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Résumé de l'article

Bien que la réinstallation des réfugiés soit caractérisée par l'opacité des décisions prises par les Nations Unies et les agences gouvernementales, les réfugiés peuvent exercer une agentivité tout au long du processus de réinstallation. En retraçant le parcours de plusieurs réfugiés à travers les processus de réinstallation et d'admission humanitaires de la Jordanie et de la Turquie vers l'Allemagne, cet article met en lumière les intentions, les stratégies et les actions des réfugiés pour accéder au processus et s'y frayer un chemin en Jordanie et en Turquie. Définissant l'agentivité comme une combinaison d'intention et d'action, indépendamment d'un résultat spécifique, l'article propose une conceptualisation nuancée de l'agentivité qui peut être employée dans des situations où l'agentivité des personnes est très limitée.

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Intentions, Strategies, and Actions: How Refugees Exert Agency in the Resettlement and Humanitarian Admission Process from Jordan and Turkey to Germany

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ABSTRACT

Although refugee resettlement is characterized by opaque decision-making of United Nations and government agencies, refugees may exert agency throughout the resettlement process. Tracing the journeys of several refugees through the resettlement and humanitarian admission processes from Jordan and Turkey to Germany, this article highlights refugees' intentions, strategies, and actions to access and navigate the process in Jordan and Turkey. Defining **agency** as a combination of intention and action, without reference to a specific outcome, the article argues for a nuanced conceptualization of agency that can be employed in situations where people's agency is very limited.

KEYWORDS

refugee resettlement; humanitarian admission; agency; Germany; Turkey; Jordan

RÉSUMÉ

Bien que la réinstallation des réfugiés soit caractérisée par l'opacité des décisions prises par les Nations Unies et les agences gouvernementales, les réfugiés peuvent exercer une agentivité tout au long du processus de réinstallation. En retraçant le parcours de plusieurs réfugiés à travers les processus de réinstallation et d'admission humanitaires de la Jordanie et de la Turquie vers l'Allemagne, cet article met en lumière les intentions, les stratégies et les actions des réfugiés pour accéder au processus et s'y frayer un chemin en Jordanie et en Turquie. Définissant l'agentivité comme une combinaison d'intention et d'action, indépendamment d'un résultat spécifique, l'article propose une conceptualisation nuancée de l'agentivité qui peut être employée dans des situations où l'agentivité des personnes est très limitée.

INTRODUCTION

In refugee resettlement, refugees are recipients of humanitarian intervention rather than active participants. Defined as "the selection and transfer of refugees from a State in which they have sought protection to a third State which has agreed to admit them—as refugees—with permanent residence status" (UNHCR, 2011, p. 3), **resettlement** offers a durable solution for admitted refugees in a resettlement country.

However, resettlement generally does not include the possibility for refugees to exert agency: refugees cannot apply for resettlement themselves, nor can they choose their destination country or formally influence the selection process in any other way (Garnier et al., 2018; Sandvik, 2009; Thomson, 2012). And if their resettlement case gets rejected, neither are they informed about the reasons, nor can they challenge the rejection or any of the involved resettlement stakeholders (Ozkul & Jarrous, 2021; Sandvik, 2011).

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From refugees' perspectives, the resettlement process is thus carried out behind a "veil of secrecy" (Menetrier, 2021) with limited to no transparency and exclusionary decision-making by resettlement stakeholders (Stürner, 2019). Still, refugees may exert agency throughout the process, be it through informing themselves about resettlement opportunities, persistently inquiring about their case at UNHCR information desks, or asking for a change of the assigned destination country during the resettlement interview.

The need to take refugees' agency into account has indeed been recognized by scholars working on resettlement (e.g., Garnier et al., 2018). Building on the emergent scholarship (e.g., Balakian, 2020; Sandvik, 2011; Thomson, 2012, 2018), this article offers a detailed discussion of the concept of agency in resettlement and beyond. Focusing on urban refugees in Jordan and Turkey, it also complements existing case studies on refugees' agency in resettlement that predominantly centre around refugees (mostly in camp settings) in Tanzania, Uganda, and Kenya (ibid.).

Several resettlement journeys of (mostly Syrian) refugees who were admitted to Germany from either Jordan or Turkey are examined here. The resettlement journeys highlight aspects that informed refugees' intentions to seek resettlement, their strategies to access resettlement, the obstacles they encountered during the process, and how they perceived their own agency—regardless of whether such agency led to a notable change. This is also the starting point of the article's conceptualization of **agency**, where this concept is not defined as the capability to change an outcome, but rather as the capability to **act** based on specific **intentions**. According to Emirbayer and Mische (1998), these intentions are informed by the past (e.g., routines, habits, traditions), the future (e.g., aspirations, hopes, goals), and the present (e.g., daily challenges, dilemmas) and include **strategies** to put actions into practice.

This article predominately relies on interviews I conducted with refugees who were recently admitted from Jordan or Turkey to Germany, either through the German resettlement program from Jordan or the German humanitarian admission program (HAP) from Turkey. There are some differences between the two refugee admission programs, including in the involvement of stakeholders, the criteria for admission, and the residency status granted to refugees upon admission. Nevertheless, and despite these variations, both programs are commonly labelled as "resettlement," with resettlement thus representing an umbrella term for various refugee admission programs (Schneider, 2021).

I selected Germany for this case study due to its comparatively high resettlement quota. In 2019, when data collection took place, Germany resettled 4,622 refugees, ranking fifth among resettlement countries in terms of countries' resettlement quota (UNHCR, 2020b). Likewise, Jordan and Turkey represent two important host countries for refugees worldwide. Indeed, when the fieldwork took place in 2019, Turkey was the world's largest refugee-hosting country, as well as the largest resettlement operation, and Jordan ranked as the third largest resettlement operation following Lebanon (UNHCR, 2020a).

The article is structured as follows. First, it provides a detailed description of the German resettlement program in Jordan and the HAP in Turkey. The second section introduces the theoretical framework with regard to refugees' agency in resettlement, while the third section outlines the methodology. The fourth section offers accounts of

refugees' agency in the German resettlement program from Jordan, while the fifth section highlights accounts of refugees' agency in the German HAP from Turkey. Based on these insights, the sixth section sheds light on similarities and differences across the two cases. Finally, the seventh section draws a general conclusion of the findings.

THE GERMAN RESETTLEMENT PROGRAM IN JORDAN AND THE HAP IN TURKEY

Refugee admission programs are increasingly diverse, and governments may choose different approaches in different host countries and for different refugee populations. While "traditional" resettlement is supposed to provide permanent resident status for resettled refugees in their new home country, HAPs are mostly regarded as a tool for temporary protection (Beirens & Fratzke, 2017). As such, HAPs are designed as ad hoc responses to specific humanitarian crises where admitted refugees do not have immediate access to permanent residence (Grote et al., 2016). In practice, however, humanitarian crises—such as the Syrian Civil War—often remain unresolved for a very long time. Since it is frequently unsafe for refugees to return to their home countries for decades or longer, many refugees admitted through HAPs eventually obtain permanent residency in their resettlement country.

Countries may opt to employ only traditional resettlement programs or to rely solely on HAPs. Germany, in contrast, implements resettlement and HAP simultaneously—albeit from different host countries and for different refugee populations. While refugees with any nationality residing in Jordan are eligible for the German resettlement program (Bundesministerium des Innern und für Heimat [BMI], 2018a), only refugees with Syrian nationality are admitted from Turkey under the German HAP (BMI, 2018b). Nevertheless, refugees residing in Turkey with nationalities other than Syrian could also be exceptionally included in the German HAP (BMI, 2018b).

The focus on Syrian refugees in the German HAP from Turkey results from Germany's commitment to the EU–Turkey Statement of 2016 (European Council, 2016). In 2019, this commitment translated into the admission of up to 500 refugees **per month** through the HAP from Turkey (BMI, 2018b). This resulted in a high majority of admitted refugees arriving in Germany via the HAP from Turkey, amounting to 2,430 persons in 2019 (UNHCR, 2020b), while 363 refugees were resettled from Jordan in the same year (UNHCR, 2020b).

The German resettlement and HAP processes can both be divided into three specific stages: (a) selection process, (b) departure preparations and travel to the resettlement country, and (c) integration process (Schneider, 2021). The selection process includes the screening and selection of refugees based on inclusion and exclusion criteria by different stakeholders. In the case of the German resettlement process in Jordan, UNHCR relies on internal (e.g., from the UNHCR protection unit) and external referrals (e.g., from civil society organizations working with refugees) to identity cases for resettlement. UNHCR staff then interview the identified refugees and submit the selected cases to the German Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge [BAMF]). As a next step, BAMF staff screen the referrals, travel to Jordan to interview the preselected refugees for a second time, and finalize the selection. While this part of the selection process includes the refugees' selection based on inclusion criteria, the last two steps of the selection process—the security check by the Germany security authorities

and the medical check carried out by the International Organization for Migration (IOM)—are implemented to possibly exclude selected refugees again based on security or medical concerns (Schneider, 2021).

Once the selection process is complete, the next stage of the resettlement process can be implemented: the German foreign mission begins the visa procedure while IOM and UNHCR staff carry out other departure preparations. The final step in the host country is the pre-departure orientation for the selected refugees before they travel to Germany. The integration process then starts with the refugees' arrival in the reception centre in Friedland, proceeding with their arrival in the municipalities and subsequent long-term integration in Germany (Schneider, 2021).

Most stages of the HAP process in Turkey are similar to the resettlement process from Jordan. However, the Turkish government is an additional stakeholder in the HAP from Turkey, while the Jordanian government is not involved in refugees' selection for resettlement. As such, in Turkey, the Directorate General of Migration Management (DGMM) pre-identifies cases for humanitarian admission (and resettlement) and refers those cases to UNHCR. Cases might also be identified by civil society organizations or UNHCR units, just like in the resettlement process from Jordan, but with the caveat that in Turkey, those pre-identified cases need to be approved by DGMM before they can be further processed by UNHCR (Welfens & Bonjour, 2020).

With regard to external referrals of civil society organizations, many refugees are referred by the Turkish NGO Association for Solidarity with Asylum Seekers and Migrants (ASAM). With 72 offices across the country, ASAM is the largest NGO and implementing partner of UNHCR in Turkey and provides counselling and information services to asylum seekers and refugees (UNHCR, n.d.). Until September 10, 2018, ASAM was also responsible for registering non-Syrians for international protection applications as UNHCR's implementing partner (European Council on Refugees and Exiles [ECRE], 2017). Although DGMM took over all registration activities as of September 2018, ASAM is (still) widely known among displaced persons in Turkey, including Syrians, and provides essential services including protection assessment, counselling, vocational trainings, skills development, and language courses (Association for Solidarity with Asylum Seekers and Migrants [ASAM], 2020).

The next section will conceptualize refugees' agency in resettlement by drawing on general notions of agency as well as more specific conceptualizations concerning refugees' agency in resettlement.

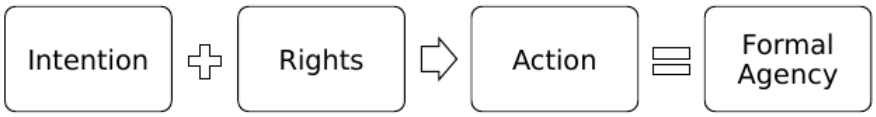
CONCEPTUALIZING REFUGEES' AGENCY IN REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT

In the last three decades, the concept of agency has gained much popularity among social scientists (Raithelhuber, 2012). Nevertheless, it has remained a diffuse concept, with different definitions and nuances across and within academic disciplines (Helfferich, 2012).

According to Bandura, "to be an agent is to influence intentionally one's functioning and life circumstances" (2006, p. 164). To exert such influence, individuals need to exhibit four core characteristics of human agency: intentionality (i.e., forming action plans and strategies to realize those plans), forethought (i.e., setting goals and anticipating outcomes), self-reactiveness (i.e., putting the plan into action), and self-reflectiveness (i.e., correcting their actions if necessary). For Bandura, intentions and actions are thus at the centre of agency.

Figure 1

Graphic display of formal agency that is comprised of an intention, rights and action



In contrast, Giddens (1984) focused on individuals' actions and their consequences. As such, he stated that "agency concerns events of which an individual is the perpetrator. … Whatever happened would not have happened if that individual had not intervened" (p. 9). The intention(s) of the individual and their reasons to act in a certain way are thus excluded in Gidden's conceptualization of agency. For Giddens agency "refers to doing" (1984, p. 9) and the consequence of such doing—not whether those consequences were intended or not.

While Giddens (1984) regards agency as a cause that is autonomously brought about by an individual, other authors focus on a relational conceptualization of agency, where individuals mutually influence each other in their agency (e.g., Barnes, 2000; Emirbayer & Mische, 1998; Raithelhuber, 2012; Scheer, 2012). As such, analyzing how respondents influenced, and were influenced, in their agency by other resettlement stakeholders' agency would certainly have its merits. Nevertheless, such an analysis unfortunately is beyond the scope of this article.

Authors working on resettlement have also developed notions of refugees' agency. For instance, Lewis and Young define refugees' agency as their "will and rights to make decisions regarding their present and future" (2018, p. 183). Conceptualizing agency not only as refugees' intentions—their "will"—but also their rights adds a legalistic aspect to agency. Strikingly, in resettlement, the refugees' "right" to make decisions about their resettlement case is from the outset almost none, with the notable exception of refugees' right to accept or decline a resettlement offer.

In contrast, Thomson does not include a rights-component in her definition of refugees' agency in resettlement and instead defines refugees' agency as their "intentional pursuit of their goals through specific undertakings" (2018, p. 205). By examining refugees' tactics to become selected for resettlement, she highlights that refugees "act in refusal to wait idly as someone else determines their future" (p. 205) despite their very limited possibilities to take action in order to be selected for resettlement or to advance their resettlement process.

The contrasting conceptualizations of Lewis and Young (2018) and Thomson (2018) help distinguish between refugees' actions that are recognized by resettlement stakeholders as legitimate and others that are deemed inappropriate. I thus lean on these authors to distinguish between refugees' **formal** and **informal** agency in resettlement.

As a result, I define **formal agency** as a combination of the refugees' **intention**, **rights**, and **action** to change an outcome (as visualized in Figure 1). Formal agency thus mostly refers to the refugees' right to say "yes" or "no" to resettlement—an action and decision that is acknowledged and accepted by UNHCR, the resettlement country, and other resettlement stakeholders.

In contrast, I define **informal agency** as a combination of **intention** and **action** (as visu-

Figure 2

Graphic display of informal agency that is comprised of an intention and action

alized in Figure 2). As such, informal agency refers to situations where refugees do not have the formal right to exert agency, such as when they seek to change the resettlement destination.

Importantly, this conceptualization of informal agency does not include the capability to change or produce an outcome—in contrast to Giddens's (1984) notion of agency. First, actions and outcomes are seldomly causally related, and it is even more difficult to analyze such a causal relationship. Secondly, just because the intended effect did not happen does not mean that no agency was exerted. Instead, I argue that informal agency can be identified in such moments where people think that their actions can and will make a difference and therefore execute said action. The **degree** of agency then is defined by how limited or unbounded the possibilities for action are, not if the outcome is big or small.

Indeed, refugees face many limitations that are defined by structure—that is, "patterns of social relations, beliefs and behaviour" (de Haas, 2021, p. 14). Those patterns include, for instance, class, economic position, family, religion, gender, ethnicity, traditions, and laws, which "limit the opportunities that people have—or perceive they have—and the economic, social and cultural resources which they can access" (de Haas, 2021, p. 14). For refugees trying to access resettlement, the policies and the stakeholders that govern and implement resettlement represent aspects of structure that greatly constrain their agency. In addition, they are faced with many other constraints, such as their legal status and economic precarity.

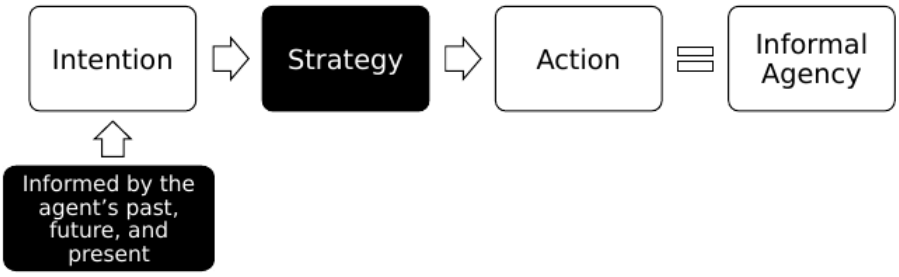
To further analyze refugees' intentions in the resettlement process (i.e., why they want what they want despite the many constraints), I draw on Emirbayer and Mische's (1998) approach to agency. Their conceptualization has already been applied to forced migration research (e.g., Hartonen et al., 2022; Müller-Funk, 2019; Ozkaleli, 2021). However, there has not yet been a study, to the best of my knowledge, that has applied Emirbayer and Mische's notion of agency to study refugees' agency in resettlement practices.

Emirbayer and Mische (1998) define **agency** as a temporally embedded process informed by the past and oriented towards the future as well as the present. In this regard, the **past** refers to habitual aspects, such as routines, habits, and traditions. The **future** refers to peoples' capacity to imagine alternative possibilities for their lives through aspirations, hopes, goals, and making plans. For Emirbayer and Mische, this projective capacity, where actors are "capable of distancing themselves (at least in partial exploratory ways) from the schemas, habits and traditions that constrain social identities and institutions" (1998, p. 984), is crucial. Last, the **present** refers to peoples' capacity to weigh possible future scenarios for action in "response to the emerging demands, dilemmas and ambiguities of presently evolving situations" (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 971). Drawing on Emirbayer and Mische's work thus makes it possible to examine how refugees' intentions to seek resettlement are formed.

Intentions also include "action plans and strategies for realizing them" (Bandura, 2006, p. 164). In this regard, existing literature on individuals' strategies to exert agency in contexts where they have limited choices has of-

Figure 3

Graphic display of the extended conceptualisation of informal agency comprising of intention, strategy and action. Intentions are informed by the agent's past, future, and present



ten focused on strategies of two different natures: strategies of confrontation and strategies of adaptation.

With regard to strategies that focus on confrontation, scholars have, for example, pointed to **resistance**—such as against schooling (Willis, 1978)—and deviance. Becker defines **deviance** as "the infraction of some agreed-upon rule" (1963, p. 8). Protests, such as refugee protests in front of UNHCR premises (Janmyr, 2022), may also be considered deviant.

Other authors have focused on strategies of adaptation. For instance, Goffman (1961) analyzed how individuals adapt to and are shaped by total institutions, such as psychiatric hospitals. In refugee studies, scholars have pointed to refugees' strategy of "performing vulnerability"—for instance, in order to be selected for resettlement or to be allowed to leave a "hotspot" on the Greek islands (Latouche, 2023; Sandvik, 2011; Thomson, 2018). In both cases, refugees are selected according to vulnerability criteria, and consequently, refugees seek to prove to authorities that they are deemed vulnerable, such as through the collection of medical and other official documents.

In sum, I define refugees' informal agency in resettlement—that is, agency that goes beyond refugees' "rights" to act—as a combination of intention and action. Intentions in turn are informed by the agent's past, future, and present and include strategies for action that may (among other strategies) rely on confrontation and/or adaptation. Figure 3 summarizes the article's conceptualization of informal agency.

Before applying the theoretical framework to the empirical findings, the next section will provide an overview of the article's methodological framework.

METHODOLOGY

The article is based on qualitative research conducted in 2019 as part of my PhD project. The PhD project included two field visits in Germany, one field visit in Turkey, and three field visits in Jordan that each lasted between a couple of days in Germany to two months in Jordan.

In Germany, I collected data through semi-structured in-depth interviews with recently resettled refugees. Eight interviews were conducted with Syrian refugees in Friedland arriving from Turkey in May 2019. In December 2019, seven interviews were conducted with Syrian and Yemeni refugees who were resettled from Jordan.

Fourteen out of 15 interviews were conducted with persons who were admitted with their nuclear family, including their spouse (except for one case where the husband was already in Germany) and their children. In contrast, one interviewed wid-

owed woman was resettled to Germany alone. I chose to interview only resettled refugees because, first, I am interested in how refugees exert agency when moving through the different stages of the resettlement process, and second, I did not want to heighten the expectations of refugees who were not selected for resettlement by asking them about their agency.

The interviews took place in the reception centre in Friedland, a small village in Germany, where most refugees who are resettled to Germany stay for the first 14 days after their arrival (Grote et al., 2016). Before interviews were conducted, the Ethical Committee of Human Science at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel approved the informed consent forms and interview guides.

To recruit respondents for the interviews, I relied on a teacher working in the reception centre in Friedland to act as a gatekeeper (Bloch, 2007). He agreed to ask the resettled refugees he had in class to participate in the interviews and also scheduled the interviews. As a certified interpreter, he acted as an interpreter during the interviews, translating the questions from German to Arabic and the answers from Arabic to German. The length of interviews with resettled refugees varied between 30 minutes and 2 hours. No recordings were made during interviews to mitigate additional stress and unease for the respondents. In addition, all interviews were anonymized, and respondents chose pseudonyms to be used in the article.

During the interviews, I asked the respondents about their lives in Jordan and Turkey; their "resettlement journeys," including their interactions with resettlement stakeholders; and their agency in the process (i.e., through collecting medical documents), as well as about their aspirations and fears for their lives in Germany. On the other hand, to avoid retraumatization, I did not ask the refugee respondents about their flight history. Still, some respondents decided to tell me about their flights by their own accord.

In addition, I conducted over 25 semi-structured expert interviews with resettlement stakeholders, including personnel of UNHCR, IOM, and the then-called European Asylum Support Office. These interviews predominantly took place at the respondents' workplaces in Jordan and Turkey between July and November 2019 and mostly informed the analysis of the resettlement and HAP processes in the two countries. In addition, I asked experts about their perceptions of refugees' agency in the resettlement process and about refugees' living situations in Jordan and Turkey.

To recruit respondents for the expert interviews, I relied on gatekeepers (e.g., heads of departments who granted access to their staff for an interview) and snowball sampling. Interviews were predominantly conducted in English (two interviews were conducted in German) without any interpretation, and each lasted between 1 and 2 hours. Like the interviews with refugee respondents, no recordings were made during the expert interviews.

For data analysis, I employed a multi-site case study approach (Creswell, 2013). As such, I developed codes for a within-case analysis, encompassing the case contexts, case descriptions, and within-case theme analysis. I then derived themes from these codes to comprehensively understand the German resettlement program from Jordan, the German HAP from Turkey, refugees' living conditions in the two countries, and refugees' agency in the two programs. Additionally, I coded and developed themes for a cross-case analysis to identify similarities and differences between the two cases (Creswell, 2013).

The following two sections will analyze refugees' agency in the German resettlement and HAP processes, thus applying the article's theoretical framework to the empirical findings.

REFUGEES' AGENCY IN THE GERMAN RESETTLEMENT PROCESS FROM JORDAN

Khaled and Amira were from Aden and Sanaa in Yemen. They had one 6-year-old daughter who had a serious illness that could not be treated in Jordan. They arrived in Jordan in 2015, and in the first year they felt welcome in Amman. Then the laws changed, and because they were from Yemen, they needed a residence permit, which would cost a lot of money. It was very difficult to find work in Amman: they needed a work permit, which is subsidized for Syrians but not for refugees of other nationalities. As a result, Khaled could only work as a volunteer even though he was a medical specialist.

At some point, they heard it was possible to get resettled when you are sick. Khaled went to the UNHCR office, where the family had registered as refugees in 2015, and asked the staff to consider their case for resettlement because his daughter was ill. He went to the office several times, even though it was difficult to get there, and asked them for resettlement. He gave the staff his daughter's medical records, but he was insulted and told that he had no chance of getting resettled.

But the family didn't give up and went to the health department in Amman, where they received a medical note, which they then sent to UNHCR. They eventually got a call from UNHCR in April 2019, inviting them for an interview. In the interview, they were told that they might be considered for resettlement in Germany or Canada, and they responded that they had no problem with any destination—they only wanted to get out of Jordan. They then got a call in July for a medical check, an interview on August 1 with the German delegation, and a security check on August 20, but they were still not sure if they would be allowed to go to Germany. Finally, they got a final confirmation call on November 11. This long waiting period was very difficult for them and felt like lost time since they could have already learned some German and prepared for their departure before travelling to Germany in early December.

Khaled's and Amira's resettlement journey was exceptional in many ways. For one, they were the only interviewees with a non-Syrian nationality. As a former medical doctor, Khaled was also the only highly skilled respondent among the interviewees who were resettled from Jordan. The remaining respondents who had an occupation prior to fleeing to Jordan had held manual jobs, including carpentry and farming.

Aside from their former occupations, the respondents' past routines, habits, and traditions in Syria did not feature prominently in their resettlement journeys. This might be because routines, habits, and traditions were severely impacted by their flight to Jordan. Another reason might be that the respondents' habitual routines and traditions, including their religion, did not greatly inform their decision to pursue resettlement. For instance, Ahmed, a Syrian married man, was afraid that his family would not be allowed to go to Germany because he practised Islam, including fasting and praying. But he did not question his decision to become resettled because of the non-Muslim majority in Germany. Neither did any of the other respondents.

It should be noted here that I did not consider the respondents' flight histories for this analysis, given that Emirbayer and Mische's (1998) concept refers to individuals' past routines, habits, and traditions, and

thus to habitual aspects—and the flight experience is far from habitual. This is not to say, however, that the circumstances of respondents' flights are not an important aspect of their past.

While Khaled and Amira did not talk much about their past habits and traditions in Syria during the interview, they did share their aspirations for their future life in Germany. Amira hoped to have a stable home and their own flat. In addition, the couple's goals included learning German as quickly as possible so that they could find work. They also hoped that their daughter could attend school. Other respondents resettled from Jordan shared similar aspirations. In all interviews, respondents addressed the hope that their children could go to school (again). In addition, respondents aspired to learn German and find jobs as quickly as possible. Another important aspiration raised by interviewees was to reunite with family, as most respondents had relatives in Germany.

While all interview respondents hoped for a better future life in Germany, their present life in Jordan included many daily demands, dilemmas, and ambiguities. This was especially the case for Khaled and Amira, whose many difficulties were often related to the Jordanian laws vis-à-vis non-Syrian refugees.

For instance, annual residence permits for Yemenis and work permits cost US$600–$1,000 (Al-Majali, 2022). Many Yemenis, including Khaled and Amira, cannot afford such sums. As a result, many Yemenis work informally or as volunteers in Jordan, just as Khaled did despite his former occupation as a medical eye specialist.

In addition, non-Syrian refugees, including Yemenis, have "limited access to UNHCR financial assistance, health services and resettlement opportunities" (Al-Majali, 2022, p. 14); indeed, the family did not receive any financial assistance from UNHCR. Moreover, xenophobia was a major concern for the Yemini family, and Khaled spoke about racism targeted towards his family and insults he endured on UNHCR premises.

While the situation in Jordan is particularly dire for non-Syrian refugees, Syrian refugees also face many difficulties in Jordan. Although the government has issued subsidized work permits to Syrians since 2016, those permits are only for certain professional sectors, such as agriculture and construction, excluding high-skilled professions (Tobin & Alahmed, 2019). Many interviews featured bad working conditions and the insecurity of unstable employment without insurance, and many Syrian respondents worked informally in Jordan.

However, the biggest problem that respondents in Jordan reported during the interviews referred to the education system in Jordan. As such, respondents were both concerned about the poor quality of their children's education as well as the poor organization of the educational system.

For the interviewed refugees, the present in Jordan thus represented many daily challenges, and as Scheer (2012) outlined, coping strategies might require all of a person's time and energy, thus limiting their agency. The resettlement journey of Khaled and Amira, however, illustrates that it may also work the other way around: when their situation became increasingly dire, the couple was even more determined to change it and to put their intentions into action. Indeed, Khaled and Amira's resettlement journey featured the highest structural constraints but also the highest degree of informal agency among the resettlement stories from Jordan.

Given his daughter's illness, Khaled was determined to become resettled, and he

went to the UNHCR office several times to ask the staff about it. The UNHCR office in Amman is situated on the outskirts—the journey is long and expensive—and once he got there, he got into fights with UNHCR staff, who told him that his attempts to ask for resettlement were futile. The family then asked for additional medical notes from the health department in Amman, which they sent to UNHCR, and they eventually received a call from UNHCR. Thus, whereas the more confrontational strategy of facing and trying to persuade UNHCR staff did not work, the couple's strategy of performing vulnerability may indeed have manifested a resettlement opportunity.

If the medical documents were in fact the reason that UNHCR reached out to Khaled and Amira remains hidden behind the "veil of secrecy" (Menetrier, 2021) of decision-making in the resettlement process. However, as outlined above, this uncertainty does not negate Khaled and Amira's informal agency. I categorize these incidences of agency as **informal** agency given that refugees have no **right** to become selected for resettlement. This does not mean that it is forbidden for refugees to collect medical and other documents to substantiate their resettlement case—they of course have the right to do so—but if and to what extent UNHCR relies on those documents to decide whom to resettle falls under UNHCR's discretion.

Other Syrian respondents also exerted (smaller) acts of informal agency to be selected for resettlement. For instance, one couple inquired with UNHCR staff about possibilities to become resettled to Germany (as their relatives already lived in Germany) when they submitted their registration documents. Others insisted on choosing Germany as their resettlement destination during the interviews because their adult children were already in Germany. Nevertheless, the Syrian interviewees were often surprised to receive the UNHCR phone call that invited them for a resettlement interview, instead of actively having to try to access resettlement themselves. In contrast, respondents who were admitted from Turkey—all of Syrian nationality—told of more instances of informal agency, as will be elaborated in the next section.

REFUGEES' AGENCY IN THE GERMAN HAP FROM TURKEY

Hassan's family is from Aleppo, and together with his wife he has six children. In Syria, he owned a brick factory before the family fled to Turkey in 2015. Hassan was an ambitious person, but it was very difficult to find legal work in Turkey, and the family's financial situation was always precarious.

In Izmir, where the family was living, there was an ASAM office on Hassan's way to work. It had a poster in the window that read, "We support refugees, so that they don't need to go to Europe via the sea." So in 2017, he made an appointment with the ASAM office, during which he asked if he could register for resettlement. They told him that it was not possible to apply for resettlement and that it is very difficult to become resettled, so he left without a solution. A few months later, UNHCR called him for a home visit. During the visit, UNHCR staff also asked why he wanted to go to Europe, but Hassan did not hear again from them after the visit.

After 8 months had passed, Hassan went to DGMM and asked if he could get resettled. DGMM staff told him that the Turkish government would not let him emigrate, but he gave them his personal details anyway, and his file was sent to UNHCR Ankara. Four months later, he received a call asking him and his family to come to the ASAM office for an interview and create a resettlement file with UNHCR. During the interview, he was asked if he had

any family in Europe, and indeed, Hassan's siblings were living in Germany.

After the interview, Hassan was very optimistic. Luckily, he received a confirmation from UNHCR for resettlement to Germany 2 months later. The family got appointments for the medical examination and an interview with the German consulate; they boarded a plane to Germany in April 2019.

Hassan's profile was an exception among interviewees, as he was the only respondent who had been a business owner prior to fleeing from Syria. Other respondents admitted through the HAP from Turkey had mostly held manual jobs in Syria, such as car mechanic, welder, or tailor. One female interviewee had studied economics in Damascus for a few semesters before she got married and had later worked as a primary teacher before her flight to Turkey.

Similar to the respondents resettled from Jordan, the interviewees who were admitted from Turkey did not dwell much on their past routines and traditions in Syria. They did, however, share their aspirations for their future lives in Germany. Hassan, for instance, had "many wishes and goals" as well as "high expectations" for his and his family's life in Germany. His biggest goal was to smoothly integrate and live in safety and freedom. His children also played an important role in Hassan's imagined alternative future: the possibility for them to receive an education was very important to him.

The other respondents had similar hopes and aspirations, with their children's education and future taking centre stage. For instance, Juan, a father of three young children, stated that his children's future was the most important and that "they shouldn't suffer as I did." In addition, interviewees stressed that learning German and finding work were important goals for them. Financial safety, social security, and health insurance were also cited by Hassan and other respondents as important hopes and aspirations.

The focus on health insurance and social security for their future points to respondents' daily dilemmas and challenges in Turkey. Hassan talked about the difficulty getting employed legally instead of relying on informal work that did not offer any security and insurance. Juan, who had worked as a craftsman in Turkey, recounted the same challenges: after he had an accident at work, he had to pay for two operations on his own because "there's no insurance in Turkey." After the accident, he could no longer use his hand and thus could not find another job.

The precarity of working conditions that many respondents pointed to is not uncommon for Syrians in Turkey (ECRE, 2022). Employers are often disinclined to get work permits for their employees, and consequently, Syrians in Turkey are "impacted by the widespread practice of undeclared employment under substandard working conditions and low wages" (ECRE, 2022, p. 184). Without any health insurance, they also have no financial safety net to cover medical costs and to compensate for lost earnings (interviewee from the German Agency for International Cooperation, Istanbul, 2019). The situation for many Syrians has thus been characterized by insecurity, heightened by "racist and xenophobic attacks against foreigners, notably against Syrians" (Human Rights Watch, 2022, "Rising Xenophobia in Turkey").

For Hassan, his intention to ask for resettlement was greatly informed by his family's precarious situation. When the appointment with ASAM and a subsequent UNHCR home visit did not open access to resettlement, he also made inquiries with the Turkish migration authorities and gave them his documents, hoping that the staff would forward his details to UNHCR. Given that he received a call from UNHCR four months later,

they presumably did; but again, the causality between Hassan's informal agency and the invitation for a resettlement interview cannot and need not be asserted here.

Similarly to Khaled and Amira, Hassan relied on his documentation, including his flight history and medical documents, to access resettlement and thus "performed" his vulnerability according to authorities' requirements.

The strategy of performing vulnerability was also employed by other respondents who went to DGMM and UNHCR to show medical records and ask for resettlement. Another interviewee relied on persistence in communicating with several resettlement stakeholders to accelerate her resettlement case, and one interviewee insisted during an interview with UNHCR on being resettled to Germany, thus intending to influence the resettlement country. Consequently, there were acts of informal agency among refugees both resettled from Jordan and admitted from Turkey.

Having outlined several factors related to refugees' pasts, futures, and presents in Jordan and Turkey that informed their intention to seek resettlement, as well as their strategies and actions to do so, the next section will compare the two cases.

SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES IN REFUGEES' INTENTIONS, STRATEGIES, AND ACTIONS TO EXERT INFORMAL AGENCY ACROSS JORDAN AND TURKEY

With regard to refugees' intentions to seek resettlement, many similarities and some differences were apparent across respondents' pasts, futures, and presents in Jordan and Turkey.

Respondents in both Jordan and Turkey with a higher level of education and with professional occupations (e.g., medical doctor, business owner, teacher) displayed higher informal agency in accessing and influencing the resettlement and HAP process than other interviewees. These findings go hand in hand with other literature on refugees' aspirations and agency and point to the layered structural constraints refugees are faced with. For instance, Müller-Funk (2019) points out that social class profoundly influences refugees' experience of displacement: displaced persons with a higher social standing have more choices. In addition, refugees with powerful social networks derived through their social class are often more apt to navigate the resettlement system than refugees without such background (Balakian, 2020).

On the other hand, reasons to seek resettlement were very similar across respondents from Jordan and Turkey. All respondents' imagined alternative futures included a better life for their children, and all respondents put high emphasis on goals including (further) education and/or employment in Germany.

While those hopes and aspirations did not differ among respondents admitted from Jordan and Turkey, refugees coming from Turkey more highly emphasized security, especially health insurance. However, this might have been a result of the specific interview sample: many respondents (or their children) who were admitted from Turkey needed medical care, whereas this was less the case for respondents resettled from Jordan. Whether this was due to the specific interview sample, or if Germany admitted more medical cases from Turkey than from Jordan in 2019 (although the German quota for medial cases is generally higher for resettlement than for the HAP), remains unclear.

While respondents admitted from Turkey highlighted lack of insurance as their biggest challenge for their lives in Turkey, respon-

dents resettled from Jordan focused more on Jordan's poor education system. Syrian interviewees who had lived in Jordan also reported less discrimination and xenophobia than the Syrian respondents who had lived in Turkey. However, the couple from Yemen had to endure many incidences of discrimination and xenophobia in Jordan.

Despite the different challenges that refugees faced in their daily lives, all respondents based their intention to become resettled on their desire to build a better life for themselves and especially for their children. As such, the different futures they imagined vis-à-vas their present struggles played a major role in their decision to pursue resettlement (and to exercise informal agency accordingly). In contrast, interviewees did not share many of their past routines, habits, and traditions that could possibly tie them more closely to Syria or to neighbouring countries. Refugees who say "yes" to resettlement thus seem to place higher emphasis on their imagined future in juxtaposition with their present challenges, whereas refugees who say, or would say, "no" to resettlement may prioritize aspects of the past, including the familiar life and culture in their host country.

Regarding refugees' strategies to access resettlement, several respondents, both in Jordan and Turkey, employed the strategy of performing vulnerability and thus adapted to the resettlement stakeholders' requirements of selecting refugees based on their vulnerabilities. In contrast, none of the respondents resorted to overtly confronting or even violent strategies to exert their informal agency (although Khaled did try to persuade UNHCR staff in rather heated arguments).

In addition, the strategy of refugees who were already in the resettlement process and who tried to move their cases along or to influence the resettlement destination can best be described as persistence. As such, the fact that they spoke up when not expected to by resettlement stakeholders and persisted may in itself be considered a deviant act, given the high constraints that refugees face.

CONCLUSION

While agency has become quite a buzzword in social sciences, including migration and refugee studies, its definition has often remained diffuse. It is thus important to have a clear idea what agency means in the specific research context. For instance, in the field of resettlement, it makes an important difference if agency includes refugees' rights to change an outcome or not.

Drawing on the two different concepts of agency developed by Lewis and Young (2018) and Thomson (2018), I argue that it is indeed important to distinguish between refugees' formal and informal agency in resettlement. Thereby, I defined **formal agency**—which mostly relates to refugees' choice to accept or decline a resettlement offer—as a combination of the refugees' **intention**, **rights**, and **action** to change an outcome. In contrast, I define **informal agency** as a combination of **intention** and **action**, thus referring to situations where refugees do not have the formal "right" to exert agency.

It is important to note that for both formal and informal agency, the **outcome** is not included in the definitions. This makes it possible to employ the article's conceptualizations of agency in social situations where individuals face high constraints and have very limited possibilities to exert agency.

By tracing two resettlement journeys in detail—one from Jordan and one from Turkey—as well as through insights from the other respondents' journeys, the article also examined how the refugees' **past**, **future**, and **present** informed their intentions to

seek resettlement and discussed their strategies to exert agency.

Indeed, there were many similarities across respondents' pasts, futures, and presents in Jordan and Turkey. While respondents did not dwell much on their past habits and traditions during the interviews, they all highlighted strong aspirations to provide a better future for their children (and for themselves) through resettlement, including access to better education and work opportunities.

While this article relied on a relatively small sample size, and it is thus impossible to generalize the article's findings, the results suggest that refugees who aim to be resettled may strongly focus on the imagined future they foresee for themselves and their children in the resettlement country vis-à-vis their challenges in the host country. In contrast, they may put less emphasis on their past, including their familiar life and culture.

In addition, the article highlighted how refugees employed adaptation strategies, mostly in terms of performing vulnerability to seek resettlement and/or to navigate and influence the resettlement process. Still, it is important not to overstate refugees' possibilities for agency in the resettlement process. First, all incidences of agency discussed in this article are incidences of **informal** agency given that refugees do not have the **rights** to apply for resettlement themselves or to influence how, when, and to which destination they are resettled. Second, refugees need to overcome many constraints to exert any informal agency in the resettlement and HAP process. As a result, most refugees have limited possibilities outside of waiting for the "surprise" phone call from UNHCR and trusting an opaque and highly bureaucratic process with their and their children's lives.

Ultimately, neglecting refugees' agency in resettlement may subvert the overarching goal of resettlement, which is to provide refugees with a durable solution to live their lives in dignity and peace. For instance, resettling a person to a country other than desired may prompt secondary movements—or even a return to the home country or the country the person was resettled from—thus leaving the individual without a valid residence permit and hence without a durable solution to displacement.

Most important is to remember that resettlement changes the lives of the concerned refugees. There may not be an adequate solution for how to account for refugees' agency and simultaneously ensure a functioning resettlement process. However, it should not come as a surprise that the concerned refugees would want to have a say in their resettlement, too.

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