Home is where the heart is

a study on the sense of belonging of Syrian refugees in Friesland

Radboud University

Marlise Hoekstra | S4246659 | June 10, 2016 |

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Written by: Marlise Hoekstra

Studentnumber: S4246659

Superviser: Lotje de Vries

Contact Details:

Marlise Hoekstra

marlisehoekstra@gmail.com

0623855991

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Preface

Writing this thesis was the most challenging work I have ever done.

However I must say that it cannot be compared to the challenges the participants of this research encountered when they found refuge in the near environment of the village that I was born myself. Writing this thesis gave me another perspective on my life in Friesland and gave me the ability to critically review the circumstances in which different people live their lives in my near environment. During this process I found out in a fundamental way, the kind of human suffering occurring in Western Europe, in our own country, but also in my near environment, with people that leave their country only to stay alive. The more I dived into this topic, the more I realized that I have chosen the right issue, as I found that the knowledge obtained from this research, might positively contribute to lives of people in my own environment.

I would like to thank my research supervisor, Lotje de Vries first. She stood by me during a period of almost 1,5 years. I am very grateful for her continues trust in my ability to successfully finish this project. The motivational feedback she gave me during this journey helped me through my insecurities.

Secondly I would like to my appreciation to all the research participants who were willing to share their personal stories on their experiences in Friesland. Working together with these people and getting the opportunity to take a closer look into their lives enriched me as a person. Also I would like to thank Vluchtelingenwerk, they facilitated this research by connecting me with the Syrians, but also for their interest in the topic of this research.

Lastly I would thank my family and friends. Especially my beloved one, Lodewijk de Vries, who always stood by me and handled my bad moods and motivated me when I felt down. To my father, Dirk Hoekstra who was a great support and never stopped believing I could do it. And to my mother, Patricia Hoekstra-Noppert, who took care of my daughter all these days when I was working on my thesis. Thanks to her I didn't have to worry about the most precious gift that came into my life.

Thank you all very much!!!

Executive summary

This research aims to unravel social and spatial aspects considering the sense of belonging of Syrian refugees that have been in the Netherlands for more than a year. To reach this I developed the following research question. To what extent do Syrian refugees, with divergent personal and collective identities, experience a social and spatial sense of belonging in Friesland?

In order to answer the main question I consulted several theories, which suggest that in order to understand the migrants' sense of belonging in a host society, the heterogeneity of these people should be included. The theories propose that social and cultural identities shape the potential meaning they ascribe to social relationships, and have different implications for feeling belonging in the host society (Anthias, 2002; Sasnal, 2015; Fenster, 2004; Yuval Davis, 2006; Tubergen, Maas & Flap, 2004). In addition the social categories and its power positions of within these different cultural and social backgrounds can be important indicators of social distance in a host society (Anthias, 2002; Yuval Davis, 2006). In addition I used theories that explain how social and spatial elements of the host society impact the sense of belonging of Syrians in Friesland. I used these theories to develop a set of questions for a semi-structured interview. These interviews were mostly held at the homes of sixteen couples and individual Syrian refugees throughout several villages in Friesland.

Results of the research show that refuges are still very much connected to their roots, which is mainly associated with family. For refugees the security of their family is the most important in establishing belonging in the Netherlands. In addition, this research shows that in order to develop a social sense of belonging in the host society, participation in the local social life and development of social networks is very important. However most refugees did not achieve this level of participation jet. Reasons for this can be found both in the individualist attitudes of the autochthonous locals, but also in the lack of language skills of the Syrians.

In the chapter on spatial belonging another important reason for this lack of social belonging can be found. This chapter reveals that social networks are often not prioritized, as most of the Syrians feel they need to achieve a certain level of security and control over their lives in advance. Aspects needed for this sense of security should be available in their spatial and contextual environment. However it appears that most refugees feel obstructed in important daily life activities, as being employed. Refugees blame the remoteness villages; their lack of mobility and in some cases the absence of facilities in Friesland. On top of that the refugee status and the governmental bureaucracy shake the refugees safety feeling and can severely obstruct development of belonging.

All in all, the sense of belonging of the Syrian refugee in Friesland towards their near social and spatial environment is still very much in development. In general they need more time to establish an emotional connection to all these aspects of the host society.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

Fadi could not sleep. He is afraid of the sounds of the bombs. He wondered when they hit his house. Today 90% of the buildings in his hometown, Caferzeta have been bombed (11[1]). A 1,5 year old girl is so scared, she does not stop crying every time a bomb drops (13). A little girl was so scared of the war, that she developed eczema and started peeing in her bed again. She continuously asks her mother "Are we dying now? Are we dying now?" eventually she talked less and less. The mother felt that she had no other option than leaving Yarmouk, which is an extremely dangerous undertaking (14).

The above snapshots illustrate situations that made people to leave their homes. They fled because of the war in Syria took lives of their family and friends. Their houses are destroyed (5, 7, 10). These people worked their whole life to invest in their homes, which disappeared in one blow (7, 14). For them there is nothing to go back to. The places where they come from no longer have work, no money and not enough food and water. Therefore they were forced to leave the place where they grew up, where they had their lives: a place where they felt belonging.

Amnesty International (2016) has estimated the number of Syrian refugees to be 4.6 million people. In figure 3, the top five countries that host Syrian refugees are demonstrated (Amnesty, 2015). This shows that only a fraction of these people ask for asylum in the Netherlands. In 2013 this were 2.621 persons, in 2014 11.595, and in 2015 this amount rose to 27.710. In January and February of 2016, some 1.899 Syrians applied for asylum. Despite the relative small amount of Syrians seeking refuge in the Netherlands, compared to neighbouring countries of Syria they comprehend 44% of the total amount of refugees in the Netherlands in 2015.

Figure 3: Percentage of Syrians in nieghbouring coutries (Amnesty, 2016)

Syrian refugees that found refuge in the Netherlands are oftexn traumatized and have lost their loved ones, On top of that they are confronted with big cultural differences; they often do not know anyone and it is hard for them to communicate, because they do not speak the local language. In such a situation it is of utmost importance that these people develop a sense of belonging in the receiving country as soon as
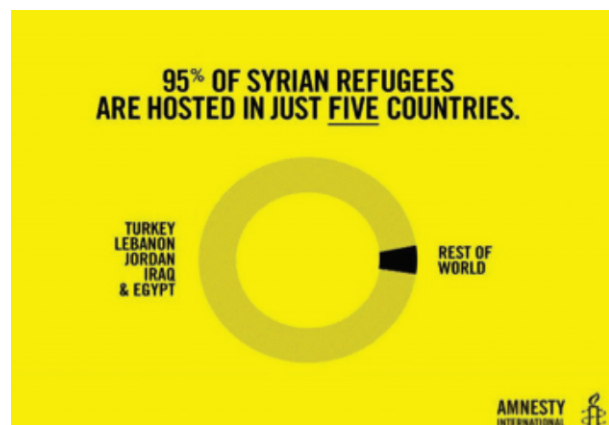
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1. The numbers refer to interviews with Syrians that are listed by date in Appendix 1.

possible. An environment in which someone feels belonging can increase resilience in dealing with (conflict) traumas (Work, 2014). Furthermore The United Nations High Commission for Refugees, UNHCR (2011, p.4) states that when a person feels belonging, he or she feels an integral part of the community or environment; this increases a person's understanding and his or her willingness to participate in the host society. Refugees have skills of which host countries can benefit when people feel at home (UNHCR, 2011, p.4). Consequently, a refugee who experiences a well-developed sense of belonging lives in a situation that is better for him- or herself and better for the host society. Contrastingly, if a refugee is unable to develop a sense of belonging, he or she might experience loneliness, which can at a certain point be experienced through physical pain. In some cases this might undermine some ones self-control and create an interpersonal conflict.

This research focuses on the development of the sense of belonging of Syrian refugees in Friesland as the host society. The development of a local sense of belonging is influenced by social relationships and by being in a particular environment, the spatial dimension to belonging. Therefore I will highlight the social aspects of the development of belonging, as well as the impact of spatial characteristics on feelings of belonging. The differentiation between spatial and social belonging increases theoretical understanding on the extent to which both factors reverberates in the life of a refugee in a host society. However, because social and spatial relationships are closely related to people's identities, I expect that, in addition to a refugee's experience of belonging in Friesland, personal histories of the war, and important people and places in Syria and elsewhere also are of great importance to their sense of belonging. Therefore I also include the histories and identity constructions that impacted the refugees belonging in Syria into the research.

The Syrian refugees that arrive in the Netherlands are often and all too easily seen as one homogeneous group of people. Reducing people to their refugee status overlooks the diverging backgrounds (in terms of religion, education, social capital etc.) that people have. As this thesis will demonstrate, it is important to include this diversity into the analysis because it gives insight on the development of belonging in a host society in two ways. Firstly it reveals the influence of personal and cultural identity in feeling belonging, but also it shows to which extent a host society can influence the sense of belonging of these people.

I have chosen to focus on the province Friesland to do this research on the sense of belonging of Syrian refugees for several reason. Firstly according to the Central Bureau of Statistics the social cohesion in Friesland is relative high compared to other provinces in the Netherlands (CBS, 2014). Furthermore, Frisian people are relative accommodating if one considers the amount of Frisians that does volunteering work compared to other parts of the Netherlands (CBS1, 2015).

Furthermore in Friesland there is a low anti-immigrant sentiment, as can be seen in figure 4 (Volksatlas, 2010). The combination of the mentioned factors support expectations that Syrian refugees have increased chances to socially integrate in Friesland in the relative short time span of one to three years. On top of that the villages and cities in Friesland have a low population density with an average of 193 persons per km2, compared to the rest of the Netherlands with a 500 persons per km2 (CBS2, 2015). Places with a low population density means that the villages and cities in this area do not differ extensively from each other considering the available space and inherent factors as employment. In comparison, provinces like Northern Holland have both small villages, and cities with over a million inhabitants, which makes it more difficult to come to general statements on the possibilities and restrictions in one province.
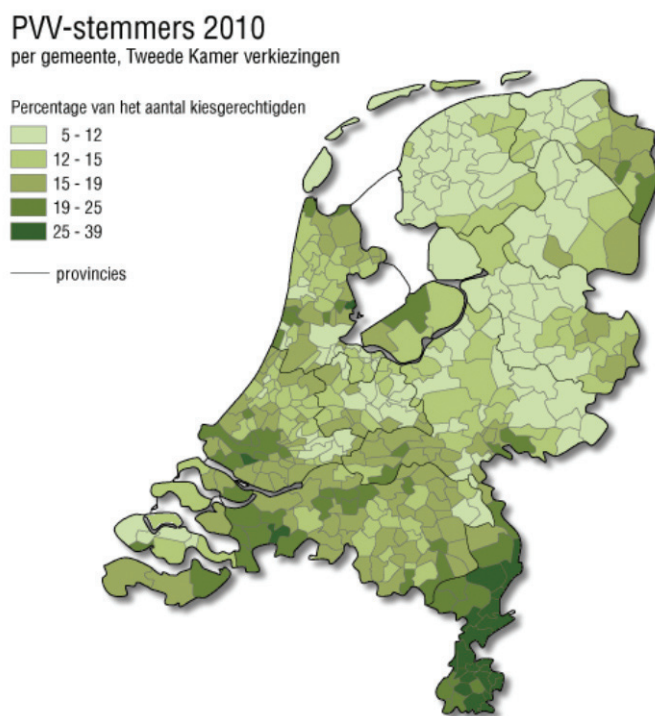
Figure 4: PVV Stemmers (Volksatlas, 2010)

Lastly the province functions as an example in the Netherlands considering its policies on the integration of refugees. In general Friesland has to follow national policies on integration and asylum procedures. However, Friesland was the first province to experiment with policies considering the so-called 'participation society' (Vellenga, 2016). These policies have to stimulate the participation of people in society in order to preserve the Dutch welfare state, where the government falls short. In order to achieve this local participation, non-governmental organizations, municipalities, migrants and locals have created networks to enable and stimulate migrants to participate in the local society.

The knowledge produced in this research is of relevance to these various networks and organisations that are involved in stimulating migrants to participate in the local society. It can be used by organizations that support refugees with their integration (such as Vluchtelingenwerk) but also by local governments to adjust policies in order to stimulate a refugee's sense of belonging.

1.1 Political Context

National integration policies impact the sense of belonging of refugees in Friesland as they influence opportunities that the host society can offer to newcomers. Therefore below I describe the procedures and policies that impact the lives of refugees.

When asylum seekers arrive in the Netherlands they have to report their presence to the police in Ter Apel. Here they are first tested on TBC and after a few days of rest their asylum procedure starts. Due to the great influx of people seeking asylum, the Immigration and Naturalization Service (IND), who is responsible for the asylum applications, is unable to process the large amount of protection seekers and therefore in many cases asylum procedures are postponed up until a year. As a result, many refugees have to wait at least six month for the procedure to start, which has serious implications on refugees' sense of belonging and feeling of security in the Netherlands (Leerkes & Scholten, 2016). Normally asylum seekers are housed in asylum centres, however due to the large influx, many accommodations for (potential) refugees have a temporary character, for which gyms, barracks and former asylum centres are used.[2]

When the procedure starts, asylum seekers need to provide the IND with information on their identity, nationality, travel route and reason for asylum application. Based on this information the IND will decide if the request will be granted (IND, 2015). With an obtained refugee status a refugee gets a temporary residence permit, which means refugees can stay in the Netherlands for five years in case the situation in their homeland does not improve. With a temporary residence permit refugees will be directed to municipalities throughout the Netherlands. These municipalities are obligated to accept these people. How many refugees will be housed in every single municipality depends on the amount of local inhabitants. If refugees have family in a certain municipality, they will often be housed in the same place if this is requested. As soon as a refugee is acknowledged as such, they have three months to apply for members of their nuclear family to follow in a family reunification program (Vluchtelingenwerk, 2015; COA, 2015). As soon as they are registered in a municipality they can be housed, start with their language classes, search for a job or start their studies. In general, with the registration in a municipality, refugees are allowed to Dutch social security benefits, or to start looking for a job. However, finding a job proves very difficult for a number of reasons. Refugees often do not have a sufficient level of Dutch, especially shortly after their arrival. For older refugees it is often problematic to learn a new language. Furthermore, licences and diplomas of refugees are often invalid in the Netherlands, which means that they have to be re-educated. Settling, re-education and integration is very challenging for many refugees (Leerkes & Scholten, 2016).

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2 This did not happen to the refugees I interviewed, however to give a complete picture of the situation, these scenario's also have to be taken into account in.

Refugees with a status are obligated to do integration courses and exams in order to apply for naturalization after five years of residence in the Netherlands. These courses were up until 2015 mainly focussed on socio-cultural integration. They include knowledge about the Dutch society, speaking, listening, writing and reading the Dutch language. However since January 2015, the socio-economic aspects of integration are highlighted in the course 'orientation on the Dutch labour market'. In this course refugees have to use their personal information as their job experiences and diplomas, to calculate their position on the job market in the Netherlands. In addition they have to search for vacancies that fit their profile and map and perform the steps they have to take in order to obtain these jobs (AD Appel, 2016). The refugees that participated in this research mainly arrived before January 2015, and were therefore not obliged to take part in this course. To pay for these integration courses and exams, refugees can loan money from DUO, the Education Executive Agency. When they manage to pass the exams within three years, these loans do not need to be repaid (DUO, 2015). The refugee is responsible for finding and completing these courses and exams himself. The Dutch government takes a step back, and this gap is, ideally, replaced by this 'participation society' instigated since 2015. However refugees often do not yet reside long enough in the Netherlands to build up a network on which they can rely. This makes them fully depended on themselves and non-governmental organizations (Vluchtelingenwerk, 2014).

According to Leerkes and Scholten (2016) a perfect scenario for refugees to integrate in Dutch society would be when asylum policies on the one hand and integration policies on the other would strengthen each other. Leerkes and Scholten (2016) state that if, during the asylum procedure, factors that increase chances on integration, such as professional and educational background, are taken into account, this could stimulate integration more effectively and this would result in integration in an earlier stage. The main factor they refer to here is a refugee's professional background and aspiration a refugee's professional background and aspirations. Similar statements can be found in the 'Integration Barometer' of Vluchtelingenwerk (2014) which points to the abolishment of target group policies. Especially in small municipalities it is important that specific circumstances of refugees are taken into account, such as traumas; worries about friends and families and the lack of a social network in the Netherlands.

On top of that they argue that the temporariness of the status is a factor for insecurity for the refugee. As will be explained in the theoretical framework, belonging is build on a sense of security that one is able to stay in a country, and therefore issues that hinder these kind of factors should be prevented. Scholten and Leerkes (2016) here offer the idea to make a distinction

between people that will probably stay in the Netherlands, like Syrians, and people that will eventually leave. History shows that wars like the civil war in Syria, usually take more than five years, so there is a high probability that Syrian refugees will become permanent residents of the Netherlands.

The end of May 2016, the government decided to invests 500 million euro to improve the current situation in the Netherlands. As a result national asylum and integration policies are starting to change in order to stimulate the participation of migrants in an earlier stage. In order to increase the refugees chances on the job market the government aims to screen refugees with a status in as early as possible, and to place them in a municipality that offers most possibilities. Furthermore municipalities will obtain 140 million euro to invest in integration and participation in its full potential. An example is that asylum seekers can already start to integrate and participate by volunteering. Also the amount of money for a person for personal guidance will be increased from 1.000 to 2.370 euro's. On top of that pre-integration is intensified in asylum centres. Furthermore there will be extra hours for language courses and integration classes on the Dutch society and the labour market will be intensified as well. There also will be extra investments for higher education for children of asylum seekers (Rijksoverheid, 2016).

As is clear from the above, the Dutch refugee policy is still very much in motion as a result of the high influx of people in the last 12 months. This thesis deliberately focuses on people who have been in the Netherlands for a little longer so that we can learn from their experiences now that many others have followed them.

Figure 5: Duma (Google Maps, 2010)

1.2 Research Question and Conceptualization

This research thus aims to unravel the social and spatial dimensions to the sense of belonging of Syrian refugees that have been in the Netherlands for more than a year. I have developed a research question and a set of three sub questions. The main question is:

To what extent do Syrian refugees, with divergent personal and collective identities, experience a social and spatial sense of belonging in Friesland?

1. How do personal histories and specific social categories of Syrian refugees' diverging identities, impact the sense of belonging in Friesland?
2. How do socio-cultural relationships within Friesland and beyond impact refugees' sense of belonging?
3. How do Syrian refugees in Friesland make use of and value their environment, and the opportunities it provides, in their daily lives?

The 'beyond' in the above questions refers to social relationships of the refugees that are maintained across borders. As many Syrians are spread around the world, but especially in Syria, its neighbouring countries and a great amount in Europe, the social relationships and feeling of belonging towards these people cannot be singled out to relationships in Friesland.

When referring to refugees in this thesis, I follow the definition of the Geneva Convention of 1951. A refugee is a person who is outside his or her country of nationality or habitual residence; has a well-founded fear of being persecuted because of his or her race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion; and is unable or unwilling to avail him— or herself of the protection of that country, or to return there, for fear of persecution (UNHCR, 2011). A refugee in the Netherlands is an asylum seeker, whose request for asylum is acknowledged on the basis of the Geneva Convention. The applicant becomes a refugee when he or she then obtains a refugee status, which includes a five-year residence permit (Vluchtelingenwerk, 2014).

The basis for understanding belonging in this thesis is based on Hagerty's definition of belonging: In order to feel part of a community, a personal involvement in the system or environment is necessary (Hagerty, Lynch-Sauer, Patusky, Bouwsema & Collier, 1992, p. 173). In this research, the focus is directed on the sense of belonging in spatial and the socio-cultural environments. In the theoretical framework, the concept of belonging will be explained extensively.

Chapter 2. Methodology

In order to answer the main question of this thesis: To what extents do Syrian refugees, with divergent personal and collective identities, experience a social and spatial sense of belonging in Friesland? I chose several methodologies, which will be explained in this chapter.

2.1 Research Methods

I have chosen to approach this topic with qualitative methods to gain in depth understanding of the refugee's experience of belonging, because the experience of belonging is very personal and can be sensitive: It asks for the feelings, values and perception of the Syrian refugees on belonging. This research mixes two methods to answer the main question, as the research consists of two parts: the first part considers the refugee's identity shaped by their experiences in Syria, researched through a narrative analysis. This research method enables to answer the first sub question:

- How do histories of Syrian refugees in Friesland and their sense of belonging to social categories of Syrians impact their diverging identities?

According to Creswell (2013, p. 71) the narratives of the refugee may shed light on their identity, which is expected to influence their feelings of belonging in Friesland. The second part is about the phenomenon of belonging, which is approached though phenomenological techniques, to find out factors those participants have in common as they experience this phenomenon (Creswell, 2013, p. 76). This method enables to answer the second and the third research question:

- How do socio-cultural relationships within Friesland and beyond impact their sense of belonging?
- How do Syrian refugees in Friesland make use of and value their (contextual) environment and its opportunities in their daily lives?

To gain understanding of a sense of belonging of refugees in the Netherlands, I reduced the scope of my analysis on the sense of belonging in three different ways. Firstly I focus on refugees from Syria; Secondly I focus on those who have been in the Netherlands for at least one year with a residence permit and lastly I focus on those who live in Friesland. I explain my choices below.
I decided to focus on Syrians, because they are the largest growing group in the Netherlands.

According to Vluchtelingenwerk (2015) and Amnesty International (2016) approximately 43% to 54% of the asylum seekers in the Netherlands are from Syria.

Furthermore I have chosen to focus on those who have been here for a year with residence permit.[3] In order to analyse one's sense of belonging in a host society, people should first of all have had the time to develop a sense of belonging, and secondly live with the idea that they are allowed to stay in the society so that it becomes worth investing in it. In one year, one can overcome the largest language barrier and also slowly get engaged in social relationships and feel attached to the local environment. As this thesis indeed will demonstrate, the time needed to feel belonging differs greatly between different people: some people never feel belonging, while others sense this straight away. Moreover, those who participate in the research have to have a residence permit, as the policies that consider these refugees need a status in order to legally participate in the Dutch society. With a residence permit, a refugee's chances to settle in the Netherlands are increasing, which makes the analysis on their sense of belonging more effective. Lastly I chose to interview Syrian people that live in Friesland for reasons already explained in the introduction. The specific spatial and social characteristics of the province make it an interesting area to study the integration and development of the sense of belonging of newcomers.

2.2 Data Collection

The research is based on a series of interviews that I undertook with Syrian refugees living in Friesland. The context in which refugees are approached is very important for this research, because they are, but also they perceive they are in a politically vulnerable position. Furthermore the context, in which the refugee is approached, is an ethical question as the research might direct into the suffering of the respondent. This can only be justified if alleviating that suffering is an explicit objective (Jacobsen & Landau, 2003, p. 186). I approached the refugees through Vluchtelingenwerk, an organization that helps refugees with integration, reunification and legal advice (2015). I approached potential participants and asked if they would like to contribute to this research on the Syrian refugee's sense of belonging in Friesland. As a result they voluntarily participated and shared their experiences.

In order to collect the stories and gain understanding on the shared phenomena of belonging among the individuals I did semi-structured interviews. A semi-structured interview is a conversation in which the researcher has before hand determined what one wants to find out. One has a set of questions in mind and an idea about which topics are needed to be covered,

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3. However, not every refugee that participated in this research resided in the Netherlands for a minimum of a year. In some cases men were reunified with their wives after several months. When interviewing a couple that experienced a situation as such, the women often arrived after their husbands. Because these women did add valuable information to the interviews, I chose to use their responses as well.

but the conversation is free to vary and is likely to change substantially between participants (Miles & Gilbert, 2005 p. 65). Interviewing was a bit difficult, as it is hard to get to the core of people's experience of belonging.

I accompanied the interviews with additional, general information on gender, culture and socio-economic circumstances, to contextualize the narratives of Syrians, which construct their identities. Initially it was unclear which amount of interviews would be needed in order to provide enough data to draw conclusions. I discovered a pattern in the fifteen interviews and decided to do one more in order to be assured that my ideas were correct. I expected that the refugee's feeling of belonging is greatly influenced by the family composition in the Netherlands. Therefore I held eight interviews with individuals who live by themselves, while the other eight interviews were with married couples. For most interviews I used a translator as most Syrian refugees speak mainly Syrian or Kurdish, and because their level of English or Dutch is difficult to determine beforehand. I tried to avoid bias, by interviewing women using female translators and male translators for male respondents, considering people's cultural background.

In order to stimulate people to speak freely and feel comfortable, I asked the interview partners to choose the location and the circumstances under which the interview took place. In practise, with the exception of five cases, all interviews took place at peoples homes. The other five interviews took place at the offices of Vluchtelingenwerk in Sneek and Heerenveen. Most interviews at the offices had a more official character because of the setting. The interviews at people's homes felt more informal, which helped the respondents to indeed talk more freely.
I also used the opportunity of visiting the Syrians at their homes to observe how people lived and with what type of material belongings. Gielis (2011, p. 262) explains that people's homes is key to understand the emotional and relational transnational experiences that people go through. Therefore the observation of their material belonging can give insights on the refugee's sense of belonging in Friesland and beyond.

I transcribed all 16 interviews, that all lasted between 1 and 2 hours, and coded the text in order to find patterns and regularity. To reveal the refugee's experience of belonging I coded the phenomenon the refugee experienced, the social and spatial feeling of belonging, and how they perceived it. I changed the codes a few times to finally end up with a few categories in which I discovered differences and commonalities.

2.3 Limitations

This research relies to a great extent on the stories that people were willing to tell me. Through the narratives of their lives in Syria and their answers to my questions about their social relations within the environment they now live in, I had to interpret the meaning of lived experiences of the refugees and draw conclusions. I sometimes felt in the wrong position to make these interpretations as a Dutch human geography student instead of being part of the research group.

Throughout the various phases of the research I have thus been confronted with a number of difficulties and limitations. Initially, for instance, I had wanted to include a photographic element to analyse the refugee's spatial belonging in Friesland. However the respondents felt uncomfortable with the photographs. I noticed that the respondents felt very uncomfortable and became suspicious when I explained the meaning of this research method. The reasons for this were among others their position as a refugee in the Netherlands. They felt insecure and did not want jeopardize their position by doing something they did not understand. Because I did not want to antagonize the respondents, I changed the research strategy.

The most important challenge, however, was just to collect relevant data from the interviews. Narrative methods ask for close collaboration between research and individuals (Creswell, 2007). Therefore the narratives that are available through interviews are not as detailed as they deserve to be. Consequently it needed to be complimented with more contextual information than narrational research needs, which in this case resulted in generalized identity constructions. Such kind of research asks for more extensive information about the respondents than I had, and a more thorough understanding of the context where people came from. As much as I realize that it is important to uncover the multi-layered context of the refugee's life (Edel, 1984), I had the feeling that I it was hard reach far below the surface in just one interview about such a personal topic.

This might be partly due to the use of semi-structured interview as method of data collection.[4] Doing interviews always has the risk of biased results as it asks for people's perceptions, which can hardly be verified by external sources. I suspect that the respondents, in some cases might have given social desirable answers and therefore create a rosy picture on their experiences in the Netherlands. The social desirable answers might be found in the fact that Syrian refugees in general feel very thankful for being in the Netherlands. They might feel that it is ungrateful to criticize the people and place they found refuge. In one of the interviews a Syrian man explains that if he wants to live in the Netherlands, he has to accept everything (1). This conviction can cause social desirable answers. Also according to research, being traumatized causes people to

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4. However social desirability is a risk in every research method (Grimm, 2010).

answer questions in a social desirable manner (Stotz, Elbert, Müller & Schauer, 2015).

Also my position as student, doing this research for Vluchtelingenwerk might have created biased answers for the same reason. Vluchtelingenwerk helps the refugees a great deal; therefore it might be difficult to be critical on downsides of experiences with Vluchtelingenwerk. On the other hand there were also people that saw my presence as an opportunity to practise their Dutch or to socialize with somebody who lives in the area. This could have had a positive effect, just as the informal setting also helps people to feel comfortable to tell the truth. However it is very difficult to judge if and when people give biased or socially desired answers.

Another downside of using semi-structured interview is the open structure does not always allow to follow the same add on questions as in previous interviews, which makes it is difficult to make general statements in the results. Furthermore a semi-structured interview can take a very long time and therefore contain a lot of information, which will be complex to interpret in a meaningful way. Also the relative small sample size that is reachable with this methodology does not allow the representation of a whole population.

All in all, I feel that the 16 interviews that I did allow me to sketch a first picture about belonging in Friesland, but for more a more in depth analysis on how belonging develops, more research and more intense interviews would be recommended.

Figure 6: Heerenveen (Nederpelt, 2010)

Chapter 3. Theoretical Framework

Analysing a refugee's sense of belonging is very complex as it can be analysed at different levels at the same time. It can be analysed from the perspective of the refugee, but also from the perspective of his or her environment. In this thesis I focus on the internal processes of the development of belonging of refugees in Friesland. However it is impossible to entirely separate the internal and external processes. Therefore I will use social structures in which the Syrian refugees developed belonging as context. I found both theories of belonging to people and places in a host society relevant in order for gaining understanding of a refugee's 'home' feeling in Friesland. In general, people are able to develop a social and spatial sense of belonging separately. However in ones experience it is difficult to distinguish these from each other. There are certain factors that need to be met in order to achieve belonging of any kind. In the Maslow hierarchy of needs the notion of belonging is placed in perspective with other basic and advanced human needs.

I will start this theoretical framework with an explanation of this principle of the Maslow Hierarchy of needs. This is followed by an elaboration on the analysis of social structures and their relations to the construction of people's identities and feelings of belonging, as explained in theories of Floya Anthias and Nira Yuval Davis. These individual processes of belonging towards social groups are followed by social theories. This is supplemented by spatial theories that enable the development of a framework in which the spatial environment can be analysed. To complete the theoretical framework, social and spatial theories are combined to fill up theoretical gaps.

3.1 Maslow Theory of Needs

In order to gain knowledge on the refugee's sense of belonging and its significance in different stages of migration I use the Maslow hierarchy of needs. This hierarchy illustrates the importance of belonging in relation to other human needs.

The 'Maslow Hierarchy of Needs' is a motivational theory in psychology that argues that while people aims to meet basic needs, they seek to meet successively higher needs in the form of a pyramid. This theory is often represented in a pyramid with five levels. The bottom four levels are considered as the psychological needs while the top need is considered as a growth need. Furthermore the two bottom needs are considered as basis needs, while the upper levels are seen as higher level needs. The lower level must be satisfied in order before higher order needs influence behaviour (Webb, 2011). The levels are as follows:
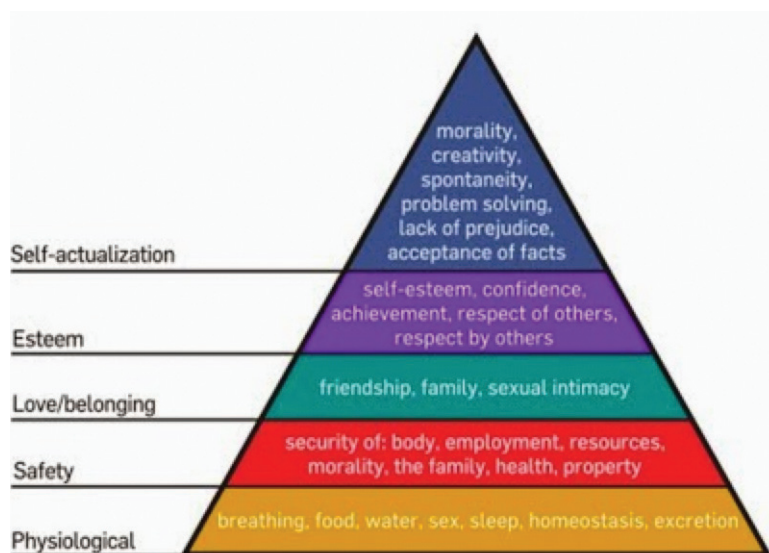
Figure 7: The Maslow Hierarchy of needs (Shresta, 2014)

There are many exceptions that frequently occur in which the hierarchy does not seem to hold. For example people put themselves in danger to rescue others. However, this hierarchy of needs gives a general overview of the place of belonging in relation to other human needs and therefore can in some cases explains why belonging is experienced or not.

3.2 Social Belonging: Identity Constructions and Social Locations

From birth, children start to develop a sense of who they are, whom they identify with and who they are not. Relationships with family members, other adults and children, friends and members of the community play a key role in building and shaping identities. Belonging is about having a secure relationship with or a connection to a particular group of people (Aistear, n.d.), which is

decided by the extent to which people can identify with these groups. Identities are flexible and always in transition. They are evolving through processes of being and becoming, belonging and longing. This duality is reflected in people's identity narratives, which consist of people's past and memories, but also present experiences and future ties (Fenster, 2004).

From Anthias' (2008, p.16) perspective, "narratives and strategies of identity and belonging are produced relationally in an interplay with regulatory regimes, via hegemonic and agonistic narratives." As she puts it:

> These narratives are an account that tells a story about one's identity, but also a narrative of location. A narrative of location explains how we place ourselves in social categories such as those of gender, ethnicity, and class at a particular point in space and time. These narratives of location are also narratives of dislocation and alterity. This 'otherness' is particularly relevant to the study of what has been termed ethnicity in migration, involving dislocation and relocation at multiple levels: structural, cultural and personal (Anthias, 2002 p. 499).

Anthias (2000) adds to this that "the construction of difference and identity, on the one hand, and the development of hierarchical social positions, on the other hand, are produced and reproduced in interplay with the narrative structures around them" (p. 500).

In the case of refugees, narratives of location/dislocation are produced in interplay with available narratives that characterize the cultural milieu in both terms of local contexts and the larger epistemological and ontological contexts of a particular worldview. Such narratives are not given or static, but are emergent, produced interactionally and contain elements of contradictions and struggle (Bakhtin, 1986). The discursive and narrational elements are embedded in structural social relations, although not mechanistically derived from them. From this point of view, the identity narratives of the Syrian refugees in Friesland can be used to understand how they as individuals interpreted their place in the world, but also to find out about collective imaginings considering belonging among this group of people. In this sense, their identity narratives may be seen from the point of view of individual narrations as performed identities.

To go a bit further into Anthias' approach on belonging, it is important to realize that the emphasis of her theory is on the dynamic qualities of peoples 'identities'. She stresses that inherent characteristics of processes of 'belonging' disables the possibility to refer to a migrant's identity, since this fixes the migrant in time, space and process. To avoid fixations of people's identity in space and time, Anthias addresses issues around identity in terms of locations. As she puts it:

> Locations are not fixed, but are context; meaning and time related and therefore involve shifts and contradictions. It thereby provides an intersectional framing for the understanding of belonging. As an intersectional frame it moves away from the idea of given 'groups' or 'categories' of gender, ethnicity and class, which then intersect, and instead pays much more attention to social locations and processes which are broader than those signalled by this (Anthias, 2009, p. 5).

Furthermore Anthias stresses that the focus in analysing belonging must be on people's social position and social positioning (as a set of practices, actions and meanings: as process). This she terms as positionality, which is the space at the intersection of structure (social position/social effects) and agency (social positioning/meaning and practice). In the case of migration, the migrant is dynamically placed in three locales and their intersection: the society of migration, the homeland and the migrant group (Anthias, 2002). Anthias (2002) notes that "these three locales are not just physical, but are symbolic, ascriptive and (non) identificational" (p. 502).

Of utmost importance is the realization that by suggesting that people position themselves in structures of locations, Anthias refuses to think of issues of population movement and settlement in terms of dislocation as this assumes a fixed and given location from which we become dislodged. She explains, this as follows:

> Although this may appear in our imaginations to be the case, people's locations are multiple and span a number of terrains such as those of gender and class as well as ethnicity and nation, political and value systems. To be dislocated at the level of nation is not necessarily a dislocation in other terms, if we find we still exist within the boundaries of our social class and our gender. However, although "we may move across national borders and remain middle class or women (for example) the movement will transform our social place and the way we experience this at all social levels and in different ways (Anthias, 2009, p. 15).

Yuval Davis (2006), explains the role of belonging to social categories (in Davis' and in Anthias' terminology, 'social locations') in the construction of people's identities. "Identification and social location can become more intertwined when an identity construction is forced on people. In that case identities and belonging become important dimensions of a person's life" (Yuval-Davis, 2006, p. 203). Furthermore she states that:

When an identity is threatened, the emotional component of the identity construction becomes more central. A person feels less safe when this happens. In extreme cases, people are willing to sacrifice their lives or the lives of others in order for the narratives of the identities to remain existing (Yuval-Davis, 2006, p. 202).

Think about 'Palestinians' that suddenly lived in Israel, due to geopolitical changes. But also out of fear of exclusion, people conform their identity narrative to majorities or to other social groups. The interpersonal relationships are affected by membership or a lack of membership in groups or collectives and also by the position within the group (Yuval-Davis, 2006, p.198). She explains how judgements on where boundaries of social locations are and where they should be drawn, decide how these social locations appear. These borders are temporarily, intersectionally (intersections of social locations), but also spatially decided. This way the social categorizations have different implications in the power grid of society at each historic moment. Signifiers of these borders can be culture, tradition and citizenship. These borders cannot be seen as total borders, but rather as porous or as processes that are always under construction. Also Pelto and Pelto (1975) acknowledge that in every heterogeneous (cultural, economic class or religious etc) group, there is a wide variation of people's socio-economic status, household composition, education, ethnic origins, religious affiliation and other aspects of culture and social relationships. Furthermore, they found a wide variation of beliefs and behaviour among these groups.

Figure 8: Kafr Zita (Alkasem, 2013)

This research into the lives of Syrian refugees arriving in Friesland and their sense of belonging indeed shows how people's narratives internally and externally construct boundaries and that they affect the extent to which they feel belonging to communities and places. The Syrian refugee's in Friesland are separated from of their social networks and societal structures, placed in a new environment; in which many structures need to be redeveloped. The political and juridical cultural and social structures for a large part decide the refugee's societal position and possibilities in Friesland. Within these given possibilities the refugee's are free to give direction and meaning to their 'new' lives. This asks for continuous renegotiation of the refugee's identity, as their social position and life goals need to be adjusted.

3.3 Cultural Aspects of Social Belonging

Dumbreicher and Kolb stress the importance of emotional co-ownership of certain places; in this research the refugee's home, their neighbourhoods and the province Friesland, and active membership within the local society demonstrate feelings of belonging to ethnic, religious and other cultural diverse groups. A sense of co-ownership is important to stimulate citizens or other social groups to value the qualities of space and feel responsible for its present and future (2008). For a refugee, the migration experience often implies an adjustment of ones cultural identity in order to develop this sense of emotional co-ownership in the host society. In order to achieve this, migrants construct narratives of belonging that relate directly or indirectly to one's self and other's perception of what it means to be member of local groups or collectivities. These identity constructions are not merely cognitive stories, but they also reflect emotional investment and desire for attachments (Fenster, 2004).

Two aspects stand out as being of particular importance: ethnic backgrounds and minority groups on the one hand, and language on the other. The first cultural aspect with which a refugee might associate and feels attachment is ethnicity. Ethnicity can have different meanings in different contexts. Horowitz (1985) describes "feelings of belonging to, and solidarity with cultural units wider than families as ethnicity. Ethnicity can generate relationships between groups, which consider themselves, and are regarded by others, to be culturally distinctive. It therefore creates a feeling of otherness, especially within minority groups. Ethnicity is often recognised in distinctive values, norms, language, religion, customs, festivals, ceremonies, clothes, food and so on, formed and preserved by a particular group of people. It is a highly complex, multifaceted and dynamic form of collective identity, typically less stable than, for example, territorial, religious or gender

identities (p.63)." "Ethnicity is often connected with racism, because it is created in response to civil discrimination in a culturally heterogeneous environment (Fenster, 1998, p. 180)."

Korac's (2009) analysis on social interaction shows the importance of ethnicity in the perception of a new environment.[5] Korac emphasizes that refugee's social relations can be ethnic or cross ethnic, which have different meanings in the context of belonging. She notes that:

> Co ethnic contacts are important when people's lives have been severely interrupted. These contacts can feel as safe havens and can be a survival strategy. Refugees try to maintain their identity by keeping transnational links to places of origin, friends and family left behind, but also develop ties with 'their' community in the host society. For some cross border relationships are the only way to maintain family life. (Korac, 2009, p. 122).

On top of relations of refugees with people from the same ethnic group in the receiving country, Korac (2009) refers to the importance of relationships with the local community in the host society. These relationships are often cross ethnic, as the communities in the hosting society in many cases do not share the ethnical background with refugees, These cross-ethnic relations are very important to regain control of one's life and to get over the feeling of dislocation. Bridging is important for a refugee in order to understand social structures and everyday life in the receiving society. Social links to the majority make refugees feel included in the social life of the hosting society. Continuity in bridging and bonding is very important to search and develop a place-making strategy through which they can negotiate their sense of belonging. Korac also points out the importance of the influence of policies in the host country on how social relationships are shaped. She conducted research on the differences between Italian (Rome) and Dutch (Amsterdam) settlement policies and how they influence social relationships of Bosnian refugees. Apparently the Italian society with its laisez faire policies forces refugees straight into the informal economy, which creates non-institutional links between refugees and locals. In the Netherlands refugees have a relative good living standard, as well employed as unemployed. Despite social tolerance of the people, refugees often felt unaccepted by the Dutch. Her interviewees mentioned feeling invisible, unaccepted and unable to make informal interpersonal contact. Most mentioned contacts were with the refugee workers (Korac, 2009).

The development of diversity in a receiving society asks for a two-way process of mutual adjustment. The Bosnian refugees that participated in Korac research did not experience this in the Netherlands. Korac points out that mutual adjustment depends on the compatibility of lifestyles and culture. In Italy (mostly Yugoslavian) refugees can find commonalities within the

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5. I must note here that her research took place in a context in which ethnicity takes a prominent place, namely the Bosnians in Netherlands.

Italian lifestyle, like living outside and the café culture (Korac, 2009). As such these refugees are able to experience a more developed sense of belonging in Italy.

Korac concludes that a sense of belonging is not solely based on resettlement policies and programmes, but also that the use of space and socio-cultural (cross ethnic) relationships are influential on the sense of belonging. In this thesis, rather than ethnicity, the notion of minority groups is important (2009). Upon arrival, the host society tends to perceive the refugees simply as hailing from the same country but refugees who 'formerly' belonged to a minority group also have different experiences of belonging in Friesland. Being formerly excluded can reverberate in the refugee's sense of belonging in the Friesland. Refugees who belong to the Kurds or Palestinians in Syria, minority groups that were excluded in Syria, have different effects in the host society. It depends on the extent to which their identity are influenced by this exclusion they have positive or negative experiences of belonging among the Frisian community. The connection to ones ethnic background sometimes is represented in their material belongings.

Also language is a very important component of people's cultural identity. A common language may be the ideal vehicle to express the unique character of a social group, and to encourage common social ties on the basis of a common identity (Dieckhoff, 2004). Language can be a robust marker of social identity; capable of binding and dividing groups and of such salience that it may displace other (e.g. ethnic or religious) identities (Jaspal & Coyle, in press). Jaspal (2009, p. 18) states that:

> Language can supersede notions of 'race' and ethnicity as determining factors for (sub-cultural) group membership. For example, some British born-South Asians identify themselves more with their sub-cultural group, which is based on their language, instead of referring to themselves as 'Black' (2009 p. 18).

However, according to Cho there is a strong relationship between ethnic identity and language. He did research among people who speak a minority language. It depended on the competence of ones heritage language how strong the feelings of belonging to his or her ethnic group are. A particularly important aspect of (ethnic) identity is said to be the mother tongue, since this is frequently viewed as being both immutable and inherited from birth (Fishman, 1991). Language has also been said to constitute a marker of larger social categories, such as the nation (Jaspal, 2009). The different perspectives on the role of language on belonging to an ethnic group might be explained by recent theories, arguing that identities are context specific. To quote Cohen (2000) "one can be Muslim in the Mosque, Asian in the street, Asian British at political hustlings

and British when travelling abroad, all in a single day (p. 582)." Consequently, identities within and outside of the home environment are likely to be qualitatively different (Jaspal, 2009).

If people's languages are negatively evaluated by others, it can be associated with negative judgements on their identities. This can create threatening situations for ones psychological situation, as individuals are motivated to feel good about their identities (Breakwell, 1986). The negative evaluation of one's language or identity might result in the desire for social mobility, which in the present context might entail the acquisition or use of a language, which symbolises a more positive identity. For instance, a study on bilingualism among Portuguese immigrants in California shows that many first generation Portuguese have difficulties with speaking Portuguese. Because of judgements of others, they experienced speaking Portuguese as negative. Therefore they mastered English at a high level and placed Portuguese on the second place (Williams, 1980). The overarching search for a positive social identity seems to underlie identity processes in which group-or individual based decisions, determine to adopt or reject a language (Jaspal, 2009). These findings can be retrieved in this thesis.

3.4 The Construction of Spatial Sense of Belonging

On top of social constructs of belonging, people can also able develop a feeling of belonging connected to certain spaces independently of social relations. De Certeau describes the notion of belonging as a sentiment, which is build on and grows out of everyday life activities. The repetition of daily practises can make people feel associated with space (Fenster, 2004). Through this repetition people get familiar with particular places. This accumulated knowledge of an area reinforces a sense of belonging. De Certeau elaborates on this theory in his book The Practice of Every-day Life, in which he explains that "the everyday act of walking in the city is what marks territorialisation and appropriation and the meanings given to a space." What de Certeau constructs is a model of how "we make a sense of space through walking practices, and repeat those practices as a way of overcoming alienation". De Certeau actually defines the process, in which a sense of belonging is established as such:

As a process of transformation of a place, which becomes a space of accumulated attachment and sentiments by means of everyday practices. Belonging and attachment are here built on the base of accumulated knowledge, memory, and intimate corporal experiences of everyday walking. A sense of belonging changes with time as these everyday experiences grow and their effects accumulate (Fenster, 2004, p. 243).

Fenster (2004) illustrates this with an example about women who experienced a stronger sense of belonging to space after they had become mothers. With their children they began using their surrounding environment more intensively, for instance by taking the baby for a walk, through shopping and by bringing children to school. Men did not experience this when becoming a father. In my thesis I draw similar conclusions. However I found that both men and women with children have increased chances of developing a sense of social belonging among the local community. Hartnell (2006) illustrates how places can also 'belong' to people. Daily life practises of a certain group of people in a certain area at a certain time of the day, represents which space belongs to whom and when. For example cleaners and businessmen occupy spaces on different times in different ways. Some low-wage workers stay mostly invisible in many parts of society.

Place making is another way of contributing to the development of structures of belonging in a spatial sense. In a sense it is also a way of creating ownership in a certain environment. Castillo (2014) wrote a report on place making processes of Nigerians in China. He concluded that these processes are central to the production of identities and the articulation of feeling 'at homeness'. Place making as a process transforms space into familiar places and generates personal attachments and commitments—it is often used as a survival strategy and as a tool to unveil opportunities in a new place. Gill (2010, p. 1157) argues that "place making is a process that entails a dialectical unfolding of affective correlations between self and place that help individuals to make sense of an unfamiliar environment." I use the notions of place-making and the routines of everyday life in this research to illustrate how refugees establish a spatial sense of belonging in Friesland.

Figure 9: Item in Fadi's living room

3.5 The Refugees' Home

A very important place in studying a refugee's sense of belonging is their home, since it is a place where their relationships and attached emotions to the former and foreign place are materialized. Gilman defined home as "a human institution which offers rest, peace, quiet, comfort, health and personal expression" (1903, as cited in Saunders & Williams, 1986, p. 82). The literature on the traditional private home suggests that the home setting is highly significant as a temporal, emotional and cultural construct (Madigan and Munro 1991, Sixsmith and Sixsmith 1999, Douglas 1991). The private home has been identified as having a variety of meanings and associations, including being a place of security from the outside world, and as a place of escape where inhabitants can be themselves (Rybczynski, 1988; Madigan, Munro and Smith 1990; Gurney, 1995).

Migrants do not live in between abstract national societies, but give personal and emotional meaning to these societies (Gielis, 2011, p. 258). The house of a migrant is very important in studying their relations to these societies, because it is the place where most of what matters in people's lives takes place (Walsh, 206b, p 271). The migrant house is an important relational and emotional place, where transnational experiences are grounded, as it is an intimate place where the near sphere, which includes re-memory, nostalgia and the visualization of landscapes from their former country of residence and the foreign sphere, the strangeness, meet through practises and conversation of the migrants (Gielis, 2011). According to Ahmed (1999) the house process of maintaining the roots in the homeland and grounding in the new country of residence are related to and can be found in these conversations and practises. In these relational processes emotions get shaped and are expressed in specific social relations with people (Gielis, 2011, p. 260).

Furthermore, the domestic objects and practises in homes are meaningful materializations that express a migrant's identity, which can be used for exploring one's sense of belonging (Walsh, 2006a). According to Marcus (1995), "the home and its artefacts have been identified as a reflection of the self of the inhabitant(s)" Gullestad (1993, p. 146) established that people "express their self identities through visual/visible and material/tangible practices of home decoration". The décor that people choose will convey messages about their identity. Boym (1994, p. 299) argues that it is "not the space itself, not the house, but the way of inhabiting it that made it home" Wise (2000, p. 295) described the home as a collection of milieus, the organization of objects and the formation of space. Wise also explored ways of marking that established personal territories in a search for a place of comfort. "Home is not an ordinary place from which identity arises, it is not the place we come from, it is a place we are. It can have different meanings for different people."

Compared to the public space, the private space indeed turned out to be of more importance

to people's identity construction then the public ones. Yet, as I will show in chapter 5 these private spaces were often still quite empty, an indication of the disrupted recent past of refugees building a new sense of belonging.

3.6 Belonging in a Social and Spatial Context

Hartnell found that the term 'belonging' contains the potential schism of 'being' from 'longing'. This division means that the physical location in a socio-political context may not correspond with one's own experienced or imagined place where people feel they belong (2006, p. 335). His perspective on belonging emphasizes the inherent duality of the term, but also shows the potential relations of belonging towards places and people. When studying literature on the notion of belonging, it becomes clear that spatial and social elements are key elements of theories considering social locations and identity constructions (Dumreicher & Kolb, 2010; Hartnell, 2006; Inglis, 2009; Hettedoft & Hjort, 2002; Hagerty et. al., 1992). This shows the possibilities of people to identify with places, social groups and categorizations. Often the feeling of belonging to people and the feeling of belonging to a specific place are deeply connected.

Dumreicher and Kolb (2010) focus on social elements that construct a feeing of belonging to space. They stress that citizens will value the qualities of places and feel responsible for its present and future under the condition of emotional co-ownership. Through social action, the individual constructs a relationship with a specific spatial field. In multiple empirical social and spatial studies, researchers found evidence showing that even activities of residents that seem to be rather insignificant in themselves, contribute to the appropriation process where 'usage creates meaning'; not an abstract meaning but an emphatic one. Starting from many similar statements of village or city dwellers, it became clear that "only if dwellers use the potential of the city and what it has to offer (including the amenities of public space) will they be able to fully identify with the place, releasing it from abstraction" (Dumreicher and Kolb, 2010, n.p.). They illustrate this with "the family who makes the house a home, the dwellers' community in the street and the quarter that transform an anonymous open space into a well known neighbourhood, within which people feel that they belong" (Dumreicher and Kolb, 2010, n.p.). In their notion of belonging the local perspective is important in shaping the socio-cultural context in which identity evolves.

Feelings of belonging related to places occur in hierarchical order, in which the house takes a central position, as the house is the space for the individual and her/his most closely related family members and friends. From the house the identity space further evolves in concentric

circles, in fields of spatial and social encounter. Several of these fields can be related to hominess, and contribute to the socialization of an identity construction. In the perspective of Dumreicher and Kolb (2010) the nation state provides geopolitical borders to where people are placed. They conclude their research with the notion that the concept of multifaceted identities should take into account that cultural diversity is based on locally expressed emotional co-ownership and an active membership within the local society including a broader space and time concept (Dumreicher and Kolb, 2010).

Figure 10: Wommels (Funda, 2016)

Chapter 4. Social Structures in Syria

According to the Oxford Dictionary of English a refugee is a person who has been forced to leave their country in order to escape war, persecution, or natural disaster. In the Netherlands a refugee is someone that applied for asylum and obtained a refugee status. Although the circumstances in which people seek refuge might seem similar at first glance, the people that are titled refugee in these circumstances are very different and their identity consists of more than being a refugee alone. They are heterogeneous in terms of where they come from, the divergent gender positions, their professions, level of education and their social cultural networks. Such differences impact people's social networks and the construction of their identities and consequently how they relate to chances that are offered in the Netherlands or in Friesland more specifically (Anthias, 2002; Sasnal, 2015). The specific social and cultural background of refugees shapes the potential meaning they ascribe to relationships and places in their new home areas (Fenster, 2004). As mentioned before, to analyse a refugee's sense of belonging in Friesland, it is thus of relevance to contextualize this sense of belonging by taking into account the life people had in Syria.

In the first paragraph I will reveal the diverse cultural background of the refugees in Friesland. Of great importance in this paragraph is the notion that people who were excluded from the majority, identify stronger with their cultural background than people that feel accepted. In the second paragraph I will go into the socio-economic status of Syrians and examine to which extent these statuses are influenced by other social positions. In the last paragraph I will highlight the differences between Syrians regarding gender equality. Also this position is influenced by people's socio-economic position, but in addition, also by their cultural affiliation. On top of that this paragraph illustrates how people have a blind spot in judging their own position.

This chapter aims to show that it is difficult to separate the different social categories, as these categories in many cases influence each other. The interrelatedness of these factors might be explanatory in the analysis of the variations between experiences of belonging of Syrian refugees in Friesland. Therefore, this chapter as a whole can explain, but also enables to give advise on the development of belonging of the different Syrians in Friesland, which will be evaluated in the chapters five and six.
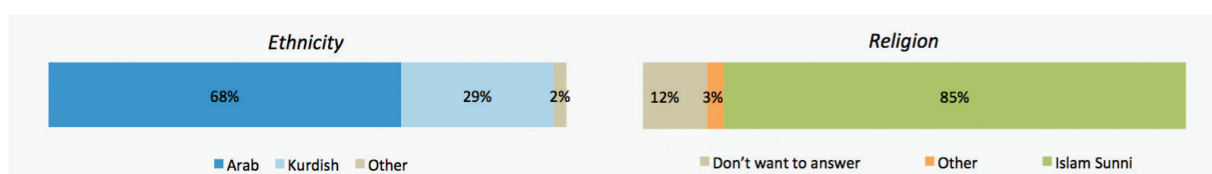

Figure 11: Division of religious devides in Syria (UNHCR, 2016)

4.1 Cultural Diversity in Syria

The extent to which a person feels belonging to a minority, majority or religious groups can differ strongly, depending on power position of this group in society (Yuval-Davis, 2006). In a host society belonging to such a cultural group also might have different implications for the development of a local feeling of belonging. Tubergen, Maas & Flap (2004) for example claim that religious background can be an important indicator of social distance in a host society. They explain that migrants from richer and 'Christian' countries have more chances on participation in Western societies. A social distance implies the limitation for the development of a sense of belonging. In this subchapter I focus on the high cultural diversity and people's feelings of belonging amongst different ethnic and religious groups in Syria and how this impacts on belonging in the Netherlands (fig. 11). These belongings will be further assessed in the chapters 3 and 4 of this thesis.

For my research I had the opportunity to meet Syrians from different ethnic and religious groups. One of them is Imad Hassan. He is Kurdish, which means he is a member of a minority group in Syria. Kurds today live spread out around Iraq, Turkey and Syria. In Syria Kurds have no rights (4). They speak another language and have a different culture in comparison the majority. The young man expressed himself: " I am Kurdish, Syria is not my country"(4). The statement expresses the collective imagining of Kurdish people in which the Kurds belong to Kurdistan and Kurdistan to them. This collective narrative causes structural feelings of dislocation among the minority group. Imad expresses this in his relation to citizenship and nationality. He has the Syrian nationality, however he feels as a Kurd living in Syria.

Despite the fact that the man does not feel belonging towards the Syrian people and the nation state, he does experience a sense of belonging towards the place where he used to live. He was born in Malikya, which is a Syrian city, inhabited by Kurds. He feels belonging towards his family and friends in Malikya. In his case his spatial sense of belonging towards his birthplace is closely related to the people who live there, but also he developed a connection to this place because he got used to the environment that was the décor of his life for a long time. The examples above illustrate how a person can feel dislocated in his country in which he juridical is considered as a national, while at the same time the emotional attachment to his social and spatial environment does create a feeling of belonging. Because the man identifies and positions himself within the Kurdish minority he constructs an identity of being different than the majority in Syria. A process that further stimulates this feeling is discrimination. He feels negatively judged by the majority, because he speaks Arabic with an accent. During social interaction with Arab speaking persons, he is constantly confirmed in his feeling of being different. Because Imad's dissimilarity

in comparison to the majority is represented in his lingual expression, language is becomes an important factor in establishing feelings of belonging among social groups.

In addition to discrimination and the collective narrative of dislocation, a Kurdish couple, Djla and Mohmmed, illustrate how their feeling of belonging to the minority group is shaped by their own choice to not belong to the majority. The couple explains that opposed to the majority in Syria "90% of the Kurdish people are more like Europeans, 90% of the Kurdish people are free (16)." They point out that young men and women are free to choose to live on their own rather then with their families. According to them this is something, which is not possible in strict Muslim families, where many children have to get married. Arab values in their perception are closely related to strict rules of the Quran. Djla and Mohammed associate themselves with being Kurdish, which in their perception means being relative 'modern' in the middle of a more traditional environment(16). Due to their specific ethnic background, they have different norms and values, which are closer to the European ones. The couple could mainly explain how their ethnicity developed feelings of not belonging to the majority in Syria, however they found it difficult to put it into words how this impact their feelings of belonging in Friesland.

Figure 12: Thaer Hurani in his home

Another ethnic minority in Syria are Palestinians. They also experience different levels of belonging to the majority or ethnic minority. Three of the refugees I interviewed are Palestinian from origin, which means they were refugees in Syria as well. Although Syria had a welcoming attitude towards Palestinian refugees, they never got full citizenship, which means they are stateless. One of them is Thaer Hurani. His parents are from Haifa, which is located in Israel. Thaer does not feel accepted in Syria and feels a strong sense of belonging to Palestine. He illustrates how his physical location in a socio-political context does not correspond with his own experienced or imagined place (7). The potential schism of belonging, 'being' and 'longing' are very recognizable in his live

(Hartnell, 2006). "My own country is Palestine. In Syria I am a refugee too. People sometimes used to ask me why I didn't go to my own country (7)." Migrating to the Netherlands did not change his feeling.

Anthias (2002) believes that people cannot be dislocated because they always position themselves within a social location as ethnicity, gender or class. However for Thaer as well as for other Palestinians of this research, belonging to the Palestinian minority in Syria comprises an inherent spatial connection to the Palestinian motherland (while being in Syria as well as in Friesland). Palestinians collectively believe that they belong in Palestine and that Palestine belongs to them (1, 7). The Palestinians that participated in this research do feel spatially dislocated, despite the fact that they belong to other social locations.

In addition, belonging to the Palestinian minority in Syria, can obstruct the ability to develop belonging to any community or place. One man illustrates how being a Palestinian refugee in Syria, impacts the experience of being a refugee in the Netherlands. The man was born in Syria, but he feels Palestinian. "I don't belong to this country (M: Netherlands), I belong to my original country (2)." "For us it's important for one reason (M: belonging to Palestine), No country wants us as citizen, they want us as refugee. They are playing political games with us; with our lives (2)." For him being a refugee means being a political play ball, without any agency in the political field (2). Although the political context in the Netherlands considering (Palestinian) refugees is different as in Syria, the man does feel a political instrument in the Netherlands as well, as refugees are a point of discussion in Dutch politics. A situation as such, reconfirms his conviction that Palestinian refugees do not belong anywhere.

4.2 Socio-Economic Position

Traditionally, the socio-economic lines in Syrian society have been divided among landlords and tenants, between urban dwellers and rural peasants, and between a Sunni elite and several minority groups. People's social economic positions were influenced by intersections with other social locations, such as ethnicity, minority groups and occupation. Following Sasnal (2015), the interrelatedness of these social categories is still visible today, however I suspect that education and people's occupation became more important considering people's socio-economic position. This paragraph illustrates the extent to which people's socio-economic status related to other social factors. According to Sasnal's (2015) research refugee's socio-economic position also partly explains which difficulties or possibilities one can experience in feeling belonging in the Dutch

society on several levels. In this subchapter I aimed to gain understandings of refugee's socio-economic background. Commonly, people's socio-economic status is mainly measured in income figures; level and time spend on education and occupational facts (Oakes, n.d.). However I mainly focus on their professional and educational backgrounds, rather than income figures, as this knowledge has the quality to gain understanding on the level of participation in the host society. The value of belonging to a specific socio-economic group will be evaluated further in the chapter on social and spatial belonging.

The refugees I interviewed were as well from the lower and middle as from higher segments of the Syrian society. Most of them had jobs and in many cases were able to provide for the family with only one income. Others were still studying. Three of the people were previously employed as tailors (5, 10, 12). In general a tailor can be seen as working class, which in general is considered as lower or middle class. Other refugees of the lower and middle segments are a taxi driver, driver on an excavator, a welder and one agricultural worker (2, 5, 9). One of the Syrians was self-employed. He had a company that makes decorations at Christian wedding parties. Another man was general manager at JVC. The two men can be considered as middle class citizens (1, 15). Two of the nine women that participated in this research also can be considered as low to middle class citizens. One of them worked in a factory to fold and tag clothing and the other woman worked for a money distributor that distributed money to small Arab villages (12, 16) Furthermore I interviewed two Syrians that belong to the higher segments of society. One of them was a brain surgeon who went the University of Damascus and a lawyer who studied at the Al Baath University in Hama (6, 11). Three of the interviewees were still in college. One young male studied to become an Arab teacher at the University of Raqqa; another young male studied commercial banking and one woman studied agricultural engineering (3, 7, 13). People who enjoy higher education, are often considered as being part of the middle to higher classes of society.

Besides class differences based on people's educational and professional background, one of the refugees' named Jamal, perceives a division between urban and rural population along level of education and thus class. He explains there is more environmental pollution in rural areas, because the people in those places are less educated. In addition to this he states that: "I am able to deal with all kinds of people. Others are completely different. Not like me. You find me unique here (1)". His statement illustrates that he perceives that it is uncommon for people from different social classes to have social relationships with each other.. In addition, He demonstrates how this behaviour can echo in the Netherlands. with an occasion in which he functioned as a translator for Vluchtelingenwerk. One of the Syrians refugees who had just arrived in the Netherlands did not

want Jamal to be his translator because he is from a different social class.

In addition to divides between rural and urban population along class lines, Sasnal suggests that people's socio-economic status links to faith and gender equality (Sasnal, 2015). Religion, and in some cases gender equality issues are supposedly less present in the daily lives of refugees from a higher social class. This would increase the compatibility of cultures, which increases feelings of belonging in a host society. The interrelatedness of these social categories will be further evaluated in the next chapter.

4.3 Gender (in) Equality

The large varieties within the markers of ethnicity, religion and belonging illustrated in the preceding paragraph are also represented in the respect for gender equality. The refugees that participated in this research have diverse understandings of gender differences, both in the Netherlands and in Syria. This paragraph illustrates gender differences in the lives of the Syrians and their relations with other social categories mentioned in the previous paragraphs. The impact of these differences on their participation in Friesland will be evaluated on in the chapters on social and spatial belonging.

In general it is said that there are less gender differences among the higher social classes than among lower classes (Sasnal, 2015; Tubergen, Maas & Flap 2004). As explained in the former chapter in very general terms, this division among class lines is represented by urban population occupying the higher segments of society on the one side and the rural population on the other side (Sasnal, 2015). This explains why differences in gender position are more visible in rural areas, where, generally speaking, lower educated and more conservative people live. This in theory explains why in rural areas the traditional division of tasks between men and women is still in place. At the countryside, men play an economic role and control income distribution; while women play a more social role (IRIN, 2016).

However I found that as well on the countryside as in urban settings, the inequality between men and women is especially visible on the economic level, as the percentage of employed and paid males is much higher than the percentage of employed and paid females. In 2010 the labour force in Syria consisted of 73% of the male population against 13% of the female population (World Bank1, 2010; World Bank2, 2010). This general picture from the literature was indeed confirmed in some of the interviews. Only two of the ten Syrian women I interviewed worked to provide an income (12, 16). In these cases there does not seem to be a relation

between their socio-economic position and them being formerly occupied. In addition to this unequal economic divide all women do more domestic work than their male counterparts (1, 5, 6, 8, 10, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16). This was made visible during interviews at the couple's residences, where the women (or in one case the child) alone, took the served coffee and sweets (6, 8, 10, 12[6]). Counter intuitively, the different economic positions among men and woman are not necessarily intended to be oppressive, but can also be regarded as a sign of respect. For example, one of the interviewed (male) refugees sees it as a privilege for his wife to stay at home and take care of their children. "She does not have to work because I will take care of the family, but if she wants to go to work, she can (1)". This shows that gender differences can be seen from different perspectives.

In addition to the perceived economic aspects of gender inequality, the gender differences are also represented along ethnic and cultural lines. For example in the perception of the Kurdish Muslims I interviewed, wearing the headscarf is a sign of gender inequality. The couple regards themselves as very moderate in the following of Islamic rules and they believe they are more advanced in gender equality, than other Muslims (16). They illustrate this by mentioning that compared to the majority a large amount of Kurdish women are free to not wear a headscarf. However they further commented that in places where ISIS took over, also many Kurdish women did start to wear a headscarf (16). In addition the fact that young Kurdish women and men fight together on the front line, shows the relative gender equality among Kurdish people. It shows their mutual political involvement, as well as the acceptance of female presence in certain public spaces of the community. Two nieces of the couple are fighting on the front as well. They are 16 and 17 years old.

Despite the perception of the Kurdish couple on the inequality that is represented by wearing the headscarf, the opposite of not wearing it, does not necessarily symbolizes gender equality. One of the couples I interviewed was Christian. The women also did not wear a headscarf, which from their perspective also means that they are relative equal – compared to Muslims. Despite their point of view they did acknowledge inequality in their relationship, as the woman has to ask permission to do something outside of the house (15). The man here takes the dominant role in the relationship.

Also in the relationship of one of the Muslim couples I interviewed, the man seemed to be the more powerful component. The man pretended jokingly that if another man comes into his house and his wife did not wear a scarf he would "Joteee!" hit him. His wife nodded convincingly and apparently fully agrees with her husband (12).

The cases above show that the equality of genders and the way this is perceived is

6. I only refer to four of the respondents as the other couples were interviewed in a different setting.

interconnected with religious and ethnic categories. In general Syrians are critical on the unequal positions of men and women with a different religious or ethnic background, rather than on their own position. One man further illustrates this tendentious attitude by stating that women in Syria have a lot of freedom, compared to Afghans (2). In addition to his point of view, he admits that there is also gender inequality in Syria. He states, "In Syria we have different cultures, of which some are a little ridiculous (2). The 'ridiculous cultures' here have less respect for woman."

When analysing the role of genders in the Dutch society, this biased attitude connected to ones social position should be taken into account as well. My position as a Dutch student also creates premises. With two interviews, I initially had made an appointment with a woman, while during the interview it was the husband who spoke the most. The change of interviewee -from female to male- can be interpreted as the man being the head of the family, which points to gender inequality in the relationship. However, this interpretation might say more about my perspective than about gender inequality among the Syrian couples. As in one case, the man resided nine months longer in the Netherlands than his wife and, therefore, was more confident and eager to speak Dutch (6). In the other case, it was also the language gap that prevented the woman from doing most of the talking (15).

Figure 13: The outskirts of Hama (Google Maps , 2010)

4.4 Conclusion

In this chapter I showed and illustrated the different social categories, like ethnicity, religion, class and gender position, people have when arriving as a 'refugee' in the Netherlands. These differences impact on how the 'Syrian refugees' relate to each other. Additionally, some of these social categories reverberate and partially influence people's sense of belonging in a host society. The short analogies of belonging towards minority, political and religious groups in Syria illustrate the highly heterogeneous nature of the society in Syria. Minorities as Palestinians and the Kurds suffered from exclusion from certain resources and statuses. This common threat stimulated identification with their social location, which increased their feeling of belonging towards their ethnic group. Contrary to theory of Anthias (2002), who claims that belonging to social categories means that being dislocated at the level of the nation state does not necessarily means dislocation at other levels, close connection to a social category can reveal feelings of being dislocated in Syria as well as in the Netherlands. As in some cases these social categories have a very strong spatial connection.

In addition to the high diversity and different experiences of belonging the results show that even within an ethnic minority there are big differences in experiencing belonging. The different characteristics of people's experiences can have several causes, such as the feeling of exclusion by the majority and the self-inflicted 'exclusion' because of disagreement with values of the majority. On top of that, the fear of exclusion and the position within a social group are of influence on the sense of (not) belonging to a certain group.

Besides the identification of refugee's with ethnic backgrounds, people position themselves —or rather are positioned— in a socio-economic class. The Syrian refugees in Friesland 'formerly' occupied the lower, middle and higher social sectors of the Syrian society. Theoretically belonging to a higher social class should increase their chances for developing a sense of belonging in Friesland, as religion, and in some cases gender equality issues are less present in their daily lives than with refugees from a lower social class. This would increase the compatibility of both cultures, which increases feelings of belonging (Sasnal, 2015). However when comparing this theory of with the experiences of Syrian refugees that participated in this research, their socio-economic status does not seem to correspond with their gender position and religious affiliation in such a way, as I did not find particular progressive ideologies on gender and religion among the people that were higher educated or from a higher social class.. I I did found that refugees have difficulties with reflecting on their own position on gender equality. They reflect on themselves

to a certain extent, however they find it more convenient to judge Syrians with different ethnic or religious backgrounds. Within these results I can carefully conclude that there are relationships between belonging to a certain ethnic or religious group and their perspective on gender equality. However I will not make general statements on the effects of these differences between ethnic groups in the following chapter as there are too much subtleties to take into account. This would be more suitable in a quantitative research.

Of the different social locations discussed in this chapter refugees clearly identify themselves more closely with their ethnic background than with their socio-economic status or gender. The effects of these findings will be elaborated on further in this thesis.

Chapter 5. Socio-Cultural Belonging in Friesland

This chapter sheds light on how socio-cultural relationships within Friesland and beyond (mainly family in Syria) impact the sense of belonging of Syrian refugees. According to Anthias the migrant is dynamically placed in three locales and their intersection: the society of migration, the homeland and the migrant group (Anthias, 2000). This research indeed confirms this idea. This chapter is subdivided in the social groups described by Anthias. In this subdivision, the family of the Syrians represent the home. In this chapter I refer to both family in the Netherlands and in Syria; migrants represent the migrant group from different social and cultural backgrounds and the local Frisian people represent the society of migration. I explain how Syrian refugees feel belonging to each of these groups. The extent to which social locations, presented in the former chapter (ethnicity, gender and to socio economic position) influence social interactions, is also taken into account when analysing the identification with other social groups. Against Sasnal's (2015) findings belonging to a higher socio-economic class does not seem to have a positive impact on the development of belonging. The influence of various ethnic groups on social belonging in Friesland seems mainly important considering the various power position these ethnic groups occupied in their country of origin.

5.1 Family

In Syria, people's social networks are often organized around family (COA, 2015, p 41). Families often visit each other on a daily basis, as in many cases they live nearby or even next to each other. Thus, families play a large role in the development and construction of people's identities, and are strongly connected to feelings of belonging. However, because of the war, Syrians now living in Friesland are separated from their family. In this paragraph I will illustrate the importance of families left in Syria and families that were reunified in the Netherlands in feeling belonging. Furthermore will I evaluate how refugees cope with situations of separation, and I will discuss how this influences their feeling of belonging in Friesland.

Generally, I noticed that the happiness of many refugees depends on the happiness of their close families (husband/wife and children). Aspirations and dreams are not only related to people's own futures but also of their family's future. As one Syrian man stated: "I want my wife and children to be happy and have a lot of diplomas (9)." Or a mother of three children illustrates: "I want my kids to study, my husband to work. I want a normal life, where the children can go to school safely (8)." After the horrors the Syrian refugees have been through as a family, their dreams and aspirations are mostly directed towards a normal family life; a life that promises stability on which they can build a future (1, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 12, 14). For some parents the future of their children is so important, that their own happiness depends on it (8, 9). In this sense family can be considered as the most valued relationship in social belonging, as the emotional co-ownership of this small unit is very intense. Unfortunately, Syrian refugees are not always able to migrate with their families to safer places. In some cases a father makes the journey to a safe country at first, because fleeing is a risky and expensive undertaking (1, 6, 9, 10, 12, 14, 16). But also a son can be sent or has chosen to find refuge at first (3, 7). Still, the family connection is (often) so strong that even a physical distance does not create an emotional

Figure 14: Faihaa and her husband

distance. Therefore all Syrians that participated in this research, except for one (4), felt that their

feelings of belonging stays connected to their family despite their separation.

Reunification with loved ones enables refugees to ground their feelings of belonging in the place that they reside. For this reason Syrian refugees often chose the Netherlands as country of destination, as it is known for its efficient and fast family reunification procedures (1, 5, 6, 10, 13). Most interviewed families were reunited with their families after a while, however in between people feel uprooted. Yaser left Syria the 14th of January 2014. Exactly one year later on the 14th of January 2015, his family was with him again. " For me it is important that my family lives with me, no matter we live in Syria, in the Netherlands or on the moon. When Sarah, Sadana and Nesreen are with me, I am home" (6).

Despite the positive effects of reunification, there are still difficulties to overcome in order to establish belonging in Friesland. For one they need to overcome the effects that come along with long-term separation. For example, when Nesreen and Yaser, the couple mentioned above, were reunited they still needed to cope with the effects of being separated for a year. The youngest daughter did not recognize her father anymore, as she was two months old when he left the family. The first months after the reunification she cried when she was near her father. She wanted to be with her mother all the time (6). After reunification it is therefore important to be able to continue family life in a 'normal' way. Another couple had similar experiences during their separation. Their separation lasted two years, because the father lived in Libya for one year and after that it took him one year to get his family in the Netherlands. They had a very difficult time while being separated. Still they also experienced difficulties after being reunited. The mother, Faihaa and children had to stay in the asylum centre until they had a status. Meanwhile her husband lived in a house in another village (fig. 14). Although he visited his family regularly, one of the children was always crying when he left. The child obviously was damaged because of the prolonged period of separation. Faihaa had difficulties seeing her children in such a state of confusion. The family wanted to live together as soon as possible. She could only start feeling a sense of belonging when they lived together in one house. When they could start their 'normal' life again (8). Other families told similar stories. People did not feel belonging in Friesland, without their families (12, 15).

I got the impression that it is very difficult to continue everyday life, being separated from family. Especially when the family lives in a war zone. Refugees can continue their lives when their family is safe. Only then can they slowly start to develop a sense of belonging.

The stories above illustrate how belonging is established through family reunification. Striking in these stories is that in general women and children arrive after their male counterparts in a regular way. This is most probably related to the dangers that can be encountered during the

irregular journey to Europe, during which especially women are at risk of being raped. Men are more often victim of other violent incidents. In addition the reason for men to make the journey at first might relate to the different position of men and women in Syrian society. Women more often take care of the children, while men provide the income. Therefore to send the men at first would be a logical step, as they can start providing an income in order for their family to come (Melchior, 2015). In cases as such, the impact of different arrival times of men and their wives and children can be found in different levels of belonging in the new environment among them.

Unfortunately not every family member is able to find refuge in Europe.[7] All Syrians that I have interviewed still have family in Syria (or in third countries). One of them is a Syrian woman named Selma. She explains that she does not experience belonging in the Netherlands, despite reunification with her nuclear family. Her feeling of belonging is strongly connected to her parents, whom she had to leave behind in Syria. She worries about them a lot, because they live in a critical situation and are unable to leave Syria. Selma has regular contact with her parents in Homs through telephone and Internet. Furthermore she checks her Facebook often, in order to stay up to date on the latest news in Homs. The separation from her parents makes her very sad. The every-day worrying even made her sick. She explained that it took her at least four months to accept her new life in Twijzelerheide, a small village in rural Friesland. At the time of the interview she resided in the Netherlands for seven months. However she revealed that she still cries every day. Despite the presence of her husband and children the woman is unable to develop a sense of belonging in Friesland. The worrying about her loved ones prevents her to focus on her daily life, which is why she did not develop a local sense of belonging (13).

Also another Syrian woman, Nesreen expressed herself about the difficulties she has with being separated from her parents. She has been in the Netherlands for nine months at the time of the interview, but still she calls her parents once or twice a day. She is grateful for being in a safe place with her husband and children, but in order to develop a full sense of belonging, she wants her parents to live in Burgum as well (6). Taken into account that these women described above are in the Netherlands for a relative short time, it is still noticeable is that in all cases; the women express their difficulties with being separated from their parents. In addition, I interviewed couples that resided in the Netherlands for respectively 2,5 and 3,5 years. They obviously developed a sense of belonging in the Friesland. However these women also mentioned that they miss their parents very much (15, 16).

Naturally, not only women miss their families. Sometimes young men choose to, or are pushed by their families, to flee the country by themselves. In such cases a family saves money for

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7. Regulations in the Netherlands and in Europe, do not allow refugees to reunify with family members, who did not live together in the same house, they cannot migrate in a legal manner. Irregular migration is also increasingly dangerous and difficult, because of the threat of ISIS at the Turkish border and the high fees demanded to cross the Lebanese border.

the youth to make the journey to Europe, as in some cases the journey is too expensive for a whole family to make. Another reason to use this 'strategy' is that these younger generations are able to learn easier and faster, through which they have less difficulties in adapting to a new culture and language. As such they have better chances to build up a life in a new country. Despite their increased chances to participate in the host society and develop belonging, also these young men miss their families very much. Their feeling of belonging is still directed to their loved ones, even though they are across borders.

One example is Osama. His family still lives in Raqqa, which is under the control of ISIS. People are not allowed to leave this city, except when they have a medical condition. He misses and worries about his family a lot. Therefore he often feels lonely (3).

5.2 The Migrant Network

When a refugee arrives in Friesland their social network often needs to be built from scratch. The development of social relationships apart of their own family network often starts with other migrants in the area. The lives of migrants are similarly structured and therefore they have chances to encounter one another on a regular basis. It starts in the asylum centre, however asylum seekers loose contact afterwards, as migrants with a residence permit can be placed in any municipality in the Netherlands. Migrants also meet each other at integration courses, since every migrant who intends to stay in the Netherlands after their temporary residence permit is expired, needs to successfully accomplish their integration exams beforehand. In this chapter I will evaluate on the meaning of belonging to the migrant group in Friesland. Refugees can have several common grounds on which they build relationships, such as co-ethnicity, co-nationality and co-linguality. However not all of these factors necessarily establish belonging among these groups in the Netherlands. Factors like friendship and common interests are also important.

Perhaps ethnicity is not very significant in the development of feelings of belonging in Friesland, among Syrian refugees and their social counterparts. The people who belonged to an ethnic minority in Syria, in this case one Kurdish couple and a young men experienced a stronger sense of belonging towards their ethnic community in Syria, while in the Netherlands this is not the case (4, 16). I believe that this is due to the small proportion of members of their ethnic minority in Friesland, but it might also due to the shifting power positions of members and non-members of an ethnic group due to migration. Migrating to Friesland and being acknowledged as a refugee (or other form of migrant) puts every migrant in a similar societal position, no matter their ethnic background. On top of the Kurds, four of the respondents mentioned that as well in Syria

as in the Netherlands ethnic and religious background are not important in social interactions (1, 2, 9, 16). The statement of Korac (2009) on co-ethnic relations being survival strategies for people in distress does not seem applicable to Syrian refugees. However it is difficult to verify the validity of this statement as only a few of the respondents belonged to ethnic minorities in Syria.

Nonetheless, for people who belonged to a majority in Syria, co-national relationships might have as survival function. The following examples point out that refugees in some cases feel more comfortable among other Syrians. Six of the sixteen couples and individual refugees explicitly mentioned that they felt most comfortable among other Syrians in Friesland, because they speak the same language and have similar cultures (2, 4, 5, 8, 10, 12). One of these interviews was with two Syrian friends. They met for the first time in Bengazi during their journey to Europe.

Figure 15: Fadi Al Saloum

In the Netherlands they met again in the asylum centre. One of the friends stated that: "I give him (the other Syrian man) a sense of belonging, because I always bring him into trouble. I make him feel like we are in Syria (2)." The friendship of the young men is based on memories to their former place of residence, and on a shared history; on the fact they can communicate with each other, but more importantly, they understand and can identify with each other.

Another family that participated in this research explains that they prefer to be around other Syrians because they are very hospitable. They live in a village with five other Syrian families. In their homes, people are always welcome, no matter the time of the day, no matter the relationship. Even when people arrive at dinnertime they are invited to join (12). This is contrasting with the attitude of many Dutch people, who are, in the minds of many Syrians, always very busy and relatively inflexible (see more in § 4.3). Therefore they feel less comfortable with Dutch people, than with other Syrians.

Faihaa expresses her desire for friendship with Syrian women of her language class, because she longs to speak to people in the same language. She explains that she experiences a stronger sense of belonging towards other Syrian women in Friesland than to members of other social groups. Within other groups she feels isolated because of her lack of Dutch language skills (8). During my first contact with Faihaa, which was at language class, I observed an unconstrained atmosphere between her and the other women present. When I asked for their willingness to

collaborate in this research they had a short informal exchange with each other that looked as if they were friends since high school (8). The familiarity during the regular encounters with the Syrian women demonstrated a contrast to her isolated life in the village that she was appointed. The examples above show how Syrian refugees feel comfortable among co-nationals, because of shared culture and language. Besides these factors a 'shared' history is probably also of influence on the feeling of belonging.

In other cases when refugees constituted friendships among migrants from a different nationality, they often share the Arabic language. Naturally, sharing a language is important for practical reasons, but it is also of significant importance in developing friendships, as it is part of people's identity, especially when one resides in a foreign country (2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 12, 13, 16). Syrians that participated in this research developed friendships among people from Morocco, Turkey, Egypt and Iraq. Those friendships were developed due to regular contact at integration courses and due to mutual friends from these integration courses. Although the respondents referred to these relationships as friends, they also mentioned they did not feel comfortable with all of their 'friends' (3, 6) This shows that in many cases sharing a language is an important factor in the constitution of relationships, but not necessarily enough to establish friendships.

The different friendships that were described above, were mainly between people of the same sex. As pointed out before, a great share of the refugees who came alone, are single young men. The young men who participated in this research only mentioned friendships with migrants of the same sex (2, 3, 4, 7). Married couples, are in some cases friends with other married couples (10, 15, 16=). The friendships among refugees, who are of the same gender, cause a sense of belonging in the migrant group, where men feel more comfortable with other men and women with women. Only in one case a Syrian man, Fadi, had a relationship with a Syrian woman (11). The norms and values of Syrian culture probably have its influence here. The overall presence of religion in the Syrian culture most probably is responsible for norms and values in which it is inappropriate for men and women to have a friendly relationship.

Beside the impact of these norms and values on gender relations, the religious background of Syrians seems to be less important for constituting friendships. This goes against the findings of Tubergen, Maas and Flap (2015) who state that different religious background can create social distance. Four respondents explicitly mentioned that difference of religion is not important (1, 6, 9, 16). Still only two respondents mentioned relationships with migrants from a different religion (7, 16). Five of the sixteen refugees did mention that they have mainly friendships between Muslims, however they state that the shared religion is not the reason for these friendships

(3, 5, 8, 10, 12), A reason for friendships between people from the same religion is probably that a great part of the refugees is Muslim, more important are their regular encounters at integration courses and the shared language discussed above. The largest migrant groups are from Syria, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Somalia, Iran, Iraq and Eritrea, in which a large amount of the population is Muslim as well (Vluchtelingenwerk, 2015).

5.3 Socio-cultural among locals

Following Korac (2009), there are two factors that influence the social sense of belonging in a host community: the compatibility of cultures and mutual respect towards each other's situation and differences. According to Korac, the extent to which lifestyle and culture are compatible influences the intensity of people's sense of belonging in a new society (2009). In this paragraph I will reveal the different social relations of refugees with local autochthonous Dutch people and evaluate the extent to which they create a feeling of belonging in Friesland. In addition, I will look at the cultural differences that were encountered by the refugees since they are in the Netherlands. Lastly, I will explain how cultural aspects of both the Syrian and Dutch society, can support mutual respect for each other's differences. All of these factors influence the refugee's social sense of belonging in separate ways.

Social Encounters

Research participants believe that relationships with locals increase their sense of belonging in the Netherlands. But this is not the only reason for refugees to aspire local relationships. Seven out of the sixteen refugees explicitly mentioned that they aspire more contact with Dutch people, because they want to learn more about the local language and culture (3, 4, 9, 10, 14, 16). One person mentioned that he needs to have a common ground, like shared interests, on which he can build relationships to increase his sense of belonging (6M).

The social relationships of the Syrians with Dutch people are mostly centred around neighbours (6, 8, 12, 14, 15, 16). This contact differs from visits on a daily basis (14, 16), to a few visits a year (10). Four of the Syrian couples have relative close relationships with their neighbours. These relationships in most cases have an accommodating character, in which the neighbours help Syrians in several ways. In many cases, neighbours help refugees with lingual and cultural questions (10, 14, 16), but they also help in the garden (8, 14) and in one case even with decoration of the house (14). One participant mentioned that in his village, Dutch people pass by, only for a coffee (15).

In addition to social contact with neighbours, five Syrian couples with school going children mentioned regular encounters with other parents of children in the neighbourhood (6, 9, 14, 15, 16). Children play together on the street or at school and when parents pick their children up, the parents often have a chat. Furthermore, Syrians have relationships with refugee workers, who assist them with their language classes and with other difficulties they encounter. Three Syrians described the atmosphere of the contact with refugee workers as very comfortable and informal (8, 9, 11, 12).

The mentioned encounters have in common that they occur on a regular basis. Syrians perceived these regular encounters with locals as very valuable. And in the case of regular encounters, the Syrians did establish belonging among the local community. Still most refugees were not able to develop a sense of social belonging in Friesland. They lack these social relationships on a regular basis (1, 2, 3, 4, 8, 10, 12).

Although, as was mentioned by Anthias (2006), people are able to stay part of the social location of which they were part in Syria (middle class men stay middle class men etc.), they can have a feeling of being displaced, as they did not developed a sense of belonging among locals. Five of the respondents did experience this as problematic of which most of them are women (4, 6, 8, 12, 13). Only two respondents did not experience their lack of friendships among Dutch as an issue (2, 3). They believe that the more time evolves, the more social belonging and friendships will grow as the development of a social network takes time.

The lack of Dutch language skills is often mentioned as a cause for the absence of friendships among Dutch (1, 5, 7, 8, 10, 12). Also Imad, a Kurdish young man, perceives this as the reason for his lack of friends. Although he seemed to speak Dutch relative well during the interview, he is afraid to use his Dutch skills in practise. He does not want other people to hear his 'difference' through his accent (4). This is related to his experiences in Syria. Imad's mother language is Kurdish. In his communication with Arab speaking Syrians, he speaks Arab with an accent. He feels that the Arab speaking Syrians, the majority, negatively judge his accent and that his pronunciation emphasize his otherness. This fear of being judged and excluded reverberates in his motivation to speak perfect Dutch (4). However, his aims are too high and form an obstacle for feeling comfortable within the Dutch community. The examples above show that language has a binding component. Furthermore it is a marker of social identity; "capable of binding and dividing groups and of such salience that it may displace other (e.g. ethnic or religious) identities (Jaspal, 2008, p. 18)."

Many refugees believe that with time their skills and with that, their social connections among locals will grow. Refugees that are able to learn a language relatively fast might establish social relationships in an earlier stage than a refugee who has difficulties with studying. One of the participants noticed differences of lingual skills between refugees who had Dutch friends and between others who do not speak Dutch that well (16). This shows that the relation between language skills and social belonging develops in both directions. Dutch integration policies in this sense stimulate a refugee's social belonging, as they stimulate refugees to learn Dutch as fast as possible.

Cultural Differences

In addition to language, there are cultural factors that might or might not influence the sense of belonging of Syrians in Friesland. The cultural differences that do not affect the refugees' sense of belonging are mostly practised in the private sphere. Examples are the fact that many Dutch people are not religious - an uncommon phenomenon in Syria - (2, 6, 9); or that people in the Netherlands go to gay festivals – which is unthinkable in Syria, where homosexuality is prohibited (1). Also the fact that Dutch people do not necessarily get married when they are together (6) and that many children leave their parental house and become independent around their eighteenth (1, 6, 16) are respected and in most cases understood. One of the Syrians explained: "People are free. Everybody has the right to choose, for himself. The most important thing is that people behave well" (2).

In addition, cultural differences that are more practised in the public sphere and can obstruct or offer chances for refugees to participate in the everyday lives of locals can influence their sense of belonging. Notable, is that refugees use foreign cultural traditions as an opportunity to make social connections with local Frisians (8, 10, 11, 14, 16). In five of the interviews, people explicitly mentioned that they enjoy joining the Dutch in their traditions. They send Christmas cards, birthday cards and 'get well soon' cards, which is not common in Syria. In one case a Syrian woman joined in a Christian event. In this way she likes to get familiar with Dutch people and customs (14). She explains that: "I don't want to feel different as your culture. With you (M: Dutch/Frisians) I feel warm. I want to do what you do"(14).

One of the main cultural differences that negatively influence the refugees' ability to participate in the local social life is the contrast between individualism in the Netherlands and the collectivist society of Syria. This difference was strongly experienced by five of the Syrian refugees in Friesland. Noticeable is that out of the five who perceive the Dutch as individualists, three experienced complications in the establishment of social connections among them. From

their perspective it is sad that Dutch people prefer to be on their own (6, 8, 12). They consider individualism as an obstruction for their feeling of belonging, because from their perspective, Dutch people are less open for social relationships than they were used to in Syria and long for in the Netherlands (3, 6, 8, 11, 12).

In many of the interviews, people illustrated Dutch individualism with the example of children leaving their parental house around the age of eighteen. In Syria children would stay in their parental house until marriage or in some cases they might live independently for their studies. In six of the sixteen interviews couples and individuals declared that they did not like the independence of youth in the Netherlands (1, 3, 4, 6, 8, 12). These couples and individuals are aware of difficulties that might be encountered as their own children arrive at this age and have difficulties to position their own values in between the Dutch customs. However, one of them solves the problem by leaving the decision to their children, following the host societies culture (1). Someone else wants to bridge the two cultures. He explains, "Every culture has good things and bad things. I want to choose the best of both" (4). Two of the interviewees explained that the cultural difference in this aspect is not problem for their sense of belonging, because they are free to stick to their own cultural practices in Friesland (9, 12). Contrastingly, the Kurdish couple (with European values) has similar customs as the Dutch. They explained that in their village as well young men as young women are free to live on their own. Although this couple did experience more belonging than other refugees in general, it is difficult to ascribe this to the similar cultural customs of autochthonous locals and themselves. On top of the shared cultural customs, the couple enjoys other aspects that stimulate their sense of belonging in Friesland as well.[8] Cultural similarities are less likely to cause identificational problems in a host society. Still cultural customs in this case do not evidently expose an increased feeling of belonging, but it certainly does not obstruct it either. Cultural differences mainly impact the extent to which refugees feel belonging if these variations obstruct or stimulate the development of social relationships.

Another expression of Dutch individualism expresses itself in the valuation of time. Five Syrians that participated in this research experience this in a negative sense (2, 6, 11, 12). They believe that time is more important in the Netherlands than they were used to in Syria, as Dutch/Frisian people always seem very busy. These particular Syrians blame the difference in time valuation for their lack of social relationships among locals. In order to have a coffee up with their autochthonous neighbours, they need to make an appointment by telephone (2, 6, 11, 12). One man explains that in Syria on the contrary "You don't need an appointment with them, you don't need to be official with them (2)." This particular man experiences this official attitude as cold. In

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8. The couple lives in the Netherlands between 2,5 and 3,5 years and the man has a job in a pizzeria. Both these factors have a stimulating effect on the sense of belonging.

Syria neighbours practically live together. These differences create a feeling of disconnection for those who are affected by it.

A negative social aspect that was encountered by the respondents is discrimination. Against expectations, this did not seem to impact the refugees feeling of belonging. Three respondents mentioned they felt discriminated by the local Dutch people on several occasions (2, 7, 12). In one case the person who was discriminated could place the event in which he felt discriminated in perspective. He comforts himself with the thought that these situations only occur occasionally with certain people (7). Others were convinced that they have to accept discrimination, because they are guests in the Netherlands (12). In the last case, the respondent even showed understanding towards the mind-set of intolerant Dutch people. He explains, "Dutch people need houses for their children, and they are afraid refugees take their places" (1). Other refugees, who did not encounter such injustices, are aware of discrimination in the Netherlands. Although it makes them very sad, they look to the other way and try not to be bothered by it (1, 8, 12, 16).

Undeterred by discrimination, in general the Syrian refugees feel accepted by the local community in Friesland. Some even emphasized this feeling, with a thumps up or another gesture of appreciation (1, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16). Three Syrians explicitly appreciate Frisian people for their open attitude towards different identities as it enables Syrians to practise their religion without being discriminated for it (1 2, 3). However an accepting and open attitude is not enough to establish belonging, as only three of couples that I interviewed seem to have established these particular feelings among locals (14, 15, 16). These couples have in common that they all have very good relationships with their neighbours.

For respondents who belong to a minority group this social recognition and cultural respect is crucial in experiencing belonging and to be able to integrate socially, as traumas of exclusion can still reverberate in a host society (2, 4, 16). Being formerly excluded among majorities can influence people's identity and the way people position themselves in the world. For example a Kurdish couple would not think twice to leave their place of residence when they would be discriminated (16). A Palestinian Syrian explains that he does not belong anywhere, because he is a refugee (2). Lastly there is Imad, the Kurdish young men. In chapter four I explained that he is afraid to speak Dutch, because he does not want to be judged as being different, through his accent. In some cases the former exclusion causes a person to try harder, or long more intense to be included (4), while at the other hand it can cause a person to have given up the idea of belonging (2). Against the assumption that the heterogeneity and cultural differences between different Syrian ethnicities would influence their social sense of belonging, it is rather the level

of exclusion and experience of discrimination that impacts the refugees' capability to develop belonging in a host society. The host community in Friesland does not make a distinction between people who formerly belonged to minorities and majorities. Migration in this case decreased the relevance of the refugee's ethnic background, as the societal attitude towards ethnicity changed. Ethnicity only matters when cultural differences are important and are made socially relevant.

5.4 Conclusion

In this chapter I answered the question: How do socio-cultural relationships within Friesland and beyond impact their sense of belonging? Experiencing a sense of belonging is shaped and maintained by access to recurring social contact and exchange with the same people, because these situations offer the possibility for the establishment of deeper, long-term social relationships.

Figure 16: Near the border of Malikya (Hemko, 2009)

In accordance with the Maslow hierarchy of needs, family is the most important unit to which refugee's feel belonging after migration to Friesland. This is the reason why the sense of belonging of Syrian refugees in Friesland is strongly connected to their roots and their family in Syria or their family who moved along to the Netherlands. Although in some cases already a few years have passed. The fact that most refugees have family members in a warzone makes it very difficult to fully focus on their daily activities in Friesland. This prevents the development of a local sense of belonging. It seemed that women had more problems with the long distance relationship with their family than men.

Besides family, the Syrian refugees in Friesland mostly associate with people from within the migrant group. These relations are mainly built on practicalities like sharing a language and sharing daily activities like integration courses. In addition familiar norms and values and a shared nationality (because of its shared history) are believed to be strong connecters.

In addition to the contact in the migrant group, Syrian refugees associate with their neighbours often autochthonous locals. However, many of the Syrians refugees interviewed felt unable to develop a sense of belonging among locals, as they did not establish recurring social links. While some authors (Korac, 2009, Yuval Davis, 2006) ascribe this to incompatible cultural divides, findings in this research suggest that this is more nuanced in case of the Syrian refugees. Cultural differences that hinder the refugee to participate in social life of the local population do interfere in the establishment of belonging. The most important example here is the individualist attitude of Dutch people, which creates a barrier in the perception of the Syrian refugee. Other features of culture that are perceived as incompatible, are mainly practised in the private sphere and do not obstruct the establishment of social relationships. The Syrians themselves blame their lack of Dutch language skills for the lack of contact with the host community. They believe that language skills will increase their feeling of belonging among the Dutch community, as they are able to increasingly understand each other, but more important find common ground in order to develop emotional co-ownership on each other's differences. The so-called 'integration lessons' can help to increase the refugee's knowledge on social structures and everyday life in the receiving society and increase their language skills. Further reasons for the lack of belonging is that Syrians did not spend enough time in Friesland to find common ground and develop emotional attachment towards the people. The couples with children have increased chances to participate in local lifestyles and therefore to fasten the development of belonging.

Chapter 6. Spatial Belonging

In this chapter I will answer, how Syrian refugees in Friesland make use of, and value, their physical and contextual environment and the opportunities it offers to their daily lives. This question leads towards a practical understanding of what is important for Syrian refugees to develop spatial belonging in Friesland. The spatial environment of the refugee can be subdivided in three areas of research; their homes; their neighbourhoods and the Netherlands. Although in theory these areas can be analysed in a purely spatial context, it becomes clear that in the perception of the refugees social elements are very, if not, the most important factors in the development of emotional connections to a place. In this chapter will be illustrated how the home is the centre of the refugee's feeling of belonging. Furthermore I will explain how the relationship of the refugees with home and their close environment are mainly related to social and spatial practises. In the last paragraph I will illustrate how the emotional attachment to the Netherlands are mainly related to policies that enable or disable the refugee's sense of belonging.

6.1 The Refugee's Home

When directly asking the research participants about the places they feel at home in Friesland, the answer unceasingly is their home. In Dumbreicher and Kolb's theory (2007), the home takes a central place in developing belonging. According to these scholars social relationships in a certain locality create emotional attachments to places. Although this is true for a large part, the home has more aspects that explain the emotional attachment of the Syrians to their homes.

In this paragraph I will reveal the connection of the refugee to his or her home in Friesland. For this I refer to the refugee's nearest and dearest and the meaning of their absence or presence in the refugee's homes in Friesland. Furthermore, I evaluate the meaning of daily activities that take place in the refugee's home and the extent to which these activities are important for creating a feeling of at home-ness. In addition, I will look at the meaning of people's ability to culturally express themselves within their homes, in regard of their home feeling. Finally, I will comment on objects in the homes of refugees that illustrate their identity, which is meaningful for analysing their sense of belonging.

As explained in § 5.1 many Syrians were able to reunify with their close family (parents and children) within a year. In these cases the families live together in their houses in Friesland. The presence of family under the same roof is the main factor that makes the house the central place to which refugees feel belonging. The level of emotional co-ownership of the house is very high among family members in the house, who in all cases, also lived together in their former place of residence. However, besides the close relationships with the nuclear family, refugees experience a big difference between their former home and the current living situation regarding the density of social relations outside of their families. In Friesland the Syrians are unable to reproduce similar social connections they had in their former place of residence in Syria where neighbours, friends and family came together in each other's houses. Sometimes people were together until three o' clock in the night (6). Furthermore, Syrians in some cases were used to sharing their residences with family members such as grandparents or brothers and sisters. The families I spoke with used to live in houses ranging from four bedrooms, of a total size of 185 m2, to villas as large as 1000m2 (5, 10). Fleeing from war forces refugees to accept new living compositions, often without their relatives and friends (4) In the beginning, people tended to continue longing for their former friendships and gatherings, but after a while, they reconsider their desires towards available scenarios in their new environments. Many Syrians explained they eventually got used to the new 'isolated' situation and to living in homes that are less lively than they were used to.

One of the things that help the refugees to continue is practising their daily activities.

This seems very important for keeping focus on living in a new environment and developing local belonging. Because refugees often do not have a job, and lack sources to be mobile, their daily activities are often limited to their homes and their close environment. Most Syrian refugees spend a lot of time working on their Dutch language. The amount of time spend on language classes varies between three to ten hours a day. Other activities that are practised at home are watching television, reading, writing, playing chess, playing with their children and occasionally meet friends. Other tasks like working in the garden, cooking, cleaning reveal the divisions of household tasks. Being responsible for a place makes the inhabitants value the qualities of it (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16). It is very likely that on top of social relationships, these repetitive practices that are performed at home, make home a place in which refugees experience belonging. People are free to do what they feel in their homes, which creates a level of co-ownership, close to their identities.

Many daily activities performed at home are often seen as activities for women. Without exception, during every interview at the respondents' home, it was the woman who'd serve. One woman mentioned that making coffee gave her a home feeling. Her husband commented on this that therefore they drink a lot of coffee (16). These tasks related to the household and hospitality can be seen as a sign of traditional casting between men and women. Although the home is a gendered space, both men and women from Syria feel belonging in their homes in Friesland. However, the difference between men and women is the direction of their aspirations: in many cases aspirations of men are focussed on jobs, while women keep their focus on the maintenance of family life (5, 6, 8, 10, 12). Still, the situation is not that black and white as there are also Syrian women that aspire a job in the Netherlands and men often help with choirs in the house (12, 13, 14). On top that the refugee's home is important because it is the place where refugees connect to their former place of residence and social networks, which, as could be read in § 5.1, are still very important in the daily lives of the refugees (5, 7, 8).

The relationship with the place of residence is not only expressed through daily activities but also in expressions of their cultural identity. Refugees attach much value to their cultural practices, which can be maintained in their private spheres. These practices are very important in feeling belonging in a new place as they are part of who they are: it is part of their identity. One example is the preparation of Syrian dishes and products in the kitchen of Syrian refugees. Although Syrians cook international dishes as well, many Syrians preferred traditional Syrian foods and products (5, 7, 10, 11, 12, 14). Some of the research participants even proudly presented some pictures of their dishes that were made for cultural festivities like, Eid (5, 7). Also Syrian music and

TV is often played inside the house. The TV keeps people up to date on events in Syria, but more often they watch series that they were watching in Syria as well (6, 8, 10). Also the maintenance of people's religion is an act pursued in the private sphere. Through migrating to the Netherlands, where events like Eid and Noroez are not celebrated nationally, these celebrations are transferred and centred in the private sphere (4, 5, 7, 9, 10, 14).[9] The ability to practise these activities at home is very important for their feeling of belonging, as it is part of their cultural identities. Migrating to another country does not change ones religious identity and nor the customs that are attached to it.

Walsh (2006) explains how domestic objects and practices in homes are meaningful materializations that express a migrant's identity, which can be used for exploring ones sense of belonging. In some cases, the houses of the Syrian refugees exposed garnishments that clearly

Figure 17: Decoration in Thaer's house

a piece of the inhabitant's identity. Fadi had a Dutch sign hanging (fig. 9) in his living room with the text: "Geduld overwint alles" which means: Patience concurs all. These typical Dutch signs are called tile wisdoms. The fact that the man has a wisdom-tile on a prominent place in his living room, illustrates his aspiration of integration in the Netherlands. He explains that this particular line is very important to him, to be constantly remembered in which way he should overcome difficulties during his

process of integration, namely; with patience (10). This is especially the case whilst dealing with the Dutch bureaucratic system (10). Also the house of Thaer had an identity revealing ornament (fig. 17). Between two windows hangs a wooden shape of the country Israel with beneath it a Palestinian scarf. The sign represents a whole Palestine, of which the Palestinian territories and Israel are united in one Palestine. Thaer explains that when he gains Dutch citizenship, he wants to migrate to the birthplace of his parents, which is in Haifa. The man dreams of living on his parents farm and grow old there (11). The sign on the wall shows that a sense of belonging can be strongly connected to aspirations and dreams.

6.2 Neighbourhoods in Friesland

In this paragraph I focus on the refugee's sense of belonging in Friesland, through analysing each of their living experiences in their near environment in the different villages in the province. All refugees who were interviewed for this research live in villages in Friesland. Although I realize I should be careful with making generalizations, it can be argued that the similarities between the places considered in this research, enable for a more widespread conclusion, thus considering the province. Through the analysis of the refugee's association of their social environment with their neighbourhood; its facilities) and activities through which refugees can participate in their physical environment, I will clarify the extent to which refugee's experience belonging in their neighbourhoods, and as such offer an indication for Friesland as a whole.

Some of the Syrians who participated were unable to develop a sense of belonging in Friesland (1, 2, 6, 10, 11). According to them there is no difference between living in their villages in Friesland or another place in the Netherlands. For them their place of residence in the Netherlands is not important. These people did not develop a connection to the neighbourhood they currently reside. Others did develop a spatial sense of belonging in their current place of residence (1, 14, 15, 16). One of the main factors that enabled Syrians to feel connected to their place of residence is social connection. In § 5.3 I illustrated the importance of neighbours in the lives of refugees. The illustration of Dumbreicher and Kolb (2010) in §3.6, describes how a family creates the home and how the neighbours create the neighbourhood. This seems to be valid in this research as well. The five refugees that expressed their satisfaction on their neighbourhood

Figure 18: Place of residence of Syrian refugee in Heerenveen

9. Not in every interview I asked for there religious activities therefor the source list might be incomplete.

had frequent contact with their neighbours (1, 14, 15, 16). This shows how relationships of Syrian refugees in their neighbourhood stimulate emotional attachments to places. The positive attitude of the neighbours towards these refugees is, among others, a reason for them to feel accepted and comfortable in their neighbourhoods (see introduction and § 5.3). However the attitude of local people differs in every neighbourhood and between all individuals in Friesland. Therefore one cannot state that Frisians in general make refugees feel welcome.

Apart of the possibility for social relationships, do refugees appreciate their physical environment for its security. The positive features of their close environment, like its safety and the possibilities that it comprises for a future for themselves and their children make negative aspects of the environment less important (1, 2, 4, 6, 7, 10, 11, 14. 16). In other cases, negative experiences in ones environment can create insecurity, when they obstruct their daily activities. "We are at home alone, maybe no food, maybe no school, maybe I don't know. It's a new situation. There (M: in Syria) everything was nearby, now everything is far away. We have to do everything ourselves. It is very difficult, but there is no war. But here it is difficult too (7)."

Another component that helps establishing a relationship with a certain place is the ability to practise daily life activities outside of their homes. Newcomers can connect to their environment by exploring and participating in the neighbourhood. Refugees mentioned activities like walking in the city and doing groceries, going to the gym, or play billiard, through which they participate in their environment (2, 3, 9, 11). Five refugees also mentioned riding a bike as an activity they enjoy. Riding a bike is a very good method to develop belonging in a place, as people can explore their environment and do something enjoyable at the same time (6, 8, 14, 15, 16). Also their language classes and volunteering connects them with their physical, as well as with their social environment (2, 3, 4, 6, 8, 10). Attending language classes mainly creates connections within the migrant group (2, 4, 6, 8, 10). Faihaa explains, "I feel at home at school, because there are people from my own country. (6)" This shows that also migrant relations stimulate the emotional attachment to the environment in which the language classes take place (6, 8). According to authors as Fenster (2004), Dumbreicher and Kolb (2010) repetitive practises in a neighbourhood increase the refugee's knowledge on the environment, which enables emotional attachment to it. The connection develops through time and creates a sense of belonging in relation to these places. This also showed in the results of this research as a few of the refugees explicitly mentioned that their increased knowledge of the place makes them feel comfortable in their environment (4, 14, 16). In addition respondents mentioned the ability to navigate in ones place of residence, knowing products in the supermarket or meeting locals on the streets and being able to make

Figure 19: Shopping centre in Sneek (Hoge Dennen Vastgoed, 2016)

a simple conversation with them also creates their local sense of belonging as it confirms the newcomers of their increasing knowledge (2, 3, 9, 11). Furthermore, when Syrians have young school going children their emotional co-ownership of the environment increases, as it increases (14, 15, 16). The mothers and fathers bring their children to school, where they meet other parents, and in addition they have more conversations with parents from the neighbourhood (1, 6, 9, 14, 15). This increases their confidence and creates familiarity and comfort, which stimulates the development of feelings of belonging. The more time one spends in a new place, the more a sense of belonging is developed. Still, the time one needs to achieve this is very personal.

Despite the connections created in and with the environment, residing in a host society can confront Syrian refugees with activities that cannot be done anymore. One woman mentioned that she misses walking to a friend or to her parents place. In her current place of residence she walks with her child without a purpose. It makes her long to her former life (16). An important activity that misses in many lives of (mainly Syrian male) refugees is having a job. For many refugees it is not easy to find an appropriate job in Friesland. This considers high and low skilled jobs (2, 4, 5, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 15). There are several causes mentioned that underlie this problem. Some refugees feel limited by job options that villages in Friesland have to offer. This is a reason why two of the respondents would rather live in a big city (11, 12). In another case, the local Frisian language, which is mainly spoken in villages, has a demotivating effect. Thaer, who volunteered with elderly people, stopped his volunteering job because the people he encountered only spoke Frisian instead of Dutch (7). Fadi explains that he needs to be re-educated in order to continue his career. He shows a lot of initiative in self-studying the Dutch language but there are not enough people in his environment that share his level of Dutch to start a separate class. He states that in other places in the Netherlands this is not the case. (11). Another Syrian, Elias believes that he needs to become more mobile in order to enlarge his chance of getting a job (15). However in this last case the lack of having a job did not influence his sense of spatial belonging as is able to compensate this lack, with social relationships in his local environment (15). In the next paragraph

I will elaborate on national influences that prevent refugees to finds a job.

The insecurity about jobs shows that not only knowledge, but also facilities are important to connect oneself with the environment. Some villages in Friesland are very remote and not only lack possible workplaces, but also other facilities that are important in people's daily lives, like a high school or a supermarket (8, 13, 15). To counterbalance the lack of facilities refugees need to be mobile. Being mobile has a significant influence on one's sense of belonging in a certain place. It influences the extent to which people are able to do basic things like buying food, or going to school. On top of that it also enables them to visit friends in other villages or cities. However, in some cases the refugees lack financial means for transport or they find it too far or difficult to go by bike to perform important daily activities (8, 12, 13, 15). One example is a Syrian family who lives in Noard-Burgum, a village without supermarkets or schools The family felt unable to reach their daily needs, like doing groceries or going to school. The children tried to cycle to school a few times during the winter, but it took them two hours. The family decided to pay for bus tickets instead. This left the family with a lack of money for food (8). The worrying about basic things like food, money or going to school, has a negative influence on people's development of a sense of belonging. The refugees' trauma's and their lack of social networks decreases their capability to creatively deal with circumstances and instead makes them long to their former lives. When refugees feel obstructed in the performance of their necessary daily activities, they can feel vulnerable. This jeopardizes their safety feeling in their neighbourhood, which is fundamental to feel belonging in the neighbourhood.

The lack of shops and faxilities in a village in some cases creates a feeling of remoteness of

Figure 12: Frisian village, Twijzelerheide

the world. Twelve of the sixteen interviewed individuals and couples came from cities with over million inhabitants, which is a great contrast with the villages they currently live in varying from 1.236 inhabitants in Wirdum to 33.260 in Sneek. Compared to the cities from which the refugees originate, the neighbourhoods in which the refugees currently live are relative lifeless (2, 3 6, 8, 10, 12, 16). In Syria shops close late at night, while in Friesland, especially in the evening, life on the street stops around six. Shops, if at all present, close. People finish working and go home. One man joked that if Dutch people would not have dogs, the streets would be completely empty. Because there is nothing to do after six o'clock, most refugees stay at home in the evening. Furthermore the fact that most refugees do not have social networks in their near environment yet, creates an even bigger contrast between their current and their former lives. Initially the differences between life in a big city and in a village were difficult for some of the Syrians (2, 6, 8, 12, 13). However, some of them got used to the quietness in a few months and even started to appreciate typical aspects of the village, like the lack of traffic and the ability for their children to play outside (6, 9, 10, 13M).

6.3 The Netherlands

On top of the refugee's near environment there are also factors that are not necessarily elements of the Frisian province that influence the lives of refugees in Friesland, but are rather related to national policies. The refugee status, and Dutch bureaucracy and Dutch policies impact the feeling of security in Friesland and influence their feeling of belonging in Friesland.

To some refugees, having a refugee status makes them feel insecure. With a refugee status and the related return policy, people can be sent back to their country of origin when the war stops. One person mentioned he needs the assurance of a permanent stay, to feel secure enough to start his own business. Without this security they cannot establish feelings of belonging in the host society (13). In another case the refugee status means not being part of a place, instead he feels used as a political pion (2).

The biggest problems for ten of the refugees interviewed, is the insecurity considering their professional future (2, 4, 5, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 15). According to Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, OECD, (2007) one third of the skilled refugees are unemployed and the rest work beneath their level. Some causes of being unemployed lie partially with the Syrians, like the language gap. However the Dutch policies considering integration play a part in this as well. Especially Syrian men mentioned that having a job is very important for them to feel belonging. A job creates the feeling of being in control over ones' life. However, many of them

depend on unemployment benefit. The dependence on externalities, such as government money, gives them a very insecure feeling. It is very important to build a new life, in which the Syrians feel in control, especially considering the traumatic experiences they have been through (6, 7, 11, 13). Two other men explain they need to be re-educated in order to continue their jobs. However instead of a university degree they will start with an intermediate vocational education, MBO, because they believe their language level does not allow them to go to university (3, 11). One of the men was a lawyer in Syria, however had a relative high level of Dutch. He took the initiative to study Dutch himself when he was still in the asylum procedure, which in his case took half a year. His background as a lawyer and his initiative to put effort in his integration process himself makes me believe that he has chances to continue his former career in the Netherlands (11). Surprisingly, both men did not really seem to mind this degradation in education level or even which kind of job they plan to do in the future. They were more troubled by their unemployment.

While these two men were relatively uncritical towards the need to change their careers, another interview partner, Yaser, was very critical. He wants to continue his former job as brain surgeon as soon as possible. He studies Dutch 10 hours a day, so that he is able to be re-educated on the academic level as fast as possible. However he encounters other difficulties in his quest to participate in the Dutch society. The main reason is the Dutch bureaucratic system, which makes him highly frustrated and insecure about his future in the Netherlands (6). He is eager to make his contribution to the Dutch society, but feels withheld by the Dutch bureaucratic system. He feels that his life depends the decision of a certain employee, who works in the municipality of his village. He feel treated as a number instead of a person that is eager to contribute and participate. Being out of control as such gives him sleepless nights and is contra productive for developing belonging in his place of residence (6). Another respondent, called Yusef has similar experiences with this bureaucratic attitude. Initially he wanted to continue his work as a cheese maker. However there are many hygienic codes that need to be respected. The licences and adjustments needed for his project were too expensive to continue. Therefore he initiated another idea, which during the interview was in the process of being approved or declined. The long waiting time for the approval is very demotivating to him. Yusef initially believed that projects are easy to start in Europe, but he did not take into account the bureaucracy and the many rules that are involved (13). Despite the few negative experiences that derive from national policies inhibiting the feeling of belonging, refugees mentioned elements as safety, justice, respect for human rights and no discrimination, as of utmost important to develop their feelings of belonging (2, 8, 10, 13, 14).

6.4 Conclusion

In this chapter I answered the question: How do Syrian refugees in Friesland make use and value their environment, and the opportunities it provides, in their daily lives? Without a doubt, the most important space in which refugees develop belonging is their homes. Especially, when refugees live together with family, the home is associated with their nearest and dearest. However also for single headed households the home is the most important place as it the place for which they feel responsible. I suspect that women have a slightly closer connection to their homes, as they are in many cases the person that takes most responsibility for its maintenance. Syrian men feel more responsibility for the maintenance of the family, which is often revealed in their longing for a job. Nevertheless, both men and women's emotional co-ownership of the private sphere is among others revealed through cultural activities that are performed at home and not in the public sphere. Also non-cultural daily activities that are practised at home, anchor the refugee's to this place. Very important activities are the communication with the home front. Which also shows that refugee's sense belonging is not only grounded locally, but also in their former place of origin or elsewhere. This is also made visible through objects refugee's have in their homes, which in some cases these strongly represent people's (be)longings. These can be directed either to the Netherlands, Syria or other places. This is very personal and is difficult to make general conclusions on, without further research.

The relationship with the neighbourhood has similar characteristics as relations to their homes. Because every refugee is different and every neighbourhood consists of different people it is hard to make general statements on the development of belonging of refugees in Frisian neighbourhoods. However due to the relative high level of social cohesion of Frisian neighbourhoods, belonging of refugee's can develop in two ways. Social cohesion can increase chances of social relationships and spatial belonging in a Frisian village. On the other hand it might be difficult for a newcomer to join a closely connected community. This means that refugees can feel very isolated, but also very much included. In both cases refugees with children have increased chances to develop local belonging.

When refugee's lack social relationships in their neighbourhood, the villages can be perceived as lifeless. However there are positive sides of the quiet qualities of Frisian villages, like the ability for children to play on the streets and, as there is not a lot of traffic, the ability to learn how to ride a bike. On top of that, in many cases the appreciation of being in a safe environment balances out the quietness in villages. One thing that does seriously obstruct the development of refugee's feeling of belonging is that some villages are relative remote from important facilities

that are needed to perform daily practises. This is a factor that can negatively influence the sense of belonging of refugees as it shakes peoples' sense of security, considering the fulfilment of their basic needs.

In many ways, belonging is built on a sense of security. In Friesland the main problems that prevent refugees from developing feelings of belonging and security is the availability of (suitable) jobs. Especially when refugees invest in their integration, they need the security of a future in the Netherlands. For refugees this means that if they invest in a future, they need the certainty that they can stay in the Netherlands without the risk of being sent back. In addition to this Syrians want to be independent of governmental institutions so that they have the feeling they are in control of their own lives. Depending on the government creates insecurity because; it is part of Syrian culture to be able to be in control of ones own future, but also due to the bureaucratic system in the Netherlands that works with standard protocols, which are not sufficient in order to help refugee's with different needs.

Figure 21: Former home of Faihaa and her husband

7. Final Conclusion

The aim of this thesis was to understand and unpack the ways in which Syrian refugees that arrive in Friesland create a sense of social and spatial belonging. Its main question was: to what extent do Syrian refugees, with divergent personal and collective identities, experience a social and spatial sense of belonging in Friesland?

Generally speaking, this research has shown that people's sense of belonging is to a great extent determined by the specific situation their close family and friends are in either in Syria, Friesland, or elsewhere. The experience of social and spatial belonging to the situation they currently live in in Friesland is less dominant in people's narratives.

Contrary to what the host society often tends to think, the Syrians refugees that arrive in the Netherlands are a heterogeneous group of people with different cultural, religious socio-economic and ethnical backgrounds. This is important because migration did not change the refugee's position within these social categories. Following Anthias work, the sixteen semi-structured interviews helped me to gain insights in the relationships of people's identities, their social location and belonging. According to Anthias, belonging to social locations such as ethnic group, nation, gender and socio-economic status, influence the extent to which people feel belonging in a society. Anthias argues that when a refugee is dislocated at the level of a nation, by migrating to another country, it does not necessarily mean dislocation in other terms. By being part of several social categories the refugee increases the chance of feeling belonging in a different society. In contrast to Anthias ideas, however, the specifics of those social categories do not seem to have significant influence on the extent to which refugees feel belonging in Friesland. It is rather the power position of these various social categories in which the refugees place themselves, or are placed, that impact their feeling of belonging in the host society. In addition respondents did mention feeling displaced, especially when they strongly identify with a social category. For example migration can create a feeling of being spatially dislocated, through strong identification with ones ethnic group. Belonging to such ethnic groups often means having a strong aspiration and sense of belonging to their motherland, in these cases 'Palestine' or 'Kurdistan'.

However when a person feels spatially displaced through one specific factor, other spatial or social factors of the specific environment can create feelings of belonging at the same time.

Importantly, the data gathered in this study have demonstrated that the relationships between social and spatial belonging is more interrelated than expected when I designed the research. While I had expected to more explicitly include a spatial analysis, the data clearly establish

that my interlocutor's emotional attachment to space is revealed by the social relationships in places, such as their homes and their neighbourhoods. As Dumbreicher and Kolb's (2010, n.p.) theory explains, "when the individual performs social action, he or she constructs a relationships with a specific spatial field." Belonging relates to places in a hierarchical order, in which the house is the centre and from there the "identity space" evolves in concentric circles (Dumbreicher and Kolb, 2010, n.p).

Indeed, the house turned out to be the most important place in my interlocutors' lives. Home is the place that is associated with family, but also because in this place where people can freely express their (cultural) identity. However, when increasing the scope from the house outward, it becomes clear that the emotional attachment of the Syrians with Friesland and the Netherlands is not very strong and still very much being developed. Counter intuitively, it is not necessarily the difference between Syrian and Dutch culture that creates a distance between the refugees and their connection to their new environment, but rather the lack of social relationships. Refugees mainly blame this on their lack of language skills, but they also mentioned to feel slightly inhibited by the individualist attitude of the Dutch.

The relationships of the Syrian refugees within the migrant group reveal that not only factors like culture and language matter for migrants in order to feel belonging, but many other factors of identification are important as well. One significant factor that facilitates feelings of belonging that revealed itself in the analysis is parenthood.

Following the Maslow hierarchy of needs, a few conditions need to be present in the near environment to enable the establishment of belonging. Findings of this research show that in Friesland great deals of these needs are fulfilled. The most important aspect is general safety and accommodation. However the results also revealed a few aspects of the Frisian province and of Dutch policies that shake the refugees' safety feeling. Refugees in relative remote villages mentioned the lack of facilities and the inability to be mobile. In addition, Friesland has fewer jobs available and a smaller job-market than the urban agglomerations in the west and south of the Netherlands. People's professional backgrounds and aspirations are not taken into account when placing refugees in municipalities, which indeed may decrease their chances on the local job market. Furthermore the refugee status, the dependency on unemployment benefits and the associated bureaucratic attitude of the Dutch government establish feelings of insecurity, especially with regards to their plans for the future. What all these factors have in common is that refugees are not in control of the situation, which shakes their sense of security. In these cases, their sense of belonging is especially threatened when the refugee does not have the impetus or financial means to overcome this breadth.

In conclusion, the Syrian refugees are still very closely connected with their families and histories in Syria. Their sense of belonging towards their near social and spatial environment is still very much in development. In general they need more time to establish an emotional connection to all these aspects of the host society. All in all, this thesis illustrates that regardless people's cultural identity; home is where the heart is.

8. Recommendations

To enhance the refugees feelings of belonging and participation in their near environments in Friesland and the Netherlands, I wrote the following recommendations based on finding in this thesis.

•   The results of this research show that family is the most significant factor for Syrian refugees in the development of belonging. To enable refugees to establish a feeling of belonging in the Netherlands and Friesland, it is important that their nearest and dearest are able to with them as soon as possible. Therefore family reunification is of utmost importance for refugees to focus in their lives in Friesland. These procedures should be handled as fast as possible.

•   Language is shown to be one of the most important factors to be able to participate in the host society. However in Friesland there are not enough levels of language classes to provide every refugee with language classes of their own level of education. To increase the potential of refugees to participate in the economic and social life as fast as possible there should be more options available for refugees that learn relative fast.

•   The individualist attitude of the Dutch people in some case withholds the potential creation of social connections of refugees among them. In order to increase chances of refugees on social relationships that emotional attach them to their social and spatial environment, non-profit organizations such as Vluchtelingenwerk or neighbourhood association should create platforms where these such encounters are easy accessible and stimulated in the refugees near environment.

•   The research showed that Dutch bureaucracy can have a very demotivating impact on the refugee's sense of security and belonging. Since the target group policy in the Netherlands is deprecated, refugees feel unheard in their efforts to integrate in municipalities. In order to improve this situation a target oriented policy, that takes into account the refugee's professional and educational history should be re-implemented. Furthermore employees at municipalities should obtain supplementary training in the treatment of refugees. They are dealing with people with traumatic experiences and they have to realize that inadequate treatment of these people can severely impact the refugee's future, but also deprive the local society of the potentials of these people.

- Results show that some Syrians experience difficulties in finding a job in Friesland, because the province lacks professional opportunities for every sector in which the refugees were formerly employed. In order to avoid these situations asylum and integration procedure should be integrated. This way the refugee's professional and educational background can be included in the asylum procedure in an earlier stage and be further asessed for finding appropriate municipalities for refugees to be placed, based on local market options.

- Some Syrians were placed in relative remote areas. These places are more common in Friesland than in some other provinces in the Netherlands. The remoteness in some cases creates difficulties in achieving important daily needs and hereby creates a feeling of insecurity. When a refugee is placed in a municipality their options for mobility should be taken into account. Refugees that are relative well of have increased possibilities to be mobile as they are more able to pay for bus tickets or drivers license. Therefore data on income should also be used included when placing refugees in certain villages that have increased risks of causing isolation. Furthermore the use of the bike should be stimulated. Non-governmental organizations or municipalities can play an active role in informing refugees on the importance of the bike in Dutch culture. On top of that the provision of free bikes to refugees should actively stimulate the use of the bicycle.

- Results show that the refugee status in several cases creates difficulties in the development of belonging among the Syrians, as they are afraid they will be send back to the Syria while circumstances in Syria are not are not secure enough jet. Therefore Syrian refugees should obtain citizenship after their asylum procedure is approved. History shows that in general refugees that flee civil war at least reside in a host society for five years after which they obtain citizenship. The insecurity the refugees currently live in can be avoided by such measures. In this way the Syrian refugees investments like learning the local language and re-education can be rewarded with a secure future.

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