The Crisis of Belonging and the Syrian Diaspora: Individual voices and Collective Liminality

MA Media Studies

Cultural Analysis: Literature and Theory

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Abstract

During the last decade, Europe has faced what is considered to be the largest migration wave since the Second World War. It affected and continues to influence national and international socio-political decisions and policies for European and Western countries. The migration wave peaked in 2015, with more than a million refugees, including Syrian refugees, seeking asylum. The main reason for Syrian migration was the Syrian revolution, sparked by the demonstrations that started in 2011. Pro-democratic protests called for freedom, aiming to end the oppressive regime under the Assad family that has exhausted the country for around five decades. The unforeseen result of these protests was a brutal war. The Syrian conflict and the Syrian diaspora have been framed in European news and media coverage as the "refugee crisis." It has been framed as a crisis not only due to the severity of the situation but also based on a tradition of "Othering," as the refugees generally come from a Muslim majority.

While there is a common agreement on the passivity, generalization, and dehumanization at work in media coverage of the refugees, art, and literature often try to provide alternative narratives. Using critical analysis as a research method, this research investigates the representation politics of refugees in two case studies: a book by Wendy Pearlman, and an exhibition by Carlos Motta, focusing on the concept of belonging and its politics. Furthermore, I employ post-coloniality discourse that enables a critical reading of political and cultural power relations, including history, race, and queerness. The analysis of the cultural objects will show that these art-works have provided a personal space for refugees to tell their stories, which symbolizes a positive step away from the mainstream media representation. However, these representations do not automatically also generate a critical examination of the belonging crisis of refugees, especially while the art-works do not establish a dialogue with the "Other."

Introduction

The year 2011 marked the beginning of the Syrian war that continues to this day to devour a country, a nation, and a culture. To some extent, the war marked the last decade, in part due to the internationally interested parties that participated in it, both directly and indirectly. Additionally, the magnitude of the humanitarian crisis that resulted from it was devastating. The year 2015 marked the peak of what is known as the "refugee crisis" in Europe with hundreds of thousands of asylum seekers, the majority Syrians, entering different European countries in search of a haven. More than 11.7 million Syrians were estimated to be displaced both internally and externally according to the UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) Global Trends report on forced displacement in 2015, with more than a million asylum seekers in Europe (unhcr.org). The media covered the migration wave extensively, but also created and established certain stereotypes when representing the refugees.

These popular representations often failed to speak to and from the refugees' experience; they instead spoke about them, diminishing their stories and hardship into what was often a generalized and dehumanizing representation. Many artists and literary writers have taken it upon themselves to engage with the crisis and represent the refugee figure within the context of humanitarian tragedy, and in many cases, artists have assumed a superior Western role in their representations, the refugee remaining a passive and silent figure while others are presenting and directing the conversation. However, whilst "Othering" can often be problematic, simply acknowledging the difference between refugees and the Western host countries is not necessarily a negative thing. Stuart Hall, in his book *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices,* argues that "we need 'difference' because we can only construct meaning through a dialogue with the 'Other'" (Hall 235). Addressing the different backgrounds of refugees, and the different stories they might want to tell about their experiences in contrast to the popular generalized representation is key to understanding the crisis. Engaging in a productive dialogue with the other is thus essential to paving the way for new representations and narratives. Hall also argues that "meaning, …, does not belong to any speaker. It raises in the give-and-take between different speakers" (Hall 235). I concur with Hall's line of argument

that meaning should not belong to one side. Rather, in order to comprehend the "refugee crisis" in full, refugees must also have platforms to tell their stories without popular media prejudice.

Diverging from the hegemonic narratives around refugees, there are works of contemporary literature and art that distinguish themselves by addressing the Syrian "refugee crisis" more authentically. Such works provide a space for refugees to express themselves, representing a variety of individual stories, experiences, and memories within the context of the Syrian war and its aftereffects. In this thesis, I will examine two such cultural objects, *We Crossed a Bridge and It Trembled: Voices from Syria* by Wendy Pearlman, and "The Crossing" by artist and activist Carlos Motta.

Pearlman's book is a collection of interviews, testimonies, and stories by displaced Syrians in different countries in the Middle East and Europe. Alongside presenting the Syrian refugees' stories, the book provides a summary of the complex history of the country, as well as, explanations regarding the Syrian regime (Pearlman xxxvii). The extensive historical contextualization distinguishes the book by not delving immediately into the "refugee crisis" in isolation. Additionally, Pearlman presents herself in the introduction of the book as an academic expert in Middle Eastern studies, positioning herself and her work in opposition to mainstream media. She conducted all of the interviews in Arabic, the language of the interviewees, allowing for firsthand experience and connection that would have been limited by a translator (Pearlman xxxiii). Motivated by the previous prospects and promises of different representations of the Syrian diaspora, I choose to analyze *We Crossed a Bridge and It Trembled* within the broader context of the Syrian war and representation tradition of Syrian refugees. Additionally, I will focus on the volume's representation of belonging and its politics, especially as it comes forward in the interviews.

"The Crossing" by Carlos Motta is a collection of eleven video portraits of LGBTQ refugees living in the Netherlands exhibited in The Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, the Netherlands. The artist presented his work alongside other historicized items displayed in cabinets symbolizing Dutch colonial history. Queer refugees are a minority within the refugee spectrum and are largely underrepresented in mainstream media, their voices, stories, and challenges rather neglected. By representing them in the exhibition, Motta adds a deeper, more complex layer to the representation of the "refugee crisis." The artwork

shows that alongside their traumatic experiences of fleeing their countries, they are confronted with Islamophobia, transphobia, and discrimination in the asylum camps. The exhibition consisted of two-part installations video portraits of eleven queer refugees from different countries such as Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Morocco, Pakistan, and Syria where the participants share their personal stories regarding the discrimination and repression of non-normative genders in their home countries with the audience. They also tell about the discrimination and exclusion practices they suffered from in the Dutch camps during the asylum procedure from their fellow refugees and Dutch authorities. In my research, I will focus mainly on the stories of two Syrian transgender women: Butterfly and Layan.

Previous discussions of the dehumanization of refugees include that by post-human Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben. In his work *Homo-Sacer Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, he argues that the refugee figure occupies an exceptional status as a human that is simultaneously outside and inside societies. Furthermore, he uses the asylum seeker figure to interrogate the link between nation, state and citizen as representative of the political life (bios) in comparison to be a human or bare life (zoë) (Agamben 9). He asserts that "the fundamental categorial pair of Western politics is not of friend/enemy but that of life/political existence, zoë /bios, exclusion/inclusion" (Agamben 12). While refugees occupy natural life rather than the political one due to their position in society, they are implicitly excluded from the political life and from society itself. Agamben also argues that the refugee figure does not belong to either the home country or the host country. Therefore, one can argue that the impossibility to belong to a certain place or community is integrated and accepted in the term "refugee" itself, and as a result, is embedded in the representation of the refugees as humans. However, despite the "refugee crisis" being extensively covered by the media, and discussed in academia, there is little scholarly work that interrogates the possibility of belonging for refugees, and the relationship between the representation politics and the belonging politics.

The refugees' journeys in both case studies in this research challenge the postulates of home and belonging through claiming different representation traditions of refugees. They adopt a critical view of belonging as an important pillar in the "refugee crisis." In this research, I argue that the two artworks try to counteract the refugee in a state of disbelonging by emphasizing their humanity. However, they draw from the stereotypical

orientalist and colonialist notion of the refugee in order to do so, therefore reaffirming the stereotypes. In the first case study, I argue that Wendy Pearlman provides examples of refugees with many qualities to belong in the new environment. In the second case study, Carlos Motta represents refugees struggling to belong in their home countries, while, showing a willingness to create new belonging attachments in the new places. They also unravel the transitional nature of migration journeys. They invite the spectator to deconstruct and question the concepts of home and belonging, among other concepts such as human rights, culture, and queerness, in order to ultimately open new spaces for refugees. I am interested in examining the representation of belonging within the refugee stories.

In order to answer my inquiries, I will use critical and cultural analysis theory and alongside close reading. I will examine the concepts of home, identity, belonging, and its politics in the context of the Syrian diaspora, using the works of Sara Ahmed, Nira Yuval-Davis, and Madeline-Sophie Abbas, as well as utilizing the work of Bishupal Limbu to conceptualize the refugee figure and the space occupied by the refugee. Additionally, I will use theories on post-coloniality, on “the coloniality of migration,” and on practices of “othering” to further analyze the crisis of belonging for the Syrian refugees in Europe. Historian and author Yuval Noah Harari argues in his book *Sapiens* that studying history is essential to “widen our horizons, to understand that our present situation is neither natural nor inevitable,” (269) I agree with his emphasis on the importance of placing our present into a historical context. Therefore, I will analyze the historical background in Wendy Pearlman’s book, and the historicized objects in “The Crossing” in juxtaposition to the current “refugee crisis.” An important element of analysis in this research is race. While nowadays racism is increasingly substituted by culturalism, as Harari argues in his book, I will argue that race is still very much the engine that drives the ‘us’ vs. ‘them’ binary.

In the first chapter, I shall delve into deconstructing and contextualizing concepts of home and belonging as well as its politics in the context of the Syrian war and diaspora. Besides, I will provide an examination of the “Othering” tradition and “coloniality of migration.” In the second chapter, I will focus on the first case *study We Crossed a Bridge and It Trembled: Voices from Syria*. Subsequently, I will examine two video-portraits from “The Crossing” exhibition. In both case studies, I will focus mainly on the politics of

representation of refugees and on the politics of belonging. The conclusion chapter sums up the insights gained in the research.

First Chapter: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

2.1 Home and Away

Leaving one's home traditionally marks the beginning of a journey of migration and estrangement, as is the case of the Syrian diaspora. Unpacking the concept of home is thus the first step in mapping the refugee's journey, and the resulting representation and politics of belonging. As this journey marks a crucial, pivotal point in the lives of refugees, it affects the trifold relationship between home, identity, and belonging. This consequently subjugates refugees to a multitude of politics of belonging upon arriving in different countries.

Feminist scholar Sara Ahmed argues in her article "Home and away: Narratives of migration and estrangement" that the transitional nature of migration journeys challenges one's understanding of inhabiting certain places or being in specific homes (Ahmed 331). Additionally, these journeys, according to her, invite us "to question the relationship between identity, belonging and home" (Ahmed 331). Even though the term refugee entails an inherent status of dis-belonging, a more critical analysis of these characteristic is due. The forced displacement of the refugee compels them to occupy a liminal boundary between their past and present. As a result, these journeys challenge the allegedly homogenous fixity of the trinity of home, belonging, and identity, obtaining different associations and understandings. Building on the same line of argumentation, Nira Yuval-Davis, in her paper "Belonging and the politics of belonging," identifies belonging as primarily "about emotional attachment, about feeling 'at home'" (197). However, she argues that "belonging tends to be naturalized, and becomes articulated and politicized only when it is threatened in some way" (197). Belonging is thus considered a natural relation between citizens living in their country and having a sentimental attachment to it. This relationship becomes politicized when the relationship between the state and the citizens changes. Therefore, one can argue that belonging is represented as exclusive for citizens implicitly excluding persons who do not qualify as such 'Others,' in this case, refugees.

In addition to embedding the characteristic of dis-belonging in the refugee, the term might as well imply an incapability, or preference to dis-belong from the refugee's side. Furthermore, I believe that the tradition of representing these journeys in popular media and multiple art projects contributes to the estrangement of refugees as well. First, these media and artistic bodies often speak for the refugee without engaging in a conversation with them, leading to the establishment and continuations of a hegemonic stereotype of these immigrants. In his book *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices,* Stuart Hall argues that such "stereotyping reduces, essentializes, naturalizes and fixes difference" (Hall 258). So, instead of engaging with a constructive conversation of difference that could lead to better comprehending the crisis, stereotyping in mass media often produces fixed associations that become hard to negate. Furthermore, stereotyping is at the heart of the "Othering" tradition because it "deploys a strategy of 'splitting,'" between what is normal and acceptable and what is not then excluding the later eventually (ibid 258). This then becomes "part of the maintenance of social and symbolic order," setting up a symbolic wall between belonging and othering, between who is inside a community, and who is destined to remain outside of it, "'Us' and Them" (ibid 258). Condemning the refugees to the stereotypes enhanced by the mainstream media creates a gap between refugees and the host countries that is difficult to bridge.

Stereotypical representations affect the possibilities and willingness to create new belonging attachments by continuously portraying the migrant within an 'Othering' discourse. Without critically questioning the concepts of home and belonging, one risk presenting the refugees as incapable of belonging to new societies and thus incapable of creating new homes. Arguably, the politics of representation and belonging have a deep correlation in deciding the refugee's position in new countries, and her[1] possibilities of creating new attachments.

In the case of many refugees, their attachment to their homes becomes a metaphorical one, existing in collective memory narratives, as my analysis of the case studies will show. The physical attachment to home is left behind, and with-it part of their

[1] I have chosen to refer to "the refugee" as she, using the feminine pronoun.

sense of belonging and arguably part of their identity as well. Searching for a place that can be a home becomes a necessity for the refugees; a recurring sentiment in many of the testimonies and stories shows an eagerness to establish new belongings. However, as Ahmed argues, true belonging remains an impossibility due to its intersectional relationship with identity and the politics of belonging (331). Finding a home or creating one is not only about the physical space where one can live, even though for some refugees around the world this is also a significant problem and a dream unrealized. Instead, the concept of Home, in this research, is one's attachment to a place where the past, present, and future can come together. The rupture in the refugee's life leads to inhabiting "too many places" where memory and home connect with one another, creating further obstacles to establishing the connection between one's past and present upon which a sense of continuity can be founded (Ahmed 330). Home thus becomes, as Ahmed defines it, "implicitly constructed as a purified space of belonging in which the subject is too comfortable to question the limits or borders of her or his experience" (339). In contrast, in the lack of home in the traditional sense, the refugee becomes conscious of the limitations and restrictions of their experiences, as people without attachments, a state imposed by others on them and one which is exemplified in the politics of representation and belonging. Leaving home results, therefore, in a "failure of memory to fully make sense of the place one comes to inhabit" (Ahmed 343) because of the embedded assumptions of the inability to belong to this new space as a refugee. This assumed failure of creating new belonging attachments results in "the discomfort of inhabiting a migrant body" (ibid 343), a body that is already always assumed as out of place and space.

Ahmed further asserts that, "the question then of being at home or leaving home is always a question of memory, of the discontinuity between past and present" (343), particularly due to the generational acts of telling stories about previous histories of displacement and migration. She defines memory as "a collective act which produces its objects (the 'we), rather than reflecting on it'" (343); hence, the production of the 'we' within the Syrian diaspora can only be generated by telling stories by these same people. Thus, this collective memory should be based on stories of the refugees themselves, rather than an imposed representation, one often laden with concepts of 'Othering.' Ahmad concludes that migration bodies cannot be limited to either side of identities or belongings,

they must rather be given the liberty to decide for themselves what they have in common due to the “uncommon estrangement of migration itself” (345). Building on her work, this research argues that telling stories, and constructing a new collective memory of the Syrian diaspora, is thus part of creating possibilities for new belonging attachments in the new places Syrian refugees inhabit. One can argue that popular media bodies did not grant such liberty to refugees. Instead, a prevailing representation tradition dominated the migration wave making it quite impossible for refugees to evoke estrangement.

2.2 Belonging and the Politics of Belonging

As has been established, the notion of belonging is an essential part of constructing a possible home and identity for the Syrian diaspora. In this part, I will delve into the concept of belonging, and its politics.

In her work “Belonging and the Politics of Belonging,” Nira Yuval-Davis asserts that there are “analytical differentiations” between belonging and its politics. These differences become crucial as one engages with critical political discourses on “nationalism, racism, or other contemporary politics of belonging” (197). I agree with her that it is essential to distinguish between the two concepts in order to establish an understanding of the crisis of belonging for the refugee. For the Syrian diaspora, there is a multitude of socio-political discourses at work, making it important to distinguish between these two concepts, and their intersectional relationship. Furthermore, the notion of belonging, according to Yuval-Davis, needs different levels of analysis such as social locations, identification, emotional attachments, ethical and political values, to be studied thoroughly (198-99).

To begin with, “belonging can be an act of self-identification or identification by others, in a stable contested or transit way” (Yuval-Davis 199). Instead of being produced by specific hegemonic power structures, belonging is arguably a “dynamic process” ideally determined by oneself and the other, in an interactive conceptual relationship (199). However, hegemonic power relations between the West and the Middle East, where the Syrian diaspora originates from, affect the interaction limiting the possibilities of self-identification and belonging. In *Orientalism* - cited in Hall - Edward Said analyses ‘the Orient’ through the understanding of the West’s patronizing representation of the East and its inhabitants. Said asserts that the idea of European identity as superior to all non-European

people and cultures is what created the hegemony of European culture itself: "the hegemony of European superiority over Oriental backwardness" (Said cited in Hall 261). For centuries Europeans have produced other cultures and nations stereotypically as inferior "Others" that cannot belong to or concur with the Western rival.

Further emphasizing this social and racial gap between Europeans and non-Europeans, Gloria Wekker, in her book *White Innocence: Paradoxes of Colonialism and Race*, asserts that the "contemporary constructions of 'us,' those constructed as belonging to Europe, and 'them,' those constructed as not belonging … still keep following that basic Manichean logic. This entails the fundamental impossibility of being both European, constructed to mean being white and Christian, and being black-Muslim-migrant-refugee" (21). Elaborating on her work, the Oriental "Other" in Said's works translates to the Muslim refugee "Other" in our contemporary times. I would like to emphasize that even though theoretically speaking, as a refugee or a foreigner, one can self-identify as belonging to Europe or the West, identification or rather rejection by the hegemonic powers is far more powerful and influential. Accordingly, one can argue that Hall's positive difference suppressed by "Othering" stereotypical representations is far more robust than the sentiment of belonging.

Social location, whether defined by gender, race, social class, ethnicity, sexuality, or ability among other axes of difference, also plays an essential role in the process of identification and belonging (Yuval-Davis 200). So, even though one may self-identify clearly and exclusively, these deeply rooted constructions of social locations will affect, if not predetermine, one's possibility to belong. Therefore, despite the refugee's attempt to impose her identity as first and foremost a human being deserving protection, safety, security and, human rights, her belonging is already determined by existing power systems and social locations. Belonging and identity are thus inseparable. Through a narrative of identity, one aims to acquire a level of belonging, and challenge hegemonic power relations. "[I]dentities," as Yuval-Davis defines them, "are narratives, stories people tell themselves and others about who they are" (Yuval-Davis 202). Going back to Ahmed, through telling stories, one can argue that refugees aim to establish their own identity narrative, and create a 'we' through a collective narrative and memory (Ahmed 342). However, cognitive stories alone cannot alone establish a level of belonging (Yuval-Davis 202). There must be a level of

attachment and a desire to belong from the refugee's side, but also an acknowledgment by the host country and its citizens. The refugee must be recognized and accepted in order to be able to belong. As this research will show, traditions of representing the refugees as capable of belonging to their new societies will dominate the case studies. I argue that this is an attempt to close the gap between the desire to belong and its possibility.

Yuval- Davis highlights another duality that complicates the concept of belonging for refugees. Constructing identity narratives in transition, exemplified in the migration process, produces a duality of "being and becoming, belonging and longing to belong" which consequently affects the construction of identity narratives (Yuval-Davis 202). The refugee occupies the liminal space between their past as being and belonging to their home country, and their present of becoming "Others" and their unfulfilled longing to belong. Additionally, Yuval-Davis emphasizes that the ability to belong is closely attached to the valuation and judgment of the identity narratives by the host countries (203). Transposed to the Syrian diaspora, one can say that a Syrian refugee's story will be inevitably burdened with the unfolding of the war, "refugee crisis," socio-political and economic consequences, and terrorist attacks in Europe and the world. Therefore, refugees attempt to establish a recognized, and legitimate belonging is heavily judged and little valued.

While Yuval-Davis identifies belonging as a homely sentimental attachment (Yuval-Davis 197), John Crowley, according to her, offers a different identification of the politics of belonging. He argues that they are "'the dirty work of boundary maintenance' … the boundary of the political community of belonging, the boundaries that separate the world population into 'us' and 'them'" (cited in Yuval-Davis 204). People living in a distinguished community have an image in their minds fostered by nationalism and its politics that they form a society. They believe that they belong together even though members of the community might not know, meet, or hear their fellow members (Yuval-Davis 204). The "boundary maintenance" is thus about deciding the position of these new "Others," and whether they can be inside and belong as an "us" or whether they must remain outside the "imaginary boundary line of the nation" (Yuval-Davis, 204). While the politics of belonging foster the national affiliation imagery, it tends to foster simultaneously the impossibility that others could belong to this community as well. "Othering" is, thus, central to the politics of belonging. While refugees might succeed in crossing country borders, one could argue that

they are failing to cross political and cultural ones, emphasized by the stereotypical and generalized mainstream media representations.

2.3 The Refugee

In 2015 the Syrian regime and its allies severely bombarded Syria, while militant terrorist groups such as al-Qaeda and ISIS controlled most of the Northern and Eastern parts of the country. Consequently, Syrian citizens had only two choices: to leave their country or to die. Due to extensive media coverage of the war, the Syrian refugee became a figure known around the world.

In defining the refugee, Bishupal Limbu offers a more thorough definition of what it means to be a refugee in addition to simply forcibly leaving one's home in his article "Illegible Humanity: The Refugee, Human Rights, and the Question of Representation." Limbu argues that "to be a refugee is to lose certain rights, and in the absence of these rights a person is not recognizable as such and thus becomes socially, devoid of significance, and meaningless to the prevailing scheme of representation" (257). Therefore, the loss of home and the attachment to the past is merely one of the refugee's losses that affects their belonging, followed by others. In this broad definition of the refugee, Limbu highlights two crucial aspects: the loss of rights, and the representation tradition of the refugee's experience.

Limbu builds his discussion on the work of Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, when making a distinction between being a human and a citizen. Arendt observes that "whereas human rights are ostensibly based on the sole fact of being human, it is in fact only when the human is also a citizen of a nation-state that s/he has access to those rights" (Limbu 265). Moreover, the refugee is no longer a citizen, and is left only with the characteristic of being human, therefore, "[losing] the rights which should have been, according to common language and belief, inalienable" (ibid 265). The figure of the refugee becomes thus "uncapturable" and "nonfigurable" in the discourse of human rights. In order to maintain these rights, the human must be a citizen and not merely a human, the human status secondary to citizenship. This distinction between the human and the citizen directly affects the representation of refugees, their identity formation, and the national attitude towards them.

Furthermore, based on the dialogue of Arendt's and Agamben's observations of the refugee, Limbu argues that the refugee blurs the boundaries between bare life and political lives. He does that by being a human without citizenship, not subject to any nation-state, and simultaneously demanding protection of the law and human rights (Limbu 266). On the one hand, one can observe that the refugee is reduced to a bare life without citizen rights. However, she challenges and complicates the political discourse and national identity by demanding protection from the countries that she illegally entered and thus placing herself under the law. As a result, one can argue that the refugee becomes a figure occupying a critical status in our contemporary times that brings into the front line the definitions and conceptions of humanity, equality, identity, and home.

In the case of the refugee, I second Limbu's questioning of the "transparency" and "self-evidence" in the notion of the human, especially since this notion is often accepted "uncritically" (Limbu 258). The notion of the human is, as Limbu asserts, "the heart of many ethical and political concerns: human, person, human nature, human dignity, human rights" including the structure of representation of the refugees that "informs the notion of the human" (ibid 257). Moreover, Limbu poses questions regarding the limitation of the cursory understanding of the human, and the limitations of representing human experiences. He suggests that a space must be created to allow new narratives of representation (ibid 257). In addition to invoking the need for new representation spaces, Limbu highlights that all representation involves a certain limitation. However, according to him, these limitations are the essential infrastructure of all representations. In other words, one can argue that the need for new representation narratives of refugees' experiences does not necessarily contradict the limitation of these representations. Understanding the limits of the representation of human experiences, such as that of the refugee, is essential to portray the impossibility of grasping their experiences and thus leaves a space for the unrepresentable. Examining the popular representation of refugees and highlighting their limitations is crucial since they inform the nation about these humans, and consequently shape a certain idea about them and therefore shape the nation's collective response or attitude towards them. Departing from this sequence, their representation shapes the possibility of integration, belonging, forming an identity and eventually how these individuals will exist in this new society.

It is hard to argue against the magnitude of the "refugee crisis," and its consequences. Therefore, one would assume that there are many different stories and experiences of these people since they are a diverse group. However, these experiences and stories have been repeatedly generalized and reduced to a representation of refugees as an influx of people either in need of rescue or as an influx that is a danger to European civilization and identity. David Farrier, in his book *Postcolonial Asylum: Seeking Sanctuary Before the Law*, elaborates on the generalization of the refugees' experiences and speaks of "the 'discursive' construction of the refugee as bare humanity" (9). He argues that by generally presenting the refugees as a collective entity with impersonal stories and experiences, they become bare life: human bodies that are easily disposable. Therefore, the generalized representation of the refugees is arguably linked to their status as bare life and their lack of agency over their story. On a similar line, Limbu argues that the refugee "conjures up the image of a large mass of people linked not only … to international humanitarian aid, but also, in the popular imagination, to an overwhelming influx of unwanted persons" (268). Building on that, I argue, that the refugee has therefore always been perceived in plural terms and as a group of people that would burden a certain nation, rather than as individuals, each with their own history, memories, and sense of belonging. Therefore, it is not surprising that when the Syrian "refugee crisis" happened, the representation of these influxes on people was generalized, their subjective disappearing along with their rights to freedom and freedom of expression.

2.4 Postcoloniality and the Coloniality of Migration in the Representation of the Refugee

Madeline-Sophie Abbas in her article "Conflating the Muslim refugee and the terror suspect," observes that while the Syrian war started back in 2011, it only gained the name "crisis" in 2015 when people started crossing borders. The war, thus, only became framed as such when the limits between Europeans and Muslim "Other" were "disrupted" (Abbas 2460).

Abbas developed the concept of "Concentrationary Gothic" to address the Othering discourse of refugees that "persistently put[s] to work anxieties about national identity that have become primarily associated with the 'refugee crisis'" (Abbas 2452). Abbas is thus linking the acquired "crisis" to cultural and national fears of the "Other" as someone who will disrupt European homogeneity and civilization. Muslims, as Gothic others, Abbas

argues, are linked to “illiberal and barbaric behaviours, …, in need of modernization, democratization, and secularization” (ibid 2452). Accordingly, most refugees fall under one of the many categories of the Othering social stigmas that are directly linked to their cultural background, and that defines them in Western society (ibid 2456-57). Reflecting back on Said’s words, the Orient and the West have always been produced in popular imagination on opposite ends, even contradictory. Thus, one can argue that refugees crossing boarders triggered the “crisis” discourse that is a contemporary translation of Western superiority culturally and geographically. One can thus draw from this that the act of crossing boundaries, the arrival of refugees in Europe and the demand for refuge became the dominant discourse in representing the war and its atrocities; the humanitarian crisis was not completely neglected, refugees arriving and applying for asylum seemed to trigger the “crisis” narrative. Therefore, one can argue that from that start, controlling the representation of refugees through mainstream media emphasized Western superiority over the influx of people. The West could not refuse them as refugees, but their mediary could re-produce them in dehumanizing and “Othering” stereotypies, and more importantly as dehistoricized people, people without a past, people who could not belong.

Delving deeper into the relationship between the West and the East, Anibal Quijano develops the concept of the “coloniality of power” to analyze the interrelating practices and legacies of European colonization of Latin America, and the resulting social orders and forms of knowledge. Race as a power system is at the core of Quijano’s concept. He argues that “the racial axis has a colonial origin and character, but it has proven to be more durable and stable than the colonialism in whose matrix it was established. Therefore, the model of power that is globally hegemonic today presupposes an element of coloniality” (Quijano 533). Western superiority originates primarily from European colonial history, so, a description once used to refer to a geographical origin such as Spanish, European, and I would also add Middle Eastern, later, acquired its own “racial connotation in reference to new identities” (ibid 534). One can argue that while geographical expressions have been transformed into racial idioms, the same hegemonic powers are not allowing a geographical transition, exemplified in refugee’s mobility, to become a racial one as in crossing racial borders. Race was exported from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries to European colonies and further developed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, becoming “the basis of

the constitution of the world order and the division of the world's population" (Rodríguez 20). In this sense, racism and culturalism are still the essence of Western hegemonic power and superiority that have adopted the generalized othering representation of refugees, and have established that they can never belong in Europe.

I agree with Abbas's line of argument that being a Muslim coming from the Global South triggers specific 'fears.' These fears are the product of the orientalized and stereotypical representation of the crisis as an Islamic and barbaric occupation of civilized and secular Europe. Examining this emotion of fear help deconstruct the relationship between citizens and human refugees.

In her book *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Sara Ahmed writes, according to Senthorun Raj, "emotions are not simply embodied states; they are contact zones of movement and attachment" (Raj 456). Building on that, one can argue that emotions are influenced by certain movements, both personal movement, and movement that might affect our personal space, such as in this case, an immigrant's movement. Also, since emotions are the main contact between movement and attachment, they inevitably affect the relationship citizens have with refugees or foreigners. Focusing on the emotion of fear, Ahmed argues that, "fear, for example, projects us into an experience of the future by revealing our proximity to imminent acts or attachments (such as terrorism or terrorists) that can hurt or injure us" (ibid 456). Fear, thus, is built upon future uncertainty of harm or pain that is associated with the arrival of the stigmatized refugee as a Muslim, or terrorist, or barbaric other who is going to destroy European civilization and identity. By extension, fear, and stereotypes link refugees to imaginary acts of terrorism or disruption. All of which affect the attachment the refugees might feel, or not feel, towards the new country and society and thus their ability to belong. Furthermore, this attachment that has a long history of colonialism and racism puts the refugee in a vicious circle, a deep-rooted stereotype. As a result, a Syrian humanitarian crisis becomes a European national one. As Abbas puts it: "the Syrian Muslim represents Europe's constitutive outside, whose admittance would threaten the fundamental meaning of Europeanness" (Abbas 2456).

Moving the focus to the European reaction to the recent refugee crisis, one could say that while some countries opened their borders to the refugees, right-wing populists and nationalists had a counter-reaction. They "exposed amnesia about inter-European

histories of incessant migrations and (anti-) hegemonic struggles and Europe's history of colonialism, slavery, imperialism, settler colonialism, and transatlantic migration" (Rodrigues 18). Rodrigues claims that the current refugee crisis reactivates "the dichotomy of civilization and barbarity" (ibid 17) and creates a "moral panic fabricated on the basis of racist fantasies about a constructed inferior, animalistic, racialized Other" (ibid 18). I concur with her opinion that the refugee figure brings a European history of both migration and colonization to the surface that dominant discourse prefers to keep in the past because it complicates power relations between host countries and refugees, between those who are allowed to belong and those who are not.

The term "refugee crisis" acquired currency over the past years, a word with a double meaning. On the one hand, the term means a crisis for the migrants themselves, including dealing with the consequences of war, displacement, poverty, deprivation of health care, and safety. On the other hand, it refers to a socio-economic and political crisis for the European host countries. Neske Baerwaldt writes in her article "The European refugee crisis: crisis for whom?" that the tendency of appropriating the "refugee crisis" into a European one activating the 'us,' as innocent European under "siege", vs. 'them' dichotomy (Baerwaldt, European Border Communities.eu). It is the action of othering the refugees by instrumentalizing this dominant binary between an image of an innocent and savior West that is invaded by under-civilized and potentially terrorist refugees that came basically to disrupt a civilized and developed Europe. The refugees are "interchangeably, portrayed as victims and dangerous invaders" (ibid), clearly displaying the double meaning of the "refugee crisis." Therefore, addressing the topic of the refugee in Europe brings to the surface many intersecting issues of nationalism, history, identity, the cultural binary opposition of civilization and barbarity. As a result, the humanitarian crisis and the effect of war on these people become less central and significant by creating all these distinctions and classifications. Analyzing the refugee crisis thus can never be a singular act of examining the recent events in isolation from historical events, nor from the intersection of politics and economy, as with the entire history of humankind.

Additionally, Baerwaldt draws attention to the necessity of placing the contemporary crisis in its historical context in order to understand the situation in the Middle East in all its complexity and to realize that the crisis is not novel and spontaneous. Instead, it has a

multitude of causes that are rooted in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. She asserts that “by reaffirming Us-Them distinctions, the refugee crisis imagery erases precisely such historical and contemporary relationships of power” (ibid). In a similar vein, David Farrier argues that “it is widely acknowledged that one of the principal obstacles to the formation of positive refugee identity is the manner in which terms like ‘refugee’ and ‘asylum seeker’ are progressively dehistoricized” (4). Thus, the question of historicizing and dehistoricizing the refugees’ experiences and stories and representing them as separate to their history or the connection of that history to the history of Europe is essential to the representation of their image in European society. These figures might seem to have no historical connections with Europe other than seeking protection and refuge. Nonetheless, by taking a more in-depth critical look, one can see that these countries such as Syria have been colonized by European countries or at least “have been subjected to European imperial powers” (Rodríguez 18). Therefore, it is essential not to separate the recent history from our modern times in order to understand the current crisis and the effect the West has had on the current conflicts in the region and, by extension, the “refugee crisis.” Gerard Delanty and others argue that “one of the major problems facing Europe is the legacy of the liberal idea of tolerance ” (9). The problematic colonial history the refugee makes this tolerance legacy much harder to commit to since these identities of people from East and West have been historically established as a binary opposition: inferior and superior, colonizer and colonized, civilized and barbaric.

While the historical relationship between the East and the West is quite complicated and continues to affect contemporary politics, stories and collective memories, as scholars assert, are essential in constructing the attachments of home and belonging in the lives of refugees. Therefore, in the second chapter, I will interrogate the stories of Syrian refugees, and analyze the representation of refugees and their belonging crisis in *We Crossed a Bridge and It Trembled: Voices from Syria.*

Second Chapter: The Collective Memory of the Syrian Diaspora

3.1 Case Study: *We Crossed a Bridge and It Trembled: Voices from Syria*

In this chapter, I will examine my first case study, a book by Wendy Pearlman *We Crossed a Bridge and It Trembled: Voices from Syria*. The book was written in 2017 within the broader context of the Syrian war and its aftermath. The author, in the introduction, emphasizes her unique exposure and knowledge about the Syrian revolution. She cites her contacts with many hundreds of Syrians during the years 2011 to 2017, which led to the birth of this book. She talks about her many years of living in the Middle East. In addition, Pearlman also presents herself as an intellectual expert, a professor of political science at Northwestern University, specialized in Middle Eastern studies in addition to her ability to speak Arabic. This all works to distinguish her position from that of most journalists who produce the stories.

Her work presents a collection of real stories and testimonies of Syrian refugees that have been displaced. The writer summarizes in eight chapters the contemporary Syrian history from the seventies until 2011. She focuses on the revolution that started on March 15, 2011, and the war that followed. Furthermore, the book is composed of stories selected by the author of 88 people, including 21 Syrian women and 67 men. At the beginning of the book, the author shifts from the general to the personal twice. First, she provides to the reader the international recognition of the book, and the more personal and detailed information about Syrian refugees. Second, she moves from the dominant discourses of representation into presenting her individual expertise. These contrasts create a dialogue between popular and personal discourses. Furthermore, presenting this shift at the beginning of the book can be analyzed as an invitation to reading these stories as a personal experience. Finally, it solidifies the promise of a different and humanized representation of the interviewees.

The first two pages of the book present fourteen reviews from leading media platforms such as "The Guardian,” "The New Yorker,” "Times Literary Supplement" and others praising the extraordinary representation of these stories. Then, follows a photo of a Syrian girl playing in, what appears to be, a refugee camp with UNHCR tents in the background. The girl's head is held high with a hopeful look towards the horizon.

Showing the international recognition of the book can be assumed as an effort to position it in a particular contemporary relevance and importance. The photo, in my opinion, is meant to confront the reader on a more personal level. It puts a face to the tragic situation of one of the most vulnerable casualties of the war, the children, and their stolen childhood. However, one should take notice that putting a child's face to represent the crisis has been done numerous times during the crisis by different popular media platforms, as in the case of the famous photo of Aylan Kurdi, a 3-year-old who drowned on the Mediterranean shores. While Aylan's photo was depicted as a representation of the horrors of the war, the girl's hopeful look suggests a more optimistic narrative of prospects of refugees. Dedicated to "those who did not live to complete their stories," the book includes a map of Syria, followed by a list of names, and detailed information of all the interviewees. I believe that these pieces of information can be seen as a step towards a more personalized representation of the refugee figure. The reader is thus encouraged to be acquainted with Syria on the map, and to know as much as possible about the people behind the stories. This would help to provide the readership with a more transparent and authentic experience, as the book promises. More importantly, I think that it is a step towards humanizing the refugees in the eyes of the spectator by introducing them as individuals, negating the dominant popular representation of them as a mass influx of people.

Pearlman highlights the popular representation that has surrounded the Syrian war and its humanitarian crisis. She explains that "politicians and commentators throughout the world talk about the Syrians as victims to be pitied, bodies to be sheltered, radicals to be denounced, or threats to be feared and blocked" (Pearlman xxx), bringing into play the aforementioned dichotomous relationship between the representation of refugees civilization and barbarity (Rodrigues 17). Additionally, she criticizes these pundits by saying that "in the whirlwind of words spoken about Syrians as a global problem, it can be difficult to find chances to listen to actual Syrians, as human beings" (Pearlman xxx). What interests me in these arguments is that, first, Pearlman points out the problematic nature of some of the most dominant stereotypical representations of refugees as being a complication or even a crisis to the West. She also denounces classifying the refugees as either victims or radicals as it leaves a very narrow space to other narratives of representation. Additionally, Pearlman criticizes this lack of representation, especially when it comes to listening to

stories of Syrians as human beings. All of which implies that a different, more transparent, and authentic story of real human beings is what can be expected in her book.

Describing the nature of the interviews, Pearlman says that "the interviews … were open-ended chances for individuals to describe and reflect on life before, during, and since the start of the 2011 Syrian rebellion" (Pearlman xxxiii). She claims to open a new space for the refugees to speak about their experiences in a transparent way that has not yet been represented. Moreover, she emphasizes the fact that she has conducted these interviews in Arabic, the official language of the interviewees, which, as she asserts, has created a special connection that would have been impossible if she was relying upon translation (Pearlman xxxiii). Building on her firsthand interviewing experiences, one assumes that the representation tradition of refugees in her book must be authentic compared to the mainstream media platforms that have extensively tried to cover the Syrian war. Together with her intellectual expertise, this places her work in a different position. Pearlman mentions that the interviews ranged from a few minutes to days and years, indicating a special bond created between herself and the people she interviewed. Therefore, one can assume that the relationship between the two is equal rather than a hierarchal one. In this relationship, one can assume that Pearlman speaks *with* the refugees rather than *about* them.

The book offers its readership an overview of the complicated colonial history of Syria, starting with the Ottoman rule in the sixteenth century to covering the French colonization, ending with Assad's family rule. After the defeat of the Ottoman empire in World War I, Pearlman explains, "the league of Nations carved these Arab areas into separate nation-states under British or French colonial control" (Pearlman xxxvii). Syria came under the French Mandate rule, and the French divided the country into states based on the different ethnic groups. Damascus and Aleppo contained the Sunni Arab majorities, while the coastal region was designated for the Alawite minority, and the southeastern part was for the "heterodox ethnoreligious" Druze minority (Pearlman xxxvii-xxxviii). The summary of contemporary Syrian history works, in my opinion, to give the reader a sense of depth, originality, and historical accuracy regarding Pearlman's project. Furthermore, it gives prominence to the historical relationship between Syrians, Turks, and Europeans. It brings to the attention of the reader that there is a shared history before the "refugee

crisis." I also argue that within the context of the "coloniality of migration," the historical summary undermines the popular imagination of representing refugees as invaders threatening Europeans and the national identities.

3.2 From the Past to the Present

In the first part of the book, "Authoritarianism," the stories of the interviewees take the reader back to an earlier time during the rule of Assad the father. His authoritarian and cruel reign started in the 1970s and continued until his death in the year 2000.

The stories tell how Assad the Father ruled by the principle of reward and punishment. It was advised to stay in the regime's good graces; punishment awaited the ones who disobeyed. An example that Pearlman points to of the regime's cruelty that is still alive in Syrian collective memory is the massacre of 1982, when hundreds of men accused of membership in the Islamic Brotherhood were killed in Hama, Homs, and Aleppo. Iliyas, a dentist from Skalbiya village in the Hama Governorate, who was interviewed in Antakya, Turkey on September 5, 2013, explains that "Syria [had] the appearance of being a stable country. But, in my opinion, it wasn't real stability. It was a state of terror" (Pearlman xxii 13). In addition, several interviews make clear that Assad the Father established his empire by imposing a continuous state of fear and terror. He also eliminated any form of political or religious groupings that might threaten his sovereignty. The book explains the multitude of intersecting societal fabrics presenting Syria as a collection of communities that knew very little about each other, and as "a country of closed communities, held together by force" (Pearlman 7). The book tracks the repression, hypocrisy, and corruption that have accumulated for many decades under the rule of the Assad family. The situation had eventually exploded and resulted in the Syrian revolution.

Instead of starting the book immediately with the stories of refugees and displacement, Pearlman structures the entire book along an underlying timeline of contemporary Syrian history leading up to the revolution. She presents the revolution and the refugee status resulting from it as only one part of contemporary Syrian history. In contrast, most popular representation discourses are more invested in representing the arrival of refugees to Europe or displacement as the starting point of their representation. In

this sense, Pearlman keeps her promise of delivering a more thorough representation of history, starting with Assad, the father.

In the second part of the book "Hope Disappointed," the writer offers a flashback to the beginning of Assad junior's rule. The Syrian people saw an educated young man who came to rule the country with promises of democracy, prosperity, and growth. They generally welcomed the new head of state, but others demanded more freedom and political reform. Pearlman describes the "Damascus Spring" as an "unprecedented" political movement by civil society that demanded freedom, occurred, but it was heavily shut down by the government" (Pearlman xlii-xliii). Furthermore, Pearlman describes how in 2004, popular demonstrations began in the streets of the Kurdish city of Qamishli where the army brutally handled the protests and killed many people (Pearlman xliv). Following the build-up of the historical timeline, Pearlman shows through the structure of the book that the Syrian people were critical of their government long before the 2011 revolution. This contributes to the construction of an actively disruptive and revolutionary character of the Syrian nation and of Syrian civilians. In addition, Pearlman simultaneously emphasizes the high rates of poverty, inequality, unemployment, favoritism, and nepotism in the first decade of Bashar Al Assad's rule (Pearlman xliii-xliv). She portrays the government as the enemy of the people for at least five decades. The first two chapters thus reveal a continuous state of protest against the cruel rule of the Assad family, father and son, and its totalitarianism and dictatorship.

The remaining six chapters of the book "Revolution," "Crackdown," "Militarization," "Living War," "Flight," and "Reflections" continue to fill in the timeline by taking the reader through the events and stories of the interviewees, through the Syrian revolution from the cradle to the grave. Based on personal stories and memories, these sections vocalize the people's dream of liberation, freedom, and annihilation of a tyrant through peaceful protests. By looking back and sharing experiences, the stories of these interviews form a collective narrative that to provides a multi-faceted and intimate insight into how these peaceful demonstrations and legitimate demands resulted in a bloody war. Pearlman's book thus offers a broader perspective on this war that caused the killing and displacement of millions of Syrians and produced part of the phenomenon now known globally as the "refugee crisis."

Pearlman manages to establish a textual space where her interviewees activate and contribute to a specific collective memory. She does that by building up the historical timeline using fractions of the contemporary Syrian history of the past fifty years as well as a multitude of voices to do so. Yuval-Davis argued that "constructions of belonging have a performative dimension. Specific repetitive practices, relating to specific social and cultural spaces, which link individual and collective behavior, are crucial for the construction and reproduction of identity narratives and constructions of attachment" (203). Building on this idea, I argue that, while Pearlman is trying to represent the Syrian diaspora transparently, she is simultaneously emphasizing the notion of belonging among the Syrians through different performative dimensions and repetitive practices. In addition, she is doing that by merging individual narratives into a collective memory of belonging.

Diving further into the concept of belonging, Yuval-Davis states that "many writings (of social psychology) have focused on the different ways people belong to collectives and states, as well as on the social, economic, and political effects of moments when such belongings are displaced as a result of industrialization and/or migration" (Yuval-Davis 198). People might establish different attachments to one another during their lives. However, these attachments can be disrupted for different reasons, including migration. Pearlman's strategy of representing the Syrian refugees relies on presenting their shared history and different moments of belonging. She tries to portray Syrians as a diverse mosaic, belonging together on the basis of ideas of revolution, freedom, dignity, and liberation in addition to their shared history and regardless of their differences. The book revolves around stories of Muslims, Christians, atheists, women, and men - humans. Together they deliver a varied as well as personalized representation of refugees. Pearlman is using the concept of belonging in portraying the Syrian diaspora as a nation that can belong regardless of differences. This emphasis on belonging arguably proves that it is indeed a pillar of the “refugee crisis.” Pearlman, one can argue, is eager to open the way through her representation to a possible crossing of cultural and political boundaries.

3.3 Revolutionary Optimism

In "Revolution," we hear the first female voice in the book, speaking about the early demonstrations at Hareeqa old market in the capital Damascus. Rima, a writer from Suwayda says that "In less than one hour, videos of the incident (the demonstration) were

uploaded on YouTube. I watched them and was so happy that I cried. It meant the revolution in Syria had begun" (Pearlman 56). Female revolutionary voices and stories help to challenge the stereotypical representation of Arabs, refugees, or Muslims as repressive regarding their women, presenting the Syrian community as an advanced one, where women can express themselves. In my opinion, it also implicitly indicates to a Western readership the Syrian's capabilities of integrating into a supposedly more progressive West. More often in the book similar pattern occurs of representing a spectrum of Syrians from different cities and backgrounds. In addition to giving space to as many people as possible, I further argue that choosing such representation politics acquaint the reader with different narratives, thus, creating a wider scope of possibly identifying with the interviewees and reducing the gap between them.

The testimonies in this part of the book are emotional, full of romanticization: the revolution is connected to dreams of freedom, prosperity, and liberation, finally achievable through peaceful demonstrations similar to those in neighboring countries such as Egypt and Tunisia that succeeded in eliminating oppressive leaders and changing regimes. Showing a positive face to the Syrian revolution, is arguably essential in creating a more comprehensive image of the war in the imagination of the reader. Rima, like the other twenty-nine stories in this chapter, is proud and ecstatic because the revolution is happening in her country. All the interviewees share a similar dream of freedom in this chapter, and belong together to it regardless of their city, religion, or gender. Abdul Rahman from Hama says in the light of the national demonstrations that were happening all over Syria that he was glad to "belong to this place" (Pearlman 91).

Moreover, Pearlman selected stories that also demonstrate the national solidarity between people of different religions. Ziyad, a doctor from Homs, tells a story of a young Christian man who came to the mosque and prayed with Muslims. When people asked him about his religion and why he was in the mosque, he said, "I came here to go out in the demonstration with all of you" (Pearlman 72). Confirming this national solidarity, Marcell, a female activist from Aleppo, says: "my first blog about the revolution was on. I said that we deserved freedom. I never wrote under a fake name. That was risky, but I wanted all Syrians to know my identity: I'm a woman. And I'm Christian. And I believe that this regime should go. I don't see Muslims as people who kill Christians. I trust you. Let's go forward, together"

(Pearlman 92). Using Marcell's story in the last few pages of the "Revolution" chapter" is significant, in my opinion. Before delving into the gloomy stories of killing and torture in the "Crackdown," Pearlman leaves the reader with one last emphasis on the solidarity and the state of belonging among Syrians and the intended state of peace rather than war. Marcell's testimony opposes the popular representation of Muslims, who will become Muslim refugees or the uncivilized Other in the dominant representation tradition, which is violent.

Examining the collective memory shared by the interviewees, I recognize the theory by Sara Ahmed, who argues that "the telling of stories is bound up with – touched by – the forming of new communities. Memory is a collective act which produces its object (the 'we'), rather than reflects on it" (343). Up until that moment in the book's timeline, the people shared the feeling of belonging to their country, a common cause, and one another. They are indeed represented by Pearlman as a community sharing a collective memory where the 'we' is clear and definitive. Through this careful inclusion of both female and Christian voices, Pearlman, I argue, establishes a collective memory that is shared by all spectra of the Syrian nation, and not limited to Muslim men. Furthermore, one can assume that Pearlman is paving the way towards the identification between the reader and the interviewee. By creating this possibility, the reader gets to see the human in the refugee, and further understand that becoming a refugee is a small part of one's life, rather than a fixed single and stable identity.

3.4 Disappointment & Belonging

Following the optimistic tone in the "Revolution" section, there is a shift in the tone of the stories in the fourth chapter, "Crackdown." The name of the chapter itself is expressive of the gloomy stories of torture, killing, imprisonments, disappearances, and the horrors of the war that dominate the storyline. However, the first statement in this chapter is by Miriam, a former student from Aleppo, who describes to the reader that people awaited a civilized and peaceful response from the government, emphasizing that peace was equally important to freedom. Miriam also reminds the reader that once, they believed in Bashar Al Assad, and he had a chance to live up to the expectation of his nation. Nonetheless, he did not, and the people could not accept tyranny any longer (Pearlman 99). This first testimony fills up some of the gaps in popular representations of the Syrian war and its casualties. It highlights the

increasing rift between the government and the people and the last's growing feeling of dis-belonging to the state.

The notion of belonging as an "emotional attachment, about feeling 'at home'" (Yuval-Davis 197), witnessed a drastic shift in Syria before and after the war. Through its brutal/violent response to the revolution, the Syrian regime contributed to intensifying and deepening the feeling of dis-belonging nationwide. Adam from Latakia explains in his story how the regime treated the cities differently based largely on ethnic differences. Adam elaborates, "in some places; they tried soft politics. In other places, like Latakia, they went extreme from the very beginning. It was a manipulative, evil way of doing business" (Pearlman 105). Pearlman, at the beginning of the book, clarifies that her work covers the stories and experiences of the people who lived in the revolutionary part in Syria, outside the regime control. As a result, the opinions of the people who lived under regime control are still very vague, since the book covers people in areas that supported the revolution. Adam's story, however, reveals how the Assad regime ruthlessly treated the territories under his control, because losing territory would have meant a possible defeat. He continues, "the regime was saying that groups of radicals were coming. It was like, 'imagine what will happen to you if one of those terrorists get into power.' Alawites that they had no choice but to be 100 percent behind the leadership" (Pearlman 106). From this becomes clear that the Syrian regime was thus creating spaces of fear and hatred between the people from different cities and different ethnicities, in order to create a state of dis-belonging to each other. The goals and hopes of the revolution, as Adam puts them, were "political reform, participation, real presentation, and some actual active citizenship in the country" (Pearlman 107). The regime saw in these goals and demands a real threat to its domination over the country. As a result, he claims, they did "everything possible to put sects against each other and create a toxic environment," creating a lack of trust and enemies everywhere (Pearlman 108). Adam's testimony shows the reader the level of complexity that characterizes the revolution, indicating that a more thorough discussion and understanding of the revolution is needed before adopting popular opinions and representations.

Following the method of having as many diverse Syrians groups as possible focalize, Pearlman introduces to the reader the secular voice of Mustafa from Salamiyah, an atheist

and Marxist barber. He explains how the revolutionaries started establishing coordination groups that would benefit from people's expertise in order to help the revolution succeed: "age and education and social class weren't important. This is a major indicator that the Syrian people are not backward" (Pearlman 120). Here, Mustafa's testimony comes in the middle of the "Crackdown" chapter to introduce the reader to yet another part of the Syrian nation. Pearlman's representation of the Syrian people as intelligent rather than backward, I believe, challenges the dominant cultural hierarchy between the West and the East in popular representations of refugees. It also challenges the dominant representation that leans on the binary between civilization and barbarity.

The "Militarization" chapter covers the equipping of the revolution with armed groups supported by many countries, European and others, that interfered in the demonstrations. Some of these countries supported the regime, and others rallied for the rebellion. The result, however, was mass destruction. Many cities were bombarded and destroyed, and hundreds of thousands were either killed or displaced. Captain, a former FSA (Free Syrian Army) fighter from Aleppo, says, "when the demonstrations began, the security forces would come. We'd throw rocks at them, and they'd use tear gas against us. Then they started opening fire on us, …, then we needed weapons, too" (Pearlman 145). War became a reality for Syrians and an inevitability after the demonstrations. The interviews suggest that destroying the country was a choice made by the regime and the international community. Pearlman thus represents Syrian refugees as people who did not rush into war. Instead, the war was forced upon them. Gradually in this chapter, notions of belonging among the Syrian people become vague. While "we" at the beginning of the book was a clear definition of Syrians, now it becomes rather a vague signifier where the shared states of belonging slowly transform into a longing to belong to a place and a shared present.

The people in the book give voice to disappointment in the international community. When the Assad regime bombed the city of Homs or when they used chemical weapons, protesters expected action from Western and European countries. Still, they received nothing, as Ashraf, an artist from Qamishli, asserts (Pearlman 151). Abu Faris, a fighter from rural Idlib, shares the same opinion: "not a single one (country) is doing anything to protect any fraction of the rights that I should have as a human being living on earth. I'm not saying that the conscious of the international community is asleep. I'm saying

that conscious doesn't exist at all" (Pearlman 160). Abu Faris's testimony invites the reader to question the nature of human rights as they have been used and abused by different nations, and by us humans. Reflecting on the distinction made by several scholars between being a human and being a citizen, this testimony can be seen as a clear embodiment of the superiority of citizenship over being a human, showing the cruelty of being only a human. I agree, therefore, with Ahmed's line or argumentation describing the migrant as "impossibility of the human as homely" that "ironically confirms the violence of humanism" (Ahmed 333). Here, in addition to human rights being exclusively reserved for citizens, home becomes a luxury for citizens as well, and with-it possibilities of belonging. Migration indicates the loss of home as a physical place, and consequently, the loss of belonging as a feeling at home. As I have established in the previous chapter, when the human, in this case, the refugee, is only left with her humanity, rights vanish since human rights in name are rather citizen's rights in action.

References to a state of dis-belonging dominate the stories in the book from here onward. The shared dreams of the revolution, as well as political and social reform are shattered, and a state of mass destruction and war takes control of the country. First, stories about leaving the country start to be told, demonstrating a general sentiment of the moral and material defeat of the free Syrian nation, gradually transforming into the Syrian diaspora. A sentiment of loss of humanity, reconciliation, and the acceptance of death dominates the final stories of the book. Amin, a physical therapist from Aleppo says, "I'd open my contact list (of the phone) and it was all Martyr, Martyr, Martyr,…" (Pearlman, 178). Amin's story that of the refugee's status of losing not only a country and a home, but also their loved ones, and often leaving them with nothing to belong.

Only towards the end of the book does the reader come across the first mention of the word refugee, even though all the characters in the book are themselves refugees. The people within this book are thus only become defined as refugees recently in their life and history. Osama, a student from al-Quasyr, says, "when al-Qusayr fell, I felt that I became a refugee" (Pearlman 189). Refugeeism manifests a loss of connection to the social location, and to the emotional attachment to a place with memories. It also signifies the loss of the present and the future, and the loss of home as Sara Ahmed puts it: "the narrative of leaving home produces too many homes and hence no Home" (Ahmed 330). Henceforth, a general

effect of estrangement dominates the mood of the storytelling towards the end of the book; most of the country is either destroyed or controlled by either the regime or one of the many armed forces, and the human in the people telling their stories gives way to the refugee. Reflecting on their stories and the war that has been devouring Syria for the past nine years, Ghayth, a former student from Aleppo, reflects on their fate as follows: "many people aren't happy with the refugees coming to their country. Maybe we came illegally, but every other door was shut in our faces." (Pearlman 273). Sami, a graduate from Damascus, says, "I'm not a traitor. I love Syria. But I believe in human rights, and I can't feel like I belong to a society that oppresses women or children or people from other ethnic backgrounds" (Pearlman 275). Ghayth's experience reflects the mainstream media representation of the "refugee crisis." His words are full of powerlessness towards the situation, and the popular representation. He is, hence, presenting to the reader the popular reception of refugees in many countries. Sami's words, however, takes the reader to a new level of representation by indicating a new sentiment. He is defending himself from being represented as a traitor to his country, which might seem peculiar because he left and is not fighting or killing anyone. This defensive status, one can argue, generates from the shame of leaving one's home that is being projected on refugees, directly or indirectly, by the media. However, Pearlman does not elaborate on the popular representations touched upon in these stories limiting her representation on the edges of more challenging topics. Even though she often succeeds in the book in creating possibilities of presenting authentic narratives, it is telling that they are all representative of the past rather than the present.

On the final page of the book Husayn, a playwright from Aleppo, shares a last concluding thought: "we've accepted the fact that we need to make our dreams smaller if that's what it takes to keep dreaming" (Pearlman 285). The stories in the last chapter of the book represent the Syrian people as a nation that once had been able to belong to a place, society, ideas, or each other. Simultaneously, through their stories, these people explain that they are suffering from a nostalgic longing to be able to recreate their previous belonging attachment in their new countries. Marcell, the activist from Aleppo, had eventually to seek refuge in Turkey after ISIS took control of parts of the country (Pearlman 200). Lana and Osama share their stories of humiliation in the neighboring Arab countries

such as Jordan arriving as refugees, and the endless difficulties they suffered in Germany and Denmark. In parallel to the difficulties and trauma, they end their stories on a positive note, "I'm happy now," says Osama, "in the end, there's hope" (Pearlman 238). In other words, Pearlman makes sure to represent Syrian refugees as people with prospects of belonging in the new countries where they seek asylum. To me, it seems that the word hope also resonates with the photo of the Syrian girl at the beginning of the book fighting for her childhood with her head held high.

However, Pearman falls short in representing the full stories of these people after they have arrived in Europe. She does not engage with the details of their current lives as she has done with their past. She avoids delving into the difficulties of some of the interviewees in Europe and the potential of exclusion or racism they might be facing based on their status as the refugee, Muslim, "Other."

3.5 Inclusive exclusion

In *We Crossed a Bridge and It Trembled*, Wendy Pearlman tries to include the whole spectrum of the Syrian community in collecting their stories about the revolution, displacement, history and potential future: women, children, men, Muslims, atheists, Christians, educated people, fighters, workers, and others. As I have shown throughout my discussion of the book, the writer portrays the refugee figure as a human being, first and foremost. In her representation of them with their former education or job title, she tries to create an image of a normal person, challenging the popular representation in numerous media of refugees as mere numbers among the influx of people. Furthermore, she represents them as people, none of whom are interested in disrupting Europe's homogeneity. She only delves into their lives as refugees towards the end. They became refugees through the destruction of their home.

Even though Pearlman herself challenges the stereotypical traditions of representing refugees, she does not critically engage with any of her interviewees in asking questions and addressing this representation tradition. The present day lives of the refugees she interviews remain mostly vague, and the book has an open ending where the reader is left to use her imagination to construct a story of the present and the future of these people. The refugee figure is therefore left in a liminal space between the past and the present

where a home is not constructed, and belonging is not established. The reader is also ignorant as to whether the politics of belonging, the exclusion, or inclusion of others, is ambiguous. Therefore, one can assume that refugees are racially excluded since creating attachments is not solely dependent on social locations and collective identities, whose value and how they are judged is of crucial importance (Yuval-Davis 203). Pearlman, throughout the book, gives substantial emphasis to belonging. By not addressing the status of belonging in the present lives of the refugees suggests that this may be at the heart of their crisis.

Pearlman seems keen on representing the Syrian refugee crisis within an interesting and informing historical and social context, positing her work in a more transparent light. However, she seems to discard the history and the complicated socio-political situation of the queer minority in Syria, and among the Syrian diaspora. The study of homosexual history in the Middle East has always been scarce as Bruce Dunne asserts in his article "Homosexuality in the Middle East: An Agenda for Historical Research." Dunne asserts that during the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries "European travelers in the 'Orient' were impressed or shocked by its exhibiting what appeared to be a widespread and relatively 'public' homosexual culture" (56). Homosexual and queer refugees are present in different European countries and are included in many reports from the UNHCR as a part of the Syrian diaspora. It seems rather peculiar to marginalize them in a work of representation that positions itself as different. Therefore, one would argue that even though Pearlman tries to position her work in a more transparent light, she is still trying to produce a work that can be favorable among popular narrative discourses.

Moreover, the book completely disregards the representing of queer people who are part of the Syrian society and Syrian diaspora. As a minority, they have especially suffered under the rule of the Assad regime that criminalizes homosexuality. They suffered as well during the war under the rule of the Islamic caliphate that controlled part of the country and executed LGBTQ community members publicly and horrifically. As a part of the Syrian diaspora, they have their own stories and challenges when it comes to the concept of belonging and its politics, and the dichotomy between their past and present. Pearlman, in my opinion, carefully chooses the characters in the book to present a diverse group that challenges the reader's conceptions of the stereotypical image of Syrian refugees, showing

these people as a community that could belong, communicate, and have dreams. However, a community that is not too challenging for a Western reader to accept and tolerate. The book falls shy from addressing issues and stories of sexuality, gender, gender equality, and race. These topics might prove more challenging to represent than the summary of the history of colonization by European countries. Nevertheless, addressing them, I argue, is absolutely essential in creating new possibilities of representation narratives of refugees and their belonging crisis.

Third Chapter: On Being Queer and Being a Refugee

4.1 Case Study: "The Crossing"

In this chapter, I will analyze the second cultural object, "The Crossing," an exhibition by the New-York-based Colombian artist and activist Carlos Motta. "The Crossing" was exhibited in the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, the Netherlands, between the 16th of September 2017 until the 21st of January 2018. The exhibition is an installation of eleven video portraits that shed light on the journey of queer refugees coming from different countries, including Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan. It represents their experiences in their home countries, during and after arriving in the Netherlands, and while seeking asylum. Motta focuses on the experiences and stories of queer refugees who are a minority within the minority of refugees in Europe. Therefore, examining this cultural object is of importance in my quest to analyze the crisis of belonging faced by refugees and the tradition of their representation. My analysis will be limited to and depend on two video portraits of two transgender women from Syria provided by the artist on the Vimeo platform.[2]

While queerness might take many different definitions and identifications, in this study, queerness refers to non-normative sexual orientations and practices. I agree with Senthorun Raj's line of argument that queerness and subjectivity are closely associated with one another. Queerness, Raj argues, "is not ultimately confined to a discrete identity or identification," it rather exposes our non- normative sexual, gendered, or cultural

[2] Other video portraits were not available publicly and could not be obtained

differences (Raj 456). The dynamics forming identity and identification, including queerness, thus must be analyzed in their specific cultural and historical contexts (Raj 456). Therefore, one can argue that one's queerness is deeply connected to people's different cultural and historical backgrounds, and that there cannot be one definition that fits all queer individuals due to the diversity of their backgrounds. This is a statement and self-definition that has been taken by the refugees themselves in the video portraits and the artist's representation of them since non-normative sexual and gender orientations are the central themes in the exhibition. Moreover, the refugee's sexuality and gender identity are central to the politics of their representation.

The stories of the queer refugees in the exhibition reveal the challenges they encountered living in homophobic and transphobic cultures where they suffered oppression and discrimination. It was simply impossible for them to come out and express their non-conforming genders and sexuality. In a marginalized phenomenon within the "refugee crisis," the art project presents itself as a platform for queer refugees to express themselves. They expose the injustice and oppression they experienced in their countries. In addition to the possibility to show glimpses of their pasts, the exhibition is simultaneously space for these refugees to tell their more recent experiences in the asylum center after arriving in the Netherlands, the assumed sanctuary. Unfortunately, as they tell, the exclusion, abuse, and discrimination continued in the Dutch asylum-seeking camps, "which often failed to obtain the protection they sought from Dutch authorities" (The Crossing: Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam). The video installation allows the participants to represent their continuing liminality as their past is haunting their present as well as their hopes and prospects of living free and dignified lives.

Stylistically, the participants address the camera directly in the video installations in a "confessional style" where they tell their personal stories of persecution. The setting is simple with a dark background, giving the focus to the person in the screen. They tell a combination of past stories in their home countries, their journey across the sea and crossing borders to reach the Netherlands, and finally of their encounters with Dutch refugee policies. The visitor is confronted with different and usually multilayered histories and realities that are forced upon queer refugees, including dreadful war narratives and forced migration. The participants use their native language in telling their stories,

accompanied with subtitles in English, which allows for a more personal and genuine experience. Even though the spectator might not understand the mother tongue of the participant, the multitude of feelings and emotions are transmitted to them through the refugee's voice. In addition, the participants unravel the "deep-rooted discrimination LGBTQ people continue to face throughout the world" (The Crossing: Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam). However, the stories mainly reflect upon the discrimination from people with Eastern, or especially Islamic, background whether in their home countries or the camps, as this research will show. Participants do not reflect on the discrimination in the host countries, such as the Netherlands.

Aside from representing stories of war, suppression, and the discrimination of queer individuals coming from different countries, the exhibition consists of twenty historicized objects selected by the artist himself from different collections in the Rijksmuseum, Tropenmuseum, and Amsterdam Museum. These objects are shown in two glass cabinets, and they include photos, porcelain, souvenir sculptures, and other objects that refer back to the colonial and imperial history of the Netherlands. According to the museum description, these objects exemplify where different diverse groups, cultural identities, and social positions were excluded, reshaped, and dominated by Dutch national traditions. The exhibition's representation of the stories and different histories of the refugees and their experiences in their home countries and the juxtaposing history of the Netherlands as a colonial and imperial power is innovative. In both of the case studies I am treating, Pearlman and Motta have taken history and historical objects as significant elements of their works. In my opinion, this format is promising as an open space for a different narrative that represents the refugees' experiences and examines the intersection between these experiences and race, gender, and different histories.

Additionally, the exhibition of queer stories in the light of the contemporary refugee crisis challenges the idea in which Europe in general, and the Netherlands, in particular, are perceived as " a humanist state that breeds hospitality, a welcoming refugee policy, and social and cultural tolerance through the framework of international human rights" (The Crossing: Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam). More critically, these stories reveal the clash between the Western tendency to advocate for LGBT community rights and accepting them as refugees. Of the eleven video portraits, I will focus on the stories of Layan and Butterfly,

two transgender women from Syria. I will examine how the crisis of belonging translates through their stories and experiences in Syrian and as refugees in the Netherlands. I will investigate how the project reflects upon the issue of the participants' belonging and their representation of the politics of belonging in their home countries and the Netherlands. Also, I will explore how the project presents new narratives of refugee representation, and what the limitations of these representations are.

4.2 Queer Belonging in Syria

Nine years ago, when the war in Syria started, LGBTQ+ community members, similar to most Syrians, found themselves in a dangerous situation, surrounded by oppression as well as war, mass destruction, and unimaginable circumstances. Many of them had to flee the country dreaming of reaching Europe and seeking asylum in a pursue of safety and freedom and the chance to create a new home where they could belong and be themselves.

As Senthorun Raj demonstrates in his article "A/Effective Adjudications: Queer Refugees and the Law" worldwide, there are 76 countries that criminalize same-sex activities, and 13 countries have capital punishment for such 'offence' (454). Among the many countries that criminalize non-conforming gender individuals in Syria, where the penalty on homosexuality, whether it be same-sex intercourse, or non-conforming gender roles, might reach up to seven years in prison. Building on this judicial fact, queer individuals are thus liminal figures "inhabiting liminal spaces and temporalities" as Thomas Wimark writes in his article "Homemaking and perpetual liminality among queer refugees" (3). Liminality, as Wimark asserts, is a period between the past, present, and future possibilities of refugees in their asylum-seeking process (3). Liminality also means "a transitional or indeterminate state between culturally defined stages of a person's life" (OED). For queers in Syria, however, they have been as the stories of Layan and Butterfly attest, living in a liminal space in their home country where their past and recent present no clear prospects. Even though the exhibition efficiently highlights these critical liminal spaces or temporalities of queers, it does not show any silver lining for their end as if suggesting they will be perpetual. He adds, "thinking of queer individuals as inhabiting liminal spaces and temporalities, in general, has been a principle understanding in queer studies of home and

homecoming" (Wimark 3). These spaces and temporalities appear queer studies scholar Jack Halberstam argues, "in opposition to the institutions of family, heterosexuality, and reproduction" (Wimark 3). Even before the war, the situation of the LGBT community in Syria was critical, as its members were seen as opposing their families and society by their mere existence.

Furthermore, as a minority group, they were neither recognized nor protected by the law. Instead, they were pursued and persecuted. The exclusion of LGBT individuals came in different shapes. Like the social and judicial systems, families rarely accepted their queer children since "the process of creating home spaces is (thus) often achieved by regulating behavior and excluding unfit individuals" (Wimark 4). For families, having children that are more adaptable to the surrounding social norms is essential in the family's process of creating a home. As a result, rejection becomes the solution to exclude queer or unfit individuals. I argue that living in such a precarious and perilous situation, makes it impossible for these individuals to belong to a place and a society where they are ultimately rejected and oppressed, since belonging in its core is an emotional attachment about feeling at home (Yuval-Davis 197).

In "The Crossing," Layan, a 30-year-old transgender woman from Damascus, Syria, and a current refugee in the Netherlands tells her story of estrangement. Growing up in her home country, she was not satisfied with her body as a man because she was aware that she is a woman from the inside. Upon that recognition, her troubles with her family started. In my opinion, this has to do with the fact that, as Wimark and other queer scholars also assert, family home spaces are built on an assumed heteronormativity (Wimark 4). In her video-portrait, Layan says that "the problem started when my parents noticed that my behavior was different from a normal boy" (Carlo Motta Vimeo). The word 'normal' in Layan's statement stands out, in my opinion, because it reflects certain assumptions of families in the Middle East regarding their children's sexual and gender behavior. So, as Layan's story shows, a normal boy would not be expected to act like girls and prefer their company to that of other boys. Building on that, families have a fixed assumption regarding 'correct' sexualities, as well as expectations of performing gender roles (Wimkar 7). Since family homes are heavily dependent on these fixated presumptions and anticipations, these spaces thus result in treating queer individuals as "outcasts" (ibid 4). Excluding queer

individuals from these family spaces results eventually in their incapability to create affinity with the initial belonging space, the family. Layan has dreams of marrying and having children as a woman, a dream incomprehensible and surely unacceptable to her family and society. Since belonging as I have established an emotional attachment about feeling at home, Layan could not establish the feeling of belonging in her home since her identity as a woman was utterly refused.

Losing the hope that her family and her close circle would understand her, Layan found affiliation with a group in the LGBT community. She says, “I started feeling real with them outside” (Carols Motta Vimeo). After her failed initial belonging with her original family, she was able to find an alternative with a group of LGBT people with whom she was able to be her authentic self. Wimark asserts that having a queer community “offers ways to attach to places and create new belonging” (12). The video portrait seems to confirm this idea: Layan and her group would meet in secret and share their problems and stories of similar sufferings. Having a community that one is able to relate to and exist in is thus essential to creating an attachment of belonging. Syria, as she says, is a country that offers no protection for their LGBT minority, the regime instead prosecutes them.

Moreover, LGBT individuals might be killed by their own families in ‘honor crimes’: their families consider their queer children “deviant” and a disgrace to them. Layan tells the viewer that her own father used to say that he would have preferred to have a thief or an addict for a son rather than a gay or transgender. She explains that the LGBT community is “targeted by society, by the regime and from all directions,” especially after the war where security measures were strengthened, and more parties were besieging them (Carlos Motta Vimeo). Even though Layan and her group were able to establish belonging to each other secretly, and share their stories, lives, and suffering, their belonging to their outside society and country was minimal because of the discrimination against them. Moreover, the community’s fragile attachment that they created among themselves in their country was threatened by imprisonment or even death by the outside rejection, whether it is the family or the law. Layan, therefore, could not belong to a place where she could be herself, whether with her family, in the street, at work, or generally in her home country. For her, life was made up of different roles she would play in different situations. That was essential to secure survival. Her inability to belong in her country manifests itself in and is opposed by

creating a new language and vocabularies to use within her queer community that people outside her community would not be able to understand. Simultaneously this creates a new layer of disconnection with her society.

During the war, the situation for the LGBT community in Syria worsened. Many of Layan's friends, her surrogate family, were taken at one of the numerous checkpoints in the country, and some of them never returned. They were either killed or imprisoned. In addition to the regime, ISIS began to persecute queer people as well "they (ISIS) threw them (gays) from a high building, which is one of the worst ways to die," says Layan (Carlos Motta Vimeo). The representing the stories of the Syrian queer refugees in "The Crossing" is, in fact, the underlying personal story of oppression within the bigger context of the Syrian war and the resulting humanitarian crisis. However, in my opinion, neglecting the presentation of the revolutionary aspect of contemporary Syrian history, especially in light of the historicized items present in the exhibition, is rather peculiar for several reasons. First, the war in Layan's story comes and destroys her intimate space of belonging that she and her friends have shared, which creates a gap between the pre-war situation and the post-war situation, namely during the protests. So, the stories do not reveal the relationship between the queer community and their society during this period nor whether any kind of belonging to an idea or prospect has been shared.

In addition, neither Layan nor Butterfly reveal what their opinions regarding the pro-democratic demonstrations are. We, as spectators, do not know whether they have participated in the revolution that aimed to demolish the regime that has been persecuting them for decades. In their representation, the queer community in their country does not engage with any form of activism in light of the revolution; they are instead represented as passive victims of the war and its consequences. Reflecting on the previous case study where the revolution was represented as an action that made people from different states and backgrounds belong together and to the action, the war here is mainly used to highlight the further oppression of queers. So, as a minority group, LGBT people were rejected by their families, targeted and rejected by their government, and by ISIS and other Islamist groups fighting in Syria, destroying all chances of belonging in their own country.

Butterfly, another participant in "The Crossing," is a 46-year-old, transgender woman from Syria, also living in the Netherlands as a refugee. For her, life in Syria was complicated.

She would continuously receive “malicious” looks from people, and as a result, would change schools every year. After many years of exclusion and discrimination, she was able to make friendships with other LGBT community members who accepted her and would meet in secret to talk about their problems and support each other, similar to Layan’s situation. Adding to the many other difficulties Layan mentioned, religion, says Butterfly, is one of the main obstacles in the Syrian society for LGBT. Being, generally, an Islamic country, homosexuality is considered a sin punishable by the law, as Layan clarified. Life for both Butterfly and Layan was no longer tolerable in Syria after the war. Therefore, they decided to flee the country and come to the Netherlands by “death boats,” as Butterfly calls them. Butterfly’s story back in Syria was one of oppression and hatred, resulting in many years of agony and continuous movement between schools and neighborhoods. Thus, she used to live in a continuous liminal temporality.

In parallel with Layan’s story, Butterfly was able to create a safe space shared with other LGBTQ members where they would meet in secret and share their problems and support each other. Butterfly, unlike Layan, highlights the issue of religion, specifically, Islam as the main obstacle for the LGBT community in Syria. Butterfly’s experiences with Islam in Syria resonates with other Muslim refugees in the camps in the Netherlands. Specifying Islam, in this case, affirms already existing stereotypes that condemn people who are expected to be Muslims or come from a Muslim country of being homophobic or transphobic, and activates the cultural hierarchy and the civilized-uncivilized binary between Westerns and non-Westerns. I believe that both Layan and Butterfly must remain transparent in telling their stories. However, I also believe that it is essential to highlight the fact that there have not been any reported incidents where Syrian people from other religions, such as Christianity, have been more tolerant or accepting of their queer children. Therefore, queer oppression in Syria is a socio-cultural tradition that is not limited to Muslims. Building on that, the queer crisis of belonging in Syria is a social, cultural, and religious tradition that was intensified by the war, making life intolerable for LGBT community members. The state of estrangement to Syria because of the war was a national dis-belonging shared by people of all religions, backgrounds, sexual and gender orientations even though neither Motta nor the participants reflect on the connection between the queer community and the revolution.

4.3 Queer Belonging in the Netherlands

Queer studies assert that “migration and home are intertwined as a search for belonging, comfort, and safety” (Wimark, 3). As I have established earlier, belonging could not be found for queer individuals in their homes because they are packed with social norms and expectations regarding sexuality and gender roles. Migration thus becomes way for queer people to find new homes where they can belong. For Layan, the war in her country was a secondary reason for leaving. The main reason for her was “the persecution” she was already suffering before the war (Carlos Motta Vimeo). She emphasizes that the initial loss of her home as a sanctuary, was her main reason to leave. Nevertheless, the intersection between the political and the social situations of queer people in Syria cannot be neglected since the war intensified their imprisonment and persecution.

In transnational migration studies, scholars recognize that refugees inhabit a “liminal period,” a stage that is between their pasts and what they have left behind, and their present and future in their asylum-seeking process, as Wimark argues (3). Hence, the concept of reaching safety is often emphasized among these scholars in the light of refugee liminality (ibid 3). In order to deconstruct the crisis of belonging for refugees, and queer refugees in this chapter, in the new countries where they arrive, it is vital to acknowledge this liminal space they occupy. As for the concept of home, even though some scholars consider home a potential space of belonging, safety, and stability, in the case of refugees, these perceptions might be simplistic and even considered naïve. Home can also mean “alienation, violence and fear” (ibid 4), especially in the case of queer refugees. They often could not belong in their first homes and had to seek refuge elsewhere. In the video-portraits, I recognize Wimark’s definition of the home as a “site of ambiguity, …, always in the making and not a finished project” (4) especially due to the continuous moving between the camps. Most of the prominent discourses describing queer refugees evolve a story of a transition from an oppressing environment in their home countries to the liberty and freedom in the promised land. Assumptions and expectations of the refugees entail the possibility of creating a home where they can “live their sexualities and gender performances without punishment” (ibid 10). The representations of the queer refugees in “The Crossing” fall within this popular narrative of home seeking and sexual and gender liberation. It is striking, however, that the issue of the possibility of belonging in these new

spaces is scarcely discussed by media bodies treating the refugee crisis. Similarly, the representations in "The Crossing" do not reflect on the theme of belonging even though the general context of these stories revolves around the war and the humanitarian crisis and queer inequality.

After their journey in the rubber boats, or "death boats," as Butterfly calls them, Layan and Butterfly arrived in the Netherlands. After her arrival, Layan stayed in the asylum center posing as a man for seventeen days, not able to reveal her authentic identity as a transgender woman out of fear. Layan might be expected to feel free and proud regarding her gender identity in the Netherlands, instead, she is afraid of coming out. One can argue that Layan has moved from one set of assumptions exemplified in correct sexuality and gender identity to another set of expectations in the Netherlands. Being a queer refugee, a problematic liminal figure, unpacking this emotion of fear is crucial to understanding the gap between refugees and Dutch authorities. Furthermore, it helps to understand liminality and belonging for queer refugees. Fear cripples Layan's first possibility to find belonging in Ter Apel camp because of her encounter with people who might reactivate the cycle of rejection and oppression she lived in Syria. While the fear of the refugee as a "barbaric other" is built on a future possibility or proximity to harm and danger (Raj 456), Layan's fears are more realistic when compared to the ideological fears of refugees. A man in the camp attacked her, so she felt obliged to tell the authorities that she was a transgender person and had to move again.

Queer refugees are forced to move between many different camps because of their non-conforming gender identity that many other refugees reject. These other refugees feel entitled to humiliate or attack them as the participants assert. Therefore, as Wimark suggests many, if not all, queer refugees are "in a state of liminal homemaking" (3). Layan and Butterfly's forced liminal status, one can argue, is based on the impossibility of stability due to the continuous moving, and not being able to settle in one specific place and establishing belonging. Both Layan and Butterfly reflected on their liminal status of being taped between the past and the present as negative. Moreover, it is related, in my opinion, to another impossibility with this being surrounded by rejection and hatred which disables them from creating relationships among themselves or other people. However, I find the

fixation on the negative relationship between the refugees in the camps emphasizes the stereotype of other refugees as homophobic and uncivilized.

Her final camp, after many, was the refugee center in Alphen aan den Rijn, where she felt lonely and scared. After some time, she met other LGBT people, and they became a family. They would, as a group, move together inside and outside the camp. Layan found sanctuary and empowerment with her LGBT group since they could understand and relate to one another's challenges and difficulties. As a result, one can argue that Layan was able to establish a belonging attachment with them, since the home is not necessarily associated with a place, but it can be associated with people as well (ibid 4).

As for the Netherlands as a country, Layan declares that she thinks it is one of the best countries in the world. Nonetheless, there was a clash between her expectations and the treatment she received. She says, "I was expecting them (in the Netherlands) to feel my pain better than they did" (Carlos Motta Vimeo). Layan, like her friends, discovered that the Netherlands also has certain values and expectations from them as queer individuals, such as being "out and proud." I second Wimark in his argument that "these expectations fail to comprehend that it is common for queer refugees to hide their sexual desires and to perform gender according to cis-gender expectations" (Wimark 11). Moreover, as it shows in the story of Layan, there seems to be a cultural gap in the refugee centers that does not include understanding the background of fear, persecution, and oppression and how these people can move past that. This cultural and sexual difference is what prevents, in my opinion, establishing a real feeling of belonging.

Another problem for Layan and her LGBT family was their placement with heterosexual refugees in the camps. She believes that "those people (heterosexuals) were new to the country and did not understand it was different from Syria" (Carlos Motta Vimeo). Her only solution was to go on a hunger strike. The authorities responded that LGBT people are similar to all the people in the camp, and they are expected to act accordingly. She found it admirable that they are seen as equals to others. Nonetheless, even if authorities in the camps believed that, other refugees did not. At one point, Layan is threatened in the camp by one of the other refugees, who declared that ISIS should have killed her. The socio-cultural and religious differences between the Syrian diaspora in the Dutch refugee camps seems to widen the gap between different refugees further. Layan's

statement highlights the established assumptions about refugees as being uncivilized in terms of diversity, which implies that similar behavior would take place against any Western queer community or Western traditions which are different from theirs. What is again lacking in this representation is the emphasis on placing the queer community outside the Syrian diaspora rather than seeing it as a vital part of it, which results in a representation as a victimized minority within the minority of refugees. This representation tradition highlights the challenges of these individuals to belong whether within their diasporic community or in the broader Dutch community, where certain expectations must be met. Especially the fact that in the eyes of Dutch law queer refugees are not entitled to special treatment or a special camp, because they are treated as normal individuals, seems not to be accepted or expected by Layan.

In the first chapter, I explained the distinction between human and citizen and explained how human rights even though they emphasize the human, only apply to citizens. The refugee thus inhabits this liminal space between humans and citizens, where there is no question about their humanity, but as non-citizens under no nation-state, their position and thus their rights can be debated. This liminal space between humans and citizens is at the heart of another dilemma that Layan is confronted with as a refugee. Her lack of citizenship determines her inability to obtain hormonal medications to continue her treatment “they (camp authorities) refused it because I didn’t have the residency permit yet.” Thus, she is denied the only thing she truly wants, which is being her authentic self. Eventually, she sells her cellphone in order to buy the medication “illegally.” After losing humanity in her home country, dignified life is what she aspires, like any other human being. For her, it is essential to present the LGBT refugee minority as they indeed are: people who love others, love peace, and are more humane than many others. Even in her attempt to positively represent queer refugees, she does not position the queer community as willing to belong within the diasporic community. There is no mention of any activism that is intended to help others in Syria or the Middle East. Furthermore, the representation is limited to their experiences in the camp, so, the spectator does not know how queer refugees are being accepted within the broader Dutch community, and how the racial gap is affecting them.

After arriving in the Netherlands, Butterfly applied for asylum in the Ter Apel center, where she is received in a special safe house for queer refugees. After twelve days in Ter

Apel, she is transferred to the Alphen aan den Rijn refugee center. This transfer affected her negatively, as she described, resonating, in my opinion, with the liminal process of homemaking experienced by Layan, and not being able to achieve it. Gradually her personality would "grow weak" even though she describes herself (self-estimated) as having a "uniquely strong personality" (Carlos Motta Vimeo). She seems eager to settle in a place where she can form new attachments of belonging, and with that belonging a new sense of self. However, she cannot escape the liminal status that she as a queer refugee occupies.

Alphen aan den Rijn refugee center is a former prison. Like other refugees, Butterfly was expecting a refugee center and not a prison; "even the employees at Alphen aan den Rijn" she says, "had been prison guards. They had been trained as prison guards and were now working with COA" (Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers) (Carlos Motta Vimeo). After spending some time there, more queer refugees started to arrive, and after fifteen days, they formed a group of LGBT community and started leaving the rooms. "We stopped being afraid of the other Arab refugees," she says (Carlos Motta Vimeo). Even though they thus found a queer community in the camp, that did not mean that things were easier now. One of the community members committed suicide; Butterfly says, "We had formed a group of ten and there was a suicide case amongst us. He cut his wrists with a blade. It was so hard seeing that happened to one of us" (Carlos Motta Vimeo). As a queer community in Alphen aan den Rijn, Layan, Butterfly, and their group, felt neither comfort nor a possibility of belonging. As a result, they started a hunger strike. The reason for not being comfortable in the camp, says Butterfly, is that the authorities in the camp would not listen to them; "We wanted a transfer, but they didn't approve it. We were suffering. We wanted to stay together in our group of ten," she explains.

Butterfly's experience, similar to many queer refugees' experiences, is a clash between her expectations and reality upon arriving in a liberal country that supposedly advocated social justice and LGBTQ+ rights. Her position in a new society that perceives her as a refugee, thus not as a citizen but rather a figure that has entered the country illegally and claims protection. At the same time, she is a transgender person belonging to a minority group that is urged to be protected. This complicates her, and all queer refugees' situations. The two portraits that I have discussed make this clash visible. Carlo Motta asserted in a panel discussion regarding "The Crossing" that "when it has come to the

questions of migrations and asylum, certain things have tested the limits of these liberal ideas and nations" (Carlos Motta Vimeo). The intersection between migration and gender is problematic for both the individuals and the country's image and convictions. While it is essential to most European countries to protect and provide a free and normal life to the queer minority, including providing the possibility to belong, there are the politics of belonging to be considered. As Nira Yuval-Davis argues, "the politics of belonging includes also struggle around the determination of what is involved in belonging" (205). As a result of the binary division, it is more difficult to allow these persons to have a chance of belonging to each other, their created community, or a place in which they might feel comfortable.

4.4 The Muslim or Gay Binary and the Coloniality of Migration

In the case of queer and other refugees, racism often passes unrecognized. In the case of queer migrants coming from Syria, like Layan and Butterfly, racism, as I will argue in the following section, appears twofold: cultural racism intersects with sexual racism as my close reading of scenes from "The Crossing" will help to demonstrate. Departing from these two concepts of racism, I will analyze the Muslim-gay binary and its significant affect on the refugee's crisis of belonging. In order to further contextualize the cultural differences and expectations that cripple the process of belonging for queer refugees as depicted in The Crossing, I move to examine the intersection between race and sexuality as it is represented in the artwork.

Islam is certainly not a race since the race is not a biological reality but rather a social and political construction (Considine, Craig. Huffpost). Stuart Hall identifies race as a "floating signifier" that is a "fluid concept which has specific connotations during certain moments in history" (ibid). In addition to identifying as a fluid socio-political construction, Hall recognizes a new type of racism, mainly "cultural racism" (ibid). Therefore, the racist Othering tradition and discrimination against people is based on different cultures, backgrounds, practices, and beliefs sociologist and sociologist Craig Considine argues. Furthermore, the concept of "cultural racism" reproduces the hierarchy between different cultures where a particular culture, mainly white, Western and Christian, is presented as superior to the Muslim, Eastern, barbaric other which activates the binary of civilized 'we' versus the uncivilized 'them' (ibid). Ultimately, being a Muslim, or expected to be a Muslim, or coming from a Muslim majority country in a Western society exposes people to sort of

“racism without race” as sociologist Euduardo Bonilla-Silva puts it. On a similar note, sociologist and scholar Anibal Quijano identifies race as a power system and the core of his developed concept of “Coloniality of power” has been essential to postcolonial studies, and decoloniality and examining legacies of colonialism in contemporary societies. Exported from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries to European colonies and further developed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, race becomes “the basis of the constitution of the world order and the division of the world’s population” (Rodríguez 20). Building on that, I believe that race is at the heart of the Othering tradition and classifying nations based on cultural hierarchies that refugees suffer from upon arriving in new countries, and thus contributes to solidifying the possibility of belonging as a crisis for these newcomers.

In addition to the possibility of experiencing racism based on the prediction of their Muslim hood Andrew DJ Shield in his *book Immigrants on Grinder: race, sexuality, and belonging online* introduced the concept of “sexual racism.” Shield asserts that queer migrants “face obstacles that extend beyond homophobia in their diasporic communities: many experience racism within white-majority spaces, including LGBTQ spaces” (Shield 5). He adds that “this racism frequently has a sexual component, …, many feel disconnected from white-majority LGBTQ spaces due in part to unrecognized racism” (ibid 6).

“The Crossing,” as I have mentioned, was filmed and exhibited in Amsterdam, the Netherlands. The participants, including Layan and Butterfly, are asylum seekers there. So, I want to concentrate on the Dutch national scene when it comes to queer refugees from the Orient with an assumed Muslim background. Jasbir K. Puar highlights in *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*, according to Murat Aydemir in his article “Dutch Nationalism and Intersectionality,” the binary of Muslim or gay is deliberately divided. He argues that “the binary mandates that the homosexual other is usually understood as normatively white, while the racial other is most often regarded as straight as well as axiomatically homophobic” (Aydemir 188). The presence of the queer refugee challenges the normative binary as a racialized other who is indeed homosexual or queer. However, queer immigrants continue to occupy a liminal space of not fitting in either group, which increases their crisis of being able to belong.

The pro-gay, anti-Islam rhetoric is not novel to the Dutch political discourse. Both Aydemir and Shield address the fact that around the 2000s, a “‘pro-gay, anti-immigrant’

rhetoric grabbed Dutch national attention" (Shield 1). Pim Fortuyn, a leader of a populist party at the time, argued that "immigrants from particularly Muslim-majority countries were homophobic and sexually conservative, and that their cultural attitudes were enough to justify not only new policies on integration, but also restrictions on immigration" (ibid 1).

In the recent migration crisis Geert Wilders, leader of the nationalist and populist Party for Freedom, "elided immigrants with Muslims, and contrasted immigrants attitudes towards homosexuality with the assumed progressiveness of Europeans" according to Shield (Shield 5). One can argue that right-wing populists have thus the tradition of merging immigration with Islam, and Islam with terrorism and bigotry and presenting it as the counter of European liberty and freedom. Furthermore, Wilders argued that Europeans, as a 'we' "have a responsibility to save 'them' from their culture." 'We,' according to Shield stands for "those in the room, presumed to be non-Muslim, non-immigrants," and 'them' stands for "those oppressed, invisible, disenfranchised immigrant LGBTQs" (ibid 5). Culturalism and racism merge together in the discourse of nationalism to reproduce the Western superior as the saviour, and the Muslim Oriental migrant as in need of saving from their culture.

Moreover, Puar's term "homonationalism:" "the term points at the uncanny 'convergence' between the increasing (if qualified, half-hearted, and opportunistic) inclusion of homosexual citizens in the body politics with the increased exclusion of racial and class others" (Aydemir 188). The choice of the word "citizen" instead of the inclusion of homosexuals, or humans who are gender non-conforming is not coincidental in my opinion, and I argue that it is directly linked to the previous binary of citizen and human that I highlighted in the previous chapter. Refugees are not citizens; thus, their access to human rights is compromised, and similarly, here, queer refugees are not citizens either because their refugee status dominates their queer identity and thus are not being included socio-politically but rather excluded with the other racialized Others. So, instead of adopting an exclusionary attitude towards all refugees, including LGBTQ ones, Wilders reduces the potentials and subjectivity of queer into a group of people in need of being saved and protected from their own people and culture. I am not suggesting that queer individuals are being discriminated against by their fellow refugees, instead what I am suggesting is that this tradition of representing the white, Western, Christian individual as the savior activates

once again the cultural hierarchy and civilized-uncivilized binary. Additionally, limiting these individuals to humans that need saving does not include them actively in the socio-political body of the country, which also relates to the politics of belonging of inclusion and exclusion.

Shield argues that “the liminal figure of the LGBTQ immigrant – if mentioned at all in these political and media discussions – seems to do little to destabilize the dominant understanding of immigrants as sexually conservative and homophobic” (Shield 3). Reflecting on both case studies, Pearlman’s refugee is not sexual at all. There is no reference whatsoever to any of the sexuality of the characters, in addition to the fact that she completely neglects queer refugees, even though queer migrants are recently having more exposure and influence. In “The Crossing,” the representation of Layan and Butterfly falls within the affirming tradition of immigrants as conservative and homophobic which does not help in negating generalized representation of refugees.

Furthermore, Shield asserts that LGBTQ individuals with an immigration background are acknowledged by politicians or media; their representation is confined to their struggle with homophobia and oppression from their “families and diasporic communities” (ibid 3). Layan and Butterfly both demonstrated in their testimonies that being rejected from their primary belonging spaces, exemplified by their families, marked their belonging dilemma and their occupying of liminal spaces. Moving from Syria, they faced the same crisis of rejection, exemplified this time by the diasporic community and other refugees. I want to emphasize the mention of the family and the diasporic community as the main obstacle in the lives of queers as it becomes the stereotypical representation of their lives without critically engaging with either the cultural or sexual racism they face, and limit their possibility of creating homes and new belongings. As my analysis of “The Crossing” has shown, both Layan and Butterfly’s representations are, unfortunately, within the context of confirming these stereotypes of the homophobic racialized Muslim others who discriminate against them. I am not suggesting that they should not refer to their real experiences, however, emphasizing these stereotype and not engaging with the underlying racism leaves LGBT refugees in a vicious cycle of liminality, and does not allow them to engage critically with their belonging crisis.

I will now conclude by returning to the historicized objects presented in the exhibition. As I have emphasized in the previous chapter, Baerwaldt and Ferrier draw attention to the necessity of placing the contemporary crisis in its historical context. They especially state that forming a positive refugee image cannot be separated from the fact that the term refugees or asylum seekers are “progressively dehistoricized” (Ferrier, 4). As a result, the refugee is gradually detached from the already existing hierarchical relationship they have with the Western countries as former colonizers. Moreover, as artists are supposed to provide more critical content against the status quo, Motta here fails to engage critically on a cultural, racial and personal level with the stories of the participants. The historical articles are loaded with a history of colonization and racism that could have been used to raise awareness and critically engage with the nationalistic discourse of refugees invading Europe. These articles could have also been used to show the positive integration, perhaps between the Netherlands and former colonies. Alternatively, they could have been used to confront the European spectator with their past, and that history and contemporary events are hardly natural, but rather a sequence of events leading to a specific outcome. As a result, they could have served as a reminder to behave in a better way, and make smarter choices. Alas, the historical objects were silenced objects left to the spectator to interpret them.

What is striking is that Motta does not raise any questions regarding the historical objects in the exhibition. They exist in juxtaposition to the very recent migration history of the participants and the mainly vague and unknown homosexual and queer history of the Middle East. Here, cultural and sexual racism and the history of colonialism is ignored in favor of limiting the obstacles queer refugees face as they attempt to overcome oppression from their origin countries framing their representations as human beings deserving of rights, who were in need of saving. Carlos Motta, in his exhibition, situates the representations of the stories of the queer refugees in juxtaposition to the items representing the colonial history of the Netherlands. However, I think that he falls short in critically engaging with these intertwining histories.

Moreover, the representation of both Layan and Butterfly is limited to their camp experiences and the camp borders. The artist does not also engage with any forms of activism they might be undertaking in the Netherlands, even though there are a multitude

of artistic platforms both personal and collective, that actively engage with the representation of refugees through their own art or form or representation or social interaction outside the borders of the camp and aimed at more than generating empathy and victimization. Motta does not take the additional step that resonates with Limbu's quest for a new narrative or with Hall's suggestion of a dialogue with the other in representing the refugee figure as an actual citizen in the new country engaging with life in one way or another. Motta represents the part of their experiences that echo the stereotypes and does not, in my opinion, fulfill Limbu's call for the need to create new narratives of representation of refugees' lives and experiences.

Conclusion

In the last decade, Europe has witnessed the largest and most influential migration wave since the second World War. Among the many hundreds of thousands of people who have crossed seas and deserts in a pursue of a better life in Europe were a large number of Syrians. They fled the on-going brutal was that has raged since 2011 and has exhausted the nation and caused more than 10 million forcibly displaced people inside and outside the country. Media coverage of the Syrian war and the following refugee "crisis" was substantial. However, the representations of the refugees were mostly within the generalizing and xenophobic traditions in which the refugees were photographed and portrayed as an influx of people invading Europe. Many saw the humanitarian crisis and reacted to it, while others saw these refugees as an uncivilized threat to the national and cultural identity of civilized Western countries. Artists as well have taken it upon themselves to represent the crisis and comment on it. However, the subjectivity and representation of the refugees were reflected upon without being given a chance to be created by the refugees themselves in the first place. The belonging possibilities of these people in the host countries were hardly addressed or discussed. In this thesis, I have analyzed two cultural objects that opened a space for refugees and queer refugees to express themselves, thus creating a 'we' and a collective narrative and memory that helps to create new representation and narratives of the refugees.

In this research, I have analyzed the works of two Western intellectuals and artists on refugee representation. However, as time goes on and refugees receive increasing credit for their artistic works, the works of refugee artists and intellectuals themselves on their crisis will be interesting to analyze. Wendy Pearlman, in her book *We Crossed a Bridge and it Trembled*, presents a multitude of stories from the Syrian diaspora in Arab and European countries. She collected stories and testimonies from 88 Syrians who describe to the readership the Syrian revolution from cradle to grave. Pearlman's work, unlike most popular representations of the Syrian diaspora, does not concentrate merely on Syrians leaving the country and seeking refuge. Instead, she provided the reader with a historical background on the complex history of Syria starting from the Ottman Empire, to the French colonization, ending with the most contemporary control of the Assad family over the country. Hence, representing the Syrian refugee crisis, not as spontaneous event that has happened out of the blue, but rather as a phenomenon with historical and colonial roots that cannot be ignored. Pearlman included in the book as much information about the interviewees as possible ranging from their names and age to their professions and education. This input, as I have argued, is an attempt by Pearlman to humanize the refugee and represent her as a normal figure, and similar to the reader even, in order to create a personal level of identification on the one hand, and to negate the popular representation of the refugee as a number in a group of people lacking any sort of subjectivity, on the other. Furthermore, Pearlman, throughout her book, emphasis on the Syrians experiences of belonging, whether to their country, communities, or to the revolution negating the association of the impossibility of belonging with the refugee figure. She creates through the diverse background of the voices she presents a Syrian diasporic collective memory of the revolution, war, and their results. She challenges through her interviewees the human vs. citizen binary and raises inquiries through these stories regarding human rights.

In a similar pursuit to represent a rather underrepresented part of the Syrian diaspora, Carlo Motta presents an exhibition of eleven video-portraits in Amsterdam, the Netherlands, as a platform for queer refugees to tell their stories. The exhibition sheds light on the neglected history of queer individuals in the Middle East and the difficulties and challenges they face. I have focused on two participants, Layan and Butterfly, both transgender women from Syria. Both participants relate to the spectator their challenging

past in Syria, full of persecution, rejection, and uncertainty, which, as I have argued, resulted in an impossibility to create attachment of belonging with their home country and families. Layan and Butterfly tell their stories about fleeing Syria in rubber boats and arriving in Dutch asylum-seeker centers. They reflect in their stories on the 'normal' sexual and gender normal behavior expectations in Syria. As a result of their non-conforming gender identities, they faced rejection by their families and society. Motta emphasizes queer temporalities in their home countries where they could not be free and safe. To their surprise, the Netherlands' culture has its own assumption of queer refugees: the Dutch authorities were expecting them to be 'out and proud' and did not understand their fears and challenges. They reveal the cultural and gender gap between queer refugees and the Dutch system that did not seem to grasp the double trauma of being a refugee and a queer person. In addition to the video-portraits, the artist presented a collection of historicized objects collected by him from different Dutch museums. It is, of course, interesting that Pearlman and Motta, even while representing different spectra of the Syrian diaspora, both reflected in their representations on different histories emphasizing, in my opinion, the importance of framing the current Syrian refugee crisis within historical discourses.

My main argument in this thesis is that Syrian refugees and queer refugees are faced with a crisis of belonging in the host countries that is mainly embedded in the refugee status to begin with. I was interested in examining whether different representation tradition, as the previous case studies promised, might address this crisis and open new spaces for refugees. I concluded that even though Pearlman positions herself as an intellectual, and positions her book as divergent from mainstream media, which she criticizes. She seems to neglect the queer refugee minority among those she interviews. She hardly includes any queer interviewees or even hints at their existence or the challenges they face. This negligence confirms the state of complete exclusion of eastern queer communities, whether in their original societies or their diasporic ones. Furthermore, it demonstrates the liminal state they inhabit, which leads to estrangement being the core of their crisis within the general context of the refugee crisis. As an intellectual, Pearlman's opinion and critical analysis and observations of the crisis of the Syrian diaspora are vague in the book. Apart from the historical background, she provides in the introduction, her thoughts are reserved. She seems to be building an underlying timeframe of the refugee crisis and indirectly

directing the reader to see the refugee as a human being first and foremost, but the reader is also left to her own assumptions and understanding due to the lack of the critical framing of these stories. Hence, the stories raise little controversy with the mainstream media representation traditions, and leaves the refugee fighting their own fights through their stories. Pearlman does not thus fulfill Hall's invitation to engage in a conversation with the "Other," a conversation that is hoped to change the stereotypical view and representation of refugees and undermine the belonging politics that keep the refugee on the borders of exclusion.

This conversation with the other is also lacking, as I have analyzed and concluded, in Carlos Motta's representations of the queer spectra within the Syrian diaspora. In their video-portraits, Layan and Butterfly seem to affirm the backward and homophobic stereotypical assumption the West maintains of other Muslim refugees. Of course, remaining authentic to their experiences is essential, but, as an artist and activist Motta fails to bring these testimonies to the spectator critically. Moreover, there is no engagement with Syrian queer or colonial history in conversation with the historicized objects that surrounded the video-portraits. This creates again a silence rather than a conversation with the "other," and the "other's" history. Layan and Butterfly's stories finish while they are still in the camp, exemplifying their continuous liminal position, which they inhabited in their home country and were still inhabiting. This suggests the dis-belonging status too that is at the core of their crisis (Ahmed 330). Fundamentally, these two artworks strive to create the refugee as human, providing a counter-voice to the dominant discourse on refugees, contributing to creating a collective memory of the Syrian diaspora, and addressing the belonging crisis of the refugees. They present a needed possibility of creating spaces for the "others" to express themselves and tell their stories, hopefully leading the way to a more inclusive and individual representation of refugees.

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