

**A Qualitative Study of Acculturation and Intimate
Relationships Among Refugee Women in Switzerland**

By

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ABSTRACT

In mid-2024, there were approximately 122.6 million forcibly displaced individuals worldwide (UNHCR, 2024). Of these, 192,507 reside in Switzerland, half of whom are women (Macrotrends, 2023). While extant literature has explored the challenges faced by refugee women, understanding of post-migration experiences related to intimate relationships and acculturation remains limited. This study addresses this gap using interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) to capture the emotional, social and psychological aspects of participants' post-migration experiences. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 12 refugee women, all in intimate relationships, aged 25-45 years, who migrated to Switzerland from Pakistan, Iraq, Cuba, Colombia, Kurdistan and Turkey. Berry's (1997) acculturation framework and Bornstein's (2017) specificity principle guided the data analysis, identifying four experiential themes: 'Pathways of Acculturation,' 'Shadow of Bias,' 'Loss in a New Land,' and 'Metamorphosis of Relationships'. Findings revealed participants' experienced racism, systemic barriers, loss, resilience, gendered and cultural challenges, and changes in intimate relationships, which shaped the participants process of acculturation. Acculturation strategies were grouped by pre-migration culture, and intimate relationships were often intertwined with acculturation, as some couples adapted together while others experienced tension due to changing gender and cultural norms. Racism contributed to mistrust, anxiety and social withdrawal, leading to isolation and cultural preservation. This research introduces transformative acculturation (TA) as a novel addition to existing acculturation frameworks, based on the post-migration changes of participants affected by gender-based violence (GBV). TA offers a comprehensive understanding of acculturation, addressing the limitations of existing frameworks by

positing TA as a process of cultural, identity, gender and relationship transformation, driven by the pursuit of safety and agency for refugee women impacted by GBV. Furthermore, the importance of interventions and policies guided by transformative acculturation is emphasised, highlighting culturally responsive support that prioritises safety post-migration. Additionally, targeted interventions to support refugee women's intimate relationships post-migration is addressed.

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Abbreviations

AIA: Anlaufstelle Integration Aargau (Integration Aargau Information Centre)

CERD: International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial
Discrimination

CHF: Swiss Franc

COVID-19: Coronavirus Disease 2019

DE: German (language)

DV: Domestic Violence

DP: Displaced Persons

ECRE: European Council on Refugees and Exiles

EN: English (language)

EFTA: European Free Trade Association

EU: European Union

FDP: Forcibly Displaced Persons

FRB: Federal Commission against Racism

GDPR: General Data Protection Regulation

GBV: Gender-Based Violence

GETs: Group Experiential Themes

GBP: British Pound

IDP: Internally Displaced Person

IOM: International Organisation for Migration

IPA: Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

IPV: Intimate Partner Violence

MRAs: Migrants, Refugees and Asylum seekers

NGO: Non-Governmental Organisation

PETs: Personal Experiential Themes

PTSD: Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

RSD: Refugee Status Determination

SEM: Secrétariat d'Etat aux migrations (Swiss Department for Migration)

SGBV: Sexual and gender-based violence

SP: Bornstein's (2017) Specificity Principle

TPS: Temporary Protected Status

UCLAN: University of Central Lancashire

UN: United Nations

UNHCR: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

WGPAD: UN Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent

WHO: World Health Organisation

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"Refugees are people who have been robbed of their past and are busy dreaming of a future. All of us need to respond to them with a sense of urgency and compassion."

Ban Ki-Moon

Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Introduction to Chapter One

This chapter provides an overview of forced displacement within the current global context including the increase in the number of refugees and the underlying causes driving this rapid growth (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], 2024). The common global challenges faced by refugee women is explored, and the key terminology that is used throughout this research is outlined. The reason for the selection of Switzerland as the location for this research is explained, and the current Swiss societal and political environment is explored (Lutz & Lavenex, 2024; Secrétariat d'Etat aux migrations [SEM], 2023). An overview of the identified gaps in the literature, particularly the limited research on the lived experiences of refugee women in Switzerland and how pre-migration norms and systemic barriers can shape the process of acculturation and intimate relationships for refugee women is also outlined (Alessi, 2023; Lutz & Lavenex, 2024). The aims of this research and the research questions are provided, along with an overview of the thesis structure and the significance of this research and its contributions to extant literature.

1.2 Forced Displacement: Global Perspective and Terminology

The UNHCR, along with other organisations including the World Bank, the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) and Amnesty International, have continued to highlight the increase in forced displacement from 2021 to 2024 (Amnesty International, 2022; Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre [IDMC], 2023; IOM, 2023; UNHCR, 2024; World Bank, 2023). Approximately 122.6 million individuals globally are currently forcibly displaced (UNHCR, 2024). The number of forcibly displaced people has nearly doubled over the last decade increasing from approximately 59.5 million at the end of 2014

(UNHCR, 2015) to 108.4 million at the end of 2022 (UNHCR, 2023). This number continued to increase by 14 million forcibly displaced persons (FDPs) to 122.6 million by mid-2024 (UNHCR, 2024). This increase has been attributed to factors such as war, persecution, conflict, violence, human rights violations, environmental changes, food shortages, water scarcity and economic downturns (Berchin et al., 2017; Gemenne et al., 2021; UNHCR, 2024). Ongoing conflicts in the Ukraine, Afghanistan, the Middle East, South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Mali and Somalia have continued to increase the numbers of FDPs (UNHCR, 2023; 2024). With one out of every sixty-seven individuals being forcibly displaced worldwide and eighty-seven per cent of FDPs seeking shelter in low- to middle-income nations (UNHCR, 2024), this has impacted global demographics and placed forced migration at the forefront of international discussions (Khanna, 2021; Sema-Mencutek et al., 2022; UNHCR, 2023).

To understand global and regional migration, the terminology used to describe FDPs needs to be clear and precise to avoid any ambiguity. FDPs encompass several subsets groups of individuals, including refugees, internally displaced persons (IDPs), asylum-seekers, returnees and stateless individuals, all of whom fall under the mandate of the UNHCR (2023). Refugees are defined as individuals who have crossed an international border to escape persecution, conflict or violence and are unable or unwilling to return to their home country due to well-founded fears of harm from racial, religious, national or political persecution (UNHCR, 1951; 2023). Additionally, they have been granted legal protection in a host nation (UNHCR, 1951). Internally displaced people (IDPs) are people who have been forced to flee their homes due to war or conflict but remain within their country-of-origin borders (UNHCR, 2022). Asylum-seekers are people who have left their

country of origin and who are in the process of seeking international protection in a host country while awaiting the decision on their status as a refugee (UNHCR, 2022). Stateless individuals are not recognised as citizens of any nation or country but still fall under the concern of the UNHCR (1954) and returnees are FDPs, who voluntarily return to their country of origin when they are able to for example when conditions have improved (UNHCR, 2023). In this thesis, the focus is on refugees, with the term ‘refugee’ specifically referring to individuals who have been recognised under the criteria set out in the 1951 United Nations Convention for Refugees and recognised by the Swiss government and granted refugees status in accordance with their legal framework (Swiss Federal Assembly, 1999).

1.3 Host Countries and the Importance of Acculturation for Refugees

A host country, as defined by international law under the 1951 Refugee Convention, is any country that provides asylum and protection to refugees (UNHCR, 1951). As forced migration continues to increase, host countries continue to face increasing challenges (IDMC, 2023; UNHCR, 2024; World Bank, 2023). By June 2024, the global refugee population had increased by seven per cent from 2023 to reach approximately 43.4 million and those numbers are expected to continue to grow (UNHCR, 2024). Notably, as of June 2024, low and middle-income countries hosted approximately 71 per cent of the global refugee population. By the end of 2022, Europe (including Turkey) hosted over one-third (36 per cent) of the world’s refugee population, an increase from seven million in 2021 to 13 million in 2022. In comparison, Africa hosted approximately 26 per cent, Asia and the Pacific 16 per cent and the Americas 13 per cent (UNHCR, 2024). From a global perspective, Turkey, Iran, Colombia, Germany and Pakistan remain the world’s leading host

countries, with Turkey currently accommodating approximately 3.3 million refugees (UNHCR, 2024).

The Refugee Convention provides international standards for all host countries and includes guidance for their government, their social structures along with their roles and responsibilities (UNHCR, 2018). Over the last few decades, the immigration landscape in Western Europe has changed due to its long history however individual countries adopt different approaches to migration and immigration (Berry & Sam, 2013; Pemberton & Phillimore, 2018). While the European Union (EU) seeks to coordinate national immigration policies across the EU, the approach to immigration can vary significantly by each EU member state (European Court of Auditors, 2023). These differences have shaped the process of acculturation for FDPs across the EU. In 2018, the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) built on this foundation by updating and emphasising the continued importance of host countries in international cooperation and shared responsibility (UNHCR, 2023). The GCR expanded the host countries' obligations to include the integration of refugees into the respective host country's governmental systems including their healthcare, education, employment and other national systems. Also, one of the GCR goals was to guarantee that the host countries get the right support from the international community to manage these responsibilities (UNHCR, 2023). This cooperative approach was designed to create a sustainable solution and to reduce the burden on the host country (UNHCR, 2023).

However, recent research shows that international migration governance in the EU has become increasingly fragmented and securitised, particularly in response to the recent increase in FDPs and terrorism (IDMC, 2023). This fragmentation is driven by inconsistent national policies, the securitisation of international borders and defensive measures such as

refugee detention and deportation (Deleixhe et al., 2019; Khanna, 2021; Sema-Mencutek et al., 2022). Germany, alongside several other European countries, has recently intensified its border control with its Schengen zone neighbours, including Switzerland, Austria, the Czech Republic and Poland. Such increased securitisation (Deleixhe et al., 2019) continues to highlight the importance of understanding how refugees experience their host countries to fully understand the challenges they can encounter from unreceptive host countries, restrictive policies and systemic barriers and the impact on integration.

Acculturation is a process of cultural change resulting from contact between distinct cultures, leading to changes in an individual's behaviours, values and attitudes (Acevedo-Garcia, 2004; Berry, 1997). It is shaped by numerous factors, including migration policies and host-country attitudes, yet no single theory fully captures its complexity (Deslandes et al., 2024). According to Berry (1997), who proposed in the theoretical framework on acculturation, individuals adopt one of four key acculturation strategies: integration, assimilation, separation, or marginalisation. These strategies shape how individuals adapt to their host environment. Researchers have suggested that the acculturation strategies refugees adopt can impact their well-being, mental health, adaptation and economic integration post-migration (Berry, 2005; Kämmer & Albert, 2023; Kuo, 2014; Mähönen & Jasinskaja-Lahti, 2013). For example, one UK-based study of 138 refugees in England found that factors shaping acculturation operate at both a group and an individual level. Group-level factors included host society attitudes and governmental policies, while individual-level factors encompassed personal experiences, resources and motivation (Phillimore, 2011). In line with this perspective, the approach of the EU toward migration has been to promote acculturation as a bidirectional process where the adjustment of both the host society and the

migrants is recognised as important for successful integration (Sam & Berry, 2016; Titzmann & Jugert, 2024). While not a member of the EU, Switzerland is also bound by bilateral agreements that align with the EU's immigration and integration policies (UNHCR, 2023).

Integration is important for refugees as it supports their well-being and long-term adaptation and successful integration of refugees into their host country can contribute positively to the social and economic wellbeing of the host countries (European Commission, 2024; OECD, 2022; UNHCR, 2023). Berry (1997) defines integration as adopting both the new cultural norms of the host country and retaining elements from the pre-migration culture. As the EU host nations grapple with rising refugee numbers, there is a rising need for policies that can support the integration of refugees in their respective host nation (European Commission, 2024; UNHCR, 2023). Research indicates that countries that support refugees in becoming self-reliant through initiatives such as social support, available mental health resources and employment opportunities have better outcomes in terms of both long- and short-term integration (UNDP, 2023; UNHCR, 2023). Like acculturation, integration is considered to be a two-way process, one that involves both the refugees and their adaption to the host country and the host country's reception of the refugees (IOM, 2023). Similarly, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) emphasised the importance of the host country in providing early intervention and support to help refugees to integrate into the local job market and community (OECD, 2022). The UNHCR (2022) and The Migration Policy Institute have both emphasised the importance of refugees in learning the local language, finding employment and accessing community networks to promote integration (Migration Policy Institute, 2023; UNHCR, 2022).

Furthermore, the EU Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion (2021-2027) is designed to encourage all of its member states to help improve refugees' integration by promoting skill development and social inclusion (European Commission, 2020). As such research that improves the understanding of acculturation for refugees is increasingly important particularly as the global refugee population continues to increase.

1.4 Refugee Women, Gender, Culture and Acculturation

Gender can play a role in shaping the experiences of refugees, with adult women and girls making up half of the global refugee population (UNHCR, 2022; UN Women, 2023). Recent data shows that one in five refugee women are exposed to violence, both pre- and post-migration, which can include sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) (UNHCR, 2022; UN Women, 2023). While male refugees face their own challenges, including labour market exclusion or conflict zone risk in wartimes, refugee women often experience a higher prevalence of SGBV than men, along with cultural, gender and familial barriers that can restrict their access to healthcare and education (IOM, 2023; UNHCR, 2023). Furthermore, being a female refugee leads to an increase in the risk of marginalisation and coercive control both pre-and post-migration, which can be further compounded by pre-migration cultural norms leading to disempowerment, restricted access to support services, economic difficulties and mental health problems (Pittaway, 2003; Smith, 2009; UNHCR, 2022; WHO, 2018; Young et al., 2015). Researchers have also indicated that refugee women can encounter mental health problems along with cultural and societal obstacles post-migration, which are often related to their pre-migration cultural and gender norms (Kirmayer et al., 2011; Kiselev et al., 2020). Pre-migration culture and gendered norms can be continued in the post-migration host country, which can hinder the integration process for some refugee

women as their pre-migration cultural norms can lead to their family or social circles to restrict their access to post-migration social and economic opportunities (Kirmayer et al., 2011; Kiselev et al., 2020; Shishehgar et al., 2017).

1.5 Research Gaps, Switzerland and Refugee Women

Switzerland, like the rest of Europe, has experienced an increase in the number of refugees. In 2023, the total refugee population in Switzerland was 192,507 refugees, which was a five-and-a-half per cent increase from 2022, when numbers of refugees were 182,474 (Macrotrends, 2024). Additionally, approximately 30,000 more asylum applications were registered in Switzerland in 2024, with numbers projected to remain high in 2025 (UNHCR, 2024). The primary countries of origin for refugee applications in Switzerland come from Afghanistan, Syria, Turkey and Ukraine (SEM, 2024; UNHCR, 2024).

Historically, Switzerland has focused on recruiting temporary labour through its guest worker (“Gastarbeiter”) programs, which limited workers to a seasonal stay only, and denied the right to bring their families to Switzerland with whilst working. The Gastarbeiter programme was designed to meet the country’s economic needs by providing short-term visas rather than focusing on long-term integration (Akgündüz, 2012; Mexi et al., 2021; Switzerland Federal Archives, 2021). Today, Switzerland’s immigration policies are decentralised across its 26 cantons. While the Swiss Foreign Nationals and Integration Act (2008) sets out general guidelines and policies for the cantons to follow for the integration of refugees, including language proficiency tests, integration assessments, criminal record checks, length of residency checks and cultural knowledge tests, their rigour and requirements can vary between the cantons (Lutz & Lavenex, 2024; Mexi et al., 2021; SEM, 2023). Consequently, local authorities have the discretion to apply their own criteria, which

has resulted in inconsistencies in the migration process across Switzerland and can contribute to prolonged waiting periods and uncertainty for refugees (Bader & Probst, 2018). Additionally, non-European migrants, particularly those from regions such as Asia and Africa, face stricter requirements for residency and citizenship in Switzerland than nationals from the EU or the European Free Trade Association (EFTA), due to Switzerland's bilateral agreements (Lutz & Lavenex, 2024; Mexi et al., 2021; Schindall, 2009). Moreover, marginalisation and racism in Switzerland are more commonly directed toward non-European's which means that these people can face higher levels of discrimination and exclusion than Europeans (Lutz & Lavenex, 2024; SEM, 2023).

Given these systemic challenges in Switzerland, it is important to explore how the increasing number of refugees in Switzerland and its inconsistent and complex migration system (Lutz & Lavenex, 2024) could affect the post-migration lives of refugee women. Refugee women can face obstacles based on their gender, their culture and their status (UNHCR, 2024) shaping their post-migration experiences in Switzerland (Lutz & Lavenex, 2024; Mexi et al., 2021). While some researchers have explored the barriers that refugees can face in Switzerland which include racism, prolonged waiting periods and unequal access to support services (Bader & Probst, 2018; Drescher et al., 2021; Kiselev et al., 2020; Lutz & Lavenex, 2024; Ossipow, 2019), these studies have predominantly focused on the general refugee population. While that is important a generalised focus can mean that the gender-specific challenges such as marginalisation, social and political barriers and gender-based violence (GBV) may be overlooked (Phillimore, 2011; Pittaway & Bartolomei, 2003; Shishehgar et al., 2017). Given that there is integration and acculturation is considered to be bidirectional, the attitudes and policies of a host country can also shape how refugees

acculturate (Berry, 1997; Deslandes et al., 2024). Therefore, this research outlined in the thesis focuses on the gender-specific barriers that are often overlooked in studies on the general refugee population.

Secondly, there is scarce research on refugee women and their process of acculturation in the Swiss post-migration environment. Switzerland's decentralised migration policies and stricter residency requirements for non-European migrants can create challenges for refugees. While researchers have examined issues such as racism and marginalisation (Kiselev et al., 2020; Ossipow, 2019), they have not examined how these issues can specifically shape the acculturation strategies of refugee women in Switzerland. Switzerland's post-migration environment creates challenges for refugee women due to its decentralised policies, strict residency requirements, and issues such as spatial segregation and temporary permits (Alessi, 2023). However there remains a lack of research on gender and the intersecting identities of refugee women (Savaş & Dutt, 2023), or how refugee women interpret and make sense of their challenges within the Swiss social, cultural and political environment. These structural challenges can complicate the integration and acculturation of refugee women. Therefore, how post-migration social and structural factors in Switzerland can shape the acculturation experiences of refugee women will be explored in this current research.

The third gap in the existing literature is the need for more research on how intersectionality shapes the post-migration experiences of refugee women, particularly in relation to their intimate relationships, acculturation and well-being. While intersectionality is recognised as a factor that can impact refugee women (Freedman et al., 2017;avaş & Dutt, 2023; Triputra et al., 2021), there is a gap in the understanding of how intersecting

identities, such as gender, status (Alessi, 2023), and pre-migration cultural norms can impact refugee women's lived experiences. The intersecting identities and compounded challenges that refugee women can experience post-migration will also be explored in this present research.

The fourth gap is the scarcity of research on the pre-migration cultural and gender norms of refugee women and how these can shape refugee women's intimate relationships and process of acculturation. While the third gap focuses on how intersectionality can shape post-migration challenges, this gap specifically examines how the pre-migration cultural and gender norms can shape the process of acculturation for refugee women post-migration. Research in Australia (Pittaway & Bartolomei, 2003; Taheri et al., 2024) and Jordan (Lokot, 2023) has explored how pre-migration gender norms can impact the post-migration experiences of refugee women, but this sort of research is lacking in Switzerland (Alessi, 2023). Addressing this gap is important for increasing the understanding of how refugee women interpret and adapt to the post-migration changes they experience in Switzerland.

The fifth gap stems from the need to increase the understanding of the post-migration changes in the intimate relationships of refugee women in Switzerland. Intimate relationships play an important role in the post-migration life of refugee women (Zbeidy, 2020). Furthermore, differences in cultural expectations and gender norms between pre- and post-migration cultures can lead to conflict and tension in intimate relationships (Al-Natour et al., 2019; Rapaport & Doucerain, 2021; Zbeidy, 2020). While some research has explored how the intimate relationships of refugee women are shaped by post-migration cultural changes (Krause et al., 2015; Njie-Carr et al., 2021), none of this research has been done in Switzerland. For example, research in Jordan found that shifts in gender roles and economic

independence post-migration created tensions in intimate relationships, sometimes leading to increased conflict or relationship dissolution (Al-Natour et al., 2019). Additionally, research has highlighted the impact of GBV on refugee women, which can lead to trauma, mental health challenges and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Horn et al., 2014; Krause et al., 2015; Njie-Carr et al., 2021; Pérez-Vázquez & Bonilla-Campos, 2023; Sullivan et al., 2021; Taheri et al., 2024). However, little is known about how GBV experiences shape the intimate relationships of refugee women in Switzerland. The present study is important for addressing this gap to provide and develop post-migration supportive interventions and policies that can be tailored to the needs of refugee women, particularly those affected by GBV.

The sixth gap is the limited qualitative research on refugee women and their post-migration experiences in Switzerland. Andronic and Constantin (2024) emphasised the need for both quantitative and qualitative methods in acculturation research and highlighted the importance of integrating the subjective experiences of participants into research on acculturation (Andronic & Constantin, 2024). While qualitative research has addressed and post-migration challenges and employment barriers refugee women can face, this research has been conducted outside Switzerland (Al-Natour et al., 2021; Ala Uddin, 2021; Njie-Carr et al., 2021; Walther et al., 2021). Schwarz and Pfammatter (2024) recently explored the importance of acculturation for the well-being of second-generation immigrants in Switzerland. However, they did not focus on refugees, and they used a quantitative approach (Schwarz & Pfammatter, 2024). To address this gap, a qualitative approach will be used in this present research to explore the lived experiences of refugee women in Switzerland.

The seventh gap concerns the limitations of the current acculturation frameworks in capturing the acculturation experiences of refugee women. Berry's (1997) acculturation framework is foundational in acculturation research (Abu-Rayya et al., 2023; Berry, 1997). However, it has been critiqued for its simplicity and its inability to capture the complexities of acculturation in marginalised populations (Deslandes et al., 2024; Rudmin, 2003; Rudmin et al., 2017). This critique can extend to refugee women, whose experiences of acculturation can be complex due to factors like GBV, pre-migration trauma, cultural and gendered norms and intersectionality (Deslandes et al., 2024; Van der Zee & Van Oudenhoven, 2022). However, despite these criticisms, Berry's (1997) framework of acculturation continues to contribute significantly to acculturation research due to its structured approach. Bornstein's (2017) specificity principle enhances Berry's (1997) acculturation framework by highlighting the importance of individual, contextual, and cultural factors as integral components of the acculturation process. While Berry's (1997) framework and Bornstein's (2017) specificity principle both provide a structured approach to understand acculturation, they do not capture the nuanced ways in which refugee women in Switzerland manage their experiences of acculturation. This research draws on Berry's (1997) acculturation framework and Bornstein's (2017) specificity principle to analyse the acculturation experience of refugee women while also critically examining their limitations in capturing the complexities of acculturation in this population.

Given the gaps in existing literature, this research will help inform targeted interventions, such as culturally sensitive mental health services and support programs for refugee women exposed to GBV, and the development of immigration policies that can enhance the process of acculturation for refugee women. As such, this research will address

these gaps by utilising Interpretive Phenomenological analysis to explore how refugee women interpret and make sense of their lived experiences in Switzerland. Using IPA's focus on phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography, the lived experiences of the participants will be analysed, including their acculturation strategies, and how their intimate relationships are shaped post-migration. By integrating their subjective experiences, the gaps in our understanding of gender-specific barriers, intimate relationships, acculturation, intersectionality and pre-migration culture will be addressed.

1.6 Study Aims and Research Questions

The first objective of this research is to develop an understanding of the post-migration lived experiences of refugee women in Switzerland. This will be achieved by analysing women's lived experiences, meaning-making, challenges and motivations for adaptation, resilience, and navigating post-migration opportunities and barriers post-migration. The aim is to generate an understanding of how the refugee women perceived their post-migration lived experiences and further understand what facilitated, hindered, challenged or changed their post-migration experiences. This will involve exploring participants' narratives to identify new perspectives or patterns emerging from their lived experiences post-migration. This approach will facilitate openness to any themes that naturally emerge from the data (Smith, 2023).

The second objective of the study is to explore the post-migration experiences and any post-migration changes within their intimate relationships of refugee women. Several researchers have indicated that forced migration can lead to changes in a couples cultural and gender norms, which can at times increase the conflict in intimate relationships (Higginbottom, 2013; Khawaja, 2008; Stewart, 2014). Therefore, the focus will be on their

emotions, feelings and how they made sense of their intimate relationships post-migration. The use of a qualitative approach and semi-structured interviews will enable in-depth explorations of participants' post-migration lived experiences.

Given the exploratory nature of these research questions, IPA was chosen as the methodological approach. IPA is well suited to exploring how individuals make sense of their personal and social experiences (Smith et al., 2009). The idiographic approach of IPA enables an in-depth investigation into the lived experience of each participant, which is relevant for understanding the complexity of the lived experience acculturation of the refugee women in this research and meanings that they assign to their experiences.

The research aimed to answer the following two research questions:

1. How do refugee women experience acculturation during their post-migration lives in Switzerland?
2. How do refugee women in Switzerland experience their intimate relationships within the context of their post-migration lives in Switzerland?

1.7 Thesis Structure

Chapters Two to Five provide an overview of the literature. In Chapter two acculturation, theoretical frameworks, and challenges for refugees are detailed. This chapter starts with a definition of acculturation, an exploration of how it occurs (both consciously and subconsciously) and its importance, particularly for refugees. Acculturation is reviewed within the context of a number of different theoretical frameworks, including Berry's (1997) bi-dimensional framework and Bornstein's (2017) specificity principle. The potential barriers to acculturation including racism, discrimination, and social exclusion for refugees are also discussed. This is then followed by an exploration of the emotional and

psychological dimensions of acculturation and how culture and gender, can play a role in shaping the outcomes of acculturation.

In Chapter Three, Gender, Intimate Relationships, Violence and Acculturation are discussed. This chapter outlines the existing literature on the challenges refugee women face due to gender and culture. This includes an exploration of how family dynamics can affect refugee women's lives and choices post-migration, SGBV, GBV and intimate partner violence (IPV). The impact of forced migration on the intimate relationships of refugee women is then explored. The chapter finishes with an overview of the literature and the gaps in qualitative literature on refugee women, gender, GBV and their intimate relationships.

Chapter Four examines Switzerland as a host country, focusing on discrimination and racism within its structural, political and cultural context. This chapter reflects on Switzerland as a host country and the potential current challenges that refugees can encounter in this country. Existing literature on Switzerland is explored, including literature on the prevalence of marginalization, and discrimination in Switzerland. The chapter finally closes with looking into the issues of intersectionality and the gaps in existing literature on refugee women in Switzerland.

Chapter Five outlines the chosen methodological approach, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), including the rationale for its selection, its roots in phenomenological epistemology, and its strength in capturing the lived experiences of refugee women (Smith & Eatough, 2007). The chapter explores IPA's focus on interpretivism, phenomenology and idiography (Smith, 2023) and how these facilitate an in-depth examination of participants' narratives are discussed. Additionally, the ways in which

Berry's (1997) acculturation framework and Bornstein's (2017) specificity principle are used to support analysis and interpretation of the interviews is outlined.

Chapter Six outlines the method including the detailed protocol for participant selection and recruitment, the interview protocol, sample size, and how the method aligns with the principles of IPA. The ethical procedures, data collection, data analysis and analytical steps are also described.

Chapters Seven, Eight, Nine and Ten outline the findings thematically. Chapters Seven, Eight, Nine, and Ten outline the findings thematically, focusing on the following themes: 'Pathways of Acculturation,' 'The Shadows of Bias,' 'Loss in a New Land,' and 'Metamorphosis of Relationships.'

Chapter Seven: Pathways of Acculturation. This chapter which focuses on participants' post-migration acculturation experiences and includes detailed accounts of participants' acculturation strategies and the factors that shaped their choices. The chapter is structured around four sub-themes: 'Transformative Acculturation: Pathways to Safety, Autonomy and Agency'; 'A Love Left Behind: Resistance and Separation of Kurdish Women in Switzerland'; 'Cultural Crafting and Navigation Among South American Participants'; and 'Confronting Cultural Dissonance'.

Chapter Eight: The Shadows of Bias. This chapter discusses participants' experiences of racism and discrimination. It examines how racism and fear exacerbated the feelings of alienation and the emotional reactions of the participants. This chapter is organised into three subthemes: 'Lived Experiences of Racism' 'Emotional Reactions to Racism', and 'Behavioural Adaptions to Racism'.

Chapter Nine: Loss in a New Land. This chapter describes how participants experienced loss post-migration, including loss of choice and loss of family and homeland. The chapter is structured around two sub-themes: ‘Loss of Choices: From Agency to Powerlessness’; and ‘The Cost of Leaving: Loss and Grief of Homeland and Family’.

Chapter Ten: Metamorphosis of Relationships. This chapter discusses the changes in the participants intimate relationships post-migration. This subtheme includes the ending of intimate relationships due to the experiences of GBV, along with how relationships improved due to forced migration. Furthermore, the impact of uncertainty on intimate relationships post-migration is also explored, along with how the post-migration unmet expectations negatively impacted intimate relationships. The chapter is structured around four sub-themes: ‘Finding Freedom and Embracing Escape’ Loves Evolution: Building Back Better’ ‘Turbulent Horizons: Uncharted Futures and Intimate Relationships,’ and ‘Crossroads of Love and Discontent: Marital Narratives in Changing Cultures’.

Chapter 11: Discussion, Key Findings and Implications. This chapter is structured into several key sections and includes a synthesis of the key findings. It begins with a summary of findings, highlighting participants’ acculturation strategies and exploring the factors that shaped their post-migration experiences. This chapter also discusses the acculturation framework (Berry, 1997), the Specificity Principle (Bornstein, 2017), Swiss societal constructs, and the impact of loss and racism, all in relation to the participants’ lived experiences. Transformative Acculturation is introduced as a new concept, distinct from Berry’s (1997) acculturation framework, to explain the acculturation experiences of refugee women escaping GBV. This concept is then compared with the acculturation model of Berry (1997) and the Specificity principle of Bornstein (2017). Furthermore, this chapter explores

cultural preservation, bicultural integration, resilience, loss and coping strategies, along with challenges such as cultural dissonance in the acculturation process. Additionally, this chapter examines how economic pressures, cultural expectations, and visa uncertainty shaped the post-migration intimate relationships of the participants. It also highlights how acculturation is not solely an individual process but can extend to and be shaped within intimate relationships. This chapter also includes the conclusion of the thesis and covers the overall findings of this research providing a summary of how this research contributes to extant literature and knowledge concerning the process of acculturation, integration and intimate relationships of refugee women in Switzerland. The chapter ends by outlining the contributions of the research, its strengths and limitations of the research and implications for policy and practice and future research.

1.8 Significance of the Study

This research is significant and timely, given the global increase in forced migration, with over 122 million forcibly displaced individuals worldwide (UNHCR, 2024). The need for research that enhances the understanding of the lived experiences of refugee women in their host countries is important. This research involves an in-depth exploration of the post-migration experiences of refugee women in Switzerland which focuses on their meaning-making, process of acculturation, and intimate relationships. Four Group Experiential Themes (GETs) were identified, capturing participants' acculturation processes, shifts in intimate relationships, and their experiences of cultural norms, systemic barriers, loss, and GBV in Switzerland.

A key contribution of this study is the introduction of transformative acculturation (TA), which expands upon Berry's (1997) acculturation framework and Bornstein's (2017)

specificity principle. TA reflects the intentional, acculturative and agency-driven strategies of the participants who were exposed to GBV and captures how they reshaped their identities and lives post-migration. Through TA, participants described achieving feelings of safety, autonomy and agency, as they explained how they selectively adopted aspects of Swiss culture that aligned with their needs and goals. TA addresses a gap in acculturation by foregrounding the role of trauma, agency and safety in the process of acculturation particularly for women exposed to GBV.

The findings also highlight the shared acculturation patterns among participants from similar pre-migration cultures, reflecting how their cultural backgrounds shaped their process of acculturation in the Swiss post-migration environment. Furthermore, this study contributes to understanding how various forms of loss, including loss of choice, and loss of family and culture, can intersect with the process of acculturation. By capturing the participants' lived experiences, along with their emotional challenges brought about by their experiences of loss this finding captures the nuanced ways loss can shape the lived experiences and acculturation process of refugee women.

This research also provides insights into how racism impacted the acculturation processes and well-being of refugee women. Participants described experiences of racism in Switzerland that evoked fear, anger, shame, withdrawal and isolation, aligning with existing literature on the negative mental health effects of racism, which includes depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress (Bendjo et al., 2019; Kämmer et al., 2023). To mitigate these effects, participants described adopting protective strategies, including self-censorship, social withdrawal, and cultural preservation. Additionally, the findings highlight the interesting challenges arising from racism, GBV, gender, ethnicity and refugee status, which

participants described as barriers to their process of acculturation and contributors to their emotional distress. While previous research has established the negative psychological effects of racism on refugees (Bendjo et al., 2019; Kämmer et al., 2023), this study extends these findings within the Swiss context by demonstrating how participants' acculturation processes were shaped by racism along with the intersectionality of experiences of GBV, pre-migration culture, and refugee status. The need for acculturation models that account for trauma, including GBV to better help and support the lived experiences of refugee women is highlighted (Triputra et al., 2021).

The study demonstrates how changing gender norms and cultural expectations in Switzerland were reflected in the participants' intimate relationships. Participants described egalitarian changes that improved or harmed their intimate relationships, demonstrating that their process of acculturation extended beyond their individual experiences and shaped their intimate relationships. Gaps in understanding gender-specific experiences and intimate relationships were addressed, such as how dissatisfaction in intimate relationships arose when participants' husbands could not fulfil pre-migration cultural roles. These findings suggest that acculturation should be understood not only as an individual process but also as one that can impact and is often negotiated within the intimate relationships. The study highlights the need for gender-sensitive support frameworks that consider the impact of economic constraints, changing cultural and gender norms and refugee status uncertainty on intimate relationship post-migration.

Methodologically, the use of IPA enabled a detailed exploration of participants' lived experiences, capturing their meaning-making and allowing themes to emerge from their narratives and experiences. The importance of this study lies in its exploration of how the

pre-migration cultural identities, emotional experiences, intimate relationships, and post-migration challenges (such as racism) were described by refugee women in relation to their process of acculturation. By introducing the concept of transformative acculturation (TA) and emphasising the role of resilience, racism, intersectionality, loss, intimate relationships, and acculturation, this research provides a new direction for research on acculturation and intimate relationships among refugee women. Specifically, the findings highlight the need for trauma-informed acculturation models that integrate gender-sensitive support for refugee women, while considering the effects of changing gender norms, economic constraints, and legal precarity (e.g. visa insecurity) on acculturation and intimate relationships. Additionally, policies should address the psychological challenges associated with racism by developing interventions that encourage social integration and emotional well-being. Furthermore, the insights gained from this research can contribute to migration policy discussions, particularly by demonstrating that refugee women from similar pre-migration cultural backgrounds tend to adopt comparable acculturation strategies. Recognising these patterns can be important in understanding the process of acculturation. Furthermore, this research underscores the need for trauma-informed approaches that consider the effects of changing gender norms and legal precarity on acculturation and intimate relationships, ensuring refugee women's well-being and long-term acculturation in Switzerland and other host countries.

Chapter Two: Acculturation, Theoretical Frameworks and Challenges for Refugees

2.1 Introduction

This chapter begins with an overview of the existing literature relating to forced migration, refugee women, racism, host nations, structural barriers, refugee mental health, gender, acculturation, cultural norms, intimate relationships and Gender based violence (GBV). This chapter also includes a definition of acculturation and an examination of its psychological and sociocultural dimensions using Berry's (1997) theoretical framework of acculturation and Bornstein's (2017) specificity model. The changing perspective in acculturation is reviewed including the changes from the unidimensional models of acculturation to the bi-dimensional models outlined (Deslandes et al., 2024; Rudmin, 2003; Schwartz et al., 2010; Schwartz et al., 2024; Yoon et al., 2020; Yoon & Langrehr, 2010). Key literature is explored in this chapter, including work on the challenges associated with acculturation for refugees (Berry, 1997; Bornstein, 2017; Deslandes et al., 2024; Kämmer & Albert, 2023; Kuo, 2014; UNHCR, 2022) and their associated psychological adaptation (Kuo, 2014; Saksena & McMorrow, 2021; Schweitzer et al., 2011; Van Oudenhoven & Ward, 2013). Additionally, the role of the host country and how its societal positions, including discrimination, can affect acculturation are discussed (Bornstein, 2017; Lauterbach et al., 2021; Sam & Berry, 2016; Tsoukaneli, 2023). Lastly, literature on coping and coping mechanisms in refugees is reviewed (Alzoubi et al., 2017; Walther et al., 2021).

2.2 Qualitative Studies on Acculturation and the Experiences of Refugees

In this section, qualitative studies relevant to this research are reviewed, along with the theoretical frameworks that underpin them. These studies span various geographical regions and provide insights into research on the experiences of refugees with forced

migration, racism, restrictive asylum policies, mental health, gendered norms, intimate relationships, and gender-based violence (GBV). As Chapter One outlined the gaps in the literature, this section focuses on summarising qualitative findings that inform the present study. The authors of these studies utilised various methodologies, including ethnography, thematic analysis, interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), and grounded theory. This literature review builds on Berry's (1997) theoretical framework of acculturation and Bornstein's (2017) specificity principle, to highlight how different acculturation processes are shaped by pre- and post-migration experiences. The qualitative studies, displayed in Table 1, employ ethnography, thematic analysis, IPA, and grounded theory to explore themes such as forced migration, culture, and acculturation. Acculturation is defined as the cultural and psychological adaptation following migration (Berry, 1997), and is central to these studies, particularly when examining how refugee women navigate post-migration changes in identity, relationships, and culture.

Researchers from Switzerland (Bader & Probst, 2018; Ossipow, 2019) and Germany (Kämmer & Albert, 2023) have highlighted how systemic racism, decentralised asylum policies and marginalisation can complicate the integration and mental health of refugees. Similarly, Driel and Verkuyten (2022) examined the role of the local community in shaping the reception of refugees in Riace, Italy. They found that hospitality when actively maintained by the community and the local leadership, helped the refugees in managing their needs. Furthermore, research from Freedman (2017) highlighted the opposite demonstrating that European asylum policies often fail to protect refugees adequately, which can worsen their vulnerabilities and insecurities post-migration.

Research has also highlighted that intimate relationships can be shaped by their pre-migration culture and gendered norms. For example, Rapaport and Doucerain (2021) and Zbeidy (2020) explored how cultural expectations and gender roles can shape the intimate relationships of refugee women post-migration. Rapaport and Doucerain (2021) also found that mismatches between pre-migration and post-migration cultural and gendered expectations, along with financial challenges, can create tensions and increase conflict within the intimate relationships of refugee couples. Zbeidy (2020) examined how forced displacement affects marriage and intimate relationships among Palestinian and Syrian women, emphasising their need for safety and stability in their new host environments and how marriage can provide refugee women with support. Khawaja and Milner (2012) observed that the increased freedom South Sudanese women experienced in Australia introduced tensions within their intimate relationships and highlighted how changing gender norms can shape intimate relationships. Lokot (2023) explored the narratives of participants in Syrian marriages both pre- and post-migration and highlighted how the power dynamics within the couple often changed post-migration, particularly if the women were working when they had not worked in their country of origin (Lokot, 2023).

In addition, the literature explores the post-migration challenges associated with forced migration, including GBV, restrictive policies, cultural and gender norms and racism (Krause, 2015; Sullivan et al., 2021; Wachter et al., 2017). Krause (2015) demonstrated that GBV can often continue from the forced migration setting into the post-migration environment and how systemic challenges such as stigma and structural inequalities can compound the challenges of refugee women. Sullivan et al. (2021) found that GBV is not limited to discrete incidents but can form a cyclical continuum throughout the different

phases of forced migration, which can be further exacerbated by limited access to support systems. Additionally, Horn et al. (2014) identified that financial dependency and changing gender norms were often linked to IPV in Jordan. Similarly, Wachter et al. (2017) identified drivers of IPV which included men's substance abuse, destabilisation of gender roles and family separation. The research listed in the table below also examined the resilience of refugee women in their post-migration environment. For example, Njie-Carr et al. (2021) demonstrated that resilience can empower refugee women who have been exposed to GBV and emphasised the importance of supportive structures for overcoming their trauma. Similarly, Taheri et al. (2024) identified the psychological impact of female-specific refugee trauma and the potential for post-trauma growth for them once they are removed from the situation. Together this extensive research illustrates how systemic barriers, cultural norms, GBV and trauma can shape the post migration experiences of refugee women. While existing literature provides valuable insights into the cultural norms and systemic barriers refugee women it also reveals the complexity of their post-migration experiences, challenges and opportunities. While much of the reviewed literature provides valuable insights, relatively few studies have focused specifically on the lived experiences of refugee women in Switzerland, which highlights the need for this present research. This present research builds on the gaps outlined in Chapter One, specifically focusing on the lived experiences of acculturation and intimate relationships among refugee women in Switzerland. It addresses the limited research on areas such as pre-migration culture, the role of intersectionality, and the shaping of pre-migration cultural and gender norms on post-migration experiences. Additionally, it examines how intimate relationships change post-migration, and the process of acculturation while assessing the applicability of existing acculturation frameworks to the

lived experiences of refugee women in Switzerland. Table 1 provides an overview of the key qualitative studies in this research, outlining their geographical focus, research themes, and key findings.

Table 1
Literature on Acculturation in Refugees

Authors	Date	Location of study	Title/focus	Data analysis	Key findings
Al-Natour, Morris & Al-Ostaz	2021	Jordan	Through her eyes: The impact of war on Syrian refugee families	Descriptive phenomenology	Women impacted financially and socially, at risk of stress, violence, Culture and religion affect family responses
Bader & Probst	2018	Switzerland	Barriers to refugee integration in Switzerland	Content analysis, framework analysis	Decentralised asylum policies create integration barriers
Baird & Boyle	2012	Australia	Refugee women's negotiation of cultural norms post-migration	Qualitative content analysis of interview data	Refugee women face cultural conflict in host country
Beiser & Hou	2001	Canada	Language acquisition and mental health	Survey/participant observations, interviews	Mental health factors shift depending on resettlement phase.
Berry	1997	Canada	Immigration, acculturation, and adaptation	Mixed methods/ quantitative surveys & interviews	Defines acculturation and typology.
Berry	2005	Canada	Acculturation: Living successfully in two cultures	Thematic analysis	Describes acculturation strategies and outcomes.
Berry	2013	Canada	Integration and multi-culturalism: Ways towards social solidarity	Conceptual analysis , theoretical development	Explores acculturation in different populations.
Bornstein	2017	Cross-cultural	The specificity principle in acculturation	Conceptual analysis	Acculturation is shaped by context, domain and individual factors.
Brun	2001	US	Relationship between people and places in refugee studies	Conceptual/Theoretical analysis	Displacement is not just uprooting; refugees and host attitudes matter.

Authors	Date	Location of study	Title/focus	Data analysis	Key findings
Driel & Verkuyten	2022	Italy	Contact theory and multiethnic community	Ethnography	Mutual benefits for locals and refugees.
Eisenbruch	1991	South-East Asia	From post-traumatic stress disorder to cultural bereavement: Diagnosis of Southeast Asian refugees	Grounded theory	Cultural bereavement needs more recognition.
Freedman	2017	EU	Gendering the international asylum and refugee debate	Grounded theory/case studies	EU fails to protect; women develop coping strategies.
Hawkes, Norris Joyce & Paton	2021	Australia	Resilience and well-being in refugee women	Thematic analysis:	Resettlement adds adversity, community aids coping.
Higginbottom, Safipour, Mumtaz, Chiu, Paton & Pillay	2013	Canada	“I have to do what I believe”: Sudanese women’s beliefs and resistance to hegemonic practices at home	Ethnography	Sudanese women resist hegemonic practices post-migration.
Horn, Puffer, Roesch, Lehmann & Bolton	2014	Sierra Leone and Liberia	Consequences of war on intimacy for refugees	Focus group discussions/ individual interviews	War affects IPV but allows change.
Hynes	2017	Locations including refugee camps, host countries and the UK	Trust and mistrust in the lives of forcibly displaced women	Qualitative research, case studies, interviews and practitioner experience	Focus on trust, GBV, and lived experience
Kamisli	2021	US	Acculturation experiences of Syrian Muslim women in the US	Qualitative narrative inquiry methodology	Forced migration and subordinations that refugee women experience.

Authors	Date	Location of study	Title/focus	Data analysis	Key findings
Kämmer & Albert	2023	Germany	Perceived discrimination among three groups of refugees	Qualitative content analysis of interview data	Former refugees experiences of immigration considered decision making for integration policy.
Khawaja & Milner	2012	Australia	Acculturation stress in South Sudanese refugees	Focus groups/qualitative interviews	Freedom for women causes couple tension, financial issues common.
King-Savić	2021	UK	Ethnography with refugees	Ethnography	Labelling and categorisation of refugees should be reconsidered.
Kirkland, Evans, Spates & Kabasele	2022	US	Perceptions of resettled refugee Congolese women:	Thematic analysis	Three themes relating to cultural traditions clothing dressing, food, parenting style.
Krause	2015	Uganda	Gender-based violence and refugee women's well-being	Mixed-methods ethnographic approach interviews, focus group discussions	GBV patterns evolve from conflict to encampment
Krifors	2022	Sweden	Rural multiculturalism Migrants, antiracism and in Sweden	Ethnography	Migrant solidarity with racial, ethnic, multiculturalism.
Liberatore	2016	UK	Imagining an ideal husband: Marriage as a site of aspiration among Somali Women in London	Focus groups , thematic analysis	Marriage reveals aspirations and religious identity.
Löbel	2022	Germany	Social networks and refugee mental health	Mixed methods/ quantitative surveys , qualitative interviews	Susceptibility to social isolation is equally strong for refugees and host populations.
Lokot	2023	Jordan	Decision-making, violence, resistance, and love	Qualitative analysis of interviews and narratives	Syrian marriages navigated during and after forced migration.

Authors	Date	Location of study	Title/focus	Data analysis	Key findings
Mangrio, Zdravkovic & Carlson	2021	Sweden	Refugee women's adaptation to post-migration cultural norms	Thematic analysis of qualitative interviews	New gender norms create adjustment challenges.
Müller, Pannatier & Viarengo	2021	Switzerland	Labour market integration, local conditions and inequalities.	Quasi-experimental longitudinal data analysis	Early workforce entry helps refugee economic integration.
Njie-Carr, Sabri, Messing, Suarez, Ward-Lasher & Wachter	2020	Participants from Africa, Asia and Latin America	Understanding intimate partner violence among immigrant and refugee women	Grounded theory	Women use faith and support to cope with IPV.
Ossipow, Counilh, & Chimienti.	2019	Switzerland	Racialization in Switzerland: experiences of children of refugees from Kurdish, Tamil and Vietnamese backgrounds	Thematic Analysis qualitative interviews	Experiences of racialization among refugees in Switzerland based on socioeconomic status, gender, and race.
Phillimore	2011	UK	Refugees, Acculturation Strategies, Stress and Integration	Mixed methods, interviews, survey's	Systemic constraints limit acculturation choices
Pittaway & Bartolomei	2001	Australia	Refugees, Race, and Gender Discrimination against Refugee Women	Qualitative case studies, interviews, document analysis	Gender and race shape refugee discrimination
Puvimanasinghe, Denson, Augustinos & Somasundaram	2015	Australia	How former refugees talk about loss and past trauma	Semi-structured face-to-face interviews, thematic analysis	Dual impact of trauma and implications for care.
Rapaport & Doucerain	2021	US	Shared immigration process, different perspectives	Dyadic research design	Challenges for couples related to gaps in employment, finances, legal status and gaps led to conflicts.

Authors	Date	Location of study	Title/focus	Data analysis	Key findings
Saksena & Mcmorrow	2021	US	Social and cultural integration challenges of Congolese refugee women	Thematic analysis	Identified key issues such as racism, intersectionality and challenges around raising children.
Shishehgar, Gholisadeh & Digiacomo	2017	Various locations	Health and socio-cultural experiences of refugee women	Integrative review using the resource-based model	The impact of refugee women's resettlement and experiences on their health. Cultural, social, personal and resilience were the main themes.
Sullivan, Block & Vaughan	2021	Various locations (transit and resettlement)	The continuum of GBV across the refugee experience	Qualitative analysis (theoretical, contextual exploration)	GBV as a continuum that permeates through conflict, transit and resettlement.
Taheri, Fitzpatrick & McCormack	2024	Australia	From the brink of survival to "become the person that they want to become"	IPA	Six Afghan Muslim women who resettled in Australia after enduring gender-specific trauma.
Uddin	2021	Bangladesh	The meaning of marriage to Rohingya refugees and their survival in Bangladesh	Ethnography	Absence of food, shelter and security in refugee camps, Rohingya women marry Bangladeshi men
Wachter, Horn & Puffer	2017	Three refugee camps in South Sudan, Kenya and Iraq	Drivers of IPV in three refugee camps	Thematic analysis	Drivers of IPV include gendered norms, destabilisation of roles, men's substance use, women's separation from family, rapid/forced marriages.
Zbeidy	2020	Middle East	Refugee women's intimate relationships post-migration	Ethnographic methods, qualitative interviews	Displacement affects marriage practices, intimate relationships among Palestinian/Syrian refugees

2.3 Acculturation History from Unidimensional to Bi-dimensional Frameworks

While acculturation has long been a topic of philosophical inquiry, it was only in the latter half of the 20th century that it began to gain attention in the field of psychology (Berry & Sam, 2016). In early 19th-century conceptualisations of acculturation, it was framed as psychological changes driven by cross-cultural imitation and later by McGee (1898) who viewed acculturation as the process of cultural exchange. Teske and Nelson in 1974 proposed that acculturation involved a mutual reciprocation, rather than being a one-way process of assimilation. Acculturation has been a topic of interest and debate over the years because it is often confused with other similar concepts such as integration, biculturalism, and multiculturalism (Berry, 2005). Despite the fact that there is no single theory that fully captures the complexity of the individual, social and contextual factors that are involved in acculturation (Deslandes et al., 2024), there is some consensus on the fundamental definition of acculturation. Berry (1997) defined acculturation as the cultural and psychological changes that occur when an individual or group of individuals from different cultural backgrounds engage in a form of continuous contact. This perspective was also adopted by earlier scholars such as Redfield et al. (1936) who, similar to Berry (1997) defined acculturation as a process that involves an adjustment in behaviours, values and identities that enable an individual to adapt to continuous first-hand contact with individuals or groups from different cultural backgrounds. Deslandes et al. (2024) further highlighted that acculturation is a complicated process that can be shaped by numerous contextual factors, including colonial history, migration policies and individual attitudes toward their host country. Furthermore, the IOM (2004) also defined acculturation as the gradual adoption of the host culture by an individual. However, this definition focuses only on the cultural

adoption of the host country and does not address the other acculturation strategies such as marginalisation and separation which are key components of Berry's (1997) acculturation framework (Berry 1997; 2005; Berry & Sam, 2016; IOM, 2004).

Acculturation can be confused with related concepts including integration and assimilation, which are considered strategies within Berry's (1997) framework. However, Berry's (1997) model also includes two additional strategies, which are discussed in detail in the next section Berry goes on to define acculturation as encompassing a range of strategies, including maintaining one's pre-migration culture or adopting the new host culture, or interacting within the host society or allowing for cultural coexistence without requiring full integration into the dominant host society (Berry, 1997; 2005). Furthermore, acculturation according to Berry (1997) and other researchers, can encompass an individual's psychological changes in several areas including their identity, values, social networks, dress norms, diet, family dynamics and cultural norms (Berry, 1990, 2013; Brun, 2001; Graves, 1967; Kämmer & Albert, 2023; Yoon & Langrehr, 2010).

Acculturation has been conceptualised through various theoretical models, most notably the unidimensional and more recently the bi-dimensional approaches (Ryder et al., 2000). Acculturation was initially viewed as a unidirectional process, where it was assumed that individuals undergoing acculturation would eventually adopt the customs and values of the host culture, similar to what is now called assimilation (Berry, 1997; Gordon, 1964). The unidirectional model used a single index or dimension to assess the individual's adaptation (Mendoza, 1984) and positioned acculturation as a linear process of cultural assimilation. It was also assumed that failure to assimilate would result in adverse outcomes for the individual such as alienation, anxiety and stress (Gordon, 1978; Mendoza, 1984; Olmedo et

al., 1978; Rogler et al., 1991). While proponents of the unidimensional model of acculturation suggested that adaptation to cross-cultural contact could be mapped along a continuum of cultural identity (Gordon, 1964), this approach was criticised for its simplicity and for being unable to recognise the ability individuals can have to sustain multiple cultural identities (Phinney, 2003).

Subsequently, researchers further criticised the unidirectional models of acculturation for assuming that an individual cannot engage with or maintain their pre-migration and host culture simultaneously (Cabassa, 2003; Sam & Berry, 2016). Proponents of the bi-dimensional approach recognise that individuals can maintain aspects of their pre-migration culture while simultaneously engaging with the host culture, rather than following a linear path to assimilation (Berry, 1997; Ryder et al., 2000). Berry's (1997) model challenged the assumption that acculturation is unidirectional, and the next section expands on this by detailing Berry's (1997) bi-dimensional acculturation framework and its four acculturation strategies.

2.4 Berry's Bidimensional Framework of Acculturation

Berry's bidirectional acculturation framework is widely regarded as one of the most comprehensive approaches for understanding how individuals negotiate their new host culture and environment (Juang & Syed, 2019). Berry (1997) proposed two orthogonal dimensions of acculturation, the first is the extent to which the individual seeks to maintain their pre-migration culture, and the second is the extent to which they engage with the post-migration host culture. As such, Berry's (1997) acculturation framework is centred on two key decisions people must make when exposed to a new host culture, the first being whether to retain their pre-migration culture and the second being whether to adopt the post-

migration culture. When combined, these two orthogonal dimensions of acculturation can yield a conceptual quadrant model that consists of four acculturation strategies (Berry, 1997, 2005). Berry (1997; 2005) has further defined acculturation as involving two key dimensions, the first being maintaining one's pre-migration cultural identity and the second the adoption of the dominant culture. This perspective from Berry (1997; 2005) highlights how acculturation is a bidirectional interaction that involves the individual, their pre-migration cultural background and the host culture (Deslandes et al., 2024). These four acculturation strategies include integration, assimilation, separation and marginalisation (Berry, 1997). Integration involves an individual maintaining their pre-migration culture while adopting aspects of the new host culture. Assimilation refers to individuals adopting the new culture and discarding their pre-migration culture. Separation involves an individual retaining their native culture and rejecting the host culture and marginalisation involves an individual rejecting both their pre-migration culture and the new host culture (Berry, 2005, 2013).

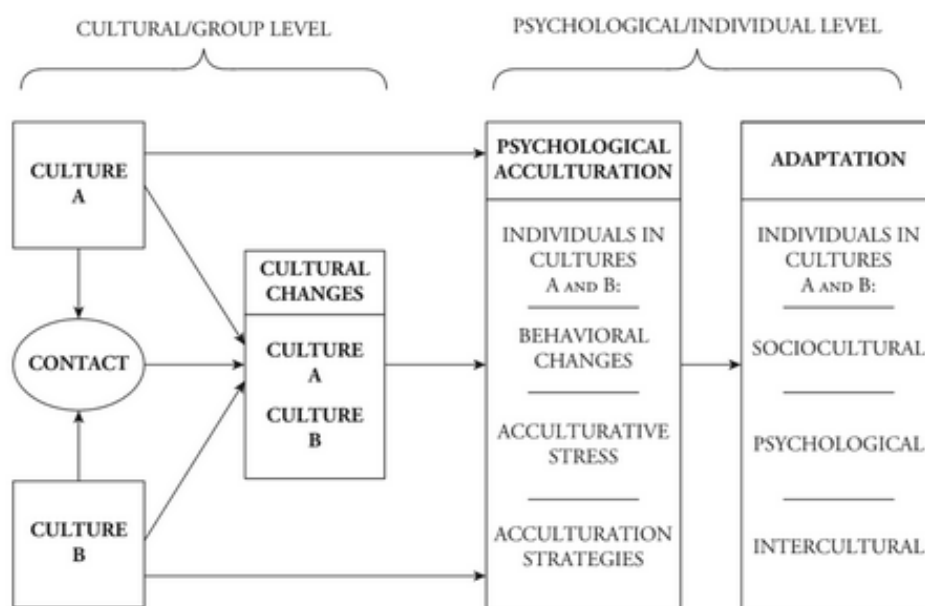
Berry's (1997) bi-dimensional framework is also recognised for its ability to address the psychological and sociocultural dimensions of acculturation. Unlike the older unidimensional models (explored in section 2.3), which conceptualised acculturation as a linear process, Berry's (1997) acculturation framework provides a comprehensive understanding of individuals' adoption, preservation or rejection of their pre-migration and host culture. Furthermore, Berry's (1997) framework enabled insights into the internal processes through which people negotiate and change their cultural identities.

Berry (2017) found that various individual, ethnocultural, societal and global factors can shape acculturation strategies. Bicultural individuals who combine their heritage

and host cultures tend to adapt more successfully than those who only retain their pre-migration culture (separation) or fully assimilate into the host culture. Those who do not adopt either culture (marginalisation) generally experience poorer psychological outcomes (Berry & Sam, 2016). Berry (2005) outlined three primary adaptation outcomes during the acculturation process. These are behavioural change, psychopathology and acculturative stress. Behavioural change involves adopting practices from the dominant culture to help reduce an individual's stress levels. Psychopathology according to Berry (1997) refers to the mental health challenges and the increased stress levels that can result from unsuccessful integration, which can then lead to withdrawal or the marginalisation of an individual (Berry, 2005). Furthermore, acculturative stress which is characterised by an individual's negative reactions to the host culture can prompt a range of coping strategies, from adaptive to non-adaptive, which, in turn, can further influence the level of stress that an individual can then experience (Sam & Berry, 2010).

Figure 1

Berry's (2017) Framework for Conceptualising and Studying Acculturation



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The bi-dimensional approach from Berry (1997) has been widely applied in acculturation research across different cultures and demographics, including refugee populations (Berry, 2005; Beiser & Hou, 2001; Sam & Berry, 2016; Schwartz et al., 2024; Schweitzer et al., 2011; Colic-Peisker & Tilbury, 2004; Silove et al., 2017; Zhang et al., 2017). These studies have utilised Berry's acculturation framework to examine how individuals can adapt to their host environment and looked at areas such as long-term generational changes, cultural continuity in multicultural societies, and the complexity of the process of acculturation (Van Oudenhoven & Ward, 2013).

2.5 Acculturation Framework – Strengths, Critiques and Specificity Principle

Berry's (1997) bi-dimensional acculturation framework remains one of the most widely used theoretical models for understanding acculturation, having influenced over four decades of acculturation research (Nguyen & Benet-Martínez, 2013; Schwartz et al., 2010; Schwartz, Cobb, Szapocznik, Lorenzo-Blanco, Unger, Meca, & Stuart, 2024). Its continued relevance stems from its approach to understanding how individuals navigate cultural change, along with its recognition of the coexistence of both pre- and post-migration cultural influences (Nguyen & Benet-Martínez, 2013). Berry's (1997) acculturation framework has also been extensively validated across different cultural groups, demonstrating its empirical strength and its ability to incorporate individual and contextual factors, such as the host society, and culture which reinforce its relevance within acculturation research (Schwartz et al., 2010; Berry & Hou, 2017). For example, Schwartz et al. (2010) highlighted that acculturation can encompass different dimensions including culture and identity, which can be shaped by both the pre- and post-migration experiences. More recently, Schwartz et al. (2024) strengthened Berry's (1997) model by examining how acculturation occurs at a daily level. Their longitudinal research revealed links between the general (macro-level) and daily (micro-level) acculturation experiences, which further demonstrated how Berry's (1997) framework can capture both general and the daily fluctuations of the process of acculturation (Schwartz et al., 2024). Further supporting the strengths of Berry's (1997) framework, Schwarz and Pfammatter (2024) (a different Schwartz from the above) demonstrated that alignment with both pre- and post-migration cultures can contribute to the well-being of second-generation immigrants in Switzerland. Their findings reinforce Berry's (1997) acculturation framework and emphasised the importance of maintaining connections to the

pre-migration culture while engaging with Swiss society. Given its widespread influence, Berry's (1997) bi-dimensional model remains one of the most comprehensive and foundational frameworks for studying acculturation. (Nguyen & Benet-Martínez, 2013).

However, despite its widespread use, Berry's (1997) acculturation framework has also been criticised for being overly simplistic and adopting a 'one-size-fits-all' approach (Cabassa, 2003; Rudmin, 2003). Critics have suggested that Berry's (1997) bi-dimensional model does not sufficiently account for all the factors that can shape a migrant's experiences (Deslandes et al., 2024; Rudmin, 2003). Additionally, researchers have critiqued the acculturation framework for its emphasis on the psychological perspective of an individual which critic's claim can lead to a neglect of interdisciplinary considerations such as law, sociology and anthropology (Rudmin, 2003). Rudmi (2003) claimed this focus risks limiting the frameworks applicability, especially when acculturation intersects with important legal or social dimensions such as minority rights and immigration law (Rudmin, 2003).

Researchers have also posited that acculturation models must be flexible and account for complexity in the migrant groups they are applied to. For example, Yoon and Langrehr (2010) criticised Berry's (1997) acculturation framework, stating that it was primarily developed from migrant populations that migrated voluntarily, who are often a more homogeneous group of individuals. Furthermore, critiques claim that Berry's (1997) acculturation model does not always capture the notion that individuals can freely choose how or when to acculturate (Alegria, 2009; Rudmin et al., 2017; Demes & Geeraert, 2014). Additionally, Yoon et al. (2013) examined the association between acculturation and mental health across a variety of demographic factors. They found that Berry's (1997) framework can oversimplify acculturation by not sufficiently integrating factors such as the geographic

or the political environments of the pre- and post-migration cultures. Yoon et al. (2020) critiqued Berry's (1997) acculturation framework, arguing that acculturation is bilinear, context-dependent, and evolves across dimensions like language, identity, and values. Their meta-analysis highlighted the need for a more dynamic approach that considers pre-migration culture, post-migration interactions, and individual adaptation (Yoon et al., 2020). While these critiques focus on Berry's (1997) model specifically, broader critiques of bi-dimensional acculturation models as a whole argue that it may still oversimplify acculturation by not fully accounting for structural and historical factors, such as colonial histories, migration policies, and host country attitudes (Deslandes et al., 2024; Van der Zee & Van Oudenhoven, 2022). They argue that acculturation is not solely an individual psychological process but is also shaped by systemic and societal forces, and as such, a more context-sensitive approach is needed to fully capture the complexities of acculturation across different migrant populations.

In response to these critiques, researchers have sought to refine and extend upon Berry's (1997) foundational work. Bornstein's (2017) specificity principle, for example, expands the bi-dimensional model by incorporating contextual moderators such as setting, person, time, process, and domain. This approach allows for greater flexibility in understanding how acculturation unfolds across different environments and life domains (Bornstein, 2017). Bornstein (2017) also highlighted that acculturation can be further shaped by factors such as socialisation and opportunity, which can differ across cultures and regions. By applying the Specificity Principle, Bornstein (2017) moved beyond the static acculturation model and clarified how these different moderators can shape acculturation outcomes. Furthermore, Bornstein, (2017) specified that acculturation does not uniformly

impact all areas of life, rather there can be differences between public and private domains, where individuals can adopt host culture norms in public spheres, such as workplaces, while preserving their pre-migration practices in private domains (Bornstein, 2017; Phinney, 2003).

Integrating Bornstein's (2017) specificity principle with Berry's (1997) acculturation framework offered a more nuanced understanding of acculturation in this research by recognising how acculturation applies across interacting factors, including individual characteristics (e.g. gender), situational contexts (e.g. discrimination), and sociopolitical influences (e.g. Swiss attitudes). This is particularly relevant for this research which focused on refugee women where their lived experiences are shaped by their pre- and post-migration situational and contextual factors (Bornstein, 2017; Sullivan et al., 2020). Bornstein's (2017) specificity principle emphasises the importance of individual, temporal, situational, and domain-specific contexts which aligns with IPA's commitment to explore the meaning making of each participant. By integrating both frameworks, this research positions the participants' experiences within a theoretical perspective and ensures a nuanced recognition of their lived experiences.

2.6 The Role of Acculturation in Post-Migration Adjustment and Identity for Refugees

Acculturation is an important post-migration process for refugees, as it encompasses how they adjust and adapt to the new culture of their host countries (Berry, 2017; Kämmer & Albert, 2023; Kuo, 2014; UNHCR, 2022). While acculturation is the overall process of adapting to a new culture (as defined in section 2.3), integration is defined as an acculturation strategy, whereby the individual maintains aspects of their pre-migration culture and adopts certain aspects of the new host culture (Berry, 1997; Sam & Berry, 2016).

Successful acculturation, particularly through integration, can lead to improved mental health, social inclusion and overall well-being, whereas challenges in acculturation can be linked to increased stress, anxiety and barriers to social and economic mobility (El Khoury, 2019; Kämmer & Albert, 2023; Mähönen & Jasinskaja-Lahti, 2013). Therefore, understanding acculturation and the role of integration within it are essential for addressing refugees' post-migration adjustment.

Quantitative researchers have demonstrated that there is a positive association between integration and positive outcomes such as self-esteem, life satisfaction, and sociocultural adaptation across different populations (Abu Rayya et al., 2017). However, a recent meta-analysis found that this relationship may be weaker than previously thought and can be shaped by contextual factors, leading to a push for a more nuanced understanding of how integration and positive outcomes in adaption can work together (Ward, 2024). This change highlights the importance of exploring the context(s) that can shape the outcome of acculturation and the variability in the individual and situational experiences. For the purposes of this research, this changing understanding highlights the importance of considering both the individual and contextual factors that can shape the lived experiences of refugee women.

As such while research demonstrates the benefits of integration, recent findings show that its impact is not universal and may depend on specific contexts and conditions in which acculturation occurs (Ward, 2024). For refugees, local integration represents one such context where it can play an important role in enabling the establishment of a new life and facilitating economic and social adaptation in the post-migration environment (Kämmer & Albert, 2023; UNHCR, 2022). According to the UNHCR (2022), integration is particularly

important shortly after refugees arrive in the host country. Refugees are exposed to challenges that include securing safety, housing and healthcare, overcoming language barriers and finding education and employment (United Nations [UN], 2017; UNHCR Global Trends, 2023). Such challenges can be practical but can also be tied to the acculturation process and acculturative stress (El Khoury, 2019; Kämmer & Albert, 2023). Refugees may encounter restrictive policies in their host countries which limit their opportunities to integrate, including temporary protection statuses and complicated asylum processes (Sam & Berry, 2016). As such, positive acculturation outcomes for refugees are often associated with supportive policies in the new host country, whereas restrictive policies, such as limited asylum rights, can increase acculturative stress and contribute to feelings of isolation, anxiety and depression (Sam & Berry, 2016). Restrictive immigration policies in the host countries can increase refugees' acculturative stress, especially if they limit people's access to essential resources and services (Silove et al., 2017). Furthermore, the host country's reaction to refugees can play an important role in their post-migration integration, where for example, community support can increase integration, while discrimination has been shown to hinder integration (Ecer, 2022; Schindall, 2009). Additionally, barriers to social services in the host country has been shown to increase feelings of inferiority and heighten psychological distress in refugee women (Schweitzer et al., 2011).

Aligning with this, Mestheneos and Ioannidi (2002) conducted qualitative research across 15 EU Member States to understand how refugees experienced integration and what they considered to be obstacles to integration. They found that when personal or institutional racism was experienced, this became a significant obstacle to integration. Racism was

experienced as a direct affront to the individual and affected the mental health of refugees (Mestheneos & Ioannidi, 2002). Similarly, a quantitative longitudinal study was used to capture the nature of acculturation and the identity development of Turkish-origin adolescents in Germany (Jugert et al., 2020). They identified different acculturation profiles, based on Berry (1997) acculturation framework, and found that integration was the most common initial approach, however it declined over time. Furthermore, the research demonstrated that the participants were more likely to transition to a separation strategy of acculturation when they encountered experiences of ethnic discrimination (Jugert et al., 2020).

Kämmer and Albert (2023) studied refugee acculturation in Germany, finding that cultural factors (language, values, expectations) and post-migration stressors (housing instability, unemployment, social isolation) hindered their integration. Discrimination was found to further harm their mental health, and they stressed the need for more research on how these stressors can affect acculturation (Kämmer & Albert, 2023). Furthermore, Tsoukaneli (2023) recently explored the impact of acculturation in refugees, and the subsequent changes in their post-migration cultural adjustment and cultural identity over time. He found that pre-migration culture including religion and cultural identity can play an important role in a refugees' sense of identity post-migration (Tsoukaneli, 2023).

Identity is an important concept in forced migration and acculturation research, as it can shape how an individual approach post-migration adaption. For instance, Bhugra and Becker (2005) highlight how forced- migration can lead to changes in individual and cultural identity due to the loss of familiar social structures, norms, and values, which can be further explained through identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), which posits that

individuals define themselves based on group membership and social belonging. Tajfel and Turner (1979) emphasized that social categorisation can shape how individuals perceive themselves and others, with individuals often categorising themselves and others into groups, leading to in-group and out-group distinctions. This suggests that refugees may experience identity conflicts when their cultural background is marginalised within a host country which can then shape their post-migration identity and sense of belonging (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Furthermore, identity formation for refugees is not only shaped by group membership (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) but also by their individual's traits, beliefs, and values (Abrams, 2001). These contextual factors can shape the process of acculturation and sense of belonging for refugees as they experience post-migration cultural and identity changes (Bhugra & Becker, 2005).

2.7 Challenges to Acculturation, the Host Society, Discrimination and Racism

The policies, institutional frameworks and societal attitudes of the host society can influence refugees' post-migration acculturation, well-being and mental health (Mestheneos & Ioannidi, 2002; Phillimore, 2020). Much of the extant research has examined acculturation in Western societies, where policies are predominantly designed to promote integration (Kuo, 2014). However, the reception of the host countries can vary. For example, Smith (2008) examined the receptivity of local communities in upstate New York and found that supportive social norms and acceptance from the local community contributed to a more successful integration strategy for the refugees.

However, challenges can also shape acculturation. Researchers have demonstrated that refugees who experience racism and discrimination tend to find it harder to adapt and integrate into the host culture (Ciftci et al., 2012). Furthermore, the impact of discrimination

and social exclusion can also impact refugees' psychological well-being of refugees, leading to isolation, anxiety and depression (Mestheneos & Ioannidi, 2002; Phillimore, 2020; Sam & Berry, 2016). Whether rooted in class, socioeconomic status, gender, race or ethnicity, discrimination can harm the mental health and well-being of refugees, leading to feelings of isolation and diminished motivation (Pittaway & Bartolomei, 2001; 2003), which can hinder integration (Mestheneos & Ioannidi, 2002). Researchers exploring the impact of discrimination on refugees' mental health in Germany found that individuals who experienced discrimination were more prone to distress, depression, anxiety and PTSD (Colucci et al., 2015; Sullivan, Vaughan, & Wright, 2020). Berry and Hou (2017) quantitatively analysed acculturation patterns and found a link between discrimination, acculturation and well-being. Notably, individuals who strongly identified with their ethnic background reflected a separation acculturation strategy and were more prone to discrimination. This suggests that maintaining a strong connection to one's ethnic identity without engaging with the host culture can increase the likelihood of encountering discrimination, possibly due to limited social integration into the host society (Berry & Hou, 2017). Kartal et al. (2018) conducted a cross-sectional study on Bosnian refugees in Australia, examining the link between pre-migration trauma, post-migration acculturative stress, and mental health outcomes. They found that trauma had lasting effects on mental health and acculturation, with stressors like language barriers hindering integration. Their study emphasised that trauma could predispose refugees to mental health challenges, increasing stress and shaping acculturation (Kartal et al., 2018).

Researchers in Germany have recently revealed a relationship between sociability, cultural adoption and discrimination experiences (Lutterbach et al., 2021). These findings

demonstrated the harmful impact of discrimination on refugees, which in some cases led to strategies of separation (Lutterbach et al., 2021). Similarly, Terzi et al. (2022) found a negative association between racism and discrimination, which impacted the cultural and psychological adaptation of Syrian refugees in Turkey. Conversely, a desire for increased contact with Turkish society was positively linked to both psychological and sociocultural adaptation in the Syrian refugees (Terzi et al., 2022). In two separate studies, Williams et al. (2019, 2022) analysed the experiences of racial and ethnic minorities in Canada and the repercussions of racism at structural, cultural and individual levels. They found that the challenges and racism that these participants faced exacerbated their mental health, in some cases leading to trauma (Williams et al., 2019, 2022). Thus, discrimination and racism can impede acculturation and integration and harm refugees' mental health, leading to depression, anxiety, reduced motivation, mistrust and social isolation (Ciftci et al., 2012; Kiselev et al., 2020; Wood et al., 2019). Further challenges to acculturation included language barriers, cultural perceptions and restrictions or barriers to community integration (Tsoukaneli, 2023). The literature demonstrates that refugees' post-migration acculturation, well-being, and mental health can be shaped by the host society's policies and their societal attitudes toward refugees, with discrimination contributing to psychological distress (Phillimore, 2020; Sam & Berry, 2016; Colucci et al., 2015; Sullivan et al., 2020; Berry & Hou, 2017). This will be explored further in relation to Switzerland in Chapter Four.

2.8 Coping in Forced Migration

Researchers have highlighted the importance of coping for refugees during the post-migration process (Kuo, 2014; UNHCR, 2022). Even though refugees may come from comparable cultural backgrounds, they can display different coping responses. Coping can

include active and passive methods. Problem-focused coping (an active strategy) might involve engaging with the host community by learning the local language or seeking employment opportunities (Kuo, 2014). Passive or emotion-focused coping involves techniques such as seeking social support from friends, family or community groups. Other coping strategies can include maintaining the pre-migration culture to preserve a sense of identity post-migration. However, this can also lead to avoidant coping, where an individual minimises their interactions with the host community, which can hinder long-term integration over a sustained period (Kuo, 2014).

Coping mechanisms can help refugees to manage the emotional, social and psychological challenges they encounter during forced migration. Khawaja et al. (2008) used qualitative design to explore the coping mechanisms of Sudanese refugees during pre-migration and post-migration. They found that religious beliefs, cognitive strategies (such as reframing negative situations) and focusing on the future were coping strategies used during forced migration. Social support, which had emotional and practical benefits, also emerged as important for the Sudanese refugees (Khawaja et al., 2008). Similarly, Schweitzer et al. (2011) identified coping strategies among refugees who had resettled in Australia. These included a reliance on religious beliefs, social support from their family and community and personal resilience. Religion offered refugees emotional support and a way to make sense of their experiences, while social networks helped individuals navigate their new environment post-migration (Schweitzer et al., 2011).

Building on the role of social support as a coping strategy, researchers conducted a quantitative study with Syrian refugees in Jordan. They provided insights into the stress management strategies and coping techniques they used (Alzoubi, 2017). They found that

seeking social support was the most frequently used coping strategy, followed by avoidance strategies, which included withdrawal from social interactions to deal with stress (Alzoubi, 2017). Demographic factors such as gender, education and income also play a role in the type of coping strategy used by refugees. For example, women and older participants were more likely to seek social support, while younger individuals favoured problem-solving strategies (Alzoubi, 2017). Authors of a qualitative study on adult refugees in Germany found that avoidance, including withdrawal from stressors, was often used as a coping strategy. Participants described retreating into their private space when they felt overwhelmed by challenges such as learning a new language. However, while withdrawal provided temporary relief, it also led to isolation and hindered long-term integration into German society (Walther et al., 2021).

Similarly, longitudinal research over four months was conducted with asylum seekers in Greece, using the social identity model of identity change (SIMIC) (Haslam et al., 2018). In their research, Panagiotopoulos et al. (2022) identified three key adjustment pathways, including maintaining pre-migration group connections (social identity continuity), forming new social identities post-migration (social identity gain) and reconciling pre- and post-migratory identities. They found that initial levels of social identity continuity predicted post-migration adjustment outcomes, underscoring the role of group memberships for positive adjustment. Although this research was focused on adjustment mechanisms rather than coping strategies, these social identity pathways were found to support coping indirectly by promoting a sense of stability, continuity and belonging, which helped asylum seekers mitigate the challenges of forced migration (Panagiotopoulos et al., 2022).

Aligning with this, researchers have recently highlighted that the coping strategies of Ukrainian refugees include problem-focused coping, emotion-focused strategies, avoidance, faith-based strategies, and strategies centred on maintaining a sense of belonging (Rizzi et al., 2023). Social connections and faith were found to improve psychological outcomes (Rizzi et al., 2023). Furthermore, Akef and Quintero (2024) used qualitative methods to examine adaptive and maladaptive coping mechanisms among refugees who migrated to the United States. They found that mental health support helped some refugees with coping, while others turned to maladaptive coping strategies such as substance abuse. Akef and Quintero (2024), like Rizzi et al. (2023), highlighted the importance of post-migration social relationships for refugees suggesting that the connections from social relationships are important for their overall support and adjustment.

The literature above demonstrates the diversity of coping mechanisms among refugee populations and shows that, while coping strategies such as faith and social connections are important, there is no single coping strategy suitable for everyone, as these can vary based on individual and contextual factors.

2.9 Chapter Summary

This chapter reviewed the qualitative literature that informed this present research, which was focused on acculturation, forced migration, racism, asylum policies, gender, gendered norms, intimate relationships, and gender-based violence (GBV). It then examined the theoretical frameworks central to understanding the process of acculturation among refugees and outlines the changes from unidimensional acculturation theories to Berry's (1997) bidimensional framework of acculturation. The chapter explored the strengths and widespread application of Berry's (1997) framework, along with its critiques, and examined

Bornstein's (2017) specificity principle, which highlights how the process of acculturation can vary according to individual, contextual, and domain-specific factors. Additionally, this chapter explored the existing gaps in the literature, including the limited research on how pre-migration culture and host-country reception can shape the acculturation experiences and coping mechanisms of refugees (Deslandes et al., 2024; Phillimore, 2020).

Chapter Three: Gender, Intimate Relationships, Violence and Acculturation

3.1 Introduction

This chapter examines how the acculturation experience of refugee women can be shaped by their family, their pre-migration culture, gender norms, and their experiences of gender-based violence. It begins with an analysis of the role that the family and pre-migration culture can play in the acculturation experiences of refugee women. Research suggests that when families rigidly enforce pre-migration cultural norms, this can become a source of stress for refugee women and, in turn, hinder their acculturation (Baird & Boyle, 2012; Van der Boor, 2020). Additionally, the chapter explores how pre-migration gender norms can also shape acculturation, particularly in cases where there is a stark contrast between pre- and post-migration cultural contexts (Mangrio et al., 2021; Phillimore, 2011). The challenges for refugee women, which can be compounded by GBV and IPV (Sullivan et al., 2021; UNHCR, 2022) are also explored in this chapter, along with the barriers that refugee women can face when seeking help due to cultural stigma and systemic barriers within the host country (Krause et al., 2015; Raftery et al., 2022). The compounded marginalisation refugee women can encounter is reviewed along with how gender, race and legal status can intersect and increase the vulnerability of refugee women (Pittaway & Bartolomei, 2003; Saksena & McMorrow, 2021). These factors, when coupled with reduced access to support systems, can hinder the acculturation and overall well-being of refugee women, highlighting the need for more research in this area.

3.2 Gender and Acculturation Among Refugee Women

Post-migration challenges can occur when refugee women's pre-migration gender norms are markedly different from those in the host culture (Baird & Boyle, 2012). These

challenges can be compounded when refugee women are in family environments that continue to uphold their pre-migration practices, such as restrictions on women's mobility, limited access to education, forced marriages and tolerance of GBV (Greene et al., 2023; Shishehgar et al., 2017; UNHCR, 2011). Additionally, the continuation of pre-migration gendered norms can complicate the post-migration acculturation for refugee women.

Interestingly, Butler (1990) posited that gender is not an inherent or fixed attribute, but rather a construct that can be shaped by repetitive social practices. Butler's (1990) definition suggests that gender roles can change in response to a new cultural context, such as the exposure of refugee women to different gender norms in their host country. This is seen when the different expectations around gender equality in a host country have led to refugee women changing, adopting, or rejecting the new host country's norms, leading at times to conflict in the couple or intimate relationship (Habash & Omata, 2023). For example, research on Syrian refugee families in the UK, which reviewed the changes in gender norms found at times this led to confusion and tension between spouses, as the women struggled with the new gender norms post-migration (Habash & Omata, 2023). Analysis of the changes within the 'private' sphere of family life revealed that the socio-cultural challenges of integration, particularly when the couples experienced divergent ideas about gender norms, frequently led to disputes and tension. This alludes to Butler's (1990) point on gender not being a fixed attribute and illustrates how different expectations can complicate the family dynamics and the acculturation outcomes (Habash & Omata, 2023). This tension between pre- and post-migration norms can also occur when refugee women encounter conflicting gender norms in their pre-migration culture and those of the host country. While religion can provide a source of meaning and stability for refugee's

contributing to their psychosocial well-being (Wessells & Strang, 2006) it can also be a central aspect of cultural identity, and reinforce pre-existing gender norms (Wessells & Strang, 2006). Pertek et al. (2023) highlighted how religious and cultural beliefs can serve as both protective and risk factors during post-migration gender norms changes for refugee women. Similar to Wessells and Strang (2006), Pertek et al., (2023) highlight that while pre-migration cultures and religious beliefs offer continuity and resilience for refugee women, they can also reinforce restrictive norms that limit women's ability to integrate into their host societies (Pertek et al., 2023). This duality is particularly relevant when the gender norms from the pre-migration country conflict with those from the host country (Pertek et al., 2023). Furthermore, Phillimore (2011) found that the pre-migration gendered norms are often enforced by refugee women's families, which can lead to restrictions in accessing social support such as language courses (Van der Boor, 2020).

However, Bassel (2012) critiques the 'culture versus gender' narrative, which she argues frame Muslim refugee women as passive victims. She argued that Muslim women are democratic agents who can redefine their identities post-migration. Her insights support the notion that refugee Muslim women can balance their cultural backgrounds with the host countries societal norms (Bassel, 2012). Shwayli (2016), takes this argument one step further saying that Western countries can provide refugee women with more opportunities for education, employment and financial independence than, for example, some pre-migration cultures in the Middle East. However, while some refugee women find empowerment in the new opportunities they encounter post-migration, others endeavour to keep their pre-migration cultural and religious identities, which may reinforce their pre-migration gendered norms (Shwayli, 2016).

Furthermore, many refugee women, particularly from developing countries, are unaware of their rights, which usually improve post-migration (Phillimore, 2011). This means they continue to live under adverse migration cultural practices in their host country (Phillimore, 2011). Using interpretative phenomenological analysis, researchers recently explored the lived experiences of six Afghan Muslim women who resettled in Australia for over a decade. These participants shared their journeys through semi-structured interviews and revealed how gender-specific trauma, systemic gender minimisation, and prejudice influenced their recovery, growth, and contributions to their communities (Taheri et al., 2024). An example of systemic gender minimisation from this research was in the participants' experiences of cultural and societal restrictions that they believed devalued women, such as being denied education and employment opportunities and being confined to passive gender roles (Taheri et al., 2024). Taheri et al. (2024) research explored themes such as prejudice, gender minimisation, recovery, and growth, highlighting how the participants rejected their pre-migration norms in favour of the Australian culture and values that supported their autonomy. Their research revealed a progression from survival to becoming the person that they want to become, as participants reconstructed their identities, rejected patriarchal norms, reevaluated their religious beliefs, and committed to mentoring others and contributing to their communities (Taheri et al., 2024).

Another challenge refugee women may face post-migration is related to help-seeking. At times, they do not seek support due to cultural norms and stigma associated with their pre-migration experiences (Hawkes et al., 2021). Research also indicates that refugee women can face mental health challenges when exposed to post-migration cultural stressors, such as the changing of gender norms and roles (Hawkes et al., 2021). However, Hawkes et

al. (2021) highlighted that the cultural stigma that surrounds mental health, which often stems from the refugee women's pre-migration culture, can influence their willingness to seek help. Aligning with this, Qutranji et al. (2020) found that the cultural stigma around mental health can lead to the normalisation of depression and avoidance of seeking help for refugee women. These findings are corroborated in research on the struggles faced by Muslim Arab refugee women in Sweden (Qutranji et al., 2020). Khan and Eskola (2020) found that refugee women can face specific gender challenges, including the loss of cultural norms and religious customs, changes in identity and psychological stress. Both studies demonstrated the presence of pre-migration gender norms on mental well-being of refugee women post-migration (Khan & Eskola, 2020; Mangrio et al., 2021). Overall, researchers have highlighted how pre-migration gender norms, culture and stigma can shape the lives of refugee women in the post-migration environment.

3.3 Family Matters: The Role of Family and Culture for Refugee Women

In the context of refugees, the UNHCR (2018) has defined families as a core unit of individuals who are related by blood, marriage or adoption. This usually encompasses immediate family members such as spouses and children. Family is often tied to the cultural backgrounds and traditions of refugee women, and the shaping of the pre-migration culture is often determined by the immediate family (Morrison & James, 2009). For example, pre-migration cultural customs, traditions and norms can give refugee women a lower social status than men, making them dependent on men in their families (UNHCR, 2013). As such, some refugee women can have reduced options, forcing them to rely on their family relationships, which can reduce their confidence (Driel & Verkuyten, 2022).

The family is often viewed as the most important social institution for refugee women and therefore can play a vital role in their experiences and acculturation (Driel & Verkuyten, 2022; Lacroix et al., 2014). Morrison and James (2009) found this to be the case when they explored the forced migration and the role of the family. They found that some aspects of acculturation can act as stressors, which can then alter family relationships. Specifically, family members can have different acculturation strategies based on their generation and gender, which can then impact the family cohesion, and as family members underwent acculturation, conflicts arose due to the differing acculturation strategies. Morrison and James (2009) highlighted the importance of understanding gender and cultural norms when using community-level interventions in family therapy.

Baird and Boyle (2012) found that Dinka refugee women from Sudan struggled with adjusting to gender norm changes in Australia. Language barriers led to isolation, loss of status, and difficulty accessing education or work, hindering integration. Many remained unemployed or took entry-level jobs. These studies emphasised gender as a social construct shaping post-migration experiences, and the conflict between pre- and post-migration norms (Baird & Boyle, 2012; Morrison & James, 2009; Phillimore, 2011; Smith, 2009). Pre-migration cultural norms can persist post-migration due to social networks and community structures. Refugee women often rely on their social networks after migration, which can reinforce pre-migration gender norms and practices in the new host environment (Greene et al., 2023; Kirmayer et al., 2011; Kiselev et al., 2020).

Duderija (2017) explored patriarchal interpretations of Islamic culture and found that in some contexts, patriarchal values are embedded within their cultural norms that can reinforce men as authority figures while women are expected to take on the family's

domestic roles. Cultural and societal factors can influence the dynamics within a family and impact women's autonomy. Furthermore, these social patterns can make it difficult for women to assert autonomy within the family (Duderija, 2017). Research has also found that restrictions imposed by male members of the family can prevent refugee women from accessing post-migration social institutions (Van der Boor, 2020). For example, male relatives may discourage women from seeking psychosocial support, which can limit their access to support services (Van der Boor, 2020). As such the pre-migration culture and the family norms can shape the post-migration experiences of refugee women.

3.4 Sexual and Gender-Based Violence and Refugee Women

Sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) can pose a threat to refugee women and be further exacerbated by forced migration (UNHCR, 2022). The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that approximately one in three women worldwide have experienced physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence in their lifetime (WHO, 2021). These risks are likely to increase during forced migration due to heightened vulnerability, conflict, and displacement-related challenges (Murphy et al., 2021; UNHCR, 2022). The increased risk of SGBV during forced migration can be due to overcrowded living conditions, disrupted or destroyed social and family networks and limited access to support services (Habtamu et al., 2023; Muru et al., 2022; WHO, 2021). Obstacles to addressing SGBV for refugee women can include difficulties in accessing help due to distance and cost, language barriers, cultural acceptance and fear of retaliation, all of which can discourage reporting (Habtamu et al., 2023; UNHCR, 2022). According to the UN (1993) violence against women is defined as any act of GBV that can result in physical, sexual or psychological harm. This includes violence within a family (such as battering and

marital rape), violence within a community (including rape and sexual harassment) and violence perpetrated or condoned by the State. For example, state forces using sexual violence as a weapon of war during conflicts, such as in the Bosnian War, illustrate violence perpetrated by the State (Wing, 1994).

IPV is a subset of SGBV that occurs in intimate relationships and can also include physical, sexual and emotional violence or abuse (Habtamu et al., 2023; United Nations General Assembly, 1993). Researchers have found that when men experience increased violence during war, conflict or societal disruptions, this can lead to an increase in SGBV against family members (Krug et al., 2002). Refugee women often experience increased levels of SGBV both pre- and post-migration (Human Rights Watch, 2000; Krug et al., 2002; Mburu et al., 2022). Raftery et al. (2022) agreed with these findings and highlighted that GBV increased during forced migration, when refugee women faced limited access to safe migration routes and other risks (Raftery et al., 2022). Keygnaert et al. (2014) expanded on these findings. They studied refugee women in Morocco who had experienced GBV and found that these women were more likely to experience violence during forced migration when they lacked family or community support (Keygnaert et al., 2014). Furthermore, being a refugee increases women's vulnerability to violence, as they frequently lack essential documents such as travel papers, visas or identification (Keygnaert et al., 2014). Similarly, Krause et al. (2015) research in a Ugandan refugee camp examined GBV during forced migration, and found that GBV often followed a recurring pattern, with periods of violence that would escalate in severity and frequency over time. Their research pointed to a cyclical nature of violence that gradually intensified often due to the lack of safety for the refugee women. Corroborating this, Sullivan et al. (2021) found that different stages of forced

migration, such as conflict, displacement, transit and resettlement can all increase the risk of GBV for refugee women's. Moreover, Sullivan and colleagues (2021), like Krause (2015), found that GBV was usually not an isolated incident but a violation that persisted over time, even into the post-migration environment.

The continual and damaging impact of GBV can undermine the safety of refugee and harm their well-being and mental health (Mburu et al., 2022). Tankink and Richters (2007) researched Sudanese refugee women who had experienced GBV. They found that they often utilised silence as a coping strategy, as pre-migration cultural stigma often prevented them from disclosing their experiences of GBV. This silence perpetuated by their cultural stigma meant the GBV was often unreported. Troisi, et al., (2021) research aligned with this and found that GBV often shaped the experiences of migrant women during forced migration and resettlement. For many of these women GBV was found to be perpetrated by their intimate partners or family members (Troisi, et al., 2021). However, GBV often persisted post-migration due to ongoing violence from their intimate partners who had migrated with them, and a lack of support systems in the host countries (Troisi, et al., 2021). Furthermore, refugee women who were exposed to GBV were found to be more susceptible to depression, anxiety and trauma (Sullivan et al., 2021; Troisi et al., 2021). Research also suggests that once GBV is initiated in an intimate relationship, it is likely to continue (Krause, 2015; Sullivan et al., 2021). Furthermore, researchers have recently highlighted that refugee survivors of GBV often experience injuries that extend beyond physical injuries, such as bruises and fractures, and can include long-lasting psychological trauma (Kuupiel et al., 2024). Survivors of GBV have a higher propensity of PTSD, depression, anxiety and suicidal ideation (Kuupiel et al., 2024). Trauma, as defined by the

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA, 2014), results from events that are perceived as harmful or life-threatening and can lead to lasting adverse effects on functioning. These effects are evident in a survivors' behaviour and can include hypervigilance, avoidance and difficulties in trusting others. For example, when researching displaced women in Ethiopia, Habtamu et al. (2023) found that survivors of GBV were particularly vulnerable to PTSD and depression due to the exposure of repeated GBV.

Mburu et al (2022) found that the adaptive mechanisms developed in response to trauma, such as prioritising safety and autonomy, can shape a refugee women's post-migration experiences. Additionally, exposure to host cultures with more egalitarian gender norms can help empower refugee women in rejecting their pre-migration culture (Taheri et al., 2024). The connection between GBV and trauma highlights the need to understand the behaviours and decisions of refugee women along with how their process of acculturation is impacted by GBV.

3.5 Intimate Partner Violence and Intimate Relationships

IPV is behaviour that causes harm within an intimate relationship. It encompasses physical, sexual, psychological and emotional abuse, as well as controlling behaviours aimed at exerting power and control over a partner (Devries et al., 2013; Krug et al., 2002; Sardinha et al., 2022; WHO, 2022; UN Women, 2023). The consequences of IPV can include physical injuries, mental health problems such as depression and anxiety, unintended pregnancies, sexually transmitted diseases and even mortality (WHO, 2022). IPV can worsen forced migration, impacting refugee women's acculturation, mental health and well-being (Driel & Verkuyten, 2022; Sardinha et al., 2022). IPV can escalate post-migration;

researchers and can (as noted above in cases of SGBV) persist due to a combination of factors such as a lack of safety, eroded social networks and the ongoing stress associated with being a refugee (Krause et al., 2015; Sullivan et al., 2021).

Gharaibeh and Oweis (2009) research on Jordanian women found that IPV was often shaped by cultural norms, which also restricted the participants empowerment within their intimate-relationships. Although Gharaibeh and Oweis (2009) research was not on the refugee population, their findings provided valuable insights into the cultural dimensions of IPV. They found that the Islamic cultural norms of the Jordanian women influenced their perceptions of IPV and, in some cases, even normalised it. Furthermore, they identified five main reasons why they stayed in their abusive relationships, which included their cultural norms, financial dependency, lack of family support, children and the adverse social consequences of divorce (Gharaibeh & Oweis, 2009). Corroborating these findings, Horn et al. (2014) conducted a study in West Africa. They found that refugee women's financial dependence on their partners played a role in their remaining in relationships with IPV. Furthermore, the cultural norm of men's authority within these households contributed to the normalisation of IPV, allowing men to resort to violence in response to "disobedience" or questions from their wives (Horn et al., 2014). Additionally, while some women reported IPV before their forced migration, Horn and colleagues (2014) found that, during times of war and forced migration, IPV became more widespread. Horn's findings align with other research on IPV, where it has been found that certain cultural beliefs and norms can contribute to the perpetuation and underreporting of IPV among refugee women (Al-Atrushi et al., 2013; Horn et al., 2014). The exacerbation of IPV is driven by culture and other

interconnected factors, such as financial dependency and the loss of social support structures (Horn et al., 2014; Raftery et al., 2022).

Refugee women often remain in their intimate relationships when exposed to IPV and there are challenges to leaving for refugee women. Raftery et al. (2022) found that inadequate access to safe migration routes and the insecurity of forced migration contributed to IPV. However, refugee women stayed in these abusive relationships due to social isolation, lack of support networks, financial dependency and cultural adherence. Raftery et al. (2022) found that refugee women might also prioritise the well-being of their children ahead of their own and remain in the relationship for their children's sake. Additionally, Al-Natour et al., (2019) found refugee Syrian women often remained in their abusive relationships due to a lack of alternatives and due to the challenges of being a refugee. These findings highlight that GBV and IPV can occur in intimate relationships not only because of the partner, the individual or isolated events but also due to cultural acceptance and the increased stress that is brought about by forced migration, and these are important factors for women refugees making it difficult to leave abusive partners.

3.6 The Role of Acculturation in IPV Among Refugee Women

While the previous section explored IPV in intimate relationships, this section examines how the process of acculturation can be shaped by social isolation, economic hardship, and language barriers, which can contribute to the increased risk of IPV. Researchers have highlighted that the process of acculturation, that is, adapting to a new cultural and psychological environment, can expose refugee women to acculturative stressors such as limited social networks, economic hardships and language barriers (Sullivan et al., 2021; Troisi et al., 2021; UNHCR 2022). These stressors can increase

refugee women's risk of IPV as well as complicating their ability to seek help and utilise available resources (Sullivan et al., 2021; Troisi et al., 2021; UNHCR, 2022).

Acculturative stress, which results from having to adjust to different cultural backgrounds and facing societal barriers such as discrimination and language difficulties, has also been found to affect instances of IPV (Njie-Carr et al., 2021; Phillimore, 2011). Acculturative stress can also be linked to an increase in the risk of IPV. Kim (2019) examined how social isolation and acculturative stress are associated with IPV specifically among Korean immigrant women in the United States. This study found that acculturative stress partially mediates the relationship between social isolation and IPV, suggesting that social isolation can contribute to the risk of IPV (Kim, 2019). Furthermore, this research also found that the increase in acculturative stress from the male partner can also increase the perpetration of IPV in the intimate relationship. Furthermore, the men who engaged in maladaptive coping strategies such as substance abuse, further increased the risk of IPV (Kim, 2019). These findings highlight how acculturative stress can increase the vulnerability and perpetration of IPV (Kim, 2019).

Similar patterns of increased IPV were observed in other immigrant groups (not refugees), for example research on South Asian immigrants found that patriarchal beliefs and traditional gender roles, contribute to the normalisation and perpetuation of IPV (Sabri et al., 2018). Corroborating these findings, Njie-Carr et al. (2021) found that among immigrant and refugee women, acculturation can intersect with experiences of IPV, which can then be further exacerbated by cultural values and norms that reinforce gender inequality (Njie-Carr et al., 2021; Sabri et al., 2018). Factors such as traditional gender roles and norms, substance use by men, women's separation from family, and rapid or forced

marriages have all been identified as key drivers of IPV (Njie-Carr et al., 2021; Wachter et al., 2018). Wachter et al. (2018) research found that refugee camps and displacement can destabilise established norms and family structures, creating stressors that can lead to IPV, particularly when traditional gender roles are challenged by new economic or social pressures. On the other hand, Njie-Carr et al. (2021) and Sabri et al. (2018) highlight how entrenched pre-migration gender inequalities within cultural norms, can also perpetuate women's vulnerability to IPV. Therefore, the research suggests that gender inequalities from the pre-migration culture combined with the stresses of displacement and acculturation can create conditions that increase the likelihood of IPV emerging or intensifying (Wachter et al., 2018; Njie-Carr et al., 2021; Sabri et al., 2018).

3.7 Post-Migration Changes in Intimate Relationships

Forced migration can reshape the intimate relationships of refugee women by challenging their pre-migration gendered norms, which can lead to tension as couples adjust to the new cultural norms and expectations in the post-migration environment (Baird & Boyle, 2012; Driel & Verkuyten, 2022; Shishehgar et al., 2017; Stewart, 2014). For instance, researchers exploring the experiences of Dinka women from Sudan (Baird & Boyle, 2012), found that the women's newfound independence in their host country changed the power dynamics within their intimate relationships as they started to exert more control in the couple's decision-making processes. This sometimes led to tension and conflict in the relationship (Baird & Boyle, 2012). Similarly, in subsequent research with migrants from South Sudan in Australia, it was found that some participants exerted more independence in their intimate relationships, leading to more egalitarian relationships (Khawaja & Milner, 2012). However, in some cases, changes around gendered norms, money management and

parenting responsibilities led to marital tensions. Additionally, as women pursued greater independence post-migration, they sometimes moved away from their pre-migration cultural norms, which led to further conflicts in their relationships (Khawaja & Milner, 2012).

However, in contrast to these findings, other researchers have suggested that intimate relationships can serve as a source of support for refugee women both during and after forced migration (Zbeidy, 2020) and can contribute positively to their well-being (Higginbottom et al., 2013; Uddin, 2021; Zbeidy, 2020). Liberatore (2016) examined marriage among young Somali Muslim women in Britain and found that marriage was important for Somali Muslim post-migration. She highlighted that marriage brought hope, emotional support and stability to some participants amidst the challenges of forced displacement. Marriage could also aid these women's integration by providing language support and a sense of comfort and belonging (Liberatore, 2016). Uddin (2021) studied Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh and, like Zbeidy (2020), found that marriage could be constructive for refugee women and men. Uddin (2021) found that marriage was often used as an adaption strategy for Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh where despite the challenges associated with inter-ethnic marriages between Rohingya women and Bangladeshi men, the marriage helped to secure citizenship. Uddin's (2021) research also identified marriage as a stabilising factor for the refugees as in it helped provide them with social, economic, and emotional support along with reducing their reduced social isolation and supporting their cultural integration. Expanding on this, Lokot (2023) explored Syrian marriages in Jordan and examined how Syrian women and men manage their marriage both during and after forced migration. Lokot (2023) found that, both before and during displacement, marriages included instances of love and mutual support but also challenges such as violence and

resistance, especially in the context of pre-migration cultural norms that normalised violence. Overall, the literature above highlights how marriage can function as a source of emotional, social, and practical support for refugee women, and provide opportunities for adaptation and challenges in the post-migration environment (Liberatore, 2016; Lokot, 2023; Uddin, 2021; Zbeidy, 2020).

3.8 Chapter Summary

The post-migration experiences of refugee women were explored in this chapter, including their acculturation, intimate relationships, family, changing gender norms, pre-migration culture and the impact of GBV. How the pre-migration cultural norms and the post-migration family pressure can shape the experiences, acculturation and autonomy of refugee women has been discussed. Furthermore, the role of intimate relationships was explored in order to understand how intimate relationships either support or constrain refugee women, specifically concerning GBV. While there is a number of qualitative studies on this topic, there is a notable lack of research on the experiences of refugee women in Switzerland, especially regarding the relationship between GBV, acculturation, and their well-being. It is important to have a comprehensive understanding of how intimate relationships, gender and pre-migration culture can impact the acculturation process of refugee women in Switzerland so that targeted support services, policies and interventions can be developed to meet their needs and enhance their psychological well-being.

Chapter Four: Switzerland as a Host Country, Discrimination and Racism

4.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the existing literature on the societal, political and economic challenges that refugees can encounter in Switzerland, including discrimination. Given the scarcity of literature pertaining to the lived experiences of refugee women in Switzerland, this chapter concentrates on the available data that exists on refugees in Switzerland, including what has been identified as current societal issues such as racism and discrimination (Amnesty International, 2022; Secrétariat d'Etat aux migrations [SEM], 2022, 2023; Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent [WGPAD], 2021).

4.2 The History of Immigration to Switzerland

At the end of 2022, Switzerland's population was approximately 8.74 million (Swiss Federal Statistical Office, 2022), 187,474 of whom were refugees (Macrotrends, 2023). This indicates that refugees constituted approximately two per cent of Switzerland's population in 2022. The increase in the number of refugees presented challenges from both a social and a political perspective, as the Swiss government struggled to accommodate the growing number of applications from individuals seeking refugee status (Politico, 2023; SEM, 2022). This placed significant pressure on the Swiss asylum and social support systems, resulting in accommodation shortages and an increased demand for additional financial resources to support asylum seekers arriving in Switzerland (SEM, 2023). In 2023, asylum applications rose by twenty percent, prompting changes to the federal and legal framework and accelerating asylum procedures (European Council on Refugees and Exiles, 2024). Switzerland's integration policies toward refugees reflected their differing responses to the different categories of asylum seekers. For instance, in response to the influx of Ukrainian

refugees in 2022, Switzerland introduced a protection status S which allowed Ukrainian refugees quicker access to residency and support services without requiring the full asylum process (SEM, 2022).

Switzerland's societal and political landscape is currently characterised by its restrictive immigration policies and systemic barriers, which can create a challenging environment for migrants and refugees (Lutz & Lavenex, 2024; Mexi et al., 2021). Switzerland's naturalisation policies require a long residence period of up to ten years and involve federal, cantonal and communal assessments. Integration requirements can vary by canton and commune, as local authorities have discretion in what and how they implement their specific criteria, creating challenges for migrants and refugees hoping to gain citizenship (Bader & Probst, 2018; Lutz & Lavenex, 2024; Mexi et al., 2021). In Switzerland, the criterion for determining whether a migrant is well-integrated is often a prerequisite for naturalisation. The criteria for refugees seeking permanent residency or citizenship in Switzerland can vary by canton, with official requirements often including proficiency in the canton's official language, respect for the law (verified by a certificate of good conduct indicating no criminal record or debts), financial stability, length of stay, family situation, medical status, and even the likelihood of reintegration into the country of origin (Bader & Probst, 2018). Some cantons place greater emphasis on language proficiency or financial independence, while others prioritised the absence of criminal records or the integration of children into Swiss schools (Bader & Probst, 2018). These inconsistencies made it challenging for refugees to work toward achieving permanent residency and citizenship. Additionally, reforms to asylum laws were introduced to expedite procedures and deter asylum seekers, which further contributed to an environment of

uncertainty and limited integration opportunities for refugees (Lutz & Lavenex, 2024). Furthermore, in Switzerland, immigration policies require immigrants to adapt to local norms, learn the language and contribute to the country economically (Mexi et al., 2021). These responsibilities are embedded in the Swiss Foreign Nationals and Integration Act (2006), which sets out expectations for language proficiency levels, workforce participation and respect for Swiss values and laws. While supportive measures such as integration plans and case management do exist, the responsibility for successful integration in Switzerland lies with the immigrant (SEM, 2021; Mexi et al., 2021).

In the mid-20th century, Switzerland recruited many Italian and Spanish workers through guestworker (*Gastarbeiter*) programs to meet their labour shortages and economic needs. However, the *Gastarbeiter* program allowed the workers to remain in Switzerland only for a limited period without the possibility of permanent residency or the ability to bring their families (Mexi et al., 2021). The *Gastarbeiter* program prioritised short-term economic contributions, where the migrants were expected to return to their countries of origin when their labour was no longer needed. This reinforced social inclusion and reduced long-term settlement (Akgündüz, 2012; Switzerland Federal Archives, 2021). These *Gastarbeiter* programs laid the groundwork for the restrictive naturalisation processes that are still in place today, where Swiss naturalisation rates remain low and the requirements for achieving citizenship are stringent, particularly for non-European immigrants (Akgündüz, 2012; Lutz & Lavenex, 2024; Migration Policy Institute, 2008). Furthermore, the migration process in Switzerland is decentralised and consists of rigorous naturalisation requirements which are further explored in the next section (Lutz & Lavenex, 2024; Mexi et al., 2021).

4.3 Switzerland, Discrimination, Racism and Acculturation

As a host country, Switzerland plays an important role in the acculturation of its refugee population (Mestheneos & Ioannidi, 2002; Phillimore, 2020). Researchers have shown that when host cultures are open and supportive, migrants are more likely to lean toward strategies such as integration (Berry, 1997; Croucher, 2013). However, this is not the case in Switzerland where the anti-immigrant rhetoric and restrictive immigration policies can place additional pressures on refugees. According to Berry's (1997) acculturation framework, immigrants or refugees who experience high levels of discrimination are more likely to adopt a separation strategy and minimise their interactions with the host culture. Furthermore, racism poses a problem for acculturation (Berry, 2005; Phillimore, 2020; UNHCR, 2022) with extensive research outlining the negative consequences of racial discrimination and systemic racism on the well-being of refugees (Ciftci et al., 2012; Mestheneos & Ioannidi, 2002; Phillimore, 2020; Sam & Berry, 2016). Personal experiences of racism and institutionalised forms of discrimination can not only create barriers to acculturation but negatively impact the mental health of refugees (Eidgenössisches Departement des Innern, 2023; Kiselev, 2020; Ossipow et al., 2019; SEM, 2022).

Reports from national and international institutions, including Amnesty International (2021), the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD, 2021), the State Secretariat for Migration (SEM, 2022, 2023), and the Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent (WGPAD, 2021), have all raised concerns about systemic racism in Switzerland. (Amnesty International, 2021; International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination [CERD], 2021; SEM, 2022, 2023; WGPAD, 2021). This includes both overt acts of racism and more subtle systemic inequities that can perpetuate

unequal treatment of migrants and refugees (Mestheneos et al., 2002; SEM, 2023; Cretton, 2017; FRB, 2023; Ossipow et al., 2019). Indeed, Switzerland has recently been singled out for its systemic racism by institutions such as the Secrétariat d'Etat aux Migrations (SEM, 2022, 2023), the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD, 2021) and the UN Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent (WGPAD, 2021) as having systemic racism across their public sectors including the judicial, employment, education, political and law enforcement sectors (CERD, 2022; Mugglin et al., 2022; SEM, 2022, 2023).

Legal frameworks addressing discrimination have been criticised for their gaps in providing protection against systemic racism (CERD, 2021; Swiss NGO Platform Human Rights, 2020). Reported incidents of systemic racism include police brutality, reduced promotions in the workplace and racially discriminatory children's games being taught in kindergartens and schools (FRB, 2023). For example, the game 'Who is afraid of the Black man?' has been criticised for perpetuating racial stereotypes in Swiss schools (UNHCR, 2022). Additionally, the UN has drawn attention to the police brutality in Switzerland which led to the deaths of several Black men (UNHCR, 2022). Furthermore, refugees in Switzerland have reported that undignified treatment, such as discrimination and racism from Swiss Nationals (Drescher et al., 2021). Amnesty International (2021) emphasised the need to eradicate racial profiling and establish independent police oversight across Swiss regions and cantons. All these forms of racism can intensify the challenges for refugees in Switzerland and can lead to compounded marginalisation (see section 4.4), social exclusion, negatively impact their mental health and lead to limited access to essential services (FRB, 2023).

Mexi et al. (2021) examined the integration experiences of migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers in Switzerland (2014–2019), and found a gap between policy and lived experience, with many saying they felt inadequately integrated, faced "deskilling" and worked below their qualifications. They also described a sense of unwelcomeness, and Mexi et al. (2021) highlighted that current Swiss policies focus on the individual and overlook the systemic barriers. Similarly, Riaño and Baghdadi (2007) whose research focused on migrant women and the Swiss employment landscape found that many skilled immigrant women from Latin America, the Middle East and Southeastern Europe struggled to secure work in Switzerland. They found this was due to the intersection of their status, class, ethnicity and gender. As a result, many of these women had to work below their skill level or remained unemployed or were only sporadically employed at their qualification level. While this research was not specific to refugee women, it highlights how gender, ethnicity and class can intersect to create challenges for immigrant women in the Swiss labour market.

Building on Mexi et al. (2021), Cangai et al. (2022) explored gender disparities among skilled Syrian refugee women in Switzerland and found that gender stereotyping by social institutions hindered their professional integration. For example, social workers often pushed these women into caregiving or cooking roles, regardless of their qualifications. One participant recalled being told, "Why do you want to work? Go home and live your life normally... go raise kids!" (Cangia et al., 2022, p. 755). This finding reinforces Mexi et al.'s (2021) research on the deskilling of refugee women in Switzerland and highlights the challenges they face in the job market (Mexi et al., 2021; Riaño & Baghdadi, 2007). While Switzerland has legal provisions addressing racial discrimination, such as Article 261 of the Swiss Criminal Code (Swiss Federal Council, 2022), the nation lacks a comprehensive legal

definition of racism (Federal Commission Against Racism, 2020). The Swiss NGO Platform for Human Rights has pointed out that the lack of a clear and comprehensive definition hinders the efforts to address and combat racism, making tackling systemic racism even more difficult. Furthermore, the fact that there is no overarching anti-discrimination law, and the current legal framework fails to encompass all forms of racial discrimination complicates this even further (Swiss NGO Platform Human Rights, 2020). Additionally, research highlights that racism in Switzerland extends beyond the subtle forms of systemic discrimination described in detail above (Ossipow et al., 2019) with research emphasising that policymakers, institutions, and society need to move past their denial and take concrete steps to address the covert and overt forms of racism in Switzerland (Ossipow, 2019).

To further complicate matters, the prevalence and nature of racial discrimination can vary across different regions of Switzerland (CERD, 2020). In Western Switzerland, particularly Geneva, there is a higher tolerance towards migrants primarily due to the large presence of international and UN organisations. In contrast, people from rural French, Italian and German-speaking regions, such as Aargau, Egliswil, Uri, Obwalden, Nidwalden and Appenzell, have demonstrated strong political support for anti-immigrant parties and have a higher intolerance of migrants (Schindall, 2009). Many Swiss people perceive Switzerland as ‘raceless,’ which inadvertently reinforces their current racist system (Cretton, 2017). This so-called colour blindness dismisses the realities of systemic racism which then undermines the efforts to address the ongoing discrimination (Cretton, 2017). Swiss people often view racism as an issue related to certain individuals rather than a systemic problem with this perception shifting the focus away from the systemic issues (Lavanchy, 2014), making it harder to address the discrimination that refugees can experience. These findings highlight

the racism that refugees can face in Switzerland, with an unwelcoming atmosphere leading to stress and anxiety depression, isolation, social withdrawal and PTSD (Kiselev, 2020; Ossipow et al., 2019).

4.4 Intersectionality for Refugee Women in Switzerland

Intersectionality is important for understanding the experiences of female refugees, as it highlights how overlapping factors such as gender, race, and forced migration can shape post-migration experience. Originally defined by Crenshaw (1989), intersectionality highlights how identity categories such as race, gender, class and status can intersect and affect experiences of marginalisation. According to the latest data from the UNHCR (2023), women and girls constitute approximately 50 per cent of the global refugee population, a slight increase of about two per cent from previous years, primarily due to the influx of refugees from Ukraine. However, in Switzerland, asylum applications for 2022 revealed a gender disparity, with refugee women comprising only 26 per cent of applicants (6,494 individuals), compared to 74 per cent for men (18,017 individuals) (SEM, 2022).

As discussed in Chapter Three refugee women are disproportionately affected by sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), both during displacement and in host countries, with systemic barriers often exacerbating their vulnerabilities. Although there is no specific data on refugee women in terms of GBV in Switzerland, Amnesty International (2019) reported that approximately 22 per cent of all women in Switzerland have experienced sexual violence, and over ten per cent have been victims of rape. Proponents of intersectionality acknowledge that multiple identities, such as those related to race, gender, status and disability, do not exist independently but instead intersect to create challenging and unique experiences of oppression (Crenshaw, 1989). These identities can be further

compounded in the cases of refugee women, who experience compounded marginalisation based on race, gender, religion and ethnicity (Pittaway & Bartolomei, 2003). The compounded effect of race and gender can amplify refugee women's feelings of marginalisation, harming their well-being (Pittaway & Bartolomei, 2003). For example, pre-migration gender norms can lead to diminished social status for refugee women, which can be compounded by restricted legal rights and language barriers post-migration (Memela et al., 2016). Sokoloff (2008) found that immigrant women face challenges like fear of authorities, racism, and cultural stigmatisation, which can complicate their ability to seek help. The intersections of race, class, immigrant status, and gender further hinder refugee women's access to services. Though not specific to refugee women, this research highlights how marginalisation can exacerbate GBV within immigrant populations. Alessi (2023) conducted qualitative research on the bordering processes experienced by refugee women in Switzerland using an intersectionality lens to offer insights into the mechanisms that shape these women's lives. She found that refugee women encounter social, spatial and legal barriers and internal borders that restrict their access to rights, resources and belonging, even after they have entered Switzerland. Refugee women face gendered expectations and find themselves exposed to exclusionary practices, complicating their ability to form stable intimate relationships and successfully adapt to their host culture (Alessi, 2023). This is relevant to the present research as experiences of lacking belongingness, economic pressure and social exclusion have implications for acculturation. While Berry's (1997) and Bornstein's (2017) acculturation frameworks served as the primary theoretical lenses for analysing the participants' acculturation experiences, intersectionality was not applied as a theoretical framework as intersectionality was not a core part of the findings. However,

intersectionality emerged as a relevant theme in the results, particularly in relation to factors such as gender, racism, and exposure to GBV. In these instances, it was considered in the interpretation of participants' lived experiences, providing an additional nuance to the data analysis.

4.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter explored the societal and political challenges refugees can face in Switzerland (Alessi, 2023; CERD, 2022; Ossipow et al., 2019; Mugglin et al., 2022). Systemic racism can increase the vulnerability of refugee women leading to social exclusion and impeding their access to essential services (Kiselev et al., 2020; SEM, 2022). These barriers are particularly pronounced for refugee women, whose lived experiences remain largely underexplored in existing literature (Alessi 2023). While Alessi (2023) touched on aspects of intersectionality in her work on bordering processes, gaps persist in understanding how the overlapping identities, of refugee women in Switzerland such as gender, ethnicity, and refugee status can shape the experiences of acculturation for refugee women. By addressing these gaps, this research seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of refugee women in Switzerland and provide valuable insights into their post-migration experiences.

Chapter Five: Methodology

5.1 Introduction

Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), which was used in this research, is introduced in detail in this chapter. The chapter includes an overview of the philosophical foundations of IPA and why this was selected. Furthermore, this chapter includes a comparison with other methodological approaches, and recent critiques of IPA. Furthermore, this chapter explores the ways in which IPA's epistemological and ontological foundations informed both the research questions and the interpretation of the participants' lived experiences. Lastly the chapter outlines the integration of Berry's (1997) acculturation framework and Bornstein's (2017) specificity principles and how both acculturation models were utilised alongside IPA to provide the context-sensitive analysis of the participants' lived experiences in Switzerland.

5.2 Theoretical Foundations: The Rationale for Using IPA with a Focus on Interpretivism and Idiography

Qualitative researchers seek to understand human experiences and behaviours by focusing on their meaning and the context in which they occur rather than relying on numerical measurement or statistical analysis (Erickson, 2023). Based on the need to understand the experiences of individuals and the meanings that they attribute to their experiences, qualitative inquiry can be traced all the way back to ancient times, with examples as early as the book of Job (7th century BCE) in the old Testament Bible (Job 1, New Living Translation), and literature such as Herodotus' which used cross-cultural references as early as the 5th century BCE (Erickson, 2023). In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, qualitative research began to evolve and included descriptive methods and

structured approaches toward research. This period of time marked the formal establishment of anthropological ethnography as a distinct field of study (Erickson, 2023; Malinowski, 1922; Vidich & Lyman, 1994). At approximately the same time, scholars from the Chicago School of Sociology began to use descriptive methods to examine cultural practices, moving away from their previous detached observations instead paying closer attention to participants' lived experiences (Erickson, 2023; Vidich & Lyman, 1994). Together, these developments shaped the direction of qualitative research, forming the foundation for future qualitative methodologies (Erickson, 2023; Malinowski, 1922; Vidich & Lyman, 1994).

From the 1920's to the 1950's, realist ethnographic approaches began to emerge in research, that were focused on people's behaviours, routines and the cultural contexts in which they lived (Erickson, 2023). However, researchers also started to question the power dynamics in these methodological approaches, particularly as the researchers were often from a different cultural, social or economic background than the cohort they were studying. The researchers realised this could lead to misunderstandings or biases when they were interpreting the data which could lead to a reduced representation of participant voices or researcher bias and as such the need for methods that more accurately capture the perspectives of the participants was highlighted (Erickson, 2023). For instance, Redfield et al. (1936) emphasised the importance of understanding the experiential perspective of the participants which laid the groundwork for a more interpretive research approach (Erickson, 2023; Redfield et al., 1936). These critiques contributed to a move in research toward a more participatory and interpretive approach which in turn began to reshape the methodological approach of qualitative research (Erickson, 2023).

Continuing from this change in qualitative research by 1985, the researchers Lincoln and Guba highlighted the importance of establishing trustworthiness in qualitative research, by stressing the importance of credibility, transferability and the need to prioritise the subjective meaning of the participant's experiences. Lincoln and Guba (1985) work contributed to this paradigm shift in qualitative research and shaped the standards, practices and approaches that are used today (Ramos, 2020). More recently, researchers have increasingly focused on methods that can capture the depth and complexity of an individual's lived experiences (Smith et al., 2009). This can be seen in an increase in both the range of qualitative methodologies and in their use in disciplines such as psychology, sociology, healthcare and education (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Approaches such as IPA, which emerged in the mid-1990's has also gained widespread use in the areas of mental health, primarily because of its suitability in examining how individuals perceive and make sense of their experiences (Smith et al., 2019). IPA researchers draw on phenomenology and hermeneutics to explore how participants make sense of their lived experiences within a specific context (Smith et al., 1999). This makes it valuable for exploring the meanings that people attach to their experiences while acknowledging that multiple realities can exist, rather than assuming a single objective truth (Ramos, 2020; Smith, 1996; Smith & Eatough, 2007; Smith et al., 2009, 2023; Willig et al., 2001).

IPA's philosophical roots in phenomenology, hermeneutics and idiography makes it a comprehensive methodological approach for examining a participant's lived experiences and meaning making (Alase, 2017; Smith & Eatough, 2007; Smith et al., 2009). At its core, IPA draws heavily on phenomenology which is a branch of philosophy that originated with

Husserl (1931) and focuses on exploring the consciousness of an individual in order to capture their lived experiences (Smith et al., 2009).

Hermeneutics is the theory and practice of interpretation that is also foundational to IPA, which recognises the role of subjectivity in understanding the individual's lived experiences (Smith et al., 2009). In IPA, this interpretive process is central, as it focuses on how a person understands and makes sense of their personal and social world and their experiences. Researchers using hermeneutics acknowledge that all understanding is interpretive, meaning that the perspective, language and preconceptions of an individual can shape how they interpret their experiences (Smith et al., 2009). Heidegger (1962) further advanced the field of hermeneutics by proposing that a person's understanding is interpretative and shaped by their pre-existing beliefs and their lived experiences. Heidegger (1962) also introduced the concept of the 'hermeneutic circle', which describes the continuous relationship between an individual's prior understanding and their new experiences. The hermeneutic circle highlights how the individual's meaning-making is not fixed but can change through their interpretation of events and outlines the importance of their context and history in shaping their understanding (Heidegger, 1962). As such both phenomenology and hermeneutics emphasise the subjective and interpretive nature of the research, whereby the participants' experiences and meanings are explored in relation to the researcher's context and preconceptions, contributing to a co-constructed understanding of the phenomena under investigation (Smith et al., 2021). Furthermore, this aligns with IPA's aim of interpreting and understanding the subjective meaning-making of an individual (Smith et al., 2009). As such researchers who are working hermeneutically recognise that they cannot directly access a participant's lived experience, rather they engage in an

interpretative process which involves analysing the participants' narratives in order to uncover their meanings and perspectives (Smith et al., 2009). This process called double hermeneutics involves two layers of interpretation and is also a key aspect of IPA (Smith et al., 2009). First, the participant seeks to make sense of their experiences and the meanings they attribute to them, and secondly the researcher interprets the participant's account to understand how their meanings were constructed and expressed. This process acknowledges the relationship between the participant's perspective and the researcher's understanding of their meaning-making (Smith et al., 2009). As such, when using IPA researchers acknowledge that both the participants' interpretations and their interpretations will be shaped by their perspectives and biases (Delve et al., 2023; Levers, 2013; Smith et al., 2019).

IPA's third philosophical approach is idiography, which focuses on the detailed examination of the individual's experience (Smith et al., 2021). As a philosophical concept, idiography refers to the study of the particular, by focusing on understanding the depth and complexity of the individuals' specific experiences rather than looking for a generalisable pattern across the data (Smith et al., 2021). This approach contrasts with nomothetic approaches, which tend to focus on general principles across populations rather than an in-depth analysis of an individual case (Kuper et al., 2024). In IPA, idiography means prioritising the detailed analysis of each participant's experiences and focusing on how they made sense of their lived experiences (Smith et al., 2019). This means treating each participant's experiences as unique before moving on to look for any thematic connections across the participants data (Smith & Osborn, 2008). As such, the use of idiography in IPA ensures that their interpretations of the data are based on the specificities of each

participant's narrative while allowing for the identification of themes shared across the experiences (Smith et al., 2009). This idiographic foundation makes IPA ideal for examining complex phenomena and capturing an individual's perspective (Smith et al., 2009; Smith & Osborn, 2008).

In IPA analysis, the researcher balances these three foundational approaches by including the phenomenological description, the interpretative (double hermeneutic) insights while keeping a dedicated idiographic focus. This is ensured by focusing on an accurate interpretation of the participants' accounts, while preserving their individual nuances and focusing on their meaning-making rather than a causal relationship across the data (Smith, 2019a, 2019b).

Ontology is the study of the nature of reality and what can be known about it (Crotty, 1998). Ontological assumptions shape how qualitative researchers conceptualise the world and the experiences they seek to understand (Lincoln & Guba, 1995). In the present research, a relativist ontological standpoint is adopted, where it is assumed that multiple realities shaped by the individual's personal, cultural and social experiences can exist (Willig, 2012). This perspective is relevant for exploring the lived experiences of refugee women, as it makes space for how each participant might perceive and manage their environment. By recognising these multiple realities, this research aligns with the IPA approach in seeking to understand how individuals make sense of their lived experiences (Smith et al., 2009). For example, refugee women's lived experiences may be shaped by their experiences with gendered norms, forced migration, GBV, intimate relationships and discrimination. These factors can shape their perceptions and interactions and create a diverse, context-dependent and subjective reality, making it impossible to reduce their

experiences to a single, objective truth (Crenshaw, 1991; Willig, 2013). Thus, by having a relativist ontological standpoint, the diversity of the participants' experiences and how they made sense of their post-migration realities are acknowledged (Ramos, 2020; Smith et al., 2009). As such, it was understood that IPA is a robust methodological approach for understanding how refugee women make sense of their post-migration lived experiences. By employing phenomenology, hermeneutics and idiography, the ways in which the participants' pre- and post-migration cultural, contextual and personal factors shape their lived experiences were able to be acknowledged.

5.3 Theoretical Compatibility

The rationale for selecting IPA as the methodological approach over other qualitative methodologies is outlined in this section. Comparing IPA to other methodologies, such as Grounded Theory (GT) and Thematic Analysis (TA), demonstrates the strengths and suitability of IPA for exploring refugee women's post-migration lived experiences. Additionally, the strengths and criticisms of IPA are reviewed in this section.

5.3.1 IPA vs Other Methodologies

IPA was chosen for this research because it emphasises exploring how people make sense of their lived experiences (Smith et al., 2009). The idiographic and interpretative focus of IPA aligns with the research aim of understanding refugee women's post-migration lived experiences. In contrast, Grounded Theorists develop generalisable theories, while Thematic Analysts focus on identifying and analysing patterns across datasets (Braun & Clarke, 2021). While both approaches have their strengths, they were deemed less suitable for this research due to their emphasis on broader patterns and theoretical development, which contrasts with the idiographic, context-specific focus that was considered necessary to understand the

refugee women's lived experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Charmaz, 2006). At the start of this research Grounded Theory (GT) was initially considered as a methodological approach however it was realised that with its strong focus on theory development and on general processes, this would not be suitable for capturing the detailed insights that were needed to understand the lived experiences of refugee women (Charmaz, 2006). As the aim of this research was to explore the detailed and context-specific experiences of the participants, GT was deemed insufficient as a methodological approach in capturing that depth of understanding that was needed (Smith, 2019). However, GT is a robust methodological approach for research which can be used to expand upon existing theoretical models, such as acculturation research, by enabling the analysis of data to generate categories and theoretical insights.

Thematic analysis (TA), particularly in its reflexive form, was also considered for this research as it is a flexible approach to identifying patterns and themes across qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2021). TA's adaptability allows it to be used across various research designs, making it popular in counselling and psychotherapy research (Braun & Clarke, 2021). However, compared with IPA, TA researchers adopt a methodological orientation that focuses on identifying patterns across datasets and prioritising thematic insights (Braun & Clarke, 2020) rather than the idiographic exploration needed for this research (Smith et al., 2009), thus, IPA was chosen instead of TA. Although TA can incorporate the researcher's perspective and align with an interpretative stance (Braun & Clarke, 2020), IPA's focus on personal experience provided the level of detail needed to capture participants' post-migration experiences (Smith et al., 2023).

5.3.2 Criticism of IPA

IPA is valued for its methodological approach, which enables a detailed exploration of how participants make sense of their lived experiences, however it has faced some criticisms (Smith et al., 2021). One critique of IPA was based on its idiographic focus which has been suggested could limit the ability to identify patterns that are applicable to wider populations, particularly in group settings (Love et al., 2020). However, this critique overlooks IPA's epistemological foundation, which acknowledges that while its primary aim is to explore individual meaning-making within specific contexts, patterns can still emerge when comparing and interpreting the shared themes across participants, provided they remain grounded in the richness of individual experiences.

A further critique relates to IPA and its potential to favour participants who possess stronger narrative skills. Tuffour (2017) argues that this could introduce a bias that could inadvertently marginalise those who are less verbally expressive and quieter and potentially bias the data results. However, while Smith et al. (2021) acknowledged these concerns, he highlighted that one of IPA's strengths is its commitment to methodological exactitude, which ensures a detailed understanding of every participant's meaning making and experiences. Furthermore, Smith et al. (2021) maintained that when using IPA as a methodological approach, researchers prioritise all participants' narratives and stay true to their descriptions and therefore minimising the possibility of inaccurate interpretations. In this sense IPA links back to Lincoln and Guba (1985) points around the importance of establishing credibility, transferability and prioritising the subjective meaning of the participant's experiences. Addressing the critique from Tuffour (2017), other proponents of IPA argued that the use of open-ended interview questions and the idiographic focus of the

data analysis would effectively capture all participants contexts, regardless of their verbal skills (Alase, 2017; Noon, 2018; Smith, 2019). However, perhaps in response to these criticism's, Smith recently refined the guidelines of IPA's and reinforced its suitability and effectiveness for psychological research by ensuring that the methodological rigour of IPA was explicitly outlined (Smith, 2023).

A further criticism came from the misunderstanding that IPA was a psychologically therapy-oriented methodology rather than a methodological approach, with Van Manen (2017, pp. 776–778) arguing that IPA's focus on psychological sense-making misaligns with the philosophical roots of phenomenology and its emphasis on pre-reflective lived experience. By pre-reflective lived experience, Van Manen (2017) refers to the immediate, unprocessed way individuals encounter the world before consciously interpreting or assigning meaning to their experiences. He argues that IPA, by focusing on retrospective psychological sense-making, this shifts attention away from these raw, direct experiences, thereby diverging from traditional phenomenological principles. However, Smith (2018) argued that Van Manen's critique misrepresented IPA, refuting his claims that it is a therapy-oriented methodology. Instead, Smith (2018) clarified that IPA is a hermeneutic methodology that explores a participant's sense-making processes without the researcher adopting a therapeutic role. Additionally, Smith (2018) responded to Van Manen's (2017) critique of his use of the term 'co-analysts,' clarifying that it was employed in a participatory reflexive inquiry and was not indicative of a therapeutic approach but rather a supplementary analytic exercise within specific research contexts. Furthermore, Smith (2018) emphasised the researcher's role is central in interpreting the participants' lived experiences, and again highlighted the commitment of IPA's to understanding the subjective

meaning-making of a participant .Therefore, despite the criticisms listed above the decision to use IPA in this present research was driven by its strengths in enabling a deep and focused understanding of the lived experiences of refugee women in Switzerland (Alase, 2017; Sakhi, 2020; Smith, 2023).

5.4 The Role of Theoretical Frameworks in IPA

In qualitative research, data trustworthiness is considered to be key and is guided by four primary criteria's which include credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this study, credibility was ensured through techniques such as iterative engagement with the data, the use of verbatim quotes from participants and debriefing sessions with the researcher's supervisor to validate the interpretations of the data (Circo & Smolka, 2023). Transferability was supported by providing rich and detailed descriptions of the participants' experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018), and dependability was ensured by maintaining a detailed data analysis trail (Circo & Smolka, 2023), from the data collection to that data analysis that ensured transparency and replicability (see Appendix H and L for data analysis and worked examples). Confirmability was achieved by engaging in ongoing reflexive journaling by the researcher in order to identify and manage any potential biases (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Additionally, techniques such as data triangulation were used to reinforce the credibility of the findings where for example, data from interviews with participants from different cultural backgrounds, such as Kurdish and South American women, were compared to identify any shared or unique themes in their post-migration experiences (Circo & Smolka, 2023; Creswell & Poth, 2018).

To enhance the analysis of the process of acculturation of the participants, Berry's (1997) acculturation framework was utilised in conjunction with Bornstein's (2017)

specificity principle. While Berry's (1997) acculturation framework provided a structured approach to understanding the four acculturation strategies, Bornstein's (2017) specificity principle added the specific moderating factors, such as setting, individual traits, time, process and domain. These factors addressed the complexities of the participants' acculturation experiences during their acculturation processes and when combined with IPA this enabled a detailed examination of participants' acculturation experiences, capturing their themes and meaning making. The integration of the two acculturation models aligned with IPA's commitment to explore the participants' lived experiences, allowing for a detailed and layered approach to the analysis of the refugee women's post-migration experiences.

5.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter outlined the methodological approach of IPA, focusing on its philosophical foundations in phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography. Furthermore, this chapter outlined the rationale for selecting IPA and reviewed other qualitative methodologies such as TA and GT. Additionally, this chapter examined the critiques of IPA and addressed the theoretical framework of Berry's (1997) acculturation framework and Bornstein's (2017) specificity principle within the methodological approach of IPA.

Chapter Six: Method

6.1 Introduction

The method and protocol used to explore the post-migration lived experiences of refugee women in Switzerland is described in this chapter. This includes a description of the participants age, their nationality, their religious background, language and their education, along with the inclusion and exclusion criteria. In this research, all participants were forcibly displaced persons (FDPs), and shared homogeneous characteristics such as their location at the time of this research, (Aargau), their gender (female), their status as refugee, and their intimate relationships of over a year. The selection and recruitment processes are also outlined, including the purposive and snowball sampling strategies that was used to recruit the participants. Detailed procedures for conducting the interviews are included, along with ethical considerations that were made to ensure the participant privacy, confidentiality and well-being. The data analysis section of this chapter introduces the six-step IPA process of data analysis recommended by Smith (2019). The chapter concludes with an explanation of how Berry's (1997) acculturation framework and Bornstein's (2017) specificity principle were integrated to provide an understanding of the acculturation process.

6.2 Participants Demographics

Twelve refugee women participated in this research, all of whom were forcibly displaced persons (FDPs), specifically refugee women who were granted asylum and recognised under the Swiss legal framework as refugees (Swiss Federal Assembly, 1999). The canton of Aargau (bordering Zurich), which is located in the north-west of Switzerland, was chosen as the geographical location for this research. At the time of this research, the refugee women had been living in Aargau between 12 and 36 months ($M = 25.3$, $SD = 8.5$)

and had all been in an intimate relationship for one year to seven years. See Table 2 for demographics of participants, including their pseudonyms, countries of origin, age, nationalities, children, religions, languages, education levels and the languages that the interview was conducted in. The women ranged in age from 25 to 43 years of age, with a mean age of 33.5 ($SD = 6.1$). Most ($n = 7$) of the refugee women were from Turkey and identified as either Kurdish or Turkish, while the remaining participants were from Pakistan ($n = 1$), Cuba ($n = 1$), Colombia ($n = 2$) and Iraq ($n = 1$). The participants' religious beliefs varied, with Islam being prevalent among those from Turkey, Iraq and Pakistan, while the three participants from Cuba and Colombia identified as Christians. One Kurdish participant identified as an atheist, while another Kurdish participant reported having no religious affiliation. The shared experience of being a refugee provided the homogeneity that is necessary for an IPA study, with additional homogeneity coming from the participants' gender, their location and their intimate- relationship status. The interviews were conducted in either English or German, both of which the researcher is fluent in, to ensure effective and accurate communication and data collection. All the names used are pseudonyms, to protect the privacy of the individuals involved in this research.

Table 2
Demographics of Participants and Pseudonyms Used in This Research

Pseudonym	Country of origin	Age	Nationality	Children	Time in Switzerland	Religion	Language	Education	Interview language
Azra	Turkey	25	Kurdish	0	24 months	Muslim /Alevism	Turkish	High School	DE
Suna	Turkey	41	Kurdish	0	24 months	Muslim /Alevism	Turkish	High School	DE
Dilek	Turkey	27	Kurdish	0	12 months	Atheist	Kurdish	University	DE
Neshele	Pakistan	31	Pakistan	1	36 months	Muslim/Sunni	Urdu	Masters	DE
Defne	Iraq	25	Kurdish	2	12 months	Muslim/Shia	Kurdish	High School	DE
Karessa	Cuba	43	Cuban	1	36 months	Christian	Spanish	University	EN
Kesari	Columbia	38	Columbia	3	24 months	Christian	Spanish	University	EN
Joaquina	Columbia	41	Columbia	2	18 months	Christian	Spanish	Nursing	EN
Gocke	Turkey	31	Turkey	2	18 months	Muslim/Sunni	Turkish	University	DE
Sema	Turkey	32	Kurdish	0	36 months	No Religion	Kurdish	University	DE
Elma	Turkey	37	Turkish	2	28 months	Muslim/Sunni	Turkish	University	DE
Tulay	Turkey	31	Turkish	1	36 months	Muslim/Sunni	Turkish	High School	DE

Note. This *table* presents participants' demographic information using pseudonyms to ensure anonymity. 'DE' denotes interviews conducted in German and 'EN' indicates interviews conducted in English. Time in Switzerland is a record of how long participants had lived in months in Switzerland. Under education, University represents undergraduate studies.

6.3 Selection and Recruitment Process

The use of purposive sampling in IPA allows for the selection of participants who have specific experiences or characteristics that are relevant to the focus of the research (Smith & Osborn, 2003). Thus, opportunity and snowball sampling were used to recruit participants. Opportunity sampling refers to the recruitment of participants through the researcher's existing network, while snowball sampling involves getting recommendations from the participants (Smith et al., 2009). To facilitate recruitment, flyers were posted at Anlaufstelle Integration Aargau (AIA), which is a Swiss governmental organisation that helps refugees, where the researcher previously founded and ran an NGO providing psychological support, amongst other forms of support for refugees. The flyers were distributed via an information stand situated in AIA's front office (see Appendix G).

Women could contact the researcher, whose contact details were listed on the flyer, if they were interested in participating in the research or if they wanted more information about the study. Once potential participants expressed interest, they were contacted and, if they met the selection criteria, an interview was scheduled at a time that suited them. Fourteen women initially agreed to participate, but two were excluded as they did not meet the age criteria. The participants were asked to sign a consent form (see Appendix C) before the interview. The researcher described the process, and additional information about the study was then made available via an information sheet (Appendix B). This ensured that participants understood the study's purpose, procedures, potential risks and benefits and their right to withdraw at any time without penalty.

6.3.1 Inclusion Criteria

The inclusion criteria required all participants to be recognised as refugees in Switzerland by the State Secretariat for Migration (SEM) and to be between 25 and 45 years of age. This age range was selected to ensure participants had accumulated life experiences pertinent to the study's focus such as adjusting to a new cultural environment, engaging in intimate relationships, and managing familial responsibilities in Switzerland. By excluding individuals younger than 25 or older than 45, the researcher aimed to minimise the variability in the participants' life stages and their experiences and thereby enhancing the depth of the analysis of this research. Additionally, focusing on this age group helped maintain homogeneity within the sample, which is a key aspect of IPA, as a homogeneous sample allows for a more detailed and nuanced analysis of shared experiences (Smith et al., 2009).

Additionally, participants were required to have been in an intimate relationship for at least one year at the time of the interview. This criterion was established to ensure that the relationships had had sufficient time to develop in terms of stability, emotional connections, and patterns of interaction (Freeman et al., 2023). Lastly, all participants had to be proficient in either German or English to take part in the interviews. Conducting interviews in a language in which the participants were proficient in was important as it enabled the researcher to capture the nuances of their narratives and ensure that any important details were not lost in translation (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009).

6.3.2 Exclusion Criteria

Temporary migrant workers, stateless individuals and those that had not yet been granted a recognised legal status were excluded from participation. This criterion to only

include refugee status was established as different statuses can lead to varied experiences, and vulnerabilities that are specific to forced displacement, such as trauma, disrupted family structures, and that challenges in acculturation can shape both experiences and meaning making (UNHCR, 2023; Smith et al., 2021). For example, the experiences a temporary migrant worker may differ to that of a refugee as they face different challenges and problems. Individuals with any diagnosed psychological disorders were also excluded from this research to ensure a focused exploration of the research questions and to minimise any potentially confounding factors, such as the influence of pre-existing mental health conditions on the participants' acculturation experiences, coping mechanisms, or intimate relationships. Research has found that mental health conditions, such as depression and anxiety, can influence the acculturation process of refugees and their coping mechanisms (Kartal et al., 2018; Kirmayer et al., 2011; Schweitzer et al., 2011). Therefore, including participants with mental health diagnoses would have risked misattributing challenges stemming from pre-existing mental health conditions, so this exclusion criterion was implemented to reduce variability.

6.4 Sample Size

IPA typically requires a small, purposive and homogeneous sample, which enables a comprehensive, detailed, case-by-case exploration of participants experiences in order to understand specific phenomena (Smith et al., 2009, 2023). Indeed, Smith (2007) argued that a study with one participant can suffice if it presents a particularly rich or compelling case. As such, the size of an IPA sample can depend on the desired depth of analysis, the richness of the available data and the practical limitations on the research such as time or participant availability (Smith et al., 2006). This allows researchers to focus on generating detailed and

nuanced data from the defined group of individuals (Smith & Osborn, 2003). Although there is some debate regarding the ideal sample size for an IPA study, researchers generally agree that finding a balance between the richness and quantity of information is key (Alase, 2017; Smith et al, 2009). As such, in practice, IPA studies can range from single-case studies to projects with up to 21 participants, depending on the research aims and design (Smith, Spiers, Simpson, & Nicholls, 2017). However, managing larger datasets can challenge the ability of the researcher to engage deeply with each case, which stresses the importance of ensuring the sample size is tailored to the study's specific needs (Coyle, 2014; Chatfield, 2022; Noon, 2018). Although Smith et al. (2009) recommends that a sample size for PhD-level research using IPA should be around of four to ten participants, this research included a sample size of 12 participants. This larger sample size was selected to include all participants who met the inclusion criteria and volunteered for the study to provide inclusivity ensuring the homogeneity required for IPA research while still allowing for in-depth, detailed analysis. This number allowed for a comprehensive examination of the participants' lived experiences and ensured that the research provided rich, detailed and yet still manageable data (Noon, 2017; Smith et al., 2019).

6.5 Procedures

All interviews were held at the AIA, a government-funded office in the canton of Aargau, in Switzerland. This location was chosen as AIA is well known in Aargau for providing support services to refugees who are familiar with the location. The interviews were conducted in a private and comfortable room in the AIA building to promote the comfort of each of the participants. Before the interviews, participants were briefed about the process of the interview to ensure they were all well-prepared and knew what to expect.

Participants were also informed before the interview started that each session was confidential, and they could withdraw at any point before, during, or up to one month after the interview. The only caveat was as long as their data had not yet been anonymised or incorporated into the data analysis. No participants withdrew before, during or after from the study. To ensure the interviews ran smoothly, the researcher familiarised herself with the process by running through the interview protocol and the data recorder beforehand. This preparation was important for refining the interview schedule and the interview techniques (Noon, 2018). Furthermore, all the elements of the interview, such as the recording equipment, computer and interview protocol, were set up and checked before the interviews began in order to ensure a smooth process.

After participants initially expressed interest in the study, they were given a week to consider their decision and if they still wanted to participate. On the day of the interview, they were provided with an additional opportunity to confirm or withdraw their consent before starting the interviews. This confirmation process allowed the participants up to ten minutes to review the study information and ask any final questions before the interview began. All the recruited participants completed the interview. After agreeing to participate, they were asked to sign a consent form (Appendix C) and a COVID-19 form (Appendix J), in accordance with the ethical procedures outlined in section 6.6. of this thesis. The COVID-19 form included measures to ensure compliance with health and safety guidelines, such as symptom's, screening and the acknowledgment of the pandemic-related precautions (see section 6.6 for further details). Participants were then provided with an information sheet (Appendix G), and a data protection form (Appendix E) that outlined how their data would be safely stored and managed.

Participants were assured that their personal information would not be disclosed to any third parties and that their involvement in this research was entirely voluntary, with no repercussions on present or future interactions with the AIA services should they choose to withdraw. The women were also told that they could have another female refugee (a trusted friend) with them for general support during the interview if they wanted. Five women brought along trusted friends to their interviews. These friends were required to adhere to the data privacy and confidentiality agreements (listed in Appendix C and E) and also be involved in signing the consent form and they were given the information sheet to review. The friends were instructed to remain silent during the interviews unless the participant explicitly requested their input or support. No participants asked for the input from their friend during the interview. Participants could also choose whether the interviews should be conducted in German (DE) or English (EN) as the researcher is fluent in both languages. At the beginning of the interview, the demographic information such as name, country of origin, age, nationality, relationship status, parental status, religion and level of education was captured. As a token of appreciation for their participation, each participant received a monetary compensation of 25 CHF (approximately 20 GBP).

6.5.1 Interview Protocol

The interview topic guide (see Appendix F) was developed based on the principles of IPA as outlined by Smith et al (2021) and was designed to elicit rich and nuanced narratives. The choice of semi-structured interviews helped to facilitate a flexible interaction with the participants, which enabled the exploration of their lived experiences (Smith et al., 2009). Semi-structured interviews are particularly suited for IPA research as they allow for in-depth

exploration of participants' perspectives while maintaining a focus on their lived experiences (Smith et al., 2009).

The researcher focused on creating a comfortable and collaborative environment for the participants by using techniques such as active listening, open-ended questions and affirming responses to ensure they felt at ease and to build rapport. In this way, a deep exploration of participants' narratives was facilitated. This approach was grounded in the understanding that the quality and depth of data depended on the participants' willingness to share their personal narratives (Alase, 2017). Recognising the potential vulnerability involved in discussing sensitive experiences, the researcher aimed to minimise discomfort by encouraging a respectful and empathetic interview that was tailored to each participant's comfort level. In practical terms, this involved observing participants' verbal and non-verbal cues, such as their tone of voice or body language, in order to guide the interactions. For example, if a participant appeared uncomfortable, the researcher would refrain from probing further, whereas with those who seemed eager to elaborate, additional questions were posed to encourage deeper exploration of their narratives. To minimise misunderstandings, the interview schedule consisted of questions that were easy to understand in German and English. The interviews ran from 80 to 85 minutes ($M = 82.5$ minutes, $SD = 2.5$).

6.5.2 Materials

The interviews were audio-recorded using an Olympus DS-9000 Dictaphone, which included 256-bit AES encryption to ensure the confidentiality and security of participant data. The recordings were transcribed verbatim using MS Word on a password protected Dell laptop. A semi-structured interview guide (Appendix F) was used to facilitate in-depth discussions.

6.6 Ethical Procedures

Formal ethical approval was granted by the Ethics Department of the University of Central Lancashire (UCLAN) on 06/10/2021 (see Appendix I). Furthermore, the researcher ensured that UCLAN's ethical and data guidelines were followed before collecting data. To maintain ethical standards and procedures, the participants were provided with a debriefing document (Appendix D) that included 24/7 helpline contact numbers for professional organisations in Switzerland that were equipped to address any emotional discomfort or distress that might arise during or after the interview process and had access to the appropriate support resources. Although no discomfort was reported by the participants, the form was nevertheless provided. Before starting the interviews, the researcher explained the study purpose, how the data would be used and that the participants had the right to withdraw at any time. She also provided contact information for both herself and UCLAN supervisors. The researcher then explained all the research materials, including the participant information sheet (Appendix B) and consent form (Appendix C), to ensure participants had fully understood the research aim and process before providing their consent. All participants provided informed consent by signing a copy of the consent form (see Appendix C). Since data was collected during the COVID-19 pandemic, participants were required to read and sign a COVID-19 Research Participant Pre-Visit checklist (see Appendix J) in accordance with social distancing and isolation regulations at the time.

6.6.1 Data Confidentiality

To ensure the confidentiality of participant data, strict adherence to UCLAN's ethical requirements (see Appendix K) was maintained throughout the study. After obtaining their informed consent (see Appendix C), all data handling procedures were designed to prioritise

anonymity and protect the participants' identities. Personal identifiers were removed from all transcripts, and pseudonyms were used during the data analysis, the reporting and the write-up, thus protecting participants' identities. All sensitive information was only accessible to the researcher and was stored in line with UCLAN's data protection policies, ensuring the participant confidentiality. No identifiable information was shared with third parties, ensuring full compliance with the UCLAN's ethical guidelines.

6.6.2 Potential Distress

The researcher was aware of participants' vulnerability and therefore focused on minimising any distress that could arise, particularly during the recounting of events that could trigger traumatic memories (Alase, 2017). To ensure their well-being, participants were assured that they did not need to discuss any traumatic events they had experienced. Additionally, if a participant did show any signs of distress during the interview, the interviewer planned to immediately change the line of questioning, adjust the wording, pause or even stop the interview altogether (Alase, 2017). However, no participants appeared to experience any distress during the interviews. Time was allocated at the end of each interview to allow participants to ask questions or voice any concerns they may have had. All participants were provided with a debriefing document (Appendix D), which included six free helplines for refugees, accessible in Switzerland 24/7. No participants reported the desire to use these services during or after participating in the research.

6.7 Data Security

Ensuring the security and confidentiality of the data was crucial in this research. Therefore, the researcher adhered to UCLAN's data security (see Appendix K) for the duration of the research. Considering the confidential nature of the data, strict physical and

electronic data security measures were implemented. All digital devices storing research data were safeguarded with password protection, which acted as a first line of defence against unauthorised access. Additionally, regular backups were made on UCLAN secure drives, minimising the risk of data loss. Data security was adhered to during each interview by using an encrypted Dictaphone. Data security procedures for physical materials such as printed transcripts, the reflexive diary and other related documents were also adhered to. All physical materials were securely stored in a locked filing cabinet in a lockable room in Aargau which was accessible only to the researcher.

6.8 Data Analysis and Theme Identification

The analysis was an iterative, interpretive process that required a thorough understanding of IPA's hermeneutic, phenomenological and idiographic foundations (Smith et al., 2009). These foundations were important as, without a solid understanding of them, the results could end up being surface-level and not aligning with IPA (Alase, 2017).

Additionally, Berry's (1997) acculturation framework was applied as a theoretical framework for examining the participants' acculturation strategies, categorising acculturation into assimilation, integration, separation and marginalisation. Bornstein's (2017) emphasis on context and specificity in acculturation added depth of understanding to the participants' experiences around their acculturation. The researcher remained flexible during the analysis, allowing participants' lived experiences to be explored without forcing them into any predefined acculturation strategies. This enabled the identification of where the participants' experiences aligned with or diverged from both Berry's (1997) framework and Bornstein's (2017) specificity principle and revealed perspectives that extended beyond both frameworks.

To provide transparency and demonstrate the flexibility in the data analysis, a worked example of a data table that as developed is included in Appendix L and Appendix H. This example captured an analysis where the participants' experiences converged to form Personal Experiential Themes (PETs) and Group Experiential Themes (GETs) and aligned with and diverged from Berry's (1997) acculturation framework and Bornstein's (2017) specificity principle. This data analysis snapshot highlights the relationships between the key themes such as racism, acculturation, and the loss of social identity.

The researcher followed the six analytical steps that are outlined by Smith (2019) which are designed to transform participant narratives into meaningful themes. These six steps are not overly prescriptive and allow room for adaptability, which was important as it ensured that the emerging GETs and PETs reflected the lived experiences of the participants while remaining true to the phenomenological foundations of IPA (Smith, 2019).

The initial analytical phase required a complete data immersion, where the researcher read and re-read the interview transcripts over a period of several months. This deep dive into the data and the familiarisation of the data allowed the researcher to identify patterns which then laid the foundations for the next steps (Smith et al., 2021). Following this, the initial noting (the second step) began, whereby any observations made in the data were then categorised into descriptive, linguistic, and conceptual notes within an extensive Excel table that was designed to capture the participants' lived experiences. For example, linguistic notes were made that focused on the participants' tone, their choice of words and any repetitive or recurring language patterns which gave further insights into their experiences. The third step built on the second step and involved transforming these notes into emergent themes through an iterative and reflective process. This also required the researcher to

engage in reflexive consideration and acknowledge any potential biases that could impact the interpretation of the data. The fourth step involved identifying connections and patterns across the data, which then required further analysis and note-making. From a practical perspective this entailed reviewing the descriptive, linguistic, and conceptual notes and grouping them into emergent themes. The same Excel table, with different tabs was used to categorise and cross-reference these themes, allowing for the identification of recurring patterns both within the individual interviews and across the entire dataset (see Appendix H). Themes were then mapped out visually to explore potential relationships, any overlaps, and any contrasts. For instance, the theme of 'racism and discrimination' emerged repeatedly in the participant narratives, with participants describing incidents such as being spat on, pushed, or feeling excluded due to their accents or language skills. This theme was tracked alongside expressions such as 'fear,' 'withdrawal' or 'avoidance'. Mapping these connections then started to highlight how racism shaped aspects of the participants' experiences of acculturation. This iterative process ensured that the themes remained grounded in the participants' lived experiences and highlighting patterns as they emerged, making this phase extremely important when exploring the relationships between the emerging and the overarching themes. The fifth step involved identifying the emerging PETs (previously called superordinate themes), which were then organised into thematic constructs. This process entailed grouping related PETs into categories with the thematic constructs representing a higher-level of data synthesis which then provided a structured way in which to present how these themes interconnected (Smith, 2023) For instance, the PET "Conceptualised Cultural Reality and Cultural Consequences of Old and New" was grouped into the thematic construct "Cultural Challenges and Adaptation," which included

subthemes such as "Multicultural Challenges," "Loss of Social Integration," and "Cultural Expectations of Women." (see Appendix L). This thematic grouping allowed the analysis to move beyond the individual experiential statements and capture patterns that highlighted how cultural norms shaped the participants' post-migration experiences.

The final step was the creation of the overarching GETs (previously known as master themes), which represented the participant experience and provided an overview of the multiple participants' accounts that converged into a GET. This step identified the patterns across these themes and the convergence and divergences within the GETs. For example, the formation of the GET 'Acculturation: Pathways to Safety, Autonomy, and Agency' captured the patterns of GBV across the participants narratives, where shared experiences of violence, and control were accompanied by acculturation strategies and coping mechanisms. To ensure thoroughness throughout the data analysis, a theme table was created that incorporated the emerging PETs and GETs, with selected excerpts from each of the interviews to represent each GET. Importantly, reflexivity was also included in all phases of the research as outlined in chapter twelve.

6.9 Chapter Summary

Chapter Six provides an overview of the methods that were used in this research to explore the post-migration lived experiences of refugee women in Switzerland. This chapter outlined the recruitment process and the interviewing techniques that were used with the twelve participants. It also outlines the shared the characteristics of refugee status, residency in Aargau, and intimate relationships to ensure the homogeneity that was required for IPA research. This chapter also explored the ethical considerations that were implemented in this research including the informed consent, the data security, and the measures that were taken

in to minimise the participant distress. Data collection is given in a step-by-step approach, including how the semi-structured interviews were conducted and the six-step IPA data analysis process that facilitated the development of the PETs and GETs. Lastly the integration of Berry's (1997) acculturation framework and Bornstein's (2017) specificity principle is explained in order provided a theoretical structure for understanding the process of acculturation in the data analysis.

Chapter Seven: Findings: Theme One – Pathways of Acculturation

7.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the first GET is introduced. This consists of four subthemes about the participants' post-migration acculturation experiences. Interestingly, those from similar cultural backgrounds often showed similar acculturation strategies. The first subtheme, called 'Pathways to Safety, Autonomy and Agency,' is an exploration of the accounts of three Muslim participants who were exposed to GBV and utilised acculturation to achieve safety, autonomy and a new life. The second subtheme which is called 'A Love Left Behind: Resistance and Separation of Kurdish Women in Switzerland,' explores the narratives of three Kurdish participants who resisted integration, as they explained their strategy of separation. The third subtheme titled, 'Bicultural Navigation Among South American Participants', explores the bi-cultural integration approach of the three South American participants, and the fourth subtheme called 'Cultural Dissonance and Separation: Pre-Migration Expectations and Post-Migration Reality', examines the acculturation strategy of three Muslim participants and their experiences of cultural dissonance and separation. Participants' efforts to preserve their pre-migration religion and culture while navigating the challenges of Swiss society are highlighted through these subthemes in this chapter.

Table 3 presents the subthemes and highlights participants' acculturation choices.

Table 3
Overview of the 'Pathways of Acculturation' GET: Frequencies and Key Insights

Subthemes	Frequency mentioned	Participants	Key insights	Acculturation process	Contributions
Pathways to safety, autonomy and agency	174	Elma, Suna, Defne	Acculturation as empowerment, escape	Expands acculturation to include safety as driver	Acculturation for women affected by GBV/IPV added to Berry's framework, with TA.
A love left behind: Resistance and separation of Kurdish women in Switzerland	132	Azra, Sema, Dilek	Resistance to acculturation, attachment to homeland	Emphasises cultural separation and strong emotional attachment	The Kurdish women's narratives illustrated a collective resistance to acculturation.
Bicultural navigation among South American participants	147	Joaquina, Kesari, Karessa	Biculturalism, blending cultures	Highlights biculturalism as stabilizing	Experiences of biculturalism; integrated with the Swiss environment.
Cultural dissonance and separation: Pre-migration expectations and post-migration reality	159	Tulay, Gocke, Neshele	Cultural dissonance/separation	Cultural loyalty with desire for change	Cultural dissonance driven by gender roles.

7.2 Pathways to Safety, Autonomy and Agency

In this subtheme, Defne (25, Kurdish, Iraq), Suna (41, Kurdish, Turkey) and Elma (37, Turkish, Turkey), all from Islamic backgrounds, described how their experiences of GBV and IPV shaped their lived experiences in post-migration Switzerland. Throughout this subtheme, participants' pre- and post-migration experiences are explored to provide context for their post-migration experiences, reactions and decisions. All three women mentioned that their husbands were practising Muslims and reflected on the contrast between the patriarchal norms in their pre-migration culture and the post-migration Swiss cultural norms. The participants described their acculturation process as a way to achieve the agency, autonomy, independence and safety they needed.

Table 4 outlines these women's lived experiences and captures their acculturation process. It illustrates the links between their pre-migration cultural backgrounds, experiences post-migration and their approach to acculturation.

Table 4*Autonomy and Safety Through Acculturation: Post-Migration Experiences*

Participant	Pre-migration experiences	Motivations for acculturation	Post-migration outcomes	Transformative acculturation themes	Illustrative quote
Suna	Experienced IPV from husband; lack of protection for women in Turkey.	Desire for safety, gender equality, and freedom from violence.	Adopted Swiss cultural norms emphasising autonomy and resilience.	Resilience, Autonomy rejection of patriarchal norms,	“The violence from my husband... that’s why I gave up my good job, my family and my life in Turkey, and now I look for freedom.” (Suna, lines 6-7)
Defne	Forced engagement to abusive cousin; cultural normalisation of GBV; lack of agency	Escape from forced marriage, autonomy, and a safe environment.	Reclaimed agency, sought work opportunities, and embraced women’s rights.	Escape from GBV, redefinition of self, safety and equality.	“My family wanted me to marry a man... so I considered going to Europe because where I come from it is not possible to fight against the family.” (Defne, lines 4-8)
Elma	Controlling husband; GBV persisted post-migration; critical of restrictive pre-migration culture.	Personal growth, freedom from ‘ideologies’, and hope for a new start.	Actively engaged in reinvention and empowerment.	Identity transformation, critique of pre-migration norms.	“I come fresh to the world... a new chance, I can build my life again.” (Elma, lines 90-91)

Defne began by explaining how her planned forced marriage, her struggle against her family and culture and the daily GBV she experienced shaped her pre-migration life. Defne was specific in her description of her lack of agency, as she recounted the cultural and familial pressure she experienced when she was forced to conform to an arranged marriage to her abusive cousin. She explained:

My family wanted me to marry a man [her cousin and fiancé], so I considered going to Europe because where I come from it is not possible to fight against the family, I couldn’t argue with them. (Defne, lines 4-8)

Defne explained that it was impossible for her to challenge her family and the pressure they put on her to marry her cousin while remaining in Iraq. This demonstrated her limited agency and autonomy in this situation. Defne further described how, in her pre-migration culture, GBV was often framed as a consequence for women who refused to conform to family pressure. She recalled:

This [violence] is normal in Turkey or in Iraq. They say you have to marry the man [they choose] and if you don't want to you have to leave the country, if you stay in the same country, they can find you and do something bad to you. (Defne, lines 17-20)

Defne explained that the threat of violence meant it was impossible to resist her family. From her perspective, violence was both normalised and inescapable in her family, culture and throughout Iraq. She continued:

This is how it is in my family, he [fiancé] always had violence against women, the whole family knew this, he was violent to women, I know when I was a child I was always hit, but I knew they and their entire and whole family are so violent. (Defne, lines 29-32)

Defne's trauma was unmistakable as she described her memories of GBV, saying: "Always violence" (Defne, lines 57-59). She continued, "I remember my mother always had blood on her head, because my father beat her so much and with different things, he was always so violent. I always remember so much blood on her head" (Defne, lines 73-75). The memory of her mother's repeated abuse provided a background to her trauma and urgent need

to escape her sister and mother's fate. Defne's trauma and fear, as well as her lack of safety and autonomy, were clearly depicted in her descriptions and experiences of GBV.

Defne also reflected on her perception of Islam and the role it played in shaping the normalisation and justification of GBV in her pre-migration culture. She explained, "The men, they misunderstand Islam, or they use Islam wrongly, an excuse" (Defne, line 68) and "Because Islam says that men have rights against women and women do not have any" (Defne, lines 61-62). From Defne's perspective, the men in her pre-migration culture misinterpreted Islam to justify the GBV and control she experienced. However, there is a contradiction in Defne's statement, where she attributes the justification of GBV to the misinterpretation of Islam and then to Islam itself. This maybe a reflection of an internal struggle that Defne has, as she attempts to make sense of her pre-migration culture which is then shaped by the trauma she had to endure as a child and as a teenager.

Forced migration allowed Defne to escape the GBV. In Switzerland, she embraced opportunities that prioritised her safety, autonomy and agency. For instance, she reflected on how the post-migration culture allowed her to escape the restrictive gender norms she had experienced in Iraq and imagine a future where she could find employment and live better. As Defne weighed up her past and present, she explained that she could focus on new opportunities in Switzerland:

If I think because of women's rights, then Europe is better, because of the culture is difficult but here is better, for example in Kurdistan I can never work always stay at home and clean and cook, but here if I have an ID card I can work here, that's why here is better than Kurdistan. (Defne, lines 141-145)

Defne also contrasted her pre-migration gender norms with those she saw in Europe. She saw Switzerland as a place where she could redefine herself and her circumstances:

I know the life here now and I know you can live better than I lived. If I stayed there, then not ok, but I think here, here I can live better, and my children can live a good life. That's why I always think I should stay here. (Defne, lines 109-112)

Defne's acculturation meant a redefinition of her sense of self, initially driven by her prioritisation of safety, autonomy and agency in post-migration Switzerland. She emphasised how acculturation in Switzerland could help her shape a new identity and overcome her experiences of traumatic GBV and familial pressure. Through acculturation, Defne could embrace women's rights, safety and autonomy. The feelings of safety she experienced in Switzerland, enabled her to create a better life for herself, which was free from the violence she had experienced. This contrast between the lack of agency in her pre-migration experiences and the acculturative opportunities she experienced in Switzerland provides her with the opportunity for her transformation. This was reflected when she explained, "My youth time I have always had terrible situations... I want to live my new life without worries" (Defne, lines 113-118). Defne's narrative illustrated how she had used Transformative Acculturation to not only reject the harmful norms of her pre-migration culture but embrace post-migration opportunities that provided her with safety, gender equality, and autonomy, such as the possibility of work, learning the language and building a better future. Through these actions, Defne reshaped her identity as she integrated norms and values from the Swiss host culture while rejecting those that had perpetuated trauma in her pre-migration life.

Elma, Suna and Defne's narratives demonstrated their transformation through the changes and the reconstruction of their lives and identities in Switzerland. Their process of

transformative acculturation (TA) was evident in their rejection of their pre-migration culture, the adoption of autonomy and agency and their active pursuit of safety, equality, and empowerment. While the degree of transformation varied among the three participants, the process was noticeable in all three with Defne and Suna showing significant change, and Elma strongly progressing toward her new sense of self.

Similar to Defne, Suna's decision to leave Turkey was an act of survival and autonomy, driven by her desire to escape her husband's violence and the systemic lack of support for women that were in her pre-migration situation. She explained that leaving was the only way to protect herself, since returning to Turkey would put her life in jeopardy stating, "If I go back [to him], I may be killed" (Suna, line 87).

Suna's process of acculturation became a response to her repeated experiences of GBV and her rejection of her pre-migration culture which she believed perpetuated GBV. By fleeing, Suna gave up her job, family, and any possibility of safely returning home. However, she believed that living free from violence was worth these sacrifices. She explained, "[Because of the] violence from my husband, that's why I gave up my good job, my family and my life in Turkey, and now I look for freedom" (Suna, lines 6-7). This reflected how important safety and autonomy were for her, as she would rather lose everything than continue to live in violence. She tearfully explained that: "I had so much violence from my husband" (Suna, lines 6-7), and she explained that she was unable to seek help from anyone else, including her family. Suna, similar to Defne, highlighted her belief that her pre-migration culture allowed for the continued subjugation of women, which left her feeling trapped and helpless. She explained:

When you have a problem, you can't share it with your family, because they will then have problems with each other, and they become threatening, and everyone

starts fighting... The women then have no power, and the women then think it is better for their families if they figure out problems on their own and leave their family out of it. (Suna, lines 116-124)

Suna reflected on how her pre-migration cultural expectations could lead to women being isolated and, in her case, forcing them to handle issues like GBV alone to avoid creating fighting and family conflict. Suna explained, “I have not told my family everything, not all the problems that I had... Sometimes my husband can make it worse” (Suna, lines 129-133), emphasising her fear of her husband if she disclosed the GBV. Suna’s attempt to seek help from the police was also thwarted, as she recounted: “Once I also went to the police [for GBV], but it makes no difference in Turkey as a woman” (Suna, line 134). This highlights the lack of systemic support that was available to her as a woman suffering from GBV and the lack of support from her family. These circumstances left Suna with no viable options for protection.

Suna’s fear of her husband remained after she escaped from him and the GBV.

Reflecting on her pre-migration culture, Suna explained:

The violence against women, in Switzerland [...] is much less than in Turkey, and in Turkey, although it is a democratic country, the women are treated like the women in Afghanistan. (Suna, lines 12-14)

Suna described perceiving Turkish culture as depriving women of safety and autonomy so they can be treated however a man pleases. She elaborated:

The women in Turkey are treated so badly, although there are laws and rules. A man can do whatever he wants to a woman and the woman cannot hide [from him]. You

will not get a job as a woman; you will not have contact with your family. (Suna, lines 20-22)

Suna's reflections on the violence and lack of autonomy for women in Turkey highlighted how her fear and rejection of these norms became a driving force in her process of transformative acculturation. Her decision to seek safety and freedom in Switzerland was the beginning of her changing her cultural, relational and personal identity, as she sought to replace subjugation with empowerment. Resilience was also key in Suna's acculturation as she explained:

I have lived so much, but if I was ever to go to a psychologist/doctor, I think that I will lose my strength, because I have always been healthy and I am a strong woman, and when someone gives me medicine, I don't know what to do, because I always think that I am strong and healthy enough and I don't need a psychologist. (Suna, lines 38-41)

Suna narrative suggests she associates her strength and resilience with her independence, avoiding what she perceives as reliance on others. Additionally, her reluctance to seek support could also be a reflection her past experiences of trauma and lack of control, where now any external interventions may feel like she is losing that control and as such feel like a threat to her autonomy. In the context of transformative acculturation, her resilience reflected her desire to assert her newly found autonomy and create a new sense of self in the Swiss post-migration environment. In this way, she ensured that her post-migration identity remained firmly rooted in her self-reliance. While Suna's narrative constantly stressed how important it was for her to remain strong and resilient, she also explained how staying positive

was key to navigating her new challenges. Statements such as: “I like life... [I] think positively” (Suna, line 62) show her commitment to remaining positive. She elaborated further:

I know ways how to think and live positive... I think about what I can tell myself and that I can help myself and that helps more than psychologists and medicine. That helps me more. (Suna, lines 64-75)

Suna’s narrative again suggests internalised stigma around her belief of mental health. Her dismissal of external support, despite having never tried it reflects her belief that seeking help is unnecessary. Suna explained how she contextualised her trauma by comparing her experiences to those of other women in her pre-migration culture, saying, “Although I had, like many women in Turkey, a bad story and experience, I moved away from the situation” (lines 140–141). By recognising her experiences as part of an overall cultural problem in Turkey, Suna seems to reframe her suffering as not only an individual experience that she experienced, but a consequence of systemic oppression. This reinterpretation in her narrative also reflected a change in her perspective, and similar to Defne, Suna used acculturation as a way to reject her premigration norms around GBV and reclaim her autonomy. Her belief that “life is precious” (Suna, line 144) further underscored her focus on rebuilding her life with a renewed sense of purpose and empowerment.

In contrast to Defne and Suna, whose transformation using acculturation appeared to be more fully developed, Elma’s narrative revealed her ongoing struggle with her husband, who had accompanied her to Switzerland. Elma’s transformation was at the beginning stages, however her critique of her pre-migration culture, intimate-relationship, patriarchal norms, rejection of GBV, and her determination to build a new life indicated her engagement with the process of Transformative Acculturation post-migration. Elma’s emerging changes aligned

with the experiences of Suna and Defne as Elma described her marriage as filled with control and violence, which contributed to her feelings of fear and insecurity, as she explained “One time in Greece he held my neck... I do not feel safe with my husband” (Elma, lines 132-133). Once they were in Switzerland, her husband’s anger continued as Elma explained:

We have no middle ground. That's why I decided I think I will separate... I understood that I can't live with this man any longer. My motivation is gone and that's why I have to separate... Our house has problems every day (Elma, lines 118–120)

Elma continued, “He has much anger” (Elma, lines 112-114). Elma felt that her husband’s anger created a toxic marriage, saying: “We always fight... but my idea is against this fighting” (Elma, lines 115-116). Elma’s experiences of GBV converge with those of Suna and Defne, as she described how GBV is accepted in her pre-migration culture:

Many women have many problems after getting married because of Islam... We [women] can't do anything, and we are stuck... Many men are like that [violent]. Unfortunately, we have to do something. It is countries where many men have control. That is why women feel weaker and weaker. (Elma, lines 140-141)

Elma’s criticism of her pre-migration culture, which her husband continued to adhere to after moving to Switzerland, was apparent in her frustration around the restrictions she and other women in her homeland experienced. Her use of “we” and “many women” demonstrated her feelings of solidarity with other women who might be in similar situations. Furthermore, Elma highlighted this a collective struggle for women when she explained, “Women feel weaker and weaker” (Elma, lines 140-141). This statement encapsulates her perception of

women's disempowerment in her pre-migration culture. Her use of "weaker" twice suggests that she saw this as a continued erosion of agency. Elma further clarified:

In our Eastern culture, not only Turkey, Afghani, Turkish, Iranian and women have the chance to be free... But this will only happen when we are strong... but we [women] have to change because these lives are not good, we do not live well as a result of this. (Elma, lines 145-150)

Like Defne and Suna, Elma criticised her pre-migration culture. This collective rejection of the pre-migration culture also reflected participants' recognition of a need for cultural and personal change, forming a foundation for their transformative acculturation and determination to pursue the autonomy, safety and freedom observed in Switzerland.

However, Elma also described seeing the potential for transformation in her acculturation process. She explained, "I come fresh to the world... a new chance, I can build my life again" (Elma, lines 90-91). Thus, she framed acculturation as an opportunity to redefine her identity and rebuild her life. Similar to Defne, Elma viewed acculturation as an opportunity to rebuild her life, although for Elma this transformation was ongoing as she continued, "I stayed strong... I have to build a new life; this is a chance for me" (Elma, lines 109-112). Stating that she is fresh to the world symbolises her re-birth and new chance in a metaphorical sense. Elma continued with "We [women] have the chance to be free, but this freedom is realised only when we are strong" (Elma, lines 146-148). Elma displayed strength and determination to stay strong as she built a new life, in Switzerland, as she explained this new start gave her a chance to reinvent herself. She articulated this as a "chance for me" (Elma, lines 112), while her use of the word "freedom" indicating her desire to transcend the pre-migration constraints she had experienced with her husband.

Elma's narrative showed her engagement with the process of acculturation in her reinvention of herself. This demonstrated her use of transformative acculturation to reshape her life by rejecting the pre-migration cultural norms that condoned GBV while embracing opportunities for autonomy and change in Switzerland. She articulated this further: "When we come to Switzerland or other countries, we can see other women and men, other relationships, and we see how they are, and we know we can be the same" (Elma, lines 142-144).

Elma, Suna and Defne's narratives exemplify how acculturation can act as a catalyst for transformation. As they changed their culture, their identity and their intimate relationships, this seemed to provide all three of them with a renewed sense of self and purpose. Their lived experiences of GBV, trauma, fear and control had set the stage for their transformative change. While their transformations diverged with Defne focusing on pursuing gender equality and work opportunities (lines 109-112), Suna emphasising the importance of autonomy and resilience (lines 38-41) and Elma starting her new life over (lines 90-91), all three narratives converged to reflect their transformation through the process of acculturation, although Elma's narrative also reflected that her process of TA was still unfolding. However, despite being at different stages, all three shared the goal of safety, empowerment, autonomy and change driven through their acculturation in Switzerland. As such their process of Transformative Acculturation, which was driven by their pre-migration trauma and supported by their resilience, captured how these three women exercised their agency to change their identity and rebuild their lives in Switzerland.

7.3 A Love Left Behind: Resistance and Separation of Kurdish Women in Switzerland

Three Kurdish participants, Sema (32, Kurdish, Turkey, no religion), Dilek (27, Kurdish, Turkey, atheist) and Azra (25, Kurdish, Turkey, Muslim/Alevism) chose to

consciously live “outside the system” in Switzerland (Azra, line 178). This choice was driven by their deep love for their homeland. Participants’ commitment to Kurdish culture became an important aspect of their new post-migration identities. While they physically resided in Switzerland, they appeared to exist mentally in Kurdistan.

Sema, Dilek and Azra explained that forced migration meant leaving behind their “hearts and souls” (Azra, line 70). Their unwavering loyalty and love for their homeland led these three Kurdish women to resist acculturation, as they perceived that they would never truly belong in Switzerland. Their narratives aligned to show a collective post-migration cultural disconnection; they firmly believed that acculturation would be tantamount to betraying their country, describing feelings of being “different,” “emotionally detached” and “disassociated” from Swiss culture (Dilek, lines 17-18). Table 5 details participants’ motivations for the acculturation strategy of separation. The table shows each participant’s motivations and post-migration experiences, along with a relevant quote.

Table 5
Participant Motivations and Post-Migration Experiences

Participant	Motivations	Post-migration experiences	Quote
Sema	Resistance to acculturation, desire to go home.	Strong emotional bond with Kurdistan, sees Switzerland as temporary.	“I could not integrate in Switzerland...” (Sema, lines 88-94).
Dilek	Feeling of foreignness, lack of belonging in Switzerland.	Deep emotional struggle, views Switzerland as foreign, foresees perpetual outsider status.	“I feel like sometimes my heart does not belong here and I should not be here...” (Dilek, lines 9-15).
Azra	Resistance to acculturation, living “outside the system”.	Emotionally attached to Kurdistan. Does not understand Swiss norms.	“No matter what the system says... you can live outside of the system. You remain in the system, but you are not a part of the system” (Azra, lines 105-106).

Choosing to “live outside the system,” Azra’s deliberate rejection of acculturation and the post-migration Swiss culture was clearly articulated as she explained:

You can live outside the system, you stay in the system, but you are not part of it.

You can also live as if you are not in Switzerland... I do not have to live like a

Swiss... I do not have to forget my culture. (Azra, lines 178-180)

Azra’s emotional statement, “I am here because I didn’t have a country in Kurdistan... I want to go back to the past. I have to do everything I can. I really want to go back” (Azra, lines 66-68) highlighted an emotional tug-of-war which she had between her past and present. However, it also demonstrated that she was determined to preserve her pre-migration cultural identity and remain separated from the Swiss. Similarly, her statement, “I do not have to forget my culture,” highlighted that she was afraid that if she adopted the Swiss culture, she may lose her roots and her identity and therefore lose herself. Azra’s shift from using “you,” which framed her current situation in abstract sense, to “I,” which then went into her personal experiences, highlights her transition from a general observation to an articulation of her lived experiences. Azra’s narrative also demonstrated her preference for separation as an acculturation strategy (Berry, 1997), which was reflected in her strong emotional attachment to her homeland and provided her with comfort in Switzerland.

The extent of Azra’s separation from the Swiss culture became evident when she discussed the challenge of her ever understanding the Swiss cultural norms. She expressed her frustration when she explained, “In Switzerland, I always have to ask if such small things are allowed, which makes no sense to me... Like not being able to show basics like emotion here” (Azra, lines 138-140). She found the Swiss culture challenging, particularly what she interpreted it as a restricted expression of emotions. Azra’s resistance became a means of self-

expression, whereby she actively questioned and pushed back against integration. In that way, her cultural preservation became a part of her new identity. This was a daily struggle for Azra:

My culture makes my everyday life easier... My culture is so different from the Swiss culture and my everyday life has become more difficult... I do not want to lose my culture and my traditions because I have become a 'poet'. In my home country, I can open the doors easily, to a neighbour, to a colleague, or family, but here it is very different. (Azra, lines 149-160)

Azra perceived herself as a 'poet' (line 155) after arriving in Switzerland which for her was part of her cultural identity as in Kurdistan poetry is considered sacred. This also suggests that this is part of her newfound identity which emerged as a response to her experiences in Switzerland. Azra continued as she emphasised how social relations in Kurdistan were easy, and straightforward compared with her perceptions of Switzerland, which was very different, and in doing so she highlighted that for her everyday interactions felt constrained.

Sema's narrative aligned with Azra's. She explained:

I could not integrate in Switzerland, and I had no relations with people because I am not in my home country. My soul, I think, I always want to go back, I think I will always go back, I don't want to stay here for 50 years or so, I always have hope, but when I go back, I have something in my hands. (Sema, lines 88-94)

Sema's narrative was characterised by her separation and her strong resistance to integration in Switzerland. Her feelings of isolation and her strong attachment to her homeland was apparent, and yet also revealed her alienation and her difficulty in connecting with the Swiss people. Furthermore, her yearning for her homeland signified her deep emotional

attachment to Kurdistan and longing to return. Her phrase “I don’t want to stay here” reflected her perception of Switzerland as a temporary home.

Like Sema and Azra, Dilek’s narrative captured her strategy of separation as she explained:

I feel like sometimes my heart does not belong here and I should not be here. I do not know exactly why I feel that... I am in my own world and without this world, everything is foreign, and everyone is foreign to me. (Dilek, lines 9-15)

Dilek’s narrative reflected her feelings of alienation, as she described being disconnected from her surroundings and her lack of belonging in Switzerland. Her words, “I should not be here,” highlight the emotional impact of displacement and the intensity of her emotions around feeling foreign and alone. Dilek echoed Azra and Sema’s emotional struggle with her cultural dissociation and her longing for home. Her use of the term “foreign” and her description of retreating into her own world highlighted her cultural dissociation. Dilek’s experience was marked by her feeling of foreignness and her lack of belonging, leading her to believe that Switzerland would remain eternally foreign and she, a perpetual outsider. She continued:

Even if I can learn the language well or study or be here for a long time, I think I still feel foreign. I will still be a foreigner. Even after 50 years the same, I would not belong... I think I will never belong here or be accepted here. (Dilek, lines 126-130)

Dilek’s narrative demonstrated feelings of foreignness. She has a sense of not belonging, repeatedly using the word “foreigner”. This indicated that she struggled to see this status ever changing, even after five decades. This aligned with Sema’s expression of an

enduring sense of displacement and hope for a return to her homeland, both of which reflected a shared long-term perception of separation from their cultural roots. The recurring reference to 50 years in both narratives may indicate a collective or internalised expectation about the duration of their migration experience. This is a shared theme across Dilek, Azra and Sema's narratives.

Despite their reluctance to integrate, these participants were also determined to remain positive and make the most of their circumstances in Switzerland. This duality of feeling both foreign and resilient emerged as a recurring theme across Dilek, Azra and Sema's experiences. Their narratives illustrated how resilience and optimism helped them to cope. Sema articulated this dynamic, shifting her focus from past challenges to her future. She explained:

You always have to push. Always stay positive. We don't know why we are striving... I always stay happy, still I plan my future, but I am here now. I have to be happy and think positively at the moment. The whole life is difficult, but you always have to try. (Sema, lines 59-65)

Sema's drive to "always stay positive" highlighted her optimistic outlook on future challenges and a redirection of her focus. Similarly, Dilek's decision to concentrate on her future instead of her past signifies her resilience. She explained:

I am a refugee... For my future life, I can always be positive that I had a good opportunity... because in the past, I had so many bad experiences, now it is getting better. I always have to look to the future and not to the past. (Dilek, lines 54-60)

Azra, Sema and Dilek shared resistance to integration, rooted in attachments to their pre-migration culture and a sense of foreignness in Switzerland. However, this was coupled with resilience that supported their daily coping and future perspectives.

7.4 Bicultural Navigation Among South American Participants

In this sub-theme, the lived experiences and acculturation processes of the three South American participants, Kesari (38, Colombian, Christian), Karessa (43, Cuban, Christian) and Joaquina (41, Colombian, Christian) are explored. These women's narratives converged as they emphasised the importance of maintaining a strong connection to their pre-migration culture, which provided them with a sense of identity and stability, whilst embracing some elements of the Swiss post-migration environment. Table 6 is an overview of their acculturation processes and outlines the premigration cultural practices that helped them in their post-migration lives.

Table 6

Southern American Participants' Bicultural Acculturation Strategies

Participant	Cultural and coping in post-migration acculturation	Post-migration acculturation	Cultural navigation	Quote
Kesari	Engages in Colombian cooking for comfort and normalcy.	Cooking and television for comfort	Retreats from stress with Colombian culture.	"I like ...Colombian cooking... watching a Colombian soap opera" (Kesari, lines 103-104).
Karessa	Listens to Cuban music and uses humour to preserve Cuban identity and manage stress.	Music and humour manage stress.	Preserves Cuban identity, creates her "own world".	"We have created our own world" (Karessa, lines 189-193).
Joaquina	Gradual approach to acculturation, focusing on safety and support.	Focusing language acquisition and employment.	Adaptation and the need for support in acculturation.	"I feel that I can adapt to this country... not 100 percent good" (Joaquina, lines 154-182).

Joaquina's narrative provided insight into her acculturation process, revealing how she navigated challenges and opportunities in the post-migration environment. She explained, "I feel that I can adapt to this country" (Joaquina, lines 154-155) before adding, "I feel not 100

per cent good, but I feel that I can become accustomed to it here” (Joaquina, lines 181-182).

This reflected Joaquina’s proactive approach to acculturation and openness to the Swiss post-migration environment. Furthermore, Joaquina acknowledged her “gradual progress” in her bicultural integration:

I am advancing in small steps. The thing is that that doesn’t cause me stress. I feel stressed when I cannot learn the language and I am not able to work, because I know that here is a lot of work [in Switzerland]. (Joaquina, lines 189-191)

Joaquina discussed the challenges of adapting to Switzerland and highlighted her concerns over learning the language and finding employment. She described her progress as gradual and noted how she needed to remain patient and perhaps her need for psychological support. Interestingly, her statement contains an apparent contradiction: “that doesn’t cause me stress” is immediately followed by “I feel stressed” (Joaquina, lines 189-190). This juxtaposition suggests that while she tries to view her progress of acculturation with patience and optimism, she also finds that the pressure of learning a new language and looking for employment can overwhelm her. Psychologically, this contradiction could also indicate a tension between her aspirations for emotional stability and the reality of her post-migration situation.

Joaquina emphasised the need for external support for refugees when she stated:

Everyone needs a lot of patience, and everything gets better [with time] and we are in a safe place and it’s good to ask for help... that’s what people need here what they need the most is psychological help and support because immigration is not easy... with different cultures. (Joaquina, lines 154-159)

Joaquina's reflections on the need for psychological support and patience are framed in general terms, referring to "people" and "they" rather than herself. This distancing language suggests that perhaps she did not perceive herself as needing help or is reluctant to admit that she might. Her outward projection of optimism was evidenced by her narrative where she said, "everything gets better" (Joaquina, line 154). This may reflect her internal conflict, perhaps due to a belief that she should feel grateful to live in Switzerland. As such, Joaquina's narrative highlights her tension she feels during her process of acculturation, where she outwardly expressed optimism, but the realities of her post-migration life seemed to weigh more heavily upon her than she wanted to admit. Joaquina described her adjustment to life in Switzerland as a slow process, saying, "Slowly I became accustomed to this place, and the first [language] I could communicate with was sign language" (Joaquina, lines 9–10). She reflected on her progress, stating, "We [her husband] are both studying German now... full time" (lines 119–120), demonstrating her effort to overcome her language barrier. Joaquina also described feelings of exclusion due to being judged as a refugee when she explained "[They see] you are the people who come here to live off them [their taxes]" (Joaquina, lines 136-138).

A further challenge for Joaquina was a change in her profession. While she had previously worked as a nurse in Colombia, she had to take cleaning jobs in Switzerland, which she explained, "I had to clean houses, in order to learn the language... That's tough" (Joaquina, lines 155-156). However, despite her challenges, Joaquina seemed to maintain a hopeful outlook, stating, "Today is hard, but I know in the future the situation will become better" (Joaquina, lines 168-169). Her optimism may be her coping strategy, as she balanced her challenges against her positive thinking and her hope in an eventual improvement. However, this positivity may also hide a difficulty Joaquina has in acknowledging the toll of forced

migration on her, particularly in her loss of work, her changes from nursing to cleaning and the impact that had on her self-esteem.

Karessa's use of cultural practices provided her with a safe space where she sought comfort during her times of uncertainty. When post-migration stress overwhelmed her, she created what she called her "own world" (Karessa, line 192):

In Cuba, we solved everything with humour and good music. We always tried to stay happy... I try to listen to music and dance to try and cheer up. We try to stay in our culture and continue what makes us happy and what works. Then we feel good. We have created our own world, and we try to adapt to the people around us and try to fit in. (Karessa, lines 189-193)

While Karessa referred to this as her "own world," her repeated use of "we" suggests that this space is shared with her family. Together, they created a version of Cuban culture within Switzerland, using music and humour. This shared world provided them with a retreat from the challenges of post-migration life and a way to acculturate to their post-migration environment. In this sense, Karessa's experience contrasts with Dilek's, who also spoke of her "own world" however, hers was a personal retreat created in isolation to shield her against feelings of alienation. In contrast, Karessa's world was communal and helped her and her family connect with their pre-migration culture and aided in their adaption to the Swiss culture. Karessa emphasised how important it was for her to stay engaged in her pre-migration culture, which suggested that her cultural identity was tied to her well-being. Her description of her "own world" implied a sense of belonging and attachment to her pre-migration culture, while she also recognised the need to adapt to the post-migration Swiss culture around her.

Kesari's narrative converged with Karessa's when she explained that, by participating in South American cooking and music and watching Colombian soap operas, she felt a sense of comfort that enabled her to retreat from her challenges. She said: "I like looking for recipes for Colombian cooking. I try to do the same things that make me happy in Colombia. Like watching a Colombian soap opera" (Kesari, lines 103-104). Unlike Joaquina, whose narrative reflected her internal conflict, Kesari expressed a sense of calmness and freedom in Switzerland when she explained, "I feel calm, quiet, I can walk on the street... for me, it's like being free" (Kesari, lines 204-206). This sense of freedom could be connected to her ability to sustain her Colombian cultural identity through her daily practices, which seemed to provide her with emotional stability as she explained, "I try to make the same things that make me happy in Colombia" (Kesari, lines 103-104). However, Kesari also acknowledged feelings of sadness and stress, revealing that her life was not without its challenges, stating "Sometimes I am up... sometimes down..." (Kesari, lines 96-97).

Kesari and Karessa's immediate family and pre-migration culture gave them a sense of security and belonging. Kesari explained that she drew strength from her pre-migration culture and immediate family, saying: "I take the strength from the kids. I dedicate schooling to teach them Spanish at home... I try to distract myself with these things" (Kesari, lines 100-105). While Kesari was open to bi-cultural integration, her connection to her pre-migration culture appeared to be a coping mechanism that may have prevented the internal conflict Joaquina experienced. In contrast to Kesari and Karessa, Joaquina did not discuss her immediate family as a source of comfort or security. Instead, she focused on the challenges she faced in adapting to Switzerland. This divergence suggested that while Kesari and Karessa drew comfort from their pre-migration culture, Joaquina's was more focused on the challenges she encountered

post-migration. However, although Kesari, Karessa, and Joaquina used different approaches in their process of acculturation, their narratives demonstrated how they balanced their premigration cultural roots with the Swiss post-migration environment.

7.5 Cultural Dissonance and Separation: Pre-Migration Expectations and Post-Migration Reality

This subtheme includes three Islamic participants' reflections on their post-migration experiences of cultural dissonance. Neshele (31, Pakistani, Muslim), Tulay (31, Turkish, Muslim) and Gocke (31, Turkish, Muslim) all described challenges in reconciling aspects of their pre-migration culture with the Swiss post-migration culture. They spoke about rejecting certain elements of the Swiss post-migration culture while expressing a desire to reject aspects of their pre-migration culture. However, this latter desire felt impossible, leading to frustration and cultural dissonance.

Table 7 demonstrates the cultural dissonance between these participants' pre-migration cultural norms and their post-migration experiences.

Table 7*Participant Narratives, Cultural Experiences and Motivations During Post-Migration Acculturation*

Participant	Cultural experiences	Motivations	Post-migration experiences	Acculturation	Quotes
Neshele	Feeling of entrapment between desire for freedom and coercive cultural constraints.	Lack of perceived agency due to coercion and cultural obligation.	Attached to pre-migration cultural norms despite internal conflict.	Separation/cultural dissonance.	“I am with my husband only because of my culture” (Neshele, lines 146-148).
Tulay	Frustration with cultural attire	Lassitude with cultural elements like wearing a hijab; strong commitment to home culture.	Maintains Islamic traditions	Separation/cultural dissonance.	“Yes, but I love my culture ... so actually, I stay with my original culture” (Tulay, lines 203-204).
Gocke	Deliberate avoidance of Swiss culture and focus on living Turkish culture at home.	Preservation of Turkish cultural	Strong commitment to preserve Islamic culture	Separation/cultural dissonance.	“We live our Turkish culture at home” (Gocke, line 221-23).

Neshele wrestled with a juxtaposition between her imagined post-migration life and the reality of her new life in Switzerland. She explained, “When I was in Pakistan, I longed to leave the country, I thought if I am in another country, I can have some freedom and live as I want” (Neshele, lines 6–7). However, upon migration, her husband’s coercive control left her in a state of cultural suppression, as she reflected, “I am with my husband because of my culture” (line 147). Neshele narrative revealed that her marriage was shaped not by her personal choice but by her pre-migration cultural obligations and pressure from her family. Although she wished for autonomy, she admitted, “I don’t know if I can let go of my culture, but I don’t want to raise my children like that” (lines 158–159). Her tension in this narrative about not wanting to continue in her pre-migration culture but not being able to let go highlighted her internal conflict. While Neshele desired freedom, she felt constrained by her pre-migration culture, which controlled her even in Switzerland. Her statement, “I have no

choice to change my life” (line 146), encapsulated her feelings of entrapment, and demonstrated how entrenched her cultural obligations were. She explained:

In Pakistan, or in my culture, I had no choice and no decisions. My parents decided who I marry and who I can be friends with... We as women have no choices and no voice (lines 147–151).

In her narrative, Neshele reveals how her hope for post-migration freedom and the constraints of her pre-migration culture created feelings of cultural dissonance. This left her feeling trapped by her premigration culture which she could not discard yet struggled to reconcile.

Tulay and Gocke’s narratives diverged from Neshele’s, however they had similarities with the narratives of Karessa and Kesari, in that they also sought comfort from their pre-migration culture. However, Tulay and Gock narratives diverged from Karessa and Kesari in their rejection of the Swiss culture. Instead, Tulay and Gock were committed to keeping their pre-migration culture, with Tulay explaining frustration over wearing her hijab when she said “This makes me so tired. It’s not easy to always take it on and off” (Tulay, line 79). However, despite her frustration with the practical challenges of wearing the hijab, Tulay’s narrative revealed her loyalty to her pre-migration culture and religious practices:

Yes, but I love my culture... so actually, I stay with my original culture. This Islam, and Turkish culture have respect for other people, and I also read many old books of Turkish culture, and they always had respect. (Tulay, lines 203-207)

Tulay’s narrative underscored a commitment to her pre-migration cultural and religious identity, even as she struggled with the specific elements that she found burdensome, such as the hijab. Tulay’s attachment was further evident when she stated, “I have this life in

Switzerland and I understand what I have to do with my religion, Islam” (Tulay, lines 79-80).

Although brief, this quote highlights her religious obligations and demonstrated that she prioritised continuity with her pre-migration culture and religion in post-migration Switzerland.

However, Tulay’s narrative also revealed cultural incongruence which extended to her perception of others in Switzerland, particularly those from other cultural backgrounds. She explained, “Yes, I think other people don’t do anything, although they have to, then I think, ok, I have to do that now. I will just do it for them” (Tulay, lines 95-96). Tulay frustration stemmed from her interactions with the other refugees in her asylum home where she lived, as she described the communal responsibilities such had to do such as cleaning. Tulay explained, “I live here, I have to clean... I have to quickly say what they can do or not do or clean up behind them” (Tulay, lines 98-100), demonstrating her frustration with the lack of communal responsibility among the other refugees. Tulay also described her challenges with the communal washing machine as she explained “For example with washing machine problem, it’s not my machine, it’s not your machine, but we must all use it and we must respect each other and take care of it” (Tulay, lines 106-109). Tulay comments seem to demonstrate a clash between her expectations of her ideal collective responsibility (which may stem from her pre-migration culture), and the behaviour she had observed in the asylum home. Her frustrations with communal living, such as the lack of care for the shared facilities, may have reinforced her perception that such values were absent in her post-migration environment. This could then have led to her further solidifying her commitment to her pre-migration culture. Tulay’s attachment to her pre-migration culture led her to maintain her pre-migration culture, which highlighted her cultural incongruence, where, like Neshele, felt loyal to her pre-migration culture, even though she struggled with some aspects of it.

Like Tulay, Gocke chose to retain her cultural norms post-migration culture:

We do not really have or even know the Swiss culture. Currently, we live our Turkish culture at home... Each night I spend time teaching our culture, our religion and life to our children... But what is really important to me and my husband is that we also teach our culture to our children here. Yes... it's always difficult to know and adapt to other cultures. (Gocke, lines 221-238)

Gocke was fully immersed in her Turkish culture, depicted in her phrase, "We live our culture". Like Tulay and Neshele, she demonstrated a strong attachment to her pre-migration culture. However, her narrative diverged in how she navigated cultural incongruence. She described minimal engagement with Swiss culture, focusing on preserving her Turkish identity. Her preference for cultural separation was also evident in her nightly efforts to teach her children about her Turkish culture and religion, ensuring their connection to their heritage while living in Switzerland.

In contrast to Tulay, whose cultural incongruence was characterised by internal conflict over her agency (e.g., her frustration with wearing the hijab), Gocke's incongruence manifested in her views of the Swiss culture. For example, she found Swiss societal norms such as making no noise after 10:00 PM as rigid and strange. She explained, "We must watch out in the evening that it is silent... but they are children, you know? And they make noise. This is normal for children" (Gocke, lines 14-27). This dissonance between Swiss expectations and her pre-migration culture reinforced her preference for cultural separation. Similarly, her narrative diverged from Neshele's internal struggle, as Gocke described her separation as a deliberate continuation of her pre-migration culture. She remained focused on maintaining her family's Turkish identity as a source of stability, stating: "The most important thing is that we

[immediate family] were all together” (Gocke, lines 115-117). This sentiment, alongside her observation that “it’s always difficult to know and adapt to other cultures ” (Gocke, lines 237-238), highlighted her commitment to her pre-migration culture.

Gocke, Tulay and Neshele’s narratives revealed overlapping acculturation strategies of cultural separation, but their experiences of cultural dissonance diverged. Tulay’s internal struggle with agency and attire, Gocke’s external dissonance with Swiss norms and Neshele’s feeling of being trapped by her pre-migration culture illustrate distinct ways cultural dissonance shaped their post-migration lives. Despite these differences, all three participants maintained strong ties to their pre-migration cultures, prioritising them as sources of stability and identity post-migration.

7.6 Reflexivity in Pathways of Acculturation

Reflexivity was essential for ensuring transparency and credibility throughout this research (Finlay, 2014; Smith, 2023). This involved self-awareness and an examination of how my experiences and biases might have influenced the research process (Finlay, 2014; Smith & Eatough, 2007). Reflexivity was particularly important during the interviewing, writing and analysis phases of this study (Smith, 2006; Smith, 2019).

I employed reflexivity to identify my biases, understand how my experiences shaped my analysis and stay mindful of the potential power imbalances in this research (Smith et al., 2009; Willig, 2013). My journey includes this doctorate, two master’s degrees, a neuroscience postgraduate study, leadership roles as Vice President in Fortune 500 companies and clinical work as both a healthcare professional and CEO in psychology and psychotherapy in the humanitarian sector. I have travelled both alone and with my husband and family, lived and worked in New Zealand, Switzerland, Sweden, France, Australia and the USA, so I understand

what it is like to acculturate. Still, I recognised that my moves were all voluntary, unlike the forced journeys of the refugee women I interviewed. This awareness led me to reflect carefully on how my background might shape the way I listened to, interpreted and represented their narratives. I was also conscious that my professional experience, particularly in trauma and refugee wellbeing, could draw my attention towards themes such as gender-based violence. For example, I found myself especially moved by Defne's memory of her mother being "covered in blood" or Suna's fear of being killed. I recognised that I needed to be careful to attend to all participants' experiences. To address this, I made an effort to focus on all the narratives across the dataset, not just those that resonated most strongly with my feelings or expectations.

Using IPA's double hermeneutics helped me to remain reflexive about how my experiences shaped my interpretations as I tried to understand how the participants made sense of theirs. I regularly used bracketing and recorded my assumptions, biases and emotional responses in my reflexive journal to ensure that participants' voices, not my biases, guided my analysis. For example, I initially viewed "integration" as positive and "separation" as negative. However, on re-examining the data, I realised I was imposing my meanings instead of listening to theirs, so I refocused on what their narratives showed me. At the time, I wrote in my journal:

I keep noticing how I automatically assume integration is the goal here, but when I listen, I hear how separation can be protective for Azra, or does it just reflect her reality? This challenges my assumption that integration is the best outcome, I think Azra's heart is still in Kurdistan, separation seems to be her goal, I need to be careful I don't project what I think integration should look like and just focus on what they tell me. (Reflexive Journal, 17 December 2021, 4:00 p.m.)

While bracketing did not eliminate my biases, it helped me recognise when my bias could overshadow the participants' narratives and recentre on their narratives. Additionally, regular discussions with my supervisors provided me with an alternative perspective on my interpretations (Peat et al., 2018; Smith, 2019). This also aligns with Vagle's (2018) emphasis on remaining open to participants' meanings and being transparent about their interpretative process in phenomenological research.

Chapter Eight: Findings: Theme Two – In the Shadow of Bias

8.1 Introduction

This second GET, *In the Shadows of Bias*, highlights the participants' experiences of racism in Switzerland, their emotional reactions to the racism and their subsequent behavioural adjustment while living in Switzerland. Ten of the twelve women reported discrimination and racism. The two who did not mention racism said they had not interacted with Swiss people. The participants described a wide spectrum of incidents of racism, ranging from covert microaggressions to overt hostility. The first subtheme, 'Lived Experiences of Racism', focused on the participants' reports of being attacked, judged or excluded due to their ethnicity and race. The second subtheme, 'Emotional Reactions to Racism', captured the participants' emotional reactions including their feelings of fear, sadness, frustration and disillusionment. The third subtheme, 'Behavioural Adaption to Racism', examines the behavioural change of the participants which they explained were as a reaction to the racism they experienced. Together, these subthemes provide a comprehensive understanding of the participants' encounters with racism and how it shaped their acculturation in Switzerland.

Table 8 details these sub-themes, including the experiences and responses of refugee women to racism and discrimination in Switzerland. The table includes their emotional and behavioural reactions along with the impact on their acculturation.

Table 8
Experiences of Racism, Fear and Discrimination and Implications for Acculturation

Participant	Incident/type of discrimination	Emotional responses	Behavioural responses	Impact on acculturation	Relevant quotes
Sema	Overt and systemic: Physically assaulted and spat on.	Rage, fear, stress, hopelessness, sense of injustice.	Avoiding public transport, fear of authority figures, cautious behaviour in public.	Lasting fear of authority figures, caution, self-defense, negative view of Swiss.	"He blocked the road... he pushed me! ... He then spat on me" (Sema, lines 256-271).
Kesari	Covert and systemic: Felt dismissed by aid organisation.	Sadness, inferiority, hopelessness, feeling "criminalised".	Stopped seeking help and support, reduced engagement.	Undermined trust in institutions; feelings of not belonging; sense of helplessness.	"They made me feel like a criminal" (Kesari, lines 253-271).
Dilek	Overt: Looks, tones, name-calling.	Fear, nervousness, disillusionment, existential questioning ("Why am I here?").	Self-silencing and avoiding public speaking.	Self-silencing, reluctance to speak, feels she can never belong.	"I feel very bad... as soon as I speak, everyone knows that I am a foreigner..." (Dilek, lines 111-113).
Neshele	Covert and systemic: Judged by her appearance.	Anger, frustration, isolation.	Staying silent and not greeting people.	Stopped greeting people (active silence), feeling alienated from Swiss society.	"I find that 90% of Swiss are unfriendly and also rude... They are definitely racists!" (Neshele, lines 44-60).
Joaquina	Systemic stigma: Felt excluded by services.	Sadness, stress, frequent crying, sense of exclusion, frustration.	Social withdrawal.	Struggled with learning German, felt excluded in everything.	"One month ago, the doctor said to me to go back to my country" (Joaquina, lines 47-49).
Elma	Covert: Discrimination through unfriendly looks and stares.	Fear, alienation, withdrawal.	Inferred withdrawal from social interactions.	Decreased motivation to integrate, avoidance of social situations.	"There was a lot of discrimination... specifically by the way they looked at us and their actions..." (Tulay, lines 72-76).
Karessa	Systemic and overt: Discrimination in job market despite qualification.	Frustration, feeling undervalued.	Continued cautious job search; self-doubt due to discrimination.	Hindered employment prospects, restricted economic and social integration.	"They don't care that I have studied and went to university... They still won't let me get a job because I am not Swiss" (Karessa, lines 97-99).

Participant	Incident/type of discrimination	Emotional responses	Behavioural responses	Impact on acculturation	Relevant quotes
Defne	Systemic and overt racism: Other children receive gifts on a German course but hers do not. Controlling caregiver threatening to withhold money.	Fear of discrimination, sense of non-belonging, shame, fear of deportation and powerlessness.	Avoidance of conflict with carer and reduced motivation in language class.	Diminished motivation to integrate due to discrimination, ongoing anxiety, reluctance to seek help.	"I feel that the teacher is discriminating against me... because I am not from here" (Defne, lines 146-151).
Azra	Covert and systemic: Seen as a foreigner due to language.	Fear, discomfort, ongoing sense of feeling "strange".	Deliberate withdrawal and avoidance of interactions.	Social withdrawal, avoidance of being singled out.	"I always feel strange... I have not felt comfortable even after 3.5 years" (Azra, lines 53-57).
Gocke	Discomfort with "rigid" Swiss social norms (e.g., quiet hours).	Feels "strange," sometimes "controlled".	Cautious adaptation; limited social engagement.	Faces challenges adapting to Swiss norms, limited contact with Swiss neighbours.	"The rules are... difficult..." (Gocke, lines 13-16).

8.2 Lived Experiences of Racism

Ten of the twelve refugee women who participated in this research described experiencing a wide range of incidents of racism in Switzerland, ranging from covert to overt racism. The women described experiences of covert racism which included instances of unfriendly stares, or changes in facial expressions and tone, along with overt forms of racism which included name calling, verbal hostility, being spat on, and physical assault. These incidents occurred in different settings, including in an aid organisation, public spaces, shops, public transport, the workplace and in interactions with Swiss institutions. The incidents of racism were described as rude, dismissive, frightening, intimidating and exclusionary.

Table 9 details the experiences of these ten participants and highlights their responses to racism.

Table 9
Incident of Racism and Violence

Participant	Nature of incident	Domain	Illustrative quote
Sema	Physical violence.	Public spaces; train.	“He pushed me!... He then spat on me” (Sema, lines 256-271).
Kesari	Told to leave Switzerland	Aid organisation.	“They asked why are you here, why don’t you go back to your country?” (Kesari, lines 234-271).
Dilek	Judged by accent; unfriendly tone	Shops; daily interactions.	“As soon as I speak, everyone knows that I am a foreigner...” (Dilek, lines 111-113).
Neshele	Judged by appearance	Public spaces.	“They are definitely racists!” (Neshele, lines 44-60).
Joaquina	Doctor told her to leave	Healthcare.	“The doctor said to me to go back to my country... I don’t belong here.” (Joaquina, lines 47-49).
Elma	Hostile stares, subtle prejudice	Public spaces; refugee camp settings.	“There was a lot of discrimination... specifically by the way they looked at us...” (Elma, lines 72-76).
Karessa	Dismissed in job market	Employment opportunities.	“They still won’t let me get a job...” (Karessa, lines 97-99).
Defne	Discriminated against in class and care	Caregiving/educational context.	“The teacher is discriminating against me” (Defne, lines 146-151).
Azra	Language-based discrimination	Social interactions; daily life.	“I always feel strange...” (Azra, lines 53-57).
Gocke	Strict norms; felt excluded	Neighbourhood; everyday interactions.	“Sometimes the rules are... difficult...” (Gocke, lines 13-16).

Sema experienced overt racism and aggression, as she described being pushed and spat on by a Swiss man as she recounted her painful story:

I saw opposite me a man... He blocked the road he would not let me pass... so I asked him to please move... I did not know German well... When he heard my bad German, he pushed me with his hands, he pushed me! Only because he heard that I am not Swiss, and my German was not good. I have learned... one phrase in the asylum camp and that is ‘Get your hands off me and don’t touch me’ – so I said to him do not touch me! I did not understand why he did that, so I said do not touch me... He then spat on me. (Sema, lines 256-271)

Sema explained that her encounter occurred when she was recognised as a foreigner because of her limited German proficiency. Sema's immediate and instinctive response was "Get your hands off me and don't touch me," which was her demand for respect and her resistance to his aggression, with the man's final act of spitting on her demonstrating the extreme prejudice she experienced in Aargau, Switzerland. Sema, then emotionally went on to describe her experience with another instance of racism but this time on the train. She continued:

On the train, I had a very bad experience... the ticket inspector came... I bought a ticket, but... I had paid to go in the wrong direction as everything was in German and it was hard to understand... The ticket inspector came... they didn't ask why I was crying... she dragged me into a room in the train with a key, then locked me in and called the police... Then I cried, I did not understand because I didn't know German... the train inspector called the police. Instead of asking me if I am OK, they searched in my bag, searched everything. They didn't ask why I was crying.
(Sema, lines 273-301)

Sema's narrative revealed her belief that her small mistake that she made because she purchased a ticket going in the wrong direction, (due to not being able to read German) had an extreme result which she found excessive and humiliating. She described being locked in a room, then searched and treated as though she had committed a crime. This incident made Sema feel powerless and reinforced her feelings of racism in Switzerland. Sema's discomfort now extends into her everyday life, including in shops or being in lifts as she went on to say, "When I go into a store, or a shop, or the worst is into a lift, I always have the same feelings... they always keep a distance, and that always bothers me" (Sema, lines

231-235). Sema's observation of the Swiss people's behaviour, led to her feeling excluded and discriminated against.

Kesari described her encounters with racisms where similar to Sema, she also experienced covert and overt forms of racism in Switzerland. Kesari, explained how she was seeking help from an institution that is supposed to provide support to refugees and then what happened to her:

One day I was there asking for help... I didn't feel comfortable, they asked why are you here, why don't you go back to your country? When I was in [the aid organisation], they told me why don't you go back to your country... They always try to make you feel like you are a migrant or refugee, and not from here... Then you feel you are damaged because of that... Always the system makes you feel like you are an immigrant and refugee, and not from here. And I don't like that.

(Kesari, lines 234-242)

Kesari's narrative reflected her experience of racism where, rather than being treated with respect and helped she felt judged and discriminated against because she was a refugee. Kesari repeated how she had been told to return to her country and that she was not from Switzerland, demonstrating how this experience eroded her sense of belonging. Converging with Sema and Kesari's experiences of racism and insensitivity, Dilek's narrative captured her fear of being identified as a foreigner, which in turn shaped her social interactions. She explained:

When I came to Switzerland, I didn't have any clothes [she lost them during her forced migration]. I went to a store and asked at the checkout, and many people called me different names, and I thought, why am I here? (Dilek, lines 110-112)

Dilek continued:

When I go to a shop as long as I don't talk, they act normal around me. The Swiss... are cold. I have a feeling wherever I go if I don't talk, it's OK, but when I talk, I see they pay attention, the tone changes, and I know that they see me as a foreigner. That makes me nervous and afraid. They have a problem with foreigners. (Dilek, lines 121-124)

Dilek's narrative highlights her experiences with both overt and covert racism. Like Sema, Dilek experienced the discriminatory behaviour when the Swiss people heard her limited German and realised that she was a foreigner. Her descriptions of their change in tone and their name-calling, converged with Sema and Kesari's experiences of racism, demonstrating that they were judged and excluded when identified as foreigners.

Neshele described similar experiences of racism:

Even when I greet people on the streets, and say hello, like in Pakistan, we all say hello to each other on the street. But here in Switzerland when I say hello, people either don't respond, or look at me stupidly, just because I don't look like a Swiss woman. (Neshele, lines 42-45)

Neshele contrasted the warm greetings she once received in Pakistan to being ignored or judged in Switzerland. Her feelings of being judged were based on her physical appearance, making her feel unwelcome and alienated in Switzerland. Neshele also described a workplace incident which she believed was linked to racism:

For example, where I worked, I was more qualified than the Swiss women. I have a master's degree; she had only a Swiss certificate, and I worked for her, but she

looked for a problem in all my work all the time. She did that because I was not Swiss, that's what I think. (Neshele, lines 66-69)

Neshele continued by saying, "They always look for the smallest, stupidest things... Even though the mistake was so tiny, and I also worked hard and overtime all the time" (Neshele, lines 69-71). Neshele interpreted the treatment she received in the workplace as overly scrutinised and biased because she was a foreigner. She explained that despite being educated, she felt that she was subjected to undue scrutiny. Her experience converges with Karessa's, who also highlighted what she perceived as discrimination in the job market, when her qualifications were dismissed because she was a refugee. She expressed her frustration, saying: "They don't care that I have studied and went to university... They still won't let me get a job [as a refugee]" (Karessa, lines 97-99). Both Karessa and Neshele highlighted how discrimination in the workplace had undermined their employment opportunities in Switzerland.

Elma's narrative converges with Sema, Dilek and Neshele's, as she also described incidents of discrimination: "There was a lot of discrimination... we have felt these people discriminated against us specifically by the way they looked at us and their actions... This happened a lot to us in Basel [Switzerland]" (Elma, lines 72-76). Although Elma's experiences were shaped by the hostility she encountered in the refugee camp, they converged with Neshele, Sema and Dilek's perceptions of unfriendly looks as racist, demonstrating how nonverbal actions can also perpetuate feelings of racism and exclusion.

Defne reported experiencing discrimination in her German lessons. She explained, "I feel that the teacher is discriminating against me... because I am not from here" (Defne, lines 146-151). This discrimination undermined her motivation to learn the language. Like

Defne, Kesari, and Sema, Joaquina reported an encounter with a professional who was supposed to help her but instead demonstrated racism. She explained: “One month ago, the doctor said to me to go back to my country, I don’t belong here” (Joaquina, lines 47-49).

This reflected a pattern in which Defne, Kesari and Sema sought help or care but instead received discrimination, which reinforced their feelings of alienation and exclusion.

Similarly, Gocke described her discomfort with what she perceived as rigid Swiss norms, such as enforced ‘quiet times (there are designated quiet times in Switzerland which are from 10 pm to 6 am, lunchtime (12 noon to 1 pm and Sundays, and public holidays). These rules made Gocke feel controlled and as she explained, “The rules are... difficult” (Gocke, lines 13). These narratives revealed the shared experiences of both covert and overt racism and discrimination for these women. The narratives of Sema converged with those of Elma, Azra and Dilek as they all emphasised that it was not just the overt racism that caused problems but also the covert racism, they experienced from looks and changes in tones. These experiences intensified their fear of being identified as foreigners when then led to a form of self-censorship. This discriminatory behaviour led to the social withdrawal of participants and impeded their acculturation.

8.3 Emotional Reactions to Racism

This section explores the emotional responses of the ten participants who experienced racism. Their responses included feelings of anger, hopelessness, humiliation, disillusionment, sadness, outrage, anxiety, stress, frustration, fear and alienation. For some participants, these feelings were immediate and intense, while others explained how their emotions had lasted over a longer period of time leading to vulnerability, exclusion and disillusionment. Their experiences of racism reinforced their feelings of being unwelcome and marginalised.

Table 10 summarises participants' experiences of racism, their emotional responses and the impact on their acculturation.

Table 10
Emotional Responses to Racism and Their Impact on Acculturation

Participant	Type of discrimination	Emotions	Impact on acculturation	Relevant themes/quotes
Sema	Physical assault and spitting	Anger, outrage, stress, sadness, fear, anxiety.	Lingering fear, alienation, sense of exclusion.	"I was so angry ... now and I am always afraid" (Sema, lines 265-310).
Kesari	Belittled by aid workers	Sadness, distress, hopelessness.	Undermined self-worth, feelings of rejection.	"I felt destroyed completely; they made me feel like a criminal" (Kesari, lines 243-271).
Dilek	Name-calling, tone, rejection.	Hopelessness, humiliation, anger, disillusionment.	Existential questioning, rejection of Swiss society.	"Why am I here?" (Dilek, lines 98-110).
Neshele	Judged by appearance, bias	Frustration, rejection, anger, isolation.	Alienation from Swiss society, frustration with double silencing.	"I feel angry and frustrated..." (Neshele, lines 45-47).
Joaquina	Exclusion, stigma	Sadness, stress, frustration, rejection.	Feelings of exclusion.	"I feel very excluded... excluded in everything" (Joaquina, lines 123-126).
Elma	Unfriendly stares	Unease, fear, alienation, withdrawal.	Reduced motivation to engage socially, increasing isolation.	"The way they looked at us and their actions..." (Elma, line 76).
Karessa	Workplace discrimination	Frustration, anger, undervaluation.	Limited integration due to barriers.	"They don't care" (Karessa, lines 186-192).
Defne	Racism in class	Fear, frustration, disillusionment, exclusion.	Anxiety about integration.	"I feel that the teacher is discriminating against me" (Defne, lines 146-151).
Azra	Perceived as a foreigner	Fear, worry, persistent unease, alienation.	Feels excluded.	"I always feel strange" (Azra, lines 53-57).
Gocke	Cultural discomfort	Discomfort, alienation.	Limited contact with Swiss neighbours; cultural disconnection.	"Sometimes the rules are... difficult..." (Gocke, lines 13-16).

As described in the previous subtheme, Sema's experiences of racism included her being pushed and spat on. Sema's narrative demonstrated the wide range of emotional reactions she had to these incidents, including rage, fear, sadness, injustice, vulnerability and alienation. Her anger at being pushed was conveyed in the tone of her voice as she explained her reaction:

I was so angry! I threw my key at him, and I was so angry and so stressed...
 Sometimes I think about this situation... that was so bad... I am sure this was
 because I am a foreigner... I was just sad. But then I got angry... This is surely
 racism, or discrimination... now and I am always afraid. (Sema, lines 265-310)

Sema's response to the racist incident she experienced was the instinctive fight or flight reaction, with her experiencing an immediate surge of anger as she threw her key at the offender. This act could be interpreted as a visceral expression of fighting back and her defiance. Her anger was followed by a brief expression of sadness, but this quickly changed back into anger as she made sense of the event. However, she also had feelings of fear which highlighted her vulnerability at the degrading nature of the attack. Sema also reported feeling stressed when interacting with Swiss people, as she described a "gap" between them and her, which increased her feelings of unease and fear:

When I sit with Swiss people, I always have stress because I don't know what to say. In my head, I am always watching out and have to be careful... because they always have a big gap between them and me... I have to watch out with Swiss people. They always keep a distance between us, which always bothers me, and I am always afraid. (Sema, lines 224-236)

Sema's narrative revealed how she felt that the Swiss people will always perceive her as a foreigner, with her perception of the "big gap" capturing her feelings of alienation. She also appeared to have a lingering fear of being judged or caught in a mistake which gave her a permanent sense of uneasiness, anxiety and hyper-vigilance. Furthermore, her repetition of the word "always" seemed to highlight her perception that she does not see the situation she is in as changing which seemed to contribute to her feelings of rejection. She continued:

In Switzerland, I have too many times in the trams and on the street, for example when people hear I am not Swiss like when I speak on my mobile, in Kurdish, they look at me all with angry eyes. (Sema, lines 266-269).

Sema's description of "angry eyes" when speaking Kurdish revealed the nonverbal reactions she experienced, which she interpreted as expressions of hostility and judgment. Similarly, Kesari recounted the emotional toll of the discrimination that she was exposed to from two separate aid organisations where she went for help. Before migrating, Kesari worked as a lawyer. However, this was used against her to belittle her when she asked for help, as she explained:

When I go to the church, I cry a lot, a lot of times. I went to [another aid organisation], I felt discriminated because I asked for help with law, and after talking for one hour, they told me they couldn't help me... And I cried after I went to church and I cried, because I always work and used to work a lot, and I never thought I would live like this... I felt destroyed completely; they made me feel like a criminal... In the meeting I had no hope. I felt I had no hope. They said to me, if I am a lawyer, I can defend myself. (Kesari, lines 243-271)

Kesari's repeated references to her crying at church illustrated her distress. Her description of feeling like a criminal emphasised the emotional harm this encounter caused her, as she felt treated with suspicion rather than support. By using the word "destroyed", Kesari demonstrated her emotional pain and loss of self-worth. Kesari's feelings aligned in this regard with Dilek's, as both women felt rejected, unwelcome and treated with suspicion and hostility. Dilek described feelings of hopelessness when confronted with racism in Switzerland, leading her to question, "Why am I here?" (Dilek, line 110). This rhetorical

question reflected her existential questioning and disillusionment regarding whether she would ever belong in Switzerland:

Many Swiss people are very racist, especially young and old people are racists. I feel discriminated and that I don't belong here. They are racist... I am shocked and surprised at how racist the people are. When I came to Switzerland, I was surprised and shocked. I didn't know that about Switzerland before. Here many are cold and unfriendly in Switzerland. When I came to Switzerland, I did not have any clothes, I went to a store and asked at the checkout and many people called me different names and I thought, why am I here? (Dilek, lines 98-110)

Dilek's narrative conveyed her humiliation at the degrading name-calling she received. She described feelings of shock, dismay, anger and existential questioning. Her frequent use of the words "surprised" and "shocked" stressed her disbelief, with her assertion that Swiss people are "very racist", showing her convictions of their racial bias. The fact she mentioned young and old people implies she feels everyone is racist.

Neshele also outlined the emotional impact of racism, reporting feelings of anger, frustration, rejection and isolation. Her experiences converged with those of Sema and Dilek, as she explained, "I find that 90% of Swiss are unfriendly, and also rude, and I feel that from the very beginning that the Swiss people are racist, they are definitely racist!" (Dilek, lines 58-60). Her declaration of racism, which she almost yelled as she said it, highlighted her conviction. Furthermore, her statement that "90% of Swiss are unfriendly," reflected her belief that there is a widespread unacceptance of foreigners in Switzerland. Interestingly, Dilek's words, "As long as I don't talk, they act normal" (Dilek, line 121),

was an echo of Neshele's earlier quote, when as she reflected on her pre-migration culture and explained, "We as women have no choices and no voice" (Neshele, line 149). Both women felt their voices had been suppressed by marginalisation, and while the statements arise from different contexts, they both adopted silence as a coping mechanism. While Dilek's silence was a self-protective strategy to avoid further discrimination, Neshele's silence came from her pre-migration cultural disempowerment. However, Neshele also used silence as a coping mechanism for racism. This dual experience of marginalisation, stemming from her pre-migration culture and racial discrimination in Switzerland, seemed to create a sense of 'double silencing' for Neshele.

Neshele also expressed anger over her experiences of workplace discrimination, which converged with Karessa's workplace experiences. Karessa said, "Swiss people won't let us get a job, because they don't want us to be better than them, they don't want us to succeed, because we aren't Swiss" (Karessa, lines 97-99). Both Karessa and Neshele felt anxious about securing employment in Switzerland. Neshele explained:

I always give 100 per cent at work for example, but many people still never accept me... because I was not Swiss... No companies, even though I have a master's degree, want to hire me... They [Swiss] wanted me to work in a shop as a check-out assistant... Even with a master's degree! (Neshele, lines 63-79)

Both Neshele and Karessa felt that, despite their qualifications, they were marginalised and undervalued in the workplace. Their repeated emphasis on their education and experiences conveyed their frustration and a desire for workplace recognition. Karessa detailed how discrimination acted as a barrier to her finding work in trade and finance:

They do discriminate, though, when we try to get a job. They don't care that I have studied and went to university. They still won't let me get a job because I am not Swiss. They offer me a hairdressing job. The work that they don't want to do, they want us to do... I can't accept these jobs. (Karessa, lines 186-192)

Joaquina reflected on her feelings of being judged and excluded by the Swiss when she explained, "I feel very excluded. My husband and I feel like that here and we get annoyed by this. Excluded in everything" (Joaquina, lines 123-126). Joaquina's statement demonstrated her annoyance at feeling excluded in everything, with her emphasis on the word 'everything' illustrating how this could be applied to all aspects of her post-migration life. Her inclusion of her husband's perspective suggests that Joaquina perceived that the rejection and exclusion extended to her spouse, which seemed to magnify her sense of exclusion.

Azra's narrative illustrated her fears about being perceived as a foreigner in Switzerland, as she explained:

I always have worries. I always feel strange. When people look at me, they think I'm foreign and you learn German in the courses, but on the streets, people speak Swiss German and realise I'm not Swiss right away... I have not felt comfortable even after three and half years. (Azra, lines 53-57)

Azra focused on her fear of being perceived as a foreigner, as she described that this fear was compounded by her challenges with the language, which further reinforced her feelings of alienation. Her statement, "I have not felt comfortable even after three and a half years," suggested that her feelings were not temporary, but her uneasiness had grown over

time and would continue. Additionally, her phrase “I always feel strange” highlighted that how she felt she would always remain foreign in Switzerland.

Like Azra and Neshele, Elma described her experiences of covert racism which she described as occurring via nonverbal cues such as unfriendly looks and staring. She explained how this made her feel uncomfortable because of “the way they looked” (Elma, line 76). All the participants’ narratives revealed a wide range of their emotional responses to the racism they experienced. These emotions included feelings of anger, frustration, stress, anxiety, fear, sadness, alienation, inferiority, rejection and disillusionment. Azra, Elma and Gocke all described their feelings of judgement, fear and alienation due to covert racism and nonverbal cues, while Kesari and Joaquina all described anger, sadness and inferiority from their experiences of overt racism. Frustration and anger were very prominent in Sema, Neshele and Karessa’s reactions to racism, while Dilek’s narrative highlighted her disillusionment, leading to her existential questioning and further feelings of rejection. These women also critically evaluated the Swiss people’s behaviour and described them as rude, unfriendly and selfish. While many of the women in this subtheme described adopting avoidance behaviours as coping mechanisms, their varied reactions highlighted the negative psychological impact of racism and discrimination on their psychological well-being.

8.4 Behavioural Adaptations to Racism

This subtheme explores the behavioural changes and adaptations from eight of the twelve participants in response to the racism and discrimination they experienced. While Gocke and Elma described their emotional responses to racism, they are not included in this section as they did not explicitly describe any changes in their behaviour. Of the eight participants who did describe behavioural changes, avoidance was one common reaction which included guardedness, social withdrawal, self-silencing, and not responding to greetings for fear of rejection or judgment, ultimately impacting their integration and process of acculturation.

. Table 11 outlines the participants' behavioural responses to the racism they encountered and the impact on their acculturation.

Table 11
Behavioural Responses to Racism and Their Impact on Acculturation

Participant	Response to racism	Impact on acculturation	Relevant quote
Sema	Avoidance of public interactions, hyper-vigilance.	Increased fear mistrust, reduced engagement	"I am always watching out" (Sema, lines 227-228).
Kesari	Disengagement from aid organisations.	Avoidance.	"I try to distract with these things" (Kesari, lines 101-105).
Dilek	Self-silencing and avoidance of speaking in public.	Restricted social interactions, isolation.	"As long as I don't talk, they act normal" (Dilek, line 121).
Neshele	Ceasing social greetings emotionally guarded.	Limited social engagement, sense of alienation.	"I don't expect anything good from them anymore" (Neshele, line 44).
Defne	Compliance with discriminatory demands to avoid conflict.	Withdrawal from integration	"The career makes more stress" (Defne, lines 189-190).
Azra	Long-term social withdrawal	Persistent disconnection from Swiss society	"I always feel strange" (Azra, lines 53-57).
Joaquina	Addressing daughter's exclusion.	Reduced integration.	"She will learn German" (Joaquina, line 85).
Karessa	Resistance to undervalued job roles	Limited opportunities, increased frustration and disconnection.	"They still won't let me get a job because I am not Swiss" (Karessa, lines 97-99).

Sema's experiences of racism in Switzerland shaped her behaviour, particularly in social contexts or when she was around Swiss people. After being pushed and spat on (Sema, lines 254-256), Sema described feeling fearful and hyper-vigilant whenever she is exposed to a social situation, stating: "I am always afraid" (Sema, line 229). She reported feeling uneasy around Swiss people and authority figures, explaining how she acts very cautiously to avoid confrontation, explain "I am always watching out" (Sema, lines 227-228). Sema's fear stemmed from the multiple experiences of racism that she described (see details in section 8.1). Sema also explained that she now avoids all social interactions with the Swiss unless necessary, describing how she feels "stress, because I don't know what to say, there is always a big gap between me and them" (Sema, lines 226–229). Sema's

narrative demonstrated how her discomfort led to her act differently in effort to minimise her interactions with others and to reduce the likelihood of these negative experiences. For example, after the incident on the train, which escalated into her being searched by the police, fined and locked in a room (see section 8.1). Sema explained how she had now purchased an annual train ticket, despite it being an excessive financial burden as she explained “I have a train ticket that lasts all year now, and I am always afraid on the train” (Sema, lines 306–307). Sema’s narrative clearly shows how her fear of being at the mercy of authority figures, or of racism is due to her emotional aftermath of the events she experienced. Her account showed how the racism she experienced led her to develop self-protective behaviours and distance herself from social interactions with Swiss individuals. Sema encapsulated her experience of discrimination in Switzerland with this poignant reflection:

The discrimination here in Switzerland, they look at us as if we are nothing. In our homeland, we are someone, we are maybe a doctor, an engineer, or a business manager, but here we are just refugees. But that’s not true, we are equal. (Sema, lines 318-322)

Sema’s repetition of “we” highlights the bond she feels with others who also feel marginalised in Switzerland. By contrasting being “someone” in her homeland with being seen as just a refugee in Switzerland, also shows how she thinks the Swiss perceive her. Her phrase “we are equal” demonstrates Sema’s rejection of this view, and how she still believes in, and asserts her equality, despite the experiences she has had.

Like Sema, Kesari’s experiences of racism in two aid organisations in Switzerland led to changes in her behaviour, particularly in relation to how she seeks help. Her encounter

with the aid organisations (see section 8.1) led to her feeling belittled, disillusioned, dismissed and “destroyed” (Kesari, lines 267-271). The experiences she had appeared to change her approach to seeking help; and rather than relying on support from aid organisations and risking another rejection, she began to prioritise her self-reliance, stating: “I take the strength from the kids... I try to distract with these things” (Kesari, line 105). Kesari feelings of exclusion were shaped by these experiences of racism, however while she avoided organisations that provide help, she still sought solace from her belief and a church, where she frequently cried (Kesari, lines 253, 258). This suggests that the discrimination she experienced forced her to seek alternative forms of support, and that she used her church and her family as a form of coping.

Dilek’s narrative was similar to Sema and Kesari as all three women explained how they used avoidance strategies to avoid encounters with the Swiss and in Dilek’s case she explained how she avoided speaking in public so she would not be identified as a foreigner. Dilek explained, “As long as I don’t talk, they act normal” (Dilek, line 121). This protective behaviour she exhibited reflected her efforts to control how she was seen in Switzerland, suggesting that she restricted her interactions because of her fear of discrimination. She continued, “As soon as I speak, everyone knows that I am a foreigner” (Dilek, lines 111-113), indicating that even the act of speaking in mundane situations like shopping, could expose her to discrimination. Dilek changes in behaviour converged with Sema’s, as she avoided public interactions to avoid racism as she explained, “Even after 50 years... I would not belong here” (Dilek, lines 127-128). Dilek seems to feel that despite living in Switzerland for a long time, nothing would change, and while Dilek, Sema and Kesari’s curtailed their social interactions to avoid racism this also led to increased isolation.

Neshele's behaviour converged with Dilek's, as she also explained how she no longer greeted people in the streets in order to protect herself from racism and rejection. Neshele also explained that she was subjected to racism because of her appearance:

The people, in general, are very unfriendly... I have stopped saying hello. I always felt bad at the beginning because of this, but now I often say nothing at all...

When they [Swiss] look at me, they see that I look like I am a foreigner. Then these people are not peaceful towards me or friendly, they judge me, and this makes me feel bad. (Neshele, lines 44-50)

Neshele's narrative showed her change in behaviour, as she progressed from feeling hurt by hostility to actively withdrawing from any social interactions. Initially, her narrative indicates she felt bad when she stopped greeting others, but then after her repeated experiences of feeling judged, this seemed to lead her to use silence as a coping mechanism and to protect herself from further rejection.

Azra's narrative converged with those of Dilek, Sema and Neshele, in that all four women highlighted their fear of being recognised as foreigners, which led to their withdrawal from social situations as a form of coping. Azra described how her language challenges, because she could only speak High German and not Swiss German, led her to experience discomfort and sense of being different if she had to talk in public. Reflecting on the persistent unease, she said, "I always feel strange..." (Azra, lines 53-57). This ongoing discomfort implied a feeling of unending unease, leading her to avoid interactions where she could be identified as a foreigner.

Defne's narrative echoed Neshele's, as she recounted how her Swiss caregiver in her accommodation imposed unfair cleaning duties on her requiring her to clean twice as often

as others and withholding money for minor infractions. She believed this was due to racism as she explained:

In accommodation, everyone has a cleaning day, but she always says Defne you have to clean twice a day... I have so much stress, so I just clean... The caretaker makes more stress, only when the shoes are in front of the door, even when it rains, and makes trouble. Then she takes the money away. (Defne, lines 181-192).

Defne's compliance with her caregiver demands seemed to stem from her fear of losing her money and similar to Semas they both have a fear of authority figures. Furthermore, Defne's stress was compounded by her limited German, and her lack of support, which was demonstrated when she said "I am always alone here... It is so difficult for me to make an appointment here... sometimes, I can't communicate, and people don't agree" (Defne, lines 202-205). As such, Defne's behavioural change seemed rooted in her perceived powerlessness, which was demonstrated in her behavioural change of submission, all of which she perceived as driven by racism and her subsequent fear.

Joaquina reported how her experience of racism extended to her daughter being excluded in her school as she explained, "The teacher... said that my daughter is being excluded at school because she doesn't speak very good German. The other kids are not playing with her" (Joaquina, lines 74-76). While Joaquina's concern was demonstrated in her tone of voice, she appeared to reassure herself in her next sentence by saying "She will learn German... kids will learn the easy way" (Joaquina, lines 83-85). Her response demonstrated her pragmatism and her emotional stability when addressing the discrimination that her child was experiencing. Karessa expressed her frustration at feeling undervalued, noting how her qualifications and work experience, which as quite extensive,

was overlooked when she looked for a job – she explained, ‘They don’t want us to succeed because we aren’t Swiss’ (Karessa, lines 97–98). This seemed to increase the frustration she felt toward the Swiss.

Overall, the experiences of racism described by the eight women in this subtheme led to a number of behavioural changes that appeared to be coping mechanisms for their negative experiences. These behavioural changes included avoidance, withdrawal, compliance, guardedness, and pragmatism. Examples of social avoidance were expressed through withdrawal, self-silencing, and refraining from social greetings by Sema, Kesari, Dilek, Neshele, and Azra. Furthermore, Sema and Defne used a form of compliance to the perceived power of authority figures, in order to reduce their stress and avoid conflicts. Lastly, Sema, Dilek and Defne all demonstrated guardedness through their cautious behaviour, in order to avoid further negative experiences, while Joaquina and Kesari showed a pragmatism by focusing on practical solutions to cope with the racism they encountered. As noted in section 8.2, the exposure to racism also provoked a number of negative feelings of fear, sadness, anxiety, frustration, anger, discouragement, disillusionment and hopelessness. The behavioural and emotional experiences such as those described by the women in this GET, support the idea racism can negatively shape the experiences of refugee women and reduce their motivation and interest to integrate, creating barriers to acculturation.

8.5 Reflexivity In the Shadow of Bias

Throughout the research, I remained aware of how my experiences could shape my interpretation of the participants’ narratives. This was particularly relevant in this GET, which focused on the participants’ experiences of racism in Switzerland. My family and I

also experienced discrimination in Switzerland, which increased my empathy and created a sense of common ground between myself and the participants. For example, my young daughter was told to “pack her bags and go back to Germany,” and when I spoke German in shops, I noticed a change in tone when people heard my accent. As a white, Western, educated foreigner (rather than a racial minority), I realised that these experiences were not the same as those of the participants. However, they provided me with a glimpse into what they experienced.

Narratives from participants such as Sema, who described being pushed and spat on for speaking poor German, or Neshele, who was discriminated against because of the way she looked, left me upset and angry. At times, I questioned whether I could remain impartial. Consequently, I used bracketing and supervision to ensure my feelings did not shape my interpretation of the participants’ experiences. For example, I wrote in my reflexive diary after interviewing Neshele: “I feel protective and angry [...] it’s difficult to not to let my emotions shape my understanding of N’s experiences... Here is where I must be careful not to impose my own interpretation!” (Reflexive Journal, 17 December 2021, 4:00 p.m.).

I also recognised that it was not realistic to completely remove my bias, as aspects of my experience may have shaped my approach to double hermeneutics (Smith et al., 2021). However, by clearly outlining my positionality and process of reflexivity while focusing on the idiographic details of the participants’ narratives, I aimed to enhance the transparency and credibility of my analysis.

Chapter Nine: Findings: Theme Three – Loss in a New Land

9.1 Introduction

In the third GET, Loss in a New Land, the participants' experiences of loss in post-migration Switzerland were explored. Feelings of loss were described as being experienced in various ways, including loss of family, culture, homeland, loved ones and choice. As such, this GET is categorised into two sub-themes. The first subtheme, Loss of Choice, explored the participants' feelings that their ability to make choices was diminished in their post-migration lives. Before forced migration, the choice of where to live, work or move was a normal part of life, however, after the migration, these choices were no longer available to them, and as such became a memory of what they had lost. The second subtheme, the Cost of Leaving, captured the participants' emotions around losing their family, friends, culture and homeland. They talked about missing family gatherings and longing for their homeland or familiar activities they used to do back home. Their sense of loss was increased when it was shared with a spouse. It was not only the physical distance that intensified the participants' feelings of loss but also their cultural disconnection.

Table 12 details these experiences and organises them into three themes.

Table 12*Loss in a New Land: The Loss of Choice and the Cost of Leaving*

Participants	Number of times mentioned	Subthemes	Key findings	Impact on acculturation	Psychological impact
Tulay, Elma, Sema, Joaquina, Karessa, Azra, Kesari	147	Loss of Choice: From Agency to Powerlessness.	Powerlessness and diminished agency.	Challenges in decision-making, and integrating.	Stress, helplessness and resignation due to lack of autonomy.
Azra, Sema, Dilek, Joaquina, Kesari, Gocke, Tulay	121	The Cost of Leaving: Loss and Grief of Homeland and Family.	Grief leaving homeland and family, guilt, regret and loss.	Struggles with identity and emotional stability	Grief, longing, sadness and guilt due to familial separation

9.2 Loss of Choices: From Agency to Powerlessness

In this subtheme, seven of the 12 participants explained how their sense of autonomy and choice had diminished post-migration, leading to feelings of powerlessness and a change in their locus of control. Their narratives illustrate how these challenges impacted their acculturation, well-being and engagement with the Swiss post-migration society. Table 13 illustrates how the loss of choice shaped their experiences of autonomy, acculturation and well-being.

Table 13
Impacts of Loss of Choice on Acculturation and Engagement

Participant	Narrative	Impact on acculturation	Psychological impact	Barriers to engagement
Azra	Systemic barriers to autonomy.	Struggled with language, hindering acculturation.	Stress/helplessness due to lack of control	Limited opportunities to engage with Swiss.
Joaquina	Loss of choice, job/self-esteem.	Feelings of powerlessness, slowing acculturation.	Disbelief due to loss of control.	Linguistic barriers, loss of choice,
Karessa	Disrupted by asylum camp.	Restrictive living conditions	Frustration stemming from limited agency.	Systemic restrictions
Elma	Rapid forced migration.	Overwhelmed by changes	Fear /emotional distress	Resigned to lack of agency, struggled to feel empowered.
Kesari	Resentment toward Swiss institutions	Lack of empathy impedes acculturation.	Anger over perceived injustice	Limited avenues for engagement.
Sema	Forced to leave home country.	Loss of choice made acculturation challenging.	Resignation/grief over circumstances.	Felt powerless and unable to engage effectively.
Tulay	Constraints in asylum camp/limited autonomy.	Hindered ability to integrate.	Feelings of stress and disempowerment,	Restricted autonomy; lack of language skills

Kesari, Elma, Azra and Joaquina reported being frustrated and overwhelmed when they found they could not make the choices they used to make before forced migration. Azra highlighted her loss of choice when she explained, “I had no choice... it was a difficult time” (Azra, line 9). She continued, “It was not my decision, but I had to come, and I couldn’t decide... It was very difficult because I like my country and I couldn’t decide anything because I had to come” (Azra, lines 26-29). Azra’s repeated emphasis on being unable to make decisions suggested a sense of helplessness that started with forced migration. Her loss of choice led her to experience feelings of stress as she explained that her actions did not make any real change to her circumstances:

I always want to develop, or improve, for myself, but I can’t because I didn’t feel good. First reason is I don’t know German, so I don’t have contacts with people in Switzerland... I also don’t have possibilities to learn German or languages, people in Switzerland are very closed. I think in the evening, tomorrow will be better, I

want to do so much but I am a foreigner here, but every day is the same, I have no languages and no work. [When asked if she could learn German, she replied] It is possible... [pauses and sighs] (Azra, lines 38-50)

Azra's narrative highlighted how her perceived loss of choice affected her acculturation process. Azra found that the rigidity of the Swiss culture left her feeling restricted and contrasted this against spontaneity of her pre-migration culture. For instance, she described how even small actions, such as visiting her family, required formal permission in Switzerland, stating "For example, if I miss my uncle or grandfather, I quickly go and visit him, but in Switzerland, I always have to ask if such small things are allowed, which makes no sense to me (Azra, lines 136-139).

Additionally, Azra reflected on the challenges of the Swiss culture and her desire to retain her premigration culture, as she explained, "I have to adapt my culture... then I lose my culture, and I don't want that" (Azra, lines 157-159). Her words suggest that she is afraid that if she would adapt to the Swiss culture and she would lose her pre-migration culture. This was further complicated by her limited opportunities to learn the German language, which she identified as a key barrier to her integration when she explained "I don't have possibilities to learn German... People in Switzerland are very closed" (Azra, lines 42-43). Because of her perception of the rigidity of Swiss culture, and her lack of language skills Azra felt her ability to engage with the Swiss culture was hindered. Her loss of choice in that sense then shaped her acculturation, as demonstrated by her tension between her pre- and post-migration culture, the lack of opportunities to learn the German, and the rigidity of the Swiss culture. These constraints undermined her loss of choice in acting freely and limited her sense of belonging.

Joaquin's narrative aligned with Azra's, as she also reported her feelings of loss of choice, agency and powerlessness over her circumstances, as she explained:

We came here because we had to come here. We had no other option. We would have been killed otherwise. We had to leave everything behind... I had my work and my car and then from one day to another I had to come here and leave everything behind! I did not even know what language I needed [in Switzerland]. From one day to another... From one day to another! We were told to go to Switzerland. I think it's difficult to accept and I was in Colombia and then suddenly not... And the course that I had to attend, and I had to clean houses, in order to learn the language... That's tough. (Joaquina, lines 141-156)

Joaquina's narrative about her job and possessions in Colombia highlights her loss of choice, as she contrasts it with her life in Switzerland, where she has nothing, and choices are now imposed upon her. Additionally, her repetition of the phrase "from one day to another" highlighted the shock she felt at the abruptness of her life's changes as she continues to process the abruptness of these change. It is almost as if Joaquina was verbalising her disbelief by repeating this phrase to confirm the reality of her situation to herself. Her repetition also suggests that it's a challenge for her to accept her loss.

Joaquina's loss of choice also shaped her process of acculturation as she described how her inability to control her post-migration life has extended to her attempts to integrate. She described as she clarified "Coming here when you have been working all your life, and... cannot work because you don't know that language, that is very frustrating" (Joaquina, lines 57-60). Joaquina's frustration reflected her lack of choice in defining her own future, including finding work has led her to experience a sense of loss, and

powerlessness. In this sense both Joaquina and Azra's narratives converge around their feelings of loss of choice and feelings of powerlessness in controlling their circumstances.

Karessa's narrative illustrates how her loss of choice shaped her acculturation process as she described being forced to move to an asylum camp, where she felt her agency was stripped away as she explained:

We [her and her family] were asked to the asylum centre, and everything changed... They took our [passport/visa away], and we had to go to a big camp... That was a terrible experience, it was like being in jail. (Karessa, lines 7-10)

The relocation to different asylum camps along with the associated restrictive living conditions and the lack of autonomy over decisions around her son's education heightened Karessa's sense of disempowerment. Furthermore, she explained how forced dependency on the government for basic needs, coupled with barriers to finding employment, led her to experience feelings of loss. Karessa's felt her loss of agency even more when her request to move to a different canton where her son could speak the language and continue his education was denied. She explained: "I wrote a letter to immigration and asked to go to another canton, because my son had learned French not German, but they said no, and told him to finish school in Aargau" (Karessa, lines 22-24). She also expressed frustration at losing her agency, explaining: "We had no choice" (Karessa, line 32). Karessa felt her agency was further restricted by the asylum camps, where rigid routines dictated her daily life. She explained, "Every morning at 6 o'clock in the morning, someone came and told us to wake up and clean, there was security at the door, for every time we went in and out of the camp" (Karessa, lines 16-18). These experiences left her feeling powerless over even the simplest aspects of her daily routine. This loss of choice and autonomy shaped Karessa's

process of acculturation, with her and her family's integration hampered when she explained: "My son couldn't go to school for eight months" (Karessa, line 25). Karessa also described how language barriers hindered her ability to connect with Swiss society when she explained "I realised I can't compete with people who speak German" (Karessa, line 100).

Elma's narrative is similar to Karessa as she explained, "My experience is difficult for me... everything changed very fast... This happened extremely fast" (Elma, line 39). Like Karessa, Elma highlighted her loss of choice around the suddenness of her forced migration. Her description of this rapid and uncontrollable change highlights her loss of choice. Kesari's narrative converged with Azra and Elma's as she explains:

They [Swiss aid organisations] don't understand why we do these sacrifices, and they think it is for money, here they don't understand that we are facing a difficult time, we had to go out of this [pre-migration situation] ... Like I had a choice! (Kesari, lines 239-245)

Kesari's phrase, "Like I had a choice," conveyed her sarcasm and her resignation. Her anger was directed toward Swiss aid organisations, which she perceived as lacking understanding and empathy. Her report of having no real choice demonstrated her loss of agency.

Tulay's narrative, like Elma's, also illustrates a loss of control in her lived experiences post-migration. Her description of life in the asylum camp reflected how she felt about the living conditions she was exposed to as she explained:

The camp was difficult ... there was one time, I saw blood, and it was always very loud, and this made me afraid. I had fear, [constant] stress... I don't know what problems would come. (Tulay, lines 36-39)

Tulay continued, “Sometimes the police come with dogs, and there was always problems” (Tulay, lines 40-41). This experience, alongside the constant loudness and frightening incidents she witnessed, contributed to her fear and stress. Tulay explained that even the simplest daily tasks, such as cooking or using the toilet, required navigating shared spaces, where she felt a loss of privacy:

We only have one room, and I always have to go outside to other people for cooking and cleaning. Then it becomes more difficult because I have to wear my headscarf in front of other people always. This makes me so tired. (Tulay, lines 86-89)

These repeated intrusions into her personal space highlighted how the rules and the camp’s itself amplified Tulay’s sense of loss of agency. Sema’s narrative aligned with the other four women regarding loss of choice. She explained, “I had to leave my home country, I didn’t want to, but I had to” (Sema, lines 3-5).

Azra, Joaquina, Elma, Karessa, Kesari and Sema all felt a loss of agency and choice, as they described how imposed decisions, barriers, lack of choice and refugee camps all restricted their freedom and ability to choose their own paths. This led them to experience feelings of powerlessness, which appeared to delay their sense of belonging.

9.3 The Cost of Leaving: Loss and Grief of Homeland and Family

This subtheme explores the emotional and lived experiences of the seven participants who expressed their grief over leaving behind their loved ones, family, friends, culture, home and community. Their narratives explore the sacrifices that they made due to their forced migration, as they described their feelings of loss, guilt and regret. Each individual

struggled to reconcile their loss, and the narrative provided an insight into the cost of leaving for each of the women in this subtheme.

Table 14 provides an overview of the emotional toll and the loss experienced by the participants.

Table 14
Participant Narratives on Loss: Emotional Challenges Post-Migration

Participant	Theme of loss	Emotional outcome	Adjustment outcomes
Sema	Loss of homeland.	Emotional distress due to separation from homeland/family.	Desire to return home.
Dilek	Emotional ties to homeland.	Sense of not belonging.	Struggles with emotional adjustment.
Azra	Loss of family connections and culture.	Sadness, emotional anchoring to her homeland.	Struggles to reconcile emotional ties to Kurdistan.
Joaquina	Loss of family and culture.	Emotional loss , shock	Grief and loss.
Kesari	Guilt and regret over leaving her daughter.	Emotional turmoil	Mixed feelings of guilt and loss.
Gocke	Sadness over separation from her mother	Struggles with family separation.	Hope to reunite with family in future
Tulay	Regret that her son has not seen grandparents in years.	loss of family.	Sense of guilt tied to her son's lack of a relationship with grandparents.

Azra, Gocke, Tulay, Sema, Joaquina, Dilek and Kesari all expressed regret, sorrow, loss and guilt over leaving their families and homeland. Sema, Dilek and Azra's shared how their loss of their homeland, family and culture caused them to feel grief and sorrow. Their narratives also converged to show their emotional love of Kurdistan. Sema described her loss:

I should be in my home country. This thought has always stayed with me... I always have a strong relationship with my homeland. I have loved so much my

home country. That's why I think about what I have when I go back... I want to be in my home country. (Sema, lines 80-100)

Sema's analogy of a relationship between loved ones to describe her love for her country highlighted the depth of her emotion. Her repeated assertion, "I should be in my home country," revealed her feelings of loss and desire to return home.

Like Sema, Dilek also expressed her grief:

I can't say exactly how I feel because there are so many differences between Kurdistan and Europe and my culture, the people I know are all not here and I feel like sometimes my heart doesn't belong here and I shouldn't be here. (Dilek, lines 21-24)

Dilek and Sema both shared a sense of disconnection from Switzerland., which was captured in Dilek narratives as she said, "My heart doesn't belong here." Her emotional ties to Kurdistan and her feelings of loss also shaped aspects of her acculturation reinforcing her strategy of separation. Azra's narrative converged with Dilek and Sema's, as she demonstrated her sadness over losing her homeland and family. She described the pain of being forced to leave when she said:

It's not a [my] decision, but because I had to come and I couldn't decide to leave my country, it was very difficult because I like my country, and I couldn't decide anything because I had to come. (Azra, lines 26-29)

Azra's loss of her homeland, family connections, culture and ability to choose is clear in her narrative. Azra felt emotionally anchored to her homeland, saying: "Physically I am here, but I have never really left Kurdistan. I want to do so much in Kurdistan" (Azra,

lines 72-74). Interestingly Sema, Dilek, and Azra's, all from Kurdistan had their narratives converge over their grief around their physical displacement from Kurdistan, which came across very strongly, even stronger than their loss of family.

Other forms of loss were seen for example Joaquina reported feelings of loss when she explained the emotional impact of losing her family and culture. She said, "I feel that I have to struggle every day... My husband, the kids, everybody accustomed to the country [Colombia], and we left it, and we are now alone" (Joaquina, lines 164-166). Joaquina's narrative conveyed her sense of loss and her daily struggles in Switzerland, suggesting an ongoing feeling of grief and sadness.

Kesari highlighted her feelings of regret, loss and guilt over leaving her older daughter behind in Colombia:

She [her daughter] wants to talk about her experiences, I feel like she needs me but now, but I am not there. She is accomplishing her dream. Five years ago, we were walking and talking about obtaining scholarships and she gained three scholarships... She is like me, studying law, I realise that's her dream, she makes her dream, and I was not there with her... I am not there... (Kesari, lines 184-190)

Kesari expressed guilt and regret over being absent from her daughter and missing key moments in her daughter's life. As a lawyer, Kesari felt connected to her daughter's achievements, as her daughter was also studying law. However, Kesari felt the forced migration had disrupted their connection. Perhaps also for Kesari, leaving her daughter behind meant leaving behind a part of herself, which exacerbated her feelings of guilt, loss and regret.

Gocke also expressed feelings of loss, especially in connection to the distance she now had to her mother and family. She said:

I was close to my family, especially my mother. It is difficult for me. I miss my family in Turkey and my children miss their grandparents, as well as other relatives. It's so hard to be away from them and I would like to go back one day to have the opportunity for my children to see their grandparents. They were very close to my mother and asked about her all the time. Unfortunately, it's not possible to go back at the moment, but maybe in the future. (Gocke, lines 206-218)

Similar to Kesari, Gocke missed her mother and her family and was unhappy about the prospect of navigating the future without them. Her narrative has revealed how unhappy she has been that her children would grow up without knowing his grandparents. Her use of past tense when describing their bond suggests that her child's memories of his grandmother may already be fading, which may deepen Gocke's distress. Gocke's hope to return to Turkey one day highlighted her hope that in the future her family would be reunited.

Similarly, Tulay spoke of the loss she felt after her son was separated from her parents. She explained:

What is sad is that my son has not seen my parents in seven years or so and that is also difficult. My son does not know his own grandfather or grandmother. That really is a pity. (Tulay, lines 256-258)

Like Gocke and Joaquina, Tulay experienced sadness over losing contact with her family in Turkey. Tulay's narrative suggested a sense of regret and guilt over her son not

knowing his grandparents. All these narratives revealed the sense of loss the women experienced which led to feelings of grief, regret and guilt. These experiences were often described in conjunction with feelings of guilt, particularly when it came to missing key moments with families. While some participants found solace in their memories or hopes of returning home, their narratives still captured their feelings of loss on their emotional well-being.

9.4 Reflexivity: Loss in a New Land

Reflecting on the narratives in this chapter was challenging. Although I have lived away from my home country for many years, the scale of loss described by the participants, which included loss of family, homeland, culture and agency, was overwhelming. Analysing stories like Azra's regret and sadness at leaving Kurdistan or Kesari's ongoing guilt over being separated from her daughter, I found myself saddened by their grief and guilt. One aspect of this GET that particularly resonated for me was the participants' descriptions of their loss of agency and choice in Switzerland. When they spoke about no longer being able to decide where to live, which language to speak, their work or other aspects of daily life, I was struck by the contrast with voluntary migrants like myself, for whom any loss of choice is usually temporary or balanced by the benefits of migration. As I read Karessa's description of life in the asylum camp ("like being in jail"), I realised how difficult it was for me to grasp her loss of agency. Their words stayed with me, making me reflect on the privilege of choice. My reflexive engagement aligned with the critical self-awareness and importance of researcher positionality inherent within IPA (Finlay, 2014; Smith et al., 2009).

Reflexivity also helped inform my interview technique, as I carefully revised questions to avoid any leading language (Smith et al., 2021). In this GET, reflexivity also

was valuable during the analysis, where I noticed my emotional reactions to stories of separation from family, as I was geographically separated from my parents. As such, I made a conscious effort to pause, revisit the data, explore alternative interpretations and focus on the participants' perspectives so that my interpretations were grounded in the idiographic detail of their lived experiences (Smith et al., 2021).

Chapter Ten: Findings: Theme Four – Metamorphosis of Relationships, From Celebrations to Farewells

10.1 Introduction

This final GET called ‘Metamorphosis of Relationships’ explores the post-migration changes that occurred within the participants’ intimate relationships. Participants described how through their experiences, the phenomena of forced migration, acculturation and changes in their intimate relationships were all interconnected. As such there are four subthemes that capture the changes in the participant's intimate relationships. The first, subtheme called ‘Finding Freedom and Embracing Escape’, captures the narratives of three of the participants from Islamic backgrounds who were exposed to GBV and used the process of forced migration and acculturation to end their relationships. The second subtheme, Love’s Evolution: Building Back Better,’ focuses on the experiences of four of the participants from Islamic and Catholic backgrounds who described positive changes in their relationships post-migration, including increased mutual reliance, improved communication and renegotiation of gender roles, leading to more egalitarian and supportive intimate relationships. The third subtheme, ‘Turbulent Horizons and Uncharted Futures’ is built on the experiences of three of the Kurdish participants who all expressed concerns about the future of their relationships due to the uncertainty of their refugee status. Finally, the fourth subtheme, Crossroads of Love and Discontent: Marital Narratives in Changing Cultures, captured the experiences of two women, one from an Islamic and one from a Catholic background, who felt discontent and frustrated with their marriages. Their narratives revealed the gaps between their pre-migration expectations and their post-migration realities, with their unmet expectations contributing to their dissatisfaction.

Table 15 details these subthemes, highlighting the changes of intimate relationships post-migration.

Table 15
Participants' Experiences and Post-Migration Changes in Intimate Relationships

Sub-theme	Participant	Cultural background	Pre-migration status/expectations	Post-migration changes/reality	Impact on relationship	Emotional response
Finding freedom and embracing escape	Suna	Muslim/Alevism	Experienced GBV/IPV	Sought freedom and safety	Ended	Pursuit of autonomy and stability
	Defne	Muslim	Experienced GBV/IPV	Sought freedom and safety	Ended	Search for safety and independence
	Elma	Muslim	Experienced IPV	Triggered separation	Ended	Choosing self-preservation
Love's evolution: Building back better	Joaquina	Colombian Catholic	Catastrophic relationship	Improved cooperation, mutual reliance	Strengthened marriage	Shared acculturation
	Kesari	Colombian Catholic	Individualistic approach	Joint decision-making, mutual understanding	Strengthened relationship	Shared acculturation
	Gocke	Muslim	Limited spousal support	Increased empathy and support from husband	Strengthened relationship	Shared elements of acculturation
Turbulent horizons	Tulay	Muslim	Experienced GBV /traditional gender roles	Husband stopped violence, got more engaged in childcare	More balanced responsibilities	Some change in relationship, stopped violence
	Sema	No Religion/ Kurdish	Stable relationship in home country	Uncertainty due to refugee status	Strain due to inability to plan	Anxiety due to lack of control
	Dilek	Atheist/ Kurdish	Positive relationship in Turkey	Relationship seen as short-term due to refugee status	Doubt about future together	Anxiety due to inability to plan
	Azra	Muslim/Alevism Kurdish	Stable relationship in home country	Struggles with financial aspects and uncertain future	Challenges due to refugee status	Lack of control uncertain about future
Crossroads of love and discontent	Neshele	Muslim	Arranged marriage	Remains in marriage due to cultural norms	Emotional discontent	Unhappy due to unfulfilled expectations of husband
	Karessa	Cuban Catholic	Husband as primary provider	Becomes primary provider	Separation	Unhappy due to unmet expectation

10.2 Finding Freedom and Embracing Escape

This subtheme explores the impact of IPV and GBV on the intimate relationships of there of the women in this research who were all from Islamic backgrounds. Suna, Defne and Elma all reported that their experiences of GBV were inflicted by their husbands, who were all practicing Muslims. They recounted how they experienced feelings of fear, self-preservation, pain, shame and disempowerment due to their experiences of GBV. Suna, Defne and Elma's narratives also highlighted how, as they engaged in the post-migration process of acculturation, they were able to prioritise their safety and physical and emotional well-being and separate from or end their marriages. They reflected on how the process of acculturation helped them find safety, freedom and agency post-migration.

Table 16 details the post-migration experiences of these three participants, including their emotional and behavioural responses and changes within their intimate relationships.

Table 16

Experiences of IPV, GBV and Post-Migration Changes in Intimate Relationships

Participant	Acculturation opportunities	Behavioural changes	Emotional responses	Outcome
Suna	Freedom from restrictive gender norms -TA	Prioritised autonomy/well-being	Emphasised resilience and hope	Left relationship to pursue freedom
Defne	Exposure to cultural values on safety - TA	Actively sought safety, independence	Hopeful yet fearful	Left relationship to escape violence
Elma	Access to new culture - TA	Let go of norms, change, self-preservation	Increased optimism but emotional strain	Separation planned for self-growth

Defne described her life before migration as filled with despair, hopelessness and fear, which began with her experiences of a childhood filled with abuse and violence, as she recalled:

When I was a child, I was always hit... [my] family are so violent. They do so much violence against women, always violence... My father fights with my

mother, my brother beats my sister and me, and my father beats me. (Defne, lines 51-60)

Defne's decision to flee was in order to escape the violence within her intimate relationship, which she described as symbolic of the violence and the acceptance of violence within her culture, family and community. She explained:

In my family, there was my relative [fiancé]. He always had violence against women, the whole family knew this, he was violent to women. I know when I was a child I was always hit, but I knew [fiancé], and his entire family was so violent. When the family decided we must marry I just say yes. But when I was a child until they age, they say that I needed to marry him. I always saw that there is always violence in this family, that's why I wanted to leave... When I decided, I decided to go to Turkey... in Europe, it's much better for women. I felt very happy to leave but I was afraid. (Defne, lines 30-43)

Defne described her family's acceptance of GBV as she explained that her fiancé's family shared the same values as her family (he is her cousin), in that they were all extremely violent. Given that her childhood memories were so traumatic, she expressed a desire to free herself from the past. And to find the safety she desired. Defne demonstrated her determination, as she explained that for her forced migration was the only way to find safety and freedom.

Elma described her experiences of IPV, where she said her husband strangled her during their forced migration journey to Greece. She explained, "In Greece, he held my neck... I do not feel safe with my husband... That is why I have to separate from my

husband” (Elma, lines 132-134). She continued to explain her reasons for separating from him:

I have seen my husband was depressed and has a lot of anger. [...] I think he can't forget old life, but I want to forget some, not all, but some I have to forget. I want to make a decision. I can't stay the same ideology with my husband. If I stay the same ideology, I feel depressed too. My positive psychology goes away. But I have to build a new life, this is a chance for me... He [husband] has much anger... we always fight. This is also very difficult. We have no middle ground. That's why I decided I think I will separate... I understood that I can't live with this man any longer. My motivation is gone and that's why I have to separate. Our house has problems every day. (Elma, lines 96-100, 106-122)

Elma's narrative revealed her desire to move on and forget some aspects of her old life, such as her trauma from GBV, but simultaneously she expresses her desire to build a new life. This dual approach of Elma, as she lets go of the negative while embracing her hope in a positive future, seemed important for her in order to move keep moving forward. Elma's decision to separate from her husband stemmed from what she perceived as the irreparable damage that was caused by her exposure to his anger and to GBV, which furthermore she explains is because of his adherence to their pre-migration culture. She referred to this as his “ideology.” Interestingly Elma's narrative starts with her acknowledgement of the unsatisfactory state of her marriage, which is indicated by her phrases such as “was not good before” and “not so good” (Elma, line 96). She then acknowledged the divergent paths she is taking from her husband, particularly when she contrasted her “old life” with her resolve to separate from him (Elma, lines 106-116). Elma

perceived her husband's anger as constantly causing strife in their relationship, which had a negative emotional impact on Elma, which she referred to as a decline in her "positive psychology". Elma described her household as one which is steeped in daily conflicts and then goes on to describe her husband as "depressive" (Elma, line 99), "angry" (Elma, line 100) and always fighting (Elma, line 100). The lack of "middle ground" (Elma, line 118) and the repeated conflicts created for Elma a toxic environment, which motivated her to separate from her husband. She repeatedly asserted that a fresh start would help her, in her personal growth, in a new and better life and give her the chance she wants, as she explained:

Only with my husband I have problems... otherwise [I have] no worries and many opportunities... new culture, learn new languages. I come fresh to the world. I come to new world again, a new chance, I can build my life again. Better. But now we have many problems with my husband... now is not so good. (Elma, lines 88-92)

Elma's excitement and optimism were palpable as she talked about starting anew and rebuilding her life. This suggested her hope for the future as she looked towards a fresh start without her husband. Throughout her narrative, Elma conveyed her increasing realisation that her new chance could only be occur outside of her marriage, as she explained:

That's why I decided I think I will separate... Since last year. I was pregnant, and afterwards I understood that I can't live with this man any longer. My motivation is gone and that's why I have to separate. (Elma, lines 118-122).

Elma's narrative converged with Defne and Suna's, as they all highlighted how GBV had led them to end their intimate relationships. Suna also expressed her determined to move forward after the separation of her husband as she explained, "I moved away from the situation" (Suna, line 121). Suna explained how her exposure to constant IPV motivated her to leave:

I am here because of my husband and while I was in Turkey I had many good opportunities, but I was not free... I had so much violence from my husband, that's why I gave up my good job, my family and my life in Turkey and now I look for freedom, I am free from the violence... The violence against women, in Switzerland in general is much less than in Turkey... (Suna, lines 3-15)

Suna, Elma and Defne all detailed their desire for freedom, safety and a new chance at life post-migration, which meant they ended their intimate relationships. Suna's emphatic assertion that "things need to change" (Suna, lines 168-179) demonstrates her, and Elama's and defines new beginnings.

10.3 Love's Evolution: Building Back Better

Joaquina, Kesari, Gocke and Tulay all described how they had experienced post-migration improvements in their intimate relationships, explained how a united approach in overcoming the challenges of forced migration with their significant other had strengthened their intimate relationships. Furthermore, they highlighted how an increase in compromise, mutual respect, and improved communication had improved their relationships. Gocke and Tulay (both from Turkey), discussed how the influence of the Swiss post-migration culture specifically around gender roles had led to their husband supporting them more with their children. Importantly, Tulay highlighted how her husband's exposure to Swiss gender norms

had also led him to stop using GBV. Joaquina and Kesari, who were both from Colombia, explained how they experienced their intimate relationships as a dyadic process with their husband mirroring their emotions and emulating their process of acculturation.

Table 17
Positive Transformations in Intimate Relationships Post-Migration

Participant	Pre-migration status	Acculturation impact	Behavioural changes	Emotional responses	Outcome
Joaquina	Strained, "catastrophic" relationship	Shared cultural background provided stability	Rekindled relationship, prioritised joint decision-making	Hopeful and supported	Strengthened marriage through unity
Kesari	Individualistic approach to marriage	Shifted to collaborative roles	Joint decision-making and shared responsibilities	Improved emotional connection	Strengthened marriage through mutual reliance
Gocke	Limited spousal support	Exposure to egalitarian gender norms increased support	Greater husband involvement in childcare	Happiness and optimism	Strengthened marriage with increased trust
Tulay	Experienced GBV	Adoption of Swiss norms stopped GBV	Husband ceased violence	Cautiously optimistic	Improved relationship stopped GBV

Joaquina reported being happy over the positive changes in her marriage which she explained improved due to their mutual reliance on each other and their new and collaborative approach to decision-making. She also discussed the motivations behind her decision to rekindle her marriage with her husband, which she explained had deteriorated before their forced migration, primarily because she and her husband had been living separate lives and drifting apart. Joaquina began by describing her relationship in Colombia, and shortly after they arrived in Switzerland as "catastrophic" and said she had planned on filing for divorce upon arrival in Switzerland. She explained, "It was catastrophic at the beginning. I wanted to get divorced as soon as I came here" (Joaquina, lines 89-90). However, Joaquina then went on to explain, "We decided to try again for the kids, because

in another way, because here we have the same culture and it's easier to be here together” (Joaquina, lines 97-98).

What is interesting here is the noticeable role of their pre-migration culture, which for Joaquina seemed to be something she had in common with her husband, and a reason to work on her marriage. Additionally, her children played a role in their staying together as did her feelings that it is easier to be together rather than alone. Joaquina seemed to change her perspective upon her arrival in Switzerland as she started to see how she and her husband's shared culture and shared history together could be a solid foundation for their marriage. Furthermore, Joaquina described the comfort she felt in living their life together, rather than alone. Joaquina's statement, “Here we have the same culture” suggested that she felt that they now share a cultural understanding, which was something they may not have shared or even experienced in Colombia. Her husband's presence and support seemed to provide Joaquina with feelings of comfort and security as she described how they were building a stronger marriage together.

Similarly, Kesari highlighted the positive changes in her intimate relationship post-migration, as she also explained a change toward improved unity within her marriage. Like Joaquina, she emphasised the importance of joint decision-making around finances, household responsibilities and caring for their children. Kesari explained how she had changed from her pre-migration individualistic outlook to a new post-migration to collaborative decision-making in her marriage as she explained:

We didn't, in Colombia, work together in this way, for example each one of us has our own money, our own jobs and our own lives and we live like that. But here we have no money, so we talk about how to survive, we now decide together,

over the money, the household, the kids, how to take care of the kids, who will take them to school who picks them up things like that. (Kesari, lines 141-146)

This change towards unity in Kesari's marriage directly contributed to her perception of improvement in terms of cooperation, childcare responsibilities and financial responsibilities. She affirmed this by saying, "Yes we are better" (Kesari, line 106). Kesari also emphasised the importance of joint decision-making in her marriage specifically in their finances, household responsibilities and caring for their children. Interestingly, Kesari's emotional state mirrored that of her husband's, which also suggested a dyadic relationship, where her husband's emotional ebbs and flows seemed to be reflected in Kesari's. This created a harmonious yet sometimes challenging connection between their emotions. Kesari explained, "Sometimes when I feel down, he feels down also. But we are very stable since we arrived here; we have improved our relationship" (Kesari, lines 135-138). She continued:

Yes, definitely [the relationship improved]. I know, I know my husband; before I didn't. At that time, I thought it was a normal relationship, but right now I realise it wasn't. In Colombia, he was away with work, caring for us, he was carrying a lot of work, but now he is caring for all the family. His focus was on the work and now it is on the family. (Kesari, lines 136-152)

Kesari emphasised the importance of her and her husband working towards common goals, highlighting how their joint decision-making was fundamental for improving their relationship.

Gocke's post-migration relationship journey converged with Joaquina's as she attributed the post-migration improvements within her marriage to an increase in spousal support, more empathy from her husband and an improvement in the quality of their

communication. Gocke underscored the importance of her husband's support for her, stating that his help with the children had reinforced her trust in him. She elaborated on the change in her marriage, and its importance for her when she explained:

When we are together and when I need something, he tries to make it happen for me and yes he tries to understand me... and sometimes for example when I am tired and then he understands... he supports me in this and this makes me happy, he also is involved with the children, sometimes he goes outside with children, or when I need to study and learn German and he supports me in this, this is much better for me and for us, this has improved since we left Turkey. (Gocke, lines 152-162)

Gocke's husband increased his involvement with their children indicated a change from their pre-migration gendered roles from Turkey and reflected the influence of the Swiss post-migration environment. Furthermore, this demonstrated how forced migration can lead to positive changes in her relationship, including changes in gender roles and improved communication understanding. As a result, Gocke felt valued as a mother and wife, leading to optimism about her marriage. Gocke explained:

It's going well, he helps me with the children, or with work and with the language and he supports me... Yes, with my husband, it is even better, better than before in Turkey and it keeps getting better... It keeps coming better and yes, I am very happy. (Gocke, lines 116-125).

Gocke's repeated use of positive statements, such as "he supports me" and "it is even better," highlighted her growing trust and satisfaction in her marriage. Her

repetition of these positive statements indicated the significance of her husband's support for her and the improvement in their marriage since leaving Turkey.

Additionally, her husband's support appeared to directly contribute to her happiness and her perception of stability within their marriage.

Kesari, Joaquina and Gocke all described their happiness at the improvements in their marriages, which they said led to enhanced stability, growth and reciprocal support. Tulay also highlighted the changes in her marriage post-migration, as she explained that "My husband used to beat me before, but now he has changed, and he also has more respect" (Tulay, lines 136-137). This change she described in her husband may be because of the influence of the Swiss cultural norms that emphasise gender equality. Tulay went on to explain how acculturation had shaped her marriage saying "We look at other culture[s] [the Swiss culture], and we take good things from it... Many say the men do not want to change, but Swiss culture helps us" (Tulay, lines 191-199). This suggested that the exposure to Swiss cultural values and norms contributed to the change in her husband's behaviour and, as such, an improvement in their intimate relationship. Tulay hoped that this aspect of acculturation would not only stop the GBV in her intimate relationship, but that this would lead to a permanent a change. However, Tulay did not explicitly clarify whether she believed the change would be permanent or if it was only short term and perhaps conditional. Her mention of her husband's stress, "he always goes outside and leaves... I understand he has a lot of stress" (Tulay, lines 160-162), highlighted a potential source of tension, but again this did not directly address whether she feared a recurrence of violence. However, similar to Gocke, Tulay's husband also increased his post-migration engagement in their child. This could

also be a result of the Swiss post-migration environment, as it reshaped their gender roles. Tulay explained:

Before when we followed the Islam culture in Turkey and the Turkish culture, my husband did not help with children... but now in Switzerland, my husband helps me much with my son. In Turkish culture, or in Turkey, they say everything is woman's job with children and house... But now he helps. (Tulay, lines 183-191)

However, Tulay's narrative also highlighted her commitment to her cultural roots, as she added, "My culture is also very good... I read many old books of Turkish culture, and they always had respect" (Tulay, lines 203-207). Thus, while Tulay selectively embraced some of the aspects of the Swiss culture, in particular the ones that promoted respect and equality in her marriage, her connection to her pre-migration cultural remained strong.

Tulay and Gocke's narratives illustrated a change toward a more egalitarian relationship which they explained as driven by improved communication and shared domestic responsibilities, which in turn strengthened their marriages. Kesari and Joaquina also described how their relationships improved post-migration as they shared their past and their culture and described their dyadic approach toward acculturation. Contrary to the perception of forced migration as a source of conflict in intimate relationships, these four women all illustrated how forced migration became a mechanism for improving their relationships. Although the interviews were conducted solely with the wives, their narratives suggest that, as couples, they jointly worked to strengthen their relationships with their husbands.

10.4 Turbulent Horizons: Uncharted Futures

In contrast to the previous sub-theme, Sema, Dilek and Azra, all Kurdish participants, expressed uneasiness about the future of their relationships. They explained how their uneasiness stemmed from the uncertainties about their future that they experienced as refugees. These uncertainties were driven by their status, employment, racism, visa, language difficulties and financial concerns, and this affected their perspectives on their future and left them feeling uncertain about their intimate relationships.

Table 18 details the changes in the participants intimate relationships following forced-migration and highlights the role of uncertainty.

Table 18

Uncertainty and Strain in Intimate Relationships: Experiences of Kurdish Participants Post-Migration

Participant	Pre-migration relationship	Post-migration uncertainties	Emotional responses	Impact on relationship
Sema	Stable, caring	Unable to plan due to refugee status	Anxiety, insecurity, and apprehension	Strain due to lack of long-term planning.
Dilek	Positive relationship in Turkey	Fear about future	Hopelessness, worry	Perceived as short-term, loss of optimism
Azra	Affectionate but informal	Economic challenges, lack of control	Frustration, love, and helplessness	Doubt about long-term viability

Sema described her uncertainty which spilt over into her intimate relationship as she explained:

My relationship at the moment is good. But in the future, I don't know what I do because he also doesn't know... whether he stays here or he does something else [due to refugee status]. I am not sure; he is not sure either. Here in Switzerland, although we are young, we cannot plan our future. I'm not sure what we will do in the future, and this is a problem in our relationship because we cannot plan anything, for example we cannot talk about our future or family, or having children, so until now we have not talked. I am also not sure of my future. (Sema, lines 105-128)

Sema expressed her feelings of uncertainty about her future, particularly in relation to her relationship with her partner. While she loved and cared for her partner, she also described her apprehension about the possible paths their lives might take, and the uncertainty around those paths. Sema shared her emotions and her struggle with uncertainty, and she also reflected on the importance of stability and security for her. She described how her uncertainty about the future inhibited her and her partner having discussions about their long-term commitments or having children. Sema explained that all of her uncertainty was primarily driven because of she and her partner were refugees.

Dilek reflected on her relationship with her partner, and explained how the positive relationship they had shared in Turkey had changed, leading to a feeling of hopelessness about their future. Dilek explained, similar to Sema that this was also driven by her uncertainty in her relationship as she explained:

I had a relationship, and my partner was in Turkey, we got along well... But I feel I have no future with him anymore, because I had to flee from Turkey, and I have too many worries... I have no idea about the future, because I am a refugee... That's why I think with my relationship with him, it will only last for a short time... I always have to think about my situation. (Dilek, lines 78-88)

Dilek and Sema's narratives converged on the themes of uncertainty and instability and the impact that this had on their intimate relationships. They each expressed fear about their future, which trickled down to fears about the future of their relationships. Like Dilek and Sema, Azra also expressed her affection toward her partner but again like Sema and Azra she admitted that her loss of control, and the uncertainty she has over her future, led her to doubt and insecurity in her relationship. She explained:

It's a difficult situation when you love someone... I'm not officially married and if he comes with a visa, he has to find a job and I have to pay [for us both] and that's not possible at the present time. If you are a non-refugee, you can work right away. (Azra, lines 119-125)

Azra expressed a mix of emotions, such as love, worry, frustration and helplessness, over the future of her relationship. She emphasised the hopelessness of her situation and how powerless she felt due to being a refugee. Azra, Dilek and Sema all revealed how they experienced doubt, loss of control and ambiguity around their future which led to doubts around the future of their intimate relationships. Their narratives collectively highlighted the importance they placed on stability and security for fostering a healthy intimate relationship.

10.5 Crossroads of Love and Discontent: Marital Narratives in Changing Cultures

In this final subtheme, two participants described their experiences of discontent. Neshele who came from Pakistan and is a Muslim, and Karessa who came from Cuba and is a Catholic. Both women described how their pre-migration cultures, characterised by a patriarchal societal structure, had shaped their experiences and perspectives of their marriage post-migration. They reflected on how the gendered expectations that were instilled by their pre-migration cultural backgrounds impacted their marriages. While Neshele admitted she adhered to her pre-migration cultural norms, she also made it clear that her arranged marriage gave her no personal fulfilment. Meanwhile, Karessa described how she faced the challenge of having to work and provide for her family because her husband had become ill, and as a result this upending her traditional expectations of him as a provider. These narratives converged on a shared sense of discontentment regarding their spouse, and their pre-migration cultural expectations of their husbands as provider's while in reality their husbands were not working, leading to tension, dissatisfaction and conflict.

Table 19 details Neshele and Karessa's post-migration changes in their intimate relationships.

Table 19
Crossroads of Love and Discontent

Participant	Pre-migration cultural influence	Post-migration challenges	Emotional responses	Impact on relationship
Neshele	Arranged marriage rooted in patriarchal norms	Struggles with unmet emotional expectations financial instability	Resignation, frustration, longing	Chose to remain in marriage due to cultural obligation/parenting
Karessa	Expectation of husband as primary provider	Husband's dependency, jealousy; unmet expectations	Resentment, determination for independence	Plans to separate after achieving legal stability

Neshele shared her longing for a relationship that aligned with her perception of the 'Hollywood' notion of love. Her narrative revealed a conflict between her idealised vision of

romantic love and her actual marriage, which was arranged by her parents. She expressed discontentment over her marriage, and the fact that her husband had another wife in Greece and highlighted how her pre-migration culture limited her freedom to marry a man based on love. Neshele described her feelings of missed opportunities and unrealised dreams when she said:

I have no choice to change my life. When I see these American films, I always think how beautiful their marriage is and how beautiful their life is in contrast to mine. They are always happy because they have their own choice. I hope when I die, I will get a life with lots of love. I am with my husband only because of my culture... But my heart doesn't really want to accept it. For me, it's just a must. Not to love him. (Neshele, lines 147-176)

Neshele's belief that love is only possible in her next life highlights her feelings of resignation around her marriage and her emotions. Her narrative conveys her feelings of disillusionment as she believes she will never have the chance or opportunity to experiencing freedom to choose a man based on love. She continued:

Here in Switzerland, women and men have freedom, not just the men. In Pakistan, or in my culture, I had no choice and no decisions... In Pakistan, the culture is way too extreme. We as women have no choices and no voice... I do everything the way they do in Pakistan. (Neshele, lines 59-63)

Neshele expressed her frustration with both her pre-migration culture and her marriage, which she explains is driven by feelings of her limited agency and gender-based constraints. Her recurring phrases "no choice" and "no decisions" highlighted her frustration

and the restrictions to her agency. Her feelings for her husband contrast sharply with the love-based relationships she had seen in films. Although these are not real, she had nonetheless idealised them. Neshele's expressions of discontent and descriptions of her pre-migration cultural constraints also showed her frustration and dissatisfaction with her husband. Her pre-migration culture, which she explains is upheld by her husband, is based on his patriarchal control, and the gaps between what he enforces, and the Swiss culture seemed to amplify her dissatisfaction with her marriage. Neshele reflected on the constraints imposed by her pre-migration culture, which her husband continued to uphold as "In Pakistan, the men have all the control, and the women have no control or decisions" (Neshele, lines 125-127). Describing Pakistan's culture as "way too extreme" and stating that women have "no choices and no voice" reflected a sentiment that Suna, Defne and Elma all shared. However, Neshele diverged from those participants by retaining her pre-migration culture and remaining in her marriage despite her obvious unhappiness and her discontentment.

Neshele's marriage also reflected her internal, persistent conflict between her desires and the cultural obligations that continued to dictate her life. She expressed frustration with the lack of support from her husband, explaining how his allegiance to his family exacerbated her feelings of isolation in her marriage when she said, "He doesn't want to hear my story or my side of the story at all" (Neshele, lines 102-103). However, she explained that her decision to remain in the marriage was rooted in her co-parenting, as she recognised the challenges of raising her son alone, saying: "For my son, it would not be good with another man, so I want to do it for him" (Neshele, lines 173-174). So, her dissonance continued as she explained how while she wanted to experience the freedom she

saw in Switzerland, her deep-seated convictions of her premigration culture continued to shape her life and her marriage. After the interview, as noted in the researcher's journal, Neshele mentioned that her husband had no work in Switzerland, further contributing to their financial instability. This was compounded by the fact that her husband had another wife in Greece at the same time as they were married, and he had been living and working in Greece with his other wife until recently. These circumstances likely deepened her dissatisfaction.

Neshele's narrative converged with Karessa's regarding how cultural expectations, unmet expectations and post-migration realities shaped her discontent in her marriage. Karessa's unmet expectations extended to important aspects in her life such as housing, health and finances, with her discontentment stemming from what she perceived as a mismatch between her pre-migration expectations of her husband as the provider and her post-migration reality. Karessa described that while she expected her husband to be the primary provider, his age and health prevented him from fulfilling this role. Similar to Neshele, this created a conflict between Karessa's expectations and her lived reality. Therefore, she explained her intention to leave her husband once they acquired a permanent visa, stating, "We are going to stay together until we got the B permit [permanent work visa]" (Karessa, line 109). Her statement indicated that their cohabitation was based on practical necessity rather than any meaningful emotional connection. Karessa's dissatisfaction with her husband was further evident in her portrayal of him as a dependent, jealous old man who was now unable to contribute financially, as she explained:

All his attention is on me, and he is jealous of me because I have a job, and he does not have anything to do... I had to replace my friends with him because he always gets jealous when I went out. (Karessa, lines 119-123)

Additionally, she noted:

It's difficult for him because he is too old, so he can't get a job. I speak a little English, but he doesn't speak anything but Spanish. He is 15 years older than me... it is impossible for him to find a job. (Karessa, lines 114-118)

Karessa's statements underscored her frustration with her husband's dependency and inability to fulfil the role of a provider. Her remark about ending their relationship further demonstrated her intention to separate and end their marriage. Karessa's narrative reflected her growing resentment, which was fuelled by the ongoing challenges in their relationship. Her unease culminated in her observation, "We always have problems" (Karessa, line 130), illustrating how she saw that their relationship continued to deteriorate. Furthermore, her narrative highlighted her primary reason for her to end her relationship, was also related to her working (rather than her husband), which had now become her way to achieve independence and subsequently made her see her husband as a burden, because now she needs to provide for him. As such, her growing sense of autonomy and independence, juxtaposed with her husband's increasing dependency and jealousy, leading to her plans to separate.

Karessa narrative and outcome diverged from Neshele's, in the sense that Neshele chose to remain in her relationship out of cultural obligation despite longing for a different life. However, Neshele and Karessa's narratives both converged to reveal their

dissatisfaction with their marriage, which stemmed from their pre-migration cultural norms and their unmet post-migration expectations.

10.6 Reflexivity: Metamorphism of Relationships from Celebrations to Farewell

In this GET, I focused on capturing the diversity of participants' experiences of intimate relationships, whether that meant escape, growth, uncertainty or disappointment. This approach aligned with my relativist ontological view, which meant accepting that the meanings shared in participants' narratives were co-constructed by both the participants and myself. My use of double hermeneutics also meant that my understanding of the participants' understandings of their experiences (assuming multiple realities) helped in my analysis.

At times, I noticed my clinical background shaping my interpretations, particularly when analysing accounts of GBV. For example, I sometimes found myself focusing more on trauma narratives due to my previous work with GBV survivors. To address this, I regularly returned to my reflexive journal, engaged in supervision discussions and deliberately checked that positive or less traumatic experiences were not overlooked in my analysis.

I found the participants' accounts of GBV emotionally challenging, as they brought back memories of some of the patients I have treated, like "Hilda" (pseudonym) whose story stayed with me long after our sessions ended. I can still picture her face, covered in scars from her lifelong exposure to GBV, which led her to flee with her seven-year-old daughter from Afghanistan. I recall her describing the unbearable decision she had made to leave her daughter alone in a refugee camp in Greece because she thought if she made it to Switzerland alone, she could then bring her. I remember her fear when she was denied a visa to stay in Switzerland, and how she then fled again (I have no idea where she went). Her

exposure to GBV and her inability to find a country willing to help her or her daughter deeply affected me and still does. Including this reflection is important because it demonstrates how my clinical experiences shaped my engagement with the participants' experiences and increased my sense of responsibility to capture their voices.

However, while I was particularly moved by the accounts of GBV in this research, I made sure these stories did not overshadow the other important post-migration changes described in participants' intimate relationships. For example, I systematically coded and revisited narratives describing improved relationships or changing gender norms to ensure the analysis reflected the breadth of all participants' experiences. This also helped to highlight the complex ways intimate relationships can be shaped by forced migration

Chapter Eleven: Discussion, Key Findings, Implications and Future Directions

11.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter begins with a summary of the key findings, including the role of the pre-migration culture, gender norms, loss and racism on acculturation. There is also a summary of post-migration changes in participants' intimate relationships. Various concepts are then highlighted, including the shared acculturation patterns within the pre-migration cultural groups. This chapter introduces Transformative Acculturation (TA), a novel concept that emerged from the data analysis, which describes how participants, in response to GBV, actively reshaped their cultural norms, identities, and intimate relationships post-migration. TA builds on existing acculturation frameworks by demonstrating how GBV-related trauma can drive cultural adaptation, identity transformation, and agency in refugee women. It is examined in relation to Berry's (1997) acculturation framework and Bornstein's (2017) specificity principle. Further findings demonstrated that participants' 'post-migration acculturation strategies were often shaped by their pre-migration culture, leading to strategies of separation, bicultural integration, and cultural dissonance. Furthermore, the impact of racism, loss and resilience on acculturation is explored.

The commitment to IPA's idiographic focus on understanding how participants made sense of their circumstances (Smith, 2023) is also reflected on throughout this discussion. The strengths and limitations of the study are discussed, followed by practical implications for policy and practice, including recommendations for gender-sensitive refugee support services, couples' counselling and anti-discrimination policies. Emphasis is placed on culturally informed interventions for refugee women exposed to GBV. Lastly, ideas for

future research are explored, focusing on the potential for expanding and refining existing acculturation frameworks to suit vulnerable populations.

11.2 Summary of Findings

In this research, the post-migration lived experiences of refugee women in Switzerland were examined, focusing on their meaning-making, interpretations of acculturation and the circumstances that shaped those experiences. Their perceptions and emotions were investigated, along with their feelings and perspectives on their intimate relationships

Four main group experiential themes (GETs) emerged, each offering insight into the participants' post-migration experiences and directly addressing the research questions. These themes illustrated the acculturation process for the refugee women in Switzerland and the changes in their intimate relationships. The first GET, Pathways of Acculturation, addressed the research question on post-migration acculturation. It explored the participants' various forms of acculturation, demonstrating that those from similar cultural backgrounds often adopted comparable acculturation strategies. This led to four subthemes within this GET that were shaped by the participants' pre-migration cultural backgrounds. The second GET, In the Shadows of Bias, addressed the research question on participants' post-migration experiences in Switzerland and included accounts of racism and discrimination. The subthemes in this GET covered the incidents of racism, their emotional impact and the changed behaviour of the participants in response to these incidents. The third GET, Loss in a New Land, addressed the research question on post-migration emotional responses and explored participants' loss of family, homeland and choice. The final GET, Metamorphosis of Relationships from Celebrations to Farewells, examined changes in the participants'

intimate relationships post-migration. The subthemes explored both positive and negative changes in participants' intimate relationships.

Overall, the findings provided an in-depth exploration of the participants' post-migration lived experiences, revealing how their emotions, motivations, pre-migration culture, changes in gender norms and experiences of racism in Switzerland shaped their acculturation and intimate relationships.

11.3 Acculturation Strategies, the Specificity Principle, and Swiss Societal Constructs:

The Role of Loss and Racism in Post-Migration Processes

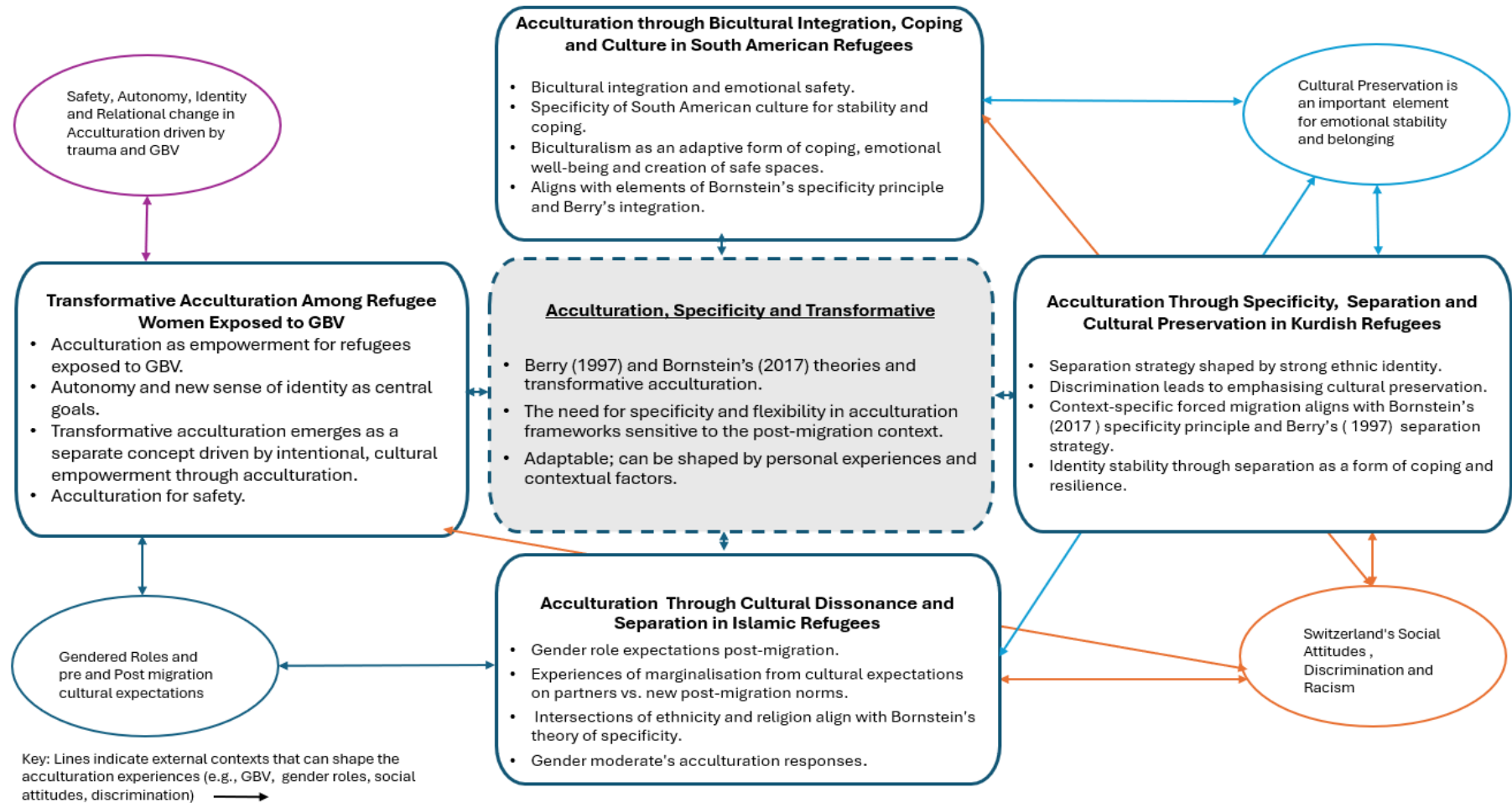
In this discussion, the research findings have been organised into themes according to participants' acculturation processes and intimate relationships. This approach was taken to highlight the participants' shared approaches to acculturation, which were often shaped by their pre-migration cultural background, with those from similar backgrounds describing comparable acculturation strategies. The analysis was also informed by Berry's (1997) acculturation framework and Bornstein's (2017) specificity principle, both of which provided a theoretical foundation for understanding the variations in the participants' process of acculturation. The concept of transformative acculturation (TA) will be introduced, which captures how the participants exposed to GBV navigated their acculturation process.

A diagram is provided (Figure 2) which gives an overview of how the pre-migration cultures and the post-migration experiences shaped the participants' acculturation processes and highlight's the patterns and themes that emerged from their experiences. This diagram, which is organised by pre-migration cultural backgrounds, captures the participants' experiences and, where appropriate, aligns with Berry's acculturation framework (1997) and

Bornstein's specificity principle (2017). It highlights how factors such as bicultural integration, cultural dissonance and the trauma that stemmed from GBV shaped the participants' meaning making and their process of acculturation. TA is presented in Figure 2 (and described in detail in section 11.5 and 11.6) as a novel, trauma-informed acculturation concept that provides an understanding of the acculturation processes of the participants who were exposed to GBV. Based on the participants' narratives, TA extends upon Berry's (1997) acculturation framework and Bornstein's (2017) specificity principle, positioning GBV, trauma, transformation and the need for safety as the central to these participants' acculturation processes. Additionally Figure 2 illustrates how acculturation strategies varied by not only the participants' pre-migration culture, but were also shaped by contextual factors, including their experiences of gendered norms, GBV, racism, discrimination, and intimate relationships. Each box represents a distinct acculturation strategy informed by these personal experience and contextual factors.

Figure 2

Comparative Acculturation Strategies Across Ethnic Groups: Contextual, Cultural and Post-Migration Experiences



Note: This diagram illustrates the acculturation strategies adopted by the participants and is organised according to their pre-migration cultural backgrounds. The grouping reflects how participants made sense of their post-migration experiences and highlights how cultural norms and pre-migration experiences can shape acculturation strategies. The diagram also includes Berry's acculturation framework (1997), Bornstein's specificity principle (2017) and transformative acculturation. The solid lines in the diagram indicate external factors such as gender and discrimination, can shape acculturation.

11.4 Acculturation Through Contextual Factors, Specificity, Separation Racism and Cultural Preservation

Acculturation refers to a process of cultural change involving behavioural exchanges and adaptations that occur when individuals come into continuous contact with a different culture. This process is shaped by external contextual factors, internal choices, and individual experiences (Berry, 1997; Bornstein, 2017). Berry (1997, 2005) outlined four acculturation strategies that individuals can adopt when adapting to a new culture. These include integration, assimilation, separation and marginalisation. In his specificity principle (2017), Bornstein posited that acculturation is context-sensitive and can be shaped by the interaction of specific factors, including setting, individual characteristics, timing and processes. The experiences of the three Kurdish participants, Sema, Dilek, and Azra can be interpreted using both Berry's acculturation framework (1997) and Bornstein's specificity principle (2017) (see Figure 2 for an overview of these processes).

The three Kurdish participants repeatedly emphasised their strong pre-migration cultural and ethnic identities along with their deep attachment to their homeland. They described how they preserved their pre-migration culture by limiting their interactions with the Swiss host society, a response that aligns with Berry's (1997) concept of separation. These participants also described how by preserving their pre-migration culture this provided them with a sense of stability and belonging. However, participants' separation from the host society was not solely described as a matter of their cultural preference. They also made sense of their social withdrawal in relation to their experiences of racism and discrimination in Switzerland, seeing it as a way to protect themselves from further harm. The participants' reactions align with the literature on how racism reinforces feelings of

isolation and can impact the acculturation process of refugees (Alzoubi et al., 2017; Schweitzer et al., 2011; Sheikh & Anderson, 2018). As shown in Figure 2, experiences of discrimination shaped the process of acculturation across participant groups and often reinforced their pre-migration culture and occasionally resulted in social isolation.

11.4.1 *Switzerland's Social Attitudes, Discrimination, Racism and Acculturation*

The three Kurdish participants, Sema, Dilek, and Azra, reported experiencing racism, which reinforced their feelings of isolation and shaped their process of acculturation. However, this experience was not unique to them, and as illustrated in Figure 2, discrimination shaped the acculturation process across multiple participant groups. Nearly all participants (10 out of 12) described experiencing overt (e.g., verbal abuse, physical violence) or covert (e.g., microaggressions, hostile tones) forms of racism in Switzerland. These experiences were reported by the participants from Kurdistan, Turkey, Iraq, South America, and Pakistan, and were described as contributing to their feelings of mistrust towards the Swiss people. In response to these experiences, the participants described withdrawing socially, limiting contact with the Swiss, and focusing on their connections to their pre-migration culture. For many, preserving their pre-migration culture became a way to regain control and create stability amid their experiences of discrimination. The participants' accounts align with existing research which demonstrates how discrimination can erode trust in the host country and strengthen a refugee's pre-migration cultural identity as a coping mechanism (Lauterbach et al., 2021; Phillimore, 2020; Pittaway & Bartolomei, 2001; Sam & Berry, 2016).

Furthermore, the participants described experiencing fear, anger, shame, withdrawal, inferiority and isolation in response to racism. These findings align with existing research on

how racism can negatively impact the mental health of refugees (Berry & Hou, 2017; Jacob et al., 2023). The negative psychological impact of racism on refugees is well documented, and research demonstrates that refugees who are exposed to discrimination can face increased risks of mental health issues such as depression, anxiety and PTSD (Bendjo et al., 2019; Kämmer et al., 2023; Schweitzer et al., 2011).

Berry's (1997) acculturation framework identified separation as an acculturation strategy where individuals maintain their cultural identity while rejecting interaction with the host culture. While Berry (1997) frames separation as a strategy that can be voluntarily adopted to maintain the pre-migration cultural identity, the participants' narratives suggested that their use of the separation strategy was also used as a means of protection from discrimination. The experiences of discrimination impacted the participants' sense of safety and shaped their acculturation processes. While previous research has established that racism hinders integration (Lauterbach et al., 2021; Schweitzer et al., 2011), the findings in this present research illustrate how for these participants, attachment to their pre-migration culture was often described as a coping response to ongoing discrimination. This adds complexity to Berry's (1997) acculturation framework and aligns with Bornstein's (2017) specificity principle which suggests that for some of the participants in this study, the strategy of separation was a response to their lived experiences of external pressures rather than an internally chosen acculturative strategy. While Berry's (1997) model offers a foundational understanding of acculturative responses, Bornstein's (2017) principle highlights how these can be shaped by individual and contextual factors. In this study, the participants' experiences of racism illustrate how specific environmental contexts, such as racism, can shape the process of acculturation. The accounts of social withdrawal in

response to racism reflected this and highlighted the importance of situational specificity in understanding acculturative strategies.

Moreover, participants' emotional and behavioural responses emphasised the negative impact of racism on their well-being, pointing to a potential limitation of Switzerland as a host country, where the responsibility for integration is often placed on the migrants rather than society (Mexi et al., 2021; SEM, 2021). Switzerland's migration framework is decentralised across its 26 cantons, which can lead to inconsistencies in the application of integration policies. Additional barriers include restricted rights, temporary permits and spatial segregation in remote asylum centres for non-European migrants (Alessi, 2023; Lutz & Lavenex, 2024). Refugee women can face the compounded challenges of gender and status in Switzerland, reinforcing feelings of isolation and making integration harder (Alessi, 2023). Additionally, there has been a recent proposal to cap the population of Switzerland at ten million by 2050, which is driven by political concerns around migration, and could lead to further constraints on integration (Neue Zürcher Zeitung [NZZ], 2024). These measures could also contribute to an increased atmosphere of exclusion, potentially worsening refugee women's experiences. These findings support existing literature that highlights the pervasive nature of racism in Switzerland (Ossipow et al., 2019; SEM, 2022). In line with the existing literature, participants' experiences of racism and discrimination in Switzerland harmed their well-being, eroded their trust in the host society and reinforced their attachment to pre-migration cultural identities (Berry & Hou, 2017; Lauterbach et al., 2021; Phillimore, 2020). Participants' experiences appeared further compounded by the structural challenges of Switzerland's decentralised migration framework, including their restricted rights which can disproportionately affect refugee women and amplify the barriers

to integration (Alessi, 2023; SEM, 2021). Such systemic limitations, coupled with racism (Ossipow et al., 2019; SEM, 2022), reflect a society that perpetuates exclusion, thus undermining refugee women's well-being.

Sema experienced some of the most severe forms of racism reported in this research, including physical violence. Additionally, Dilek, and Azra described reducing their interactions within Swiss society due to the anxiety these experiences generated, and becoming increasingly engaged with their pre-migration culture, which they associated with a sense of safety and belonging. This aligns with Liebkind et al.'s (2016) research, where it was found that perceived threats to an individual's ethnic identity, such as racism, can reinforce cultural preservation and lead to the avoidance of social interactions with the host culture. Thus, racism can reinforce post-migration cultural preservation, perpetuate isolation, and complicate integration (Bornstein, 2017; Knappert et al., 2018; Sam & Berry, 2016). Additionally, their reactions resonate with findings about Kurdish men in Sweden, where a strong attachment to pre-migration culture has been described as a response to discrimination (Taloyan et al., 2011).

11.4.2 Acculturation through Specificity, Separation and Cultural Preservation in Kurdish Refugees

Building on the psychological and emotional impact of racism, the three Kurdish participants described how separation (Berry, 1997) from Swiss society helped them to shape their post-migration identities. Like the three participants who were escaping GBV (see section 11.5), Sema, Dilek, and Azra described how they changed their sense of self and identity when in Switzerland. However, their post-migration identity was entrenched in their longing for their homeland and culture and their position as cultural outliers within the Swiss

host society. Their ‘new’ post-migration identity appeared to provide them with a sense of self and meaning. Rather than seeking integration, these participants reinforced their attachment to their pre-migration culture as a way of coping. In line with this, separation has been found to limit engagement with host societies and impact integration outcomes (Berry, 2005; Sam & Berry, 2016). These three participants’ separation strategy (Berry, 1997) reflected their perception that attempts to integrate into Swiss society would be both futile and a betrayal of their cultural heritage. They believed that they would be viewed as “perpetual foreigners,” and explained that integration in Switzerland was unachievable for them. As such Sema, Dilek, and Azra built their sense of belonging by separating from the Swiss culture and maintaining their pre-migration culture and creating connections within their ethnic community (Schweitzer et al., 2011; Rizzi et al., 2023). This aligns with findings about the importance of cultural continuity in the post-migration environment for refugees’ psychological well-being (Panagiotopoulos et al., 2022). They also discussed how optimism helped them cope with their daily challenges. This aligns with the finding that optimism can complement cultural continuity as a protective factor, providing psychological stability by linking past and present experiences (Panagiotopoulos et al., 2022). This suggests that, in their lived experience, optimism served as a coping mechanism rather than promoting integration and demonstrated how resilience can coexist within the separation strategy of acculturation. Furthermore, the idiographic focus of IPA aligned with Bornstein’s (2017) specificity principle and highlighted how Sema, Dilek, and Azra acculturation, particularly the resemblance to Berry’s (1997) separation strategy, was shaped by their experiences of racism, love of their homeland, coping, resilience and loss. These findings demonstrate how both psychological (e.g., distress, coping, optimism, identity negotiation) and contextual

(e.g., racism, language barriers, limited employment opportunities) factors can interact to shape the process of acculturation (Bornstein, 2017).

11.4.3 Grief and Loss in the Post-Migration Acculturation Experiences

Seven of the twelve participants' narratives were marked by various forms of loss, including cultural loss, familial loss, and loss of choice. Participants described their grief over leaving family, community and homeland behind. Unresolved grief can act as a barrier to forming new connections and adapting to a new society (Echterhoff et al., 2020; Sagbakken et al., 2020). The three Kurdish participants described feeling as though they were physically in Switzerland but mentally still in their homeland. However, their grief was shared by six other participants, including those from Turkey and South America, who described the emotional toll of leaving behind their family, community and cultural roots. The impact of this led the participants to express grief, regret and guilt, in line with the finding that grief can have a negative psychological impact on refugees' post-migration (Albers, 2021). Grief can also weaken the post-migration sense of belonging due to the separation from family and culture (Sagbakken et al., 2020). Killikelly et al. (2018) conducted a narrative review on the grief assessment in refugees and post-conflict survivors. They found that refugees often experience elevated rates of grief, particularly in contexts where family ties have been severed. This finding aligns with the experiences of loss reported by the six participants in the present research. Unresolved grief and loss can lead to ongoing emotional distress, hindering psychological adaptation and acculturation (Echterhoff et al., 2020; Sagbakken et al., 2020).

Loss of family, culture and choice was a part of the post-migration experiences of participants from Turkey, South America and Pakistan. Systemic barriers such as limited

employment opportunities and language restrictions limited their sense of agency and contributed to a sense of being stuck and diminished their sense of autonomy in their daily life. This reinforced their feelings of disempowerment and undermined their motivation to integrate by limiting their ability to make meaningful connections with the host culture and pursue their personal goals. This aligns with findings that forced displacement can restrict agency and increase emotional distress (Killikelly et al., 2018; Sagbakken et al., 2020). In line with this, research highlights how forced migration can limit a refugee's agency post-migration. For example, Knausenberger et al. (2022) found that forced displacement can lead to psychological distress and a sense of disempowerment, which was associated with reduced confidence in the ability to integrate into the host society.

11.4.4 Acculturation through Bicultural Integration, Coping and Culture in South American Refugees

The three Kurdish and three South American participants all highlighted the importance of their pre-migration cultural backgrounds for acculturation. While both groups described retaining some values, traditions and practices of their pre-migration cultures, their approaches differed. The three South American participants, Karessa, Kesari and Joaquina explained how their retention of their pre-migration culture was intertwined with their engagement with the Swiss culture. A bicultural acculturation approach emerged as these participants described how pre-migration cultural activities, such as traditional cooking, music and media, provided them with comfort and emotional stability. These activities from their pre-migration culture, provided them with what they described as a safe haven during their post-migration challenges. Additionally, while their efforts in bi-cultural integration appeared gradual, the participants highlighted the importance of patience when

applying that to activities such as learning the local language or pursuing employment opportunities.

Researchers have indicated that integration is often associated with improved mental health outcomes, as it can reduce marginalisation while promoting emotional resilience and psychological well-being (Mähönen & Jasinskaja-Lahti, 2013; Schwartz et al., 2024). Additionally, integration has been linked to lower stress and greater stability during post-migration adaptation (Phinney et al., 2003). The South American participants described adopting a bicultural approach to acculturation, and in the case of Kesari and Joaquina, this approach aligned with their spouses' bicultural approach to acculturation. This mutual process not only improved their intimate relationships but also supported their post-migration daily lives. Their use of elements from their pre-migration culture, such as traditional practices or support from their family, also appeared to provide them with emotional stability, which helped them manage their stress during acculturation. This aligns with the finding that retaining elements of the pre-migration culture can mitigate acculturative stress for refugees and help strengthen identity stability (Kuo, 2014; Rizzi et al., 2023).

The findings in this section illustrate the process of bicultural integration among the South American participants, which they described as retaining aspects of their pre-migration culture while engaging with Swiss culture through learning the language, employment, and activities that supported their well-being. The mutual bicultural strategies employed by Kesari and Joaquina and their spouses further highlighted how a shared approach to acculturation can strengthen intimate relationships. These findings aligned with research suggesting that integration can mitigate acculturative stress and promote

psychological resilience, emotional well-being, and identity stability (Kuo, 2014; Mähönen & Jasinskaja-Lahti, 2013; Phinney et al., 2003; Rizzi et al., 2023; Schwartz et al., 2010 2011).

11.4.5 Acculturation through Cultural Dissonance and Separation in Islamic Refugees

The lived experiences of the three Islamic participants, Tulay, Azra and Neshele, two from Turkey and one from Pakistan, demonstrate how their pre-migration culture shaped their acculturation approach. Acculturation was shaped by the post-migration tension they experienced between their pre-migration cultural preservation and post-migration adaptation. The pre-migration cultural and religious norms shaped these participants' responses to Swiss cultural and gender norms, particularly in areas such as intimate relationships and household responsibilities. Similarly, previous researchers have found that refugees' acculturation processes can reflect the cultural and religious contexts of their countries of origin and that Turkey and Pakistan share similar religious and cultural values (Ahad & Ahmad, 2023; Glas, 2023).

The experience of cultural dissonance was revealed through the participants' descriptions of their inner tension driven by their belief that they needed to preserve their pre-migration culture, which contrasted with their desires for autonomy and choice. The explained how this contributed to their decision to separate from the Swiss host culture. For example, Tulay shared how, although wearing the hijab in Switzerland made her feel "tired" and "frustrated," she was committed to her Islamic culture, so would continue to wear it. Similarly, Gocke, described how she deliberately avoided the Swiss culture in order to preserve her Turkish and Islamic identity within the home, highlighting the separation and the cultural dissonance she experienced post-migration. This illustrates the double bind

faced by these three participants that engaged in the strategy of separation strategy (Berry, 1997), whereby their premigration culture provided them with a sense of identity and stability but also created challenges where it conflicted with host society. These findings align with the literature on acculturation, which highlights the psychological and emotional strain that can arise from balancing conflicting cultural values and norms (Phinney, 2003; Schwartz et al., 2010).

The participants' narratives also highlight the transformative potential of exposure to host culture norms. Tulay described how her husband's behaviour changed in Switzerland, attributing his decision to stop using GBV to the influence of Swiss gender norms on him. This underscores the post-migration influence of Swiss cultural norms in reshaping pre-migration gender expectations, and in this case, in altering the behaviour of Tulay's husband within her marriage. Furthermore, this supports findings from Khawaja and Milner (2012), who discussed how there is often a renegotiation of roles related to gender norms in the intimate relationships of refugees in the post-migration environment. However, while exposure to Swiss egalitarian norms contributed positively to Tulay's intimate relationship, her acculturation process was driven by her pre-migration culture and the expectations around that. The immediate dissonance experienced by Tulay is captured when she explained how by preserving her pre-migration culture this provided her with a sense of identity. These findings align with Glas's (2023) research on generational change, which highlighted that while gender norms among migrants can change over time, support for progressive family roles (such as women working) may decrease due to the enduring influence of pre-migration culture and religion. Although the present study is cross-sectional, participants' reflections similarly suggest that cultural and religious values

continue to shape gender expectations in the post-migration context. Although Glas's (2023) research focused on migrants, similar patterns may apply to refugees, where resistance to change can often be rooted in their pre-migration cultural or religious norms. This resistance is frequently driven by their desire to preserve identity and continuity during acculturation, as family-related cultural norms can offer stability and a sense of belonging (Glas, 2023). Similar to the findings in this present research, Glas (2023) also found that while exposure to egalitarian values in the host culture can promote change, the extent of this change is mediated by the strength of pre-migration culture and religion. These patterns were also evident in this present research where Neshele, Tulay and Gocke all expressed a desire to maintain their pre-migration culture. For them, the cultural continuity provided them with a sense of security and identity, even when exposed to more egalitarian norms in the host culture.

These findings demonstrate that the process of acculturation was not uniform for the participants in this research, but was shaped by their pre-migration cultural norms, intimate relationships, religious identity and post-migration experiences. The experience of cultural dissonance and separation also highlighted the importance for the participants of their pre-migration culture preservation similar to that of the three Kurdish participants. The resistance to Swiss culture and the tension with pre-migration values were particularly evident in gender-related areas, where the interaction between cultural change and the participants' desire for agency created opportunities for conflict. However, this tension ultimately resulted in the separation strategy of acculturation, as adherence to their pre-migration norms took precedence over engagement with the Swiss culture.

11.5 Transformative Acculturation Among Refugee Women Exposed to Gender Based Violence

One group of participants in particular, demonstrated a need to expand the existing acculturation frameworks in order to account for the impact of pre-migration trauma from GBV on post-migration acculturation. Berry's (1997) acculturation framework categorised acculturation into four strategies including marginalisation, separation, integration, and assimilation. However, this acculturation framework did not fully account for the three refugee women who experienced gender-based violence (GBV) and their post-migration processes of acculturation. These three participants Suna, Defne, and Elma, all of whom had experienced gender-based and intimate partner violence (GBV/IPV), described post-migration experiences that did not align with Berry (1997) or Bornstein (2017) acculturation models. These participants came from Islamic pre-migration cultures (two from Turkey and one from Iraq) and identified as Muslim (Alevism and Sunni Islam). Their husbands were practising Muslims, and their pre-migration social structures reinforced gendered norms that had normalised GBV.

Acculturation has often been presented as a cultural adjustment (Kuo, 2014), but in the case of these three participants it became a deliberate response to their harmful pre-migration experiences of GBV. Recent research by Taheri et al. (2024) demonstrated that for women who have survived GBV, post-migration adaptation was not only about cultural adjustment but about actively reconstructing their identities and autonomy, rather than adopting the host culture norms (Taheri et al. 2024). To better conceptualise the experiences of Suna, Defne, and Elma, this study introduced Transformative Acculturation (TA) which is a novel, interpretative concept that captures how these participants engaged in

acculturation as a response to their repeated exposure to GBV. TA was a process of acculturation in which the participants actively reshaped their cultural identities, gender roles and intimate relationships while seeking safety, autonomy, and agency. TA builds upon Berry's (1997) framework by integrating aspects of both the pre-migration and host culture while rejecting the harmful pre-migration norms that perpetuated GBV. However, unlike Berry's (1997) static categories of marginalisation, separation, integration or assimilation, TA is a dynamic process of acculturation that was driven by the participants' pursuit of safety, autonomy and agency, and captures their transformation as deliberate, rather than a passive adjustment. In this way, the participants used acculturation to change several key aspects of their post-migration lives, including their intimate relationships, their premigration gendered norms, their post-migration cultural identity and their sense of agency. For example, Elma highlighted how, in her pre-migration culture, it was unthinkable and unattainable for a woman to achieve agency and freedom, without very difficult and deliberate change. She emphasised for women in her situation to need to reject these harmful norms, explaining that women do not live well under the Islamic conditions so they must actively work to transform their lives. Elam applied this perspective in her post-migration life in Switzerland, which shaped her process of acculturation and provided her with an opportunity for transformation. Elma then described how her post-migration experiences using acculturation were akin to starting her life over as they provide her with new chances and changes that gave her a renewed sense of identity and culture.

The findings in this section align with those of Taheri et al. (2024), who found that gender-specific trauma shaped the lived experiences of Afghan refugee women in Australia as they transitioned from survival to empowerment post-migration. These women rejected

harmful pre-migration norms and engaged with opportunities in Australia to foster autonomy, personal growth and psychological well-being. Taheri et al. (2024) also identified that participants' transformative progression was marked by identity changes, including a spiritual re-evaluation and commitment to giving back to their communities.

Similarly, the three participants in this present research highlighted how engaging with Swiss cultural norms helped them reshape their perceptions of their pre-migration gendered norms. For instance, Suna described how challenging the acceptance of violence of GBV in her pre-migration culture led her to experience a sense of liberation and facilitated her pursuit of autonomy. All three participants used TA to challenge and reshape their cultural identity, engaging in a transformative process similar to that experienced by the Afghan refugee participants described by Taheri et al. (2024), who also rejected pre-migration norms in pursuit of safety, autonomy and empowerment. As such, TA provided them with a way to reconstruct their personal and social identities as they rejected patriarchal norms from their pre-migration culture, redefined their roles in their intimate relationships and embraced the Swiss cultural ideals of gender equality and autonomy.

Researchers have posited that identity includes traits, beliefs and values (Abrams, 2001; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). In this present study, the three participants' identities, including their beliefs about gendered norms, autonomy and equality, were shaped by both their pre- and post-migration experiences. Social identity (as explored in section 2.6) is linked to the cultural and ethnic affiliations that provide individuals with a sense of belonging (Abrams, 2001; Berry, 1997). This helps explain changes in identity by highlighting how individuals navigate their sense of belonging through group membership, social categorisation, and identity change (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), particularly when

transitioning between pre- and post-migration cultures. This aligns with the findings in this present research where the three participants distanced themselves from the patriarchal norms of their pre-migration culture and accepted some Swiss cultural norms, such as gender equality. Furthermore, the theoretical perspectives of social identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), and Berry's (1997) acculturation framework along with the research on personal identity traits, beliefs and values (Abrams, 2001) illustrated how the participants' personal and social identities changed post-migration. An example was when the participants described how they redefined their pre-migration norms to adapt to the cultural norms they saw in Switzerland. This illustrates how TA, when understood as a dynamic and agentic process within acculturation, enabled the participants to actively reconstruct both their personal and social identities.

In addition, TA helped explain how the participants' rejection of pre-migration gender norms coincided with their decision to end their intimate relationships. Through her theory of gender performativity, Butler (1990) offered a helpful angle for interpreting such changes in gender norms. Butler (1990) stated that gender is not an inherent or fixed attribute but is comprised through the repeated social practices and repeated performances that an individual does that then aligns with societal expectations. This perspective helps to contextualise the changes seen in the participants' acculturation. Moreover, Butler (1990) highlighted that changes in gender identity are sometimes reactive but can also be intentional and transformative. In line with this, researchers have recently outlined how different expectations around gender norms and equality in refugee women's host countries can lead to changes in how they adopt, adapt or reject cultural elements related to gender (Habash & Omata, 2023). Subservient gender roles can also be reinforced by religious and

cultural beliefs, which can then shape a refugee women's intimate relationships (Wessells & Strang, 2006). In alignment with this literature (Butler, 1990; Habash & Omata, 2023; Wessells & Strang, 2006), Suna, Defne, and Elma changed their view on their pre-migration gendered norms, deliberately distanced themselves from their pre-migration culture and accepted aspects of the Swiss culture that aligned with their needs, particularly safety, autonomy and equality. Suna described distancing herself from her pre-migration culture, particularly the elements that normalised GBV. Leaving her abusive husband marked a turning point which allowed her to begin engaging with the Swiss culture. Furthermore, Elma's narrative suggested that the changes she was undergoing to her identity, her intimate relationships and her autonomy were all part of her process of acculturation. For example, she described how she was creating a "new world" in Switzerland where she could prioritise her well-being and pursue opportunities, such as education, that she was unable to do in her pre-migration culture. Furthermore, Elma highlighted that she had a desire to explore new learning opportunities, such as learning German, which she perceived as a new opportunity that she had previously not been able to do in her pre-migration life. These findings align with those from Pérez-Vázquez & Bonilla-Campos, (2023) who found that refugee women who had been exposed to GBV during forced migration in order to cope often engaged in educational and vocational training, to enhance their practical skills and create a renewed sense of agency (Pérez-Vázquez & Bonilla-Campos, 2023).

The SAMHSA defines trauma as an event, series of events, or set of circumstances that an individual experiences as physically or emotionally harmful or life-threatening, with lasting adverse effects on their functioning and well-being (SAMHSA, 2014, p. 7). Exposure to GBV can be traumatic and shape how individuals perceive and make sense of their

environmental and relational interactions (Habtamu et al., 2023). Habtamu et al. (2023) researched internally displaced women in Ethiopia and found that GBV survivors were more vulnerable to mental health challenges. They found that experiences of GBV can be associated with psychological challenges such as PTSD, depression and anxiety (Habtamu et al., 2023). Furthermore, GBV can exacerbate the mental health issues of individuals in marginalised communities, highlighting the importance of trauma-informed approaches for treatment (Mburu et al., 2022). Building on this, Kuupiel et al. (2024) recently stressed the mental health consequences of SGBV for survivors in sub-Saharan Africa. Using a systematic scoping review, they identified associations between SGBV and mental health challenges, including PTSD, depression, anxiety, suicidal ideations and psychological trauma (Kuupiel et al., 2024).

While trauma resulting from GBV can harm women's mental health, it can also help shape how refugee women navigate their lives post-migration (Taheri et al., 2024). In line with observations from the literature (Habtamu et al., 2023; Kuupiel et al., 2024; Taheri et al., 2024), participants' acculturation processes in the current study appeared to be shaped by their experiences of GBV, meaning they prioritised safety, autonomy and changes in their intimate relationships and identities. Suna, Defne, and Elma narratives suggested that their exposure to GBV the traumatic and emotional impact played a central role in shaping their motivations and desire transformative change. For example, Defne described her life as being consumed by "despair, hopelessness and fear," stemming from the persistent GBV she endured from her family and fiancé. Suna and Elma both recounted the difficulty of being exposed to their husbands' anger and violence, explaining that this eroded their sense of self. The cumulative effect of this trauma led them to a breaking point, where separation from

their spouse became for them, the way forward to find safety and self-reconstruction. All three participants acknowledged the traumatic nature of their experiences, which were marked by GBV. The violence they experienced undermined their sense of safety, agency and emotional well-being, yet their responses reflected their drive for change and transformation. Their emphasis on pursuing safety, autonomy and the need to escape harmful environments suggests that their engagement with TA was influenced by their efforts to overcome the trauma they associated with GBV. This was evident in their narratives, for example when Defne explained that her only option to escape the GBV was through forced migration, stating, “so I considered going to Europe because where I come from it is not possible to fight against the family” (Defne, lines 4-8). Similarly, Suna described fleeing Turkey to avoid her husband's violence, saying, ‘If I go back [to him], I may be killed’ (Suna, line 87). These statements highlight how the participants engaged with TA as a survival strategy shaped by trauma, enabling them to begin reconstructing their lives and identities in the aftermath of GBV. These experiences not only reflect the participants’ trauma and pursuit of TA but also reveal the limitations of the existing acculturation models in capturing the role of safety, agency, and GBV in shaping the process of acculturation.

In this sense, TA builds on Berry’s (1997), concept of integration however while Berry considered the cultural and societal influences on acculturation, he did not address the role of safety or agency as a central and/or active component that can shape acculturation (see Section 2.5 for a detailed analysis of Berry’s framework). Similarly, TA builds on Bornstein’s specificity principle (2017), which highlights the role of specific conditions and moderators in acculturation. TA advances this concept by emphasising safety as a key factor that shaped the participants’ process of acculturation and offers a way to understand

acculturation in the context of GBV, forced displacement and trauma. Thus, TA advances the existing acculturation frameworks and offers a nuanced perspective on how GBV, trauma, adaptation and agency can intersect in acculturation.

However, intersectionality also played a role in the TA process for Defne, Suna, and Elma, as they described how their lives in Switzerland were often challenged by overlapping contextual factors such as racism, refugee status, social isolation, limited access to resources, and language barriers. When combined, these factors increased their post-migration challenges and created barriers to their sense of belonging. This aligns with findings from Pittaway and Bartolomei (2003), who demonstrated how compounded factors such as race, gender and refugee status, can amplify vulnerabilities and impede integration. Similarly, Alessi (2023) found that the spatial, social and legal barriers faced by refugee women in Switzerland can limit their access to resources, increase isolation and impede their sense of belonging. Aligning with Alessi (2023), Defne described how her experience of racism, which was compounded by being identified as a refugee, demotivated her from integrating and learning the local language. She also shared her struggles with a caregiver whom she felt withheld her money. These experiences, compounded by GBV, illustrate the intersectionality of the challenges that these three participants faced and how this can still impede the process of acculturation for the women. These challenges also underscore the importance of addressing intersectionality when considering the acculturation experiences of refugee women (Sullivan et al., 2020). While GBV shaped the participants' engagement with TA by driving their pursuit of safety and autonomy, they also faced additional barriers, such as racism, marginalisation, and the limitations associated with their refugee status. These

intersecting challenges can further complicate the process of acculturation for refugee women.

11.6 Comparing Transformative Acculturation with Berry and Bornstein's Acculturation Models

The ways in which Transformative Acculturation (TA) converges with and differentiates from Berry's acculturation framework (1997) and Bornstein's specificity principle (2017) are explored in this section. While both existing models provide foundational insights into acculturation, they do not reflect the breadth of the acculturation processes described by Defne, Suna, and Elma. Berry (1997) outlined four strategies: assimilation, integration, separation and marginalisation. However, researchers have posited that these strategies do not always fully capture the nuanced and context-dependent experiences of marginalised populations (Deslandes et al., 2024; Rudmin, 2003). For example, Berry's assimilation strategy did not apply to Defne, Suna, and Elma, as assimilation involves abandoning one's pre-migration culture and completely adopting the host culture (Berry, 1997). Instead, the three participants retained cultural elements, such as family values, while rejecting harmful pre-migration practices such as GBV. Similarly, the acculturation strategies of separation and marginalisation (Berry, 1997) did not apply to the participants, as they engaged with Swiss culture rather than isolating themselves from it or rejecting it. TA aligns with some elements of integration, as described by Berry (1997), whereby the participants-maintained aspects of both their pre-migration culture and the Swiss culture. However, the concept of TA extends beyond Berry's (1997) integration strategy by focusing on GBV and the related trauma that shaped the participants' acculturation, as evidenced throughout their narratives.

Kartal et al. (2018) demonstrated how pre-migration trauma and post-migration acculturative stress can interact to shape acculturation. While their primary focus was on mental health outcomes, their work provides important context for understanding how trauma can influence acculturation processes. This aligns with the findings of the present study, which show that GBV-related trauma shaped the three participants' engagement with acculturation by driving their pursuit of safety, agency, and identity reconstruction through TA. Similarly, Taheri et al. (2024) highlighted how trauma can shape refugee women's post-migration acculturation processes, as they found that the rejection of pre-migration norms and gradual embracing of the host culture values supported Afghan participants' pursuit of safety and self-determination. As such, TA has emerged as a transformative process that was rooted in the participants' responses to their lived experiences of trauma, forced displacement and post-migration adaptation. Berry's framework (1997) does not account for how GBV-related trauma can actively shaped participants' acculturation, cultural identities and relationships.

In his specificity principle (2017), Bornstein posited that certain conditions, individuals, settings and time can moderate acculturation across various domains. While the specificity principle allows for the inclusion of individual and contextual factors, including trauma, which is conceptualised as one of many potential moderators that can shape acculturation outcomes, it does not frame trauma as a mechanism that can drive acculturation or changes in identity, but instead situates it within the context of variables that can shape the acculturation process. However, TA positions trauma from GBV as a mechanism that drives intentional changes in identity. Thus, the participants described how their acculturation experiences post-migration enabled them to reconstruct both their

identities and intimate relationships. This distinction demonstrates that TA extends upon but complements Bornstein's specificity principle (2017) and Berry's acculturation framework (1997). Figure 3 below provides a comparative overview of the three acculturation models: Berry's (1997) theoretical framework, Bornstein's (2017) specificity principle, and Transformative Acculturation.

Thus, TA offers a way of understanding how refugee women navigate acculturation in response to GBV, as they reconstruct their identities and relationships through processes shaped by safety-seeking, agency, and intersecting factors such as racism, refugee status, and social isolation. Figure 3 below highlights the key components, shared concepts, and differences amongst the models.

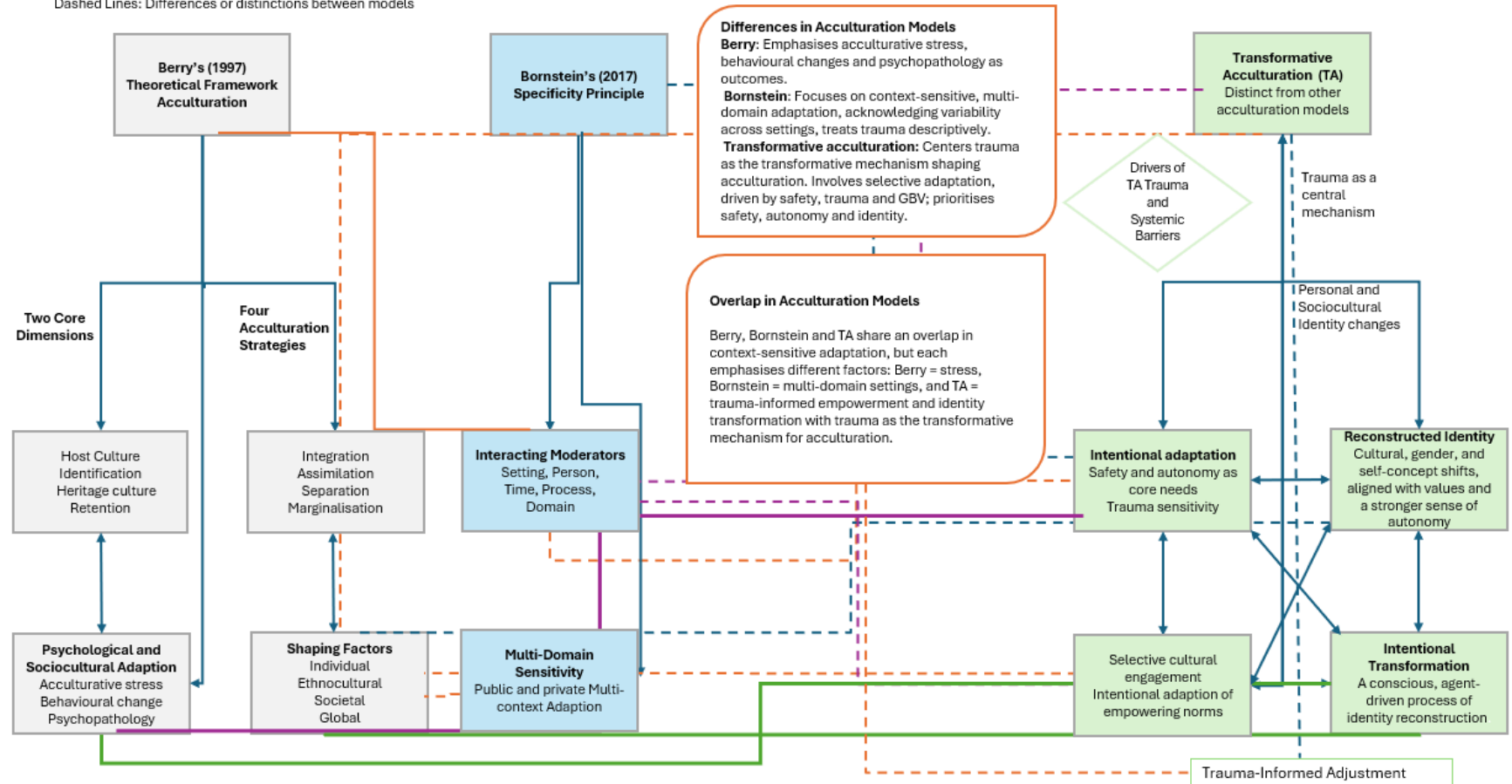
Figure 3

Comparing Acculturation Models: Berry (1997), Bornstein (2017) and Transformative Acculturation (TA)

Title: Comparing Acculturation Models: Berry (1997), Bornstein (2017) and Transformative Acculturation (TA)

Key: Solid Lines: Shared concepts or overlapping elements within the acculturation models.

Dashed Lines: Differences or distinctions between models



Note: This diagram compares the three acculturation concepts, highlighting the shared concepts and differences and the positioning of transformative acculturation as shaped by agency, GBV and trauma. Solid lines indicate overlapping concepts, while dashed lines illustrate nuanced or partial connections between elements.

11.7 Intimate Relationships and Acculturation: Change and Challenges Post-Migration

Participants' intimate relationships were sources of both support and conflict and were shaped by their pre-migration cultural norms and post-migration experiences. For three participants from Islamic backgrounds who were exposed to GBV, the decision to end their relationships was presented as an assertion of their agency and need for safety. Conversely, participants from both Catholic and Islamic backgrounds who described improvements in their relationships attributed these to their exposure to Swiss cultural norms, including gender equality, shared childcare and shared financial management. This finding challenges the dominant narratives in existing literature, which concentrates on the strains of forced migration on intimate-relationships (Khawaja et al., 2012; Stewart et al., 2014). These four participants described how adopting aspects of the host culture helped them promote a more egalitarian approach within their intimate relationship, which led to improvements. For example, two participants from South America described their bicultural approach to acculturation, which was characterised by mutual support and collaboration with their partners, suggesting that their intimate relationships provided a space for a shared exploration of acculturation.

A further important theme that emerged was the alignment of the acculturation process between the participants and their partners. Participants often described sharing approaches to acculturation, including cultural preservation, separation and bicultural adaptation with their significant other. This reinforced the pre-migration norms and roles of some participants from Islamic cultural backgrounds, even with their experiences of cultural dissonance. Their narratives align with findings on the role of the immediate family in the acculturation process (Khawaja & Milner, 2012). Khawaja and Milner (2012) found that

acculturation stress, including tensions surrounding changing gender roles and the absence of extended familial support, often strained marital relationships among South Sudanese refugees. While these stressors were significant, the study also highlighted the importance of understanding and addressing these challenges within the intimate relationships to support adjustment and reduce conflict. These findings underscore how the alignment or misalignment of cultural expectations within an intimate- relationship can shape the couple's ability to navigate acculturation challenges (Khawaja & Milner, 2012).

Two participants, Neshele and Karessa's unmet expectations around their husbands' roles as providers post-migration created tension in their intimate relationship. While existing research has focused on the male resistance to changing gender norms (Al-Natour et al., 2019; Khawaja & Milner, 2012), the economic constraints in post-migration Switzerland forced these women to work when their husbands could not. This changing of their traditional pre-migration roles led to frustration and relational conflict. This finding adds more of a nuanced angle to the role of gender and norms in the post-migration contexts, and revealed how both economic pressures and cultural expectations can shape intimate relationships in the post-migration environment. The participants' frustrations was compounded by their unmet emotional needs, the conflict in their intimate relationship and the tension between their expectations and their post-migration realities. Research highlights that conflicting gender norms can lead to changes in the intimate relationship of refugees which can then lead to increased tension post-migration (Khawaja & Milner, 2012; Baird & Boyle, 2012; Lokot, 2023).

Uncertainty about refugee status further complicated the intimate relationships of the three Kurdish participants. This uncertainty was experienced as destabilising, hindering the

participants' ability to plan for their future and undermining their emotional security. These narratives align with existing research on the impact of visa uncertainty on refugee well-being (Liberatore, 2016) but also highlight specific relational consequences, such as the erosion of stability.

Overall, participants' intimate relationships were intertwined with their acculturation process. For some, their intimate relationships were a place of comfort and support, while for others their intimate relationships became a source of tension, that was shaped by uncertainty, or unmet expectations. The findings demonstrate that the process of acculturation is not always limited to the individual but can also extend to the intimate relationships of refugee women.

11.8 Strengths and Limitations

This section covers the strengths and limitations of this research.

11.8.1 Study Strengths

Several strengths were demonstrated in this research. The first is the inclusion of theoretical frameworks to aid understanding of the findings. Berry's acculturation framework (1997) and Bornstein's specificity principle (2017) were integrated throughout this research to provide a deeper understanding of participants' acculturation processes while ensuring the findings were situated alongside an established theoretical framework to enhance research credibility. A further strength is the review of the existing acculturation frameworks and proposition of the inclusion of the new theoretical concept of transformative acculturation (TA) extending Berry's theoretical framework (1997) and Bornstein's specificity principle (2017).

Secondly, a further strength of this research is its idiographic approach, through the use of IPA, which supported an in-depth and detailed understanding of the participants' experiences and meaning making. IPA as an approach in this research facilitated important insights into how and why the participants decided on their choices, they made concerning their intimate relationships and acculturation. Furthermore, the use of semi-structured interviews allowed participants to explain their experiences in their own words, which gave important and detailed accounts of their post-migration experiences. Therefore, by using IPA as a methodological approach this enabled detailed and specific insights into the participants' process of acculturation and their intimate relationships.

A third strength in this research was found in its findings that were related to racism and marginalisation, which the majority of the participants experienced in Switzerland. This finding addressed the previously overlooked gaps in the literature concerning refugee women, particularly around the challenges of racism and their resulting behavioural changes, such as social withdrawal. This enabled a better understanding of the impact of racism on acculturation processes.

A fourth strength of this research was in the inclusion of participants from different countries with different backgrounds which enabled an exploration of how participants' pre-migration culture shaped their post-migration process of acculturation. Participants from the same premigration cultural backgrounds seemed to adopt a similar process when it came to their post-migration process of acculturation which will be an important consideration in future research in this area.

A fifth strength in this research was its relational perspective on acculturation, which highlighted the alignment of acculturation strategies between participants and their

significant others. This approach provided a more holistic understanding of acculturation as a shared and interactive process, demonstrating how overlaps between pre-migration cultural experiences and intimate relationships can shape the acculturation process

A sixth strength in this research was its focus on the underexplored strategy of separation in acculturation. While most acculturation research prioritises integration and assimilation, this study sheds light on how and why some individuals prioritised the preservation of their pre-migration culture in post-migration Switzerland. By addressing this gap, the study contributes to and broadens the conceptual understanding of separation as a strategy in the process of acculturation.

Finally, a seventh strength in this research was that the interviews were conducted in a setting familiar to the refugee participants, where trusted members of the staff were present. This may have enhanced the confidence of the participants' and encouraged a sharing of their lived experiences. By creating a secure and supportive environment, this research ensured detailed narratives which strengthened the validity of the findings

Overall, this research provided an in-depth understanding of the acculturation processes and intimate relationships of the participants. By utilising IPA to explore participants' lived experiences, this research captured how they maintained their pre-migration culture while navigating post-migration challenges. The research strengths, including the introduction of the transformative acculturation, the focus on separation as an underexplored acculturation strategy, the impact of racism, and the role of intimate relationships in acculturation, all contributed to a more comprehensive understanding of acculturation. Additionally, the secure and familiar interview setting enhanced the

participant confidence, leading to rich and detailed narratives that strengthened the study's validity.

11.8.2 Study Limitations

However, limitations with this study are noted. This first limitation was the use of cross-sectional design, which was effective in capturing a 'snapshot' of the current lived experiences of refugee women at a certain point, however, was limited in its understanding of the changes that can occur over a period of time. Additionally, interpretations regarding findings relating to changes in intimate relationships and identity made in this thesis are dependent on retrospective reflections of the participants and as such may be biased. For example, interpretations regarding the changes in intimate relationships and identity in this thesis often rely on participants' retrospective reflections, which may be subject to recall bias, potentially affecting the accuracy of self-reported data (Hassan, 2006). Future research should use longitudinal designs which would be effective in gaining a deeper understanding of the lasting and perhaps evolving changes in the process of acculturation, in a refugees' cultural and personal/social identity, and in their intimate relationships over time.

Furthermore, in this research, the exploration of TA as a process of acculturation was limited to refugee women who had experienced GBV. While this provided in-depth insights into their lived experiences, it did not address other trauma-impacted groups who might also experience acculturation as a transformative process. For example, individuals displaced due to war, such as those who have experienced violent persecution, survivors of torture, ethnic cleansing, or state-sanctioned violence may undergo similar transformative adaptations in their process of acculturation. Future research could build on this to include other marginalised populations, such as stateless individuals, Internally Displaced Persons,

survivors of human trafficking, those under 18 years of age, or displaced individuals from different cultural backgrounds. This could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the process of transformative acculturation.

11.9 Implications for Policy and Practice

11.9.1 Implications for Trauma-Informed, Gender-Sensitive Support and Policy

Development: Integrating Transformative Acculturation

Researchers have recently highlighted the increasing importance of gender-sensitive awareness when addressing the needs of refugee women (Pérez-Vázquez & Bonilla-Campos, 2023). Moreover, recognising the cultural diversity among refugees, particularly regarding their acculturation, gender norms and pre-migration culture, is important (Kämmer & Albert, 2023). The concept of TA has been introduced in this research. Recognising TA could help inform support services and policies which are developed for refugee women experiencing GBV and trauma. Programmes that address safety and provide resources (Ciftci et al., 2012; Wood et al., 2019), including resources to overcome trauma from GBV, could enhance these women's safety and well-being and the likelihood of TA occurring for these women.

Practitioners working with refugee women consider the impact of trauma on the individual and on their intimate relationships and support women in a trauma-sensitive way. Furthermore, trauma-specific therapies, such as cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) or eye movement desensitisation and reprocessing (EMDR), should also be considered as a psychological approach to help refugee women who are recovering from GBV (Thompson & Roberts, 2018) and/or other types of trauma(s). Additionally, practitioners should provide culturally sensitive support services and counselling to enable refugee women to feel

supported and regain a sense of stability as they adjust to the post-migration environment.

Addressing the basic needs of refugee women is important, as stability plays a crucial role in the process of acculturation and well-being. For participants who used transformative acculturation as a pathway to safety, autonomy, and agency (e.g., the three participants escaping GBV), access to secure housing is essential in helping their transition.

Furthermore, assistance in accessing language support services, legal aid, and job training programs could help these women rebuild their lives and achieve independence and social integration.

Furthermore, it is important for practitioners to be aware of the importance that the pre-migration culture has on the process of acculturation for refugee women. As such, practitioners should be culturally aware so they can understand the challenges these women can encounter post-migration. Additionally, refugee women would benefit from peer networks where they could share their experiences of the Swiss post-migration culture, with each other in order to encourage each other. For example, this research has shown that participants who engaged in bicultural navigation (South American women) actively maintained elements of their pre-migration culture while adapting to Swiss society, often relying on familiar cultural practices for stability. Peer support could serve as a crucial mechanism to help other South Americans reinforce their sense of identity post-migration. Similarly, for those experiencing cultural dissonance or resisting integration (e.g., Muslim or Kurdish women) peer networks could provide a space to validate their experiences, reduce their feelings of isolation, and facilitate discussions on how to manage cultural conflicts. By developing connections between refugee women from similar pre-migration cultures this could assist in their process of acculturation in a way that aligns with their cultural and

emotional needs. Furthermore, community support, that provides an opportunity for refugee women to engage with the Swiss locals, would help encourage a sense of belonging.

However, care would have to be taken to ensure they are safe and not subjected to racism.

Working with local communities and professionals through anti-racism training, community forums, and policy advocacy can help address racism and promoting systemic change

(Shelton et al., 2021)

Moreover, governmental and legal policies that address the challenges faced by refugee women exposed to trauma, GBV or marginalisation are needed. For example, refugee women should be informed of their legal rights as soon as they arrive in Switzerland, particularly the support they can receive if exposed to GBV. Furthermore, when they are granted refugee status in Switzerland, there should be policies in place that ensure that they have free access to legal advice. Incorporating the concept of TA into policies that are aimed at refugee women could help guide the development of policies and interventions that address their specific needs.

11.9.2 Implications for Intimate Relationship Support and Gender Post-Migration

Changes to gender norms post-migration were found to have varying effects on the intimate relationships of the participants in this research. For some, changes included an increase in the sharing of responsibilities and a shift toward more egalitarian norms, leading to improved communication and stronger relationships. Similarly, researchers have found that effective communication can help with the stresses of forced migration among refugee couples (Lokot, 2023; Stewart et al., 2014; Uddin, 2021; Zbeidy, 2020).

However, these changes to gender norms caused conflict for other couples. As such, interventions to help refugees in their intimate relationships could improve their

acculturation and well-being post-migration. These interventions should focus on effective communication, such as active listening techniques, along with a constructive expression of emotions and ensure they address the negotiation of gender and responsibilities within intimate relationships. Such programmes could be integrated into support services offered to refugees. Additionally, given that egalitarian norms benefitted the participants intimate relationships in this research, creating and hosting workshops or therapy sessions that explain the changes in gender norms to both partners could help lessen their potential for post-migration conflict. These could enable both partners to explore how these changes could enhance relationship satisfaction. Session facilitators should be trained in cultural sensitivity so that they respect the couples' pre-migration backgrounds while promoting healthy, equitable norms. Adapted couples' counselling and family therapy could help address migration-specific stresses, such as financial instability (Zbeidy, 2020). Couples' counsellors and family therapists should also consider acculturative stress and stress around financial and social status changes. All counselling should be offered by professionals skilled in intercultural challenges who can guide couples in navigating post-migration changes. Furthermore, it may be beneficial for refugee women or couples to engage with therapists who are migrants themselves, as shared experiences can encourage an improved understanding during counselling.

Group therapy or support groups could effectively address conflicts around unmet pre-migration expectations and the post-migration reality. Furthermore, since post-migration changes to gender norms can increase tension, providing education on how to renegotiate gender norms could help. This could include the practicalities of shared household responsibilities such as parenting and finances.

Finally, trust and mutual support were found to be important for enhancing intimate relationships. Therefore, establishing a peer mentorship program could help. This program would involve couples who have experienced similar situations mentoring newly arrived couples. Peer mentors could share their insights and strategies for maintaining strong, supportive relationships amidst the challenges of post-migration life. Programs like Problem Management Plus (PM+), developed by the WHO, have shown that structured peer support can effectively help refugees navigate post-migration challenges (WHO, 2018)

11.9.3 Policy Implications for Combatting Racism and Supporting Refugee Integration

Ten out of the twelve participants in this research reported experiencing racism and discrimination, which hindered their integration and led to feelings of inferiority, fear, anger, anxiety, shame and social withdrawal. Similarly, previous researchers have found that discrimination leads to mental health issues such as depression, anxiety and PTSD (Bendjo et al., 2019) along with experiences of mistrust and social isolation (Ciftci et al., 2012; Wood et al., 2019). As shown in the current research, there is a need to address racism and discrimination in Switzerland. Although the importance of integration is recognised (Njie-Carr et al., 2021), how these issues will be addressed in Switzerland or if they will be addressed in Switzerland remains a question.

Policies should be created that address both the occurrence of individual and systemic racism by emphasising the humanity of the individuals that are affected by racism and the harm that can be caused to them. Anti-racism training for public officials should focus on prioritising empathy and awareness of the impact of racism on refugees (and all people), while also addressing the legal ramifications of continuing in such practices. Support networks and community activities that bring together refugees and the local Swiss

residents could help build bridges between them and enhance their understanding and support of each other. Researchers have recently emphasised that interventions for refugee women must be collaboratively developed and culturally sensitive (Pérez-Vázquez & Bonilla-Campos, 2023). Community involvement in creating supportive environments could reduce stigma and promote inclusivity (Tsoukaneli, 2023). Additionally, public educational media programs should be created to increase awareness about racism in Switzerland and its negative effects. However, before implementing these strategies, a major change that encourages inclusivity should be considered, one that can help mitigate feelings of inferiority and psychological distress for refugee women and enhance their well-being both immediately and in the mid to long term (Hossain et al., 2017; Schweitzer et al., 2011; Vromans et al., 2021). As shown in this present study, unless these systemic barriers are addressed, refugees are likely to remain marginalised, with their ability to integrate fully into Swiss society hindered by individual and institutional racism. Furthermore, governmental organisations in Switzerland should ensure that their policies are proactive in understanding and preventing racism. The findings from this research indicate the need for new policies that support refugee women's immediate safety and health needs as well as their long-term cultural and societal needs.

11.10 Conclusion

This research is an exploration of how 12 refugee women in Switzerland made sense of their post-migration experiences, with a focus on acculturation and changes in their intimate relationships. A qualitative methodological approach was employed, specifically interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), which enabled an idiographic focus and in-depth understanding of how each participant interpreted and gave meaning to their

experiences post-migration. Berry's (1997) acculturation framework and Bornstein's (2017) specificity principle were used to contextualise the participants' processes of acculturation. While the process of acculturation was similar for participants from similar pre-migration cultures, the constructivist ontology and interpretivist epistemology underpinning IPA, together with the idiographic analysis, facilitated the finding that certain aspects of acculturation, particularly for refugee women exposed to gender-based violence, were not fully addressed by existing acculturation models. Therefore, the novel concept of transformative acculturation (TA) was introduced. This captures how refugee women exposed to GBV used acculturation to actively reconstruct their identities, cultural norms, religious practices and intimate relationships in the pursuit of safety and autonomy post-migration. Agency, trauma and participants' intersectional experiences were foregrounded to inform this novel concept, which captures complex and agentic acculturation processes while complementing existing acculturation frameworks. Additionally, in this research, both the analysis of acculturation and the introduction of TA highlighted the intersectional nature of participants' experiences. Gender, refugee status, race, culture and religion often intersect to compound participants' vulnerabilities and shape their acculturation processes. Racism and discrimination also shaped these processes, often causing participants to withdraw socially and reinforce their pre-migration culture as a coping strategy.

Post-migration changes to the intimate relationships of the participants were often experienced in relation to their acculturation processes. Some participants described improvements in their intimate relationships, including improved gender equality resulting from exposure to Swiss cultural norms, while others described increased tension and dissatisfaction. Challenges often arose from changing gender norms, unmet cultural

expectations and ongoing uncertainty related to participants' refugee status. These challenges were also grouped by pre-migration culture. In response to economic pressures, some participants assumed the role of financial provider when their husbands were unable to work. This reversal of pre-migration patriarchal cultural expectations contributed to their frustration and increased the conflict in their intimate relationships. These findings offer a more nuanced post-migration perspective on intimate relationships, building on existing research, which has typically emphasised men's resistance to post-migration changes in gender norms (Al-Natour et al., 2019; Khawaja & Milner, 2012).

Reflexivity was maintained throughout this research, with regular self-reflection, bracketing and supervision employed to address potential researcher biases, particularly during the analysis of distressing narratives of racism and gender-based violence. Positionality was explicitly addressed in the findings to provide transparency regarding any biases rather than attempting to eliminate them. This approach enhanced the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings (Finlay, 2014; Smith, 2023; Willig, 2013).

This thesis makes several original contributions. The development of TA advances theory by situating acculturation as an agentic process, while the importance of safety and the effects of trauma on refugee women exposed to GBV have been emphasised. The idiographic interpretative phenomenological analysis demonstrated how trauma, gender, racism, loss, intersectionality and pre-migration culture can shape acculturation. The findings also extend the current understanding of post-migration intimate relationships, indicating how changing gender norms, economic pressures and unmet expectations can produce either egalitarian outcomes or increased relational conflict. Recognising the diversity of acculturation strategies among refugee women is helpful for developing trauma-

informed, culturally responsive post-migration policies and support services. The findings in this research highlight the need for gender-sensitive, anti-racist and culturally adapted policies and interventions that address both structural barriers and the need for safety, autonomy and support. Such insights are relevant to policymakers, practitioners and support services working in migration, acculturation and mental health.

11.11 Future Research

Future researchers should further explore the concept of TA by examining how it can apply to other trauma-impacted populations and/or marginalised groups, such as internally displaced persons, stateless people, survivors of ethnic war, former child soldiers, victims of human trafficking or minors who have been exposed to forced migration. This could guide the development of culturally relevant interventions and services to promote recovery, integration, and resilience among differing trauma-affected populations. Additionally, future researchers could develop and validate measures for TA using qualitative or mixed-methods approaches or might evaluate TA-informed interventions and support programmes in refugee services to assess their real-world effectiveness.

Furthermore, building on this research and its findings about the connection between acculturation and intimate relationships, particularly how acculturation shapes gender expectations, culture and both improvements and conflicts post-migration, future researchers could explore how intimate relationships, in turn, may influence acculturation in the post-migration context. For example, researchers could examine how different acculturation strategies (e.g., integration, separation) impact the satisfaction and stability of intimate relationships. Additionally, future researchers could build on these findings by using longitudinal or dyadic designs to examine how intimate relationships and acculturation

shape one another over time in the post-migration context. Future researchers should also consider examining the individual perspectives of both the partners within the intimate relationship, as this would provide a more comprehensive understanding of how pre-migration culture, acculturation, and intimate relationships can interact, and thereby inform targeted support and interventions for couples navigating post-migration changes.

This research was based in Switzerland, meaning that elements such as racism (which participants experienced as severe) may differ in other host countries. Thus, the insights derived from this study might not be representative of other cultures or countries. Future researchers could consider including a more diverse array of host countries to enhance the generalisability of the findings.

Lastly, a longitudinal design could offer valuable insights into how TA, intimate relationships and other acculturation strategies change and interact over time. Additionally, a longitudinal design could be used to explore the relationships between racism and acculturation, TA and integration, or intimate relationships and acculturation. Importantly, such research would deepen our understanding of TA as a distinctive process by showing whether the transformation is sustained, accelerated or diminished as individuals become more embedded in their host culture.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: A Summary of Qualitative Studies Which Examine Acculturation and Gender

Literature on Acculturation in Refugees

Authors	Date	Location of study	Title/focus	Data analysis	Key findings
Ala Uddin, M.	2021	Bangladesh	The meaning of marriage to Rohingya refugees and their survival in Bangladesh.	Ethnography	In the absence of adequate food, shelter and security in refugee camps, Rohingya women try to manage their survival marrying Bangladeshi men with the hope of obtaining citizenship
Al-Natour, Edith J. Morris, Samar Mohammad Al-Ostaz	2021	Jordan	Through her eyes: The impact of war on Syrian refugee families	Descriptive phenomenological study	The study highlighted the experiences of Syrian refugee families, emphasising the financial, social stress, family violence and hazardous health effects on women.
Bader & Probst	2018	Switzerland	Barriers to refugee integration in Switzerland.	Content analysis and frame analysis	Highlighted the role of decentralised asylum policies and prolonged asylum processes in creating significant integration barriers for refugees.
Baird & Boyle	2012	Australia	Refugee women's negotiation of cultural norms post-migration.	Qualitative content analysis of interviews.	Refugee women face significant cultural conflicts between host and home norms, requiring reconciliation strategies.
Beiser, M., & Hou, F.	2001	Canada	Language acquisition and mental health	Survey/participant observations, interviews	Mental health salience of risk and protective factors changes according to the phase of resettlement.
Berry, J.W.	1997	Canada	Immigration, acculturation and adaptation	Mixed methods/quantitative surveys plus qualitative interviews	Definition of acculturation and types of acculturations
Berry, J.W.	2005	Canada	Acculturation: Living successfully in two cultures	Thematic analysis	Themes related to different acculturation strategies (integration, assimilation, separation and marginalisation), levels of stress and adaptation outcomes

Authors	Date	Location of study	Title/focus	Data analysis	Key findings
Berry, J.W.	2013	Canada	Integration and multi-culturalism: ways towards social solidarity	Conceptual analysis and theoretical development	Acculturation in different populations
Berry, J.W., & Hou, F.	2016	Canada	Immigrant acculturation and well-being	Phenomenology/interpretive	Those using integration and assimilation strategies had the highest scores of life satisfaction.
Birman, D., & Tran, N.	2008	US	Psychological distress and adjustment of Vietnamese refugees	Mixed methods Thematic analysis qualitative coding	Different psychological outcomes are predicted by different pre- and post-migration factors.
Bornstein, M.H.	2017	Cross-cultural	The specificity principle in acculturation	Conceptual analysis	The Specificity Principle highlights how acculturation processes and outcomes are shaped by context, domain and individual factors, emphasising a need for tailored approaches to understand refugee adaptation.
Brun, C.	2001	US	Relationship between people and place in refugee studies	Theoretical analysis	
Choy, B., Arunachalam, K.S.G, Taylor, M., & Lee, A.	2021	US	Acculturation strategies and their impact on mental health	Interpretive review	Marginalisation more than triples the likelihood of anxiety-related symptoms compared to integration.
Driel, E.Y., & Verkuyten, M.	2022	Italy	Contact theory and multiethnic community	Ethnography	Both refugees and the local community benefit. Future challenges relating to insecurity around government funding and competition over local opportunities
Greene, M. C., Bonz, A. G., Cristobal, M., Angulo, A., Armijos, A., Guevara, M. E., Vega, C., Benavides,	2023	Ecuador and Panama	Cultural bereavement among refugees	Mixed-methods evaluation interviews and focus groups	The study evaluated the feasibility and outcomes of a psychosocial intervention aimed at improving mental health and social support for refugee, migrant and host community

Authors	Date	Location of study	Title/focus	Data analysis	Key findings
L., Corrales, C., De La Cruz, A., Lopez, M. J., Moyano, A., Murcia, A., Noboa, M. J., Rodriguez, A.,					women. Findings indicated positive mental health outcomes, improved well-being and strengthened social ties among participants.
Eisenbruch, M.	1991	South-East Asia		Grounded theory	Cultural bereavement should be given appropriate status.
Freedman, J.,	2017	EU	Gendering the international asylum and refugee debate	GT/case studies	The EU has failed to offer real protection to those fleeing conflict. The journey can provide insecurities for women. However, women show resilience and develop coping strategies.
Hawkes, C., Norris, K., Joyce, J., & Paton, D.	2021	Australia	Resilience and well-being in refugee women	Thematic analysis semi-structured interviews and employs Braun and Clarke's six-step framework for conducting thematic analysis	Adversities in everyday life are amplified when being resettled to a regional location of Australia. Finding a community' was identified as playing an integral role in their coping.
Higginbottom, G.M.A., Safipour, J., Mumtaz, Z., Chiu, Y., Paton, P., & Pillay, J.	2013	Canada	Sudanese women's beliefs and resistance	Ethnography	Many beliefs impact upon behaviours and perceptions during the perinatal period. Pregnancy and birth are events reflecting a certain empowerment for women and the women tend to exert control in ways that may or may not be respected by their husbands.
Horn, R., Puffer, E.S., Roesch, E., Lehmann, H., & Bolton, P.	2014	Sierra Leone Liberia,	Consequences of war on intimacy for refugees	Qualitative focus group discussions and individual interviews	The study explores women's perceptions of how war impacts intimate partner violence and gender roles in post-conflict Sierra Leone and Liberia, highlighting both negative consequences and unexpected opportunities for change.
Hynes, P	2017	Locations include refugee	Trust and mistrust in the lives of forcibly	Qualitative research including case studies,	Explores the experiences of displaced women and children, focusing on trust, mistrust and gender-based violence.

Authors	Date	Location of study	Title/focus	Data analysis	Key findings
		camps, host countries and the UK	displaced women and children	interviews and practitioner experiences	Provides insights into the lived experiences through examples from refugee camps and host countries.
Kamisli, M.U.	2021	US	Acculturation experiences of Syrian Muslim women in the US	Qualitative narrative inquiry methodology	The complexities of forced migration and intersecting subordinations that refugee women experience is highlighted
Kämmer, J.J.L., & Albert, I.	2023	Germany	Germany. Perceived discrimination among three groups of refugees	Qualitative content analysis of interviews.	Former refugees should be included, and personal experiences of immigration be more thoroughly considered in decision making in integration policy.
Khawaja, N.G., & Milner, K.	2012	Australia	Acculturation stress in South Sudanese refugees: Impact on relationships.	Focus groups/qualitative interviews	Management of finances, lack of family and social support cause conflict between couples. Freedom provided to women causes tension.
King-Savić, S.	2021	UK	Ethnography with former labour migrants and refugees	Ethnography	Labelling and categorisation of migrants should be reconsidered.
Kirkland, C., Evans, N., Spates, K., & Kabasele, C.M.	2022	US	Perceptions of resettled refugee Congolese women: Maintaining cultural traditions during resettlement.	Thematic analysis	Maintaining cultural traditions has three themes: clothing and dressing, food, parenting style.
Krause	2015	Uganda	Gender-based violence and refugee women's well-being.	Mixed-methods ethnographic approach with participatory observation, interviews, focus group discussions, unstructured interviews, surveys and analysis of medical reports.	Demonstrates a continuum of sexual and GBV from conflict to encampment, highlighting widening patterns of violence due to evolving forms, perpetrator structures and conditions. Points to challenges like stigma, structural inequalities and gender affecting both men and women.
Krifors, K.	2022	Sweden		Ethnography	

Authors	Date	Location of study	Title/focus	Data analysis	Key findings
			Rural multiculturalism? Migrants, antiracism and convivial cultures in provincial Sweden.		Migrant solidarity movements engage people with different racial, ethnic and migrant experiences and give way to multiculturalism.
Liberatore, G.,	2016	UK	Imagining an ideal husband: Marriage as a site of aspiration among Somali pious women in London	Focus groups and thematic analysis	The process of imagining and aspiring are crucial to understanding young women who turn to practice Islam.
Löbel, L.M.	2022	Germany	Social networks and refugee mental health – from social isolation to family reunification.	Mixed methods/quantitative surveys plus qualitative interviews	Susceptibility to social isolation is equally strong for refugees and host populations.
Lokot, M.	2023	Jordan	Decision-making, violence, resistance, and love: Contested and complicating narratives of Syrian marriages	Qualitative analysis of interviews and narratives from Syrian men and women in forced displacement	Explored how Syrian marriages are navigated during and after forced migration, highlighting experiences of love, mutual support, violence, and resistance to oppressive norms.
Mangrio et al.	2021	Sweden	Refugee women's adaptation to post-migration cultural norms.	Thematic analysis of qualitative interviews.	Explored the challenges refugee women face in adjusting to new societal gender roles and expectations.
Taheri, M., Fitzpatrick, S., & McCormack, L.	2024	Australia	Afghan women refugees, described rejecting oppressive pre-migration norms while selectively adopting empowering host culture values	IPA	Participants in this research demonstrated how trauma drove survival-based acculturation strategies prioritising safety, autonomy and identity reconstruction.

Authors	Date	Location of study	Title/focus	Data analysis	Key findings
Müller, T., Pannatier, P., & Viarengo, M.	2021	Switzerland	Labour market integration, local conditions and inequalities.	Quasi-experimental longitudinal data analysis.	Early entry into the workforce is important to ensure effective economic integration of refugees
Njie-Carr, V.P.S., Sabri, B., Messing, J.T., Suarez, C., Ward-Lasher, A., Wachter, K., Marea, C.X., & Campbell, J.	2021	US	Understanding IPV among immigrant and refugee women. A grounded theory analysis.	Grounded theory	Resilience as a process and outcome could facilitate empowerment and self-directedness to access health services and resources to stay safe.
Ossipow	2019	Switzerland	Refugee perceptions of racism and marginalisation in Switzerland.	In-depth qualitative interviews coded with NVivo.	Explored how children of refugees negotiate their experiences of racialisation, often denying or relativising racism while highlighting the influence of social class and refugee status on their integration trajectories.
Phillimore, J.	2010	UK	Approaches to health provision in the age of super-diversity. Accessing the NHS in Britain's most diverse city	IPA	Many refugees lack choice about acculturation strategy and are vulnerable to psychosocial stress and struggle to integrate
Pittaway & Bartolomei	2003	Australia	Gendered experiences of refugee women during resettlement.	Qualitative case studies and interviews.	Explored how pre-migration gender norms intersect with post-migration barriers, amplifying vulnerabilities.
Puvimanasinghe, T., Denson, L.A., Augustinos, M., & Somasundaram, D.	2015	Australia	How former refugees talk about loss and past trauma.	Interviews / narrative methodology	A salient divergence between stories was found within which there were also differences of structure and content.
Rapaport, M., & Doucerain, M.M.	2021	US	Shared immigration process, different perspectives: The impact of immigration-related	Dyadic research design	Challenges for couples were related to gaps in employment, finances, legal status and satisfaction. Gaps led to conflicts.

Authors	Date	Location of study	Title/focus	Data analysis	Key findings
			gaps on couple relationships.		
Ressia, S., Strachan, G., & Bailey, J.	2017	Australia	Gender and migration	Feminist qualitative interview study	Policy is necessary to manage migration intakes and attract female migrants, it needs to be expanded to assist skilled migrants to integrate more effectively into labour markets and provide targeted support for women migrants.
Saksena, P., & Mcmorrow, G.	2021	United States	Social and Cultural Integration Challenges of Congolese Refugee Women in the U.S.	Thematic analysis	Identified key issues such as racism, intersectionality of gender and refugee status and challenges around raising children. Discrimination escalated over time, affecting daily lives and social connections.
Shishehgar, S., Gholisadeh, L., Digiacomio, M.,	2017	Various locations	Health and Socio-Cultural Experiences of Refugee Women: An Integrative Review	Integrative review using the Resource-Based Model	Investigated the impact of refugee women's resettlement and socio-cultural experiences on their health. Identified cultural, social, material, personal and resilience factors as main themes influencing the health of refugee women.
Sullivan, C., Block, K., & Vaughan, C.	2021	Various (conflict, displacement, transit and resettlement contexts)	The Continuum of Gender-Based Violence Across the Refugee Experience	Qualitative analysis (theoretical and contextual exploration)	Explores the spectrum of gender-based violence (GBV) experienced by refugees across different contexts. Highlights that GBV is not confined to discrete acts but forms a continuum that permeates through conflict, transit and resettlement. Discusses structural and symbolic factors shaping GBV experiences and responses.
Veronica P. S. Njie-Carr, Bushra Sabri, Jill T. Messing, Cecilia Suarez, Allison Ward-	2020	Participants from Africa, Asia and Latin America)	Understanding Intimate Partner Violence among Immigrant and Refugee Women: A	Grounded Theory Analysis	Identified "Engendering Resilience to Survive" as the core category explaining resilience in IPV situations. Developed a model to inform research, policy and practice to support abused women.

Authors	Date	Location of study	Title/focus	Data analysis	Key findings
Lasher, Karin Wachter			Grounded Theory Analysis		
Wachter, Horn, Puffer	2017	Three refugee camps in South Sudan, Kenya and Iraq	Drivers of Intimate Partner Violence Against Women in Three Refugee Camps	Thematic Analysis	Identified drivers of IPV including gendered social norms, destabilisation of roles, men's substance use, women's separation from family and rapid/forced marriages. Highlighted individual, family, community and societal processes exacerbating IPV risk.
Zbeidy	2020	Middle East	Refugee women's intimate relationships post-migration.	Ethnographic methods and qualitative interviews.	Examined how displacement affects marriage practices and intimate relationships among Palestinian and Syrian refugees, highlighting the interplay between cultural expectations, gender norms and the refugee experience.

Appendix B: Participant Information Sheet Example

1. Title of Study

The title of this research project is *"Mine, Ours, Theirs: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of the Interconnected Themes in Coping, Intimate Relationships and Culture in Female Refugees in Switzerland"*.

2. Version Number and Date

Participant-information-Sheet V2.0 29.06.2021

3. Invitation Paragraph

You are being invited to participate in a research study. Before you decide whether to participate, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and feel free to ask any questions. If you would like more information or if there is anything that you do not understand please also feel free to discuss this with your friends, relatives and AiA (Anlaufstelle-Integration-Aargau) staff if you wish. If you have questions concerning the study you can also email me at arking@uclan.ac.uk. You do not have to accept this invitation and should only agree to take part if you want to.

4. What is the purpose of the study?

The purpose of this research is to investigate and contribute to improving knowledge relating to coping, relationships and culture in female refugees. This study focuses on the perspectives and experiences of female refugees who are currently in an intimate (e.g. romantic) relationship. It aims to provide information that will help other refugees in the future, and to further our understanding of how to support and meet refugee women's needs.

5. Why have I been invited to take part?

You have been invited to take part in this study because you are a female refugee. You can take part if you are a woman aged 25-45 years, with legal-status B, F, N, S or L under the Swiss Government, and currently in an intimate relationship. 12 participants will be selected

Participant Information Sheet Guidance (plus COVID-19) V2.0 29.06.2021 Page 1 of 7

Appendix C: Consent Form Example


UCLan

Participant Consent Form

Version number & date: V2.0.02.07.2021
 Research ethics approval number:
 Title of the research project: Me, Ours, Theirs: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of the Interconnected Themes in Coping, Intimate Relationships and Culture in Female Refugees in Switzerland
 Name of researcher(s): Allison King

Please

initial box

1. I confirm that I have read and have understood the information sheet dated [01/07/2021] for the above study, or it has been read to me. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily. ☐
2. I understand that taking part in the study involves an interview which will last 60 minutes and will be audio recorded. ☐
3. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to stop taking part and can withdraw from the study at any time without giving any reason and without my rights being affected. In addition, I understand that I am free to decline to answer any particular question or questions. ☐
4. I understand that my participation in the research study is not related to support services provided by Integration Aargau ~~Anlaufstelle~~ (AIA) and my participation or withdrawal from the study will not impact on my access to support services. ☐
5. I understand that I can withdraw from this study at any time. If I withdraw from this study I have the option to retain my data for use of this project, or within a one month period after the interview, all data obtained from my interview will be destroyed. ☐
6. I understand that the information I provide will be held securely and in line with data protection requirements at the University of Central Lancashire. ☐
7. I understand that personal information collected about me that can identify me (Le audio-recordings of interviews), will not be shared and interview will be anonymised during transcription. All study data will be anonymised. Names of participants will be not appear in thesis or reports resulting from this study and all personal details will be removed. ☐
8. I understand that as appropriate in the qualitative approach using IPA, direct quotes from participants will be used in the publications of this research, however there will be no identifying details in the publications or the write up. ☐

.. . . .

Appendix D: Debrief Letter Example

Thank you for participating in the research.

The information you have provided will assist in developing an understanding of Coping, Intimate Relationships and Culture in Female Refugees in Switzerland. This project is intended to investigate and contribute to improving knowledge in this area and to contribute to future studies and psychosocial support for female refugees in Switzerland. It is anticipated that these findings will assist our understanding of the issues facing refugees and potentially enhance adjustment, well-being and inform appropriate care and interventions. Furthermore, information from this study may help research in this area, particularly in psychotherapy and psychology.

The results from this research may also be presented at conferences and in academic journals, in the form of articles and a thesis. All data will be fully anonymized so your comments will not be identifiable. If you have an interest in this area, or require further information please contact arking@uclan.ac.uk for further information.

A list of Free Telephone Counseling Hotlines in Switzerland is provided here for you to use should you feel distressed or need further help/counseling after the interview:

1. Dargebotene Hand (Extended Hand) via telephone, e-mail, or chat (telephone 143, www.143.ch) and is a helpline services available 24/7 offering experienced counsellors providing anonymous psychosocial support to refugees in Switzerland who feel distressed and need to talk to a counsellor outside of regular business hours or on weekends.
2. The National Suicide & Crisis Lines and La Main Tendue is available 24/7 and have a hotline +41 (0) 27 321 21 21: La Main Tendue is available is Switzerland's largest telephone help support and

guarantees callers complete anonymity 24 hours a day three different languages. Tel 143 is an emergency number, not only for refugees in crisis, but also for women and men of all ages with everyday worries.

3. Schweizerische Flüchtlingshilfe (SFH) Tel.+41 (0)31 370 75 75 is available online 24/7 and by telephone 8:00 am – 6:00 PM daily- providing the guaranteed right to anonymous protection from refugees in Switzerland.
4. Additionally further psychosocial support and counselling with trained psychologists, therapists and doctors is available via PAXION +41 79 287 07 02
5. IAP Institut für Angewandte Psychologie ZHAW + 41 58 934 83 30 This counselling support for refugees is provided free of charge and available from 8: 00 am – 6:00 pm daily
6. Psyc4Asyl and AIA provide integration support, psychosocial support and counselling with clinical psychiatrists psychologists, therapists and doctors is available via are available at Telefon +41 (0)62 823 41 13

Appendix E: Data Protection Example

Legal and Governance: Data Protection Checklist



Data protection checklist: Teaching, research, knowledge transfer, consultancy and related activities

All activities which involve personal data of any kind, in any way, must comply with data protection legislation (the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA)). This checklist outlines the requirements of the data protection legislation and the measures you must take when processing personal data; it also provides a mechanism for recording the steps you will take to ensure the personal data you are using are safeguarded and the reputation of the University is upheld.

Ensuring personal data are processed transparently, fairly and lawfully with due regard for individuals' privacy and ensuring that personal data remain secure are paramount. Demonstrating that we have considered the requirements of data protection legislation when conducting our activities will provide assurances to students, employees, research participants and business partners that their personal data is protected at UCLan. Organisations can be fined up to €20 million or 4% of global annual turnover for breaches of the GDPR; therefore it is important that we get it right from the outset. If it is possible to use anonymised data so that individuals cannot be identified from it and still achieve your aims, this is always the preferred method of operating. Truly anonymised data (which cannot be reconstructed or linked to any other data you hold or may hold in the future to enable you to identify individuals from it) does not constitute personal data because it cannot be used to identify individuals.

Section 1: Does my activity involve personal data?

What is personal data?

Personal data is data relating to a living individual who can be identified from those data (or from those data and other information in our possession or likely to come into our possession).

Personal data can be factual (such as name, address, date of birth) or can be an opinion (such as a professional opinion as to the causes of an individual's behavioural problems or a response to a survey question). Voice recordings are personal data because the individual can be identified from his or her voice. Information can be personal data even if it does not include a person's name or other obvious identifiers. **Example:** a paragraph describing a specific event involving an individual or a set of characteristics relating to a particular individual may not include their name but would clearly identify them from the set of circumstances or characteristics being described or represented.

If you are unsure whether or not your activity involves personal data, please contact the Information Governance team to discuss on DPFOIA@uclan.ac.uk.

More information about personal data is available in the Data Protection Policy.

Appendix F: Interview Topic Guide Example

INTERVIEW TOPIC GUIDE & QUESTIONNAIRE

MAIN QUESTION - SITUATION, CONTEXT BACKGROUND	POSSIBLE PROMPTS
Can you please begin by telling me about your experiences since coming to Switzerland?	1. Tell me about your experiences being displaced? 2. Tell me about your experiences when you realized you were coming to Switzerland
What is daily life like for you? How do you feel about being resettled?	1. Tell me about the daily challenges for you in Switzerland 2. Contrast questions: 'what is the difference between a good day and a bad day for you?'
Tell me about any challenges you have faced? What do you do to overcome the challenges? What helped? How did you face them? Can you tell me about most challenging thing for you during your resettlement process? Can you tell me about positive experiences you have had since coming to Switzerland?	1. Tell me about what has helped you? 2. How did this affect you? 3. What has helped or supported you? 4. How did it improve your well-being?
How would you describe your relationships with your partner/significant other?	1. Descriptive Question: 'can you tell me what your relationships looks like?
Have you noticed a change in your relationship with your partner post-settlement?	1. Evaluative: 'how do you feel after a good/bad in the way you relate to your significant others after resettlement?' 2. How has this affected you and your significant other
Can you tell me about how the move to Switzerland has impacted your relationship?	1. How was your relationship affected by the forced migration 2. What has affected your relationship the most? 3. Positive/negative impacts on your relationship and how that makes you feel?
Tell me about your experiences being displaced and how that relates to your culture and your experiences? How does that make you feel?	1. How are you impacted by the cultural shift / change? 2. What has been the most challenging?
How does your culture influence your daily life and relationship?	1. How did this affect you?

Appendix G: Information Flyer

DO YOU WANT TO TALK ABOUT YOUR EXPERIENCES?



**University of
Central Lancashire**
UCLan

Student Researcher: Allison King, Professional Doctorate Candidate , MSc, MBA, UCLan

If you are a woman 25-45 years, in an intimate relationship with legal-status B, F, N, S or L you may take part in this study. If you do not meet the criteria above you are ineligible to participate in this project

A 25 CHF gift certificate will be provided after the 1 hour interview.



ABOUT THIS STUDY

This is a research study into the coping experiences of women who are refugees. If you are willing to take part, you will be invited to be interviewed. The interview will take 1 hour and involve you talking about your experiences as a refugee moving to/living in Switzerland, the impact on your relationship, culture and what helped you in coping.

This study focuses on the perspective and experiences of female refugees. It aims to provide information that will help other refugees in the future, and to further understand how to support and meet displaced individuals needs. It will also add to scientific and psychological literature around displacement, coping, relationships and culture. If you are interested in taking part or would like more information please contact or take a contact slip

Appendix H: Data Analysis Example

Excerpt from Data Analysis Table

Popular Count	Count - Number of times theme appears	Preliminary Name of Experiential Statement	Step 5 Preliminary naming the PETS	Primary Colour	Relationship Link 1st	Relationship Link 2nd	Preliminary Experiential Statements Connections (Step 4)	Connections found green when contains Subs ES	Connections Blue when is a Sub ES	TOTAL number times connected	Step 4 Verified connections	relevant quotes found	Interview (s) found & Percentage	Possible Experiential Statements
Coping														
1	321	Coping Strategies					Dyadic Relationships; Rollercoaster Relationships; Integration Negativity	Major for many sub ES or linked (1) Psychosocial support Sub ES (2) Religion (3) Culture (relationships & ...)	Sub under conceptualized cultural reality	7	(1) Psychosocial support Sub ES (2) Religion (3) Culture (4) Dyadic Relationships (5) loss of time & Age (6)	See word document a lot of quotes for each sub ES	All, 100%	A common emotional consequence of the flight from the respective countries was fear, hopelessness, worry, anxiety, and stress. This resulted in a wide range of coping strategies employed by each ref. These included Psychosocial support; Denial or Suppression/Avoidance; Helping others; Religion as Culture; Inner strength and Resilience; Goal creation; Keeping things private (could be suppression of feelings); ...
N/A	N/A	Multiple Coping Strategies Listed					A. Psychosocial support; (has sub ES) + B. Denial or Suppression	See word document and mindmap for all links	A. Psychosocial support; (has sub ES) + B. Denial or Suppression - a. Avoidance; - b. Keeping things private	24	A. Psychosocial support; (has sub ES) + B. Denial or Suppression - a. Avoidance; - b. Keeping things private	See word document very important coping strategies listed here with information in word doc	N/A	A. Psychosocial support; (has sub ES) + B. Denial or Suppression - a. Avoidance; - b. Keeping things private; - c. ...
21	74	Dyadic Relationship (sub ES under rollercoaster relationships)					Strongly linked to Rollercoaster relationships, Dyadic Relationship / Dyadic coping - happiness and also linked to Coping		Sub under coping; Sub under rollercoaster relationships and coping	2			33% 12, 9, 7, 6	Dyadic Relationship: It is important to note that the experiential theme of Dyadic relationships coping strategies, as well as rollercoaster relationships are closely related. In these interviews, the women frequently acknowledged the importance of their relationship in coping in both positive and negative ways (negative captured in roller coaster relationships experiential statements). With regard to the Dyadic relationship experiential theme, I have selected the positive elements (in contrast to the roller coaster) based on the assumption that romantic relationships are based on love, trust, intimacy. In this ES, there appears to be some variation among the women based on their religion and religious dimensions. Religion is closely related to coping mechanisms and cultural consequences as experiential statements, according to the women interviewed. Several of the women who mentioned religion emphasized the negative aspects of their culture. While some women indicated that they were not religious at all, the majority indicated that they had a religious affiliation. Some participants noted:
9	169	Religion					Linked to ES coping mechanisms and cultural consequences		Sub under coping; Sub under cultural reality Sub under relationships	4			50% 12, 11, 10, 9, 8, 4, 2	Conceptualized cultural reality / Cultural Consequences from old and new: Culture plays a significant role in determining how refugees women cope, integrate, and adjust to their new environment. It is the purpose of this experiential statement to explore conceptual paradigms for understanding how the different cultures of these women influence their coping, integration, relationships, lifestyles, and associated social pathways. Interrelationships between experiential statements are also highlighted. In addition, the interviewees were susceptible to the influence of stigma and culture. Women brought with them the stigma of social status and cultural norms that influenced their decisions in Switzerland. For these women both before and after migration, culture
2	268	Conceptualized cultural reality / Cultural Consequences from old and new					Linked to Cultural diversity, Coping, Rollercoaster relationships; Integration; Grief; Social Stigma Multiculturalism, and multiracial challenges	Major for many sub ES or linked (1) Burden on women (2) Social stigma, (3) Integration (4) Religion (5) GBV, acculturation orientations, (6) women on mute (7) Discrimination (8) coping (9) social identity	Sub under coping and relationships and its own culture and integration	16		Interview 12 184 – 202 "Before, when followed the Islam culture in Turkey, and in Turkish culture, a husband don't help with children.... but now in Switzerland, my husband helps me much with my son. In Turkish	All, 100%	
15	139	Psychosocial support or Social support networks					Linked to loss of time; Integration; racism & discrimination		Sub under coping	1			83% 12, 10, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1	Psychosocial support or Social support networks The purpose of this ES is to examine the feedback refugee women regarding the psychosocial support they received or did not receive in Switzerland these interviews, psychosocial support is defined as the support provided at the local (Gemeinde), regional (Kanton Aargau), and federal (Swiss plus UN) levels. It includes all community, church, family and support activities, such as German lessons, financial assistance, social networks, and in child-free spaces. The Psychosocial interventions were often mentioned by the women interviewed as being

Appendix I: Ethics Form Example

Does any part of your research take place outside of the UK?		☒
Does the research deliberately include participants from any of the following groups:	• pregnant women?	☐
	• children aged five or under?	☐
	• adults who lack the capacity to give informed consent?	☐
Does the research include medical intervention involving:	• investigating a medical device?	☐
	• a clinical trial?	☐
	• contraception?	☐
Does the research include more than 5000 participants?		☐
Is the research to be carried out by other organizations where the University is required by contract to provide insurance cover for the research if it proceeds?		☐
1.1 Project Type:		
☐ Staff Research	☐ Masters by Research	☐ Taught MSc/MA Research
☐ Commercial Project	☐ MPhil Research	☐ Undergrad Research
	☐ PhD Research	☐ Internship
	☒ Professional Doctorate	
1.2 Principal Investigator:		
Name	School	Email
Maire Percival	Community Health and Midwifery	MPercival@uclan.ac.uk
1.3 Other/Co- Researchers / Student:		
Name	School	Email
Rebecca Nowland	Nursing	RNowland@uclan.ac.uk
Allison King	Community Health and Midwifery	arking@uclan.ac.uk
	Choose an item.	
1.4 Project Title: <i>Mine, Ours, Theirs: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of the Interconnected Themes in Coping, Intimate Relationships and Culture in Female Refugees in Switzerland</i>		
1.5 Proposed Start Date:		
13/09/2021		

Appendix J: COVID-19 Research Participant Pre-Visit Check

COVID-19 Research Participant Pre-Visit Check

To prevent the spread of COVID-19 and reduce the potential risk of exposure, we are asking participants to complete a COVID-19 Pre-Visit Check before any study-related visits and in-person interactions can take place. You will be asked to read six statements and declare that none of the statements apply to you. On the day of your study visit a member of the research team will record your name and contact number for the purpose of facilitating contact tracing by the **BAG**. Please refer to the Participant Information Sheet for further information.

If any of the statements are applicable to you, we will need to cancel and reschedule the study visit for a later date and ask that you follow the Federal Office of Public Health (FOPH) BAG

Please read the following six statements carefully:

1. I have knowingly been exposed to someone with COVID-19 or displaying COVID-19 symptoms in the past 14 days.
2. I have underlying health conditions which could put me at increased risk if I should contract COVID-19. A list of these conditions can be found here.
3. I have at present, or in the past 14 days had one or more of the following flu-like symptoms:
 - Fever
 - Breathlessness
 - Cough
 - Sore throat
 - Loss of sense of smell or taste
4. I have been notified by BAG that I have been in close contact with a person with COVID-19 and have been asked to self-isolate.
5. I have returned to Switzerland in the last 10 days and require to quarantine and/or self-isolate. The list of countries and areas with an increased risk of infection is updated on a regular basis. Anyone arriving in Switzerland from one of these countries or areas must, among other things, go into quarantine : FOPH list of risk countries (admin.ch)
6. I have tested positive for COVID-19 in the last 7 days.

Declaration*Select one option*

I have read the six statements listed above and none of these
statements apply to me: ☐ True ☐ False

Participant Name: _____

Participant Signature: _____

Date: _____

The completed form must be emailed to the researcher [xxxxx@uclan.ac.uk] 24
hours before taking part in the research. Confirmation on whether the study-related visit and
in-person interaction can proceed will be sent following receipt of this form.

Appendix K: UCLAN Ethics Form



UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL LANCASHIRE
Ethics Application Form

PLEASE NOTE THAT ONLY ELECTRONIC SUBMISSION IS ACCEPTED

This application form is to be used to seek approval from one of the three University Ethics Review Panels (BAHSS; Science & Health). Where this document refers to 'Ethics Review Panel' this denotes BAHSS; Science & Health. These Ethics Review Panels deal with all staff and postgraduate research student projects. Taught (undergraduate and MSc dissertation projects) will normally be dealt with via School/Faculty process / committee.

If you are unsure whether your activity requires ethical approval please complete a UCLan Ethics Checklist. If the proposed activity involves animals, you should not use this form. Please contact the Ethics and Integrity Unit within Research Services – EthicsInfo@uclan.ac.uk – for further details.

Please refer to the notes for guidance on completion of the form.

If this application relates to <u>project</u> /phase which has previously been approved by one of the <u>UCLan</u> Ethics Review Panels, please supply the corresponding reference number(s) from your decision letter(s). ONLY REQUIRED FOR PHASED PROJECT SUBMISSIONS	
Previous Ethics Approval Ref No	
Student Registration No	

Appendix L: Worked Examples of Data Analysis

PETs GETs Contextualized Cultural Realities & Gender Implications; Women on mute			
268	Conceptualized cultural reality /Cultural Consequences and Gender	All, 100%	Conceptualized cultural reality /Cultural Consequences from old and new: Culture plays a significant role in determining how refugees women cope, integrate, and adjust to their new environment. It is the purpose of this experiential statement to explore conceptual paradigms for understanding how the different cultures of these women influence their coping, integration, relationships, lifestyles, and associated social pathways. <i>Interrelationships between experiential statements are also highlighted. In addition, the</i>
189	Burden on Women	91% 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12	The burden of being a women: The refugee women in these interviews often talk about the challenges they face as women, and the burden they carry being a woman, in the form of integration challenges, loss of choices, control through culture and male members of their family which force them into difficult situations. Other challenges in recognition of skills and
77	Women on mute	66 % 11, 10, 9, 7, 6, 5, 4, 2	This ES refers to women as being on mute since many women reported feeling as though they lacked a voice. In this case, this ES could be viewed as a subset of the cultural consequences or the ES burden of being a woman. The ES is representative of the fear and insecurity women experience because, in the cases of the two interviewers, they were more likely to have been
130	Gender Based Violence (GBV) possible Subset Burden on women or Conceptualized cultural reality /Cultural Consequences from old and new	50% 12, 11, 6, 5, 4, 2	The interviews have revealed that several women have been exposed to or controlled by gender-based violence. Anger and fear were produced as a result of this. As a theme or subtheme, many women were frustrated by the feeling of gender inequality and the abuse of power and harmful norms imposed by social stigma. One woman reported seeing
130	The power of social stigma on refugee women (possibly a part of ES Conceptualized cultural reality /Cultural Consequences from old and new)	75 % 12, 11, 10, 9, 6, 5, 4, 2, 1	the mother and sister have been sexually abused by the husband of the husband's mother. culture. The stigma of social status and cultural norms travelled with the women and influenced their choices in life. Participants reported that both cultural background and social stigma affected their integration, mental health, relationships, and coping mechanisms. The study revealed that social stigma was linked to cultural differences as well as affecting many coping strategies when making everyday decisions and planning for the future. Even after moving to
160	Better then the alternative/ Is this freedom but at what cost?	83 % 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 9, 10, 11, 12	Kurdish women This experiential statement captures both the psychology of the refugee's flight, as well as the process of thinking at a high level. These interviews highlight the integration challenges, grief, and psychology involved, along with the violent trauma(s) that drove these women to flee their home countries, the journey itself, and the challenges they face upon arrival. <i>Out of the frying pan and into the fire.</i>
169	Religion	50% 12, 11, 10, 9, 8, 4, 2,	In this ES, there appears to be some variation among the women based on their religion and religious dimensions. Religion is closely related to coping mechanisms and cultural consequences as experiential statements, according to the women interviewed. Several of the
264	Rollercoaster Relationships	83 % 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 10, 11, 12	Rollercoaster Relationships: According to the women interviewed, one of the most common patterns is that they perceive their relationship to be an emotional roller coaster. In my opinion, a relationship rollercoaster is characterized by a few emotionally highs that are full

