Patterns of Belonging

Promoting integration of Syrian and Eritrean refugees in Nijmegen

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Abstract

This research has the purpose of examining to which extent is integration of Syrian and Eritrean refugees in the Dutch municipality of Nijmegen successful. The Netherlands has received a large influx of forced migrants since 2014 and the numbers are growing. The assimilationist approach to integration lacks space for the refugees’ individual deterrents to integrate like motivation, perceived discrimination and feelings of belonging. The cultural cleavages between the Dutch society and the refugees may lead to identity or cultural conflicts. Using integration as a tool for conflict prevention, this thesis’ goal is to assess refugees’ perspective on integration through interviews and compare it with the normative governmental approach to evaluate the efficiency of the national approach to integration. Evidence gathered through this research shows that the 'othering' process, cultural cleavages and lack off language skills are some of the most noticeable impediments for a successful integration of Syrian and Eritrean refugees in the Nijmegen. It is hoped that this study helps finding better practices to overcome the limitations for a successful integration of refugees in Nijmegen.

Key words: Refugees – Integration – Nijmegen – Othering
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List of acronyms

CBP: Common Basic Principles
CBS: Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek
COA: Centraal Orgaan opvang Asielzoekers
CSOs: Civil Society Organizations
DNB: De Nederlandsche Bank
EU: European Union
ICR: Interactive Conflict Resolution
IND: Immigratie- en Naturalisatiedienst
NGO: Non-Governmental Organization
PAR: Participatory Action Research
UNHCR: United Nations

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1. INTRODUCTION

The advent of violent conflicts in Africa and in the Middle East forced people to flee their home country to find safe heavens elsewhere. Those people are called refugees. According to the Oxford definition, a refugee is a ‘person who has been forced to leave their country in order to escape war, persecution, or natural disaster’. Most of these refugees want to go as far as possible from the violence that put their countries in crisis, and for many of them the final destination of their diaspora is Europe.

The refugee crisis have been everywhere in the news for the past years. The European Union designed some basic principles and actions that should be taken in case of an alarming influx of forced migrants to its territory. However, each European state established a domestic policy regarding the refugees arriving in their land. For instance, The Netherlands has a strong policy regarding granting asylum to asylum seekers. A Dutch report released by the Ministry of Security and Justice called ‘How (un)restrictive are we’ (2015) shows that The Netherlands is the Sixth country that most rejects asylum requests, behind Greece, Hungary, Romania, Luxemburg and Poland¹. The migrants that could have their asylum request accepted need to go through procedures of integration established by the Immigration and Naturalization Service (IND, in Dutch). At the end of the day, there is no way to stop the influx of refugees while the conflict is still happening in their countries. If they are here to stay, there should be a policy to manage the relationship of both worlds and to find better way for practices of living together. This policy is called integration.

Integration is the process of becoming part of a society (Penninx, 2009), and this process starts when a forced migrant arrives in the host country he is intending to ask for asylum (Strang & Ager, 2010). Integration have the approach of a normative policy but also of a local practice. Its specificities are determined by the rule of law and then it becomes a governmental policy. However, it is at the local level that integration is turned into action. Although the European Union has a list of Common Basic Principles (CBP) regarding integration, the ratification of the norm is done in a different way between the member states. For instance, the Dutch approach to integration has a strong assimilationist characteristic. To assimilate to the Dutch culture, the refugee would need to learn Dutch language, the country’s rules, culture and history and to accept the country’s laws and values. This assimilationist characteristic of the governmental normative approach to integration shows that there is no space for the analysis of an individual perspective of the most affected by integration policies. The newcomer’s ideas, motivations, expectations, perceptions and feelings of belonging are not part of the national integration policy.

These information are extremely important to understand if integration is really working or not and why. Although the enforcement of integration courses and exams were implemented through the Civic Integration Act, there is a growing feeling that refugees are failing to integrate in The Netherlands, ‘either through lack of will or lack of opportunity’ (Dutch News, 2017, February 19). But what does failing to integrate means? In fact, Milton et al. (2013) argue that if refugees are failing to integrate, this is probably ‘due to the negative perception of refugees and the negative impact they can have on the host country’ (Black and Sesay 1997:252; Jacobsen 2002:586; Martin 2005:332, p628). Hence, refugees may be targeted with prejudice because of a general ‘fear of the other’. The consequences of this fear is reflected in the asylum exclusionary policy of The Netherlands that unfortunately contributes to social exclusion (e.g. Di Saint Pierre et al., 2015; Bakker et al, 2016). Another reason behind the belief that refugees are failing to integrate is that refugees are not completing the Integration Courses and exams on time. Thus, the real question here should not be if they are failing or not to integrate, but to what extent integration of refugees in The Netherlands is successful. How has it been done, what are the procedures for a newcomer to integrate, and if there are any barriers, how to find better practices to overcome them? This is what I intend to address in this thesis.

By the fact that every place has its own unique dynamics and every refugee its own unique background, a general formula of integration may not work with the same effectiveness in every case. Nonetheless, Strang & Ager (2008) developed a framework that is capable of dealing with the spectrum between national and local perspectives to integration. The authors created a framework that shows four core themes that should be taken into account on integration policies to finally reach successful integration. These themes the foundational rights of the newcomer, the facilitators of the integration process, the importance of social connections and finally the markers and means of integration. The author’s framework shows us that there is an interdependence between the theme’s domains. To understand and realize to what extent is integration working in Nijmegen, these themes shall be used to assess the Dutch integration policies and then compare it with the refugees’ experiences and perspectives on integration.

Empirical evidence in the literature about refugees’ integration has already shown the existence of barriers for a successful integration in the country. For instance, the thought that the terrorism crisis and refugee crisis are the same (e.g. Wike, R. Stokes, B. & Simmons, K.2016; Schmid, A. P., 2016; Nail, T. 2016), discrimination and the ‘othering’ process (e.g. Verkuyten, 2016; Di Saint Pierre et al., 2015; Van Doorn et al., 2013; Ghorashi & Van Tilburg, 2006), the securitization of refugees (Huysmans, 2000), and the assimilationist approach to integration (e.g. Entzinger, 2006; Alencar & Deuze, 2017). But how do the refugees face these barriers on a local level? Despite the governmental integration policies, it is only at the local level that we can understand individual perceptions and motivations to integrate,
especially because people can have their voice heard and their local needs addressed.

This research focuses on the integration of refugees in The Netherlands on a local level, more specifically in the municipality of Nijmegen. The final goal of this thesis is to investigate to what extent is integration of Syrian and Eritrean refugees in Nijmegen successful. The investigation process was done through three main steps. The assessment of Dutch policies regarding integration, the textual analysis of previous researches about integration of refugees in The Netherlands and the collection of refugees’ local perspectives about integration and their own situation as asylum seekers. The gaps between national expectations and local motivations to integrate could be analyzed by comparing policy and practice. Only then it was possible to evaluate the extension of effective integration of refugees in Nijmegen.

The local approach involves the targeted municipality, its NGOs, citizens and asylum seekers. In the Dutch city of Nijmegen, an organization called Yalla Foundation advises on inclusive society between the Dutch citizens and refugees as well as encourages on- and offline social connections with refugees/newcomers. Their work is based on empirical action, raising awareness about the refugee issue, bureaucratic aid and building social connections. The refugee groups that the organization targets have a Syrian and Eritrean background. The Annual Report on Integration (CBS, 2016) shows us that there are refugees of Iraqi, Afghan, Iranian, Somali, Eritrean, Syrian and others background settled in The Netherlands. The largest groups in the country are of Iraqi, Afghan and Syrian background, and more than 50% of each refugee group is composed of newcomers - refugees from the first generation -. However, in recent years the largest flow of refugees coming to The Netherlands have Syrian and Eritrean backgrounds (Dutch Annual Report on Integration 2016; Bakker et al., 2016). In the past few years, more precisely since 2013, the largest influx of refugees on the municipality of Nijmegen was of Syrian – 40% of the municipality total – and Eritrean – 16% of the municipality total – backgrounds (Gemeente Nijmegen, 2016). For this reason, Yalla Foundation’s work is focused on these two refugee groups. The interviewees were provided by Yalla Foundation, and the final findings of this research is of paramount importance for the organization’s work on the integration issue.

This topic is timely and affects people’s lives on a daily basis. The refugee crisis have been regularly in the international political agenda and mass media. Likewise, the influx of refugees to Dutch cities changes the local everyday dynamics of people. For the refugees, adapting to a new culture is a challenge because of cultural cleavages, making integration possible only if there is a successful management of these different realities.

1.1. Research Questions and Objectives

The objective behind this research is to promote better strategies for Syrian and Eritrean refugees to integrate in the Dutch society. The research will be conducted on an individual level by the analysis of refugees’ personal struggles and motivations to
integrate. There are three reasons why the focus is on these two groups. First of all, according to the Dutch Annual Report on Integration 2016, the migration balance of Syrian and Eritrean refugees increased substantially in 2014 and 2015. That’s why on 1st January 2016 the amount of Syrian and Eritrean refugees in the Netherlands reached 44 thousand and 8 thousand, respectively (CBS, 2016). Second of all, the biggest amount of refugees in Nijmegen come from a Syrian and Eritrean background. It seems that narrowing the research into these two groups is logical because the research is focusing on the municipality of Nijmegen and its surroundings. Last but not least, the work of the NGO Yalla Foundation focuses on these two groups of refugees because these are the one that approach the organization the most for help. As the research is being done for the organization, it became clearer to me that the research focus really should be on these two nationalities, especially because these are the only groups of refugees the organization could provide me to be interviewed for research purposes.

That been said, the research question of this thesis is ‘to what extent is integration of Syrian and Eritrean refugees in Nijmegen successful?’ The conceptual framework of successful integration developed by Strang & Ager (2010) is going to be the theoretical basis of this research. According to this framework, there are four domains that the refugee need to go through to reach a full integration in the host society. These domains are explained in the next session. Notwithstanding, to answer this main question appropriately, other sub questions should be addressed throughout the research. The first one would be 1) how is the integration of refugees being promoted in the Netherlands? In this sub question, I will assess the governmental approach to integration and compare it to the conceptual framework. The second one would be 2) what approach does Yalla Foundation use towards the integration of refugees in Nijmegen? Comparing the empirical actions with the conceptual framework is a way to find the strong and weak points of the dynamics within the organization. It is also important to compare the framework concept of successful integration to the refugees’ understandings, perceptions and visions on what exactly is integration and being integrated in the host society. Therefore the third sub question would be 3) what are Eritrean and Syrian refugees’ perceptions of integration in Nijmegen?

After reaching the findings and conclusions, it is necessary to analyze what can be done in practice to change the current situation of the refugees in Nijmegen. These recommendations based on the findings are going to benefit Yalla Foundation’s work and the refugees themselves. A practical solution to the problems regarding integration is the final goal of this research. This thesis aims at giving recommendation practices on how to overcome potential barriers for a successful integration of the very refugees in the Dutch society; more specifically in the municipality of Nijmegen.
1.2. Scientific & Societal Relevance

In the past decade, a lot has been written regarding the forced migration of people in conflicting areas to other countries. The amount of refugees from Africa the Middle East fleeing to Europe is increasing as the civil conflicts in these places have risen. However, sometimes it is hard for a refugee – or asylum seeker – to integrate in the host society. The limitations for a full integration may be different according to the background of the refugees as well as the cultural cleavages between the individual refugee’s reality and the reality on the host society. This research’s scientific relevance can be explained in three ways. First, by the fact that this research is going to focus on Syrian and Eritrean refugees in Nijmegen, I am going to be adding another case study to the literature on Integration. It is indeed relevant to have more information regarding integration practices from a local perspective because the national level does not have the tools to reach the individual struggles and personal backgrounds that may be deterrent in the dynamics of inclusion/exclusion (Strang & Ager, 2008). I offered a different perspective through the bottom-up work of the NGO Yalla Foundation and reach the domains that the governmental approach could not.

Second, this research was built on a multi-dimensional approach to integration. This definition goes further than the interpretation of ‘integration as a two-way process’ because it involves the perceptions of acceptance and discrimination, the conditions to participate in the host society and the actual participation/interaction between the refugees and host society (ECRE, 1999; in Strang & Ager, 2010). In other words, the definition of integration as a multidimensional process gives ground for a methodological combination of the concepts from the literature on integration of refugees in The Netherlands, motivations, attitudes, feelings of belonging and the process of ‘othering’ (Mountz, 2008) to address the possible limitations for a successful integration of Syrian and Eritrean refugees in the Nijmegen. There is only limited literature that combines such local features and compares it to the normative governmental approach to integration in Nijmegen. Thereby, this research aims at overcoming this knowledge gap. The final goal I strive to achieve is to find feasible ways to overcome the limitations for a successful integration of these very refugees in Nijmegen.

Third, it is important to mention that the politicization of migrant integration in the Netherlands ‘has altered the interplay between knowledge production and policymaking’ (Entzinger & Scholten, 2015, p60). In the Netherlands, Sweden and the United Kingdom, there was a huge involvement of social researchers in policymaking (Hammar 1985; Favell 2001; Scholten 2011 in Entzinger & Scholten, 2015) regarding migration and integration. Considering that migration has risen in the political agenda worldwide, The Netherlands is a good example of how scientific research can be used as the basis of policy change. In fact, this research aims to guide integration policies in Nijmegen by assessing former research and empirical evidence collected in the field. Therefore, this thesis should be used as an empirical tool for real change in refugee’s
lives through the management if integration practices through NGOs in the municipality.

There is a large social and societal relevance on obtaining knowledge about the limitations for a successful integration of refugees. First, a better understanding of the limiting factors for integration would benefit the refugees to overcome the adaptation struggles they have in the host society. Hence, this would improve their feeling of belonging and ultimately diminish some of the general tensions between them and the Dutch society. Undermining the possibility of grievances by managing identity and cultural cleavages between the host society and refugees is a strategic way of avoiding conflict and consequently being beneficial for both of them as a zero-sum game. Dealing with immigration is one of the top priorities in the actual Dutch political agenda but political parties have different approaches to the refugee problem. Public opinion on the issue has generated tensions and protests that are polarizing the population because of a growing fear that ‘minorities are failing to integrate’ (Dutch News, 2017, February 19). Therefore, understanding what is really lacking for a successful integration would help to increase the refugee’s social capital.

Second, the way refugees are perceived is prominent to understand the individual practices of inclusion and exclusion. External influences like political discourses and mass media play an important role on the individuals’ opinion formation, hence shaping attitudes towards the refugees. The way refugees perceive themselves in the host country is also important because these perceptions shape their feelings of belonging. Evidence shows that the perception of an increasing discrimination towards the refugees in The Netherlands make them wish to return to their home countries (Di Saint Pierre et al., 2015). Analyzing perceptions, motivations and the ‘othering’ dynamics are hence going to make an impact on the lives of refugees.

1.3. Research Design and Structure

The following structure is going to be used in this research. In chapter 2 the methodology for collecting data will be assessed. After an explanation of the importance of such methods for this research, some limitations in the methodology and the actual practice in the field must be mentioned. In chapter 3 I will discuss about the different concepts of integration in the literature. Then, I will compare the top-down and bottom-up approaches to integration and assess their importance. The European Union and Dutch normative approaches to integration shall be explained in this chapter as well. Today, the Dutch norms regarding integration are different from the approach they used to have in the 90’s and before. Thus, in this chapter I will explain how the evolution of the integration policy in The Netherlands happened, hence answering the first sub-question. By doing this, we can understand how the Dutch policy became more assimilationist throughout the years in a better way. In addition, integration can also be used as a tool for conflict prevention. The explanation of the relation between conflict prevention and integration shall be quickly explored in this thesis. Furthermore, Strang & Ager’s theoretical framework is applied in this thesis.
as a formula to reach a successful integration between the migrants and the host society. I will assess previous literature on the integration of refugees in The Netherlands and discuss the applicability of the concept of the constitutive ‘other’ or the process of ‘othering’. The first two sub-questions of this thesis are going to be answered in this chapter.

Chapter 4 provides us with a quick explanation on why Syrian and Eritrean refugees are coming to The Netherlands. A brief statement about the background of the Syrian and Eritrean conflicts is also going to be provided in this chapter.

In chapter 5 I will be aiming at answering the second and third sub-questions, as well as the research question, from a local perspective. This chapter aims to explain the work of Yalla Foundation, understand the refugees’ perception on the different integration domains and finally understand if the integration of these forced migrants in the Dutch society is really working in practice.

Finally, Chapter 6 will conclude this research, showing its final findings, limitations and recommendations for practice.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A qualitative methodology based on triangulation is the best way to reach better findings, where I can use mixed methods like semi-structured interviews or in-depth interviews (Baxter & Eyles, 1997), literature review and participatory action research (Clifford et al., 2016). This may be the most suitable method for my research because I have the mandatory need to understand what the limitations on integration processes are and how to overcome it. Triangulation has a multifaceted characteristic, which gives more credibility for my research because multiple sources that provide similar findings increases credibility (Knafl and Breitmayer, 1989; Krefting, 1990 in Baxter & Eyles, 1997).

There is an interesting use on semi-structure interviews because they are not strict to the questions formulated beforehand. The interviewees have more space to express their opinions, emotions and conclusions about a determined issue. This is an important aspect to be considered when applying to my research because the interviewee may want to further express their opinions beyond the answers given to the questionnaire, which can lead to a better comprehension of his/her opinions, feelings and motivations. Literature review is another interesting method that I used on my research because it involves the assessment of the current state of the topic, its key questions, methodologies and experts. Participatory action research is a very important way of benefiting the community with the research. The affected community is part of the formulation of questions that should be investigated to raise better actions towards the advance of integration. Clifford et al. (2016) describe in their book that ‘the data that Participatory Action Research can produce are also more likely to be useful, accurate and to lead to actions that address people’s needs and desires.’ (p212).

I can address the importance of the chosen methodology for my research goals
by its applicability and relevance. For me to figure out if integration is working or not and its limitations, talking to people would be the best way for me to reach the answers. By using semi-structured or in-depth interviews, literature review and Participatory Action Research, I have different ways to approach people and understand their perceptions and motivations. The use of quantitative methods are not useful for my research on integration because surveys in general reach findings that are too simplistic, thus there is always room for misinterpretation. The use of diaries, for instance, is also complicated because it demands a rigorous research strategy that may not match with the ones that I chose. It demands a commitment from both sides, and I do not know what the situation of each refugee is, therefore perhaps this method is unproductive. An alternative for this method may be in-depth interviews. Initially I had the idea of using focus groups as a way of gathering data as well. However, there was no opportunity for me to do it throughout the whole time I had at my internship. I decided then to focus on the interviews.

There are of course some limitations on my research methodology. Potential problems for any kind of interview would be asking too intimate questions or perhaps step into identity issues. There is an ethic limit on what I can and cannot ask as well as an awkward dilemma if the interviewee express racism or other offensive views (Flowerdew et al., 2005). There’s also a need to analyze the cultural context of the refugees and gender relations beforehand. Also, the problems with literature review are mainly the fact that I can rely on out-of-date material and sometimes it is difficult do differ relevant and irrelevant literature. PAR also have weaknesses. For instance it does not permit standardization of the phenomena (Clifford et al., 2016). To overcome these problems, I evaluated the interview flow to check if I could go deeper on my questions. Likewise, the women were interviewed without the presence of another men to avoid cultural gender cleavages. When not found in academic articles, I used media articles to find recent information about integration dynamics in Nijmegen.

Nevertheless, the primary data collection techniques that I used in this research were mainly interviews, literature review and PAR. By using these techniques, I could have a better understanding on people’s backgrounds, perspectives and interpretations of their own realities and therefore find a way to overcome the deterrents for a successful integration.

2.1. Semi-structured Interviews

The work of Yalla Foundation aims towards helping refugees that recently arrived in The Netherlands. All the people that accepted being interviewed were provided by the organization. My aim was to look for the quality of the interviews instead of interviewing many people. During the three months of internship, I intended to interview at least 15 people, being 8 interviews from male and female Syrian citizens and 7 interviews from male and female Eritrean citizens. However, the challenge of finding Syrian and Eritrean people that are capable of speaking English
should not be ignored here. In addition, we should consider the availability of the interviewees as well as the availability of the Yalla Foundation’s office. These deterrents were carefully considered and discussed with the organization a couple of times. Unfortunately the amount of people capable and available to be interviewed needed to be reduced to 9, and those interviews needed to be carried not only at the Yalla’s Foundation office, but also at the Public Library of Nijmegen and some of the interviewees’ houses. Therefore the final result was that I could interview 5 Syrian males and 1 Syrian female; 1 Eritrean male and 2 Eritrean females.

Despite the number of interviews, the information provided is extremely important to understand the dynamics of refugee’s integration in The Netherlands. The outcome of these interviews is important to analyze the dynamics of integration specifically in the municipality of Nijmegen and its surroundings. Although these interviews could provide interesting insights about the local situation of the refugees in the city of Nijmegen, these results cannot be seen as a representative of the whole community of Syrian and Eritrean refugees in The Netherlands due to its spatial focus and limited number of interviews. Therefore, to overcome this limitation I made use of literature analysis about the integration of refugees in The Netherlands. With the support of previous research, I could assess which information is more pertinent within the final findings of this thesis.

The interviews were made following a protocol (appendix I) that was developed by a collaboration with Yalla Foundation. However, the development of the conversations with each person had a different process. The conversations needed to be flexible as the interviews were in motion. This is partly explained by the fact that some questions with no research value were asked to build confidence between the interviewer and the interviewee. Deeper questions were asked depending on the course of the interviews. Another thing that should be considered here is the lack of English knowledge and strong accent from some interviewees. These facts limited some of the answers provided and might have caused unintended miscommunication. To overcome this, some questions were asked more than once – sometimes even three times – to make the message clear from both sides.

All the interviews were recorded with a smartphone. Because of the Yalla Foundation’s office availability, some of the audio files had better quality than the others. Also, some interviewees couldn’t make to the office, thus some interviews were conducted at their homes or at the Public Library of the municipality of Nijmegen. The transcription of the interviews was done with no help from any kind of software; it was done manually in a Microsoft Word file. However, the interviews were coded and analyzed through the software QDA Miner Lite and also manually through Word. I asked the participants for consent before recording each interview. I also explained to them about the importance of this research to the community and made clear that their identity would not be disclosed. Finally, the interviewees could understand that this research was not only for personal use and that Yalla Foundation
would use its recommendations to look for better practices in the field of integration at the municipality of Nijmegen. At the end of the day, they realized that the final goal of this research is to effectively aid people in practice and undermine the distance between themselves and the Dutch society.

2.2. Literature Analysis

There is plenty of literature on the refugee integration topic. Due to the amount of interviews that was possible to be done, I turned myself to the analysis of academic and media articles, books and policy documents. Nonetheless, the use of academic articles was the biggest tool used at this research. This is because most part of the evolution of the academic debate on integration happened through this vehicle, and this evolution has a direct impact on how national policies are created and institutionalized in a determined country. I made use of some academic articles about the changing of the Dutch policy regarding integration as well. In addition, there are academic articles comparing the Dutch policy with other countries’ policies. This is interesting because each country deals with refugees in a different way, depending on their internal law and the origins of the forced migrants. When not found in the literature, the most recent information regarding asylum seekers and refugees in The Netherlands were found in media articles. Another important literature was the analysis of policy papers to understand the principles that guide the country towards a solution for the refugee crisis. The Dutch state of law should describe the obligations and rights of the asylum seekers, hence having direct influence on the lives if the refugees. At last but not least, books were used for theoretical basis and methodologies. Unfortunately I could not find many books that were really useful for such a specific theme like the integration in Nijmegen. However, the amount of academic articles that I could find were sufficient for me to reach the findings I needed. In sum, the main explanation for the use of many different literatures is that it could fill the gap that existed in this research because of the amount of interviews.

2.3. Participatory Action Research

Perhaps Participatory Action Research is one of the most empirical methodology in Human Geography. In a sense, it is a kind of activism because its objectives are the democratization and demystification of the research, and the results are used to improve the life of the targeted community (Breitbart, 2016). The questioning of who really benefits from the research created space for this methodology to be conducted on behalf of other people and with their collaboration to collect data, engage on critical analysis and design actions that improve people’s lives and potentiate social change (idem).

It is interesting to notice that this methodology has a research topic formulated within the affected community, and the theme and core questions of this research are discussed and agreed by both subject and object of the research. The Participatory
Action Research methodology fits perfectly with the research topic proposed by Yalla Foundation and the community they offer aid. The principles of the Participatory Action Research are the constant dialogue between researcher and community to produce a complete understand of the environment; sharing power, responsibilities and opinions on research methods within the research – using their lives as the basis of the investigation –; aiding the research with supplying information and technical skills and using participation as a tool to address strengths and problems. The whole research is built based on the daily dynamics of people’s lives, and its methods are created according to the need and availability of the community. To achieve the final goals, the researcher and the community work together to formulate questions, and the interviewees are asked to engage and help the research anytime they could to further enjoy from its findings.

Although this research is fairly based on the politics and ideology of Participatory Action Research, its data-collection methods were shrunk to a qualitative approach. The interviews were designed by collaboration with Yalla Foundation after debating with the refugees about their needs and problems. The interviewees are asked to help the research by speaking to other people as well as discuss the community problems that should be addressed on it, contact more people to engage on the research and share knowledge and information about the issue in check. Thus, the shared responsibility starts after the interview is complete. As it was mentioned before, this methodology is more like a form of activism, combining data collection, critical inquiry and action (ibidem). In sum, Participatory Action Research has a strong practical capability because it can address real needs and trigger change. Its core concepts and philosophy were applied throughout this research, always aiming at the development of the community.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Before explaining the theoretical framework used on this research some other things should be clarified. The framework is the basis of analysis of the raw data. However, the objective of this research is to understand what the deterrents for a successful integration are. This chapter starts defining the concept of integration, making a comparison with the many definitions that exist in the literature. After defining the concept, the state of law applied to the EU and more specifically to The Netherlands should be analyzed as well. The integration policy in Nijmegen is a reflection of the national law and the common principles stated on EU documents. Furthermore, there is a need to differ the top-down and bottom-up approaches to integration. The national perspective is mainly normative while the local perspective deals with the practice, by definition. It is also interesting to notice that integration is an important tool for conflict prevention. An integrative society withholds better practices of living together, thus undermining the probability of clashes between the forced migrants
and the host society. At this point, the literature regarding integration should be further analyzed and then applied to the theoretical framework. Then, the framework will be explained and assessed. I might say that a framework that can completely gather all the information needed for a rightful policy regarding integration is yet to be created. However, there is no way to deny the applicability of the framework created by Strang & Ager to this research.

3.1. Definition of Integration

Defining the concept of integration is rather complicated because the definition of this concept has many variations. With the rise of the refugee crisis, the concept has attracted the attention not only of academics but also policymakers, hence changing the concept in a way that could adjust to their political interests. Alencar & Deuze (2017) explain that ‘despite the significant development of empirical research, there is a lack of consensus on what the concept of integration refers to’ (p2). The consequence of this lack of consensus is that ‘there is no clear measurement to determine when an individual is integrated into a new society’ in the scientific community. (Favell, 2003). Another problem is that in most countries the definition of integration is not in a law, but in their policies or strategies, and it’s ‘often formulated in broad terms describing the aim of integration, the indicators of integration and the means by which the government sets out to achieve integration’ (UNHCR, 2009). All this confusion about the definition is problematic for the empirical study of exclusion patterns and the integration process (Penninx, 2009).

The simplest definition of the concept of integration is described by Penninx (2009). The author tries to avoid the ‘multiple-definition’ problem by arguing that Integration is the process of becoming part of a society. This does not mean that there should be no distinction between a national and an integrated foreigner. However, authors like Ward (2013) goes in a different direction and argue that integration is the ‘full assimilation of migrants into the new culture’ (In Alencar & Deuze,2017, p2). In his definition, integration has a characteristic of the ‘assimilationist turn’ instead of a multicultural one, which may step into identity issues. Other authors like Bhatia and Ram (2009) go a little bit further and argue that ‘integration is a negotiation between contexts and cultures, past and present, and country of origin and country of refuge, wherein identity is contested and constantly moving (in Bakker et al, 2016, p120). It is possible to see that the process of becoming part of the society involves constant ‘negotiation’ between the reality of the host society and the reality of the refugees. Some sociologists analyze the process of integration through two different dimensions; a structural one – institutional participation – and a cultural one – value orientation and behavior (Gordon 1964, Schnapper 2007; in Entzinger, 2014). Other authors added an interactive (social contacts) and an identification (loyalties) dimension (e.g. Esser 2003; in Entzinger, 2014). Although those definitions vary from the simplest to the most complex ones, they are not applied anywhere beyond the academic spectrum.

Notwithstanding, some variations of the concept understand integration in as a linear, two-way or a multi-dimensional process. The idea that integration is a linear process is obsolete and not used by any entity anymore as the term came to be understood as a dynamic process instead of a static one. The two-way process is a relational concept, exactly because it can only be complete if both parts – host society
and refugees – are willing to work towards it (Barry, 1997 in Bakker et al, 2016) and interact in the concrete context of public spaces (Penninx, 2009). In fact, the first paragraph of the EU Common Basic Principles describe integration as ‘a dynamic, two-way process of mutual accommodation by all immigrants and residents of Member States’ (Council of the European Union, 2004). Not only at the EU, but the UNHCR describes local integration in the refugee context through its Executive Committee conclusion nº 104 as

‘a dynamic and multifaceted two-way process, which requires efforts by all parties concerned, including a preparedness on the part of refugees to adapt to the host society without having to forego their own cultural identity, and a corresponding readiness on the part of host communities and public institutions to welcome refugees and to meet the needs of a diverse population’ (UNHCR Executive Committee of the High Commissioner’s Programme, 2005).

This is the most common definition of integration, used by many countries, scholars and organizations. The European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE) used this definition for over a decade until they changed the two-way process to a multi-dimensional definition, ‘involving the conditions to participate in society, actual participation in society and a perception of acceptance in the host society’ (ECRE, 1999; in Strang & Ager, 2010, p600). The multi-dimensional approach is defended by authors like Verkuyten (2016) that argues that if the integration policies only focuses on structural integration, this does not mean that it will be necessarily successful in developing a sense of belonging and a positive attitude toward a host society (p593).

After collecting the raw data and gathering information about integration processes in The Netherlands, the two-way definition sounded limited in practice. Strang & Ager (2010) even argued that the concept ‘might be expanded to embrace the multiplicity and fluidity of social meaning and identity’ (p589). Thus, for the purpose of this research, Integration will be defined through the concept of a multi-dimensional process. The feeling of belonging and the conditionality to be fully active in the society should be considered as the ultimate tool for promoting a successful integration. The dynamics of the Dutch politics and society have such a complexity towards migration that integration cannot be analyzed otherwise. Defining integration as a multi-dimensional process overcomes the duality of ‘us’ and ‘them’ and hence giving more space for perceptions and feelings that shape attitudes towards the host society. The decision of using a different definition from the Dutch government was also influenced by the interviews done with the refugees. Their understanding of integration varied from the classic two-way definition to a broader one. It seemed reasonable to apply the broader definition in here because of their unique experiences. Thereby, integration shall be interpreted in here through a multi-dimensional approach.

3.1.1. Top-down/national vs bottom-up/local integration levels

The difference between the national/governmental levels to the local level on integration is a practical one. Top-down perspective is the State level of policy
formulation. In the Dutch case, integration policies were formulated basically at the national level, which has ‘centralised and strongly institutionalised subsystems’ with just a few actors participating in the process, showing that the politicisation of the topic on integration came to exist relatively late (Bruquetas-Callejo et al., 2007, p32). The national approach is a normative one, it deals with the rules and policies regarding integration on a macro level and it constrains and limits the width of the action that can be taken at the local level. The paradox here is that policies are steered by an interplay between international and national institutional rules, but actions are done on a local level (Strang & Ager, 2010; Penninx, 2009). These actions may float through the legal-political, socio-economic and cultural/religious analytical dimensions. The top-down approach have historically been applied to the concept of integration, focusing on structural and organizational aspects (Korac, 2013). However, this approach does not acknowledge local dynamics, people’s feelings and the coexistence negotiation between the asylum migrants and the host society. That is why a local approach on integration should be further explored because ‘at the local level that much of the ‘work’ of the integration process has to take place’ (Strang & Ager, 2010, p601).

From a bottom-up perspective the analysis of the individuals and the civil society response to the crisis can be better comprehended. It is possible to analyze public opinion and perceptions of the refugee crisis, the influence of political and media narrative in the civil society, the practices undertaken by local authorities – such as NGOs or municipalities – and also civil society organizations (CSOs) (Cappiali, 2016). These actors are crucial for a solution-oriented practice in the small sphere of districts, social circles and municipalities. They can be a bridge of dialogue between the national level and the local level, addressing local problems that may be common in other municipalities as well. Thus, these actors play a key role in the integration process, especially in areas that the government does not reach completely. Of course there should be for instance a normative approach in the fight against xenophobia; but in practice, the fight truly happens in the daily social dynamics between the forced migrants and the Dutch society.

Good practices are also a characteristic of bottom-up integration. Civil society and municipalities actively engaging on refugee’s integration became the core strategy to deal with the influx of people. However, the municipalities’ potential to welcome asylum migrants and ‘to address the main social, economic and cultural aspects that are required for successful integration’ (FRA, 2016 in Cappiali, 2016, p28) is diminished by a governmental lack of support. This situation is complicated because local support structures are important to avoid social marginality or social exclusion (Mestheneos & Ioannidi, 2002). In sum, the probability for refugees to integrate rises with the cities’ support of local NGOs and Civil Society Organizations. Nonetheless, municipalities have a high level of autonomy in The Netherlands. This creates space for local policy management which hence improves the responses to the refugee crisis in the area. However, in the words of Penninx (2009), ‘cities should be allotted more resources,
instruments and latitude to act in ways they deem appropriate in their local circumstances’ (p12). Of course cities are places where coexistence management happens in practice; but it is also a place for the creation of meaning, social organisation, cultural identity and political representation (Ramirez, December 2016).

3.1.2. Basic EU and Dutch integration principles

Now that the concept of integration is defined it is important to analyze the procedures described at the EU common Basic Principles (CBP) and at the Dutch Immigratie- en Naturalisatiedienst (IND) governmental partition. These are top-down approaches that influence normatively the policy regarding integrative practices within The Netherlands. Before explaining both principles, I would like to mention that the problem in defining integration had consequences at a normative level, especially in relation to immigration and refugee policy-making in supra-national territories like the EU. (Alencar & Deuze, 2017, p2). Therefore I should make clear that the definition of integration is not always the same depending on the policy document. It is true that the countries within the EU operate under the constraint of the same international laws. However, the national applicability has always an influence of internal dynamics within each country. Another important thing to be mentioned is that after the year 2000, integration became more politicized, which undermined the politics-academy relationship even further (Entzinger & Scholten, 2015, p72). This fact made researchers lose some authority on the theme, giving their place to policymakers. The reflection of this drawback is fairly seen in incomplete indicators that a foreign has integrated in the Dutch society. In response to this drawback, local NGOs, municipalities and even the civil society took action to fulfill the gaps left by the national policy. That being said, I should now explain the EU CBPs regarding integration and the Dutch national interpretation.

According to the 2004 Common Basic Principles for Immigrant Integration Policy in the EU, there are eleven founding principles regarding integration that should be followed by all the European Union members. In these principles there is a definition of integration as a two-way process and the details of what constitute integration in the EU. Integration implies the respect of EU basic values, it has employment as a key part of it, knowledge of the host country’s language, culture history and institutions, education – especially for descendants of the refugees –, access to services and institutions, interaction with the host society and the guarantee of freedom of religion and cultural habits. The last principles of the EU CBP are related to participation in democratic process, integration in public policy at the local level and the development of clear goals and evaluation of integration practices and policy. There is an assimilationist characteristic in the EU policy that should not be ignored. In the next chapter this acculturation process will be described and explained. For now, I will explain the particularities of the Dutch approach towards integration and its
relation to the EU CBP.

The formula used by the IND is fairly based on the EU CBP. The Dutch Education Executive Agency (DUO) released the Civic Integration Act in 2013 describing the preconditions for an asylum migrant to integrate in The Netherlands. The Act consisted in the appliance of an exam of six parts, taking from the complete domain of the Dutch language – listening, reading, writing and speaking –, knowledge of the Dutch society – customs, rules, and values –, and finally being able to finding their way on the Dutch labor market – finding a proper job –. The Civic Integration Examination is paid by the asylum migrant, and if they do not have the money to do it, they should borrow it from DUO and pay the money back with interest after a while. However, if the asylum migrant finishes the integration course within three years, they do not need to repay the loan. These are the basic criteria for an asylum migrant to be considered integrated in The Netherlands.

Unfortunately these criteria do not have the capacity to fully embrace the complexities of a successful integration. It would be better if the Civic Integration Examination had modules carefully designed to explicitly address refugees’ concerns about social acceptance/inclusiveness and acculturation expectations (see Amiot et al., 2007; Brown & Zagefka, 2011 in Esses et al., 2017). Therefore, the need for local support in the asylum migrant’s integration dynamics is a role that was taken by NGOs, municipalities and civil society organizations. For instance, both the EU and the Dutch normative policy did not account about effective participation in civic life and if there is no ghettoization of foreigners (Eurocities, 2016 in Cappiali, 2016). However, the municipalities in the Netherlands have certain autonomy in implementing national civic integration policies and also in formulating ‘city-specific’ policy discourses (Hoekstra, 2015). Thus, bottom-up approaches are the key to change realities locally, even though the assimilationist spectrum still constrains these policies from a national level.

3.1.3. Changing on immigration and refugee policies

Top-down integration models are not something fixed or static - they change over the years - and the Netherlands are a good example of how this change occurred in structural, cultural, social and identification dimensions. Scholten (2011) call these changes as ‘frame shifts’ in the Dutch policy. These frame shifts on integration policies can be categorized as exclusion to multiculturalism, multiculturalism to integrationism, and the final shift towards assimilationism. But why the Dutch integration policy changed so much throughout the years? In this section I will show the main ‘frame shifts’ that happened in the country’s policies. Furthermore, I intend to answer the first sub-question of this thesis; how is the integration of refugees being promoted in the Netherlands?

Until the 1980’s, migration was considered a temporary phenomenon in The Netherlands. This is because the migrants coming to the country from the 1950’s to the 1970’s were people running from war and were perceived as staying in Dutch lands
for a short period of time (Duyvendak, Pels and Rijkschroeff, 2005). The Netherlands was focusing on maintaining the cohesion between communities and on the return of immigrants. The policy regarding migration at that time was of *verzuiling*, the pillarization Dutch tradition of pluralism that enabled arrangements between communities (Entzinger, 2014). In the 1980’s, integration became with the ‘ethnic minorities’ document created in 1979. When the minorities policy came to exist in 1983, the focus was on keeping migrants own culture while helping them to integrate for instance in the labor market. The problem is that the minorities’ policy did not work because there was no community or pillars, they were too diverse in the first generation and even more on the second one (Turk, 2014). Hence, the multiculturalism approach started to be seen as ineffective in the beginning of 1990.

According to Tariq Modood (Modood, 2007 in Taras, 2012), multiculturalism is ‘the recognition of group differences within the public sphere of laws, policies, democratic discourses and the terms of a shared citizenship and national identity’ (p280). The advent of new anti-immigrant narratives widespread by western politicians’ speech and media is the proof that western democracies became fertile ground for xenophobia. This trend is known as ‘multiculturalism backlash’ (Vertovec & Wessendorf, 2010 in Cappeli, 2016) and it marks the end of multicultural policies throughout Europe. In fact, the widespread belief in the Netherlands is that early policies of multiculturalism are responsible for asylum migrants’ lack of integration. It is vastly seen in the literature that The Netherlands is considered the prototypical example of the multiculturalist shift to a restrictive integration regime (Joppke, 2007 in Hoekstra, 2015), and this shift that happened in Dutch lands was ‘more extreme than elsewhere’ (Vasta, 2007, p715 in Hoekstra, 2015, pp1798-1799). The political discourse about the multiculturalism failure was based on the idea that migrants were refusing to integrate, which was a threat to Dutch democratic values and civil liberties (Entzinger, 2006). Consequently, the Dutch government decided that they are not responsible for immigrants to preserve their own culture anymore, but to catalyze their participation in the Dutch society through work, education and mandatory integration courses (Entzinger, 2006a in Entzinger, 2014). This policy worked until late 1990’s when certain problems appeared. Migrants were failing language courses, segregation started to grow and delinquency rates among migrants have risen.

**So, how is the integration of refugees being promoted in the Netherlands today?** Starting in the year of 2002, a contradiction emerged about the progress on the immigration debate. These contradictions were a reflection of the integration problems that appeared on a local level (Bruquetas-Callejo et al, 2007). The integration policy shifted here from targeting groups to target area-based policies, and it was strongly influenced by the europeanisation, privatization and decentralization trends which turned immigration part of symbolic politics at the national level (idem). The attacks of 11 September 2001 reinforced the ‘clash of civilizations’ theory (Huntington, 1996) and influenced governments to strengthen their migration policies. Nonetheless, the integration policy in The Netherlands became tougher, in an attempt to discourage immigration. This centralization of political formulation is a characteristic of a top-down approach because the concern here is with national security instead of local problems. Thus, migrants were to blame if they fail to integrate and expelled if they were not capable of passing the integration exams. The migrants’ situation worsened with the advent of the war on Syria. After the war on Syria and the rise of populism,
Islam became extremely targeted by politicians like Marine Le Pen, Donald Trump and Geert Wilders. Then, the integration debate in The Netherlands became strongly embedded in identity problems. Assimilating to the Dutch culture and adopting a Dutch identity is called by Vasta (2007, in Entzinger, 2014) as institutional discrimination, because it is focused on the ‘protection of national identity and social cohesion in Dutch society’ (Duyvendak and Scholten, 2012 in Alencar & Deuze, 2017, p5). The immigrant should adopt Dutch values and traditions as well as acquiring sociocultural competencies (Baumann, 1996 in Alencar & Deuze, 2017). Entzinger (2014) argues that Dutch society has changed a lot in past decades and that immigration was paramount for these changes. Consequently, some people perceive immigration and Islam as a threat, increasing the distance between native Dutch and migrant in a process called autochtonen versus allochtonen, in the Dutch terminology (Turk, 2014). Allochtonen is the term used to express the lack of room for the articulation of the asylum seekers’ identities (Hoekstra, 2015) and to replace the term ‘minorities’ (Ham and Van der Meer, 2012; Duyvendak et al., 2005 in Turk, 2014) while the autochtonen are the ethnic Dutch citizens. The term came to exist in the 90’s and it’s been extensively used in the literature.

Assimilation is part of the acculturation process known as civic integration. Civic Integration would be the refugee’s acquisition of a ‘citizen-like’ status, which includes ‘speaking the host country language, having knowledge about the country’s history, culture and rules, and understanding and following the liberal democratic values that underscore their new home’ (Goodman, 2015, p2). Since the early 2000’s, the Dutch integration policy has been addressed towards this form of acculturation. There are four models of acculturation in the literature organized in two dimensions: asylum migrant’s desire to maintain his culture and desire for contact with the host society (Berry, 1980-1997 in Esses et al., 2017). The four acculturation forms are integration, assimilation, separation and marginalization. The first is ‘a desire for migrants to maintain aspects of their heritage culture as well as have contact with host society members’; the second is ‘a desire for migrants to shed their heritage culture and seek contact with host society members’; the third is ‘a desire for migrants to maintain their heritage culture and not have contact with host society members’ and finally the fourth is the ‘migrants’ rejection of their heritage culture and low desire for contact with the host society’ (p92). It is possible to see a paradox in the Dutch approach when dealing with the asylum migrants.

The Netherlands is one of the biggest enthusiasts of the assimilationist approach in Western Europe today (Entzinger, 2014). This fact in itself shows that assimilation is not the best approach to integration because it is a paradox in terms. Esses et al. (2017) argue that if people cannot recognize multiple identities, integration is not going to be successful. Also, the ‘desire’ aspect is replaced by a normative obligation to adapt without having effective contact with the host society. That is why the Dutch government should focus on a complex set of factors, and integration should be done in different domains, considering ‘feelings of national belonging and attitudes of the native majority’ (Di Saint Pierre et al., 2015, p1851). Otherwise, The Netherlands shall deal with deterrents for a successful integration for a long period.
3.1.4. Integration as Conflict Prevention

In the era of forced migrations that we are living, newcomers and the host society are forced to negotiate coexistence as a way of creating a ‘living together’ space that would help avoiding identity, cultural or even physical conflicts. Migration became something central in the post-colonial approach (Jacobs, 1996 in Gregory et al., 2011), showing that if newcomers must negotiate coexistence with the host society, there is a plethora of potential conflicts that should be avoided. Fair to say, the use of violence is one of the many characteristics of conflict, but conflict. However, conflict does not necessarily mean physical violence. Conflict can mean anything from a ‘personal disagreement between two people to a world war’ (Gregory et al., 2011, p106). In other words, ‘conflict can take place through peaceful means as well as through the use of force, though violent conflict often receives most attention’ (Gilmartin, 2009, p227). Defining the scope of conflict prevention is rather complicated. The concept is different from the definition of conflict resolution, conflict management, crisis prevention, preventative diplomacy, peace maintenance, and peacebuilding (Menkhaus, 2004). The definition of conflict in this thesis floats between the spectrum of Human Geography and Geopolitics. This is the case because there are different themes on this research that varies between the aspect of demography, identity clashes and diasporic populations to territory, power and will (idem).

The Netherlands is a democratic country with no violent conflict in motion. However, conflict prevention should not be defined based on the Brahimi (2000, in Menkhaus, 2004) report or the ‘security-development nexus’ (Atmaar et al., 1998 in Menkhaus, 2004) because these definitions are too narrow and do not apply to The Netherlands because they always refer to armed conflicts. Thus, by broadening the term, conflict prevention in The Netherlands should be faced as preventing cultural, social and even physical clashes between the refugees and the Dutch society. Some scholars understand integration as an important tool for conflict prevention in the literature. The integration-conflict prevention relationship will be now assessed.

When integration is successful, the possibilities for clashes between forced migrants and the host society diminishes. Boateng (2014) argues that ensuring authentic social integration is a strategy to prevent conflicts. In this case, nurture ‘meaningful discursive engagement in ensuring social integration’ is a precursor to conflict Prevention (idem, p64). These discursive engagements are how politics, media, civil society and forced migrants communicate in the spectrum of social dynamics. Societal harmony can only be achieved if there is no ethnocentric or xenophobic background in their narrative. Otherwise, the feelings of exclusion and discrimination could trigger conflicts between the refugees and the civil society. Brown & Rosecrance (1999) established some elements of long-term efforts for conflict prevention. These are economic development, political justice, the reduction of security concerns and overturn patterns of cultural and social discrimination. The asylum migrants in The Netherlands receive subsidies for economic development and have access to political justice. The security concerns in The Netherlands are different from the cases describe in their book. With the rise of international terrorism hence the securitization of refugees, European countries started to adopt security measurements that previously did not exist. However, these security measurements are not related to physical conflict or people carrying weapons like in violent conflict cases. They have a
preemptive characteristic and are used with transparency, hence security concerns are already reduced in The Netherlands because the country has no active physical or violent conflict. Again, the focus of conflict prevention comes back to the patterns of cultural and social discrimination. These ‘othering’ patterns are going to be further explained in this chapter.

Although discrimination is one of the biggest causes of clashes between the Dutch society and the asylum migrants, other indicators like living conditions, the bureaucratic asylum procedures slowness, gender issues (Pieters, 2016, March 9) and perceptions of economic problems should also be assessed here. The Heumensoord refugee camp was opened in Nijmegen on October 2015. The massive camp tent in the middle of a forest was sheltering roughly three thousand people with no privacy, health care, safety and too little activities and living expenses (Pieters, 2016, February 10). After an inspection on the camp, the National Ombudsman and Board for the Protection of Human Rights ‘released a critical report on the living conditions in the camp’ (Pieters, 2016, February 15). This situation made 150 asylum seekers to march from the asylum camp to Nijmegen’s town hall to express their discontent about their situation in Heumensoord. The protesters were also complaining about the slowness of the asylum procedures. The State Secretary Klaas Dijkhoff of Security and Justice sent a letter to the lower house of Dutch parliament saying that the asylum procedures may take 15 months to be accomplished (Pieters, 2016, February 11). This statement created a collective anxiety among the refugees because the maximum waiting time used to be of six months. Mayors Hubert Bruls of Nijmegen and Paul Mengde of Heumen tried to ask the government to change the timing of the asylum process unsuccessfully (Pieters, 2016, February 16). In addition, harassment of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender asylum seekers in the asylum centers was fairly high. The discrimination was not exactly from Dutch people towards the refugees but their fellow residents. However, the situation against LGBT people is ‘much more serious than it’s portrayed in the media’ (Pieters, 2016, February 08). The situation should be relieved by the closing of Heumensoord in May 2016, but problems still persist. Finally, thousands of Dutch citizens were protesting against the creation of asylum centers in small cities (The Guardian, 2015, December 17). Beyond the visible xenophobia, some of the protests had an economic reason behind it. This is because the Dutch government spent Over 25% of the Dutch government’s development aid in 2015 (Dutch News, 2015, November 27). The perception that the government is ‘spending too much’ with refugees is another reason for clashes that happened between the Dutch citizens and the refugees, even though the Dutch central bank (DNB) argued that the influx of refugees have a small positive impact on the economy in short term (Pieters, 2015, December 07).

The relationship between these clashes is noticeable. Beyond the practicalities of living conditions, the other problems were caused by perceptions and again, discrimination. Of course there are external constraints that shape people’s perceptions and mindsets like political speeches and biased media. However, social inclusion and a normative policy undermining racism would facilitate the integration process, hence avoiding conflicts between the refugees and the Dutch society. In the next section the framework for a successful integration will be assessed, and a successful integration is supreme for conflict avoidance.

Some municipalities in The Netherlands are already applying the concept of
integration as a form of conflict prevention like Rotterdam, Amsterdam and The Hague. In a 2016 Conflict Prevention Report from The Hague, the former mayor Jozias Johannes van Aartsen explains that

‘Cities today have become more important in maintaining order, peace, security, and justice. In a world where most of the global population now lives in urban areas, cities need to find responses to rapid change. Issues that were traditionally the prerogative of national governments, such as social cohesion, integration and counter-terrorism, have moved up the agendas of municipalities. (p4)’.

The mayor’s argument is that education and business specialization are priorities for a successful integration and sustainable peace in the city. The mayor also addresses social deprivation as the main causes of conflict in The Hague. Although the municipality has its own responsibilities, representatives of civil society also play an important role in pointing to social, economic and cultural barriers to participation among the municipality’s residents. Likewise, civil society organizations and NGOs in other municipalities play a similar role, for instance, Yalla Foundation’s work in the city of Nijmegen and its surrounding areas.

In the interplay of communities and spaces, the interaction of refugees with the civil society must be fostered. Ramírez (2016, December 13) discusses about three strategies that could catalyze this process based on the idea of an Interactive Conflict Resolution (ICR). First, by the establishment of communities of practice. Second, by the improvement of open or safe spaces and finally to use these very spaces to ‘mediate interactive resolutions of conflicts’ regarding the integration of the refugees. The idea of ‘communities of practice’ is indeed an interesting tool to improve refugees’ feelings of belonging. It consists in groups of people who share common interests and hence they interact regularly in a way that would help them to create social networks (idem). By the creation of these communities of practice, it would be easier to understand what ‘moves’ these people, what are their interests, and then find a common ground to unify both worlds. This would be a great solution to overcome stereotypes regarding refugees’ background as well. Although the proposition sounds promising, there are some shortcomings that were not seen by the author. For instance, there may be language barriers, budget barriers and lack of material capacity for it to be achieved. Furthermore, those interaction in public space may have a counter-effect of power asymmetry and negative attitudes influenced by discrimination. The author admits that there should be an exploration on the bonds between institutions, organizations and individuals in each case. I would add the fact that the local context and dynamics should be assessed before any of these measurements are taken.

3.2. Strang & Ager’s framework for a Successful Integration

When the influx of refugees started to rise in the UK, the United Kingdom Home Office asked some academics to develop a system that could embrace the details of how the forced migrants arriving in the country should integrate in the British society successfully. Attending to the request, Strang & Ager developed a framework capable of identify elements that are perceived as mandatory for the integration to be complete. The authors separated key integration domains among four themes. The
Although the framework proposed by the authors is rather normative, the focus of their paper was on facilitating policymakers, researchers and the refugees to visualize the domains more clearly and facilitate discussions on the topic. The issues that may influence the process of integration are not focused on this framework. Instead, the authors say that the framework should be faced as a ‘middle-range theory’ capable of providing ‘a coherent conceptual structure for considering, from a normative perspective, what constitutes the key components of integration’ (Strang & Ager, 2010, p167). The domains of the core themes are going to be further explained here. However, the study case applied to this framework will be assessed in the next chapter. It is also important to mention that the themes and domains of this framework are interdependent. Each domain influences each other through different themes. For instance, a forced migrant that cannot find a job because his language skills are not sufficient for him to find a job with his level of education. In this case, it is possible to see an interdependence between the employment domain and the language domain, going through two different core themes. The complexity of this interdependence web should be further assessed as well.

The first theme is the Markers and Means of the integration process. This theme shows the areas from a public policy perspective on what integration is. The employment, housing, education and health domains are frequently mentioned on policy papers and used on a governmental approach. This theme is called Markers and Means because its domains can be achievement markers of integration but also the means to achieve successful integration. Employment is the first domain within this core theme. As it was explained before, it is also one of the core areas in the Dutch integration policy. Promoting a way that the refugees can feel independent by working for their own futures is important for the development of self-value and to overcome dreadful feelings of burden. However, the authors argue that even if refugees may have high education, the recognition of these qualifications in the host country might
be a problem. It is not difficult to see a Syrian doctor working at an under-employment because he didn’t have the proof that he is highly educated or even if he has, his diploma is not valid in the host country. In addition, refugees can only work after finishing the integration course and after they stopped receiving benefits from the government. If a refugee that is receiving benefits finds a job, he loses the benefit automatically.

The second domain within the first theme is housing. The Dutch Refugee Council (ECRE 2001, in Strang & Ager, 2010) withholding the information that housing has a direct impact on refugees’ physical and emotional health as well as influence their ‘feeling of belonging’ in the host country. In Nijmegen, newcomers used to live in tents at the Heumensoord camp. This camp was located far away from the city center, in the middle of a forest, undermining refugees’ capacity of interacting with Dutch citizens. However, in May 2016 the camp ceased to exist as the Dutch policy was in motion towards better actual housing. Nonetheless, the houses provided to the refugees were all around the municipality of Nijmegen and its closest villages. Of course, some of the houses had better location than others. The problem is that some of these locations were fairly empty until they received a lot of refugees all at once. What comes afterwards is the creation of a kind of ghetto that undermines the possibility of good and healthy integration (O’Brien, 2009). Neighborhood is an important aspect, because it influences people’s perceptions and feelings of belonging. Putting refugees in bad or unsafe neighborhoods is basically determining their fate.

Education is directly related to language skills, employment and building social connections, hence aiding the refugees to become active members of the society, especially the young. One of the main policies regarding integration in The Netherlands learning the Dutch language, culture, values and rules. These courses are provided by the Dutch government to the newcomers. The biggest deterrent for a young refugee to integrate in the education system is the insufficient knowledge of the host language and the prejudice and bullying they may suffer at school. Notwithstanding, in the first three years the adult refugees can only do the Dutch language course. After this course is done, they can apply to other ones.

The last domain of the first theme is health. Refugees will only truly engage in the host society if they have a good mental health. Perceptions of discrimination can make them depressed and undermine their feeling of belonging. Thus, this domain has a strong interdependence with all the other ones. The state of mind would guide refugees’ actions, job relations, education motivations, and so on. All the domains within the Marks and Means are fairly operational with institutions working on it. However, these four domains are not sufficient to embrace the complexity of a successful integration. Internally, the refugees have their own rhythm in the integration process. Externally, the host government expects them to follow the rhythm established by them. These governmental expectations lead us to a discussion about the foundation domain.

Rights and Citizenship is a complicated domain because it always steps into national identity issues. Articulating the spectrum between Nationhood and Citizenship in each specific context is ‘fundamental to understand the principles and practice of integration in that situation’ (idem, p176). The problem is that The Netherlands changed its interpretation of what integration is a couple of times throughout the years. The present Dutch policy regarding integration has an
assimilationist characteristic that may create identity conflicts among the refugees. This 'assimilationist' characteristic is called by Faist (1995, in Strang & Ager, 2010) as an 'ethno-cultural political exclusion' and it means that the government expects that 'refugees will adapt to become indistinguishable from the host community' (p174-175). If the refugee is not prepared to adapt to the lifestyle of the host community, integration is never going to work. The final question here is if the refugees have the basic and equal rights to fully engage in the host society.

Social Connection, as mentioned before, is a ‘process of mutual accommodation’ where refugees and the Dutch society should negotiate coexistence. This may be the most important feature according to the refugees themselves. There is a huge interconnectedness between the social connections, mental health, feelings of belonging and successful integration. Also, field research in Nijmegen showed that expectations of friendship relationships is fairly high. The refugees’ feeling of belonging is strongly shaped by social connections. In this case, the level of friendship and trust a Dutch citizen offers to a refugee is highly appreciated by them. Putnam (1993) and Woolcock (1998, in Strang & Ager, 2010) distinguished three different kinds of social connection: Social bonds (family and people from the same ethnicity, nationality or religion), social bridges (the Dutch society) and social links (with the structures of the state). Creating social bonds in Nijmegen is almost unavoidable because the refugees live in shared areas. Although social bonds have a positive impact on refugees’ feelings of being settled, many of them do not have family in The Netherlands and/or do not want to have contact with co-nationals because sometimes it is a sensitive thing. On the other hand, social bridges are the representation of harmony between their former society and the new one. The dynamics of inclusion/exclusion, feelings of belonging, perceived discrimination and identity conflicts can all be addressed by this domain. Friendly relations between refugees and Dutch citizens are extremely important to build up a successful integration. For this to happen, both groups should aim at effective communication because the lack of communication can lead to pre-judgments from both sides. Also, building social relations between refugees and Dutch citizens can facilitate employment opportunities and friendship networks. The last domain within social connections is the social links. This domain describes the relation of the refugees with the governmental services. Initiatives facilitating the accessibility of refugees to relevant services is done not only through governmental partitions but through the aid of NGOs. According to the refugees themselves, having access a telephone – so they can contact their families in their home countries – is a service that they highly appreciate.

The last core theme in the framework is the Facilitators one. This theme withholds the domains in which actions could serve to facilitate (remove barriers) or constrain local integration. The first domain is about language and cultural knowledge. The Dutch approach to integration has this first domain as a core policy towards the integration of refugees in The Netherlands. Both aspects are included in the integration agenda and applied as soon as the Asylum request is accepted. Being able to speak the host country’s language is paramount for the refugee to engage in any kind of activity, employment, education and social interaction in the new society. Of course, if the newcomer is capable of speaking English his communication with the Dutch citizens will be easier since the beginning. However, to fully engage on the Dutch lifestyle the very newcomers needs to go through a process of learning Dutch
within maximum five years. Otherwise, translation and interpreting supports would be necessary at least in the first contact with the newcomer (Strang & Ager, 2010). Beyond language skills, knowing about the host country’s culture, rules and values are part of the integration process in The Netherlands. Adjusting to the country’s culture may take time. In the meanwhile, patterns of exclusion and isolation may lead to mental health problems such as depression as well as undermine the refugee’s feeling of belonging. Also, identity clashes and crisis may happen within themselves. How can a refugee manage his cultural traditions and at the same time adapt to a culture that may be extremely different from their own?

The safety and stability domain is another important facilitator of the integration process. Feeling safe is important for most part of the refugees. If a refugee feels that he is not safe in the host country, it is possible that his feeling of belonging is going to be decreased. We should keep in mind that these refugees are running from their home countries to save their lives. If they arrive in a European country and they feel threatened by the host society it may appear that they escaped from a conflict just to find another one. Furthermore, discrimination has an important impact on refugee’s interpretation of safety. In the next chapter I will analyze the refugees’ perceptions and experiences in The Netherlands through this conceptual framework.

At the end of the day, integration will remain controversial ‘both as a policy objective and as a theoretical construct’ (idem, p186). However, the conceptual framework developed by the authors facilitates to understand the domains that compose a successful integration. Nonetheless, creating a framework that completely assesses the integration complexity is a challenge. The idea behind using this framework is to understand in practice what the integration flaws are and how we can overcome it.

3.3. Literature Analysis

Empirical evidence and literature research on integration of refugees in the Netherlands show us some barriers for asylum seekers to be fully integrated. These barriers are divided by categories, which includes language, labor market, social inclusion, and the paradoxes of its application. Many of these paradoxes have a direct relation to perceptions of discrimination. Many refugees in an advanced integration stage can perceive with more clarity when they are being ‘othered’ (Verkuyten, 2016). This creates internal conflicts on the refugees, undermines their feelings of belonging, and make some of them wish to return to their home countries (Di Saint Pierre et al., 2015) – even if effectively they do not return –. This ‘integration paradox’ suggests exactly this; the more highly educated and integrated a refugee is, the easier it is for him to perceive social and structural discrimination. Van Doorn et al. (2013) gave this paradox the name of ‘theory of exposure’. The hypothesis in the theory is that immigrants with higher education participate more in the host society, so they are more exposed to contact with Dutch citizens, hence increasing their vulnerability to cultural conflicts and discrimination. The situation is worsened especially when they perceive that they lack job opportunities because the market is ‘othering’ them. For instance, the level of Dutch language acceptable for the labor market is in practice something extremely subjective, depending only on the will of the employer to hire someone. More specifically, the use of Dutch language may be a deterrent for a successful integration rather than a progress. In their study, Ghorashi & Van Tilburg
(2006) evaluate the Experiences of Refugee Women with Dutch Labor Organizations and concludes that discrimination added to high expectations from labor organizations caused by fear of cultural differences has a negative impact on Muslim women. Although their article has a strong gender perspective, the paradox between normative and practical integration should not be ignored in here. If learning Dutch language is mandatory for a successful integration, the author leaves us with the question ‘when is my Dutch good enough’? Some authors even argue that in The Netherlands there is a culture of discrimination in the workforce (Weiner, 2015, p590). Being realist, the normative approach may be too simplistic to embrace the integration complexities. The authors argue that learning the language is not going to help refugees to integrate ‘when Dutch context, society, organizations, and discourses are so exclusive toward migrants’ (p69).

Another paradox in the Dutch approach to integration is between asylum and integration policy, which may contribute to exclusion rather than inclusion Bakker et al. (2016a). The official approach towards refugees is the promotion of the importance of integration, but in practice the government is segregating them from the general population by putting them in asylum accommodation centers. For the authors, different asylum support systems influence different refugee integration domains. After going to these state-subsidized houses, they must pass an integration exam. The asylum support systems are analyzed through different integration domains like social networks and health. The biggest problem is that these asylum centers are isolated from local people, they are mostly in rural areas. This spatial exclusion may turn into a social exclusion (Madanipour, 2003 in Bakker et al., 2016a) through prejudice, perceived discrimination and segregation (Stewart, 2005 in Bakker et al., 2016a). Esses et al. (2017) describe perceived discrimination as meta-perceptions, which means ‘how people think others think about a particular topic’ (p94). In this case, refugees’ meta-perceptions about social acceptance and integration expectations shape their acculturation strategies (idem). The only social connection possible in this situation is of social bonds. In relation to health, the lack of privacy and autonomy in the asylum center in The Netherlands may contribute negatively to refugees’ mental health because it can exacerbate feelings of abandonment and exclusion, hence undermining their feeling of belonging (Mawani, 2014). If asylum support systems offered houses embedded in the Dutch community, the likelihood of social integration would be increased.

In another paper, Bakker et al. (2016b) explore the ‘refugee entry effect’ to analyze that it is more difficult for a newcomer to engage in the labor market because they often arrive in The Netherlands less prepared, with limited rights and carrying traumas. The ‘refugee gap’ in the labor market is created by this very ‘refugee entry effect’. This effect shows the refugees’ disadvantage compared to other migrants in the labor market, especially if they are not young. Also, the Dutch nationality helps refugees to find employment, therefore nationality should be added as a ‘Mean of Integration’, but this issue is still very opened for discussion in the academia. The authors’ argument in this article is that Dutch policy-makers should speed up refugees’ participation in the labor market when they are still newcomers, without requiring language proficiency, and invest in training for them to acquire a Dutch qualification.

Many studies about integration or refugees in The Netherlands evaluates the effects of institutional racism and the importance of employment and language
competence. However, Mesthenos & Ioannidi (2002) go a little bit further and argue that the individual personality of the refugees are another important factor that should be taken into consideration. This means that motivations to integrate varies according to how the refugee reacts to traumas and the loss of their country, family, social status and housing. Also, there is an interplay between perceived racism, personalities, experiences and will to integrate. The authors’ final argument is that to overcome this situation, refugees should be included in policy planning through NGOs and governments. In fact, increasing local decision-making is a necessary precondition for successful integration (Penninx, 2009). Otherwise, mandatory integration wouldn’t be really necessary because it would not be really effective.

The question ‘if mandatory integration really matters’ is fairly discussed in a 2015 Goodman’s article. The author argues that integration as it is after the ‘civic turn’ does not acknowledge some of the effects of civic integration on societal integration such as levels of well-being, sense of belonging or contextual factors that are specific for each country. This factor alone is enough for a reflection; perhaps integration policies are more symbolic than empirical. The author’s findings reveals that there is little evidence that civic integration has an impact on the asylum migrants’ integration, either positively or negatively. Furthermore, the authors find that civic integration is indeed more of a rhetoric political strategy than functional or effective as an integration policy (p18). It is really complicated to ‘appropriately manage issues of diversity’ in the context of the migration crisis. However, the assimilationist approach has shown itself rather ineffective.

3.3.1. Identity and Othering

Understanding the ‘othering’ process is really important for this research. Many of the interviewees experienced some kind of discrimination, directly or indirectly, and this discrimination has a profound link with identity issues or racism. The idea of the ‘other’ comprises the structural, institutional and practical negative influences that the ‘us’ and ‘them’ dichotomy has on people’s lives. In this section, I will explain the ‘othering’ process, analyze it through the literature and then discuss about how it is visible in The Netherlands. The assessment of the ‘othering’ process through the interviews should be further explained in chapter 5.

Many identity theories use the idea of ‘the other’ as a basic principle. The term is extensively used in political geography, human geography, geopolitics and other fields of study. The term has a normative principle that identities are formed in relation to an ‘other’ (Gallaher, 2008). Weiss (1995 in Grove & Zwi, 2006) defined other as a process that ‘serves to mark and name those thought to be different from oneself’ (p1933). Furthermore, the term ‘other’ can be used as a noun and a verb (Mountz, 2008). As a noun, the ‘other’ is the person different from the self, the outsider, the foreigner, the stranger. As a verb, the process of ‘othering’ is the process of labelling, categorizing, stereotyping, and excluding all the people that does not fit in a determined culture or society; it is this process that effectively creates the ‘other’.

It is possible for the ‘othering’ process to happen subjectively, actively, towards a person, a culture, a region or a nation. For instance, Edward Said (1978) took the ‘othering’ to the next level, showing that western literature and study of the east created a dichotomy of ‘us’ and ‘them’ in a cultural and regional level. This process was
baptized by Said as Orientalism. The orient region was seen as underdeveloped, savage, mystic and weird. Traces of orientalism are easily found in political discourses and in the media. Refugees are among those ‘othered’ people through ‘categorization, differing legal status and public discourses such as news reports that characterize particular groups of immigrants’ (Mountz, 2008, p332). Researchers that homogenize and essentialize groups of people in their studies are somehow contributing to the ‘othering’ process to happen.

The differentiation of the ‘other’ to the self is part of a historical process much older than colonialism itself. However, the ‘othering’ process gained ‘more relevance in the light of current geo-political developments following the 11 September 2001 attack in the USA’ (Van Houtum, Van Naerssen, 2002). Nonetheless, these geopolitical developments constrained policymakers to harden migration policies around the globe. In fact, political leaders and the big media used the recent refugee crisis as a scapegoat for the creation of a populist dominant discourse that became increasingly dehumanizing (e.g., Gabrielatos & Baker, 2008; Taylor, 2015; Usborne, 2015 in Esses et al., 2017, p87), hence deeply intensifying the ‘othering’ process. The year of 2015 was the most visible ‘breakthrough’ of the right-wing populist parties’ success (Boros, 2015 in Cappiali, 2016). These anti-immigrant parties have been successfully ‘othering’ the asylum migrants through the narrative of ‘threat’. Thereby, migration became a theme of securitization worldwide (Huysmans, 2000).

This narrative is widely used by right-wing parties across Europe. Canetti et al. (2016 in Esses et al., 2017) investigated that individuals that identify with a right-wing approach perceive refugees as more threatening than the individuals that identify with a left-wing approach. This ‘fear of the other’ leads right-wing supporters to agree with exclusionary policies towards the refugees. Although threats can be real, symbolic, perceived or imaginary, each country has its own reality and dynamics, therefore empirical evidence should be assessed to each case before making assumptions based on political discourses and biased media information. The refugee and terrorist crises were never really separated in the nationalist imaginary (Nail, 2016). The mass media shows that the political speech from Marine Le Pen, Donald Trump, Dunald Tusk, Geert Wilders and Viktor Orbán are based on the idea that the migration of refugees is a ‘barbaric invasion of the west’. In fact, the Pew Research Center (2016) made a survey on ten european countries, and 59% of the respondent believed that refugees would increase the likelihood of terrorism. The Netherlands was in third place on the ‘fear scale’ (61%), being only behind Hungary (76%) and Poland (68%) (idem).

This conservative belief and discourse create a self-fulfilling prophecy regarding the fear of the imagined other as a threat to the host society. This ‘othering frenesi’ is completely imagined because there is no evidence ‘for a direct relationship between forced migrants arriving in Europe and the risk of terrorism in the EU’ (ICCT, 2016, p45; Choi & Salehyan, 2013, p56). Beyond physical threat, the idea that migration may threaten ‘Dutch identity’ or ‘Dutch way of life’ appears to be extremely appealing (Van der Waal, 2010 et al. 2011 in Entzinger, 2014, p702) and it is fairly used by some politicians. Hence, asylum policies became institutionally exclusionist because the asylum migrant’s is marked with the ‘other’ stigma for his limitations of employment, mainstream welfare provision, freedom of movement and housing (Sales, 2002 in bakker et al., 2016a), as well as creating restrictions for their access to services and opportunities. Unfortunately, the understanding of ‘refugee as a threat’ shifts the
focus from ‘protection of the refugee, to protection from the refugee’ (Sathanapally, 2004 in Grove & Zwi, 2006, p1934). It is fair to say that in contemporary Europe ‘migration has become a meta-issue in the political spectacle’ (Huysmans, 2000, p770) and it is used as a tool for political purposes.

Moving from the irrational fear of the ‘other’ as a threat, there is a need in clarifying how the ‘othering’ process shapes attitudes towards refugees and creates a ‘public anxiety’ about if refugees are going to successfully integrate or not. Cappiali (2016) argues that these hostile political narratives are the outcome of structural problems like systematic discrimination or economic marginalization, and these are the biggest contributors to the ‘integration crisis’ in The Netherlands. D’Appollonia (2015, in Cappiali, 2016) points out that over the past 15-years xenophobia, islamophobia, racism, and anti-immigrant sentiment grew exponentially in Europe, which influenced the rise of an era of restrictive integration policies (p8). There is also an interesting relation between media, ‘othering’ and integration in The Netherlands. Extensive media attention and high immigration levels catalyze the ‘othering’ process in the country (Gijsberts and Lubbers, 2009 in entzinger, 2014). This is because the media has a strong capacity of influencing public opinion, especially among the lower educated Duch, which are Geert Wilder’s electorate (entzinger, 2014). In this case, the level of education is directly proportional to the level of tolerance. The dehumanization of refugees by the media occurs in three main ways (Esses et al., 2013): first, refugees are the sources and spreaders of infectious diseases; second, refugee claimants are bogus queue-jumpers who are trying to take advantage of lax refugee policies to gain entry to western nations and finally, terrorists are trying to gain entry to western nations as refugee claimants (p524-525). The focus on negative news instead of positive ones is proven to be a catalyst of the dehumanization of refugees, hence contributing to the ‘othering’ process. Of course, the media may also be manipulated for political purposes (idem). However, actions towards changing this dehumanized image of refugees should be taken by governments, municipalities and media. Only then the civil society can move their opinions towards a more integrative practice.

Other studies examine how public discourse and its political, legal and media responses are reinforcing the ‘othering’ process and how it impacts the migrant’s mental health (Grove & Zwi, 2006). It is really hard for a refugee to build a sense of belonging in a country that they are being ‘othered’. This creates anxiety, fear of not matching expectations, depression and even suicide (Goosen, 2011). Again, by making their voices heard and understanding the circumstances in which they arrived in the country is a way to overcome stereotypes. If their stories are strange and distant, both world would remain unconnected, thus successful integration would be impossible.

The ‘othering’ process in The Netherlands has a direct impact on integration efforts. This impact affects many integration domains. It is visible how it undermines the possibility of forced migrants to find jobs, build social networks and truly have the feeling of belonging. The more the Dutch society and policy ‘other’ the refugees, the less integrated they will be. The paradox between Dutch normative policies and attitudes towards the refugees is rather schizophrenic which makes them have contradictory feelings. In the words of Ghorashi & Van Tilburg (2006), ‘integration policy in the Netherlands will not succeed until it considers the power of dominant discourses on migration and its negative effect on the participation of migrants in
society’ (p69). In sum, if the ‘authoritarian wind that is blowing through the Netherlands’ (Uitermark, Rossi & Van Houtum, 2005, p635) does not vanish from the political spectrum, little room will be left for actual change and effective integration.

4. SYRIAN AND ERITREAN REFUGEES IN THE NETHERLANDS

In the past years, the biggest amount of asylum applicants in The Netherlands come from a Syrian and Eritrean background. Almost every month the IND releases a report with the country’s statistics about the total of Asylum Influx in Dutch lands. The last report that can be found at their website is from May 2017. The report compares the total entrance of refugees from the last thirteen months, including first applications, repeated applications and family reunification. Since June 2016 until May 2017, at the top of the list there were 14,159 applicants from the Syrian Arabic Republic and 3,652 from Eritrea. Those applications constituted 39% and 10% of the total, respectively. After comparing with the previous years, it was noticeable that this pattern repeated itself practically every month since 2014.

Gathering recent data regarding refugees in the municipality of Nijmegen was fairly challenging, mainly because of language barriers, scarcity of information of recent events and confidentiality of data. Nonetheless, all the following data was provided by Yalla Foundation through information given by the Municipality of Nijmegen. The numbers tell us that from 2013 to 2015 there were refugees from 44 different nationalities in the city. In general, refugees arriving in the city are young males. 30% of the refugees are under 20 years old and 30% is between 20 and 30 years old. Male refugees constitute 70% of the city’s total. People coming from a Syrian, Eritrean and Somali background accounted 69% of the refugees in the same period. Syrians alone made 40% and Eritreans 16% of the total. In 2015, the largest amount of settled refugees live in Nijmegen-Oost (Gemeente Nijmegen, 2016).

The decision to focus on Syrian and Eritrean refugees at this research can be explained in three ways. First, these two groups form the biggest amount of asylum applicants in The Netherlands nowadays, hence in the municipality of Nijmegen as well. Second, since the start of its activities in 2015, Yalla Foundation was approached by people from within these two groups for help. Thus, the organization needed some empirical research on the integration of people from Syrian and Eritrean background in Nijmegen for the development of better strategies that could aid them in a better way. At last but not least, the interviewees that were provided to this research by Yalla Foundation are from a Syrian and Eritrean background. Therefore, for the management and feasibility of the research, the focus of this thesis is on Syrian and Eritrean people.

4.1. Background: Civil war in Syria

Many of the refugees coming to The Netherlands have a Syrian background. The armed conflict in Syria started in 2011 after manifestations and protests against the Bashar Al-Assad government in January of the same year. In 2012 the conflict in Syria was declared as a Civil War by the Red Cross and accepted by the international community after the alleged use of chemical weapons (CBC News, 2014, April 3). The UNHCR called the Syrian War as the cause of ‘the biggest refugee and displacement
crisis of our time’, and they are almost surpassing the Afghans’ position of the largest refugee population in the world. After six years of conflict, the influx of Syrian citizens to other countries has risen exponentially. According to the UNHCR, there are 5.2 million Syrian refugees worldwide and 6.3 million Internally Displaced Persons (IDP). The biggest amount of Syrian people can be found in Syria’s neighboring countries; Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq. Together, neighboring countries withhold 4.7 million of the Syrian refugees. Europe in total received roughly one million of Syrian refugees, with Germany and Sweden receiving the biggest amount of asylum applications. In total, until September 2016, 64 thousand Syrian nationals were registered by the Dutch government (Dutch News, 2016, September 28). Most of the Syrian forced migrants live in Amsterdam, Rotterdam and Utrecht. However, it is possible to find Syrian people all around the country, mostly because of a national plan of distribution by area.

4.2. Background: Political instability in Eritrea

Unlike the Syrian War, the political instability in Eritrea is not shown in the media very often. It is not a war, but five thousand Eritreans leave the 5.6 million people country each month. So what is exactly happening in Eritrea? According to the American Think Tank called Council on Foreign Relations (CFR), Eritrea has historically been an unstable country. After 30 years of war against Ethiopia, the country was founded by a popular referendum in 1993. Since then, the country’s one-party system was characterized by the High Commissioner of the UN Human Rights Council as a regime ‘ruled by fear’. This tiny country in the Horn of Africa has many problems. Border clashes with Ethiopia eventually happen, the Eritrean government was accused of supporting the Somali terrorist group Al-Shabab, there is no free press, political rights or civil liberties and the mandatory national service program is extremely violent. The national service is *de facto* the true reason for Eritreans to flee their country. Military service in Eritrea is obligatory for 18 months, but in practice, it is indefinite. The problem is that if one refuses to serve, that person is persecuted, tortured and even assassinated by authorities. In the minds of Eritreans, doing military service is no different from slavery.

Like Syria, most Eritrean refugees settle in neighboring countries; Sudan and Ethiopia. The particularity about the Eritrean case is that they are not allowed to leave the country, thus the only way for them to flee is by land. Eritreans come to Europe through the path from Sudan to Libya, crossing the Mediterranean Sea and mainly arriving in Italy. However, their final destination is Germany, Switzerland, Sweden and The Netherlands (Lanni, 2016, February 23). In 2015 there were 3.000 Eritrean asylum requests in Europe. The biggest amount off Eritreans were granted asylum in Switzerland and in Germany; followed by The Netherlands which gave asylum to 6.980 applicants (idem).

5. REFUGEES IN NIJMEGEN

After assessing the Dutch governmental approach to integration, the former literature on the issue and explaining the importance of the local perspective, it is time to understand how empirically refugees face integration in the municipality of Nijmegen.
The multidimensional aspect of integration is exposed by the refugees’ different interpretations of the term. These differences are going to be further explained here. First, the role of Yalla Foundation will be explained. The organization has a very important work concerning the local developments and perceptions in Nijmegen. Likewise, the second sub-question of this thesis - what approach does Yalla Foundation use towards the integration of refugees in Nijmegen? – will be answered in here. Then, the refugee’s perspective on integration shall be assessed to understand their common concerns. Therefore, the third sub-question of this thesis - what are Eritrean and Syrian refugees’ perceptions of integration in Nijmegen? – will be answered in this section as well, concluding the research and finally answering its main question. For better organization of the interviews, I will refer to the interviewees with numbers, thereby their identity will not be disclosed but their personal opinions can still be identified. The refugees’ numeric order was organized based on the order that the interviews were done.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Refugee/Interviewee Number</th>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Gender</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>R1</td>
<td>Syrian</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R2</td>
<td>Syrian</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R3</td>
<td>Eritrean</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R4</td>
<td>Eritrean</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R5</td>
<td>Eritrean</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R6</td>
<td>Syrian</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R7</td>
<td>Syrian</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R8</td>
<td>Syrian</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R9</td>
<td>Syrian</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Most of the refugees arrived at The Netherlands in 2015.

5.1. The Role of Yalla Foundation

Yalla foundation started its activities in 2015 and it was formally recognized in 2016. The organization was founded by Younes Younes, Syrian newcomer and master in Business Economics and Management and Marinka Dohmen, communication advisor, in the municipality of Nijmegen with the support of Hendrik-Jan Derksen, a senior social worker. Initially, they created their online communities to increase the welcoming society and to make it possible for the refugees (that are often isolated from society during their stay within COA locations until they obtain a temporary permit or eventually get a house to settle down) to be in touch with the local society and provide helpful and cultural sensitive information.

This research’s second sub-question is what approach does Yalla Foundation use towards the integration of refugees in Nijmegen? The organization believes that building social networks is the path for refugees to fully integrate in the Dutch society. Thus, by helping the refugees building on- and offline networks is the focus of Yalla Foundation’s work. The organization also created a space for participatory action in
creating an inclusive society. In other words, Yalla Foundation’s bureau, volunteers, interns and refugees work as one to encourage inclusiveness in the Dutch society. For instance, in the ‘Refugees in The Netherlands’ Facebook groups, refugees can take responsibility and get in touch with the Dutch citizens to start building their social bridges. Yalla supports newcomers to build not only social, but also processional local networks. This is only possible by reducing the gap between newcomers and the host civil society. Yalla decreases this gap by providing information needed to support mutual understanding and hence manage coexistence. This work is firstly done around reception centers. From this starting point, Yalla’s goal is to stimulate an opened and hospitable society based on social cohesion.

However, to motivate some of the newcomers to integrate when they have been through difficult situations and suffered discrimination is a tough challenge. Thus, Yalla works on both sides of the equation. On the one hand, Yalla helps to increase the power and motivation of these very newcomers to actively take part in the Dutch society and have the strength to start building a new life in The Netherlands. On the other hand, Yalla also makes the local society more open by showing public events, providing information and encouraging Dutch organizations to be in touch with the new locals for mutual benefits.

Yalla Foundation cooperates with other organizations nationally and locally, such as the municipality of Nijmegen, in order to support intercultural connections offline. One of the main activities towards offline connection is the buddy program created by the organization. The program involves the direct interaction of student volunteers aiding newcomers to understand the dynamics of the city of Nijmegen, helping them to solve problems and building social bridges. The organization also lobbies for opportunities to overcome integration obstacles between newcomers and the Dutch society. One of the lobby strategies is advising organizations which are already working or plan to work with newcomers. Yalla explains to these organizations how they can work (better) in contributing to an inclusive society.

Some of the organizations cooperating with Yalla Foundation are the regional work organization WBRN, the municipality: Gemeente Nijmegen, welfade organisations STIP/Interlokaal, volunteer matching centre Vrijwilligers Centrale and provincial departments of the health organisation GGD. For instance, Yalla advises GGD on how to improve communication and connect with newcomers to increase their (mental) health.

The foundation is looking for future cooperations, aiming towards the improvement of its activities and to raise awareness on both the new and receiving sides about successful integration. For instance, the organization is working on a future cooperation with the foundation My Syria, Refugee Academy and the online platform Open Embassy in Amsterdam, as well as many more. Next to that, Yalla stimulates newcomers to provide feedback on municipal issues concerning integration directly by arranging focus groups around certain subjects.

All relevant information for newcomers is available at the yallafoundation.nl and welcometonijmegen.nl websites, in different languages. The website Yalla Foundation advises refugees from the first period of arrival – reception process, asylum procedures, integration courses, health insurance, etc – to housing, studying, Dutch language, work, health, culture and practicalities of everyday life. The website has a national reach. The newcomers can always contact Yalla’s office by social media
and talk personally about their concerns and get referred. In sum, Yalla’s foundation
work is done on an everyday basis to help newcomers nationally and in Nijmegen.

Nonetheless, the organization perceived that there should be scientific
research on the integration of refugees in Nijmegen. In research executed in
cooperation with the Vrije Universiteit in Amsterdam – and with new developed
empirical information about the impediments for a successful integration – they could
aim at the right targets and effectively overcome those very deterrents. This is the final
goal of this research.

5.2. Refugees’ Perceptions and Experiences

In the space of three months, Eritrean and Syrian people were interviewed
about their own lives, perceptions, motivations and expectations over their life
experience in Dutch lands. Their personal opinions were compared to the existent
literature regarding integration of refugees in The Netherlands. The set of questions
varied between the Strang & Ager conceptual framework’s domains for a successful
integration, the analysis of personal perceptions on integration and the link between
the process of ‘othering’ and feelings of belonging. The interviews were analyzed
following the framework pyramid. However, evidence showed me an interdependence
between determined domains. Thus I decided to explain about this relation in one
section. This section aims at answering the third sub-question of this research: what
are Eritrean and Syrian refugees’ perceptions of integration in Nijmegen?

Before the assessment of the interviews, two things should be clarified in here.
First, there is a conceptual difference between the Syrian and Eritrean forced migrants.
The civil war in Syria has many fronts and many players. This fact in itself divides
opinions among the Syrian citizens and hence among the asylum seekers coming to
Europe. They do not have the same political visions which may trigger conflicts
between themselves outside their homeland. The political aspect of their home
country is not a matter of discussion on this thesis. However, the reflection of these
disagreements can be seen in determined domains of this research, like for instance in
safety. The political instability in Eritrea has a different dynamics. It is not a civil war,
thus there are no fronts or sides against one another. The enforcement of everlasting
military service is a characteristic of a government against its citizens as a whole. The
Eritrean refugees coming to Europe are fleeing the exact same situation, therefore
there are no visible difference of opinions regarding the Eritrean government dividing
the migrant population. Second, this conceptual difference influences the way Syrian
and Eritrean refugees face their overall situation. Furthermore, the way the media
portrays the situation in both countries is also an important way of shaping refugees’
and Dutch citizens’ opinions. It is easier to find information about the Civil War in Syria
on the media than the political instability in Eritrea. The biggest difference is on the
guilt for what is happening in both countries. The media often portrays confusing
information about the Syrian War, blaming government, terrorist and rebels at the
same time. This raises mistrust among Syrian people and between Syrians and Dutch
citizens. On the other hand, in the Eritrean case the government is always the one to
blame for what is happening in the country. These situational differences between
both countries give ground for Syrian people to have more disagreements between
themselves than Eritrean nationals. Overall, it was possible to perceive throughout the
interviews that Eritrean people are more positive about their current situation than Syrian nationals. The details are going to be further explained in this chapter.

In total, it was possible to make nine interviews with Syrian and Eritrean males and females, and the participants were interviewed with the same set of questions. However, depending on the course of the interview, specific question were further asked. The contacts from all participants of this research were provided by Yalla Foundation. In addition, all the interviews were in English, therefore there was no need for an Arabic or Tigrinya translator. The interviewees’ age varied between 20 and 52 years old. The participants’ age difference is an interesting indicator to evaluate if integration is more difficult if the asylum migrant is older or younger. There is a contrasting perspective on the core domains among the interviewees. At some extent there was an agreement about certain issues. Nonetheless, some external and internal forces influenced the refugees’ perception about their situation in The Netherlands. These forces are going to be further explained in each domain.

All the information gathered in this chapter was provided by the refugees. These information have cross-cutting cleavages among the framework domains and they influence each other in the dynamics of a complex interdependence. The findings gathered through the interviews are the ones as follow.

5.2.1. On Housing and Safety

If a newcomer has arrived in Nijmegen before May 2016 there is a high probability that he/she was allocated in the Heumensoord refugee camp. The COA system helps the refugees when they first arrive in The Netherlands until they have enough capabilities to step further by themselves. This period is shifted basically when refugees are allocated in actual houses, although some refugees were still being helped by COA even when they moved from the camp. The refugees argued that if you are older than 21 years old, you don’t need to share a house with other asylum migrants. Most of the interviewees have family in The Netherlands and live with them, thus all of the interviewees have intimate social bonds. Many of them came to Nijmegen through the Dutch policy of Family Reunion. In the words of an interviewee, the Dutch housing system is very ‘beautiful’. However, there is a good and a bad side about it.

‘The good side is that they choose you a house. So you don’t have to look in a place that you don’t know anything about it. The bad side is they choose you the place. And most of people, they throw them in small villages, where is very hard to find a job’ (R2, Nijmegen)

The distribution of asylum migrants around the country is not something exactly uniform. After the dismantlement of refugee camps like Heumensoord, the refugees that still did not get the residence permit were moved to Asylum Centers while they wait for housing. Some of these Asylum Centers houses 300 refugees, the kitchen and shower are shared with the whole floor of 12 rooms, and each room has around 5 people. Some ‘lucky’ refugees were allocated in Amsterdam, Eindhoven, Utrecht or Rotterdam. Living in a big city instead of a village increases the possibility of more job opportunities and social bridges. The kind of housing also varies. Some refugees can get a modern and furnished house. Although some others are allocated in
old houses and they need to furnish it themselves, they may live in better neighborhoods, close to the city center, instead of small villages. Most of the interviewees lived in small villages but they did not have shared houses. Furthermore, some refugees come to The Netherlands with their families. In this case, they are provided with a family house. Strang & Ager (2008) argue that housing location is important to provide refugees with more contact with the host community and thus learn customs and language more easily. Also, it helps refugees to build up social networks with the host citizens through neighborhood relations. This is true is the refugees also take the initiative to speak to his neighbors. For instance, one of the Eritrean interviewees was living with his wife and daughter in Malden, a small village close to Nijmegen. Their neighborhood consisted of Iranian, Syrian, Iraqi nationals and just a few Dutch citizens. The way this interviewee could find to approach Dutch people was to walk around the neighborhood, talking to his Dutch neighbors and explaining about who he is, where he came from, and why is he there. According to the interviewee, this experience had noticeable positive results because it could overcome the ‘fear of the other’ in people’s minds by undermining ignorance.

Indeed, some of the neighborhoods the refugees live are isolated from the Dutch citizens. These neighborhood have multiethnic foreign nationals and there are barely any Dutch national. However, there is a very individual characteristic at stake in here as well. The motivation for a refugee to speak to a Dutch neighbor may vary according to one’s individual personality (Mesthenos & Ioannidi, 2002). Not every refugee is going to approach its neighbors and just start a conversation. A Syrian woman was explaining that ‘[…] in fact I don’t have any contact with people, with my neighbors. Maybe it’s because I don’t have the time, maybe… I don’t know why, usually I am very social […]’ (R8, Nijmegen). Even if a refugee lives in a good area it doesn’t automatically mean that his capability of creating social bridges will rise. Sometimes the refugee expects the other side to approach first because he is afraid of rejection or discrimination, but maybe he is just not motivated enough to start doing it by himself; every situation is unique. It is fair to say that housing – in the way it is being applied today – may have a positive or a negative impact on integration, depending on the refugee’s allocation area and on expectations and motivation from both refugees and the Dutch society.

Interviewees in general have mixed feelings about housing. Especially when housing has a direct relation to safety (Strang & Ager, 2008). None of the interviewees exposed concern about physical threats coming from Dutch citizens. The concern regarding Dutch people was related to perceived discrimination, not to threats. However, most of the areas the refugees live are isolated from Dutch people. They normally live in areas with other foreign individuals. In general, refugees feel safe in their neighborhoods. Nonetheless, one of the interviewees expressed concern about his safety in his neighborhood. He explained that he feels threatened by other Syrians living in the same neighborhood. According to him, people in Syria are standing with the government or with the terrorists from Al Qaeda, Jabat Al-Nusra or Daesh (ISIS). Thus you cannot speak your mind in that area, otherwise they threat you right away over Facebook.

‘[…] I feel threatened from them, so most of the time, I cannot speak my mind, I cannot say anything, I have to keep silent. […] When I meet any Syrians I don’t speak politics. And if he speak politics I ask him politely not to speak politics
under the... I use the argument that ‘sorry I skipped there because of the politics I don’t want to hear anything because it hurts my feelings’. Just to run from the conversation. Then, I can live peacefully’ (R2, Nijmegen)

When asked about safety in the area they live, right after the question, most of the interviewees said that in general they indeed feel safe in The Netherlands. The situation mentioned above is not something exclusive, but it is also not something that happen very often. In Addition, the idea of a ‘safe space’ has a wide range in the mind of some interviewees. Safety may be related to physical threats but also psychological harm. For instance, one of the Syrian interviewees argued that ‘compared to what we used to have in our country, anything is safe in here’. However, by the fact that they the refugees look different because of their ‘hair color or the skin color [...] people always look at you in a different way’. But on the other hand, the same Syrian man said that even if it is hard sometimes, most of the people are really nice, especially in Nijmegen.

Overall, the main problems related to housing in Nijmegen are isolation and social exclusion. Safety is not really a big issue for the refugees. The allocation of refugees in isolated areas undermine their motivation and capability of getting in touch with the Dutch citizens and hence their feeling of belonging. Also, there are some concerns about safety from some of the interviewees, but not all of them. In fact, most of the interviewees feel safe in the areas they live. The major problem about housing is the fact that, for the most part, the asylum seekers are isolated from the Dutch community. Thus, there is a direct impact of housing on the refugees’ motivations and expectations to integrate.

5.2.2. On mental health

Some of the interviewees went through many problems after crossing different countries and the Mediterranean Sea to arrive in Europe. The situation in their countries and the tough path they have been through may generate mental health problems among the refugees. Nonetheless, most part of the refugees argued that they didn’t need any kind of help regarding their physical or mental health. Actually, only three of the interviewees said that they were having depression problems, and only one of these three actually got professional help. This feeling was higher on the refugees that had to abandon their home country and leave their family behind. The other interviewees said that they did not need professional help, some of them were feeling depressed either way. The lack of information about health aid was also a problem. One of the refugees said he needed help but he did not know that he could have been helped.

‘I didn’t know that somebody can help. But the first second I knew, it was not good advertised. Like when I was at the camp. The first six months in the Netherlands, very later I discovered this as well. A psychologist for mental health, but it was too late’ (R9, Nijmegen)

According to Strang & Ager (2008), good health is ‘widely seen as an important resource for active engagement in a new society’ (p172). Surprisingly, the refugees
that complained about depressive feelings were very active. According to evidence gathered through the interviews, they did not stop to be active because of their grief.

5.2.3. On employment and Education

Employment is one of the most researched areas regarding integration (Strang & Ager, 2008). The interviewees used to have fixed jobs in their home countries before fleeing. When they arrived in The Netherlands, they were told that they should finish the integration exams before they get a permission to work. In other words, they should learn Dutch first. Only two interviewees said they have jobs in The Netherlands, and another one said he has an unpaid volunteer job. The other interviewees argued that they have no jobs because of their level of Dutch language and because it is more difficult for a refugee to find a job than a regular immigrant in general. One of the reasons is that The Netherlands may not recognize determined documents from other countries: ‘I have a certificate from Syria, from that country that no one believes in. So if I say that I have this and this, no one will believe at it.’ (R7, Nijmegen). This puts the refugees in disadvantage at the labor market.

A Syrian refugee told me that he does not like the fact that he is receiving subsidies from the Dutch government. In fact, he expressed that the fact he is receiving subsidies from the government makes him feel less integrated. ‘I [would] feel more integrated when I start to pay taxes, because then I will feel equal [to] the others’ (R2, Nijmegen). Other refugees had the same concern about subsidies; sometimes they feel like a burden to the Dutch community. Furthermore, some cultural cleaves should be taken into account as well. For instance, a Syrian mother who found a job in The Netherlands said to me that

‘In our culture, we are always depending on the man. It is too hard to work, to do everything and to be the mother and father […] It’s very difficult, also because you don’t know anything here, you don’t know how to do this, how to do that’… in your country you know everything. So maybe when I learn the language it would be easier with the time’ (R8, Nijmegen).

Most of the refugees showed a strong association of employment with feelings of belonging. Also, knowing the Dutch language in this case is paramount for the refugees to find a job. It is hard for the refugees to find volunteer jobs as well mainly because of two things: the lack of knowledge about the Dutch language and the area they live. Some of the refugees are allocated in small villages where employment and volunteer jobs are difficult to find.

Furthermore, almost all the interviewees had higher education or at least started studying at a higher education institution before fleeing their country. For them to continue their studies in The Netherlands, they must learn Dutch first. Only one of the refugees could start studying something beyond language in Nijmegen. The reason behind it is that he started learning Dutch at his home country. In general, the refugees have been in the Netherlands since 2015 and some of them were living in Heumensoord for a while. When living at the camps, the refugees could not start studying the Dutch language because they should get a house first. Although some refugees were still living at COA asylum centers, they had the opportunity to start
learning Dutch language in there. After reaching a certain level of Dutch, the refugees should go through a probation year to start studying at a Dutch higher education institution. The refugees argued that studying again is one of their main expectations for the future.

5.2.4. On Integration and feelings of belonging

The concept of integration was unknown to most of the interviewees. After a brief explanation about what integration is, I asked the interviewees if they received any information about integration expectations when they arrived in The Netherlands. This question was elaborated in different ways for them to fully understand what I was asking. In sum, most part of the interviewees received some information about the integration obligations and expectations from IND, COA or another governmental unit, but in a fragmented way. I also asked them what integration for them is and if they feel integrated in the Netherlands; if they feel part of the Dutch society. These questions were very important to understand to which extent the refugees lacked knowledge about processes, their very own interpretation on what integration is and if they have feelings of belonging and why.

In the beginning, COA did not provide refugees with enough information about integration in The Netherlands and they did not provide them with subsidies. A refugee that came to Dutch lands in 2014 (R2) said that he and other newcomers received nothing at that time. Things started changing in 2015, when COA focused on a more informative approach towards the refugees. The information that most of the refugees received about integration expectations was that they should accept the laws and values of The Netherlands and learn Dutch. The fragmented information that some of the refugees received was that they should understand the rules, respect the society, acquire cultural knowledge, that they should learn everything about The Netherlands in three years, that they could only stay for five years and that they should do an integration exam.

It is noticeable that all the refugees received different or incomplete information about integration expectations from the Dutch government. The problem of receiving fragmented information is that the refugees may not have enough knowledge of what is expected from them. For instance, one refugee said that the only information he received was that he should accept and respect the Dutch way of life. R9 said the only information he got was through a letter, saying that he had three years to learn Dutch and that was all. Even though the refugees did not receive a good explanation about what the Dutch government expect them to achieve, they knew for sure that they should learn Dutch language. However, the integration exam involves information about ‘how to vote, how the economy works, how to pay your taxes, how to send a post mail or even how to ride a bike’ (R7, Nijmegen). The refugees’ lack of information is alarming and influences the length of their integration process.

The refugees had many different interpretations on what integration is. Most of the interviewees understood integration as knowing Dutch language and understanding, respecting and knowing the society’s dynamics, to be part of the society, to be accepted, to accept the differences and to have social networks. It is interesting that some refugees argued that knowing Dutch history is not actually important or that to fit the society there should be no difference between a Dutch citizen and an immigrant. These interpretations were individual, hence not shared by
any other interviewee. Furthermore, one of the interviewees argued that integration for him is to understand the working market. In other words, doing this you can get to know the Dutch ethics and culture; you can understand how they think, what is offensive for them and what is important to them. Through the understanding of what the market needs, you can fit the host society better and hence understand and respect it. This vision was not shared by other interviewees.

Some of them gave preference to the idea that integration is cultural understanding and education. For instance, a Syrian father (R6) had this very strong belief that integration is three things; understanding how people think, having freedom of movement and building social connections. It is interesting how freedom of movement for him was not only ‘the right to come and go as he wish’, but also the right to know where he is going, to know the place he lives and to receive useful information about his new land. This belief of integration as freedom of movement was not shared by other interviewees. However, the interpretation of the concept of integration as understanding the new culture and having social connections was fairly shared among the interviewees. One of the interviewees clarified that integration for him is about respect and understanding the new society. In his words, ‘you do not have to be the same as anyone else, but you have to be respectful for what this community has to offer and how this community is living’ (R7, Nijmegen). This vision was shared with three other interviewees.

The conceptualization of integration varies according to each refugee’s experience. After defining the concept through the refugees’ interpretation, the interviewees were asked what is it to be successfully integrated for them. Most of them answered that if they feel accepted, feel at home, speak Dutch, have social bridges and a job, they would be successfully integrated. To a fewer extent, interviewees argued that overcoming ignorance would help diminishing fear – hence giving space for more interaction between refugees and the host society – and that paying taxes are important for integration to be successful. Consequently, I asked the interviewees if they feel integrated and if they feel part of the Dutch society. These were really deep questions and the answers were rather confusing sometimes. There was only one interviewee that answered positively for both questions, a very well educated 52 years old Syrian man. The reason why he felt integrated and a part of the Dutch society was because he speaks Dutch, have good relations with people, he have friends, projects that he could develop and that he could cope really well with the environment around him, therefore he could put his ‘fingerprint’ in Nijmegen; leave his mark.

Three of the interviewees said they feel integrated but not part of the Dutch society. One of these two said he feels integrated just because he could speak good Dutch. Nonetheless, he did not know how to explain why he does not feel part of the Dutch society. The closest to an explanation was because he does not have close Dutch friends. The other one argued that he feels integrated because he did not face any problems in Nijmegen. Integration for him is not something static; he can feel integrated now but maybe not in the future. It depends on where he is and if the other side of integration – the Dutch society – to their part on the integration process as well.

‘For today I feel integrated, tomorrow I’ll also feel integrated, but for the next couple of weeks or the next place I’m going to be or how things will move on from there. So it’s a
very wide aspect about integration. I hope I can be integrated on the whole time I’m here and in the place I may be moving.’ (R7, Nijmegen)

In addition, he does not feel part of the Dutch society because he feels that he is always trying to prove something to someone and to himself, and when this feeling goes away, he would finally feel part of the society. The last one said he feels a little bit integrated because his friends accept him, but he does not feel part of the Dutch society because he does not feel part of the Dutch society because the society does not consider him Dutch.

Two interviewees argued that they do not feel integrated but they mixed feelings about being part of the Dutch society. The other respondents argued that they do not feel integrated nor part of the Dutch society. The reasons for them not to feel integrated or part of the Dutch society are based on the lack of social acceptance, social bridges, language skills, adaptation to the system and feeling of belonging. Furthermore, interviewees were questioned about what is lacking for them to feel successfully integrated. As it was said before, the answers varied between feeling accepted, feeling at home, speaking good Dutch, having social bridges and a job. These are the most important indicators for them to feel successfully integrated. These different answers are going to be discussed below. All of the following situations were experienced by the refugees in the municipality of Nijmegen.

Social acceptance. Integration is a process that depends on the refugees, the host society and the environmental conditions for it to be accomplished. Refugees and Dutch society should manage coexistence and work for mutual understanding and acceptance. Furthermore, perceptions of lack of enforcement from the both sides have a negative impact on the integration process as well. This should be done from both sides, otherwise integration would fail. One of the interviewees argued that

‘Some people spend more than 10, 15 or 20 years and they don’t feel integrated. To feel integrated, that means that the other side considers you Dutch. But the other side doesn’t consider you Dutch […] society still always look to me like a stranger, a foreigner. So I don’t think I’ll be 100% fit. But, of course, I’ll do my best to reach that place, even if it’s hard’ (R2, Nijmegen).

In this case, integration has a lot to do with acceptance of the other. With no acceptance, the refugee would not feel integrated in the host society. No matter how much integration enforcement a refugee makes, if the other side does not cooperate, integration will not be achieved. The same happens in the other way around. If the Dutch citizens have the perception that the refugees are not ‘putting enough efforts to integrate’, their motivation to engage in the integration process may be weakened. The dynamics of social acceptance has a direct relation to discrimination and the ‘othering’ process, therefore the theme is going to be further explored in the next section.

Social bridges. There is a very interesting contradiction related to the building of social bridges. All the interviewees agreed with the fact that Dutch people are nice, polite and always willing to help. Albeit this finding was unison, almost all the interviewees agreed that making Dutch friends is rather tough. They argued that despite Dutch’s goodwill, they could not really connect to the Dutch citizens because
they keep a certain distance from them. Empirical evidence from this research showed that it is hard for a refugee to have a strong friendship with Dutch nationals for three main reasons: Dutch people are too busy and refugees have too much free time, because Dutch people are distant, the aspect of friendship is different in The Netherlands from their home country and in some cases the Dutch citizens are simply not interested in the refugees. For instance, one of the interviewees explained why it is difficult to make Dutch friends:

‘We come to study, we came from war, we came from doing everything and a lot of people think if you are refugee than they don’t want to speak with you [...] I talk to people on the internet, they know that I’m a refugee, they do not reply [...] if we go to the party here in the Netherlands, and I don’t drink alcohol [...] for me is haram, but for many people is not. So if I don’t drink with them, they don’t like. They don’t like these things. [...] all my life I have never tried.’ (R1, Nijmegen)

The lack of interest on the refugees added to the existent distance between them and the Dutch people are one of the main deterrents for the creation of a healthy feeling of belonging among the asylum seekers. There is also an understanding that refugees should take the action to start effective communication and relations with the Dutch community. If this first contact never happens by a refugee’s initiative, maybe Dutch people would never approach them. An Eritrean man explained about his situation

Even if they don’t talk to me, I have to get much effort to know about myself, the Dutch community. You don’t know me, I am a new one here, so they must know me, who I am. Because many people came here and they don’t know all of them unless you get to their house and describe in which way you came here and who are you, everything. So, for me nederlanders... if you don’t contact with them, they don’t ask you anything, you know? But you have to contact by yourself who are you and for example if you need any kind of help, they are opened to help you, but if you don’t contact with them, even they don’t believe you [...]. (R3, Nijmegen).

Another refugee was explaining about interpretations of friendship and the distance it makes:

‘of course you can have friends, but they won’t be like the best friends or the friends you can depend or relay on [...] In Syria, it is widely opened for building relationships and to be friends, people are always with each other, hanging out, inviting at the evenings. In Syria, you wouldn’t find people sitting in their homes alone in the evening; they are always visiting other people. Each day, not only in the weekends. So it’s something... people like to be around each other in Syria more than here’ (R7, Nijmegen).

It is possible to see an important cultural cleavage here. The expectation some refugees have to build social bridges similar to the ones they used to have in their home country creates space for an anxiety in the integration process. Some refugees
expressed concern about cultural cleavages, sometimes even using the Huntington’s terminology of ‘civilization’ clashes (1996). On the one hand, a refugee argued that it is easier for the Syrian to accept the Dutch than the other way around because in Syria they are used to have multiple ethnicities sharing the public space and living together. On the other hand, one refugee argued that cleavages are not that big between both cultures because we are all human and we have the same problems and worries. Anyhow, the interviewees consider social bridges one of the most important things in the integration process. The harder it is, they feel less integrated and less part of the society. This distance may be a result of the ‘othering’ process, hence increasing exclusiveness and decreasing refugees’ feelings of belonging. At the end of the day, the national and local approaches to integration should focus on working towards a more inclusive society by overcoming stereotypes and raising awareness about who the refugees are and why they are in The Netherlands.

Language skills. The interviewees expressed a common concern regarding language skills as imperative for integration. The idea that acquiring Dutch language would catalyze their integration has two main explanations: because someone from the government ‘told them’ that it is mandatory for a normative integration or because they feel it is the only way to really build social bridges with Dutch people. When one of the interviewees was asked about what is lacking for him to feel successfully integrated in the Dutch society, he answered

‘To speak perfect Dutch. To have a conversation with a Dutch and don’t feel like a stranger [...] to look at us as a Dutch man, understand another Dutch man. That’s still hard because when I read now I can’t understand it fully, because I’m still not that good in Dutch. Even Dutch people doesn’t understand their language... its complicated’ (R2, Nijmegen).

Feeling of belonging. The idea of ‘feeling at home’ was very important for some of the interviewees. Even though they shared the concern about this feeling, they did not have a common idea of ‘home’ or ‘belonging’. R7 argued that he would never feel at home in a place his family is not close to him. R8 argued ‘I feel comfortable [...] I like the freedom. So yes, it is good for me. But now no, of course not, it’s not my home. Maybe with the time, I’ll feel this is my home. I feel that t’s better then when I lived in Syria, but it’s not my home yet’. R9 was straight to the point and said ‘I feel safe and when I feel here is my home, my homeland, then I will feel completely integrated’. Other interviewees argued that their feeling of belonging would be increased by social bridges, having jobs or by being accepted by the Dutch people in the society. All of these reasons have an intimate relation to the ‘othering’ process. For instance, one interviewee wanted to clarify the link between social acceptance, ‘othering’ and feeling of belonging

‘Let’s say I am a girl who wears a scarf. And I’m just studying at the school and “you must integrate, you must study, you must work”. And when she goes to the market – and that happened to a person I know – they started to look at her with disrespect. Or even say something not right to her. “Why are you wearing a scarf? You look different, take off your scarf; bad muslim”, or something like that. Do you think that she will go back to her house and study happily? Or feel
integrated? Maybe she did her best, but I don’t think she will feel integrated.’ (R2, Nijmegen)

Situations of this kind have a negative impact on refugees’ mental health as well. Likewise, it makes them feel ‘othered’ by the perception that they are not welcome or accepted in the host society, hence undermining their feeling of belonging. In sum, social rejection makes refugees to avoid contact with the host community for self-protection. In the following section I will compare the discrimination patterns to ignorance and continue the discussion of the ‘othering’ process more deeply.

5.2.5. On Discrimination, ‘Othering’ and Ignorance

‘I have a problem all my life in The Netherlands because a lot of people think that refugee is nothing. They cannot do anything, they just want a house and just stay in the house. (R1, Nijmegen).

As it was explained before, ‘othering’ is a process of differentiation of the ‘other’. This process can happen normatively by the rule of law, structurally by institutions and on the everyday dynamics of public space. The interviewees were asked if they have suffered any kind of discrimination in The Netherlands and to describe their experiences. The findings were revealing: only few refugees experienced any kind of discrimination or perceived discrimination in Nijmegen. The other ones were sure that racism exist in The Netherlands, but they did not experience that. Notwithstanding, even some of the refugees that did not experience discrimination somehow have been through an ‘othering’ process. Of course, the evaluation of perceived discrimination is something very personal. However, it is really rare to find a refugee that have not been through the ‘othering’ process.

In other words, evidence from this research shows that in general refugees feel welcome in Nijmegen, do not feel ‘othered’ or did not suffer discrimination. However, by assessing their stories and situations they have been through, most of them perceive discrimination and have been through an ‘othering’ process at some point. In this case, the refugees see direct discrimination or perceived discrimination as a reflection of fear and ignorance.

For instance, I was told that a Dutch woman on her 50’s was shouting in Dutch ‘you came here, and you don’t speak the language […] you came to our land, and you don’t respect us, and you don’t respect our laws […]’ (R2, Nijmegen) to one of the interviewees, just because he was riding a bike on the sidewalk to avoid the cars. Another interviewee told me

“Once I was approached by people who said just leave, go back to your country. We don’t want you here’. They didn’t know me, they didn’t know anything […] I don’t understand why they have to say it like this or they want people to move back to a war zone, to go and die. So yeah, basically I don’t expect those stuff to end […] it was really humiliating […] no one did anything’ (R7, Nijmegen).
Cases of explicit discrimination are not commonly seen in the city of Nijmegen, but they eventually happen. Most of the time, the discrimination is hidden in the speech, the attitudes and the approach people have towards the refugees. One of the refugees argued that he could perceive discrimination when he tries to communicate with somebody and the person shows no interest or sometimes disrespect. He also said that

'[once someone] told me: “you have to be thankful for you have got food for free”. And I told him, “It’s not nice to get for free, it’s better to find a job”. And he also said “but there is no many jobs”. I think he meant ‘you are taking our jobs’ or something (R9).

Thereby, sometimes the discrimination is on the speech, is on what people think and how they express it. These perceived discriminations – or meta-perceptions – give ground for the refugees to feel that they are not really accepted in the Dutch society and that people are just being ‘polite’. But why some Dutch citizens ‘other’ the refugees? The very refugees believe that the biggest problem is ignorance.

The opinion of some Dutch citizens are indeed influenced by populist discourses and negative mass media information, according to the refugees. This creates an orientalist view of people coming from Africa and the Middle East based on ignorance. One of the interviewees believes that the image westerns have of Middle Easterners is 90% stereotypical: ‘90% think that because we are Arabs, we used to use camels to go to [our] job, and live in tents, and all our life is sand (R2, Nijmegen). He also argued that the media has an important role on building the stereotypical view that middle eastern are ‘barbaric’ or ‘backwards’:

‘I watch [the news] [...] every day. When the word ‘Syria’ appears, it’s connected always with filthy people, dirty people, people who come with dirty clothes and filthy faces, terrorists, war... so the word Syria, when I say it, that’s the image that come to your head; war and filthy people. (R2, Nijmegen)

The distorted images of who the refugees are creates a huge gap in the integration enforcements. Some Dutch people don’t know much about refugees, so they prefer to keep distance. However, if this gap is filled with real trustable information, the ‘othering frenesi’ would be replaced by a more human approach to the refugees. This can be done empirically by individuals, organizations, municipalities and the refugees themselves. For instance, one refugee was explaining how he could overcome ignorance and change people’s understandings about what a refugee is

I don’t know what they [know] about refugee, and a lot of people didn’t want to learn [...] one month ago I made a presentation about Syria, and one lady come to me and say to me ‘I don’t like refugee’ and after that, when I make the presentation, ‘I like so much the refugee’, because you are changing the background of the refugee’ (R1, Nijmegen).

Other refugees also agree that people don’t understand why people are coming to The Netherlands. This ignorance may be psychologically harmful to the refugees. One of the interviewees said that when he is back home after spending the whole day
outside, he thinks ‘I felt like people are seeing me differently; they are laughing [...] (R7, Nijmegen). These small things diminishes the possibility for a refugee to feel at home in Dutch lands, because this raises the feeling that they are not welcome, that they are always different, that they are always ‘the other’.

According to some of the refugees interviewed in this research, each city has a different dynamics, regional cultures and mindsets. Thus the situation of the refugees in each city of The Netherlands is different from each other. Although they have some difficulties in the city of Nijmegen, they said that in other parts of the country the situation is worse. Nijmegen is a multicultural city and there is people from all around the world living in there. ‘People in Nijmegen is very friendly, but if you go to the south of Netherlands, they would be less friendly than here’ (R1, Nijmegen).

‘Othering’ is a path that permeates many integration fields and domains. It has strong impact on social acceptance, extremely negative effects on the feelings of belonging, the construction of social bridges, the lack of job opportunities, housing and safety and the dynamics of inclusion/exclusion. Empirical evidence from this research shows that ignorance is one of the main catalyzers of the ‘othering’ process. This ignorance is spread through many ways, and it gets into people’s hearts and minds. Consequently, integration will never be successful if policymakers and society in general keep ‘othering’ the asylum migrants.

5.3 Is integration really working?

This thesis’ research question is to what extent is integration of Syrian and Eritrean refugees in Nijmegen successful? The short answer is it depends on the domain and on whose perspective. From the refugees’ perspective, there are some reasons for them not to feel completely integrated in the Dutch society: because they still lack language skills, they lack strong social bonds, they do not feel completely accepted by the Dutch society and they do not have a job. These problems decreases refugees’ feelings of belonging and motivations to integrate.

Previous literature shows that in general, refugees are failing the integration exams in The Netherlands. If both the Dutch government and the refugees express that they are not integrated, maybe integration is indeed not working. But some details should be taken into account in here. Through the conceptual framework, it was possible to understand that the most problematic domains in Nijmegen are language, employment and social bonds. Refugees in Nijmegen are having some troubles learning Dutch language. However, none of the interviewees have been in The Netherlands for more than three years, so they are still within the given time to learn the language. Language is a facilitator of the other two domains, and it has a direct influence on them. However, the ‘othering’ process has also a strong influence on employment and the construction of social bonds. Even of a refugee speaks Dutch, it does not mean that he is going to be accepted by the Dutch community.

Speaking about the other domains, safety was not a general concern among the refugees. Likewise, Improvements were made in housing and healthcare. There are still some problems within these domains – for instance housing allocation, healthcare advertising –, but they were not general concerns among the refugees either. Continue studying and having a job were the core refugees’ expectations for the future. Both of these domains depended on the Dutch level of the refugees.
Even if language skills are an important facilitator of the integration process, evidence from this research has shown that knowing Dutch language is not enough. Even if the refugees speak good Dutch, they can still be ‘othered’ in social life and at the labor market. In addition, the integration course is also not enough. Even if refugees pass the exam, it is only theoretical. If normatively a refugee is integrated because he passed the integration exams, he is not going to feel integrated if he is still being ‘othered’ in practice. For integration to work, both sides should work towards it, therefore true integration cannot be achieved in three years.

This research has shown that the ‘othering’ process escalated through ignorance is one of the biggest problems for integration to be successful. Refugees can be ‘othered’ when they try to find a job, when they try to build social bridges by making Dutch friends or when their house’s location is isolated from the Dutch society. This has an impact on refugees’ motivation to integrate and makes them feel that they are not part of the society. The refugees believe that, on the one hand, Dutch people are kind and are willing to help. On the other hand, they keep a certain distance from them. This ‘othering’ process is not a direct discrimination. It is a meta-perception of the refugees; they experience this feeling on the dynamics of daily life. If ‘othering’ patterns continue to influence so many domains, refugees would never really feel at home in the Dutch society.

To overcome ignorance and diminish the ‘othering’ process, some refugees are engaged in on- and offline activism to help the newcomers and raise awareness about their situation in the Nijmegen to Dutch citizens. Likewise, Yalla Foundation works on building social networks between refugees and the Dutch society. These actions are taken to decrease the distance between the refugees and the Dutch nationals. Then, both sides would accept each other easier, avoiding cultural conflicts and increasing the possibility to build social bonds. The question that still begs an answer is: Beyond what is already being done at the local level, how can a successful integration of Eritrean and Syrian refugees be promoted in Nijmegen?

To overcome these barriers, I propose two strategies. First, refugees should be part of policymaking. If this is not made nationwide, it should be done at the local level with the Municipality of Nijmegen, especially because it has autonomy to build up municipal policies. The refugees are the ones that know the best what is necessary for them to feel more integrated or to raise fruitful conditions for an inclusive society. With a municipal refugee council composed by refugees themselves, their concerns and its details could be discussed at a policy level. This would change the city’s approach towards employment, housing and health.

Second, there should be a joint action from NGOs, civil society and the city of Nijmegen to raise awareness about who the refugees are, why is there a refugee crisis happening worldwide and why are they coming to the Netherlands. This can be done on a local level through the investment in events, commercials, public lectures, the production of documentaries and brochures, by inviting refugees to share their stories at universities and other public spaces. Then, the stereotypes one could have about refugees in general or towards a certain nationality could be replaced by the understanding that they are not that different from oneself. Raising awareness is an important tool to decrease the ignorance level of the population on the subject and hence avoid the ‘othering’ process to happen or to escalate. Then, it would be easier
to create social bridges, refugees would feel more accepted in the host society and their feelings of belonging and motivation would increase exponentially.

7. CONCLUSION

As long as conflicts happen around the globe, people will continue their perennial migration towards a place they can finally feel safe. After arriving in the targeted country, refugees should still deal with deterrents for them to stay in the very land. The amount of people arriving in The Netherlands raised considerably in the past few years and the assimilationist public policy regarding integration of these refugees proved to be problematic. The Nijmegen local NGO Yalla Foundation deals with this problem at the local level on an everyday basis. Thus, the organization needed further research on the local integration dynamics between Syrian and Eritrean refugees and the Dutch society in Nijmegen. With empirical evidence, Yalla would be capable of establishing better integrative practices between NGOs, civil society and the municipality of Nijmegen.

The purpose of this thesis was to assess to what extent is integration of Syrian and Eritrean refugees in Nijmegen successful. To answer this main question, I proposed three other sub-questions that would help me answering the research question. These questions were ‘how is the integration of refugees being promoted in the Netherlands’, ‘what approach does Yalla Foundation use towards the integration of refugees in Nijmegen’ and ‘what are Eritrean and Syrian refugees’ perceptions of integration in Nijmegen’. This research made use of Strang & Ager’s conceptual framework for a successful integration to assess the most important integration’s domains. Integration at the local level is believed to be influenced by refugees’ motivations to integrate, perspectives and feelings of belonging. Therefore, the refugees’ perspectives on integration and its domains is an important point of focus of this research.

Through the sub-questions of this research it was possible to understand the integration dynamics in The Netherlands and more specifically in Nijmegen. Since early 2000’s, integration in The Netherlands has been done through a top-down normative approach based on the acculturation principles of assimilation. Empirical evidence showed us that, in practice, assimilation gives little space for the management of multiple identities and creates an exclusionary integration policy (Hoekstra, 2015; Entzinger, 2014; Alencar & Deuze, 2017). The need for a local bottom-up approaches to integration is extensively expressed in the literature (e.g. Korac, 2013; Strang & Ager, 2010; Cappiali, 2016; Mestheneos & Ioannidi, 2002; Penninx, 2009). Yalla Foundation was created to fill this gap in the city of Nijmegen. Their local approach focuses on inclusive society through aiding refugees with the creation of social and professional networks. The organization has strong ties with the municipality of Nijmegen and the refugees. Yalla looks forward to find better integration practices and actions by managing the city’s integration normative rule of law and the refugees’ individual perspectives.

The assessment of refugees’ perceptions regarding integration was done through the themes and domains of Strang & Ager conceptual framework. These findings show us that there is a need to improve determined domains to achieve
successful integration. These domains are health, housing, language skills, employment and social bridges.

Evidence from this research showed that there are different interpretations of the concept of integration and its core domains. For instance, there is a relationship between housing, isolation and safety. For the refugees, the fact that they live in areas with other foreigners and isolated from the Dutch citizens increases isolation. However, if a refugee lives in a good area and has Dutch neighbors, it doesn’t necessarily mean that they are going to build social bridges. It is going to depend on refugees’ allocation area and their motivations and expectations. Nonetheless, the interviewees agreed that housing location is important for them not to feel isolated, to find better employment opportunities and to feel secure. Regarding safety, most of the refugees feel safe in the areas they live because they do not feel threatened by Dutch citizens. However, one refugee indeed complained that he feels threatened by his fellow countrymen in the area he lives. To overcome these problems, the city of Nijmegen should allocate the refugees in places with higher amount of Dutch citizens or closer to the city center.

Mental health was not a big issue among the refugees. Most of them did not need professional help since their arrival in the country. However, this research has shown that there should be better public advertising about newcomers’ rights to health aid.

Employment is a really important domain for all the interviewees. They argued that having a job would increase refugee’s feelings of belonging. It would also help diminishing the feeling that they are a burden to the host society. Some of the deterrents for refugees to be employed are the level of Dutch language they can speak and the fact that sometimes they are being ‘othered’ in the labor market.

Between many different interpretations of what integration de facto is, the interviewees shared the idea that integration is knowing Dutch language, understanding, respecting and knowing the society’s dynamics, to be part of the society, to be accepted, to accept the differences and to have social networks. However, most part of the refugees said they do not feel integrated nor part of the Dutch society. The main reasons for them not to feel integrated are that they do not feel accepted by the host society, they find it difficult to build up social bridges, they do not speak Dutch and they do not feel at home. In other words, the biggest deterrents for a successful integration of Syrian and Eritrean refugees in Nijmegen are that they feel ‘othered’, because of cultural cleavages, perceived discrimination and because they still lack language skills.

Previously, I proposed two strategies to overcome the limitations for a successful integration of Syrian and Eritrean refugees in The Netherlands. The two proposal were 1) to include refugees as part of policy planning and policymaking; and 2) for NGOs, civil society and the municipality of Nijmegen to raise awareness about who the refugees are, why is there a refugee crisis happening worldwide and why are they coming to the Netherlands. With both policy and practice aiming at undermining stereotypes and effectively sharing information about what is really happening in Nijmegen, Dutch citizens and refugees would manage their coexistence in a better way.
7.1. Discussion and Recommendations

Due to time, space and personal limitations, some interesting details about the integration process were taken away from the analysis, for instance a gender perspective on integration. Also, the availability of Syrian and Eritrean nationals that could speak English, wanted to speak and had time for it was rather small. The amount of interviews was then reduced, therefore the data collected was limited. Likewise, the integration process might be tougher for the refugees that cannot speak Dutch neither English. Unfortunately, this issue could not be analyzed on this research because of the availability of the people and feasibility of the interviews.

Also, the findings from this research may be generally applicable to other Dutch cities, depending on local factors. Each city has a different dynamics, culture and approach in dealing with the refugees. The studied case was focusing specifically in the multicultural city of Nijmegen, thus the applicability shall be different in small villages or cities that are less multicultural.

It is natural to suggest a cross-municipal analysis for further research. It would be helpful to gather information regarding integration from other cities and reach common indicators for development. Likewise, an analysis of refugees’ integration in Nijmegen with more scope may have different results. Further research embracing refugees in general and withholding more interviews may have different and interesting results compared to the present research.

Finally, a gender perspective on the integration of refugees in Nijmegen would be interesting to understand if integration is different for women. This would involve a different practical approach depending on the gender of the refugee.
8. REFERENCES


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9. APPENDIX I - Semi-structured Interviews Protocol

Igor de Freitas Carneiro da Silva

Questionnaire on Integration

HUMAN GEOGRAPHY

Conflicts, Territories and Identities

First of all, thank the interviewee for coming and then explain about the purpose of the interview, stressing that the final goal of the research is to help them (by supporting the development of knowledge that can lead to better integration policies). I should also clarify that their identities will not be disclosed. Furthermore, I should get their consent for recording the interview with an audio recorder as well as explaining why I have to record it. If there is no agreement on the recording, notes are going to be taken instead.

The interview should start with opened questions, to make the interviewee more comfortable to talk. Trust-building is paramount for the refugees to be honest about their answers and to undermine their fear that some of the provided information may be used against them at some point. The purpose of doing semi-structured interviews is to give the interviewees freedom of speech and space for brainstorming and storyline insights about their own journey.

1 Demographic Info
Before asking the following questions, I should explain that they are necessary for cataloguing data, making the interviewee more comfortable and avoid the feeling that this is an interrogation.

1.01 Gender: M \ F
1.02 When were you born?
1.03 Where are you from?
1.04 What is/was your profession back in your home country?
1.05 When did you arrive in The Netherlands? How long have you been in the country (Are you a newcomer or not)?
1.06 Which languages do you speak?

1 Knowledge about The Netherlands and governmental integration

2.01 What information did you receive about integration expectations since your arrival in the country?
2.02 What is integration to you?

3 Markers and Means [Strang & Ager’s conceptual framework]

3.01 Do you have a house? Where is it? Is it a shared house? How long have you been living independently (out of the COA system)?
3.02 How safe do you feel in the area you live?
3.03 Do you have a job in the Netherlands? What kind of job? Do you have social connections at work?
3.04 Do you study in the Netherlands? Where? Do you have social connections at
3.05 Did you have to deal with physical or mental health issues when you came to the Netherlands?

3  Feelings, motivations and expectations

4.01 What does your day look like?
4.02 How do you feel about your current situation?
4.03 Do you feel integrated? Why, what do you think it is lacking?
4.04 What is it to be successfully integrated to you?
4.05 What are your expectations for the future?

5  Social Connections/Networks, Identity and Othering

5.01 Do you have family or friends in The Netherlands? Do you have Dutch friends?
5.02 Do you feel part of the society? Why?
5.03 How do you think that people see you? Do you feel that people have any kind of prejudice against you?
5.04 What kind of discrimination did you experience? [for instance, along ethnic, national, linguistic or religious lines]
5.06 Can you give me some examples of situations of this kind that you have been through?