SOCIAL CONTACTS AND NETWORKS OF REFUGEES IN THE ARRIVAL CONTEXT – MANIFESTATIONS IN A LARGE CITY AND IN SELECTED SMALL AND MEDIUM-SIZED TOWNS

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Summary: The integration of refugees with prospects of remaining in the country has noticeably shifted into the focus of public attention and is presently being addressed in numerous research projects as well. Our contribution aims to address the significance, which the various contacts or networks, respectively, hold for the integration of the refugees. Issues of particular interest are how contacts to friends and families are maintained, what role these contacts play in the refugees' daily lives, how new social contacts are established in the arrival context, and which factors may ease or hinder the creation of new contacts. Based on the assumption that integration processes of migrants and refugees are influenced to a large extent by the prevailing local context, we investigated whether there are differences between a metropolitan situation (city of Cologne) and a small or medium-sized setting (district of Heinsberg) in the social contacts and networks of the refugees. In both distinct local contexts, which are located in North Rhine-Westphalia (Germany), we conducted qualitative interviews with 41 refugees in total. All interviews were recorded, subsequently transcribed and analysed using a largely inductive category scheme. Due to the exceptional situation of the flight and the assignment of a place of residence by the state, similarly escaped relatives and friends from the past usually live in other parts of Germany or even in other countries, and therefore cannot serve as a localised network to cushion the individual's arrival. Within the arrival context, contacts to other refugees who share the same or a similar background and language provide an important source of practical support and emotional backing. Bridging ties to members of the receiving society are most likely to be established through language courses and volunteer initiatives. Here, the openness and proactive attitude of the refugees prove to be an important factor. The metropolis offers abundant opportunities for new but fleeting social contacts. In the context of small and medium-sized towns, the greater manageability imbues the newly developing networks with greater stability.

Zusammenfassung: Die Integration von Geflüchteten mit einer Bleibeperspektive ist verstärkt in den Fokus der öffentlichen Aufmerksamkeit gerückt und wird gleichzeitig aktuell in zahlreichen Forschungsprojekten behandelt. In unserem Beitrag gehen wir der Frage nachgehen, welche Bedeutung die verschiedenen Kontakte bzw. Netzwerke für die Integration der Geflüchteten haben. Wir untersuchen, wie die Kontakte zu räumlich entfernten Freunden und Familien aufrechterhalten werden, welche Bedeutung diese Kontakte im Alltag der Geflüchteten einnehmen, wie neue soziale Kontakte im Aufnahmekontext aufgebaut werden und welche Faktoren den Aufbau neuer Kontakte erleichtern oder auch erschweren können. Basierend auf der Annahme, dass der Integrationsprozess von Zuwanderern und Geflüchteten in hohem Maße vom lokalen Aufnahmekontext beeinflusst wird, haben wir untersucht, ob es Unterschiede zwischen einer eher großstädtischen (Stadt Köln) und eher klein- und mittelstädtischen Situation (Kreis Heinsberg) gibt. In beiden Räumen führten wir 41 themenzentrierte Leitfadeninterviews mit Geflüchteten. Alle Interviews wurden aufgezeichnet, transkribiert und mit einem weitgehend induktiven Kategorienschema einer qualitativen Inhaltsanalyse unterzogen. Aufgrund der besonderen Situation der Flucht und die Wohnsitzzuweisung durch den Staat leben ebenfalls bereits geflüchtete Verwandte und frühere Freunde der FluchtmigrantInnen meist an anderen Orten in Deutschland oder sogar in anderen Staaten und bilden daher kein das Individuum auffangendes lokalisiertes Netzwerk. Im Ankunftskontext stellen aber Kontakte zu anderen Geflüchteten gleicher oder ähnlicher Herkunft und Sprache eine wichtige Quelle praktischer Unterstützung und emotionalen Rückhalts dar. Kontakte zu Mitgliedern der Aufnahmegesellschaft werden vor allem über Sprachkurse und ehrenamtliche Initiativen geknüpft. Dabei erweist sich die Kontaktfreudigkeit und Eigeninitiative der Geflüchteten als wichtiger Faktor. Die Großstadt bietet vielfältige Gelegenheiten für neue, aber flüchtige soziale Kontakte. Im klein- und mittelstädtischen Kontext hingegen erlaubt die Überschaubarkeit eine größere Stabilität in den sich neu entwickelnden Netzwerken.

Keywords: migration, refugees, integration, North Rhine-Westphalia, Germany

1   Introduction

Forced migration to Germany has gained considerable significance since 2015, due to political strife and armed conflicts in the Middle East, Africa, and Central Asia, as well as economic problems in numerous countries. In the meantime, the topic of migration has come to determine the social and political discourse in Germany to a great extent. In 2017, when the total protection rate reached 43.4 % (BAMF 2017), more than 250,000 refugees were granted the legal opportunity to remain in Germany for a period of several years and, as a result, they now face the challenge of coming to terms with the situation in the arrival context. The integration of those refugees with prospects of remaining in the country has therefore noticeably shifted into the focus of public attention and is presently being addressed in numerous research projects as well (Aumüller 2018; BpB 2017; Glorius 2017).

Acquiring knowledge of the receiving society's national language and achieving inclusion in the education system, the labour market, and the housing market, are widely regarded as 'key to integration' (Hanewinkel and Oltmer 2017). Moreover, cultural integration is seen as an essential factor for social cohesion (Initiative Kulturelle Integration 2017). However, in German-language migration research, attention has only recently turned to the social contacts and networks of the refugees in the context of integration (cf. Kutscher and Kress 2018). This juncture serves as the starting point for our contribution.

The day-to-day contacts of the refugees form the core of our contribution. In line with expectations, on the one hand, there are social contacts and networks involving relatives and friends that were established in the country of origin or during earlier migration stages, and which are maintained throughout the further course of the migration biography. On the other hand, there are contacts that are freshly formed within the arrival context. Initial contacts to the receiving society often emerge through the social workers attached to the local communities and welfare organisations, and through the many volunteers. Similarly, the ethnic communities of the respective arrival cities frequently offer first points of contact. As time passes, new personal relationships can also develop at the place of work or education, or in the new residential environment. Overall, we hypothesize a spatially scattered network of the refugees,

with contact points in the country of origin, in the country of destination, and at the refugees' various intermediate stations.

Our contribution aims to address the significance, which the various contacts or networks, respectively, hold for the integration of the refugees. We explore how contacts to friends and families are maintained over great distances, and what role these contacts play in the refugees' daily lives. A further issue of particular interest is the manner in which new social contacts are established in the arrival context, and which factors may serve to ease the creation of new contacts, or may prove a hindrance. Finally, in terms of the development and maintenance of social contacts and networks, we are also interested in discovering whether there are differences between metropolitan situations and small or medium-sized settings. Specifically in terms of considering opportunities for establishing networks as an essential dimension of integration, this comparison contributes to shedding light on the question whether the residential assignment to small and medium-sized municipalities as opposed to large cities places refugees at a disadvantage or at an advantage.

Our results are based on our own empirical investigation in two distinct spatial contexts in North Rhine-Westphalia, which we conducted within the framework of a network of the Research Institute for Social Development (German abbreviation: FGW) between 2016 and 2018.

Following the introduction, in the second section we will present a number of seminal papers on the role of social contacts and networks drawn from social science literature, which we will subsequently build on. In the third section, we aim to substantiate our own empirical approach in the shape of qualitative guided interviews with refugees in two distinct situational and spatial contexts. Our own results concerning the different social contacts and networks of the refugees are presented in the fourth section, followed by the résumé, in which we discuss what role social contacts and networks play in the integration of refugees.

2   Conceptual framework: Social networks and integration

The relevance of social networks with regard to migration and integration processes has generally received increased attention in recent years (Ryan et al. 2008, 673; Haug 2006). Literature offers vari-

ous definitions for social networks (Stevens 2016, 53). For the purpose of this paper we understand social networks to be a group of individuals that are related to each other through personal social relationships, which do not depend exclusively on formal role-based contacts, whereby the individuals with whom one has personal relationships also maintain social relationships among themselves. In other words, the building of networks implies that a person, with whom a relationship is formed, provides access to further individuals from her or his own circle of acquaintances (Granovetter 1973; Wöhler 2015). The relationships in question may be very close or very loose (contacts) and cover a variety of spatial contexts. A distinction must be made between personal networks that existed prior to the migration and the construction of new social networks in the arrival context. Admittedly, to date, scant knowledge exists about the manner in which new social contacts and relationships are actually established, and which barriers migrants encounter in the process (Ryan 2011, 720). In the present paper we endeavour to address this issue with regard to refugees, who have substantially shaped the migration flows in Germany in recent years. Thus, questions surrounding their social integration are of paramount importance for society as a whole. In the following section, we will begin by outlining the importance attributed to social relations in view of integration processes. This is followed by a brief overview of the state of research regarding the significance of the social networks of refugees.

2.1 The significance of social networks for processes of integration

While classical US-American theories and, in keeping with these, Esser and Heitmeyer et al. (e.g.. Esser 2001, Heitmeyer and Anhut 2000) in Germany proceed from the assumption that integration is an effort by migrants to adapt to an ethnically homogenous majority population, a process which is largely linear and determined by a rational cost-benefit calculation, more recent approaches represent a greater diversity of notions, such as integration into a transnational-pluralistic space that is shaped by the community of origin, or integration into an endogenous marginalised minority. The idea that integration can be measured by means of objectively observable factors is in contrast to the socio-constructivist approach whereby integration is defined by an increase in the perceived simi-

larity of the migrant population to the dominant population (Fincke 2009, 21ff.). Pries (2003) calls for an enhanced understanding of the relations between migrants and the host society. Also Ager and Strang (2008, 186) argue that "processes supporting the maintenance of ethnic identity (especially 'social bonds') in no way logically limit wider integration into society (through the establishment of 'social bridges' and other means)." We comprehend integration as a coping of migrants within and a participation in the receiving society, characterised by the satisfaction of fundamental needs for a self-determined life.

The high significance attributed to social networks in relation to the integration processes of migrants stems from the assumption that social networks provide access to various resources, which can influence both the migration and the integration process (Ryan et al. 2008, 673; Fenicia et al. 2010; Haug 2006). Based on Bourdieu's work, social networks in this context are comprehended as access paths to social capital, which is the "aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition" (Bourdieu 1986, 51).

However, Bourdieu also stresses that networks do not simply emerge and that not all networks are accessible for everyone. In fact, the development of new local networks requires effort, the conquest of obstacles, an investment of time and resources: "The network of relationships is the product of investment strategies, individual or collective, consciously or unconsciously aimed at establishing or reproducing social relationships that are directly usable in the short or long term (…)." (Bourdieu 1986, 52). The extent to which the creation of new social relationships is crowned with success also depends on the readily available cultural capital (e.g. language proficiency and knowledge of standards, qualifications), economic capital (money, e.g., facilitating participation in leisure activities or the payment of membership fees), or even 'interesting' social capital (ibid.; cf. also Ryan et al. 2008, 720). This indicates that the three types of capital are interconnected and, at least in principle, convertible, one into the other (ibid.; cf. also Erel 2010).

Following Putnam (2000), recent studies addressing social networks distinguish between bonding ties (relationships between individuals with a similar background) and bridging ties (relationships between different groups) (cf. also Gericke et al. 2018; Ager and Strang 2008; Haug

and POINTNER 2007; MABEYA 2015). According to PUTNAM (2000, 23), bonding ties, for instance between family members, close friends, an ethnic or religious community, primarily serve to help people cope in the new context and to feel at ease there. They can represent an important resource by providing both emotional and informational support, for example in relation to housing and employment opportunities (STEVENS 2016, 53; RYAN et al. 2008, 674; HAUG and POINTNER 2007, 383). At the same time, close social relationships to friends and families in the country of origin or at other stations of the migration biography can also be maintained for extended periods of time after the migration, and thus they remain an important resource, providing informative and emotional support (transnational networks) (HAUG and POINTNER 2007, 373). It should be noted, however, that there has also been some critical discussion concerning the excessively strong involvement in close, homogenous ties, as these only permit a severely limited exchange of information about opportunities beyond the respective community (ANTHIAS 2007; cf. also STEVENS 2016). It is also not uncommon for migrants themselves to disapprove of an excessively strong involvement in their own ethnic community (cf. RYAN et al. 2008). The theory of transnational pluralism (named in accordance with FINCKE 2009) considers that maintaining contacts to the group of origin can be a valid strategy when it comes to gaining social and economic capital and even achieving status gains in a transnational space, provided that there is bicultural competence (PORTES 1999; LEVITT and WATERS 2002)

By contrast, bridging ties to members of other communities (for instance of the receiving society) are seen as desirable, due to the prevailing assumption that these facilitate the transfer of further information, which can foster comprehensive integration and social upward mobility (cf. STEVENS 2016, 53; HAUG and POINTNER 2007, 383; GERICKE et al. 2018, 58; cf. also ESSER 2001). However, this requires bridging to individuals who are genuinely endowed with relevant resources (RYAN et al. 2008, 676; FÖBKER and IMANI 2017). According to AGER and STRANG (2008), as far as integration in the receiving society is concerned, both forms of social relationships (bonding/bridging) are necessary. As the theory of segmented assimilation (PORTES and RUMBAUT 2006) states, under conditions of racism and difficult access to the labour market, integration into marginalised endogenous populations is also possible.

2.2 The significance of social networks for refugees

2.2.1 Networks that already existed prior to the flight

According to UZELAC et al. (2018), soon after their arrival, many refugees strive to rebuild their local network, which was often drastically reduced due to the flight. They do this, for instance, by contacting relatives or friends, who have also fled. These links to relatives, trusted friends, or an ethnic community are particularly important in the case of refugees who frequently struggle with the effects of traumatic events experienced in their countries of origin and during their flight, because these contacts can offer emotional support without presenting any language barriers (cf. also STEVENS 2016; PALMGREN 2017). This simplifies the exchange of information (i.e. about employment opportunities, supply offers) and of offers of support. Finally, these contacts also ease the access to further networks and to the receiving society (KINGSBURY et al. 2018). However, UZELAC et al. (2018) also point to the fragility of these networks in situations where there is fierce competition for central or vital resources. It is not uncommon for social networks to collapse when fundamental supply structures are missing (UZELAC et al. 2018; cf. also STEVENS 2016).

In addition to the local contacts to friends and relatives, contacts to individuals who are spatially distant but closely related can also serve as an essential resource, providing emotional and informative support (cf. 2.1). Contact via digital media simplifies the preservation of these transnational social networks and the exchange of information between families and friends (cf. UZELAC et al. 2018; ALAM and IMRAN 2015, 356; KUTSCHER and KRESS 2018, 5). It should be noted, however, that the infrastructure conditions in the countries of origin and restricted access opportunities within the arrival context can complicate the maintenance of contacts, creating a significant emotional strain and hampering the integration process as a whole. These considerations also shed a light on the strain that is caused by being separated from close family members as a result of fleeing. This situation is also described as a barrier to integration, as concern and fear for those left behind can make it more difficult to come to terms with the new context (TAHA BASCH and PANZER-KRAUSE 2016, 22; JURT and ROULIN 2014, 344). Nonetheless, it is not uncommon for a family reunion to present a considerable challenge due to the extended period of separation and the emotional estrangement that may be associated.

2.2.2 Building new social networks

To date, there are no comprehensive studies that explore how refugees construct new networks in their present location. It can be assumed, however, that refugees face difficult initial conditions when establishing relationships to the receiving society. Prior to fleeing, only very few of them had the opportunity to prepare for the foreign culture, or to learn the language (Gericke et al. 2018, 47). Once they arrive, their social network is considerably reduced, and as such it is far less reliable when it comes to providing points of contact.

Initial contacts with the receiving society are often brought about by the social workers assigned to the residential homes and the volunteer support organisations. Here, certainly, there is scope for the development of close personal relationships (=bridging).

In her comparative study on the community-level integration of refugees, Aumüller describes the relationships between the local population (beyond the support context) and the refugees as being characterised by a 'neutral indifference' (Aumüller and Bretl 2008, 147; cf. also Ager and Strang 2008). She goes on to list the lack of leisure time, poor language skills and few economic resources, the cultural distance and the residential situation, which is often perceived as embarrassing, as central barriers to the development of more intensive social relationships (Aumüller and Bretl 2008, 41). Similarly, Hebbani et al. (2018, 82) acknowledge that language and cultural barriers as well as the residential context inhibit the construction of more intensive social contacts between refugees and their neighbours in the residential neighbourhood. The absence of positive interactions with the neighbours can, in turn, hamper the acquisition of the new language and social bridging.

In contrast, religious communities and clubs are considered to have high integrative power, as they offer relatively beneficial framework conditions for the development of personal relationships (Aumüller and Bretl 2008; Wägerle 2012, 111). For instance, participating in sporting events can promote (physical) health and social inclusion (Block and Gibbs 2017, 95). Generally speaking, recurring events where one can meet like-minded people with regard to certain aspects (for example, hobbies), are beneficial for the emergence of stable personal contacts (Mollenhorst et al. 2008). In this context, it is important in terms of the development of social relationships that these are not purely sports offers

tailored for refugees, but regular sports clubs with mixed groups of members (=bridging). Here, once again, a lack of financial resources (e.g. for membership fees, equipment), accessibility problems, or gender roles can act as barriers. In relation to Cologne and the Heinsberg district, this gives rise to the question about the extent to which social contacts and networks emerge locally and how these affect the refugees' integration processes. What role do bonding and bridging ties play in the daily lives of the refugees, and which differences and commonalities arise in the two spatial contexts of this study?

3   Methodological approach: guided interviews with refugees

In order to investigate the social contacts and networks of the refugees, we elected to use a comparative analysis of two distinct local contexts in North Rhine-Westphalia: the context of a metropolis on the one side, and the context of a rather rural district with small and medium-sized towns on the other side. The decision to set the focus in this way was based on the insight that no clear statements exist about the influence of the local context on efforts by refugees to build social relationships. Aumüller and Bretl (2008) as well as Glick-Schiller and Çağlar (2011) assume that integration processes of migrants and refugees are influenced to a large extent by the prevailing local context. According to this viewpoint, the central influencing variables are the size of the city and the structure of the population (presence of ethnic communities), the structure of the urban labour market and the structures determining how refugees are admitted (Aumüller et al. 2015, 118). Furthermore, with respect to the structure of population, the concept of super diversity assumes that in the case of large cities such as London and Amsterdam, owing to the vast number of ethnic minorities, integration no longer takes place into a homogenous majority population as proposed by the classical theories, but rather into an ethnically heterogeneous environment (Crul 2016). According to Beggs et al. (1996), personal networks in rural settings are based more on kinship and neighbourhood solidarities rather than on friendship, are more intense, smaller, denser, and have greater race, ethnic, and religious homogeneity, so that it may prove difficult for refugees to participate here. By contrast, Petermann (2002), conducting a general city-countryside comparison, determined that social integration in the sense of personal networks is hardly

influenced by the place of residence, but above all by personality traits of the individuals. Due to the inconsistent findings it is advisable to take a closer look at the significance of the metropolitan versus the small and medium-sized context for the social integration of refugees.

Each context is represented by a case study: the city of Cologne for the metropolitan context, and the district of Heinsberg for the context of small and medium-sized towns (cf. Fig. 1). The city of Cologne was selected by virtue of being the largest city in North Rhine-Westphalia. Hosting 182 different nationalities, the conditions in Cologne also present a greater similarity to a super diversity than can be stated for other cities, although even Cologne does not fully satisfy the definition of a super diversity, as the dominant ethnic groups are still relatively few in number. By contrast, the district of Heinsberg corresponds to a region that is typical for the federal state, being made up of small and medium-sized towns without a dominant centre, and it is considerably less well developed in terms of local public transport than larger cities.

Home to 1.08 million inhabitants (as at 31.12.2016), Cologne is the fourth largest city in Germany. The city is currently experiencing net immigration, mainly resulting from migration from abroad and from the migration to the city of 18- to 20-year-olds. 19.3 % of the inhabitants of Cologne are foreign citizens, a further 18.5 % of inhabitants are German citizens with a migrant background (Stadt Köln 2017). Individuals with Turkish citizenship represent the major share of the foreign urban population (22.5 %). Individuals from the refugees' main countries of origin (Syria, Iran and Iraq) account for 6.9 % of the sum of Cologne's foreigners (Stadt Köln 2017). In many ways, the city features an international character and diverse forms of migrant infrastructure (restaurant trade, clubs, sites of worship), which support the image of a comparatively open and tolerant urban society and can, in principle, contribute to simplifying the integration processes for refugees. The 'Guidelines for the accommodation and care of refugees in Cologne', passed by the city council as early as 2004, served as exemplary template for numerous other cities in Germany (AUMÜLLER et al. 2015; Stadt Köln 2004). Moreover, a 'Concept for strengthening the integrative urban society' was developed in 2011 (Stadt Köln 2011).

The district of Heinsberg, which has a total of 260,000 inhabitants, is comprised of ten municipalities, with the respective populations varying between 9,000 and 44,000. It is characterised by well-supplied and connected urban centres as well as sparsely
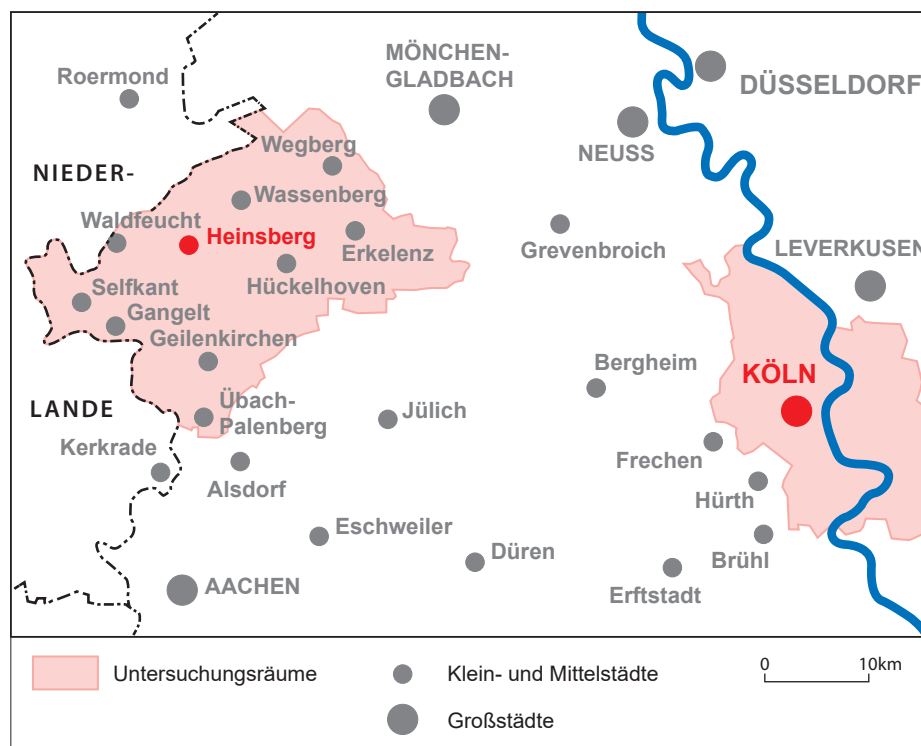

Fig. 1: Location of the city of Cologne and the district of Heinsberg

populated communities in the peripheral regions. Around half of the communities are medium-sized towns with more than 20,000 inhabitants, while the second half consists of small towns (with fewer than 20,000 inhabitants). Just like Cologne, the district of Heinsberg also has net immigration, and recorded a substantial increase in the year 2015. 14.7 % of the district's inhabitants are foreign citizens. The proportions vary considerably between the communities, ranging from 8.4 % to 38.8 %. Persons from neighbouring Netherlands and from Turkey represent the dominant share (IT.NRW 2017). At the start of 2017, 3,600 refugees were living in the district. Their distribution across the individual municipalities was roughly proportional to the respective size of the local population. Due to the foreign worker recruitment pursued by coal mining companies in the past, the local communities have gathered many decades worth of experience with the integration of migrant labourers from different countries. Unlike the city of Cologne, an integration concept was not passed until 2014.

The objective of this contribution, to examine the formation and the significance of the local social contacts and networks of refugees in the context of integration, is mirrored in our methodological approach. We have selected a comparative analysis of two case studies to allow us to identify differences and even commonalities despite the different contexts (Baxter 2010). Furthermore, we opted for a qualitative approach, in order to ensure that the perspectives of the refugees can be captured and comprehended more profoundly.

We conducted interview with 41 refugees in total. The interview partners ideally had relatively secure prospects of remaining in Germany as this was an assumed prerequisite for an incipient process of integration. Consequently, individuals with refugee protection or subsidiary protection were preferred, as were individuals who had already resided in Germany for some time, but whose legal status had not yet been fully resolved. The selection of the interview partners also reflected our endeavour to consider as many different life situations as possible, as these may exert an influence on the process of integration (e.g. age, gender, country of origin, family situation, education). In order to establish contact with the interview partners, we secured the assistance of staff in municipal authorities and citizens' action groups, who work with refugees on a professional or voluntary basis. This mediation provided by so-called gatekeepers was intended to encourage the creation of an interview atmosphere based on trust. The arrangement of interview partners through trusted gatekeepers was also an approach used by Kutscher and Kress (2018), and was described as an important aspect in terms of research ethics. Consequently, the interviews were conducted in the office premises of the institutions, for the most part. The guided interviews addressed the refugees' experiences upon arriving at the current place of residence, the patterns of their daily lives, the living and working situations, and personal networks.

When we consider the interviews with the refugees (cf. Tab. 1), young men from Syria are distinctly over-represented. However, this accurately reflects the large proportion of this group among those fleeing to Germany. At the time of the interviews, the length of time spent in Germany so far was between one and five years (for 18 individuals the duration was 1.5 years, for seven individuals it was one year, for two persons each it was respectively two and

Tab. 1: List of refugees interviewed

Country of origin	City of Cologne Women	City of Cologne Men	District of Heinsberg Women	District of Heinsberg Men
Syria	4	9	3	5
Iraq	2	2	2	2
Iran	1	1	3	-
Afghanistan	-	-	1	2
Palestine	1	-	-	-
Uzbekistan	-	-	1	-
Tajikistan	-	-	-	1
Eritrea	1	-	-	-

three years, for two persons each it was respectively four and five years; the duration was not clearly stated by a further four individuals). With regard to the residency status, the sample included a greater proportion of individuals with refugee status and a residency permit for three years including extension (17) compared to individuals with subsidiary protection for one year (11). In nine cases, the decision on the status was still pending (including legal challenges to deportation orders), and four individuals made no mention of their status. Finally, the selection of our interviewees shows a wide variety of social positions: the age of our interviewees varies between 17 and 75 years; we interviewed slightly more men than women; there are single people, single mothers as well as families. Some people did not have a high school diploma and others were university graduates. Most of the interviews were conducted in German, because the interview partners were eager to apply their language skills. However, in these cases, the ability to articulate was often somewhat restricted. Several interviews were held in Arabic or Persian, with the support of an interpreter. Various authors point to the problems associated with interviews conducted with foreign language speakers, which first require translation (e.g. TEMPLE and YOUNG 2004; FILEP 2009; ROSS 2010; INHETVEEN 2012). A shift in meaning brought about by translation can never be ruled out entirely. However, this was the only available option to enter into conversation with refugees who lacked a sufficiently good command of the German language. What is more, the interviews dealt with aspects (such as interactions, relationships, contacts, meeting places) that are relatively well structured and less susceptible to issues surrounding the equivalence of meaning. In addition to the interviews, we scheduled three workshops to take place over the course of the research process, to provide opportunities to discuss our findings with local actors and refugees. Feedback from the refugees, in the form of transcribed audio logs, allowed us to validate the results, expand our understanding, and learn about new developments. All interviews were recorded with a dictation device, and subsequently transcribed and analysed using a largely inductive category scheme.

All statements presented in the results section refer to the interviews conducted with the refugees. In Chapters 4.1 and 4.2 we first address fundamental insights pertaining to the formation and maintenance of social contacts, turning our attention specifically to the significance of the local contexts in Chapter 4.3.

4   Results: Diversity in the social contacts and networks of refugees

Below, we first examine the social contacts and networks that already existed in the context of origin and that were, in effect, brought to Germany. In the interest of ethical sensitivity (traumata, fear of persecution, illegal assisted escape), the circumstances leading to the flight were not explicitly mentioned; thus, no statements can be made about the role of previous networks for any decision-making regarding the flight and the organisation thereof. Next, we address those that were freshly established in the context of arrival. Finally, we investigate the specific significance that local contexts hold for the creation of new contacts and network relationships.

4.1   Existing social contacts and networks to the context of origin

Some of the refugees interviewed do not come alone, but rather flee along with their core family (spouse and children). Fundamentally, the own core family represents an emotional resource, as it comprises persons of reference that both deliver and demand support and affection. Here, relationships between spouses do not always act in a stabilising manner, and in some cases these relationships do not survive the strains of the flight and of the orientation phase in the receiving country. Thus, at the time of the interviews, several females reported that they were now living apart from their respective husband and had no knowledge of his current place of abode. Furthermore, continuing relationships may also be under pressure, for instance due to differing views about the division of chores in the household. Meanwhile, the relationship to one's own children is of central importance, particularly but not exclusively for women. Occasionally it was reported that the children had acquired a greater proficiency in the German language through kindergarten and school, and in some cases, they were able to assist their parents as interpreters. When it comes to establishing contacts in the new setting, children can prove to exert both a limiting and an encouraging effect. If the children are very young, or childcare is unavailable, women are mostly tied to the household and are prevented from attending integration and language courses, entering into a traineeship or taking up employment. On the other hand, whenever children are in public spaces (playgrounds) or in an institutional setting (day care centre, school), it is possible to enter

into contact with other parents. In most cases where members of the own core family have not yet arrived in Germany, the interview participants are extremely preoccupied by their concern for their children or their partner; as a result, the effort to establish new contacts in their daily lives and to get to grips with the social environment is severely limited:

"A lot of refugees say without family reunion no integration" (IP1 Heinsberg).

The parents, regarded as the core of the family of origin, frequently remain behind in the refugees' native country. Albeit all interview participants indicate that they are in touch with their parents, customarily by telephone, e-mail, Skype, or digital networks (Whatsapp), the importance of the parents for the refugees varies from individual to individual. If the parents of the interviewees are in a place of safety or are already elderly, their journey to Germany is not necessarily considered; contact is limited to telecommunication and planned visits. The significance of virtual social contact to distant parents lies in the emotional sphere. Though few interview participants divulge the content of their conversations with their parents, nonetheless there are indications of consultations taking place about fundamental life questions (e.g. about the appropriate time for marriage). This applies particularly to young refugees travelling alone, who – in the context of their flight – have to cope without parental guidance for the first time, and who seek support through virtual contacts.

The importance of other relatives such as siblings, but also uncles, aunts, and cousins, for the refugees interviewed is even more heterogeneous at the individual level. Where there were close relationships to individual siblings or to cousins in the country of origin, these are maintained, through virtual contacts, mutual visits, and sometimes even through the experience of joint flight and shared accommodation. In the majority of cases some of the interviewees' siblings and more distant relations have already departed from the country of origin and are now living in other countries, or in other parts of Germany. And yet, contacts to relatives living in Germany often prove to be of limited benefit as social capital. Admittedly, relatives sometimes provide temporary assistance as (initial) port of call, offering emergency shelter and information about how to manage the bureaucracy and life in general in Germany. However, according to some interviewees, help is sometimes granted grudgingly, and may involve feelings of being taken for granted. Distant relatives sometimes merit a visit, but they are rarely listed as key contacts in case of problems. This function is dominated by people located in the current place of residence (spouses, volunteers, friends). Within the sample it was not possible to find evidence of the role of relatives as genuine support network, cushioning the arrival of newcomers and providing guidance according to their needs. In some cases more intensive forms of contact, going as far as shared accommodation, are maintained with individual close relatives, usually siblings. However, some interview participants also report that siblings who have been in Germany for some time now lead their own lives with their families, and contact tends to be relatively loose. While the scope of the official obligation to remain in one place of residence does not allow cohabitation with distant relatives anyway, the concrete desire to move in with relatives is very rarely expressed.

The importance of friendships, forged in the country of origin and during the flight, also differs widely from one individual to the next. On the whole, respondents rarely mention ongoing contact with friends from their past (e.g. former colleagues and fellow students, school friends). If contacts do continue to exist, they are usually conducted through digital media (Whatsapp, e-mail); in cases where old friends are in Germany at the same time, there may also be occasional visits.

4.2 New social contacts and networks in the arrival context

4.2.1 Contacts to other refugees

The daily existence of many refugees at the place of arrival is shaped, at first, by living in residential homes, negotiating appointments with official bodies, and participating in language courses. Here, refugees mainly encounter other newcomers. The relationships that develop as a result are very varied. According to a lot of interviewees, residential homes, in particular, are the sites of budding friendships on the one hand, and of various types of conflict, on the other (for more on this, see CHRIST et al. 2017). Frequently, new contacts arise from refugees offering assistance with translations into German or requesting help with appointments with authorities or medical practitioners. This practical form of support is mainly rendered by refugees for refugees and is very important in terms of adjusting to the new place of residence. It is not unusual for such coincidental

offers of assistance to develop into friendships between refugees. Friendships involving other refugees can fulfil an important emotional function:

> "I cannot explain my feelings to the German (friends). I cannot explain my problems very well in German. It is better if I tell the Syrians. (…) Of course I use Arabic. (…) It's a question of language." (IP12 Köln)

Overall, the interviews show that language is highly significant for social relationships. As such, emotional support is closely linked to a shared mother tongue. On the other hand, knowledge of the German language can contribute to forging new social contacts with other refugees.

The social network of the interviewees is mostly used to secure practical support, as an information source, for instance regarding available housing or potential employers, and for emotional backing. In this manner, it greatly eases the adjustment to life in the new setting. The manner in which such contacts are formed, and which benefits they offer, will be examined in the following section.

4.2.2 Contacts to the receiving society

In residential homes, language courses, and government offices, many refugees reported coming face to face with other refugees, but they also meet individuals from the receiving society. Teachers delivering language courses, in particular, are often described as important persons of reference by many refugees. As well as conveying the language and knowledge about Germany, they also suggest leisure activities and may even broker accommodation and jobs. Thus, they can have a considerable impact on the integration at the point of arrival. In contrast to earlier migration flows to Germany, it seems that today's refugees gain access to individuals from the receiving society sooner and in a more direct manner. This is achieved, on the one hand, through the integration courses, and on the other hand, through the numerous initiatives, which were set up in 2015/16 especially, to provide support to newly arrived refugees. These initiatives also offer information, practical assistance, and opportunities to meet local people. Offers that are aimed specifically at refugees receive a mixed assessment, as those involved rarely meet at eye level, but rather come together in different roles, those of the helpers and the refugees. What is more, these contacts are often restricted to specific locations and situations.

> "I met a girl who works in a café for refugees. You can go there, meet other people, and speak German. We became acquainted (…) Somehow. We only talk to each other when I visit the café. (…) I met a different girl at the 'Welcome dinner' (…) We met at the railway station, went to her home, and shared a meal. It was a great evening in the flat-share with her friends. (…) Because she is a teacher, she does not have time (to meet up again)." (IP 13 Köln)

Thus, while there seems to be no lack of opportunities to get to know people from the receiving society, deepening the contact proves to be challenging. Many refugees interviewed emphasise that people from the receiving society are very tied up due to work and commitments, and lack the time to maintain closer personal relationships with them. In order to establish contact to the receiving society beyond the scope of specific offers for refugees, it is often necessary for the refugees to take the initiative. They might participate in different sports or in cultural events and they report that they actively approach people there or in public spaces. Knowledge of German is obviously an important prerequisite here, as this allows a conversation to happen in the first place. In general, significant insecurity prevails with regard to the relationship between refugees and the receiving society. Women who wear headscarves and young male refugees are particularly aware of being regarded with suspicion, which has a detrimental effect on attempts to initiate contact:

> "There is an important point here (…) where the media constantly mention refugees, (…) and what happened in Cologne. With the spotlight on refugees, one feels (…) like a burden for society. (…) That is not good, then one is not motivated to develop, one prefers to be alone and keep a distance, and that leads to being excluded." (IP 1 Köln)

Given the background of the events in Cologne on New Year's Eve 2015/2016, when a number of young North African men assaulted women who were celebrating, and which received broad media attention (cf. GUINAN-BANK 2017), other interview partners state that they fear behaving improperly and therefore they refrain from starting a conversation with people whom they have not met through shared acquaintances. This is further exacerbated by the challenge of not being able to argue effectively

against instances of prejudice towards refugees due to often limited language skills.

Refugees who act as volunteers themselves are, according to their statements, especially likely to access new networks successfully. Not only do they meet many refugees, as described above, but they also frequently forge new ties with members of the receiving society.

As a rule, refugees (are required to) take part in an integration course, before they are recommended for employment or training, and many of them, provided they do not have childcare duties, dispose of a certain amount of free time that is often used for volunteering purposes. This is frequently motivated by the idea to give something back to the German society. At the same time, many refugees who engage in volunteering also confirm that they themselves benefit from their efforts, because they receive support from the contacts they establish there.

The interviews show that the refugees take an active part in the construction of social contacts, by becoming engaged as volunteers, or in cultural and sporting events, by learning the German language, and by striking up conversations with other refugees or with members of the receiving society. For a number of interview partners with a limited knowledge of German, Turkish-speaking contacts represent an important source of information, as they themselves are proficient in Turkish. These language skills, acquired in their daily lives and while working, sometimes exist, for instance, in cases where the flight included a longer stopover in Turkey. Thus, the Turkish community serves as a bridge to the receiving society. This also mirrors the heterogeneity of the receiving society. For instance, one female interviewee, discussing the rules of behaviour in Germany with an acquaintance, provides the following insight:

> "She isn't German. But there are many, who were born here, or have been here for a long time. They know more about Germany than I do." (IP 3 Köln)

This quote clearly shows that local integration does not depend exclusively on contacts to individuals with a German passport or German native speakers, but rather that the definitional scope of the receiving society must be much broader. In line with the concept of super diversity, this heterogeneity is greater in Cologne, and yet, particularly with regard to contacts to individuals who have a Turkish migrant background, it can also be found in the district of Heinsberg due to foreign worker migration.

4.3 The significance of the local contexts

The local contexts serve as an important, though not decisive framework condition for establishing new contacts. What is of primary significance are the places and the opportunities to meet people who are suitable partners for repeated communication due to their age, their gender, their family status, their language, their current problems, or their knowledge. Clear differences can also be distinguished here between the metropolitan context and that of small and medium-sized towns.

Cologne, the metropolis, is characterised by the diversity of opportunities the interviewees mention. Numerous institutions run language and integration courses, there are advice centres, and initiatives and projects run by volunteers. At the same time, the elevated numbers of refugees in the city increase the likelihood of meeting people – locals, but also other refugees – who are 'on the same wavelength'. To provide an example: In Cologne, unlike the district of Heinsberg, with its character typical of small and medium-sized towns, easily accessible integration and language courses were offered in combination with childcare. As some of the female refugees state, offers of this kind serve the dual purpose of improving access to education and employment for mothers, while simultaneously creating the opportunity to enter into an exchange with women who are in a similar situation. The wider range of cultural projects with a specific thematic focus (e.g. drama and acting, where some interviewees participated) more easily allows meetings of the like-minded. The large, multicultural population additionally facilitates an economically viable ethnic supply of goods and services, such as the Syrian bread favoured by several of the interview partners. On the other hand, these stores, which are also visited by customers who live outside of Cologne, provide opportunities for contacts to develop between people with a shared language and a shared country of origin.

Then again, the social contacts and offers of support offered in the metropolis are less binding and more flexible by nature. Some offers the refugees mentioned, such as the 'Welcome Dinner', are limited to one-off encounters, and contrary to the original intention of the organisers, these rarely lead to longer lasting contacts. Other options, such as a Welcome Team project for refugees at the Catholic University of Applied Sciences, were essentially decreed 'top-down', with the result that German students did not feel obliged and refugees felt excluded rather than accepted. Based on the statements of the

interviewees, it is possible to conclude that in a large city such as Cologne one might easily meet kindred spirits, but one might just as easily encounter hostility toward foreigners. It is true that interviewees who live in Cologne made more frequent mention of negative experiences with authorities or with members of the police force (only men who look Arabic are stopped and checked, leaflets announcing that foreign-looking individuals will be subject to stricter controls during carnival), however, respondents from the district of Heinsberg also had their share of experiences of racism.

In all, the district of Heinsberg, with its small and medium-sized towns, offers fewer opportunities to meet other refugees or locals. However, the opportunities that do exist tend to be more stable and easier to comprehend. The bus stops and the railway station of Erkelenz may serve as an example here: Because interviewees frequently want or need to travel to neighbouring larger towns (to see a doctor, lawyer, or to attend a public authority) they meet or repeatedly meet other people who are in a similar situation, and by exchanging information about destinations, fares and timetables etc., they strike up conversations. When respondents make direct mention of the social quality of their place of residence in the district of Heinsberg, this is mostly framed positively. Individuals who have visited other, more densely populated cities, tend to emphasise that life 'in the countryside' is better than in the metropolis. They point to a higher level of friendliness, more openness and willingness to help, and more compassion; in contrast, their descriptions paint the large city as selfish, arrogant, ignorant and xenophobic.

Considered as a whole, the interviews clearly reveal that the refugees do not encounter a homogenous 'German' receiving society. Even in the small and medium-sized urban space that describes the district of Heinsberg, the so-called foreign worker migration is already far advanced, so that many people with whom the refugees come face to face in their daily lives (neighbours, landlords, volunteer helpers, tradespeople) themselves have a migrant background; often, they originally came from Turkey, but also from other countries. The effect of these encounters must be described in ambiguous terms. Refugees may conclude that integration into the German society is challenging, even for those 'foreigners' who have lived in Germany for many years. On the other hand, the sense of being able to weave oneself into the tapestry of German multi-culturality may encourage the process of settling in:

"I encounter many foreigners here, […]; I can't really say what makes a real German person, and what they think about refugees. But the people I meet are usually friendly." (IP3 Heinsberg)

5 Résumé

Our study allowed us to confirm but also to differentiate and supplement existing insights about social contacts of refugees. It is quite clear that, upon their arrival in Germany, refugees only have reduced social networks at their disposal (Aumüller and Bretl 2008). Due to the exceptional situation of the flight and the assignment of a place of residence by the state, similarly escaped relatives (e.g. siblings, aunts/uncles and their children) and friends from the past usually live in other parts of Germany or even in other countries, and therefore cannot serve as a localised network to cushion the individual's arrival. Compared to conventional chain migration (Nauck and Kohlmann 1998; Haug 2000), the social capital of familial networks can clearly only be leveraged to a limited extent. Within the arrival context, contacts to other refugees who share the same or a similar background and language act as bonding ties, which provide an important source of practical support and emotional backing (Uzelac et al. 2018; Stevens 2016; Palmgren 2017). These contacts are usually forged in residential homes, through integration and language courses, during visits to public authorities, or in the course of volunteer initiatives. According to our results, bridging ties to members of the receiving society are less likely to be established through faith communities and (sports) clubs (Aumüller and Bretl 2008; Wägerle 2012), but rather through language courses and volunteer initiatives. Here, the openness and proactive attitude of the refugees prove to be an important factor: the swift acquisition of the language, and taking up voluntary work lead to contacts with other refugees and with locals. Thus, the initiatives of volunteer helpers can be regarded as a significant medium of integration. Since the volunteers working for the various initiatives tend to belong to the middle class, as can be reconstructed from occasional hints (for instance, regarding their occupations), they cannot serve as a conduit for integration into a marginalised minority, as predicted in the theory of segmented assimilation. Due to the relatively short lengths of stay, it is not possible to conclusively state how contacts with compatriots develop starting from the initial arrival

context (group accommodation, waiting rooms of public authorities, integration courses) nor how they change in relation to people firmly embedded within the host society. However, results do reveal that integration into one's own ethnic milieu is not only relevant for the children and grandchildren of the first generation of migrants, but can take place upon arrival. What does clearly emerge, is that refugees with longer stays due to internships, training or jobs increasingly come into contact with locals. In addition to the well-known barriers to establishing contact – language, lack of time and money, cultural distance (cf. AUMÜLLER and BRETL 2008) – in the case of our interview partners, individual hesitation and the perceived suspicion of the receiving society also produced an inhibiting effect. The metropolis offers abundant opportunities for new social contacts; however, these are frequently revealed as fleeting. In the context of small and medium-sized towns, on the other hand, the greater manageability imbues the newly developing networks with greater stability.

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