The University Of Sheffield.

An Ethnographic Inquiry into Being an Asylum Seeker in Japan

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Sheffield
Faculty of Arts and Humanities
School of East Asian Studies

Submission Date
29 September 2020

Acknowledgements

During the years that I spent working on this thesis, many things have changed in my life. Not all of them were good, that must be said. Still, these changes made me the person who I am today. Looking back, I feel that I have grown up with this thesis, and just want to say: I am grateful for the journey.

On this long and arduous journey, many people and institutions have kindly supported me. First and foremost, I would like to thank all my participants/friends in Japan who embraced and trusted me as one of their own. They not only made this research possible, but also carried me during one of the most challenging times of my life. You will be in my heart forever.

I want to thank my supervisor Peter Matanle, who supported and guided me throughout the process, academically and emotionally. He provided me with space and freedom that I need and showed patience when I struggled to find my own pace and voice. I am also thankful to Yu Chen, my second supervisor, for supporting me during the doctoral development process. Onur Unutulmaz, my supervisor in Turkey, has been supportive and encouraging from the early days to the end, and I am grateful for it.

I would also like to thank İbrahim Sirkeci, Sarah Son and Mark Pendleton, the members of the viva committee, for their valuable comments, suggestions and time. It has been my privilege to discuss my thesis with them, and their feedback has been absolutely invaluable.

Throughout my fieldwork, I was fortunate enough to be hosted by Glenda Roberts at Waseda University. Professor Roberts' and Gracia Liu-Farrer's weekly *zemi* discussions provided me with many insights regarding my research and helped me to develop my ideas. Therefore, I would like to thank Prof Roberts and Prof Farrer, as well as my fellow PhD students at Waseda University.

I am grateful to the Turkish Ministry of Education for their support throughout my PhD studies, which made it possible for a working-class child to pursue a PhD degree abroad. I

will be forever indebted to all the Turkish citizens who contributed my education with their elbow grease.

There are other institutions to whom I must express my appreciation for their financial contributions to this research: the School of East Asian Studies' generous 1964 anniversary PhD fieldwork scholarship provided me with relief and vital support during the fieldwork. With their research grant, the Great Sasakawa Foundation enabled me to conduct pilot fieldwork in Japan, which proved to be crucial for the research project. The British Association for Japanese Studies (BAJS) kindly supported me during my final year with a John Crump Studentship. The Politics and International Studies Department at Warwick University provided me with the opportunity to teach, which I appreciated.

Of course, special thanks go to all my friends, who made this ride an enjoyable and unforgettable one. My colleagues at Sheffield helped me to acclimatise to my PhD during the first year. I will miss the fellow research-room residents Misha and Nathalie, and after-drinks friends, Seongjo and Dmitry. Thanks to Sheffield, I gained a lifelong friend, Sinan, who has helped me to develop my ideas throughout these years, and cheered me up all the time.

Warwick Law School became a massive part of my life in the last couple of years, to the extent that I consider myself an honorary PhD student at the department. I thank all the friends who made Warwick home for me: Limia, Sara, Rafael, Simona, Jasmin, Mohammad, Martha and others that I forget to mention.

Even though I was far away, my friends back home and abroad have been a constant source of joy and encouragement. I wish to thank all of them: Abdurrahman, Turgut, Tansel, İlgi, Gamze, Tonguç, Eda, Devran, Okan, Alperen and others. I cannot find the right words to describe the loss of a dear friend, Hülya. I like to believe she is in a peaceful place.

Irem was kind enough to read the final version of the thesis and made many valuable comments. I also would like to thank Is for careful proofreading and increasing the readability of the thesis.

Supervisor of my masters' thesis, Zeliha Etöz will always be a source of inspiration for me, and I want to thank her for everything she has taught and done for me until now. Likewise, Gökçen Alpkaya has been my mentor since I was a young undergraduate student. She tried to teach me not to hurt words or people, a lesson that I still strive to learn. Nazan Çicek was a supervisor in the beginning, and she became a mentor afterwards. Now, she is also a dear friend to me. I would like to express my gratitude to all of them.

My sisters, Sümeyra and Dudu, have been my guardian angels since the day I was born. Thanks to my sisters I gained two older brothers, Mustafa and Ramazan. I could not be here without their endless support, for which I cannot thank them enough. I do not know how to thank my dear nieces Büşra, Zehra and Beyza for being the joy of my life. I cannot imagine my life without them. I am grateful to witness them becoming smart, self-confident and kind young women. Special thanks go to Dudu and Ramazan Kılıçaslan, and Emine and Mehmet Avcı. This journey could not go further without their confidence and support.

My partner Yasemin has been the colour of my life throughout this journey. Everything becomes beautiful and fun when I am with her. Thank you, my cutie pie, for letting me hang around you.

Last but the most important of all, I would like to express my gratitude to my parents, Kezban and İbrahim Avci, to whom I dedicate this thesis. Since my childhood, they made enormous sacrifices to support me, even during the most challenging times. I hope seeing this thesis will make them a little bit proud. This would mean the world to me.

Abstract

Japan has long been under criticism for its low refugee-recognition rate, which has been at the lowest end of the spectrum among developed countries. Especially after providing working rights to legally-staying asylum seekers in 2010, the number of asylum applications has increased sharply. Since it is possible to re-apply for asylum after receiving a negative decision, it is possible to stay within the application process for years. The academic literature on asylum seekers and refugees in Japan has been primarily focused on the country's refugee law and asylum policy; therefore, asylum seekers' experiences have largely remained unexplored. Based on a year-long ethnographic research in Tokyo, including participant observation and in-depth semi-structured interviews, this study explores how asylum seekers experience, negotiate and cope with life within their liminal status as asylum seekers in Japan. Of course, these experiences vary, based on their legal status, personal traits and social networks. While those who applied for asylum while having a legal status enjoy a renewable six-month-long residence, which also provides a work permit, asylum seekers who apply for asylum without having a legal status are faced with restrictions on mobility, employment and even detention. Drawing on asylum seekers' lives in the arenas of detention, work, love and marriage, this study shows how asylum seekers exercise limited yet powerful subjectivity within the Japanese asylum regime. Detention, work, love and marriage are chosen for examination because they represent and constitute the main stages of the experience of being an asylum seeker in Japan. The thesis concludes that the concept of productive liminality encapsulates asylum seekers' experiences in Japan, and it underlines the limits of state power regulating migratory movements.

Declaration

I, the author, confirm that this Thesis is my own work. I am aware of the University's Guidance on the Use of Unfair Means (www.sheffield.ac.uk/ssid/unfair-means). This work has not been previously been presented for an award at this, or any other university.

Yusuf Avci

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List of Abbreviations

ACLA	Administrative Case Litigation Act
CD	Compact Disc
EJICC	East Japan Immigration Control Centre
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
ICRRA	The Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act
JAR	Japan Association for Refugees
JICA	Japanese International Cooperation Agency
MAXQDA	MAX Qualitative Data Analysis
MoJ	Ministry of Justice
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OICC	Ōmura Immigration Control Centre
PhD	Doctor of Philosophy
RECs	Refugee Examination Counsellors
SPtS	Special Permission to Stay
SUV	Sport Utility Vehicle
TIBDH	Tokyo Immigration Bureau Detention House
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
USA	United States of America
UYFI	United Young Formosans for Independence

Chapter One—Introduction

'After all, if there were no borders, there would be no migrants—only mobility'
(De Genova, 2013, 253)

'They say 'either you marry or apply for asylum'. You have three months. They give you three months' holiday visa. In three months you either marry or…'
(Interview with Serkan (25), Ibaraki, 2017) [1]

1.1. Encounters in the Field

I was sitting in front of a big tempered-glass window, which separated the small meeting room, waiting for Halim (mid 30s) to be brought from his room. At that moment, it seemed clear to me that waiting is a fundamental part of the asylum experience—not only in Japan but elsewhere too (Pardy, 2009). At least, the room was cooler than the scorching Japanese summer outside. Taking advantage of a week-long holiday from my Japanese language school, I was staying in a nearby town to visit the detention centre every day during that week. Cycling from the town, passing by rice fields and apple orchards every morning, was a real delight. While waiting for Halim to arrive, I was thinking about the contrast—my beautiful morning route, and then to arrive in this small box-shaped room to have depressing conversations with detained asylum seekers.

My thinking was interrupted when Halim finally arrived, and our precious thirty minutes started. He had been in detention for more than four months. He had thought about going to Europe before coming to Japan, but it was an expensive and challenging journey, including smugglers and dangerous routes. Japan, on the other hand, was a relatively easy route, requiring just a passport for Turkish citizens, as they can obtain a 90-day tourist visa at the port of entry. Halim was from Adiyaman, a city close to the Syrian border in southeast Turkey, and he was claiming that his political ties were putting him in danger. His problems were only exacerbated by unemployment and mounting debts. As we talked, it became

[1] When a participant's name appears in the text for the first time, I write his/her age in parenthesis. If it is not provided, it means that either I do not know the person's age, or the person did not tell me. The information about the age reflects 2017 numbers, the period in which I conducted the fieldwork.

apparent that his motivations for seeking asylum were complex: 'if I hadn't had these debts, I wouldn't stay here even an hour'. Halim had been working as a construction worker in Turkey, but it was not easy to find work, for which he was blaming Syrian refugees:

> There is no work. This Syria[n issue] just destroyed Turkey. There are too many Syrians. Maybe there are not too many around your side [of the country][2], but there are millions in our region. We can't make money in any job. East[ern Turkey] is finished.

Even before coming to Japan, he had not been able to afford to the pay the rent on his house for months and was grappling with debt. On top of everything else, Halim's baby—born while his father was in detention—had a medical condition. Halim was waiting restlessly for provisional release (*karihōmen kyoka*). Even though he was forbidden to work, in addition to many other restrictions, Halim was hoping to find work under provisional release, thanks to people he already knew before taking the journey to Japan. However, his cautious optimism was not preventing him from protesting the conditions of detention and problems of seeking asylum in Japan. Smoking cigarettes inside the detention centre was forbidden that summer and, according to Halim, it was just part of a bigger picture of the asylum regime in Japan:

> … [regardless of the reason] an asylum application wouldn't be recognised here. Because it's all lies. These people don't have a system, law. For instance, they banned smoking. If you are a passive smoker…. It's forbidden inside, right? Then make an open area! Like this room, [but] with an open roof. Make an open area like those in Istanbul or France. This is not torture, but this is psychological torture. [They say] 'Nobody should come here'. If you think about it, they're right: [Because] if there is no human right somewhere, you shouldn't go there, but I came because of desperation. Otherwise, I would go to France. I would go to Germany or somewhere.

[2] My hometown, Balikesir, is a city in Western Anatolia. This part of the country is seen as the most developed region, including industrial cities like Izmir, Bursa, Izmit and Istanbul.

Halim was not the only person thinking like this; I heard similar words from other people around me every day.

After finishing a long day meeting detainees, I cycled back to the town where I was staying. There were not many places to eat there, so I decided to go to the small shopping centre to eat kebab. Surprisingly, there was a small kebab van parked in front. It was also an opportunity to talk with the owner, Serkan (25), a Turkish asylum seeker, who was on a renewable six-month-long designated activities visa. Serkan had applied for asylum after entering the country as a tourist with a ninety-day-long temporary visitor visa. His asylum application was based on a dramatic story about Serkan having sex with a girl, and the possible repercussions of her family's reaction, but this was a fiction: 'You say something just for the sake of formality. Like 'I came because of this problem''.

After working odd jobs in Tokyo and Gunma, Serkan bought a custom-built kebab van, thanks to his Filipino partner, Tala, who financially supported his enterprise. After the first kebab van, she even supported him to buy a second one. Serkan moved into her house, and was not paying any rent. In many ways Tala rescued him, and he was not shy to admit it:

> *Serkan*: Eventually, my current partner, I met her. She helped me. She rescued me. I mean, she pulled my life together, my current partner. She was looking after me… Really, I was a ruin.
>
> *Yusuf*: Did she lend you money or help you with your business?
>
> *Serkan*: [She] lent [me] money. [She] sent money to my family. [She] rent a house, paid my rent. [She] found a job [for me]. Many [things].

At that time, Serkan was thinking about buying more kebab vans. Apart from his business plans, he was doing well enough to be able to invest money in an expensive racing car. He was showing me videos of himself driving a shiny car on a racing track with his Japanese friends. For me, his life was in stark contrast to what I had seen and listened to earlier that day. When I asked if he was having any problems as an asylum seeker, he could not find any, except travel restrictions:

Yusuf: So, you only go and renew your [designated activities] visa?

Serkan: I only go for renewal, no problem. If you think about it, I live like a Japanese. Among the people who applied for asylum, only Kurds are a bit… How can I say? They have problems like 'We don't have anything', 'We can't find jobs'. It's a lie. Some places don't hire [people] on asylum visa, but you can work in most places, bro. Like, as an asylee, everything is on my name here. Sales permission, health permission… Everything is, I mean, normal. If you don't make trouble…

Yusuf: Do you have any problems because of [your] asylum application? Or any disadvantage?

Serkan: I mean, the only problem is that you can't visit your country. You know, you can't go and see your family.

Serkan's experience of being an asylum seeker in Japan could not be more different from Halim's. During that day, therefore, I saw two men at very different stages of seeking asylum in Japan. Even though they were just ten kilometres away from each other, they were living in different realities, at least at that moment. It is essential to be cautious here, because Halim was probably going to start working after being granted provisional release. It is not surprising in Japan to see news about asylum seekers working without work permits, even on public projects (Wilson et al., 2016; Osumi, 2018).

In general, it is almost traditional for international media outlets to publish articles (Chan, 2018; Katz, 2020) and news (Harding, 2017; McCurry, 2018) about Japan's low refugee-acceptance rate, especially around February every year, when the Ministry of Justice publishes the previous year's immigration statistics. These articles reflect meagre recognition numbers, which is a fact; for instance, Japan's refugee recognition rate was around 0.4% in 2019, and this number was considerably higher than in 2017 when it was around 0.1%. In 2016, Germany's recognition rate was around 41%, and Britain's recognition rate was around 21%. However, the Japanese government rejects these comparisons, emphasising that most people seeking asylum in Japan originate from countries with a low

rate of asylum application elsewhere (Japan accepts far fewer refugees, 2019)[3]. In short, there is an ongoing discussion about Japan's refugee recognition rate.

In addition, Japanese detention centres have, in recent years, received considerable media attention as a result of the prolonged detention time for asylum seekers (Fritz, 2019), hunger strikes (Mesimaki, 2019; Craft, 2019), and deaths within detention centres (Shim, 2019). In fact, Halim's protests reflected a significant problem, and he was not alone in complaining about the conditions of his detention. The threat of detention is like the sword of Damocles hanging over asylum seekers' heads, and it represents the hardest part of the asylum journey. However, like Serkan, some are not subjected to detention. There are also those who are released within Japan, like Halim. Detention, therefore, is only part of the story.

Working, and before that finding a job, are crucial for all asylum seekers to survive in an expensive country like Japan. Of course, it is not uncommon for many people to walk the shoreline of legality when it comes to working. Consequently, there is a continuous negotiation between asylum seekers and governmental agencies about legality. Social networks, personal characteristics and legal status all play essential roles in asylum seekers' success. However, as with Serkan's story, miracles happen. It is not uncommon to hear a success story of an otherwise miserable asylum seeker involving a Japanese woman. However, marriage is by no means an easy decision, and this is true for asylum seekers too. Matrimony is also about masculinity, religious and cultural identity, and arguably legal status. Even though detention occupies more space in the media, it only shows one aspect of asylum seekers' lives and struggles in Japan.

Actually, from a more general perspective, the legal limbo in which asylum seekers live in Japan has been a constant source of criticism (Nikolau, 2016; Ekin, 2017; Brasor, 2019; Ida, 2019). Taking account of the fact that asylum seekers live in this perpetual limbo, David Slater (2019) observes that asylum seekers have to walk a 'circuitous path' in Japan.

[3] For all newspaper articles without a named author, the title of the article is used for citation, as per Harvard Referencing Style.

By focusing on the experiences of Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers from Turkey, my aim with this thesis is to explore how asylum seekers experience, negotiate and deal with different stages of the circuitous path of seeking asylum in Japan. In so doing, I examine the following research question: *How do Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers experience, negotiate and cope with life, within their liminal status as asylum seekers in Japan?*. By answering this question, this thesis explores the lived experiences of Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers within the Japanese asylum system, and demonstrates their resilience and courage. As an ethnographic inquiry, providing in-depth insights into the lived realities of Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers in Japan constitutes the core contribution of this research.

Of course, it is essential to locate this research within the literature of migration studies, and specifically, forced migration studies in Japan. To this end, I will critically engage with the literature in the following section, to explore the existing literature and how this research can find its place within it. Then, I will discuss the theoretical framework of the thesis. By introducing the main concepts of the research, this section also highlights the conceptual contributions of the research. In the following section, I briefly discuss terminological issues to clarify conceptual ambiguities. Finally, the last section of the chapter outlines the chapters, and provides a map of the thesis to guide the readers.

1.2. Locating the Research within the Literature

Despite its long history of migration, until recently Japan was not generally regarded as a country of migration, either by the public or the academic world. Although academia overcame this 'myth', it is still reflected in the opinion of the Japanese government, and the majority of the public. Underestimating migration issues in Japan supports the narrative of a racially and culturally homogenous society (Douglass and Roberts, 2000, 9). However, as clearly explicated by scholars of the field, migration is not a novel phenomenon for Japan (Yamawaki, 2000; Kuwahara, 2005), and neither is Japan a homogenous society (Weiner, 2008).

The narrative of an ethnically homogeneous Japan overlooks many ethnic and

socially-discriminated groups, such as Ainu, Burakumin and Okinawans (Siddle, 2008; Neary, 2008; Taira, 2004). Contemporary Japan cannot be understood by neglecting these groups and their long history in Japanese society. Moreover, understanding Japan without including migration can be misleading, as this fails to acknowledge a fundamental part of its society. Japan's migration history can be traced back (at least) to the end of the Tokugawa era, which permitted foreign settlements in designated areas (Yamawaki, 2000). Koreans, Chinese and Taiwanese were prominent immigrant groups in Japan for a long time, and notably, the number of Koreans reached 2.1 million at the end of the Second World War (Weiner, 1994, 194). The Immigration Control Act, enacted in 1952, considered Taiwanese and Koreans as aliens, and was the legal foundation of migration in post-war Japan (Douglass and Roberts, 2000: 5).

Japan, however, differed from the United States (US) and Europe in its post-war history, as it maintained its rapid economic growth without accepting migrant workers until the 1980s (Weiner, 2000). Even this assertion, however, has been challenged by Morris-Suzuki (2010), who emphasised that even before the 1990s, irregular migrant labour played a vital role in Japanese economic growth.

In the 1980s, Japan became more attractive to migrants—primarily due to labour shortages, which affected small and medium-sized enterprises and large companies. As a consequence, the number of migrants, both regular and irregular, increased steadily from the 1980s. Between 1983 and 1993, the number of foreign residents increased by 62% and reached 1.3 million. Additionally, the number of irregular migrants was approximately 300,000 (Goodman et al., 2003). With the number of migrants rising, the Japanese government revised the Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act (ICRRA) in 1989, implemented from 1990 onwards (Kondo, 2015).

The new immigration law was a response to new migrant flows, but it was not meant to officially open the door to unskilled migrants to resolve the severe labour shortage. On the contrary, officially speaking, it firmly closed the front door for unskilled migrants. However, through side and back doors, immigration laws resourced the Japanese economy's unskilled

labour demand. First of all, mainly Brazilian, but also Peruvian and Bolivian descendants of Japanese emigrants, known as *Nikkeijin,* were entitled to long-term residency without working restrictions. Second, through changes to the trainee programme in 1993, the immigration law turned into a way of importing unskilled workers (Yamanaka, 2008). In addition to these 'side doors', there was an increase in the number of irregular migrants—representing the 'back door'.

In academia, these 'newcomers' (Gaynor, 2016) were primarily studied from the perspective of labour migration. Initially, scholars like Shimada (1994), Komai (1995), Mori (1997), and Sellek (2001) focused on labour migration, the changing dynamics of migration in Japan, and the rights and problems experienced by newcomers. In the 2000s, however, a more nuanced analysis began to emerge. For instance, Brody (2002) and Tsuda (2003) examined 'the return' of Nikkeijin from the perspective of ethnicity, identity and immigration policy. In addition to newcomers like Nikkeijin, Zainichi Koreans (Chung, 2010) were studied, in order to understand citizenship policies and the democratic inclusion of immigrants in Japan. Similarly, Shipper (2006) described how immigrants and Japanese activists worked together to create a more democratic and inclusive society through multiculturalism. This list could be extended—but the critical point is that the increasing number of immigrants in the 1990s opened new avenues for researching migration in Japan.

In terms of asylum seekers and refugees, as will be explained in detail in Chapter Three—Asylum Seekers and Refugees in Japan, there were occasional arrivals of political refugees from China and Korea—but Indochinese refugee arrivals starting from the mid-1970s were those of the first large-scale refugee movement in Japan. Their arrival also became a basis for the development of the asylum regime in Japan. In this respect, Japan's accession to the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol [hereafter the Convention and the Protocol] cannot be understood without considering the arrival of a relatively large number of Indochinese refugees. It is therefore not surprising to see studies examining various aspects of Indochinese refugees' arrival and accommodation in Japan. In her thesis on Burmese refugees, Banki (2017) compares Burmese asylum seekers' and refugees' transnational political activism in Japan and Thailand. Koizumi (2015), on the other hand,

focuses on the local integration of Burmese asylum seekers in Shinjuku, Tokyo. Although descriptive, this research provides information about the community by integrating asylum seekers' voices.

More importantly, Koizumi makes an observation about the literature—with which I agree—claiming that the literature on refugees in Japan 'has mainly focused on the analysis of legal issues and the application process itself' (2015, 241). Indeed, explaining and exploring the refugee recognition system from the application process to judicial review has been a central theme in the literature (Yamagami, 1995; Abe, 2003; Obi, 2003; Arakaki, 2004; Dean, 2006; Mackey, 2007; Honma, 2008; Arakaki, 2008; Arima, 2012; Akiyama, 2019). Of course, these studies are valuable, as they help us to understand the development and transformation of the asylum system from a historical perspective. Mackey (2007) examines Japan's refugee determination system within the global context by comparing it with New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the European Union. Similarly, in his seminal book, Arakaki (2008) investigated the refugee determination process in a detailed way from the application to the judicial review process. Based on the analysis of judicial materials, the book presents the problems of the system and offers remedies.

On the other hand, a number of studies (Tarumoto, 2018; Akashi, 2006; Wolman, 2015) have attempted to explain Japan's low refugee acceptance rate. Scholars like Tarumoto (2018; 2014) followed the question of 'Japanese exceptionalism' to explain Japan's (non)compliance with international norms by focusing on refugee policy. According to Tarumoto, Japan's illiberal refugee policy is the result of institutional conservatism within the Ministry of Justice, and a mono-ethnic understanding of citizenship. In the same vein, Akashi (2006) supports Tarumoto, and concludes that institutional interests are the main reasons for Japan's strict refugee policy. Wolman (2015) adds more, explaining 'non-compliance', such as the regional environment, 'and lack of strong pro-compliance pressure from UNHCR and international NGOs' (2015, 427).

In connection with the non-compliance literature, several studies have explored the NGOs, national and international agencies and grassroots movements working with and for

refugees and asylum seekers in Japan (Kuroda, 2003; Kalicki, 2019; Flowers, 2008). Kalicki (2019) claims that grassroots support for refugees can make Japan more open to them. According to Kalicki, private refugee sponsorship programmes provide an opportunity to move beyond state-centric refugee policy. However, in an earlier article, Flowers (2008) demonstrates that the Ministry of Justice has been careful to protect its hegemonic position over refugee policy. Therefore, it is not easy for the UNHCR and NGOs to be accepted as integrated actors in the policymaking and policy application processes.

Another critical research avenue has been about detention centres, detention practices, and detainees' conditions (Oh, 2017; Yagishita, 2008; Ohashi and Kodama, 2009; Niitsu, 2012; Ichikawa et al., 2006; Miyauchi, 2015). From a legal perspective, Ohashi and Kodama (2009) challenge the government's interpretation of the immigration law, and claim that detention should only be exceptional. Miyauchi (2015) and Oh (2017) examine aspects of the detention centres, such as health issues, and provide information about the provisional release system and its application. On the other hand, Yagishita (2008) and Ichikawa et al. (2006) demonstrate the effects of detention on detainees. Even though they are not exclusively about asylum seekers, these studies show the long-term psychological effects of prolonged detention.

Since 2010, the Japanese government's decision to start a pilot resettlement programme has become a new research area. As a policymaker, Hashimoto (2013) was involved in the design process of the resettlement project, and she offered an overview of the programme. In her review (2013) of the pilot resettlement programme, she suggested that Japan learn from its history, but also consider learning from other countries and be patient about the integration process. This view is shared by others (Takizawa, 2015). In a similar study, Treviranus and Törngren (2015) evaluated the application of the resettlement programme and conducted interviews with government officials, local representatives, NGO officers and resettled refugees. According to the research, even though refugees found employment and housing, most of them still felt insecure. Also, language was continuing to be a significant problem, limiting refugee integration into Japanese society.

Lastly, a relatively small body of literature has focused on the lived experiences and everyday lives of asylum seekers and refugees. Even though there are exceptions (Treviranus and Törngren, 2015), most of the studies mentioned above have been based on document analysis and, in some cases, judicial materials. The following studies are, however, methodologically different within refugee studies in Japan, as they are usually based on qualitative research, such as interviews and observation. For instance, based on interviews, Koizumi (2015) explores the coping mechanisms of Burmese asylum seekers in Tokyo and emphasises the importance of ethnic networks in the absence of formal support mechanisms. In this respect, Koizumi's analysis confirms Banki (2006), as she states, 'Burmese refugees in Japan are able to pursue livelihoods largely because of the Burmese community's strength' (2006, 343). These studies show the importance of legal status and ethnic community for survival.

However, specifically drawing on the second generation of Vietnamese refugees in Osaka and Kobe, Takazawa (2010) demonstrates that even recognised refugees experience educational, economic and identity problems. In order to overcome these, the research highlights the importance of Japanese language skills, especially for integration into Japanese society. Similarly, Suzuki (2003) focuses on Cambodian refugees in Japan to understand the inter-generational problems between the first and second generation. She argues that the tragic experiences of war and of being a refugee have become an obstacle for communication between the generations. Both studies are valuable, as there is still little research on the experiences of second-generation refugees in Japan.

Kurdish asylum seekers have also been under scholarly attention. Even though Kurdish asylum seekers have been recognised as refugees in most European countries, and in Canada, Australia and New Zealand, Japan has never recognised any Kurdish asylum seeker as a refugee. Fujibayashi (2018) uses 'analytical liberalism' as a framework to connect domestic and international politics and explain why. According to this explanation, under internal and external pressure, the Japanese state has developed a strategic path of not recognising Kurdish asylum seekers as refugees, but providing residency status to some on humanitarian grounds. However, only a tiny group has received residency permission under

this strategy. Consequently, most Kurdish asylum seekers are left in a legal limbo:

> […] Japan's never hosting any Kurdish asylum-seeker as an official refugee result from the strategic calculations of the state's preferences, stemming from the state-society relations depending on the context of domestic and international politics. In contrast to the lofty aim of international refugee regime of protecting all of the world's refugees beyond the limits of world politics and state sovereignty, the opposite results have been reproduced, and thus the emergence of legal limbo of Turkish Kurds in Japan can be a textbook case to represent the structural failure of international refugee regime, and also sheds light on the existing deficits of international, domestic and local governance for people seeking asylum. (Fujibayashi, 2018, ix)

From another perspective, Tsuchida asks the same question (2018): Why do Kurdish asylum seekers continue applying for refugee status, even though none of them have yet been recognised? The focus of the research is shifted from the state to asylum seekers themselves. According to Tsuchida, there are two reasons for Kurdish asylum seekers to continue coming to Japan, even though they have never been recognised as refugees in Japan. First, since the refugee status determination system allows repeated applications, asylum seekers can extend their stay in Japan merely through reapplication. Second, thanks to the establishment of an ethnic community based on family and relative connections, Kurdish asylum seekers can support each other, even though they do not receive official support from governmental and local agencies.

Tsuchida's research confirms earlier studies (Koizumi, 2015; Banki, 2006) on Burmese asylum seekers, and demonstrates that co-ethnic support mechanisms are also crucial for Kurdish asylum seekers to survive in Japan. However, probably as a result of methodological choices, since all the earlier literature is based on interviews and limited observations, these studies place more emphasis on the 'ethnic community support' narrative. As such, they miss the cracks in this narrative. Undoubtedly, co-ethnic support mechanisms are crucial for asylum seekers, and Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers in particular. As will be seen in the

following chapters, however, not only are co-ethnic connections multi-dimensional, they definitely are not exempt from conflict and exploitation. Therefore, the support narrative is not enough to understand this multidimensional web of relationships.

Additionally, there are Turkish asylum seekers in Japan. Although Turkish and Kurdish asylum seekers have political differences, these two groups also have similarities and connections, as they live and work in close proximity. Even among Kurdish asylum seekers, there are differences and divisions based on identity and politics. However, no single study exists which has taken these nuances into account. Therefore, Kurdish asylum seekers in Japan have been understood as a monolithic community, even though Turkish asylum seekers are a distinct community, and there are various sub-divisions within the Kurdish community as it is observed elsewhere (Sirkeci et al., 2016a, 2-6).

In addition to a one-dimensional understanding of inter-community support mechanisms and a monolithic understanding of the community, existing literature suffers from what is called 'the politics of compassion' (Sigona, 2014). Asylum seekers in general, and Kurdish asylum seekers in particular have been portrayed at worst as victims, and at best as a group of people drifting like sand, without agency. In other words, they are portrayed as passive recipients of institutional decisions and policies. As you will see in the following chapters, however, this is far from the whole truth. Even under the most unfavourable conditions, such as in detention, Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers show their agency capacities in multiple ways, from establishing ties with allies to creatively disrupting disciplinary mechanisms.

The research limitations are also related to the methodological preferences or limitations of earlier studies. Again, as I will discuss in detail in the methodology chapter, my study would have been very different if it had been based solely on interviews and document analysis, rather than participant observation. Igarashi (2014), for instance, attempted to conduct ethnographic research among male Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers, but as a result of gender differences, this attempt was not successful. In my case, as a straight male, I did not have a problem socialising with men, but I could not reach women asylum seekers, which

has therefore become the main limitation of this study. Therefore, in addition to the tendency to choose the less time-consuming path, there are other, more complicated reasons for scholars to choose document analysis and interviews as research methods over participant observation, which is more time consuming and labour intensive. My original study would not have been any different. But thanks to a series of unfortunate events, which will be explained in the following chapter, I found myself in the middle of the community.

Consequently, we still do not have a comprehensive analysis of the experience of being an asylum seeker in Japan. Although there are earlier studies about asylum seekers, no single study has comprehensively explored the circuitous path that asylum seekers walk in Japan. My study will contribute to filling this gap. This will allow us to go beyond policy papers, government statistics and sensational articles. Instead, this research provides a holistic perspective on what it really means to be an asylum seeker in Japan, and explores what those policies, statistics, regulations and numbers actually mean for real people. Therefore, the contribution of this research primarily comes from its comprehensive exploration of Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers' lived experiences in Japan.

Still, it is fair to ask why anyone would be interested in the lives of Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers in Japan. Various answers may be given to this question at different levels. In the most general sense, quite simply: we are curious about other people's lives. That is why, for instance, Joy Hendry, a leading anthropologist working on Japan, subtitled her book on social anthropology 'Other People's Worlds' (Hendry, 1999). Hendry claims that,

> social anthropologists generally share […] an interest in different ways people have of looking at the world they live in. These different ways are not individual idiosyncrasies, but different views of the world learned as people grow up in different societies, or within different groups which make up one larger society. (Hendry, 1999, 2)

I believe this interest goes beyond social anthropology, and is shared by social scientists and Humanities scholars. This study is no exception, and it shares the interest in other people's

lives and worlds.

When a similar *why* question, 'why did you want to climb Mount Everest?', was posed to George Leigh Mallory, a mountaineer who died while climbing Everest, he famously replied, 'Because it's there' (Climbing Mount Everest, 1923). This is even truer for real people. Why do we want to learn about the Lhotsampa people's lives (Pulla, 2016), or why do we want to learn about young black men's lives in America (Wacquant, 2004)? Because they are there, they exist. In this case, 'they' are Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers in Japan. This research provides a glimpse into Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers' worlds in Japan.

There are, of course, more specific answers to this question. This research also offers alternative ways to think about immigrants, asylum seekers and refugees. As of summer 2020, Nigel Farage has been on 'guard duty' at the English Channel (Wanga, 2020) and immigration has been at the centre of politics in the UK for some time (Shabi, 2019). Similarly, in the US, response to President Trump's Mexican/US wall has divided the country (Gramlich, 2019). As for Japan, however, it is argued that Japan's illiberal approach to immigration is one of the critical factors as to 'why populism missed Japan' (Lind, 2018). Still, this is also the reason why the country has been suffering and will continue to suffer from a severe labour shortage (Kamei, 2018). Actually, mobility has become a major issue in politics around the world. Drawing on Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers' experiences, this research offers insights from Japan, especially in terms of how governments' decisions and policies can create unintended consequences.

Even though this research has not been designed or conducted to be part of the policymaking process in Japan, it may be useful for policymakers to understand the on-the-ground realities of high politics. Beyond policymakers, however, Japanese citizens can read it—to understand the lives of the foreigners who are demolishing the house next door, or the person who sells kebab near the train station. I like to believe that reading this research might help Japanese individuals look beyond labels.

This research is also important as it is expanding the geography of Turkish and Kurdish migration literature; therefore, it concerns a sizeable migrant population. According to

official figures, more than 6.5 million Turkish people are living abroad, and 5.5 million of them are in Europe (Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2011). These numbers only reflect the number of Turkish citizens, both Turks and Kurds. Further, Kurdish diaspora also includes Kurds from Syria, Iraq and Iran. Since Kurdish migrants are registered based on their country of origin and not based on their ethnicity, it is not possible to produce an accurate number of the size of the Kurdish diaspora. Still, it is estimated that 1.5 million Kurds live in Europe in 2006 (Mahmod, 2016, 79).

Considering most of these migrants—both Turkish and Kurdish—live in Europe, it is understandable that researchers usually focus on European countries, such as Germany, Finland, Sweden, United Kingdom (Wahlbeck, 1999; Sirkeci, 2003; Baser, 2013; Dedeoglu, 2014; Kaya, 2019). There are notable exceptions, such as Şenay's (2013) research on nationalism and secularism among Turkish immigrants in Australia. By focusing on Japan, a unique destination for Turkish/Kurdish migration, this study expands the field and provides additional insights from the Asia-Pacific region.

Finally, on a theoretical level, as will be seen in the following section, the study advances a new conceptual tool—namely, *the asylumisation of migration*—to explain the transformation of the asylum regime in Japan. Through the ethnographic research of Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers, this research also develops a concept—*the productive liminality*—to explain Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers' lived experiences within the circuitous path of seeking asylum in Japan.

1.3. Theoretical Approach

I first designed this study to be research about irregular Turkish immigrants in Japan. After short period of pilot fieldwork, however, it was clear that the focus of the research had to change, because as of 2015, there were no Turkish overstayers in Japan. One Kurdish informant told me that there are no overstayers anymore because everyone applied for asylum. To be honest, at that time, I did not understand the real importance of this encounter. It was, of course, valuable in the sense that I had to change the focus of the

research. However, it seemed like a practical issue. I did not understand the theoretical meaning of this change; why had my research subjects changed, particularly from being irregular immigrants to asylum seekers? This particular change shows the interconnectedness between these two primarily legal but also socio-political statuses.

Even though I could not see the obvious connection between these two categories, scholars within the literature have explored this connection. In his article about irregular migration, for instance, Düvell (2011, 277) observes a particularly high level of 'political 'harmonisation'' between asylum and irregular migration policies in the European Union. Similarly, in her book *Making People Illegal*, Dauvergne (2008) starts a chapter titled 'Making Asylum Illegal' with a problem: 'how international refugee law has become intertwined with the growing global concern about illegal migration' (2008, 50). These examples indicate a convergence between asylum and irregular migration at the political and legal level.

Of course, these observations reflect transformations in migratory movements around the globe. In order to explain this convergence, Castles and Loughna (2005) used the concept of 'asylum-migration nexus' and summarised the process:

> In recent years, some politicians and other observers claimed that many asylum seekers are economic migrants who are abusing the asylum process. This has led to increasingly restrictive entry rules. The feedback effect of such policies is that many genuine refugees are unable to make claims because they cannot enter a potential country of asylum. This, in turn, has caused some asylum seekers to enter illegally, often using the services of people smugglers. The result is that the distinction between asylum seekers and undocumented migrants has become blurred, leading to the notion of the 'asylum-migration nexus'. (Castles and Loughna, 2005, 40)

However, Castles and Loughna claim that the asylum-migration nexus is not a new phenomenon. At least three stages can be identified. First, refugees were treated like migrant workers after the Second World War, since the Western economies needed labour during the recovery period. Second, after the oil crisis in 1973, Western European countries

decided to close their borders for labour migration, and claiming asylum became the only legal way for migrants with mixed motivations to overcome these restrictions. Third, increasing border controls made it harder and harder for asylum seekers to reach and claim asylum in developed countries. This, in turn, canalised asylum seekers into using the same routes as irregular migrants (Castles and Loughna, 2005, 41). This is why Castles (2007) claims that '[t]o some extent; therefore, the migration-asylum nexus is a self-fulfilling prophecy' (2007, 30).

According to Castles (2007), there are two applications of the asylum-migration nexus. It can be helpful for us to understand,

> the blurring of the distinction between economic and forced migration. This blurring relates to the causes of migration: globalisation, US hegemony and growing North-South inequality give rise to failing economies, impoverishment, weak states, human rights abuse and violence (Castles, 2007, 38).

The concept is also suitable for use by politicians in the global North to portray asylum seekers as 'bogus' economic migrants:

> As such, the migration-asylum nexus becomes a mechanism of knowledge-power, designed to legitimate draconian border control measures and rapid deportation, even to countries with poor human rights records (Castles, 2007, 39).

On the other hand, the asylum-migration nexus focuses on movements from the Global South to the Global North, even though most migration flows are between countries in the Global South. Therefore, the concept of the asylum-migration nexus is limited in scope, as it 'has become associated with a narrow range of problems and policy issues, most notably those related to the arrival of asylum seekers and irregular movements in the industrialised states' (Crisp, 2008, 4). Hence, although the concept can be useful for us to understand the transformation of asylum and economic migration, it is not exempt from criticism (Crisp, 2008; Castles, 2007).

There are, moreover, attempts to expand the scope of the concept of the asylum-migration nexus. In a study on health professionals in the UK, Stewart (2008) demonstrates that 'the asylum-migration nexus operates beyond the irregular domain' (2008, 234). According to this study, even though they can be eligible as displaced people, instead of claiming asylum, most health professionals from conflict regions use other migration routes or options to come to the UK (2008).

Similarly, Soykan (2010) operationalised the concept in order to explain migration movements in Turkey. She argues that—in addition to causes mentioned by Castles—legal, historical and political idiosyncrasies are crucial to understanding the asylum-migration nexus. By emphasising the importance of any local context, and using Turkey as a case, her analysis expands the geographical limitations of the concept.

In order to understand the Japanese case, the asylum-migration nexus can be useful as an analytical framework. I argue that, as a result of immigration law and policy, characteristics of the refugee status determination process, and economic and demographic transformations, an asylum-migration nexus which is beyond the irregular domain is established in Japan in general, and between Turkey and Japan in particular. One step further, I also argue that as a result of the above-mentioned national idiosyncrasies, Japan has experienced *the asylumisation of migration*—meaning a migration route is established through asylum in the absence of any other legal route for migration. By this concept, therefore, I mean the establishment of a specific asylum-migration nexus, which is beyond the irregular domain in Japan.

In a sense, Japan has experienced what Western European countries experienced after closing their doors to labour migration in the 1970s after the oil crisis (Castles and Loughna, 2005). Therefore, as happened in Western Europe in the 1970s, regardless of the motivation for migration, applying for asylum has become the only legal option to stay in Japan. The possibility of reapplication has made it possible to stay within the asylum process for a long time. With the introduction of 2010 revisions, legally-staying asylum seekers became eligible to work legally six months after submitting their applications. This has resulted in the

asylumisation of migration, and blurred the distinction between economic and forced migrants.

As for the causes of this process, we can start with economic and demographic reasons. As a result of the declining birth rate and long life expectancy, the dependency ratio is high, and most companies experience labour shortages, especially in 3D (dirty, dangerous, demanding) jobs. Therefore, there is a growing need for low- and semi-skilled labour (Goodman et al., 2003; Mouer and Kawanishi, 2005), as is the case in other parts of the developed world (Wills et al., 2010). Until 2019, however, the Japanese government was reluctant to introduce a specific visa scheme for low- and semi-skilled migrants. In a sense, Zetter (2007) defined the situation in Japan when he wrote:

> More significantly, labels have become conflated because governments themselves have failed (and are still failing) to develop 'managed migration' policies which distinguish between entry rights for economic migrants and the labour market needs of their global economies, and the fundamentally different entitlements and needs of the more specific category of refugees. (2007, 183)

As noted by Zetter, the proliferation and conflation of labels have been a global phenomenon. A similar point is made by Sirkeci (2009), who questioned the effectiveness of these labels to grasp the motives and realities of international migration:

> Thereby we override the existing typologies (e.g. labour, family, asylum, irregular migration etc.) which have been so far unhelpful in the endeavour of conceptualising the phenomenon. These categories are often reflections of legislation that do not provide clues to help understand migration behaviour. (Sirkeci, 2009, 7)

Indeed, these labels have become increasingly insufficient to grasp the dynamic migration trends and movements around the world. For instance, shortcomings of these labels have been demonstrated in the case of Turkish Kurds' migration to Germany (Sirkeci, 2003a). Based on his research with Turkish Kurds in Cologne, Germany, Sirkeci claims that 'the

typologies used in the literature as well as in policy are in need of revision' (2003b, 203). These observations are also relevant for Japan, as it is challenging to fit the mixed motivations of migrants into one typology.

Still, it is worth answering why migrants apply for asylum, instead of being irregular migrants? Or trainees apply for asylum, rather than remaining trainees or becoming irregular migrants? The concept of the opportunity framework (Sirkeci, 2003a; 2003b; 2005) can be valuable in answering these questions. This concept has been utilised to explain the relationship between conflict, human security and migration:

> Conflict circumstances can act as a direct push factor for migration, but may also serve as an opportunity framework for those already planning to migrate and with no or only loose connections with the conflict itself. (Sirkeci, 2003b, 203)

In the case of Japan, as discussed above, the economic and demographic structure provide an opportunity framework as a pull factor. In addition to these structural facilitators, specific aspects of immigration law and the refugee-status determination-process (which will be examined in detail in Chapter Three—Asylum Seekers and Refugees in Japan) also contributed to the opportunity framework, and therefore to the asylumisation of migration.

Specifically, two regulations contributed to the emergence of the opportunity framework: the possibility of reapplication, and receiving a work permit more than six months after submitting the asylum application, introduced in 2010 by the government. Lastly, the visa waiver agreement between Turkey and Japan, which allows Turkish citizens to visit Japan for up to 90 days as a tourist without a visa, creates a specific opportunity framework for Turkish citizens. In turn, all of these factors contribute to the asylumisation of migration in Japan.

However, as I will explain in the following chapters, being an asylum seeker in Japan is not a smooth ride. It is a long process that most probably ends with an unfavourable decision, since the refugee recognition rate is meagre. Significantly for asylum seekers from Turkey, no Turkish citizens have been recognised to date. The only outcomes are going back to

Turkey, or making a reapplication and starting over again—a process that can take years. At this point, the concept of *liminality* is useful to develop a better understanding of the circuitous path of seeking asylum in Japan.

The concept of liminality was first introduced by anthropologist Arnold van Gennep in the context of transition rites in societies, where he identified three phases of rites of passage in any society: rites of separation, transition rites and rites of incorporation. He also called transition rites a *liminal period* or *liminal rites* (van Gennep, 1960). Van Gennep was probably aware of the potential of the concept; however, it was rediscovered and introduced to the academic world by Victor Turner (Thomassen, 2014, 4-5). Turner emphasised the ambiguous status of the *liminal personae,* as they are 'neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial' (Turner, 1986, 95).

As a concept focusing on transition and in-betweenness, liminality provides a powerful perspective to understand asylum seekers' experiences:

> In anthropological terms, refugees are people who have undergone a violent 'rite' of separation and unless or until they are 'incorporated' as citizens into their host state (or returned to their state of origin) find themselves in 'transition', or a state of 'liminality'. This 'betwixt and between' (Turner 1969) status may not only be legal and psychological, but social and economic as well. (Harrell-Bond and Voutira, 1992, 7)

Indeed, several scholars applied the concept of liminality to capture various aspects of asylum seekers' and refugees' experiences, such as displacement (Malkki, 1995), temporal in-betweenness or waiting (Brekke, 2004), spatial in-betweenness and camps (Mountz, 2011; Conquergood, 1988), mental health (Beiser, 1987) and legal liminality (Menjivar, 2006). Two of the studies mentioned above, Mountz (2011) and Menjivar (2006), are particularly important for this research.

In her article, Mountz defines detention centres as 'liminal spaces of enforcement' (2011, 381), which means 'waiting, limbo, disruption of life before and after and legal and

jurisdictional ambiguity' (2011, 381) for asylum seekers. Chapter Four— of this thesis is focused on the detention experiences of asylum seekers in Japan. Actually, for asylum seekers, detention represents the hardest section of the circuitous path of seeking asylum. Temporal and spatial liminality reaches its peak in detention; however, as will be seen in Chapter Four—, it is more than that—it includes negotiation, manipulation and resistance.

On the other hand, in her seminal article on Salvadoran and Guatemalan immigrants in the US, Menjivar explores 'how this 'in-between' status or liminal legality shapes different spheres of life' (2006, 1000). In order to explain the 'legal limbo' in which Salvadoran and Guatemalan immigrants are situated in the US, Menjivar uses 'liminal legality', a concept that she developed connecting liminality (Turner, 1986) and 'legal nonexistence' (Coutin, 2000). Liminal legality has explanatory power for my study, because some asylum seekers in Japan have temporary residence status, as they are lawfully staying as asylum seekers. However, there are also unlawfully-staying asylum seekers who do not have residence status, as the deportation process is suspended during the asylum process (Hashimoto, 2018a). Therefore, applying for asylum can be considered as a 'legal move' or 'legal strategy' (Coutin, 2000) to be *more* legal, in the spectrum of legal liminality. The importance of this spectrum will be seen in Chapter Four— on the working lives of asylum seekers in Japan.

However, as Menjivar observes in the case of Central Americans, asylum seekers in Japan;

> do not wait passively for their statuses to change. They look for other avenues to become permanent legal residents, such as applying for asylum (see Coutin, 2000b), resorting to marriage, or seeking legalisation through work, but these efforts do not always work out. (Menjivar, 2006, 1008)

The problem is that applying for asylum almost never results in permanent residency in Japan, since the refugee-recognition rate is so low. Legalisation through work is also not possible. It may, at least theoretically, be possible to change residency status from a legally-staying asylum seeker to an employer or investor visa. However, in practice, this is not happening. The last option that Menjivar mentions is marriage, and as we will see in Chapter Six—Seeking Love, Marriage and Asylum in Japan, which considers dating and

marriage, the only other option for asylum seekers in Japan is matrimony. However, as Menjivar reminds us, this option does not always work out (2006, 1008). Nevertheless, an ideal marriage with a Japanese citizen or a permanent resident may open a new path for an asylum seeker.

It is important to emphasise that, even though the concept of liminality has been interpreted as ambiguous in the negative sense, especially in the literature of forced migration, Turner's interpretation was more optimistic: 'Liminality may perhaps be regarded as […] a realm of pure possibility whence novel configurations of ideas and relations may arise' (Turner, 1986, 97). This aspect of liminality has important implications for this study, because Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers' experiences are not limited to horrible detention stories. Even for unlawfully-staying asylum seekers who do not have legal residency, 'legal nonexistence' (Coutin, 2000) does not do justice to their experience. Menjivar (2006) and Coutin (2000) use the concept of 'legal nonexistence' to define 'being physically present and socially active, but lacking legal recognition'. As mentioned before, however, in Japan—as a result of strong community ties, labour market necessities and the possibility of reapplication, even for unlawfully-staying asylum seekers—the emphasis must be placed on being 'socially active', instead of 'lacking legal recognition'. By working, either regularly or irregularly, and looking for marriage if it is possible, Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers' experiences in Japan can be called 'productive liminality'.

This concept has been developed by Beresford et al. to define the political situation, which allows ruling parties to govern for long periods in countries such as Rwanda and South Africa:

> […] we develop the concept of *productive liminality*, to help explain how the ambiguity and malleability of this liminal space betwixt and between authoritarianism and democracy can actively and productively be harnessed by regimes as a means of reproducing power. (2018, 2)

Instead of focusing on the directions of these regimes towards democracy or authoritarianism, therefore, Beresford et al. concentrate on the 'regime liminality, hybridity,

and ambiguity' (2018, 14) which these regimes actively utilise. In this way, they demonstrate that liminal spaces can be active and long lasting, instead of being inactive and transitionary.

Similarly, in this research, I use this concept to explain Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers' liminal yet extended and productive lives in Japan. In the literature, the asylum seeker's liminal status has been associated with waiting, unproductivity, inactivity and unemployment (Brekke, 2004; Brekke, 2010; Taylor and Rafferty-Brown, 2010; Hainmuller et al., 2016; O'Reilly, 2017; Haas, 2017; Bjertrup et al., 2018). Including the adjective 'productive' before liminality, therefore, I aim to emphasis the distinct character of Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers active, lively and productive experiences in Japan.

In her research with asylum seekers in Glasgow, Rotter (2015) makes a similar observation. According to Rotter, asylum seekers in Glasgow define their lives as empty and stagnant when asked. However, based on her observations, she describes this process of 'waiting as affective, active and productive' (2015, 81). Similarly, my participants were also active and productive. The difference, however, was stark. Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers are not 'waiting'. On the contrary, they *live* in this productive liminal zone.

To conclude, this study draws on the concept of the asylum-migration nexus to explain the idiosyncratic nature of asylum and labour migration in Japan, which has resulted in the asylumisation of migration. Asylum can therefore be considered a 'legalising move' (Coutin, 2000) for some asylum seekers in Japan. It does not, however, explain their experience of legal limbo. In order to capture the everyday reality of legal limbo, I employ the concept of liminality (Turner, 1986). Based on the literature of liminality, I then consider the concept of 'liminal legality' (Menjivar, 2006)—this concept is open to development, and I use *productive liminality* to explain the forward-looking approach of Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers.

1.4. Terminology

Since Japan has been a signatory to the Convention and the Protocol since 1982, throughout the thesis I use the term *refugee* as it is defined in the Convention and the Protocol. A

refugee is defined in the Refugee Convention as a person who is:

> owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it. (United Nations General Assembly, 1951)

On the other hand, according to UNHCR (2006), an asylum seeker is defined as:

> An individual who is seeking international protection. In countries with individualised procedures, an asylum-seeker is someone whose claim has not yet been finally decided on by the country in which the claim is submitted.

In official documents in Japan (for instance: Ministry of Justice, 2019a), *nanmin*, which literally means 'difficult people', is used to define the term 'refugee' in Japanese. As for asylum seekers, the term *nanmin nintei shinseisha*, which means 'refugee recognition applicant' and often the shorter version of it, *shinseisha* (applicant) is preferred. However, *higo kibō-sha*, which literally means 'protection applicant', is also used to define asylum seekers, although less frequently.

Earlier in the chapter I use terms such as 'Burmese refugees' and 'Burmese asylum seekers', because the Japanese government recognises some of them as refugees and others are in the process of seeking asylum. In his seminal article, Zetter (1991) demonstrates the power of labelling, as it 'is a process of stereotyping which involves *disaggregation*, standardisation, and the formulation of clear cut categories' (1991, 44). Keeping this reminder in mind, however, we should not forget that 'the state continues to hold great power, as through its laws it delimits, constrains, and affords rights, privileges, duties, and responsibilities (Menjivar, 2006, 1033). These labels indicate the power of bureaucratic classifications. However, I believe scholars should not turn themselves into government agents. Therefore, these concepts or labels should always be read sceptically, in addition to

other labels such as migrant, immigrant, and labour migrant. To demonstrate and raise that conceptual, 'intellectual—and ultimately political' (De Genova, 2002) terminology problem, I sometimes prefer to use 'people' to define asylum seekers, detainees and (im)migrants. Throughout the thesis, I prefer to use 'irregular' to define legally-entangled migrants, instead of undocumented or illegal.

Another important terminological issue is about Turkish and Kurdish asylum seekers and Turkish citizens. 'Turkish' can define Turkish citizens as an umbrella concept. However, it has substantial ethnic implications, especially in a country grappling with problems based on ethnic differences. As a solution, I prefer using 'Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers' when and where something is relevant for both groups. However, I use 'Turkish asylum seekers' or 'Kurdish asylum seeker' if something is relevant to only one of the groups. The term 'Turkish citizens' is self-explanatory, defining all Turkish citizens.

Lastly, this research is almost exclusively about *male* Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers. Unless it is explicitly written otherwise, the phrase 'Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers' should be read with the qualifier of 'male' throughout the text. Obviously, this important factor is more than just a terminological issue, and it will be addressed in the Chapter Two—Methodology chapter.

1.5. Outline of Chapters

This long introductory chapter began with a vignette to demonstrate the intricacies and problems underlying the thesis and its research question. I then discussed the themes and issues with which Japanese migration studies scholars are concerned. Next, in order to locate the research within refugee studies in Japan, I explored the studies in this field. Here, I showed the conceptual and methodological limitations of the existing literature.

Following this, I explained the theoretical framework of the thesis using the two concepts of the asylum-migration nexus and liminality, as well as new concepts, such as the asylumisation of migration and productive liminality. I also discussed the idiosyncratic aspects of the labour market and immigration system which, in general, have contributed to

the creation of an asylum-migration nexus, which in turn creates protracted liminality for Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers in Japan. Lastly, I defined and explained some terminological preferences.

Chapter Two—Methodology is devoted to the research methodology. It begins with a reflexive account of the field, research and life, to show how they intertwine and affect the researcher, and consequently the research itself. The second section (2.2. Ethnography, Fieldwork and Access) presents my understanding of the ethnographic approach and data collection methods that are employed for the research. I then explain the importance of the pilot fieldwork for the research and how I negotiated access in the field.

The next section (2.3. Being an Insider and/or Outsider: Beyond Binaries) discusses the complexities of positionality, focusing on ethnicity, (non)religiosity, class and gender. I discuss how my identity and participants' identities clashed, overlapped, defined and redefined, and how these processes affected my positionality throughout the fieldwork. Section 2.4. Ethical Considerations is concerned with the ethical considerations, such as reciprocity, vulnerability, power dynamics, consent, anonymity and data protection. In this section, I discussed the precautions that I took to protect the participants. However, I also examined the concept of vulnerability.

Chapter Three—Asylum Seekers and Refugees in Japan analyses the transformation of Japanese refugee policy and system from a historical perspective, to understand the development of the system. After a brief introduction, the chapter begins (3.2. The History of Refugee Movements in Japan until the Accession to the Convention and the Protocol) with a focus on political asylees and refugee movements before Japan's accession to the Convention and the Protocol in 1982. The following section (3.3. Japanese Refugee Policy After the Accession to the Convention and the Protocol) is about Japanese refugee policy after the accession to the Convention and the Protocol. Together, these two sections provide a historical background for the research. Having discussed the historical development of Japan's refugee policy, next section (3.4. Refugee Recognition System) explores the refugee recognition system from application to the judicial review process.

Again, this section provides a review of the different stages of the asylum process in Japan.

The last section of the chapter, (3.5. Turkish/Kurdish Asylum Seekers in Japan) is about Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers' journeys within the Japanese migration and asylum regime, starting from the mid-1990s to the present. Here, the establishment of the Turkish/Kurdish community is explored within the broader contextual transformation of Japanese migration and asylum regime. This section, therefore, embodies the previous sections on Japan's asylum history and policies in the case of Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers. This chapter presents a comprehensive review of the history of refugee movements and the asylum system and policy in Japan; moreover, it provides a historical analysis of the Turkish/Kurdish community in Japan. In doing so, it lays the ground for the following chapters.

After establishing the research context, the theoretical framework of the research, the methodology and the historical development of the asylum system in Japan, I begin to present my findings in the following chapters. Based on the data collected through the fieldwork, these three chapters complement each other by focusing on three main aspects of Turkish/Kurdish asylum seeker life in Japan: detention, work, and love/marriage. Detention is an integral part of the asylum seeker's experience, as it is a continuous threat and keeps them in limbo. The following chapter, on work, explores asylum seekers working life in Japan, and investigates the complex relationships between asylum seekers themselves and also their relationship with government authorities. Lastly, the third data chapter aims to understand what marriage means for asylum seekers, and how they navigate love and dating beyond marriage. Taken together, these three chapters provide a comprehensive picture of asylum seeker life in Japan. Below, I will give more details about the content of each chapter.

Chapter Four— explores the most challenging section of asylum seekers' circuitous path in Japan—the experience of detention. The chapter begins by introducing the main characters of the thesis and follows them from the airport to the detention centre. For many Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers, detention becomes their first entry point to Japan after the airport. Still, there are other routes to detention. Therefore, the systemic aspects of the

detention of asylum seekers are addressed before exploring life in the detention centre.

The third section of the chapter examines life in detention from various perspectives, such as temporal-spatial liminality, social networks, discursive conflicts, faces of agency and resistance, and release from detention. To explore life in detention, I start with the temporal-spatial restrictions and demonstrate how these restrictions affect relationships between detainees, volunteers and officials. Then, I explore this complex web of relations vacillating between solidarity, negotiation and resistance. Overall, this chapter explores the detention as a liminal experience and as an intrinsic and most challenging part of seeking asylum in Japan.

Chapter Five—Working as an Asylum Seeker in Japan examines the working life of Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers in Japan on the shores of legality. It starts with the importance of work permits for Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers to find jobs. It then explores how Turkish and Kurdish asylum seekers deal with liminality in everyday life, and how they operate within complex webs of social networks, which can become exploitative and oppressive, as well as supportive and protective. In order to demonstrate how Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers negotiate with legal structures and enforcement, the chapter focuses on their everyday strategies at work. The everyday reality of their liminal legality is, therefore, the centre of this chapter.

Chapter Six—Seeking Love, Marriage and Asylum in Japan looks into intimate experiences, marriage strategies, and the dating lives of Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers. Marriage emerges as the only option to overcome the permanent uncertainty within which asylum seekers are situated by liminal legality. The second section discusses the importance and the meaning of marriage for Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers. Since marriage offers a break-away from the circuitous path of asylum seekers, it is a significant part of Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers' lives in Japan.

Still, Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers assert agency, and demonstrate that there is more than one perspective to take, based on one's concerns. The third section of this chapter explores the Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers' perspectives on marriage. These perspectives reveal

different goals; aspirations and problems, offering insights about Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers lived experiences. The last section follows Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers' dating adventures—which do not conform to the picture of piteous asylum seekers requiring compassion.

Chapter Seven—Conclusion concludes the thesis, by summarising its findings and how these provide a coherent answer to the research question. It also discusses the originality of the thesis by focusing on its contribution to the literature. Lastly, suggestions are made for future research.

Chapter Two—Methodology

'Your life is so boring bro; just reading and writing. I'd be crazy if I were doing that.'
(Hakan, 18, my roommate and a young asylum seeker, Saitama, 2017)

'Actually, I don't want to write about anything. The only thing that I want to do is to sleep. Yeah, I just want to sleep. I want to go back to Turkey. I feel like I'll go mad here.'
(An excerpt from my field diary, Tokyo, 2017)

2.1. Introduction

Tolstoy's masterpiece, Anna Karenina starts with a famous sentence: 'All happy families are alike; each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way' (Tolstoy, 2001, 12). A couple of years ago, Turkish professor Ahmet Çiğdem twisted this famous sentence and tweeted: 'All theses that are finished on time are alike, each belated thesis has its own story'.[4] I could not agree more, and this chapter aims to tell the story of my thesis. The chapter starts with a depressing excerpt from my fieldwork diary, and I chose it because that excerpt perfectly encapsulates my emotional and mental condition during the fieldwork.

Actually it all started before the fieldwork. On 16 July 2016, a coup attempt was organised in Turkey by a group of military officials, who were allegedly affiliated with a religious group (Esen and Gümüşçü, 2017). Even though the coup was not successful, its effects on already weakened Turkish democratic institutions were substantial. Right after the coup attempt, thousands of governmental officials were expelled with successive waves of statutory decrees, including academics and students studying abroad on Turkish government scholarships (Yılmaz and Turner, 2019). At the end of the process, a couple of hundred students' scholarships, in the same scholarship programme as mine, were cancelled.

During the whole process, which spanned more than a year, like many others, I was on

[4] Unfortunately, Çiğdem deleted his Twitter account and this tweet is no longer accessible. After I decided to use his tweet, I asked Twitter users if anyone remembers this tweet; the answer was negative. One of my followers sent my tweet to Çiğdem to ask if he remembers the tweet. Sadly, even Çiğdem does not remember it. I still wanted to include the tweet, but it is not possible to verify the source anymore.

tenterhooks as a result of the possibility of losing my scholarship in the middle of my research. Even though the wave of statutory decrees did not hit me directly, many people—some of whom were close to me—were affected.

I went to Japan and began my fieldwork as planned, but I was in a major depression. This was exacerbated by a serious health problem, which I noticed just days after reaching Japan, even before having a health insurance. As a result, after just three months from my landing in Japan, I decided to go back to Turkey to visit my family. I could not focus on my research anyway; it seemed the right thing to do. After a month, I returned to Japan in February and was ready for a fresh start. However, this time it was my turn to face an inquiry into my right to study. In April, my scholarship payment was delayed a week, and when I tried to reach the officials about it there was no response.

After a couple of restless weeks, I learned that there was an investigation about me; my scholarship was suspended and it was not certain when the investigation would be concluded. From the experiences of other people, I thought that it was almost impossible for me to be acquitted after this point. I also learned that the Ministry of National Education did not initiate the investigation. According to an official that I talked to, the investigation was coming from 'outside'. I was not only about to lose my scholarship, but this could also turn into something far more severe. Ironically, I was in Japan, in a country where I came to conduct research on asylum seekers, and I was on the brink of becoming an asylum seeker myself. The irony was priceless, especially because I already knew that Japan does not recognise more than a fraction of asylum seekers as refugees.

After learning about the investigation, I contacted my supervisor and PGR director to explain the situation. We agreed that I had to finish my fieldwork as soon as possible and then we would wait for the conclusion of the investigation.

In the meantime, I started thinking about what to do. First, I thought about the fate of my PhD. I could stay in Japan for a couple of months to finish my fieldwork and return to the UK. However, I was in my second year, so I had to pay my tuition for the last year, which was around £18,000. I only had enough money to fend for myself for couple of months, so it was

not possible for me to find that amount. Even though I had a visa until February 2020, the university would contact the Home Office when I could not pay the tuition, and I would lose my visa. Eventually the Home Office would deport me.

A second idea came from my partner, who was also starting a PhD that coming Fall. She suggested that we get married to secure a visa as a spouse of a tier 4-visa holder. According to this plan, even though the Home Office would cancel my visa after I failed to pay the tuition, I would be able to stay in the UK. In order to receive a dependant visa for me through her, however, we had to show a certain amount in a bank account. The required amount was around £32,000 for four years, which we did not have. Therefore, this was also not possible.

At this point, I was running out of options to continue my life as a 'high-skilled immigrant'. It was hard to accept, but I would not able to find a job either in Japan or England[5] with visa sponsorship. The feeling of helplessness and unworthiness was immense. Therefore, I reluctantly turned to the idea of seeking asylum and began considering my options.

According to the results of my own research on Japan's asylum policy, Japan was not an option. Since my partner was going to start a PhD in the UK, my second option was applying for asylum in the UK. However, even though the UK's acceptance rates cannot be compared to Japan, I was not sure if my case was strong enough. I heard that the authorities in Turkey were not revealing prosecution cases if the person under prosecution was abroad, in order not to scare them away from returning—when the person landed in Turkey however, the airport police would detain them. Therefore, I would not be able to prove my prosecution case, and being expelled from my scholarship would not be enough to be recognised as a refugee. People expelled by the government were not even able to open a bank account, since the aim was to cause their 'civic death' (Özdemir and Özyürek, 2019), meaning taking away all their economic, social and political life. The intent was to basically reduce them to a 'bare life' (Agamben, 1998).

[5] During the fieldwork, we always referred to the UK as 'England'. Throughout the chapter, therefore, I will use England when I talk about the UK in the context of conversations with my participants.

After thinking about seeking asylum, I realised how tricky it was to 'prove' that you are in danger. I was not skilled enough to find a job and become the high-skilled immigrant that all the receiving countries were looking for. On the other hand, my situation might not be 'bad enough' to be recognised as a refugee. I started thinking about establishing a business in Japan or the UK, but I did not have enough money to invest. Again, I was not one of those millionaires who can buy residence status or even citizenship.

Thankfully, after two months, I received an email from the ministry telling me that the investigation was over and my scholarship would be paid soon. I could not believe it for a while, and it took me a long time to recover from the mental shock, but it was true. Around the same time, I received more good news from Turkey relating to my family and friends. These two incidents, however, changed everything about the research for me—especially the potential impact of losing my scholarship. As I will explain in the section on power relations within the field, it changed my relationships with my participants. In a way, this was my moment of 'going native' (O'Reilly, 2009). Before that, I was engaged in participant observation—after losing my scholarship, I was not doing research anymore, I was just surviving. The research was not my primary concern at this point, I was concerned about my future, which was very bleak at that time, and the research was important only in terms of its possible contribution to my future options.

Before starting the fieldwork, I scrutinised the literature on preparing oneself for the undertaking, but I do not think that I could have anticipated all these difficulties and problems beforehand. Nevertheless, these experiences also made it clear to me that it is indeed impossible to think about any research without considering the researcher's positionality. This is even truer for ethnographic projects. Of course, I am a part of this research, and there is no way to think about it without considering my identity, relationships and positionality. For this reason, this chapter will discuss the methodological background of the research. I will start by explaining my understanding of ethnography and the data collection methods that I employed. Then, I will discuss access, the issues regarding inside and outsider debate, and positionality in general. Lastly, I will focus on the ethical choices that I made, and how research ethics are integrated into the research.

2.2. Ethnography, Fieldwork and Access

Ethnography is difficult to define, precisely due to 'its variable and sometimes contested character' (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, 1). Although differences in the definition of ethnography exist, it is of course possible to find a common ground. In broad terms, ethnography can be defined as a qualitative methodology involving participation and observation of a group of people for a period of time to understand their perceptions, interactions and relations (Naidoo, 2012, 1). In a similar way, Hammersley and Atkinson (2007, 3) list five aspects which are mostly shared by ethnographic studies: observation and participation in the natural settings of people i.e. in the field; collection of a wide range of data from participant observation to documents; an unstructured process of data collection; limiting the scope of research in order to gain a deeper understanding; and, analysis of the gathered data which involves interpretation and understanding meanings that are produced within the group. Ethnography, therefore, is useful for grasping people's experiences. Lastly, Wacquant provides a comprehensive definition:

> [Ethnography is a] social research based on the close-up, on-the-ground observation of people and institutions in real time and space, in which the investigator embeds herself near (or within) the phenomenon so as to detect how and why agents on the scene act, think and feel the way they do. (2003, 5)

Indeed, studying people's experience requires close and continuing participation in their daily lives. By doing so, ethnographic research can develop a vivid description and understanding. It is especially appropriate for understanding 'a group of interacting people' (Neuman, 2007, 276) such as Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers in Japan. Since the aim of this research is to understand Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers' 'circuitous path' (Slater, 2019) within the Japanese asylum system, ethnography emerged as the appropriate methodology for this project.

Malinowski, the founder of ethnography as a fieldwork practice, was passionate to

understand the natives' point of view in the context of social organisation. This approach was about creating a framework of examining society or culture, collecting the expressions of culture such as myths, narratives and tales (Mitchell, 2007, 58).

Similarly, researchers from the Chicago School introduced ethnography to sociological studies to grasp a colourful representation of the urban space. The Chicago researchers studied a variety of issues, such as brothels, gangs, ethnic minorities, gambling, and drug addiction. Therefore, the subject of the ethnography was no longer just the 'native', as it was equally useful to examine modern people. Additionally, one of the long-lasting effects of the Chicago School was their contribution to strengthening the descriptive, less theoretical character of ethnography. They were more motivated to dive into the 'field' and produce a detailed portrait of it (Marvasti, 2004, 38).

In addition to the importance of fieldwork, or 'nosing around' (Gobo, 2008)—as coined by the early members of the Chicago School—Clifford Geertz's concept of 'thick description' highlights the significance of the context (Geertz, 1973). Thick description can be understood in two ways: on the one hand, it requires the researcher to provide a detailed account of the environment in which the actions take place. However, beyond that, an ethnographic account should offer an in-depth contextual knowledge to 'explicate' (Geertz, 1973, 5) the human action (Mills et al., 2010). Geertz was suspicious about nomothetic tendencies in social science, at least in anthropology. On the contrary, 'thick descriptions that this sort of work produces are regarded as enabling us to think in a clearer way about the nature of human social life more widely' (Hammersley, 2008).

The concept of thick description also connected to the overall ethnographic style of this research, which is critical ethnography. Even though Geertz emphasises the importance of the context, he is somewhat reluctant to talk about structures and mechanisms affecting the lives of the people studied (Hammersley, 2008). At this point, critical ethnography is crucial, as it aims 'to expose the hidden agendas, challenge oppressive assumptions, describe power relations, and generally critique the taken-for-granted'. In other words, as Thomas put it, critical ethnography is about 'resisting domestication' (Thomas, 1993).

In the context of this research, resisting domestication means, perhaps more than anything else, not taking the power of the nation state for granted. We should always remember that there was no migration or seeking asylum until a very short time ago in human history. As emphasised by De Genova (2013, 253), borders created migrants—before borders, it was all about mobility.[6] For the sake of positional clarity, therefore, it should be known that I support free movement for all people.

In reality, all research projects have political implications, or at least political assumptions. However, only some explicitly reflect on these implications and assumptions. By making the researcher's political position clear, critical ethnography opens a space for reflexivity. Even before starting the fieldwork, I was constantly thinking about my positionality in the field. Of course, through the research, my ideas and knowledge are also challenged. As will be narrated in the following sections, I experienced the dilemma of an asylum seeker first-hand, and I understood personally how traumatic it can be. In short, a critical ethnographic perspective forced me to be more reflexive about my position throughout the research (Allen, 2017).

The reflexivity is also reflected in the writing style of the text. I did not try to hide my presence at any point throughout. On the contrary, I decided to include my voice and presence wherever possible. Thinking about what Van Maanen called 'confessional tales', I think the style can be considered as confessional at times;

> Much confessional work is done to convince the audience of the human qualities of the fieldworker. Often the ethnographer mentions personal biases, character flaws, or bad habits as a way of building an ironic self-portrait with which the readers can identify… (Van Maanen, 2011, 75)

Of course, this is not an auto-ethnography, and it is not self-centred. It is confessional, however, in the sense that I am transparent about the fieldwork process, the difficulties I

[6] Of course, I do not want to paint a rose-tinted picture of the past here: 'territorially-defined 'national' states and their borders remain enduringly and irreducibly problematic' (De Genova, 2013, 253). An interesting analysis can be found in Torpey's (2018) discussion on the rise of the passport as a legitimate means of travel, and states' increasing monopolisation over legitimate mobility.

faced, and conditions under which I worked. Following the advice of Jacobsen and Landau (2003, 202), I aimed to be 'explicit' about the research process. Hopefully, this 'exposed' writing style will allow the reader to evaluate the value of the research and increase the trustworthiness and validity of the narrative (Van Maanen, 2011, 92).

2.2.1. Data Collection: Participant Observation and Semi Structured In Depth Interviews

In terms of research methods, participant observation—which also gives the ethnography its distinctive character—was used as the primary data collection method. Participant observation entails gaining access, taking time, participation and observation, and taking notes (O'Reilly, 2004, 84). The logic behind participant observation is to grasp the relations, understandings and perceptions of people in their natural surroundings. It also means that the researcher becomes the part of the group or process which he[7] studies. Participant observation or fieldwork practice in general demands flexibility, because the researcher never has optimal laboratory conditions. One of the significant elements of participant observation is choosing the research site and gaining access (Neuman, 2007, 278-280). I will address these issues in the subsequent sections.

At the beginning of the fieldwork, I was more of an observer, but through the process, I became more of a participant. In the beginning, I started with visiting kebab shops, talking to asylum seekers in front of convenience markets and going to mosques. At this stage, I was observing and participating for a limited time and returning to my home to write my field notes. Later, I became more involved when I moved into the same neighbourhood. This had profound effects on the research process, because it was hard to keep up with the volume of data. When I could not take field notes, I was recording my voice while walking. In this way, I managed to store observations that I would have forgotten otherwise. I always wrote my field notes on my phone, because it was more natural to check my phone. Everyone uses smartphones these days; therefore, it is not unusual for someone to write something on his

[7] Since I identify as male, I decided to use 'he/him' as a referral to myself and others.

phone every once in a while. I have never used a notebook and pen because it would have been unnatural and made people nervous. After moving into Kerim's (33) house, I did not have a private room, but Kerim's family did not feel uncomfortable seeing me writing up my notes at night, because I was doing my 'study'.

In general, participant observation enabled me to understand and observe asylum seekers' lives in diverse settings and conditions. It would have been impossible to gain these insights if I had adopted other data collection methods (Guest et al., 2013). The importance of participant observation became apparent during one of the interviews. I was asking questions regarding injustices at work, but at some point, my participant commented: 'Because you're asking now, I can't remember everything. Normally I'm thinking about these things and curse them'. This example epitomises the difference between participant observation and interview. Interviews are essential in discovering what people think, how they conceptualise certain matters, and how they explain their understandings about those matters. It is, however, hard to grasp how they actually behave. By relying exclusively on interviews, we can understand what people *think* about what they do, but we cannot understand what they actually *do*. Accordingly, if we only rely on interviews, there is no way to capture the things happening in the routine of daily life. We can only obtain the highlights, because that is what people generally say during the interviews: the things that they can recollect at that particular moment.

That being said, I do not depreciate the value of interviewing as a data-collection method. Semi-structured in-depth interviews were used as a data collection method in the research. Interviewing is one of the main methods of qualitative methodologies, and an effective way to understand subjective meanings (Neuman, 2004, 296). As for this research project, there were issues which could not be revealed with participant observation. To support the data that was generated through participant observation, purposeful sampling was used to select interviewees. Purposeful sampling was used because it helps the researcher to choose 'information-rich cases' for the study, which can provide valuable knowledge about the central questions and themes of the research (Patton, 1990, 169). For instance, matters related to past experiences could not be observed through participant observation. By

conducting interviews with people who had lived in Japan as overstayers and returned to Turkey, I obtained valuable information regarding the Kurdish community in the 1990s. I managed to conduct three interviews with such people, and these interviews also enriched the research. In such cases, interviewing was extremely useful as a data collection method.

In order to reach people, I adopted the snowball approach as a part of purposeful sampling. Snowballing is particularly useful to reach people who are not easily accessible, such as asylum seekers. According to a definition provided by Neuman, 'snowball sampling is a method for identifying and sampling (or selecting) the cases... It begins with one or a few people or cases and spreads out on the basis of links' (2007, 144). In small communities like Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers in Japan, members of the community are likely to have extensive networks. The effectiveness of relying on personal networks in the process of sampling in migration studies has been demonstrated, for instance, in the case of Peruvians (Takenaka, 2007). The technique also worked well in this research, because I conducted most of the interviews at the end of my fieldwork, therefore, I had already developed a rapport with people within the community. However, snowball-sampling can result in concentrating on a small network within a wide web of relationships. In order to overcome this problem, I mapped out multiple networks within the community of Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers (Dahinden and Efionayi-Mader, 2009, 103).

It was also useful to compare my observations with my participants' perspectives. For instance, I was observing relationships between close relatives through interviews. At the same time, I was able to ask them to reflect on their relationships.

Interviewees were principally Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers, but there were also asylum seekers from other countries, such as Nigeria and Sierra Leone. In addition to asylum seekers, I conducted interviews with professionals working with asylum seekers, such as a doctor, a lawyer, and a social worker. To be able to understand the bigger picture, I interviewed two overstayers living in Japan. Similarly, interviewing an asylum seeker's family member, who was visiting Japan at the time, provided me with added perspective. Finally, in addition to interviews in Japan, I conducted a short research visit some cities in Turkey, to do

interviews with people who had been in Japan as overstayers but had returned to Turkey years ago. In total, thirty-eight semi-structured in-depth interviews, ranging from twenty-five minutes to around two hours, were conducted for the research. Two of them were received as written responses from the detention centre.

The locations of the interviews were varied, from a shopping mall to a detention centre. Some interviews were conducted at interviewees' houses. Since I personally knew all these interviewees, I did not feel any insecurity about meeting and talking with them there, and the locations were arranged based on mutual agreement. Finding available time—especially to conduct interviews with asylum seekers—was not a straightforward task, simply because they were working a lot; and if they were not working, it was not their priority to meet and talk with me.

As for asylum seekers, I prepared open-ended questions, starting from their life before coming to Japan to their experiences in Japan. Since I knew most of the interviewees before interviewing, I slightly modified the questions for each of them, based on my participant observations. Of course, I tried to follow my participants' lead if they were interested in talking about a particular topic. During the interviews with experts there were more specific questions, but I still tried to follow the conversation. In general, conducting interviews with a diverse range of people contributed to developing a comprehensive analysis of the phenomenon.

I continued interviewing asylum seekers until reaching a saturation point (Mason, 2010)—i.e. until the data started to repeat itself—as recommended by Lincoln and Guba (1985):

> In purposeful sampling the size of the sample is determined by informational considerations. If the purpose is to maximise information, then sampling is terminated when no new information is forthcoming from newly simply units; thus *redundancy* is the primary criterion. (202, emphasis in original)

In the case of asylum seekers, I followed the advice of Lincoln and Guba (1985) and continued interviewing until no new information was emerging. However, in the case of key

informants, interviewing was aimed at gaining a more comprehensive understanding of specific issues. For instance, I conducted interviews with three volunteers, and these three interviews allowed me to understand the volunteers' perspective on specific issues surrounding asylum seekers, refugees and volunteering. Similarly, interviews with experts such as the doctor and lawyer were about obtaining answers to particular questions, and each interview provided valuable information.

Lastly, document analysis was used as a third data collection method. The research benefited from a variety of sources, such as newspapers, grey literature, government documents and statistics. For instance, official reports about Japanese migration policy provided an opportunity to track the changes within the policy, year by year from the 2000s.

Data analysis was a part of data collection during the fieldwork, because I was always thinking about the field notes while writing and creating codes to clarify my thoughts. As for interviews, I began to transcribe interviews in the field. Again, listening to interviews and transcribing them afterwards helped me to refine questions, and add new ones if necessary. Therefore, the data analysis process was a part of the fieldwork, and the data collection process was sensitive to the reflections from the field.

Of course, the real process of data analysis commenced when I returned from the field. To be able to structure and organise the data, I used qualitative data analysis software, namely MAX Qualitative Data Analysis (MAXQDA). Multiple themes, including but not limited to detention, working life, and dating and marriage emerged, based on more than 400 codes. These main three themes turned into chapters, as they cover crucial stages in the experiences of Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers.

2.2.2. Pilot Fieldwork and Its Impact on the Research

During my first year, at least until the pilot fieldwork, I was planning to do a research project about irregular immigrants in Japan, focusing on irregular Turkish and Kurdish immigrants. After reading about Japan's reluctant attitude to developing a comprehensive immigration policy, I thought that studying irregular immigrants would be ideal to understand the impact

of this policy of non-policy. Interestingly, the number of irregular immigrants had declined sharply, especially after 2004, and I aimed to understand the construction of irregularity in the Japanese context. With this plan in mind, I decided to conduct short pilot fieldwork between 21 April and 11 May 2016 in Japan, just to have an idea before beginning my actual fieldwork in September. Consequently, I conducted a three-week-long pilot fieldwork in Japan, spending fifteen days in the Tokyo area and five days in Nagoya.

There were mixed motives behind this research visit: first, I was hoping to meet with potential gatekeepers and participants, as well as researchers, academics, experts and officials. Although I had a rough idea regarding where I might find irregular Turkish immigrants in Tokyo, Nagoya and Saitama, I did not have sufficient information to choose a research site. As the subjects of the research were irregular migrants, it was important to understand whether it was feasible to find them in a metropolis like Tokyo. As stressed in the literature (Sampson, 2004; Kim, 2010), pilot fieldwork is valuable in terms of recruitment, as well as networking. Thanks to this research visit, I met many Turkish people in Japan, regardless of their legal status. Much to my surprise, most of them were not irregular, as I will explain below. Nonetheless, the pilot fieldwork enabled me to establish initial contacts and to introduce myself to the Turkish and Kurdish community in Japan.

In order to reach potential participants, my initial method was visiting Turkish kebab restaurants in Tokyo. Since the likelihood of bumping into an irregular Turkish or Kurdish immigrant in a crowd in Tokyo is close to zero, I used kebab restaurants as my stepping-stones. I visited around twenty kebab restaurants in Tokyo. I have never eaten that much kebab in such a short time in my life! Even though I did not conduct any formal interviews, thanks to the outspoken Turkish people that I met, I obtained important information related to the Turkish and Kurdish community in Japan.

Apart from kebab restaurants, I also visited the Tokyo Mosque, which is directed by the Japan Diyanet Foundation, a foundation close to the Directorate of Religious Affairs of Turkey. The Turkish government appoints the imam, and the mosque is one of the notable public spaces for the Turkish community in Japan. Fortunately, my stay in Tokyo coincided

with a religiously significant day, and I attended the ceremony in the mosque. Again, I introduced myself to the imam and people from the congregation.

One of the most critical parts of this pilot fieldwork was my visit to Saitama, where the majority of the Kurdish population in Japan live. The second week of my pilot fieldwork coincided with the Golden Week holiday, which turned out to be serendipitous for the research. Thanks to the holiday, no one was working, so I found a chance to meet over thirty Kurdish people, most of whom were asylum seekers. On another occasion in Nagoya, I randomly found around twenty Turkish men in a bar favoured by foreigners. It was on a Saturday night, and I figured out that they came to that bar almost every weekend. Those two occasions expanded my network to a great extent. When I returned to Japan in September for my fieldwork, I managed to meet some of these people again.

All these encounters helped me to develop a deeper understanding of the research project. Basically, I could not find any irregular immigrants among the Turkish and Kurdish community. Of course, I was never expecting people to admit that publicly—but the problem was not that people were hiding it, but that everyone had applied for asylum. When I asked about overstaying, on one occasion a Kurdish man told me: 'You can't find anyone illegal, there is none anymore. Everyone did asylum'.

During those three weeks, there were many times that I had to push myself to approach people. Before the pilot fieldwork, I was not confident to talk to strangers, but I improved my ability to approach people on the street or to start small talk with a kebab chef while buying a döner wrap. After coming back from the pilot fieldwork, I realised that I had to rethink my research, considering that the very people I had planned to study were now almost non-existent. Therefore, I decided to follow the leads and concentrate on asylum seekers. This experience not only helped me to change the locus of the research, but also to develop my skills as a researcher (Janghorban et al., 2013; Doody and Doody, 2015).

2.2.3. Negotiating for Access: Relationships with Key Informants and Gatekeepers

When I first landed in Tokyo for fieldwork, I found temporary accommodation close to Waseda University, where I would be affiliated throughout the fieldwork process. The temporary accommodation became permanent, as a result of a health emergency—in order to join the health insurance system, it is compulsory to have a permanent address in Japan. Therefore, I did not have much time to search for other options, and I rented the place, despite the fact that it was quite far from Warabi and Kawaguchi cities (hereafter Warabi/Kawaguchi), where most of the Kurdish asylum seekers live.

Since my accommodation was far away from Warabi/Kawaguchi, I began to visit local kebab shops to talk to Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers. It did not take long to realise that these places were not ideal for gaining access to the community. I managed to meet people and made my face known by many, but people were busy in these shops. They were happy to have exchange small talk with me if they were not busy with keeping up the work, but that was that. Even though they were not busy, I had to leave after a while; it was not natural to sit in a kebab shop for a whole day. However, I continued to visit kebab shops during the fieldwork—notably, the one in Warabi/Kawaguchi became a sort of base for me to socialise, but this was also possible thanks to my gatekeeper, Kerim. By virtue of being a resident of the neighbourhood, after moving into Kerim's house, it was natural for me to visit the kebab shop every once in a while.

In addition to visiting kebab shops, I also began volunteering as an interpreter and food collector for a leading NGO working with asylum seekers and refugees. The NGO was paying over $100 to interpreters for a couple of hours of interpretation, therefore my offer of doing the job for free was much appreciated. They knew that I was researching Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers; accordingly, there was a risk of conflict of interest, which I will explain in detail in the ethics section. One day, a family of five, comprising husband, wife and three boys, came to the NGO office to seek help and advice for their son. The little boy had a severe condition, and they were asking if the NGO could assist them. According to the

father, Kerim, they were surviving with the help of friends and support from their family in Turkey, as Kerim could not work legally as he was on provisional release.

While we were having a break, he suggested that I join him for a smoke downstairs. I was in a delicate situation because—as an interpreter—I could not develop personal ties with clients; but it was a small community, and I did not want to be known as 'that cocky guy working for the NGO'. I decided to be open about it and told him that I would like to do that, but I was not allowed as it was against the rules. My concern was managing to convey that it was not that I was uninterested in Kerim, or perceived myself to be of a different social, economic or intellectual class. Later, Kerim insisted on giving me his number. At the end of the interview, I left the building before the family, but Kerim caught up with me around the station. He wanted me to help him calling an English-speaking agency. After doing so, we went our separate ways.

After our initial meeting, Kerim invited me to his house for dinner and to help him translate some documents. He was living around Warabi/Kawaguchi, so I recognised that he could be my key participant (O'Reilly, 2009, 132-136) and access point to the neighbourhood. In a couple of months, we were regularly meeting and going out together; he was introducing me to other asylum seekers from Turkey, Kurds and Turks. Our relationship, however, took an unexpected turn following my scholarship suspension in April. With less money, I decided to move to a more affordable place; ideally, the new location would be around Warabi/Kawaguchi. While chatting about it with Kerim, he offered me to move into the house where he was living with his wife Fatma (early 20s), one of his boys, Semih (5), and his nephew, Hakan. It was a tiny traditional Japanese flat, with one living room divided by a paper wall. I decided to accept his offer, and within just a couple of days, I moved into their house.

Figure 1: A self-portrait in my new room, which I shared with Hakan and then Tarkan (13 May 2017, personal archive).

Moving to Kerim's house was a crucial point in the fieldwork. By just staying at home, I was learning something new every day. For instance, I learned that Kerim was regularly working, even though he did not have permission to work. I had known before that he was working—but he was working almost every day, twenty-five or more days in a month. In addition to that, we had visitors regularly, and I was meeting new people almost daily. After a while, I began to develop my own relationships with some of these people. We were going out together on weekends, or we were chatting at a street corner (Whyte, 1993) while drinking and smoking. Living in the neighbourhood made my interactions more natural, such as seeing people in the market or stopping by at the kebab shop for lunch. I was not a researcher who was occasionally visiting the neighbourhood to talk to people anymore; I was a normal resident.

Kerim's other nephew, Tarkan (21), was in detention at the East Japan Immigration Control Centre (EJICC). Through Tarkan I met Suzuki-san, who has been visiting detainees at EJICC for

more than twenty years. Anyone can visit detainees during visitation hours; therefore, I did not have difficulties with access to the EJICC. Suzuki-san was visiting detainees once a week, and she accepted me as her protégé. From May to September, we visited Turkish and Kurdish detainees together. She was the leader of a group of volunteers, so being under her wing provided me with a convincing reference when I met other volunteers. Suzuki-san was an unofficial gatekeeper. She could not deny me visiting the detention centre officially, but she could certainly turn other volunteers, and maybe even some detainees against me, had she wished (Ahern, 2014), making my job difficult. However, in fact, we almost became a team, and she picked me up from the station every Wednesday morning to visit the centre.

Having Suzuki-san as my sponsor was critical when I first met with detainees at EJICC. Suzuki-san introduced me to the Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers, and this introduction itself eradicated a lot of potential questions. She was recognised as a respectful leader (Jump, 2006)—although later I discovered that even she was not immune to suspicion. Of course, after this initial contact, earning trust and nurturing the relationship was my responsibility. In order not to let people down, I visited them regularly for the rest of my fieldwork. My position evolved, or at least blurred over time, from researcher to volunteer. I was perceived as a member of Suzuki-san's volunteering group, and cultivated a deep bond with many of the Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers.

Although I completed my interviews and data collection in July, I did not stop visiting the centre. First, I did not want to stop visiting, because the centre meant more to me than data collection. Second, I felt obliged because the impact of my visits there were no longer confined to being about me and my research (Markova, 2009, 149), and so I continued visitations until the end of September. Reflecting on the process, the detention part of the study was the toughest part, emotionally speaking. In my conversations with people there, we would be talking about harming oneself at one point, and then laughing about something the next. My connection with the people detained at the centre was a rollercoaster experience.

Even though living with Kerim provided me with an opportunity to introduce myself to the

community, Kerim himself was not politically engaged as a Kurd. Consequently, he could not help me when it came to granting access to the more politically active members of the community. There was a Kurdish association that I needed to access, but I knew it would not be appropriate to visit the association without a sponsor. While searching online about the association, I came across Koray (mid 30s), a spokesperson for the association.

Koray was well educated, working on his PhD, and fluent in Japanese. At that time, he was teaching Kurdish to Japanese people in a prestigious Tokyo university; thanks to his cultural and social capital[8] (Bourdieu, 1986), Koray was emerging as a community leader. For a couple of months I thought about finding someone to put me in contact with him, but I could not find anyone. Therefore, I had to do it by myself. I introduced myself to him during an event, and we scheduled an interview. I visited him in the office where he was working, and after winning Koray's trust, I gained access to the association. Even being able to set foot in the association and socialise with its prominent members increased my reputation within the community. Again, this connection made me a familiar face in the neighbourhood.

Leaving the field was as hard as gaining access, and not an easy process (Given, 2008, 553). Everyone knew about my departure, and I tried to say goodbye to everyone in person, clarifying what I would do next with my research and where I would be. Nevertheless, there were people that I forgot to say goodbye to personally, which later became an issue. For instance, Koray reached out me from social media and sent me an expostulatory message. I apologised for my negligence, and that was that.

We have maintained regular communication since then, and I have been in contact with most of my participants or friends since I returned to the UK. I continue talking with my

[8] Bourdieu's conceptualisation is closely 'connected with his theoretical understanding on class' (Siisiainen, 2000, 2). He defined social capital as 'the sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, 119). In Koray's case, I decided to use the concept of social capital in Bourdieu's terms, because he had access to political, academic and economic circles in Japan, Turkey and beyond. Since 'social capital was an asset of the privileged and a means of maintaining their superiority' in Bourdieu's conceptualisation, it is more applicable here. However, for the rest of the text, I use the concept following Portes' definition (1998). The concept of social capital will be discussed in detail in Chapter 5.

flatmates, of course, Kerim and Tarkan, and in addition to these two, there are several people with whom I regularly communicate. For instance, I try to send postcards to Suzuki-san as much as I can. Also, I exchange 'likes' with others on social media. Thanks to advanced communication technologies, I think there is no way of getting out from the field entirely, and I am grateful for this, because it was not only my field, it was also home (O'Reilly, 2009, 12).

2.3. Being an Insider and/or Outsider: Beyond Binaries

In all studies that include interaction with people—be it ethnographic research necessitating engagement with a community for a long time, or survey research requiring the asking of questions—researchers have to negotiate their positionality. For me, as for all researchers, this was a long process of learning and reflecting about my participants and myself. Through reflecting on my positionality regarding 'culture, class, gender, age, religion, sexual orientation' (Coghlan and Brydon-Miller, 2014, 627) within the field and beyond, I learned about the complexities (and maybe even contradictions) of my participants and myself.

Regarding the debate of being an insider or outsider, there were complex concerns, particularly relating to my ethnicity, gender, class position and religiosity. As a Turkish citizen whose native language is Turkish, I am ethnically Turkish. As for my political views, however, I am sympathetic to the equal citizenship demands of Kurdish people in the Middle East in general. I also come from a working-class family with low economic and cultural capital. At the same time, I was in Japan as a postgraduate researcher who had been studying in the UK as a student with the support of the Republic of Turkey. Therefore, it is probable that I was seen as more privileged because of my cultural capital, which of course had nothing to do with my economic position as a student living with a scholarship.

As for religion, even though my parents and two sisters strongly identify themselves through their religious identities and passionately perform Islamic duties, religion does not occupy much place in my life. Still, due to coming from a religious family, I am educated about how to perform Islamic duties, have memorised some sections of the Quran, and when visiting

my parents, I sometimes pray to comfort them. Being knowledgeable about religious scholarship was helpful for me in the fieldwork in accessing some places, such as mosques.

Lastly, as a male in his early thirties, it was relatively natural for me to gain access to the masculine world of Turkish and Kurdish men. This same identity, of course, diminished my opportunity to delve into the lives of women asylum seekers. Overall, these contradictory positions, in many respects, left me in a complicated situation in terms of the insider / outsider debate (Wray and Bartholomew, 2010). In all likelihood, Turks would view me as both insider and outsider; insider because of my ethnicity and outsider because of my political views.

On the other hand, as a Turk, I was an outsider from an ethnic perspective; however, they admitted me as an insider because of my human-rights-based political views. The combination of a religious background acquired from my family and my own secular lifestyle helped me to reach both religious and non-religious spaces. Having a lower-class upbringing, but with a higher level of cultural capital put me in a contrary position, because I was perceived as 'weak' when it came to the masculine working-class world. I will now expand on the complexities of all these concerns, since they affected the research in fundamental ways.

2.3.1. Ethnicity

One of the main concerns was ethnicity. When I first visited Japan for the pilot fieldwork, I immediately realised that my ethnicity would be an issue. After spending some time in Tokyo, I learned that I could reach more people in Warabi/Kawaguchi, which is in Saitama prefecture. On the train, I spotted a man who appeared to be from the Middle East from his wheat-skin and thick beard. I thought he was Kurdish, and noticed that he left the train at Warabi station. Later near the station, I saw him talking to some people who also looked like they were from the Middle East. I was close by, and heard them talking in Turkish. I took a cigarette from my package and approached them to ask for a lighter.

As we spoke, I explained that I was in Japan for my research, and as I did so, I realised how

suspicious it sounded: an ethnically Turkish student with a scholarship from the Turkish government, studying in English, researching Kurdish asylum seekers in Japan, supporting human rights for all citizens in Turkey. After talking about politics for a while, I felt that we reached an understanding, and I was accepted as a trustworthy person. In this way, I was trying to compensate for my ethnic-outsider position by emphasising my political-insider position. This seemed to be successful, as I did not feel excluded because of my ethnicity, at least most of the time.

Of course, there were moments that I sensed some people were anxious about my ethnicity. For instance, I was interpreting, between English and Turkish, for Turkish-speaking asylum seekers as a volunteer, and accompanied a Kurdish asylum seeker numerous times during his hospital visits. After we met, he once said, casually, 'Yusuf brother, let's eat, drink together but not talk about politics. Politics ruins relationships'. At the time of his comment, we were not talking about politics—but he was nervous about me being Turkish. Even though we did not have a problem personally, the long-lasting Kurdish issue in Turkey posed an area of potential difficulty between us. He did not know my position on the subject; therefore the safest thing was not to touch Turkish politics. The best remedy for this tension was building trust and rapport over time. I interpreted for him voluntarily numerous times, and I think it helped me to gain his confidence in the end. It was same in my relationship with others—living in the same neighbourhood, making friends, visiting kebab shops and eating with people helped me to overcome their suspicion in the long run.

In addition to the risks of possible ethno-political disputes separating me and the participants, another ethnically-induced problem perceived by some of the participants was the possibility of me being a spy. No one explicitly questioned me or commented on it, but at the beginning of the research, some people might have thought about it.

In addition to the Kurdish asylum seekers and immigrants, there were also Turkish people in the same position. For them, I was an ethnic insider, but politically we were not sharing a common ground—making me, politically, an outsider. Most of the time I avoided comment when it came to Turkish politics, but I guess they still knew my position. Particularly after

learning that I was living in Warabi/Kawaguchi, most of my Turkish participants had a hard time understanding my reasoning—according to the prevailing perception, Warabi/Kawaguchi is the place where Kurdish people live in Japan. After discovering I was living in Warabi/Kawaguchi, Aslan, a Turkish immigrant with a shisha shop in Tokyo, advised me that people living in Saitama were 'troublemakers'. He did not aspire to meet any of them, let alone live with them, because he believed they could only be harmful. However, my choice of residence was one of the 'quirky' things that I was doing as a 'student', and therefore for Turkish asylum seekers and immigrants I did not pose any threat.

2.3.2. (Non)religiosity

Since religious parents raised me, I was a devoted Muslim for a long time, until the end of my undergraduate education. For this reason, I am 'fluent' when it comes to Islamic vocabulary, cultural and somatic codes. For instance, when I entered a small kebab shop around Shinjuku for the first time during my pilot fieldwork, I immediately recognised the Islamic vocabulary of the Turkish chef while we were chatting. Without making a deliberate decision (Jarviluoma et al., 2003, 29), this instantly influenced my choice of words, such as using the phrase *insallah* [if God permits]. He was likely to assume that we shared a similar cultural background, and in that sense, I could be deemed a religious insider.

My religiosity was especially relevant during mosque visits. The Tokyo Mosque was one of my central field sites, because it was a meeting spot for Turkish and some Kurdish people. I used to go to the mosque at least once in a month, preferably on Fridays, because Friday prayers attract more people than ordinary prayers. Again, throughout my conversations with the imam of the mosque and other members of the congregation, I did not advertise my secular identity, and sought to maintain a neutral tone. I did not deliberately portray myself as a dedicated Muslim, but took the opportunity to participating in Friday prayers when I was able.

When I reflect on this aspect of my time with the communities I was researching, whilst I do not identify with any religion, participating felt more comfortable and fitting rather than

simply standing and watching people pray. In another mosque, which provided accommodation for Muslim asylum seekers, it was customary for everyone to join prayers. Considering we were literally inside a mosque, it was hard not to participate. Nonetheless, when my scholarship was cancelled, I observed myself attending prayers with a sense of satisfaction and an unusual enthusiasm. I considered that this was not because I was seeking divine intervention or solace, but the feeling of solidarity and fellowship was soothing, and I needed it. This same comforting sense helped me to appreciate the importance of religiosity for asylum seekers.

Nonetheless, I was not spending my daily life as a pious man; the people that I usually mixed with were not particularly religious. To illustrate, I never saw my housemates (Kerim, Tarkan and Hakan) praying at the mosque; most of them consumed liquor. As can be seen in Chapter Six, most of my participants were routinely going out on weekends with the hope of finding a partner for a one-night stand, frequently hitting Tokyo's famous night scene. My impression was that they were enjoying a secular daily life in Japan. The numerous and regular religious reminders which dominate space and time in Turkey, such as mosques or prayer calls, were largely absent in Japan—and no one was complaining about it.

2.3.3. Culture and Class

From the beginning, I was aware of the potential problems regarding culture between my participants and myself. Even though I was born in a rural area, and my family has a working-class background, I recognised that my position is a privileged one (Allen, 2017, 298). I am doing a PhD in England with a scholarship from the Republic of Turkey. Being a 'university teacher' could become a barrier for me. To make this less intimidating, I decided to introduce myself as a student.

Thanks to my short, slight stature, I did not look thirty years old, and so when talking to people in the kebab shops, I presented myself as a student, rather than a researcher. It was also convenient to be seen as ordinary. Everyone was pleased to advise me with my 'homework', as it was not perceived to be a serious undertaking.

Even so, other matters created a distance between me and those I was researching. First of all, they were all informed about the hardships of getting a visa for Europe; most of them had already tried the route to Europe before arriving in Japan. Thus, the fact that I lived in England was confirmation that I had the necessary resources to obtain such a visa. Some people had relatives in England, even in Sheffield and these transnational connections were helpful; when I presented myself, it was not unusual for someone to respond, 'Yeah, I have relatives in England'. In this respect, living in England was not that special.

More importantly, we were all in Japan; living abroad was a sort of equaliser among us. As I was new in Japan, they were more experienced than me in the country. When I noticed that point, I began to highlight my 'ignorance' during our conversations, and I was glad to remind them of it from time to time, to recalibrate the status levels between us. I would say, 'since I just came to this country, of course, you know better than me' or 'I don't know what to think about this as I'm new in this country'. Though I was capable enough to study in England, they knew Japan better than me, and this levelled us.

Language usage was another domain that created a gap between us. I was using polite language, including 'thank you' and 'sorry'; however, my politeness did not sound natural in that context. To illustrate, Fatma was preparing all the meals and washing the dishes. I could not be involved, because it would have been inappropriate, as if I was attempting to be close to her. A grown man living in the same residence with a married woman was inappropriate enough. After every meal, I was telling her 'Thank you Fatma, it was delicious'. I began to notice that I was the only one making these kinds of comments. Eventually, following dinner one evening, Fatma complained, 'only Yusuf brother is saying thank you to me'.

In general, the way Kerim and Fatma interacted with one another in their house initially made me uncomfortable. After pondering on it, I discerned that it was about my different expectations of what a romantic relationship should be like. Kerim also thought that their perception of romantic relations was different than mine:

> You and people like you, I mean educated people, those who see the world, when you come home, you greet each other, saying beautiful things like 'how

was your day?', and you don't break each other's heart. And when you argue, maybe you get a divorce. We are not like that.

These issues became more apparent when my partner came to Japan in the summer. I realised that I was uncomfortable for most of my research participants to see us together. My partner was wearing low-cut clothes in the blistering heat of Tokyo. I was hesitant about being regarded as a 'light' man who is not jealous of his girlfriend. I did not have any problem with her choices, but I was anxious about my participants thinking that.

Still, as well as distinctions, some things brought us closer. For instance, over time, I learned the vernacular used by my participants (local to the southeast of Turkey, where most of the participants came from). Kerim and Tarkan were laughing hard, when I said, 'this rice is wicked bruv!' while eating the rice that Kerim cooked. Learning the vernacular was a major step for me to be accepted as a member, as Goffman experienced during her research with the Afro-American community in the US (Goffman, 2014).

2.3.4. Gender

The research was destined to be about men, simply because I am a straight man, and as a consequence, most of my participants were men. As a straight man, I was fortunate in terms of being a part of the men's world, as it is not easy to enter some 'men only' aspects of life (Gill and Maclean, 2010, 7). There were specific issues that made it easier for me to be embraced by the men around me. When I was in Nagoya during the pilot fieldwork, I visited a bar on a Saturday night. The bar was packed with ethnically-Turkish asylum seekers; I counted more than twenty, and met most of them that night. Many of them were friendly to me, mainly because I could talk English and was studying in the UK. When they realised that these qualities were making it easier for me to approach ladies, suddenly I had a lot of Turkish friends around me.

With that experience in mind, I quickly realised it would be an essential part of the fieldwork process. Indeed, before I moved into Kerim's house, we were going out together on weekends. After I moved to Warabi/Kawaguchi, spending weekends in Shibuya and

Roppongi (the centres of Tokyo's nightlife) with my friends became a part of my weekly routine. My English-speaking skills were beneficial for attracting attention. My friends would approach a lady and point at me saying, 'he is from England'. I was always careful to include my friends into the conversations by doing translation for them. As a result, I was a wanted person to come along when a couple of men decided to go to Roppongi or Shibuya.

I was also enjoying the nightlife; therefore, beyond research objectives, this was an enjoyable experience for me. However, meeting people in a nightclub environment and recruiting possible interviewees and participants carried certain risks. There was the danger of being carried away by the moment, especially under the influence of alcohol and competition for the attention of the women around me. Additionally, my partner, who was in Turkey at that time, was not wholly pleased with this research strategy. Once it had become a regular event, I was giving her detailed reports about what we did and when I returned home; this was an ongoing issue of contention throughout my fieldwork. Ultimately, however, I did not have any negative exchanges with my participants, and I did not ruin my relationship. Therefore, looking back, I can say that it was a relatively successful recruitment method, and an enjoyable experience for me.

In addition to being a 'wingman', I was ready to have locker-room talk. We often had visitors at home, and swearing, talking about women and sex were frequent subjects. If I had not been a straight male, it would not have been possible for me to partake in these performances. Even conducting interviews with these men was extremely troublesome for a female Turkish researcher, who wrote, 'my interactions with low skilled labourers were not as productive as I wished it to be and I faced some limitations to conduct more research with them' (Igarashi, 2014, 66). This was not a difficulty for me at all, on the contrary, gender was my most significant advantage in terms of building rapport.

In another context, however, gender did not always operate to my advantage. There were Kurdish women asylum seekers present, but I could not talk to them, primarily because of gender divisions. It would be improper for a straight man to be alone with a Turkish or Kurdish woman; I did not conduct a single formal interview with a woman asylum seeker.

However, there were opportunities to have a chat; for instance, while sitting in the waiting room of the detention centre, I could talk to other visitors, and this included Kurdish women with whom I could speak.

My most significant advantage here, of course, was living in the same house with Fatma, Kerim's wife. Although she had three sons at the time (four now), Fatma was just in her early twenties and younger than me. For the first few weeks she and Semih were staying in the hospital, but Semih's condition got better over time, and we shared the same house for months. As a grown man, it was inappropriate for me to live with them, and I was cautious never to be alone with her in the house; I spent several hours in coffee shops and fast-food restaurants on weekends for this reason. She was calling me 'brother', so I was accepted as a 'fictive kin' (Warren and Hackney, 2000, 14-15). That was the only way to explain my staying in the same house with them. In general, the relationship between Kerim and Fatma, and more importantly talking to Fatma, helped me to appreciate the complexities of the gender dimension (Beqo, 2019) of seeking asylum in Japan.

I began this section by highlighting my insider position as a straight male—however, it was more complicated than that. I am not a muscular man, simply because I have never done hard physical labour in my life; all my participants were truly muscular since they had been doing physical jobs for years. For this reason, I was not physically fit for working-class masculinity. I was not a 'tough guy' like most of the people around me. In this sense, it was not possible to hide my habitus, particularly when it was 'written' on my body (Bourdieu, 1990, 63). When I lost my scholarship, I was thinking about the jobs that I could do to earn money. Considering I knew people working in demolition, it was reasonable for me to look for work in demolition as a labourer, but I knew that I was too weak, and I did not have a hope of finding work in this way.

In addition to my relative weakness in terms of physical power, I noticed that my body movements were different from most of my participants. They were very relaxed with their body movements, covering ample space by swinging arms and walking with long steps. As an illustration, one day, Hakan, Burak (18) and I were returning from a shopping mall. Hakan

and Burak were exchanging banter about finding someone and beating him. It was disturbing for me because I felt there might be a problem. As we continued walking, they began to wrestle on the street. I felt like everyone was staring at us and I was embarrassed. Even their walking style looked obnoxious to me; they were covering the entire sidewalk with their swagger.

Throughout the fieldwork process, I was conscious of an estrangement between these boys and me, but I could not conceptualise it. Later, I came across Young's (2005) book on female body experience. In *On Female Body Experience*, Young offers an eye-opening observation on differences between men and women in terms of body movements, and says,

> Even in the most simple body orientations of men and women as they sit, stand, and walk, one can observe a typical difference in body style and extension. Women generally are not as open with their bodies as are men in their gait and stride. Typically, the masculine stride is longer proportional to a man's body than is the feminine stride to a woman's. The man typically swings his arms in a more open and loose fashion than does a woman and typically has more up and down rhythm in his step. (Young, 2005, 32)

I am not a woman, and our differences cannot be attributed to the differences between the two sexes. It was about different masculinities. Even though I was educated in boarding schools and came from a working-class background, the cultural capital that I gained through education had changed my understanding of being a man. Hence, my masculinity and body performance was distinct from theirs, and compared to Hakan or Burak, my physicality was less muscular and more feminine.

Another striking example was a young Kurdish asylum seeker named Fatih (26). As I explained in detail in Chapter Four—, he dreamed of travelling, going to university and, in general, looking for a middle-class life. When we were chatting, he said he never even fought in his life. He also did not cover much space while walking or sitting. It was truly enlightening to see that as he was hoping to jump to the middle class from the working class, he was also adapting his body.

In summary, my gender was an essential part of the research. Even though this enabled me to be a part of a group of men, joining them on weekends when they hit Tokyo's bars and nightclubs, I was also aware of specific differences, and my gender prevented me from socialising with women asylum seekers—although I managed to overcome this obstacle to a certain extent, thanks to sharing the same house as Fatma. Still, it was not enough to overcome gender limitations. Therefore, this is still a study conducted by a man in the men's world and this limitation must be taken into consideration.

2.4. Ethical Considerations

There were multiple ethical dilemmas that I encountered during this research, because '[f]rom 'gaining access' to reciprocity and the ongoing negotiation of consent, every aspect of ethnographic practice has an ethical dimension' (Mills and Morton, 2003, 73). Upon reflecting on these ethical matters, I feel most of them were linked to my shifting identities, that were often in conflict with one another. In particular, I faced an ethical quandary when I was working as a volunteer interpreter in one of the leading NGOs working with asylum seekers and refugees in Japan.

As an interpreter, I was required to be entirely professional, having no personal association with clients. I was not even allowed to have unsupervised talks with them, acting only as an interpreter. I quickly understood that this was not a straightforward role to maintain, because clients perceived me as an ally when they negotiated with the NGO officers. Because both the clients and I were Turkish citizens, it was natural for me to support them against 'Japanese' NGO officers. I was, in that sense, 'on their side'.

Furthermore, interviews were harsh. The NGO officers were seeking to determine if the clients were indeed in need of financial support because they had a limited budget. However, this meant that the interviews were lengthy, tiring and similar to an interrogation in nature. The clients often became irritated, and I was the person conveying these difficult questions. Inevitably, they directed their anger at me, or made unpleasant comments concerning the NGO officers in Turkish to me. Often they asked for my contact information,

in the hope that I could help them with translation.

I managed to hold my ground and refuse most of these requests; in one case, I could not escape from the client—Kerim. As described more fully above, he asked for my help in negotiating with a governmental agency and asked me to act as an interpreter.

In this case, I was caught between three identities; volunteer, researcher and activist. My volunteer identity was pushing me to reject Kerim's request for help. However, as a researcher, this meant that I would be pushing the community away, and I knew that in such a small community, such an act would tarnish my reputation. Lastly, as a human and advocate, I would be rejecting an asylum seeker family when they needed me the most. In the end, I helped them, and we developed a long-lasting and meaningful relationship.

The NGO office noticed that my position as a researcher and volunteer was a continuing source of conflict of interest, and after a while, they stopped sending me invitations to assist with interpretation. When I inquired about this, they replied by email explaining that they did not need my services anymore.

Treading the fine line between being an observer and participant was another ethical quandary that I encountered. As an observer, it was possible not to intervene, even though morally I found this unacceptable. Nonetheless, as a participant, I had to speak. For example, Kerim was raising Semih as a misogynist and sexist. In my opinion, this was wrong, and it was happening right in front of me every day. Kerim was telling Semih to insult his mother or to hit her, and Semih was obeying his father with pleasure. Fatma was yelling at both of them, or crying. I was not in a position to say anything, but it was hard not to interfere. My small comfort was that my presence in the house kept things within certain limits; there was never actual physical violence. Following a particularly intense argument, Kerim rushed out of the house with rage, and when he left, Fatma told Tarkan and me not to leave the house. According to her, if we had left the flat, he would beat her. So whilst I could not prevent verbal abuse, I would like to think that my presence contained the violence.

In a similar vein, there were irregularities that I witnessed or was even invited to participate

in. One night there was a pile of trash at home, and there were a couple of days until the trash disposal day. Kerim and I grabbed two garbage bags and put them into the front basket of our bicycles. He said we could put them into recycling collection bins in front of the adjoining shopping mall. Our garbage bags, however, were full of simple trash. They were not suitable for recycling bins. He did not listen to me and put them into the containers anyway.

Another example would be harassment on the street. While I was out walking in the streets with young men, they would regularly harass passing women. I told them not to do that, but was of little help. When I contemplate these issues, I think they were linked to my conflicting position as a participant and observer or friend and researcher.

As a friend, my language and IT skills and knowledge on Japanese asylum policy were much appreciated. Yet, there were several moments that I found myself in difficult circumstances. Kerim was planning to bring his brother, Mert (early 20s), to Japan from Turkey. The most obvious way was coming to Japan as a tourist, as many others do. Mert was an unemployed young man who had never been outside the country and could not speak any foreign language. Therefore—as will be explained in detail in the coming chapters—it was difficult for him to pass the border as a tourist. In these circumstances, Kerim turned to me and asked if I could go to Turkey to see my family and bring Mert with me on my way back. He was willing to pay my plane tickets and additional expenses. I knew that Mert would apply for asylum after entering the country as a tourist. Meaning, I would be lying to officials at the border check. I did not know if this was right or wrong, and I am still not sure about it.

Nevertheless, it made me very nervous. Thankfully, Kerim dropped the idea after a while and forgot about it. In this situation, again, I felt a conflict between my identities as a researcher and friend.

Extensive involvement made my life complicated more than once. Kerim's uncle-in-law Bekir (late 30s) came to Japan in the summer of 2017. He was married to Kerim and Tarkan's aunt, and they had three children. After a few months, he was active on multiple social dating apps, like the rest of the men in our community. Later, he began an affair with a Japanese

woman living in Hokkaido. The woman came to Tokyo to see him. A few weeks later, he started to make arrangements to visit the woman in Hokkaido. At this point, Bekir asked me to purchase tickets for him online, as I knew how to buy plane tickets and owned a credit card. Everyone, including Kerim and Tarkan, knew about the affair, except the aunt. Although I did not wish to be a part of it, I purchased the tickets, and he paid me in cash.

Months later, after I came back to the UK, I received a message from Bekir's wife on Facebook. Somehow, probably through Fatma, she learned about the Hokkaido trip, and she knew how he bought tickets. She was asking me not to help Bekir in any way. In the end, she and the children went to Tokyo to join Bekir, and everything is settled now. For me, however, it was a difficult dilemma to solve. I still do not know how I would have been able to turn down that request, because finding an excuse would have damaged my relationships.

In general, negotiating and shifting between roles and identities was a fundamental part of the fieldwork. The roles did not always work well together. I was regarded as a friend in the community, not as a researcher. This multiple roles gave me extra responsibilities, which were not always easy to fulfil.

Having said that, it is also essential to acknowledge that these dilemmas were not unique to this research. On the contrary, these ethical quandaries should be seen as intrinsic to research involving vulnerable people, as Liamputtong observes: '[t]he task of undertaking research with vulnerable people presents researchers with unique opportunities, but also dilemmas' (2007, 2). In the meantime, as I will discuss below, vulnerability should not be taken as given.

2.4.1. Giving Back to the Community

Reciprocity has been a central concern from the beginning of the fieldwork (Schwandt, 2007). To accomplish that, I volunteered for an NGO, but this was cancelled after a while as a result of the conflict of interest. During my volunteering period, I was accompanying NGO officers to interview clients when they applied for support to the NGO. I acted as an

interpreter during several interviews. I also accompanied Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers when they were visiting hospitals. Even after the interpretation work finished, I continued volunteering for the NGO as a food collector. I was collecting food from another NGO and carrying it to the office.

I acted as an interpreter and translator, in a personal capacity, until the end of the fieldwork. My tasks spanned from dealing with mobile phone companies to speaking with immigration officials about asylum applications. I accompanied people when they were visiting the Tokyo Immigration Office because they did not know Japanese or English. This seemed insignificant, but it made a huge difference. As I mention in Chapter Four—, the challenges—of not being able to read the documents and not being able to understand the officers—were psychologically tiring for asylum seekers. That is why having someone else present that they could count on was reassuring. I accompanied Bekir when he submitted his asylum application, and I noticed that our relationship transformed immediately. He said how grateful he was multiple times that day (Given, 2008, 739-740).

I was also serving as an 'IT guy' when it came to phone problems. Seemingly a 'minor service' (Hammersley and Traianiu, 2012, 59-60), smartphones are essential items for asylum seekers. As I explain in detail in Chapter Five—Working as an Asylum Seeker in Japan and Chapter Six—Seeking Love, Marriage and Asylum in Japan, mobile phones were indispensable in the daily lives of my participants. Any problem with the smartphone substantially affected their lives. Accordingly, my help was much appreciated.

In addition to my position as an interpreter and translator, I was visiting Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers in the detention centre as a volunteer. I began this to do interviews and collect data, but it turned into more than that after a while, and I continued visiting the centre even after collecting sufficient data. The detention centre was far away from central Tokyo, and as such it was rare for most of the detainees to have visitors. For this reason, they were pleased to see me every week. Usually, Suzuki-san was the only regular visitor for most of them, and when I began visiting them it was very welcome, as the daily routine was mundane and unstimulating. There were people in the detention centre who had close

family members or friends in Tokyo, but there were others who did not have anyone to visit them except Suzuki-san. For those people, visitors were critical. For instance, Naci (mid 30s), a Turkish asylum seeker who had lived in Nagoya for years, did not know anyone in Tokyo. In addition to that, it was even harder for him since he was ethnically Turkish. Probably because I am also ethnically Turkish, he accepted me as a confidante. I like to think that my visits became a consolation for those people who were detained for months in the centre (Hammersley and Traianiu, 2012, 59).

Lastly, most of my participants did not have a fixed income, and from time to time I was lending money to my close friends because, except for two months of suspension, I had a regular income. However, I did not want to trade access or information with money. For this reason, I was always careful about repayments.

2.4.2. Power Dynamics

The power dynamics between the research and participants in the field are often delineated as an uneven relationship between the powerful researcher and powerless research participants (Corlett and Mavin, 2018); participants reveal their lives—even the most intimate parts—to the researcher, but researchers do not equally open their lives to the participants (Berthoud et al., 2002). In reality, however, this relationship is much more nuanced and multidimensional.

At the beginning of the fieldwork, I was living away from my participants. So, I had the luxury of leaving them after a day full of talking and observation—or at least, that was my assumption. In reality, even during those days, I did not have that luxury. Actually, it was at my participants' discretion whether to talk or not. Sometimes I was visiting a kebab shop, and nobody would talk to me. There was nothing I could do in those kinds of situations.

For this reason, it is misleading to assume participants are vulnerable individuals in their relationship with the researcher. Even in the detention centre, where the participants were under the worst conditions, they were able to manipulate, question or reject my visits. When I first met Rasim, a young Kurdish asylum seeker, for instance, he questioned me, my

research and asked me dozens of questions. It was certainly not a one-way relationship, even in the beginning.

However, the issue of vulnerability took an unexpected turn when my scholarship was suspended. I used to spend a couple of hours at most in the mosque, but I started spending more time there after losing the scholarship, because that feeling of unity and solidarity was giving me strength. It was nothing to do with religion—just talking to friends, socialising with them was more than enough.

This experience changed my understanding and perspective about people, time, space and myself. The following note from my field diary shows my perspective:

> When I arrived at the mosque, a guy was standing in front of the mosque. He was wearing a pyjama/sportswear kind of clothes. He was holding his phone, and it seemed to me that he doesn't take care of his look that much… He was using the internet of the house next to the mosque. I guess his name is Osman, he is from Iran, and he stayed in Ibaraki for seven months. And they caught him at the airport. He asked me if I'm Turkish or Kurdish since he met lots of Kurdish in the detention centre. While we were talking a car came and parked in front of the house. Some ex-mosque residents live in that house, across the road. A woman and two kids get off the car, and we were looking at them. I felt like they were representing what it means to have a 'life', but we were just standing there; lost, waiting…

At this time, to save money, I moved to Kerim's house and we became housemates. Actually, I literally took refuge at his house, but I could not truly adopt it as my home, as I wrote in my diary: 'Homelessness… Yeah, I realised how tiring it is. I envy everyone. My life looks like shit. I don't understand how I became so miserable'.

When I moved into his house, the dynamics of our relationship changed; I became dependent on him. Moreover, it appeared that I was astonishingly unskilled and useless at everything. To illustrate, I did not know anything about preparing, cutting and packaging kebab. He took me with him a couple of times to the small kebab kiosk where he was selling

kebab on weekends, but I was hopeless. Certainly, Kerim was much more skilled than me. He was scolding me and giving orders by saying things like 'bring this', 'wrap that', 'you can't do it like this' or 'you shouldn't keep it in this way'.

On the other hand, the idea of me working in demolition was even more ridiculous, as I mentioned in the previous section on masculinity. One of the participants, a young Turkish asylum seeker, Burak, made it clear: 'Please don't take it in a wrong way, but a man like you can't work [as a labourer]. You can't work there like two months, three months, let alone four months…'. Burak was comparing himself with me, and apparently I did not have any chance of winning this comparison. Not just Kerim but all of them were much more able than me. They were earning more than ¥200,000 in an average month. My scholarship was ¥230,000, but without it, I was not able to make any money in Japan. In truth, I was the weakest and most vulnerable person among our group at that point.

All in all, I think this experience made it clear to me that as a PhD student or academic, my so-called skills and expertise do not have any value in the 'real world'. At the same time, it revealed to me how resourceful and skilled my participants were. Consequently, they were anything but vulnerable—and if they were vulnerable, they were less vulnerable than me.

2.4.3. Issues of Consent and (Do No) Harm

Informed consent is obtained from the participants during the research. I informed participants about my identity as a researcher, and my purpose of writing a PhD thesis about asylum seekers in Japan. The consent was taken verbally, and I did not ask for written consent. The nature of ethnographic research lies behind this methodological choice. Given the nature of ethnographic research, obtaining informed consent, which is imported from biomedical research traditions, has some problematic aspects (Atkinson, 2015). In broad terms, ethnography can be described as a qualitative methodology involving participation and observation of a group of people for a certain period to understand their perceptions, interactions and relations (Naidoo, 2012, 1). The distinguishing feature of ethnographic research is the direct, close and long-term involvement of the researcher with the group under study. Therefore, the idea of one-time consent is not consistent with participant

observation.

Participants might be content with the researcher's involvement in certain activities, but not others, or these might change after a certain amount of time. Due to this, consent must be seen as a continuous negotiation between researcher and participants. It is neither natural nor appropriate to ask for consent every day. Also, it is not realistic. Clearly, the researcher cannot ask every person on a bus while conducting participant observation with a group of participants. In theory, all people on the bus become participants at that point. Still, ethnographic research is the most egalitarian and consent-sensitive research, because participants have the power to inhibit the researcher's involvement at any time, in any place (Brooks et al., 2014, 90).

In addition, participants were asylum seekers, and naturally they were highly conscious of their anonymity. For this reason, writing their names on a consent form and expecting them to sign such a form was neither reasonable nor safe. Even further, asking about being a participant verbally was enough to create suspicions about my position as a researcher. I am sure at least some people suspected me of being an official collecting information for the government. In order to avoid the issue of trust and insecurity, written informed consent was neither asked for nor given. I was, however, honest about my identity as a researcher and also explained my study. I also explained that the information that I collected would be turned into a thesis, and may end up as a book.

As for interviewees, I prepared information sheets and consent forms, which are attached to the forms. In addition to English and Japanese versions, all documents were translated into Turkish to ensure participants fully understood the explanations and what they had agreed to. One copy of the documents was supposed to be given to the participant, and the researcher would take the other one. Nevertheless, none of the above actually happened, because no one agreed to sign anything. I anticipated this potential result before the research, but ethics committee members were sure that asylum seekers would be ready to sign a paper with their name on it. Although I insisted that it was not reasonable, the ethics committee made it clear that they would not approve my application if I insisted otherwise.

However, in the field, I only managed to receive one signed consent form, which was signed by a Japanese doctor. However, I recorded verbal consent at the beginning of each interview. I asked whether they agree to join an interview or not, and they said yes. Verbal consent, therefore, was received for interviews.

The names and specific locations of the participants are anonymised, and the research does not involve any information that might reveal the identity of the participants. Research sites are described in a general way in the study. These descriptions, again, do not disclose any specific details or any additional information that it is not already public. However, it is clear that the research is conducted in Tokyo and Saitama, specifically in Warabi/Kawaguchi, mainly with Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers. This is not sensitive information, because it is already an obvious and publicly available fact that there are Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers in this area. Accordingly, writing the name of the city and participants' ethnicity does not provide new information.

There are matters that I decided not to include in this study, and I will keep these unpublished in the future (Hammersley and Traianiu, 2009, 66), in order to keep certain information away from governmental agencies. Some tactics or everyday practices that asylum seekers and irregular migrants employ to overcome structural barriers should not be revealed. For this reason, it should be known that I decided not to include any information if I felt that publicising that information may make life harder for my participants.

2.4.4. Data Protection

The field notes and diary are kept only in my password-protected computer and high-security online storage as a backup. These are also stored only as a Word document. Again, in order to minimise the risk of them being stolen or lost, keeping them on the computer is considered to be the best way. Because there is no risk to lost field notes or field diary, these documents will be safe in the personal computer of the researcher. In addition to password protection of the computer, all these documents are protected with additional passwords. Since the beginning of the research, the risk of being robbed or losing notes has not been an issue. In the field, I took my notes habitually in my

password-protected phone instead of paper. I have notes on paper, but those have been stored safely, either in a locked drawer or carried by me all the time.

As mentioned above, to avoid potential data loss, online versions of all the data are stored in a Google drive folder provided by the University of Sheffield. The security of this platform is guaranteed by Google, and it is used by all university personnel. Any hacking of such data would represent a major crisis not only for this research but also all the researchers in the university; I believe that this is the best solution, and university-provided storage is the most secure place to store the data.

The data will be used only by me for this PhD project and further academic publications. It will be destroyed after the PhD project and related publication processes are finished.

2.5. Conclusion

Each research project has its own story, and this chapter has explored the theoretical and practical choices that I made during the research process. Since the beginning of this research, ethnography has almost dictated itself as the research approach. Even though it was difficult to establish ties within the Turkish/Kurdish community in Japan for various reasons in the beginning, thanks to a series of unfortunate events, I managed to find a position within the community over time.

Unarguably, there was suspicion stemming from ethnic and political differences. Therefore it took time to establish trust between me and my participants. In order to reach that, self-reflexivity became important, because I had to understand my positionality to be able to understand how I was affecting the research. For instance, my gender as a straight male has been decisive.

Participant observation has been crucial for data collection, but this went beyond research and at some point, I was about to go native. Temporarily losing my scholarship was really instructive about power relations within the field; this experience also demonstrated how resourceful and resilient my participants were. In addition to participant observation,

semi-structured in-depth interviews helped me to compare my own observations with my participants' approach to the same issues. I also managed to see other actors' ideas and approaches, such as a doctor, a lawyer, a social worker and volunteers, in addition to that of asylum seekers from Turkey and beyond.

As expected, ethical concerns have been a crucial part of the research project. Asylum seekers are considered vulnerable subjects. Of course, this required me to be more careful about every decision during the research process. I have been careful about storing the data during fieldwork, and I do not provide any personal information about the participants in the thesis. More importantly, I was concerned about power relations. Within a short time of starting the fieldwork, however, I realised that my participants were actually powerful subjects. As I mentioned above, they were more powerful than me at least. During the fieldwork, I constantly struggled between different roles: researcher, friend and volunteer. These different roles were often at odds with each other, but I was careful to be self-reflexive throughout the fieldwork and deliberate in my choices whenever I perceived conflict.

Chapter Three—Asylum Seekers and Refugees in Japan

3.1. Introduction

In a study aiming to understand experiences of asylum seekers within the asylum system in Japan, their negotiation with governmental agencies, and their day-to-day survival strategies, it is indispensable to examine aspects of the asylum regime, starting from its historical formation to the refugee recognition system. Accordingly, this chapter will provide background information for the following chapters. In a way, this chapter lays the foundation for all of the subsequent chapters by providing contextual knowledge.

Specifically, I aim to answer the following questions in this chapter: what is the historical background of the asylum system in Japan? How has the Japanese asylum system been transformed through time? What are the particular turning points during the formation of the asylum system? Why did Japan not sign the Convention and Protocol until 1981? Historically, who were asylum seekers in Japan? How were they welcomed? How has the asylum system been developed after the accession to the Convention and the Protocol after 1981? Why did the number of asylum seekers rise after the mid-2000s? What are the stages of the refugee recognition system? How do asylum seekers apply for asylum, object to decisions, and use their right to litigate the decision in the courts? What are the problematic features of the refugee recognition system? When did Turkish citizens begin applying for asylum in Japan? Why have Kurdish asylum seekers come to the forefront of discussions regarding asylum seekers and refugees in Japan? How has the community of Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers been transformed over time? And why does this community continue applying for asylum, even though no Turkish citizen has ever been recognised as a refugee in Japan?

By answering these questions, the chapter will reveal the framework of the asylum system

from a top-down perspective. Remembering Slater's (2019) metaphor of the circuitous path, the chapter will look at the construction and structure of the path of seeking asylum in Japan. Or to put it another way, we will examine the construction of the context of the liminal legality for asylum seekers in Japan, before providing a bottom-up perspective in the upcoming chapters.

3.2. The History of Refugee Movements in Japan until the Accession to the Convention and the Protocol

3.2.1. Before the Second World War

Although Japan has not been particularly famous for being a safe haven for refugees, it has a long history of hosting people who have fled their countries. Since feudal times, Japan has occasionally been a refuge, especially for defeated parties of warring factions in Korea and China. Notably, after the opening of the country to the outside world with the Meiji Restoration (1868), Japan became more politically and diplomatically involved in East Asia. The first diplomatic extradition request for refugees from Japan made by other countries was also the result of Japan's growing involvement in the region (Arakaki, 2008, 9-10).

In the 1880s, Japan and China were striving to extend their influence in Korea. In order to support reformers in Korea to modernise the country, Japanese officials provided them with financial loans and guidance. Nevertheless, after an unsuccessful coup attempt in 1884, the leaders of the failed coup, Kim Ok-gyun and Pak Yeong-hyo, were forced to flee to Japan. The extradition of the two reformers turned into a diplomatic crisis, but the Japanese government refused to return them to Korea, where they were to be put on trial as traitors. However, this refusal did not mean that their protection from repatriation by the Japanese government would extend indefinitely beyond the bare minimum, and they did not receive long-term support (Duus, 1995).

Kim and Pak were not the only political refugees coming to Japan as a result of political upheavals. In 1898, following the *coup d'etat* coordinated by Empress Dowager Cixi to halt

the reform process launched by young Emperor Guangxu, prominent Chinese reformer and statesman Kang Youwei fled to Japan. However, he did not stay for long, and after a year he proceeded to Canada, where he instituted a foundation named *Baohuang Hui* (the Society to Preserve the Emperor) to continue supporting the emperor (Fidan and Jovanovic, 2015).

As well as these political fugitives occasionally arriving from Korea and China seeking refuge, Japan encountered a larger refugee movement following the Russian Revolution in 1917. Several thousand refugees from Russia—White Russians Poles, Tatars and Jewish people—sought refuge in Japan after the revolution. The October Revolution prompted two separate waves to and from Russia: the first wave was the outcome of the political amnesty that Bolsheviks declared after the revolution in 1917. Those people, comprising the members of several political or religious movements, were transit passengers returning to Russia from Canada and America, where they had emigrated before the revolution (Podalko, 1998, 206).

Unlike the first group, the direction of the second wave of Russian refugees was not towards Russia. These refugees were fleeing from the October Revolution, and their number only grew over time, after various White Army setbacks, until the Red Army captured Vladivostok in 1922. As many of them were intending to go to America, or occasionally Australia or Europe, again Japan was not a final destination. Probably because of the cultural differences and language barriers, Japan was not regarded as an ideal country to settle in by many of these refugees, which was also indicated in the statistics: the Interior Ministry's 'General Status of Foreign Residents' demonstrates that the number of Russian people had decreased between January and December 1921 (Podalko, 1998, 206).

Additionally, it must be noted that the Japanese government was not particularly welcoming to Russian refugees. In 1920, a new immigration system was put in place by the Japanese government, requiring every foreigner entering Japan to possess at least ¥1,500 per person, which is equivalent almost US$10,000 in 2019 (Lewis, 2013). The system was intended to reduce the financial costs of refugees, as well as eliminating the poor ones. This is, of course, if they were fortunate enough to make it Japan in the first place. Considering that most of

the refugees could not bring their valuables with them, this cash condition became a significant obstacle for many refugees. Even those who reached Japan became stateless, after Japan reached an agreement and officially recognised the Soviet Union (Nakanishi, 2004).

On the other hand, there were international efforts to protect Russian refugees. To this end, Norwegian scientist Fridtjof Nansen was appointed as High Commissioner for Russian Refugees by the League of Nations in 1921. By his initiative, the 'Arrangement with Regard to the Issue of Certificates of Identity to Russian Refugees', which created the 'Nansen Passport' designed to protect refugees, and eventually signed by 52 countries (Chetail, 2003, 4). Even though Japan ratified the arrangement, those who only had a Nansen passport were refused entry by Japan, creating one more obstacle for Russian refugees (Arakaki, 2008, 11).

3.2.2. During the Second World War

The Second World War displaced millions of people in Europe, but the Jewish people suffered the most from the catastrophic events before and during the war. Even in the 1930s, the anti-Semitism of the Nazi regime forced Jewish citizens to leave Germany, and later, the rest of Europe. In order to find a solution to the pressing issue of Jewish refugees, the Evian Conference was coordinated by Franklin Roosevelt in 1938. Even though the Japanese government did not send a delegation to the conference, Shanghai, which was under Japanese control at that time, surprisingly became a haven for Jewish refugees; 17,000 Jewish refugees arrived in the city from 1938 to 1940 (Shatzkes, 1991, 257).

Japanese attitudes towards Jewish refugees were considerably different from those in Nazi Germany, although the two were allies and formed the Axis alliance during the war. Reports from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs point out that, similar to their Nazi counterparts, Japanese officials were influenced by conspiracy theories about the wealth and power of Jewish people. However, based on these conspiracy theories, Japanese officials evaluated the circumstances differently. They perceived an opportunity to bring foreign capital to

Japan and Greater Asia, i.e. Japan's sphere of influence. In addition to that, Japanese officials were hoping to utilise the 'influence of Jews' to alleviate Japan's relationships with Britain and the US. Notably, the development of Manchuria was the focus of some Japanese officials, who were seeking to bring Jewish capital into Manchuria for investment. Hence, the Japanese government granted Jewish refugees permission to come to Japan, as well as to the areas under Japanese control such as Manchuria and Shanghai. By 1940, however, Japanese officials began to restrict immigration and tighten the rules (Kranzler, 1974; Shatzkes, 1991).

There were exceptions to the pragmatic approach that determined the perception of the Japanese government towards Jewish refugees. A notable example was Sugihara Chiune, who was the Japanese consul in Kaunas, Lithuania in 1940. By that time, thousands of Jewish people—mostly Polish citizens—were stranded in Lithuania, as they could not obtain a visa for any country. However, the island of Curaçao in the Caribbean, which was a colony of the Netherlands at that time, now became an option—as Polish citizens could travel to Curaçao without a visa. The Netherland's honorary consul in Lithuania, Jan Zwartendijk, began to stamp documents of Jewish refugees, including a statement that the holder of the passport did not need a visa to enter Curaçao. Having these stamps, Jewish refugees applied to Sugihara to provide them with a transit visa for Japan. Sugihara notified his superiors in Tokyo and requested their approval to issue transit visas, but the ministry declined his appeals. However, he displayed an act of exceptional courage and did not follow the commands; Sugihara issued more than 2,000 visas, which helped to protect up to 6,000 people (Hadzelek, 2016).

3.2.3. After the Second World War

Following the Second World War, Japan continued to experience infrequent arrivals of individual asylum seekers, until the mass exodus of Indochinese refugees as a result of the Vietnam War in the 1970s. One early example was Yuri Rastvorov, then the Second Secretary of the Soviet Embassy in Tokyo, who sought asylum from the US on 24 January 1954. Without asking the Japanese government, US officials transferred Rastvorov from

Tokyo to Okinawa before he flew to the US, where he took refuge on 26 January. The Japanese government expressed its frustration concerning the handling of the situation, as the procedure was not compatible with Japanese laws and regulations. The US ambassador assured Japan that from now on, 'every attention will be paid to respecting Japanese laws and regulations and that the Japanese Government will be consulted immediately in cases of this kind' (Rastvorov given US asylum, 1954).

Yuri Rastvorov was not the only defector from the Soviet Union seeking temporary refuge in Japan after the Second World War. In 1976, a Soviet lieutenant, Viktor Belenko landed in Hakodate with his MIG-25 fighter jet, one of the most advanced aircraft of the era. Initially, Belenko's situation was handled as a criminal case by local police, buying Japanese officials time to decide what to do with the pilot and plane. Belenko made it clear that he aspired to seek refuge in the US, which made the decision easier for the Japanese government. From a legal perspective, Belenko did not even enter Japan, because he was not given entry permission, but taken into custody at the border. Therefore, his departure to the US resolved the quandary for the Japanese government (Eyster, 1977). During both events, Japan had been a temporary refuge for defectors on their way to the US.

In addition to defectors from the Soviet Union, individuals from East Asia continued to seek refuge in Japan. One of them was a Korean citizen, Shu Kil Yun, who entered Japan as an irregular migrant in 1951. As a supporter of a unified Korea, Yun was a critic of the Park administration; he organised an unsuccessful campaign against the South Korean government's execution of a journalist for treason. In April 1962, Yun was detained and received a deportation order by immigration officials on the grounds of irregular entry, as he arrived in the country without a visa in 1950. Yun declared himself a political refugee and filed a lawsuit against his compulsory repatriation, as the South Korean government would punish him if he returned. In 1969, the Tokyo District Court cancelled the deportation order and recognised Yun as a political offender, declaring non-extradition of political offenders as a principle of customary international law. Nevertheless, the Tokyo High Court overturned the decision in 1972, and the Supreme Court upheld the decision of the Tokyo High Court in 1976. In the end, the deportation order was dropped, and Yun was allowed to stay in Japan

(South Korean fighting to get status, 1963; Mukae, 2001, 100).

As a neighbouring country close to both communist mainland China and the Taiwanese nationalist government, Japan emerged as a natural destination for political dissidents from both countries, even though it was not easy to define Japan as an ideal destination, due to its reluctance to provide long-term refuge for political refugees. At the beginning of the 1960s, a group of Taiwanese student formed an organisation in Japan named 'United Young Formosans for Independence' (UYFI) which was distancing itself both from communists and nationalists (Youths stage anti-Taipei street rally, 1965). In August 1967, the group came under the spotlight when the Japanese Immigration Bureau detained two of their members for overstaying their visas. The deportation process, however, was halted by the Tokyo District Court's injunction. A couple of months later, in October 1967, the Japanese Justice Minister visited Taipei with Immigration Bureau officials. During the visit, the delegation discussed the deportation of a Taiwanese narcotics smuggler with Taiwanese counterparts, who accepted it on the condition of extradition of the members of the Taiwanese independence movement[9] (Mukae, 2001, 100-101).

Approximately six months later, in March 1968, the Japanese Immigration Bureau deported a Taiwanese citizen and member of UYFI, Liu Wen-Ching, for overstaying after completing his postgraduate education. Although Liu's friends filed an injunction order to rescind the deportation order, the Immigration Office did not wait for the decision of the court. Liu was deported just a day after his arrest, amid protests from other members of the Taiwanese independence movement (10 members of Taiwan, 1968). His wife filed a damage suit and requested monetary compensation, which was accepted by the Tokyo District Court (Court validates suits, 1968).

A year later, the Tokyo District Court concluded that the deportation of Liu, a political

[9] A socialist Diet member, Kozo Inomata called it 'political negotiation' in 1969, when another member of the UYFI, Chen Yu-shi was deported to Taiwan. Inomata said '[…] a few years ago, Japan's Minister of Justice and the Director of Immigration went to Taiwan to discuss Taiwanese narcotic smugglers in Japan. […] In return, the Taiwan Government requested that Taiwanese living in Japan who were against Taiwan Government also be deported.' (JSP Dietman says Taiwanese deported as political deal, 1969).

asylum seeker, violated international customary law and ordered the government to pay ¥2 million to his wife and son. The judge stated that Liu had been deported, even though the immigration officials was notified about the injunction order by the Tokyo District Court before the deportation. According to the court, therefore, Liu's human rights were violated by the government as a result of his deportation to Taiwan (Taiwanese deportee's wife, 1969). The decision was turned down by the Tokyo High Court in 1971, stating 'although it is 'customary international practice', based on freedom and humanity, to refrain from subjecting political criminals to extradition, it has not been firmly established international law' (Court backs gov't in deportation case, 1971).

Taken together, these cases prove that until the Second World War, asylum cases were perceived as *ad hoc* administrative decisions based on policy concerns. On the other hand, Japan's post-war asylum policy was an extension of its foreign policy, which was based on pacifism, concentrating on economic development and avoidance of conflict on the international stage (Arakaki, 2008, 14). For this reason, by not making asylum accessible for people looking for protection, the Japanese government intended to avoid potential crises that could be disruptive to its international relations. In some instances, Japan evaded responsibility, thanks to the US's eagerness to grant protection for defectors from the Eastern Bloc. Accordingly, a small number of asylum cases did not constitute a challenge for Japan. However, this policy was tested subsequent to the fall of Saigon, the capital of the American-backed South Vietnam regime, in 1975.

3.2.4. Indochinese Refugees in Japan

Beginning in mid-1975, groups of Vietnamese asylum seekers began to arrive in Japan by boats, or they were brought to Japan after being rescued at sea by ships. The problematic aspects of not having a legal framework to accommodate refugees became apparent with their arrival. In the absence of appropriate means to host Vietnamese asylum seekers, the Japanese government accommodated asylum seekers as if they were victims of maritime accidents (Mukae, 2001, 102-104). An official from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs framed the difficulty of the situation as '[w]e don't know what to do with these people' (Chapman,

1977).

The number of Vietnamese asylum seekers only grew over time, reaching 1300 by mid-1978 and 800 of them arriving in 1977 alone (as cited in Press comments, 1978). In mid-1978, the Japanese government decided to allow Vietnamese asylum seekers to stay in Japan permanently by a cabinet decision. Aside from the fact that the number of Vietnamese asylum seekers was growing day by day, increasing pressure and criticism from the US was a significant push factor for the Cabinet (Gov't to let refugees, 1978). A year later, in April 1979, the Cabinet expanded the resettlement policy by including Laotians and Cambodians. Additionally, the government undertook the responsibility of providing language support and employment opportunities for Indochinese refugees. Unsurprisingly, this decision came just before US President Carter's visit to Japan, once again confirming the importance of international pressure for the Japanese government to act on refugee matters (Mukae, 2001, 110-111).

The discussions regarding the ratification of the Convention and the Protocol had been taking place since the 1960s. However, the European origins of the Refugee Convention, and the vague definition of a 'refugee' were seen as problematic by the government. Besides, joining the Refugee Convention would create a flow of refugees from nearby countries, which were undergoing political and economic instabilities (Arakaki, 2008, 16). Following the influx of Indochinese refugees, however, this was not a concern anymore, as there was already a flow of refugees.

Together with international pressure, which was coming mainly from the United States, the arrival of the Indochinese refugees made the Japanese government's position unsustainable in the long run. Before the accession, however, the government had to change the related laws to be able to accommodate refugees. Unsurprisingly, the main obstacle was changing the discriminatory aspects of the socio-legal system, which had been established based on the premise of ethnic homogeneity, race-based citizenship, and the exclusion of *Zainichi* Koreans. Even though they were accepted as subjects and citizens during the imperial era under the concept of the multi-ethnic empire of Japan, after the Second World War, Koreans

who decided to stay in Japan were deprived of citizenship and became foreigners. A new national ideology based on ethnic unity was established during the post-war period. Therefore, it was not surprising that the exclusionary socio-legal system, which was based on a 'one people one nation' ideology had to be changed when Japan decided to ratify the Convention and the Protocol (Yamanaka, 2004).

The laws regarding naturalisation and particularly the citizenship requirement for social insurance had to be changed, which also implied that *Zainichi* Koreans (who had been brought in Japan before the Second World War from Korea) would also be covered by social insurance plans (Flowers, 2009, 49). In order to make the necessary changes, a bill was submitted to the Diet by the Japanese government on April 28, 1981, together with the accession proposal to the Convention and the Protocol, and approved by the Diet on 5 June 1981 (Mukae, 2001, 147).

3.3. Japanese Refugee Policy After the Accession to the Convention and the Protocol

In 1981, Japan became a signatory of the Convention and the Protocol. At the same time, the Immigration Control Order established in 1951 was changed, and a new immigration law, the Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act (ICRRC) came into effect on 1 January 1982. As discussed in the preceding section, the Japanese government's decision to host Indochinese refugees was not a result of domestic pressure, but largely international pressure and the Japanese government's decision to retain its sovereignty (Mukae, 2001). The reception of Indochinese refugees was a political decision taken by the government.

For this reason, most refugees did not go through a determination process. The protection of refugees usually requires cooperation between ministries and governmental agencies; however, this was not the case in Japan, where the Ministry of Justice was solely responsible for all matters regarding refugees. Since the beginning, the Ministry of Justice has been the sole governmental bureau that is responsible for the acceptance of asylum applications to the protection of refugees after recognition, and more importantly, it is also responsible for

immigration control—thus making its personnel and institutional culture more sensitive to security issues, rather than humanitarian approaches (Honma, 2008).

3.3.1. Japan's Refugee Policy in the 1990s

Japan's accession to the Convention and the Protocol, therefore, does not suggest a high refugee acceptance rate for asylum seekers. On the contrary, as can be seen in Table 1 below, the refugee recognition rate has been incredibly low, notably in the first half of the 1990s.

Table 1: Japan's Refugee Protection Statistics (MOJ, 2019b)

Year	Asylum Applications	Refugees Recognised	Indochinese FU/Resettlement	Humanitarian Status
1978	-	-	3	-
1979	-	-	94	-
1980	-	-	396	-
1981	-	-	1203	-
1982	530	67	456	-
1983	44	63	675	-
1984	62	31	979	-
1985	29	10	730	-
1986	54	3	306	-
1987	48	6	579	-
1988	47	12	500	-
1989	50	2	461	-
1990	32	2	734	-
1991	42	1	780	7
1992	68	3	792	2
1993	50	6	558	3
1994	73	1	456	9
1995	52	2	231	3
1996	147	1	151	3
1997	242	1	157	3
1998	133	16	132	42
1999	260	16	158	44

2000	216	22	135	36
2001	353	26	131	67
2002	250	14	144	40
2003	336	10	146	16
2004	426	15	144	9
2005	384	46	88	97
2006	954	34	-	53
2007	816	41	-	88
2008	1599	57	-	360
2009	1388	30	-	501
2010	1202	39	27	363
2011	1867	21	18	248
2012	2545	18	0	112
2013	3260	6	18	151
2014	5000	11	23	110
2015	7586	27	19	79
2016	10901	28	18	97
2017	19629	20	29	45
2018	10493	42	22	40
2019	10375	44	20	37
Total	71168	750	11493	2628

While Japan began admitting Convention refugees after becoming a signatory, Indochinese refugees continued arriving each year. Since the situation in Indochina became more stable at the end of 1980s, the Japanese government's stance towards Indochinese refugees took a negative turn. Particularly after the second international conference on Indochinese refugees in Geneva in 1989, which authorised countries to take a stricter stance on economic immigrants 'disguising' themselves as refugees, the Japanese government decided to introduce new measures to separate economic immigrants from 'genuine' refugees. There was also a suspicion that Japan's economic boom was attracting economic immigrants (Akashi, 2006, 228). Between May and September, 2,270 new refugees arrived in Japan by boat, alarming the Japanese government (Ono, 1989).

The new screening process was primarily designed to detect Chinese nationals claiming to be Vietnamese refugees, as well as Vietnamese citizens who did not leave the country as a

result of persecution. For this reason, the Japanese government was adamant about detecting those 'bogus' refugees and deporting them as soon as possible. Business associations, however, were criticising the government's approach, and argued that those people should be accepted whether as immigrants or refugees because they could contribute to the economy, which was suffering from a lack of unskilled labour (Ono, 1989). Therefore, the confluence between immigration policy and refugee policy can be traced back to this period.

In the 1990s, the problems mentioned above regarding refugee policy became clear, and attracted criticism from international agencies. Amnesty International (1993) published a lengthy report about Japan's refugee policy. According to Amnesty International, Japanese refugee policy was 'deficient in a number of respects' (1993, 235), as a result of 'arbitrary and overly politicised' (1993, 225) status determination procedure which was not in compliance with 'Japan's international obligations' (1993, 225) concerning refugee protection.

Amnesty International's criticism covered a broad range of concerns, starting with the application process through to the detention of asylum seekers. In terms of the application process, Amnesty International underscored the difficulties of applying for asylum, particularly for those who claim asylum at a port of entry, considering there was a tendency not to permit 'landing for temporary refuge' to anyone except Indochinese refugees.

Besides this, there were examples where in-country asylum applications were obstructed by not providing sufficient information to asylum seekers, and even failing to provide application documents. Lastly, Amnesty International censured the notorious '60-day rule', which will be discussed in the subsequent section. In addition to these problems with the application process, the report questioned the expertise of the Refugee Inquirers, and underlined the difficulties faced by detained asylum seekers, particularly regarding accessing information.

Further, Amnesty International expressed its concerns over asylum seeker detention. The relationship between the UNHCR Tokyo office and the Ministry of Justice was regarded as

problematic by the report, since UNHCR's opinions were not always followed during the status determination process. Lastly, the appeal system was characterised as defunct, and any judicial appeal was described as 'illusory' (2003, 234). Amnesty International's report was significant, because it was an early warning about the challenges of the refugee determination system.

Even though the Ministry of Justice rejected Amnesty International's criticisms (Yamagami, 1995), after 1998 there was a slight improvement in the number of recognised refugees and humanitarian status holders. As can be seen in Table 1: Japan's Refugee Protection Statistics (MOJ, 2019b), between 1986 and 1997 the number of recognised refugees exceeded ten only once, reaching twelve in 1988. During those years the number was usually between one and three each year. As for those granted humanitarian status, the number changed between zero and nine, most of the time not surpassing three. The number of recognised refugees and humanitarian status holders began to rise in 1998. Japan became a signatory of several international conventions around the mid-1990s.

Therefore the Japanese government aimed at compliance with international human rights, which presumably softened the stance of the Ministry of Justice. In the meantime, Japanese scholar and academic Sadako Ogata's position as the High Commissioner of the UNHCR from 1991 to 2000 might have played a role (Tarumoto, 2018, 12). However, Ogata's impact was more visible on Japan's financial contributions to the UNHCR, as Japan was the second biggest donor behind the US (Akashi, 2006, 30).

3.3.2. Shenyang Incident and the 2004 Revisions

The real shift in Japan's refugee policy was the outcome of an incident that occurred outside of Japan. In May 2002, five North Korean defectors sought refuge in the Japanese consulate in Shenyang, and although Chinese police officers apprehended most of them, two of them managed to reach the visa-application section of the consulate. During the incident, Japanese consulate officers watched police officers detain two asylum seekers, and did nothing to prevent them. The entire story was documented by photographs, which were

later published by international media outlets, provoking a strong national and international reaction. After the incident, the Japanese government claimed that Chinese police officers entered the consulate territory without consent, violating the 1961 Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations. However, the Chinese government rejected this version of events, insisting that the Japanese consulate reached out to the police to remove the North Koreans, and afterwards thanked them for their cooperation (China police entered, 2002).

Of course, the Japanese government vehemently dismissed the allegation that Japanese officials invited the Chinese police to enter the consulate. The Japanese government demanded that the North Korean asylum seekers be handed back, and emphasised the importance of human rights (Japan-China refugees, 2002). Nevertheless, the Japanese government's efforts could not stop public and international criticism about Japan's poor record regarding asylum seekers and refugees. The outcome was the establishment of a panel named the Special Working Group on Refugee Problems, to make recommendations to the Minister of Justice about refugee policy. In the autumn of 2002, the panel delivered a report which included several policy suggestions; this subsequently became a bill and ultimately led to a legal revision of ICRRA in 2004 (Abe, 2003, 6).

The 2004 revision of the ICRRA improved the refugee status determination process in three areas. First, the 60-days rule was abolished. Now, asylum seekers were permitted to submit their applications even after 60 days. Second, the system of permission for provisional stay was introduced, to enable irregular residents to have legal residency status during the refugee status determination process if they apply for asylum. Lastly, Refugee Examination Counsellors were incorporated into the administrative review process. These changes were nowhere near adequate to resolve all the problems associated with Japan's refugee policy (Akashi, 2006, 232). Nevertheless, simply abolishing the 60-days rule was sufficient to increase the number of asylum applications, which almost tripled between 2005 and 2006. After 2005, the number of humanitarian status holders also rose, and reached its highest at 501 in 2009.

3.3.3. Resettlement Programme and 2010 Revisions

In 2008, the Japanese government made another historic move by deciding to accept refugees via a pilot resettlement programme for three years, starting from 2010. According to the project, Japan was going to accept 90 Myanmarese refugees from Thailand in total. After the first three year period, the programme extended for two years, and then became semi-permanent after 2015. Until 2017, thirty-nine families from Myanmar (comprising 152 individuals) arrived in Japan through the resettlement project. By initiating the pilot programme, Japan became the first country to accept refugees through resettlement in the East Asian region (Hashimoto, 2019, 129). The programme had the potential to improve Japan's negative international image of having a highly restrictive refugee policy, especially in terms of accepting refugees to its own territory. The programme aimed to prove that in addition to its financial contributions, Japan was willing to take more responsibility for international burden sharing. The UNHCR was also encouraging the Japanese government to take the lead in Asia, which turned out be a significant motive (Takizawa, 2015, 213).

While the first group of Myanmarese refugees was arriving Japan via a pilot resettlement project in 2010, the Ministry of Justice adopted a new policy to provide a work permit to asylum seekers who applied for asylum while holding a legal residence status. Considering the longevity of the refugee status determination process, holding a work permit would help asylum seekers to have financial security until they receive a decision about their status. In the absence of formal immigration routes for low-skilled immigrants, however, this decision produced an unintended outcome.

As there was not a visa programme to accommodate low-skilled immigrants, much needed by the Japanese economy, submitting an asylum application became a convenient and legal way to secure a work permit. The outcome of this policy change was observed immediately. The number of asylum applications took an upward turn after 2010, and proceeded to increase for the next seven years until 2018 (Takizawa, 2018). While the asylum applications were soaring, the number of recognised refugees did not improve. Providing work permits for legally-staying asylum seekers legalised working for asylum seekers. However, in the

absence of a legal route for labour migration, it also contributed to the emergence of the asylum-migration nexus in Japan, and specifically resulted in the 'asylumisation' of migration.

In the meantime, the Syrian Civil War, which began in 2011, forced millions of Syrian citizens to flee to nearby countries. As expected, the Japanese government's strategy was assisting refugees financially through the United Nations and other channels such, as the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC); the Japanese government announced a US$2.8 billion support package in 2016 (Yamagata, 2017). Between 2011 and 2018, however, among eighty-one Syrian asylum seekers, only twelve of them were recognised as refugees in Japan, and fifty-six of them were entitled to stay for humanitarian reasons. Even though some Syrian asylum seekers took the government's decision to court, the Tokyo District Court upheld the decision.

Once again, Japan's strict refugee policy caught international attention (Wilson, 2018a). Presumably as a result of growing international pressure, the Japanese government again delivered a timely decision, and just before the G-7 Summit in Japan, proclaimed that Japan would admit 150 Syrian refugees to study in Japan for five years starting from 2017. It must be noted that the refugees were admitted as students, instead of being recognised as refugees. The programme is coordinated by the Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA); in addition to JICA, Japan Association for Refugees (JAR)—a leading NGO working with asylum seekers and refugees—also provided scholarships for Syrian refugees to study in Japan (Hashimoto, 2019, 131).

3.3.4. 2018 Revisions to Decrease Asylum Applications

The introduction of a pilot resettlement programme and accepting 150 Syrian refugees as students did not represent substantial policy changes, but were more symbolic of an apparently progressive approach in Japanese refugee policy. However, an increasing number of asylum applications and low recognition numbers continued to be a concern. From the perspective of the Ministry of Justice, they had made a mistake in providing work permits to

legally-staying asylum seekers. As a result of this policy change, the number of applications increased, but the recognition numbers did not.

In order to discourage economic migrants to apply for asylum to receive work permits, the Ministry of Justice published a guideline and revised the refugee recognition procedure. According to the guideline, permission to work would not be given if an applicant resubmitted an asylum application repeating the same reasons. In addition, the Ministry of Justice announced that permission to stay would not be granted if the applicant made three or more applications (MOJ, 2015).

These revisions, however, proved to be ineffective, as the number of applications continued to rise in 2016 and 2017—simply because most of the applications, around 905 of them, were from first-time applicants. Consequently, the Ministry of Justice announced another revision in January 2018. According to the new policy, all asylum applications would be classified into four different groups based on credibility within two months of initial application. Based on this classification, asylum seekers were given different rights. Category A represented applications with a strong possibility of refugee recognition. Asylum seekers who fell into this category were granted permission to work without waiting six months. Category B is for those applicants clearly outside of the scope of the Refugee Convention. Category C represents reapplications that do not present any new proof but simply restated the applicant's reasons. These applicants were not granted permission to stay or the right to work; and therefore, may face detention and eventually deportation. The final category, D, is for all other applications that could not be placed within any of the first three categories. These applicants were given the right to stay with designated-activities visas and permitted to work after six months. (This category used to cover all applications before the introduction of the current revision.) Notwithstanding this, Category D excluded technical intern trainees and students who left the companies for which they were working or educational institutions where they were studying in order to apply for refugee status. Even though they were given the right to stay, the new revision restricted their right to work, in order not to encourage them to leave their institutions. Table 2 below summarises the new system and compares it with previous policies.

Table 2: Outline of Further Revision of the Operations of the Refugee Recognition System

The Details of Further Measures	Current	Further Measures (Yellow boxes)
Restriction on Stay	Applicants repeating an application twice without the Convention definition Applicants repeating an application 3 times without a good reason	Applicants clearly without the Convention definition (the first application) Re-applicants (Note 1)
Restriction on Employment	Applicants capable of supporting themselves without working Applicants repeating an application twice without a good reason	Applicant capable of supporting themselves without working Applicants applying after abandoning initial activities (the first application) Applicants applying after getting the designated status to make the preparations for departure (the first application)
Fast-track Process	Applications clearly without the Convention definition Multiple applications without a good reason	Applications clearly without the Convention definition Re-applications Applications after abandoning initial activities Applications after getting the designated status to make the preparations for departure

Note 1: Excluding applicants whose applicability as a refugee under the Refugee Convention is deemed to be high, or applicants who are considered likely to require humanitarian consideration due to the situation in their home country.

Source: MOJ, 2018

The new revision's impact was evident in the number of asylum applications at the end of

2018, as the number of asylum applications almost halved within a year. In addition, the Japanese government took a huge step, and decided to accept low- and semi-skilled foreign workers for employment in specific sectors suffering from labour shortages, such as agriculture, social care, construction, fishery, hospitality, food, and manufacturing. The new skilled-visa programme started in April 2019. By creating a legal route for low- and semi-skilled immigrants, the new visa programme offers an alternative to the asylum application. Accordingly, it may decrease the number of asylum applications. This is, however, yet to be seen.

3.4. Refugee Recognition System

Having discussed the formation of the asylum regime in Japan from a historical perspective, this section of the chapter will explore the refugee recognition system. It has been shown in the preceding section that Japan's refugee policy in general, and refugee recognition process in particular, has received various criticisms from domestic and international actors over the years (Honma, 2008). Indeed, there are several limits and restrictions on the refugee recognition process. In order to understand these criticisms and the situation of asylum seekers and refugees in Japan, it is crucial to examine the refugee determination process. Table 3 below outlines the stages of the refugee determination system. The rest of the chapter will follow this figure to explain each step.

Table 3: Refugee Status Determination Process in Japan

Source: Japan Association for Refugees, 2013

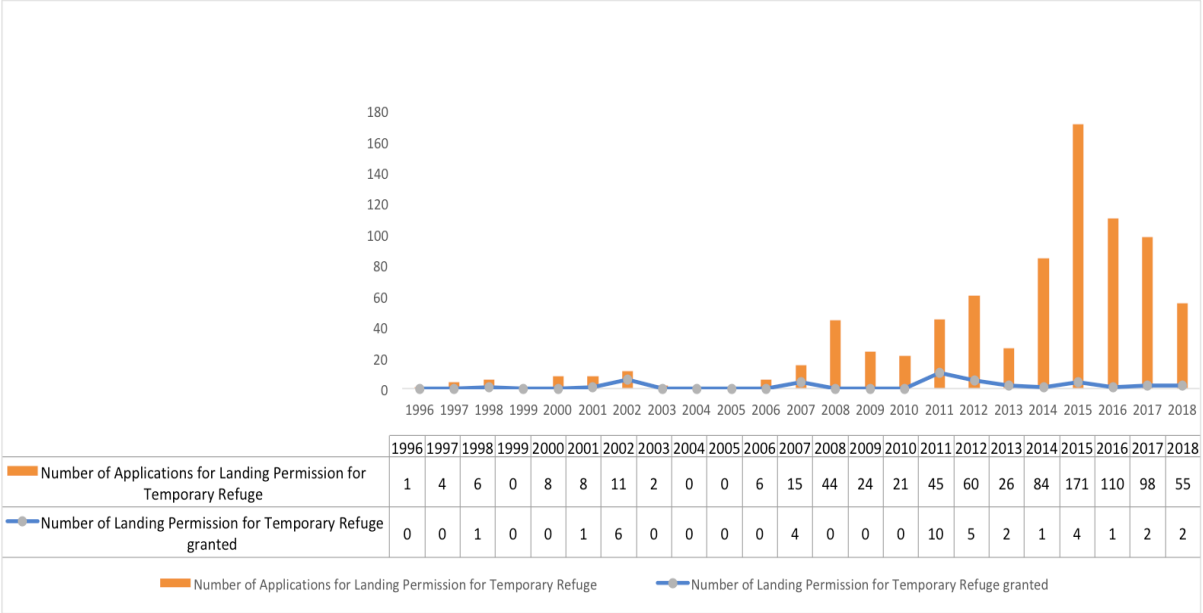
3.4.1. Application

In Japan, admitting asylum applications and determining refugee status is the duty of the Immigration Bureau of the Ministry of Justice (MOJ). Accordingly, asylum seekers have to submit their application to the Immigration Bureau. There are four different alternative ways to apply for asylum in Japan:

- An application can be submitted at the port of entry for landing permission as a temporary refugee following Article 18-2 ICRRA. It is also possible to submit a separate asylum application under Article 61-2 to be recognised as a refugee.
- An asylum application can be submitted at the port of entry under Article 61-2 ICRRA when applying for landing permission under Article 6 ICRRA.
- An asylum application can be submitted under Article 61-2 ICRRA by a person who has been in deportation procedure under Article 24 ICRRA.
- An asylum application can be submitted under Article 61-2 by a person who has been entered the country with a valid visa.

In the case of the first option, there are concerns that asylum seekers are forced to return to their countries after their application for landing permission for temporary refuge is refused, which is the case almost all the time. As can be seen in Table 4 below, the landing permission for temporary refuge applications is seldom granted.

Table 4: Landing Permission for Temporary Refuge Statistics



	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Number of Applications for Landing Permission for Temporary Refuge	1	4	6	0	8	8	11	2	0	0	6	15	44	24	21	45	60	26	84	171	110	98	55
Number of Landing Permission for Temporary Refuge granted	0	0	1	0	0	1	6	0	0	0	0	4	0	0	0	10	5	2	1	4	1	2	2

This figure is created based on MOJ statistics

As stated in the Immigration Control Report published in 2005 by MOJ, the permission for temporary refuge 'was initially given primarily to the boat people who landed in Japan' (MOJ, 2005, 210). Following the end of the arrival of Indochinese refugees, however, it became practically impossible to receive landing permission as a temporary refugee, as a result of strict conditions that are set by the MOJ:

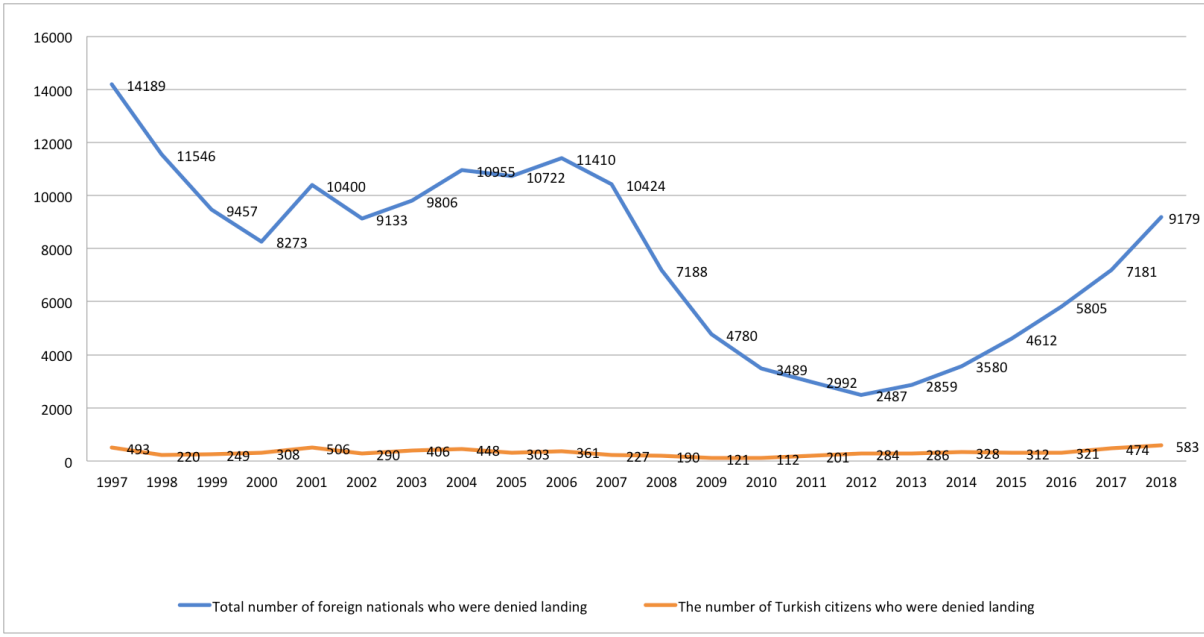
> Landing permission for temporary refuge, prescribed as one of the types of special landing permission granted to foreign nationals (Article 18-2 of the Immigration Control Act), will be granted by an immigration inspector if a foreign national aboard a vessel or aircraft has fled from a territory where his or her life, body or physical freedom is likely to be endangered for the reasons prescribed in the Refugee Convention and other reasons equivalent thereto, and it is appropriate for permission for temporary landing to be granted to such foreign national. (MOJ, 2014, 34)

If landing permission is not granted, which is usually the case, then the applicant must leave the country immediately. If the applicant refuses to do so, the deportation procedure

commences. Of course, the asylum application is a separate procedure, which is not affected by the decision on landing permission as a temporary refugee. There are concerns about this, however: many potential asylum seekers may not be aware of this, and return to their countries after being refused as temporary refugees. If the person refuses to return to his or her country of origin and instead chooses to apply for asylum, he or she loses the chance of having legal residency status, since his or her application is submitted after the refusal of landing permission (Japan Federation of Bar Associations, 2014, 14). The process above, which effectively makes asylum seekers 'illegal', can be understood in the light of the 'legal production of illegality' (De Genova, 2004).

Considering it is almost inevitable to fall into an irregular status in the case of applying for landing permission for temporary refuge, most asylum seekers strive to receive landing permission as a tourist, so that they can apply for asylum within the country while holding a legal status. A similar difficulty, however, appears at this point again, which is receiving landing permission as a temporary visitor. It is not uncommon for potential asylum seekers to attempt to hide themselves as tourists merely to secure landing permission, but being unsuccessful and receiving a landing refusal. Table 5 shows the number of foreign nationals and Turkish citizens who were denied landing between 1997 and 2018.

Table 5: Landing Permission Statistics



This figure is created based on MOJ statistics

The succeeding chapter of this thesis will explain in detail the process of receiving (or not receiving) landing permission as a temporary visitor. For this reason, this section will focus on in-country applications.

In terms of in-country applications, the asylum application can be submitted to the regional immigration bureau, district immigration office or branch office in person. If the applicant is younger than 16 years old, or cannot appear in person as a result of illness or any other unavoidable reason, then the application can be submitted by a relative. During the asylum application, asylum seekers should submit two photographs, documents and materials supporting their case and an application form, which is available in twenty-eight different languages. The applicant has to provide Japanese translations of the supporting documents if they are in a different language (MOJ, 2016).

An asylum application can be made any time, as the time restriction on asylum application was lifted in 2004. Before that, asylum applications had to be submitted within 60 days from the arrival of the applicant. If the applicant was in Japan before the start of problems that affected him or her, then the application had to be made within 60 days from the day he or

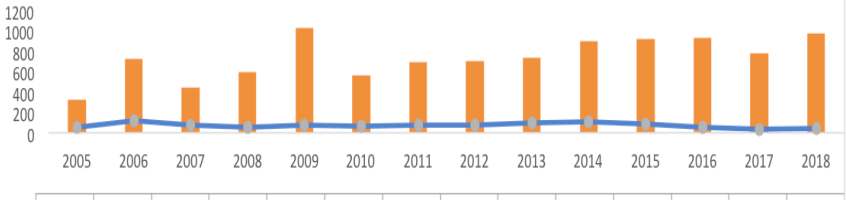
she became aware of the situation. Before its abolishment, the 60-day rule was a significant barrier for asylum seekers, as it was the rejection reason for half of the applications. With the revision of the ICRRA in 2004, the notorious 60-day rule was abolished. Even though it has not been an obstacle for application since 2004, there has not been an improvement in the number of recognised refugees (Dean, 2006, 8-9).

The 2004 revision of ICRRA, which came into effect on 16 May 2005, also introduced the new system of granting permission for provisional stay '[w]ith the aim of ensuring the stable legal status of illegal foreign residents who have applied for refugee status' (MOJ, 2005, 209). Consequently, if an asylum seeker does not have legal status at the time of application, then he or she can be considered for Permission for Provisional Stay, which provides temporary stay to the applicant and temporarily suspends the deportation procedure. There are, however, specific criteria to be eligible for Provisional Stay to be granted:

> … such as that an application for refugee recognition is submitted within six months after he/she disembarked in Japan (or the day he/she became aware of the fact that the circumstances in connection with which he/she may become a refugee arose while he/she is in Japan) or he/she directly entered Japan from a territory where he/she may suffer the persecutions that are stipulated in the Refugee Convention. (MOJ, 2016, 5)

The consequences of these conditions are revealed in the number of asylum seekers who were granted permission for provisional stay, as most of them were not eligible, for one reason or another. Table 6 below illustrates how many asylum seekers were considered for provisional stay and how many were granted.

Table 6: Provisional Stay Statistics



	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Total number of asylum seekers that were considered permission for Provisional Stay	326	721	438	599	1028	558	689	701	736	901	919	930	784	977
Number of people who were granted permission for Provisional Stay	50	122	79	57	72	65	71	74	95	111	83	58	35	38

This figure is created based on MOJ statistics

As can be seen in the table above, most applicants were not able to legalise their status as a result of lodging the asylum application later than six months, the perceived danger of absconding, or making the application after receiving a deportation order. Apart from the difficulty of being eligible for provisional stay, it can:

> be revoked if a person who is permitted to temporarily stay in Japan violates the set conditions, if he/she dishonestly submits falsified documents to be recognized as a refugee, if he/she makes a false statement, and in other similar cases. (MOJ, 2016, 6)

Considering that Permission for Provisional Stay does not provide a work permit to asylum seekers, it is inevitable that most of them then seek irregular employment. Consequently, it is not unexpected that some asylum seekers' Permission for Provisional Stay is revoked because of irregular employment. Again, the asylum system directs asylum seekers into irregularity.

3.4.2. Interview and Decision

Following the submission of each asylum application, a refugee inquirer interviews the applicant based on 61-2-14 of the IRCCA. The interview date is not specified, and may take

place months after the application. Furthermore, it is possible that the refugee inquirer requests multiple interviews, especially if the case of the applicant is complicated. During the interview, asylum seekers are not accompanied by lawyers, families or friends—just interpreters. At the end of the interview, the interpreter translates the notes that are taken by the refugee inquirer, and the applicant checks and then signs the interview document (Japan Association for Refugees, 2018, 6).

The applicant can request to change the interpreter on political or ethnic grounds, which can influence the interview. There are also concerns relating to the language abilities of some interpreters, as they are not full-time employees at the Ministry of Justice. Plus, some of them are students studying the language of an asylum seeker, but not necessarily qualified enough to be able to serve as an interpreter during such an important interview. There are also cases where an interpreter and asylum seeker are from the same country, but they do not speak the same language (Dean, 2006, 10). These cases may also create tension between interpreters and asylum seekers, especially if they have different ethnic or religious identities. As mentioned in the Chapter Two—Methodology chapter, I experienced that tension myself, when I was acting as a volunteer interpreter. In a refugee status determination interview, these anxieties can affect asylum seekers, and they can avoid recounting certain aspects of their experiences. Apart from language competency, it is also crucial for interpreters to have adequate knowledge of human rights, refugee issues and international law. Since details are of the utmost importance during the refugee status determination, interpreters must be sure that they pay attention to detail, which can determine a person's fate. Since the burden of proof is solely on asylum seekers' shoulders in Japan, the positions of interpreters become even more critical (Flowers, 2008, 345).

In addition to interpretation, there are other problems with the refugee status determination process. For instance, in summer 2004 the Immigration Bureau sent a mission to Turkey to gather information about Kurdish asylum seekers in Japan. The immigration officials revealed the information to the Turkish security forces in order to verify if they were really persecuted. After the incident, the Japan Federation of Bar Associations issued a warning (Ministry lashed over, 2005) and Amnesty International released a statement.

According to Amnesty International (2004) immigration officials visited the families of asylum seekers accompanied by security forces. The incident has been an exemplar of the problems of the refugee status determination system.

After the interview, the refugee inquirer prepares his assessment based on the interview, and submits it to the regional bureau. Having the opinion of the regional bureau, the Immigration Bureau's Refugee Recognition Section comes to a conclusion about granting or not granting refugee status to the applicant, which is conveyed to the Minister of Justice by the Director of the Refugee Recognition Section. The Minister has the authority to deliver the final decision based on the advice (Arakaki, 2008, 61).

3.4.3. Administrative Review (Appeal)

If an asylum seekers' application is refused, based on ICRRA 61-2-9, he or she can appeal the decision within seven days beginning from the date he or she receives the original decision. The initial decision is made by the Refugee Recognition Office, which is under the Immigration Control Division of the Immigration Bureau. The appeal application is, however, examined and evaluated by the Adjudication Division of the Immigration Bureau (MOJ, 2019c, 203). One of the essential changes made by the 2004 revision of the IRCCA was the introduction of Refugee Examination Counsellors (RECs). 'The refugee examination counsellors' system was introduced in May 2005 in order to improve the fairness and neutrality of the procedures' (MOJ, 2019c, 196). According to Article 61-2-10 of the IRCCA, the RECs are selected by the Minister of Justice among those who have academic expertise in law or international relations. Furthermore, the RECs must have good character and be able to judge the appeal applications fairly. They are appointed for two years with the possibility of reappointment, and can work part time.

The primary method of the RECs to evaluate the appeal is listening to the asylum seekers by arranging an interview. Since the RECs work as teams comprised of three individuals, they join the interviews together alongside the appellant, his or her legal representative, and interpreter. The Refugee Inquirer leads the interview and stenographers transcribe the

interview. The staff members of the Immigration Bureau also join the interview. Usually, the RECs conduct one or two interviews in half a day, every second week of the month (Arakaki, 2008, 62-63).

The REC system could be considered a progressive step which can alleviate some of the problems embedded in the refugee status determination process. Based on its application since 2005, however, refugee rights groups and scholars noticed and criticised the system as being inadequate and structurally flawed. First of all, the RECs cannot serve independently, because the Ministry of Justice appoints them. Furthermore, the RECs do not have an independent secretariat and have to depend on the Immigration Bureau for their secretariat. In addition to that, there are doubts about the level of expertise of the RECs. Since the refugee-status-determination process is quite complicated and delicate, the RECs are expected to be well-informed in refugee law and politics, but this is highly debatable. Lastly, the RECs do not have the legal authority to overturn a decision. They are in an advisory position, and the Immigration Bureau can keep the initial decision even if the RECs suggest it should be changed (Hashimoto, 2018b; Akashi, 2006, 232-233).[10]

Despite the criticisms of the RECs system, application rates for administrative review have been high since its introduction.

Table 7: Number of Asylum Seekers who Appealed the Initial Decision and Applied for Administrative Review

Division \ Year	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Not recognized as a Refugee	2906	3411	7492	9736	10541
Appeal	2533	3120	5197	8530	9021

Source: MOJ, 2019c, 74

[10] Japan Federation of Bar Associations (2014) published a lengthy analysis of the problems of the RECs system and ways to improve it.

The processing time for administrative review applications tends to be longer than the initial decision, which means that it can take longer than two years. If we add the processing time for the initial decision, which can take between six months to a year, concluding an asylum application can take around three years or more (MOJ, 2015). Typically, this means that asylum seekers have to wait for a long time to be recognised as a refugee. In Japan, however, the possibility of being recognised as a refugee is close to zero. Hence, the long processing time actually means a time of relief, being far away from the danger of deportation. For legal applicants it is an opportunity to be able to work legally. For this reason, after receiving the result of the administrative review process, which almost certainly means approval of the initial decision, very few asylum seekers take their cases to the judicial review. Instead of going into the costly process of judicial review, they opt to submit another application, which gives the Japanese asylum system its unique dimension.

3.4.4. Judicial Review

Apart from the administrative review, asylum seekers can also challenge the decision of the Ministry of Justice by applying for judicial review, based on the Administrative Case Litigation Act (ACLA) (Law 139 of 1962, as amended). The judicial review application can be submitted following the initial decision given by the Immigration Bureau. Therefore, it is not compulsory to wait until the end of the administrative review process. According to the ACLA, an application for judicial review must be submitted within six months after the notification of the decision is received by the claimant. Since there are no special courts for asylum and immigration matters, judicial review applications are made to the District Court. The appellant can also appeal the decision of the District Court to the High Court and then to the Supreme Court (Mackey, 2007, 5).

Until the 2000s, it was not common for Japanese judges to overturn the decisions of the Immigration Bureau. Indeed, the courts only challenged the government once regarding refugee recognition. Nevertheless, there were numerous examples after the 2000s where the courts overturned Immigration Bureaus decisions on refugee recognition. According to Arakaki (2008, 194), not only the decisions but also the quality of the arguments improved.

However, most asylum seekers cannot apply for judicial review, as it is a lengthy and costly process. As mentioned before, instead of taking the arduous road of judicial review, asylum seekers usually choose to submit a new application to regularise their residency.

3.5. Turkish/Kurdish Asylum Seekers in Japan

Having discussed the historical development of Japanese refugee policy from the Meiji era to recent times, and having explored refugee recognition process, this section of the chapter will discuss the Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers' history in Japan. Starting from 1990s, their trajectory reflects major turning points in Japanese asylum policy, as well as reflecting its weaknesses and ironies.

3.5.1. Establishment of the Turkish/Kurdish Community in Japan

The number of Turkish citizens in Japan started to increase at the beginning of the 1990s. In fact there were only 205 Turkish citizens in Japan in 1990 (Takeshita and Hanaoka, 2015, 196). Although there is a lack of accurate accounts about the origin of this migratory movement, personal narratives suggest that the earliest immigrants from Turkey came from a specific town named Fatsa. According to narratives, a man from Fatsa named Hayri Atılgan, who afterwards was denominated as 'the conqueror of Japan', decided to settle in Nagoya and work as a junk dealer. He was the pioneer of chain migration from Fatsa to Nagoya (Demirkol, 2011, 11). Whether or not the story is accurate, it is clear that the number of Turkish citizens increased rapidly in Japan in the 1990s. Besides, there are also ethnically Kurdish Turkish citizens who began to come to Japan around the mid-1990s as a result of political concerns at home. As discussed below, they chose to reside around Tokyo and Saitama, not Nagoya.

The visa waiver agreement between Turkey and Japan facilitated migration to Japan, allowing Turkish citizens to stay in Japan up to 90 days for tourism. In the 1990s, almost all the Turkish and Kurdish immigrants who arrived in Japan arrived as tourists. They then became overstayers when their tourist visas expired. In this respect, the case of irregular

Turkish and Kurdish immigrants epitomises the wave of irregular immigrants who came to Japan in the 1990s.

The Japanese economic boom in the 1980s attracted 'male citizens from various Asian countries—such as the Philippines, Pakistan, Bangladesh and, later Iran—began to enter as tourists, and worked at '3D workplaces', such as construction and small manufacturing companies without permission' (Takaya, 2014, 26). The number of irregular immigrants, for instance, peaked at around 300,000 in 1993 and started to decline after this point. The decline accelerated, particularly after 2004, when the Japanese government announced its 'Five-year plan to halve the number of illegal immigrants'. The journey of Turkish citizens in Japan too reflects this story. The number of overstayers among Turkish citizens decreased, and more and more Turkish citizens have applied for asylum, starting from the late 1990s. Therefore, this trend can be seen as a part of a broader change in migration trends in Japan.

In terms of geographical distribution, Turkish citizens are concentrated in three prefectures: Aichi (Nagoya city), Tokyo and Saitama Prefectures (Warabi and Kawaguchi cities). Most of the Turkish citizens in Nagoya are from Fatsa and the other towns of Ordu (Takeshita and Hanaoka, 2015, 196). Although their numbers are significantly lower in comparison to people from Ordu, there are people from other cities such as Adıyaman, Istanbul and Tokat. They are ethnically Turkish—therefore when I refer to Turkish citizens in Nagoya, I prefer to use the term Turkish immigrants.

Most of them work as labourers in demolition, construction and manufacturing (Özkarabekir, 2005). Notably in demolition, Turkish immigrants have created a migrant niche. Through social networks newcomers easily find work in these sectors. The dangerous and precarious structure of these jobs makes them undesirable for Japanese people. Hence, the labour shortage in the demolition and construction sectors facilitates employment opportunities for Turkish immigrants in these sectors (Takeshita and Hanaoka, 2015, 200). There are also restaurants and bars run by Turkish immigrants.

In addition to Nagoya, there are high numbers of Turkish citizens in Tokyo and Saitama. Turkish citizens in Tokyo are more heterogeneous in terms of their city of origin. In

comparison to Nagoya, Turkish citizens in Tokyo do not have a specific city of origin. This heterogeneous structure is also the case in terms of occupation. There are highly skilled Turkish citizens who work in prestigious jobs in Tokyo. Also, language-school teachers, government officials and researchers can be added to this list.

Additionally, there are around thirty Turkish (kebab) restaurants in Tokyo. Low-skilled Turkish citizens can find employment in kebab restaurants. Some people also come to Japan on a skilled-migrant visa as Turkish kebab chefs.

As a public space, the Turkish mosque (officially Tokyo Camii & Turkish Cultural Centre) in Tokyo serves as a gathering point for Turkish citizens (the religious ones). Having an imam appointed by the presidency of religious affairs of Turkey, the mosque seems to play a significant role in bringing together at least some of the Turkish citizens in Japan.

Saitama and specifically Warabi/Kawaguchi cities host a couple of thousand Kurdish people from Turkey. Kurds are one of the major ethnic groups in the Middle East, and it is estimated that there are around 15 million Kurdish people in Turkey. They are concentrated in the eastern part of the country, although Istanbul is seen as the world's biggest Kurdish metropolis. Kurds in Turkey are not described as a minority; however, they demand political and cultural rights, such as autonomous government or education in their own language, i.e. Kurdish. In 1984, after the PKK's (Kurdistan Workers Party)—declared a terrorist organisation by the Turkish Republic— foundation, the issue turned into an armed conflict between the PKK and the Turkish Republic.

The long-lasting 'Kurdish issue' (Gambetti and Jongerden, 2015) has its historical roots within Ottoman modernisation, and the aim of centralising the declining empire. The centralisation movement created unrest among the largely autonomous Kurdish subjects. After the Republic of Turkey’s establishment as a nation-state, the multi-ethnic demographic composition of the Ottoman Empire was changed, and the country became more homogenous over time. Non-Muslim subjects, such as Armenians and Greeks, either chose to leave or were exiled during this period. However, Kurds were spared from this process of ethnic homogenisation, since they shared the same religion as the ruling Turkish majority.

Nevertheless, religion was not enough to convince the Republic's Kurdish citizens regarding assimilation and the ruling elite's secular and reformist agenda. An early sign of a longstanding conflict was a Kurdish rebellion in 1925, only two years after the establishment of the Republic (Yeğen, 2007; Ergil, 2000).

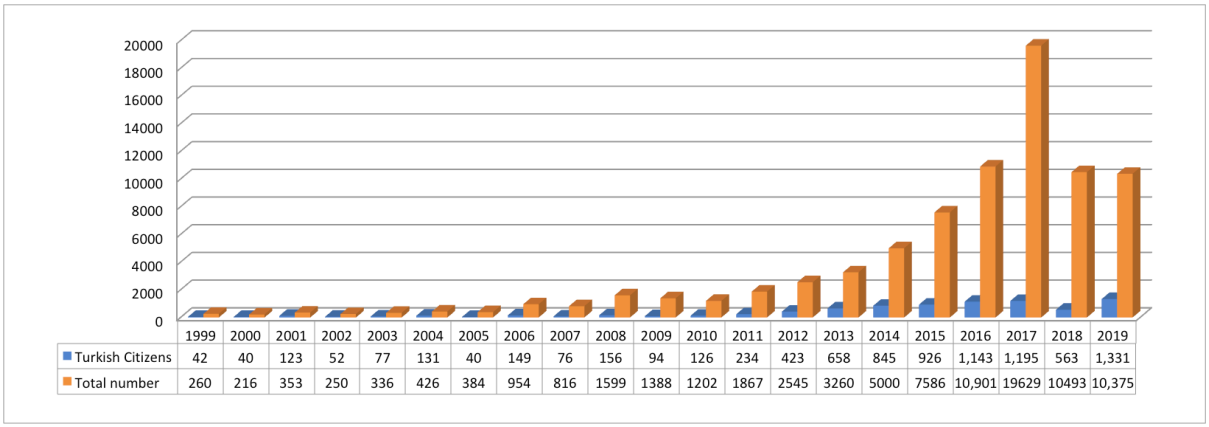
Until the 1990s, even the existence of Kurds and Kurdish language was not recognised by the state in Turkey. However, denial became increasingly unsustainable, especially after the 1970s, and the rise of identity politics both within Turkey and worldwide. Unrecognised by the state and oppressed by the law and security forces, there was a political and cultural revival for the Kurdish movement in the 1990s and 1990s (Sirkeci, 2000, 150-151).

This process of revival became an armed conflict during the mid-1980s. In addition to ethnic and political roots of the Kurdish issue, historical underdevelopment of the Eastern Anatolia and the Southeastern Anatolia regions exacerbated the situation, creating an 'environment of insecurity', which motivated migration from these areas. Today, the Kurdish issue has become a transnational phenomenon, since millions of Kurd from Turkey, Iran, Syria and Iraq live in Europe and beyond (van Bruinessen, 2000)—such as Japan.

3.5.2. Kurdish Community: From Overstayers to Asylum Seekers

Table 8 below demonstrates that Turkish citizens became the number one group in asylum applications in the early 2000s in Japan, but the trend started in the mid-1990s. One of the respondents, Hamit (46), was within the first group of Turkish citizens who applied for asylum in Japan. Hamit was ethnically Kurdish, like many of the other participants in this research, and the violent turn that the Kurdish question in Turkey took in the 1990s was the reason for his departure from Turkey. As a result of increasing political tension and violence in Turkey, many Kurds sought asylum in Europe (Mahmod, 2016; Sirkeci, 2003a). However, seeking asylum in European countries was not possible for all, due to visa requirements.

Table 8: Number of Turkish Citizens Applied for Asylum



	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Turkish Citizens	42	40	123	52	77	131	40	149	76	156	94	126	234	423	658	845	926	1,143	1,195	563	1,331
Total number	260	216	353	250	336	426	384	954	816	1599	1388	1202	1867	2545	3260	5000	7586	10,901	19629	10493	10,375

This figure is created based on MOJ statistics

In this context, Japan emerged as an alternative to Europe for Kurdish asylum seekers like Hamit, because it was easy to travel to Japan thanks to the visa waiver agreement, which allows Turkish citizens to visit Japan as tourists for up to 90 days without applying for a visa. Hamit's story epitomises a typical pattern. He came to Japan in 1994 and became an irregular resident after overstaying his 90-days tourist visa. He did not apply for asylum until 1999, because, according to him, he and his friends did not know that they could apply for asylum in Japan. For this reason, seeking asylum was not an option, until one of his friends heard about it. In general, it can be said that asylum applications became an option for Turkish citizens, mainly Kurds, starting from the mid-1990s.

In the meantime, Kurdish asylum seekers began to receive attention from the Japanese public, thanks to the media. In 1999, for instance, a group of Kurds reapplied for refugee status in Tokyo after receiving a negative decision for their initial application in 1996. A human rights lawyer, Takeshi Ohashi, was providing legal advice to Kurdish asylum seekers, and he also visited Turkey to collect information about two Kurds who had returned to Turkey from Japan. According to Ohashi, two former Kurdish asylum seekers were detained after their return to Turkey (Kurdish citizens request, 1999).

After two years of this news, five Kurdish asylum seekers held a hunger strike in the EJICC in Ibaraki. Among them was Hasan Cikan, one of the asylum seekers detained in Turkey after

being deported from Japan in 1999. He had come back to Japan in 2001, and applied for asylum at Narita Airport. The hunger strike was organised to stop the group's deportation to Turkey. A week after the group started the hunger strike, Hasan Cikan was granted special permission to stay, the first time this was granted to a Kurd asylum seeker (Asakura, 2001).

Public attention to Kurdish asylum seekers around 2001 and 2002 was not a coincidence. Asylum seekers from Turkey were the top asylum applicants during those two years. Also, in 2003, thirty Kurdish asylum seekers submitted a letter to the Ministry of Justice to ask for an explanation concerning why Kurdish asylum seekers were denied refugee status by Japan. Essentially, Kurdish asylum seekers demanded the government publicise the refugee determination interviews and complained about the behaviours of the immigration staff (Matsubara, 2003a).

In addition, a Kurdish asylum seeker, Erdal Dogan, in detention at the EJICC, began a hunger strike with his brother Deniz, who was also in detention. In an interview with journalists, Erdal made his motivation and aims clear:

> I'm not going to stop until they accept that we have a right to be treated with dignity and if they refuse, then I'll continue to the end. I won't accept if they try to force feed me. They have to negotiate.

Over the years, detention in general and hunger strikes in particular have become an intrinsic part of the daily life of asylum seekers in Japan. So much so, that asylum seekers' experience in Japan cannot be understood without looking into detention centres, and Kurdish asylum seekers are no exception.

A year later, in 2004, two Kurdish families made headlines in Japan and beyond, by staging a sit-in outside of the United Nations University in Tokyo. Erdal Dogan was at the centre again. Led by Ahmet Kazankiran and Erdal Dogan, fathers and families were demanding UNHCR Japan to pressure on the Japanese government to recognise them as refugees. They were adamant about staying until they received a response from UNHCR Japan or the government.

Additionally, as mentioned in the previous section, the Ministry of Justice had sent a fact-finding mission to Turkey to investigate the credibility of Erdal Dogan's asylum claim. However, the mission collaborated with Turkish security forces to search his family's residence in Turkey. Erdal Dogan learned that some members of his family had to flee, as they were feeling insecure after the incident (Matsubara, 2003b).

The protest continued for the next 72 days in front of the United Nations, and received considerable public support. In August, a petition signed by 3,000 Japanese citizens asking for support for the families' cause was submitted to UNHCR Japan (UNHCR petitioned to aid, 2004). Nevertheless, the Kurdish asylum seekers resistance was radical for the UNHCR and NGOs working with refugees in Japan, even creating some disturbances for the latter (Shindo, 2009). The protestors were expecting to be recognised as refugees by the Japanese government or to be resettled in a third country with the assistance of UNHCR Japan. However, deportation orders were issued for all the members of the Kazankiran and Dogan families, and they were all on provisional release (Ito, 2004).

A couple of months later, however, the Ministry of Justice decided not to extend the provisional release status of Erdal Kazankiran and his son Ramazan, and just the next day, on 19 January, deported them to Turkey. Just a month before, in December, 60,000 Japanese citizens had signed and submitted a letter to the Ministry of Justice to support the Kurdish asylum seekers. The government's deportation decision was completely unexpected and shocking. Erdal and Ramazan Kazankiran were recognised as mandate refugees by the UNHCR. Accordingly, the deportation of the two created a huge backlash (Ito, 2005a; Ito, 2005b). After two years, in January 2006, with the help of NGOs, the Kazankiran family resettled in New Zealand (Ito, 2012) and the Dogan family went to Canada in 2007 (Ito, 2007).

As a result of the incidents mentioned above, Kurdish asylum seekers became a well-known group and almost a symbol for asylum seekers' struggle in Japan. At the same time, the Immigration Bureau maintained its strict policy and has not recognised any Kurdish asylum seekers as a refugee.

Nevertheless, a Kurdish asylum seeker who married a Filipina with a child born in Japan received special permission to stay. They all received deportation orders but filed a lawsuit against the decision. After the High Court's settlement suggestion to parties, the government decided to provide special permission to the family on humanitarian grounds (Japan allows Pinay, 2008). Since being recognised as a refugee was not possible, special permission to stay on humanitarian grounds was the best possible option for Kurdish asylum seekers.

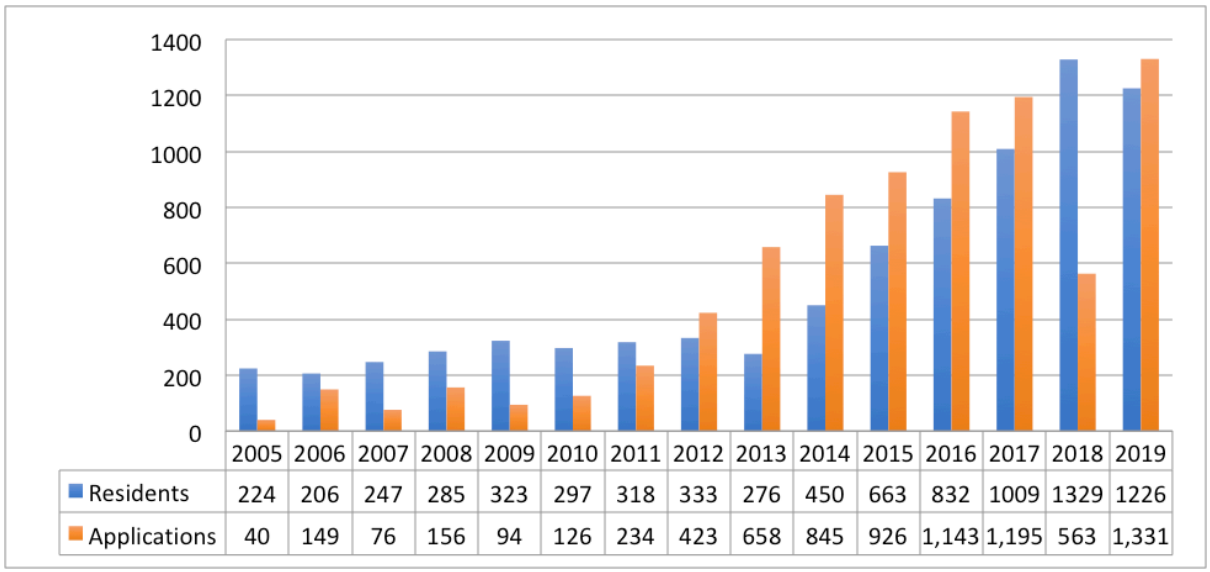
3.5.3. The Asylumisation of Migration After 2010

Until 2010, the number of Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers was inconsistent. After the government's decision to provide work permits to legally staying asylum applicants in 2010, however, the number of Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers began to increase consistently, reflecting a more general trend in asylum applications in Japan. The applications rose from 94 in 2009 to 1,195 in 2017. As can be seen in Table 8: Number of Turkish Citizens Applied for Asylum, Turkish citizens were at the top of the list for two years, in 2012 and 2013. The internal political developments in Turkey must be taken into account. After 2013, politics became more polarised in the country, with the failed coup attempt prompting the sharp increase in 2016 and 2017 (Sirkeci, 2017).

During this period, applying for asylum also became an option for Turkish citizens who are ethnically Turkish. Therefore, in addition to Kurds, Turks also started to apply for asylum in Japan. As mentioned before, this was a part of a more general trend that took place in asylum trends in Japan, which can be called the asylumisation of migration.

Although the number of Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers was increasing year by year, the Japanese government has continued its policy not to recognise any Turkish citizen as a refugee. At the same time, this policy of not recognising Turkish citizens was becoming clearer. According to Takeshi Ohashi, the strong diplomatic relationship between Turkey and Japan was the reason why it was hard for Kurdish asylum seekers to find refuge in Japan (Ito, 2012).

Table 9: Number of Turkish residents in Kawaguchi City and Number of Turkish Asylum Applications



	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Residents	224	206	247	285	323	297	318	333	276	450	663	832	1009	1329	1226
Applications	40	149	76	156	94	126	234	423	658	845	926	1,143	1,195	563	1,331

Source: Kawaguchi City (2019) and MOJ statistics

Table 9: Number of Turkish residents in Kawaguchi City and Number of Turkish Asylum Applications demonstrates the number of residents in Kawaguchi City, where most of the Kurdish asylum seekers live in Japan. The precarious legal status of Kurdish asylum seekers continues to be regular news for national and international media outlets, and it is here that the problems of the provisional release system became apparent. Almost all the asylum seekers, even those on provisional release, were working to survive in Japan. Some of them were even working in public works funded by the government. A Kurdish asylum seeker who was on provisional release explained the contradictory approach of the Japanese government:

> Japan bans us from working, but everyone knows that without foreigners this country's in trouble. There aren't enough workers and young Japanese can't do these jobs. The government knows that better than anyone. (Wilson et al., 2016)

The famous designation 'Warabistan', from the name of Warabi City, became a popular expression, especially after 2015. Warabistan has been used to underline the concentration

of Kurdish asylum seekers in Warabi/Kawaguchi cities (Rich, 2016).

Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers regularly drew attention as a result of their precarious status in Japan. However, the Turkish/Kurdish community made headlines in Japan in 2015 as a result of a fight that broke out just outside the Turkish Embassy in Tokyo during the voting process for the parliamentary elections. There were hundreds of Turkish citizens around the embassy, both Turkish and Kurdish; therefore the fight became a huge clash, leaving some people injured, including police officers (Clashes hurt nine, 2015).

The fight was the result of ethno-political tensions within the community. According to my respondents, there were online arguments between Kurdish and Turkish people who live in Nagoya. In the greater Tokyo area, Kurdish and Turkish people developed complex relationships through work. Those Turkish people who live in Nagoya, however, were not sharing any connection with the Kurdish community. After the clash, it was widely reported by national (Turkish men held, 2016) and international agencies (Visser, 2015). According to my respondents, this had a really negative impact on the image of Turkish citizens in Japan. Even though it was not possible to verify this claim, it is reasonable to assume that the incident was not helpful for the image of Turkish citizens in Japan.

There were also more general changes in the asylum system in Japan. The increasing number of asylum seekers became a justification by the Japanese government for its low number of refugee recognitions. Accordingly, asylum seekers were accused of abusing the system, including Turkish and Kurdish asylum seekers (Yoshida, 2017). 'Fake refugees', or *giso nanmin,* became a part of the discourse, leading the Immigration Bureau of Japan to find ways to decrease the number of asylum applications (Osaki, 2017).

In 2017, in order to discourage asylum seekers, the government started clamping down asylum seekers, among other foreigners, for violating immigration rules, such as working without work permits (Japan: 3 Filipinas, 2018). As will be discussed in Chapter Five—Working as an Asylum Seeker in Japan, Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers were very much aware of this increasing pressure coming from the immigration authorities. Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers were attributing this change to the upcoming 2020 Tokyo

Olympics. This process also exposes the vulnerabilities of that liminality for asylum seekers.

As mentioned previously, the Japanese government also tightened the asylum process from January 2018. The number of asylum applications almost halved that year, and this general trend was also reflected in the number Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers, which fell from 1,195 in 2017 to 563 in 2018. However, the number of Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers increased to 1,331 in 2019 again, even though the number of applications continued to decrease.

Considering the Turkish/Kurdish community's ability to provide support to newcomers and opportunities to find jobs even without a work permit, it is no surprise to see Turkish citizens continuing to apply for asylum. The visa-exemption programme between the two countries also continues, and Turkish citizens enjoy visa-free travel to Japan. However, it is possible to be denied entry at airports, which will be discussed in detail in Chapter Four—.

The Japanese government is able to cancel the visa waiver agreement and make the journey harder for potential asylum applicants from Turkey, but this is unlikely, considering the strong relationship between Turkey and Japan. They have maintained a close relationship since the late 19th century, when an Ottoman frigate, Ertugrul, was sent to Japan in 1890. During its return journey, Ertugrul sank shortly after leaving Japan, and more than 500 personnel were killed; this later became a reference point between Turkey and Japan. In the 1980s, 215 Japanese citizens were rescued by Turkey when they were left stranded in Iran during the Iran-Iraq War (Pehlivanturk, 2011; Avci, 2013; Worringer, 2014). Although only symbolic, these incidents created friendly diplomatic relations and public affection towards each other in both countries. In this context, a decision to cancel the visa waiver agreement would spark a backlash from Turkey. When the Japanese government did not include Turkey in its newly established labour migration programme, the slight caused a small crisis. Turkey's Foreign Ministry spokesperson said:

> We are very disappointed that Turkey is listed among countries from which foreign workers will not be accepted to Japan, in the draft notification regarding the implementation of new law on the residence status of foreign

> nationals, that will come into force in April. This situation does not reflect the deep-rooted friendly relations and strategic partnership between our countries. We believe that this decision will be revised and amended as soon as possible. Japan's Ambassador to Turkey was summoned to the Ministry to express our concern on this issue (Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2019a).

As mentioned in the statement, Japan's ambassador to Turkey was summoned to hear expressions of disappointment. After these strong messages from Turkey, the Japanese government overturned the decision, and included Turkey in the programme. Again, the Turkish Foreign Ministry released a written statement, citing 'historic and deep-rooted ties':

> We are pleased that Turkey is removed from the list of countries from which foreign workers would not be accepted to Japan, within the framework of new law on the residence status of foreign nationals, that came into force on the 1st of April, 2019. We believe that this step reflects the spirit of friendly relationship between Turkey and Japan that share historic and deep-rooted ties. (Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2019b)

As can be seen, the Turkish government does not overlook these issues, which is well known by Japanese counterparts. Therefore, it is reasonable to expect that the Japanese government will not cancel the visa waiver agreement, at least in the foreseeable future.

3.6. Conclusion

Even though there were occasional political asylees from neighbouring countries, Japan did not experience a large-scale refugee movement until the 1980s. Following the Second World War, Japan managed to avoid taking responsibility for political asylees originating from the Eastern Block. However, the arrival of the Indochinese refugees forced the Japanese government to undertake responsibility. Coupled with international pressure, this urgent concern of accommodating a considerable number of refugees produced the circumstances for Japan's accession to the Refugee Convention and Protocol in 1981.

The Japanese government's approach to refugees has been shaped by concerns about its international image, and long-lasting resistance in order to maintain a so-called homo-ethnic society. Institutionally, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' approach has been more open, as it is the government branch which fields international criticisms. The Ministry of Justice, however, has been more conservative and concerned to protect its monopoly over refugee-related policies. It can be said that the Ministry of Justice's approach has been the main driver of Japan's asylum policy. The result has been low refugee recognition rates. Nevertheless, there have been incremental improvements over the years. For instance, the abolishment of the 60-days rule and the introduction of resettlement projects are important steps.

In general, asylum policy in Japan has been affected by immigration policy, or rather the absence of one. Since the government has not officially created a legal route for low- and semi-skilled migrants—whom the country has needed for years—applying for asylum has become the main legal option to come and work in Japan. Being able to make a reapplication after receiving a negative decision for an asylum application made it possible for asylum seekers to extend their stay in Japan by submitting numerous applications. Especially after the 2010 revision, which provided work permits to asylum seekers after six months from their asylum applications, an asylum-migration nexus was established in Japan. In order to explain this phenomenon, in this thesis I refer to this as the *asylumisation of migration*.

In this context, Turkish/Kurdish people began arriving in Japan at the beginning of the 1990s. Like many other immigrants, they became irregular migrants by overstaying their visas. The visa waiver programme between Turkey and Japan made it easier to travel to Japan for Turkish citizens. Even though some Kurdish people had reasons to apply for asylum, during this period they were not aware of the possibility. Also, it was not possible to apply for asylum after 60 days. Therefore, almost all of them became irregular migrants.

In the 2000s, Kurdish asylum seekers' numbers started to increase in Japan, and their struggles drew attention in Japan and around the world. The Kurds in Japan almost became

a symbol for asylum seekers. However, the Japanese government did not recognise any Turkish citizens as refugees, even though some received humanitarian protection over the years. However, due to the reapplication option, they managed to stay in Japan, although in a liminal condition.

After the 2010 revisions, applying for asylum started to provide a work permit for those who applied for asylum as a legal resident. In the absence of a legal route for immigrants, asylum applications from Turkish citizens began to increase, following the general trends. Through political, legal and economic processes, an asylum-migration nexus has therefore been established in Japan, especially for Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers.

The Japanese government made revisions in 2018 to discourage asylum seekers, and established a new visa programme for low-skilled immigrants in 2019. The results of these changes are yet to be seen—however, initial signs demonstrate that they may 'fall far short of expectations' (Japan's new working visa, 2019).

Chapter Four—Asylum Seekers Detention in Japan: Between Negotiation and Resistance

'They don't release me bro! I'm trying (to be strong), really trying. It has been one year and three months, and I'm still hanging on… Whenever I try to read a book, something is happening in my head. My brain is burnt out. Thoughts like 'When will I go out?' are spinning in my head all the time' (Interview with Bayram (22), Ushiku, 2017)

4.1. Tarkan's Story

In May 2017, I woke up at 5.30 am in a house which I was sharing with an asylum-seeker family consisting of my friend Kerim, his wife Fatma and their little boy Semih. At that time we had been living together for about two months. In terms of traditional Turkish values, this was highly unusual, and it was quite inappropriate for an adult man like me to be living in the same house with a family. Comprising two traditional tatami rooms separated by a sliding door, the house was far from able to provide comfortable accommodation even for one person, not to mention a family of three and a single adult man. Actually, there had been even more of us until a week ago: Hakan, Kerim's cousin, had been living with us, but he moved into his friends' house as a result of longstanding disputes with Kerim. It was, however, quite a timely move, as his other cousin Tarkan was about to be released from the EJICC on that very day. Kerim had been warning me since the day before not to be late, and not to allow Tarkan to stay in detention even one extra minute. Having stayed there himself for six months, he was well aware of the gruesome experience of being in detention.

Figure 2: The East Japan Immigration Control Centre (EJICC) from the front side

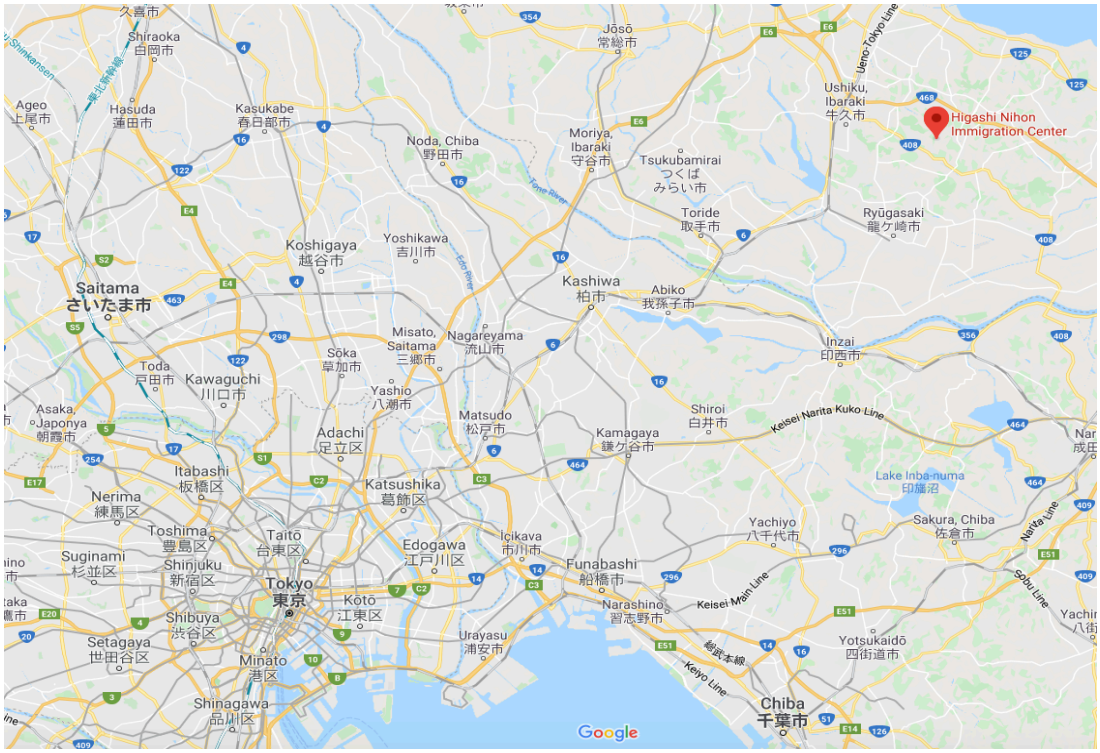
Source: Personal archive, 07 July 2017

Figure 3: The East Japan Immigration Control Centre (EJICC) from the back

Source: Personal archive, 05 July 2017

It takes around two and a half hours from central Tokyo to reach the detention centre.

Figure 4: The location of the East Japan Immigration Centre



Source: Google Maps, 2020

Tarkan came to Japan as a tourist in Autumn 2016. One of his closest friends, Tekin, and his cousin Kerim were already in Japan. Although both of them were on provisional release *karihōmen kyoka* they offered and promised help. After talking to both of them, he decided to come to Japan. However, as a blacksmith earning the minimum wage in Turkey, which in 2020 hovers around 2324 TL (Turkish lira) per month—about £250—it was not easy for him to collect the amount of money that he needed for the journey. Kerim supported him financially and lent most of the money. Of course, financial support was not the only thing that Kerim provided; he also gave him advice on how not to 'be caught'. 'Being caught' was one of the most common phrases my interlocutors used when talking about seeking asylum in Japan, meaning to be stopped and refused entry permission at the airport by immigration officers.

Even though Tarkan had known what to do before coming to the airport, and how to behave during the entry examination, he prepared for the worse, which in this case means

detention. Kerim had been denied entry permission as a tourist when he came to Japan and had spent six months in detention, so he warned Tarkan to prepare for this. For this reason, Tarkan was not surprised when immigration officers stopped him. He recalled:

> Of course, I knew. My cousin was inside (the detention centre before). I took the risk and came. But, I knew that could happen. I took the risk and came anyway. I thought this is my only chance. It was my only chance anyway; I wouldn't have arranged the money and come again. So, there was no second time; I used my only chance.

After twenty-seven days, Tarkan was transferred to EJICC, where he stayed for eight months. He remembered EJICC as 'nice', especially after 'boring' Narita. The block he was put in, however, was quite small—but there was another Turkish asylum seeker there; they had been brought from the airport at the same time, so they were already befriended.

Even though calling home was expensive, Tarkan was trying to talk with his parents regularly. After a while, he realised that he had not talked with his father for quite a long time. In the end, his mother revealed the truth: his father had died almost a month ago, just a week after Tarkan's departure. He recalled his first words at the moment he knew: 'I am coming back'—it is possible to withdraw the asylum application and return home anytime.[11] After giving it much thought, and talking with his cousin Kerim, however, he decided to stay:

> I thought: it all finished a month ago. Everyone offered condolences. The funeral was finished. He was not going to come back anyway. It was futile. It was finished.

So, on top of everything, Tarkan endured that tragic loss. Thankfully there was another young Kurdish man in the centre, Zeki (early 20s), to support him during those dark times. Later, with the help of a Nepalese detainee, they discovered that it was possible to exchange

[11] In terms of asylum seekers, it is possible to withdraw an application at any time. Also, if a written deportation order is issued to a person, then the recipient can decide to leave Japan at his own expense—naturally, the preferred option for the Immigration Bureau, since the other option is deportation at the expense of the government. Asylum seekers' stubbornness to stay in Japan, even under the detention conditions, demonstrates their determination.

letters with other Turkish/Kurdish detainees. Learning tricks from others, they performed a bogus fight with his friend, just to be transferred to a different and hopefully more comfortable block in the centre. Their little trick somehow worked, and Tarkan was lucky enough to be placed in the biggest and most 'entertaining' block. For the next six months, Tarkan stayed in that block.

After spending a couple of hours sorting out the bureaucratic procedures, Tarkan was released, and I met the person with whom I was going to share a great deal—starting with my room—for the next couple of months. The afternoon he was freed on provisional release, the first thing Tarkan said about the whole experience was, 'they drank our blood here. I swear they drank our blood'. Later, while we were sharing the same room, he told me many sad and sometimes tragicomic stories and memories about detention. Even though his first words were quite terrifying, after a while he also said: 'Ibaraki [EJICC] was fun'. The complexity of feelings and ideas about detention was puzzling and even shocking for me.

Even though Tarkan's story is particularly tragic, as he lost his father while in detention, it resonates with the experiences of many asylum seekers in Japan and beyond. In fact, from a broader perspective, detention has become a common practice for states in controlling their borders in recent decades. As pointed out by Wilsher (2012), emerging in the West and spreading around the globe, the practice of detention primarily targets 'unlawful' entries or residents. In practice, however, in the context of the constant securitisation of immigration, the differences between lawful or unlawful detention are often blurred, not to mention the problematic structure of these concepts. Even though it is generally framed as an administrative procedure, the structure, organisation and daily operational processes of detention reveal its punitive nature (Wilsher, 2012, xi-xii; Kotsioni, 2016, 2).

In terms of justifying the detention of asylum seekers, mitigating the possibility of absconding and facilitation of deportation procedure are cited the most. Since the 1990s, however—as seen in the US, UK and Australia—administrative reasons have become more common in rationalising the detention of asylum seekers in many countries. In the US, for instance, detaining asylum seekers from certain countries has become routine upon arrival,

as a result of the changing direction towards normalising detention for asylum seekers (O'nions, 2008, 4).

The prison-like nature of detention is evident in Japanese detention centres as well: uniformed staff, inmates kept in cells for over 18 hours a day, not allowed to meet in person with visitors, blackened windows, and only thirty minutes of open-air time in an area enclosed from all quarters—these are some features of Japanese detention centres. Especially from the viewpoint of detainees, there is no doubt about their prison-like character. One thing Tarkan recalled was how he and his friends were handcuffed to each other when they were transferred from Narita to EJICC. Asylum seekers in Japan are not spared the proliferation and transformation of detention practices (Wilsher, 2012).

In terms of facilities, Japan has two detention centres for long-term detention, namely the East Japan Immigration Control Centre (EJICC) in Ibaraki, and Ōmura Immigration Control Centre (OICC) in Nagasaki. As with Japan's accession to the Convention and the Protocol, knowing the colonial history and the exclusion of Zainichi Koreans is essential to understand the history and formation of these detention centres. Initially, some facilities were established to facilitate the repatriation of Koreans who had been stripped of their citizenship after the collapse of the Japanese empire. The repatriation process was interrupted by the Korean War, which initiated a refugee flow from Korea to Japan. However, these people were not accepted as refugees, but considered irregular immigrants, and they were interned at the Hario Detention Centre (the predecessor of the OICC). The Hario Detention Center was relocated in Ōmura in 1950, and became the OICC (Morris-Suzuki, 2006; Ri, 2017; Tanaka and Wattles, 2019). Again, the history of detention centres demonstrates the importance of the exclusion of the Zainichi Koreans in understanding immigration governance in Japan.

In addition to this, there are fifteen detention houses in regional immigration bureaus, district immigration offices, and branch offices for short-term detention. Lastly, landing-prevention facilities and airport rest-houses are used for detention in airports such as Narita and Haneda International Airport. As of December 2017, there were 1,386 people

in detention facilities around Japan, and 313 people had been in detention for over a year (Yamaguchi, 2018). The exact number of people in the landing-prevention facilities and airport rest-houses, however, is not disclosed. Also, the number of asylum seekers in detention is unknown, as the Immigration Bureau does not publish those numbers. On the other hand, the number of people who applied for asylum without residence status was 1,199 among 10,901 applications, making 11% of the total number. This figure reflects the number of asylum seekers under the threat of detention.

Based on observations during regular weekly visits to EJICC for six months—over eighty rounds of regular interviews with a group of detainees and relevant parties, such as volunteers, lawyers and researchers—and the experiences of living with asylum seekers on provisional release for over four months, this chapter aims to provide insights into the detention experience of asylum seekers.

The chapter has four objectives. First, it provides information about the process and procedure that leads asylum seekers into detention. As detention is neither a natural nor normal part of seeking asylum, it is crucial to follow and explore the different routes ending in a detention centre. Therefore, by focusing on detention, this chapter explores the hardest stage of the circuitous path of asylum seekers in Japan, and demonstrates how the liminal legal status of asylum seekers creates various routes to detention. Second, the chapter sheds light on the nature of life in detention, by providing a vivid narrative of detainees' daily life in the detention centre. Considering the limited knowledge of the detention experiences of asylum seekers in Japan, this chapter aims to draw a comprehensive picture of the detention experience in Japan, from entry to exit. Third, it reveals how asylum seekers exercise limited yet powerful subjectivity in terms of state power, even in one of the state's most restrictive institutions, where the discretionary power of officials is greater than in many other institutions. It focuses on the dynamic relationship between asylum seekers and government officials, ranging from negotiation to resistance. Lastly, the chapter explores the temporal and spatial liminality in the detention centre, and shows how the detainees turn this into a productive liminal experience—by expanding their social network, learning Japanese, and cooperating with volunteers, scholars and journalists.

4.2. Pathways to Detention

Detention is not explicitly stipulated for asylum seekers in ICRRA; however, it is not unusual for asylum seekers to find themselves in detention at some point during the asylum process in Japan. According to ICRRA, two types of detention are possible, based on either a detention order (Article 39) or a deportation order (Article 52-5). Grounds for deportation are explained in Article 24, which includes persons who have overstayed their visas, entered the country through irregular means, engaged in work without permission, committed particular crimes, been linked to human trafficking, been suspected of terrorist activities, and those who have manufactured documents. According to Article 39, on the other hand, the suspicion of these violations may be grounds for a detention order:

> An immigration control officer may if he has reasonable grounds to believe that a suspect falls under any of the items of Article 24, detain the suspect pursuant to a written detention order.

In conjunction with the immigration authorities' broad interpretation of the law, the result is the detainment of any person who is suspected on grounds for deportation. The policy is called the 'Detention of All Violations Doctrine', or '*Zenken shūyo shugi'* (Global Detention Project, 2013; Miyauchi, 2015, 212).

In terms of asylum seekers, the above-mentioned legal framework results in the detention of those who applied for asylum without having residence status. Consequently, there are at least four different possible scenarios for an asylum seeker to be detained. First, applying for asylum in the airport after being refused entry, therefore without having residence status. Second, applying for asylum within the country, for instance as an overstayer, without having residence status. Third, having residence status during the application process, but losing it after not being recognised as a refugee, and therefore becoming an irregular resident at the end of the process. Fourth, being released from detention on provisional release, but being detained again as a result of violating the conditions of provisional release. It is useful to examine these different paths in a more detailed way to understand

their differences, similarities and effects.

As Tarkan's story exemplifies, persons who are refused entry and apply for refugee status without having residence status are subject to detention. Even though they are released on provisional release, they are not allowed to work, and are subjected to many other restrictions. At this point, being able to get landing permission to enter the country means everything for asylum seekers.

A young man, Emrah (19), was told by his uncle to go back to Turkey if he cannot 'pass' the border with a 90-days tourist visa. His uncle advised him on the phone:

> If you can't pass [the border], don't spend time [in detention]. There is no point [being in] Japan if you are in jail. You are excluded from everything. You can't leave your neighbourhood if you are on *karihōme* (provisional release). You don't have a work permit. You can't work anywhere. If the police see you in another neighbourhood, you're in jail. They put you in jail and will tell you to go back to Turkey.

It is clear that asylum seekers are aware of the consequences of making an asylum application without having a residence permit, and that they will even take the risk of return rather than being detained. Therefore, they actively seek ways and tactics to pass the border.

In a similar vein, in the US-Mexico border setting, Chávez (2011) points out how migrants find new techniques to deal with the constant developments of border enforcement. In Japan, these tactics include changing how they look, or being a part of guided tour groups, then leaving the group at some point in Japan. Despite all the efforts to pass the border, successfully obtaining entry permission is seen only as 'luck' or 'fortune'—even a mystical experience—by many people. Emrah, for instance, said he 'never thought about not being able to pass [the border]. My heart was always at ease… I always said 'we will pass'.

The people I talked with always emphasised the importance of having a 'guarantor', which in this case means a person to talk to immigration officers on the phone during the hearing

process. Some people said that they were given landing permission after immigration officers confirmed that they had someone to look after them during their visit. Also, it is believed that the status of the 'guarantor' is quite significant, so being able to find a native Japanese speaker or someone fluent in Japanese increases the chance for entry. In one case, I accompanied a friend to welcome one of his acquaintances at Narita Airport. I acted as a translator between an immigration officer and my friend, who became a guarantor for his relative. The immigration officer was not particularly happy about talking in English, so it is hard to be sure if the conversation was convincing or not. However, in the end, the person was granted entry permission.

In some cases, however, the decision is negative, as was the case for Tarkan, and based on the interview, the special inquiry officer notifies the person that he has been denied entry. In this case, the person has two options: either filing an objection or leaving the country. As can be expected, immigration officers try to convince people to sign a document accepting their return. Again, being informed prior to their attempts to enter, Turkish and Kurdish people resist signing anything and refuse to return. Through informal channels, I learnt that in terms of resisting returning, people from Turkey are considered by immigration officers to be particularly stubborn. This perception conforms with the narratives of asylum seekers, as Tarkan claimed he and his friend refused to leave, even though immigration officers made numerous efforts to convince them. However, it took two weeks for Tarkan to be able to apply for asylum. The problem is that without proper interpretation and information, potential asylum seekers may not ever manage to apply for asylum. There are also cases in which immigration officers will not accept the application—but as pointed out by Slater and Barbaran (2020, 5), it is hard to know what makes an application credible or not.

Actually, this is far from being a new problem, and has been a growing concern since the 2000s (Dean, 2006; Amnesty International, 2002). In 2007, an Ethiopian refugee was about to be deported at Narita Airport, but managed to apply for asylum before immigration officers put her on a plane (Japan Association for Refugees, 2016). Tarkan was not threatened with deportation, but after refusing to return to Turkey he was put in a small solitary room at the Landing Prevention Facility at Narita Airport. Not allowed to leave the

room, he started to think about going back to Turkey, but Kerim told him on the phone that 'you will stay there for three or four days, cousin, then they will transfer you somewhere'. As he said, after four days, Tarkan was transferred to the Narita Detention House. There, he shared a room with four other people, including one fellow Turkish citizen. Two of them accompanied him for the next couple of months, although the two other occupants could not endure the conditions and chose to return to their home country of Pakistan after a couple of days.

People who stayed at both Narita Detention House and EJICC have agreed that the detention conditions in the former are much harder than the latter. As one person I met during my visits to EJICC put it, 'Narita is for making people disgust from here, they try to break you and make you accept to return. This place [EJICC] is a holiday. There is no problem here'. The person who told me this was released from EJICC detention some time ago—it is doubtful if he would have defined it as 'holiday' when he was in detention. Nevertheless, it conveys the perception of most people towards detention facilities at Narita Airport.

Apart from being detained at the airport as a result of applying for asylum after being refused landing permission, all the three other pathways to asylum take place within the country. The most common reason for detention is applying for asylum without having residence status. This may be the result of either being an overstayer or an irregular entrant. Of course, there are other more complicated situations in addition, such as losing a spousal visa as a result of divorce and therefore becoming an irregular resident.

Naci, for instance, was married to a Japanese woman for a couple of years, but his wife decided to end the marriage after he was convicted of a minor offence. His spousal visa was revoked when he was in prison. Naci attempted to make an asylum application before losing his visa, but even reaching the application documents was impossible from prison. In the end, he was directly handed over to immigration officers on the ground as an irregular resident after serving twenty-four months in prison. He managed to apply for asylum only after being detained, and the application was refused within just a month, which clearly shows the Immigration Bureau's tough stance on the matter.

At the time we met, Naci had been in detention for more than sixteen months, which was equivalent to two-thirds of his time in prison. This does not mean, however, all asylum seekers without residence status are detained when they apply. If a person makes the application before being arrested, then it is possible to be granted provisional release without detention (Japan Association for Refugees, 2013, 16).

Another pathway is to be detained immediately after the negative result of an asylum application. In this case, if the person is on provisional release, the provisional release ceases when the person visits the Immigration Bureau, one of the conditions of provisional release. The possibility of detention makes these visits unnerving experiences for many people, a reasonable response, since there are many horrifying examples.

Two young men I met, Guray (mid 20s) and Onur (mid 20s), were both detained when they visited the Immigration Bureau to renew their provisional release. Immigration officers informed them at that point that their asylum application had been refused and their provisional release application had ceased, so they were not allowed to leave. Guray was furious, as he had done nothing to violate the conditions of provisional release. The Immigration Bureau had visited his house, which he was sharing with his girlfriend, and they were satisfied to find him at home on a weekday, indicating that he was not working without permission.

The situation for Onur, on the other hand, was far more tragic—he was detained just days before his marriage to his Japanese girlfriend, timing that was perceived by him as malicious. Both Onur and Guray were first put in detention in the Tokyo Detention House, and then transferred to EJICC. It seems that people who are transferred to EJICC are kept for an extended period, and therefore they tend to become more frustrated.

Lastly, detention can occur in the case of violation of the terms of provisional release. This might happen as a result of irregular working, or any other violation, such as going outside a designated area without permission. There was general agreement that immigration authorities do not usually detain asylum seekers just because they work, but this of course is not guaranteed. Many people told me that they were talking with immigration officers

about working when they visited the Immigration Bureau to renew their provisional release. Being arrested in the workplace and at work, or as a result of an accident in the workplace, may be reasons for detention, however.

A middle-aged man, Hamit was one of the first Kurdish people who came to Japan in the mid-1990s, and his provisional release was not renewed after he had an accident at work. Probably informed by police, immigration authorities did not renew his provisional release and detained him during one of his visits to the Immigration Bureau. There are other reasons for detention, such as what happened to Bayram, a young man who has spent most his life in Japan. Bayram had been given provisional release without detention; however, after being involved in a brawl, he was detained for the first time. Before the incident, immigration officers did not detain him even though they had known that Bayram had been working irregularly for years. Again, this indicates that immigration authorities tend to tolerate asylum seekers who are working irregularly. However, the structure of the provisional release gives officers broad discretion to detain any asylum seeker, based on the acts that would not 'normally' cause detention.

Taken together, the discussion above demonstrates that as a result of their liminal legal status, asylum seekers face detention via several pathways in Japan. Detention is almost an intrinsic part of the asylum process. Nevertheless, an asylum seeker who is denied entry and transferred to EJICC directly from Narita airport experiences the whole process quite differently from an asylum seeker who has lived in Japan for a long time. Distinguishing these pathways and the results of these different experiences is significant, in order to understand their various effects on the lives of asylum seekers. The following section of this chapter will explore how asylum seekers negotiate with liminality and experience life in detention.

4.3. Life in Detention

In the previous section, there were two strikingly different remarks on the detention experience: Tarkan summed up his experience as 'they sucked our blood', but he also

described it as ‘fun’. These two highly contradictory statements show how complicated the detention experience can be. This section focuses on the life in detention, in order to understand the conditions and experiences behind these conflicting comments. There are seventeen detention facilities, including two detention centres: the Ōmura Immigration Control Centre and the East Japan Immigration Control Centre. These facilities came under public scrutiny after tragic deaths (Funakoshi, 2017) and suicides (Wilson, 2018b) have occurred there over the last couple of years. In addition to this, they both have poor reputations as a result of various problems, such as failing to provide appropriate health services, locking up detainees for long hours, and prolonged detention periods. This section aims to shed some light on these discussions, and provide a deeper understanding of the liminal experience of everyday life in detention, which is constructed through a dialectic relationship from negotiation to resistance.

4.3.1.Temporal-spatial Liminality

As a ‘total institution’, the main idea of detention is to limit the freedom of movement of detainees (Goffman, 1961). It also includes limiting the freedom of movement inside the detention centre. In EJICC[12], there are essentially five different spaces that detainees can be: rooms or cells, common areas, courtyard, visiting rooms and solitary cells. Rooms are the places where detainees spend most of their time in detention. Shared by up to five people, each room is equipped with a toilet, washbasin, kettle to provide hot water, and a television. Three or four rooms comprise a block, and all detainees in the same block share a communal area, in which all rooms are opened up. These common areas have small lockers, washing machines, showers, and basic work-out equipment like dumbbells or barbells and table tennis. Third, there is a courtyard, where detainees can benefit from forty-five minutes of outdoor exercise every day. Although playing football is the most popular activity among detainees, some of them choose to play basketball or doing basic exercises like running or stretching. Fourth, detainees are brought into visiting rooms if they have visitors from

[12] Though they cannot be included in this thesis due to copyright restrictions, photos from the inside of the EJICC can be seen via the following link (Kishitsu, 2016):
https://www.asahi.com/articles/ASJ623SB1J62UQIP00M.html

outside. These rooms are quite small, and have glass windows between detainees and visitors, so physical contact is not possible. If a person does not have any visitors, then he cannot go to the visiting rooms. Therefore, having regular visitors can become a privilege in these circumstances, even just in terms of expanding the limited physical spaces in which detainees live. Life in detention means spending months or even years existing in just these four or five different spaces.

Detention has a schedule, and life revolves around these externally imposed timings. The day starts around 7.30am when breakfast is distributed, and room doors are opened at 9.00am. After that time, detainees are allowed to spend time in the common area until 11.30am. Lunch is served between 11.30am and 1.00pm, and detainees are locked up in their rooms again during that period. After lunch, doors are opened at 1.00pm, and detainees are free to use the common area until 4.00pm. Detainees may use the open-air courtyard for forty-five minutes, but the timing changes every day, as different blocks use the same area in regular turns. Lastly, detainees may be put in solitary confinement cells for a certain time as a punishment. The size of one cell is two tatami mats; around three metres square, and they comprise a toilet and bed. Apart from being alone all the time when in the cell, the person in solitary confinement is forbidden to use the common room and the courtyard. All in all, detainees have to spend 18.5 hours (or 24 hours if they are in solitary confinement) in their room each day.

As a result of long hours being locked up every day, boredom becomes the leitmotif of the liminal experience in detention. During my visits, all the conversations were leading up to boredom and the ways to deal with it. Understandably, the feeling of entrapment—a foregone conclusion of living in a restricted place for a long time—is the primary reason for tedium. One example was my conversation with Bayram. I usually started our meetings by asking about how detainees were doing, and asking questions about what was going on inside. One day Bayram answered my question by saying ‘You must have the news! You are the free one’. From his perspective, nothing exciting or newsworthy could happen in detention. Even though detainees learn and experience lots of things in detention, according

to asylum seekers, nothing is going on worth mentioning. In these circumstances, tempo-spatial liminality means being excluded from 'being in Japan'. Starting from the location of the centre, which is defined as 'in the middle of nowhere' by most of the people I met, detention aims to marginalise people. Consequently, when it comes to boredom, space is a crucial part of it, as detention is all about being forced to stay in a liminal state.

The number of detainees in each room ranges from three to six, although Onur mentioned that he spent three weeks alone, a time that is remembered with fondness. It was surprising to hear someone telling me that being alone in a room was better than sharing it with other people, so I asked him about it:

> *Yusuf*: It sounds like a solitary cell to me. Must have been hard, though?
>
> *Onur*: It is similar to a cell, but you can do whatever you want. The room is large. You cannot behave freely when there are three people in a room.

It seemed to me that being lonely actually meant having little personal space. Privacy was an issue in detention. Tarkan clarified the effects of small-sized rooms on daily life:

> We do not make our beds and eat while sitting on them. There is no space to walk. Actually, what would be the point to walk in that room? Where to go?

In these circumstances, any activity that requires moving within the room is not an option. This reduces the number of possible activities to those that can be performed while sitting or lying on a bed, such as reading a book, chatting with roommates, listening to music, watching television or playing card games. Even though these activities may contribute to alleviating boredom, stress can be an obstacle to doing them in the first place, as Onur said:

> There is nothing [to pass the time]. Actually, there are things to occupy you like books, lots of things... But your brain doesn't work anymore. Distress, depression, everything… You don't want to strive anymore.

Similarly, as quoted at the beginning of this chapter, Bayram was complaining about not being able to concentrate on anything, including reading, because of the constant anxiety and stress. Therefore, it can be said that the primary effect of temporal-spatial liminality of

asylum seekers in the EJICC is boredom.

4.3.2. 'The Social' and Social Networks

This finding notwithstanding, reading continues to be a refuge for some, as it allows people to escape from the reality of being in detention, even for a short time. Tarkan emphasised this point, saying 'if there is a book, it really helps very much'. Apart from reading, listening to music also provides an opportunity to leave boredom behind. In the absence of a radio or smartphone, the only device on which to listen to music is a CD player. There is a limited number of books or CDs in Turkish or Kurdish, and this makes swapping crucial to accessing new books and CDs. Tarkan explained how book swaps are organised:

> … they [fellow detainees] may send you a letter and say, 'send us books'. Then you can take a book from a shelf in your section and send them. You tell the guard 'I take it from the shelf and will send it to my friend. He will send it back after reading.'

Therefore, other than helping people to deal with boredom, sharing (or not sharing) these resources, sometimes as little as a book or CD, plays a vital role in establishing and maintaining social relationships. Again, Tarkan was very informative about how crucial these relations were:

> We were sending CDs to each other. So, CDs travel from hand to hand. For example, if I listen to a CD, I definitely don't keep it. I can [keep it] if I want to, but that's not good. I send it to a friend in another block so that he can benefit from it. I mean, he doesn't have to suffer as I did before. Bro, CD player is a very important thing there. When you listen to music… When you put [in] that earphone, you just forget everything.

The relative value of these small resources also makes their control a vital issue among detainees. During one of my last visits to the centre, I mentioned to Devran (38) about the books that I was thinking of donating before leaving Japan. He insisted on sending all the books in his name and did not drop the topic until I gave him assurance of this. At first, I was

surprised and even disturbed by his insistence, until I realised it was because of the significance of having control of the books.

As can be seen in Tarkan's statement about the CD player, these small items are particularly useful to forge social bonds. Considering Sahlins' typology of reciprocity, these relationships may be understood as generalised reciprocity—as the receiver is not under the obligation of reciprocating. Of course, there is no one in the detention centre who can act as a 'big man' distributing favours without anything in return, but 'the material side of the transaction is repressed by 'the social' (Sahlins, 1972, 193-194).

In the detention context, 'the social'—which overrides short-term material gains according to Sahlins—principally means the connection and community of compatriots. Halim, a Kurdish asylum seeker from Turkey, explained how crucial are compatriot ties: '[f]or example Brazilians, they all hang out with their countryman. You know, Iranians talk to Iranians. Turkish people talk to Turkish people'. This natural alignment of detainees based on country of origin is primarily based on speaking the same language: Turkish, Kurdish, Portuguese or Iranian, and sometimes not being able to speak any other language, i.e. Japanese or English. Halim elaborated his point:

> I mean sometimes we talk, but actually we can't go further because of the language problem. Not only because of me, but he [detainees from other nationalities] can't talk either... He doesn't know Japanese.

This is especially true for those who are detained at the airport. Since most of the newly arrived asylum seekers cannot speak any other languages except their native language (Turkish and Kurdish in my participants' case), they mostly depend on their more experienced compatriots to communicate with other detainees, officers, volunteers and lawyers.

Kamil, a middle-aged Kurdish man in his fifties, was not permitted to enter the country under a tourist visa at Narita Airport, but he decided to apply for asylum and face detention, which for him lasted around two years. Throughout this time, Naci, an ethnically Turkish asylum seeker who speaks perfect Japanese, assisted him. Undoubtedly, without Naci's

translation skills and companionship, life would have been much harder for Kamil. Fully aware of the constant support that fellow countrymen provide each other, the detention administration is careful to have at least two detainees from the same country to each block. For a while, Tarkan was the only detainee from Turkey in his block, but detention officers assured him that they would bring a Turkish-speaking person within three days:

> *Tarkan*: When they took me to 9A [block], I was alone. They told me 'be patient; someone will come in three days'. I waited. Normally, it is forbidden to be alone. There must be someone that you can communicate [with].'

Apart from language support, experiencing the same conditions—which affects every aspect of one's life—underscores the common ground among detainees and gives rise to a feeling of solidarity.

This does not mean all the relationships are harmonious and exempt from conflict. To start with, as is seen in Europe (Baser, 2015), the interminable Kurdish issue within Turkey is a potential source of conflict between Turkish and Kurdish detainees. In 2015, a brawl broke out between Turkish and Kurdish people in front of the Turkish Embassy in Tokyo, when they were casting their votes (Turks and Kurds clash, 2015), indicating that potential ethnic tensions had already turned into active conflict among Turkish and Kurdish people in Japan. Despite long-lasting ethnic tensions in the homeland, and this recent fight in front of the embassy, however, the practical necessities and the requirements of detention are generally urgent and demanding enough to deflect such underlying issues.

The necessity for solidarity in terms of the hardships of detention works as an incentive for everyone to avoid any action that might cause unnecessary conflict. As can be seen in the relationship between Kamil and Naci, detainees do not just set aside ethnic differences, but develop strong solidarity networks over the bond of sharing the same country of origin and speaking the same language. Most Kurdish detainees are from the same area in Turkey, and it is not unusual for them to have family ties, or at least to be acquaintances.

For instance, when Kemal was in the centre, his cousin Umut (early 30s) was also staying in another block. Pre-existing ties and newly-established connections turn the detention

experience into productive liminality, since asylum seekers overcome spatial and temporal liminality through expanding their social networks. Therefore, they continue to invest in the future, even though detention aims to keep their life on hold in a marginalised and excluded status.

4.3.3. Discursive Strategies and Divisions

In the EJICC, almost all people who had been detained within Japan knew each other beforehand one way or another, as a result of the relatively small size of the Turkish and Kurdish community. This also meant that no one could keep any secrets. Especially those with previous police records were subjects of gossip, and sometimes, depending on the accusations, they were excluded from the social networks of fellow countrymen. The rationale is to draw a line between 'criminals' and 'innocent asylum seekers' who are only in detention as a result of the 'wrongdoings of the government'.

Accordingly, asylum seekers separating themselves from 'those criminals' was a common discursive strategy, in order to prove their unjustified incarceration; asylum seekers brought directly from Narita Airport especially tended to look with suspicion upon those who were detained within Japan.

Halim had been brought from Narita a couple of months ago, and he was suspicious about a fellow Kurdish asylum seeker who had been in detention for a long time:

> A Turkish guy came, Devran… I said 'why are you here? For two years?' First of all, they don't have any right to put you here for two years. Why have you been here for two years? You are here because you did something! [Maybe] you stole a car and came here?

According to Halim, anyone who had been detained within Japan must have done something wrong. He was complaining about sharing the same space as ex-prison inmates, even though some of them were also asylum seekers.

Devran, however, was building his argument around being an asylum seeker, as he had been

in prison himself before. Instead of focusing on each asylum seeker's background to decide if they deserved to be in detention or not based on their record, he was objecting to the detention practice by noting the apparent similarities between the detention centre and prison. For him, it was inappropriate for asylum seekers to stay in a place comparable to a prison:

> They're saying this is not a prison; this is for refugee applicants, right? But they lock us inside, restrict our free time, don't allow us to go out, read our letters, listen our phone calls... Are we in prison? Look, we can only talk through a glass! This is in fact a prison. Some people have been here for three years.

Devran was not alone with his thinking, as Kamil also said: 'this is nothing to do with refugees, (this is) imprisonment!' This was a recurrent theme, providing asylum seekers with the moral grounds to demonstrate the illegitimacy of the treatment they were facing in Japan.

In daily conversations, it was unsurprising to hear people naturally talk about detention centres as prisons. During our interview, Kerim's mother, Meryem (53), was talking about a distant relative who came to Japan a long time ago, and she casually said: 'he was also in prison once'. Of course, her usage of the term 'prison' was not the same as Devran's, who was using the word in order to expose the unfair incarceration of asylum seekers, including himself.

The prison-like conditions of detention were not the only thing that people were frustrated about. For Guray, the level of exclusion and oppression that asylum seekers experience in Japan should be deemed proper only for murderers:

> If you think about it, it is like a life sentence in Turkey. As if you killed ten people and received a life sentence. None of us killed someone here! Okay, I came here, I applied for asylum, but I didn't kill anyone. I didn't do anything wrong. We didn't commit a crime. We didn't do anything! [We didn't] even steal a matchstick.

Emphasising the nature of the detention centre as a prison, and then challenging it by emphasising their innocence was brought up many times as an argument during conversations with asylum seekers, in or out of detention. Therefore, *the innocence clause*, as I call it, is the main argument that asylum seekers use for their moral condemnation of detention practices. As Bosworth (2014, 89) shows in her research on British immigration removal centres (IRC), by using this argument, detainees challenge the identity that their confinement entails. Resonating with Bosworth's findings, some asylum seekers emphasised their past to prove that they did not belong in detention. Halim was trying to convince me of his decent personality:

> I haven't even seen heroin or marihuana in my life! None! Even though I had seen it, I wouldn't have touched it. The only thing I smoke is tobacco. I don't even drink alcohol. I can't. I mean, I just came here as a tourist and applied for asylum. Applying for asylum… You don't have a choice. How dare you to lock me up for seven or eight months like this? This is offending me. If I had another solution, I wouldn't have stayed here, even a second.

Halim connoted the detention centre with criminal activities, which did not suit his character. Some others, like Cemil, were more cynical, or at least helpless about the situation. According to Cemil, the treatment they faced was inhumane: 'they treat us as if we are dogs'. Guray, on the other hand, reversed this idea, saying 'they are not human. I swear they are not human'. By his logic, the inhumane treatment they were experiencing in detention indicated the nature of the people who were managing the centre. By 'inhumane treatment', asylum seekers were not referring to particular acts by the detention personnel, but a reflection of general disappointment and anger towards the agencies, institutions and policies in Japan. The critical point is that asylum seekers do not passively accept the conditions in detention and discourses that are generated about them. They continuously challenge both of them. Asylum seekers produce counter-arguments and construct their own narrative.

4.3.4. Looking for Allies: UNHCR, NGOs, Volunteers, Researchers and Media

Apart from moral and discursive interventions, asylum seekers also strive to gain support from different parties outside the detention centre, in order to create pressure on the detention management, the Immigration Bureau, and ultimately the Japanese government. Researchers and academics who visit the detention centre are seen as potential allies. In general, volunteers who have been visiting the centre for many years introduce researchers to the detainees. In one instance, an academic from a prominent North American university visited the centre, and I accompanied her as a translator, and noted that all the detainees she visited were eager to share their difficulties.

As I mentioned above, Guray was infuriated by the detention conditions, and asked me, 'If it is possible, please do something for us. Bring some television, or news crews here if you can. Also, if you can call foreigners, bring them'. Understandably, asylum seekers were hoping that the media could make their difficulties public, but Guray thought this was unlikely. 'Even if someone dies, reporters don't come here. I haven't seen anyone in eight months'. He was quite right, as detention centres do not receive much media attention in Japan except for tragic incidents like death (Immigration detention centers, 2014), or sensational events like hunger strikes (Japan detention centre, 2018). Even so, it is questionable as to what extent the media—especially the national media—are able to cover this subject. A Japanese filmmaker who was considering shooting a documentary about the centre said that language must be chosen carefully, to convince the national media to broadcast the documentary. We discussed possible collaboration opportunities, and even conducted an interview together. However, I did not hear from him after a while, and the project eventually petered out.

On the other hand, Guray specifically suggested to me to bring 'foreigners' to the detention centre to show them the problems of the centre. This was not unusual at all, because many other asylum seekers also believed that when it comes to detention issues, Japanese people—even those volunteering for many years to help detainees in the East Japan Immigration Control Centre (EJICC)—were not entirely trustworthy. For this reason,

detainees prefer to speak to foreign volunteers and international agencies when it comes to complaints about detention.

In this respect, almost all the asylum seekers interviewed mentioned the United Nations (UN) at some point. Of course, by invoking the UN, they were referring to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) office in Japan. Their comments about the UNHCR, however, were not wholly complimentary. Some asylum seekers—for instance, Hamit, who had been in Japan for over twenty years—said that the Japanese government had managed to deceive the UNHCR, so 'United Nations does not know what's really happening [here]; they [Japan] hide the truth from the rest of the world'. Bayram also thought that the UNHCR did not know about the situation of refugees in Japan, and he asked me 'Can you reach United Nations on behalf of us and tell them that we have no right in detention?' Hamit and Bayram were not particularly positive about the UNHCR, but they did not blame it for their treatment.

However, Devran was, as usual, angrier than the others. There was much blame to lay on the UNHCR, beyond being deceived by Japan or not being aware of the situation inside detention centres. He said 'United Nations is the dog of Japan. I called them to help, but they sent a Japanese to me again'. For him, the problem was related explicitly to the UNHCR in Japan. Hamit also joined Devran in blaming the UNHCR for being corrupt: 'United Nations is bribed in Japan. They're doing something else. Report it to the UN in England!'

Conversely, there was also a common belief that the Japanese government is receiving funds from the UNCHR for each asylum seeker. For many asylum seekers, this was the real reason for widespread detention in Japan, as the government was making money over detained asylum seekers. Kamil was even confident enough about this to give exact numbers: 'They're keeping us here because they're getting money from the United Nations. For each of us, they are getting ¥200,000'.

These three different and even contradictory views of the UNHCR in Japan can be seen as a reflection of asylum seekers' efforts to find an explanation for the UNHCR's seemingly inactive position. They were trying to make sense out of the UNCHR's silence, and find a

logical explanation for its perceived passivity.

Asylum seekers prefer to seek support from international agencies and foreigners, because they tend to be suspicious about Japanese institutions and individuals. However, some volunteers seem to be an exception to this rule, if they have been visiting the centre for a long time. Therefore, they have earned well-deserved respect and trust among detainees. Many of these groups are religious organisations and operate as a part of different churches, but there are also some secular organisations. Volunteer groups provide various services, such as donating clothes and sanitary products, offering legal support or religious counselling, and most importantly providing companionship through regular meetings with detainees.

During my fieldwork, I was associated with a local volunteer group (Tanaka and Wattles, 2019), which is one of the leading organisations visiting the centre. The leader of the group, Mrs Suzuki or Suzuki-san, a middle-aged petite Japanese woman, has been heroically visiting the centre since 1995. In the group, each volunteer focuses on one or two countries; Suzuki-san is the person in charge of Turkish and Kurdish detainees, whom she has been visiting regularly since 2000.

Suzuki-san's continual efforts have made her a well-known figure, particularly among Kurdish asylum seekers. However, even Suzuki-san's volunteering career, spanning two decades, is not enough to save her from accusations of being a spy for the Immigration Bureau. One day while we were at home together, Tarkan was telling us how helpful Suzuki-san was—but he also added '…she's working for Nifkan [the Immigration Bureau]; she tells them everything'. Fatma was also listening and commented, 'Then you shouldn't have told her anything about you!' Tarkan laughed and replied, 'That's exactly what I did! I didn't tell her anything'. After a while, this conversation was repeated in the presence of Kerim, who was also in the EJICC for around six months. Kerim did not take Tarkan's words seriously, replying 'Don't be silly! She is a good person and helping us. She knows all of us working. If she had been working for them [the Immigration Bureau], she could have made all of us arrested'.

A possible explanation of this chronic distrust could be the ongoing insecurity that asylum seekers experience in Japan, which in turn has an impact on their relationships with ordinary Japanese citizens.

Still, volunteers play a vital role, which is appreciated by most of the asylum seekers. Even sharp-tongued Devran told me 'I would sacrifice myself for Suzuki-san. No one care for us except her. Without her, we would have been forgotten here'. He is quite right because, besides some asylum seekers with close family members such as a spouse, most of them do not have regular visitors. Having trouble with his wife, Devran was one of the unlucky ones, and depended on volunteers to visit him. For someone like him, these meetings mean a rupture in the space and time of detention, as they provide a rare opportunity to leave the block and talk to someone from outside.

In these circumstances, asylum seekers usually consider meetings as rare windows to the outside world. They ask about friends staying in other blocks, or talk about their problems inside. Whether someone has been detained or released is a particularly hot issue. For religious groups, the main focus of the meetings may be praying and studying the Bible. Randall, a Western-born Christian volunteer, residing in Japan, was refusing detainees' requests, especially regarding legal issues, because:

> Some of them asked me for help. But on guarantee document, you have to agree on providing food, shelter etc. for that person and I'm not [going to do that]! Also, you know, most of them come here from prison… I just tell them, 'I'm here to study Bible'.

Randall was linked to a denomination, but he was lacking institutional support. Other religious groups, especially the ones working as a part of a church, were able to provide some material support like clothing or sanitary products such as toothbrushes, toothpaste or washing powder. Asylum seekers with close relatives in Japan generally do not need these donations, as family members visit them regularly. Tarık's (mid 20s) case was particularly interesting, because his Japanese wife was visiting him every day, five times a week. Naturally, he did not need anyone to visit him or give him anything, as she was carrying bags

stuffed with goods every day to the centre.

From a general perspective, asylum seekers actively seek support from outside the detention centre. Even though institutional structures such as the UNHCR disappoint them, volunteers and detained asylum seekers manage to create a network of solidarity. There are difficulties embedded in this relationship, such as suspicion, but the tenacity of the volunteers helps to overcome these problems. Again, asylum seekers demonstrate a continuous effort to overcome being marginalised and silenced in a remote detention centre.

4.3.5. Faces of Resistance

In order to visit a detainee, visitors have to submit an application containing the details of the person that they want to visit. After that, detainees are brought to meeting rooms, in which cell phones and other devices that can record video or sound are not allowed. Visitors can meet with two detainees at the same time, but they have to be from the same block. According to Theresa, a Christian volunteer who has been visiting the centre for more than fifteen years, visitors were allowed to call an unlimited number of detainees from different blocks until 2010. However, this was stopped by the detention administration, as detainees used that opportunity to organise a hunger strike in 2010 (Matsutani, 2010). For this reason, the detention administration now limit the number of calls to two people from the same block.

Even though it is still possible to share information via letters within the centre, new rules have reduced the opportunity for instant communication. Despite the efforts of the detention administration to curb prospective hunger strikes, detainees have organised a couple of hunger strikes since 2010. During spring 2017, more than twenty detainees started a hunger strike in Nagoya, which was followed by asylum seekers in Tokyo (Ryall, 2017). The hunger strike (which demanded better conditions and a shortened detention period) lasted two weeks before participants decided to terminate it, as a result of worsening health conditions (Funakoshi and Miyazaki, 2017). Asylum seekers in EJICC did not follow their

fellows in Tokyo and Nagoya, but the topic was widely discussed during our meetings. I talked with Onur after the end of the hunger strike in Tokyo Immigration Bureau Detention House (TIBDH). For him, the success depended on the number of people holding the hunger strike:

> It's not something that you can do with fifteen people. If all block doesn't join, it doesn't work. If ten people go on [a hunger strike], they [detention administration] separate those people immediately.

If the number of detainees holding a hunger strike is low, it is easy for detention management to relocate them to different blocks and eventually stop the protest. Hamit was a part of the 2011 hunger strike and spoke from his experience:

> Yes, there was one [hunger strike] in Shinagawa [TIBDH], but it didn't work. If the whole block participates, then it can work. Ten to twenty people from each block are enough. If you organise [a hunger strike] in one block, they disperse the whole block. They can easily send you to other blocks, and it is finished. But if all blocks participate, like ten people from each block, then it will be successful.

Convincing people to act together, however, is not easy for various reasons, including the multi-ethnic structure of the detention centre. Hamit continued, 'Sri Lankans are the most crowded group in our section, thirteen or fifteen… Then Chinese and Myanmarese. You can't convince all of them'. He did not mention any particular problem among these ethnic groups, but it was clearly not easy to convince these different groups to organise towards a united goal.

The detention centre administration also has other disciplinary mechanisms by which to deter detainees from holding a hunger strike or any collective resistance. First of all, it has the authority to grant or deny provisional release, which holds the utmost importance for all detainees. Since the director of the immigration centre and the supervising immigration inspector make the decision over each provisional release application, detainees refrain

from having trouble with officers. Onur exemplified this, when we were talking about an African detainee, 'for instance, there is an African guy. He says 'I don't break the rules'. He runs away from anything. Some people are afraid because of *karihōme* [provisional release]'.

In particular, those detained at Narita Airport know that they will be released within six to eight months, therefore becoming involved in a protest and getting negatively noticed by detention officers can jeopardise their prospective provisional release application. According to the Immigration Bureau, there is:

> … [no] criteria for making a decision on provisional release. If applicant seeks for provisional release, the director of the immigration centre or the supervising immigration inspector may provisionally release the detainee if he deems necessary to do so by comprehensively considering the detainee's circumstances, evidence proving the reason for provisional release, the detainee's characteristics and assets. (MOJ, n.d.1)

However, by saying, 'comprehensively considering the detainee's circumstances' and 'considering… detainee's characteristics', the Immigration Bureau provides a broad and vague authority to the detention administration, which uses this power as a tool to oppress detainees. The threat of prolonged detention forces detainees to control themselves and become their own police. While talking about conflicts and fights among detainees, Halim said, 'if you fight with someone, that's bad. It [detention time] gets longer. If you give any harm or injury [it gets longer too]'.

At this point, it is important to add that detainees did not mention any experiences of violence at the hands of either detention officers or fellow inmates, as is the case elsewhere, for instance in Indonesia (Missbach, 2015, 79). In the absence of physical violence, Hamit was explaining the experience as 'psychological torture', saying, 'they want to break you. They want you to be mad'. Here, he was referring to the smoking ban inside the detention centre. For asylum seekers in the detention centres, all these restrictions and regulations and the confinement itself were elements of a policy of intimidation and demoralisation. In

this context, guards in the centre were seen as the embodiment of the detention system, Immigration Bureau, and everything problematic about the asylum system in Japan.

As mentioned at the beginning of this section, detention is a total institution, which disciplines the body of detainees through scheduling time and limiting the use of space. In this way, detention is experienced directly through the body, as Tarkan said:

> It is weird, but something happens to you there, because of the strict order of life. Everything is scheduled—because of that, even though you don't think about it, your body just follows the order.

Tarkan's insight echoes what Goffman called 'primary adjustment, which means the person 'is transformed into a co-operator; he becomes the 'normal', 'programmed', or 'built-in member' (Goffman, 1961, 189).

Still, there are avenues for resistance, which can be understood through Goffman's analysis of 'secondary adjustment'—which defines 'practices that do not directly challenge staff but allow inmates to obtain forbidden satisfaction or to obtain permitted ones by forbidden means' (Goffman, 1961, 54). Asylum seekers were constantly challenging detention management and officers with various acts that can be classified as falling within secondary adjustment. For instance, the first block Tarkan stayed in was quite small and boring, but he did not know how to get himself transferred to another block, until some Kurdish asylum seekers suggested to him to carry his bed out of the room. By doing that he was going to perform a protest, to force officers to transfer him to another block, but he eventually gave up this plan because, 'we thought about trying it, but then we [got] scared that they extend our detention'.

In this case, it is evident that detention management succeeded in neutralising a possible resistance before it even started. However, Tarkan only lost the battle, not the war—because after putting in some thought, he and his friend performed a bogus fight over a minor issue. When detention officers came and interrogated them, they refused to stay in the same block with each other. Of course, this was all part of the plan. Unable to establish peace between two asylum seekers from Turkey, detention officers did not have any option

but to relocate them in different blocks. On this occasion, after understanding the day-to-day running of the centre, Tarkan and his friend found a way to reach their goal without any explicit confrontation with detention management.

While the aim in the case above was changing blocks, sometimes a detainee's only goal is to be disruptive. Each room has a button for emergencies to call officers, but Tarkan was pushing this button every night, over and over again, to wake up officers as they were sleeping in the adjoining control room. When they eventually came to the room, he would ask for painkillers for his apparent earache. Tarkan proudly told me that the guards were so disturbed by him they told his lawyer to get him out as soon as possible. These tactics neither sought to alter the whole system, nor would have the power to do so; instead, they represent the constant but limited agency of asylum seekers in detention. De Certeau's (1984) distinction between tactic and strategy is explanatory here. Unlike strategies, which are the result of institutional and overarching planning, tactics are contingent, unplanned, and aim to find the cracks in strategies. In a detention setting, it is evident that asylum seekers' actions fit into tactics, as they do not have any long-term perspective or means to accumulate their gains.

Detainees' limited options become especially visible when it comes to their struggle to access health services, which was among the most commonly complained about issues. When asked about the biggest problem in the detention centre, Shigeru, a middle-aged Japanese volunteer who was visiting the centre on a weekly basis, answered '… not enough medical care. Not timely care'. Tadanori Onitsuka, one of the members of the Immigration Detention Centres' Visiting Committee, appointed by the Ministry of Justice to make recommendations to improve the conditions of detention facilities, also thinks that the most severe problem is the poor level of medical treatment (Onitsuka, 2012, 95).

There are various reasons hindering detainees from accessing better health services. First of all, as of 2017, only one part-time doctor has been working in the centre, and detainees have been waiting days or even weeks to see the doctor. In his witty way, Tarkan claimed, 'You get well until then. After one or two weeks of waiting, you recover by yourself. Your

body gets used to it'. Even seeing the doctor, however, does not guarantee better treatment, due to insufficient examination, language barriers and detainees' distrust of doctors and medicines.

The insufficient number of medical professionals in the centre does not only mean delayed appointments, but also insufficient examination for each patient (Miyauchi, 2015, 215). Once again, Kamil was eager to share his frustration:

> They didn't examine me, just talking. There was an interpreter on the phone. None of them explained my problem to me. They asked me why I had the pain. How the hell I could know why I had pain?

Kamil continuously complained about his health condition for months and was never satisfied with the medical treatment that he received. One part of the problem was the poor level of communication between the doctor and detainees, resulting in detainees avoiding using medications. Tarkan explained why he did not use the medications, 'I don't know, I just didn't trust their medications. I didn't trust the doctors and pills of that place [EJICC]. I didn't know what kind of pills they were giving…'. Compounding his distrust in the doctors and medications, Tarkan, like everyone else at the centre, claimed that prescribing painkillers for every sickness was a tactic to keep detainees docile. Tarkan was afraid of becoming addicted to sedatives, so he refused to use the pills.

Unfortunately, detainees lacked power to compel the detention administration to improve health services within the facility. Refusing medications left one likely alternative—living in pain, maybe for months. As was seen in the death of Van Huan Nguyen, a Vietnamese detainee who died in 2017 in EJICC, sometimes the consequences of inadequate healthcare were even more severe. Devran accused the detention administration and the Immigration Bureau: 'they don't want you to be well. They want you to become permanently disabled, physically and mentally'.

Shigeru, a Japanese volunteer, agreed with Devran, and explained the logic behind the detention practices:

> I think this is the mental torture of the government. [They're] trying to push the detainees to the corner. And they try to force them [to say] 'I give up, this is too hard. It's better to go back to my country'. They don't do physical torture but try to make as much as difficult the situation.

Shigeru's comments reflect a widely shared idea among detainees and volunteers. Widespread and prolonged detention practices convince asylum seekers that it is all about forcing them to accept going back. It was clear for Naci: 'they try to send as much as they can. If they achieve to send one person, that's it. They just don't want anyone'.

On the other hand, Bayram could not understand the reason for his detainment, which was for more than a year: 'I have Japanese friends and a girlfriend. But they badly want me to go back. I also don't get it'. According to Tarkan, the Immigration Bureau was holding Bayram as a hostage to force his family to go back,

> Even if they keep him five years, he will wait. He can't go back. It doesn't make sense to lock him up. It's nonsense. This guy is not going back! They know it too. He is not going back; why are you keeping him inside? What is the reason? They threaten his family. They want his family to go back. They want his family to think 'Our boy is in detention'. […] They threaten the family with him. If they let him go, then they will detain someone else from his family. This is how it works.

If Tarkan, Devran and the others are right, and the intention is to force asylum seekers to leave the country, then the result of detention, and especially prolonged detention, could not be more disappointing for the authorities, because it usually has the reverse effect. Asylum seekers consider the time they spend in detention as an investment, and therefore prolonged detention means a higher investment from their perspective. 'After staying fourteen and a half months, you can't go back'—this was Kamil telling me why he could not return. Therefore, prolonged detention generally does not convince asylum seekers to go back, quite the opposite; they become more adamant about staying in Japan.

Having said that, some people do opt to return, because they decide that they cannot bear

repeated spells of detention. Zeki had spent about six months in EJICC with Tarkan, but he was detained again because of working without permission just a couple of months after his provisional release. After putting some thought into it, he decided to go back instead of spending probably more than a year in detention. Deciding to go back because of the detention threat is not common, but there are also some exceptional cases. I remember that learning of Zeki's decision to leave was quite shocking for Tarkan, because generally waiting for provisional release is seen as the hardest part. No one expected him to be detained again within such a short time, as for everyone in detention, provisional release means freedom and starting a new chapter in life.

As discussed above, asylum seekers' tactics range from open resistance through a hunger strike to finding the cracks and blind spots in the system just for fun. However, forcing change, as in the case of health services, is more complicated than creating disruption, and it is usually beyond their power. The discretionary authorities of the detention officers act as a disciplinary control over asylum seekers, and most of the time these powers prevent detainees from openly challenging the system—although there are exceptions. In general, however, the detention system is not successful in convincing asylum seekers to return to their countries.

4.3.6. The Light at the End of the Tunnel: Provisional Release

Provisional release is stipulated in Article 54 of ICRRA, which gives the decision-making authority over provisional release applications to the director of the immigration detention centre, or a supervising immigration inspector. All the issues regarding provisional release were at the top of the agenda for our weekly meetings with asylum seekers. A paramount concern is to decide on the timing of the application, because it must not be made too soon or too late. According to common understanding, people who are transferred from the airport can expect to be released after six months, and they make their applications accordingly. However, most of them, like Halim and Tarkan, ultimately spend around nine months in detention as a result of the prolonged decision times, which take at least two or three months.

Waiting for the decision during this period is the hardest part for most people. Onur, for instance, carefully decided the timing of his second application, after the first one was refused. He waited for around forty days for the decision, but during the waiting period, he was trying to lower his expectations. In his case, the waiting period concluded with a happy ending; however, Kamil was not so lucky. After waiting more than 100 days to receive an answer, he learnt that his application had been refused. This was quite a shock for all of us, because he had already been in detention for more than fifteen months at that time. Considering the new application and waiting period, he would be staying in detention for at least four or five more months.

In these conditions, people consider anything that can shorten the detention period. Kerim, for instance, pretended to be a lunatic, in order to tire the detention officers, hoping that they would release him earlier. This pretence was walking a thin line, because they could have also prolonged his detention time. As mentioned before, this was the most effective strategy for detention administration to control the detainees. Actually, Guray told me that after an argument with a detention officer, he was told: 'if you continue arguing with guardians, your provisional release application can be denied'. There were also more secure but painful ways to shorten the detention time. Bayram's older brother was bearing the pain of a kidney problem, because he knew that immigration officers could not keep him in detention long as a result of his condition. This extreme approach reveals how abstruse and tragic asylum seekers' tactics might become during their struggle with the detention regime.

Lawyers, in this context, play a vital role for asylum seekers, as they have to identify a guarantor who is going to be responsible for their compliance with the conditions of their provisional release (MOJ, n.d.2). However, this does not create any legal responsibility other than the ethical one for the guarantor, and therefore, usually, lawyers undertake this responsibility. Kamil was angry at his lawyer, as she did not inform him about the result of the application for a month. This happened not because the lawyer was ignoring Kamil, but because of her workload—only a couple of courageous lawyers attempt to represent all the asylum seekers in the detention centre. Volunteers work in collaboration with lawyers, and inform them if a new asylum seeker comes to the centre. Then, one of the lawyers meets

with the person to arrange the details of the provisional release application. Most asylum seekers do not pay any fee for this legal service, but the Japan Federation of Bar Associations pays ¥108,000 for each person the lawyer represents. Since the amount is limited and paid on a case-by-case basis, the job does not appeal to the majority of the professionals except a small and passionate group of lawyers (Japan Association for Refugees, 2017).

The last requirement is paying the guarantee deposit, which can be up to ¥3 million according to Article 54 of ICRRA, but instead of collecting the guarantee deposit, the relevant authority (the director of the detention centre or supervising immigration inspector) can accept a letter of guarantee. In practice, a letter of guarantee is used, and asylum seekers are expected to pay ¥100,000 deposit for provisional release. A month before Tarkan's release, Kerim was joking with him on the phone, saying 'hang in there for a while cousin, we don't have money to take you out now!' As expected, Tarkan did not have any money, so Kerim paid the deposit for him. For people who lack financial support, it is hard to find the required amount.

After waiting for months and fulfilling all the requirements, the day of release comes. All the asylum seekers I welcomed had a new haircut, and they were wearing probably the best clothes they owned for release day. Most Turkish and Kurdish people have family members or friends at least, so they were the luckiest ones, because there was always someone to welcome them. However, some asylum seekers—for instance, an asylum seeker from Sri Lanka that I met—did not even have money for a train ticket to Tokyo. Those who are brought directly from Narita Airport in particular have no experience about Japan, so they are in dire need of someone to welcome them. If the person did not have anyone to support them, volunteers came up with solutions like collecting money for them, giving them a ride to the station, or helping them to find accommodation.

The release from detention is a real relief, but because of the strict conditions of provisional release, asylum seekers face many hardships outside. According to Article 54 of ICRRA, the person who is granted provisional release can neither legally work, nor leave the designated area of residence, and must visit the immigration office every one or two months.

Undoubtedly, these conditions make life hard for asylum seekers, and the following chapters will explore different aspects of their life, while focusing on their struggle, adaptation and negotiation after detention.

4.4. Conclusion

This chapter has explored the experience of detention as a part of asylum seekers' liminal existence, which puts them in constant limbo. Like many of their counterparts around the world, asylum seekers in Japan are under the constant threat of detention during the process of seeking asylum. Asylum seekers find themselves in detention through various pathways. It can be said that it is hard to avoid detention for asylum seekers, especially if they have applied for asylum without having a legal residence during the application. For some, it is their first stop in the country, as they are brought directly from the airport to detention. For others, it is a constant threat which can put their life on hold at any time. Consequently, detention is an intrinsic part of a circuitous path for asylum seekers in Japan.

Detention creates a temporal-spatial liminality for asylum seekers, and keeps them in between for a protracted period. However, they manage to overcome this exclusion by turning it into productive liminal experience, through expanding their social networks, learning the Japanese language, establishing relations with Japanese citizens, and finding allies.

Even though their problems sometimes make headlines in the media, there is still a need for scholarly research to more fully understand the situation in Japanese detention centres. Actually, as asylum seekers are keen to find allies outside of detention, they are very receptive to visitors, and they make every attempt to collaborate with the media, volunteers and academics to publicise the conditions of their detention. However, for asylum seekers, it is not easy to distinguish different levels of state and society. Therefore, they find it hard to trust Japanese citizens; this distrust sometimes extends to the volunteers, even though they have been working heroically for years to help the detainees. They also cannot understand the passive position of the UNHCR.

Asylum seekers also problematise the treatment they receive, by emphasising the distinction between criminals and asylum seekers. These distinctions become divisive and create friction among people in the centre, and this friction, together with language difficulties and ethnic differences, makes it harder for asylum seekers to show unity, especially when it comes to organising a hunger strike, which is difficult to organise and maintain. Also, considering the high costs of a hunger strike, asylum seekers usually adopt more subtle tactics to challenge the detention system in general, and the detention administration in particular.

They choose to do so because the detention centre administration uses its discretionary power of provisional release to oppress asylum seekers. In most cases, however, extending the detention of the asylum seekers motivates them to stay in Japan, because in addition to the dangers that await them in their countries, prolonged detention increases the sunk cost for them. Therefore, by detaining asylum seekers, and by keeping them in detention for a long time, the immigration authorities make asylum seekers more determined to stay in Japan as an unintended consequence. Of course, these paradoxical situations are the result of a migration regime which is ridden with contradictions, and results in the *asylumisation of migration*.

Lastly, detention does not represent the end of the journey. On the contrary, it is the starting point for some. It does mean to live, however, under various restrictions concerning working, mobility and surveillance. Of course, these restrictions affect asylum seekers' daily lives in a fundamental way. Having explored the detention of asylum seekers, the next chapter will focus on asylum seekers' strategies in their working life, to explore how they negotiate with their liminality.

Chapter Five—Working as an Asylum Seeker in Japan

'If you wait for five seconds like this [standing idly], then they say, 'You don't come tomorrow'. You have to be seen occupied all the time. Picking up something or sweeping the floor… You can't wait idly without doing anything. You always have to do something.'
(Interview with Hakan, Saitama, 2017)

5.1. Tarkan's Lucky Day

It was a sunny June day in Tokyo when I was walking back from the local train station to the home which I was sharing with Tarkan, Kerim, Kerim's wife Fatma, and their little boy Semih. I was going to the language school every morning, and spending the rest of the day conducting interviews and talking with people in the neighbourhood. Walking idly, as I was not in a rush, I noticed that Tarkan was walking on the other side of the road, possibly towards home. It was unexpected because he was supposed to be at work at that time. I waved and shouted at him 'Tarkan, what are you doing here at this time of the day?' Eventually, he saw me and laughing came to my side of the sidewalk and said, 'You won't believe it! I hardly managed to escape from the police!'.

Before going into detail about this story, it may be useful to give some background information about how things were since Tarkan's release from detention. At that time, it had been less than a month since he had been released—being caught by the police while working without a permit would mean re-detention for him, and would have been a disaster. Since Tarkan's release from the EJICC, Kerim was arranging daily jobs for him as a seller at kebab stalls, and at demolition sites as a labourer. Actually, Tarkan had started working the very next day of his release, thanks to Kerim, who took him to a *matsuri* (festival) to work as a kebab seller, even though Tarkan had known nothing about cutting kebab; Kerim had told him that it was not a problem.

After that day, Tarkan started going to demolition sites on weekdays, and on weekends they

were selling kebab together. Kerim arranged all these jobs, which meant that Tarkan was entirely dependent on him; Kerim had also paid for Tarkan's plane ticket and sent him money when he was in detention. Consequently, Tarkan was indebted, not only financially but also emotionally. The amount of the debt, however, was not specified. A couple of times during random conversations, Tarkan had asked, in a casual way, how much money he had to pay, but Kerim changed the topic or started shouting and refused to give any specific amount. In addition to this, our original agreement had been that the expenses of the house would be divided into three—but Kerim was making us pay more by inflating the bills, something that we had to shut our eyes to. On top of all of this, there was Tarkan's mother, who began asking him for money on the very day that he was released from detention. These combined factors were forcing Tarkan to keep his head down when it came to arguing with Kerim.

In this context, Tarkan had no choice but to take any job that Kerim found for him, because he desperately needed money. It was also the reason why Tarkan got into trouble that day. The previous night, Kerim had made some phone calls as always, and found a job for Tarkan. A young Kurdish man living in the same neighbourhood, Tamer, was the primary contact for the job. Tamer was from the same town as Kerim and Tarkan back in Turkey, so they were fellow townsman, and most probably had known each other for a long time. While talking on the phone, however, Tamer had warned Kerim about the dangers of this particular worksite. He had been working there for a while, so he knew the neighbourhood. Police had visited the worksite before. Accordingly, Tamer told Kerim that this work could be dangerous for Tarkan, since he did not have a work permit. Tarkan did not have the luxury of refusing the job, so he went anyway.

They were three people in the *genba* (worksite), one of them being Tamer. Around noon, someone called the police because of the dust that the workers had produced while demolishing the house. Since they did not take all required precautions, like Japanese companies usually do, it was not unusual for neighbours to complain. At first, there were few police officers, and Tarkan did not get involved in the conversation, but hid in the building and waited for the police officers to leave. The other two men did have work

permits, so they did the talking with the police. In the meantime, some tough-looking Japanese men, probably *yakuza* or *kesik*[13], according to Tarkan, for some reason arrived and became involved in the argument. The crowd was growing. Police officers called for support because of the increasing tension. After a while, a large number of police officers were waiting outside the building. It was becoming inevitable that they would enter the building at some point to check if there was anyone else present, so at that point, Tarkan decided to run away. Using the front door was not an option because the police were waiting outside the building, so he decided to jump from the window to the backyard, which was full of thorny plants after a long period of neglect. Thorns scratched his whole body, and he sprained his ankle as a result of the jump. Then he found his way to the closest train station to come back home.

When I stumbled upon him on the street, the incident was still fresh, as he had just got off the train. He was pretty angry with Kerim, as he was the one who sent him to this job: 'Fuck this job, how much would I get anyway? I was about to go into prison again for only 10,000 yen!' When Kerim came back home that night, Tarkan was still angry with him. He asked Kerim why he had sent him to this job in the first place. With an annoyingly calm voice and without even looking at him, Kerim replied, 'You don't have to go bro! We [I] find you a job, and you don't like it. If you don't like it, then don't have to go'. That was it. After this reply Tarkan moderated his tone, and said meekly: 'It's not your fault, I know, I know'. While saying this to Kerim, however, he winked at me with a smirk on his face.

Asylum seekers like Tarkan and Kerim are often a target in Japan for exploiting the asylum system (Osaki, 2017; Yoshida, 2017), which is conceptualised in this thesis as the *asylumisation of migration*. And yet, even though they may be exploiting the system, this does not change the reality—asylum seekers have to work in order to survive, irrespective of legal status. This chapter focuses on asylum seekers' working experiences in Japan, in order to provide a better understanding of their constant struggle within their liminal status in

[13] Turkish/Kurdish people in Japan use the Turkish word *kesik*, which means 'cut' in Turkish, to refer to members of *yakuza*. Using the word 'yakuza' draws attention, especially if there are Japanese people within earshot. Naturally, Japanese people do not understand the word 'kesik'; therefore this works as a safe code for Turkish speakers. The word comes from the finger cutting tradition of the *yakuza*.

Japan.

The chapter starts with a discussion about the relative importance of having or not having a work permit for Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers in Japan. This section also explores the demolition and kebab industries, in which two trades most Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers work. Focusing on their similarities and differences reveals the effects of (il)legality on finding a job in Japan as an asylum seeker. The second part of the chapter explains the essential role of social networks as survival strategies, but it also emphasises its 'cracks', by introducing the concept of *social proxies*. The third section focuses on what it takes to work in the demolition industry as an asylum seeker. I claim that their liminal position puts Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers under stress in the workplace. The last section of the chapter explores how Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers negotiate with government agencies. In general, this chapter explores how liminal legality affects Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers and how they cope with it at work.

5.2. The (Relative) Importance of a Work Permit

As we have seen in Tarkan's story, asylum seekers find themselves in a situation in which they have to start working as soon as possible to be able to survive in Japan, regardless of their residential status. Whether they have a legal residence status or not, all asylum seekers feel the same pressure. Therefore, asylum seekers who have a work permit are also under pressure to start work immediately, from the first day of their arrival. This imperative also forces them to work without a permit for a while, as they have to wait for six months in order to be eligible to apply for a work permit, after their initial asylum application (Hashimoto, 2019: 137). Of course, having residence status and a work permit affects one's chance of finding work, working conditions and power of bargaining, which will be discussed later in this section.

Asylum seekers who have applied for asylum after legally entering the country on a tourist visa have three months to apply for asylum, and after applying they have to wait for six months to receive a work permit during the asylum process, which usually takes around two

to three years. Starting from 2018, however, the Japanese government launched a new fast-track evaluation system to separate 'baseless' asylum applications. These 'baseless' applications, according to the Immigration Bureau, are clearly outside of the definition of the Refugee Convention, and therefore such applicants are no longer granted a work permit (Brasor, 2019). This was a crucial change, as '[t]he absence of a work permit makes it difficult for individuals to survive' (Yaron et al., 2013, 149). Therefore, it may also have a significant impact on asylum seekers' job opportunities.

The importance of having a work permit is evident, especially when it comes to changing jobs and finding employment quickly. A compelling case in point was Salih, a young Turkish asylum seeker living in Nagoya, and working as a day labourer on demolition sites for two years. Before that, he had worked in a factory in a small city close to Nagoya. After I came back from Japan we maintained our relationship online, and I learned that for some reason, he had returned to the factory again. Asylum seekers with work permits have more options about where they work, and they can enjoy the freedom of changing their job if they wish.

On the other hand, working in a factory was impossible for asylum seekers who did not have a work permit, like Kerim. When we were talking about finding a job without a work permit, Kerim told me 'You can't work in a factory anyway. Even though someone has a visa, if he doesn't have a work permit, he can't work in a factory!'

In the absence of factory jobs, Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers' only chance is to find work in two ethnic economy niches: the kebab businesses and the demolition industry. The former of these two has been employing Turkish and Kurdish immigrants since the 1980s in Europe, and has been studied in the European context (Wahlbeck, 2007; Panayiotopoulos, 2010; Dedeoglu, 2014; Sirkeci, 2016b). Panayiotopoulos even named this phenomenon the 'doner revolution', citing the commodification of kebab as an ethnic food just like pizza (2010: 64). Sirkeci (2016b) considers döner kebab as a social remittance, and shows how it has changed the foodscape in the UK. One aspect of the internationalisation of kebab was its 'enormous employment generation capacity' (Dedeoglu, 2014). The kebab business in Japan is no exception.

There are more than twenty kebab shops, restaurants and kiosks in Tokyo, and many Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers work in these places. However, those who do not have a work permit are not allowed to work in restaurants or shops, especially if the place is in a central location. This is a significant difference from the European context, where the kebab business creates employment opportunities for irregular Turkish and Kurdish immigrants. In their study on irregular youth in the UK, Bloch et al. (2009) demonstrated that small kebab shops and takeaways are one of the few places that such people can actually find work. In Japan, however, Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers cannot find work in this industry if they do not have a work permit.

During a conversation about the importance of a work permit, Altan (27) mentioned kebab shops. He was trying to help one of his childhood friends who came to Japan and was unable to find a job because he did not have a work permit:

> We went to [kebab shops in] Roppongi once or twice. I mean, [we went] to ask if they need a chef or something like that… They asked for a visa, a work permit, such things. Those guys don't take any risks. Those people working in the kebab business definitely ask for a work permit. They ask you to show documents proving that you're really a chef.

Therefore, unlike European countries, the employment-generating capacity of the kebab industry in Japan was extremely limited for asylum seekers without a work permit—where it is possible at all, such jobs tend to be short-lived. For instance, Kerim was working in a kebab kiosk in the outskirts of Tokyo on weekends. Even though the kiosk was very close to the train station, the owner was comfortable with Kerim working there. Kerim was also working in kebab stalls during *matsuri* (festival) time in different neighbourhoods around the Tokyo metropolitan area. Since street food is one of the main attractions of the *matsuri* concept in Japan (Ashkenazi, 1993), these events were a perfect opportunity to sell kebab. These two jobs—small kebab kiosks and kebab stalls—were the only ones that asylum seekers without a work permit could find for work in the kebab industry. Therefore, even though some asylum seekers who did not have a work permit were working in kebab businesses,

employment opportunities were still minimal.

This leaves the demolition industry as the primary sector providing employment for Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers. As a result of an ageing society and low birth rate, or 'demographic challenge' (Coulmas et al., 2008), it is estimated that there are eight million vacant houses in Japan, and this number is expected to increase to twenty million by 2033 (Brasor and Tsukubu, 2016). Therefore, the demolition industry has been growing and is expected to continue to grow in the future. However, the supply of labour nowhere near matches the demand of the industry. As a result, the construction (and demolition) industry in Japan has been experiencing a significant labour shortage, to the extent that there were 3.46 jobs available for each job seeker in the industry in September 2018 (More and Kaneko, 2018). Finding work without a work permit in the demolition industry is much easier than in the kebab business.

Amid the labour shortage, public authorities have probably been more tolerant in terms of law enforcement. As will be explained below, some of my respondents were freed without any legal action by police authorities after they were caught while working irregularly. Also, working in demolition sites does not require workers to interact with the public, unless there is a complaint from someone (mostly made by neighbours, according to my respondents). Therefore, demolition jobs minimise the risk of being caught in irregular work. Even so, finding a job was much easier if a Turkish or Kurdish person owned the company; according to my respondents, Japanese-owned demolition companies were stricter about work permits. Kerim underscored the difference between Japanese and Turkish/Kurdish companies when I asked him about how to find a job:

> *Yusuf*: Okay, what does someone have to do to find work here?
>
> *Kerim*: You have to have a visa. You have to have a work permit. For example, people on provisional release are working in demolition, but some Japanese firms ask for a work permit. If you don't have it, then they don't hire you. And some of them hire you illegally.
>
> *Yusuf*: But I guess most of them are hiring anyway. For instance, have you

ever been denied because you are on provisional release?

Kerim: I mean most of them hire you anyway. One time, I was working somewhere. In a nearby building, someone was doing construction. [They were] sending people to the workplace that I was working. I went to them and talked to them. I mean, I met the guy and told him 'Give me a job, I want to work', something like that. He gave me his card. At the end of the talk, he asked me 'Do you have a work permit?'. I said 'No'. 'We' he said, 'can't hire you if you don't have a work permit'. He said, 'We can't hire those who haven't got a visa'. I said, 'What if I send you guys who have a work permit?'. 'That may be okay' he said.

Kerim was always socially confident, especially when it came to job opportunities, but not enough for that Japanese demolition company. He was not the only one talking about the differences between Japanese and Turkish/Kurdish companies when it comes to hiring people without work permits. A seasoned Kurdish asylum seeker, Hamit agreed with Kerim:

Yusuf: Is it easy for those on provisional release to go to work or to find a job?

Hamit: One may have difficulties, but those working with us [Kurdish] don't [have any difficulties]. Everyone has a company these days. You don't have a problem; you can find a job. I mean, you won't [have any problems]. Sometimes you go to Japanese's work; they say, 'You don't have a visa, you can't [work]'. That's happening, what can I say, maybe 40% [would say that], they say 'no'; 60% directly say 'okay'. No problem.

Yusuf: But some people can't find work. For example they say, 'I only found work for 15 days or 16 days [this month]'. I guess if someone doesn't have any relatives, they can't find work easily?

Hamit: Yeah, it's not easy to find [a job]. If we weren't here, people couldn't have found jobs easily. They [Japanese companies] only accept one out of ten times when you go to Japanese [company]. Because they are afraid! Immigration Bureau and the police visit all companies. I mean a foreman told

us back in the day. They said, ‘The fine is three million yen’.

Hamit’s words demonstrate that having a work permit expands one’s flexibility and job prospects, within the community and beyond. Actually, as can be seen below, having a work permit allows one to be free of the Turkish and Kurdish asylum seeker community, as it is possible to find job opportunities beyond its boundaries. In general, however, it is clear that Japan’s labour shortage in specific industries creates a strong demand. In the case of Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers, demolition, and to some extent kebab businesses, provide employment. Even without a work permit one can work more than twenty days and can earn over ¥300,000 a month, which is more than an entry-level white-collar job can provide in a month in Japan. Their liminal position, therefore, does not create an entirely negative experience. Still, the discussion above also highlights the importance of social networks for job opportunities for Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers, which will be discussed further in the following section.

5.3. How to Find a Job? Social Proxy and Social Network Between Exploitation and Cohesion

It is hard to miss Hamit's emphasis on 'we’—the Kurdish community—when he was talking about job opportunities for asylum seekers who do not have a work permit. Indeed, when it comes to factors affecting asylum seekers' chances of employment, social networks are definitely as important as legal status.

In the migration literature, social networks are used to understand the decision to migrate, the destination of migrants, and their adaptation process in the host countries (Koser, 1997). Massey and others (1993) underlined how migrant networks facilitate migration by lowering the risk and cost of it. In this context, they defined migrant networks as ‘sets of interpersonal ties that connect migrants, former migrants, and non-migrants in origin and destination areas through ties of kinship, friendship, and shared community origin’ (Massey et al., 1993, 448). These ties and connections are proven to be valuable, providing employment and job opportunities to migrants, as has been shown by researchers (Padilla,

2006; Nguyen, 2016). This is also true for Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers, as will be discussed below.

Social networks are closely associated with the concept of social capital—an elusive and ambiguous concept. There are three main approaches to conceptualise social capital, proposed by Bourdieu, Coleman and Putnam (Martikke, 2017). Even though there are differences in the definition of the concept, according to Portes, social capital can be defined as 'the ability of actors to secure benefits by virtue of membership in social networks or other social structures' (1998, 6). This definition allows us to acknowledge both the individual and group-based application of the concept. My research demonstrated that the Turkish/Kurdish community acts as a social network; however, not all members of this network hold the same degree of social capital. Therefore, social capital generated by the group is not shared equally among its members, making it possible for some of them to hold high social capital, and others to hold low social capital.

As a result of this social capital inequality, before being part of social networks, Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers usually connect with the broader community through what I call *social proxies*: people who act as channels between newcomers and the wider Turkish/Kurdish community. This process makes newcomers dependent on the person who acts as a social proxy for a while, but over time, the proxy loses power as the newcomer accumulates social capital. Social networks play a vital role for the survival strategies of Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers, but they also have problematic aspects. The following sections will discuss these inter-community relations, which oscillate between solidarity, cohesion and exploitation.

5.3.1. Social Proxy before Social Network

Social proxies act as mediators for newcomer integration into the Turkish and Kurdish community in Japan. Once again, in this context Tarkan's experience was enlightening. Thanks to Kerim's connections within the community, Tarkan could start working immediately after his release from detention. For comparison, Ismail, a young African

asylum seeker, was also looking for a job. He even had a designated-activities visa, but no matter how hard he tried, he could not find a job until he received his work permit, which took six months. During that six months-long waiting period he stayed in a mosque outside of Tokyo, and sometimes he was not even able to afford eat as a result of his destitution.

One time I visited Ismail in the mosque, and we decided to take a stroll to the nearby train station. In the station, there was a branch of one of the famous international coffee brands, where I invited Ismail to drink coffee with me inside; I would pick up the bill. I noticed that he was a bit unwilling to drink coffee, and at first, I thought it was because of embarrassment about being unable to pay for himself, as recently I had been in the habit of buying him coffee or food from a convenience store. Later, however, I realised with a shock that he was just hungry—he did not need coffee, he had to eat something. I was incredibly ashamed and embarrassed by my thoughtlessness, and offered to buy him a burger in a nearby fast-food restaurant. Ismail was desperately in need of making money, but he could not find a job without a work permit, as he did not have someone to support him as Kerim supported Tarkan.

This initial support is crucial because, naturally, dependence on social proxies is higher among newcomers due their lack of language skills and information about the country, and more importantly, their low social capital. In her article on young irregular migrants in the UK, Bloch (2014) points out that co-ethnic social networks become more critical for those who cannot speak English, as they do not have the opportunity to expand their social networks outside ethnic circles. Similarly, Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers depended on social proxies within the community—usually, the person whom they had contacted before coming to Japan.

In the case of Burak, for instance, his social proxy was Davut (50), who was also his uncle-in-law. In the first couple of months Burak had to depend on Davut to find him a job, and to give him stipend for transportation and cigarettes, as well as his accommodation. Davut even offered Burak his own bed:

> … I always say that, even now he [Davut] helps me. Whatever I need, even

> though I don't have money. He gave me money for food when I didn't have. He gave me money for train [tickets]. He fed me. He even gave me his own bed! I mean he gave me his own bed—no one would do that! His own bed, his own pillow which he puts his head! No one would do that in this country. To be honest with you, I wouldn't do it. I mean, if I'm honest, Uncle Davut showed some real generosity towards me. No need to deny it.

Although he had known some other people before arriving in Japan, Davut was the one who 'brought' him; therefore Davut was 'responsible' for him. This idea of responsibility between relatives or friends creates a moral obligation. When we were in the EJICC with Fatma for Tarkan's provisional release procedures, we met a Kurdish man in the lobby, visiting one of his distant relatives. While talking, he said:

> His cousins brought this guy here, but after he was caught, they didn't look after him. He is also my relative, not a close one, but after learning about his situation, I gave my hand.

When he said that, Fatma replied, 'Yeah, people are bringing their relatives, but they do not look after them later'. There was a common consensus among Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers about this moral responsibility.

As mentioned above, Burak was fortunate in this sense. When he came to Japan, he could not speak Japanese or English at all. Even finding his way in the Tokyo metropolitan area and using the complex underground system was a significant problem. He remembered those first days as the hardest partly for these reasons, but primarily due to the pressure of finding a job and beginning to send money back home:

> Anyway, three days passed, five days passed. Of course, calls were coming from home, like every day, asking for money. They were also in need; they have to call because they have hopes [from me]. [….] Five days passed, no work. Seven days passed, no work. But at the same time, I was losing my mind. I was going out and talking by myself. I wish you were there. You would have understood better if you had been there.

Thankfully, Davut slowly introduced him to the broader community, and Burak began working regularly within a couple of months without any further help from Davut.

It was common to see members of the asylum-seeking community happy to accept this role of social proxy towards a relative or a friend as a result of moral obligation—but beyond this, it was not uncommon to see social proxies try to take advantage of and exploit their newcomer relatives or friends, which will be explained further in the following section.

5.3.2. Social Proxy as a Trap

The implications of the newcomer's dependency on a social proxy may be more than simple gratitude; there is a chance that exploitation may accompany the support. Vasta (2004) warns about the exploitative side of social networks, which are often explained through the solidarity thesis. She emphasises that social networks can marginalise weak members of the community and make them vulnerable to exploitation (2004, 17). This was a recurring theme during my fieldwork. Even though Burak did not experience this kind of exploitation in his relationship with his Uncle Davut, he was always aware of the danger, and mentioned it a couple of times. Hakan and Tarkan, meanwhile, were having serious problems with Kerim over financial issues.

After moving into Kerim's house, I was sharing a room with Hakan, Kerim's cousin. At that time, Tarkan was still in detention. One day, Burak, Hakan and I were basking in the sun together in front of the house. The conversation quickly turned to financial issues between Kerim and Hakan. Kerim was acting as a social proxy; he was the one finding jobs for Hakan. The employers, therefore, were paying Hakan's wages to Kerim, who was deducting ¥2,000 per day for himself from Hakan's salary.

Typically, the daily salary was around ¥12,000 for demolition jobs at that time. Kerim, however, was only giving ¥10,000 to Hakan, in addition to overcharging him for rent and house expenses, so there was apparent exploitation in multiple ways. Hakan was extremely uncomfortable about the situation, but Kerim had paid his travel expenses, which Hakan was still paying back, and he was still living in Kerim's house. Consequently, discussing the

problem frankly was not simple, unless Hakan took the risk of cutting off the relationship for good. Knowing these issues in detail, Burak was furious, and he was trying to persuade Hakan to stand up for himself:

> I swear I will talk to this guy [Kerim] now! This can't happen bro! You earn this money! Who the fuck is he not giving the money to you and hand over your earning? […] Look bro, I also live with my uncle [Davut], but he can't take my money! I swear I'd take blood from his ass! […] Look, I'm an openhearted person. I can't keep inside what I think. This [Kerim's exploitation] can't continue like this. You should openly talk about this issue. For example, I had a debt to Uncle Davut, and he calculated the debt. But, I realised that he added two thousand yen. I said, 'You shouldn't do that' and gave him the exact amount [nothing more]. It doesn't matter. If it is my right, I don't give up even against my father!

Hakan was listening silently and saying, 'Let it go, it's not important'. His meek attitude was in stark contrast with Burak's anger, but it was quite understandable since at least for the moment, his hands were tied. Things escalated quickly however, and only one week later, Hakan left the house. While playing football in the nearby park, Burak implied that he knew Kerim was taking Hakan's money. After learning that Hakan was gossiping about him, Kerim got extremely angry and sent a text to Hakan saying 'Take your clothes and get the fuck out my house'. When I came back home, Hakan had already left, and Kerim started to explain the issue to me from his perspective:

> I brought him to Japan, welcomed him at the airport, opened my house to him. When he first came, he couldn't work, but I gave him a stipend and paid for his cigarette. But people are unfaithful. I learnt that he was gossiping about me. He was saying that 'My cousin [Kerim] is taking my money. Doesn't allow me to go anywhere'. Then I texted him 'Take your clothes and go to Davut's place if you want it that badly'. Then he came and took his stuff.

Kerim's perspective on the argument also shows how and why newcomer asylum seekers

become dependent on social proxies. Financial support and cultural knowledge begins even before the person departs from Turkey, and it continues for a while after reaching Japan. Once the newcomer adapts to life—which basically means being able to find jobs by himself—the importance of the social proxy gradually dwindles. That is the point that Hakan had reached within less than a year, and then the relationship collapsed instantly.

In this case, not only cutting a commission from Hakan's salary, but also overcharging him for rent and house expenses were part of the exploitation and an essential part of the dispute. The signs of the upcoming eruption between the two men, however, was there months before. While we were talking about why people would hope that their relatives might come to Japan, Hakan directly referred to exploitation, referring mostly to his relationship with Kerim:

> Bro, everyone is bringing his relative to take advantage of him. Look, if you rent a house here, and bring two of your relatives, then you can make some money from each of them, and you can live without paying anything yourself!

Accordingly, it was nowhere near a unique pattern in Kerim and Hakan. After his release from detention, Tarkan was talking with Sinan, one of his friends, over the phone. Sinan was living in his brother's house. Tarkan asked him if he was paying rent to his brother. Sinan said he was paying ¥60,000 per month. After hearing this answer, Tarkan said: 'Fathers asking money from their sons here, it's a very strange place'.

Actually, Tarkan's referring to the paternal relationship was accurate, because most of the time this type of exploitation was happening under cover of paternalistic relationships. This resonates with Kim's research (2012) about a shop owner's strategy to use maternalistic control over irregular migrant workers in a restaurant setting. According to Kim, the shop owner Mrs Kwon is called 'mama' by her employees, and she 'exercises power over her employees through maternalism and masks exploitation with motherliness' (2012, 179). In the case of Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers, social proxies also tend to be relatives and use paternalistic ties for exploitation. Both Tarkan and Hakan were younger than Kerim, and in all the arguments Kerim was using phrases like 'Aren't you ashamed to talk with your older

brother like this?'

In some cases, newcomer asylum seekers were finding themselves in a more entangled relationship with social proxies, which made the situation harder for them when they tried to free themselves. In Hakan's situation, he was staying in Kerim's house, and there was paternalistic emotional pressure too. Finding a new house, however, was not that hard for him. Altan's situation, on the other hand, was much more complicated. We met in front of the kebab kiosk, where Kerim was working on weekends. Altan had three uncles in Japan, and one of them had a demolition company, which he was running with the help of his Japanese wife.

Altan was working in his uncle's company along with his eldest uncle, with whom he was also sharing the house. Two more people were living in the same house; therefore four in total were sharing it. One day I received a text message from Altan asking me about the rent prices. He was paying ¥65,000 for the house with two other people, and he was guessing that his eldest uncle was staying free, thanks to them. But it was not only about rent; Altan sometimes was paid less than usual. One night, when we were going to Roppongi (a nightlife area in Tokyo) together, I asked about the situation, and he said:

> These guys [the uncles] robbed us. This is what happened. Everyone [the other two housemates] is angry, but there's nothing we can do. This month we were keeping it tight to reduce the expenses, but the man [uncle] told us that he will take sixty-five thousand [from each of us] anyway. But I'm telling you when he takes sixty-five thousand yen from three of us, all the rent, expenses and bills can be paid, including parking space of the house. So, my older uncle stays free of charge. But I will change it; there is a friend that I can rent a place with. They [uncles] deceive themselves. Actually, they know that it's not working, but they don't know how to change it. For instance, I worked until noon today, but he [uncle] messaged me that he sent three thousand yen with someone. Three thousand? I work hard for half day, and the guy told me that I sent you three thousand!

Altan was a clever young man, and right after he arrived in Japan, he understood the uneven relationship that he had with his uncle. However, Altan also recognised his dependency on him, as the owner of the company, in many ways. Therefore, Altan had to take some time to establish his own network, and save money to afford to rent a house by himself. In our interview, he made it clear that he was aware of the situation, but just waiting for the right time:

> *Altan*: When I learn how to live here… I mean, I'm thinking about leaving now, but then I'm afraid that I'll be at odds with them [the uncles]. [So] I can't tell.
>
> *Yusuf*: Really?
>
> *Altan* : I don't have to put up with them! I can rent a house for forty thousand yen by myself.
>
> *Yusuf* : But then you will continue working with them, and it's….
>
> *Altan* : I will still work with them. But, then it will be a problem. I'm sure it will. Therefore, we have to be silent for a while.

Altan left the house and his uncle's company after I came back from Japan, and since then he has been working in other companies with other Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers. His relationship with his uncles had gone wrong to the point that he longer talked with them. Again, paternalistic power, financial dependence and the pressure of being able to work regularly can keep someone silent for a while, but there is always a time limit for this kind of exploitative relationship. More importantly, the relationship between close family members and friends does not always run in the direction of support and solidarity.

5.3.3. Social Network for Finding a Work

In order to escape from the exploitation of social proxies, Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers often turn to the broader community or social network, as Altan did. Whilst those seeking to liberate themselves from the exploitation of their social proxies were more desperate to expand their social network, it was a common concern among all Turkish/Kurdish asylum

seekers, regardless of proxy dependency. This was the result of the unstable employment structure of the demolition and kebab industries, because most of the time jobs were acquired through a relative, friend or acquaintance in this environment. Therefore, knowing more people definitely increased the chance of being able to find work. In order to expand their social network, asylum seekers have to be sociable and talkative, because it is crucial to meet as many people as possible.

This is particularly interesting, because this culture of networking and social gregariousness is happening at the same time as Japanese society is experiencing—one might even say suffering from—social disconnection and increasing levels of solitude, ultimately resulting in a low level of social capital and a 'relationless society' (*muen shakai*). In fact, the problem of lonely death (*kodokushi* or *koritsushi*) for older people is seen as one of the manifestations of increasing social isolation in Japanese society. Also, there are as many as one million young people who choose to withdraw from social life and continue to live in their rooms, mostly depending on their families for food and accommodation (Allison, 2015). These social problems are the result of weakening ties in three different levels in society: family, the local community and the workplace (Hommerich, 2014).

In contrast to general tendencies within Japanese society, however, asylum seekers become what I call *enforced sociality*, which refers to the pressure that asylum seekers experience to expand their social network. They were always looking for ways to establish new connections, meeting people who might help to find work for them. Of course, the type of help can change, based on the situation of an asylum seeker. When I met Ismail, whom I mentioned above, his attitude towards me was a bit confusing. From the beginning, he was acting as if we were very close friends, and we had known each other for a long time. He was calling me a 'brother' all the time. Later, I realised that being able to establish personal connections with people was crucial in his position, because he could use any help he could get.

On the other hand, for Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers, an extensive social network was most useful to find work. One example was Emrah, a young asylum seeker who was living

with his uncle's family. We became quite close over time, because their house was in the same street as ours and we saw each other almost every day. A couple of months after his arrival, Emrah slowly expanded his network and he was proud of it:

> *Yusuf*: Who is finding jobs for you? Does your uncle arrange it, or do you find it by yourself now?
>
> *Emrah*: Brother, when I started working, we bought a phone for me. If I can meet with the boss, I ask his phone number. In this way, I took four or five persons' number. It increased slowly like five, six. Now, I don't need my uncle. I find my job by myself. I mean, I'm the one arranging my work, taking care of it. I have my connections, so I'm not a burden to my uncle.
>
> *Yusuf*: For instance, what do you do? How did you arrange this job for tomorrow?
>
> *Emrah*: Tomorrow, there is no job in the place where I worked today. He said, 'no work tomorrow'. I said 'ok'. I called [someone] and said, 'Is there a job?' He said, 'I will [make a phone] call and get back to you'.
>
> *Yusuf* : I mean, whom did you call?
>
> *Emrah*: Brother, there is a guy named Kartal. This guy is *Makyanli* [Kurdish]. I worked one day with him. Three or four days, I worked. He asked me to come again. If a guy likes your work, he asks you to come [again]. Then I said 'Ok, I'm waiting for you to call'. He said ,'Don't promise anyone, I'll call you back'. Then he called me. 'You'll come with us in the morning. Wait in front of *Seizerya* [a restaurant] at 5.45 am' he said. I said, 'Ok brother'.

In this conversation, Emrah explains the most effective way to establish valuable connections, by collecting phone numbers in the workplace. As will be explained in the following chapter, having a phone was crucial for asylum seekers in many ways. In order to meet a woman, for example, they were using dating applications, and translation applications were helping them to communicate in Japanese and English.

Having a phone, as seen in the dialogue, was also essential to find work. Since jobs tend to be temporary, asylum seekers always had to be in communication with the people they knew, to ask if there was an available job. I first noticed the importance of the phone for work when Kerim invited me to have dinner in his house for the first time. That day we met in the nearby train station and during the fifteen minutes' walk from the station to his house, we could not talk at all, simply because he was continually calling or being called by someone to talk about tomorrow's job.

On another occasion, after Tarkan's release from detention, he was talking with one of his old friends over the phone which belonged to Kerim. The young Kurdish man, Sinan, was more experienced than Tarkan, whose experience of Japan was only based on his time in the detention centre. While they were talking on the phone Sinan suggested to him to buy a phone as soon as possible, because he said 'It's your hand and leg here. No one can go somewhere without a phone'. Tarkan said 'I want to buy, but my debt is making me nervous, it's not my priority now. If I can pay the debt, then I will buy one'. However, even after this reply, Sinan continued to insist and said: 'Even second-hand ones might do the trick'. Sinan's insistence was quite understandable because he was trying to do a favour for his friend.

Having a phone was not only essential for finding a job, but also for receiving information about the working sites' addresses, deciding meeting points, and navigating in Tokyo while going to work. In a similar way, but in much more dangerous conditions, Syrian refugees were also using smartphones for navigation (Gillespie et al., 2018) to reach Europe during the 'refugee crisis' (Sigona, 2018). Based on her research with Syrian refugees in Turkey, Narli claims that in addition to navigation, refugees are finding creative ways to use smartphones:

> [T]hey use it as a GPS to navigate at sea or on land, as a diasporic space to connect for finding shelter and work and to be informed about the situation at home, as a learning tool, as a *dispositif* for a building a war archive, and as a social assistance tool for integration. (Narli, 2018, 281)

In a similar, but less dramatic way, Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers were using smartphones

for dating and expanding their networks to increase their chances of finding work. In addition to having a phone and meeting many people in the workplace, Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers were also using kebab shops as social hubs to meet people and find work. There were two kebab shops in our neighbourhood, and both of them had become a meeting point after 5pm when people finished their work.

Naci, a Turkish asylum seeker from Nagoya, told me that in that city, not only kebab shops but also Turkish coffee shops were used as meeting points:

> It is same there [Nagoya]. There are two or three Turkish coffee shops. They always go there and hang out there. For instance, back then, when the work finished [at night], they used to go to the coffee shop. They ate dinner there. If someone didn't have a job for the next day, they were going there [to the coffee shop] to find a job. Then someone would take them to work as a day labourer.

It was also the case in our neighbourhood in Tokyo. Kurdish asylum seekers were using these two kebab shops for socialisation. Probably due to the demand, in addition to serving kebab, both of them were serving alcohol, shisha and hot beverages. Therefore, especially at night, these places were becoming more like traditional Turkish coffee houses (*kahvehane*) than kebab shops.

The main difference between a Turkish coffee house and a cafe is based on gender, as Turkish coffee houses are normally men-only social places (Rath and Kılıç, 2018; Beeley, 1970). Therefore, only men were visiting these kebab shops. I also experienced how effective these places are to bring people closer, as I managed to recruit interviewees and make new connections thanks to these two kebab shops. Just by sitting in these shops, drinking tea and eating kebab, I was meeting new people every day, as well as strengthening my existing friendships.

In summary, using smartphones, workplace connections and face-to-face interactions in kebab shops, Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers seek to extend their social networks, as this behaviour increases their chances of employment in a highly flexible working environment.

Based on this background, the next section of this chapter focuses on workplace experiences of Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers, and the conditions that shape and affect their experiences.

5.4. Working as an Asylum Seeker: 'You Always Have to Do Something'

Finding a job was hard enough for Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers, but being able to keep working was not an easy task, if someone is lucky enough to start. Holding down a steady flow of work requires the ability to manage multiple relationships with co-workers, bosses and governmental agencies based on their visa situation and personal skills. However, the sector is also important, because there are different skills and requirements for the demolition and kebab industries. For instance, in the kebab industry, language skills are pretty essential, as the job is usually based on interaction with customers; however, in demolition, the most important thing is physical power, and therefore one can work even with minimal knowledge of Japanese.

These issues regarding work were one of our frequent topics, as I was a good listener, and my friends were more than happy to share their deep knowledge about the qualities of the desired worker.

5.4.1. Unwritten Rules of Work: Being Fast and Strong

While having lunch together in our house one day, Hakan, Burak and I were talking about demolition jobs. I was eager to hear everything about the work, especially the qualities that make someone a valuable worker. At some point, Hakan stood up and said,

> If you wait five seconds like this [standing idly], then they say, 'you don't come tomorrow'. You have to be seen occupied all the time. Picking up something or sweeping the floor. You can't wait idly without doing anything. You always have to do something.

At this point, Burak entered the conversation, emphasising the difference between Japanese and Turkish/Kurdish demolition companies and workers, 'Japanese don't really work like us, but in Turkish companies, we finish a job in two days. Nevertheless, the same job would take a week for Japanese!' The fierce competition for work was forcing Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers to be very hardworking to prove their value:

> *Burak*: […] Anyway we started the demolition, [and] we were working like a rocket! There was no job. If I don't work like that, I can't make a living in this country. I had learnt it long ago. […]
>
> *Yusuf*: Is it really that clear? I mean if you work slowly, you can't work?
>
> *Burak*: Yeah—that clear. There is no job bro, there is no job [if you're a slow worker].

However, some people were managing to be able to work, even though they were not as powerful or fast as Burak. One example was his uncle Davut, who was around fifty years old, much older than the average Turkish and Kurdish asylum seeker working in the demolition industry. Naturally, Davut could not work as fast as the young people around him. Therefore, Burak was telling me that Davut could not keep up with other workers in terms of hard work, but thanks to his strong social network, he managed to find work regularly:

> …you have to be known. I mean people should know your name. For example, everyone knows my Uncle Davut as a good man. They say, 'he works well'. Even though he doesn't, they say 'he does' because this is what they believe.

Davut, therefore, was compensating for his older age by having high social capital within the Turkish and Kurdish community. Even though several studies emphasise the advantages of social capital, such as higher wages (Aguilera and Massey, 2003) or solving financial and personal problems (Lamba and Krahn, 2003), the more subtle benefits of social capital often go unnoticed.

As can be seen in the case of Davut, substantial social capital can also help asylum seekers to be tolerated even though they may not be able to work fast enough, especially compared to

others. However, for newcomers who are not well known within the community, and inexperienced at demolition, the only way to be hired as a day labourer was to show an outstanding effort:

> Now, go and ask my Uncle Davut 'how is he [Burak] working?' I worked with him for three days, and two guys were fired because of me. [Because] Not every man can work like me, [I mean] they can't work fast. Even though I don't know the job, I work fast. This is an important thing in this country.

Burak was an inexperienced young asylum seeker with little knowledge about construction and demolition. Therefore the only advantage that he could use was his youth. In the absence of alternative resources, such as an extensive network like Davut, Burak and other asylum seekers like him had to depend on their power and speed.

5.4.2. Constructing Masculinity through Demolition

As a result of intense competition, all our conversations about work were turning into a bragging game about being the most hardworking demolition worker. Kerim used to belittle Hakan and Burak for being slow and weak. Of course, this kind of strength competition was also related to masculinity. For instance, it was common for Kerim to ask Hakan or Tarkan jokingly, 'Hey! Do you think you can take me down?'. Their answer was always 'No, I can't', as he was older than both of them.

On the other hand, Burak was taller and more muscular than Hakan and other young boys. These qualities were giving him a higher position in the pecking order. During our interview, he was bragging about his position in the group:

> Even now, if someone says something to me, I start a fight without thinking. I mean, no one even argues with me. Because they all know that I'm crazy, they don't mess with me. Really, they don't get close to me. You know, people don't come around me. One time, I shouted Hakan for some reason at home; he lost his mind. Hakan has never opposed me because he can't! Look, Hakan is older than me. Ekrem is also older than me, but their brain doesn't

work like mine.

Issues related to work, therefore, were also about masculinity. In this context, being able to work regularly was an indication of the strength and power of the person, and it was demonstrating one's ranking, among other things. Hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1995) among Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers was mainly based on physical power, and it was becoming evident through work. Therefore, one's ability to endure physically demanding conditions becomes proof of one's manhood.

As put by researchers investigating the relationship between masculinities in the construction industry in different contexts, such as Denmark (Ajslev et al., 2013), Spain (Ibanez and Narocki, 2011), Australia (Iacuone, 2005) and the USA (Paap, 2006), an ideal construction worker is expected to handle hard work and even injuries. Again, being fearless and carrying out dangerous tasks in the demolition site also fits into the narrative of the masculine, brave man. Therefore, as well as underscoring their indispensable position in the workplace, performing these dangerous tasks also proved how brave they were and eventually became an indication of manhood. Building a scaffold and breaking down a roof are two of the most dangerous tasks in a demolition site. In the following story, it can be seen how Burak played a dangerous game to make a point on the work site:

> Anyway, maybe fifteen or twenty days passed. We were working with these Makyan [Kurdish] guys. There were two demolition sites side by side. They built a scaffold behind the second building. We finished the first one and then the second one. We were working on the wall, and the scaffold started to tilt towards us! I mean, the whole iron thing was coming towards us. Anyway, brother Mehdi held it with the excavator and said 'break', and we sat. There is brother Tahir, using the dump truck; brother Mehdi, using the excavator, and brother Veli and me. And there is another new guy named Samet, around the same age as with me, and he is working under me because he doesn't know the job. Brother Mehdi said, 'Let's dismantle this scaffold'. I said, 'Ok brother, let's do it'. They have never asked me to do it before. But, he knows that I can

do it. I said I can do it. And I mean I can do it, I did it. Anyways, he asked the guy who knows about scaffolding, and the guy really knows his job. 'Go and dismantle this' he said. 'I'm not looking for a dick to stick my ass. I have a child; I won't do it' he replied. By the way, the scaffold is like this [showing forty-five-degree angle]. Five-storey scaffold is waiting like this. How can you climb on it? It's breaking down, collapsed from the bottom anyway. He asked brother Veli, but he said 'I'm the boss. It's not my job to climb there among this crowd'. He's right, and didn't fall in the trap. Brother Mehdi said, 'If I climb who will use the excavator?'. They all looked at me and I looked at Samet, 'You climb' I said. He said, 'I came here three days ago, how I can climb there?' I thought, and said, 'Ok, I'll climb'. I'm not afraid, just waiting for them to do it, because they can't [do it], you know. Then, I'll do it. If they don't ask me, I don't do it. But if they can't do it, then I'll take it, without even asking, if it is something that I can do. I said, 'I'll do it, just take the excavator'. He took it, and you must see how it was shaking. I climbed to the fifth floor; it is like *Fizan*[14]. I'm also scared, but I can dismantle it. I'm like, it's not important, even though I fall down it's ok. I was injured [at work] many times, no problem at all. Look, a pillar as big like my body fell down on my shoulder, here. Do you know from where? Like from two times higher than my height! I said, 'No problem brother' and continued [working].

I included this lengthy excerpt from my recordings because it demonstrates the complex dynamics in the workplace. By doing this dangerous task, Burak showed everyone in the company that he was the most courageous one among them. At that time, those two Kurdish people had just started working in the company, and as they had more technical knowledge in construction and demolition, Burak felt threatened. However, the scaffold that they built was tilted, potentially causing a significant problem for Veli, the owner of the company. By dismantling the scaffold, Burak solved the problem that arose from the fault of

[14] *Fizan* in Turkish or *Fezzan* in English is a region in Libya, considered to be the worst exile post for bureaucrats during the Ottoman Empire. Since then it has been used to describe distance and hardship in Turkish.

those Kurdish men. In addition to that, it was also empowering for Burak to say 'I'll do it' when all the other men retreated.

He and other young asylum seekers, therefore, were putting themselves in dangerous positions just to prove their value in demolition sites. It was even causing accidents at work, as happened to Burak:

> For instance, I used to come home [after work]… Like my arm was cut, scratched from here to here [showing his shoulder]. There is still a scar. Then a month later [from that incident], I took out a big splinter from here. I had to do it [to continue working].

His normalisation of this injury was quite understandable, considering the specific masculinity surrounding construction work.

5.4.3. Secret Weapons: 'Do You Have a Driving Licence?'

Some asylum seekers had specific qualities that separated them from others. As I mentioned in the previous section, Emrah was staying with his uncle, on the same street as our house. His uncle, Yahya, who was a middle-aged man, had come to Japan a couple of years ago and applied for asylum on a tourist visa. This meant he had a designated-activities visa which allowed him to work legally. Initially, an acquaintance had promised to arrange accommodation and found jobs for Yahya, but he did not keep his promise. Yahya's first couple of months in Japan were hard, but then he started to know people in the community, and it became time for him to reveal his 'secret weapon'—an international CE class driving licence, which allowed him to drive long vehicles.

After learning Yahya had this licence, the Turkish owner of the demolition company that he was working at that time hired him permanently as a driver. Emrah was quite enthusiastic about this story:

> My father had a friend here. He asked that friend [to help] Uncle Yahya [but, he] became miserable. He [Yahya] couldn't work; he [my father's friend]

> didn't take him [Yahya] to work. Then, this company that he is working asked my uncle 'Do you have a driving licence?' Uncle Yahya showed his licence, and their jaws dropped when they saw the licence. They [the boss] said, 'I'll fuck anyone if they mess with you from now on'. They told [him] that. His licence is the most powerful one, E class. He drives four tonnes [truck]. Those guys taught the roads [in Tokyo] to my uncle within a couple of months. He continues [working] now. Twenty four, twenty-five, twenty-six [days] in a month…

After the owners of the company found out that he had a licence, Yahya's salary also improved, and from that point he did not have to worry about competing with other Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers. His family followed him after a year, and by the time I did my fieldwork, he was working more than twenty-four days in a month, as Emrah mentioned. A particular kind of skill (in this case, a truck licence) as a part of human capital, therefore, had the power to provide guaranteed employment for its holder.

Truck drivers are seen as lucky among asylum seekers, because they also do not get involved in the dirty work on demolition sites. Their only job is to carry debris to the dumping ground. Most of the Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers, therefore, are planning to get a driver's licence. After I came back from Japan, for instance, I learnt that Hakan received his first licence. For a long time, however, he did not have any speciality.

In a highly competitive environment, a driving licence—especially if it enables the person to drive trucks—can improve one's job prospects. In the absence of skills such as this, the importance of social network increases.

5.5. Dealing with the State at Work

This chapter began with Tarkan's escape story, when the police came to the demolition site where he was working, after a complaint from a neighbour who was disturbed by dust and noise. That was quite a close call, as it happened only a short time after Tarkan's release from detention. It would have been devastating for him to be put back in detention by the

Immigration Bureau as a result of being caught by police working without a work permit. Of course, this was not only his problem. Every Turkish and Kurdish asylum seeker working without a permit was anxious about being stopped at train stations or being caught during a police raid at a worksite, and eventually being put in detention. And their worries were not baseless, as the Immigration Bureau were indeed targeting those working irregularly (Osumi, 2018).

5.5.1. Staying Under the Radar: Commuting from Home to Work

Commuting was perceived as a potential risk for those working without a permit. Using the underground during peak times while wearing working clothes was seen as dangerous, as there was a possibility of being stopped by police. Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers with work permits freely used public transportation while wearing work clothes. Others, however, were wearing daily clothes and changing them at the workplace when they arrived:

> *Yusuf*: For instance, you're not on provisional release. What is the difference?
>
> *Emrah*: I can answer it with Tarkan. When he goes to work, let's say in the train or at the station or whatever… He goes with clean clothes and returns with clean clothes. He carries the provisional release papers all the time. Everyday he's in fear about police coming to the working site. He is afraid of it a lot. Brother Kerim too. I mean, he's on provisional release too.
>
> *Yusuf*: What is the matter about clean clothes?
>
> *Emrah*: Brother, if his clothes are not clean, [what happens] when the police stop him? Let's say, he's unlucky and police stop him… When the police learn he's on provisional release and doesn't have a work permit, then…

I did not hear of anyone being stopped and checked at train stations, but the feeling of insecurity was there. Emrah was also right about Tarkan and Kerim. They were cautious about wearing clean clothes before and after work. Carrying 'papers' was another constant reminder of their insecure condition. I remember how Tarkan panicked when we saw the police while we were cycling around the neighbourhood. He forgot to take his provisional

release documents that time, and in order to avoid the police we used little alleys while going back home. It must be noted, however, the feeling of insecurity never prevented Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers from being in public, as was the case for refused asylum seekers (Bloch, 2014) and irregular migrants (Sigona, 2012) in England.

In some cases, however, participants told me that immigration officials visited them at home. Guray, for instance, was called by an unknown number in the middle of the day. When he picked up the phone, the person said 'Am I talking with Guray? Are you at home? If you're at home, open the door. We are coming from the Immigration Bureau'. The door was knocked a while ago, but Guray did not open it, because his Taiwanese girlfriend warned him not to open the door, because of 'too many crazy and idiot people in Japan'. When he opened the door after the phone call, there were three officials from the Immigration Bureau. While one of them was doing the talking, the other two took notes and pictures. According to Guray, their intention was pretty clear:

> They investigated whether I live in that house, [and] whether I am at home. They were looking for my mistakes to catch me. Let's say, I'm working here or there, ok? They take your photos, next time when you go for signing [renewing provisional release], they will say 'you're working, we are detaining you!' Or I'm not at home; then they catch you because you aren't at home. But I was at home when they came. You know, they asked me to open the door. I said 'Ok, I will'. They came inside, took photos of the house, took photos of my clothes, like everything. 'It's your house, [it's] nice' they said and [were] gone. A month later, I went for signing [renewing my provisional release at Immigration Bureau] and they gave me one month [of extension for provisional release]. Then, one month later I went again, and they caught me. I thought that 'they wouldn't take me, because they came [to my] home' because I was at home. […] They couldn't find anything. 'We're detaining you [because] your asylum application is denied'. They usually tell some people 'you're detained because of working' or 'you were not at home'. You left your address. Let's say you live in Saitama and go to Tokyo. [If you do that, then]

> they get you in Tokyo, you're caught in Tokyo. You leave your address.

There is no way to be sure whether the reason for revoking Guray's provisional release was related to that visit, or merely because of the denial of his asylum application. In either case, Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers were suspicious and alert to possible raids by the Immigration Bureau. It was a part of our daily conversations at home with Kerim:

> […] they don't come [to your home] as the Immigration Bureau [officers], but they find an excuse, [and wear] different clothes. They ask you questions like if you have an internet or etc. Do you have a television? Do you have this and that [as if they are salesmen]. They come and talk, but also they take a look at the place like this. They even look for working clothes, they check the clothes inside [the house]. When you say you don't want [to buy something], they ask something else. I mean they're clever, they try to get you.

Kerim did not have this kind of experience, and I have not heard of anyone visited by immigration officers who pretend to be someone else. However, Kerim's claims show the deep suspicion that Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers feel about the Immigration Bureau.

Naturally, asylum seekers who do not have a work permit were extra cautious, whether it was on the way to work or at home. In any case, this does not mean that they were all staying at home or stopping working. On the contrary, it was all about working as much as possible but not being caught—even though they were not refraining from having fun, as will be discussed in the following chapter. However, they were being careful about little details, such as not wearing work clothes in public spaces.

5.5.2. 'Friendly Authoritarianism': Dust, Neighbours and Surveillance at Work

Although surprise home visits by immigration officers, and random police checks at train stations were the most-perceived dangers, workplace raids and identity checks by police were quite frequent. As has been mentioned, these raids usually happened after a call from a neighbour disturbed by the activity. According to Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers, these neighbours were mostly motivated by xenophobic ideology, like the police officers. The

underlying reason may be the self-policed neighbourhood life of Japan, which is called 'friendly authoritarianism' (Sugimoto, 2014). By using and extending the concept of 'friendly authoritarianism', Davidson argues that neighbourhoods in Japan do not create a free public space where someone can 'go unnoticed and retain anonymity' (Davidson, 2013, 209). In this respect, it was not surprising that Japanese neighbours were vigilant about reporting noise or dust pollution, which were minor issues for Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers.

Davut was regularly working for a Japanese demolition company, and he claimed that Turkish/Kurdish companies were under stricter control compared to Japanese ones:

> Another issue, brother: their [Japanese] police are policing only for foreigners! Not for them [Japanese]. I also worked for Turkish companies. God forbid if a small thing drops around the neighbouring house. They would scream like crazy, like gone completely mad, [even] kill you. But if the workers are Japanese, then they don't or can't say anything. They [Japanese firms] put all the tools on the main road. I mean the main road! How this is possible!

Davut's accusations about Japanese people and police forces were based on being xenophobic. However, these complaints were also related to complying with regulations and receiving permissions while doing the demolition, as well as complying with social customs and negotiating with neighbours. Most of the Turkish/Kurdish companies were actually working as subcontractors for small Japanese companies, which were acting as mediators between customers, and outsourcing the work to Turkish and Kurdish people who received residency visas thanks to marriage with a Japanese citizen. These Turkish and Kurdish migrants already had an extensive social network within the community. Therefore it was easy for them to use these ties to build a team to work as a subcontractor.

Altan's uncle, whom I mentioned in the previous chapter, was one example. He married a Japanese woman who controlled the company for him. While she was doing the paperwork and negotiations with government agents and other companies, he was doing the labouring with his cousin Altan and other relatives. They were trying to finish all the demolition jobs as

soon as possible to be able to take more jobs. As one can expect, this may have been at the expense of breaching some safety regulations, not taking necessary precautions, and making more noise and pollution during the work. As mentioned in the previous section, working fast was creating enormous pressure on Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers in their jobs. Altan explained why they were working fast, and the difference between Japanese and Turkish methods of demolition:

> *Altan*: They [Japanese] do it [demolition] more systematically. Only building a scaffold takes a week for Japanese. And a day for the surrounding [area]… We don't do it that way. We build the scaffold. We open the ceiling. We demolish the walls and then leave. I mean for Japanese it takes three weeks to do the same job, but we leave that house in five days. Because the sooner, the better you know.
>
> *Yusuf*: So, [after that] you start the second job, right?
>
> *Altan*: Yeah, we start the second [building]. We don't stay jobless; we work continuously. Also, my uncle [the boss] makes [more] money.

Altan was not the only person emphasising how fast Turkish/Kurdish companies were working compared to Japanese companies. However, this did not mean that Turkish/Kurdish workers were more hardworking than Japanese workers—according to my respondents, Japanese companies were complying with rules and sticking with the initial plans, and as a result, they were completing the jobs much slower than Turkish/Kurdish companies. Burak mentioned about the systematic approach of Japanese companies which was slowing them down:

> Japanese don't work fast. They [only] finish the things [that they planned for each day]. They have projects for each day. They say 'Come, build the scaffold and then go'. You only do that [job] on that day. You can do it at 9am in the morning or 7pm at night. This must be built today. Japanese are like that. We don't do it in this way. [We] build the scaffold in one hour and start

> demolishing. We're doing the same job in one day, which takes ten days for those guys. The other day, I went [to a Japanese company to work and] it took a week to build the scaffold. I build the scaffold in two hours [by myself]! Working with Japanese is like this.

Probably Burak is exaggerating the difference between Turkish/Kurdish and Japanese companies, but it is safe to assume that Turkish/Kurdish companies were mostly focusing on pace, rather than complying with regulations or not disturbing neighbours. When combined with 'friendly authoritarianism', this approach was likely to be the reason for more police raids to demolition sites where Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers were working.

5.5.3. Dealing with the Police: Between Swagger and Pleading

When it comes to police raids, Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers who were working without a permit tended to hide or run away, like Tarkan did. Usually, when the police came, those with work permits would take the lead in talking, and persuade the police to leave without checking everyone's identity cards and work permits. While those people would talk with the police, others working without a permit would hide inside the building. Emrah had applied for asylum while having a tourist visa; however, he did not have a work permit for the first six months. During that period he was working irregularly, and he once experienced a police visit while working with Uncle Davut:

> Police came to the demolishing site. I sneaked inside the building. They were talking outside. I was in a room or a toilet. Then I thought they left. Uncle Davut said, 'Okay, come'. I got out, [but] they came back, then I hid again. I said something like 'I need to go inside to do that [activity]'. I waited for a while; they left again and never come back. What if they had asked me [about my work permit]…?

Interestingly, however, hiding or escaping were not the only reactions in those situations. Some Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers were doing something unexpected. When the police came to the demolition site, they would start yelling at the police, and scolding them for

disturbing them while working and asking for work permits. When I first heard about it, this act sounded like a suicide mission! However, Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers were bending the Japanese social rules of avoiding arguments to their end (Prunty et al., 1990; Ohbuchi and Takahashi, 1994). Through yelling and acting aggressively, they were creating tension and intimidating police officers. Once, the police took Onur and his friends to the police station. He told me how he acted when the police were around:

> They took me upstairs [inside the police station]. Then a police superintendent called me. He said, 'do you smoke?', I said 'Yes'. 'Let's go out and smoke' he said. Then we went out. I wasn't afraid [of him] at all. Actually, when something happens with police, I don't [feel fear]… You know, if you fear they understand! I always act like as if I'm teasing. It's like I'm messing with them. I was joking with them; the police were laughing. I wasn't giving any clue. How can I say? One time, there was a complaint about me. Two police came. There were my aunt's son and another relative; both have their visa [which allows them to work]. My aunt's son went down and showed his visa. We were at the back, you know, because we're on provisional release. It's forbidden to go out of our town. The police came, and other guys also showed their visas. Police said 'One more person [should] show [a visa]. We know there are five of you. At least one of you come, and then we can go'. It shouldn't be less than three people. Anyway, they called me. Other guys didn't have a driving licence or anything similar… I had a driving licence. Other guys weren't angry at police, [but] I immediately yelled. I said 'Don't you know we're working! It's our working time. Why are you coming and stopping us? Come around 12pm or at 3pm!' (12pm is lunchtime and 3pm is a smoking break.) I yelled at them. Other guys had their visas; they didn't have to yell. I shouted, then police said, 'Show me your visa'. I said, 'I won't'. He said, 'Give it to me', I said, 'I won't'. Then, I said, 'Here is my driving licence'. He checked. He didn't call the Immigration Bureau. 'Where is your visa?' he said. 'My wallet was stolen here a couple of months ago, so I was scared and I don't

> carry my visa on me. Isn't this enough for you?' I said. 'Okay, okay show this one' he said, and left. If you are afraid of the police a bit… How can I say, they push you to the corner? Nothing happened. 'Carry your visa all the time with you' they said. I said, 'Okay, okay, just leave'.

This long story captures the core of what I want to say about this impressive tactic of using cultural nuances to create an advantage against the police force. Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers were using machismo as a practical tool to intimidate Japanese police officers, by creating stressful situations when they confronted them. Being tough and assertive in those situations was seen as necessary in order to get away from the police. When I was talking with Kerim about police visits, he also answered in the same way:

> *Yusuf*: Okay, for instance, was it a big problem when the police came to the worksite? I mean, what are you doing in those situations?
>
> *Kerim*: When the police come, sometimes you hide. If there is no time to hide, you behave somewhat a bit tough. You don't let them go inside the worksite. You are like 'Wait for the boss, talk with the boss'—something like that. Boss comes, for instance, [and] deal with it. You slip away. If you're dumb enough to go when the police call you, they interrogate you. I mean you [should] say something like 'I just come [to work] today, because I don't have money'. The police don't give people a hard time; they don't push you. I mean, when do police arrest people? For instance, if you do something terrible… If you steal…

If the tactic of intimidation did not work, and the situation became dangerous, then Kerim's suggestion was to ask for compassion. By the strategic use of masculinity, he was able to adapt his behaviour based on the necessities of the actual moment. It may be seen as contradictory to shift from being aggressive to asking for compassion, but for Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers, they were two sides of the same coin, and they would adapt their tactics depending on the situation. Kerim's little son Semih had a severe illness. Therefore he would begin talking about Semih's condition if the police tried to arrest him for working irregularly or driving without a licence.

Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers' tactics would switch from hiding to yelling when they had to deal with the police at their workplace. If the police came to the work site, they mostly tried to hide or escape. But if they were not able to do that, they made a scene by acting aggressively to intimidate the police. However, if the situation was becoming more dangerous on occasion, in that case they would appeal to the compassion of the police. Of course, these tactics were mostly about those working irregularly—if someone has a work permit, navigating these interactions becomes much easier.

5.6. Conclusion

Following the previous chapter on detention, this chapter has focused on Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers' work-life experiences in Japan. The legal limbo in which they find themselves means that Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers do not always stay at the positive end of the legality scale. This means that social networks play a vital role as a support mechanism.

Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers in Japan mostly depend on relatives, acquaintances and compatriots for work. Finding a job is not usually possible outside the community, especially for newcomers. Their integration to the broader Turkish and Kurdish community usually happens through a specific person, whom I call a *social proxy*. These social proxies may provide valuable support during the initial period. However, they also tend to exploit newcomers. In order to escape the exploitation of social proxies, Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers turn to the broader community. They use various ways to expand their social connections. Through focusing on several aspects of social networks, in this chapter I have examined how social networks are crucial for asylum seekers to find work, in addition to finding accommodation and becoming accustomed to Japan in general terms; here I have outlined the conflicts between social networks and social proxies.

Finding work is a real challenge—and when found, it is also easy to lose. Therefore, Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers work hard and fast if they want to keep their jobs. Especially for those with a limited social network, this becomes crucial to proving their importance for

the company. In combination with the image of masculinity attached to the construction industry, working at a fast pace and sometimes in extreme conditions proves one's employment value—and this sometimes forces Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers to undertake dangerous tasks. Certain qualifications, such as having an international driving licence, can provide a significant advantage in the job-seeking process.

On the other hand, this aggressive approach to work can also cause problems with neighbours and police officers, putting workers in a constant struggle with the police and immigration authorities. Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers without a work permit are cautious about being caught by the police. Their avoidance tactics start with not wearing working clothes on the way to and from work; if the police come to the workplace, on the other hand, they choose to escape or hide, but in some situations, they creatively use cultural differences and masculinity to negotiate with police.

In general, however, Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers are not waiting idly for the rejection decision of their asylum applications. On the contrary, they are working and looking for options, as will be explored in the following chapter, to open another path for themselves and enjoy life—existing in *productive liminality,* by which term I define the forward-looking attitude of Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers.

Chapter Six—Seeking Love, Marriage and Asylum in Japan

'Bro, in short: They tell us that 'if you want to stay in Japan, then you have to fuck us''
(Metin, Tokyo, 2017)

6.1. Tarkan and Kerim: Dilemmas of Love, Marriage and Asylum[15]

It was late July 2017, about three months after Tarkan's release from EJICC, and everything was going fine. He was regularly working, thanks to his cousin and my friend Kerim, who introduced Tarkan to the broader community of Turkish and Kurdish people. I was staying in the same room as Tarkan, having conversations about everything and nothing each day. As for me, I was occupied with my language school and interviews, alongside participant observation—which was actually a synonym for everyday living. Occasionally, we would bike around the neighbourhood, and that Friday afternoon we took a break in a nearby park. We were talking about the future, and Tarkan mentioned his plans.

After the death of his father, Tarkan's mother and younger sister were dependent on him financially as he was the man of the house now. For this reason, he was thinking about going back after earning enough money to buy a house, and perhaps setting up a business in his hometown in Turkey. Settling down in Japan would be an option, but his mother and sister would feel abandoned. He also mentioned his uncle's daughter, whom his late father had been determined to have as his daughter-in-law. In a way, this was his father's Will, and Tarkan felt obliged to fulfil the last wish of his father. Looking after his mother and sister, therefore being a dutiful son, and honouring his father by marrying his uncle's daughter

[15] All the female Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers that I met or heard were in Japan as a daughter or wife of a male Turkish/Kurdish asylum seeker. I have not heard of any woman who came to Japan alone, without having a close male family member. As wives and daughters, they were not going out clubbing. Single women were only marrying men within the Turkish/Kurdish community. This chapter, like the rest of this thesis, therefore, is silent when it comes to women and their experiences. The reasons for this silence have been explained in detail in the Chapter Two—Methodology chapter. Although I am very well aware of this deafening silence and its crippling effect on the narrative, there was and is very little that I can do about it.

were strong moral obligations for him. Since his release from the detention centre, however, he was experiencing Japan for the first time, and finding lots of distractions.

To begin with, Tarkan was bemused by the progressive nature of the relationships between men and women in Japan. On top of that, fellow countrymen were not short of locker-room stories about their experiences with Japanese women. Everyone around him was using dating apps to meet women, and making weekly pilgrimage visits to Tokyo's famous nightlife districts such as Roppongi or Shibuya. This was not only to find company for a night, though—Tarkan quickly understood the importance of marriage in order to stay in Japan. We were hearing and talking about people who had set up businesses or made fortunes, thanks to a marriage to a Japanese woman. Kerim was always telling Tarkan how lucky he was to be single; he was desperately trying to convince Fatma to divorce him, in order that he could marry a Japanese woman. When Kerim came to Japan, Fatma and their three kids stayed in Turkey and moved into Kerim's parents' house. Therefore, he lived like a bachelor for more than two years in Japan, including six months of detention at EJICC, before Fatma and the children joined him. Nevertheless, maintaining the conjugal union as a transnational family was complicated, because Fatma and Kerim's mother Meryem did not get along well, and eventually Fatma sent Kerim an ultimatum. Caught between the choice of divorce and bringing his family to Japan, Kerim chose the latter, and that is how Fatma ended up in Japan with three little boys.

After a year, however, the family was shaken by Semih's illness, who was diagnosed with cancer. Kerim's mother, Meryem, came to Japan with a tourist visa for two months to take care of the kids, while Fatma was in the hospital with Semih. When Meryem went back to Turkey, she took two of the children with her. After their departure, Kerim insisted that he wanted also to send Fatma and Semih back too, as two of their children were already in Turkey. Kerim's overall plan was to return his entire family to Turkey and divorce Fatma, and by so doing, become available to marry a Japanese woman—someone who could provide him with a visa, maybe even some money to establish a business—although he was not honest with Fatma about this at the time. However, Kerim was reckless in his search for a prospective Japanese wife, and the couple had huge fights over Kerim's addiction to online

dating apps. I also became part of the argument, as Kerim was using my language skills to impress the women with whom he was chatting. For me, this was a no-win situation, being caught between a rock and a hard place. In the end, however, Kerim did not succeed with any of his endeavours. Fatma neither agreed to return to Turkey nor accepted a divorce. They still live in Tokyo together, although their story is far from over.

The complexity of Tarkan's and Kerim's stories can be seen as an invitation to explore the issues of marriage, love and intimacy in the lives of asylum seekers in Japan. These matters may be seen as very personal, but as we know, even the most intimate human activities are not exempt from societal effects (Bourdieu, 1984). With this understanding, this chapter seeks to unravel the asylum seekers' most intimate relations from their broader experience of seeking asylum in Japan. Here I examine asylum seekers' appropriation (Scheel, 2017) of the migration regime through marriage, beginning by examining the relevance of marriage for asylum seekers in Japan, with a specific focus on their perception of marriage in this context. Why is marriage important for asylum seekers in Japan? Why do some asylum seekers want to marry Japanese citizens, and why do others not? How do they perceive love and marriage? I will then explore the dating experiences of asylum seekers, which are vital to understanding how they employ creative ways to enjoy the possibilities of a global city like Tokyo. Since asylum seekers are often portrayed as vulnerable subjects who are always suffering, this section also shows that they always find ways to enjoy life.

After following asylum seekers in detention, and then at work, this chapter explores Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers' strategies to break out of the circuitous path of seeking asylum. In the absence of any chance of being recognised as a refugee, marrying a Japanese citizen or a permanent resident offers a way to break the vicious cycle of asylum application/refusal. Consequently, it demonstrates how Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers turn their experience of liminality into *productive liminality,* by appropriation of the migration regime and its caveats. However, the chapter also demonstrates that asylum seekers cannot easily be portrayed as 'visa hunters', as they have other plans, concerns and motivations.

The first section of this chapter explores what marriage or relationships represent for

Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers. The second section focuses on those who oppose the idea of marriage in Japan, exploring their perspectives. Lastly, the third section explores the intimate experiences of Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers, since their experiences are not limited to an instrumental view on marriage.

6.2. Why Does Marriage Matter?

Tarkan and Kerim were both on provisional release, which did not provide them with legal residency in Japan; they applied for asylum after being denied entry. Therefore their asylum application was failing to legalise their situation, and for this reason they were looking for other opportunities to make their residency legal, like many other asylum seekers and irregular migrants elsewhere. The legalisation of one's residency, however, is becoming increasingly difficult—again, not only in Japan but also around the globe.

In her study on Zimbabwean women who migrated to South Africa, Morreira (2015) reveals how these women, in actively seeking ways to legalise their situation, despite the political system, are forced into irregularity. Aside from legalisation, marriage is also used as a legal way to migrate from the Global South to the Global North. In the European context, for instance, marriage has provided a secure entry to the 'fortress Europe' (Kofman and Sales, 1992), despite the constant securitisation of borders.

Alpes (2014) demonstrates the day-to-day contestation between Cameroonian spouses of European men and officers of the French consulate, over the authenticity of love and marriage of these couples. From a broader perspective, Scheel discusses the concept of *bezness*, which 'refers to a migration strategy of aspiring migrants from outside the Schengen area who try to seduce and subsequently marry European tourists to gain entry to and residency in Europe' (2017: 390). In Scheel's analysis, *bezness* appears as a form of appropriation, which aims to grasp the complexity of agency in the context of complex structures of international migration.

These researches resonate with the experiences of asylum seekers in Japan. Tekin, a Kurdish restaurant owner (who was once an overstayer), explained it to me in the most striking way.

I was going back home after a long day from visiting detainees in the EJICC. Tarik was also visiting one of his relatives. When we both finished our visitations, he offered me a lift in his nice looking SUV. On the road on our way to Tokyo, we talked about various topics: getting a visa in Japan, the problems of detainees, the situation in Turkey, the procedure of seeking asylum. At some point, he was tired of my questions, and he said: 'Bro, in short, they tell us that 'if you want to stay in Japan you have to fuck us''. From his perspective, this was the only way to be able to stay in Japan, as is the case for many migrants around the world.

Likewise, Tarkan had internalised the idea that marriage was the only way to stay in Japan in the long run, and he was not alone thinking this way. During our interview, I asked Burak, an 18 year-old Turkish asylum seeker, whether he was thinking about getting a long-term visa to stay in Japan. Even though I did not mention anything about marriage, he directly said, 'No, I don't want to get married here'. Again, like Tarkan, the connection between marriage and a visa was evident for him. And indeed, marriage provides two different types of visa options to asylum seekers based on their legal status during the application process. Asylum seekers like Burak, who have legal residency during the asylum application, may apply to change their visa status to a spousal visa after marrying a Japanese national or permanent resident (Kondo, 2001).

After receiving the spousal visa, someone can apply for permanent residency after three years (MOJ, 2017). Asylum seekers who applied for asylum without a valid visa may obtain 'Special Permission to Stay' (SPtS) after marriage to a Japanese national or a permanent resident (Kondo, 2015). The decision whether to grant SPtS is made based on individual cases, and various factors are taken into account, such as having a child, maintaining a legally-established marriage, living in Japan for a long time, or receiving treatment for an illness. There are also negative elements that affect the decision, such as being involved in a crime, or committing 'an offense related to the core of national administration on immigration control, or … a significant anti-social offense' (MOJ, 2009).

6.2.1. Seeking Upward Mobility through Marriage

While talking about marriage in the context of asylum seekers' experiences in Japan, however, the discussion should not just be limited to visa issues. In fact, providing a legal and secure residency is only one of the perks of marriage; for a male asylum seeker, being with a Japanese woman offers upward mobility in life in many ways. For instance, Fatih, a 26 year-old Kurdish asylum seeker, who became one of my best friends during the fieldwork, explained why he wanted to marry a Japanese woman:

> *Yusuf*: How about the boss? Does he have a visa? How long has he been here?
>
> *Fatih*: He has been here for 22 or 23 years. He has a permanent residency. I don't know anything about him!
>
> *Yusuf*: Is his wife Japanese? It seems like this is the case generally.
>
> *Fatih*: Yeah! Actually, I think, most of them improved [their status] after marrying a Japanese. I saw it with my own eyes. Someone who was asking money for a cigarette suddenly became a boss!
>
> *Yusuf*: How does it affect?
>
> *Fatih*: Turkish-Kurdish women would say, 'My husband should bring money to home. [He should] work, day and night'. You know it too. So, I don't want to marry a Turkish or Kurdish woman. Even if I do, she must be a university graduate.
>
> *Yusuf*: Why do you think in this way?
>
> *Fatih*: Because an ordinary woman can't have an [positive] effect in my life. I need someone to help me to reach a certain level. I shouldn't carry her! The difference is they [Japanese woman] always think about the future. For instance, a guy marries a Japanese woman. He can speak Japanese, but he can't write. The woman helps him with it. And if he has an intention to do business… The wife says, 'I support you'. Actually, these guys' wives take care

> of the company's tax or issues with the municipality. But an ordinary Kurdish or Turkish wife can't do this kind of thing in Japan.

Fatih was an aspiring young man looking for something more than working in a demolition company for the rest of his life. From his perspective, having a Japanese girlfriend and eventually, a Japanese wife represented a significant step forward to reach his goals. Turkish or Kurdish women do not have any economic, social or cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986) that could have a positive contribution to Fatih's plans.

Kahn's (2007) observations from South Africa can be helpful here. Like African girls in Cape Town, Fatih was also looking for 'shared values and ambitions', and people 'who were similarly engaged in building productive futures, and who could provide a point of mutual identification and understanding' (Kahn, 2007: 31). However, shared values did not mean coming from the same cultural background. Instead, Fatih's understanding of values was more forward-looking, towards an imagined future. Therefore, shared ambitions, and especially the ability to provide support was more important than a shared history or cultural background. He would make an exception for university graduates, because a university graduated Turkish/Kurdish woman might also provide the support he needed. In those days, my partner was visiting me in Tokyo, and we had a double date with Fatih and his Japanese girlfriend, Keiko. After our double date, Fatih shared his observations with me,

> No, her [a university graduated woman] ideas would be different. I even observed it with you, with Yasemin sister [your girlfriend]. I understood it a little. Because I saw the difference between an educated and uneducated [woman]. When you go for a dinner with someone from here [Turkish/Kurdish community]… I don't know. No conversation or anything like that. The work is done; money. Work, money, work, money, work, money… Nothing more. I mean nothing I can think of. And for the future—I don't want to live in Japan for forever. I want to go to other countries, to meet new people… It [marriage] may also be good for that. If I am here, marrying a Japanese is the best option for my future.

An educated Turkish/Kurdish woman *would* be an option, but even so, Fatih would prefer Japanese women because, in the Japanese context, they were able to offer more support than the former. Fatih's expectations in life included, but were not limited to making money, becoming a boss or getting a visa—additionally, he was talking about having deep conversations with his prospective partner, travelling the world and meeting new people. His girlfriend came from an educated middle-class family, studying international relations at a prominent university in Japan, fluent in English.

Thanks to this background, Keiko was an embodied example of a new type of *habitus* for Fatih. She was promising him an upward trajectory in the social space. Under Keiko's guidance and mentorship, the process was happening without a major *hysteresis* crisis—a mismatch between *habitus* and *field* (Hardy, 2008). For Fatih, therefore, a relationship with a Japanese woman represented a new habitus, different experiences and eventually other ways of living and being in the world.

The idea of moving forward in life with the help of a Japanese wife was a recurrent theme during my conversations with Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers. Altan, a good-looking young Kurdish asylum seeker, for instance, was talking about a new woman he had met:

> For example, I'm talking with this girl. She sent me a link. Telling me to apply for modelling. I mean, she's showing me a direction. I told [her] about my job after we slept [together]. First, I lied, [and said] 'I am a student'. Then, I told my real job. She told me 'Your job is tiring'. You know, she cares about me. So, she sent me the link and told me to apply there. I have a dream about opening a restaurant with someone like her.

Like Fatih, Altan was expecting guidance from a potential future spouse within the labyrinths of success in Japan. Again, he did not have any intention to stay a construction labourer for the rest of his life, and looked out for opportunities. This girl impressed him, because even after learning the lie about his job, she did not leave. On the contrary, she continued to help him. She was not only understanding and caring, but also capable of finding an alternative career opportunity for him. All these qualities, therefore, were making her a trustworthy

partner for the future business venture of which Altan dreamed.

6.2.2. Seeking Business through Marriage

Business issues also surfaced during my conversations with Fatih, and he shared one of his observations about Kurdish/Turkish company owners, 'Actually I think, most of them improved [their position] after marrying with a Japanese'. Choosing self-employment and establishing a business after receiving a visa through marriage is not exclusive to Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers. Takeshita reveals that Pakistani husbands of 'Japanese women advanced rapidly beyond their status as factory and construction site labourers to self-employment' (2010, 225). Fatih's observation about becoming rich from being penniless was not baseless.

My friend Kerim was also telling me about Kurdish/Turkish people who became prosperous thanks to their Japanese wives. One night we were talking over dinner at home; the future of my scholarship was uncertain, so I had been desperately considering other options, and one of them was buying a kebab van in Japan or the United Kingdom. Kerim was also thinking about opening a kebab shop, but all his plans hinged on marriage. He said:

> If I could marry, then it would happen. I could get the residency, and she could follow the events, she could find ways to boost the business. I could benefit from it.

Again, a visa was a necessary precondition for him to be able to launch the kebab shop, but it was not sufficient of itself. Establishing a company requires dealing with complicated and puzzling bureaucratic processes—again, not possible for someone who cannot read and write Japanese. In her study about African men married to a Japanese woman, Schans (2012) emphasises this point. Some of these men choose to set up transnational businesses between Japan and Africa, focusing on second-hand cars and car parts, and usually, Japanese spouses play a vital role in this process:

> Setting up such a business is by no means easy; legal documents tend to be in Japanese only, and to buy cars at special auction sites, a Japanese guarantor is

> required. Spouses can become business partners in setting up such ventures'. (Schans, 2012, 375)

As is the case with these African men, to set up a business, Kerim would also need the support of someone literate and fluent in Japanese, and a Japanese wife would be a perfect fit for that. She could easily communicate with suppliers and customers, and maintain relationships with government agents. These issues not only require language abilities, but also extensive cultural knowledge to be seen as a trustworthy business partner. Similarly, African men in Tokyo were using their wives' 'Japanese-ness' to convince prospective employers that they are included:

> The advantages of being married to a Japanese spouse were not restricted to business entrepreneurs. It was not uncommon for Japanese wives to write applications for jobs or even to accompany their spouses to job interviews. According to one of my informants, this was not only beneficial for translating purposes, but also for shown the prospective employer that this African immigrant was married to a Japanese national and therefore more 'in-group'. (Schans, 2012, 376)

Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers did not usually apply for jobs outside of the food and construction sectors; therefore needing to be seen as more trustworthy by having a Japanese wife during a job interview was not an issue for them. The real point for them was having a Japanese person as the public face of the company, since the main route for Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers after marriage was self-employment, like Pakistani husbands of Japanese woman (Takeshita, 2010).

A kebab-van owner, Serkan, explained this to me while I was eating a kebab wrap that he had prepared, during a period in which I spent time around the EJICC every day for a week to conduct a series of interviews with detained asylum seekers. Serkan sold kebab in his van in front of a local mall near the EJICC, and during that week I visited him every night; thanks to the low number of customers we had the chance to talk. Serkan was very knowledgeable about the kebab business; he mentioned the most prominent kebab restaurant chain owner,

who was also his leading supplier:

> *Yusuf*: They [the company] are really big, aren't they?
>
> *Serkan*: Big, they are big, but the guy [owner] is doing nothing! His wife is Japanese. A fat, old woman. Not old actually. Fat, ugly; but working like a demon. Usually, Turks look for beauty, but he preferred an ugly, but hardworking one. It's all about her. She manages everything.
>
> *Yusuf*: For a Turkish guy, it's not easy, even though you speak well. For instance, arranging a place in a festival.
>
> *Serkan*: Exactly. People tell me 'Marry a Japanese. You also become successful'. I say, 'I don't marry a Japanese'. But I will find a Japanese girl and talk with her, like 'I will give you money if you work for me'. Not like an employee, but like a part-timer. As long as she finds me events... For each event, ¥50,000. If it is crowded, ¥100,000; if it is average, ¥20,000. I will make that kind of arrangement. She can search from her computer at home.

According to Serkan, that person had made the critical and wise decision to choose diligence and shrewdness over beauty and youth. Thanks to the Japanese wife, the kebab company had many vans to attend local festivals all over the country, and as a supplier, they were providing meat products to smaller businesses. Serkan was well aware of the importance of the support he could get from a Japanese woman, but since he had other concerns (which will be discussed in the next section), he found another solution. That solution was employing a Japanese girl as a freelance assistant to arrange festivals to attend and sell kebab.

Serkan was very relaxed, even playful when it came to dealing with customers, but tasks like searching for festivals online—and more importantly communicating with organisers—were over his head. Serkan was living with his Filipino partner, Tala, a middle-aged divorcee with one child. She was not helping him with the kebab business, but she had loaned him more than one million yen to buy the kebab van. He had moved into Tala's house at the beginning

of the relationship, and they had been living there together ever since. From this perspective, his partner's assistance went way beyond helping him with his business; instead, she made the enterprise possible in the first place, by loaning money and offering a home. Serkan's story is a reminder of the vital element of economic capital.

Japanese spouses' language skills or 'Japanese-ness' may be contributing to improving families' positions in many ways, but economic capital can change everything by itself. Yamanaka's research on Nepali migrants married to Japanese women suggests that even after receiving a legal visa status, the economic positions of these men did not improve (2006). In Serkan's story, however, it was quite the opposite, because a culturally and linguistically disadvantaged Filipino partner had improved his life substantially, thanks to her financial capacity.

In addition to financial help, Tala made another crucial contribution to Serkan's life, by providing free accommodation. This helped him in different ways. For starters, he was not paying rent, which was a great way to save more money. Also, he was using the garage as storage for kebab tools and meat. Again, he normally would have had to rent a place in order to use as storage. Thanks to his partner, Serkan could use this facility for free, in addition to free accommodation.

Obviously, he was not the only one benefiting from the perks of moving into the house of a partner, girlfriend or wife. Altan mentioned his uncle, who was living in Azabujūban, a wealthy neighbourhood of Tokyo, with his girlfriend. He was also working in her cosmetic shop as a salesclerk. Before that, he was a labourer like Altan, working in demolition sites. Altan undoubtedly saw this change of job as an improvement for his uncle.

On the other hand, my housemate Kerim was continually questioning my intelligence for not finding a Japanese woman for myself. According to Kerim, I could easily find a rich Japanese woman, so I must have been a fool for choosing to live with them instead of avoiding paying rent and living downtown. Moving into the house of a woman also meant gaining some distance from the community—which appeared to be, surprisingly, desirable for most of the people I met. It was common to accuse the people around oneself of being jealous or

greedy. Therefore, moving far away, especially to downtown Tokyo, was seen as a chance to break away from the restrictions of the community.

Tarık, for instance, was happy to live in Chiba with his wife, 'I live in Chiba, I don't know. Only me. I didn't want to live with them'. Serkan was another example, 'in Nagoya, Gunma, Tokyo; there are lots of Turkish people bro. There are none here in Ibaraki. Only me. I don't hang out with them, it's good'. Serkan had been seriously injured by a group of Turkish people in a fight before moving to Ibaraki. Although he did not tell me all the details, Tarik also had a similar story. Beyond these problems, most of the participants complained about the widespread gossiping within the community. Being under constant surveillance by the community would seem to be an obstacle for people in reinventing themselves in a new country. As mentioned in the methodology, for instance, I also felt that pressure when my partner came to Tokyo.

Living far away, however, was only possible if the person did not need the advantages of being in the same neighbourhood with fellow countrymen, in order to access job opportunities. Both Tarik and Serkan had secure jobs, so they did not depend day-to-day on social networks to find work. For this reason, being able to live away from the community also meant success, indicating that the person managed to establish for himself a life in Japan, and he did not need the support of the community.

Even though this section began by considering the social, economic, cultural and legal advantages of marriage, I observed that a girlfriend or partner could provide almost all of these benefits—as in the case of Serkan—with the exception of a spousal visa. Serkan was on a designated-activities visa, having applied for asylum while having a tourist visa, and therefore was not feeling any pressure to marry in order to legalise his situation or receive a spousal visa. Tarkan similarly lacked enthusiasm for marriage. Despite the obvious advantages, of which Tarkan was well aware, he said he did not want to marry in Japan. Considering all its potential advantages, this may seem puzzling. In order to understand the drawbacks to marriage in this context, I will now explore a deeper perspective on marriage for asylum seekers in Japan.

6.3. Asylum Seekers' Perspectives on Marriage

After having discussed the importance of marriage for asylum seekers in the Japanese context, this section explores why some Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers do not marry, and how their perception towards marriage changes, depending on their situations. Therefore, this section discusses asylum seekers' perceptions towards marriage, and offers a vivid understanding of their subjectivities regarding intimacy.

In general, three different approaches can be identified. The first approach is that of marriage as simply a route to getting a visa—which is despised by most people. Second is rejecting the idea of marriage with a Japanese or foreign woman altogether. The third is aiming to set up a 'real' marriage with the hope of establishing a 'real' life in Japan. The rest of this section will discuss and elaborate on these approaches.

6.3.1. Marrying Just for a Visa

As established, marriage is a common way to access a visa and mobility from the Global South to the Global North. However, for most asylum seekers in Japan, marrying only to receive a visa is not preferable—or at least, openly acknowledging this approach was not popular. Actually, I met only one person openly acknowledging that he was looking for a woman to marry solely as a way to stay in Japan. His legal situation was ambiguous, because he never made it clear whether he was an asylum seeker or an overstayer. Cemil was an older Turkish man, probably over fifty years old, and he had been living in a mosque for more than ten years.

At the time we met, Cemil had an eye condition, but receiving proper medical treatment was not an option for him, because he did not have medical insurance or money. He was working in casual jobs in Turkish kebab stalls at festivals, but these jobs were usually available only in the summer season, leaving Cemil destitute most of the time. As far as I understood, even finding food was a challenge for Cemil, and he was fasting almost every day. He seemed quite religious, praying regularly and carrying a Quran with him all the time, but it was not clear whether he was fasting as a result of destitution or religiosity. Most

probably, it was a combination of these two.

Since I knew this background, it was strange to get a phone call from Cemil inviting me to hang out around Shinjuku. I accepted the invitation with great curiosity, and we met near Shinjuku station. I did not have any idea what we could do together, but soon he offered to go to an English pub chain famous among foreigners in Japan, frequented by Japanese people who want to meet with foreigners. Considering my education, income, language skills and experience of living abroad, it was probable that Cemil considered me to be a good 'wingman'. While we were walking to the pub, he started to talk about the hardships of living without a visa in Japan as an explanation for inviting me to a pub, simply because we both knew that it was unexpected, if not strange, for him to make such an offer.

Meanwhile, Cemil was cursing women as devils, seducing men by wearing low-cut dresses, to make them sin—in an attempt to establish that he would not have gone to such an immoral place if 'conditions' had not forced him; by conditions, Cemil meant visa problems.

After we entered the bar, I bought him an orange juice, knowing that he did not have any money, but he said 'Thank you, it was not necessary though. I normally tell them [women] I'm waiting for a friend, that's why I'm not drinking anything'. In the beginning, I did not think any women in the bar would talk to us, because I was with a fifty year-old *ojisan* (middle-aged man) with grey hair, wearing old clothes—an indication of his financial hardship. I could not have been more wrong, because Cemil was talking with any woman he could see. After living in Japan for over fifteen years, he spoke Japanese fluently—and more importantly, he had no problem with approaching people. When he met someone, he immediately introduced me: 'he's handsome, isn't he? My friend is living in England, a university teacher…' Despite these efforts, we did not manage to establish any promising connections.

At the end of the night, however, one of Cemil's Turkish friends called him, in order to 'pass' him a Japanese woman; they were also around Shinjuku Station. Ten minutes later, three of them met, while I watched at a distance. After talking for a while, they all went to the closest subway entrance, but it appeared that the Japanese woman decided to go home without

Cemil. After she left alone, I approached and asked them what happened; Cemil angrily answered that she did not like him—cursing her as 'bitch'. I then realised that most people around him knew about Cemil's desperate search for a woman to marry.

As a result of the hardships that he faced, Cemil had a different perspective than most of the other asylum seekers that I met. He was just looking for someone—anyone—to marry, with presumably no other criteria besides being legally resident in Japan, because he was hoping to solve his problems with accommodation, poverty and unemployment through marriage. As an old, destitute and not so physically attractive person, however, he did not seem to have much chance.

Moreover, his insistence on finding someone to marry was damaging his relationship with other people around him. One kebab shop owner told me that he did not hire Cemil anymore, because he had disturbed female customers many times. Being on provisional release and not having a work permit were common issues for many asylum seekers, but they were able to work in demolition sites, where working without a permit is not really a big problem. However, Cemil was too old and weak to work as a labourer in demolition, and kebab shops usually asked for a work permit before hiring. Therefore, not having a work permit had much more impact on Cemil's life than other people—due to his 'conditions'.

The other part of the problem was Cemil's inability to formulate his intention in the form of romantic love, which may have emerged as a Western concept, but has since become a global phenomenon (Lindholm, 2006). Cemil had rejected this concept and was focused only on his own needs. Potential spouses—Japanese women in this case—did not share the same understanding of marriage, and thus it was crucial for Cemil to express his intentions in the form of romance, even though he did not share the idea, because marriage is seen as the climax of romantic love in modern societies like Japan. He had to convince potential candidates by performing a satisfactory performance of romance. In order to receive a visa, therefore, he would have to transgress the romantic idea of love (Scheel, 2017).

6.3.2. Ideal Marriage: 'You Should Do a Normal, Real Marriage'

In addition to Cemil, I met only one other asylum seeker who mentioned marrying just for a visa, because for most people this was unappealing in many ways. For instance, Tarkan was very much against the idea of making a sham marriage, because of the problems it might cause in the long run,

> But if you say, 'Let's find someone immediately and marry for a visa', that's wrong bro. You are buggering around. I mean it's wrong. If you want to divorce with this girl later, then you're in trouble.

By mentioning trouble, he was implying that in the case of divorce, foreigners are on the disadvantaged side of the marriage if their spouse is a Japanese citizen. According to him, making a sham marriage to receive a visa was not a wise decision in the long run, because he did not believe that someone can maintain such a relationship for a long time. The life as an asylum seeker is marked by 'temporariness' (Stewart, 2005), and the most critical effect of marriage is to provide stability. Making a sham marriage does not properly change the reality of the temporary nature of asylum seeking; rather, the pressures of continuing such a relationship may even heighten the feeling of anxiety (Fleischer, 2008).

Instead, making a 'real marriage', which was the second perspective on marriage among Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers, offered happiness and stability:

> If you are making a marriage, then don't think of it as temporary. Love a girl and marry with the one that you love. I mean, not for temporary—live your life. (Tarkan)

In this context, making a 'real' marriage means not marrying only to receive a visa, with the intention to divorce after securing permanent residency after five years. Making a 'real' marriage was a crucial and common concern among Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers; most of them expressed their suspicions about the idea of marrying just to receive a visa. At the very least, most of the time there was a quest to reconcile love with the maximisation of the practical benefits of marriage.

For instance, while looking for a womanising venue in notorious Roppongi, Altan suggested that we go a particular club, about which he had heard from his Uncle Santiago. This man was famous within the community, and very much envied, because of his success with Japanese women. Santiago had introduced the club to Altan in his early days, and now he was telling me that 'bro, if you're looking for a woman who can buy you a truck, you should come to this place'. Therefore, Altan was neither romantic nor naive about the qualities of the woman he was looking for. Still, he emphasised the importance of authenticity:

> *Yusuf*: What is your plan here? What will you do in the long run?
>
> *Altan*: Honestly, I definitely think about marriage.
>
> *Yusuf*: For visa?
>
> *Altan*: If it were only for a visa, I'd be married today. I'm looking for a reliable person. Decent and down-to-earth…
>
> *Yusuf*: Normal, real marriage?
>
> *Altan*: Real.

Altan was looking for a real marriage based on 'love'—but his conceptualisation of love did not have the same meaning as 'romantic love', understood as being free from any material interest. In order to understand what Altan means by love, it must be taken contextually, as in the case of Cuban women's relationships with tourists in Cuba (Santos, 2009). For Cuban women, Santos argues that love means making financial contributions in the family context; in a romantic relationship context, it means taking care of daily chores such as doing laundry or cooking for the men they 'love'. It does not mean that these women do not have feelings for their husbands or boyfriends, but 'these feelings are not directly translated as romantic love' (Santos, 2009, 414).

Similarly, in Altan's conceptualisation, love included reliability, both personally and financially. That is why, as seen in the previous section, being cared for was important for him. Likewise, Tarkan was telling me the 'correct way' to make a marriage and establish a life in Japan:

> …you should do a normal, real marriage. […] If you want to stay here, then go, [and] talk with a beautiful girl that you love, agree, and marry. If you really love her and if she really loves you. I mean: commit. Live your life, have a child. Live your life that way.

A marriage with a Japanese citizen promises to solve multiple problems at once for Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers in Japan. This is only possible if the marriage is 'real', although their conceptualisation of a 'real marriage' can differ from a romantic understanding. By emphasising a 'real marriage', Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers aim to bring together their aspirations of having a family, succeeding in life, and having a secure and legal residence in Japan. This is also why I claim that their liminality cannot only be defined by in-betweenness and limbo, but should be understood as productive liminality, since they use this in-betweenness as a way of preparation.

6.3.3. Different Perspectives on Marriage: 'I Don't Marry a Japanese'

However, there were other perspectives in opposition to the idea of marriage in Japan (not linked to the dishonourable notion of it being a sham marriage). Even though Tarkan appreciated the value of marriage in Japan, this combination did not appeal to him. His reasons not to form a family with a Japanese citizen or a long-term resident reflected how the decision to marry is affected by various responsibilities, aspirations and necessities.

As briefly mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, Tarkan was hoping to be able to go back someday, because of the responsibilities that he was feeling towards his recently widowed mother and his sister. He emphasised his situation, as being the only son and the only man in the family: 'I think about going back anyway, brother. I will go back; I have to go back after a while. I am the only son in our house'. Legally speaking, Tarkan was in the same position as Cemil. However, he was not feeling the same pressure to legalise his situation. The difference can be explained by the relative conditions of these two people. Having a secure place for accommodation, and being able to find jobs as a day labourer, Tarkan was not feeling so much pressure in daily life.

In addition to family responsibilities, patriarchal norms about female sexuality were affecting some male asylum seekers' decisions about marriage in Japan. For instance, Burak was aware of the importance of marriage in terms of obtaining a long-term visa, but he did not have any intention to marry, because 'a [Japanese] girl can hang out with someone else tomorrow, even though she is with you today…. I better be with someone from my own country'.

As I will discuss in the next section on dating experiences of Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers, Burak was visiting sex workers almost every month in Tokyo—but expecting his future wife to be a virgin. In terms of virginity and marriage before sex, Turkish society has different standards for males and females. In Turkey, women's bodies—and specifically their virginity—are directly associated with honour/shame, and therefore premarital female sexuality is widely regarded as unacceptable, and may even result in honour killings (Awwad, 2011; Eşsizoglu et al., 2011; Sakalh-Ugurlu and Glick, 2003). Considering this widespread double standard for premarital sex, Burak's objection to marriage in Japan may not seem so surprising.

Since he applied for asylum while having a tourist visa, Burak had a work permit due to his designated-activities visa, which he was renewing every six months. Unlike Tarkan and Cemil, therefore, he did not have a problem of legalisation. Burak was not feeling cornered by visa problems, and working at least more than twenty days in a month, earning a decent salary even by Japanese standards. Therefore, Burak could preserve his gendered ideas about sex before marriage, thanks to his stable position. On the contrary, Cemil was suffering from the discrepancy between his beliefs and his actions. According to his religious beliefs, going to clubs where alcohol is served and socialising with women were prohibited. Nonetheless, his unstable legal, financial and social position was forcing him to act in contradiction to these norms.

Burak was not the only person who brought up the issue of virginity as an obstacle for marriage in Japan. Yasin (19), a young Kurdish asylum seeker, also expressed the same concern about Japanese women's likely premarital sexual experience. For him, however, this

was the crystallisation of more general cultural differences,

> *Yusuf*: So you don't think marriage here?
>
> *Yasin*: No, brother. I don't marry a Japanese. There are my relatives who married, and they are so regretful. They tell me.
>
> *Yusuf*: Why are they regretful, or why don't you think about it? What's the harm?
>
> *Yasin*: You know, Japanese [woman]… Because we're Turkish, they're not compatible with us. I can't accept someone who has had previous relationships with other men. You get your salary. The woman says, 'Give it to me'. Don't give it if you can! I think most of the people who marry for a visa are regretful. And they look at the children of Turkish couples, Turkish families and become jealous. They say 'why did I do this kind of foolishness! I wish I hadn't [married]'. But it's too late to be regretful!

Apparently, for Yasin, cultural incompatibility mostly stemmed from the dominant position of Japanese women in the marriage. Symbolised by not being a virgin—but also more than that—it was about being forced to establish an equal relationship between spouses. Also, when Yasin said 'Don't bring it if you can!', he was referring to the dominant position of the Japanese spouses in the relationship due to their position as a visa provider. Like Cameroonian men in Germany, who expressed their anxiety as a result of being dependent on their German wives (Fleischer, 2008), Yasin was afraid of the implications of depending on a Japanese wife. These reservations were not baseless, as Hamit, another Kurdish asylum seeker who has been in Japan for more than twenty years, confirmed:

> Japanese [woman] says 'Give me the money, give me your salary'. And then tells you that 'You have it thanks to me'. These things happen. Some people get married, but it is problematic. Some say, 'I'm happy, but I'm not telling'. I mean it's hard. If you had experienced [it] yourself, you would understand.

In these conditions, the danger of being unhappy in an oppressive marriage with a Japanese

woman was discouraging for some asylum seekers. Again, this was especially the case for those who didn't feel any urgency, thanks to their work permits or supportive social networks. However, the negativity towards marriage stemmed from 'identity work'—the 'range of activities individuals engage in to create, present, and sustain personal identities that are congruent with and supportive of the self-concept' (Snow and Anderson, 1987, 1348). For instance, Serkan was separating himself from other asylum seekers who were making sham marriages without considering any further consequences:

> Some people receive a visa after three [or] five years and get divorced. The guy has two children, but he doesn't care at all! Sorry, but even dogs care about their pups… I have friends, one of them divorced. Another one is going to divorce soon.

By distancing himself from the people who selfishly did not even care about their children, Serkan was creating a better image of himself. He also emphasised the problems of cultural differences between Turkish/Kurdish people and Japanese people, mentioning how his ex-girlfriend had forced him to eat pork:

> My Japanese girlfriend told me 'Why don't you eat pork?' and we broke up because of it. The girl told me 'You will choose between me and eating pork. If you don't eat pork, we're done!' I said 'okay, we're done!'

Serkan's action in giving up on a promising relationship to preserve his identity was implying a clear distinction between himself and people who were ready to make concessions about their values, as 'for a Turkish Muslim, eating pork is the paradigmatic act of loss of identity, the paradigmatic marker of having fallen out of the group and having become an outcast' (Kurban and Tobin, 2009, 31). However, like Yasin, Serkan was also highlighting the problem of cultural incompatibility by bringing up the pork issue. According to him, Japanese women did not even know how to prepare dinner for the family. Therefore he intended to marry a Turkish woman. He said, '…at least I can find a hot meal when I get home at night'. As a result, he was refusing the possibility of marriage with a Japanese woman because of cultural differences and the possibility of divorce. And this refusal was also becoming a

symbol of protecting his integrity and refusing degeneration.

However, most of my respondents left themselves a margin, indicating they could change their ideas. Uncertainty—almost an integral part of the asylum experience, not only in Japan but also in other countries such as Turkey (Biehl, 2015) or the United Kingdom (Griffiths, 2014)—was forcing them to be cautious about making long-term plans or ruling out any options. For this reason, it was common to hear people saying that they can change their ideas. For instance, after talking about his intentions not to marry, Burak added, 'of course, if something unexpected comes up, that's different. It may happen then. But I don't want to. It's unnecessary'. Appropriation means people adapting to outside changes in order to survive—keeping options open and being flexible is vital for Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers.

This section has discussed Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers' perceptions of marriage. As discussed above, most of them oppose the idea of a sham marriage, which is seen as an option only when someone becomes really desperate. If necessary, finding a suitable partner and forming a family based on a 'real marriage' is seen as a better option than a sham marriage, but not everyone jumps at this opportunity, even if it seems like the best option from the outside. As a result of different future plans, cultural differences or patriarchal ideas, some Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers theoretically refuse the idea of marriage in Japan or with a Japanese citizen—although few rule it out entirely, recognising at some level the need to remain adaptable to an uncertain environment.

6.4. The Dating Lives of Turkish/Kurdish Asylum Seekers

The previous sections of this chapter have explained the meaning and importance of marriage for Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers in Japan, as well as their different perspectives. This section, on the other hand, is focusing on asylum seekers' experiences of intimacy, dating and sexuality, which can be seen as the prequel for some marriages. As seen in the previous section, however, some asylum seekers did not have any intention to marry in Japan, but they were still enjoying romance, sex and intimacy. Therefore, asylum seekers' intimate experiences cannot be confined to marriage. For instance, Tarkan was not very

keen to get married, despite his precarious situation. He was, however, enjoying the company of Japanese women.

Prior to meeting Japanese women, all of Tarkan's previous sexual experiences were with sex workers, so he did not have any sexual experiences based on the 'free choice' of a woman. Being able to convince a woman to have sex with him without paying money, therefore, greatly boosted his self-confidence. We still talk regularly via video call, and Tarkan's adventures with Japanese women are definitely at the top of our agenda. His success on the dating front and being able to have multiple sex partners heightened Tarkan's status as a heterosexual male among the members of his circle. Thus, it is limiting to regard asylum seekers' intimate relationships only in connection with visa issues. Even though it has been shown in other contexts, such as England (Sigona, 2012) and Israel (Willen, 2007), that legal status can have detrimental effects even on the most intimate and personal matters, asylum seekers in Japan still manage to access new experiences and explore new possibilities, despite various challenges.

6.4.1. Smartphones, Dating Apps and Online Dating

In order to meet women for promising sexual encounters, and even more serious relationships, Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers use two main methods: online dating applications (apps) and visiting certain Tokyo districts such as Roppongi, Shibuya and Ikebukuro, famous for their vibrant nightlife. During my fieldwork, I used the same online dating apps that my participants heavily employed. Also, I was a regular attendee of these trips to Tokyo's nightlife centres. In both situations, I was useful for Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers in different ways, which in turn guaranteed my invitation/participation.

Mobile dating apps were trendy among Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers, because they allow users to meet women without spending any money, to change their identity, and 'swipe left or right' anytime and anywhere. Every night after dinner, Kerim was swiping for new matches, and talking with the women that he matched. One of my primary duties was talking in English with the women whom Kerim had matched with on these apps. In a way, I

was acting as a personal translator, helping him to turn these matches into dates. When we were not together, he was sending me screenshots of these conversations for translation. When I first moved into his house, I realised that my English language skill was one of my few assets to be useful in this new environment. However, even without any help from me, it was possible to communicate in English or Japanese without knowing a word, thanks to translation applications.

Being able to use dating and translation apps in coordination, however, requires a certain level of knowledge of information technologies. In the absence of any formalised educational support, asylum seekers relied on social networks to learn these skills. When Bekir, Kerim's uncle-in-law, came to Japan, using these apps was the first thing he learned. Of course, in order to use these apps at all, having a smartphone is a must (Leung et al., 2009). When we were talking with Hakan about the hardships of the first days, he emphasised the importance of having a phone:

> I came, and you know, communication was a bit of a problem because of the language. I didn't know where to go and how to go. There was no phone. I didn't have a phone for a month or two, you know. The phone is a must in this country. It was really a struggle.

(The need for such technology is again evident for the successful navigation of life for an asylum seeker—not only was having a phone crucial to enter the dating scene, but also more importantly, it was crucial for finding work, communicating with the broader network of Turkish/Kurdish community, as has been examined in the Chapter Five—Working as an Asylum Seeker in Japan in detail.)

In addition to delivering the advantage of communication by using translation (where the user has no knowledge of Japanese or English), mobile dating apps are also flexible in terms of place and time, making them adaptable to asylum seekers' busy and tiring daily routines. Many asylum seekers spend long hours at work, including commuting, which may take a long time in a metropolis like Tokyo—therefore, going out was only possible on Friday or Saturday nights.

In these conditions, mobile dating apps offered a solution. Altan was regularly going out with his uncles and friends on weekends. On the weekdays, he was working full time in his uncle's demolition company, so going out on weekdays was not an option. However, this was not a problem, because on weekdays he was arranging dates for the weekend through the dating app he used:

> *Yusuf*: What's your plan for a typical Saturday? When do you leave home? What do you do?
>
> *Altan*: If I have a date that day, then I go to the date.
>
> *Yusuf*: So, you don't go out solo?
>
> *Altan*: No, always with a girl. I don't go out alone. Only yesterday [I was alone]. There was a girl [that I was going to meet], but she said, 'I'm tired'.

Again, Altan could not speak English or Japanese at all, but through week-long communication, he was able to build a degree of relationship with these women by using translation apps. When they eventually met in person on the weekend, the conversation continued via translation apps, and previous online communication compensated for the limitations of these 'live' interactions.

6.4.2. Authenticity, Stigma and Lying

Having week-long communication on dating apps, however, does not guarantee authenticity, which is a common concern among the users of these apps (Duguay, 2016). Most of the time, Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers were not revealing their country of origin, occupation, and status as asylum seekers. Altan was usually introducing himself as a university student, and his preference for the country of origin was Italy, which was the most common choice for Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers.

When Cemil and I were in the bar that I mentioned before, he also introduced us as Italians. We were talking with a group of people, including two Japanese women and an American male tourist. As soon as Cemil said 'we're Italian', the American male tourist asked 'which

part of Italy? My best friend is from Italy'. Cemil hesitated, but manage to answer by saying 'Rome'—probably the only city that he knew in Italy. I was panicked, and I could not do anything else than watch them talk.

To make matters worse, one of the Japanese women asked Cemil how to say hello in Italian. I was still in shock and feeling sick from embarrassment, so I was just watching and letting Cemil talk. I was horrified that our lie was about to be discovered; Cemil seemed confused, but after a bit of thinking, he found a word and said '*Hola*'. She repeated the word a couple of times, but nobody objected within the group; I assumed that no one there knew Spanish or Italian. However, I could not bear the pressure anymore, and crept away to the bathroom. That embarrassing experience made me more aware of the issue of authenticity.

Obviously, Altan, Cemil and others did not want to be stigmatised at the beginning of a conversation. As shown by other researchers (Kumagai and Sato, 2009; Simmons, 2017), Westerners are perceived more favourably than non-Western foreigners by most Japanese nationals. The latter is usually associated with backward cultures, crimes and the degeneration of community life (Iwata and Nemoto, 2017). However, this prejudice also reflects national and international racial hierarchies. Similarly, in her article on Anglophone wives in Korea, Son (2019) concludes that these women's experiences in Korea are different than Asian wives, since 'racial hierarchy and stereotypes present in Korea also create a distinction in the experience of the Anglophone migrants' (2019, 633). Therefore, it should be noted that stereotypes and racial hierarchy are not specific or unique to Japan. Still, in the case of Japan, the binary distinction made between Westerners and non-Westerners also explains why many Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers were introducing themselves as Italians, or as Europeans in general.

Since the cultural differences affect public perception towards foreigners more than any other factor in Japan (Green, 2017), introducing themselves as Europeans helps Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers to overcome stigma during their encounters with Japanese women, at least for a while. In some cases, however, this identity shift reached various levels for different people—to the point that one of Altan's uncles adopted a new name for

himself, Santiago. Mentioned earlier in this chapter, Santiago was only known by this European alter ego, and to this day I have never learned his real name.

The strategy of lying about status and nationality was, of course, derived from previous experiences and encounters. One particular example was Fatih, who claimed that most Japanese people are fascists, especially the women—except for his current girlfriend Keiko. Fatih's previous girlfriend, however, was another story, as she broke up with him because of his status as an asylum seeker. His ex-girlfriend's mother was working for an international organisation focusing on human rights in Japan, and she asked her daughter to break up with Fatih. Moreover, the girl, who was under her mother's influence, broke up with Fatih by saying 'I can't make my life miserable because of you'. Knowing that her mother was the one who persuaded her to end the relationship, Fatih said 'why does your mother work for that organisation? What's the point?' When he finished his story, Fatih told me 'after seeing this kind of things, you say 'I'm gonna fuck all of them''.

During this conversation, we were in a supermarket to buy a locker for my bicycle, and a woman was passing by with her small daughter. As that little girl was looking towards us, Fatih remarked, 'they show you to their kids and say, 'Look he is a foreigner, he came to our country'. Maybe you don't see that look in their eyes, but I notice it now'. Fatih's current girlfriend was very understanding and helpful about his asylum application, but still, he thought of her as an exception.

Fatih was not the only one who had negative experiences with women because of being an asylum seeker. When they were talking with some Japanese women in a bar in Roppongi, one of Altan's friends blurted out their status as asylum seekers and showed the women his residency card. The women left the club immediately after learning this information. Altan recounted the scene angrily and explained why he was reluctant to reveal his status and nationality to Japanese women:

> *Altan*: I said, 'Idiot, why are you showing your card'! Isn't your asylum application written on that card? I told him 'Who do you think you are? Are you a businessman? Are you showing your company's business card?'

Yusuf: Has this happened recently?

Altan: Yeah, the other day. It happened just last week. Of course, the girl left. She thinks that all Turkish people apply for asylum. 'All of them are asylum seekers' [she thinks]. I'm not sure though. According to my uncle, they are scared. They are afraid of someone who applied for asylum. [They think] 'Why did he apply for asylum? Did he commit a crime?' [I have] never tried [to tell anybody]. I haven't told any women [that I applied for asylum] yet. When I tell somebody, then I can tell you the result. I have never told any women yet, I always told them that I'm a student. When you say, 'I'm a student', it sounds attractive to them. [They ask] 'Do you have a visa? How long will you stay here?'. One of them asked me openly. She said, 'You're Turkish, do you have a visa?' I said 'I have a visa. I'll stay here for three years'. She asked for my card. I said 'It's at home. I'll show you next week'. I didn't show it when we met next time, but she forgot it anyway.

Altan's story also reveals the importance of going out with 'right' people, which was always a concern for my Turkish/Kurdish friends. There were certain qualities and virtues, making people suitable and favourable in a night-out group. Conversely, the lack of these qualities made people undesirable in the group.

6.4.3. Clubbing: How to Do It Right

When it comes to the qualities of an ideal clubbing companion, being able to speak Japanese or English is top of the list. Most of my participants were able to speak some Japanese within a couple of months after their arrival, but speaking English was not that common. As mentioned above, being able to speak English at a certain level was one of my assets during the fieldwork, and thanks to my language abilities, I received plenty of invitations to be a part of different party crews to Shibuya and Roppongi.

Although speaking English is valuable in Shibuya and Roppongi, where most of the Japanese men and women also speak the language, outside of those areas Japanese language skills

matter the most, because most Japanese people do not feel comfortable speaking English (Woodrow, 2006). Outside of those nightlife districts, therefore, Japanese speaking-skills make the difference. In summer 2017, Hakan was working in a small kebab shop in Tokyo, and he was meeting plenty of people every day, thanks to that job. One day he was telling me about this girl he had just met, but he could not manage to set up a date initially as his Japanese was not good enough. Thankfully, two people working in nearby shops helped him,

> *Hakan*: There is a guy named Eren. He works in that restaurant, just there. Do you know him?
>
> *Yusuf*: No. So?
>
> *Hakan* : Go straight from that road. There is a restaurant. He works there. He came [here]. You know, he speaks the language. He talked, said this and that, like, 'Let's hang out, let's do this, let's do that'. Then, he left. [But] the girl called! Brother Bora was with me. You know, as I don't understand Japanese, brother Bora talked [with her]. Then, we set up a date. Then, that day, they [the girls] came.

In order to advance the relationship, some degree of proficiency in Japanese was crucial. Therefore, lacking this skill may result in exclusion from party groups. When two Turkish friends/participants came to Tokyo from Nagoya to handle some bureaucratic problems through the Turkish Embassy, they called me to accompany them. We spent the day trying to finish the work at the Embassy, and decided to visit some clubs at night in Shibuya. One of them, Salih, was proficient in Japanese, as well as being talkative and entertaining. The other one, Ayhan (mid 20s), could not speak Japanese and was more withdrawn.

Throughout the night, Salih tried to convince Ayhan to go back to Nagoya, saying 'You should go Ayhan. Shouldn't he, brother Yusuf? We should send Ayhan'. It was because he saw Ayhan as a liability. Knowing the Japanese language was not enough, though. Instead, knowing 'how to speak'—the ability to flirt—was also vital, as we have seen in Altan's story. Of course, there was also an element of physical attractiveness, as this provides a clear advantage in the sexual marketplace (Udry and Eckland, 1984). Thanks to his good-looking

physique, Altan was getting away with his lack of language skills.

Even though most of the Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers were using dating apps and going to clubs, these activities were also drawing some criticism within the community. Bora (mid 20s), who was working at the same kebab shop with Hakan, talked about the people who were spending all their money in Roppongi:

> After all, it is about your personality. If you come to Japan and degenerate, then… Some people lost their character. Every weekend they go to Roppongi and entertain themselves there. In Roppongi, they spend all the money that they earn.

Bora was in a long-distance relationship with a Taiwanese woman, and they eventually married last year. From his perspective, excessive money-spending on women was an indication of a weak character and a sign of degeneration. Most of the time, degeneration was associated with being young, uneducated and nouveau-riche.

Hamit was in Japan for over twenty years, and observed the Turkish/Kurdish community grow and change in Japan. While we were talking about the minor offences committed by Kurdish people, and why these kinds of troubles were happening, he said '[They are] young! If people come here at the age of 17-18, then it is normal, you know?'. When it comes to excessive spending for nightlife or being involved in crime, the emphasis was almost all the time on young Kurdish men. Even some young Kurdish men—for instance, Yasin—were separating themselves from this group. He despised the Kurdish community in Japan in general, but again, there was a particular emphasis on young Kurdish men and their inclination towards womanising:

> *Yasin*: I really hate the [Kurdish] people here. Their demeanours, their behaviour. There is no respect or compassion [to each other]. I mean little kids came here and they're doing things.
>
> *Yusuf*: Such as?
>
> *Yasin*: Philandering! Like 'Ok, let's get a girl and have some fun'. You are a kid!

> You can't go to [a club in] Roppongi here [in Japan] if you're under 20 years old. Any club wouldn't let you in! But these kids somehow manage to go in!

For most of the Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers, saving money, sending money home to family, being able to establish a business and eventually become successful (which means being rich in Japan) were the most praised virtues. Therefore, spending excessive money on women, instead of sending money to one's family in Turkey, or saving for the future, was condemned. To some degree, this behaviour was not a problem, as every man around me was in one way or another visiting clubs and bars. However, there was a clear distinction between just going to clubs and wasting money,

> *Yusuf*: Actually, you made it clear, but what should someone do to become successful here? Who fails and who becomes successful?
>
> *Hakan*: You see brother, I don't tell lies. If you go to bars frequently, it won't help too. I go once a month. You know, we went together with you the other day too. You should go once a month. Like every day with a different girl, [no, you should] go out with *one* girl. [If] you go out with this girl, and then go out with that girl… If you do that, you can't save anything. How can I put it? You have to save it here. If you spend most of the money here, [and] you send it to Turkey; you can't save it. Honestly.

Excessive spending and wasting money was not the only concern when it came to clubbing. There was always the danger of finding oneself in trouble, especially for those on provisional release, as they were not allowed to leave the area where they live. In Japan, police do not perform random identity checks on the streets without reason. However, nightlife districts, where excessive alcohol consumption meets sexual competition among men, creates the perfect conditions for violence (Tomsen and Wadds, 2016). Therefore, being involved in a fight can turn into a police investigation, which may eventually result in revoking provisional release by the Immigration Bureau. This was a constant concern among my participants.

One night, Altan and I met in a famous bar in Shinjuku, thinking about going to Roppongi afterwards. When I entered the bar, Altan was already waiting for me. As soon as I

approached his table, he poked a woman near the table and pointed at me, saying ‘this is my friend, talk now’. Around the table, there were two Japanese women and a Japanese man. I could not understand what had happened between that group and Altan, but at some point, the (heavily drunk) Japanese man started to act aggressively. Immediately, Altan told me ‘don’t mind him, no need to be in trouble’. That was not the reaction I was expecting from Altan, but I realised he was afraid of becoming part of a fight, thinking about its possible implications regarding his visa.

Altan had a designated-activities visa, which he was renewing every six months and so did not have any restriction of movement like those who were on provisional release. Naturally, asylum seekers who are on provisional release are more careful and cautious about potential problems with police. While I was on a video call with Tarkan, after coming back to the United Kingdom, he was telling me about his clubbing adventures, and he said ‘we are not going to Roppongi, brother. That place is packed with cops. We are going to Shibuya or Shinjuku’. However, neither the restriction of movement posed by the Immigration Bureau nor the threat of police would stop Tarkan and others from experiencing nightlife in Tokyo, but only prevent them from going to Roppongi in particular. This active social life was defying the stereotypes about being an asylum seeker or refugee, usually associated with destitution. Beyond marriage, therefore, Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers were enjoying the dating scene of Tokyo, showing another face of productive liminality.

6.5. Conclusion

As we have seen in the Chapter Five—Working as an Asylum Seeker in Japan, on detention, asylum seekers are always expanding their repertoire of tactics and seeking out ways to challenge government agencies through appropriation, mostly without direct confrontation. Marrying a Japanese citizen, in this context, emerges as a swift solution to Japan’s intractable refugee-recognition policy. Since it was well known by everyone that the refugee recognition process was only providing time, not protection, marriage was the only realistic way to receive a spousal visa or at least residence status. Therefore, many seek an

appropriate candidate to marry—again, Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers continually look for ways to overcome their liminal position, which we can call productive liminality.

The idea of marrying just for a visa is rejected by most asylum seekers, and only those in a desperate situation consider making such a marriage. Finding a balance between love—which may differ conceptually from person to person—and the benefits of marriage with a Japanese citizen or permanent resident is a common dream among Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers.

There are also asylum seekers who refuse the possibility of marriage in Japan altogether, for different reasons: from cultural incompatibility to family responsibilities. Despite the apparent advantages of marriage, therefore, such asylum seekers refuse to marry Japanese citizens. Therefore, it is too simplistic to draw a conclusion that every asylum seeker is desperately looking for marriage in order to receive a visa and access other benefits to make their lives easier in Japan. On the contrary, there are some who are very much against the idea of marriage, demonstrating the diverse perceptions and life choices of asylum seekers.

Regardless of their perspectives, however, Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers enjoy the opportunities that are offered by the cosmopolitan Tokyo life, and make effective use of online dating and translation apps, and available language skills to meet Japanese women. Still, they feel the label of being an asylum seeker and non-European, and often disguise their ethnic and class identities on initial meetings. There are also moral concerns, responsibilities and stigma attached to clubbing. Therefore, most asylum seekers seek a fine balance between having fun and retaining their self-concept as a moral person. However, considering growing adverse reactions against asylum seekers and refugees around the world (van Schaik, 2015), even enjoying one's life is becoming a form of resistance in itself.

Chapter Seven—Conclusion

While writing the conclusion of this research, I saw a social media post from my ex-roommate, Hakan, selling his German-brand 4x4 SUV. For the last three years he has been living with his Japanese girlfriend, during which time he bought two German-brand cars: one 4x4 SUV and one sports coupé. I am not sure if he got married and shifted to a dependent visa, or is still on a designated-activities visa thanks to his asylum application. Either way, Hakan has been doing well. Still, I suspect his legal status in Japan is far from stable. His situation encapsulates and embodies the complexities and contradictions of Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers and what I have termed in this research *productive liminality.* At the same time, there are reports (Tamura, 2020; Slater and Barbaran, 2020) about the problems that asylum seekers are facing during the pandemic, especially those who are on provisional release. It is not hard to imagine how challenging this pandemic process must be for asylum seekers without stable accommodation and income.

Although both these different stories—that of relative 'success' and that of hardship—reflect the realities of asylum seekers' lives in Japan, stories similar to the latter are usually publicised more. Of course, publicising asylum seekers problems is essential, because there are many asylum seekers in Japan suffering from destitution. However, it is also true that there is more to understand and explore than stories of suffering when we talk about asylum seekers in Japan.

In order to be able to go beyond rather simplistic accounts, this ethnographic research has explored the lives of Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers and their experiences, struggles and negotiations along the circuitous path of seeking asylum in Japan. To this end, the following research question was asked to guide the research:

> How do Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers experience, negotiate and cope with life, within their liminal status as asylum seekers in Japan?

In this conclusion, keeping in mind the research question above, I aim to discuss three aspects of this research: first, I will summarise and discuss its findings. Second, I will demonstrate the contributions and the limitations of this research to the literature. Third, I will discuss further research avenues to explore, in order to expand our knowledge in the future.

7.1. Key Findings and Insights

This thesis has explored the idea that Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers' lives in Japan are defined by liminality, adding to the growing body of research that follows the concept of liminality in the context of forced migration (Malkki, 1995; Brekke, 2004; Mountz, 2011). However, I claim that liminality does not have to be conceived as a negative concept or status, because Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers are aware that applying for asylum does not provide *protection* for them in Japan; rather, they know that asylum applications only provide them with *time* in Japan. This can be quite a long time, in fact, as it is possible to renew one's application after being denied recognition as a refugee.

In these conditions, asylum applications become important in providing legality—to some degree, for a certain amount of time—rather than providing protection. Even though they are in legal limbo (Menjivar, 2006), Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers are not passive subjects without agency. On the contrary, they actively negotiate, adapt and sometimes resist government agencies and policies. At the same time, they work and enjoy life in Japan, seek ways to improve their legal situation—primarily through marriage—and they live in a liminal condition which can be called *productive liminality*.

Following the concept of productive liminality, this thesis has focused on different stages of Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers' journeys within the circuitous path of seeking asylum in Japan. To this end, the research started with the detention experiences of Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers, which represents the toughest stage of the journey. Then, it proceeded to examine the working lives of Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers, both as a constellation of their interaction with the government agencies, and providing insights into the relationships

within the Turkish/Kurdish asylum seeker community. Lastly, the thesis explored the marriage and dating experiences of Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers—as marriage is the only realistic option for them to find a way out of the circuitous path of seeking asylum—demonstrating how Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers enjoy life in Japan.

Asylum policy in Japan has been affected by national, regional and international changes, and a so-called mono-ethnic understanding of the society, and it has become increasingly intertwined with the migration regime over time. Japan has been a destination for political asylees coming from neighbouring countries such as Korea and China at least since the end of the 19th century, although sporadically. The Bolshevik Revolution and the Second World War brought different groups to Japan; during the Cold War, Japan became the first stop for some defectors who escaped from the Socialist Bloc, as most of them headed to the United States afterwards.

With the arrival of Indochinese refugees in Japan starting from the mid-1970s, it became impossible for the government not to take some responsibility. This refugee flow initiated Japan's accession to The 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol in 1981. Mounting international pressure was critical, and this was a way to maintain the government's sovereignty over refugee policies. Therefore, from the start, Japan's asylum and refugee policies were not aimed at prioritising the protection of asylum seekers and refugees, but rather at maintaining sovereignty and international credibility. Problems arose not long after the accession to the Convention and Protocol, and minuscule refugee recognition numbers have been normalised in Japan since that time. Of course, there have also been improvements in the refugee recognition process and asylum policy in general, usually following tragic incidents. The Shenyang Incident, in which Japanese authorities allowed Chinese police to arrest five North Korean defectors on Japanese consulate soil, for instance, initiated the 2004 revisions which abolished the notorious 60-days rule.

Starting from the late 1980s, Japan started to attract low-skilled migrants with its booming economy. Although the front door was shut for migrants, the country accepted those people as trainees, students, and overstayers during this period. In a country that has been

experiencing a labour shortage in many sectors for years, the absence of a legal route to accept low-skilled migrants had a channelling effect. The result was a convergence between asylum and migration flows, creating an asylum-migration nexus in Japan. Especially after the 2010 revision, which provided work permissions for legally-staying asylum seekers after six months from their application submission, making an asylum application became the only way to stay and work legally in Japan for many migrants.

Instead of being a miscalculation, however, the creation of this asylum-migration nexus can be understood as a policy, designed by the government based on labour needs. Indeed, according to Castles (2003), '[n]orthern governments in Japan, the USA, Italy and elsewhere tacitly use asylum and irregular migration as a way of meeting labour needs without publicly admitting the need for migrants' (2003, 16). By so doing, the government keeps migrants fragile and vulnerable in their relation to the state and economic power. Therefore, it must be noted that, throughout this thesis, asylum seekers are not accused of being bogus or disguised. On the contrary, specific policies and conditions create migration flows or movements, which can channel, affect and shape individual strategies.

The effects of these policies become apparent when we look into the detention of asylum seekers. In Japan, for some asylum seekers, detention is the entry point for the country. For others, it is always a possibility. Especially those who do not have legal residence continually feel the danger of detention. In this way, detention and provisional release almost create a self-reproducing cycle. Reminiscent of mass incarceration discussions in the USA (Goffman, 2014), the counter-position of detention and provisional release creates a cycle. Of course, this is very disruptive for those who experience it, and it creates a liminal existence, even when they are outside of detention. It is an important suppressive factor, because the effects of detention continue even after one's release, as re-detention is always a possibility.

In a way, detention represents the toughest stage of the asylum seeker's circuitous path in Japan. In detention, asylum seekers are caught in temporal-spatial liminality, excluded from life. As a result, boredom becomes a leitmotif in detention, permeating every aspect of daily life inside the centre. In these conditions, basic items such as books, newspapers and CD

players become valuable, as they help asylum seekers pass the time. Through these items, asylum seekers also establish and strengthen social ties.

As seen in Chapter Five—Working as an Asylum Seeker in Japan, social capital plays a vital role in providing jobs for Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers. Actually, detention is an ideal place for Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers to expand their social networks—not only do they establish connections within the community, but also they improve their language skills in detention. Even though the detention practice places them into a liminal existence, therefore, it is a productive liminality. They keep preparing themselves for a future life outside the detention centre.

Of course, this does not mean that detention is a comfortable place. There is a constant struggle between the detainees and the detention administration. Asylum seekers maintain a discursive struggle against the detention of asylum seekers; they reject being treated as criminals, and accuse the government and detention administration of inhumane treatment of asylum seekers. Beyond discursive struggles, there are day-to-day tactics. These tactics aim to disrupt the detention centre's operations, or at least make detention officers' job harder. Lastly, there are more direct rebellious actions, such as hunger strikes, but these are costly and difficult to organise.

In their endeavours to challenge the detention administration and the government, asylum seekers try to find allies from outside. Various volunteer groups regularly visit the centre and provide moral and material support. In addition to volunteers, asylum seekers establish collaborations with media and scholars. The passive stance of the UN is the biggest disappointment for asylum seekers, and they develop different explanations for that.

The detention experience can end with deportation, but most Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers are provisionally released. Even though the government aims to facilitate deportation by keeping asylum seekers longer in detention, prolonged detention times usually create the opposite results. Since asylum seekers' invest more time, money and emotion over time, they become more adamant about staying in Japan.

Even though detention definitely leaves a mark on those who spend time in it, we should remember that most asylum seekers are not detained, and even for those who are, detention does not represent an endpoint. Outside detention, the most critical issue for Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers is being able to earn money and therefore they must find a job. For this reason, Chapter Five—Working as an Asylum Seeker in Japan focused on Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers' working lives in Japan.

When it comes to finding work, social networks play a crucial role within the Turkish/Kurdish community. However, this research has revealed that, usually, *social proxies* introduce Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers to the broader community. In the shape of family members, relatives or friends, these social proxies may sometimes become exploitative, and their power decreases over time as the newcomer expands his own network.

There are two main industries in which Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers can find employment in Japan. Accessing work in the kebab industry generally requires a work permit; therefore, it is hard for those who are on provisional release to find a job in this sector. Since the country has a significant need for workers in the demolition industry, it is easier for sufficiently fit and youthful Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers to find a job in demolition, even if they do not have work permits under the terms of their asylum-seeking status. There are also Turkish/Kurdish bosses who own their companies, thanks to their dependent visas as spouses of Japanese citizens or permanent residents.

Since jobs are scarce, there is intense competition forcing Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers to work hard and fast, which is almost the mantra of becoming a good worker. In addition to being a hard worker, additional qualifications such as possessing a driving license, or having a strong and broad social network also increase the chance of finding jobs.

Since demolition sites are not public, the danger of being caught in irregular work is usually not especially high. Still, at times, police visit worksites to check work permits. In these cases, Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers working without work permits employ a variety of tactics ranging from hiding, escaping and if there is no other option, confronting the police. Playing and negotiating with cultural conventions, if they do not have any other option,

Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers try to intimidate / embarrass police officers into leaving them alone.

In summary, in Chapter Five—Working as an Asylum Seeker in Japan, I demonstrate that Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers do not accept merely being placed in a position of uncertainty and passivity. On the contrary, they actively use their time to increase their quality of life and work hard, living in *productive liminality*.

The Chapter Six—Seeking Love, Marriage and Asylum in Japan of the research focuses on productive liminality from another angle, which is Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers' intimate experiences in general, and marriage strategies in particular. In a country where they have little chance of receiving a legal visa as low-skilled migrant, or refugee recognition, Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers' only permanent legally-staying option is through marriage. Therefore, marriage appears as the primary tactic in finding an exit from the circuitous path of asylum seeking in Japan.

Having a long-term visa through marriage usually means upward mobility for Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers. Marrying a Japanese woman represents entry into a middle-class life for some; for others, it represents success in business, maybe becoming a boss, and a more prosperous life.

Nevertheless, marriage is not an easy decision. Most Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers condemn the idea of marrying just for a visa, and aim to combine their practical needs with romantic and emotional aspirations and expectations. There are also those who reject the idea of marriage in Japan altogether, for a variety of reasons, from family duties waiting for them back home to cultural concerns. Therefore, it cannot be said that Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers only consider getting a visa and nothing else when it comes to marriage strategies.

In order to meet women, Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers usually use dating apps. However, they also feel the stigma of being an asylum seeker. Therefore, it is common to hide their situation and present themselves as students or professionals. As well as hiding their asylum

seeker status, it is not unusual to also hide their nationality sometimes, introducing themselves as Europeans for a more favourable initial response from prospective sexual or marital partners.

In addition to dating apps, going out on weekends and accessing Japanese nightlife is another way to meet women. Of course, in order to be able to meet women in pubs and clubs, one has to be proficient in Japanese, at least to some extent. In addition to being essential in job seeking, therefore, language skills are also crucial for making friends and potentially meeting a partner. Though being relatively successful in flirting increases one's popularity and status among friends, this can also become a source of moral stigma, particularly in terms of earning a reputation for spending excessive money or creating problems with police.

Nevertheless, Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers definitely defy stereotypes about being vulnerable, depressed, weak or disempowered, and they enjoy life in Tokyo, at least sometimes. Of course, this does not mean that their lives are full of fun, but it is clear that they are resisting being put in a box labelled 'asylum seekers'.

Again, in addition to working and earning money, Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers look for ways to extend their experience go beyond the circuitous and repressive path of asylum-seeking, assertively looking for ways to enjoy life in Japan, once again exhibiting productive liminality.

7.2. Contributions and Limitations

The discussion until now also highlights the contribution of the study. Even though there is a growing interest in asylum seekers and refugees in Japan (Arakaki, 2004; Dean, 2006; Akashi, 2006; Banki, 2006; Koizumi, 2015; Fujibayashi, 2018; Tsuchida, 2018), there is a lack of comprehensive and detailed research based on a qualitative approach. By drawing on male Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers' experiences through ethnographic research, using participant observation and in-depth semi-structured interviews, this study contributes to the growing literature on asylum seekers and refugees in Japan (Banki, 2006; Koizumi, 2016;

Fujibayashi, 2018; Tsuchida, 2018) in particular, and migration studies in Japan (Douglass and Roberts, 2000; Weiner, 2008; Goodman et al., 2003; Tsuda, 2003; Graburn et al., 2008) in general.

The literature on asylum seekers and refugees in Japan has been dominated by policy analysis and reviews, and studies from the perspective of law. With its bottom-up approach, this research has explored the lives of Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers based on their own experiences. This thesis, therefore, provided a comprehensive analysis of the circuitous path of asylum seekers in Japan, exploring how they negotiate their status.

By drawing on the concept of the *asylumisation of migration*, this research suggests a framework to understand changes in Japan's asylum trends, especially after 2010. The concept of the asylumisation of migration explains the convergence between migration and asylum policies in Japan. Even though scholars of refugee studies and migration studies on Japan rarely attempt to bring these areas together, this research argues that there is a growing need to think about asylum and migration in Japan in a collective way.

In connection with the above point, by offering the concept of the asylumisation of migration, the research also makes a conceptual suggestion following Castles's (2003; 2007) argument about the asylum-migration nexus. The blurring of lines between economic and forced migration, and the effects of different labels such as asylum seeker, refugee, migrant, forced migrant and more, has already been at the centre of politics for years—but these discussions have been reignited after the so-called 'refugee crisis' in Europe (Sigona, 2018). Focusing on Japan, this research extends these discussions to East Asia, and shows how government policies and laws channel migrants into asylum routes and then delegitimise asylum seekers as a result of this process. In this context, the asylumisation of migration aims to capture this transformation, and it can be applicable to other contexts around the world.

This research also demonstrates that, without considering migratory movements and their causes, laws and regulations cannot produce their intended results. In this sense, states may be powerful to a certain point, yet still, migration movements—legal or irregular—find a

way. During this process, the securitisation of migration can create unnecessary suffering for migrants, and cause socio-economic and political drawbacks for host countries and populations. The Japanese government's insistence on refusing to accept and integrate low-skilled migrants and the consequence of related policies are an example of the effects and limitations of state policies and laws.

Similarly, this research offers alternative ways to think about seeking asylum, legal limbo and irregularity, highlighting the importance of contextual differences and comparative studies in the field. For instance, refused-asylum-seekers and irregular migrants experience fear of being out in public in the UK (Bloch, 2014; Sigona, 2012); however, this has not been a problem for asylum seekers on provisional release in Japan. Instead of irregularity, therefore, this study highlights the need for studies of multiple irregularities, changing experiences based on different contexts. Again, it is a sign that the Japanese context can make theoretical and conceptual contributions to migration studies.

By focusing on male Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers in Japan, this research also makes a contribution to Turkish and Kurdish migration studies, since Turkish and Kurdish migrants and asylum seekers have been studied usually in European and North American contexts, but rarely outside of these regions (Wahlbeck, 1999; Sirkeci, 2003; Dedeoglu, 2014; Baser, 2013; Kaya, 2019). Even though there have been some studies focusing on Turkish migrants (Igarashi, 2014) and Kurdish asylum seekers (Fujibayashi, 2018; Tsuchida, 2018), this is the first research exploring male Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers lived-experiences in Japan in a comprehensive way. Therefore, this research has further expanded the Turkish migration studies' geographical scope and provided a novel case for comparison.

Based on the Turkish/Kurdish community in Japan, the findings of this research support the importance of social capital for migrants and asylum seekers. However, the limitations and dangers of bonding social capital (Holland, 2008) once more become apparent. The research revealed that social networks usually include exploitative relationships, and they can quickly become oppressive for disadvantaged members of the community.

The research also introduced the concept of *social proxies* to define individuals who

introduce new members to the community. Social proxies are usually family members, relatives, friends or acquaintances who act as hosts and mediators between newcomers and the community. Of course, the concept is open to development, but it can expand our understanding of the relationships within migrant communities and social networks.

The concept of liminality has been central for this research, in order to explore the limbo that Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers experience within the asylum system in Japan. However, the research expanded the limits of the concept by introducing the concept of *productive liminality*. Returning to Turner's (1986) initial usage of the concept, which was more open to positive connotations, the concept of productive liminality aims to capture Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers' status in Japan. Even though they are quite sure that they are not going to be recognised as refugees in Japan, they use the application time for working and enjoying Japan, and if possible, to marry and gain more stability. Therefore, they do not passively accept the government's decision; instead, they navigate their way within the system and exploit its cracks. In this context, productive liminality expands the applicability of the concept of liminality and contributes to its study.

In terms of the limitations of this study, of course, there is an inescapable discussion of validity, replicability and generalisability. A rather lengthy discussion on reflexivity has already been held in the Chapter Two—Methodology chapter; therefore, it is not going to be repeated here. However, it should be noted that as an ethnographic inquiry, this research does not aim to capture the average or the median; therefore this research does not aim to reveal the average asylum seekers' experience. Instead, it aims to provide an in-depth understanding of male Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers' lives in Japan. The themes that are discussed in this research would sound familiar to most male asylum seekers in Japan, but of course, it would not encapsulate all experiences of them all.

Again, as mentioned in the Methodology section, there are limitations based on my identity as a researcher. If I had been an ethnically Kurdish researcher or a female researcher, this research would have progressed differently. Especially, the limitations of gender have been clear throughout the research, effectively making it a research on male asylum seekers. I

tried to reflect on these issues as much as I can in the Methodology chapter.

7.3. Avenues for Further Research

The limitations of this thesis bring me to the issue of future research. This study has focused on the Turkish/Kurdish community, which has high social capital, creating a safety net for its members, at least to some extent. However, as briefly mentioned in the case of an African asylum seeker, Ismail, there are asylum seekers who do not have family members or relatives to support them. In this case, asylum seekers' experiences can differ drastically. These are the unfortunate examples, which usually hit the headlines in the media. This research offers limited insights to understand these asylum seekers' experiences; therefore, further studies are needed on asylum seekers who experience the process without the support of a social network.

In connection with the point above, this research is mainly about male asylum seekers, female asylum seekers' experiences can teach us a lot about the gender dimension of the process. Race and skin colour also affect asylum seekers' experiences. Therefore, studies considering these issues can help us to understand the complexities of asylum seekers' lives in Japan.

At an institutional level, for the last couple of years the number of asylum applications has been decreasing, as a result of new policies that the Immigration Bureau introduced. The effects of these policies, however, have yet to be explored by scholars of the field. These policies include denying work permits to some asylum seekers, and giving swift decisions in some cases. It can be assumed that these policies make asylum seekers more vulnerable. The conditions, therefore, can be more unfavourable for new asylum seekers now. Further research is required to understand the effects of these policies.

Similarly, the Japanese government introduced a new visa system to accommodate low-skilled migrants from selected countries in 2018. Even though the number of foreign residents who received these visas was not as high as expected, the numbers may increase over the coming years. It is possible that the new system will affect asylum seekers' job

prospects, and the government's attitude may become less hospitable, making life more difficult for already vulnerable asylum seekers. Further studies that bring these issues together can expand our understanding of the complexities of migration and asylum in Japan.

In this discussion, I have summarised the findings of the thesis by focusing on each chapter respectively. I then discussed the contributions of the thesis, and emphasised its specific contributions to relevant scholarship. Lastly, I offered suggestions for further studies to scholars of the field. Aiming to explore the lives of Turkish/Kurdish asylum seekers' and their journey through the asylum system in Japan, hopefully this thesis is successful in demonstrating their resilience, resourcefulness and courage.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. List of Interviews

No	Nationality	Group	Date	Location	Duration
1	Turkey (Kurdish)	Asylum seeker Provisional Release	21/05/2018	Video chat	25m
2	Togo	Unknown Provisional Release	21/05/2017	Tokyo	1h 47m
3	Turkey (Kurdish)	Asylum Seeker Detained	Regular meetings	Ibaraki	30 min each time (several meetings)
4	Turkey (Kurdish)	Asylum Seeker Designated Activities	26/08/2017	Saitama	1h 1m
5	Turkey (Kurdish)	Asylum Seeker Designated Activities	20/09/2017	Saitama	1h 43m
6	Turkey (Kurdish)	Asylum Seeker Designated Activities	09/09/2017	Saitama	1h 30m
7	Turkey (Turkish)	Asylum Seeker Designated Activities	18/08/2017	Saitama	1h 19m
8	Turkey (Turkish)	Asylum Seeker Detained	05-07/07 2017	Ibaraki	30mx2
9	Turkey (Kurdish)	Asylum Seeker Detained	03-04-05/07/2017	Ibaraki	30mx3
10	Turkey	Asylum Seeker	03-04/07/2017	Ibaraki	30mx2

	(Turkish)	Detained			
11	Turkey (Turkish)	Asylum Seeker Designated Activities	12/09/2017	Tokyo	1h 3m
12	Turkey (Kurdish)	Asylum Seeker Detained	06-07/07/2017	Ibaraki	30mx2
13	Turkey (Kurdish)	Asylum Seeker Detained	06/07/2017	Ibaraki	30m
14	Turkey (Turkish)	Asylum Seeker Designated Activities	04/07/2017	Ibaraki	1h 13m
15	Turkey (Kurdish)	Asylum Seeker Detained	06-07/07/2017	Ibaraki	30mx2
16	Turkey (Turkish)	Asylum Seeker Designated Activities	19/09/2017	Tokyo	47m
17	Turkey (Kurdish)	Asylum Seeker Detained	03-04/07/2017	Ibaraki	30mx2
18	Turkey (Kurdish)	Asylum Seeker Detained	03-04/072017	Ibaraki	30mx2
19	Turkey (Kurdish)	Asylum Seeker Designated Activities	14/05/2017	Tokyo	1h 42m
20	Turkey (Kurdish)	Asylum Seeker Detained	03/07/2017	Ibaraki	30m
21	Turkey (Kurdish)	Temporary Visitor (Tourist visa) Kurdish	21/04/2017	Saitama	29m
22	Sierra Leone	Asylum Seeker Designated	25/05/2017	Tokyo	1h 2m

		Activities			
23	Nigeria	Asylum Seeker Provisional Release	04/09/2017	Saitama	1h 22m
24	Turkey (Kurdish)	Asylum Seeker Designated Activities	08/09/2017	Saitama	26m
25	Turkey (Kurdish)	Asylum Seeker Designated Activities	21/09/2017	Saitama	1h 8m
26	Turkey (Kurdish)	Asylum Seeker Provisional Release	28/07/2017	Saitama	1h 29m
27	Cameroon	Unknown Detained	Written Response	Ibaraki	-
28	Ethiopia	Unknown Detained	Written Response	Ibaraki	-
29	Turkey (Kurdish)	Asylum Seeker Designated Activities	15/09/2017	Tokyo	43m
30	Turkey (Kurdish)	Ex-overstayer Returnee	19/10/2017	Turkey	1h
31	Turkey (Kurdish)	Ex-overstayer Returnee	19/10/2017	Turkey	45m
32	Turkey (Kurdish)	Ex-overstayer Returnee	19/10/2017	Turkey	30m
33	Japanese	Doctor	05/04/2017	Tokyo	1h 22m
34	Japanese	Volunteer	05/07/2017	Ibaraki	56m
35	Japanese	Lawyer	02/09/2017	Saitama	1h 24m
36	Japanese (Iranian)	Volunteer	06/07/2017	Ibaraki	1h 59m
37	Japanese	Volunteer	23/08/2017	Ibaraki	51m

38	Japanese	Social Worker and Researcher	27/08/2017	Saitama	1h 15m

Appendix 2: Consent Form Example

The Sheffield of University
School of East Asian Studies

Information Sheet for Research Participants
Research Title: Seeking Asylum in Japan

Researcher: Yusuf Avci
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Introduction

You are invited to take part in a research project. Before you decide 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 discuss it with the researcher and others if you wish. Ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep (and be asked to sign a consent form) and you can still withdraw at any time without it affecting any benefits that you are entitled to in any way. You do not have to give a reason. Thank you for reading this.

Summary of the Research

This research aims to explore various aspects of asylum in Japan and try to develop better understanding of the phenomenon. The research will focus on the experiences of various actors including asylum seekers, government officials, NGO workers, lawyers etc. You are invited to participate this study because of your knowledge, expertise and experience.

Participation

You are being asked to participate in an individual interview in which you will be asked to share your opinion about various aspects of asylum in Japan. The interview will last between 60 and 90 minutes and will take place at a mutually agreed place upon by yourself and the interviewer. The interview will be audiotaped and/or videotaped if you provide your explicit permission and they will not be made directly publicly available in any form

Usage of the Data

The data will be used for the PhD thesis of the researcher and additional journal publications on the topic, either during or after the completion of the dissertation. The data that is collected will not be directly used as material for any new pieces of research that diverges significantly from the above, without the explicit and renewed consent of the participants.

Risks and Benefits

Interviewees will remain anonymous in the study, and they will be referred to through a reference code. There is always, however, the risk of a breach in confidentiality. The researcher will minimize the risk by removing identifying information from the data. Additionally, all data will be kept in locked storage and password protected computers. You can feel stress because of the questions about your life and residence in Japan, especially if there are legal disputes. The researcher is not providing any information to the governmental agencies.

Questions and Comments

You are welcome to ask questions at any time during your participation in this research study. You can reach the researcher through mail or phone. Please use this space for additional information/requests/comments relating to your participation:

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM **REF:**

Name of Interviewee	
Date	
Location	

YOUR CONSENT

I have read the information about the research and have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the research	
I understand that the data collected will be dealt with in confidence and I have the right to withdraw from the study at any time and decline to answer questions/participate in activities I do not feel comfortable with during the research	
I am happy for the research to be recorded either by voice recorder or video camera. A copy of the recording(s) can be provided upon request.	
I agree that the data collected from me can be used for future research	
I agree to take part in the research and do so voluntarily	

The consent form and interview are matched only through the reference number given at the beginning of your participation and recorded at the top of this page. An English and Turkish or Japanese language copies of the consent form will be provided for the participant for reference. Two copies of the consent form will be signed, one remaining with the participant, one with the researcher.

I have understood the above:

Signature: _____ Name: _____
(Participant)

Signature: _____ Name: _____
(Researcher)

Appendix 3: Participant Profiles

1. **Tarkan (21):** One of the central figures of the thesis. He is from Kahramanmaraş, a city in Southeast Turkey, and came to Japan in 2016. We shared the same room in his cousin Kerim's house for a couple of months and became good friends. Although he is ethnically Kurdish, he cannot speak the language. He was in detention for more than six months. In detention, he lost his father, and his mother and sister became dependent for him financially. After being released on provisional release, he started working without a work permit in the kebab industry and in demolition. He was indebted to Kerim for many things, and this situation complicated their relationship. Tarkan is not planning to marry in Japan, but he likes going out. He still lives in Tokyo. He is mentioned frequently in Chapters Two, Four, Five and Six.

2. **Kerim (33):** Kerim is Tarkan's and Hakan's cousin, my good friend and another main character of the research. He is also from Kahramanmaraş, which he left to go to Japan in around 2014. Kerim is Kurdish and speaks the language, but he is not politically active. He was detained in EJICC for around six months, and his experiences were helpful for Tarkan. We lived together in his house for approximately five months, where he was living with his wife Fatma and their son Semih. The couple sent their two boys to Turkey with Kerim's mother, Meryem. He tried to convince Fatma to divorce him, in order that he might marry a Japanese woman who could provide him with residency in Japan. His plan, however, did not work since Fatma was not impressed with this idea. Kerim's addiction to dating apps was a constant problem at home. He still works in demolition, even though he is on provisional release. He is mentioned frequently in Chapters Two, Four, Five and Six.

3. **Hakan (18):** Hakan is Kerim's other cousin and my former roommate. Before coming to Japan in 2016, he was living in his hometown, Kahramanmaraş. He entered Japan as a tourist and applied for asylum; therefore, he is on a designated activities visa and can work legally. Just before Tarkan's release from detention, Hakan left the house after an argument. Kerim was overcharging him for rent and taking a

commission from his daily wage. These issues became a problem. After leaving Kerim's house, Hakan started living with a Japanese girl. He managed to save money and two expensive German cars. He still lives in Tokyo with his girlfriend. He is mentioned frequently in Chapters Two, Five and Six.

4. **Devran (38):** As a Kurdish, Alawite and self-proclaimed revolutionist, Devran was a unique character. He came to Japan more than a decade ago and submitted a couple of unsuccessful asylum applications. His Japanese wife could not save him from detention. During his time in detention, Devran was mentally and physically in great pain. He was very critical and outspoken about the injustices of the Japanese asylum and detention system. After I finished my fieldwork, Devran was released from detention on provisional release and has become an activist for all asylum seekers in Japan. He is mentioned frequently in Chapter Four.

5. **Burak (18):** He is Hakan's best friend and a relative of the central figures (Hakan, Kerim, Tarkan) of the research. Naturally, he is also from Kahramanmaraş. Although he was young, Burak undertook significant responsibilities. His family had a considerable debt, and Burak was the primary provider for the family. As a strong and able young man, he was a good worker—a fact he liked to share. Like Tarkan, he did not want to marry a Japanese woman, but he was enjoying the nightlife in Tokyo. He is mentioned frequently in Chapters Two, Five and Six.

6. **Serkan (25):** Serkan is an ethnically Turkish young asylum seeker from Inner Anatolia. He came to Japan as a tourist four years ago, therefore obtained a designated activities visa and worked at odd jobs. Serkan was seriously injured in a fight with some other Turkish people over a love affair. After the injury, he met his current partner Tala, and she helped him set up a kebab business. Thanks to Tala's support, he was doing well financially and investing in expensive sports cars. He still lives in Ibaraki. He is mentioned frequently in Chapters One and Six.

7. **Fatma (early 20s):** Fatma is Kerim's wife and mother of his three boys. She is Turkish and from Kahramanmaraş. Fatma came to Japan with their three boys after Kerim, in

2016. Kerim did not want her to come, but Fatma gave him an ultimatum. After Fatma's arrival, Kerim tried to convince her to divorce, so he could make a sham marriage to secure residency in Japan, but Fatma did not accept it. Since she is on a designated activities visa, Fatma had started to work in a factory (after I returned from the fieldwork), but stopped working when she became pregnant with her and Kerim's fourth son. She still lives in Tokyo. She is mentioned frequently in Chapters Two, Five and Six.

8. **Davut (50):** As an ethnically Kurdish Turkish citizen, Davut is one of the oldest asylum seekers in the community. He is Burak's uncle-in-law, and he also has a close relationship with Kerim, Tarkan and Hakan, since they all are from the same village. He came to Japan in 2015, and he has become a respected member of the community thanks to his social skills, age and maturity. Davut's wife and kids are in Turkey, and he was planning to return to Turkey after the 2020 Tokyo Olympics. He still lives in Tokyo. He is mentioned frequently in Chapter Five.