

Recreating Memories for Immigrated or Displaced People

Thesis Report

Submitted to the Faculty of Miami University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Fine Arts

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ABSTRACT

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by Kansu Özden

Millions of people in whole around the world are immigrated or displaced because of wars, famine, drought, religion, language, race discrimination, natural disasters, and economic reasons. This study focuses on the people who have immigrated or have been exiled from their native country due to those reasons. Not finding or having the similar or same rituals they had in their native country is the main problem for them. This study endeavors to help people to overcome their sense of longing by making them feel as they are in their native country via virtual reality.

Keywords: immigrated or displaced people, recreating memory, virtual reality, experience design

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this study to all immigrants and refugees that have had to abandon their countries and homeland for any number of reasons. I especially dedicate this work to my Circassian ancestors that have lost their lives during the countless years of war with Russia and exile on May 21, 1864. This work expresses my gratitude for all Circassians of past present and future whom are spread across the world and have not lost their identities and still fight to keep their ideals and cultures alive.

Besides that, I dedicate this paper to my mother, father, sisters, and everyone else who has had a significant role in changing my life. To my teachers who especially helped me to discover my talents and encouraged me to come to the USA. Also, I want to thank my relatives and close friends who have supported me through all of my hardships.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, I want to thank Helen Armstrong who believed in me and helped me to start my journey at Miami University. I would like to thank my advisor, Dennis Cheatham, who has supported me with the most positive and mentoring input and Silas Munro who had a profound impact on the birth of my thesis project from the workshop we had together. I also would like to thank my colleagues and friends (Paulina Zeng, Bryant Thomas, Ringo Jones, Ali Place, Danny Capaccio, Andrea Mateus) in the Department of Art, their support and enthusiasm the past two years have pushed me to further develop myself and improve as an artist. Last but certainly not least, I greatly thank my roommate and brother Bilal Altundas in his translations and constant support during my time at Miami University. Although this may be the end of our journey here I have made a friend and brother for life.

INTRODUCTION

Around the world people are forced to abandon and leave their homelands for innumerable reasons whether it be poverty, war or exile. These people are referred to as refugees which might describe their situation but what's important is what this means officially.

The United Nations describes a refugee¹ as "Any person who, owing to a wellfounded 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 to or. owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country." According to the UNHCR, some 19.5 million people met these criteria at the end of 2014. That number has almost certainly grown, given ongoing conflicts in Syria, Iraq, and elsewhere. And about twice that number -- 40 million—are "internally displaced," uprooted and forced to seek shelter in their own country.

Instead of focusing on refugees directly, this study focuses on refugees who have had to immigrate and abandon their homelands due to various reasons. In order to collect more reliable data and design a solution that can be widely applied to a greater population of people, immigrated and or displaced individuals who reside in the USA were chosen as the audience.

Furthermore the study also focuses more in depth on the religious and cultural background of the audience. People who have immigrated or were displaced have several problems after moving to a new country. Among these problems are reminiscing on past memories especially of those regarding their religious and cultural rituals. Although remembering these challenges may provide them with relief short them, actually living and practicing them in a completely different environment where it may or may not be viewed as normal might be very challenging for these people. Even in the event that a community of fellow countryman were established or joined into, experiencing and practicing these rituals do not provide the same feeling as experienced at home. There are several details however minute they may be, which impede the ritual's authenticity and make the experience all that different from the original. The question that this study tries to answer is how and what can be done to help these immigrated or displaced people in recreating their memories and make them feel less lonely while so far away from home in a completely different country. The ultimate goal is to help these people overcome their sense of longing by providing them the means to an experience they would have access to in their homeland. This study proposes a method and experience that may provide an answer to their longing, help them overcome their loneliness and become more attached to their cultural roots. In Syria, in the early spring of 2011, a civil war began and still remains to continue to this present day. Since 2011, according

^{1 &}quot;Refugees." UNHCR News. Web. 29 Apr. 2016.

LITERATURE REVIEW

to UNHCR over 7,600,000 people were internally displaced and 4,000,000 people left their country. Of these people to leave Syria, most immigrated mainly to Turkey and other European countries. According to a recent poll, there are 2,749,140 people who are registered to the UNHCR that live in Turkey².

After a massive migration wave to Turkey since 2011, many studies have been done. Şenay Özden (2013) conducted research about Syrian refugees in Turkey which provides an overview of Syrian migration to Turkey since 2011. The study utilized qualitative research methods and focuses on the reasons why they came to Turkey and what were their underlying problem. An example of these methods is conducting interviews with openended guestions on many of the Syrian activist and Free Syrian Army members who were staying in the refugee camps in Turkey. Through these questions it was learned that many refugees came to Turkey for several reasons such as for treatment in hospitals, not being happy at home because of their countries current situation and living in fear of death every day. Army members revealed that even they did not have the chance to visit their families and that talking on phones with their families were forbidden³.

Ozden's study is a good starting point for research regarding why refugees left their countries and what current conditions they are faced with. In order to further understand the problem, discovering the reasons why they had to leave is quite crucial.

In Nathalie Rothschild's study, the interviews focus on Syrian refugees in Sweden. This study shows4 what type of struggles individuals face and tells of their personal stories in very intimate ways including using voice recordings during the interviews. Nathalie Rothschild's interviews with Syrian people has a unique perspective. Although many resources focus on bigger groups, Nathalie Rothschild chose to talk with individuals from different ages and also reveal their unique and incomparable problems which are very helpful to see their difficulties. Her method of interviewing provides the means to understand how perspectives differ among people of different age groups and socioeconomic background and how their former lifestyle and jobs in Syria affect their life in Sweden as a refugee.

In Karkin's and Yazici's study, ethnic diversity in Syria, reasons of artificial divisions, Arab Spring's reflections on Syria and in which conditions Turkmans taking refuge in Turkey live in Turkey were investigated. Answers to these

^{2 &}quot;UNHCR Syria Regional Refugee Response." UNHCR Syria Regional Refugee Response. Accessed April 28, 2016. http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/country.php?id=224.

³ ÖZDEN, ŞENAY. "Syrian Refugees in Turkey." MPC – MIGRATION POLICY CENTRE, May 2013.

⁴ Rothschild, Nathalie. "Sweden – Stories from Stockholm | Syrian Refugees." Syrian Refugees. Accessed April 28, 2016. http://syrianrefugees.eu/?page_id=622.

questions were research in accordance with interviews made by reaching out toa part of the Turkmans residing in Gaziantep⁵. Besides the research and explanations about why a war began in Syria, this study offers vital and rich content for the present study. In the study groups of 4 people were studied and interviewed. The interviews for each group took 120 minutes and was also recorded by a reporter. In total, 15 questions were asked to each Syrian refugee in Turkey focusing on how long they have been staying there, have their views on Turkish people changed after moving there, what kind of language problem have they had, what are the things that have especially changed in their social lives after coming to Gaziantep, what were the difficulties faced in terms of practicing their religion. They were also asked what they missed most from their country, what their plans were after the war ends in Syria and why they had to leave their country. The results of this study show what kind of common problems Syrian refugees have in Turkey and what can be done for them to solve their problems. Furthermore, the study suggests and claims that refugees miss their memories and emotionally this affects them to go back when the war ends.

This study explains how and what Syrian refugees in Sweden did to recreate⁶ their monuments. Among the several lives lost due to the various conflicts in Syria to add to the further devastation, a number of historical monuments were also destroyed adding another layer of tragedy to the case. ISIS, especially is targeting, damaging and destroying these historical places and monuments. In rise against this great act of vandalism, Syrian refugees in Sweden decided to recreate their monuments to not forget and lose their rich architectural culture even though the original pieces were destroyed. Among the several refugees, talented individuals arose with capabilities of reconstructing these monuments such as the Umayyad Mosque, the Citadel of Aleppo, and the Deir ez-Zor bridge. By recreating their models, they aimed to keep Syrian culture alive for future generations. This study is genuinely significant for the present research and the great lengths and ingenuity that the Syrian refugees expressed in order to keep their culture alive was guite amazing. The devotion that these refugees displayed inspired this present work and fueled the desire to find means of helping people that are in similar conditions.

⁵ KARKIN, Veysel, and Önder YAZICI. "Syrian Arab Spring Reflection And Turkey Refuge Refugees (Gaziantep Sample)." 21. Yüzyılda Eğitim Ve Toplum, Kış, 4, no. 12 (December 12, 2015): 201-13. Accessed March 10. 2016.

^{6 &}quot;Syrian Refugees Recreate Destroyed Monuments to Always Remember Their Culturally Rich Architecture." My Modern Met. 2016. Accessed April 28, 2016. http://www.mymodernmet.com/profiles/blogs/refugees-recreating-replicas-monuments.

METHODOLOGY

In the first stage of creating a methodology an online survey was employed and conducted for the present study. The reason for using a survey method was to be able to reach a wider audience of immigrated or displaced people from various backgrounds living in different regions of the USA. With this wide array of participants we aimed to produce various types of results from a number of different people thus providing a more inclusive point of view.

Participants of the survey were all volunteers and were reached through email and or advertising through student organizations. The survey was conducted using the Typeform.com website where participants can access the site and fill out the answers to the questions online. The survey had ten questions and prior to taking the survey each volunteer participant was required to agree to the consent form. There were two questions which provided quantitative data and the remaining eight guestions were open ended response questions. These open ended guestions were answered through short or long answer responses by participants and there was no character restriction, participants were allowed to provide as long of an answer as desired. These qualitative questions focused on discovering what people missed, what their cultural and religious rituals were, whether it was hard or easy to find a place for them to conduct their religious practices and if they obtained the same feeling from religious or cultural holidays as they had experienced back home. The 10 guestions provided extremely rich and beneficial data which were then used

to design a proper solution to solve the problem effectively.

The data gathered from the online survey was taken from a total of 30 participants. The mass data from these participants were then coded to make the results clearer and representable. Furthermore by pooling this data, answers were compared among the participants and the responses that stood out the most were also determined. Interestingly, although not expected, several common answers were observed among the 30 responses and these were highlighted to better convey, visualize and present in the study.

The majority of the audience that participated in the survey is made up of young adult Muslim people that are from Turkey. This audience was targeted intentionally because as a researcher the goal was to focus on this demographic because of the shared religious and cultural background. This audience would provide a more understandable and relatable insight to the research process as the conductor of the research and participants share the same belief, culture and heritage hence benefiting in the design of a proper solution.

After gathering data from 30 different participants, a design solution was prepared for those who have visited the thesis exhibition. The goal was to test the designed solution and determine whether this was a viable solution to the problem. According to the feedback from various visitors of the exhibition, the reviews provided mainly positive

responses on the videos of Turkey and the religious acts performed. Furthermore, based on this feedback, hearing the call to prayer was also very effective. Many of the responses claimed that the designed solution serves its goal well and that they are looking forward to experience the next step in the design.

RESULTS

Survey Results

The following describes and conveys the results obtained from the applied online survey. This operated survey has both quantitative and qualitative data and each step in collecting and analyzing the data will be explained in detail.

Figure 1 shows the participants' ages. The nine different countries were color coded to add visual clarity. Three participants are between the ages of 18-24, 23 people are between the ages of 25-30, one person

is between the ages of 31-35, one person is between the ages of 36-40, and two participants are between the ages of 41-50. As can be recognized from the above figure, the majority of people are between the ages of 25-30 and they are from Turkey.

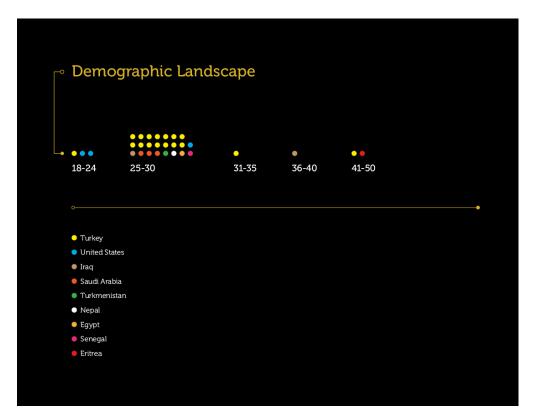


Figure 1. Demographic Landscape

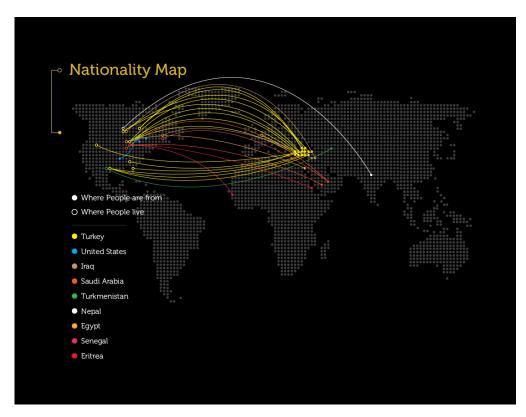


Figure 2. Nationality Map

Figure 2 shows the Nationality map which illustrates the various participants' nationalities. The curves are color coded to each nation and each curve connecting two points in the figure account for one participant. These curves represent where the participants are from and where they live now. The filled points show where people are from; the hollowed points demonstrate where people live now.

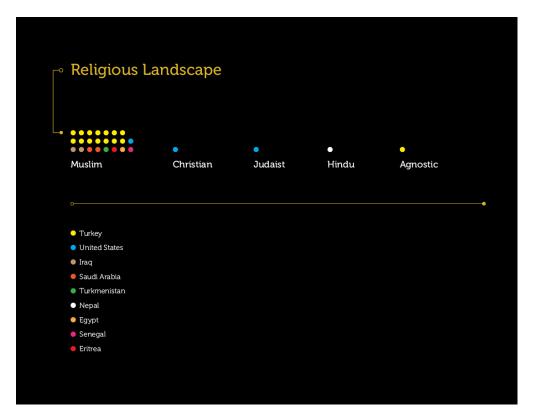


Figure 3. Religious Landscape

Figure 3 shows each participants' religion and are color coded to show where they are from. There are 23 people that are Muslim, one that is Christian, one that is Jewish, one that is Hindu, and one person that is Agnostic.

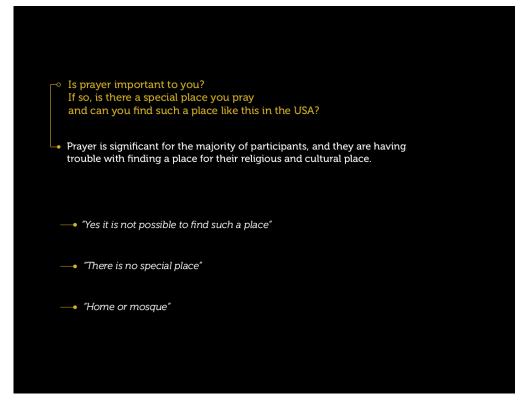


Figure 4. Place of Prayer

Figure 4 depicts the qualitative aspect of the online survey with the proposed question in a vibrant yellow color. The question asks, "Is prayer important to you? If so, is there a special place you pray and can you find such a place like this in the USA?". The results show it was clear that prayer is very significant for many participants as part of a religious ritual. However, most responses suggested that they are struggling to find a special place to practice these rituals. Among the participants that stated that they can pray at mosques, they noted that the mosques do not have the same feeling as they do in their native country such as the minarets and the call to prayer.



Figure 5. Missing Rituals

Figure 5 leads with the next qualitative question which is, "If you are not living in your native country, what do you miss most about prayer rituals?" The majority of participants answered this with "call to prayer" and similar responses such as "sound of call to prayer". Also, "gathering before and after the prayer" is another common answer.

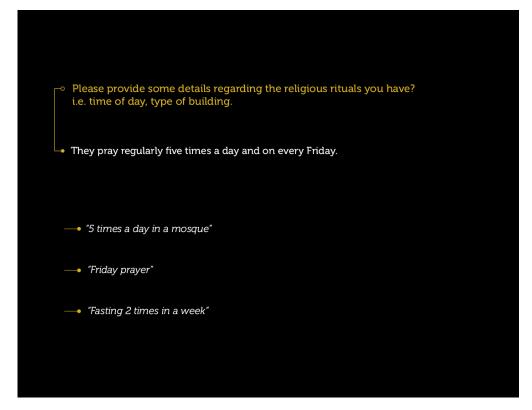


Figure 6. Ritual Detail

Figure 6 follows up with the next question, "Please provide some details regarding the religious rituals you have? i.e. time of day, type of building". The main responses gathered from this question was "five times a day in a mosque" and "Friday prayer". A small portion of participants answered with "fasting two times a week".

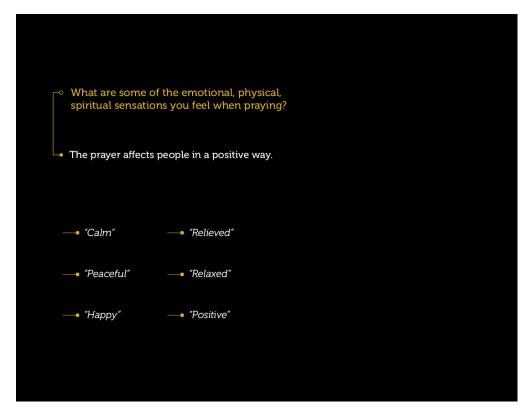


Figure 7. Prayer Sensations

Figure 7 follows with the question, "What are some of the emotional, physical, spiritual sensations you feel when praying?". The common results gathered are calm, relieved, peaceful, relaxed, happy, positive, excited, respectful, reverence, safe, confident, connected, and closer to Allah (God).

Think about your experience during religious holidays like Ramadan, Christmas, and Hanukkah etc. In what ways is your experience different between your hometown and where you live now?

Participants have difficulties with not being able to feel their religious holidays as they would at home.

"Less people and the importance of it is less pronounced"

"The social atmosphere is pretty much nonexistent here"

"Less family bonding because I do not have family here less sense of home"

Figure 8. Religious Holiday Experience

Figure 8 includes the question, "Think about your experiences during religious holidays like Ramadan, Christmas, and Hanukkah etc. In what ways is your experience different between your hometown and where you live now?". From the responses the three most common answers were lesser amount of people celebrating and the less pronounced importance of the holiday, nonexistent social atmosphere and less sense of home and family because of having no relatives here.

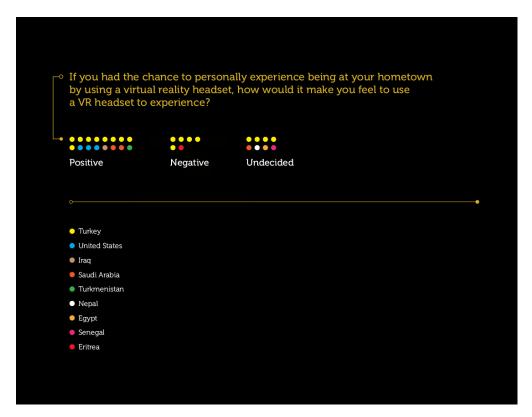


Figure 9. Virtual Reality Experience

Figure 9 depicts the last question of, "If you had the chance to personally experience being at your hometown by using a virtual reality headset, how would it make you feel to use a VR headset to experience?". Each response is color coded to the country of the participant and of the 30 participants 16 of them were positive about the VR headset experience and stated they would use it. 6 of the participants state that it is not a good idea or that it would not make a difference. The remaining 8 participants were undecided on the VR headset experience.

Testing Results

The following describes and conveys the results obtained from the exhibition. The people who visited the exhibition tested the design solution and gave feedback. This operated test has qualitative data. With the provided design solution at the show, the test results revealed that the immersive experience made visitors feel the experience and transport the emotion as if it were real. It was also very clear that having a multi-sense service was very efficient in transporting them to another place. Furthermore, the sound of prayer is one of the compelling sides of the experience for visitors. One of the participants from Turkey said that "The video took me back to my adolescent years, it was like a flashback in time".

DESIGN SOLUTION

In constructing this design solution my first intentions were to focus on refugees directly. However, due to the current situation mainly location and accessibility, I decided to shift my focus towards immigrants. Therefore, because of the difficulties in conducting studies on actual refugees, ideas for developing simulations that would help us learn what would impact immigrants the most instead were investigated. The target audience for this research was people who have somehow immigrated or lives far away from their homeland. In doing so, the data could be extrapolated and analyzed and lead to further ideas on the possible problems and challenges that refuges might actually face.

From the results that was produced by the online survey, the design solution greatly came into fruition with the details obtained from the responses of the participants. According participant responses, the participants mostly missed the call to prayer and stated that they could not experience the cultural and religious holidays as they did at their home country. They also noted that it would relieve them if they could visually be in their country and that they would be happier in this case. In this study, based solely on these results, the design solution aimed as best as possible to encompass all participants and provide an answer to their needs and a solution to their problems.

For the first stage of the solution, I chose to build a booth that could accommodate one person and provide a private setting. In essence this

booth would then be understood as transporting the user to their homeland and disengaging them from their current surroundings. Although at first, the idea to use virtual reality headsets was quite interesting and attractive, unforeseen problems arose with this idea. Virtual reality headsets at this time are expensive technology and is not commonly found among most people. Also, it has been reported that some users of virtual reality headsets have side effects mainly motion sickness problems7. The ultimate goal of the design solution was to create a setting that can be universally transferable across the world. Therefore. our focus was shifted towards visual and aural stimulation through the use of a computer and headphone, a very common technology that is found in most people's homes.

In creating this simulation, a black booth of the dimensions 80x35x35 inches was prepared. This booth was outfitted with a curtain to provide a private setting and sense of solitude. Within the booth, a large monitor and computer combined with headphones were provided. Here in this booth, participants in the exhibition would be able to watch various clips and images of their home country. At the same time, they would hear the call to prayer and other religious or cultural sounds to lessen their longing for home. In doing so, the participant will feel departed from where they actually are and instead have an experience where they are visually transported to their home country and in a sense reattached to their roots.

In future stages of the planned design solution, I plan to incorporate various other aspects to this experience. This would essentially start with including several other countries and not focusing on mainly one. Another aspect would be to focus on what sort of objects, whether they be material or abstract, are missed most and add that into the experience.

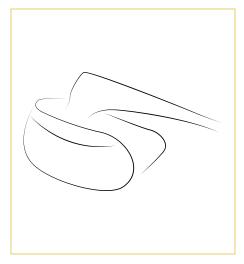
In providing these further additions, with the use of a virtual reality head set, immigrated or displaced people could have the means to escape from where they are now and visit their homeland by having a booth in a specially separated part of their home. With this booth in their home for personal use, they can choose what they miss most and experience it both visually and aurally. In essence they will be able to completely experience what they have been longing for and fill that need without having to travel back home.



The booth. The dimensions 80x35x35 inches



Computer combined with headphones.







VR headset usage

DISCUSSION

All results of this study were gathered using the responses from the 30 participants of the online survey and the feedback of the visitors of the exhibition. These results suggest that immigrated and displaced people experience several difficulties in both religious and cultural aspects. The responses provide further insight into the difficulties they face and the underlying reasons why they feel the sense of longing and why they cannot experience the same feelings here as they did back home. In order to live, apply and keep alive these religious and cultural rituals, these people need to experience the same atmosphere that they have back in their home country. However, being in a foreign country makes this guite difficult and the same ambiance or atmosphere and resources are hard to find or even nonexistent depending on where they are currently. These people have to subsist without having many of the religious and or cultural norms that they would have easy access to at home.

This study aimed to especially explain what kind of religious and cultural rituals these people have the hardest time in practicing and focuses on how to relieve the problems that may arise from this dilemma. It is clearly seen that among the participants of the study, a majority of the participants have difficulties in practicing their religious rituals. Because of this hardship, these people are forced into a sense of solitude and their personalities are also affected. They are led into a state of sadness and become less confident in themselves. When examining the results from the online survey it is seen that when people pray at home or at

a mosque they feel happier, safer, at peace, relieved and closer to Allah (God). The design solution aims to provide an answer to alleviate the sense of longing that immigrated and displaced people feel by providing a means to experience the objects they miss whether it be material or abstract. With this provided solution, it was observed that participants show a positive response and are on the path to overcoming this sense of longing by visually and aurally experiencing what they specifically missed from home. The test results and feedback obtained during the exhibition show that a great leap has been made in the right direction in resolving the problems faced by immigrated and displaced people.

Based on the findings, this study could be an exemplary solution especially to future designers and researchers dedicated to helping individuals that are have been forced to abandon their countries or refugees. The research conducted in this study will pave the way for my future research and will be a beacon in pioneering new design solutions upon my return to Turkey. Due to the close proximity to Syria of the city and university that I will return to and start my teaching position, I envision that this environment will better influence and guide me on a path to choosing a suitable area of focus for my doctoral studies. With the aforementioned resources and the ability to directly come into contact with many of the refugees along with various other sources of study, new ideas for the next stage of this design solution has already begun to take root. It is of no doubt that instead of

conducting an online survey of people, being able to individually and personally interview each refugee will provide a richer source of information which in turn will lead to a better solution to the problem.

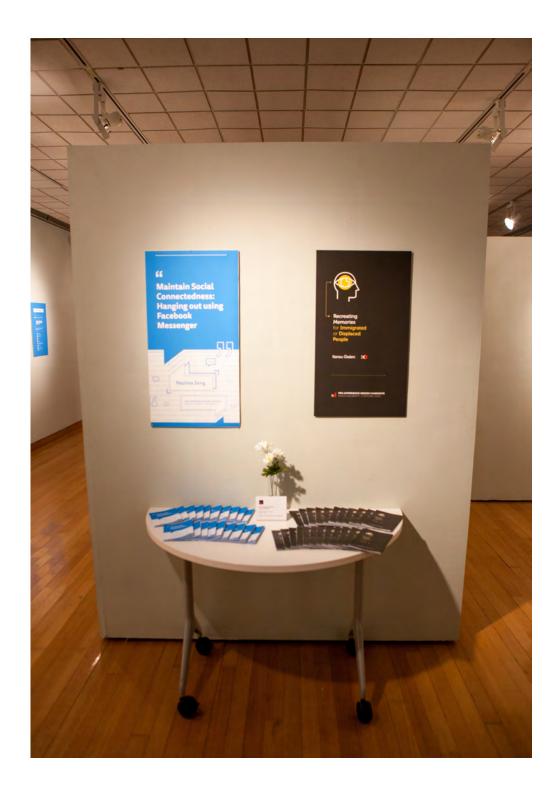
Additionally, there will be no time constrictions in gathering data and there will be more sources to gather the data from. Therefore, instead of extrapolating information gathered from immigrated and displaced people it will be highly beneficial in testing and observing whether the tested model is efficient using data gathered from people in actual refugee status. After obtaining the results, various revisions based on these results can be made to better modify the design and hence develop a more fruitful solution based on the needs of actual refugees. In this regard, the final product will have been tested by the refugees themselves and will be more suited especially for these refugees with no shortcomings in the end product. With the surplus of time on our side and an excess of technological resources, a more comprehensive end product resulting from a longer period of study is bound to emerge.

In returning to my home country and breathing its fresh and rejuvenating air, I believe that by remembering my refugee Circassian ancestors, using my personal experiences and insight I will further develop the design product. As previously mentioned, if I were to conduct this study again I would plan to expand the research into a more comprehensive field. At this stage, further work in this

area is in the planning stage for future research back in Turkey. The time allotted for this study here was constricting for a wide analysis however given more time I believe that more unexpected problems would be uncovered. In this regard, by discovering these problems a better end product might have been created and it might have been beneficial to not just one type of refugee but to all refugees around the world.

XD:MFA THESIS SHOW

Thesis is accompany with an exhibition as part of the Experience Design Practicum Project process. The show gives audience is broad overview about the research and the product. It includes information, results of the research, and design solution.



The thesis show was exhibited on April 18th - 22nd, 2016. The reception was held in Robert E. and Martha Hull Lee Gallery at Miami University. The reception is held on Friday, April 22, 2016, from 5pm - 7pm.

The photos were taken by Miami University's Communication and Marketing Department. Some of them were also taken by Bryant Thomas, Andrea Mateus, and Paulina Zeng.















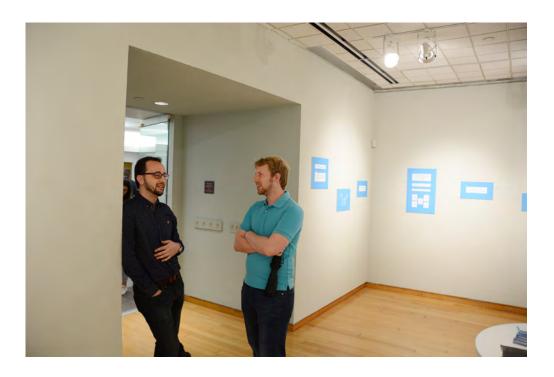












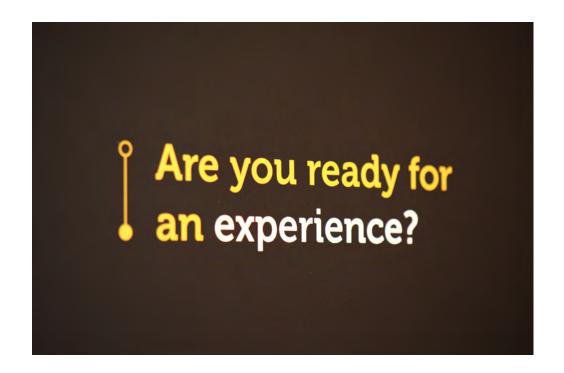


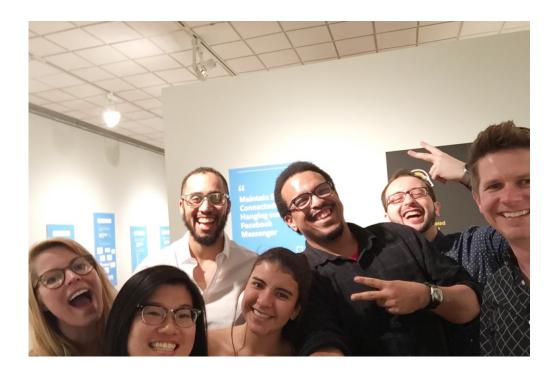


















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APPENDICES

Survey Questions

- 1- How old are you?
- 2- Where is your hometown?
- 3- Where do you live now?
- 4- If you have a religious affiliation, what is it?
- 5- Is prayer important to you? If so, is there a special place you pray and can you find such a place like this in the USA?
- 6- If you are not living in your native country, what do you miss most about the prayer rituals?
- 7- Please provide some details regarding the religious rituals you have? i.e. time of day, type of building.
- 8- What are some of the emotional, physical, spiritual sensations you feel when praying?
- 9- Think about your experience during religious holidays like Ramadan, Christmas, and Hanukkah etc. In what ways is your experience different between your hometown and where you live now?
- 10- If you had the chance to personally experience being at your hometown by using a virtual reality headset, how would it make you feel to use a VR headset to experience?

Testing/Feedback Questions

- 1- How old are you?
- 2- Where is your hometown?
- 3- Where do you live now?
- 4- Tell me what you liked and disliked about the experience?
- 5- Tell me about your overall experience at the exhibition?





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