

Article

Impact of War Trauma on Interpersonal Mistrust among Syrian Refugees in Germany and Their Interpersonal Trust in Germans

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Abstract: In forced migration literature, there is a lack of studies on the impact of war trauma on interpersonal mistrust among refugees and their interpersonal trust in members of the host society. To contribute to filling this gap, the author studied the impact of war trauma on interpersonal mistrust among Syrian refugees in Germany and their interpersonal trust in Germans. The data are based on semi-structured qualitative interviews with 20 Syrian refugees and asylum-seekers conducted in 2018 and 2019. The author argues that because traumatised refugees are powerfully influenced by past traumatic events experienced in their home country, they tend to mistrust people who can be associated with the place where these traumatic experiences occurred. In contrast, they are inclined to trust people who cannot be linked to the geographical location of the traumatic experiences. The main result of this study is that similarity—that of war-traumatised refugees sharing the same socio-cultural backgrounds—leads to interpersonal mistrust, while dissimilarity leads to interpersonal trust. The author of this paper calls for considering trust-building among war traumatised refugees, which has significant importance for refugee integration.

Keywords: Germany; interpersonal mistrust; interpersonal trust; Syrian refugees; trauma; war

1. Introduction

According to the German Federal Office of Migration and Refugees, Syrian refugees are the biggest refugee group in Germany ([Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge 2020](#)). Syrians fled their country due to a destructive civil war described by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein in 2017 as the “worst man-made disaster the world has seen since World War II”.

Researchers such as [Elbert et al. \(2006\)](#) and [Elbert and Schauer \(2002\)](#) have explained the mechanism of how war trauma impacts the human mind. In addition, a considerable number of studies on refugees and asylum-seekers have shown a strong relationship between war exposure and depression, as well as the fact that grief is mediated through trauma ([Jabbar and Zaza 2014](#); [Bean et al. 2007](#)). [Bemak and Chung \(2017\)](#) found that displacement and premigration situations of war and conflict may involve witnessing or being subjected to torture, killings, atrocities, incarceration, starvation/deprivation (e.g., food, shelter), rape, sexual assault, and physical beatings. Those traumatic experiences can lead to long-term impacts on mental health, including higher rates of anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder ([Baird et al. 2020](#)).

[Stotz et al. \(2015\)](#) found that refugees' exposure to multiple traumatic events poses a risk factor for mental health, including greater suffering and functional impairment due to shame and guilt. [Knipscheer et al. \(2015\)](#) concluded that refugees and asylum-seekers have been shown to be at substantially higher risk of developing post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Refugees exposed to more than three trauma events had a heightened risk of mental illness ([Steel et al. 2002](#)), whilst many refugees continue to have PTSD even after being safely relocated ([Said 2015](#)).

Several studies have addressed the negative influences of the war on the mental and psychosocial wellbeing of forced migrants from Syria. For instance, [Wells et al. \(2015\)](#)



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concluded that refugees from the conflict in Syria had been exposed to various stressors known to increase the risk of mental distress. These may include witnessing atrocities as well as dealing with the challenges of surviving in the displacement context. [Kliwer et al. \(2021\)](#) observed high levels of PTSD symptoms among Syrian refugee students in Jordan, particularly among males, for cultural reasons. Syrian refugee students in Turkey reported multiple traumatic experiences, acute post-traumatic stress, and severe emotional and behavioural problems ([Gormez et al. 2017](#)). A report by the Global Child Protection Group showed that 98% of Syrian children surveyed in the Zaatari refugee camp in Jordan reported deterioration in their psychosocial wellbeing ([Abdel Jabbar and Zaza 2014](#)).

This study concentrates on the mistrust among Syrian refugees and their trust in Germans on the interpersonal level. It refers to “trust and mistrust between people” based only on nationality regardless of the inside variations within the groups of Syrians and Germans; for instance, ethnicity or religion. In addition, it does not include political or institutional trust, such as the office for foreigners and the social office or the German police.

Although there is not only one definition of trauma ([Sweeney et al. 2016](#)), in this study I use the American Psychological Association’s definition of trauma:

Trauma is an emotional response to a terrible event such as an accident, rape, or natural disaster. Immediately after the event, shock and denial are typical. Longer term reactions include unpredictable emotions, flashbacks, strained relationships and even physical symptoms such as headaches or nausea. While these feelings are normal, some people have difficulty moving on with their lives.

In this study, I address the question of how war trauma affects interpersonal trust or mistrust towards members of the in-group (Syrians in Germany) and members of the out-group (Germans).

The author aims to develop academic debates about the impacts of trauma on traumatised people. The study addresses new dimensions of trauma impacts, namely, the impact of war trauma on interpersonal mistrust among traumatised refugees and their interpersonal trust in the people of the host country. In this study, the author shows how the traumatic war experiences that Syrian refugees have been exposed to in their country of origin influence their mental and psychological wellbeing and interpersonal mistrust. In addition, it is illustrated how those traumatic experiences also influence their interpersonal trust in Germans. Through the example of Syrian refugees, the author draws attention to the major result of this study which is: interpersonal mistrust among traumatised refugees from war zones follows the rule of similarity, that is, ‘having the same socio-cultural backgrounds’, and their interpersonal trust in hosts follows the rule of dissimilarity with the traumatised refugees. This result shows that the phenomena of trust and mistrust among forced migrants from war zones might not always follow the same logic as other researchers found within natives’ communities.

2. Literature Review

Although many researchers and writers in the field of forced migration studies have made reference to trust and mistrust in the lives of refugees, few have focused specifically on these issues ([Ní Raghallaigh 2014](#)). However, the literature on refugees’ trust and mistrust can be classified in three major strands at least.

The first strand of this literature focused on the institutional trust and mistrust of refugees (refugees’ trust in the institutions and organisations of the host society). For instance, [Eide et al. \(2020\)](#) studied unaccompanied refugee minors’ distrust in institutions responsible for providing social services in Norway. They found that their distrust was related to the complex system of requirements in the care institutions, such as work schedule, documentation, and more generally rules and regulations that make personal relationships difficult to sustain. Furthermore, [Majumder et al. \(2015\)](#) studied the perceptions of mental health services by unaccompanied refugee adolescents in the United Kingdom. They found that many participants held negative attitudes toward mental health care and had a lack of trust in services. This could be explained by their descriptions of their experiences

within their home country of psychiatric care, their experiences of being a refugee/asylum-seeker, or cultural differences. [Veck and Wharton \(2021\)](#) studied refugee children's trust and inclusion in school cultures in the United Kingdom. They found that in the schools there is mistrust directed towards refugees, which takes an entirely depersonalised form when it results from exclusionary processes that situate unique persons within generalised categories. This experience of refugees often accords with the palpable and painful reality that when people are persistently mistrusted, they are themselves all too likely to mistrust, rather than trust, strangers. Therefore, refugee children hold all authority figures, including educators, in suspicion. [Lehti et al. \(2022\)](#) studied the trust of refugee women, who have experienced violence, in their social counsellors in six European Union Countries. They found that victims often have difficulties trusting their counsellors and are not willing to talk about their experiences for many reasons, such as trauma and fear. They have difficulties recalling the details of the violence, or they feel ashamed; often they do not understand the value of uncovering their experiences.

The second strand of this literature focused on trust and mistrust of the host societies in refugees (refugees as objects of trust). For instance, [T. Hynes \(2003\)](#) concluded that the rise of mistrust felt towards refugees in the UK is due to past legislation on asylum that has been based on deterrence and other measures restricting the rights of refugees. A more formally structured social exclusion of refugees comes in the form of compulsory dispersal through a separate agency; the national asylum support service has separated refugees from mainstream society, leading to an entrenchment of the feeling of mistrust towards refugees at a national level. According to [Harrell-Bond \(2002\)](#) the undignified image of refugees such as increasing use of negative adjectives such as "bogus", "scroungers", "fortune seekers", even "sores", to describe refugees leads to a treatment of refugees as institutional subjects that cannot be trusted. [Kyriakides \(2017\)](#) suggested that persons seeking refuge in Europe must sustain an identity of 'non-threatening victim' if they are to gain recognition in a securitised culture of mistrust.

The third strand of this literature on refugees' trust and mistrust includes many studies that tried to find out why refugees and asylum-seekers are mistrustful. In this regard, researchers have addressed a variety of reasons that can be grouped in five main clusters.

The first cluster contains a group of reasons that are related to the life circumstances of refugees and asylum-seekers inside their origin countries. For instance, [Fink \(2001\)](#) suggested that the authoritarian nature of the political system and the atmosphere of fear and repression that envelope many refugees home countries creates a situation whereby the primary lens is suspicion and mistrust. The culture of mistrust has characterised not only the military regime but, in many cases, the opposition groups as well. [Gandolfo \(2022\)](#) studied trust and distrust in the Libyan refugee community in Malta. She found that the regime of Muammar Gaddafi and the ways that political and social distrust was facilitated by the government as a mechanism of regime preservation makes distrust percolate into Libyan society. This has impacts on the fabric of Libyan society, which is traced to the present day and has influence on the diaspora. As the war in Libya continues, particularised and institutional social trust is eroded at home and abroad as the communal fabric is pressured by factionalism, and while the Gaddafi era has ended, social and political distrust remains. [P. Hynes \(2009\)](#) concluded that mistrust that predominates within refugee populations may be due to religious, ethnic, linguistic, political, or other lines of fragmentation made manifest by this restructuring in their host countries. [Richlen \(2022\)](#) found that while external agencies sought a single communal address, Darfurian refugees largely viewed themselves as a collection of ethnic groups; a notion deeply entwined with trust. In this case, Darfurians decided to participate in a government decision that did not take into account these ethnic divisions. According to the same author, this had a direct and extremely negative repercussion on their self-organisation; an impact which decisively influenced future Darfurian community organizing in Israel.

The second cluster is 'transnational studies', according to which trust and mistrust are cultural traits transferred from the origin countries of migrants and refugees to their

settlement and host countries. For instance, [Algan and Cahuc \(2010\)](#) concluded that the inherited trust of descendants of US immigrants is significantly influenced by the country of origin and the timing of arrival of their forebears. [Guiso et al. \(2006\)](#) found that culture is not continually altered in step with the changes that individuals experience during their lifetimes. For instance, emigrants from Southern, low-trust regions in Italy tend to carry their mistrust to their new locations. [Ketabi et al. \(2012\)](#) studied the trust level among Iranian migrants residing in Toronto in Canada and found that out-group social trust is significantly higher than in-group social trust. The results of this study suggest that the most influential factors causing this lower in-group trust should be sought for in the pre-migration period. The weakness of social trust in the home country is often transferred to other countries—after migration—and is intensified due to problems of the migrant community and the increase in social risks.

[Helliwell et al. \(2015\)](#) demonstrated that migrants tend to make social trust assessments that mainly reflect conditions in the country where they now live, but they also reveal a significant influence from their countries of origin. The latter effect is one-third as important as the effect of local conditions. [Rice and Feldman \(1997\)](#) found that trust of various immigrant groups in the United States strongly mirrors present-day trust in their ancestral countries. For example, descendants of immigrants from high-trusting Northern European countries, Scandinavian countries in particular, are more trusting than descendants of immigrants from low-trusting Southern European countries.

In this vein, [Fukuyama \(1995\)](#) stated that trust is a cultural heritage resulting from shared values that allow individuals to subordinate their interests to those of larger groups. According to [Dohmen et al. \(2012\)](#), trust attitudes are transmitted from parents to children through their education. In contrast with these studies, [Dinesen and Sønderskov \(2018\)](#) confirm that finding that present-day trust of immigrants correlates with trust in their ancestral country is not unequivocal evidence for trust being a cultural trait.

The third cluster contains several studies that have answered the question why refugees and asylum-seekers are mistrustful by the traumatic events that they have been exposed to inside war zones. For instance, [Riaño-Alcalá and Goldring \(2014\)](#) studied how social dynamics of trust and mistrust influence community organizing and networking locally and transnationally. They concluded that Colombian refugees in Canada have limited ability to return home, and barriers to community building in Canada are caused by deep mistrust rooted in the armed conflict time. In this vein, [Morina et al. \(2016\)](#) suggested that it is possible that the extent to which refugees were exposed to interpersonal trauma, such as torture, led to an erosion of their capacity to trust others. [Kline and Mone \(2003\)](#) demonstrated that, because of the impact of the war, people are no longer trustworthy or predictable. Neighbours often turn against neighbours, and traditional beliefs and customs, which at one time meant safety and security, are now used to justify murder and mayhem. The actions of others no longer fit established patterns observed throughout childhood.

A similar result was found by [Robinson and Segrott \(2002\)](#), who concluded that the reasons for mistrust are related to the fact that many asylum-seekers and refugees have been victims of persecution, harassment, and violence in their countries of origins. [Nguyen and Bowles \(1998\)](#) stressed that survivors of torture and trauma often find that their faith in life and people is shattered. Traumatic events call into question basic human relationships. They breach the attachments of family, friendship, love, and community. In line with these findings, [Kijewski and Freitag \(2018\)](#) demonstrated that civil war is negatively related to social trust. This effect proves to be more conclusive for individual war experiences than for contextual war exposure. Arguably, the occurrence of instances of violence with lasting psychological as well as social structural consequences provides people with clear evidence of the untrustworthiness, uncooperativeness, and hostility of others, diminishing social trust in the aftermath of war.

Furthermore, [Bell et al. \(2019\)](#) found that higher trauma scores were associated with lower levels of trust. Individuals who experienced interpersonal trauma could indicate acquired insensitivity to social rewards or inflexible negative beliefs about others as a sequel

of the traumatic experience, which increases in relationship with the severity of the trauma. [Vromans et al. \(2021\)](#) conducted longitudinal research investigating the psychological distress in at-risk refugee women one year after resettlement in Australia. They found that the absence of trust in community members was associated with trauma and depression.

The fourth cluster comprised studies that have explained refugees' and asylum-seekers' mistrust by the asylum journey itself. For instance, [Baker \(1990\)](#) explained refugees' mistrust by what he called 'refugee experience' that had taught them not to trust people anymore. Similar results were found by [Lyytinen \(2017\)](#) who explained refugees' mistrust by what she called 'exilic journeys' suggesting that the question of trust building and/or loss is associated with the journey from the country of origin to the country of exile. [T. Hynes \(2003\)](#) concluded that flight is often imminent as the refugee no longer trusts their own government with their life.

The fifth cluster includes studies that illustrate refugees' and asylum-seekers' mistrust by the life circumstances inside their host countries. For instance, [Voutira and Harrell-Bond \(1995\)](#) found that within refugee camps, where competition for food and other resources is high, individuals may often feel that it is necessary to engage in the deception or manipulation of others to cope or survive. Trust in others, whether fellow refugees or aid workers, is unlikely to develop in such circumstances and indeed may not be in the best interests of individual refugees. [Ní Raghallaigh \(2014\)](#) found that the reasons for mistrust are embedded within the social contexts from which asylum-seekers have come and that they are exacerbated by the social contexts in which they are now living. [Bilodeau and White \(2016\)](#) confirm that immigrants to Canada make a clear distinction between trust in other people in general, and trust in Canadians in particular: the former is grounded in pre-migration cultural influences, while the latter is grounded in immigrants' experiences in the new host country.

However, studies on natives often have attributed different causes to interpersonal trust and mistrust phenomena. For instance, according to some researchers, people who are socially closer related tend to trust each other. [Glaeser et al. \(1999\)](#) concluded that differences in race and nationality reduce the level of trustworthiness; however, according to [Glaeser et al. \(2000\)](#), when individuals are closer socially, trust and trustworthiness occur. Trustworthiness declines when partners are from different races and nationalities. [Delhey and Newton \(2005\)](#) found that generalised trust is strongest when people have something in common with others, particularly when they are from the same ethnic background. [Liang \(2015\)](#) demonstrated that people trust those inside their circle more than those on the outside. [Guiso et al. \(2009\)](#) found that the coefficient of somatic distance shows that citizens of one country tend to be more trusting towards citizens of other countries that are somatically closer. [Barr \(1999\)](#) determined that people trust each other less due to a lack of familiarity that leads to uncertainty when people try to predict each other's behaviour in strategic situations.

According to various trust researchers, economic equality and social equality give rise to social trust. For instance, [Rothstein and Uslaner \(2005\)](#) concluded that social trust is caused by two different yet interrelated types of equality: economic equality and equality of opportunity. Both types of equality lead to a greater sense of social solidarity, which spurs generalised trust. [Kawachi et al. \(1999\)](#) found that citizens' belief that most people could not be trusted was highly correlated with the degree of income inequality.

[Alesina and La Ferrara \(2002\)](#) found that the strongest factors associated with low trust belong to a group that historically felt discriminated against, such as minorities (black populations in particular) and, to a lesser extent, women, as well as being economically unsuccessful in terms of income and education, and living in a racially diverse community or in one with a high degree of income disparity. [Mirowsky and Ross \(1983\)](#) concluded that mistrust is produced through the interaction between the belief in external control and low current socioeconomic status. Mistrust is greatest where victimisation is greatest; lower social classes are more likely to be victims of assault, robbery, purse snatching,

pickpocketing, personal larceny, rape, and attempted rape. Life under such threatening conditions promotes mistrust.

The literature on refugees' trust and mistrust addressed several dimensions to these phenomena and suggested a variety of reasons for refugees' and asylum-seekers' mistrust. In addition, studies on natives have shown different reasons of interpersonal trust and mistrust. However, one hardly finds studies on interpersonal mistrust among refugees and asylum-seekers, and so far there is no study which focused on interpersonal mistrust among Syrian refugees and asylum-seekers in Germany. Furthermore, to the knowledge of the author there is no study that focused on refugees' and asylum-seekers' interpersonal trust in members of the host society.

3. Theoretical Background

Despite decades of interdisciplinary research on trust, the literature remains fragmented and balkanised, with little consensus regarding its origins. We still lack a common conceptual understanding of what constitutes trust (Robbins 2016). There is no general theory of trust; rather, there is a degree of conceptual and theoretical confusion and a variety of partial approaches (Delhey and Newton 2005). According to McKnight and Chervany (2000), trust is naturally hard to narrow down to one specific definition. Fisman and Khanna (1999) concluded that the definition of trust has been much debated by social scientists over the past decade. No single definition is entirely satisfactory. P. Hynes (2009) demonstrated that trust is an ambiguous term; it is complex and multifaceted and, once lost, it takes time to restore.

However, definitions of trust can be classified in two strands. First, trust refers to positive expectations about the trustee's behaviour. Second, trust is understood as a social relation between people and not as a decision taken individually.

Regarding the first strand, Amiraslani et al. (2017) concluded that trust is the expectation that another person will perform actions that are beneficial, or at least not detrimental, to us regardless of our capacity to monitor those actions. Gambetta (2000) concluded that when we say we trust someone or that someone is trustworthy, we implicitly mean that the probability that he will perform an action that is beneficial or at least not detrimental to us is high enough for us to consider engaging in some form of cooperation with him. Lewicki et al. (1998) define trust as confident positive expectations regarding another's conduct, and distrust in terms of confident negative expectations regarding another's conduct. Lyytinen (2017) defined trust as a positive feeling about or evaluation of the intentions or behaviour of another, and conceptualised it as a discursively created emotion and practice which is based on the relations between the 'trustor' and the 'trustee'.

Yamagishi and Yamagishi (1994) defined trust as a bias in the processing of imperfect information about the partner's intentions. A trusting person is one who overestimates the benignity of the partner's intentions beyond the level warranted by the prudent assessment of the available information. Tanis and Postmes (2005) demonstrated that trusting behaviour will only be displayed when people think that others will not take advantage of the situation and when reciprocity is expected. Hardin (1992), who studied trust epistemologically, found that rational choice and other accounts of trust base it upon objective assessments of the risks and benefits of trusting. One trusts someone if one has adequate reason to believe it will be in that person's interest to be trustworthy in the relevant way at the relevant time. Omodei and McLennan (2000) defined interpersonal mistrust; a general tendency to view others as mean, selfish, malevolent, or unreliable people who are, thus, not to be depended on to treat one well. In this vein, Dinesen and Sønderskov (2018) confirm that social trust is the inclination to trust unknown others in situations where little information exists about their trustworthiness.

Regarding the second strand, Lewis and Weigert (1985), who studied trust as a sociological concept, argue that trust must be conceived as a property of collective units (ongoing dyads, groups, and collectives), not of isolated individuals. Being a collective attribute, trust is applicable to the relations among people rather than to their psychological states

taken individually. According to [Rothstein and Uslaner \(2005\)](#), social trust is a measure of how people evaluate the moral fabric in their society. [Frederiksen \(2014\)](#) argued that trust is not solely an individual phenomenon based on individual perception but also develops from and within social relations.

In this study, the author defines trust as an attitude based on positive expectations about the trustee, that his or her behaviour will be beneficial to the trustor and not harmful. Therefore, trust does not refer to the positive expectations themselves because those expectations happen first as reasons of trust; then, due to those reasons a trust attitude emerges. Moreover, trust is not a social relation because the social relation between the trustor and the trustee comes as a result of the trust attitude. This means that trust is embodied in social relations between the trustor and the trustee. Hence, the author argues that trust can neither be defined by reasons (positive expectations) nor by the result (social relations), but it is an attitude located between the two. For example, if someone has a trust attitude towards another, this will be because he or she has positive expectations about the conduct of the other. As a result, the trustor finds himself or herself encouraged to have a social relation with the trustee.

However, the reasons for those positive and negative expectations are varied and variable and might be rational or irrational. For instance, they can be based on real information and direct personal experiences with the trustee, or they can be established on false information or the negative impacts of trauma. As a result, trust and mistrust can be logical or illogical attitudes. This explains, for example, why people can be disappointed after certain trust relations.

This study shows how Syrian refugees and asylum-seekers, under the impact of war trauma, establish irrational interpersonal mistrust attitudes towards each other and irrational interpersonal trust attitudes towards Germans. Interpersonal mistrust among traumatised Syrian refugees is established on the rule of similarity, meaning 'having the same socio-cultural backgrounds', and their interpersonal trust is established on the rule of dissimilarity. This means that reasons of interpersonal trust and mistrust of traumatised war refugees seems to be different from native communities, as will be discussed in this study.

4. Methodology

According to [Strauss and Corbin \(1998\)](#) social reality is based on the interplay between personal conceptions and knowledge of the world. Accordingly, the data analysis of this study aimed to explain the phenomenon of interpersonal trust and mistrust of Syrian asylum-seekers by uncovering the causal and intervening conditions around the phenomenon. Data were collected in 2018 and 2019 in different parts of Germany.

Following the tradition of grounded theory, the data were collected and analysed concurrently, starting with purposive sampling based on the topic of the study to understand the phenomenon of trust and mistrust among Syrian asylum-seekers in Germany. The sample size could not be decided in advance; only when no more categories occurred during the coding process was the recruitment of new respondents stopped. The final sample consisted of 20 semi-structured qualitative interviews with male asylum-seekers and refugees from Syria who, at the time, were all single. Their age at the time of the interview was between 20 and 35 years. They are from different ethnic backgrounds and religious affiliations from urban and rural areas in Syria. For cultural reasons, the author could not access female participants; for a male researcher it is difficult to access their accommodation and to conduct interviews with them. Although this sample size is not large, the 20 interviews, each around 60 to 90 min long, provided information that is rich enough to fulfil the requirement of theoretical saturation ([Strauss and Corbin 1998](#)). Participants were recruited by using snow-ball sampling.

The semi-structured one-on-one interviews allowed participants to concentrate on and feel free to talk around the topic, share their experiences, feelings, and perceptions related to the process of trust and mistrust. Before answering the interview questions, all participants agreed to the informed consent, provided in the Arabic language. All the interviews were

conducted in Arabic, tape-recorded, transcribed, anonymised, and translated into English by the author of this article.

After the interviews were transcribed, in a first step the researcher started with open coding to find the major categories of information and their different dimensions. Based on that process, the researcher selected the category “similarity vs. dissimilarity” as a core phenomenon of interest resulting from the interviews. During the second step of data analysis, the causal conditions that influence the core phenomenon, respondents’ ways to negotiate and make sense of the core phenomenon, and the context and intervening conditions that shape respondents’ perceptions were identified (Strauss and Corbin 1998). Participants were recruited by using snow-ball sampling.

During the research and data analysis, two biases had to be considered and overcome: the personal experience and pre-knowledge bias and the asymmetrical power relationship between interviewer and interviewee. First, my personal experience as someone with the same background as the respondents provides me with an insider perspective that might be different from the perspective of a researcher without this experience. This is particularly relevant with respect to the topic of mistrust towards members of the in-group. Being aware of this potential bias, this perspective also offers the advantage of a way of analysing that might be difficult for other researchers to carry out due to barriers of language and culture. In addition, the asymmetrical power relationship between interviewer and interviewee always bears the danger of affecting data collection. In the case of the present study, the interviewer is an academic who lived in Germany for several years, while the respondents did not have an academic background and had just arrived in Germany some time ago at the time of the interviews. Therefore, it was important to always encourage the respondents to share their ideas freely and to avoid giving any signs of approval or disapproval of their stories.

5. Findings

This section first shows the traumatic experiences that Syrian refugees have been exposed to in their origin country. Based on these insights, the interpersonal mistrust among Syrian refugees and asylum-seekers is explained. Finally, the section shows Syrians’ interpersonal trust in Germans and their justification for this attitude.

5.1. Syrian Refugees Being Exposed to Traumatic Experiences

All Syrian interviewees reported that they have been exposed to and witnessed many traumatic experiences in their home country. These experiences include witnessing the death of members of their families, being subject to cruelty or torture, seeing wounded or dead people, or living in an area sieged militarily for a long time. For some, this occurred when they were minors.

One Syrian refugee, who witnessed his parents’ and his neighbours’ deaths due to a military aircraft raid, explained how it is so difficult for him to continue his life normally even after more than a year of his arrival to Germany.

“From January 2013 on, the city was exposed to shelling. On 12 January 2013, a military plane bombed the building where our home was. All inhabitants died, including my parents; I was the only survivor. Then the area was sieged by the regime and its allies. For three years: no electricity, no clean water, we ate animals’ food [. . .] When there was shelling, the ambulance cars went to bring wounded or dead people from under the rubble, I saw the cars pass in front of me, carrying wounded and dead people”.

Interviewer: *“Do the visual images of those events still affect you?”*

“It does not leave me. Even now, I feel panic at the noise of a plane, or even if someone sharply closes a door. There is a panic; there are psychological issues. I always have nightmares. I dream that I return there under the shelling. I have lost my appetite; I have lost more than ten kilos of my weight”. (Interview three)

Another refugee from a different Syrian city was a child when his father died from gas inhalation in front of him, as the interviewee reported. He is afraid that his mother in Syria may die before he has a chance to see her again as his refugee status does not allow visits to his home country.

"[. . .] My dad died in front of us (members of his family) because of a strange smell that came out of a rocket that hit the house of our neighbour [. . .] I feel the most afraid of this feeling, maybe my mom dies before I can meet her again". (Interview eight)

The traumatic events that Syrians have experienced inside their country of origin, and that may have been aggravated because of the situation inside the transit countries or the destination country, severely impacted their psychological and mental wellbeing inside Germany. For instance, interviewees have stated that they suffer from nightmares, visual images of the traumatic events, loss of appetite, loss of concentration, etc. The following quotations reflect this:

"I go to school, half of the information I understand and half I cannot. And when I return home and try to study [. . .] no more than half an hour, then I throw the book because I cannot concentrate". (Interview five)

"It was the first time in my life that I saw dead people, three young people. I saw them dead; they were my neighbours. [. . .] perhaps the travel to Europe made me 20 years older. How we reached Europe, only God knows. This makes that one cannot concentrate, especially when I hear that something bad happened in Lebanon, where my family still is living. I cannot study on those days". (Interview 14)

Previous studies in different countries have stressed the bad influence of the war on the mental and the psychosocial wellbeing of Syrian refugees, such as studies by [Wells et al. \(2015\)](#), [Kliwer et al. \(2021\)](#), and [Gormez et al. \(2017\)](#). In line with these existing results, as the data in this study show, Syrian refugees in Germany have been exposed to traumatic events in their origin country, which negatively impact their mental and psychological wellbeing, even after years of their arrival to Germany.

5.2. Interpersonal Mistrust among Syrian Refugees

All the Syrian refugees interviewed in this study reported that they suffer from interpersonal mistrust in members of their community, even though they are from the same nationality and have the same social and cultural backgrounds. Moreover, some of them reported that they mistrust even their siblings and parents. The following quotations show that:

"I do not trust anyone, even my father. The bad circumstances that we had made me doubt even in myself; because of loneliness; because of depression. All souls have badly changed; even members of the same family have badly changed. Here in Germany, no one acts against you like the sons of your country. You must be careful about everyone and everything" (Interview five)

Another interviewee reported, *"[. . .] Trust! I don't trust anyone, even my family members. I don't trust any of them"* (Interview 17)

The main reason for the interpersonal mistrust among Syrian refugees, as they reported, is that they do not expect reciprocity. Moreover, they think that trust in members of their community will bring them the risk of harm, and there are no expected benefits from trusting other Syrians. Their conclusion, as they reported, is based on bad experiences, primarily during wartime, and in some cases, even after their arrival in Germany. Due to these experiences, they concluded that Syrians are selfish and only try to achieve their own personal goals. In addition, those interviewed believed that Syrians are dishonest and reveal the secrets of others. Because of these feelings, the Syrian refugees I interviewed mistrusted attitude towards members of their community. These experiences let them conclude that Syrians are selfish and only try to achieve their personal goals. In addition,

they are dishonest and reveal the secrets of others. For all of that, they establish a mistrust attitude towards members of their community. The following quotations illustrate that:

“It is well known that Syrian people cheat each other, just like what they are doing here in Germany [. . .] If we were good, it wouldn’t happen in Syria what is happening now”. (Interview 19)

“Every person wants his interests; you cannot trust anyone. From my experience, I was exposed to many stories that made me mistrust people”. (Interview two)

“People lie, you cannot trust anyone, and if you do trust someone, then he gets angry with you, he will uncover your secrets”. (Interview 13)

“After what I saw during the Syrian revolution and that people can be changed by money, and every person has his own interests, I cannot trust people”. (Interview 14)

“I don’t trust anyone; even your best friend will cheat you [. . .]” (Interview 20)

“Currently, I do not trust people. I trusted guys two years ago, for insignificant reasons, they told everything about me”. (Interview six)

Based on the previous quotations, we can see that when a group of refugees is exposed to many traumatic events in their home country, similarity, or ‘sharing the same social and cultural background’, does not necessarily and automatically lead to rising interpersonal trust but, in this particular case, interpersonal mistrust. This result seems to be different from what other researchers have found in different contexts and different fields of study. For instance, [Glaeser et al. \(1999, 2000\)](#), who studied a sample of Harvard nonmigrant undergraduates, found that trust and trustworthiness increase when individuals are closer socially, and that differences in race and nationality reduce the level of trustworthiness.

Likewise, [Barr \(1999\)](#), who studied natives in Zimbabwe, concluded that a lack of familiarity leads to uncertainty when people try to predict each other’s behaviour in strategic situations and to a lower level of trust. [Delhey and Newton \(2005\)](#) found that generalised social trust is strongest when people have something in common with others, particularly when they are from the same ethnic background. This result shows that mistrust and trust among refugees from war zones seems unique in some respects in comparison with native communities.

Furthermore, it may be not enough to explain interpersonal mistrust among Syrian refugees by their life within camps, as [Voutira and Harrell-Bond \(1995\)](#) suggested; where competition for food and other resources is high, refugees may often feel that it is necessary to engage in deception or manipulation of others to cope or survive. Nevertheless, some of the interviewees in this study who had already been granted asylum were not living in camps but in small apartments. However, their interpersonal trust and mistrust attitudes are the same.

Syrian refugees’ conclusion that other Syrians are harmful and not beneficial is because they have lived through civil war—a war fought not against an external enemy but between members of the same society. It is understandable to lose their trust in each other; this can be understood as a strategy to survive in the war zone. Trusting others in the war zones is dangerous and can end up in losing one’s life. However, their mind keeps the same mentality, even after their arrival in Germany. Therefore, they have low expectations from members of their community and classify them as a source of danger. This is the case regardless of the relationship between them—parents, siblings, relatives, neighbours—because they are Syrians and Syrians are a source of danger in their minds. Therefore, this result, ‘traumatic experiences as reason of interpersonal mistrust’, corresponds with the studies in the third cluster that contains studies, which explained why refugees and asylum-seekers are mistrustful by the traumatic events that they were exposed to inside the war zones. For instance, this is addressed by [Riaño-Alcalá and Goldring \(2014\)](#), [Morina et al. \(2016\)](#), [Robinson and Segrott \(2002\)](#), and [Kijewski and Freitag \(2018\)](#), etc., as shown in the literature review section.

5.3. Syrian Refugees' Interpersonal Trust in Germans

Despite the cultural and religious differences between Syrian refugees and Germans, language barriers, and the short period of time in Germany, all interviewees reported that they trust Germans. They addressed many reasons that make them have positive expectations about Germans which lead them to see them as trustworthy. For instance, for some interviewees, Islam is reflected in German culture and the way in which people interact with each other. The following quotation indicates that:

"[. . .] I noticed that Islam is here in Germany".

Interviewer: *"how did you conclude that?"*

"Through their honesty when they deal with you, their commitment to deadlines. I did not find that in Arab countries, but I found it here in Germany. In general, I do not know many Germans, but I trust Germans more than Arabs". (Interview 18)

For some Syrian refugees, Germans, unlike Syrians, keep secrets and do not use them against the person who trusts them when the relation with them falls out for one reason or another. The following quotation reflects that:

"Through my experience, and I have German friends, so far, I haven't seen anything bad from Germans. But Arabs, and through my experience with them, I saw a lot of bad things. Let me say that my confidence in Germans is greater. Unfortunately, this is the fact; if you tell your secret to an Arabic person, he will use it against you one day. Unfortunately, we have problems with backbiting and gossip". (Interview seven)

Some of the respondents trust in Germans because Germans were brought up respecting the laws of the country. In addition, Germans know the legal consequences of breaking the laws. Therefore, dealing with them is safer than dealing with other Syrian refugees. In addition, some interviewees found themselves sharing democratic principles with Germans. The following quotation shows this:

"I trust Germans more because they were brought up in a legal environment, and they know the consequences of breaking the law. For example, the refugee, even if he knows the consequences, might underestimate them. I mean, it is possible for a refugee to attack me and disappear, and then nothing happens. But if a German wants to assault a person, he knows what the consequences are. Another thing, I feel that there are many common ideas between Germans and me, unfortunately not with my countrymen. Ideas such as democracy, respect for the other opinion even if it is offensive to you". (Interview four)

For some, honesty is the reason for trust in Germans; they think that Germans do not lie when they promise something. The following quotation reflects that:

"The good thing about Germans is that they don't lie. When a German person says something, his words are true, not false. But you know, we lie a lot". (Interview 13)

Some Syrian refugees trust Germans because they help them solve problems that they face as new people in a foreign country. This might include, for instance, helping them with learning the language or supporting their asylum application. The following quotations reflect that:

"The thing that influences me negatively is that, where I live, all people are Arab. So, I want to go to the job centre and ask them to send me into an area where there is no Arabic person. I need people who can help me in this country, so I can stand again on my feet. The key to this country is the language. If you don't have it, you don't own anything in this country. Without it, you will live on the margins of life, and in my whole life, this never happened to me". (Interview ten)

"I wasn't exposed to any problem with Germans; the situation is the opposite of that. In a room in the library, we come and sit with German people, and we talk transparently. They are very kind and accept our situation as refugees in Germany. They help us in solving many problems. There is an organisation for helping refugees, and they have an

attorney, and every person can come and speak his problems, and they will help him”.
(Interview eight)

As the previous quotations show, the case of trust in Germans among Syrian refugees, who have newly arrived in Germany, appears unique in some respects. They trust Germans because they think that Germans keep the laws of the country, keep the secrets, and they will help them to have better chances inside Germany. Therefore, the reasons for trust that have been suggested by researchers in other contexts seem to be insufficient to explain this case for traumatised Syrian refugees in Germany from war zones. In other contexts, [Fukuyama \(1995\)](#) concluded that trust is ‘cultural heritage’, but if Syrian refugees’ interpersonal mistrust exists because they were brought up in a culture where people mistrust each other, that means they should also mistrust Germans, perhaps even more so than each other since they are not familiar with Germans, who have a different nationality and culture; yet, as the previous quotations show, Syrian refugees trust Germans but not each other.

These findings suggest that trust and mistrust can be an irrational attitude, and the case of war-traumatised refugees may illustrate that. Because they are powerfully influenced by past traumatic events experienced in their home country, Syrian refugees and asylum-seekers tend to mistrust people who can be associated with the place where these traumatic experiences occurred. In contrast, they are inclined to trust people who cannot be linked to the geographical location of the traumatic experiences. Thus, the empirical results confirm what was already discussed in the section above on the theoretical background of this study.

In addition, interpersonal trust in Germans among Syrian refugees might be hard to explain by the ‘transfer theory’ in the field of migration studies since Syrian refugees were not in contact with Germans before their arrival to Germany. Hence, argument by the authors of the studies in the second cluster in the literature review, that trust and mistrust transfer from the home country of migrants to the destination countries ([Algan and Cahuc 2010](#); [Guiso et al. 2006](#); [Ketabi et al. 2012](#)), could be inapplicable in the context of forced migrants from war zones.

5.4. Importance of Trust and Trust Building among Refugees

Several studies have addressed the importance of trust relationships in general. For instance, [Chappell and Funk \(2010\)](#) studied the relationship between social capital and health status and examined social capital through social participation and trust. They found significant associations for trust and health. [Nummela et al. \(2012\)](#) demonstrated that low trust is a sensitive indicator of higher mortality risk among ageing men in Southern Finland.

[Helliwell and Huang \(2010\)](#) concluded that trust in neighbours, the police, and the workplace are strong determinants of respondents’ subjective wellbeing. [Helliwell et al. \(2016\)](#) found that living in a high-trust environment makes people more resilient to adversity, high-trust communities respond more successfully to natural disasters or economic shocks. In their study on Japanese people, [Tokuda and Inoguchi \(2008\)](#) found a strong relation between interpersonal mistrust and unhappiness.

Furthermore, trust researchers have addressed the importance of trust for economic growth and development. For instance, [Knack and Zak \(2003\)](#) showed that interpersonal trust substantially impacts economic growth, and that sufficient interpersonal trust is necessary for economic development. [Alesina and La Ferrara \(2002\)](#) found that when people trust each other, transaction costs in economic activities are reduced, large organisations function better, governments are more efficient, and financial development is faster; more trust may spur economic success. [Zhang and Ke \(2003\)](#) determined that trust affects the growth of the economy, the size of enterprise distribution, and the foreign direct investment inflow. [Algan and Cahuc \(2014\)](#) found that trust has a causal impact on economic development through its channels of influence on the financial, product, and labour markets and with a direct effect on total factor productivity and the organisation of firms.

In addition, some studies have addressed the importance of trust in social relationships. For instance, [Lewis and Weigert \(1985\)](#) concluded that trust is functionally necessary for the continuance of harmonious social relations. [Dinesen and Sønderskov \(2018\)](#) confirmed that social trust is important for the human cooperation that underpins successful societies because most humans will cooperate only if they trust others to do the same.

According to [Rothstein and Uslaner \(2005\)](#), people who believe that, in general, most other people in their society can be trusted are more inclined to have a positive view of their democratic institutions, to participate more in politics, and to be more active in civic organisations. They also give more to charity and are more tolerant toward minorities and people who are not like themselves. [Herreros and Criado \(2009\)](#) found that societies with high levels of social capital facilitate the integration of immigrants because those members with high levels of social trust will tend to have more positive attitudes towards immigration. [Hibbard \(1985\)](#) found a relationship between trusting others, having greater social ties, and health status. Individuals low in interpersonal trust have been found to be less confident, less popular with others, and lonelier ([Mitchell 1990](#)).

In contrast, [Kawachi et al. \(1999\)](#) from the United States found that levels of interpersonal mistrust were strongly correlated with both violent and property crime. Greater interpersonal mistrust was linked with higher homicide, assault, and robbery, as well as burglary.

In the field of forced migration studies, fewer researchers have addressed the importance of studying trust among refugees, trust building, and the impact of distrust on the refugee life. According to [Richlen \(2022\)](#), while there is a significant literature about trust, relatively little research has examined trust within refugee communities. This has not been sufficiently theorised in terms of its impact on participation and representation. In her study on Darfuriian refugees in Israel she found that distrust decisively influenced future Darfuriian community organizing in Israel. [Gandolfo \(2022\)](#), who studied trust and distrust in the refugee Libyan community in Malta, found that because of distrust problem Libyan refugee community was loosely structured and less inclined to participate in the events organised by the Libyan civil society organisations. [Riaño-Alcalá and Goldring \(2014\)](#) concluded that the social dynamics of trust and distrust influence everyday relations and networks among Colombian refugees in Canada. For instance, there is a significant difference between those who arrived as economic immigrants and those who came as refugees, regarding their participation in the Colombian associations in Canada. Participation in the association was confined mainly to professionals who arrived in Vancouver as economic immigrants. Although a significant number of the refugees in Vancouver had a professional degree, their participation was very limited.

Similar results were found by [Guarnizo et al. \(1999\)](#) who also studied Colombian refugees but in New York City and Los Angeles. They showed that generalised mistrust has become a major stumbling block for the political organisation of Colombians as a group.

In line with this result, I found that Syrian refugees in Germany, due to the negative impacts of interpersonal mistrust, also become unable to establish their own community within their host country even years after their arrival and despite their big numbers. Although there are around 800,000 Syrian refugees in Germany, so far, they have not established a 'Syrian community'. This is in direct contrast to other groups of migrants from Turkey and Morocco who have established their own schools, mosques, and cultural centres in Germany.

Therefore, as [Lyytinen \(2017\)](#) demonstrated, the question of trust-building among refugees can be of significant importance when refugees' integration and durable solutions are deliberated. The effect of length of time in a host country on the trust among a refugee group is not conclusive from the literature. More likely, time alone, without fundamental help, might not be enough to overcome distrust and political divisions among refugees.

Some researchers made suggestions in different contexts that policy-makers in Germany might take advantage of. For instance, [Gandolfo \(2022\)](#), for the case of Libyan

refugees in Malta, suggested a cooperation between the organisations and the refugee community leaders to solve the problem of social and political distrust.

Similarly, for the case of Colombian refugees in Canada, according to [Riaño-Alcalá and Goldring \(2014\)](#), local immigrant settlement organisations, an intercultural non-profit organisation, and the social work department of a local university facilitated a process of community mediation. The immigrant community recognised the institutions as legitimate, and Colombians responded positively to an invitation to participate in a series of workshops. The workshops highlighted distrust, silences and traumatic experiences of loss and disorientation among Colombians and concluded with a proposal to create an association (Colombiestic) dedicated to building trust, facilitating peaceful relations among its members, and supporting the formation of social networks for local incorporation.

The importance of trust for health, happiness, economic growth, and harmonious social relationships has been addressed by many researchers, as shown above. However, in the case of refugees, interpersonal trust has multiple factors of importance because of the critical situation of refugees in foreign host countries. For instance, because of the myriad differences between Syria and Germany and their lack of proficiency in the German language, Syrian refugees as newcomers need to trust each other to cooperate and benefit from exchanging experiences. In this way, they can cope with problems that emerge due to the lack of social and cultural capital. Therefore, interpersonal mistrust among Syrian refugees might lead to another problem, one the author calls 'lack of community'. This problem, as shown above, has already been noticed by some researchers, but regarding other groups of refugees who live in other countries such as Colombian refugees in Canada and the US, and Darfurian refugees in Israel.

6. Discussion

Through the example of traumatised Syrian refugees and asylum-seekers in Germany, this study shed light on how traumatised refugees from war zones established their interpersonal trust and interpersonal mistrust attitudes based on the negative impacts of war trauma on them. Studies showed that interpersonal mistrust attitudes are established on negative expectations, whilst interpersonal trust attitudes are established on positive expectations. However, I argue that trust and mistrust attitudes are not the expectations themselves, as some researchers suggested, because those expectations happen first as reasons, then trust or mistrust attitudes emerge as results.

Moreover, I argue that trust is not a social relation, as other researchers have suggested, because the social relation between the trustor and the trustee comes as a result of the trust attitude. Therefore, trust can neither be defined by the reasons (positive expectations) nor by the results (social relations), but it is an attitude situated between the reasons and the results. Furthermore, because reasons for those expectations are varied and variable and can be real or unreal, interpersonal trust and mistrust can be rational or irrational attitudes. Traumatized Syrian refugees and asylum-seekers in Germany have established irrational interpersonal mistrust attitudes towards each other and irrational interpersonal trust attitudes towards Germans based on the negative impacts of trauma.

In this study, it is argued that the reasons for interpersonal trust and mistrust attitudes among war traumatised refugees and asylum-seekers seems to be unique in comparison to the situation of native communities. Interpersonal mistrust among traumatised refugees is established on the rule of similarity—having the same socio-cultural backgrounds—and their interpersonal trust in members of the host society is based on that of dissimilarity. That is because traumatised refugees are powerfully influenced by past traumatic events experienced in their home country; therefore they tend to mistrust people who can be associated with the place where these traumatic experiences occurred. In contrast, they are inclined to trust people who cannot be linked to the geographical location of the traumatic experiences.

Interpersonal mistrust inside the civil war zones can be understood as a defence mechanism, which people tend to use to survive the war circumstances. Syrian refugees and

asylum-seekers, as they reported, have personally suffered and witnessed many traumatic experiences, such as the death of family members, living in an area sieged militarily for prolonged periods, and personal exposure to torture. Since the war in Syria is a civil war, the agents of those traumatic events mainly are Syrians. Therefore, their minds tend to classify Syrians as sources of danger as a coping strategy for surviving inside the war zone. However, their minds cannot automatically switch off the survival strategies used inside the war zones as soon as they arrive in the host country; thus, their minds work in the same manner upon arrival in Germany. Consequently, the reasons for interpersonal mistrust among Syrian refugees and asylum-seekers, as they reported, are selfishness, dishonesty, and revealing secrets. Most of it is based on the image of other Syrians in wartime, more than on real experiences that they have encountered with other Syrians in Germany.

Moreover, it is argued that Syrian refugees' interpersonal trust in Germans also exists because traumatised Syrian refugees are inclined to trust people who cannot be linked to the geographical location of the traumatic experiences. Since German people cannot be linked to the civil war and the traumatic experiences there, Syrian refugees trust them. Therefore, the examples that Syrian refugees have listed to justify their trust attitude in Germans—such as honesty, keeping the secrets, and commitment to the law—cannot be considered the real reasons. Because the Syrian refugees newly arrived in Germany usually speak little German and have not yet enough life experiences with Germans, it is still early for them to conclude that all Germans are trustworthy.

However, studies in the first strand of the literature review, such as the ones by [Eide et al. \(2020\)](#), and [Majumder et al. \(2015\)](#), have shown that refugees and asylum-seekers in different contexts mistrusted institutions in their host countries. Therefore, the result of this study opens new horizons for future studies to explore the question of whether Syrian refugees have institutional trust or not, as is the case for refugees in other Western countries. Another question of interest for further research is what the reasons for institutional trust or mistrust of Syrian refugees in Germany are, and what similarities and differences to the case of Syrian refugees' interpersonal trust in Germans exist.

Furthermore, because the reasons for interpersonal mistrust among traumatised refugees and their interpersonal trust in their hosts seems to be unique in comparison with natives, most of the reasons for those phenomena, as suggested by researchers in other fields, could be inapplicable in the case of traumatised refugees of war zones. For instance, familiarity, or having the same race and nationality, have been suggested by some researchers as reasons for trust. However, in the case of traumatised Syrian refugees, they are reasons for interpersonal mistrust. Likewise, interpersonal mistrust among traumatised refugees and the interpersonal trust in Germans might not be explained completely by the "transfer theory" which sets that trust and mistrust are transferred from the origin countries of migrants to the destination countries. Because Syrian refugees were not in contact with Germans before the war, we cannot consider their trust in Germans as transferred from Syria to Germany. However, we do not have enough evidence to prove that interpersonal mistrust among Syrians existed before the time of the civil war and whether it was at the same level or escalated by the circumstances of the war.

7. Conclusions

This study draws attention to several decisive cases. First, the traumatic war experiences to which refugees have been personally exposed or have witnessed in their home countries have severe and long-lasting impacts on their lives in their destination countries even years after their arrival. Second, it is the rules of similarity and dissimilarity that determine the interpersonal mistrust among traumatised refugees and their interpersonal trust in their hosts. This is based on the impact of war trauma on their mind, as shown above.

Third, the results of this study show the need for more social and psychological support targeting trust-building among refugees who have fled war zones to achieve a better integration of them. Furthermore, it is important to understand refugees in a different way than migrants are understood. Thus, putting war-traumatised refugees and

asylum-seekers together upon their arrival or linking them to each other might not make their lives easier in the host countries because they mistrust each other. Fourth, traumatised refugees' interpersonal trust in their hosts, which is based on the rule of dissimilarity with them, can be seen as a good potential that might facilitate their integration into the host society, for instance, by establishing friendship relations with members of the host society and adapting to the laws and the culture of the host country, unless the host society itself hinders that through different means such as complex and bureaucratic administration systems and negative stereotype images of refugees. This was shown, for instance, in the second strand of the literature in T. Hynes (2003) and Barbara Harrell-Bond (2002).

8. Limitation

This study focuses on refugees from the civil war zone in Syria, and it does not include other groups of forced migrants, such as people who fled their countries for economic reasons. This study showed that interpersonal mistrust among traumatised Syrian refugees and asylum-seekers and interpersonal trust in Germans exist because Syrians are powerfully influenced by the past traumatic experiences in their home country. Hence, the interpersonal mistrust and trust towards other groups of forced migrants, such as those who flee their countries for economic or environmental reasons, might be different.

Moreover, this study is about Syrian refugees who arrived in Germany no longer than three years ago. Therefore, since psychological distress and PTSD symptomology decrease over time (Stuart and Nowosad 2020), Syrian refugees' and asylum-seekers' interpersonal mistrust might decrease after they spend more time in Germany and the effects of trauma gradually recede. Furthermore, their trust in Germans might decrease the longer they stay in Germany and have more life experiences with Germans, speak better German, and face difficulties in integration, such as finding a job or being exposed to discrimination and racism. Additionally, the asylum procedure in Germany might exacerbate their psychological situation and influence their attitude towards Germans, particularly due to the uncertainty that results from the unclear path towards permanent residency and German citizenship.

Finally, the study includes only male Syrian adult refugees; the situation regarding those two phenomena within other groups of refugees such as females, older age refugees, and minors may well be different.

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