practices

[515] Laure Moguérou and Emmanuelle Santelli, 'The Educational Supports of Parents and Siblings in Immigrant Families', *Comparative Migration Studies* 3, no. 1 (2015): 11.
[516] Barglowski, 'Migrants' Class and Parenting'.

such as meeting with teachers, making school choices, helping with homework, regulating sleep time, watching television, monitoring mobile phone use, talking about the importance of school, asking about the school day, etc.

In the group of parents with different educational and financial assets from Syria, I also showed that older children in the families and ethnic networks served as fundamental resources in Sweden. While parents' influence over their children was weakened due to forced migration, children were assigned more responsibility and became more autonomous, as they spoke Swedish and were already part of the Swedish school system. The need to rely on their children or ethnic network to manage their children's education was also partly related to the parents' own struggles learning to speak a new language and establish occupational status. These aspects, as represented by other migrant families, were also evident in the Kurdish case, where family dynamics were challenged in the face of the changes they experienced after migration to Sweden.[517]

These findings support the existing literature on the experience of immigrant families, further contributing to this literature by bringing forward families' class backgrounds (i.e. parents' citizenship status, and educational and occupational backgrounds). By gaining insight into the pre-migration lives of the refugee group, I pushed for a more nuanced understanding of their post-migration experience, where I showed that the former class practices that had distinguished the families from each other no longer held relevance, at least in the initial phase of migration and settlement.

The parents, however, had other domains in which they could take a relatively more active role in managing their children's education. In Chapter 8, I discussed the extent to which refugees can act in a society that places a high value on educational attainment as a critical pathway to integration. I showed that the parents' response to state-led integration through education was occasionally to break with the state nationalist approach, as they believed school in Sweden was more than just a place where children are awarded grades and degrees, but a tool to shape identity, where their children's Kurdish identity could be weakened. They therefore had ambitions and adopted strategies that fostered a stateless spirit. Accordingly, I argued that strengthening their children's Kurdish identity was a way they actually *could* respond to the integration process in Sweden, as opposed to other domains, where their responses were strictly shaped by their constraints in Sweden (such as parental education practices).

Families defined Sweden as a 'democratic country', and for them, migrating to Sweden created a sense of hope for a better future that was deeply rooted in their educational aspirations for their children. For some Kurdish parents, however, these aspirations were not only related to migration and securing upward mobility,

[517] E.g. Beaud, 'An Algerian Family in France'; Beaud, 'The three sisters and the sociologist'.

but to the opportunity to access education and the ability to contribute to the fight to promote the recognition for the Kurdish struggle.

Regardless of class background, parents thought it was important to raise children that were aware of the Kurdish struggle. In Sweden, where they were liberated in terms of their ethnic identity and national struggle, including the suppression of the Kurdish language in Syria, parents found that education provided an opportunity to counter the discrimination faced by the Kurdish population. They wanted to ensure that their children followed in their parents' footsteps by maintaining and transmitting their 'Kurdishness', i.e. the Kurdish language, the Kurdish national struggle and what they defined as Kurdish social and cultural values.

This being said, preserving culture and emphasising traditions should not be reduced to cultural conservatism. It should instead be understood within the broader context of displacement and social marginalisation. For families, this manifested in certain educational strategies, either directly related to their children's schooling or their social lives.

First and foremost, ensuring children maintained their Kurdish skills was crucial. Language was an essential part of their ambitions to reinforce their national consciousness, which was a topic that often led to political discussions with the families regarding their statelessness and subordination. To promote Kurdish skills, some parents adopted various strategies to ensure control over their children's socialisation, such as participating in social gatherings and cultural events, communicating Kurdish social norms and cultural traditions, and choosing to live in small cities where it was easier to control the social environment. Others emphasised the importance of mother tongue tuition (and making sure that their children expressed their Kurdish identity at school events), which was a right guaranteed by the Swedish school system that was not afforded to them in Syria.

In any case, parents often stressed the importance of ethnic networks and frequent social events and cultural celebrations. This, according to the parents, was a fight for a greater cause to which they could contribute through educating their children primarily regarding the awareness of the struggle for their ethnic identity. In a way, it could also help the parents to see themselves in their children, to 'prevent' them from emigrating from their common habitus i.e. Kurdish identity.

Distance from their geographic origin made this fight more crucial to the parents, as they expressed fears regarding the possibility that their children would forget the Kurdish language and 'become Swedish', that is, embodying the social values reinforced in Swedish schools, which conflicted with what they defined to be their social and cultural values. In Syria, such fears did not exist, even though the language of instruction was Arabic and the children attended Syrian schools. This was because the families relied on their close-knit communities, which played

a key role in upholding and reinforcing their Kurdish identity and struggle. These communities were vital for maintaining their Kurdish heritage and the ongoing fight for recognition. Even though relying on their ethnic network was also a significant part of the strategies they used in Sweden, the parents believed they had to ensure that the effort to reinforce their Kurdish identity also carried over to the family homes and was complemented by other strategies.

To analyse this, I relied on the existing conception of the role of education in social and cultural reproduction. Accordingly, I showed that the responses of Kurdish refugee parents to their children's integration (both social and cultural) through education were rooted in fears regarding the lack of legitimised institutions that preserve the Kurdish language and what they defined as their social and cultural values. It is common for political refugees to have certain fears regarding their children's integration in the 'receiving society', and diaspora studies have long shown that integration does not imply a loss of connection to the homeland. The fears held by Kurdish parents were described in a way that closely linked their concerns to their statelessness, with their narratives transcending class differences. As Kurds have long struggled to promote nation-building and fight subordination, the Kurdish parents' persistence to avoid 'losing' their children through integration can thus be related to the lack of a national education system that legitimises the reproduction of their national identity. In order to keep the Kurdish narrative present, the parents needed to have an even stronger commitment to, and connection with, their history, ethos and habitus.

Consequently, their children's education in Sweden entailed a paradox related to the families' statelessness. On the one hand, it was a source of strength that brought recognition for their national struggle. On the other hand, it was a source of tension as it entailed a fight to avoid losing their national identity.

These findings clearly show that statelessness was a lived experience for the Kurdish refugees in the study.[518] This significantly influenced their responses to their children's education, which is a key aspect of Sweden's integration policies. Supporting Wahlbeck's assertion that the Kurds' collective identity, which is tied to their nationalism, can help overcome internal differences, I demonstrated that the refugees' responses were transcended class backgrounds.[519] This also aligns with Eliassi's argument that the strong attachment to Kurdish identity, which is rooted in political oppression in the Middle East, underpins the struggle of the Kurds for recognition and can resist pressures to 'assimilate' into the 'West'.[520]

With these findings, I showed that the Kurds from Syria shared a certain idea of groupness, mainly in relation to the recognition of their national struggle and

[518] Eliassi, 'Statelessness in a World of Nation-States', 1416.
[519] Wahlbeck, *Kurdish Diasporas*, 182.
[520] Eliassi, 'Kurdish Diaspora', 867.

marginalisation. I therefore argue that the effects of class can be underplayed when 'Kurdishness' becomes a source of unification, which implies a possible homogeneity in their existence and therefore to the logic they attach to their practices after forced migration. In studying Kurdish refugee families' relationship to education, I also contributed to the understudied domain of Kurds' education outside of their 'homelands.'

In the following section, I will finalise this chapter by offering a broader discussion related to my findings, where I present a theoretically informed discussion of integration.

Habitus clivé in the making: (Dis)integrating under the weight of forced migration

This study has shown that, for the Kurdish refugee families from Syria, the parents' national identity, class background (measured by educational level and occupational status) and gender interact in their experience and responses to their own and their children's education in Sweden, which is central to the integration process. Accordingly, I argue that their social existence is determined not only by their present structural possibilities and constraints in Sweden (i.e. eternal present), but also by their social histories. I believe this provides an understanding of integration that emphasises the significance of migrants' internalised histories from their lives before migration, adding a deeper layer of complexity to the integration process.

My project viewed refugees as products of their own histories, which served as a lens for examining how they experience integration and to what extent it is shaped by parts of their internalised histories. Rather than focusing on integration at a macro level, where structural integration and the possibilities and constraints faced by migrants' post-migration are examined, my study sheds light on integration from the point of view of the refugee families. Following Abdelmalek Sayad's contribution to the sociology of migration, I engaged with the perspective that reducing migrants to their eternal present circumstances, without acknowledging the social histories they carry, offers an incomplete understanding of their experience and integration.[521]

Conceptualising migrants' integration through social integration, I discussed the relationship between nation states and national education systems and their role in promoting social cohesion. I highlighted how different social groups integrate within a society through educational systems. During times of social change, educational systems have served as a tool for nation states to integrate their

[521] Sayad, *The Suffering of the Immigrant*, 1–6.

population into new social norms, necessitating a relative (dis)integration from previous social and mental structures. Drawing a parallel with migrants, I discussed how their encounters with a new society, particularly through interactions with national education systems, indicate a relative (dis)integration from their former order and logic. The experience and responses of refugees to integration in Sweden, specifically through their engagement with the education system, served as an important lens for this study.

By establishing a broader understanding of families' integration processes in Sweden through an investigation of their experience and responses to their forced encounter with education, I showed that for these families, integration indicated (dis)integration from their previous practices and routines (i.e. their former logics of practice) leading them to develop different coping methods. This means that, for parents, integration in Sweden implied letting go of what defined them in Syria, such as their traditions and ways of living, feeling, acting and thinking, along with all of the other social and mental structures of their society that they had embodied. They had to leave behind their classed and gendered dispositions from Syria, and were instead required to adapt and embody the 'Swedish' social and mental structures.

Analysing parents through Pierre Bourdieu's concept of habitus, i.e. 'a product of history', I further related (dis)integration to habitus clivé, i.e. the disruption that causes a mismatch with the social space with which the habitus is particularly associated.[522] It is possible that over time, forced migration itself can create *clivé* as individuals physically disconnect and begin the process of disconnecting further, mentally as well. As 'a product of social conditionings,' that are 'endlessly transformed,'[523] the transition from Syria to Sweden signified a shift in the social conditionings of parents, and migration introduced the possibility of challenging 'former' dispositions due to the 'cleavage between two cultures.'[524] Hypothesising based on this concept, the experience of parents with their (dis)integration can be interpreted as *clivé in the making*. This can be observed and analysed in future research that looks across generations, as opposed to this study, which contributed to an understanding of what happens to parents and families in the first years after arrival to Sweden, rather than focusing on the relationship between time and (dis)integration.

In sum, my study has departed from the predominant 'receiving society' perspective often found in studies of migrant integration, instead highlighting the significance of refugees' social histories – or as put by Sayad, 'emigrants' conditions of origin' – in shaping their experience and understanding of integration.[525] This does not suggest that refugees are simply carriers or representatives of what is perceived to

[522] Bourdieu, *Science of Science and Reflexivity*, 95–115.
[523] Bourdieu, *In Other Words*, 116.
[524] Sapiro, 'Habitus Clivé'.
[525] Sayad, *The Suffering of the Immigrant*, 29.

be their culture. Rather, it illustrates the complexities involved and moves beyond previous interpretations that reduce refugees to mere representatives of their culture, hindering integration. Their experience and responses to integration are instead a mere indication of what education implied to them, i.e. (dis)integrating from what fundamentally formed their social existence prior to migration. Therefore, within the structural constraints and possibilities they faced in Sweden, they formed ways to improvise and adapt, determining their margin of freedom, wherein their deeply rooted former assets and dispositions played a significant role.

SAMMANFATTNING

Familjer i (des)integration

Flyktningars sociala historier och deras möte med utbildning i Sverige

Denna studie undersöker i vilken omfattning flyktingfamiljers sociala historia och nuvarande omständigheter formar deras erfarenheter av och reaktioner på statligt styrda integrationsprocesser i Sverige. Genom att blottlägga flyktingars heterogenitet, bortom den gängse bilden av flyktingar som en homogen grupp, betonar jag kontinuiteten i deras förflutna och utforskar ytterligare deras handlingsutrymme inom ramarna för deras nuvarande begränsningar. Jag visar att flyktingar i hög grad påverkas av sina tidigare erfarenheter, vilket dock inte förminskar betydelsen av de rådande villkoren i Sverige.

Flyktingar ses ofta som en homogen grupp. Den starka betoningen inom forskningen på identitetsstudier förbiser ofta betydelsen av flyktningars sociala bakgrunder. Flyktningars förflutna framställs ofta som icke existerande med intresset enbart riktat mot deras nuvarande situation. Integrationen analyseras främst genom flyktingars erfarenheter av utbildning och arbetsmarknad med tonvikt på deras kamp att integreras och huruvida de lyckas eller inte.

Välfärdsstater som den svenska, vilka historiskt sett har värnat om principerna för likabehandling och social jämlikhet, utgör ett intressant sammanhang att analysera flyktingars erfarenheter av och förhållningssätt till integration. Sverige har genom sitt välfärdssystem och det nationella utbildningssystemet verkat för en stark social integration, vilket gjort det möjligt för individer med olika sociala och ekonomiska bakgrunder att bli delaktiga samhällsmedborgare. Utbildningssystemet har fungerat som den primära arenan för att integrera migranter såväl på arbetsmarknaden som i samhället i stort. Vid ankomsten och när de fått uppehållstillstånd uppmuntras vuxna flyktningar att delta i vuxenutbildningsprogram, medan barnen direkt anvisas plats i skolsystemet. Detta strukturerade mottagande handlar inte bara om språkinlärning, utan också om en socialisering omfattande normer och värderingar i syfte att verka för en integration i det svenska samhället.

Mitt studieobjekt är kurder från Syrien som anlände till Sverige i början av 2010-talet, som ett fall för att förstå hur individuella och kollektiva sociala historier påverkar deras nuvarande situation, med mötet med utbildning som kontext. Denna grupps reaktion på social integration i Sverige genom utbildning har varit central i denna studie, eftersom kurder är en etnisk minoritet som saknar

en stat och ett nationellt utbildningssystem. Dessutom har de behållit starka band till sin kurdiska identitet trots de störningar som orsakats av migrationen. Utifrån integrationsteorier utvecklade av Abdelmalek Sayad visar jag hur flyktingars situation kan förstås i sin helhet.

I kapitel 1 presenteras en litteraturöversikt som behandlar integration av migranter, med särskilt fokus på Sverige. Här framgår det att migranternas sociala och kulturella historier ofta ignoreras. Migranter ses ofta som produkter av ”bakåtsträvande” kulturer snarare än att de förstås utifrån deras bredare historia som format dem, inklusive faktorer som klass.

I kapitel 2 vidgas litteraturöversikten. Först undersöks frågan i vilken utsträckning det är möjligt att bibehålla den sociala statusen efter migrationen genom överföring av utbildnings- och yrkesmässiga tillgångar från det tidigare hemlandet till det nya. Trots globaliseringens löften om att kapital är lättrörliga och att världen är sammankopplad, blottlägger studier, som jag visar, att det är svårt att mobilisera dessa tillgångar bortom de egna nationsgränserna. Jag visar att värdet av dessa tillgångar varierar beroende av den nationella kontexten de härstammar från. Därefter diskuteras studier som illustrerar att föräldrarnas klassbakgrund, etnicitet och ras påverkar erfarenheterna av och förhållningssätten till barnens utbildning. Genom att ta utgångspunkt i denna typ av undersökningar och genom att inkludera betydelsen av migration i diskussionen skapas en mer nyanserad förståelse för hur familjer förhåller sig till barnens utbildning. Detta står i kontrast till en stor del av litteraturen om flyktingars utbildning, som ofta bortser från deras aktörskap och främst fokuserar på de begränsningar de möter. Kapitlet avslutas med en diskussion om hur migration och integration utmanar familjedynamiken.

I kapitel 3 presenteras de begrepp och teoretiska ramverk som ligger till grund för min analys. Min studie bygger på den kritik Sayad riktat mot att ensidigt fokusera på mottagarländerna och på problemen med integrationen av migranter. Vidare tillämpar jag Pierre Bourdieus forskningsverktyg och använder särskilt habitus-begreppet, där flyktingfamiljerna analyseras utifrån medborgarstatus, utbildningsnivå, yrkesbakgrund, sociala kontakter, språk som talas, kön, familjestruktur och sammansättning (antalet medlemmar, ålder och kön) samt deras kurdiska bakgrund i Syrien.

Jag konstaterar att ”flyktingars integration” är ett politiskt laddat begrepp. I kapitlet för jag därför istället en diskussion om ”social integration”, där jag lyfter själva begreppet integration ur migrationskontexten och frigör mig från den dominerande utgångspunkten i mottagarländernas perspektiv som är vanligt förekommande i studier av migranter, särskilt flyktingar. Här definieras därmed integration som en anpassningsprocess formad av föräldrarnas individuella historier, samt de nya möjligheter och begränsningar de möter efter migrationen. Med utgångspunkt i teorier om social integration och de nationella utbildningssystemens roll för att skapa ett integrerat samhälle, handlar denna studie om integrationens konsekvenser för

flyktingar, som innebär en (des)integrering från delar av deras förflutna som inte överensstämmer med de normer som ställts som villkor för integration. Detta utgör grunden för analysen av familjernas erfarenheter, där jag inte antar att integrationen är ett slutmål för familjerna. Istället fokuseras den potentiella kostnaden för integrationen gällande den historia som har format föräldrarnas liv innan migrationen.

Metoder för datainsamling, analys, etiska överväganden samt en självreflektion i relation till studieobjektet presenteras i kapitel 4. Intresserad av de erfarenheter och förhållningssätt som kurdiska flyktingar från Syrien gav uttryck för genomförde jag under 2020 25 semistrukturerade familjeintervjuer med fokus på föräldrarnas individuella sociala bakgrunder och barnens utbildningsvägar. Här ingick information om medborgarskapsstatus, talade språk, uppväxt och familjesammansättning (antal medlemmar, ålder och kön). Studien drog också nytta av två dataset för att kartlägga relevant karaktäristik över migranternas geografiska ursprung i Syrien, samt deras fördelning på olika destinationer i Sverige. Dessa uppgifter gav ett ytterligare sammanhang åt familjeintervjuerna. Kapitlet avslutas med en genomgång av principerna för klassificering av familjerna. Eftersom klassperspektiv ofta är förbisett i migrationsforskningen utgår min klassificering av föräldrarna från deras utbildningsnivå och yrkesbakgrund (som kriterier som förenar och skiljer familjer åt). Klassificeringen tar också hänsyn till deras historia som en grupp kurder i Syrien och de möjliga konsekvenserna för deras sociala banor.

Kapitel 5 har en hybrid karaktär som dels visar på den historiska dimensionen, och dels lägger grunden för en sociologisk förståelse av de undersökta familjerna. Först diskuteras de aspekter som förenar kurder från Syrien. Dessa aspekter inkluderar de ekonomiska och politiska reformerna från 1960-talet som berövade många kurder deras medborgarskap och ledde till att ytterligare begränsa deras tillgång till olika resurser i de regioner de framför allt bodde i. Diskussionen visar hur kurderna i Syrien hade en underordnad ställning på grund av sin etniska tillhörighet och politiska historia, vilket också påverkades av Baathpartiets ambition att förändra klasstrukturen i det syriska samhället. Med fokus på utbildningsnivåerna i de olika städer, visar kapitlet även på en könsskillnad till förmån för mäns utbildning och sysselsättning som existerat under årtionden. Den historiska bakgrunden visar hur religiösa och ekonomiska reformer i Syrien förstärkte könsskillnaderna, vilket även påverkade familjedynamiken.

Mot denna bakgrund utforskas sedan i kapitel 6 föräldrarnas initiala erfarenheter av integrationen i Sverige och visar på olika uppfattningar och strategier som bottnar i spänningen mellan tidigare och nuvarande omständigheter. I integrationsprocessen ingick språkundervisning och olika vuxenutbildningsprogram som syftade till att hjälpa dem att komma in på arbetsmarknaden. Bland de femtio föräldrar som intervjuades observerades tre grupper av föräldrar. En första grupp bestod av dem som ansåg att de hade en social status i sitt tidigare hemland och som de riskerade att förlora i Sverige.

De sökte vägar för att få utföra sitt yrke i Sverige eller försökte hitta sätt att validera sina färdigheter. Detta gällde oavsett utbildningsbakgrund, det vill säga från markägare som förlitade sig på sin förmögenhet och sina praktiska färdigheter och för vilka formell utbildning inte var en del av deras identitet, till högutbildade personer som var tvungna att validera sina examina för att fortsätta arbeta inom sina yrken. En andra grupp innehöll föräldrarna som genom sin brist på utbildning i ett högutbildat samhälle som Sverige blev fast i utbildningsprogram som påtvingats dem i syfte att få dem integrerade i samhället. Att fastna i utbildningsinsatser eller att försöka behålla en social position var alltså olika förhållningssätt i det första mötet med Sverige – ett möte som formades av individernas kön och klassbakgrund. Den tredje gruppen, slutligen, bestod av dem som kunde bygga vidare på sin utbildning från Syrien, vilket visade sig främst vara kvinnor med åtminstone grundläggande betyg från Syrien. Dessa såg vuxenutbildnings-programmen i Sverige som en möjlighet att bli ekonomiskt oberoende. Männen, å andra sidan, såg utbildning i Sverige som ett tidskrävande projekt som hindrade dem att arbeta, vilket undergrävde deras status som familjeförsörjare, en position som var kopplad till starka föreställningar om manlighet och faderskap. Denna statusfyllda familjeposition var något som de hade förkroppsligat genom sitt könsprivilegium och som förstärktes av deras yrkeskunskaper i Syrien. Med andra ord fanns det en tydlig könsskillnad i uppfattningarna och erfarenheterna av utbildnings-insatserna för integration i det svenska samhället.

När föräldrarna berättade om sina erfarenheter av vuxenutbildningsprogram betonade de vikten av utbildning som ett sätt att integreras i Sverige. Den sociala status, byggd på utbildning, yrke, ekonomiska tillgångar och kön, som de åtnjutit i det syriska samhället och internaliserat som en andra natur, lät sig inte överföras till motsvarande sociala positioner i Sverige. Familjernas erfarenheter av och uppfattningar om utbildningsprogrammen i Sverige skilde sig därför åt beroende på deras olika bakgrunder i Syrien. Integrationen in i det svenska samhället innebar en process av (des)integrering från delar av sitt förflutna som för vissa var svåra att släppa taget om. Detta var särskilt tydligt hos jordbruksfamiljer, som hade lite eller ingen utbildning men förkroppsligad yrkeskompetens som svårligen kunde överföras till svenska förhållanden på arbetsmarknaden. Dessutom utmanades familjedynamiken när föräldrarnas och barnens roller förändrades till följd av deras olika engagemang i det svenska utbildningsväsendet och i samhället. Detta belyser migrationens transformativa potential, där nya roller för kvinnor uppstod, män upplevde en förlust av social status jämfört med deras tidigare positioner i Syrien och barn fick jämfört med tidigare mer ansvar eftersom de fick agera översättare och guida sina föräldrar i det svenska utbildningssystemet och samhället i stort. För flyktingarna innebar integrationen samtidigt en (des)integrering av vissa sociala (inklusive könsrelaterade) uppfattningar och attityder.

De två sista empiriska kapitlen, kapitlen 7 och 8, fokuserar föräldrarnas uppfattningar om och förhållningssätt till sina barns utbildning i Sverige. I och med att föräldrarna registrerar sig för SFI (svenska för invandrare) registreras även deras barn för skolgång i Sverige. Kapitel 7 börjar med att diskutera föräldrarnas ambitioner för sina barns utbildning. Kapitlet belyser att hos familjer som inte hade möjlighet att gå i skolan i Syrien, det vill säga hos dem som saknade medborgarskap, uppstår dessa ambitioner efter migrationen. Genom att analysera föräldrarnas syn på barnens utbildning i Sverige mot bakgrund av deras förflutna i Syrien illustrerar kapitlet även hur den påtvingande migrationen rubbar föräldrarnas tidigare utbildningspraktiker. Föräldrarna uttryckte oro över att deras inflytande över sina barn försvagades i Sverige. De kämpade med att hantera kraven i det nya landets utbildningssystem, vilket påverkade deras förmåga att engagera sig i barnens skolgång. Trots skillnader i klassbakgrund uppvisade familjerna ”arbetarklasspraktiker” i relation till barnens skolgång, vilket tyder på att flyktingar är beroende av sina nya förutsättningar när det gäller deras engagemang i sina barns utbildning i Sverige.

Kapitel 8 handlar om föräldrarnas uppfattningar om barnens sociala och kulturella integration och om hur föräldrarna interagerar med den svenska skolan. I intervjuerna framkommer föräldrarnas begräsningar i deras handlingsutrymme för att ta ansvar som kurder i att främja familjens nationella, kurdiska identitet. Den kurdiska verkligheten med avsaknad av en nationalstat var närvarande i deras berättelser om barnens integration och formade deras farhågor och önskningar om sina barns framtid. Föräldrarna framhöll olika åsikter om vad de ansåg representerade deras kurdiska identitet, men främst utgjordes den av språket och vad de förknippade med kurdiska sociala normer och kultur. Deras kurdiska identitet blev en källa till samhörighet över klassgränserna. Genom barnens uppfostran odlade de medvetenheten om sin nationella kamp och på så vis såg de till att deras kurdiska kunskaper bevarades trots att de hade migrerat till Sverige. Sammanfattningsvis kan sägas att för en grupp som saknar en stat med dess olika institutioner som förstärker den nationella identiteten blev familjernas roll att reproducera kurdiskhet. Familjerna säkerställde därmed att nutiden inte överskuggade deras förflutna genom att upprätthålla sin kurdiska identitet inom familjen.

Kapitel 9 sammanfattar studiens resultat. Genom att följa familjerna och deras upplevelse av integrationen i Sverige betraktas integrationen ur flyktingarnas synvinkel. Flyktingars kamp för att integreras i det svenska samhället har endast delvis uppmärksammats, med ett fokus på deras nuvarande situation. Följaktligen ses flyktingar ofta som ett ”problem”, som produkter av sin kultur i normativ mening – det vill säga inklusive ett värdeomdöme om att den kulturen är

underlägsen – och därmed nedvärderas de som människor. För att bryta med detta vanliga synsätt behandlar jag i min studie flyktingar som produkter av deras egen sociala historia och familjehistoria, vilket formar deras attityder och perspektiv. På så sätt flyttas fokus till betydelsen av deras liv före migrationen. Resultaten belyser en avgörande aspekt i studier av migration och integration, nämligen vikten av att beakta individers hela livsbanor för att kunna bryta med normativa synsätt på integration. Resultaten visar även att integration ofta indikerar en viss grad av (des)integration, vilket ifrågasätter föreställningar om motsättningar som ”framgång” kontra ”misslyckande” i skildringar av flyktingars integration, liksom vanligt förekommande föreställningar om den ”bra” eller ”dåliga” migranten.

Med utgångspunkt i resultaten i denna studie och i den befintliga teoretiska diskussionen kopplar kapitel 9 familjers (des)integrering till konceptet *habitus clivé*, som innebär att påtvingad migration och integration stör individers invanda vardagspraktiker. Övergången från Syrien till Sverige utmanar föräldrarnas tidigare dispositioner vilket tyder på att deras (des)integration kan ses som *habitus clivé i vardande*.

Även om kurder från Syrien kan betraktas som ett specifikt fall, representerar de samtidigt mer generella villkor för flyktingar som ofta är separerade från sina tidigare historier. Denna studie belyser vikten av att förstå deras tidigare liv för att utforska deras nuvarande integration. Studien ger ett alternativt synsätt på integration som ett socialt fenomen genom att visa i vilken utsträckning flyktingarnas historia formar deras olika nuvarande dispositioner. Deras tidigare sätt att existera i världen försvinner inte i och med migrationen, även om förutsättningar genom statligt styrd integration indikerar (des)integrering från sina ”tidigare jag”.

SUMMARY

(Dis)Integrating Families

Refugees' social histories and their encounters with education in Sweden

This study investigates the extent to which refugee families' social histories and present circumstances shape their experience of and responses to state-led integration processes in Sweden. By revealing the heterogeneity of refugees beyond their homogeneous portrayal in mainstream thought, I emphasise the continuity of their past, further exploring their margin of freedom within their present constraints. I show that refugees are significantly influenced by their past experience, which does not negate the impact of their present circumstances.

Refugees are often perceived as a homogeneous group. There is a prevailing emphasis on 'identity' studies within research, often overlooking the significance of their social class backgrounds. These studies frequently depict refugees as if their past did not exist, focusing solely on their current circumstances. Their integration is mainly analysed through their experience of education and labour with an emphasis on their struggle to integrate and whether they succeed or fail.

Welfare states like Sweden, which historically uphold strong principles of equal treatment and social equality, offer a compelling framework for analysing refugees' experience and responses to integration. Sweden has promoted strong social integration through its welfare and national education system which have enabled individuals from diverse social and economic backgrounds to become engaged members of society. The education system has served as a pivotal state apparatus in this process by facilitating immigrants' integration into the labour market and broader society. Upon arrival in Sweden, once they receive their residence permits, refugees are encouraged to participate in adult education programmes, while children are immediately enrolled in school. This structured approach aims to facilitate integration into Swedish society and extends language acquisition to encompass a broader socialisation process that includes Swedish social norms and values.

I study Kurds from Syria who arrived in Sweden in the 2010s as a case for understanding how individual social histories impact their present condition in the context of their encounters with education. Following Abdelmalek Sayad's theorising of integration, I show how we can gain a holistic view of their refugee condition. In particular, this group's response to social integration in Sweden though education has been central in this study because Kurds are an ethnic minority that lack a state and

a national education system. Moreover, they have maintained strong connections to their Kurdish identity despite the disruptions caused by migration.

In Chapter 1, I review previous literature on the integration of migrants, particularly focusing on Sweden, and highlight how their histories are often devalued. These studies often depict migrants as products of 'backward' cultures rather than acknowledging the broader histories that have shaped them, including factors such as class.

Chapter 2 presents a broader literature review. To explore the possibilities of maintaining one's social status after migration, I first present the extent to which one can transfer educational and occupational assets. Despite the promises of globalisation that capital flows and the world is interconnected, I draw on studies uncovering the struggles entailed in mobilising these assets across national borders, showing that the value of these qualifications varies depending on the national contexts. Second, previous studies illustrate that parents' class backgrounds and ethnic and racial characteristics shape their experience and responses to their children's education. By engaging with these studies and including the impact of migration in the discussion, I offer a more nuanced understanding of how families approach their children's education. This contrasts with much of the literature on refugee education, which often disregards their agency and focuses predominantly on the restrictions they face. The chapter continues by discussing how migration and integration challenge family dynamics and it closes with a presentation of the intended contributions of this study to the fields of migration and education.

Chapter 3 presents the conceptual tools and theoretical framework on which my analysis is based. This study departs from Sayad's critique of the mainstream focus on the 'receiving countries' and the problems regarding the integration of migrants. Furthermore, it employs Pierre Bourdieu's research tools, especially his concept of habitus, where the parents in the refugee families are analysed through the lens of their citizenship status, educational level and occupational background, social contacts, spoken languages, gender, family structure and composition (number of members, age and gender), and the aspects associated with their Kurdish backgrounds in Syria.

Having established that refugee integration is a politically loaded notion, Chapter 3 also presents a discussion of social integration, removing it from its migratory context and breaking away from the point of view of the 'receiving societies' prevalent in studies of migrants, particularly refugees. Accordingly, this study accordingly defines integration as a process of adaptation shaped by parents' individual histories, as well as the new possibilities and constraints they encounter after migration. Drawing on theories of social integration and the role of national education systems in establishing an integrated society, this study is concerned with the implications of integration for refugees, which involves (dis)integrating from

parts of their past that do not align with the norms required to achieve integration. This lays the foundation for an analysis of the experience of families, as it does not assume that integration is an end goal. Instead, it focuses on the potential cost of integration on the histories that have shaped the parents' lives prior to migration.

The methods of data collection, analysis, ethical considerations and a section on self-reflection in relation to this study are presented in Chapter 4. Interested in the experience and responses of Kurdish refugees from Syria in Sweden, I conducted twenty-five semi-structured family interviews in 2020. These interviews aimed to collect data on parents' individual social background and their children's educational trajectories. This includes information on their citizenship status, languages spoken, upbringing and family composition (number of members, ages and gender). The study also used two data sets to map out the relevant characteristics associated with the geographic origin of families in Syria, as well as their geographic destinations in Sweden. These data provided additional context for the family interviews.

I conclude the chapter by presenting a description of my method for classifying families. Acknowledging that class is often understudied, I take parents' educational levels and occupational backgrounds into consideration as my main principle of classification (as criteria that unites and divides families). This classification further considers their history as a group of Kurds in Syria and the possible implications on their social trajectories.

Chapter 5 presents a hybrid analysis that uncovers the historical dimension, and sets lays the foundation for a sociological understanding of the families. It first discusses the aspects that unify Kurds from Syria. These include the economic and political reforms from the 1960s, which stripped many Kurds of their citizenship, further restraining their access to different assets in the main regions where they resided. This discussion reveals that Kurds in Syria held a subordinated position based on their ethnicity and political history, which was also impacted by the Ba'athist ambition to shift the class structures of Syrian society. Focusing on the levels of education represented in different cities, the chapter also reveals a gendered divide that persisted over decades in favour of men's education and employment. Providing The historical context shows how religious and economic reforms in Syria reinforced gendered trajectories, also shaping family dynamics.

Given this background, Chapter 6 explores parents' initial experience of integration in Sweden, illustrating different perceptions and strategies rooted in their negotiation between their past and present circumstances. This process included their experience with language classes and various adult education programmes aimed at helping them access the labour market. Among the fifty parents interviewed, three clusters were observed. First, those who believed they had social status to lose sought

ways to preserve their occupation or find other ways to validate their skills. This held true for people across different educational backgrounds, from landowners who relied on their wealth and management skills and for whom formal education was not part of their identity, to highly educated individuals who were required to validate their degrees to continue working in their professions. Second, the parents who suffered from their lack of education in a highly educated society remained stuck in the programmes that were imposed on them for their integration. I observed that remaining stuck or trying to preserve social status were ways of navigating the initial encounter with Sweden, and that they were shaped by individuals' gender and class backgrounds. Finally, those who could build on their education, who were mainly women with at least basic credentials from Syria, perceived the adult education programmes in Sweden to be an opportunity to gain financial independence. Men, on the other hand, viewed education in Sweden as a time-consuming impediment to their work, which in turn damaged their status as the family breadwinner, a sentiment closely tied to notions of manhood and fatherhood. This status was something they had embodied through their gender privilege, which was reinforced by their occupational skills in Syria. In other words, there was a gendered divide in the perceptions and experience of these educational dimensions of integration.

When narrating their experience with adult education programmes, parents emphasised the importance of education as a way to integrate in Sweden. Their social status in Syrian society, which was influenced by their education, occupation, wealth and gender, and which they had internalised as second nature, did not translate to equivalent social positions in Sweden. Thus, their experience with these programmes, as well as their perceptions, differed according to their varied backgrounds in Syria. Integration into Swedish society involved a process of (dis)integrating from parts of their past, which was difficult for some of the parents to do, leading them to adopt different strategies. This was particularly visible among agricultural workers, who had little or no formal education but embodied specific occupational skills that were not easily transferable to Sweden, which highlighted a stark contrast with the higher levels of education and the types of occupations prevalent in the Swedish labour market and society. In addition, family dynamics were challenged, as parents' and children's roles shifted following their engagement with Swedish education and society. This highlights the transformative potential of migration, where new roles for women emerged, men experienced a loss of social status and children took on more responsibility, as they acted as translators and guides for their parents. For refugees, integration was a simultaneous process of (dis)integration of certain social (including gendered) perceptions and attitudes.

The last two empirical chapters focus on parents' perceptions and approaches to their children's education in Sweden. The parents register for SFI and refugee children are immediately registered in schools in Sweden. Chapter 7 begins by

discussing the parents' aspirations for their children's education. It highlights that in the case of those who did not have the chance to complete their schooling in Syria, i.e. those who lacked citizenship, these aspirations emerged after migration. This chapter also illustrates how forced migration disrupts parents' former educational practices by analysing their thoughts on their children's education in Sweden compared to their past experience in Syria. Parents expressed concerns that their influence over their children was weakening. They struggled to manage the demands of their new country's education system, which affected their ability to engage with their children's schooling. Despite differences in class background, the families all displayed 'working class practices', which suggests that refugees are conditioned by their present circumstances in their experience and involvement with their children's education in Sweden.

Chapter 8 focuses on the parents' perceptions of their children's social and cultural integration and the ways in which they interact with Swedish education. This reveals their margin of freedom, since their response as Kurds was to foster their national identity. The experience of Kurds as a stateless group was present in their narratives, which shaped their fears and wishes in relation to their children's future. Parents thus held different positions on what they believed represented their Kurdishness, which was mainly the language and what they associated with their social norms and culture. Their Kurdish identity became a source of unity beyond class, i.e. they cultivated awareness of their national struggle by educating their children and ensuring that their Kurdish skills were preserved, despite migration to Sweden. In summary, in a group that lacks a state and the associated institutions that reinforce national identity, families took it upon themselves to reproduce Kurdishness. They thus ensured that their present did not overshadow their past by maintaining their Kurdish identity within the family.

Chapter 9 concludes with a detailed synthesis of my findings. By following the families and their experience of integration in Sweden, this study considers integration from the viewpoint of refugees. The struggle of refugees to integrate in Swedish society has received only partial attention with a focus on their present conditions. Consequently, they are most often seen as a 'problem,' as products of their culture in the normative sense, – i.e. including a value judgement of that culture as being inferior – and thereby devalued as human beings. To break with this mainstream approach, my study treats refugees as products of their own social and family histories, which shape their attitudes and perspectives. This shifts the emphasis to the significance of their lives before migration. My results highlight a crucial aspect in the study of migration and integration – the importance of considering entire life trajectories and breaking with normative views of this phenomenon. This approach reveals that integration often indicates a degree of (dis)integration, which questions

the contrasting notions of 'success' *versus* 'failure' in mainstream portrayals of refugee integration, as well as the common notions of the 'good' *versus* the 'bad' migrant.

Informed by the findings in this study, and engaging with the existing theoretical debate, Chapter 9 also links (dis)integration to habitus clivé, where forced migration and integration disrupts ingrained everyday practices. The shift from Syria to Sweden challenges parents' former dispositions, suggesting that their (dis)integration can be seen as *habitus clivé in the making*.

Although Kurds from Syria can be seen as a specific case, they are representative of the conditions of many refugee groups, who are often separated from their histories. This study highlights the importance of understanding refugees' former lives in any examination of their present integration process. It provides an alternative approach to integration as a social phenomenon by demonstrating the extent to which refugees' histories shape their various present dispositions. Their past ways of existing in the world do not vanish, even if the precondition of state-led integration indicates (dis)integrating from their past selves.

Appendices

Appendix A: Presentation of the study

The following information is an example of a brief description of the study distributed over several social media platforms in order to make initial contact with mediators and target families. It was written in Kurdish, Swedish and English.

> I am a doctoral student in Sociology of Education and Culture at Uppsala University. My research is about Kurds from Syria who migrated to Sweden after 2011. I study parents' approaches to their own and their children's education, focusing on life in Sweden. If anyone is interested in being interviewed about their children's education, or if you know someone who might be interested, please contact me here or via my e-mail address: nubin.ciziri@edu.uu.se. I live in Stockholm, but we can also meet online for the interview. Thank you in advance. Feel free to share this post on your pages as well.

Appendix B: Interview guide for families

Theme	Topic
Background and family life in Syria	Upbringing and family background (geographic origin, grandparents' education and occupation, siblings, languages, legal status, number of children, travels, etc.) Education and occupation of parents and children in Syria (including memories from schooling and work-life) Social life and surroundings
Migration process and first settlement	Journey from Syria to Sweden Arrival (year, city) and early experience in Sweden Impact on children's education Community connections and activities
Education of parents, children, and family life in Sweden	Education and occupation in Sweden Challenges and opportunities for adult education Experience with schools in Sweden Parental involvement and perspectives on children's schooling Mother tongue and Swedish language Comparison of education systems, schooling and activities in Syria and Sweden Sociocultural adjustments and differences Being parents in Sweden compared to Syria
Future plans and perspectives	Aspirations for children's education and careers Plans for the future and potential return to Syria

Appendix C: Overview of families

This table presents an overview of parents' social characteristics. I categorised parents' educational level as follows: those who lacked formal education were classified as illiterate. Individuals who completed schooling up to grade six (age 12 in Syria) were categorised under primary education. Those who completed up to grade 12 (age 18 in Syria) were considered to have attained secondary education. In this table, I specify whether parents have completed lower secondary education (grades 7–9, ages 12–15) or upper secondary education (grades 10–12, ages 15–18). Individuals who pursued further education, such as training to become teaching assistants, were classified as having post-secondary education. Those who obtained university degrees were categorised as degree holders. Finally, anyone who dropped out of school in Syria was categorised according to the level of their education at the time of dropout, such as 'primary school dropout', 'secondary school dropout', or 'university–', or 'higher education dropout'. The number of children is indicated by gender, where 'D' represents daughter and 'S' stands for 'son'. 'N.a.' denotes 'not available'.

	Father-Mother	Migration to Sweden	Geographic origin (district)	Swedish county	Educational level	Occupation before migration	Occupation after migration	Languages	No. of children	Legal status (Nationality)	Birth year (Age)
Family 1	Father	X	Al-Qamishli	X	Illiterate	Peasant	X	Kurdish	9D+2S	Stateless	Deceased
	Majda	2018		Stockholm			None (SFI)		9D+3S	Syrian	1967 (53)
Family 2	Cemal	In Turkey	Al-Qamishli	Turkey	Illiterate	Peasant	None	Kurdish	4D+2S	Syrian	N.a.
	Delal	2018		Stockholm		None	None (SFI)	Kurdish, Arabic (low)		Stateless	1970 (50)
Family 3	Azad	2016	Al-Qamishli	Uppsala	Degree holder (medicine)	Physician	Nursing assistant	Kurdish, Arabic, Russian, Swedish	1D+2S	Syrian	1964 (56)
	Daniela		Ukraine		Degree holder (economics)	None		Kurdish, Ukrainian, Russian, Swedish		Ukrainian	1973 (47)
Family 4	Ferhad	2014	Ayn al-Arab	Skåne	Post-secondary edu. and higher edu. dropout (teacher edu.)	Teacher (non-governmental)	Teaching assistant	Kurdish, Arabic, English, Swedish	1D+2S	Syrian	1975 (45)
	Nur	2016						Kurdish, Arabic, Turkish, Swedish			1987 (33)
Family 5	Renas	2015	Afrin, Aleppo	Stockholm	Degree holder (law)	Lawyer	Shop assistant	Kurdish, Arabic, Swedish	2D+1S	Syrian	1968 (52)
	Sara				Upper secondary edu. dropout	None	Nursery assistant				1977 (43)
Family 6	Serhad	2014	Al-Qamishli	Uppsala	Lower secondary edu.	Grocery store owner-worker	Cleaner	Kurdish, Arabic, Swedish	2D+1S	Syrian	1975 (45)
	Mizgin	2016			Degree holder, distant 2 years (Arabic literature)	Arabic teacher (for 6 months)	Library worker (extra services)				1984 (36)
Family 7	Alan	2014	Afrin	Uppsala	Degree holder (law)	Lawyer	Driver	Kurdish, Arabic, Swedish (low)	3D+1S	Syrian	1966 (54)
	Zozan	2016	Afrin, Damascus		Upper secondary edu. dropout	None	Chef training				1967 (53)
Family 8	Bilal	2013	Ayn al-Arab	Skåne	Primary edu.	Managing family land	None (SFI)	Kurdish, Arabic	2D+2S	Syrian	N.a.
	Adar	2014			Post-secondary edu. (teacher training)	Pre-school teacher (non-gov.)	None (application process)	Kurdish, Arabic, Swedish			
Family 9	Arjin	2014	Ras al-Ayn	Skåne	Degree holder (law)	Lawyer	None (application for teaching positions)	Kurdish, Arabic, Swedish	1D+2S	Syrian	1971 (49)
	Zilan	2016			Post-secondary edu. (teacher training)	Teacher (non-gov.)	None				1971 (49)

	Father-Mother	Migration to Sweden	Geographic origin (district)	Swedish county	Educational level	Occupation before migration	Occupation after migration	Languages	No. of children	Legal status (Nationality)	Birth year (Age)
Family 10	Bahoz	2014	Al-Qamishli	Halland	Lower secondary edu.	Clothing store owner and worker	Pizzeria owner-worker	Kurdish, Arabic	2D+1S	Syrian	N.a.
	Zeyneb	2015				Hospital receptionist	Nursery assistant	Kurdish, Arabic, Swedish			
Family 11	Anter	2013	Ras al-Ayn	Halland	Upper secondary edu. dropout	Steel worker	None (former truck company worker)	Kurdish, Arabic	1D+3S	Syrian	1973 (47)
	Berfin					None	Nursery assistant training	Kurdish, Arabic, Swedish			1983 (37)
Family 12	Dara	2013	Ayn al-Arab	Skåne	Higher edu. dropout (law)	Driller, political activist	None (travelling for work, political activist)	Kurdish, Arabic	4D	Syrian	1970 (50)
	Selma	2015			Lower secondary edu.	None, political activist	Nursing assistant training	Kurdish, Arabic, Swedish			1975 (45)
Family 13	Mihemed	2014	Ayn al-Arab, Aleppo	Skåne	Lower secondary edu.	Trade	None (sick leave)	Kurdish	2D+2S	Syrian	1970 (50)
	Xezal	2017			Primary edu.	None	Restaurant worker				1980 (40)
Family 14	Yusuf	2017	Ras al-Ayn	Skåne	Higher edu. dropout (Arabic literature)	Barber, bus driver, musician	None (SFI, sick leave)	Kurdish, Arabic, Swedish	2D+3S	Syrian	N.a.
	Sore				Lower secondary edu.	None	Chef training			Syrian (stateless until 2003)	
Family 15	Arman	2015	Ayn al-Arab, Damascus	Skåne	Lower secondary edu. dropout	Trade (spice)	None (former restaurant worker)	Kurdish, Arabic	1D+2S	Syrian	N.a.
	Asmin				Higher edu. dropout (area: N.a.)	Primary school teacher (non-gov.)	Nursery assistant training	Kurdish, Arabic, Swedish			
Family 16	Aram	2014	Ayn al-Arab	Skåne	Primary edu. dropout	Driller	Barber	Kurdish	6D+2S	Syrian	1978 (42)
	Yasmin	2015				None	None				N.a.
Family 17	Zana	2013	Ayn al-Arab	Skåne	Primary edu.	Managing family land	None	Kurdish, Arabic (low), Swedish (low)	5S	Syrian	1974 (46)
	Sidar	2014			Primary edu. dropout	None		Kurdish, Arabic			1981 (39)

	Father-Mother	Migration to Sweden	Geographic origin (district)	Swedish county	Educational level	Occupation before migration	Occupation after migration	Languages	No. of children	Legal status (Nationality)	Birth year (Age)
Family 18	Roder	2013	Ayn al-Arab, Lebanon	Skåne	Lower secondary edu.	Driller, Store owner and worker	Welder	Kurdish, Arabic, Swedish (low)	3D+1S	Syrian	1974 (46)
	Nida				Primary edu.	None	Personal care assistant-health				1976 (44)
Family 19	Kawa	2017	Ayn al-Arab, Aleppo	Stockholm	Primary edu.	Clothing store owner and worker	Shop assistant	Kurdish, Swedish (low)	1D+4S	Syrian	1974 (46)
	Viyan				Illiterate	At-home tailor	None (SFI)	Kurdish			1970 (50)
Family 20	Nolan	2015	Ayn al-Arab,	Stockholm	Primary edu.	Peasant	Construction worker	Kurdish, Swedish (low)	1D+1S	Syrian	1988 (32)
	Ava		Ayn al-Arab, Raqqa		Upper secondary edu. student	None	Nursery assistant	Kurdish, Arabic, Swedish			1996 (24)
Family 21	Murad	2016	Ras al-Ayn	Gävleborg	Illiterate	Peasant	None (SFI)	Kurdish, Arabic	3D	Stateless	1975 (45)
	Fatma				Primary edu. dropout		None (SFI)			Syrian	N.a.
Family 22	Soran	2013	Al-Qamishli	Gävleborg	Primary edu. dropout	Cement work	Municipal painter	Kurdish, Arabic, Swedish (low)	1D+2S	Syrian	1980 (40)
	Nergis	2014			Illiterate	None	None (SFI)	Kurdish, Arabic			N.a.
Family 23	Ridwan	2017	Al-Qamishli	Gävleborg	Upper secondary edu. dropout	Advertiser	Security guard (extra services)	Kurdish, Arabic, Swedish (low)	1D+2S	Syrian	1975 (45)
	Bahar				Lower secondary edu.	None	Tailoring (extra services				1980 (40)
Family 24	Xalid	2017	Al-Qamishli	Gävleborg	Pot-secondary edu. (teacher training)	Teacher	None (application for teaching positions)	Kurdish, Arabic	3D+3S	Syrian	1969 (51)
	Hevi				Primary edu. dropout	None	None				1980 (40)
Family 25	Rebin	2018	Al-Qamishli	Gävleborg	Primary edu. dropout	Shepherd	None (SFI)	Kurdish, Arabic (low)	3D+3S	Syrian	1971 (49)
	Helin					None	None (SFI)				1972 (48)

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