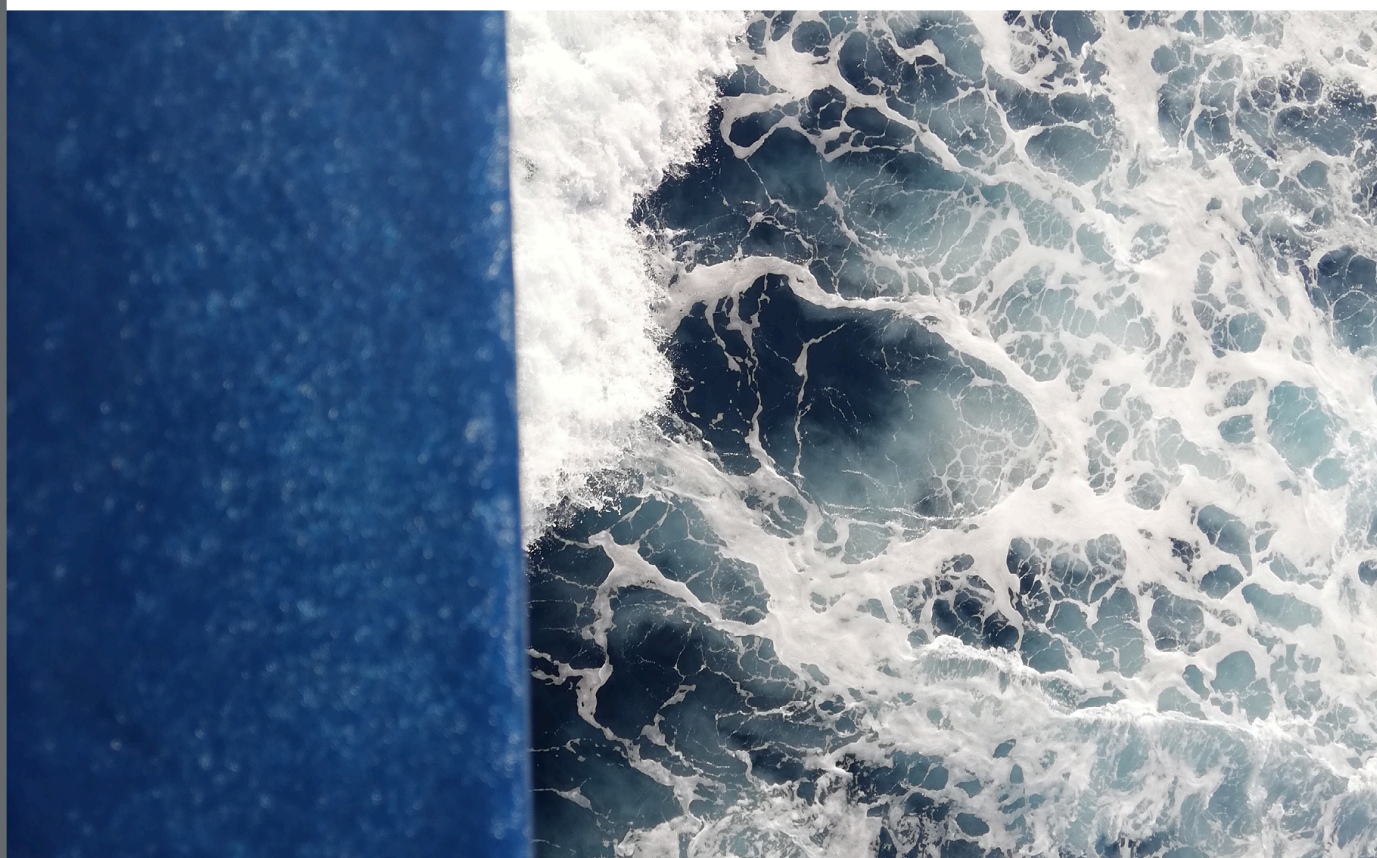# eCahiers de l'Institut
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Narrations of Belonging and Unbelonging of Refugee Women in Geneva

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ABSTRACT

The present ePaper tries to apprehend how refugee women in Geneva experience their integration journeys, understood as feelings of un/belonging. This study is based on two main beliefs. First, processes of immigrant integration must be understood not solely in terms of economic or social integration but also in terms of the individual's feeling of well-being and belonging. This means that individual perception is the main gateway into understanding how an individual can feel integrated into a new society. Second, individual identities and characteristics, such as gender, class, religion, etc., are crucial when considering social processes (following the intersectional concept in gender studies). Considering the results of this study, this thesis develops our understanding of the main institutional and social constraints experienced by refugee women in Geneva. It then addresses the experiences of inclusion/ exclusion of three clusters of women, considering their various identities and characteristics. Finally, it examines two main identity strategies used by the women to make sense of their new lives.

ESTELLE GAGNEBIN

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1. Introduction

1   Where do I belong?[1] Belonging is about "feeling at home" and "feeling safe" (Yuval-Davis, 2006b: 199). The definition seems straightforward but making sense of it is not. In practice, this is a question people moving from one country, one society, one culture to another will ask themselves. One does not need to move very far away from one's home to be faced with this question, just somewhere else where one does not have this crucial but sometimes difficult to define sense of "feeling at home".

2   However, the experience of (re)creating social and cultural links and practices as well as feeling accepted and included can be more or less difficult depending on where one comes from, where one settles and what one has experienced before. Refugees, migrants, expats, all experience uprooting, feelings of loss and the task of recreating their "own world" within the new place of settlement. Thus, "integration" is a crucial concept, with changing meanings (Castle *et al.*, 2002: 12). It is a matter of multiple actors, from the host society to the newcomers, of multiple debates and tensions. It is a matter of public policy, discussed in political debates, defined and put in place by the law.

3   Nevertheless, the individual human being at the center of the process of integration should not be forgotten. In fact, as argued by Ager and Strang (2010: 601) social processes such as integration within a new society must be understood from the perspective of the key actors. This is why this thesis will focus mostly on individuals and their experiences, fears, hopes, strategies and constraints, opportunities and agencies within their new "home", Geneva.

4   My interest in this master's thesis is to focus on the experiences of women refugees. First, the decision to take refugees and not immigrants in general as the population under study is that refugees, as forced migrants, are (or should be) given the right to stay in the host country, notably given the 1951 Refugee Convention ratified by most countries, including Switzerland. The statute regarding refugees, as an institutional apparatus, sets out specific rights and duties which profoundly impact refugees' experiences in the host country.

5   My second choice in this thesis is to study only women. Many studies on women as refugees or forced migrants focus mostly on their experiences of persecution, on their unequal access to the asylum determination process, and on specific aspects of the exile

experience such as pregnancy or employment (Hunt, 2008: 282). In these cases, women are seen as victims of their destiny and as passive. My intention here is to counter these discourses by approaching the women as active agents, listening to and amplifying their voices, and making visible their various experiences and journeys. Furthermore, as migration is a gendered experience, it can have various impacts on the lives of women. Their status as women can be improved; some studies stress how women adapt faster than men to the host country's society because migrating usually means an improvement in their independence. However, migration processes should not be essentialized because migrating can also end up aggravating inequalities (Itzigsohn and Giorguli-Saucedo, 2005: 897-898). Consequently, refugee women might go through various experiences that may or may not worsen or improve gender inequality given not only their position as women but also their position as agents with multiple identities. This can be linked to the concept of "super-diversity" developed by Vertovec (2007): we now live in a world characterized not only by ethnic diversity but also by an interplay of factors such as gender, age, immigration status and so on. Consequently, when examining someone's experience within a new society, their various identities and characteristics need to be considered (Itzigsohn and Giorguli-Saucedo, 2005: 897-898).

6   Finally, I agree with Dahinden's (2016) plea for the "de-migranticization" of research on migration and integration. According to her, when migration and integration research follows the idea of the nation-state as a reference system, the distinction between foreigners and natives, between members of the majority and the minority is made. Migrants are constructed as homogenous and different from the host society. One should thus focus on how gender, age and other axes of difference interact with the ethnic background of immigrants as emphasized by the concept of "super-diversity". Therefore, this study will analyze journeys of different refugee women focusing not solely on their ethnicity but also on various other aspects of their identities. However, I still decided to focus on refugee women coming from the Middle East in order to have a common background and not to expand too much the scope of the study. As the social process being studied here takes time, I interviewed women who had arrived in Geneva between 3 and 20 years ago.

7   To summarize, this thesis tries to apprehend how women refugees, not solely as coming from a specific country but as women with a specific religion, identity, culture, background and agency, experienced their arrival in Geneva. Thus, their multiple identities and characteristics are seen as having an impact on their agency.

8   The literature review below allowed me to focus on concepts and theoretical tools that helped me define my research question. First, the idea of experiences of settlement and integration can be conceptualized through the lens of boundaries (Wimmer, 2004; 2008), especially the various strategies of boundary making and negotiation of identities that are part of processes of belonging (Anthias, 2016: 177). Second, my primary concern was to understand how the various identities and social locations of the women I spoke with affect these experiences of settlement and integration. The concept of translocational positionality (Anthias, 2002; 2008; 2012; 2016) permits this understanding of various positionalities among different contexts and spaces. Thus, the interplay of gender, class, ethnicity and other factors needs to be considered when focusing on the refugee women's identities and should be seen as embedded in a transnational space made of hierarchical and social boundaries.

9 This focus led me to an investigation of how the refugee women negotiate their identities within a specific context and given their specific translocational positionality to create a sense of belonging and/or unbelonging. In fact, markers of identity like gender, class or ethnicity and so on are not only exclusive forms of categorization but also provide narratives and resources. Consequently, individuals should be apprehended as "becoming subjects" (Prins, 2006). For this purpose, the following question is addressed in this study:

10 *How do refugee women in Geneva use negotiations of identity and processes of boundary work to affect their sense of belonging and unbelonging given their translocational positionality?*

NOTES DE BAS DE PAGE

1. *Where do I belong? Narrating collective identity and translocational positionality* is an article written by Anthias (2002) about the multiple feelings of belonging and inclusion/exclusion from second generation young Greek Cypriots in the United Kingdom.

2. Literature review

2.1 Integration as assimilation, acculturation, multiculturalism?

1   Since the early sociology of migration in the 1920s-30s, most migration research has tended to focus on the ways in which migrants adapt themselves to, or are socially excluded from, their place of immigration (Vertovec, 2001: 574). However, this process of "integration" had been widely discussed because "there is no single, generally accepted definition, theory or model of immigrant and refugee integration. The concept continues to be controversial and hotly debated" (Castles *et al.,* 2002: 12).

2   On the one hand, the classical paradigm of integration is the well-known assimilationist theory (Wimmer, 2007: 9). In sum, this paradigm understands integration as a process involving many stages, at the end of which the newcomer is expected to have assimilated himself into the host society. For instance, Gordon (1964, in Wimmer, 2007: 9) argued that assimilation proceeds at various speeds and through parallel processes in the economic, cultural and social spheres.

3   Newer versions of assimilation theory understand multiple endings to this process. For instance, Porter and Zhou's (1993) segmented assimilation theory assumes that immigrants' ethnic communities, identities and cultures might prevail over time and don't prevent individuals from achieving upward social mobility. Within the framework of socio-psychological theories, John W. Berry's typology of "acculturation" strategies (assimilation, integration, separation and marginalization) falls into this school of thought (Wimmer, 2007: 10).

4   On the other hand, the multiculturalist paradigm understands integration as a negotiation between contexts and cultures. Cultures, identities and communities are seen as persistent across generations of immigrants and understood as desirable, without negative effects on the social mobility of immigrants or on the social cohesion of the whole society (*Ibid.*).

5   Another trend in the literature, according to Cheung and Phillimore (2017), is the identification of factors of integration which allows for an assessment of the extent to which an individual or a group is integrated within the host society. Ager and Strang

(2004; 2008) with their "framework on integration" are among the authors cited in this debate. Their framework defines the core domains of integration and outlines their different roles in the process of integration.

6 Within this trend in the literature, scholarship studying specific aspects of integration, such as cultural integration, social integration or integration into the labor market, can also be cited. The aim of these studies is to assess the extent to which immigrants and/or refugees integrate themselves into specific spheres. For instance, Liebig, Kohls and Krause (2012) studied the labor market integration of immigrants and their children in Switzerland.

7 The methodological nationalism of these theories and scholarship on immigrant integration has been criticized (Wimmer and Glick-Schiller, 2002; Wimmer, 2007; Glick Schiller, 2007). In fact, by studying the boundaries of the nation-state within which immigrants settle, the scholars mentioned above emphasize the differences existing between the host society and newcomers, contributing "to teach citizens that the fundamental social division in society is between natives, who are assumed to uniformly share common social norms, and foreigners who bear some essential form of difference" (Glick Schiller, 2007: 63).

8 The early 1990s saw a shift in perspective towards a more global way of understanding migration. This transnationalist approach focuses on the links and attachments that migrants maintain outside the boundaries of their host nation-state. Social networks for instance usually extend beyond the boundaries of nation-states, which is the reason why studying them provides new insights on international migration and incorporation (Waldinger, 2013: 757). This literature on transnationalism contributes to overcoming a feature of methodological nationalism: the assumption that each ethnic or national group would occupy a specific territory (Wimmer, 2007: 9).

9 This new trend further questions the concept of assimilation because "if one can build a life in two places, then there is every reason to assume that assimilation – as both concept and reality – belongs to yesterday's world, not today's" (Waldinger, 2003: 248). Thus, according to Vertovec (2001), one can ask whether the maintenance of transnational ties represents a distinct alternative to other social forms and processes of immigrant incorporation.

10 In sum, these debates on immigrant integration bring forward some concepts and understandings of the so-called integration phenomenon. The idea that immigrants' experiences within the host society need to be understood as a *process*, evolving back and forth in time, is especially important. Moreover, as the debate on transnationalism emphasizes, social networks extend beyond the host society and transnational ties must not be forgotten.

11 However, as Wimmer (2007: 10-11) points out, the new trend of transnationalism usually fails to avoid methodological nationalism: "Still, the world is made up by clearly demarcated communities of identity and shared culture, albeit now including some deterritorialized communities stretching over several nation-states". This remark led me to search for a better understanding of immigrants' experiences within a new society in the literature on ethnic studies and boundaries, namely one which tries to overcome this methodological nationalism.

12   Furthermore, transnational concepts also usually fail to consider how experiences of immigrant women and men are gendered and thus qualitatively different (Salih, 2001), a fact that will lead me to turn later on to the literature on gender and migration.

2.2 Boundary making, shifting and crossing

13   The concept of boundaries, especially the emergence and transformation of ethnic boundaries, has been a renewed concern within major paradigms in immigration research such as theories of assimilation and multiculturalism. The work of the Norwegian anthropologist Fredrick Barth has been fundamental in the development of a new paradigm, because he considered ethnicity as a relational process emphasizing how feelings of communality and belonging are created in opposition to the "perceived identity of other racial and ethnic groups" (Lamont and Molnár, 2002: 174), taking a constructivist view of ethnicity as a social process (Wimmer, 2008: 971). Consequently, researchers interested in ethnicity would not study how the ethnic boundary between a group A and a group B was created but how it is embedded in "a landscape of continuous cultural transitions" (Wimmer, 2009: 254). Ethnicity is then defined as the subjective way actors create those group boundaries and distinguish themselves from other ethnic groups by specific markers (*Ibid.*).

14   This consideration views the concept of "assimilation" or "integration" as being reconceived as boundary shifting, which is a potentially reversible and power-driven process (*Ibid.*: 244). Thus, the process involves a "shifting of the boundaries of belonging, which has to overcome existing forms of social closure along ethnic lines. In this process, immigrants strategically try to adopt cultural markers that signify full membership and distance themselves from stigmatized others through boundary work" (*Ibid.*: 245).

15   Moreover, the interaction between the majority and minority is crucial in creating the boundaries between who is part of immigrant minorities (defining their immigrant ethnicity) and who is part of the national majority (*Ibid.*).

16   Wimmer (2008) identifies 5 types of strategy of ethnic boundary making which may be used by different social actors in various contexts: "shifting boundaries through expansion, shifting boundaries through contraction, the strategy of 'normative inversion' targeting how the ethnic group is hierarchically ordered, the repositioning of an individual, and boundary blurring". This typology furthers the understanding of the strategies used by both newcomers and members of the majority within processes of group and boundary formation.

17   However, many challenges appear in the study of boundaries: the understanding of why some ethnic boundaries are more politically prominent than others, which ethnic boundaries are germane when studying the structures of social networks and their enabling access to resources, and why some boundaries and groups are more stable over time. Thus, some boundaries picture higher degrees of closure than others and might follow cultural differences (Wimmer, 2008).

18   In fact, some scholars attempt to understand which boundaries are salient within various contexts, especially trying to assess the importance of ethnicity within this boundary-making process. Furthermore, they investigate the strategies used by the created "Others" in reaction to social exclusion. I will now present some of the major

literature on these debates, especially those focusing on the context of Europe and Switzerland.

19   A significant study from Zolberg and Woon (1999) examines variations in boundaries among different contexts. These authors identify the most prominent boundaries in Europe and in the United States. In Europe, Christianity is seen as the most salient boundary, especially regarding Islam. Religion is a type of boundary that favors the emergence of pluralism, as allowed by the separation of the Church and the State. However, although Europeans claim their support for freedom of religion, in practice there is little public facilitation for the practice of Islam because the European society and culture is embedded in Judeo-Christian civilization. In the United States on the other hand, language appears to be the most significant boundary. In fact, because language cannot institutionally be separated from the State, it demands a more assimilationist strategy, meaning massive boundary crossing.

20   In a study on the assimilation and exclusion of second-generation immigrants in France, Germany and the United States, Alba (2005) argues that processes of assimilation and exclusion depend on the nature of the ethnic boundary, which can be bright (the distinction is unambiguous) or blurred (the location of the boundary can be ambiguous). He depicts three strategies of ethnic change and boundary processes: boundary crossing (the classic version of assimilation), boundary blurring and boundary shifting. To understand the position of the boundary, one should look at how it is institutionalized. Here I discuss citizenship, religion, language and race as boundaries. In the European context, religion appears to be an important bright boundary requiring individual boundary crossing.

21   Dahinden, Duemmler and Moret (2012) come up with similar findings on the role of religion in Europe in their study of the boundary work of Swiss youth. They explore how "public discursive constructions about differences are used and interpreted in daily life to constitute groups and define the boundaries between them" (2). Their results show how a "bright boundary" is constructed by Swiss youth and second-generation youth of Italian, Spanish, French or Portuguese origins against Muslims. In particular, arguments concerning religious practices are used to mark a difference between themselves and these "outsiders" and are supported by arguments for gender equality. Dahinden *et al.* also assess the counterstrategies used by young Muslims, the "outsiders", in relation to these normative categorizations and processes of social exclusion. Two types of response are assessed: individual boundary crossing or assimilation and the process of "normative inversion" described by Wimmer (2008: 1037). This last strategy includes actions trying to modify the characteristics negatively defined by the majority: They positively re-evaluate their cultural origins and use discourses of ethnocultural tolerance (Dahinden *et al.*, 2012: 14-15).

22   Holtz, Dahinden and Wagner (2013) are interested in the strategies and negotiations of German Muslims used in response to perceived discrimination (created by the bright boundary of religion). In fact, the German Muslims they studied experienced obstacles from identifying as true German citizens and therefore had to use strategies of reconstructing their social identities. Among these were "reactive religious awakening", "religion as a means of maintaining ethnic identities" and "marginalization and social creativity" (243-245).

23   Studying the process of immigrant incorporation in three Swiss cities (Basel, Bern and Zurich), Wimmer (2004) undertakes spatial case studies of social networks in certain

neighborhoods to understand the role of ethnicity in these groups' formation and boundary making. He finds that ethnicity does not structure these processes of group formation (as presupposed by classical paradigms of immigrant integration). Thus, the perceived distance between the "Other" and a sense of belonging is based on the "perceived distance from the central paradigm of order" and not on a dichotomy between Swiss citizens and foreigners. Interestingly, one of Wimmer's findings lays out how former guest-worker immigrants (Italians, Spanish) distinguish themselves from newly arrived refugees and immigrants from former Yugoslavia and Turkey. He argues that they use discourses pointing out the more recent newcomers' vices or flaws such as their religiosity or lack of decency in order to maintain "their [own] capital of normalcy" attained at the end of a process of boundary crossing.

24 Dahinden (2013) also assesses this matter of migrant incorporation and ethnicity within the framework of boundary work. She studies the social networks of the population of Neuchâtel in Switzerland to understand which categories are salient in the boundary-work process, as well as the role of ethnicity in this process. She distinguishes between three types of boundary: *network* boundaries that emerge out of personal networks and *symbolic* and *social* boundaries as defined by Lamont and Molnár (2002).[1] She also emphasizes the need to study social and symbolic boundaries created by categories other than ethnicity and how those intersect with ethnicity. She concludes that "network boundaries are reinforced by symbolic boundaries and translated into social boundaries, pointing to the social stratification of four clusters of people which are differently placed in this city" (Dahinden, 2013: 57). The main classifications creating exclusion and network and social boundaries are based on race and Islam and are mainly applied to newly arrived immigrants by the already established population which includes the former guest-worker immigrants. She also stresses the observation that ethnicity matters only in combination with other categories (education, establishment or residence permit) when taking a boundary perspective.

25 These studies emphasize how in the context of Europe and Switzerland religion, especially regarding Islam, is a salient boundary (Zolberg and Woon, 1999; Alba, 2005; Dahinden *et al.*, 2012; Holtz *et al.*, 2012; Dahinden, 2013). Some of the strategies put forward by the excluded individuals are individual boundary crossing (Dahinden *et al.*, 2012), social identity reconstruction (Holtz *et al.*, 2012) and normative inversion (Wimmer, 2008; Dahinden *et al.*, 2012).

26 My first concern within my research was to understand how the different identities and social locations of the women refugees I spoke with could impact their experience of integration and social inclusion within the context of Geneva. The literature on boundaries helps me to grasp the different processes of group creation and social inclusion/exclusion as well as the counterstrategies used by the excluded.

27 However, the work of Wimmer, for instance, focuses mainly on ethnicity along with race, without considering their intersection with individuals' other characteristics, such as class and gender (Winant, 2015: 2180-2181). In fact, scholars following the tradition of Pierre Bourdieu show the importance of class in the reproduction of exclusion and social boundaries. Symbolic boundaries depicted as the world of tastes and lifestyle were later theorized by Bourdieu as another factor of the reproduction of class privileges (Lamont and Molnár, 2002: 172). The prominence of gender boundaries also needs to be assessed. For instance, hegemonic views on masculinities or

femininities have impacts on how one can be discriminated against when undertaking a profession or playing a sport not seen as aligning with its gender norms (*Ibid.*: 176).

28   Therefore, I will now turn to the literature on gender and migration, focusing mainly on the concept of intersectionality as an intellectual and methodological tool to assess various experiences as lived by individuals in relation to their several identities and social locations. This focus on intersectionality is also the latest trend within scholarly debates on integration, as underlined by Cheung and Philimore (2017: 215). In fact, these scholars emphasize the need to examine how gender, faith, ethnicity and class combine and their influence on opportunity structures and experiences during the integration process.

2.3 Migration, gender and intersectionality

29   "Scholars across many disciplines include measures of biological sex (i.e. male or female) in their analysis, and migration studies are no exception. But there is a difference between thinking about sex differences with a dichotomous variable and integrating more complex gender analysis and theory into one's work" (Nawyn, 2010: 749).

30   Ravenstein, one of the first theorists of international migration, noted early that "woman is a greater migrant than men" (Ravenstein, 1885: 196 in Mahler and Pessar, 2003: 813). However, at its beginning, the field of migration studies mostly focused on migrant men. Women were pictured as primarily migrating to accompany or reunite with their male companion (Mahler and Pessar, 2006: 27). Only in the 1970s and 1980s did gender analysis become integrated within the framework of migration studies. However, the first integration of gender focused on the binary variable of male and female to understand the distinct experiences of migrants (Nawyn, 2010: 750; Mahler and Pessar, 2006: 27). The actual shift towards studying gender as a system of relations influenced by migration happened in the mid- and late 1980s, focusing then on the system of gender relations and women migrants' experiences within this system (*Ibid.*: 750). Scholars focused on a dynamic and fluid conceptualization of gender using theories of gender relations to understand how gender relations changed following migration and settlement (Nawyn, 2010: 751).

31   Feminist migration scholars then focused on and analyzed multiple themes linked to migration and gender. For instance, and interesting for my topic, there are studies on how the migration process (including the settlement phase) is linked to gender relations (Anthias, 2000; Fapohunda, 1988; Folbre, 1988; Grasmuck and Pessar, 1991; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1992; 1994; Kofman *et al.*, 2000; Truong, 1996 cited in Nawyn, 2010: 753). Moreover, according to Nawyn (2010: 754), one of the most prominent contributions from gender studies has been within the study of migrant households, family relations and social networks. These studies focus on how the decision to migrate is related to household gender relations and how the so-called feminization of migration was achieved thanks to increasing economic opportunities in sectors such as domestic work, healthcare and sex work. Moreover, ethnographers discovered how the experiences of wage-earning employment would lead immigrant women to more personal autonomy, independence and gender equality (Mahler and Pessar, 2006: 34).

32   Within the field of settlement and integration, transnational feminist research brought a new lens for understanding the phenomenon and the various experiences of immigrant men and women. In fact, the literature shows how men might contribute more than women to maintaining transnational ties that would facilitate a return. On the other hand, by favoring their household to stay abroad, women tend to maintain and deepen the personal benefits that follow the migration process (Mahler and Pessar, 2006: 34).

33   These new transnational and globalized research frames (see for example, Mahler and Pessar, 2003; 2006) call for a heuristic understanding of gender (Nawyn, 2010: 757). Thus, "Gender is a principal factor that organizes social life, and it has been operative since the dawn of human existence: a fact that cannot be stated for most other socially stratifying forces such as social class and race. Yet gender cannot be viewed and analyzed in isolation. Rather, gender is dynamic, and it articulates with other axes of differentiation in complex ways that many scholars have been exploring" (Mahler and Pessar, 2006: 29).

34   This type of analysis further understands "gender practices within not just a social location that includes race, class, sexuality, ethnicity, and nationality but also a context of place and history" (Nawyn, 2010: 757). For instance, Parren (2008, in Nawyn, 2010: 757) explains how immigrant women move from one patriarchal system to another and how they find not only new constraints to autonomy but also new opportunities in their host country.

35   Another example is Salih (2001) who takes a household approach to apprehend Moroccan migrant women's reproductive role as performed in Morocco and in Italy. These women's formal and social constraints are interconnected with their migration and their insertion into the labor market when it comes to women's possibility of migrating or living transnationally. In other words, Moroccan women's transnational movements between Morocco and Italy are constrained by the roles they are expected to take within their domestic spheres and households. In this context, Moroccan women's experiences of transnationalism not positive ones but ones of tension between multiple belongings and needs.

Intersectionality

36   Intersectionality is the concept that allows for a heuristic understanding of the interplay between gender, race and class. The starting point, *Ain't I a Woman* (hooks, 1981) criticized the analogy between the situation of women and those of Blacks, which implies that "all women are White, and all Blacks are men". This work was the beginning of deconstructing the categories of "women" and "Blacks" which further led to the concept of intersectionality (first introduced by Crenshaw, 1989, who focused on how categories of discrimination intersect) and its attempts to analyze the interplay among social divisions such as (but not exclusively) gender, race and class (Yuval-Davis, 2006a: 193-194). How race and gender intersect in the labor market has been the subject of many studies, focusing on wage inequality, discrimination and stereotyping and on how domestic work is embedded in hierarchies of class, gender, race, ethnicity and nationality (Brown and Misra, 2003). For instance, in the field of migration and gender, Riano and Baghdadi (2007) studied the labor market participation of skilled immigrant women from Latin America in Switzerland using an intersectional lens

demonstrating how those women cannot use their social and cultural capital to foster economic and professional advancement.

37　A position in the literature argues that intersectionality is "the best means we have for exploring the multidimensional and complex articulations of forms of social division and identity" (Anthias, 2016: 184). In fact, intersectionality, as understood by the constructivist approach (built on Gramsci's view of power as ongoing struggles over hegemony), emphasizes that identities and social locations cannot solely be understood by arithmetic frameworks. This implies that individuals should be apprehended as "becoming subjects" (Prins, 2006: 280), whose markers of identity (gender, class or ethnicity) provide narratives and resources as much as they are exclusive forms of categorization (*Ibid.*).

38　In fact, and significantly for this study, scholars use the concept of intersectionality to understand how identities and social locations of immigrants influence and are negotiated within specific contexts of boundary work. For instance, Esser and Benschop (2007) study how Islam, gender and ethnicity are negotiated by migrant Muslim businesswomen within an entrepreneurial context in the Netherlands. They show how these women do boundary work (called identity work as a reaction to inclusion or exclusion tied to identity categories) related to Islam and gender in professional contexts. Negotiations of identity in relation to Islam are used to create new opportunities, such as professional "niches".

Belonging and politics of belonging

39　The work of Yuval-Davis (2006b; 2007; 2010; 2013) makes the link with the notion of intersectionality related to identities, social locations and processes of boundaries.

40　Yuval-Davis (2006b) makes the distinction between belonging and politics of belonging. Belonging is about "emotional attachment, about feeling at home and feeling safe". On the other hand, she calls the politics of belonging "the dirty work of boundary maintenance" which separates communities between "us" and "them". Requirements of belonging can be more or less permeable depending on factors such as different levels of belonging, social locations, identities, and ethical and political values. Requirements relating to social location, origin or place of birth are less permeable than language, culture or religion for instance. According to Anthias (2016: 177), this notion of belonging allows "questions about the actual spaces and places to which people are accepted as members or feel they are members, and broader questions about social inclusion [...] entailed in processes of boundary-making". Belonging would then involve processes of boundary making as well as boundary breaking (*Ibid.*).

41　Yuval-Davis (2013) comes up with a more individual focused analysis of bordering in her article "a situated intersectional everyday approach to the study of bordering" where she makes the distinction between identities ("specific forms of narratives regarding the self and its boundaries") and identity politics ("political projects of belonging promoted by specific social agents which construct specific collective boundaries around particular identity narrative"). Boundaries between the "me" and the "Other" would be shifting processes and contested and not always symmetrical. Mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion depend on power positionality, normative values and cognitive and emotional identifications of the social actors. The bordering work could then entail various boundaries and communities ("me" and "us" / "us" and

"them"/ "us" and the many others / "me" and the transversal "us"). The boundary between "us" and "them" is the brightest in periods of extreme conflict or war where one individual's identity is closely identified with one of its community.

42 However, Yuval-Davis's work focuses mainly on the politics of belongings as practiced by nation-states. For instance, she develops how European politics of belonging tend to be highly securitized regarding immigrants. As asylum seekers (especially Muslims and people from the Third World) are constructed as a threat to European nations and their culture, Europe fosters its borders and boundaries as they are related to issues not only of national security but also of social and cultural integrity (Yuval-Davis, 2007). Hence, I will now turn to the work of Floya Anthias and her concept of intersectional positionality to assess individual experiences.

Intersectionality and intersectional positionality

43 Anthias's concept of translocational positionality allows for an understanding of the sense of belonging and identity as a product of social locations and processes within an intersectional framework (Anthias, 2008: 5). She argues that narratives and strategies of identity and belonging should be understood as relationally produced and as closely linked to social boundaries and hierarchies. These can, in turn, change depending on social location, context and geography. The understanding of belonging is dynamic and procedural and focuses on processes of inclusion, exclusion, access and participation. Moreover, the hierarchical constructs of ethnicity, gender and class (amongst others) are related to boundary-making processes (*Ibid.*).

44 Some aspects of Anthias's concept need to be emphasized. First, the intersectional frame tries to move away from the idea of "groupism" along categories such a gender, ethnicity and class and their intersection. The focus is on social locations and processes. The discussion must concentrate on structures defined as "broader economic and political institutional frameworks" and processes ("broader social relations entailing discourses and representations") (Anthias, 2012: 107). Moreover, taking a transnational perspective aims at correcting the nation-based approaches of intersectionality, acknowledging multiple and diverse social locations and senses of belonging (Anthias, 2016: 183).

45 Her argument is also based on "a rejection of the culturalization and hierarchization found in the particular construction of belonging within diversity and integration discourses and practice" which sees people mainly relating to their ethnic or racial categories without acknowledging other facets of their social locations (Anthias, 2016: 183). Another consequence for the understanding of belonging is that it "has become a term that can no longer be linked to a fixed place or location but to a range of different locales in different ways. This also means that people might occupy different and contradictory positions and have different belongings globally" (*Ibid.*). Belonging is a process and not fixed within one specific location and time (*Ibid.*).

46 Second, she makes the distinction between notions of identity and belonging: "key aspects [of identity] are found in articulations and stories about who we think we are as well as associated strategies and identifications". On the other hand, belonging entails mainly the dimension of experiences of exclusion which give a sense of how people feel about their locations in the social world (Anthias, 2008: 8).

47   Anthias (2002) uses this concept of translocational positionality to understand issues of exclusion and narrations of belonging among second-generation young Greek Cypriots in the UK. She finds out how those young people narrate stories of being excluded from the dimension of Britishness and how they would distinguish themselves ethnically (and positively) with stories of cultural practices and family links producing an "unambiguous ethnic belongness". Interestingly, these youngsters would emphasize their sense of difference in terms of demarcating whom and what they are not (which relates to Wimmer's [2004] findings on social networks and boundary making in Switzerland). Important markers of difference are the distinction between Black and White as produced by the hegemonic discourses and practices in British society.

48   Using Anthias' concept of translocational positionality to explain her findings, Dahinden (2010) explains how the social networks of Albanian-speaking migrants in Switzerland are constructed among different forms of stratification and mechanisms of exclusion. Language and ethnicity are the primary factors constructing boundaries but age, type of migration, type of residence permit, education and gender are central in structuring the internal segregation of social networks. The transnational lens allows Dahinden to explain how the social exclusion of this population is almost complete since they are missing both transnational ties (which are only of minor importance when it comes to support) and local resources.

49   Al-Rebholz (2015) uses biographical narratives of Muslim migrant women in Germany to understand their intersectional constructions of belonging and unbelonging within a transnational context. She first assesses how the identity of Muslim migrant women is constructed within the European context. Then, the biographical narratives of the women are used to develop how they construct and negotiate a sense of belonging according to their experiences of diversity, multiculturalism and various identities. In this context, intersectional identification and senses of belonging of the young women encompass many ethnicities, spaces, languages and socio-cultural contexts. Anthias's concept of translocational positionality allows for such procedural and dynamic analysis of identities embedded in specific social times and contexts (Al-Rebholz, 2015: 66-67).

50   To conclude, there are three main takeaways from this literature review. The first takeaway is the idea that the concept of settlement and integration can better be analyzed through the lens of boundaries (Wimmer, 2004; 2008) with various strategies used by the excluded individuals such as individual boundary crossing (Dahinden *et al.*, 2012), social identities reconstruction (Holtz *et al.*, 2012) and normative inversion (Wimmer, 2008; Dahinden *et al.*, 2012).

51   Second is the importance of the notion of belonging in relation to boundary work. As belonging is a notion of people "feeling at home and feeling safe" (Yuval-Davis, 2006b), meaning actual places where people are and feel accepted and socially included (Anthias, 2016: 177), it is indeed closely related to processes of boundary making and boundary breaking (*Ibid.*).

52   Finally, the concept of intersectionality developed in gender studies brings new insights on how identities and social locations of immigrant influence are negotiated within specific contexts of boundary work. The concept of translocational positionality developed by Anthias (2002; 2008; 2012; 2016) uses this notion of intersectionality in order to understand various positionalities among different contexts and spaces. It argues that the interplay of gender, class, ethnicity and other factors needs to be

considered when focusing on someone's identity and should be embedded in a transnational space made of hierarchical and social boundaries.

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1. Lamont and Molnár (2002: 168-169) in an article about the study of boundaries in social science distinguish between *symbolic* and *social* boundaries. Symbolic boundaries are "conceptual distinctions made by social actors to categorize objects, people, practices, and even time and space" and social boundaries "objectified forms of social differences manifested in unequal access to an unequal distribution of resources (material and nonmaterial) and social opportunities". Thus, both should not be seen as equal and symbolic boundaries can be understood as necessary but not sufficient for the creation of social boundaries.

3. Theoretical framework, research design and methodology

1   The literature review above allowed me to develop the following research question:

2   *How do refugee women in Geneva use negotiations of identity and processes of boundary work to affect their sense of belonging and unbelonging given their translocational positionality?*

3   Consequently, the concepts and theoretical tools I focus on in this research are firstly the notion of experiences of settlement and integration as conceptualized through the lens of boundaries (Wimmer, 2004; 2008), especially the various strategies of boundary making and identity negotiation which are part of processes of belonging (Anthias, 2016: 177).

4   Second, my primary concern was to understand how the various identities and social locations of the women affect these experiences of settlement and integration. The concept of translocational positionality (Anthias, 2002; 2008; 2012; 2016) permits this understanding of various positionalities among different contexts and spaces. Thus, the interplay of gender, class, ethnicity and other factors needs to be considered when focusing on the refugee women's identities and should be seen as embedded in a transnational space made of hierarchical and social boundaries.

5   Defining a research design allowed me to undertake the empirical study of my research question. First, the key concepts of the research question must be defined. Second, to conduct this research the most appropriate methods were qualitative, mostly content analysis and in-depth interviews.

6   The first key concept to be defined is the notion of identity which must be understood with a transnational frame, given the transnational space and practices this entails (Vertovec, 2001). Anthias (2008: 7) gives some elements of the notion of identity: notions of the self, the core self and the aspirational one, but also notions of categorizations. Identity also entails forms of practice and performance. Shared spheres of similarity with others are important parts of individuals' identities. Moreover, and importantly, there is the notion of identity as "a site of struggle, relating to strategies of power, recognition, representation and redistribution" (*Ibid.*). Finally, identity needs to be understood as a process (Anthias, 2012: 107). This leads to the idea of negotiation of identities understood as a "social practice that can be

understood as the combination of discourses, performances and (dis-)identification strategies constructed on a multiplicity of cultural frameworks and reference systems" (La Barbera, 2015: 7). Social interactions are moreover fundamental in the construction of identities because "identity as a process, story and discourse, is always spoken from the position of the Other" (own translation in Hall, 2013: 62 in Zodogome, 2017: 85).

7 Negotiation of identities is closely related to the concept of boundary work and the processes it involves. Thus, some strategies used are individual boundary crossing (Dahinden *et al.*, 2012), social identities reconstruction (Holtz *et al.*, 2012), normative inversion (Wimmer, 2008; Dahinden *et al.*, 2012) and boundary shifting (Wimmer, 2008).

8 The last key concept of the research question is the notion of a sense of belonging and unbelonging. According to Yuval-Davis (2006b: 199), belonging is about "feeling at home" and "feeling safe", and is a dynamic process involving the interaction between organizational and subjective factors. In fact, belonging entails processes of inclusion, exclusion, access and participation which give sense to how people feel about their locations in the social world (Anthias, 2008: 8). Finally, belonging must equally be understood within a transnational frame, as individuals can feel various senses of belonging in multiple social spaces (Anthias, 2016: 183).

3.1 Methodology

9 As my field research mostly focused on the perceptions of refugee women, I undertook in-depths interviews – using a biographical narrative focus – with my research partners during the period of February-March 2019. In fact, to examine how individuals understand and interpret their place in the world and sense of belonging, narrative accounts by the actors themselves are seen as the most accessible for social researchers (Anthias, 2002). Furthermore, biographical narratives allow for an understanding of identity processes as linked to concrete social and cultural situations and contexts (Al-Rebholz, 2015: 67).

10 To constitute my field and choose my research partners, I used the principle of theoretical sampling (Glaser, 1992). The aim was consequently not to gain an accurate statistical representation but, by a detailed analysis of some pertinent case studies, to understand deeply the phenomenon I am interested in. Focusing on individual women who represented a range of relevant situations among refugee women allowed me to choose relevant case studies. For instance, I tried to interview women who have different residence status (N, F, B, C or Swiss citizenship), age (23-60), time of residence (3-20 years) and country of origin in the Middle East (Syria, various part of Kurdistan, Iraq and Iran). I was able to obtain an interesting range of situations and experiences using this principle. In order to find my research partners, I used my personal contacts, collaborated with two refugee organizations (Camarada and Agora[1]) and used the "snowball" principle (Biernacki and Waldorf, 1981).

11 I interviewed 14 women over the period of 2 months. The interviews usually lasted from 1 to 2 hours, with some exceptions: three were about 13 minutes and one was extended in 3 periods of 2 hours. We would meet either in a café, in the woman's apartment or in the local of one of the partner's organizations depending the woman's preference. I always started our encounter by explaining my subject and interest, confirmed the confidentiality of the interviews (every name was changed in the

analytical section) and asked if they agreed for me to record the interview (I usually transcribed and translated the interviews right after they were completed). I used the biographical narrative interview method, which entails three steps (Rosenthal, 1993: 60). First, I asked a broad question regarding the person's life history and let the woman talk. Afterwards, I asked narrative questions on topics and biographical themes that she mentioned in her story. Finally (possibly during a second interview) I asked some specific questions about issues that had not been addressed in the first and second parts. I had an interview guideline with me (annex 1) which allowed me to guide the women towards subjects and topics I was interested in. However, I mainly tried to let them talk and tell me about their journeys and experiences when arriving in Geneva.

12   I was also interested in gaining some insights and points of view from professionals working in the field. Indeed, the importance of the context and of the institutional framework cannot be denied, as negotiation of immigrants' identities and strategies should be assessed in reference to the subjective meanings, social locations of the subjects as well as "products of the institutional framework" (Al-Rebholz, 2015: 67). Consequently, I conducted three interviews with practitioners. First, I was able to interview a social worker from the *Hospice Général.*[2] The discussion we had was very broad, but I gained some interesting insights from her professional experience. Second, I had an informal discussion with two women working and volunteering with Agora. One of them is a chaplain and the other one has been volunteering for more than 20 years, spending one afternoon a week talking with refugee women. Finally, I conducted an interview with one professional from Camarada who explained to me the work of the association and the challenges many women face. To complete my understanding of the institutional context, I undertook secondary literature research on governmental policies and practices.

13   To analyze my materials, I used the open coding method for grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006). I started with an initial open coding phase, where I "read all my notes, transcripts line-by-line to identify and formulate patterns and themes" (*Ibid.*: 47-48). After that, I tried "synthetizing and explaining larger segments of data" (*Ibid.*: 57-58) in the focus coding part. Finally, the theoretical coding allowed me to "conceptualize how substantive codes may relate to each other" (*Ibid.*: 63-64).

3.2 Limitations and ethics considerations

14   Ethics considerations are essential, as the population I am interested in can be considered as "vulnerable". The importance of traumas certain individuals might have been through cannot be forgotten, for instance. These considerations led me to interview women who had been settled in Switzerland for some time and had not just arrived. Furthermore, I considered that interviewing women who had arrived some time ago was beneficial for this study. In fact, the social processes I am interested in take time and cannot be apprehended within a limited time period.

15   Limitations of the study entail considerations of representativeness. As the study uses qualitative methods, especially in-depth interviews, I was not able to interview enough women to satisfy what statistical representativeness would ask for. However, as stated before, the aim was not to gain an accurate statistical representation but rather to

understand deeply the phenomenon I am interested in through a detailed analysis of some pertinent case studies.

16 Finally, it is important to provide some reflections on the interviews I undertook. Interviews cannot be neutral and, as social interactions, their development largely depends on both (or all) actors' strategies, cognitive resources and the context in which the interview takes place. The interview can be understood as an intercultural meeting (Briggs, 1986 in Zodogome, 2017: 26) where different norms that are sometimes incompatible are encountered. Indeed, my research partners had very different behaviors towards me depending on their age, the location of our meeting and so on. For instance, I interviewed three young women who quickly considered me almost as their friend and easily shared their stories. On the other hand, when the woman was older, she would consider me as young and as if I could have been her daughter. Consequently, our interactions were very different depending our various social positioning. Social desirability also needs to be considered when looking at my interviews. As I asked questions about exclusion, inclusion, and the Swiss society and system, my position as a Swiss citizen most likely affected some of the responses.

17 Moreover, my analysis focuses on the discourses of my research partners. Discourses are gateways into reality; however, they are distorted by the point of view of the person being interviewed. There can be differences between reality and what the person is saying. Consequently, I did not have access to my research partners' actual practices and experiences but to their opinions on these. However, this is also a strength of this study. Indeed, my main interest was in the perception of well-being, of belonging and unbelonging of the women as these were created by their social interactions and experiences of inclusion/exclusion. Consequently, not only the actual social interactions or experiences of inclusion/exclusion interested me but also the women's perceptions of these and how they were affected by them.

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1. Camarada is an association that aims at welcoming and participating into the integration of migrant women in Geneva with a wide range of activities, such as French classes, training courses and helping for their socio-professional insertion (https://www.camarada.ch/). Agora is an ecumenical association that aims at welcoming and accompanying asylum seekers in Geneva, either at the airport, in the foyers and in the administrative detention center (http://agora-asile.ch/).

2. The *Hospice Général* is the institution in charge of social action in Geneva and is in charge of insertion and integration of refugees (https://www.hospicegeneral.ch/).

4. Analysis

1   The analytical part of this thesis is divided among three subsections. The first section is devoted to analyzing and developing the structural and institutionalized context as these are experienced by the refugee women in their everyday lives as well as how they are explained by the professionals and by the secondary literature review. This section consequently aims to present and conceptualize the main institutionalized, social and symbolic boundaries (Lamont and Molnár, 2002) – the macro context – as expressed in the interviews. From my field research, five main boundaries emerged: the Swiss asylum policy, the integration policy, language, religion and gender. These boundaries will be addressed in terms of their consequences for refugee women's inclusion and exclusion journeys and opportunities to exercise their agency in Swiss society.

2   The second section is devoted to the analysis of the women's biographical narratives regarding their translocational positionality, agency, identity strategies and construction of un/belonging. Looking at their individual responses allowed me to identify and present three clusters of women who are socially and institutionally included and excluded in Swiss society in different ways. These three clusters interestingly correspond to a spectrum that was drawn for me by the social worker from the *Hospice Général* I interviewed. She explained to me that over the years she could see how women's experiences and integration were qualitatively very different. On one side, both the highly skilled and the vulnerable women had more obstacles and difficulties in their journeys in Switzerland. On the other side, the young women experienced more possibilities and opportunities for integration. The second section of this analysis is consequently devoted to these three clusters of women and their individual translocational positionalities, agencies and narratives of belonging. Their experiences of belonging and integration do not really confirm the social worker's explanation. As will be shown below, narratives of belonging, inclusion and exclusion are more complex and depend on the many social and institutionalized spaces to which the women have access and from which they are excluded. Using the concept of translocational positionality and the women's biographical narratives allows for an integrative understanding of the women's experiences which is not limited to their labor market integration or language capacities for instance. Feeling safe and belonging somewhere have variable meanings depending on one's history, age, religion, family situation and so on. As found by Dahinden (2013) in her studies on social integration of

immigrants in Neuchâtel, ethnicity only matters in relation with other markers of difference. The analysis of the three clusters will allow me to develop an explanation of how such markers of difference are important given one's intersectional positionality and do not only act as exclusionary factors but also as resources.

3   The three clusters analyzed concern only half of the women I interviewed. Indeed, as the aim in this study was to analyze the variability of women's journeys, my interviews reflect this variability. The rest of the women fall in the "in-between" identified by the social worker. Their experiences and journeys in Geneva are sometimes complex and difficult, sometimes less so, once again depending on their various markers of difference and resources, as women, as mothers or not, and with a given permit, age or religion. However, the interviews allowed me to identify two main identity strategies used by most of the women in order to make sense of their new lives characterized by exclusion, inclusion, access and participation. The third section of this analysis is consequently devoted to these two main identity strategies. First, creating transnationalist and hybrid identities allowed the women to gain access in several spheres such as the labor market or various social spheres. This allowed the women to keep their own previous identities and at the same time get a better sense and comprehension of their new lives. Second, by extending the boundaries of their identities, as being part of a wider humanist, internationalist and respective of women's rights and freedom group, the women could create a sense of belonging beyond their condition of refugees and migrants. Their core identities and group attachments became one made of a wide range of values developed by the women among their journeys and previous lives.

4.1 Context: institutional, social and symbolic boundaries

4.1.1. Swiss asylum policy and permits

4   The Swiss asylum and admission policy are the first and main institutionalized boundary experienced by refugee women in Geneva (and by refugees in general). Indeed, the juridical statute, as determined by the asylum process and permits related to it, mainly determines refugees' capabilities and opportunities to avoid discrimination as well as one's possibility to enter the host society or to be excluded from it (Bolzman, 2016: 55-56). The asylum process and required permits constrain the possibilities of entering the labor market and/or accessing social protection and benefits. Consequently, the juridical statute is the main driver of insertion, casualization and can instead lead to exclusion (Bolzman, 2001: 136).

5   Since their implementation, Swiss asylum policies have had a prominent and sensitive place within the public debate in Switzerland (Bader, 2018: 70). Indeed, Swiss asylum law has been subject to a wide range of revisions since entering into force in 1981, often leading to more restrictive measures. Increasing suspicion towards the veracity of refugees' demands has followed this restrictive trend (*Ibid.*) and taken shape in an evolution of the understanding of the figure of the refugee from the 1980s onwards: from a person escaping Communism characterized by cultural closeness, the political refugee became an asylum seeker or an economic migrant coming from "Third-World" countries, constructed as an "Other" threatening Swiss society with social and cultural

differences. Consequently, over time, both admission and integration policies have moved towards more restrictive measures (Bolzman, 2001: 140). As explained by Bolzman (2016: 57), the right to asylum in Switzerland entails an important paradox: according protection to those in need, but under very strict and limiting conditions.

6   Swiss asylum law is grounded in the Geneva Convention from which it takes its definition of a refugee (Bader, 2018: 71). Refugees are defined as people who "in their native country or in their country of last residence are subject to serious disadvantages or have a well-founded fear of being exposed to such disadvantages for reasons of race, religion, nationality, memberships of a particular social group or due to their political opinions". Serious disadvantages include a "threat to life, physical integrity or freedom as well as measures that exert intolerable psychological pressure" (Art. 3 para. 1 AsylA).

7   In Switzerland, there are three permits relating to the different stages of the asylum process. The N permit is given to a person with asylum seeker status, meaning that the person requested asylum in Switzerland and qualifies for the process of his or her application (Art 18. AsylA; Bader, 2018: 72). They have the right to stay in Switzerland but not the right to work during the first 3 months following their arrival and only under very strict conditions after that. Moreover, social benefits are given to asylum seekers each month, however the amount is lower than it is for Swiss citizen (asile.ch [1], 2019).

8   The F permit is given to provisionally admitted refugees who qualify for refugee status in the sense of the Geneva refugee convention but not according to Swiss asylum law (Bader, 2018: 72): those persons cannot be sent back to their country of origin because it would be illicit (contrary to international law), unenforceable or materially impossible (Bolzman, 2016: 59). Usually, this permit applies to people who cannot prove their individual persecutions, but it also applies to individuals for whom the motives for their persecution occurred after they left their country (as for deserters for instance). This permit is established for one year and must be renewed each year. Furthermore, there is another F permit for a *provisionally admitted person*: a person granted subsidiary protection status but not refugee status (Bader, 2018: 72). Someone with a *refugee provisionally admitted* F permit can engage in a lucrative activity without any restriction. For someone with a *provisionally admitted person* F permit, engagement in a lucrative activity is only possible under some conditions and they had to pay a special tax of 10% of their salary until the suppression of the tax in January 2018 (asile.ch [1], 2019).

9   After 5 years, F permit holders can make a request for a B permit based on a series of criteria such as their integration, their family situation and the situation in their country of origin (*Ibid.*). Finally, a B permit is given to recognized refugees whose personal persecutions have been attested to and to persons granted authorization to stay for humanitarian reasons (Bader, 2014: 72). Holders of a B permit can obtain a C (establishment) permit after 10 years, or after 5 years in the case of "exceptional integration" based on a series of criteria (asile.ch [1], 2019).

10 Bolzman (2001: 139) explains how asylum admission policies and integration policies are interlinked: when the predominant option chosen by the State is to refuse or only temporarily admit the exiled, integration policies enable poor living conditions to dissuade the person from settling in the host society. However, when the main option is the definitive admission of refugees, integration and reception policies favor long-term integration (*Ibid.*). Consequently, it is possible to take a symbolic and social boundaries

perspective (Lamont and Molnár, 2002) to understand the effects of asylum admission and integration policy: who has the possibility to obtain which permit shows the symbolic boundaries of the Swiss "imagined community" (Anderson, 1983). In the case of Switzerland, more difficult access to more stable permits for refugees (permit B, permit C or nationality) is a concrete realization of symbolic boundaries: access to nationality is difficult in Switzerland due to the country's *ius solis* tradition which sees naturalization and immigration policies as a means to protect Swiss national identity (Riano and Wastl-Walter, 2006: 16).

11   The symbolic boundaries created by naturalization and immigration policies (Benour and Manatschaal, 2019: 194) become social boundaries in the form of determining who has access to or is excluded from the social and economic spheres. Indeed, each permit entails different rights relating to residency, social insurance and benefits or work-related permissions. For instance, Bolzman (2016) explains how the rights and duties imposed by temporary permits (F permit) have an important impact on one's abilities to access the social, cultural and economic spheres of Switzerland. It is important to note that in 2016 for instance more than a third of permit F holders stayed more than 7 years which makes the permit "provisoire qui dure" (temporary that lasts) (*Ibid.*: 60). Given the fact that F permit holders stay with the same permit for a extend period of time, an improvement of the rights associated with this permit took place in 2008 (Bader, 2018: 75).

12   Access to the economic sphere is still very difficult for F permit holders, even though the Swiss government removed the tax that employers had to pay when hiring them in 2018 (asile.ch [1], 2019). Their access to the labor market is still very limited. Indeed, as the social worker I spoke with from the *Hospice Général* explained to me, most employers are still not aware of the removal of the tax. Moreover, the appellation of "temporary" written on the F permit gives the idea that these individuals will not stay in Switzerland (contrary to what happens in reality), impeding their chance to be employed. For N permit holders, access to the labor market is even more problematic given the conditions raised before. As explained by Bolzman (2016: 62), the juridical precarity of the permit consequently leads to an economic and social precarity.

13   Bolzman develops the concept of "mitoyen" to speak about temporary permit holders in Switzerland: individuals who do not entail all the rights and duties associated with citizenship in Switzerland but at the same time, due to their condition of being refugees, are not full citizens of another country (Bolzman, 2016: 63). Responses from the interviews I conducted show how this condition of mitoyen is not limited to temporary permit holders but also to persons holding a more stable permit (B or C). Indeed, feelings of lack of capacity and lack of security result from this condition up until the acquisition of nationality as expressed by Farrah when talking about acquiring the Swiss nationality and her feeling of belonging to the Swiss community:

> No, not yet. Especially in Geneva but we will see. I think that the red document (the Swiss passport) would give me a recognition from whole Switzerland. They cannot take it back. And also, about belonging to a country, it has been since 2006 that I don't have any country, any place of origin, I have nothing. I am without nationality. So yes it would help me feeling safe because this is a feeling I miss, I miss it profoundly. (Farrah, March 2019)

14   Finally, a feeling of uncertainty resulting from an unstable permit is linked to the length of the asylum process. Many women I interviewed had to wait a very long time to get a response to their request for asylum and were consequently holding an N

permit for years. Moreover, as stated before, in 2016 a third of "temporary" F permit holders had been in Switzerland for more than 7 years (Bolzman, 2016: 60), and their temporary permit must be renewed every year. Uncertainty and length of the procedure, as well as lack of perspective, impact one's feeling of being safe and are usually paired with feelings of resignation (Achermann, Chimenti and Stants, 2006: 73l ss in Jörg *et al.*, 2016: 25). Reduced capacity and desire for learning the language and becoming integrated are important consequences, as an employee of Camarada explained to me and as was expressed by some women:

> Yes of course you see with the N permit you are not allowed to work, back then it was for 6 months. And with the F permit you can work but of course the employer, he sees an F permit, maybe he is going to be sent back, we don't need to put all this time and then he is sent back. And also, we do not know if we are going to leave so what is the point? What is the point of getting integrated, put effort to learn the language? It is really demotivating. But with the B permit, it is over, we are going to stay here. There is the possibility, we are being more stable in our head. This is what gives you the strength, to say ok I start. I start learning the language, getting integrated. (Sabeen, March 2019)

15   In the long term, temporary and precarious permits have an impact not only on one's well-being but also on one's long-term integration in the labor market: Bertrand (2017) shows the incidence of staying for an extensive period of time with a precarious/ temporary permit (N or F). Individuals who stayed longer with one of those permits remained perpetually disadvantaged in the labor market (Bertrand, 2017).

4.1.2 Admission and integration policy

16   Closely linked to the Swiss asylum policy is the admission policy put in place by the Canton of Geneva, which is the second institutionalized boundary impacting refugee women's feelings of belonging and safety. In Switzerland, cantons are responsible for putting in place integration policies and programs (articles 17a and 17d OIE;[1] Bertrand, 2017: 50): starting in 2014, they were meant to implement a "programme d'intégration cantonal" (cantonal integration program) over a period of four years. In general, Swiss integration policy includes the following points: socio-economic integration, including professional insertion and language courses; cultural and religious integration; and juridical-politico integration (*Ibid.*: 55). An interesting study by Bennour and Manatschaal (2019: 195) shows how "inclusive cantonal reception contexts in terms of integration policy and popular attitudes amplify the positive effect of duration of stay on immigrants' national identification." According to the study, more inclusive integration policies are found in French-speaking cantons. However, the women I interviewed spoke mainly negatively of their experience with the *Hospice Général* and the integration policy put in place in Geneva.

17   A first difficulty can be linked to the social control produced by the temporary permit (Bolzman, 2001: 141) and integration policy. Indeed, as explained by Bolzman, social control is one of the main characteristics of the refugee's conditions as their subsistence is assured but the person is physically excluded and put aside from the Swiss population (*Ibid.*). From the interviews I conducted, two main issues relating to social control stand out: As asylum seekers and refugees benefit from social assistance (if they cannot sustain themselves), the canton can assign them a communal housing or an apartment (Jörg *et al.,* 2016: 13-14). Many women I interviewed had to move

frequently from one communal housing or apartment to another impeding both their rooting experience and their feeling of autonomy. For instance, a change of permits (from N to F) led Songul's family to move to a new communal housing at the other side of the Canton, with the whole family having to create new habits and the children having to change schools.

18   Second, getting access to social benefits is conditional upon evidence and control, obligating the women to justify any of their spending or activities:

> You give your bank statement, the proof of paying the rent, insurance, public transport subscription, everything. Every month. And if one paper is missing, they do not give you the money. And they do not call you to tell you. (Shada, February 2019)

19   Finally, the women felt that their choices and possibilities of integration were very limited due to their social positionality as refugees and as being dependent on the *Hospice Général.* Opportunities (or lack thereof) in term of language learning and formation were criticized by many women as they felt they were not given the opportunities and tools to further their education and language skills:

> the system did not put in place a formation for the refugees to learn the language, that impedes them to be well integrated into the society. How can we ask someone to be integrated in the society when they are not given the means? (Sanaa, March 2019)

20   Bolzman (2002: 71 in Bertrand, 2017: 57) criticizes this situation in Switzerland where everything is done to render the integration of immigrants from certain countries impossible and then reproaches them for not wanting to be integrated. Putting this in relation to the fact of having to flee her country, Shada explains how everything in her life was imposed on her:

> But my education was imposed on me. I am very grateful towards Switzerland but still it was not my choice, I did not decide to leave Iraq, to come here, I did not decide the war over there, where I was born, everything was imposed on me, my education, my work, the *Hospice Général*, the social aid.... (Shada, February 2019)

21   Consequently, being a refugee contributes to make this social control even more difficult to accept. Belen expressed these difficulties in terms of tragedies. Tragedies in her life, both in Syria and in Switzerland, would not stop as most of her choices were imposed on her.

4.1.3 Language

22   Speaking or not speaking the French language does not appear as a main social boundary contrary to what was expected from the literature review. Indeed, it is considered as a blurred boundary (Alba, 2005), since people can easily speak two or more languages. However, the journey of learning French remains fundamental as a *fil rouge* throughout the women's experiences of un/belonging. When asked about what it means to be integrated and belong in Geneva, the majority of the women responded first with knowing the language. A lack of linguistic competence was thus associated with feelings of frustration, exclusion and loneliness. Language, as evoked by Anthias (2006b), is quite a permeable requisite of belonging, which asks for processes of boundary breaking or crossing by the individuals. When talking about language, four issues stand out from the interviews as related to belonging, meaning "the actual

spaces and places to which people are accepted as members or feel they are members, and broader questions about social inclusion" (Anthias, 2006b: 177).

23 First, immigrant insertion into the labor market is very much tied to the ability to speak the host society's dominant language as many studies have showed (for instance Chiswick and Miller, 1995; 2002; Dustmann, 1994; VandenHeuvel and Wooden, 1997; Trejo, 1997; Tumlin and Zimmerman, 2003; Bleakley and Chin, 2004; McManus, Gould and Welch, 1983 in Nawyn *et al.*, 2012: 256). Many women considered their non-integration into the labor market – their non-acceptance into that economic space – as a consequence of their poor ability to speak the language and expected better economic integration once they acquired better language abilities.

24 Second, language competencies should also be considered as non-economic social capital (Nawyn *et al.*, 2012). Indeed, Nawyn *et al.* (2012) looked at the links between linguistic isolation, social capital and immigrant belonging. Two main issues related to linguistic competencies and feelings of belonging stand out: a complete lack of competencies impedes access to "(1) feeling respected and valued in their receiving communities and (2) developing social ties in those communities that could provide them with essential information" (256). Many women interviewed would indeed link their French capabilities with facilitated possibilities of meeting new people and friends as well as obtaining access to services and information. Sabeen expressed frustration when talking about her medical visits with her children due to her lack of comprehension of French:

> When I was going to the doctor, I did not have a translator with me, and I did not know if I have the right to have one or not. I was blind, I felt blind alone out there. I would not understand…. I remember very well, my son was a year and half and I was going to the doctor, saying "cough cough".
> Because when I was going with my children, I would not understand what the doctor was saying. I would not understand what my daughter had. And how. This is what pushed me to, I wanted to understand. (Sabeen, March 2019)

25 A third domain related to linguistic competencies and feelings of belonging is the hierarchical construction of languages related to a loss of confidence in one own competency. Indeed, foreign languages spoken by the majority of refugees in Europe are for instance not taught in schools, showing the prioritizing of some languages over others. The non-recognition of the usefulness of one's mother tongue was thus evoked as a loss of feeling of well-being and self-confidence:

> And also, the idea that I speak one language, why would you propose me another. It was really difficult. And it took me those 10 years to realize, here, there are other things to learn. My luggage, they are not useful here. So, I put them aside, I took me that time to say ok, my treasures that I have now are not useful, so we put them aside, not letting them down but for learning something else. (Sabeen, March 2019)

26 Moreover, Arabic compared to English for example, as a foreign language, does not have the same status in Western societies, giving the women feelings of a hierarchical construction of the foreigner:

> When I look at Americans, British, Irish, they are expats. It is not the same thing. So, everyone wants to go to the pub and they speak English there, being proud of speaking English because it shows a certain level of education. We speak an important language while only ordering a beer. But we must have the right accent because otherwise, they will look at you differently. But when we go to a Portuguese restaurant or Turkish kebab or Lebanese fast food, we will not order in Arabic. It this, that thing, that hierarchy…. (Farrah, March 2019)

27 Finally, even when a high linguistic competency level is acquired, it remains an indicator of "Otherness". Indeed, as expressed by Bourdieu (1991 in Nawyn *et al.*, 2012: 258), language is related to power: "linguistic capital is the acquired skills of speaking a dominant or 'official' language according to the specifications of those in power" (*Ibid.*). Accent and misuse of words always indicate the foreign origin of the person and acts of correction impact their feeling of self-confidence when using the language:

> Back then, I was staying a lot on my own, and I did not speak French very well so I would avoid talking to people. I was ashamed of my accent, ashamed of not being able to use the right words, ashamed of not understanding everything that was happening. [...] Yes, they would comment, even now at work. If I do a mistake in French. I don't know, it is exhausting. (Farrah, March 2019)

28 Language consequently still appears as a social boundary in the sense that it has an important impact on one's feelings and capabilities of being part of the society. Naturally one can learn a new language and acquire the right skills over time. However, as expressed by Farrah, it always stays as a mark of Otherness. As she was not able to master the language at all, Sanaa called the French language her enemy because her lack of competence completely impedes every part of her life.

4.1.4 Religion

29 Religion is pictured as a bright boundary in the literature: as one cannot be part of two religions at the same time, it requires a massive boundary crossing from the individual other (Alba, 2005). Even though European societies are becoming more and more secular, "the ways in which Christian religions have been institutionalized and constitute, through customs and habits of thought, part of the definition of 'who we are' makes it difficult for Islam to achieve parity. Thus, while secular natives of these societies may see religion as a minor feature of the mainstream, Muslims cannot help but be aware of the secondary status of their religion" (*Ibid.*: 32). Yet, the Muslim women I interviewed expressed a feeling of unbelonging related to the boundary of religion not mainly in relation to practices and customs but mostly regarding prejudices and stereotypes. Moreover, it is important to note that most women I interviewed did not practice Islam anymore and some of them were atheist.

30 On the one hand, the women who talked about practices of Islam in Europe did not express facing many institutionalized difficulties or obstacles:

> After all, we always see girls at school wearing the veil, they are not prevented from going to school, doing internships and so on. [...] Because if I think if I go to the mosque to pray, no one is going to stop me. It is true I could easily wake up at four in the morning and pray, I just did not do it. (Shada, February 2019)

31 For instance, wearing the veil was not associated with more experience of discrimination or prejudices. It is however important to link this with the fact that only 3 out of the 14 women I interviewed were still practicing Islam strictly and only 2 wearing the veil. Moreover, the two women had limited French capabilities – even though one had been in Switzerland for more than 10 years – which can impact their potential to notice discrimination.

32 However, on the other hand, still "living in the context of a secularized Christian Europe, many Muslims experience European claims of religious freedom as a contradiction since they receive little public facilitation and in fact face many practical

difficulties in trying to live according to Islam" (Zolberg and Woon, 1999: 19). Indeed, some women still expressed the lack of public facilities and recognition especially towards Islam as impeding their freedom of religion and fostering their position of Otherness:

> At school I was suffering for example when we had the sport class. I run but after a while I stop because I am tired, I did not eat, did not drink and I am thirsty, but I can't drink [because of fasting for Ramadan]. And the professor would not tolerate that. He would not respect my beliefs, I think if I was from another religion, I would not have had those difficulties. Because they respect others, but unfortunately nowadays they don't respect everything that comes from Islam. (Shada, February 2019)

33 Finally, expressions of prejudice associated with the practice of Islam – such as about terrorism and danger – were identified as having the main impact on their feelings of belonging and safety:

> Because they would not understand why I was fasting during Ramadan. Unfortunately, nowadays everything that is Muslim is seen as terrorist, so you practice, it means that you accept what is happening in the name of Islam. (Shada, February 2019)
>
> So even when I was saying that I don't drink: why? Ah because you are Muslim? You practice? When another person, who is European and do not drink, they will say ok she is just healthy. She is careful about what she eats and drinks. There is not this etiquette, she does not represent a danger, when it's about me, if I don't drink, it represents a danger. (Shada, February 2019)
>
> For example, the fact that even an act by a Swiss, a good Swiss, a blond Swiss for example who is not from another origin other than Swiss or European. And the good Europe, not Eastern Europe, Western Europe. Well that one will be seen as an individual crime, when if it is a Maghreb, Arab, Kosovar, Rom etc., it will be seen as "ah he did that, he is Arab, he is Muslim, that is why". It is an argument that is used. It enters the daily conversation, when we meet someone. (Farrah, March 2019)

34 Indeed, as expressed by Martiniello (2018: 98) in an article in a publication from the federal commission against racism (CFR – commission fédérale contre le racisme), "in the present chaotic context, Muslims became the central figure of contemporary racism". Especially in the wake of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, Muslims in Switzerland expressed experiencing an increase of prejudices and widespread mistrust. They became the new scapegoats and are slandered collectively and ascribed a sort of collective responsibility for events taking place abroad (Angst *et al.*, 2006: 15). Farrah for instance expressed apprehension when hearing about a new terrorist attack – not because of the victims but because of her fear of the collective responsibility she will have to bear if the perpetrator is Arab/Muslim:

> When I hear about a terrorist attack, I say… I pray God that he is not Arab or Muslim, before thinking about the victims. All the community, and it is like me, I am the respondent and I have to show how much I disagree with his act. This is what is expected, I am supposed to say that I disagree. You will not write on your Facebook or your friends are not going to ask you if your friend robbed a bank, if you disagree with his acts. No. We know that you disagree, it is a prerequisite. (Farrah, March 2019)

35 Finally, it is interesting to put Muslim women's experiences in relation to experiences from the two Christian women I interviewed: the fact of living in a Christian society did foster their feelings of belonging and well-being in the Swiss society (in opposition with Muslims or women associated with Islam):

> When I was saying I am Christian, and the people would say "so what?". Wow I come from a country where I could not show that I am Christian, I could not show my faith and here in Europe, you tell me that I can do it.
> He said it is closed. And I said to myself oh my God it is Sunday. They, they respect Sunday, for me it was like wow, I came back home discovering something precious. The day off here was Sunday, it was great for me. (Sabeen, February 2019)

36 Consequently, even though most of the Muslim women I interviewed did not practice anymore, being in a Christian society still had some important effects mostly in their creation as an "Other", sometimes dangerous, characterized by stereotypical, backwards and dangerous representations of Islam.

4.1.5 Gender

37 Gender appears as a social and institutionalized boundary in the experiences and journeys of the refugee women in Geneva. Indeed, the intersection of the condition of being both a woman and a foreigner has a predominant impact on three domains.

38 First, the Swiss asylum procedure shows a lack of support and appreciation for women's specificities. As expressed in a report by Terre des femmes (2011), the Swiss asylum procedure is still based on the stereotype of the male migrant. Consequently, discrimination and lack of information and recognition of women's specific needs appear in the procedures and specifically in the collective housing centers:

> So, we arrive, and they give us a room, we visit the place. We make an inventory of the place. The bathroom, we had another family next to us, there was two boys, the father, the mother and the grandmother. And there was a man living alone, he was Iraqi and us. So, to be simple, we shared the bathroom and showers with five men we did not know. Without talking about the women. So sometimes when we were taking a shower, someone could enter.... (Farrah, March 2019)

39 The intersection of gender and precarious status, holding an N permit, made housing conditions even worse for Ezin as her family did not receive proper accommodation even when she was pregnant:

> After the 8th month, I was lying most of the time because I was pregnant. I was tired so I could not really walk. [...] And with my husband, we slept on a mattress for one person, very small and I was pregnant. The children slept on the floor.... It was difficult and we start to have issues in the family. (Ezin, March 2019)

40 Insertion into the labor market is the second domain where gender impacts women's experience. Research shows how refugee women are less employed than men in the labor market, and remain so in the long term (Bertrand, 2017), which has further consequences for their insertion into society as well (Vidal-Coso, 2019: 157). Racist and sexist prejudices put migrant women into subaltern professional positions (Dallera, 2007: 58).

41 Indeed, as showed by Browne and Misra (2003 in Ratcliff, Bolzman and Gakuba, 2014: 66), when gender is intersected with ethnicity or national origin, potential employers spontaneously combine those characteristics to predict one's performance. Consequently, stereotypes related to foreign origins are interlinked with those that already concern women. When undertaking a training program for unemployed youths, Farrah had to face these stereotypes when she was asked to add/remove orientalist stereotypes on her CV:

> She asked me to put a photo to prove that I was not veiled, she asked me not to put my origin, not to put Iraq. To say that I speak Arabic but not as my mother tongue. And also, to say that I do belly dance. (Farrah, March 2019)

42 Moreover, gender roles as experienced mainly by women with children impede their possibility to access training and employment: many of them arrive as single mothers with children or as married women with children. The lack of nursery availabilities as well as the lack of flexibility in employment impede their possibility of accessing integration courses for instance (Hobz, 2012 in asile.ch [2]):

> You know when I was there, I was still, in quotes, penalized, because I had young children. There were always courses, available spots, but I had to go get the children from school. So, at first, they said my husband has to learn the language first so he can find a job and as you have young children, you stay with them. (Sabeen, February 2019)

43 The third domain where the women expressed difficulties concerns those who came with their families as daughters. Their position as the daughter of the family brought issues of gender role and place in the society linked with different traditions. Belen explained this issue to me when she had the opportunity of working in Lausanne but would have had to undertake night watches, meaning sleeping and spending the night away from home. Her brother strongly opposed this possibility at first. However, she explained to me how her parents are quite open, and how she could finally convince her family to let her take this opportunity. Another example was expressed by Shada who talked about the conflict she felt between respecting her family and enjoying her social life:

> It was a bit difficult for me to get integrated because I always wanted to respect my family, not hurt them, and as woman with the traditions and the society here it really creates complicated links. So, I had to find an equilibrium which was not always easy. How should I do things not to offend my mother? (Shada, March 2019)

44 Finally, it is interesting to note how both Farrah and Shada gave attention to the fact that their condition as women and with the prejudices attached to it also benefited them as it would decrease their representation as a threat and as being dangerous:

> I think that for me as Iraqi, it is easier to be a woman in Switzerland than a man. Because I have less stigma, I am less dangerous. We rarely hear about women terrorists; we hear about submissive women. (Farrah, March 2019)
>
> Talking about my journey here, yes it facilitated lots of things. For example, when I go to an interview, they forget the fact that I am Iraqi because I am a woman. I do not represent a threat. (Shada, February 2019)

45 This first section of this chapter allowed me to develop the main institutionalized, symbolic and social boundaries identified and expressed by the women. These boundaries, as part of the macro context, restrict and limit the women's agency. Asylum and integration policies, language, religion and gender are in consequence crucial to take into account when looking at and analyzing the women's journeys through their biographical narratives. One's agency is important and crucial but limited by a wide range of factors. Given this macro context, I now want to turn to the women's responses and strategies. How do they make sense of their lives, of their senses and feelings of exclusion and inclusion? Do they feel as though they belong in Geneva, in Switzerland? What makes them feel included or excluded? What important sectors, spheres and parts of their identities are important to their feelings of un/belonging? These are the topics that are now going to be addressed by looking at the intersectional positionalities and biographical narratives of three clusters of women.

4.2 Narratives of belonging and unbelonging

46 This second part of the analysis focuses on the journeys of the women, looking mainly at their social interactions and actual spaces to which they have access or from which they are excluded to shed light on their feelings of belonging and alterity. The women have been classified in three clusters of different intersectional positionalities and structural integration, showing their various and sometimes contradictory journeys and experiences of exclusion and inclusion and feelings of belonging. Their intersectional positionalities show how certain aspects of their identities will have a profoundly different impact, positive or negative, on their opportunities and access. I now want to focus on the agency of the women, constrained by their translocational positionality and the structure conceived in terms of the main boundaries presented in the previous section. However, as highlighted by the transnational trend of migration studies, "the intersectional constructions of belonging and identity should, therefore, be understood as responses to the hegemonic cultures of both the sending and the host countries" (Al-Rebholz, 2015: 61). Consequently, it is crucial to keep in mind that identity strategies and feelings of belonging are not only told in relation to the Swiss context and culture but also regarding one's own culture and nationality.

4.2.1 First cluster: young refugee women and the ambivalence of belonging

47 The first cluster entails three young women who arrived in Geneva between the age of 15 and 20 years old. Farrah and Shada are sisters and arrived from Iraq with their mother and brother in 2006 at the age of 15 and 17 years old respectively. Belen is Kurdish and came from Syria in 2016. Although there is a long period separating their arrival, the three young women narrated the same types of experience of discrimination and exclusion as well as questioning of their identity. Consequently, I chose to analyze their journeys together, given their close and quite similar translocational positionalities. Indeed, all of them came with their family as young women from the Middle East having to bear the weight of prejudices and stereotypes. Their social positionality as young women gave them a privilege of what I would call a "deeper integration and opportunities for belonging". The three of them learned the language quite quickly and through the pursuit of their education in Switzerland, had the opportunity of exchanging and sharing social spaces with young Swiss people. Consequently, their inclusion experiences could be more developed than the other women. However, the three of them mainly told stories of exclusion and discrimination as part of their experiences in Geneva.

48 I can see two reasons for this fact: first, young migrants usually express higher perception of discrimination which can be explained by the high expectations they have of the host society: higher expectations of belongingness and opportunities than their seniors since the young experience most of their life in the host country (Simon, 1998: 65). Second, by their closeness and everyday experiences inside the host society, sharing social spaces such as school, they have more probability of experiencing discrimination. Consequently, their translocational positionality as young migrants gives them an ambivalent opportunity of inclusion and exclusion at the same time.

49 Before analyzing their experiences of inclusion and alterity with the angle of social interactions, it is important to note two critical facts which differ in the social positioning of the three women, having a crucial impact on their agency. First, the age of arrival: both Shada and Farrah arrived in Switzerland as minors, giving them the possibility of following a quite usual Swiss educational cursus, by going first to a so-called "integration class" for newly arrived immigrant children to learn the language and then easily entering a business school for Shada and a general school for Farrah before she further went on with her studies at the school of social work in Geneva. On the other side, Belen arrived at the age of 20 years old, having already started a university degree as a laboratory assistant in Syria. Given her age, she had to follow the usual French class from the *Hospice Général* and given the low level and slow path of teaching, had to find other courses and possibilities to learn the language by herself. Moreover, continuing her education was difficult because she could not enter the University of Geneva, given her foreign and unrecognized high school diploma. She would have had to redo the whole Swiss cursus and pay about 10,000CHF in order to enter the university, a possibility the *Hospice Général* did not give her. Consequently, she had to look for other ways to continue her education and could finally enter the same school of social work as Farrah.

50 The second critical factor is the permit as already explained in the boundaries' section of this study. The social positioning of the three women differs as Farrah and Shada quickly obtained a B permit. On the other side, given her F permit, Belen experienced more constraints and impasses. For example, Belen wanted to do an internship as part of her studies at the school of social work. She had many difficulties finding one in Geneva but eventually found an opportunity in Lausanne. However, given her F permit, she was not initially allowed to work in a different canton than the one in which she lived (asile.ch [1], 2019). She had to hire lawyers and convince the authorities that the employment opportunity was part of continuing her education before she finally received permission. On the other hand, Farrah also found employment in Lausanne but given her B permit, had no institutionalized difficulties working there.

51 The social positioning of the three women, despite being almost similar, differs in two crucial points that had important impacts on Belen's opportunities to enter the educational and economic space. The following section aims at analyzing the social experiences of inclusion, exclusion and feelings of belonging as well as alterity as a result of their social interactions. Three social spaces appeared as impactful in the narratives of the young women: school, the familial circle and their own community. Finally, I will consider how their feelings of belonging are mainly rooted in their everyday experiences of living in Geneva and in their obtainment of Swiss nationality.

Narratives of exclusion and demarcation logics: the school

52 School appears in the narratives of the three women as the most important social space where they experienced exclusion and categorization as Others. Prejudices and stereotypes, associated with remarks by both the children and teachers on the women's difficulties with the French language and on their origins, had a profound and negative impact on their experiences at school. For instance, students' and teachers' lack of accurate information, ignorance and mainstream ideas about Iraq led Farrah and Shada to experience many offensive remarks and questions:

> At school I was not very well accepted, integrated because I was the only Arab, Iraqi and Iraq is a country at war, we always hear explosion when we watch the television. So, one of the questions someone asked me once was: do you know how to make a bomb? They thought they taught us this at school. (Shada, February 2019)

53 Shada described to me at length the stereotyping she suffered from at school but also at her workplace. Stereotypes associated with Muslim traditions or practices being backward for instance were prominent even though she did not keep on practicing for a long time after arriving in Switzerland. Indeed, having Arab origins is usually associated with Islam in Europe. Shada suffered from stereotypes about the dangers of her Arab and Muslim origins but also from being treated differently, as a constructed Other. For example, she was told not to touch the bacon when she was working at McDonalds. Feelings of exhaustion and revolt were associated with these constant processes of Othering and categorization as a threat. Consequently, Islam through the perception and stereotypes associated with it appears as a clear exclusionary boundary in the social spaces of school and work.

54 Interestingly, Belen expressed feelings of exclusion and Otherness mainly related to her experience at school, meaning a few years after her arrival in Switzerland. Ignorance and immaturity were adjectives she associated with her school comrades who displayed feelings of pity associated to Belen's status as a refugee:

> I don't know if we can say that it is racism but… ah but you come from Syria? Ohh poor people, you had that stupid compassion. Ok I have been through this, but I am in front of you and you should know that I did not come crawling or walking on all fours. I came on my feet and I am in front of you. You always had that look of pity and it would deeply disturb me. (Belen, February 2019)

55 Belen consequently felt like her agency was diminished by her label as a refugee as people she met would feel like she needed them or assume that she was constantly suffering. Shada expressed the same difficulty of being labelled as a refugee and foreigner: she considers her social networks and experiences in general as improving once she was able to remove this refugee label.

56 Martiniello and Simon (2014 in Zodogome, 2017: 88) explain the effect on the identity construction of a minority group of such social categorizations as experienced by the young women: social categorization leads people to either retake possession of the stigmatized identity and requalify it by inversing the stigma (using the normative inversion strategies developed by Wimmer (2008) and Dahinden *et al.* (2012) to detach the negative image associated with the group. Inversely, strategies of assimilation – boundary crossing – are used to avoid being depreciated, hoping to be unremarked and escape identity categorizations (Zodogome, 2017: 88).

57 The three women expressed using both of these identity strategies to respond to the discrimination and exclusion they faced. Farrah explained to me how she had to educate herself about her own heritage, about the traditions, origins and political situation of Iraq. She felt that she had to be knowledgeable about them and that being proud of her origin was the only way to tell her comrades and inverse the stereotypes. Using "the right words and arguments being used here" was crucial in order to inverse the stigma associated with her origin.

58 On the other side, Shada expressed using classic assimilation strategies – adopting practices and cultural references of the dominant Swiss culture. Notably concerning

questions related to going out and alcohol, she felt as though she had to change her behavior, "give a bit of herself", or she would never be able to be accepted.

> If I would always stay on my side, not drinking, not going out, not partying, I don't think I could have been integrated. It would have always been, "you are old-fashioned, you don't drink you don't go out". (Shada, February 2019)

59 Interestingly, Farrah also used assimilation strategies, however with the purpose of not being even more excluded. Indeed, she felt as though she had to learn how not to get angry or mad at remarks in order not to confirm stereotypes about "bad" Arab and Muslim migrants.

60 Finally, their identity as shaped by their experience of migration was used by the young women as a logic of demarcation between their comrades and them. The common past experience of migration associated with all the difficulties and feelings of uprooting are narrated in opposition to the ignorance and immaturity of the youngsters. A group of "us" migrants in opposition to "them" is consequently constituted as a reaction to the experiences of exclusion and discrimination.

61 However, Farrah, Shada and Belen all felt as though their exclusion and categorization experiences at school could not completely be avoided or overcome by identity and boundary-breaking strategies. The social networks of the young women had been constituted mostly outside of school once they could overcome their labels and stereotypes. Being able to meet people with closer origins and/or interests also helped them constitute their social groups.

Negotiations within the family circle

62 Having arrived in Geneva as part of a family and as daughters of this family is an important aspect of the women's identities that cannot be left out when looking at their experiences in Geneva. Indeed, the three of them talked about how issues and sometimes conflicts within their family circle would impact their possibilities of becoming integrated and feeling safe. Moreover, their social location as daughters who must respect traditions impacted their access to specific spaces and opportunities.

63 Both Shada and Belen expressed feelings of ambivalence about their position as daughters in a family where they had to respect their elders and their traditions. For Shada, the difficulty was in finding the right equilibrium between respecting her mother and brother, by showing respectful behavior in line with her education, and being able to develop a social network. As going out and drinking was part of the creation of this social network, those practices were not always in line with her mother's and brother's expectations. Moreover, with their past of living in a country at war, issues of security worried her mother when she went out at night. Shada consequently had to use identity strategies with her family by positioning herself as someone mature and independent. However, she felt like she was in a constant struggle for a while as improving on the side of her social relations usually led to issues with her family.

64 Belen explained this issue in relation to her opportunity to work in Lausanne where she would have to do night watches (as already mentioned in the previous section about gender boundaries). When her brother opposed her working there, she felt an immense feeling of injustice leading her to use identity strategies to convince her brother that it would be okay for her to do so (it is interesting to note that she convinced her parents

beforehand quite easily). She had to position herself as a deserving, honorable and hardworking young woman who had the rare opportunity for an F permit holder of working in a different canton. Using her brother's cultural references linked to their place of origin, she distanced herself from other young women who pursued the frivolous behavior of going out meeting men.

> But then I was giving him evidence, evidence that I came here to work, that I want to start over my studies, I am not like the other girls that just want to get married and stay at home. I need you to encourage me and not to say no you don't do this. Then my father said ok if you think it is good for your future. But my brother stayed stubborn. For three days. I was not stopping to tell him he has to agree. But then at some point I said I'm going to do it even if you say no. But I did not want to go working and at the same time we don't speak to each other. [...] He said anyway you're going to do it you don't need my opinion. I said no I don't need it; I just want you to understand why I want to go to Lausanne and stay the night. It is not to go have fun with guys or something else, it is to help sick people who are suffering. (Belen, February 2019)

65   Finally, both Belen and Shada expressed the difficulties of being on a different path from their parents concerning their experiences in Geneva. Indeed, their social relations and experiences were much more varied and developed which made them adopt cultural practices and references more quickly than their family. Consequently, they both had to adopt identity strategies using their cultural references from their own culture of origin in order to convince their family to give them the permission of accessing a range of social and labor spaces.

Double identities, negotiations and transnationalism

66   Having to balance between their identities linked to their place of origin and the process of acquiring new practices, references and ideas was a conflicting journey for the young women. Their identities became blurred as they sometimes would lose their points of reference. Both Shada and Belen developed these dilemmas associated with their evolving identities, especially when they met people from their own community.

67   For Shada, being with a group of only Iraqis now seems impossible for her. She distances herself from them because of her non-belief and non-practice of Islam as well as her independent character, which is seen as not aligned with Iraqi culture. As a consequence of her new identity and practices, Shada feels as she left Iraqi society and the values attached to it in order to enter the Swiss one. She described being part of two societies as unfeasible:

> So yes, this is why we can never be part of two societies at once. It is not possible. We can keep it inside ourselves but really being part, it is a huge work, except if we have a double personality. Otherwise, it would not be possible, we could not be in two societies at once. (Shada, February 2019)

68   Belen recalls the same type of dilemma with her encounters with the Kurdish community. She identified a conflict between values of being attached and loyal to her community and her identity and values as a humanist. Indeed, Belen encounters many individuals in Geneva who would be categorized as "enemies" back in Syria given her Kurdish origin, for instance Arabs or Turkish people. Her internal debate is about these conflicting identities and her need of staying neutral and avoiding being racist considering her migration experience:

> There is at the same time my identity as a human being, I cannot be that racist for my community. So, there is all the things at the same time. At the same time, you are humanist, you have, you have this duty towards your community which is actually not a duty but love. But there is time when I would realize that when I was doing all of this, there are people that would consider you as racist. Because you devote yourself totally to your cause but at the same time, with migration, you are in front of people, they are Arabs, Turkish, Iranians. (Belen, February 2019)

69 Al-Rebozlh uses the concept of hybridity to explain the strategies used by migrants with their conflicting identities: "Hybridity is a social practice and discourse through which migrants give meaning to their most controversial experiences. Hybridization can be understood as the mixture of social forms, practices, conducts/visions of life, and identification models composed of a multiplicity of cultural frameworks and reference systems" (Al-Rebholz, 2015: 69). Using hybridity as a social practice would consequently allow the migrants to regain agency in the majority culture.

70 Shada made sense of her conflicting identities and practices using strategies of hybridity by being transcultural. According to Wolfgang Welsch (1997, in CFR, 2008: 37), transculturality is a practice undertaken when different cultures meet each other and interpenetrate each other. The individual overcomes her national identity to create a new one. Indeed, Shada feels as though she was able to take the best of both cultures, Swiss and Iraqi. She considers herself as having the positive values of warmness and welcoming values from Iraq and organizational skills of Switzerland. This new hybrid identity also allowed her to take the opportunity of creating a small association aimed at helping children in Iraq. She felt as though this organization was like her, rooted in Switzerland but linked with Iraq.

71 Belen and Farrah on the other side used their migratory experience as a hybrid social practice in order to make sense of their conflicting identities. Indeed, for both of them, their migration experiences were used as a gateway to enter the sphere of social work. They feel that with their past as migrants, they should be able to help and bring some of their experience to this work. Belen expressed at length her conflicting identities of being Kurdish, a migrant and a woman and her wish of finding a hybrid way of reuniting her three causes in her future work. She feels that this would be her best way to be at peace with her past and conflicting experiences. Farrah on the other side articulated her wish, which according to her was that of every migrant, to enter the system in order to change it. Her experience with the *Hospice Général* throughout her biographical narrative comes across many times as a negative one which can explain her wish to follow this journey.

Obtainment of nationality and Geneva

72 The previous section explained how Belen, Shada and Farrah felt excluded from and discriminated against in social places, especially at school. The importance of family, traditions and gender in regard to obtaining permission or the possibility to access certain spaces was also articulated, as were various strategies of making and breaking identities and boundaries used by the three young women in these situations of exclusion. Hybridity was a way of making sense of their developing double identities in relation to their own community as well as to the rest of the society. Focusing on how the three women could develop a feeling of belonging towards Geneva and Switzerland,

this section explains Shada's and Farrah's experiences as their feelings of belonging developed over time, contrary to Belen who arrived in Switzerland only 3 years ago.

73 Firstly, Geneva, as an actual lived space with everyday social practices, is narrated as a space of safety and consequently a space where Shada and Farrah could develop feelings of belonging. Indeed, for Farrah, the cultural and ethnic mixes of Geneva made her everyday experience of walking in the street easier, for example, as she would not be perceived as different. Especially after starting to work in Lausanne, Farrah expressed feelings of luckiness and happiness about having settled in Geneva:

> I realized how great it was to live in Geneva by going to Lausanne. Sixty kilometers that change everything. I think that my experience would not have been that beneficial if we would have been transferred in Lausanne. Sincerely, after all we have to chance to be unnoticed in Geneva. In Lausanne in the canton of Vaud I don't have this feeling. (Farrah, March 2019)

74 Joking about the difficulties of finding "real" Swiss in Geneva, Shada evoked the chance of having friends with various origins in Geneva, a possibility that might not exist somewhere else.

> Then I think it is something that Geneva gives us. Because we have the choice, we can really... now for me it is not normal to go into a country and not to find many origins inside the same group of friends. I really don't find this normal. (Shada, February 2019)

75 Second, obtaining Swiss nationality was associated by both Shada and Farrah as the end of an itinerary. For Shada, it was felt as the natural end of a process, the *cerise sur le gâteau*. However, as she was in the process of obtaining nationality, she had a burn out at work and had to stop working. She explained to me how she went through a whole process and felt like waking up after 18 years of sleep.

76 For Farrah, obtaining nationality is associated with a feeling of safety that she is deeply missing at the moment:

> So yes, it would help me feeling more in security because this is a feeling I am missing, I am deeply missing. I think this is why I am in a permanent fight. Because I haven't achieved that level of security. When I was in depression, I was not feeling well, and I went to see a psychiatrist and she said something. She said you're not in a state of emergency anymore, there is no war anymore. It was like a slap, so then during the whole discussion as I was talking about this I could not breath. And then, just to think about that, wow I could breath. It's over. I think it would allow me to feel it is the end of everything, it is a new beginning. And I'm afraid not to get it... I don't know... (Farrah, March 2019)

77 Farrah's words resonate deeply with Bolzman's concept of mitoyen and the associated lack of citizenship, rights and feeling of belonging. In fact, both Farrah's and Shada's narratives articulate the rooting importance of obtaining a formal nationality in order to feel safe and a sense of belonging.

Ambivalent feelings of belonging and alterity

78 Analyzing the journeys of Shada, Farrah and Belen shows a deeply ambivalent feeling of belonging. Given their high expectations about their life in Switzerland, the experiences of exclusion are described as having an important impact on their feelings of well-being and safety. Moreover, their social positioning as young women and daughters has an important impact on their agency and opportunities.

79   It is interesting to conclude this section with one quote from Farrah, which expresses
     well her ambivalent feeling of alterity, as never being able to do enough, to integrate
     enough. She explained at length to me how she thinks she will never be integrated,
     never feel completely as belonging to the Swiss society because of the difficulties of
     always having to justify herself, and explain her journey and origins:

> Yes, it is my duty to constantly justify myself, every new meeting is a new
> integration process actually. It never stops because I have the face I have, because
> of my name. I am proud of my origins, of my country, to live here in Switzerland.
> But I constantly have to justify my existence. Still now. I will never be integrated
> enough. (Farrah, March 2019)

4.2.2 Second cluster: highly qualified women and disillusion

80   The second cluster of women concerns two highly qualified refugee women from Iraq
     who are in their 50s. Leyla and Sanaa both arrived in 2006 in Switzerland and quite
     easily obtained refugee status followed by a B permit. Leyla obtained Swiss nationality a
     few years ago while Sanaa wants to start the procedure soon (being on social assistance
     until being officially retired, she did not have the possibility before).

81   The crucial part of these women's translocational positionality as refugee women in
     Geneva concerns their employment status. Both Leyla and Sanaa were highly qualified
     working women in Iraq, as an engineer in Leyla's case and as a journalist in Sanaa's.
     However, neither of them could use their background and educational capital
     (Bourdieu, 1984) in Switzerland. Neither of them was able to secure a professional
     position even after more than 10 years in Switzerland. Consequently, both narratives
     entail stories of disillusion attached to this non-recognition of qualification process and
     loss of social status and capital endured by these women. Focusing on their experiences
     of *de-qualifications* as a narrative of unbelonging is essential because most of the
     literature on skilled migration has largely ignored skilled women migrants, especially
     when their migration is part of a family reunion or refugee migration (Riano and
     Baghdadi, 2007: 165).

82   Concerning their intersectional positioning, two important factors differentiate Sanaa
     and Leyla. The first concerns Sanaa's social position as a single mother of three
     children, which has an impact on her feeling of belonging and attachment towards
     Switzerland. Indeed, her social positioning as a mother profoundly impacts her
     experience of belonging and rooting. During our interview, Sanaa mostly told a story of
     exclusion and loneliness. However, she also expressed how her children's achievement
     was a way to accept and make her reality in Switzerland more satisfactory. On the
     other hand, Leyla does not have children but is married to an Iraqi man she met in
     Switzerland. Being married was an important part of her identity but was not
     associated with any feelings of un/belonging with Switzerland.

83   The second factor concerns Sanaa's language skills. Indeed, she was not able to
     properly learn the language after 10 years. This lack of linguistic competency was
     consequently attached to a feeling of exclusion in her biographical narrative. Not being
     able to express herself correctly led to a lack confidence and well-being. It is also
     important to note that she attributed her lack of competency in French to the poor
     integration policies put in place by Switzerland and Geneva, especially the low level of
     language courses. Her account shows the importance not only of the language
     boundary explained in the previous section, but also of the integration policies put in

place and their impact on one's feeling of well-being. Leyla on the other hand was able to develop a good level of French and her language capacity was not associated with any feelings of exclusion.

Lack of access to the labor market and disillusions

84   Turning now to the main narrative of unbelonging expressed by Leyla and Sanaa, the lack of possibilities to use their skills was associated with processes of exclusion and loss of status. As expressed in the literature, the phenomenon of non-recognition of immigrants' qualifications impacts mostly women (Riano and Baghdadi, 2007). This is mainly due to the multiple forms of discrimination they face linked to their gender and immigration status. Women from countries outside Europe are mostly victims of this phenomenon (Ratcliff *et al.*, 2014: 66), an important explanation for which could be the racist prejudices attached to their position as well as the non-recognition of their foreign experiences and diplomas.

85   "De-qualification" as a term can be defined as a phenomenon which denotes a gap between an individual's educational level and professional experiences and the position he or she occupies on the labor market leading to social regression to and maintenance in a situation of dependence (Chicha and Daraedt, 2009 in Ratcliff *et al.*, 2014: 65, my translation). As a consequence, the individual experiences a loss of income and precarious employment conditions as well as fewer social integration possibilities and increased isolation (Devarennes-Megas, 2003 in Ratcliff *et al.*, 2014: 65). Indeed, Ratcliff, Bolzman and Gakuba (2014), studying the situation of women in international migration and their failed attempts to professionally integrate in Switzerland, show the psychological impacts of these difficulties.

86   In the case of Leyla and Sanaa, both expressed a few reasons for their lack of professional integration. The main issue faced by Leyla was the lack of recognition of her previous diplomas and experiences in Iraq. She would have had to start over her studies for 3 or 4 years in Geneva to be able to work in her profession as an engineer. A study from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in 2014 talked about a "general de-valorization" in Switzerland of refugees' education followed in their country of origin (UNHCR, 2014: 37 in Jörg *et al.*, 2016: 24). Leyla also expressed that the uncertainty of finding employment considering her age also demotivated her to start her studies over. Some studies indeed consider the negative link between age and labor market participation (for instance, Lindenmeyer *et al.*, 2008, in Jörg *et al.*, 2016: 20). As for Sanaa, she also considered her age but in relation with her lack of competency in French and her lack of holding Swiss nationality as the main burden impeding her insertion into the labor market.

87   Lack of professional opportunities and recognition from the Swiss government profoundly impact Leyla's and Sanaa's well-being. They feel as though they cannot give back to the Swiss community and consequently feel meaningless. As articulated by the UNHCR (2014: 37), "the fact of not being able to exercise a profession equivalent to the one learnt or corresponding to one's education is lived as a very painful experience by most of the refugees. Highly skilled refugees suffer in particular from the non-recognition of their professional qualifications and education (in Jörg *et al.*, 2016: 24, my translation). Both Leyla and Sanaa engage in volunteer activities with the Red Cross in Geneva, which offers them advantages such as "using their professional abilities, expanding their spaces of social participation, struggling for immigrant women's rights

and giving more to their lives" (Riano and Baghdadi, 2007: 179), as well as "rebuilding their social and cultural capital" (*Ibid.*). However, neither Leyla nor Sanaa were able to use these volunteer activities to pursue other professional activities. Moreover, Sanaa does not consider the volunteer work as a valued or important professional activity:

> For me, this is not enough. I need to... to do very important things, more important than this. Normal things. (Sanaa, February 2019)

88 As both women used to have successful careers in Iraq, this lack of satisfaction associated with volunteer activities can be linked with their subsequent loss of status and social capital. As Sanaa used to be a successful journalist in Iraq, her failed attempts to continue her career in Switzerland leads her to sometimes regret leaving Iraq:

> Sometimes I regret, because I lost my job, my career. Really, and I was someone successful. (Sanaa, February 2019)

89 Integration and feelings of belonging in Switzerland mainly mean being able to continue their professional careers. Consequently, the loss of social and cultural capital and of their identities as successful working women is the main feature of these women's narratives. Feelings of being meaningless were expressed as a main consequence. Moreover, following their non-integration into the labor market, the women also expressed having difficulties developing a social network in Switzerland with similar results of narratives of exclusion and loneliness.

Social networks, unbelonging and feelings of alterity

90 Both Leyla and Sanaa expressed feeling a sense of not belonging to the social sphere of Switzerland. Their social networks are very limited, as are their contacts with Swiss people. The reason behind this is most likely their lack of opportunities to meet Swiss people given their non-integration into the labor market. Consequently, their network boundaries are reinforced by their lack of professional opportunities, and lack of language skills in the case of Sanaa. Some studies explain the importance of volunteer activities for recreating a social network (for instance Riano and Baghdadi, 2007); however, this seems to not have been the case for Leyla and Sanaa. Both consider Swiss people as very kind people but as being very busy and with no time to spend with newly arrived persons.

> It is not difficult but everyone, he has his job, takes care of his children, it is like that. Everyone is busy with something. Everyone has his life, so does not have the time for. Everyone here does not have time, every time... has a meeting, bills to pay. Lots of things to do, always. But in my country, no it is not really like that. We have a lot of time. Because work there it starts at 8 in the morning until 2 in the afternoon. After when we come back home, we have a lot of time until the next morning. We visit friends, we read, we take a walk. (Leyla, March 2019)

91 Interestingly, Leyla confronts Swiss and Iraqi habits in order to explain her lack of social integration. Iraqi people are described as having more time to spend with their relatives and friends given the relatively short period of time they work each day. This narrative can be understood as part of the identity strategies used by both Leyla and Sanaa: values such as warmness and social closeness of Iraq are used as symbolic resources by the women in order to make a significant opposition with the Swiss society and explain their lack of social integration.

> Swiss people are reserved, really. Look here in this floor there are maybe 10 or 9 apartments. That means at least 10 people but never, we never have time to say hi.

> Never, I have been here for 2-3 years, but they never say hi. I used to try to say hi, how are you to every person I would meet.
> Also, in Iraq, the house was always full of people. But here when someone rings the door it is a shock. Who is this? (Sanaa, February 2019)

92 Just as did Farrah, Shada and Belen, Sanaa and Leyla created an opposition between their group, understood here as the Iraqi society and culture, and the Swiss one pictured as entailing values and habits that impede their possibilities of social integration. People use identity strategies in the sense identified by Yuval-Davis (2013) in order to make sense of their social isolation.

Feelings of belonging towards Switzerland

93 Finally, and despite their narratives of exclusion, loneliness and bitterness, both Leyla and Sanaa still expressed positive feelings of belonging towards Switzerland. It is interesting to note that, probably given their lack of social and professional integration in Geneva, their feelings of belonging concern Switzerland as a whole, sort of abstract, entity – in opposition with the young women and their deep feeling of rooting in Geneva.

94 On the one hand, they saw Switzerland as a safe and neutral country that saved and helped them in a difficult time in their lives. Consequently, both expressed gratitude and pride in living here. Especially for Sanaa, the neutral position of Switzerland is crucial. At the time of fleeing Iraq, she had the possibility of going to the United Kingdom but given the UK's involvement and history in Iraq, she preferred going to Switzerland. It is consequently the international positioning of Switzerland as a neutral country, along with the fact that she quite easily and quickly obtained refugee status there for herself and her family, which creates a sense of belonging.

95 On the other hand, Leyla describes her feeling of belonging towards Switzerland in relation to its status as an entity with well-functioning systems and institutions, as expressed especially concerning healthcare. In opposition with Iraq, Switzerland brings her feelings of safety and wellness:

> Yes, I do love Switzerland a lot. I am comfortable, that's it. I feel safe, there are people to treat for the health, over there in my country, there is no health insurance. So, everyone, they have to look for a doctor, look for medicines, it is not easy. And we have to pay a lot, everyone pays the medical clinic, the doctor directly. But maybe the sick person comes directly, and you don't have money, what do you do? It is also a problem. But here no, always there is a doctor, the hospital. It is not free, but someone pays, the system pays. (Leyla, March 2019)

96 However, and to conclude this section, it is interesting to note how both women would never talk to me about Switzerland as being their country. Their country was always evoked in reference to Iraq even though Leyla obtained Swiss nationality a few years previous to our meeting and Sanaa was about to start the process. A lack of feelings of belonging to the Swiss entity is consequently deep, notably given these women's social positionality of being highly skilled women in their 50s. Not being able to enter the labor market deeply affected their experiences in Geneva and their social insertion into Swiss society.

4.2.3 Third cluster: vulnerable women and empowerment?

97   The third cluster to be analyzed concerns women who seem to be more vulnerable and to have fewer prospects than the two previous clusters given their translocational positionality. Consequently, it could be expected that their biographical narratives would express feelings of exclusion and loneliness. However, both of the women in this cluster created a sense of belonging in Geneva through an identity strategy aimed at broadening the boundaries of the group they belonged to by focusing on gender and identifying with other women. Indeed, as will be described, they express their sense of belonging through being part of the broad ensemble of women in Switzerland who enjoy certain rights and opportunities.

98   Ezin and Dilara are both Kurdish. Ezin is from Turkish Kurdistan and Dilara from Iraqi Kurdistan. They arrived in Switzerland 12 and 14 years ago respectively, each to join her husband who had already arrived beforehand. I met them throughout Camarada where they were taking French classes a few mornings a week. Ezin showed better competency in French than Dilara, which is the reason why we had a joint interview where Ezin could translate for Dilara. However, as we did not finish the interview with Dilara that day, I came back the following week when I had a personal interview with just Dilara. She did not exhibit as severe difficulties speaking in French as she had told me she had. Her issue was mainly a lack of self-confidence with her language capacities.

99   The main characteristics of these women's translocational positionality are firstly their position as wives and mothers, as both are married and have children. Second, the importance of their social class in their country of origin has a profound impact now in Switzerland as both did not go to school before coming here. Because of their condition as illiterate, learning French is much more difficult than for other women. Finally, both arrived in their late 20s in Switzerland, meaning they could only participate in the usual French classes offered by the *Hospice Général*, which did not always suit their schedules as mothers.

100   The main difference in their experience as told by Ezin and Dilara is the role of each woman's family and husband. As described by Ezin, she endures severe conflicts with her husband who wanted her mainly to stay at home and take care of the children. There is a conflict between Ezin's desire and understanding of freedom in Switzerland and her husband:

> We get into the new apartment, I had given birth and after I don't really have contacts with my friends, because my husband doesn't want to…. He closes his eyes because he knows that here in Switzerland there is liberty. He says that he likes our culture in Turkey… but here it is different, and he doesn't like it. (Ezin, March 2019)

101   Only after pressure from the Swiss government did Ezin's husband enroll her in Camarada so she could learn French and meet other women. Consequently, her familial situation acts as a social boundary for Ezin in her journey in Switzerland, which is the reason why Ezin decided to separate from her husband at least for a while. Furthermore, as her children are teenagers, she must compromise with their desire of freedom and liberty, which can be in contradiction with her own education, values and husband's expectations. It is interesting to look at this in relation with the first cluster of young women because Ezin is located on the other side of the situation. She understands her daughter's desires and considers them positively as part of a women's

rights process but she also expressed the difficulties they would create inside her family.

102 On the other hand, Dilara's social positioning as a mother and wife acted as leverage for her. She described her husband as being very supportive of her, encouraging her to go out by herself and to learn French. Moreover, as her children are still young and going to primary school, bringing them to school allowed her to meet other parents and consequently to create a small social network of mutual aid and parental support.

Learning French

103 French is a crucial part of the women's experience, as both have been in Switzerland for more than 10 years but still have not really mastered the language (or at least, do not feel confident about their abilities). Their translocational positioning as coming from a lower class and being women led to them not going to school in their childhood. Moreover, being mothers with the associated gender role assigned to them resulted in them primarily taking care of their children and their households. As expressed in the literature (for instance Alba, 2005), language is a boundary that requires a complete boundary crossing from the newcomers. Moreover, as described in the previous chapter, language quite significantly still impedes the women's experiences in Geneva. In the case of Ezin and Dilara, it is interesting to point out the crucial importance of their translocational positionality, which is the main barrier to their French learning process.

104 Not being able to acquire good language competence had many impacts on the two women's experiences. First, it impeded their capacities to find stable employment (although this must be put in relation with their social positionality as mothers who firstly must take care of their households). Over time, both expressed their desire to find employment but considered not having enough French skills as the main barrier. Second, their incapacity to find employment, but also their social experiences in general, is linked with a lack of self-confidence for the women. They associated not being able to express themselves properly in their everyday lives and encounters with feelings of exclusion, especially from the sphere of the labor market, lack of assurance and, sometimes, discouragement. Consequently, French is the main social boundary experienced by the two women, especially given their difficulties to overcome it.

Women's rights and feelings of belonging

105 Despite what one could see as "poor integration" given their lack of French capabilities, restrained social network and lack of labor market integration, both women expressed a profound sense of belonging towards Switzerland and Geneva. This sense of belonging is associated with Geneva and Switzerland being a safe space where the society is open to newcomers. Moreover, women's rights and freedom had an important place in both women's biographical narratives of belonging. They used what I consider an identity strategy of broadening the boundaries of the group they belong to by defining it as encompassing the category of women. Indeed, their identity as women is awakened by their common feeling of belonging to the condition of womanhood. Given the more extended rights and freedoms provided to women in Switzerland, the condition of being part of this group became positive and created a profound sense of belonging and safety:

> They are really good for the women, I went to the demonstration, I said I walked for our women, our country. You know in our countries, with Daesh in Syria. For the Kurdish women, it was difficult in Turkey, now they also started in Syria. I walked also for Switzerland, I am happy, there are a lot of rights, it is beautiful.
> I would like, yes for me it is better. I don't know for Swiss women, they say there is no salary equality, something like that, the salary. I said, for me it is not a big issue, because in our country, we have more important problems. And we say ok, it is good, we walk with you because we are all women. It is not only for the Swiss women. (Ezin, March 2019)

106 Both Ezin and Dilara expressed this feeling of belonging as a process through which they became aware of their rights and opportunities – "opened their eyes" – and found the self-confidence of undertaking actions by themselves. For instance, Dilara explained to me how the first 4 or 5 years she was in Switzerland, she was too afraid to leave her apartment.[2] Slowly, however, she found and created the self-confidence to go out, try to speak French and do things by herself. Consequently, both Dilara and Ezin expressed experiencing a widening of their rights and opportunities as women as part of their feeling of belonging in Geneva.

Meaning of belonging to Geneva?

107 In conclusion, Ezin's and Dilara's journeys are interesting to examine because they question the idea of what integration is and what it means to belong somewhere. As I explained above, their translocational positionalities substantially restrained their agency and opportunities. However, their biographical narratives still entailed expressions of safety and belonging. Even though she does not speak French perfectly and seems quite isolated from many domains of integration, Dilara was able to create such a feeling of belonging towards Switzerland to the point that she explained to me the crucial importance for her of acquiring Swiss nationality.

4.3 Discussion: identity strategies of belonging

108 The previous section underlined the experiences of inclusion and exclusion of three clusters of women, expressing diverse feelings of un/belonging, alterity and identity strategies. In each case, their experiences of inclusion and exclusion were closely linked to an important part of their translocational positioning, as young women, as highly skilled women and as so-called vulnerable women. During my fieldwork, I talked to a social worker from the *Hospice Général* who drew for me a spectrum along which she would place the women given their opportunities for integration. According to her, at one end of the spectrum were the women with most difficulties – the highly skilled and the very vulnerable – and at the other side were those with the most opportunities of being included – the women arriving at a young age. The previous analysis showed how those three clusters indeed stood out in my interviews. However, their experiences are more complex than what was expressed by the social worker. The young women expressed an ambivalent sense of belonging as their closeness with Swiss society led them to experience exclusion and feelings of alterity in their everyday lives. On the other side, the vulnerable women who had notably seen their rights as women improved expressed a more significant sense of belonging and safety as being part of a wide group of women. However, it is important to put this in balance with their limited social networks and language capacities. Looking solely at their subjective experiences

shows ambivalent feelings and more complex processes than suggested by the social worker.

109 The rest of women interviewed would fit "in the middle" of the spectrum, coming from various social classes, being a mother or not and arriving in Switzerland at different ages. Their distinct experiences, journeys, and feelings of belonging and unbelonging showed the crucial importance of taking into account their specific translocational positionality when looking at experiences of inclusion and exclusion. Consequently, I was not able to develop a fourth or fifth cluster as the women's experiences are too different and varied. However, several common and important symbolic and social boundaries did emerge from the interviews, as did common and important identity strategies. I want to focus on two main identity strategies used by most of the women to make sense of their rooting experience in Geneva, and of their new reality made of inclusion and exclusion.

Double identity, double culture

110 As seen in the transnationalist trend of migration studies, immigrants never completely assimilate within their host country. Part of their identities and everyday practices are still grounded in their home country as seen with various practices of transnationalism. Crettaz and Dahinden (2019: 269) define transnationality within three dimensions: "transnational mobilities in transnational spaces, transnational social relationships, and feelings of attachment towards the country of origin. In other words, being transnational involves (a) a mode of being mobile, (b) ways of being in terms of acting and performing (i.e., building up and maintaining transnational social relationships) and (c) ways of belonging". All the women I interviewed expressed some dimensions of transnationality as part of their new identities and practices in Switzerland. As refugees, the women cannot travel outside Switzerland until they obtain a B permit. Consequently, most of the transnational practices they engage in are ways of belonging and ways of being. Indeed, their identities and practices were considered as having evolved towards a sort of double identity that allowed them to make sense of their experiences and acted as resources.

111 First, it is important to underline how those transnational double identities need to be considered as part of a process.

> Once again, I needed those 10 years to think, OK I can learn something. You know now I am Swiss. When I present myself, I say I am a Swiss with Iraqi origins. Because I am proud to say I have this, I could learn it. And now, if I talk with images, I tell myself, I feel like I'm walking with an imaginary backpack. I have two cultures, and sometimes, it becomes heavy, so I take out and choose. (Sabeen, February 2019)

112 As expressed by Sabeen, an important part of the immigration process is acceptance of one's new condition. For instance, she explained to me the difficulties of being confronted with Swiss culture and habits at the beginning of her time in Switzerland. An interesting example was how hosting and welcoming practices are very different than in Iraq and she felt offended and excluded at many occasions:

> one of the women, she lived very close to me at Chêne-Bougeries. She invited me for a coffee at her place and we went with my husband and children. She asked me what I would like to drink, and I could not say I would like to drink a coffee or a tea, in the Middle East we do not ask the question. You come to my home, it is my duty to fill the table to say how happy I am to see you. I could not say and when I entered, the table was empty. I said ok, I said I would like a glass of water. The

woman, she brought me a glass of water. But for me, it was such a shock in my head, I said how does she dare? Now If I say I would like a glass of water and you give me a glass of water; it doesn't affect me as before. (Sabeen, February 2019)

113 Over time, being able to understand Swiss habits and keeping Iraqi habits at the same time was the best solution she found to make sense of her experiences. She developed her new identity as being half/half, keeping only the good side of both Swiss and Iraqi practices. Indeed, most of the women expressed undertaking these types of identity strategies in a variety of situations. Equilibrium was the word used by many women to express those hybrid identities that allowed them to identify themselves as being part of two places, included and comfortable in two spaces and cultures.

114 Indeed, this double and hybrid identity can be understood as a symbolic resource, allowing them to get access to and feel included in a variety of spaces. Many women for instance used their competences and knowledge of their country of origin as well as their migratory experience as symbolic resources to obtain or to succeed in their employment experiences:

> Me too, I wanted to be there for the other people, to help them. The experience I gained here, I can transmit it to other people. I was always saying, I learned this not to keep it in my mind but to transmit it. (Yara, February 2019)
> Now I feel comfortable with both because I could say, I dared having this equilibrium to accept the two cultures. Especially in my work as I am hired by the Church, there I work with Arabs a lot, and I can tell them in Arabic, here we can do this, or this doesn't work. (Sabeen, February 2019)

115 Sabeen's employment as a chaplain for an ecumenical organization allowed her to make sense of her hybrid baggage and feel it valued again. These employment opportunities consequently allowed these women not only to access the labor market but also to feel their competences and identities as valuable. As explained in the previous section, Shada, Belen and Farrah all used and considered their hybrid identities as women with Iraqi/Kurdish background, with a migratory experience and feeling of belonging in Switzerland as an advantage in their professional life.

116 Insertion into the labor market is only one example of how the women used their hybrid multicultural identities. Other spheres and situations such as raising their children, meeting people and feeling valuable or being able to deal with their family back in their country of origin were also discussed during our interviews.

Humanist identity and identity as women

117 The second identity strategy that I want to point at as important for most of the women is their identity and claims of belonging as humanists and as women. By enlarging their group identity to encompass a wider "us" and "them", many women could make sense of their ambivalent experience in Geneva. Feeling part of a humanist or women-based group allowed them an identification distinct from the one of refugee. Consequently, they would not only consider positioning themselves as being refugees but also as being humanists and women so they could thus identify themselves with the host society.

118 Many women positioned themselves as tolerant, humanist and open to various people, religions and practices. This positioning allowed them to enlarge their social networks and break a range of social boundaries such as the boundaries of religion and gender:

> Not really, because I always refused to choose my friends by their nationality, or the language they speak. I always prefer, I really look at the person in front of me.

This is why I have friends from really every origin. And it is very interesting. (Shada, February 2019)

Being a woman, I was always proud to be a woman. And I think, when we want to do something, being a woman, men, it does not change anything, you need to want it. When we really want to do something, I don't think there is anyone who can prevent us... (Ariya, February 2019)

119 Ariya put this in relation with her childhood in the Kurdish part of Turkey. Her father would not let her go to school, but she decided to go anyway and convinced him at the end to let her undertake most of her education. She now has a very humanist identity in which gender or ethnicity does not matter in her comprehension of herself:

And this is why, everyone says ah because you are a foreigner, we are discriminated, people look at you, do this and this. I say, I don't consider myself as a foreigner. I feel good actually, I accepted myself and this is how I could move on. And when I would make new friends, always it would work. I don't know how to say, explain it. Also, to be a foreigner, I am always a foreigner, everywhere I would go. I never had my own village, my own country. I was always an immigrant. (Ariya, February 2019)

120 Ariya constructed her identity as always being an immigrant and consequently would not feel her experience in Switzerland very different from her past. Moreover, her quote underlines the importance of accepting one's own identity and past.

121 Turning to identity as being part of a women-based group allowed many of the refugee women to make sense of their new lives in Geneva. This group identity awakened through the idea of enjoying and fighting for women's rights created a sense of being part of a bigger group – away from their sole categorization as refugees. For Belen, women's rights were part of her three causes as she called them and were crucial in her professional identity construction, as well as for Farrah who explained to me how proud she was to be a woman and how it would not be possible for her not to be feminist.

122 On the other hand, being a woman in Geneva for other women meant enjoying more rights and emancipation – as shown in the previous section about Ezin and Dilara. Sabeen also explained to me how she enjoyed an extended individual freedom in Geneva, through how she can walk alone at night and how she does not endure such harassment as she used to in Iraq:

I did not have the right to walk, and if I was walking, there was comments, but it was so violent, so difficult. Because I was Christian, I have blue eyes and blond hair. So yes, I was attractive. But here, blond, black, yellow, tall, yes there is comment, it exists everywhere, but it's not the same. (Sabeen, February 2019)

123 Considering those extended women's rights and opportunities in Geneva, many women also expressed how they wanted their daughters to be able to take advantage of these, as they themselves could not.

124 Certainly, it is crucial not to essentialize the experience of women's rights in Switzerland as being always positive and as an emancipatory journey for the women. However, it was important for women to point to the significance of their identity as women and how that specific identity allowed them to create a sense of their experiences and feelings of belonging.

125 In conclusion, as the various translocational positionalities of the women did not allow for more categorization, it was interesting to point out these two main strategies used by most of the women. Indeed, these identity strategies allowed them not only to feel

safe and comfortable in Geneva but also to belong to a group. Moreover, these identity strategies even further allowed them to enter spheres such as the economic one by using their newly created identity as a symbolic resource.

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NOTES DE BAS DE PAGE

1. However, the order for the integration of foreigners (OIE) mentioned here is not in force anymore and have been replaced by a new one as for the 1st of January 2019.

2. This fear was also a consequence of her traumatic journey during which she was jailed in Greece, showing the profound impact the refugees' journey toward the host country have on their consequent well-being and integration.

5. Conclusion

1   How refugee women feel in Geneva, belonging or not, safe or not, and how they are able to adapt considering the various boundaries and constraints they face was the main interest of this study. At first, the word "integration" came to my mind when starting this study. How do women feel integrated and how is this process of integration taking place? In his article "*Politiques d'asile et trajectoires sociales des réfugiés: une exclusion programmée: les cas de la Suisse*", Bolzman (2001) develops a varied definition of the concept of integration. He discusses mainly the differences in understanding between integration as being a task of immigrants/refugees and integration as a duty that must be mainly taken care of by the State and the host society in general.

2   I quickly realized that these two domains were not exactly the processes I wanted to focus on. What interested me was to understand how someone, especially someone coming from a difficult journey as refugees are, can rebuild his/her life somewhere and actually feel at home. I wanted to look at the various significations of what it means to feel at home and safe, at the opposite of the concept of integration that solely looks at economic or social integration for instance. My main interest was to talk to women and try to understand their own journeys and experiences, their impact and meanings as well as their own understandings of what it is to actually feel at home, safe and a sense of belonging in Geneva and Switzerland. Afterwards, my reflections also took me towards the path of intersectionality as a way of escaping the essentialization of refugees/immigrants and women. Closely linked to my desire to understand the various meanings of creating a new home, it was equally important to me to look at how the different identities and characteristics of the women I spoke with have an impact on their own various experiences.

3   My literature review was the main tool allowing me to undertake these reflections. Looking at the various studies which tried to grasp processes such as integration, social cohesion and inclusion helped me to develop the theoretical tools used in this study. The concept of boundaries, first ethnic boundaries (Wimmer, 2004; 2008) but later also social and symbolic boundaries (Lamont and Molnár, 2002), was especially crucial in this study in the conceptualization of the institutional context experienced by the refugee women I spoke with. I could thereby explain how five boundaries – Swiss asylum policy, Swiss integration policy, language, religion and gender – mainly impact

the refugee women's inclusion and exclusion journeys and possibilities to express their agency in Swiss society.

4 Subsequent to the concept of boundaries, the literature on gender and migration was my gateway into looking at the various identities and characteristics of the women. The concept of intersectionality further developed as translocational positionality by Anthias (2002; 2008; 2012; 2016) was the main theoretical concept I used to analyze the women's identities and characteristics and their further consequences for their experiences of inclusion/exclusion and feelings of un/belonging. I could identify three clusters of women and show how their very different identities and characteristics impact their experiences of exclusion and inclusion, their feelings of un/belonging – and basically the sole meaning of what being integrated in Geneva is.

5 Finally, as my interviews reflect my desire to look at the various experiences and translocational positionalities of the refugee women, I could not develop more clusters. I consequently focused on two main identity strategies – double and hybrid identity and humanist identity and identity as women – used and developed by most of the women in order to make sense of their new lives in Geneva, construct a sense of belonging and create more opportunities for inclusion.

6 Finally, I went on to stress the crucial importance of looking at these identity strategies and feelings of belonging as processes. Feelings of belonging will indeed be going back and forth in time and are dependent on many factors (the specific experiences of inclusion/exclusion but also transnational feelings and experiences for instance). Indeed, the employee from Camarada to whom I spoke explained to me how many women feel less stable and safe after some years, sometimes as part of the realization they will stay in Switzerland forever.

7 I want to conclude with the main take-away from this study: the crucial importance of de-essentializing refugees, women and humans in general. Indeed, this study allowed me to look closely at a few experiences and processes and show how they are context-dependent but also conditional to individual characteristics and identities. Refugee and immigrant women are sometimes seen as victims of their destiny and as passive. This thesis shows how women's experiences in a new society are on the contrary varied and far more complex.

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Annex: interview guide

1   The method I used for the interview is the biographical narrative interview which entails three steps (Rosenthal, 1993: 60), first one is to ask a broad question regarding the person's life history and let the person talk. Afterwards, I asked narrative questions on topics and biographical themes mentioned before. Finally (possibly during a second interview) I asked some specific questions about issues that have not been addressed.

- 1st part: I would like you to tell me about your life in general but especially your journey to Geneva and experiences when arriving here. I am interested in your experiences of inclusion/exclusion and how you dealt with them (what did you do for overcoming difficulties, what helped you and how ....).

Concepts: the experiences of exclusion/inclusion should explain what kind of boundaries they experienced, and their reactions should show the processes of boundaries-breaking (or other processes to overcome those boundaries), probably related to the negotiation of their different identities (and consequently should reveal their various social locations)

- Follow up questions about details or issues not mentioned (here are some examples of themes that might need to be addressed later on):

  - How were your first encounters with the swiss society? What kind of difficulties but also assistances, helps have you found in Geneva?

  - Boundaries they experienced and processes of boundary work + local contexts

  - Do you feel accepted in the Swiss society? Do you feel that you can participate within the society?

  - Informal membership and belonging

  - Do you feel like you belong to Geneva and to the Swiss

  - Belonging or not to the Swiss society and

society? What does it mean for you to belong somewhere and to belong to the Geneva society? What were the difficulties and opportunities, how did you create a feeling of belonging?

processes (negotiation of identities and boundaries work) in relation to

- Following the same idea, what does it mean being integrated somewhere and being integrated in the Geneva society?

- Same idea of belonging but with different words.

- What has changed for you since you arrived in Geneva? Regarding the person you are, your friends and families, your encounters with the social world.

- Processes tied to their identities and feeling of belonging and the changes over time

- Did you keep links with your families, relatives back home? Was it a support, help or a burden when arriving in Geneva? How and why?

- Transnational feeling of belonging