CHANGING VISTAS OF EUROPE

Refugees´ Concepts of Europe Before and After Arrival

Methodenzentrum Sozialwissenschaften

Georg-August-Universität Göttingen

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INTRODUCTION

This brochure complements the seven portraits of refugees from Asia and Africa presented in the exhibition "Changing Vistas of Europe"[1]. The portraits reveal seven very different life courses and experiences before, during and after migration, and different concepts of Europe. While public discourses tend to present very generalized and homogenized images of "immigrants" or "refugees", the exhibition invites a consideration of the differences between the experiences and perspectives of these seven people. It will be seen that the idea of migration for economic reasons is not only oversimplified, but in most cases inaccurate.

The life histories and migration routes of the seven people are described on the basis of extensive biographical-narrative interviews[2], the aim of which was to learn as much as possible about the collective and individual histories of the migrants, what led to their migration or flight, and what they experienced during their migration. First, we asked the interviewees to tell us the story of their own life and that of their family according to their own relevances. After this, we asked them to elaborate on certain topics. In addition, we specifically asked them[3] whether their imaginations and concepts of Europe before their migration had changed since their arrival. Three of them were interviewed in spring 2016 in Germany, and four between spring 2014 and fall 2015 in one of the two Spanish enclaves of Melilla and Ceuta in North Africa. These four had crossed the border into the enclaves from Morocco a short time before we interviewed them, either with fake papers, or in a rubber dinghy, or by climbing over the border fence, and were waiting to be transferred to the European mainland. In spring 2016, these four interviewees were living in Europe (in Spain, France and Germany), and we were able to ask them in telephone interviews about how their migration had continued and what they now thought about Europe[4].

We have selected these seven portraits from our sample of about thirty interviewed refugees in order to show the great differences in their life courses, their experiences during their migration and of crossing borders, and the different ways they speak about these experiences. It is not surprising that the way they regard their life in their country of origin and the dangers they faced during their migration has changed. Moreover, the way people tell their life story depends on who they are talking to, and in what situation. This means that when analyzing biographical-narrative interviews, we need to take into account the difference between the narrated life in the present time – **THE LIFE STORY** – and the lived-through life – **THE LIFE HISTORY**. Thus, in our accounts of the seven migrants, we not only try to describe what they have concretely experienced in the past, but we also show how they speak today about this past, what they speak about at all, and what they do not speak about. The cases of the four migrants we interviewed several times, sometimes after long intervals, permit us to discuss how their self-presentations have changed over time, depending on how they see the interview, in other words whether they see it as a kind of interrogation, for instance, or as a therapeutic talk or opportunity for counselling. Accordingly, we heard about different biographical experiences, and different, often interrelated, reasons for their migration or flight.

In the exhibition there are two panels for each migrant, one focusing on their statements about Europe and the other on their biographical course. We think that how one reads the panels depends on which panel one reads first. Most of the statements about Europe can be understood only in the light of the life history of the migrant concerned. Only when concrete details of the person's family or individual life history are known can we understand, for example, why Mohammed would rather live on the street in France than go back to Mauritania, or why Saida from Syria is extremely disappointed by the reality of life in Europe, or why Franklin wonders whether it was wrong to leave Cameroon and now increasingly perceives Europe as a disastrous "drag net" in which he has been caught. Conversely, the statements about Europe show very clearly that when people decide to leave their home country, they are generally not motivated simply by economic reasons. Thus Arwa, the Yazidi woman from Iraq, says: "we always had war, every single day", and is happy that her children can go to school in Germany without having to fear for their lives.

1 The exhibition was prepared in the Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Göttingen under my direction by students and members of a DFG-sponsored research project on the social construction of border zones (see RO 827/19-1; https://www.uni-goettingen.de/en/477891.html): Mahadi Ahmed, Annette Andresen, Eva Bahl, Isabella Enzler, Maria Fechter, Lukas Hofmann, Christian Jorgow, Myrna Sieden, Simon Volpers and Arne Worm. Text translated by Ruth Schubert. All names and other personal data of the people we interviewed have been changed in order to ensure that they cannot be identified.
2 On the method of conducting and analyzing biographical-narrative interviews, see Rosenthal 2004.
3 See the questions put to Matthieu quoted in this volume.
4 For a detailed discussion of this research, and the biographies of Franklin, Mohammed and Maruf presented here, see Rosenthal et al. (2016) in German and Rosenthal et al. (2017) in English.

GABRIELE ROSENTHAL

MOHAMMED

AN EARTHLY PARADISE

RULED BY LAW

about 26-year-old man from Mauritania

BEFORE HE LEFT MAURITANIA[1]

"I got to know Europe and its lifestyle first through TV. At that time I imagined Europe as a place where people's dignity is considered, a place where the values of humankind and human rights are protected, a place where people enjoy life, a place ruled by law and not by money and lies. I learned more about Europe through friends, Mauritanian friends who studied with me at the Quran school in Kiffa. Most of them were born in the country and went with their families later to France to seek a better life. Their parents sent them back home to learn Quran and Arabic. They told me stories about Europe and more particularly France. ... One friend encouraged me to come to Europe. He told me France is a promising country. I will get a flat, a bit of money if I don't have a job, and I could even study and improve my abilities. ... He realized how injustice has been done to us (Black people). I was fascinated by his stories of France and his talk about human rights values in Europe. My imagination of Europe has been created through these kind of stories. I was convinced that Europe is **an earthly paradise** and life is better than here. If you got captured by police in Mauritania for any reason they would ask you to show them your ID, you show it them, they laugh at you then and tell you no you are not Mauritanian. I once, ya Mahadi (interviewer), I was a prayer leader in a mosque and once a white man refused to pray because the prayer leader was black! I thought in Europe I will find a job so easily and I will send a bit of the money I will earn to my family. I thought there is a job there for everyone in Europe."

Morning market, Kiffa (Mauritania) © Bob Rayner
https://www.flickr.com/photos/bobrayner/3434147561
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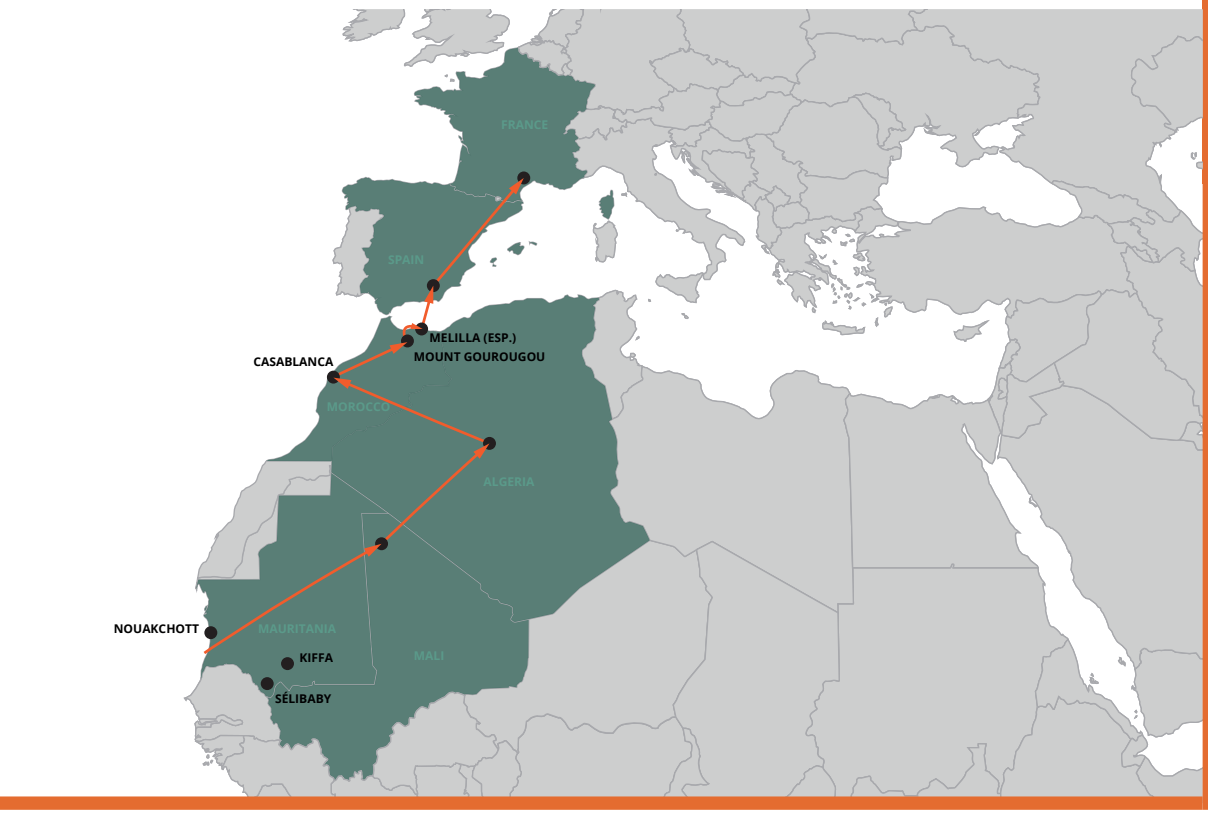
CURRENT PERSPECTIVE ON EUROPE IN FRANCE

Nouakchott (Mauritania) - Central Mosque, © Shutterstock.com

"In the beginning life was so so hard in France. I lived on the streets. I didn't expect to see poor people sleeping on the streets in Europe. They (the French authorities) tried to send me back to Mauritania. I was so down then. I lost three years of my life on the way to Europe. I was facing imminent death, lack of food and water, and they asked me so coldly to go back to my country. You know I have no papers yet. My friend told me if I spend five years in France I will be entitled to apply for a French passport. I have been living here already for some years (it is now about one and a half years) and have no papers yet. But I am happy my French got better now. I understand the way of life in France better now. I just feel happy being in a country like France where the rights of human beings are respected, all human beings, regardless of religion or race. The difference between France and Mauritania is immeasurable. Europe is **ruled by law**. I would rather sleep forty nights in the streets here than a single night in Mauritania. No freedom in my country, there is slavery and injustice instead.

1 The quotations are from a telephone interview that Mahadi Ahmed conducted with Mohammed in Arabic in June 2016.



THE LIFE HISTORY AND LIFE STORY OF MOHAMMED FROM MAURITANIA:

"I HAD TO WORK LIKE A SLAVE"

"How is it possible that a young man aged about twenty-six who has migrated from Mauritania to France can make a statement like the following: "I would rather sleep forty nights in the streets here than a single night in Mauritania". Mohammed says this about three years after leaving his country, his family and his friends. He has spent almost two years in France without finding work, and his present and future prospects are more than precarious. If I had conducted only one interview with him, I would find it very difficult to imagine why he has such a negative view of life in Mauritania. In spring 2014, in Melilla, I conducted the first biographical narrative interview with Mohammed in Arabic with the aid of my Palestinian colleague, Ahmed Albaba. In this interview he spoke about the problem of finding a job to match his qualifications in his country of origin, the extremely difficult economic situation of his extended family, and that he wanted to go to France to work for a few years, like other members of his family. Only in the second interview, a few days later, which I began with the following remark: "we haven't talked yet about the practice of slavery which still exists in Mauritania", did he change not only his explanation of why he decided to migrate, but also his attitude toward me.[2] He told me in a confidential tone about how he had suffered as a Black man in Mauritania, and about his own experience of having to work without pay for members of the Arab population when he was still a child. He now spoke explicitly about slavery and described in detail situations which he had experienced personally.

2 Slavery was officially abolished more than once in Mauritania (1961, 1981) (see Oßwald 2009: 253), but it became a punishable offence only in 2008 (see Bahrenburg/Richter 2008: 5; Hardung 2010). However, it continues to exist in that the descendants of freed slaves are often not paid for their work, and in practice have no means of taking legal action against their "employers".

Mohammed and I stayed in contact via Facebook, I conducted a telephone interview with him in November 2015, and in the spring of 2016, our colleague Mahadi Ahmed (himself a refugee from Sudan) conducted a further telephone interview with him in Arabic. These follow-up interviews showed that Mohammed was increasingly reinterpreting his biographical experiences in the light of the lack of rights of the Black population in Mauritania, and that in France he had begun to read about the history of the Soninke, his own ethnic grouping. This was a subject that he had learned nothing about during his time at school in Mauritania. The grouping known by the name 'Soninke' lives in several West African countries and is part of that population of Mauritania which is known within the country as Soudan (Arabic for "Black") and is distinguished from the Arab-Berber *"Maures"*, the Bidhan (Arabic for "White").

Like most Soninke, Mohammed's family comes from the region between the river Niger and the upper Senegal, which up to 1958 was hardly affected by national borders. Up to that date, the areas covered by present-day Mauritania, Senegal and Mali belonged to French West Africa, the *"federation"* of French colonies in West Africa. In 1958 the French colonies became autonomous republics within the Communauté Française, with the exception of Guinea, which voted to become independent. Mauritania became independent in November 1960.

Let us take a closer look at Mohammed's life history and the course of his migration. He was born around 1990 as the second son of his mother, who was his father's second wife, and as the sixth son of his father. The family lived in a big village in the province of Sélibaby (close to the borders with Mali and Senegal). His father's family owned large plots of land in this village. His father did not live with the family, but worked at times in Senegal and at times in Mali, and during Mohammed's childhood he went to work for three years in France. For Mohammed and his family, at least at that time, engaging in "duty-free" petty trade between Mali, Senegal and Mauritania, and the ease of moving back and forth between these countries, constituted an unquestioned part of their everyday reality. The history of Mohammed's family illustrates how for generations these people have been used to migrating temporarily to another country, whether for economic or for educational reasons. Several family members worked, or attended Quran schools, in Senegal and Mali during the colonial period.

Migrants are returned to Morocco - without being given the right to apply for asylum © José Palazón

In his early childhood Mohammed lived with his mother for some years in Mali in the family of his father's brother. At this time his oldest brother was studying in Saudi Arabia. In 2000, when Mohammed was ten years old, his family sent him to a Quran school in another town, the provincial capital of Kiffa. He lived with the Imam there for four years and had to work for him, although his father paid school fees:

"I had to work like a slave ... Arabs came to our school and said they needed pupils to work for them, and it affected the grade you were given if you didn't work like hell for them in the desert, and we couldn't escape."

In 2004 he left for a Quran school in the capital, Nouakchott, and later he attended another religious school in order to take the high-school examination. He had to work in order to earn money and thus failed the examination in 2013. The important thing for Mohammed is – as he himself underlines – that during his educational career he only had Black teachers in the last years of his schooling.

Mohammed left Mauritania because he could no longer endure the everyday experience of discrimination as a Black in his country, which meant he had very poor employment chances:

"Despite your good education you don't get the jobs you are entitled to, they are only for rich people ... but there are people who haven't learned anything, and they have the same job as you, they haven't studied anything ... you study and get no work, that's why I left the country."

This sequence is from the first interview with him and it might appear that he is only speaking about the difference between rich people and poor people. In the second interview, however, he gives discrimination against the Black population as the reason for his decision to leave. He told me, for example, about a girl he knew who worked as a maid in the household of an *"Arab"* for a long time. But instead of being paid a wage, she was reported to the police by her employer who claimed she was a thief. Mohammed said that when he heard about this, it was the final straw: it was clear to him that he didn't want to work in Mauritania, and he decided to leave, a plan he had been nursing for a long time. It must be remembered that in Mauritania – as in many other countries in the Global South – economic and political motives for migration often cannot be separated, because there is no strict distinction or delimitation between *"politics"* and *"economy"*, or even *"politics"* and *"education"*.

So in 2013 Mohammed left his country with the aim of reaching France. His father, who had previously refused to let him go and join his brother in Saudi Arabia, agreed to this, but only after Mohammed promised to send money to the family regularly from Europe.

His route took him to Mali (where he worked for six months), and then across the desert in Algeria to Morocco.

In the north of Mali, he and his companions were stopped by a group of militant Tuareg rebels who took away their money and their mobile phones. They feared *"we would all be killed"*. When Mohammed and his friend, who talked to the rebels in French or Bambara (the language of the majority in Mali), assured the rebels that they were all from Mali and were fleeing from the war, they were allowed to continue on their way.

In Algeria, he worked for two months on a farm and earned enough money to continue his journey and to cross the Moroccan border. In Morocco an extremely difficult time began. Several times he was beaten and robbed by the Moroccan police; once he was sent from Nador to Casablanca along with other migrants. Finally, he lived for several weeks in the forest on Mount Gourougou. In this forest, different groups are organized according to their countries or regions of origin and each group is headed by a *"president"*, as they call him. In spring 2014 he was chosen by the president to take part in the *"assault"* on the border, which was carried out in several stages by several hundred people. On this day Mohammed and many others succeeded in getting over the border fence to the Spanish enclave of Melilla.

In spring 2015 he was transferred to the Spanish mainland. From there he traveled to France, where he is now in a very difficult situation. His poor knowledge of French is a great disadvantage, and he is trying hard to learn the language by attending language courses. He mostly lives on the street, though he is occasionally offered a bed by people he meets, and he survives by begging. In the telephone interview I conducted with him in November 2015, he said: *"I have grown tired, I have even asked myself why I came here, I have thought a lot about why I am so tired, why I have such thoughts"*. Nevertheless, he says that he would rather live in this situation in France than stay a single night in Mauritania.

Trapped between Spanish and Moroccan Police Forces in Melilla
© José Palazón

Myrna Karolin Sieden & Simon Volpers

MATTHIEU

A PLACE WITHOUT STRESS

BETWEEN LIFE AND DEATH

28-year-old man from Côte d'Ivoire

THE LIFE HISTORY AND LIFE STORY OF MATTHIEU FROM CÔTE D'IVOIRE:

IN SEARCH OF A SAFE PLACE *"WHERE I WOULDN'T SUFFER THE SAME STRESS"*

We interviewed Matthieu in Kassel in August 2016 (in French with an interpreter). His life history, and his life story, the latter meaning the way he talks about his life today, are shaped essentially by the experience of fleeing from Côte d'Ivoire (Ivory Coast). He left because of political persecution, and his flight ended in the difficult and burdening process of applying for asylum in Germany, which he started in 2013. Matthieu's flight was preceded by a long phase of danger and persecution, which we will now take a closer look at.

Matthieu was born in Côte d'Ivoire in 1988, as the first son of a Muslim family belonging to the Malinke (a West African ethnic group). The family lived in a village in the southeast of Côte d'Ivoire, not far from the Ghanaian border. He had two older sisters. His mother had a farm and sold her produce in the market. His maternal grandmother lived in southern Ghana.

Matthieu spent most of his childhood with his father, mother and sisters. While Matthieu was still at primary school, his father moved to Abidjan, the biggest city in the country, where his second wife lived. A few years later, when Matthieu was between 11 and 13 years old, his father sent for him to come and live with him.

Refugees arriving on Lesvos (Greece) in 2015 © Anjo Kan / Shutterstock.com

In September 2002, when Matthieu was 14, civil war broke out in Côte d'Ivoire with an attempted coup against the head of state, Laurent Gbagbo, who had been in office for two years. Parts of the army had occupied the north of the country and engaged in armed clashes with government troops in the south.
The coup failed in Abidjan, but the rebels retained the northern regions under their control, so that the country was divided into a largely Christian south around Abidjan, controlled by the government, and a largely Muslim north dominated by the rebels. At the time of the coup and in the following weeks, there were violent conflicts everywhere, executions, and mass displacement of large groups of people. Intervention by France, the former colonial power, was only partly successful in restoring peace, and conflicts repeatedly broke out. A more or less effective peace agreement was signed only in 2007 (Asante 2015: 324; Biele 2017).

In the interview, Matthieu remembers the fighting in Abidjan: *"We could hear shots everywhere all the time"*. One day, he and his father were directly affected by these events, when both of them were attacked in his father's house and violently abducted. Matthieu's father was murdered in front of his eyes. These traumatizing events overshadow the way he remembers his life in Côte d'Ivoire, and, as our analysis of the interview shows, they still affect his feeling about life today. His narration shows that the image of his dying father, whom he was unable to help, is still present in his mind today:

"At that time there was war in the whole country and it was on a Friday, a big, new, black car with tinted windows came, it came to our house. … They forced my father and me to go with them to a house that was still being built and tied us up there, well they tied me up, they began beating my father, they beat me a bit, too, then they took my father and tied him to a tree and whipped him and I could hear shots everywhere, war was just everywhere … and then he died under that tree and there was blood everywhere and nobody did anything."

Matthieu was rescued from this situation by a man whose family took him in. He refers to the man as a *"friend of his father's"*, but it is unclear who he was and what role he played. Matthieu did not feel safe, and suffered from the fear that he, too, might be captured and killed. When he suspected that his father's killers were in the house of this family, he fled to Ghana.

A striking feature of the way Matthieu talks about this time, and about his own political activities in later years, is that he avoids giving any concrete details about the political orientation or loyalties of his father, of his killers, and of other persons involved. He mentions no names and is very vague about times. Our analysis of the interview with him thus suggests that the killers are, or were, associated with the party or political grouping that governs his country today, and that today he still fears, or has reason to fear (political) persecution.

When he was in his early twenties, Matthieu returned to Côte d'Ivoire and became politically active. The country was then gripped by a new political crisis. The presidential election in 2010 was preceded by renewed violent clashes, and the narrow victory won by the opposition candidate, Alassane Ouattara, was not recognized by the incumbent, Laurent Gbagbo. They each organized their own inauguration, so that for a short time Côte d'Ivoire had two heads of state. Subsequently there was a renewed outbreak of civil war, with many lives lost on both sides and among the civilian population, and alone in Abidjan about a million people fled the country. The conflict came to an end, at least on the level of formal political institutions, only after Laurent Gbagbo was arrested and brought before the International Criminal Court. Since then, Côte d'Ivoire has been ruled by Alassane Ouattara. To this day, unlike his opponent, he has not been (officially) charged with crimes committed during the war (Comhaire/Lawler/Mundt 2017; John 2011).

As a young man, Matthieu became actively involved in these politico-social conflicts. In respect of this time, in contrast to 2002, he does not describe himself as an innocent and passive victim of events. However, it is striking that he also presents this phase of his political engagement and activities in a specifically depoliticized way. Matthieu again avoids any clear indication of positions and parties to the conflict. He speaks, for example, of violent clashes in Abidjan in this way:

"I remember one situation where … they threw really big rocks at us, so that we … had to go back to our camp and even there they kept attacking us … And then I saw that it simply wasn't safe and that nothing had changed."

Matthieu saw no future for himself in his country. He wanted to leave and find a place where he could live peacefully.

Although Matthieu's life up to this point was shaped in significant ways by the political situation in his country, he systematically leaves this context out of his presentation. He thematizes political aspects of the war, and specifies individual actors or their political beliefs and positions only in answer to questions put by us, and even then gives only rudimentary answers. It remains unclear how Matthieu and his relatives locate themselves within the different conflicts. While this depoliticized account of his own life story is probably based on practices learned in his home country as a form of prevention or defense against possible persecution there, it probably still serves this purpose in the present. Matthieu knows that he may have to return to Côte d'Ivoire, or may even be deported. It is not uncommon for migrants to claim that they left their home country mainly, or only, for economic reasons when asked about their motives by the (European) authorities (see Rosenthal et al. 2017).

In 2012 Matthieu traveled by plane to Turkey with a forged passport and then began what for him was a traumatic journey to Europe. First he tried to reach Greece by boat, together with others, but the boat sank and he saw many people die:

"And when we then got into the second boat we were far too many … And when we got to the middle of the water, the boat tipped over and everyone fell into the water and we all looked around and there were pregnant women in the water, there were children in the water … many people died there in the water … and the whole time there was a helicopter in the air over us."

Here, as in Côte d'Ivoire, Matthieu experienced a situation in which he saw people dying and was unable to help them. With a few others, he succeeded in reaching Greece. At first he lived on the streets, and then he and fourteen other refugees rented three rooms, where they lived together for a time.

He experienced violent clashes between different groupings, and ill-treatment by the police.

"…those were only the normal police and then there were others on motorbikes, they were dressed all in black and they were the real racists and they rode around all the time and chased us and beat us."

Matthieu often paused for long periods during the interview, especially when describing difficult situations. We assume that this served as a form of self-protection against the flood of distressing memories, and as a way of making sure he kept control over what he was saying.

He decided to leave Greece because he hoped to find a better place:

"And when we were in Greece, we saw that we can't live like that and that it just confused us that the stress was too much and that it is not a country where you can live."

He crossed the border to Macedonia and continued his journey, mainly on foot. When looking for food, he was chased by the police. He reached Serbia, and then Hungary, partly on foot and partly by car:

"And then we walked and walked, until our food was finished, it was all gone, and we didn't know where we could get food, we kept meeting people, some of them wanted to help us, but some, many were afraid and refused to help us."

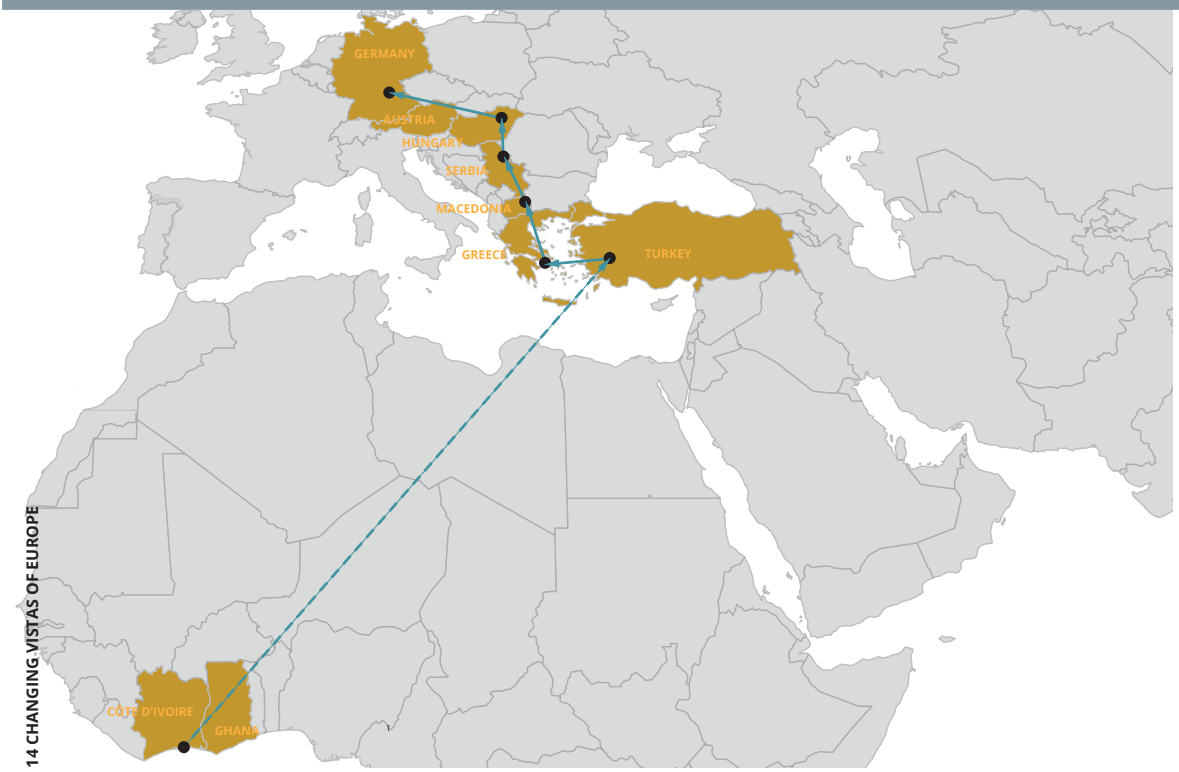
In Hungary he was placed in a camp, and probably applied for asylum. He experienced protests organized by Hungarians who uttered threats against refugees. Thus, Matthieu repeatedly found himself in situations in which he was persecuted and threatened, by the police or by the local population. He decided to leave Hungary:

"That there was always trouble with people from the Maghreb in the camp, that we heard that the local people somehow demonstrated against us …, that we couldn't go into the town to go shopping … So I said to myself, we are not safe here and Hungary is not a country where you can be safe."

In 2013 Matthieu reached Germany. His application for asylum was turned down, but he received support and encouragement from local refugee supporters, and his case is going to be reconsidered. Matthieu is suffering from the after-effects of his persecution and is currently receiving psychotherapy. In the interview he speaks about his depressive moods.

Matthieu's account of his flight and migration is a long history of suffering, which began with the murder of his father and his own feelings of helplessness in that situation. Starting with his move to Ghana, he repeatedly embarked on an active quest for a place where he would not be so powerless and helpless, where he would be safe and protected. His description of this phase is focused on recounting the dangers and difficulties he experienced, and thus trying to legitimate his successive decisions to continue his migration. It is also striking that in his account of his migration, from the time in Turkey up the time when he reached Germany, he always presents himself as a member of a we-group. He speaks almost exclusively of *"we"* in connection with this phase, but despite our questions it is not clear who this refers to, and whether it is a single group or changing groups. Apart from the fact that he experienced this time as a member of a group, we assume that this presentation is at least partly due to a need for legitimation. He describes the collectively intolerable conditions in each country in order to explain why not only he, but also the other refugees, had to leave. He is probably also anxious to avoid putting anyone in danger by mentioning names. He has probably learned that he must be careful when talking about his migration, especially in the context of the official hearing during asylum procedures. If we consider his answers to the question how he imagined Europe before his migration, it is clear that here, too, he is trying to legitimate his departure from Côte d'Ivoire. We are not trying to suggest that his talk of seeking a *"life in peace"* away from life-threatening situations is not a true account of his experiences at that time. On the contrary, we can assume that the social pressure to legitimize his migration, and its political illegalization, were additional painful experiences in a biographical course shaped by traumatizing events.

Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire) © Roman Yanushevsky / Shutterstock.com



FROM AN INTERVIEW WITH MATTHIEU

Matthieu was interviewed by Myrna Karolin Sieden and Simon Volpers on two occasions in August 2016. The interviews were conducted in French with an interpreter. His answers to our questions about his images of Europe are influenced by the fact that it was not originally his intention to reach Europe.

INTERVIEWER
"And what impression did Europe make on you when you arrived or after getting here?"

MATTHIEU
"It wasn't easy. Even in Africa I didn't have such a life. There, I slept in a house, I didn't rummage through garbage cans, I didn't have to cross water, or walk such long distances, so when I was in Europe it was like being between life and death. It wasn't what I wanted."

INTERVIEWER
"Can you say how you imagined Europe before you left your home country?"

MATTHIEU
"Well, it's like I said. Before I left Côte d'Ivoire I hadn't really thought about trying to reach Europe.
So my aim was just to find a place where I wouldn't suffer the same stress as in my country, just a –. With the war, that they killed my father, with politics, all these things made me want to leave."

INTERVIEWER
"And what is your image of Europe today?"

MATTHIEU
"(very long pause lasting 27 seconds) Europe is a good continent. But I didn't know for example that there are countries like Greece in Europe. The time when I arrived in Greece I was very disappointed by Europe and I said to myself, 'if this is what Europe is like, then I don't want to be here'."

INTERVIEWER
"Can you say whether you had a kind of general image of Europe in your mind? Perhaps things people had told you about Europe?"

MATTHIEU
"I only started thinking about Europe or how I could reach Europe after arriving in Turkey."

Airport in Côte d'Ivoire © private photograph

Eva Bahl

FRANKLIN

PARADISE

DRAG NET

25-year-old man from Cameroon

THE LIFE HISTORY AND LIFE STORY OF FRANKLIN FROM CAMEROON:

"MY DADDY CALLS US: MY UNEMPLOYED CHILDREN"

Trying to cross Melilla's border fence © José Palazón

Franklin is a young, well-educated man, who actively decided to migrate with the hope of continuing his studies and obtaining professional qualifications in Europe. He lives today in Spain and has not given up his ambitions. He comes from Kumba, a coastal town in southwestern Cameroon. My colleagues Gabriele Rosenthal and Arne Worm met him in April 2014 in Melilla, a Spanish enclave in Morocco. They spoke to him in a group discussion with a total of five young refugees from Cameroon, as well as in a biographical-narrative interview. Over the following years, we kept in contact with him via Facebook. In addition, our colleague Mahadi Ahmed, himself a refugee from Sudan, conducted several follow-up telephone interviews with him. These follow-up interviews revealed, among other things, his changing view of Europe. He says that, looking back, he had imagined it as paradise, but now he increasingly perceives it as a *"drag net"* in which he has been caught up.

Let us take a closer look at his life history:
Franklin was born in the early 1990s as the second youngest child of his parents. He has three sisters, and five half-siblings from his father's first wife. His mother is his father's second wife. His parents both come from a different region of Cameroon – the North-West Region – and belong to the ethnic group of the Bafut. His family is partly (or mainly) Christian and partly Muslim.

Around the time of Franklin's birth there was an economic crisis in Cameroon, and his father lost his job. The family's economic status fell, and Franklin and his younger sisters had a less favorable start in life than the older siblings: *"My daddy calls us: my unemployed children"*.
Despite financial difficulties, all of Franklin's siblings and half-siblings earned university degrees. Education was very highly valued in the family:

"That's how I was brought up, my elder brother is a medical doctor now … three of the girls … are all teachers, they graduated from the university of Buea, South-West Region of Cameroon, and my other elder brother he got his Masters, and moved to Canada."

In Franklin's family, *"education and professional success through mobility*" seems to be a pattern that has a tradition, is respected, and is even expected. His parents both migrated as children from the North-West Region to the South-West Region. These are the only two anglophone regions in Cameroon, which is otherwise francophone. For economic reasons, there has always been a large-scale migration of workers from north to south of the anglophone part of Cameroon (Konings 2011: 507)[1]. Franklin's eldest brother migrated to Sweden to study, and later to Canada where he found work.

Scaling Melilla's border fence © José Palazón

Franklin dropped out of university in 2011 – probably in the context of student protests, in which he was involved, and which were heavily repressed. About two years later, he started his journey to Europe, together with his friend Tom.

During his migration, Franklin was able to benefit from his cultural and social capital. Thus, he made clever strategic use of his resources, such as education, social contacts, or financial support from family and friends, and this helped him to make relatively fast progress on his journey. On the way to Melilla, he passed through Nigeria, Niger, Algeria and Morocco.

In the interview, Franklin presented himself as an *"expert"* for this migration route, by repeatedly offering very detailed information about different places, and the prices for various services that he had to pay for during his migration, or about political events. He probably thought that this information would interest the interviewers, and in Melilla his journey and everything he had experienced in the course of it were still very fresh in his memory.

The first stop on their route was Bamenda in the North-West Region of Cameroon. Via Nigeria and Niger they crossed the Sahara and reached Algeria. They stayed for a while in the oasis town of Tamanrasset, waiting for money that Franklin's father sent him. They then continued to Maghnia, the border town between Algeria and Morocco. Their first attempt to cross the border to Morocco failed; Franklin and his friend Tom were caught by Moroccan soldiers and sent back to Algeria. After another three days, they tried again and this time they were successful. They arrived in Oujda, the Moroccan border town. There, they stayed for a month in a big informal migrant camp on the university campus. Franklin told us that it was in Oujda that he first heard of the possibility of entering the European Union by crossing the border to Melilla from the Moroccan town of Nador.

Up to their arrival in Morocco, Franklin and Tom never stayed anywhere longer than a month. That is a relatively short time, compared to the reports of other migrants, who in some cases had to work for more than a year at different places along their route before being able to continue their journey. But Franklin was able to utilize his networks and the financial resources of his family. His father sent him money several times during his journey, and a friend who was already in Morocco gave him advice by telephone on how to proceed.

Franklin spent about six months on Mount Gourugu, directly beside the Spanish enclave of Melilla in Morocco. There, the migrants, mostly from West African countries like Cameroon, Mali or Mauritania, are also organized in "ghettos" according to their nationality, and prepare themselves for crossing the border, which is extremely dangerous and physically demanding. Franklin lived in the "ghetto" for anglophone Cameroonians. He describes the time he spent in this camp as the hardest of his whole journey. At this point, he refers to the comfortable life he led in Cameroon and contrasts it with his life in the camp:

"I imagine myself … in Cameroon I live in a good house, my room has everything, I go to school, I take a bath twice a day, I do go to night clubs, I hang out with friends, we go to a bar or drink or make noise, we dance, when I come to Gourugu all that was just behind me, can't go to the night club, you can't dance, you can't eat well."

1 The present-day division of the country into two very different parts goes back to relations between the colonial powers. Today Cameroon is a highly centralized state in which about four fifths of the population is francophone; they occupy a similar proportion of the territory, and are politically dominant. The dissatisfaction of the people in the English-speaking area finds expression, among other things, in a separatist movement which agitates in favor of independence for the anglophone part of the country (Konings/Jua 2004). On the critical situation at the time of the writing of this article, see Gaffey 2017.

Franklin's descriptions of his life (or struggle for survival) on Mount Gourugu resemble many other stories we heard about this place: he had to sleep in a hole in the ground and the most important thing was to escape from the Moroccan soldiers who regularly came and carried out raids on the camp. During these raids, the migrants were often exposed to extreme violence, and the makeshift tents and shelters in which they lived were destroyed. Franklin made three failed attempts to cross the fence to Melilla. During the first attempt, he and other migrants were beaten by Moroccan soldiers and then sent to Rabat, the Moroccan capital. That is the current practice. In the past, the migrants were generally taken to Oujda or the Moroccan-Algerian border zone (in the desert, where survival is not guaranteed):

"...the Moroccan police, who guards the area, they are very dangerous, they beat and they break hands of some of my friends ... we were seriously beaten, then again, and sent to Rabat, to the capital after being thrown to Rabat, we have to come back to Morocco, come back to Nador, try again."

In early 2014, together with some friends, he succeeded in getting over the fence that surrounds Melilla, and thus in entering Spain. In the interview, when asked what was the best moment of his journey, Franklin said:

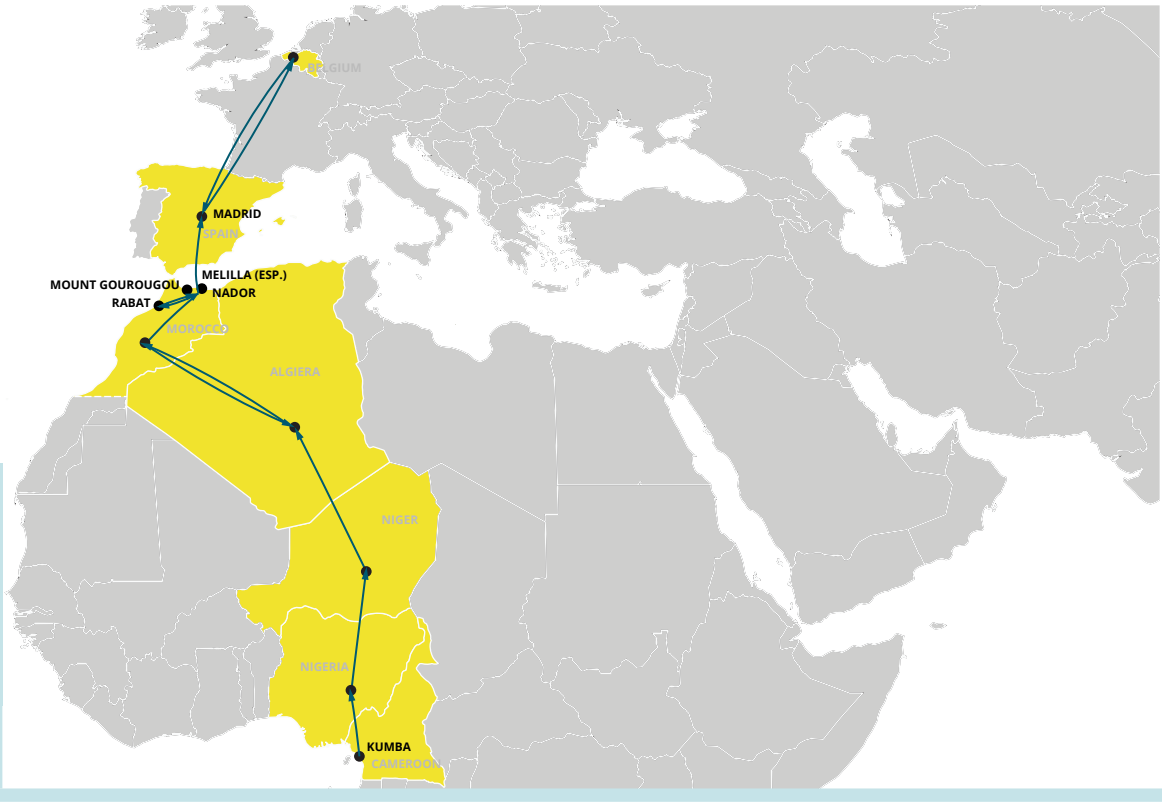
"...from here I have hopes to go to where I always want to be, so my best situation (in the mission) is here in Melilla, 'cause us from Cameroon to Morocco I don't think anything better is going to happen."

We heard what happened to his friend Tom only in the telephone interview which M. Ahmed conducted with him in spring 2016. Franklin said that his friend Tom, who had left Cameroon together with him, died during an attempt to reach Europe by crossing the Mediterranean. They had been separated in Morocco at the time when Franklin was arrested by the Moroccan police and taken to Rabat. Tom had been able to evade arrest and together with others he had tried to get to Spain in a dinghy. When the Guardia Civil shot at the migrants with tear gas, Tom fell in the water and drowned, because he couldn't swim. In the interview in Melilla, Franklin had been unable to talk about this. When we asked about his friend, he tried to avoid the painful reality and said that Tom had been transferred to the Iberian Peninsula a few days before our meeting.

Trapped between the two fences at the Melilla border © José Palazón

At the time of the interview in Melilla in April 2014, Franklin was frustrated at being stuck in Melilla, and at several points he describes the omnipresence of waiting. Before his departure from Cameroon, and during his journey, he was able to make relatively independent decisions and to act on them. But in Melilla he felt frustrated by the loss of this agency, and by being obliged to wait for his transfer – called "salida" (Spanish for "exit") – to the Spanish mainland. Shortly after our interview, the longed-for transfer took place, and from Spain Franklin set out for Belgium. After a few months, he was sent back to Spain under the terms of the Dublin Regulation, which lays down that the first EU country reached is responsible for examining an asylum application. This is where he is living today, in a small town close to Madrid, where he works as a forklift operator. Because of his insecure residence status, he has not yet been able to pursue his ambitions in respect of acquiring higher educational qualifications, but he still hopes to be able to study in Germany.

When we interviewed him in Melilla, Franklin was still in a euphoric mood because, after suffering many hardships, he had finally reached Europe. But in the follow-up interviews, he sounded very disillusioned. Before this backdrop, let us take a look at Franklin's perspectives on Europe.



IMAGES OF EUROPE

BEFORE HE LEFT CAMEROON[2]

"The story begins in mid 2013 when I started developing interest of coming to Europe, then I had little or no idea about what the actual or reality of Europe could look like, so I made up my mind to go and see things for myself, I thought Europe was like paradise with all the best things on earth on it, ... all this thought I had in mind makes me travel million miles away to Europe taking a very risky journey all away from Cameroon to Nigeria to Niger through the Sahara desert to Algeria and finally to Morocco which I finally crossed to Spain. I had so many beautiful thoughts about Europe which was, life is so easy' there is more than enough money for everyone, there are lot of job opportunities without knowing this was somehow beyond my imagination."

ON THE MIGRATION ROUTE IN MOROCCO

"so I imagine myself ... in Cameroon I live in a good house, my room has everything. I go to school I take a bath twice a day so, I do go to night clubs, I hang out with friends we go to bar or drink or make noise we dance, when I come to (Gourougou) all that was just behind me..."

CURRENT PERSPECTIVE ON EUROPE IN SPAIN

"But today I have come to notice so many things here in Europe which are far beyond what I have ever thought of. First of all, the manner which I get into Europe, by climbing the fence, which was the most risky act I have ever done. People sleeping on the street which was one of the last things I could think of and also people begging on the street, also the jobs I thought was enough for everyone have become relatively scarce with so many people being unemployed, these things have really changed my thought about how I saw Europe before coming. At times I think having a better education and try to develop our own countries is better rather than living in such stressful conditions here in Europe. And I am trying my possible best to educate my

2 The first and the third quotations are from Franklin's written answers to questions we put to him in June 2016, when he was living near Madrid, about how he sees Europe. The second quotation is taken from the biographical interview with Franklin conducted in English by Arne Worm and Gabriele Rosenthal in April 2014 in Melilla (Spain; North Africa).

younger brothers about the realities of Europe, I think is time they know better how the place is before falling into the same drag net like I did. Well I have also got lot of experience about Europe first of all which is the act of racism, which is one of the greatest effect I have faced so far, the fact that some of the Europeans have little or no respect for the black race makes it really uncomfortable for me and makes it really difficult for me to interact freely in the society, I have experienced hatred, no love among others, all these things at times makes me feel really discouraged living out of my country. Nevertheless, there are some things which I really like about Europe, I love the system of education because it is highly advanced, the training programs and of course the infrastructural development."

Student Graduation University of Buea (Cameroon) © private photograph

Gabriele Rosenthal

FATIM

LIFE IS EASY

I'M STUCK HERE

about 26-year-old woman from Guinea

IMAGES OF EUROPE

Guinea © private photograph

BEFORE SHE LEFT GUINEA[1]

"When I was in Guinea, the images of Europe that we saw made me think that life in Europe is easy. I thought I only needed to get here, then everything else would be easy. I would have no problem getting papers, work, money, a place to live, practically everything would be easy in Europe. I never thought there could be homeless people in Europe, people who don't have enough to eat, people who beg, but I was wrong, the reality here is different. Here it's not like where I come from, where your family will always help you, here everyone is on their own and no one helps you."

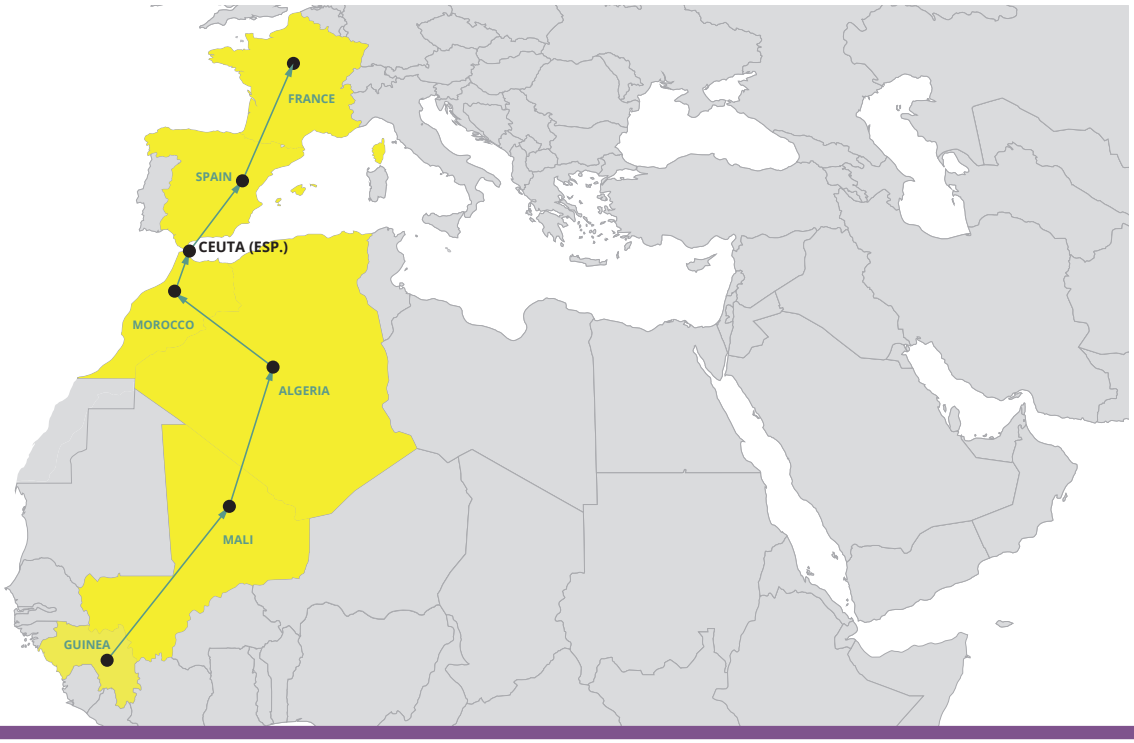
ON THE MIGRATION ROUTE IN MOROCCO

"When I was in Morocco I suffered a lot, because the Moroccans don't like strangers. We had to beg to get money for food, we were robbed and humiliated and many people died during the journey."

CURRENT PERSPECTIVE ON EUROPE IN FRANCE

"When I consider that I risked my life to get here, I can only cry and show my regret, I really regret making this journey. … I'm stuck here and I don't know what will become of me, what I can do with my life, I can't travel to any other European country, I can't buy a SIM card for a telephone, because to do that you have to have papers, which I don't have, and of course I'm not allowed to work. I often think about my family, the child I left behind, because I am her only hope, and there are times when I can't eat for days because of worrying, not even to break the fast during Ramadan. I thought that once I got to Europe I would have everything, I would have achieved my goal, but it's not like that."

1 The quotations are from a telephone interview that Mahadi Ahmed conducted with Fatim in English and Soussou in June 2016.



THE LIFE HISTORY AND LIFE STORY OF FATIM FROM GUINEA:

FLIGHT FROM FORCED PROSTITUTION

"When I consider that I risked my life to get here, I can only cry and show my regret, I really regret making this journey," said Fatim in a telephone interview with Mahadi Ahmed, our Sudanese colleague, in spring 2016, after she had succeeded in reaching France. I was very surprised to hear this, because it seemed to contradict what Fatim had told us about her life in Guinea in the interview with her conducted by me and my husband, Artur Bogner, six months earlier in Ceuta (the Spanish enclave in North Africa). Our analysis of this biographical-narrative interview, which was conducted a few days after a joint picnic on the beach, suggests that it was strongly influenced by a relationship of trust that had grown up between the author and Fatim. Fatim needed to talk about her life in Guinea and how she had suffered there. She spoke very openly about the years during which she was forced to work as a prostitute, and how she had to fear for her life even after fleeing from Guinea to Mali. She told us she was afraid that her husband and her adoptive mother, from whom she had run away, would find her there and kill her. It was in this constellation that she decided to make the dangerous journey to Europe. In the interview, Mahmoud, an acquaintance of hers who had also fled from Guinea, encouraged her to speak openly about her experience of being forced to do sex work. Since Fatim knows very little English, we conducted the interview in Soussou, her mother tongue, and Mahmoud translated what she said into English[2]. After Fatim had told us in the interview about how she was raped and beaten, she turned to Mahmoud and said: "If you tell them that, will they believe it?" Mahmoud answered: *"They will believe it, you know, they are very intelligent, if you tell them something, you must open your heart … she (the interviewer) wants you to tell her everything that happened to you."*

2 All passages in Soussou (or English) were transcribed and translated into German and later English by other translators.

The telephone interview with M. Ahmed, however, was dominated by references to the difficult situation in France and her feelings of despair, which she summed up by saying *"I'm stuck here"*, and especially by her longing to see her little daughter whom she had had to leave behind in Guinea. While she was in Ceuta, she had imagined that when she reached mainland Europe she would be able to *"apply for papers*" and send for her daughter to join her. Now she is in France this hope has begun to die.

Occasionally Fatim talks with her daughter's foster mother on the phone.

The Rock of Gibraltar seen from Ceuta © private photograph

Let us take a closer look at her life history and how she spoke about it in Ceuta in October 2015.

Fatim was born around 1990 in a small village in Guinea. Fatim's mother died following her birth; her father was already dead. She spent the first years of her life in an orphanage. A woman who ran a bar and restaurant took her from the orphanage and made her work in the bar, and later as a prostitute. She was not allowed to go to school: *"I noticed that my friends went to school and I, I was busy cleaning the restaurant."*

When she was about fourteen, *"this woman gave me to a man, she gave me to him as his wife"*. This was the beginning of a phase in which her suffering increased. She was regularly raped and beaten by her husband, who also forced her to earn money by prostitution:

"... this man beat me, raped me, and then, the men who came to the house, he sold me to these men and they also beat me, raped me when I tried to defend myself."

In the interview, Fatim showed us the scars which she still has today on her arms and her back, from beatings, and from cigarettes being extinguished on her skin.

Around 2010 Fatim became pregnant by a client:

"I didn't know whose child it was, because many men came there to rape me."

After the birth of the baby, her husband forced her to continue working as a prostitute and beat her. Fatim gave her baby girl to a woman neighbor:

"And after I had the baby and it began to get bigger I gave it to one of the women in my neighborhood, because he (Fatim's husband) continued to beat me and rape me and to sell me as a sex worker. Because of all this I had no chance to look after my daughter properly. So I gave her to this neighbor, so she could look after her, you understand, don't you? Then I ran away and went to Mali, you see."

Fatim fled to Mali somewhere between 2012 and 2014. The dates she gives are inconsistent. Fatim says she spent over three years traveling to Ceuta. However, she also says that she remembers people dying from Ebola in Guinea. This can hardly have been before 2014, which is when the first Ebola cases in her home region were publicized. It must be remembered that one of the normal consequences of a traumatizing phase is that the person's sense of time is disturbed, and the period of suffering is experienced, and remembered, as being much longer than it really was. In Mali Fatim found work as a cleaner. She heard that her husband and the woman bar owner were looking for her and wanted to kill her.

"... when I left Guinea and went to Mali, they (her husband and her adoptive mother) were looking for me and said they would kill me if they found me, you see. Even the woman who adopted me said she would kill me if she found me. So I decided to try and get to Morocco. I worked for a year cleaning people's houses in Mali. I was able to save money from my earnings and I met a girl who told me I should go to Morocco, because from Morocco you can get to the country of the white people (i.e. Europe)."

Another reason for her decision to travel to Europe from Mali was her concern for her daughter. She wanted to have her daughter with her and to give her a better future – and to let her go to school. In the interview, Fatim repeatedly said that *"her heart was restless"* because she had left her little daughter in Guinea, and that she hoped her daughter would be able to join her.

Border Fence between Ceuta and Belyounech © private photograph

In contrast to the men from West Africa that we interviewed, such as Matthieu, Franklin or Mohammed, it might seem that this woman fled from a constellation of domestic violence, and not, like the men, from the political situation in their country of origin. Yet Fatim's lack of legal rights as an orphan, and later in a forced marriage and as a forced prostitute, is a consequence of the social constellations in her country of origin, where she saw running away as the only option. Unlike the men we interviewed, she had not been to school and can neither read nor write. She also has only a limited knowledge of French, and was thus in a distinctly more vulnerable situation than the men during her migration, and was always dependent on receiving support from other migrants – mostly men.

Let us consider how she reached Ceuta. Fatim traveled from Mali to Morocco via Algeria. She lived in the forest near the border to Ceuta for a long time (she believes two years) and survived quite a number of traumatizing situations there. She was brutally beaten several times while begging, which also left her with permanent scars on her body.

In the interview Fatim attached importance to the topic of how she was mistreated in Morocco. She spoke about how Moroccans just look on when refugees are beaten nearly to death, and about the conditions in which they live in the forest near the border to Ceuta. She urged us interviewers to publicize what she said, so that the conditions for refugees in Morocco might be improved. She told Mahmoud he must explain to us that she was not thinking of herself here, but of, and for, the refugees from Africa south of the Sahara who were still in Morocco. In these passages of the interview, it is clear that her suffering in Morocco was very present in her mind, and that her thoughts were with those who had not yet succeeded in getting across the border. She herself tried nine times to cross it in a rubber dinghy, and she succeeded in reaching Ceuta in a small boat in the fall of 2015. A few months after her arrival, she was able to leave for the Spanish mainland and lived in Spain until early 2016. Because of her knowledge of French, Fatim moved to France. In France she has applied for asylum and is waiting for the result.

The Rock of Gibraltar seen from Ceuta © private photograph

Arne Worm

MARUF

PARADISE

EQUALITY

about 22-year-old man from Kobanê in Syria

THE LIFE HISTORY AND LIFE STORY OF MARUF FROM SYRIA:

"IN SYRIA WE WERE AFRAID TO SAY WE ARE KURDS"

When we met Maruf[1] for the first time in the fall of 2014 in the Spanish enclave of Melilla in North Africa, his perspective on his past life in Syria and on his present situation was strongly shaped by the ongoing battle between jihadist militias of the so-called "Islamic State" and Kurdish fighters in his hometown of Kobanê. Like other Kurdish-Syrian refugees in Melilla, Maruf was beset by worries about family members and friends who had stayed in the battle-torn city in northern Syria and whose lives were in danger. Despite the destruction of his hometown and the devastating development of the Syrian civil war since March 2011, the young man, who was born in the early 1990s, was questioning his own decision to leave Syria in the fall of 2011. He had feelings of powerlessness and uncertainty in the refugee camp in Melilla, where he had arrived a few weeks before our interview, after being repeatedly beaten while trying to cross the Moroccan-Spanish checkpoint. During the interview, he was troubled by doubts:

Airport in Algier (Algeria) © Oguz Dikbakan / Shutterstock.com

Should I have stayed to help my family? Do I have a national obligation to fight for my Kurdish we-group? And why does the European Union do so little to support the people in Kobanê and the Syrian refugees?

At the same time, Maruf expressed relief that for the first time in his life he was not afraid to show his Kurdish belonging and to speak freely in Kurmanji (one of the Kurdish languages spoken in the Middle East). He told us about his dreams of going to Europe to study and to find participation chances that were closed to him in Syria and during his migration. If he succeeded, Maruf said, he might be able to support his family by getting them out of Syria or by qualifying as a doctor. But he also described the urge to emancipate himself from the past in order to rebuild his life as a major driving force behind his migration project:

"I thought I will forget everything, everything from Syria, so I went, I left them, but it was on the contrary, my thoughts are occupied with my siblings, with the Syrian people, basically with the Kurdish people, I belong to the Kurdish people, I was with the Kurdish people, well with my friends. With my good friends."

1 His name and other personal data have been changed for reasons of data protection. In the fall of 2014 Gabriele Rosenthal, Ahmed Albaba and I conducted two biographical-narrative interviews in Arabic with Maruf in Melilla. Ahmed Albaba and I met Maruf for a follow-up interview in June 2015 in a city in southern Germany. He was subsequently visited by Mahadi Ahmed in a city in the west of Germany in the summer of 2016. We are still in contact via Facebook and by telephone.

This ambivalence between the aspiration to continue his (*"individual"*) journey and his imagined future life, on the one hand, and the ongoing, unavoidable connection to his home (and thus also to the past), on the other hand, sums up quite well his biographical situation in Melilla. His statements also draw our attention to his socially isolated situation. But what is it in Syria that Maruf wants to, but cannot, forget? To answer this question and to understand his migration course, it's necessary to look at his whole biography, as well as his family and collective (Kurdish) history. We'll see a history of multiple experiences of marginalization and a home falling apart due to a (civil) war. And we'll see marginalization in his own family, which is an issue hard to talk about for Maruf, because it came with remembering violence and unrealized family and personal aspirations. Let's take a look at Maruf's biography against the background of his family and collective history.

Maruf was born in the early 1990s into a Kurdish-Sunni family living in the rural area around the city of Kobanê, a city in northern Syria close to the border with Turkey that is almost entirely inhabited by Kurds. His parents – both without any experience of formal education – owned a small shop on the outskirts of Kobanê. Maruf was the youngest of thirteen children in the family.

His family history and his own biography in Syria were strongly affected by the exclusionist policies against Kurds in Syria, going back to the years that followed the foundation of the young Syrian Arab Republic (see Montgomery 2005; Tejel 2009; Schmidinger 2014). Expressions of Kurdish culture and speaking the Kurdish language were officially prohibited, and many Kurds in Syria lacked basic citizenship rights.

Before and after his birth, different family members faced imprisonment, torture and other forms of persecution (based on accusations of sectarian political activism). Maruf learned that being Kurdish in Syria is dangerous, and even life-threatening, but also something that establishes networks of trust:

"In Syria you go to school, but you cannot speak Kurdish, it was forbidden to speak … there were neither rights nor freedom … more problems than you could imagine, because the rule was in the hands of the Syrian, the Arabs. And in Syria we were afraid to say we are Kurds … They destroy your Kurdishness, you have no rights. My father had no citizenship, he was born in Syria and had no citizenship."

Maruf also learned, like other Syrians, to be careful about expressing any forms of belonging openly that might conflict with the authoritarian state. Many of his older siblings had obtained, or were in the middle of obtaining, university degrees, when Maruf was a child and a young adolescent. Some of them were (secretly) active in political parties. In his youth Maruf was in a weak position in the family (and was sometimes beaten by his older brothers). But still his family had high educational aspirations for him. At the same time, parts of his generation of young Kurds started to be more openly politically active, against the background of tensions between the Arabic and Kurdish population in some regions, for example in Qamishli in 2004. Additionally, at the end of his secondary school time he was part of a demographically large generation of young Syrians who were deprived of occupational and social participation chances under the authoritarian socio-political system (see Perthes 2011).

Entrance to the CETI in Melilla, 2014 © private photograph

When the conflict in Syria started in spring 2011, Maruf (then about 16-17 years old) felt the pressure of having to choose between his educational and occupational aspirations or becoming political active. In fall of 2011, at an early stage of the political turmoil in Syria, he decided to go to Algeria to continue his educational career and look for a job. Shortly before finishing his secondary education, he traveled by air to Algeria, to join his sister's family there. Like many other migrants from Syria, at this point he didn't intend to go to Europe, but chose a destination that was reachable according to his resources, informal networks and language skills.

He finished his secondary education in Algeria, but in fall of 2014 Maruf again found himself in a strong outsider position. Although it was very painful to remember and to talk about, he told us how he was beaten by his sister's husband, kicked out of their house, and lived on the street for a while. Additionally, he had several experiences of being discriminated against by the local population, and couldn't find a job. Given the escalation in Syria, returning was not an option, so Maruf decided to continue his migration project and go to Europe via Melilla.

He crossed the officially closed border from Algeria to Morocco by car with other Syrians, with the help of smugglers. After several attempts, Maruf successfully passed the Melilla checkpoint from Nador on the Moroccan side, and crossed into Spain disguised as a Moroccan worker. He had previously been discovered several times by border guards, who beat him and violently pushed him back:

"At the Algerian border they beat me and at the Moroccan border they beat me ten times. … When I tried to enter Melilla it was hard, I paid 1000 € until I crossed the gate, at that time the police 'received' me and beat me up."

After being transferred to the Iberian Peninsula, he migrated to Germany. He lived temporarily in an asylum center in a village in southern Germany and has been granted asylum status (for three years). In this situation (summer 2015), Ahmed Albaba and I met him again for a follow-up interview. Shortly before our meeting, Maruf received news of a terrible event in his family. His father, who had stayed in Kobanê, had been murdered by fighters of the "Islamic State":

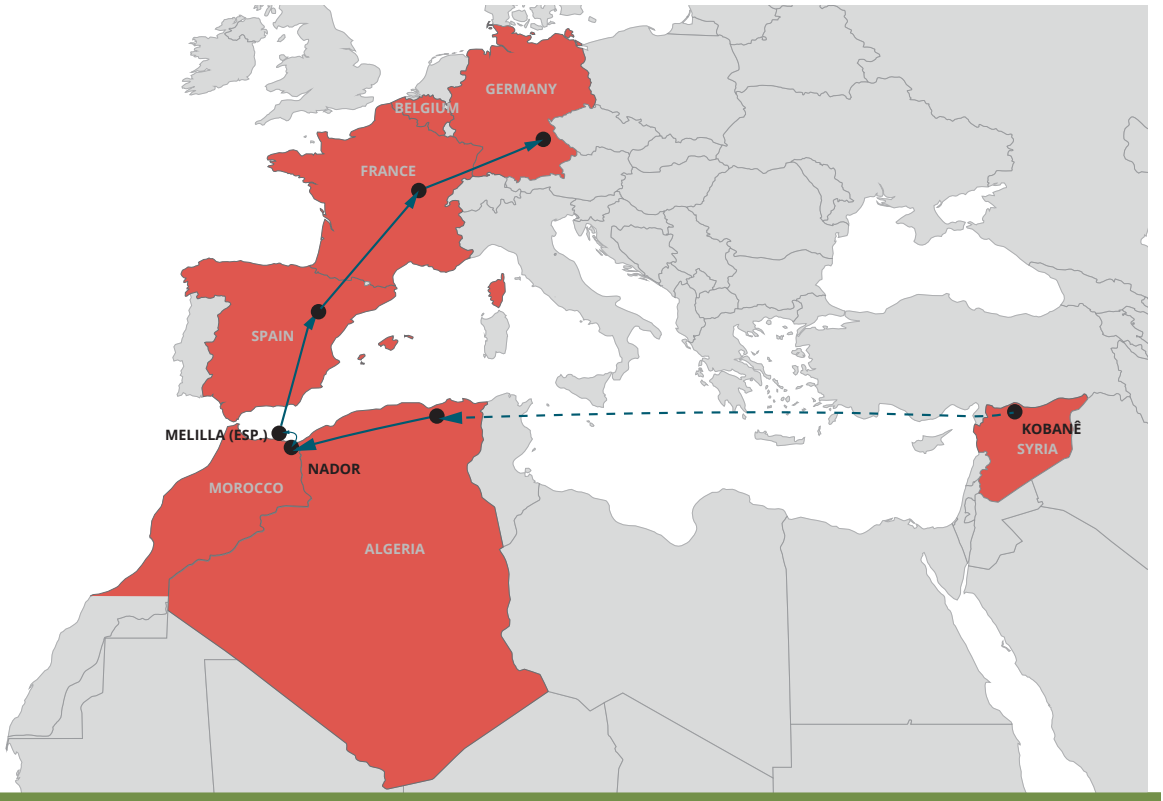
"I came here (village in southern Germany) it is nice but a bit far away from the next big city. But immediately I was happy because before I was in a room with other people and here the situation is better, I got in touch with my people there (in Kobanê) the situation is critical and you want to know how it develops. A few days ago they told my that my father has been killed (10 seconds pause) it is different when he just dies, then it is God's will but he was murdered. It was at the outskirts of Kobanê he was too close to the Islamic State territories, they disguised as Kurds and asked him, if he was a Kurd and he proudly said yes…"

Destroyed City of Kobanê (Syria), 2015 © Procyk Radek / Shutterstock.com

Despite his secure residency status, in the refugee camp Maruf was in an isolated situation again. He mostly lived with Arab refugees whom he didn't trust and was afraid of. He had intensified nightmares and mortal fears of meeting supporters of the so-called "Islamic State". His mother and other siblings had fled by then to Turkey.

After a few months, Maruf was allowed to move to a town in the western part of Germany, where families from his hometown had come to live. By now, his situation has stabilized significantly and he has started to attend a German class. But he is troubled by the uncertain future he and his family are facing, and the ongoing war in Syria. He still dreams of becoming a medical doctor.

In summer 2016, we asked him if he could write something for us describing his past and present perspectives on Europe, parts of which are presented below. We have added his statements on Europe made during the interviews in Melilla in 2014. We see clearly that his perspective on Europe has changed from a rather idealized image to a more differentiated perspective based on everyday experiences. Being seen as a "refugee" (and not as "himself") is a new struggle for the young man seeking to (re-)build an 'individual' life and to be respected in terms of his Kurdish belonging. For Maruf, equality is the central keyword, being something he is starting to experience in certain everyday situations, but which is probably more important as a moral demand and a wish for the future.



IMAGES OF EUROPE

PARADISE EQUALITY

BEFORE HE CAME TO EUROPE[2]

"I was idealising Europeans, I thought they are greater than other nations. I thought all of them are creative, intelligent & know more about the world than others. Well some of them are, but there are as many stupid among them as there are everywhere."

IN NORTH AFRICA, MELILLA

"After that I came here to Melilla ... it's exactly like the Arabic countries, they say they are European countries but I saw no European countries, I thought I had arrived in a state of morality and culture, but nobody listened to me, nobody saw what was going on, my family is still in Kobanê where are many problems. I cannot watch TV anymore, I came here only to support my family, they need me my family lives in a war I cannot support them, I came to support them but I tell you that this will not come true, it's like you're in prison you cannot make a difference."

"I realized that governance here (in Melilla) is also dictatorial, this is not Europe, the system is not European, it should- it should. We came here when we fled from the Arabic countries and everything we came and thought it will be a state for the people, well they don't care for the people. When all European countries are like this I'll go back and fight against Daesh (the Islamic State)."

2 The first and last quotations are from a text Maruf wrote for us in Arabic in summer 2016 about his past and present perspectives on Europe. The second and third quotations are from the two biographical interviews with Maruf that were conducted in Arabic by Gabriele Rosenthal, Arne Worm and Ahmed Albaba in October 2014 in Melilla (Spain; North Africa).

CURRENT PERSPECTIVE ON EUROPE IN GERMANY

“People see me as a refugee and ignore the whole of me. I wasn’t born a refugee. Am suffering a great deal of people’s image of refugees. I hate it when people look at me as a person who fled war, hungry, weak and a person in need. We need empowerment and not bread. … People are concerned after the recent terror attacks in Europe. People look at us very strangely on streets. I understand their fear but how stupid to put all people in one box. Many people think all refugees are terrorists. … I wished I came to Europe as a student or a trader! It would have been better; it would have been then the paradise as I always thought of. Many Syrians who came to Europe before the war, had good positions. Among them are doctors, architects, lawyers, as a refugee you will never be something. A refugee is a refugee forever. … The great thing in Europe and Germany is, people are equal before the law, all people are standing in a line at the bank for example. Old, young, rich and poor are standing at the same line. There is a law, that’s great. Equality is the most valuable thing. We Kurds are longing for equality. People here are equal before the law regardless of their social classes & political views.”

Cien Metros Más Allá/Checkpoint Melilla © Stéphane M. Grueso
https://www.flickr.com/photos/stephanemgrueso/5481439825; [Creative Commons 2.0 Generic (CC BY-SA 2.0)]

Lukas Hofmann & Christian Jorgow

SAIDA

NO PARADISE

IT'S NOT WORTH IT

33-year-old woman from Syria

IMAGES OF EUROPE

BEFORE SHE CAME TO EUROPE[1]

"When I went to university, I start to think, ok, when I finish, I will leave. It's not I think not just my point, most of young people in Syria thought before, of course now everyone leave. All of young people thought to travel to Europe or to Emirates or don't know, some rich country, to work, to have money."

"I think I don't have this magic picture of Europe, because already a part of my family lives in Europe for a long time … some live in France … If comparing to Syria, it's perfect but also I don't think it's paradise I know some people came to here and they think, oh we'll come to find money in the street, women, houses, of course it's a so naive image of Europe."

ON THE MIGRATION ROUTE TO EUROPE

"In Istanbul … I never had this feeling, that someone harasses against me, because almost Turkish people looked like us … But when we leave to Izmir, first day we slept in the street … first time for me I sleep in the street … the police came and kicked us out … then we slept in the street. In the next morning, we woke up because some guys shouting at us and throw eggs at us and they say go back to your country, it was the first time like someone harassed against me."

AFTER ARRIVING IN LESBOS (GREECE)

"When we arrive to the beach all people were so happy, they start to say, yeah, we do it, we're in Europe now and I feel so sad just look it's not worth it. You go to the death, one time maybe this boat will drown and all of us will die, for what?"

CURRENT PERSPECTIVE ON EUROPE

"First time it was so bad, I had so bad feelings because I feel it is not worth to do all of this to arrive at Europe, it is same world everywhere it just look like you will always fight the system everywhere."

Water wheel in Hama (Syria) © Shutterstock.com

1 The quotations are from a biographical interview conducted in English by Lukas Hofmann and Christian Jorgow in Hamburg (Germany) in June 2016.

“I think now I have this image of the German people that they are very closed inside Europe and they don’t really know what is going on outside of Europe. … But everything is connected to each other, like what happened in Syria is very much connected to what happened in Germany or in Russia for example.”

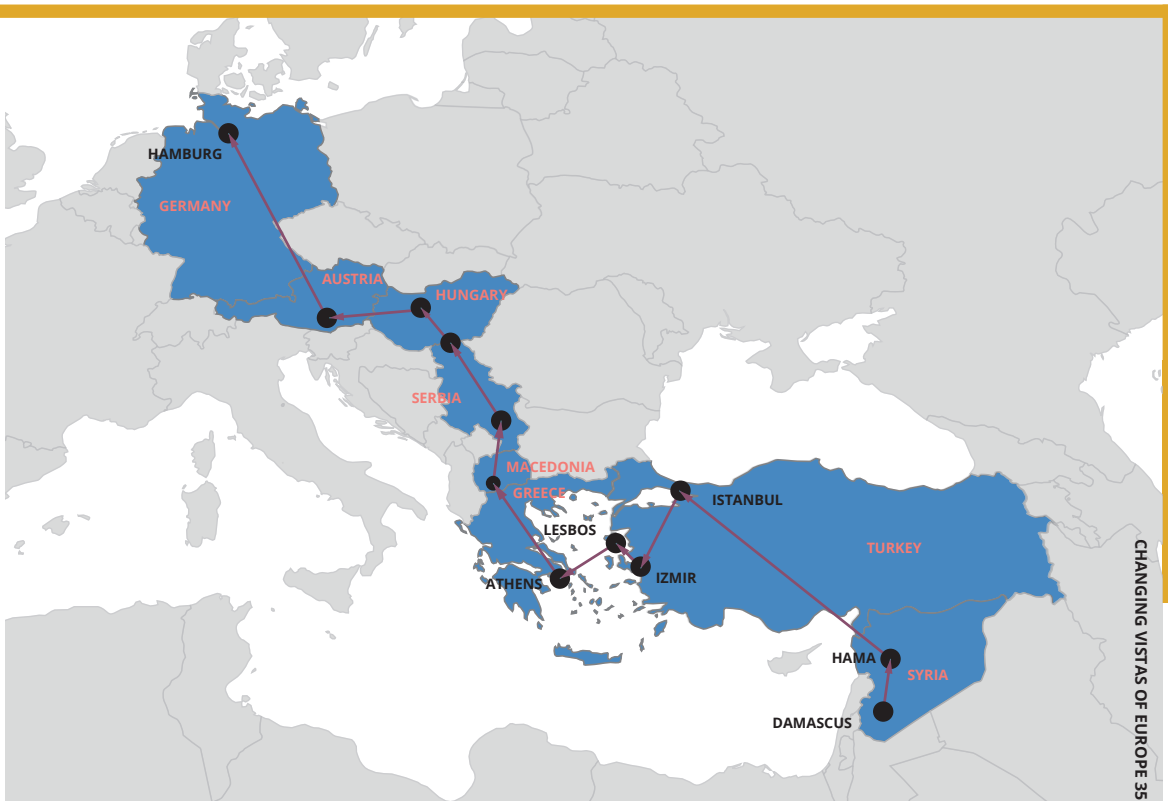
“I can see this now, it’s (Germany) not a land of democracy at all.”

“I told my brother, who still lives in Syria and thinks Europe is a paradise, that also in Germany people have hard situations and try to fight for more freedom.”

“I tried to explain that to my family a lot, but I can understand why they don’t accept this image of Europe, because they live in hell, they live in the war. Of course the life in Europe seems so nice to them.”

“Maybe I just left all people to die and just I run away, I feel so bad for myself, I always asked myself if one of my family die I will cry alone here.

Life jackets for sale © private photograph



THE LIFE HISTORY AND LIFE STORY OF SAIDA FROM SYRIA:

"WE HAD TO LEAVE, BUT EUROPE IS NO PARADISE"

"The answers she gave to our questions about how she perceived Europe, before her escape from Syria and after arriving in Europe, show clearly that Saida (as we will call her), unlike other interviewees, did not imagine Europe as a 'paradise', either during the civil war in Syria, which was traumatic for her, nor at the time of the interview, which we conducted with her in English in July 2016. Saida is also one of those refugees who did not plan to leave Syria long beforehand, but who left in a hurry because her life, or rather that of her partner[2], was in danger.

A girl in the playground, with a life-jacket © private photograph

Let us first look at Saida's life history, which she looks back on in the interview. Saida grew up in an established, well-educated family that had relatively close ties to the regime. She was born in 1983 in Hama, a city in the west of Syria, one year after the 'massacre of Hama'. Saida says that today it is still taboo to talk about this massacre, which is anchored in the memory of many Syrians because of the destruction of the old city by bombs, and the high number of victims (see Gerlach 2015: 112ff.).

Shortly after her birth, Saida's family moved to Damascus. Her father had a high ranking post in the army, and her mother was a housewife. For most of their childhood and youth, Saida and her siblings (one brother, one sister) lived with their parents in a military community, where she also attended school. Growing up in a military family in Syria meant living in an exclusive milieu. The family stayed in this base until Saida's father retired in 2002. His military career, and the way Saida speaks about the political orientation of her father, suggest that he had a certain loyalty to the Baath regime.

Like all our interviewees, Saida was invited to tell us her family and life history. She gave us a detailed account of how she left Syria and her experiences during her migration, but she said very little about her childhood and youth. Nevertheless, in the sequences on her family she indicates that there were political differences, and therefore conflicts, within the family. Unlike her father, her mother and her mother's family were critical of the political system, and had some experience of political persecution. A maternal uncle who was a critic of the regime, disappeared when Saida was a child, and for three years her family did not know what had happened to him. Only after his return did the family learn that he had been kept in prison without any charge.

In 2000, when Saida was 17, the former president Hafiz Al-Assad died, and his son, Bashar Al-Assad, became the new president of Syria. After the death of the old president, new hopes sprang up and there were signs of a trend toward the democratization of Syrian politics. This time is referred to today as the 'Damascene Spring'. However, in spring 2001 these hopes were dashed. Regressive policies, persecution and the restriction of political rights also characterized the repressive regime under Bashar Al-Assad. In 2002, when Saida was 19, her father retired. The family moved out of the military base in Damascus and returned to Hama. Here, Saida spent her last year at school in a public school, and passed her final exams. For the first time, she came into contact with classmates whose parents had civilian occupations. At first she found this very strange. Before this, she had only had contact with children whose parents belonged to the army.

2 During the interview, Saida changed the way she referred to Omar from boyfriend to husband. We assume that they married after leaving Syria.

In 2003/2004, Saida began studying law in Damascus. Here, she met Omar, who later became her husband. Her siblings were also at university. During her studies she gathered experience in various law firms, and after finishing her degree she was offered a job in the capital. She worked for this law firm up to the outbreak of the Arab Spring in Syria (2011). She experienced her time in Damascus as a time of newly won autonomy and independence (including economic independence). She lived for a year with her sister in an apartment that she rented. Today she is still proud of the fact that she was able to pay the rent.

Saida experienced the outbreak of the Arab Spring in Syria, at the end of 2010 or beginning of 2011, with 'mixed feelings': on the one hand, she had hopes of more freedom (of speech) and that an end would be put to the authoritarian structures. But at the same time, she was unable to continue her own work and life, which was a big problem for her. At the age of 28 she joined a demonstration for the first time, to fight for changed social realities:

"It's the first time you go against them and to say I want a free country, I want to have a good life, I want equality, I want a judge".

Saida's life history gives us an idea of what it meant to be politically active in Syria. After being politicalized during her time as a student at the University of Damascus, she stood up for freedom of speech. In her self-presentation in the interview, Saida focuses on the theme of fighting for a better life for all. As we have mentioned, she never considered leaving the country at that time. But being politically active also meant being kept under surveillance by the regime. Even as a child, Saida felt there was always a need to show sympathy to the regime, in order not to get into conflict with the authorities.

In 2011 this attitude changed dramatically. Saida was arrested near to an ongoing demonstration in Damascus, and was taken to a center of the secret police. Here, she had bad experiences which she describes in the interview as follows:

"I spend in this center like four hours it was the worst time in my life really it was because I was so afraid and no one knew where I am because I left my job and I don't told anyone where I went".

During the hours she spent there, Saida witnessed another child being mistreated. Today she still feels guilty because she couldn't help the child. Her account of this situation suggests that the child may have died. We also think that she herself was tortured or raped.

For days after this, she was unable to speak. The only person she was able to talk to about what happened in the prison was her boyfriend. The fact that she hardly says anything about it in the interview is an indication of how bad, and probably traumatizing, this experience was, and still is, for Saida. After her release, she no longer took part in public political activities, because of her memories and her fear of being arrested and tortured again. Instead, she began to work for the Red Crescent (the Muslim equivalent of the Red Cross). But here she also found herself in extremely dangerous situations:

"One time we were in the car then we left the car, and then after two minutes, exactly two minutes, the bomb came inside the car and everything exploded".

Even under these circumstances, Saida did not want to leave the country until she felt she was forced to. Three years after her arrest, the secret police knocked on her door and asked for her partner. Because she knew what could happen if you got mixed up with the secret police – arrest, torture, 'disappearance' – and because she realized that her life was in danger, she saw clearly *"that it was time to leave everything behind"*. First her partner left the country by plane for Turkey, and she followed a short time after, also by plane. At the beginning of their time in Istanbul, Saida and her partner found accommodation and employment in a student district, and gradually became part of an international group of friends. However, after the first month, Saida's initial enthusiasm and curiosity were replaced by feelings of hopelessness. After several months, the couple became fully aware of the legal obstacles they had to overcome. Without a valid residence permit and with very uncertain future prospects, Saida fell – as she puts it herself – into a state of depression that was shared by other refugees facing similar problems.

Saida and her partner realized that there was no future for them in Turkey, and that they would have to leave. Their preparations for departure show that they were well organized. They formed a group of eleven with a code name, and planned their "trip" by gathering all the information they could about their route, maps, etc. During their journey, they experienced painfully what the European border regime meant for them, in contrast to their French companion from Istanbul. This French woman accompanied them on their route, but with her European passport she was able to cross all the national borders with no problem, unlike themselves.

First, Saida and the rest of the group traveled to Izmir (Turkey), with the intention of finding a smuggler who would help them to cross in a dinghy from there to Lesbos (Greece). Here, for the first time in her life, Saida was forced to sleep in the street. Unlike their time in Istanbul, Saida and her friends were exposed to aggressive and xenophobic behavior in Izmir.

In the interview, Saida describes in detail how they searched for an opportunity to make the crossing safely in a dinghy. Violent encounters with smugglers and fear of an overcrowded boat caused the group to abandon their first attempt. But on their second attempt they agreed to make the crossing – with far fewer people. In addition to the constant fear of arrest, Saida was scared of falling in the water, because she couldn't swim. Afterwards she discovered that her life jacket was a fake. On arriving safely in Greece after several hours in the boat, exhausted, and with no feeling in her legs, Saida was unable to share her companions' joy at being in Europe. Looking back, she says it was mad to risk the crossing, because they might have drowned.

In this context, Saida and her partner became aware of the difference between a Syrian and a European passport. Their French friend had traveled to Lesbos without any problem on a regular ferry, and had paid only a fraction of the sum that the 'illegalized' migrants had to pay for their crossing. Saida comments on this as follows:

"We lived together in the same house in (a city in Turkey), we worked together in the same café, but we are not equal just because she has this passport and I have this passport".

After this, the group tried to get from Athens to Belgium by plane. One part of the group succeeded in doing this, using fake passports. But the deception was discovered in the case of Saida, her partner, and some of the others. They were thus forced to take the so-called Balkan route. Saida remembers especially Macedonia, because here they were daily exposed to racist abuse, and they feared being registered by the police. Registration would have put an end to their hopes of reaching Belgium.

They also faced risks in Hungary. Saida's husband was caught by the police and forced to register as an asylum seeker. This meant they could not go to Belgium, and they set off instead for Germany, which opened its border to refugees in 2015. During the journey, they continued to receive support from their French friend, which helped them to get across the borders from Hungary to Austria and to Germany.

Thanks to this financial aid, and especially to their well established network, Saida and her partner reached Germany just two months after leaving Turkey. After staying in many different refugee centers, they moved to Hamburg in 2016 where they are living today.

The interview with Saida shows clearly that for a long time she had no plan to leave Syria. However, conditions became increasingly threatening for herself and her partner, and so they decided to flee. Saida had not imagined Europe as a paradise before her migration, but her disappointment with Europe is nevertheless clear from what she says, for instance when she comments that she realized on arriving in Germany that: *"it is the same world everywhere … it looks like you always fight the system"*. She illustrates this by telling us about a demonstration in Berlin where she observed extremely violent interventions by the police. Thus, she is struggling with the question: "was it worth" leaving everything behind? Saida does not believe in the narrative that Europe is a paradise, but she knows that it can provide some hope for people in critical circumstances.

Maria Fiona Fechter & Annette Andresen

ARWA

SAFE PLACE

FEAR REMAINS

36-year-old Yazidi woman from Iraq

Lalish, Yazidi temple (Northern Iraq) © Fotolia.com

BEFORE SHE LEFT IRAQ TOGETHER WITH HER HUSBAND AND HER CHILDREN[1]

Arwa fled from the border region between Iraq and Syria in 2010, together with her husband, her sister and her children, because Yazidis were being subjected to persecution in Iraq. Before her flight, she had no concrete idea of what Europe was like. She and her family acted mainly out of fear. The wish for a better future for her children also played a role:

"In Iraq we had a lot of trouble and we didn't want our children to live this way. That is why we decided to leave."

"For example many people have a nice house, a nice car, a good job, and then they are afraid, they don't stay in Iraq … I don't think there are many people living in my village now. Everyone has left, they were afraid to stay there. You see, we have always had war, war, every single day. Always problems, they throw bombs into schools, so that people are afraid to go to school or into the town. My husband sometimes went there and we were afraid for him."

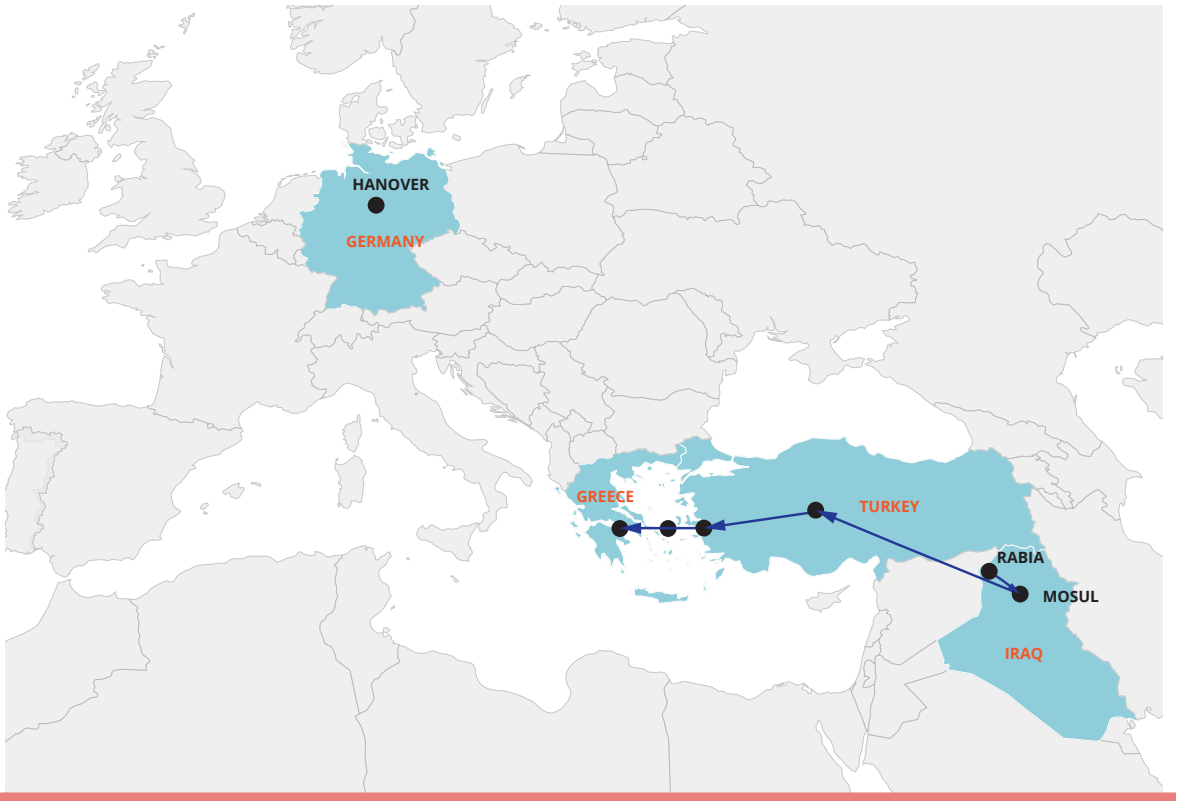
CURRENT PERSPECTIVE ON EUROPE IN GERMANY

"In Europe everything is good, for instance women in Iraq can't have such a good life. Here we see many women, the same age as my mother, who drive cars and go swimming and who have had a good life. For us in Iraq life is always very hard … In Iraq every Yazidi has many problems, but in Europe it's not easy to imagine these problems and talk about them. Every Yazidi has problems."

"There are also many bad people in Europe … For example these people have caused many problems, then they just come to Germany and after a few months perhaps they will also cause problems in Europe. We hope that in Germany it will be better with these people and that we can have a better life. In Iraq our life was not good."

"Here, my children can go to school. We grown-ups cannot begin again like the children who go to kindergarten, we can't do it, but children need this good time. Once, that thing happened in Munich[2] and then my children at home were afraid, I asked them why, and they said: Mom, someone might come to our school and cause trouble. I said, that can't happen in Germany, and then they said: but Mom, we have seen what happened in Munich, a lot of people died. And then I always tell my children that everything will be alright."

1 All quotations are from a biographical interview with Arwa that was conducted in German by Annette Andresen and Maria Fiona Fechter in Hannover (Germany) in August 2016. To aid understanding the quotations have been slightly simplified.
2 Arwa is referring to the shooting near the Olympia shopping mall in Munich on 22nd July 2016, when ten people, most of them young people, were killed.



THE LIFE HISTORY AND LIFE STORY OF ARWA FROM IRAQ:

"WE'VE ALWAYS HAD WAR, WE'VE NEVER HAD A GOOD DAY."

Arwa was born in 1980 as one of seven children in a Kurdish-speaking Yazidi family of self-sustaining farmers. They lived in a small village near Rabia, in the border region between northern Iraq and northern Syria. If we consider how much she has suffered in her everyday life since early childhood, it is easy to see why for her Europe is above all a *"safe place"*. Her life in Iraq was shaped from her childhood by the country's collective history: the war of 1980-1989 with Iran, the invasion of Kuwait by Iraqi troops in 1990, the subsequent economic sanctions, and the military intervention of a US-led coalition in 1991 (the Gulf War). As a result of these wars, Iraq was economically ruined and internationally isolated; large parts of the population became impoverished (Buchta 2016: 25). It can be assumed that the upsurge of Muslim fundamentalism in the country, which began during this phase, helped the system to counteract its weakness on the domestic front (ibid.). This affected in particular the Christians and the Yazidis, who were increasingly subjected to attacks, and who therefore began to leave the country in great numbers during the 1990s (Ibrahim 2011: 25-30). As a result, the religious minority of the Yazidis shrank considerably. Ethnically they are Kurds, with their main area of settlement in northern Iraq (UNHCR 2005: 6). The monotheistic Yazidi religion is not based on a holy book but is transmitted orally. Membership of this religious community is by birth only, and marriage outside the Yazidi community leads to exclusion (Gesellschaft für bedrohte Völker 2007: 18, Wießner 1984: 41).

From Arwa herself we learn very little about her own individual and family history, because in the interview she concentrates on telling us about the collective history of the persecution of the Iraqi Yazidis, and recounting the story of her flight. In her presentation, other life phases – such as her marriage or the birth of her children – remain very much in the background. She says that her parents did not let her go to school. She had to help them on the farm, and she emphasizes: *"Our life was always hard, we never had a good day."* She also says that around the end of the war with Iran, in 1988, one of her brothers, who was about fifteen at the time, was killed on his way to deliver food to people in another village. *"He was killed by armed Arabs,"* she tells us, and that the only reminder of him is a photo the family still has.

In 1996, at the age of 18, Arwa was married and moved to her husband's village, close to the city of Mosul. She gave birth to three daughters and two sons.

2003 saw the beginning of the Iraq War; the US and Great Britain bombed Baghdad and sent in ground troops. Like all non-Muslim minorities, the Yazidis experienced the following period as a phase of increased danger and religiously motivated attacks (UNHCR 2005: 7, U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom 2008: 11f.). Arwa and her family also began making plans to leave. First, the parents sent their eldest daughter to Europe in 2008. She was accompanied by Arwa's cousin to protect her from gender-specific violence, to which Yazidi women were, and still are, especially vulnerable (see Amnesty International 2005):

"We sent one child earlier with my cousin. I have a big daughter, and in Iraq we are always anxious about girls, because of the Muslims. We have problems if we have a pretty daughter or sister and a bad neighbor. Sometimes they take children and sell them to people in other countries, yes, that's why we are afraid."

Two years later, Arwa, her sister, her husband and her children followed this daughter. They escaped to Turkey as part of a multinational group of refugees, and traveled onward by boat to Greece, from where they continued their journey by foot and by truck. Arwa does not know the exact route they followed.

Several times in the interview she speaks about how her seven-year-old daughter fell into the water during the crossing from Turkey to Greece. A man in the boat wanted to continue and abandon the child: *"I screamed, I cried, it was about three o'clock in the morning … I said: No, I can't leave my child alone in the water."*

Village in the Mount Sinjār Area (Iraq) © Robert Leutheuser

Arwa made them search for her daughter, who was eventually found: *"Thank God, we found her. At first she couldn't breathe. I spent that night cuddling her and crying."* The girl survived and today she is terrified of deep water and swimming. This was a terrifying, and probably traumatizing, event for Arwa, for her family, and especially for her daughter, and it plays a very prominent role in Arwa's life story. She speaks about it in the first minutes of the interview and her account of it constitutes the central sequence of her biographical self-presentation. The story is told with a high degree of detail, in contrast to the other biographical data which are only given in the style of a factual report. Our analysis of this passage suggests that Arwa had probably never told this story to anyone in German before. Other difficult situations which she experienced with her children during their flight also take up a large space in her life story. For example:

"In the truck we couldn't breathe, for two, three hours we weren't allowed to speak and had to just sit there silently, but you can't tell children that…Yes, my children were very small when we came to Germany. I carried one and my husband held two by their hands…I bought a few cookies and I always had bread and water with me…it was just like in a war."

Several weeks after their departure, Arwa and her family arrived in Germany. The family was first given temporary refugee status, and later an unlimited residence permit. Today they live in Hanover.
Some effects of their past experiences are still noticeable today. Thus, Arwa speaks several times in the interview about how important it is for children and adults to learn how to swim, which is very understandable in the light of the trauma she experienced during her crossing of the Mediterranean. The ability to swim seems to be a symbol of coping with the past, gaining control, and putting up a defence against future traumas.

"There was a course here for women to teach us how to ride bikes … And then we said, perhaps we could have swimming lessons … for example, if a flood comes and we can't swim, we will die, we must be able to swim a bit … but three of my children can swim, they're not afraid."

Refugees arrive on Lesvos (Greece) in inflatable dinghy boats (2015) © Anjo Kan Shutterstock.com

Most of Arwa's relatives still live in Iraq. Arwa is very anxious about their fate, and affirms: *"I don't want to go back to Iraq, but I would like a chance to see my mother again."*

In her self-presentation at the beginning of the interview, Arwa talks a lot about how the so-called Islamic State is threatening the existence of the Iraqi Yazidis (see United Nations Human Rights Council 2016). At some points in her presentation, events she experienced herself are mixed with events experienced by others (or with the collective history of the Iraqi Yazidis) to such an extent that it is almost impossible for the interviewers to tell which events Arwa experienced personally. The chronological order of the events referred to is also difficult to establish, because she continually jumps to different years and different military conflicts. The situations Arwa describes in which she feared she would die are not clearly fixed in time. But it is clear that Arwa's whole life was affected by war, by the struggle for survival, and continual fear of being attacked: the attackers changed, and the methods they used, but the fear remained.

Arwa does not specifically name the perpetrators, and speaks only of *"those people"* or Muslim neighbors. It is conceivable that the appearance of the IS did not constitute a break in Arwa's lived experience, but that she saw it as a continuation of Muslim-Arab persecution. Her fear of Muslims or people of Arab origin in Europe must be seen in the light of this fact. This fear, which runs like a red thread through the whole of the interview, has not completely disappeared in Germany. It is important to remember that in Europe the Yazidis continue to be a relatively powerless outsider grouping. It is thus justified to ask about the relationships in Europe between refugee groupings that were more strongly established in their societies of origin, and groupings that were persecuted or discriminated against, and what potential conflicts and consequences arise from this for their new life together in Europe.

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CHANGING VISTAS OF EUROPE

Refugees´ Concepts of Europe Before and After Arrival

This brochure complements the seven portraits of refugees from Asia and Africa presented in the exhibition “Changing Vistas of Europe”. The portraits reveal seven very different life courses and experiences before, during and after migration, and different concepts of Europe.

While public discourses tend to present very generalized and homogenized images of “immigrants” or “refugees”, the exhibition invites a consideration of the differences between the experiences and perspectives of these seven people. It will be seen that the idea of migration for economic reasons is not only oversimplified, but in most cases inaccurate.