Radboud University

ADJUSTING, STRUGGLING, PROVING, AND FEELING AT HOME:

NARRATIVES OF AFGHAN REFUGEES IN THE NETHERLANDS

A STUDY IN PERCEIVED CULTURAL DISTANCE IN RELATION TO ECONOMIC INTEGRATION OF AFGHAN REFUGEES IN THE NETHERLANDS

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Student: D. Graham (Daphne)
Student number: S 4787420

Supervisor: A. Buiter (Annabel) MA
Second examinator: Dr. S. Pajic (Sofija)

Researchers involved: Ana Molina Aragon, Jeroen Lenssen, Shabnam Shanurkeyl, and Kelsi van Rozendaal

Preface

I am proud to say that this research concludes my Master's program in Business Administration at the Radboud University in Nijmegen. I have received a great deal of help and guidance throughout writing this Master Thesis.

First, I would like to express my gratitude to my supervisor, Annabel Buiter, who helped and supported me throughout the whole process of this research. She provided me with insightful comments, and always steered me in the right direction. I am also thankful to Dr. Sofija Pajic for her valuable input as the second examiner on my research proposal. Furthermore, I am appreciative of dr. Yvonne van Rossenberg for her continuous ideas, helpful knowledge, and great enthusiasm.

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Furthermore, I would like to thank the participants that took part in this research. Their collaboration enhanced the value of this research tremendously and made it extremely interesting. Looking back, I can confidently say that the stories of these refugees have impacted me in ways I would not have foreseen at the start.

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I hope you enjoy your reading.

Daphne Graham

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Abstract

Refugees bring their own cultural values, norms, and ideas upon arrival in a new host country. While some perceive great distance between their own culture and that of the host country, others perceive this distance to be smaller. Even though there is a large literature on integration issues of refugees, scholars have yet to deploy culture's relationship to refugee economic integration. Understanding how first-generation Afghan refugees perceive cultural distance and how this is reflected in their economic integration in the Netherlands is the aim of this study. A qualitative approach was opted for, and narrative analysis was used to provide an understanding of the experiences of the Afghan refugees. Twenty-nine semi-structured interviews were held with first-generation Afghan refugees who fled in the time period of 1980 until 2000. In total, 20 interviews were used for the final analysis of this study. Four dimensions were identified in this study which emerged from the narratives of the Afghan refugees and relate to their perceived cultural distance. The narratives reflect mixed experiences of perceived cultural distance in relation to integrating economically into society. Findings showed that Afghan refugees had strong cultural values regarding obtaining a good education and finding a prestigious job. Furthermore, most felt that due to cultural differences, they had to work harder in life. Limitations of this research relate to linguistic disadvantages since most of the interviews did not take place in the mother tongue of the interviewee and/or the interviewer. Furthermore, a methodological limitation was the potential for research bias. The nature of this research was a process of sensemaking and storytelling, and results were therefore unavoidably influenced by the interpretation of the researcher. Future research could ideally include additional data sources which can be used to support the narratives of the Afghan refugees. This study provides suggestions for individuals, organizations and HR departments, and society about how refugees feel disadvantaged regarding their employment due to cultural differences.

Keywords Afghan Refugees, Culture, Perceived Cultural Distance, Integration, Economic Integration, Belonging, Identity, First-Generation Refugees

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Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Background

Due to the increase of immigrants in the Netherlands since the 1960s, the country has been a net-immigration country (Bevelander & Veenman, 2006; Lancee, 2010). The migration flows to the Netherlands are increasingly becoming more diverse. In the 1970s, the majority of the non-Western immigrants came only from four non-Western countries, which were Morocco, Turkey, the Dutch Antilles, and Surinam. Around 2008, this share fell to 25% of all immigrants, and the number of immigrants from these four countries kept on decreasing. (Van Meeteren et al., 2013). Immigration from various countries has led to the trend of 'super-diversity', as has been shown in the UK by Vertovec (2007), to exist in the Netherlands (Meeteren et al., 2013; Czaika & De Haas, 2014). Another important trend outlined by van Meeteren et al. (2013) in the immigration flows towards the Netherlands is a 'new geography' of migration. This entails an increase of long-distance migration to the Netherlands and complementary migration flows from east to west.

Afghan refugees began coming to the Netherlands since the late 1980s, fleeing the violence and different regimes in their homeland (Feldmann et al., 2007). In mid-August 2021 the Taliban captured Kabul, the capital of Afghanistan, and surged back to power (Laub, 2021). This caused another large inflow of Afghans evacuating to the Netherlands, among other countries (Pronczuk, 2021). Currently, Afghans make up one of the largest refugee populations worldwide. To illustrate, there are 2.6 million registered Afghan refugees in the world, and this number will likely continue to rise due to the return of the Taliban in 2021 (UNCHR, 2021).

As the field of research on international migration has gained increased attention over the years, the focus of many researches turned to the immigrant integration processes into new host societies (De Vroome & Van Tubergen, 2010; Kuhlman, 1991; Lundborg, 2013; Phillimore, 2021). Undeniably, an important aspect of immigrant integration is economic integration, also referred to as integrating into the labor market (De Vroome & Van Tubergen, 2010). In fact, countries which have accommodated immigrants struggle with the question of how to facilitate their settlement and participation in the new society. Consequently, this issue surrounds complexity and as has been pointed out by researchers: integration is a vague and 'chaotic' term (Robinson, 1998: 118, as been cited in Korac, 2003).

Why do some refugees integrate better into the host society than others? For the integration of immigrants, employment is generally considered to be a crucial factor (Lundborg, 2013). Employment yields income for the individual, and next to this it also improves knowledge about various aspects of the host country. For example, knowledge about the way the labor market functions, about the culture

and the about the language. It also facilitates building a network. These are all aspects that help the integration process into the host country (Lundborg, 2013).

Motives for refugees to improve their economic chances upon arrival in the host country are mixed when being compared to economic migrants. While some incentives can motivate refugees to undergo rapid assimilation, refugees often face an uncertain future which may reduce the incentives to invest in human capital that is specific to the host country (Brell et al., 2020). Refugees do not know if asylum will be granted, and even when it is, getting permission to stay in the host country could be temporary and possibly reassessed with a chance of revocation.

Moreover, there is also uncertainty in whether and when refugees wish to return to their home country when it is safe and possible to do so. Uncertainty itself could inhibit the integration of the refugee into the group through posing as a psychological hindrance. Thus, the integration of refugees is most likely to come across some major challenges (Brell et al., 2020).

Unquestionably, the increase of migrant flows has led to the increase of cultural diversity in the receiving societies. Many studies have shown that higher perceived cultural distance predicts prejudice (Firat & Ataca, 2022; Mahfud et al., 2016; Mahfud et al., 2015; Mahfud et al., 2018). Furthermore, cultural differences between these social groupings have been suggested as an important key element in negative intergroup attitudes (Mahfud et al., 2018). Despite this, not much research is done on how it relates to economic integration, indicating that the perceived cultural distance between immigrant-origin groups and the majority population is an essential issue to consider.

As Afghan culture is very family orientated, research has found that Afghan refugees struggle with their limited resources when integrating into the Netherlands while trying to stay connected to Afghanistan at the same time (Muller, 2008). Although previous research established that refugees encounter many challenges when trying to integrate into the labor market (Brell et al., 2020), it remains unknown how this relates to their own perceptions on cultural distance between them and the native population.

To summarize, it remains unclear how first-generation Afghan refugees perceive the cultural differences between their culture of origin and Dutch culture and how this impacts Afghan refugees' economic integration in the Netherlands. Evidently, how minority groups, such as specifically first-generation Afghan refugees, perceive the role of cultural distance in their economic integration process in the Netherlands needs further attention. By giving refugees voice, and enabling them to share their story, this study can support the Afghan community and gain further understanding in their experiences in the Dutch labor market.

1.2 Research objective & questions

The aim of this study is to increase understanding of first-generation Afghan refugees' perceived cultural distance and how this is reflected in their economic integration in the Netherlands. Furthermore, the goal is to contribute to the literature about cultural distance of refugees and explore the cultural distance that is actually perceived by refugees. For the same reason, this research aims to understand interrelationships between perceived cultural distance and economic integration of refugees. Hence, the research question is as follows: ''*How does perceived cultural distance of Afghan refugees relate to their economic integration in the Netherlands?''*

To critically assess this research question, twenty-nine semi-structure story telling interviews will be conducted with first-generation Afghan refugees who have fled to the Netherlands. Thereafter, the acquired data will be analyzed using narrative analysis. As narratives play a critical role in the structuring of human experience and identity (Symon & Cassell, 2012), it will systematically explore refugees perspectives on cultural distance and economic integration.

1.3 Scientific relevance

Although Afghan refugees may be the most studied refugee group in general (Bentz, 2013), gaps in the literature still remain. This study will try to fill one of these gaps by researching an understudied refugee group: first-generation Afghan refugees in the Netherlands that fled in the period between 1980-2000. It is critical to study this underrepresented group in order to reach more ethical, valid, and meaningful research findings (Pfeffer, 2015). By using interviews that reflect perceived cultural distance that Afghan refugees experience in the Netherlands, perceptions at the individual level are captured. This is particularly interesting since perceived cultural distance reflects temporal changes in personal cultural values and shows insights into the perceptions of Afghan refugees.

Due to their different cultural backgrounds, Afghan refugees may have different cultural distance perceptions regarding their economic integration process (Liu et al., 2018). Previous research mainly put its focus on migrant minority' perceptions of cultural distance in relation to acculturation orientations, as well as national majorities' perceptions of intergroup attitudes (Firat & Ataca, 2022). However, what has not been thoroughly examined in previous studies is the relationship between perceived cultural distance of specifically refugees, and their economic integration process. This will be novel to the literature, as this research will provide insights into the perceptions of Afghan refugees regarding these concepts. Individuals' perceptions of cultural differences directly inform their behavior and decision-making (Liu et al., 2018). This emphasizes the importance of the role perceived cultural distance plays in human behavior. Therefore, it be assumed that these perceptions can influence refugees' actions regarding their economic integration process. Thus, as a contribution to the academic field, this study will help to improve our understanding on what difficulties are faced by Afghan refugees during integration at work in the Netherlands.

1.4 Societal relevance

Besides the scientific relevance, exploring the perceived cultural distance of refugees in relation to their economic integration, is of practical relevance to refugees, organizations, and society. As the Afghan community in the Netherlands is very large, reality is that it remains an understudied group in the Netherlands (Hessels & Wassie, 2004). Thus, it is critical that this community is investigated further to understand the integration issues of Afghan refugees in the Dutch society. Furthermore, the cultural divide between newcomers and native-born is wider than ever with the large sources of migrants coming from more culturally distant countries. This has implications for mental health consequences of refugees (Beiser et al., 2015). An essential task for all migrant receiving countries is to help migrants and refugees maintain mental health while they face the challenges of integration. However, the creation of effective policy and practice is hampered by gaps in information about what promotes and jeopardizes mental health (Beiser et al., 2015). By studying the perceived cultural distance refugees encounter these information gaps can be reduced.

Increased cultural diversity caused by increasing migration rates has various advantages and disadvantages for the countries that attract migrants (Firat & Ataca, 2022). The management of cultural diversity can be challenging for organizations that work with refugees. Examples of challenges are generating social policies that benefit the incoming minorities, or sustaining social cohesion by gaining the support of the majority of those policies (Firat & Ataca, 2022). The ongoing increase in cultural diversity due to migration numbers at the workplace indicates the need for a study that sheds light upon refugees perceptions of refugees on this. This study will provide better insights in the perspective of refugees on the context of cultural distance and diversity at the work place, which contributes to the relevancy of this research. Aforementioned, this will contribute socially by giving voice to refugee groups regarding their experiences when integrating and finding work in the host-country. Finally, implications will be given to HR and organizations as to what role they may play in enhancing the working conditions of refugees.

1.5 Outline

The remainder of this study will be organized as follows. In chapter two, relevant literature on the key topics of this research will be described, including migration, cultural distance, and integration theory. Furthermore, the conceptual framework will be included, linking the most important topics of this study together. Chapter three will elaborate on the methodology section of this study. This includes the research method and design, the data collection and selection process, elaboration on the participants, the data analysis, and finally the research ethics. Moreover, chapter four will elaborate on the most important findings of this study, including the key themes and dimensions that emerged from the narratives. Finally, chapter five provides a conclusion of the research, presents the discussion of the findings, and gives an elaboration on the limitations and implications of this study.

Chapter 2 Theoretical Background

This chapter presents an outline of the relevant literature and theories that are important to the identified problem. The theoretical background consists of the key concepts, which are integration theory, migration and refugees, and cultural distance. The chapter continues by discussing the central cause-and-consequences of these topics, and provides an overview of the relevant assumptions and conditions within the research field. Finally, the conceptual framework that consists of the relevant theoretical concepts is discussed and presented.

2.1 Migration

The academic literature on ‘’migration’’ has frequently utilized a variety of terminology. However, a consensus is found in the literature about the definition of migration, as it is referred to as ‘*’the movement of people from their usual residence place across international borders (external migration) or within the country (internal migration)*’’ (IOM, 2019; as cited in Guerrero & Wanjiru, 2021). The duration (short or long term), the crossing of borders (internal or external), the perspective of the country of origin (emigration) or destination (immigration), the reason or purpose for moving (by a conflict), and the decision to return to the country of origin (voluntary or forced) are all factors that influence the definition (Guerrero & Wanjiru, 2021). As this study focuses on refugees, only the applicable concepts will be further elaborated on.

2.1.1 Forced migration

Forced migration, also referred to as involuntary migration, is distinguished from economic (or voluntary) migration in analytical and policy terms. This distinction arises from the fact that economic migrants choose to relocate to a new country based on their evaluation of relative opportunities that are afforded abroad, in comparison to their home country (Brell et al., 2020; Castles, 2006). Thus, economic migrants are typically shown as migrating voluntarily in response to economic pull factors that attract them to a specific location (Abdelaaty & Steele, 2022). In contrast to this, forced migration has an inherent factor of constraint limiting the agency of the migrants. These limits include access to resources to be able to flee (De Haas et al., 2019).

Forced migrants are often more educated in comparison to other groups of migrants (Muus, 1997, as cited in Ager & Strang, 2008). However, since they are forced to leave their home country, they have a limited ability to choose the specific country which will become their destination. This results in economic migrants having a higher degree of economic selection than forced migrants. Evidently, this entails that forced migrants which are arriving in a host country with a disadvantage of less locally applicable human capital such as job skills and language, than economic migrants, are likely to start at lower levels of employability (Brell et al., 2020). This implies that Afghan migrants, who were

forced to flee their home country, have a lower degree of economic selection which might result in more challenges during their economic integration process in the Netherlands.

A forced migrant, also referred to as a refugee, is considered *''a person residing outside his or her country of nationality, who is unable or unwilling to return because of a 'well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion' ''* according to the 1951 UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (Castles, 2006; De Haas et al., 2019). Frequently, refugees are depicted as having been forced to flee due to political pressures such as persecution or conflict, which endangers their lives (Abdelaaty & Steele, 2022). Refugees are conceptually different from other migrants, since they do not voluntarily leave their country and are not selected on a class basis (Richmond, 1988, as cited from Connor, 2010). Furthermore, refugees encounter added complexity in their integration process. This is due to the fearful and traumatic experiences they have went through in their country of origin (Brell et al., 2020).

The term refugee is distinct from, but often confused with, asylum seeker. Asylum Seekers are classified as a distinct group of migrants. These are people who have crossed an international border in search of protection, but whose claims for refugee status have not yet been determined (Castles, 2006; De Haas et al., 2019). Thus, within the category of forced migration, the literature thus makes a distinction between refugees and asylum seekers. Upon arrival in the Netherlands, asylum seekers enter an asylum procedure and are not allowed to work during the first six months of this procedure (IND, n.d.). After obtaining a residence permit, a refugee will be allowed to work in the Netherlands (Werkgelegenheid, 2019). As first-generation Afghans that fled to the Netherlands during the time period of 1980 until the 2000's have endured this asylum procedure by now, they are considered to be refugees in the Netherlands.

Aforementioned, refugees have a lower ability to choose their destination country, which often means they flee to a country that is unknown to them. It seems that a lack of knowledge of the cultural context of the host country makes the perceived cultural distance greater, inhibiting refugees to integrate fully into the host country. How Afghan refugees perceive this cultural distance, and how this connects to issues they deal with during their integration process should therefore be further investigated.

2.2 Perceived cultural distance

Before a discussion on how cultural distance is perceived by refugees is possible, an elaboration on the concept of culture is required. Most definitions of culture seem to anchor values, norms and beliefs as being the core of culture (Beugelsdijk & Maseland, 2010). Schwartz (2004) views culture as the rich complex of meanings, beliefs, practices, symbols, norms and values prevalent among people in a society.

The concept of cultural distance describes the process of comparing two cultural groups. It refers to how cultural norms and behaviors between two groups or entities differ. Perceived cultural distance captures individual perceptions and assumes individual heterogeneity (Liu et al., 2018). With regard to

the study of migration, the concept of cultural distance is not new. Immigrants with divergent cultural backgrounds are frequently viewed as a threat to the majority group's culture and identity, which leads to prejudice and discrimination (González, Verkuyten, Weesie, & Poppe, 2008; as cited in Mahfud et al., 2018; Mahfud, 2016). Evidently, the issue of perceived cultural distance between immigrant-origin groups and the majority population is highly relevant.

Besides, several criteria of cultural distance are outlined in previous research, including: religion, mother tongue, family, marriage, values, and economic status (Triandis, 1994). Within the context of migration, refugees' perceptions on these criteria might be interesting since these people immigrate from one place to another, forced to deal with a different culture than their own cultural background.

In order to manage the increasing cultural diversity European countries face, new ideas are constantly sought out for. As has been previously mentioned, cultural distance between social groups has been offered to be an important consideration for negative intergroup attitudes. Hence, as a response to the challenges of cultural diversity, the concept of multiculturalism has arised. Multiculturalism can be referred to in terms of societal goals such as cultural equality, tolerance, and inclusion (Yogeeswaran & Dasgupta, 2014). In fact, multiculturalism preaches the right to share a territory, and the obligation to live in it according to the cultures of the groups and communities (Sarmento, 2014). It rejects the concept of a ''melting pot'', which people of minority groups are expected to assimilate into the majority culture. Hence, it can be referred to as a normative ideal in which members of minority groups can maintain their original cultural identity and practices, and it is compatible with integration into the new society. Therefore, immigrants have a better chance at integrating into the host society because of fairer terms that are provided by multiculturalism policies (Song, 2010). While this concept of a multicultural society was present in the Netherlands during the initial time period in which first-generation Afghan refugees arrived in the 1980's-2000's, the basic premises underlying policy shifted towards a focus on cultural integration in the beginning of the 2000's (Penninx, 2020).

Moreover, studies of immigrants have indicated that the greater cultural distance between the culture of origin and of resettlement, the greater difficulties with integrating and provides a significant threat to well-being it will bring. In contrast, the greater the cultural match between home and host country, the bigger the likelihood of succession (Beiser et al., 2015). A recent study investigated the challenges to the economic integration of Afghan refugees in the U.S. This included a finding of lower Afghan female employment which might be due to patriarchal family cultures and structures which are common in Afghanistan. Due to a more egalitarian gender order in the U.S. context, tensions were found around gender roles among some Afghans in the U.S. (Stempel & Alemi, 2021). These findings of cultural differences influencing female employment were parallel to findings for Afghan refugees in the Netherlands (Bakker et al., 2017). Further research on cultural differences found that larger differences between a refugee's origin culture and the culture of the resettlement country were important for

economic integration (Young, 2020). A greater cultural divide demonstrated a strong negative effect on rapid employment. However, a thorough investigation of culture's relationship to refugee economic integration has yet to be deployed in refugee research (Young, 2020).

Clearly, the cultural differences between Dutch natives and refugees from Afghanistan are undoubtedly large. First, social differences between Afghanistan and the Netherlands are visible through the differences in common family structures. In Afghanistan, a collective culture is dominant, in which extended family forms the cornerstone. Afghans who fled had a relatively modern lifestyle in Afghanistan, yet, they were socially embedded in the family structure (Muller, 2008). Family members in Afghan culture heavily depend on each other in their daily functioning, and the men have the primary responsibility of providing for their family members, while women are responsible for managing daily routines for family well-being (Lipson & Miller, 1994). Conversely, in the Netherlands a nuclear family-life is most dominant, encouraging independency and self-reliance. Since many Afghan refugees' family relationships lost close proximity after they moved to the Netherlands and other family members stayed behind, they could often no longer rely on family life anymore. Nevertheless, in a study of Muller (2008), first-generation Afghan refugees' values and ideas about being responsible for each other's well-being remained generally intact. Afghan culture is built on collective cooperation and extensive interconnected social networks, whereas the Dutch society leans towards the concept of individualism and privileges only benefit-based cooperation (Sadat, 2008).

Moreover, religious, political and institutional differences between Dutch and Afghan society cannot be ignored. Afghanistan's legal system has been historically comprised of three parts that compete: Islamic religious law (*sharia*), the state legal codes, and customary law. Religion is a very important aspect of the Afghan society, and Islamic cultural traditions cannot be seen separately from the Afghan society. Conversely, the Netherlands is a nation where state power has eliminated all other contenders for legal authority (Barfield, 2008). There are no religious denominations in the Netherlands that have formally more privileges than others, and the country has severed all ties between churches and state (Sunier & Van Kuijeren, 2010).

Undeniably, Afghan refugees are an excellent illustration of refugees transitioning from an ultratraditional, patriarchal, family- and home-oriented society to a technology-oriented individualistic, egalitarian society marked by social isolation and the pursuit of material wealth (Lipson & Miller, 1994). However, large differences in culture exist within Afghanistan, such as rural versus urban divides, and Kabul versus non-Kabul dwellers (Sadat, 2008). Therefore, not all Afghan refugees will experience the same cultural shock during their integration in the Netherlands. Some Afghans who had led Westernized life-styles in urban Afghanistan are often not considered ultratraditional and may have different experiences during their transition than Afghans who had come from more regio-culturally traditional rural areas.

In the Netherlands, Afghans are caught between two different worlds. On the one hand, they are quite western oriented, on the other hand they adhere to Afghan customs that are strict by Dutch standards. As Afghans live longer in the Netherlands, they gradually take over more of Dutch social structures. This is noticeable in a 'westernisation' of relationship patterns, with the emphasis shifting from the extended family shifting to the immediate family (Hessels & Wassie, 2004). Needless to say, Afghans in the Netherlands remain in a difficult position, juggling between two distinct cultures. These struggles regarding cultural differences might have implications for the integration of Afghan refugees, as they add complexity to the process.

2.3 Integration theory

To understand economic integration of refugees, one must first comprehend the premise of integration. The theory of integration is a well-studied topic, however there is a lack of agreement on the issue's definition and conceptual clarity (Kuhlman, 1991; Berry, 2005; de Haas, 2019; Vertovec et al., 2003). Integration into a society entails maintaining one's own identity but also becoming a part of the host society to the extent that the host population and the person in question can coexist in a manner that is acceptable to all (Kuhlman 1991; Berry, 2005). Accordingly, refugees can opt to integrate into the new host society during their settlement process (Kuhlman, 1991).

An example of a bi-dimensional model that was developed is Berry's acculturation model, which proposes two dimensions; (1) the decision of migrants whether to retain their cultural identity and (2) the willingness of migrants to engage with 'majority' communities (as cited in Phillimore, 2021). These two dimensions determine four possible outcomes[1], one of which is called integration.

Ager & Strang (2008) established a conceptual framework to structurally clarify the concept of integration. They defined four overall themes in the field of literature about integration: (1) achievement and access across the sectors of employment, housing, education, and health. (2) assumptions and practice regarding citizenship and rights. (3) processes of social connection within and between groups within the community. (4) structural barriers to such connection related to language, culture, and the local environment (Ager & Strang, 2008).

Currently, within the theory of integration, the literature makes an important distinction between social, political and economic integration (Gericke et al., 2018). For refugees, economic integration into the host society often does not happen without challenges. Subsequently, it is critical to take a deeper look at this phenomenon in order to comprehend the work-related integration process of refugees.

[1] These outcomes, also referred to as acculturation strategies of ethnocultural groups, are (1) separation, (2) integration, (3) marginalization, and (4) assimilation (Berry, 1992, 2005).

2.3.1 Economic Integration

Labor market integration has been referred to as securing and maintaining any type of formal employment. In particular, securing employment has been identified as a key mechanism for reducing welfare dependency and improving individual well-being (Gericke et al., 2018). Most research findings within the international migration research indicate that refugees face many large obstacles in their entering the labor market (Kibria 1994; Portes and Stepick 1985; Potocky-Tripodi 2001, 2004; Takeda 2000; Waxman 2001, as cited in Connor, 2010; Gericke et al. 2018). Immigrants and refugees may face unemployment, underemployment, and disqualification of their previously held professional credentials (Berger, 2013; Yakushko et al., 2008).

What has been recognized in the literature as a major barrier to refugees to get employed, is the difficulty in dealing with the non-recognition of the previous work experience and qualifications (Ager & Strang, 2008). Providing proof of previous qualifications offers a great obstacle for many refugees, and even when they are able to provide it employers may not recognize them. (ECRE, 1999b, as cited in Ager & Strang, 2008). This results in refugees often being under-employed. Under-employment is defined as holding a job which does not require the level of skills or qualifications possessed by the jobholder (Africa Educational Trust, 1998, as cited in Ager & Strang, 2008).

For refugees in a new country, employment has both advantages and disadvantages. On the one hand, work can have a substantial impact on the mental health of refugees, suggesting stressors that lead to mental illness. On the other hand, employment can be valuable for refugees who are adjusting to a new society. Work can support the integration process and the development of new roots in the new society (Yakushko et al., 2008). Some of the relevant issues that are influenced by employment of refugees are having future plans, the promotion of economic independence, getting to know the members of the host country, and getting the opportunity to obtain language skills (Ager & Strang, 2008).

Kuhlman (1991) proposes a framework with four criteria for assessing economic integration. The dimensions are as follows:

1. Adequate participation in the economy;
2. An income which allows an acceptable standard of living;
3. Access equal to that of the host population to those goods and services to which access is not determined solely by income levels;
4. The impact of refugees on the host society having been such that, on balance, the position of the various socio-economic categories within the indigenous population with respect to criteria (1), (2), and (3) has not deteriorated.

This framework tries to serve as a tool to assess and analyze economic integration of refugees. However, it still leaves a number of questions to be answered and cannot be seen as a complete model that tackles all the complexity of the integration process.

Mainly the Afghan elite succeeded to flee to the Netherlands, since the average educational level of the Afghans is higher when being compared to the educational level in Afghanistan. This leads to many Afghans having to deal with a paradox of having held influential positions in their home country, but now finding themselves in a socio-economic disadvantaged condition in the Netherlands (Muller, 2008). Afghans who are employed are mainly represented at the elementary and low levels of the labor market, which is not in correspondence with their educational level. This decline in professional status is often perceived as frustrating, since Afghans attach great value to achieving high occupational status (Hessels & Wassie, 2004). Studying narratives of first-generation Afghan refugees experiences' will yield insights on how cultural distance is perceived, and how this impacts their integration into the labor market in the Netherlands.

2.4 Conceptual Model

Academic literature has shown the importance of economic integration of refugees. Refugees can encounter different situations in their economic integration process. Namely, employment, unemployment, underemployment, or disqualification of their previously held professional credentials (Berger, 2013; Yakushko et al., 2008). Integration in the labor market is expected to interchangeably interrelate with cultural differences between refugees and host-country natives. Upon arrival in the Netherlands, Afghan refugees enter with their own set of cultural ideas, values and beliefs. In this new context, they will get to know a new culture, encountering cultural differences as they integrate more into the society. Consequently, refugees will have differentiating perceptions of these differences, resulting in perceived cultural distance, which influences their choices and behavior.

Cultural distance can inhibit economic integration and be a major barrier to the process. The other way around, economic integration can relate to perceived cultural distance in numerous ways. Getting more integrated into the host society namely includes getting more embedded socially but also economically. Employment improves knowledge about language and culture, and thus provides more understanding of the differences in culture. This provides refugees with more insights into cultural differences and can impact their perceived cultural distance to the host country.

This research aims to empirically assess how cultural distance is perceived by first-generation Afghan refugees and the way this interrelates with their economic integration. The following conceptual model provides an overview of the expected relationships between the key concepts, based on the aforementioned theory.

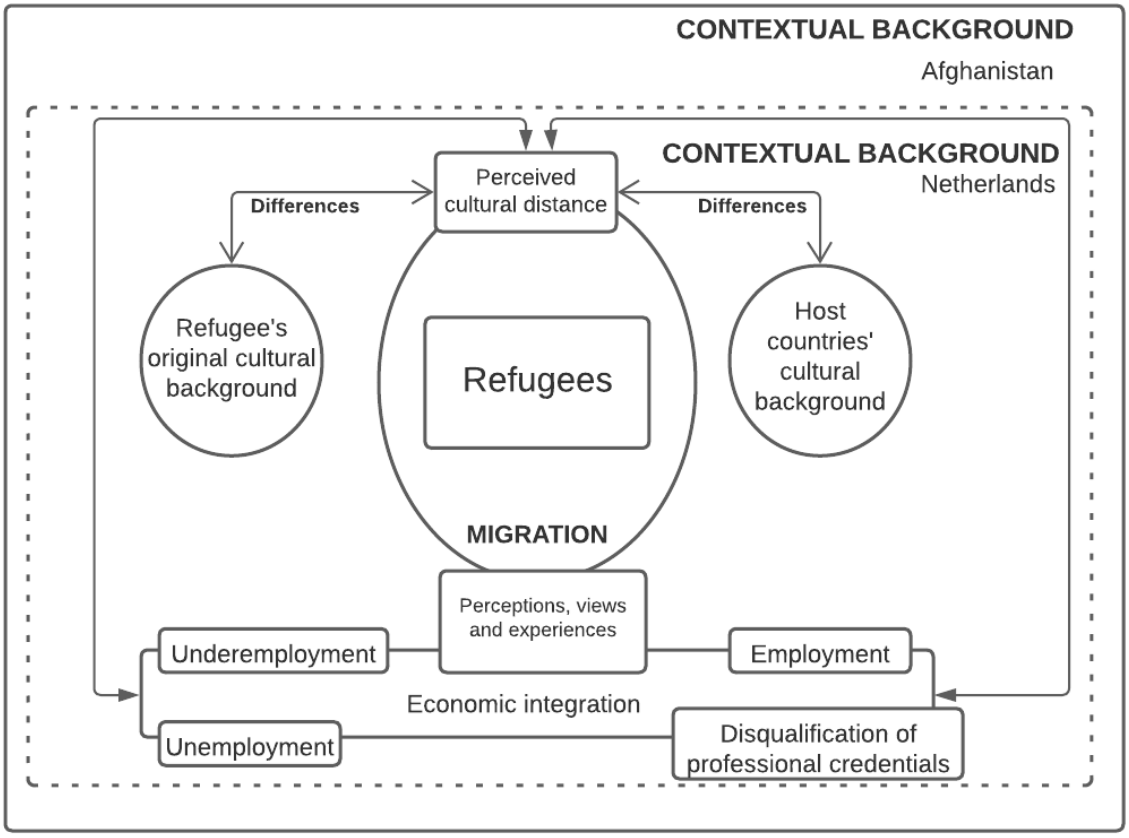

Figure 1 - Conceptual Model

Chapter 3 Methodology

This chapter provides an elaboration on the methodological considerations of this research. It provides an explanation and justification for the research method and design that was used to conduct this research. Next to this, this chapter provides an outline of the various stages of the research, including the data collection process, the selection of participants, and the data analysis procedure. Finally, research ethics will be addressed and limitations caused by the research design are briefly elaborated on in this chapter.

3.1 Research method and design

The objectives of this study require a detailed, descriptive data collection. In these terms, this study fits qualitative data collection best. This approach provides a greater depth of understanding in the phenomena from the point of view of study participants (Bryman et al., 1988), which is precisely the aim of this study.

This research takes a subjectivist (relativist) epistemological stance, which rejects the possibility of neutral observation as suggested by the positivist (realist) stance. This subjectivist stance admits that by observing the world we inevitably influence what we perceive, and conceptions of truth and objectivity are essentially the product of discursive activities that disguise rather than erase the researcher's partiality (Symon & Cassell, 2012). Therefore, things cannot be described as they really are but only how we perceive or interpret them (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). How cultural distance is perceived by refugees can differ, and is dependent on the person being questioned. Thus, taking a subjectivist stance will allow for the possibility of differentiating perceptions, and reject the thought of objectively observing the social world in order to describe cultural attributes as proposed by the positivist stance.

To understand what the ontological existence of something is, often a differentiation is made between realist and subjectivist assumptions about the status of social reality (Symon & Cassell, 2012). In this research project, a subjectivist ontological stance is assumed. When applied to this research, it would see perceived cultural distance as something that is created through our everyday talk. Here, the view that we take to be social reality is a creation of our consciousness and cognition (Symon & Cassell, 2012). For this research, this means that perceptions of reality are colored by the interviewee's and interviewers' beliefs and backgrounds. How the interviewee defines everyday situations depends on their background and experiences and this influences the way the narrative interviews are described.

Thus by taking this stance into account, the purpose of this study is understanding first-generation Afghan refugees' stories whilst being aware that during the understanding and perceiving process we create our own social reality. Concluding, the emphasis will be on rich description of the

phenomenon through meanings, contexts, processes and interpretations, which is fitting to the subjectivist stance (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

Since the qualitative tradition is based on interpretivism and constructivism, it is important for this study to adopt this outlook as well. Emphasis is on that reality depends on one's mental structure and activity (Guba & Lincoln, 1994), and the notion that there are multiple realities based on one's construction of reality in stead of one single reality (Slevitch, 2011). Therefore, reality is viewed as an intersubjective creation, and the investigated participants are interdependently connected.

The most commonly used method in qualitative research is the use of interviews (Demuth & Mey, 2015). Interviews provide participants with flexibility of explaining issues based on how well they know them. Interviews will provide the chance to ask respondents how his or her experiences were during their life. The information that will be gained from this, is expected to be far more detailed than by asking questions via a survey (Adhabi & Anozie, 2017). Bleijenbergh (2015) also states that interviewing can shape a trust relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee, and thus it can be expected that the data being collected will be more reliable.

Semi-structured in-depth interviews will be performed in this study, since this method requires no rigid adherence and allows interjections where necessary. Although these type of interviews assume a set of guiding questions, they provide the flexibility to ask more enhanced questions than those initially drafted (Adhabi & Anozie, 2017). This will be beneficiary to this study, since refugees will be asked to tell their stories on their life, and as respondence to these questions appropriate follow-up questions can be asked.

According to Holstein and Gubrium (1995), any interview situation relies on the interaction between interview participants. Therefore, all participants in an interview are inevitably implicated in making meaning. Hence, the use of narratives will be employed since a narrative is co-authored by the narrator's audience (Søderberg, 2006). Narrative analysis is concerned with the interpreting and recording of stories. It is often referred to as a cluster of analytic methods for interpreting text or visual that have a storied form (Figgou & Pavlopoulos, 2015). This approach fits with the research objectives of this study, since it allows for the participants to tell their story and experiences, and will help them organize and make sense of their lives and their storied accounts (Figgou & Pavlopoulos, 2015). Narratives will thus serve as important tools in constructing the first-generation Afghan refugees' perceptions on critical events regarding cultural distance and help make sense of understanding the challenges faced by them in the context of economic integration in the Netherlands (Søderberg, 2006).

3.2 Data collection and selection

Primary data was collected, by conducting semi-structured interviews with first-generation Afghan refugees. The guide for the semi-structured interviews was co-created with the other members of the Community of Practice, which is presented in *Appendix 1*. The interview guide comprised questions that

were relevant to all members of the Thesis Circle, since all researchers of this group made use of the same guide.

Before the start of the interview, participants were asked to sign a consent form for the interviews to be recorded, which is visible in *Appendix 2*. The semi-structured interviews were all conducted by one of the five researchers of the Thesis Circle, depending on time availability of participants and researchers. This collaboration allowed for a bigger source of data.

The interviews took place face-to-face, via regular telephone calls and through online audio-visual platforms. This consideration depended on the preference of the respondent. Face-to-face interviews are considered as the most preferred mode of interview in the current literature about qualitative research (Adhabi & Anozie, 2017). They are advantageous based on the fact that the quality of the data is also significantly high, since there is an opportunity for mutual understanding based on visual aids (Adhabi & Anozie, 2017). Therefore, the preferred location of interviewing was in person. Aside from face-to-face interviews, the opportunity to hold interviews via audio-visual platforms was also explored. It is argued by Berg (2007, as cited in Sullivan, 2012), that web-based in-depth interviews via videoconferencing provide an experience that is very similar to face-to-face interviews, and especially so when it comes to semi-structured interviews (Sullivan, 2012).

The participants were approached via different channels. One of which was the usage of recruitment flyers, which contained a text in Dutch and in English, and distributed as online adverts. This flyer is can be observed in *Appendix 3*. Furthermore, other ways were used to reach potential participants, such as going by Afghan stores and restaurants to recruit participants. This method of data collection resembles a self-selection sampling method, where potential participants identify their desire to participate in the research. Self-selecting participants will often do so because they have strong feelings or ideas about the research, believe it to be essential or fascinating, and are prepared to spend their time (Symon & Cassell, 2012).

Next to this, the personal network of one of the students was used to get in contact with Afghan refugees. This method of recruiting participants can be referred to as snowball sampling, as a form of convenience sampling (Parker et al., 2019). Evidently, snowball sampling is suggested by Symon and Cassell (2012) to be a sampling technique where participants volunteer to be part of the research rather than being chosen. It is characterized by networking and referral characteristics and is particularly useful with hard-to-reach populations (Parker et al., 2019). Hence, it is a particularly useful method to find participants for this study, since the target groups consists of refugees, which are people that desire anonymity, are sensitive and require a degree of trust in order to become a willing participant. Once contact is made and data is collected from the participant he or she will identify other participants from the same population and they will in turn identify further participants: this is how the sample snowballs (Symon & Cassell, 2012). Several sidenotes need to be taken into account with snowball sampling as a

form of convenience sampling. Next to a lack of external validity, there is also a risk of sampling bias, since the outcomes of the answers could be biased by the fact that the respondents know the person that recruited them (Parker et al., 2019). Finally, as was suggested by Lee (1993) this method can result in a homogenous sample since participants are likely to identify similar participants (as cited in Symon & Cassel, 2012).

The duration aim of the interviews was between 45 and 60 minutes. This amount of time is sufficient time for the participants to be able to answer all the questions and share their experiences. The interviews were performed in Dutch, English, and Dari[2] depending on the preference of the participants. An important issue that needs to be addressed, is that the language being spoken during the interviews is not the first language of the participants. This made it sometimes difficult for the respondents to explain themselves, or express their thoughts and feelings. Interviews in the Afghan language might have been more extensive, since being able to express oneself could help significantly in trying to tell one's life story. It is important to note that some forgotten critical events might be missed, and when interpreting the interviews, one must be mindful of misinterpretations.

The interviews were transcribed into text, which forms a technique for the fixing of fleeing events for the purpose of detailed analysis (Halai, 2007). This process involved two stages, namely, using computer software that converted the initial audio file into a typed text, and secondly, making additional changes where necessary to the typed text to check for errors. All interviews that were taken in Dutch or Dari, were translated into English. Several methodological challenges arise with the translation process of interviews that are taken in multiple languages (Lambert, 1997). For instance, for some words there is no equivalent English word available that is capable of capturing the subtle nuances in meaning or the original language (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). As Halak (2007) suggested, translation requires knowledge of subject-specific terminology, awareness of style and grammar, nuances, and idiomatic expressions. Furthermore, a part of the richness, cultural flavor and meaning will be *'lost in translation'*. It is also a cultural issue, because it demands transforming ideas expressed in one language for one social group to another language for a different social group, which involves a cultural decoding process (Torop, 2002). To summarize, translation is essentially a boundary crossing between two cultures, and a loss of meaning and understanding due to translation needs to be considered when analysing interview data.

3.2.1 Participants

Aforementioned, this research integrated different approaches regarding the finding and selection of participants. First of all, the focus of this study is on first-generation refugees who fled Afghanistan in the years 1980's until the 2000's and came to the Netherlands. Since the community of

[2] Dari is the lingua franca of Afghanistan.

first-generation refugees in the Netherlands consists of a sizable group[3], it is an interesting target group to consider. Besides selection based on background, participants are expected to fall between an age range of 30 and 60. The focus is on this group of refugees, because these people have had the time to integrate into the society. Furthermore, first-generation Afghan refugees have gone through the Dutch asylum process, and the integration and settlement process in the Netherlands. Refugees that have only recently arrived in the Netherlands, are not expected to have experienced this same settlement and integration process, as they will not have had the time or opportunity to do so. Therefore, this new group of refugees is currently less suitable for taking part in this research.

In total, the Thesis Circle research group held twenty-nine interviews. A complete overview of the participants is presented in *Appendix 4*. According to Symon and Cassell (2012), there are no hard and fast rules when it comes to sample size, and limited advice regarding the likely number of participants needed is given in the qualitative research field (Symon & Cassell, 2012). According to Esin (2011), the ‘’construction of rich, detailed narratives within the research context is the key to a good narrative analysis’’. Thus, the number of participants for a good narrative analysis is not a major concern. Therefore, it can be concluded that the number of participants that were interviewed for this research is of sufficient size for the quality of the research. What is more important, is the richness of the data that is collected during the interviews, as this will provide transferability of the findings (Slevitch, 2011).

3.3 Data analysis

Narrative analysis was used to understand the chronological arc of meaning in the participants’ experiences – as this is the ultimate goal of this analysis approach (McAlpine, 2016). The narrative analysis approach takes stories as the unit of analysis (Esin, 2011), hence, this approach is suitable when the aim of a research is to obtain a deeper understanding of the identity of particular people (Essers, 2009). By using this approach in a sociocultural context, shared cultural narratives could be explored. The goal of this analysis is ‘*’keeping a story intact by theorising from the case rather than from component themes across cases*’’ (Riessman, 2008, p. 53, as cited in McAlpine, 2016, p. 36). One of the benefits of narrative analysis is that it gives the opportunity to obtain a rich perspective, and a holistic and dynamic view of the research subject.

After the data was collected, the interview transcripts were analyzed. The analytical model that was selected of narrative analysis, is the thematic content analysis model of Lieblich et al. (1998). This model has a focus on the content of the told story. This is fitting to this study, because the research interest lays with the experiences told by the refugees. Consequently, it is useful for theorising across a number of cases by finding similar and different thematic elements between the narratives of different participants of the research (Lieblich et al., 1998). As narrative analysis is an inductive approach, themes

[3] 36.305 first-generation Afghan refugees in 2021 (VluchtelingenWerk Nederland, 2021).

are allowed to be identified that are common to all interview stories (Symon & Cassell, 2012).

Following Lieblich et al. (1998) four stages in the application of the thematic content model were applied. These stages were as following: (1) the selection of the subtext/segments, (2) the definition of thematic dimensions, (3) sorting of the material into dimensions, and (4) drawing conclusions.

First, the twenty-nine[4] narratives were summarized into short descriptions after they were read through several times. These short descriptions, to which a link is provided in *Appendix 5*, included a selection of the most important segments of the narratives for the research goal of this study. This selection included 20 interviews which were most relevant. Second, four thematic dimensions were defined which are presented in the following chapter with the support of a mind-map that can be viewed in *Appendix 6*. Common dimensions that emerged from the stories were noted and grouped in the mind-map. This provided an overview of the most important interview data. Third, these dimensions were further categorized into sub-dimensions. Finally, some conclusions were drawn from the findings.

One of the limitations of using content analysis has to do with the meaning that is reported in narratives (Esin, 2011). It is possible that some of the meaning of the story told in the interview might be lost. Also the story told on paper may either represent partly, selectively or imperfectly part of the story (Figgou & Pavlopoulos, 2015). This problem was tackled by making descriptions of the thematic dimensions that were nuanced and well-illustrated, which included the contextual details of the interview.

3.4 Research ethics

In narrative research, ethical considerations need extra care (Esin, 2011). The notion that participants are asked to tell their life stories through narratives raises ethical concerns since we as researchers become characters in those stories and thereby influence them (Shaw, 2008). Essers (2009) suggested that, within the narrative approach, life-stories are co-constructions of the researcher and researched, and this might have implications for certain power structures. Essentially, a power difference between the researcher and the researched will always remain (Essers, 2009), which will eventually influence the life-story interviews and the contents of the material conducted from the first-generation Afghan refugees.

Brinkmann and Kvale (2008) outline four fields that are traditionally mentioned in ethical guidelines for researchers, namely, (1) informed consent, (2) confidentiality, (3) consequences, and (4) the researcher's role. Following these fields, necessary steps were taken to ensure these ethical standards were met. Hence, the ethical guidelines of the Radboud University of Nijmegen were followed.

Firstly, in order to ensure that the participants obtained full understanding of the procedure and purpose of the study, a thorough description was given before the interviews. Participants were informed that they could stop and withdraw from the study at any time possible without questions being asked.

[4] 20 interviews were held in Dutch, 3 interviews in Dari, and 6 interviews in English.

The participation of this study was voluntary, hence, no (monetary) incentive was given to the people participating in the research. In addition, before the interviews took place, participants were asked to sign a letter of permission to conduct the study. Nevertheless, beyond this initial stage of 'signing the form', a crucial ethical concern is the extent to which participants continue to consent to participate in the research (Symon & Cassell, 2012).

Secondly, because the focus of this study is on people's lives and selves, confidentiality is particularly important (Symon & Cassell, 2012). All data collected was anonymized by replacing the names of the participants with fabricated names. This was done in order protect their privacy and safety, since the sensitiveness of the subject of discussion in this study must be delt with very delicately. Identification of participants will not be available during or after the study and the uncovered data will maintain confidential at all times.

Thirdly, it is not fully possible to explain beforehand what the experience of the interview itself will reveal for the participant. The research can have possible consequences for not only the person taking part in the research but also for the larger group that they represent.

Finally, it is crucial to consider the researcher's role. Consequently, in qualitative research the quality of the scientific knowledge and the integrity of ethical judgements are both dependent on the researcher as a person (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2008). Because the researcher is the primary instrument for acquiring knowledge, the importance of the researcher as a person is emphasized when it comes to interviewing. Thus, there is a considerable amount of reliance on the researcher's ethical judgements (Shaw, 2008). Furthermore, qualitative research is interactive research, since researchers have close interpersonal interactions with participants. Resulting in researchers who are particularly prone to co-optation by them. Brinkmann and Kvale (2008) argue that one risk to take into account is that researchers may fail to maintain a professional distance, and instead report and interpret from their participants' perspectives. Therefore, I as a researcher will try to ensure that my aim will be to provide original information and truth and avoid any misleading results. Evidently, I will prioritize values such as trust, fairness and mutual respect throughout the whole time period of the study.

Chapter 4 Results

This study draws on the experiences of first-generation Afghan refugees with regard to their perceived cultural distance and economic integration in the Netherlands. The interview script was mainly based on the thesis topics of all five students, and all five students performed their own individual analyses of the interviews. When connecting the different life paths, economic integration experiences, and emerging themes, close attention was paid to perceived cultural distance (PCD) by refugees. By emphasizing the emergence of these patterns and themes, and studying the different aspects of PCD that were expressed, interesting results were discovered which are shown in this chapter.

During the analysis process, the life stories of the refugees were constructed according to the stages of the thematic content analysis model as presented by Lieblich et al. (1998). The narrative material was explored through the several stages this model suggests, which included selecting segments, and defining and sorting thematic dimensions. This approach helped to identify themes and meanings between and within the stories and allowed the data to be transformed into descriptive thematic dimensions. Summaries of the narratives included the most essential narrative segments, across which connections were found.

Based on connections that emerged between and within the narratives, the following four dimensions were identified: *'adjusting to society'*, *'feeling at home'*, *'younger first-generation struggles'*, and *'proving yourself as a refugee'*. These dimensions are related to refugees' experiences concerning their perceived cultural distance in relation to their economic integration process in the Netherlands. Each of these dimensions is discussed below, including quotes from the interviewees.

4.1 PCD & Adjusting to society

The first dimension that was found in the narratives was 'adjusting to society'. This was a common feature of the life stories of the refugees since they all had similar experiences of fleeing their homeland and integrating into a new society.

Regarding the process of adjustment to the Dutch society, two groupings of stories emerged from the narratives. One group of narratives relates to refugees who were teenagers, or adults by the time they arrived in the Netherlands. They often found great difficulty adjusting to Dutch culture, as they already had a culture of their own. The other group of narratives consists of refugees who came to the Netherlands when they were still small children. For them, this adjustment to Dutch society often felt different in retrospect, as they often did not remember as clearly as the older generation. 'Adjusting to society' is an important dimension that can be divided into two sub-dimensions: 'language barriers',

and ‘freedom’. These two sub-dimensions are both related to the cultural distance participants perceived during their process of adjusting to a new society.

4.1.1 Language barriers

The dominant characteristic shared by almost all participants is the language barrier they experienced in the Netherlands. Some participant narrators describe feelings of uncertainty about their language skills, which inhibited them from trying to find a job. Some did not obtain their dream occupation, or felt they could have achieved more in their life regarding their work. As a result, narratives describe stories of feelings of regret, lowered confidence and disappointment. These stories mainly reflect the experiences of the refugees who came to the Netherlands when they were grown up.

Shahin (male, 55)[6] had studied engineering in Ukraine for 6 years and then returned to Afghanistan. However, the Taliban came back to power and he was forced to flee to the Netherlands, which was 25 years ago. These events prevented him from getting the opportunity to use his degree in Afghanistan or the Netherlands. Nowadays he is running a restaurant, something which he has been doing for the last 17 years of his life. He said running a restaurant gives him energy, but he feels the transition from his degree as an engineer to running a business was hard for him. During his time in the Netherlands, he never made any Dutch friends, and he never invited any Dutchman into his home either: *’’I have no relationship, no contact, nothing, that is my life.’’* He reflects he feels like a foreigner in the Netherlands, and due to language barriers he often does not feel that he is taken seriously: *’’Look at your language, where are you from, e.g. origin. And of course, when you are, talking, they are not really interested in you.’’* In Shahin’s life story, it becomes clear that differences in culture, such as language barriers, impacted his career path.

Like Shahin, Marwa’s (female, 52) career path has been impacted by the war in Afghanistan which led to the negligence of her degree. Marwa studied electrotechnics engineering in Afghanistan for many years but did not have the opportunity to work there due to the war. She fled to the Netherlands, but she could not bring her diploma from Afghanistan. To this day, she feels a lot of regret, for not being able to continue her studies in the Netherlands. She explained the language barrier was the main thing that held her back: *’’The Dutch language was very difficult for me especially, to learn the language in a way that is sufficient enough to study again in the Netherlands.’’* She now owns a restaurant with her husband but experiences a lot of pressure in her day-to-day life. She often wonders, if this could have been different if she had studied: *’’ Sometimes I think why did we not study? If we had studied, we would not have had the pressure of owning a restaurant and we could have had a normal job. Really, owning a restaurant is very difficult.’’* The cultural distance Marwa perceived regarding the language barrier in the Netherlands influenced her chances in the job market, since they stopped her from studying again in the Netherlands.

[6] All participants are referred to by their pseudo name, gender, and age, respectively.

In common with Shahin and Marwa, Yasmin (female, 57) also had studied many years before coming to the Netherlands. Mainly due to language barriers, she never got to use her degree, which led to feelings of sadness and disappointment. While she studied journalism in Russia, she never worked in journalism in Afghanistan or the Netherlands. She said, for example: *''When we came here, I was not familiar with the language and therefore, I could not pursue my education in journalism here. Other types of studies that people have studied in other countries, people have pursued here. However, journalism is something that requires exceptional language. This is because the writing in the language and speaking the language is very different. Because of this, I was required to study the language very precisely of the literature to be able to write. Journalistic writing requires precise language as it has a lot of high level and chic words for writing. Words that you do not use in daily life. It is not like the way we speak and write in everyday life.''* In this case, having knowledge of the specific language of the literature of the country you work in as a journalist is essential in order to perform one´s job correctly. Therefore, it was not possible to use her degree in journalism in the Netherlands, causing her to have to pick another profession.

Dunya's (female, 53) story clearly indicates how the language barrier in the Netherlands influenced her life tremendously. She felt that during the time she was applying for jobs, she was really held back by her insecurity about speaking the Dutch language. She was bullied before, in some of her previous jobs, which led to her having a burnout and becoming very sick: *''First year, a few months, went well, then just started bullying me because I had a language disadvantage. I couldn't write well, I didn't speak very well with some things, but then they just really just started bullying, bullying, bullying me every day until I got sick all over. I was through that bullying instead of helping me improve or help my language.''* She even said to herself that she never wanted to work again. However, her family really inspired her again to try to find a job again. Looking back, she felt *''everything was hindered by the language disadvantage.''*

4.1.2 Freedom

For some, the experience of adjustment is hard to remember, as they fled with their family when they were still young children. For these younger refugees, often the period of adjustment was remembered to be less difficult since they had the opportunity to learn about the Dutch culture through their education. Those that still remembered something from Afghanistan, but were still young, experienced a great sense of newly acquired freedom of choice. They felt they wouldn't have had these choices if they had stayed in Afghanistan. Some felt they liked this new freedom, which allowed them to choose their own life path. Others felt they did not know how to deal with this new freedom, as they found it easier when their parents decided. The stories reflect freedom about life choices but are also related to freedom to pursue their own interests. Below, the stories of Tamana (female, 36) and Arian (male, 40) are shared to illustrate these experiences.

Tamana's (female, 36) story illustrates how felt she had more choices in the Netherlands: *''Yeah, here's a little more freedom anyway, so you're kind of let go, huh, so you're not in all sense, say protected from everything, so you have more choices, you have freedom, you can choose.''* Her story shows a difference between freedom regarding Afghan culture and Dutch culture, as she felt that in Afghanistan things were decided for her already: *'There it was really more determined by your family, right? From your parents what you have to do, so you can't have the free choice to do something.''* She perceived this cultural distance with regard to freedom as difficult, which led to trouble in making her own choices regarding her study interests and job occupation. She explains she sometimes feels it is worse to have too much choice: *''At some point, you don't know what to choose anymore. I always find that an issue here, because you have so much freedom (...) in Afghanistan, parents could say that is more women's work, so then you would go ahead and choose that one. So that would be kind of an easier choice, than in the Netherlands.''* Currently, Tamana is working as a ZZP nurse which was actually recommended by her husband. She switched from working as a designer, which was always her dream, to becoming as a nurse. Back when she was still studying to become a designer, she also did some modelling work on top of it. However, she indicated this was really hard to get accepted in Afghan culture, so she felt held back by her family in this work: ''*That was when I was in school and I was also doing some modelling in addition and that was hard to get accepted in our culture, so there were certain people that held me back, say not to do it.''* Tamana's story shows how her family influenced her career choices due to differences in culture. Modelling as a job occupation was not understandable for parents and immediate surroundings. ''*No, that's not possible, because we are connected to our grandparents (...) because you don't damage one person, but several. Yes so hence, you went with it (...) No, because you come from the culture and from the country and religion is strict (...) And they didn't understand that at all either of that it could be like that. It was just always like. No, it's just not possible. We can't do something like that, we can't come up like that can screen (...) We must always hide and be kept secret. So you can't say here I am, an Afghan woman or an Afghan girl at that time.''* Due to religious differences, among other cultural differences, she felt she could no longer continue with this modelling job.

When Arian (male, 40) first came to the Netherlands, he was 16 years old. In the first few five years, he was in the process of adaptation. Then, when he was 21 years old he started realising that he really wanted to achieve something in his work as well. He had different expectations about his life from Afghan culture since he expected he would not be able to study anymore: ''*Because when I came from Afghanistan, I was 16 years old. So the first five years I was 21 and I thought when you're above 20, you cannot study anymore because in Afghanistan when you are twenty 21 - 22 by, you know (...) you're convinced that you're too old to study. Most people, when they are 20 - 22 they are married. They have children. So this was my expectation from life. But in the Netherlands, we have a different culture, different norms, and different values. So here actually I learned that you are never old to study.''* Therefore, after living in the Netherlands for some years, he decided to start studying again at the age

of 21. He is now working as a manager in the Dutch ministry. Freedom in this case relates back to the difference between the freedom of choices he had in Afghanistan, and the freedom he had in the Netherlands. It reveals a connection to perceived cultural distance since these differences in freedom relate to the values and norms of a culture. In this case, this new freedom regarding choices in life to start studying again changed Arian's opportunities in the job market.

It is possible that, given the emphasis in Western cultures on individualism and on the ability to control our own destinies (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 1998), most refugees are more appointed at themselves when it comes to economic integration, which relates back to the enormous cultural distance they experience. They are used to having less freedom, family influencing their choices, and not being alone in their most important life choices. It is therefore essential to take this contextual aspect into account.

4.2 PCD & Feeling at home

The second dimension that emerged from the interview data was 'feeling at home'. A common feature that emerged from the narratives is the sense of feeling at home in the Netherlands. While some participants confirm they feel most at home in the Netherlands, others do not feel the same way. Participants narratives who indicate they do not feel at home in the Netherlands, often lack a sense of belongingness. As has been mentioned by Stone (2018), 'home' is a metaphor for 'belonging'. A sense of belonging has been described as a personal involvement in a social structure that makes one feel important and indispensable to that social structure (Keyes & Kane, 2004). These refugees expressed the feeling of never belonging anywhere, not feeling at home anywhere. Mostly, these refugees felt they were split in the middle: they did not feel at home in the Netherlands, as their culture felt too different from Dutch culture, and they could not identify with it. On the other hand, they felt no connection (anymore) to Afghanistan or Afghan culture, as they had either grown up in the Netherlands, or those who fled at a later age had indicated the mindset of the country had changed majorly. This often led to them not recognizing it anymore as "their own country". It appears that refugees who felt they did not have a sense of belonging, also had struggles regarding their identity. 'Belonging', or the lack of it, is defined in this study as the interconnection of personal identity, group attachment and cultural background (Stone, 2018). These traits of feeling 'at home' are depicted in the stories below, which are not mutually exclusive and arise at different times and to varying degrees to create sentiments of belonging within individuals.

4.2.1 Belonging

Like the concepts of 'community' and 'home', the concept of 'belonging' is an elusive ideal that can have different meanings to different people at different periods in their life (Stone, 2018). It is a concept that incorporates many aspects of human perception and existence (Keyes & Kane, 2004). Regarding new migrants, the nation state and the concept of citizenship are at the heart of any discussion

about belonging (Yuval-Davis, 2001). On the other hand, personal sensations of belonging, develop from the activities undertaken and interpersonal interactions that are formed in our daily lives (Ager & Strang, 2008). Belonging is ultimately decided if an individual *feels* that they entirely belong.

In the present study, refugees who fled when they were still in their childhood spoke of how belonging was something they only ever felt in the Netherlands. They often did not have many (cultural) memories of Afghanistan or the war, which allowed them to leave behind their past and accept the new culture with more ease than those who came at a langer stage in life.

For example, Aria (female, 30) mentioned she felt she belonged in the Netherlands. She grew up in the Netherlands since she arrived when she was 4 years old, and always felt at home here: *''I feel more at home here anyway, I grew up here and have everything I know here. Look, I think in general I felt at home quickly here in the Netherlands. I went to elementary school and I haven't had the feeling that I didn't belong here. I always felt that I could just live my own life here.''*

Tamana (female, 36) also spoke about feeling at home in the Netherlands: *''No, since I came here, I felt free. Right away I felt at home because I can make my own choices. I could decide for myself what I want.''* She felt that having the freedom to make her own life choices, influenced her feeling like she belonged in the Netherlands.

Another illustration of this sense of feeling at home was given by Nawid (male, 36), who felt he is at home in the Netherlands due to his family being here: *''I think yeah, I feel at home definitely. Uh, in that time it was the rest of our family. As I told you, the rest of my father's family. They were already here, all of them were here like my uncles, my aunts, and my grandmother who came here a year before us (…) so they made us feel at home here. Uh, and we also had some Dutch friends from the social service here.''* In his case, his family, and Dutch friends from the social service helped to make him feel more at home.

Narratives that show less difficulty with feeling at home in the Netherlands, felt less cultural distance between them and Dutch people, as they often came to the Netherlands during their childhood. For them, the Netherlands felt as their home, and they felt fully integrated into society.

Conversely, other Afghan refugees spoke of belonging in terms of both their previous home and their new home. Of note is that these stories were often narrated by refugees who still remembered a lot from their time in Afghanistan, as they had fled during their adolescence or adulthood. Prior to the war, the refugees felt that they had a sense of belonging in their old home. However, after they had fled Afghanistan and arrived in the Netherlands, these feelings of belonging to the old home grew more complicated and belonging in the new home was challenging. Refugees that did not feel that they belonged in the Netherlands, often perceived greater cultural distance between themselves, their own country of origin and the Netherlands. As they reminisced about their past life, they often felt they did not belong anywhere anymore. While some felt sad looking back on the course of their life, others felt a sense of gratitude as they felt more safe and secure in the Netherlands. As these refugees often did not

feel at home in the Netherlands, they perceived their own culture to be Afghan, but not the way the country is constructed nowadays.

Shahin's (male, 55) story highlights experiences of not belonging anywhere. He said he is *''hanging in the air''*, not really feeling home anywhere. He does not feel home in the Netherlands, as he stated that he still feels like a foreigner after 25 years of living here: ''*You must have contact with them, you must speak a perfect Dutch language. You must learn all the expressions, things, little things. Always here, I feel like I am a foreigner (…) that feeling will remain within me forever.''* However, he also does not feel at home in Afghanistan: *''And what I experienced then is that there is no life for us there either. Because the mentality of the people has changed. We are different from the people who live there, completely different, especially lately. Those last six, seven months with the Taliban and the power change, are completely different. There was a completely different culture.''*

Jamila (female, 58) had a comparable situation, as she indicated she does not recognise Afghan culture anymore: *''Afghan is also strange for me, that culture, those people they are not like before. Yes, that changed so much, so backwards, those people with the headscarves with everything.''* Jamila is now working as a nurse, but since she was a gynaecologist back in Afghanistan, she never felt she accomplished anything. Not feeling at home, made her feel that she is never at peace, and she had not been able to accept this.

In addition, Zohal (female, 46) felt she did not belong in the Netherlands: *'' I am here, but I am never at ease or at peace here. I do not feel like I belong here. I do not feel home here (…) I went to Afghanistan not that long ago and I did not have the same feeling as I used to have back then.''* She felt Afghanistan felt more as her home when she was younger, but now it didn't feel like that anymore. Zohal was not able to finish her studies in Afghanistan due to the war, and was never able to continue studying in the Netherlands. She often dreams and remembers her old life in Afghanistan, when she was in school there. Now, she is not working and this makes her look back at her life with regret.

Arian (male, 40) felt the most difficult struggle of his life, was feeling home. The only place he felt at home, was his own body. He said: *'' So if I go to Afghanistan I'm different than the people there. When I live in the Netherlands, I'm different than the people here, so the feeling to be totally accepted is nowhere. Not in Afghanistan, not in the Netherlands, and not if I'm on vacation or some other countries.''* These stories show a pattern of refugees falling in between cultures, which indicates that they perceive a cultural distance between themselves, the Afghan culture, and Dutch culture.

A different perspective was shown by Khaled (male, 58), who felt more Dutch after returning from Afghanistan. Whilst Khaled always thought he would go back to Afghanistan as he still felt connected to the Afghan culture, he now no longer wants to return to live there: *''I always though of, well, I'll go back someday. I'm here temporarily. But honestly, when I went to the country for the first time after 22 years, I saw not only the society, the buildings that I had seen at the time a 16 year old, had changed, and had been destroyed. But the mentality of the people had changed drastically. That*

was just a huge setback for me. And then I just made a clear decision, I put a cross behind it.'' After that experience, after 22 years, he felt he belonged in the Netherlands in all respects.

In some situations, the sense of not belonging to any culture led to the refugees feeling different from others, which made them feel sad, and disconnected to society. Furthermore, refugees who felt they did not fit in with any culture: felt 'in-between'. This perceived cultural distance sometimes led to less social integration into Dutch society, as they had no friends here or felt no sense of community.

4.2.2 Identity

The sense of 'feeling at home' interrelates to a person's identity. The underlying sense of 'home' is part of the core 'substratum of identity' which is organized as a 'mosaic', consisting of a ''large number of smaller elements that together make a cohesive whole'' (Papadopoulos 1997b, p.14; as been cited in Papadopoulos, 2002).

A common feature of the narratives was experiences regarding struggles with identity. Often, refugees that came to the Netherlands at a young age felt they had trouble identifying themselves. On the one hand, they felt connected to Afghan culture due to their parents and other family. On the other hand they felt they were connected to Dutch culture, as they grew up here and had never known anything else, or at least not for a very long time.

Suria's (woman, 30) narrative shows how she felt difficulty during her childhood with identifying herself. She mentioned this when she talked about the journey towards her current job. Before she started working with children, she worked as a psychologist with adults. She noticed that they were always talking about their childhood. This made her think about her childhood, as she found it also hard growing up in the Netherlands: *''I worked with adults but then I knew they were talking always about their childhoods and I knew my childhood was also hard and also growing up in the Netherlands to not knowing what I identify with.''* This made her decide to start working with children, and this caused her to study again to become a behavioural scientist working with Palestinian and Syrian children.

Similarly, Samim's (male, 30) life story showed how he struggled with self-identification. He did not feel Afghan or Dutch as a child. When asked about who he felt most connected to in life, he said: *''Sounds very depressing, but actually, nothing. I didn't feel Dutch, I didn't feel Afghan I didn't necessarily feel, how should I put that yes. Look I had friends, but I didn't feel like I fit in with them, so to speak.''* Samim struggled not only with his identity, but in general he did not know what he wanted to do in life: *''Not knowing who you are, not knowing what you want and not knowing in general not knowing.''*. As he got older, he felt more connected to Afghanistan, and more connected to the Netherlands: *''At the moment I am very much connected with my homeland, Afghanistan. That also came at a much later age, I feel connected to both cultures, so both the Dutch and the Afghan. Combining or those two is something I what I do, and which I feel fine with.''* As he felt connection with both cultures, he never felt 100% Dutch or 100% Afghan, he identified with both cultures. For him, *''it was*

the golden mean''.

In addition to Suria's and Samim's story, Laila (female, 30) struggled with her identity throughout her whole childhood. She always felt a struggle between two cultures as she was growing up. Now that she lives in Amsterdam on her own, she feels she is developing her own identity, apart from being at home. *'' Yes, I think growing up between two cultures is a struggle in itself. Yes what. I've been living on my own in Amsterdam for a few years now. And in this I really develop myself as a person and develop your own identity, apart from being at home.''* In all stories, this trouble of identification, led to feelings of not belonging and feeling left out.

Some refugees who came to the Netherlands when they were older, also dealt with struggles regarding their identity. They identified themselves as being Afghan when they were still in Afghanistan, but their identity became more complex when they fled to the Netherlands. For these refugees, belonging in the new home meant changing their identities to fit into the new culture.

Whilst the narratives of Suria, Samim and Laila tell stories of refugees who struggled with their identity growing up in the Netherlands, Jamila (female, 58) mentions having struggles identifying herself with any culture. She came to the Netherlands with her children after having studied in Russia for 6 years. She notes she does not feel at home in the Netherlands, even though she has been in the Netherlands for over 25 years. She often asks herself: who am I? *''No definitely, no, I don't feel at home. I don't feel at home in Afghanistan either. I think had to, because I think in Russia also not. But sometimes I think to myself, who am I? I am not really Afghan?''* She does not feel at home in any country: not in Russia, not in Afghanistan, and not in the Netherlands. For her, this feeling of not feeling at home, makes her doubt her own identity.

For some, struggles with self-identification meant feeling disconnected to the Netherlands, and for others it worked out since they found a way to connect with both cultures. Refugees who felt greater difficulty with identifying themselves as Dutch, perceived higher cultural distance between them and the Netherlands. These stories often reflected feelings of disconnectedness, and no sense of 'feeling at home'.

4.3 PCD & Younger first-generation struggles

The third dimension that was found from the narratives was 'younger first-generation struggles'. Participant narratives that came to the Netherlands when they were still very young, all shared similar struggles during the course of their life. It appears that refugees who have come to the Netherlands when they were still in their early childhood[7], have had more and better chances at integrating economically due to their fast adaption to the new society compared to refugees who came at a later stage in their life. These refugees that arrived during their childhood had the opportunity to learn the language faster, make friends, understand the culture better through learning from others and develop themselves gradually in the new society. Here, cultural differences became smaller through their own life development and

[7] Childhood indicates 3 to 11 years old, thus before becoming a teenager (12-18 years).

served less as a hindrance in their life regarding their economic integration. Throughout the narratives of the younger first-generation refugees, it became clear that they were similar in their experiences regarding the pressure and expectations they felt from their parents and community, differences between their home (family life) and society surrounding them, and in finding their own way in society. Narratives felt that these perceived differences in culture influenced their life choices, often motivating them to work hard in life to achieve their goals.

4.3.1 Expectations from parents & community

First-generation refugees that came to the Netherlands when they were still young present a coherent and consistent narrative about the expectations from their parents and the influence it had on their life. Typically, the parents of younger first-generation refugees had strong expectations regarding their children's choices regarding school and work, and life in general. Characteristically, the storytellers describe themselves as having always felt the pressure from their parents and Afghan culture in general. At times, this influenced the refugees to work even harder, and to achieve the goals that their parents had expected and set out for them.

Furthermore, those who came to the Netherlands in their childhood, expressed that they felt cultural differences between their home and their surroundings. Whilst at home, the expectations of Afghan parents [and Afghan community] were mostly focused on education, and prestige, and they felt their friends did not have this same pressure coming from home. These differences in culture regarding their upbringing thus influenced the refugees to work harder to achieve their goals.

Aria's (female, 30) story shows how parental expectations regarding education influenced her life choices. She fled to the Netherlands with her parents when she was 4 years old. She describes she always felt high expectations from her parents to study medicine, since they have both studied medicine in Afghanistan. *''My parents would have liked us to study medicine though (…) they do have high expectations. They themselves have done both medicine for that reason (…) the bar is set a little high so to speak.''* However, she felt she wanted to do something different, she was interested in psychology, which was also supported by her family. She felt inspired by her father, who studied psychiatry in the Netherlands during her time in high school. After having accomplished an applied sciences degree in psychology, she felt she wanted to study further at university. During the course of her life, she felt her parents always supported her and felt her choices regarding continuing her study were really her own choice.

Similarly, Sahel's (male, 35) narrative indicates a strong influence of expectations of parents on his life choices. He came to the Netherlands in 1992 with his parents, when he was just five years old. His life long dream was to become a carpenter, from as long as he could remember. To work with his hands is something that he loves. However, this dream did not come to be true, as he is now in real estate. In Afghan culture, being a carpenter is a job occupation that obtains less prestige. *''It is as you get older, it is not the type of profession that you get stimulated from your parents. Of yes, you have to*

work with your hands, you have to become a plumber or become a carpenter. With us everyone must yes, immigrant parents in general who often ask you to become a doctor or whether that is a businessman or pilot or(…) Yes, then, carpenter, has just a little less prestige or something in between, that's a thing that mainly plays with Afghans.'' He felt that his family was his biggest motivator to do well in life: *''With us, prestige is important. You don't want to do badly in the eyes of your family and your friends and so on. So that has always been a motivation.''* He had several businesses as a entrepreneur, and is now working in a large real estate management company, where he works a lot with social management. He is mainly involved with housing refugees, something that he finds to be a lot of fun and diverse. This to him, feels like his dream job.

Milad (male, 30) always felt pressure from home to finish his education. He was just 1 year old when he fled with his parents to the Netherlands. During the course of his life, he felt great pressure from his parents, and from Afghan culture, to do well in life: *''Yeah from home, maybe the Afghan culture I've been taught. There is always a lot of emphasis on education that's been taught from home. It is pretty important. And, I think over the years that has always been in the back of my mind. And that's why you persevere, even when you encounter periods, say, so think, okay, why am I doing this or that? But maybe it's pressure. Yes, the pressure to finish your education well, so to speak. That you put more effort into it, even though sometimes I don't like doing it well. So attachment to Afghan culture expressed itself like that with me over the years.''* For him, these expectations motivated him throughout his life. Expectations from parents and emphasis of Afghan culture on education pushed him to study hard, which led to him studying accountancy at master level at the university, and him working successfully as an accountant.

These narratives represent refugees, whose career paths are strongly influenced by their parents and Afghan culture's expectations. In order to achieve their desired goals, they often chose career options with more prestige, and more security. They felt those expectations regarding education and job occupation from their Afghan parents and culture differed from friends' parents' expectations. This perceived cultural difference has influenced their economic integration in such a way that it often motivated them to work harder to make sure they achieved the set out goals by their parents.

4.3.2 Lack of parental guidance

A central sub-dimension that came forward through stories from some younger first-generation refugees, was that they felt they had to find their own way in society, without much parental help. Whilst some felt they were greatly supported by their parents during their life choices, most felt they lacked guidance in life from their parents regarding living in a Dutch society. Of course, their parents did not plan to come to the Netherlands, and having fled here, they did not have time to get to know the country's customs, systems, or language.

These cultural differences, as had been perceived by the refugees in the narratives, sometimes led to a feeling of ''doing everything on your own'' and having to ''discover everything yourself''.

These stories illustrate examples where a lack of parental guidance in a new society led to difficulties with school and eventually getting a job.

Omar (male, 29)'s story is a good example. He talked about a struggles he felt with the school system in the Netherlands. He sometimes felt his parents should've done more to help and support him during his time in school. He fled with his parents when he was 7 years old, and started in primary school. Because he felt he was not aware of the choices and possibilities regarding the choice for the high school level, he started at VMBO level Basic in high school. He felt he did not belong there, because he figured he had a higher IQ than other students there. He just did not study. For this, he did blame his parents a little bit: *'' If I, yeah, I wasn't really made aware of it and then I'm not saying that's my parents' fault, right? That's just my own fault, But I blame my parents, well a little bit. If I had done my best from the start, I wouldn't have had to go to all that trouble and instead of getting my college education, which I'm really proud of, I might have been able to do it, because I'm not like that, am I? Because you can also just be proud with what you have, I might have been able to get something more out of my life actually. That is actually what I am aiming at.''* Looking back at his life, he feels he would've achieved more if he had known from the start about these things from his parents. Next to this, he felt he had to work twice as hard, because he missed guidance from his parents. For instance, for conversations at school, he was on his own: *''I can't have someone who stood behind me, so I had to do everything myself. I had to like yes, I was just old, I was all 17. I had to have a conversation. And, I had Nobody behind me, so yeah, I do feel that way. I do feel like I did everything. Yes I do stand, I did stand by myself forever and people. They didn't always trust me. That was mainly at school. There I always had to prove myself.''*

Mustafa (male, 36) had similar experiences, as he felt he had no guidance from home and had to discover everything for himself. Being a first-generation refugee, his parents could not speak Dutch, and they did not understand the education system in the Netherlands. He felt this influenced his early life, regarding choices in school, but also later on in life. He felt he did not have any connections with other people, which made it really difficult for him to find a job: *'' If you're a first generation refugee then you are a bit on your own. You have to discover everything yourself, and you have to make all the connections with other people. There is very little guidance from home. So all those things together also made it very difficult for me to get a job at that time.''* Since he was done with his studies in the middle of the financial crisis in 2009, he had great difficulties finding a job. Moreover, he felt he had little guidance from his parents, which made it extra difficult.

These narratives show how refugees who came to the Netherlands at an early stage often had the feeling they had to figure out life on their own. Often, these stories were from refugees who started their school career in primary school and started their secondary school at a lower level than they felt capable of. They studied for a long time, and felt this could´ve been prevented if they had had the knowledge of the school system at an earlier stage in life. They thought that due to their parents not having knowledge of the school system and the way things work in the Netherlands, they had to do

everything themselves. Often, this led to them having to find their own way in society, as they lacked guidance from their parents. This lack in guidance, was mainly due to cultural differences, as their Afghan parents did not understand the language, (school)system, and customs in the Netherlands. In turn, these differences influenced the lives of these refugees, since they felt they had to find their own way in society without much parental help.

4.4 PCD & Proving yourself as a refugee

The fourth and final dimension that was found from the narratives was 'proving yourself as a refugee'. All refugees felt in some way or another that they always had to prove themselves in the new society. For some, this occurred at the workplace, which meant they had to work twice as hard as colleagues to get the same appreciation. For others, this happened at school, where they often experienced that others did not believe in them and they had to prove themselves. This unfair treatment and discrimination often was perceived to be on racial or ethnic basis. Some refugees were discriminated against when applying for a new job, whilst others felt it often during their social life. Also, some narratives indicated they felt 'positively discriminated' against, and mentioned experiences in which their cultural background served as an advantage. These aspects of 'proving yourself' as a refugee are highlighted in the narratives below.

4.4.1 Perceived racial & ethnic discrimination

Many of the participants felt that due to their background of being a refugee, and due to their ethnic and racial differences, they were treated unfairly and did not always get the same chances as others in the Netherlands. These stories reflect a sense of 'perceived racial and ethnic discrimination', a concept which is defined as: 'a minority group members' subjective perception of unfair treatment of racial/ethnic groups or members of the groups, based on racial prejudice and ethnocentrism, which may be manifest at individual, cultural, or institutional levels (Jackson et al., 1998; as cited in Noh et al., 1999, p.194).

Omar's (male, 29) story shows how he felt disadvantaged in the Dutch society due to his racial and ethnic background: *'' Yes then I think it makes a difference where you come from, I think. I think there is always some difference between a Mohammed or a Jan I think in the Netherlands. Yes, I think a Mohammed must work twice as hard and then also about myself. I have that feeling and I accept that and I only find it very difficult. Once you have a job, or work and have a job, then it's easier, but how? How do you make sure that you get that one job or find an internship? And when I talk about myself yes, I was finally able to find an internship, but that was a bit difficult.''* He felt he had to prove himself during his job interviews, also due to his name[8]: *''Yes, I did notice, for example, during the job interviews I had. I felt I often was not invited due to my name. Yes my name, people, usually people can't pronounce then. Yeah, well most people who don't even know how to pronounce it. I think especially because of my name it is much more difficult for me [to find a job] than for someone who just has their*

[8] Omar's real name is not mentioned in this research due to privacy reasons.

Dutch name, actually.'' Furthermore, he mentioned that people often mistook him for being Moroccan, which led to them having negative prejudices towards him: *''Most people think I'm Moroccan. I might be a little dark, right? My skin color, most Afghans are a little bit lighter toned. So yes, Dutch people are not really positive about Moroccans, and most of them think I am Moroccan, so they just have prejudices I think.''* Omar's narrative expresses feelings of being disadvantaged because of ethnic and racial discrimination.

Dunya (female, 53) had similar experiences, as she felt she always had to prove herself during as a refugee, and she experienced racial and ethnic discrimination. She studied in Uzbekistan and went to Russia and got her masters degree, before coming to the Netherlands. However, she never got to use this degree here. She mentioned how she was bullied due to her not knowing the Dutch language well enough, and often was not taken seriously. She feels that as a foreigner, it is not easy to adapt in a Dutch company: *''To say honestly as foreigners is really not easy in a Dutch company. You try, but you have to prove so much that you are going to work in the Netherlands, I have to work twice as hard, to prove that I can. And that costs you so much energy to regain that self-confidence. I still had a lot of trouble, I always suffer from my self-confidence when I'm reading or writing, so now and then I get such a blackout.''* In her story, it became clear that discrimination really influenced her ability to find work in the Netherlands.

4.4.2 Positive discrimination

In contrast to the stories which were mentioned above, some narratives reflected a different perspective, namely, experiences of 'positive discrimination'. Positive discrimination is the identification of some characteristics (e.g. sex, race/ethnicity, religion, age) that are though to have disadvantaged a group of individuals without their fault. By making these characteristics genuine criteria for evaluating candidates, it puts consideration of the disadvantage into the legitimate criteria for evaluating candidates (Noon, 2010). Sometimes, having a background as a refugee and standing out in this way from others, was perceived as beneficiary during the process of integration. These stories reflect how positive discrimination occurred at the work place.

This perspective was presented by Hosna (female, 33), who has lived in Afghanistan, the Netherlands and is now living in the UK. As she speaks multiple languages, she often feels her background is beneficiary to her job. She worked with refugees in the past, and she worked at companies where diversity was wanted. Therefore she felt she experienced positive discrimination. She always chose the jobs she applied for with her background in mind, *''so they couldn't say no''*. However, she did feel that throughout her life, she always had to work harder than others: *''When you are a refugee, you have to work hard. Way harder than of course others to adapt yourself. It's not only culture, you have to find a balance between 2 cultures. Uh, which is quite hard and have the work culture as well. It's different from your home and how you are with your friends so.''* Her story shows how she chose a job *because* of her background as a refugee, in which cultural distance was perceived to be actually

beneficiary.

Other narratives shared similar stories where their background was beneficial to their job. Examples are the stories from Aria (female, 30), Khaled (male, 58), and Shahim (male, 55). Aria now works at an intercultural organization, where her cultural background as a refugee is seen as a benefit. They were actually looking for someone who could speak Dari. Khaled and Shahim both work as interpreters, a job in which their cultural background is essential. Shahim studied physical therapy in the Netherlands, but it was difficult for him to get work as a physical therapist. His fellow students went to other countries to work there, but he did not want to start over again in a new country. This made him decide to study translation and become an interpreter. When asked about his cultural background and work, and how this has gone together, he states: *''No, you know, at my work it's a good thing that I come from Afghanistan, that's an advantage. yes, that too, for example, when I visit institutions, the mental health services, for example, that they have little knowledge of Afghan culture and then it's very nice that someone from Afghanistan can explain that or indicate that it's actually an advantage for me.''* For him, his cultural background is an advantage to his work.

Discrimination was a central aspect of the narratives, in which participants indicated that it led to them having to work much harder than everyone else to get the same appreciation. The refugees perceived that this was often due to the cultural distance between them and the Dutch society, and it often hindered them in the process of finding a job. However, sometimes participants used their cultural differences as an asset regarding their job. In these cases, the cultural distance between them and the Dutch society was what made them stand out and was the very thing that got them the job.

4.5 Main findings

This chapter provided an exploration of the experiences of Afghan refugees in which they expressed their reflections on cultural distance and integration at the job market. The dimensions represent the different patterns that emerged through the lives of the participants, as they related to the process of 'adjusting to society', to 'feeling at home' in the Dutch society, the 'struggles of the younger first-generation', and most participants felt they had to 'prove themselves as a refugee' in the Dutch society.

Participant narratives reflected on having more freedom in the Netherlands, compared to Afghanistan. They felt their ability to influence their own destiny increased here, and they were able to make their own life choices. These remarks apply to freedom regarding the choices they could make in their life and freedom relating to social and cultural norms which were more tolerant in the Netherlands. Furthermore, narratives experienced struggles with their sense of belonging, and self-identification. Refugees who fled to the Netherlands during their childhood felt these self-identification struggles between home (Afghan culture) versus the outside world (Dutch culture). However, they did experience a strong sense of belonging to the Netherlands, since they grew up here and often had little memories left of Afghanistan. Those that fled during their adolescence or adulthood, and did not fully grow up in the Netherlands, sometimes expressed feeling no connection to any culture. They felt they did not belong

in any country, since they found both the culture in Afghanistan nowadays and Dutch culture to be too different from their own culture. Hence, these refugees expressed feeling ‘in-between’.

Moreover, refugees who fled during their childhood often mentioned their parents had high expectations from them, regarding education and employment. These expectations led to higher motivation to study and work hard in life, but also to experiences of high pressure from home and from the Afghan community. These younger refugees also indicated they felt they did everything themselves and were disadvantaged because they lacked parental guidance.

Finally, many stories reflected experiences of racial and ethnic discrimination. However, some stories resembled the opposite side of the narrative: positive discrimination also happened when a different cultural background was seen as a benefit.

Chapter 5 Discussion & Conclusion

This research explored the experiences of first-generation Afghan refugees who have fled to the Netherlands in the years 1980's-2000's, regarding their perception on cultural distance in relation to their economic integration process. The dimensions represent patterns that were found in the narratives associated with the context of perceived cultural distance. In chapter 2 perceived cultural distance is referred to as *the capturing of individual perceptions and individual heterogeneity with regard to differing cultural norms and behaviors between to groups or entities*. In relation to the findings, cultural distance was found in all four dimensions. Participant narratives felt cultural distance between them and others in the Dutch society regarding their beliefs, practices, norms and values. In most cases, these differences led to struggles regarding finding a job and integrating well into the society.

5.1 Key findings

Aforementioned, the major finding of this study is the identification of four dimensions relating to PCD: 'adapting to society', 'feeling at home', 'younger first-generation struggles', and 'proving yourself as a refugee'. These narratives reflect mixed experiences of perceived cultural distance, and also in relation to the process of finding a job and integrating economically into society. In the findings of this research, the experiences of refugees showed strong cultural values regarding obtaining a good education, and finding a job that has prestige. Participant narratives felt they always tried their very best at work. Similarly, most even felt that due to cultural differences, they had to work even harder in their life. *Figure 2* shows a simplified mind-map of the most important findings, including four dimensions and eight sub-dimensions that emerged from the narratives. *Appendix 6* holds the complete mind-map analysis.

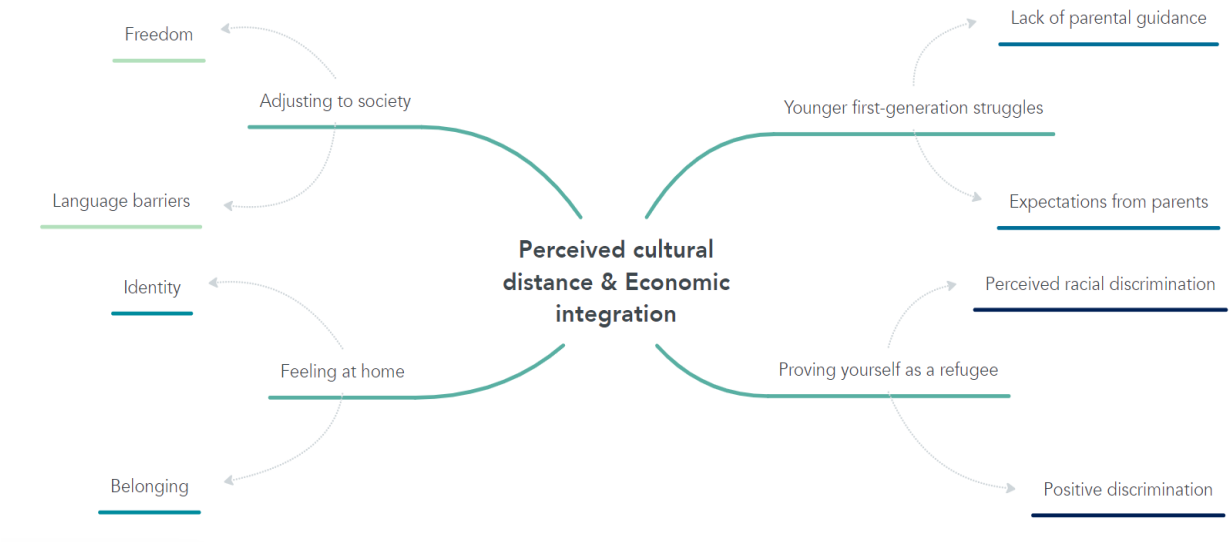

Figure 2 – Simplified mind-map of the most important findings.

5.2 Conclusion

This research sought out to answer the following question: *''How does perceived cultural distance of Afghan refugees relate to their economic integration in the Netherlands?''*. In order to achieve this goal, a qualitative research was conducted in which narrative interviews were held with Afghan refugees.

As this study has shown, Afghan refugees perceived high cultural distance between their own culture and Dutch culture. Refugees that fled during their childhood perceived cultural differences between their home environment and school environment. These differences translated into the high pressure they felt from their parents and the Afghan community, to get a good education and secure a higher-level occupation. Often, this pressure led the motivation to work hard and keep studying, to make their parents proud. In most cases, this caused them to become more highly educated and secure more prestigious positions. These situations represent how perceived cultural distance can enhance the economic integration of younger Afghan refugees.

As became clear from the findings, refugees felt they always had to prove themselves, and work twice as hard to get the same opportunities. They perceived the cause of this disadvantage to be due to racial and ethnic discrimination. Often, their name or physical appearance prevented or hindered them in the process of getting employed. For refugees who fled during their adolescence or adulthood, language barriers also were a major concern. These scenarios illustrate how perceived cultural distance led to the hindrance of Afghan refugees' economic integration. However, some situations represented the opposite experience. In these cases, positive discrimination due to cultural differences led to the hiring of the refugees. These circumstances show how refugees perceived cultural distance as the distinguishing feature that set them apart from others, and aided their job search.

This study can conclude that all Afghan refugees perceived high cultural distance in the Netherlands. For some, this meant they had better opportunities regarding getting employed, and for others, this distance led to struggles with their education and finding employment.

5.3 Contribution to literature

Firstly, the findings of this study contribute to the exploration of the relationship between perceived cultural distance and economic integration of refugees. Ward & Kennedy's (1993) study has found that, differences in cultural practices influence the mental state of migrants, while differences in cultural values predict types of acculturation and integration. Cultural practices are common impressions of how people in a culture behave on a regular basis (related phrases are intersubjective perceptions or descriptive norms), while cultural values are shared cultural ideals (similar terms are injunctive norms) (Frese, 2015). As such, looking for cultural values would be expected to be essential for investigating culture´s relationship to refugee economic integration. The findings of this study indicate that this expectation is mostly relevant since stories of refugees reflect similar outcomes. Namely, stories of refugees reflected cultural values regarding the importance of education and securing a prestigious job,

which led to better integration opportunities.

Secondly, these findings contribute to research on Afghan refugees in the Netherlands. In line with the intentions of this research, the findings capture the perceptions of these refugees on an individual level, which gives voice to this understudied group (Bentz, 2013). The results show how perceptions on cultural distance relate to educational or employment processes. Currently, culture's relationship to refugee economic integration has not been deployed yet in refugee research (Young, 2020). Findings contribute to this research gap and show how different aspects of cultural differences and the perceptions refugees have on them have implications for their education and work life.

As discussed, these coherent stories of 'feeling at home' reflect a sense of belonging, or not belonging, and relate to identity issues. Stories that reflect a higher sense of belonging to the Dutch society, perceive less cultural distance and participate more economically in the Netherlands. However, when participant narratives felt they did not belong to the Dutch society, they perceived higher cultural distance relating to differing norms and values. These stories were mostly told by refugees who had an education in Afghanistan, since they had developed a sense of cultural belonging there. This is similar to research of De Vroome et al. (2011), which found that education in the country of origin represents a period of socialization in childhood and/or adolescence with an effect of refugees' sense of ethnic belonging. Results of their study suggest that education in the origin country stimulates ethnic self-identification. Stories about struggles regarding identity, often perceived higher cultural distance due to having no connection to any culture, or to multiple at once. This often accompanied lower educational level and employment issues. Similarly, research has found that economic participation in the host country is thought to nurture a sense of achievement, self-esteem, and belonging and therefore increases refugees' self-identification as Dutch (De Vroome et al., 2011).

'Adapting to society' are the narratives of language barriers and freedom. Stories about adjusting to the Dutch society reflected struggles of refugees with living in the Netherlands without speaking the language, during their integration process. These cultural differences between languages were found to be an inhibiting factor regarding their process of finding employment. Often, this barrier caused refugees to be hindered in continuing their study or work in the Netherlands, or in advancing in their chosen profession. Previous research exploring refugees experiences regarding economic integration have found similar findings, where a strong positive relationship was found between English-speaking[9] ability and rapid employment (Young, 2020). This indicates that the inability to speak a host-country's language, negatively impacts a refugees' chance to be employed. Cultural differences regarding freedom (of choice) reflect differences in cultural practices and social norms. Narratives reflecting high cultural distance regarding freedom of choice between Afghan and Dutch culture showed mixed results with regard to finding employment. Some stories showed how this 'new' acquired freedom regarding making

[9] A research done regarding economic integration of refugees in Utah, U.S. Here, they looked at ''English-speaking ability'' since English is the native language in the U.S. (Young, 2020).

one's own choices in life resulted in fast employment since it allowed for refugees to choose their own job, instead of their parents or society choosing for them. Other narratives reflected difficulty in dealing with this new found freedom, and had struggles in finding employment that was 'right for them'.

'Younger first-generation struggles' as a dimension describe the stories of first-generation refugees who fled to the Netherlands during their childhood. These narratives relate to expectations from parents & community and lack of parental guidance. Participant narratives who came to the Netherlands as children all shared similar stories regarding the pressure they felt from their parents and the Afghan community. These expectations were always related to the pressure that came from the Afghan community, which had to do with high expectations regarding education, and finding employment with high 'prestige'. Research has found that hard work and education are seen as the gateway to economic security and social respectability by Afghan families (Eggerman & Panter-Brick, 2010). Afghan children internalise the importance of scholastic success, which is consistent with the stories of these refugees. These expectations from home differed from expectations their friends got from home, and were perceived to be due to cultural norms, values, and beliefs. For many Afghan refugees that came to the Netherlands during their childhood, these expectations led to a higher focus on education for themselves. In most cases, this led to more motivation to study, and better chances at finding employment. Besides, struggles with a lack of parental guidance often came back in the stories of younger first-generation refugees. Participant narratives indicated they had to find their own way in a new society, without much parental help. In many cases, this slowed down their educational journey and caused difficulties in finding employment. Lack of cultural knowledge, regarding the educational system, the language, or labor market complicated the economic integration process of these refugees.

'Proving yourself as a refugee' describes the experiences of most participant narratives. Stories within this dimension reflected narratives about perceived racial & ethnic discrimination and positive discrimination. Experiences regarding discrimination often went hand in hand with high perceived cultural distance regarding language, cultural capital and cultural background. These forms of cultural aspects were elements that some refugees were lacking, which negatively impacted their ability to find employment. Evidently, research has shown that a refugees' lack of cultural capital in the workplace can be detrimental for their ability to keep good jobs, make wage or occupational advancements, or to find work (Young, 2020). Contrarily, stories regarding positive discrimination reflected refugees using their cultural differences as an asset in finding work. In these cases, participant narratives did not have problems getting employment, and were often hired for their cultural background.

Lastly, narrative analysis was used, which provided a lens for the elaboration of experiences, and made up a set of artifacts connected to culture. This enabled cultural learning, transmission, and change (Soin & Scheytt, 2006). As experiences are something that '*happen to us, and are not just information' (Bondía, 2002)* narratives were the best fit to study perceptions regarding culture and integration of refugees on their own experiences in life. This study has used dimensions of the narratives

as operational conditions for structuring, as has been suggested by Mello (2002). This way the initial authenticity and substance of the narratives were preserved while at the same time analysis was used to create theory and perspective. Therefore, the findings of this study have contributed to the narrative research field.

5.4 Limitations

Despite the contributions as have been mentioned above, there are a number of limitations to this study. Interviewing has limitations and weaknesses that deserve to be addressed. Because of the researchers' lack of expertise with the Afghan language Dari, most interviews were not conducted in the participants' native language. For some participants, this did not occur as a problem, as they mastered the Dutch or English language fully. However, for several participants, this complicated the situation of having to explain personal experiences through a language they did not fully master. A consequence and risk of this problem was that the researcher, due to the language barrier, had to use simplified questions that were easier to answer, or misinterpreted the answers of the interviewees.

As has been recognised in literature, for qualitative research interviews, language is more than a translation issue (Welch & Piekkari, 2006). The adequacy of a study can be harmed by a lack of familiarity with the language, as the accuracy of the interpretations may be compromised (Kapborg & Bertero, 2002). Furthermore, since many of the interviews did not have the linguistic advantage (i.e., the usage of mother tongue of both parties), it is possible that the interviews were less elaborate, detailed and extensive than they might have been without this language barrier. These limitations are important to consider when interpreting the findings of this research. This however does not mean that crossing language boundaries should only be seen as a hurdle to be overcome. Foreign language use can also lead to new levels of understanding as researchers make sense of the unfamiliar (Welch & Piekkari, 2006).

Moreover, limitations regarding the role of the researcher, the choice of data method, and analysis should be highlighted. Using stories as an empirical basis requires the researcher to be conscious of his or her own theoretical and conceptual assumptions. Because the nature of this research can be seen as a process of sensemaking and storytelling, researchers bring biases and assumptions to the research process (Soin & Scheytt, 2006). This researcher bias, either conscious or subconscious, might have influenced the interpretation of the interview data.

Furthermore, the cultural context of the researcher and the participants in this study differed from each other, since the researcher did not have a refugee or Afghan background. When participants shared their experiences through life story interviews, they did so through the lens of their current life. Similarly, the researchers interpreted the material through the lens of their current life. It is therefore important that awareness is raised regarding the fact that the processes of interpretation and sensemaking change the material by reconfiguring meanings and making (new) sense of the interpreted material.

Additionally, the usage of narratives does limit the possibility of providing independent verification of results (Taylor & Napier, 2001). However, the goal of this research was to report results

of qualitative research which obtained great amounts of detail. For this reason, it can be assumed that using narratives is the most effective way to comprehend the realities of the situation of Afghan refugees in the Netherlands.

5.5 Future research

Future research is needed, in which multiple sources of data are used that might reveal other issues Afghan refugees face in the Netherlands. When narratives are used not solely as the source of data in empirical research, but in conjunction with other ethnographical methods it can increase our understanding and knowledge of perceived cultural distance by refugees. This corresponds with Soin and Scheytt (2006), who advocate for alternative methodologies to enhance our understanding. A suggestion might be having refugees on the research team which might reveal additional insights into the complexities of experiences of refugees adapting to a new host society. Insights into the cultural world of Afghan refugees might be provided by the use of foreign language in interviews, and by checking the results with the participants.

Furthermore, future research should focus on developing more insights in the relationship between culture and refugee economic integration. Aforementioned, this has not been deployed yet in refugee research (Young, 2020). Therefore, this serves as an important suggestion to further deepen our understanding of this relationship between the concepts.

5.6 Practical implications

The findings provide insights on how cultural aspects of refugees lives have great implications for their possibilities regarding obtaining an education or employment. For individuals and organizations, it is important to recognize how these cultural differences can take many forms, including more visible (practices), and less visible (values, and norms). Cultural values can have implications for different aspects of work, such as the societal norms about work, and work goals. Cultural values such as work ethic and focus on education were recurring topics of the narratives. This knowledge is most meaningful when it becomes known under organizations throughout the procedure of hiring new employees. Namely, if refugees are not recognized as highly motivated workers, organizations are missing out on a highly valuable workforce. These insights contribute to the awareness that refugees should not be underestimated and undervalued by individuals, employers, and society the way they often are.

Moreover, the challenges that arose during the integration process of refugees were often linked with the cultural distance they felt. Typically, this had implications for the mental health of refugees, as they felt they did not belong anywhere and felt disconnected from the Dutch society. For policy makers, these insights show how cultural distance perceived by refugees jeopardized their mental health during the integration process. Therefore, helping refugees during their integration process, while keeping in mind how cultural distance can jeopardize refugee's mental health, should be emphasized by policy makers and municipalities.

Finally, this study provides better insights on the perspective of refugees in the context of cultural distance and diversity at the workplace. The findings offer insights for organizations and HR departments in how refugees feel disadvantaged regarding their employment. Being aware of these experiences of refugees creates understanding of one's own behavior or the behavior of others. Refugees can feel pressured by society to work much harder than others to get the same recognition. As this study has shown from the perspective of Afghan refugees, these pressures are related to the cultural distance. Therefore, organizations and HR departments should emphasize on helping refugees feel less disadvantaged, and increase their awareness regarding the cultural aspect of diversity at the workplace.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Interview guide

FULL INTERVIEW SCRIPT – ENGLISH VERSION

Since the interviewees consist of participants that have prior work experience / education in their home country and participants that have no prior work experience / education before their arrival in the Netherlands, the interview script is adjusted for both type of participants. In the table below, it is clarified what each color means in the interview script. This way, the interview script is clear during the interviews to avoid confusions.

Black	**Red**	**Green**	**Blue**
Applicable to all participants	Signal to ask/do something	Applicable to participants with prior work experience / education	Applicable to participants with no prior work experience / education

CONSENT FORM

Before we start, I would like to ask you for your permission to record this interview. This recording can only be accessed by me, four other students of this research and our supervisors. This interview will be transcribed afterwards, but you will be given a fictious name and therefore, you will remain a 100% anonymous.

[SIGN CONSENT FORM]

INTRODUCTION

My name is_____, I am a researcher at Radboud University and I am part of a group that is studying the trajectories of Afghan refugees from Afghanistan to the Netherlands. In today's interview, I would like to hear your story. Specifically, I would like to hear your story of migration to the Netherlands, with a focus on your work-related experiences, social relations and changes.

PART 1 – SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION (1)

Before we start with the interview, I would like to ask you some general questions regarding your age, gender, highest achieved education (if applicable, what area), travel trajectory (countries), and how long you have been in the Netherlands.

[ASK THESE GENERAL QUESTIONS]

NARRATIVE

To start, I would like for you to think of your life as a long story. When you look back, you find smaller stories, or plots, inside of your life story, some related to your work, some related to your family, or community etc. These plots may be sometimes connected, and some of them may change the course of your life.

PART 2 - PREPARATION

[Explain that you will share your screen and show a timeline].

Here, we have a timeline for you to use, but it is almost empty at this moment. The only event we have added here is the arrival in the Netherlands, but the rest of the timeline is still empty. We would like you to tell us about two remarkable work experiences, that were important for you: one that happened before your arrival in the Netherlands, and another that started after you arrived. These events are made of people, like characters, settings, actions, emotions. Feel free to describe them, and I will take notes [only keywords and time periods] on these blue cards and add them to your timeline.

Here, we have a timeline for you to use, but it is almost empty at this moment. The only event we have added here is the arrival in the Netherlands, but the rest of the timeline is still empty. We would like you to tell us about two work experiences: the work experience that you have had after your arrival in the Netherlands and the work experience that you always had dreamed of doing, expected yourself to

pursue, or aimed at becoming. These events are made of people, like characters, settings, actions, emotions. Feel free to describe them, and I will take notes [only keywords and time periods] on these blue cards and add them to your timeline.

[Interviewer note - If you cannot identify if it is formal or informal, ask if they were/are registered]
Could you describe a bit more these work experiences?, e.g., what you liked or disliked about them, what were your work conditions and routine, how you felt or how you still feel about them? I am going to show you this yellow card with some actions that you can use in your answer if you want
Could you describe a bit more these work experiences? Could you describe what you like/dislike about your current work/occupation, what your work/occupation conditions/routines are? Could you describe what you dreamed as a profession/occupation and how you feel about that now? How you feel about what you had dreamed/aimed to do/become?

PART 3 - TRANSITIONS AND QUONDAM COMMITMENT

Thank you. Would you now tell me the story of the transition between this first work to this later work, your journey from one to the other?
If the interviewee does not reflect on the decision-making-process:
Do you intend to stay [in the host country]? Why did you decide this?

If you want, you can keep refering to these yellow cards while telling me your story, and also to these purple cards [Scroll the screen to the left - til the end]. They might remind you of people and actions that were part of your story. Of course, you don't need to stick to them, and you can add other people and actions besides these ones.

Thank you. Would you now tell me the story of the transition between this work that you dreamed of doing and to the work/occupation that you currently have? Your journey from one to the other?

If the interviewee does not reflect on the decision-making-process:
Do you intend to stay [in the host country]? Why did you decide this?

PART 4 - ECONOMIC INTEGRATION
I would now like to ask you to focus on the moment after arrival in the host country.

1. Can you elaborate on the events and experiences you had from the moment you arrived in the Netherlands until you got paid work, or a work that you liked, if that happened? I would like you to mention things and people that helped you to get work, but also mention things and people, or other people's actions that prevented you from getting work or a better work condition. You can once again use the prepared cards in your story, if that helps, and add what you feel are important.

[Interviewer note - If the interviewee says something about their home-country work experience, ask them to elaborate on that. If the interviewee says nothing about that, ask them about moments they remembered their home-country work experience]

1.1 Were there moments in which you would remember the remarkable work experience from your homeland that you told me? [If so] May you tell me when, or what would make you remember it?

1.1.1 If needed: Would you say you still feel connected/bonded to this first work experience you mentioned, like you still care about that organization/work?

[Interviewer note - If the interviewee says something that suggests commitment-conflict (like feeling conflicted, feeling tension, feeling a lot of different responsibilities), please ask about this. Interviewee: "I remember having trouble with my family" Interviewer: "Can you elaborate on that? How did it make you feel?]

1.2 When you look back to the trajectory you just told me, to whom did you feel committed? Like the work itself, family, community, culture…

1.3 [And/or] From your descriptions, I can understand that you had many relationships to manage during this period. Were there any times when you felt that your commitment to your [family? work? community? culture?] conflicted with each other? If so, what would you do in these situations, if you can give me examples?

'how did you manage these situations?'; 'how did it make you feel?'; 'what were your responses to these situations?'.

[Interviewer note - If the interviewee already mentioned some experiences of discimination, ask them to elaborate on that topic. If they did not say anything about this topic, ask them (gently!!!)

1.4 Where there situations in which you felt that your work conditions were affected by reactions to your nationality, ethnicity, race or gender? [If so] Would you elaborate on that, give examples, if you feel comfortable to?

PART 5 - SOCIAL INTEGRATION

Thank you. In this part of the interview, we would like for you to tell us the story of living in a new society. Please elaborate on your experiences and feelings since you arrived in the Netherlands until you felt home here, or connected to the Dutch community. I would like to focus on things and people that helped you to feel home, but also on things and people, or other people's actions that prevented you from feeling at home or connected to the Dutch community.

[Interviewer note - If the interviewee says something that suggests commitment-conflict (like feeling conflicted, feeling tension, feeling a lot of different responsibilities), please ask about this. Interviewee: "I remember having trouble with my family" Interviewer: "Can you elaborate on that? How did it make you feel?]

When you look back to the trajectory you just told me, to whom did you feel committed? Like the work itself, family, community, culture…

[And/or] From your descriptions, I can understand that you had many relationships to manage during this period. Were there any times when you felt that your commitment to your [family? work? community? culture?] conflicted with each other? If so, what would you do in these situations, if you can give me examples?

'how did you manage these situations?'; 'how did it make you feel?'; 'what were your responses to these situations?'.

[Interviewer note - If the interviewee already mentioned some experiences of discimination, ask them to elaborate on that topic. If they did not say anything about this topic, ask them (gently!!!)

Where there situations in which you felt that your integration to the host community was affected by reactions to your nationality, ethnicity, race or gender? [If so] Would you elaborate on that, give examples, if you feel comfortable to?

PART 6 – SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION (2)

Thank you! Now we will move to the last part of the interview in which I will ask you some question regarding socio-demographics.

1. Do you believe that your current work (e.g., or salary, wage, earning, effort) matches your education, qualifications, etc...?

2. Do you still have family in your home country? [If so] Do you support them or help them? Or do you get support from them?

3. How easy or difficult can your household make ends meet with your income?

- O Very difficult
- O Difficult
- O Rather difficult
- O Neither difficult or easy
- O Rather easy
- O Easy
- O Very easy

3. Do you feel your income and work conditions are better or worse than the ones you had in your home country?

And then my last question:

4. Do you think that your current work fits with your educational background?

[Ending paragraph]

So now I am going to stop recording. Would you like to add anything else I did not ask, but you would like to bring? I really appreciate your contribution to this research. If you would like to hear more about the results, feel free to contact me through [email/phone?]

Appendix 2: Consent form

Radboud University

CONSENT FORM

For participation in the scientific research study: *Refugees: Community, Work and the Integration Process*

Statement of participant
The aim of the research study has been outlined to me. I was given the opportunity to ask questions regarding the research study. I participate voluntarily in the research study. I understand that I can stop at any point during the research study, should I wish to do so. I understand how the data of the research study will be stored and how they will be used. I consent to participating in the research study as described in the information document.

In addition, I give permission to (please check all that apply):

Yes	**No**	
☐	☐	process the following personal data: *gender, race/ethnicity, nationality, education, age, income*
☐	☐	have *audio* recordings made of me
☐	☐	use these *anonymous* recordings for scientific purposes (for example in a conference)
☐	☐	use these *anonymous* recordings for educational purposes (for example in a lecture)
☐	☐	have the audio recordings transcribed
☐	☐	use the anonymized transcripts for scientific research

Name:
……
…….

Signature: ..... Date: …….....

Statement of executive researcher
I declare that I have informed the above-mentioned person correctly about the research study and that I abide by the guidelines for research as stated in the protocol of the Ethics Assessment Committee Humanities.

Name: …….....

Signature: ..... Date: …….....

Appendix 3: Recruitment Flyer

RADBOUD UNIVERSITY OF NIJMEGEN

LOOKING FOR: PARTICIPANTS FOR AN INTERVIEW

We (students at the Radboud University of Nijmegen) are doing research on **the integration and search for employment of first-generation Afghan refugees in the Netherlands.** For this, we are looking for participants who fled in the time period of 1980-2000 from Afghanistan and came to the Netherlands. It involves an interview of maximum of 60 minutes where there will be a focus on stories and experiences about integration and the search for employment in the Netherlands.

INTERESTED? CONTACT US VIA MAIL:
SHABNAM.SHANURKEYL@STUDENT.RU.NL OR
ANNABEL.BUITER2@FM.RU.NL

THE INTERVIEWS CAN TAKE PLACE EITHER ONLINE OR IN PERSON

Appendix 4: List of Participants

Number		Pseudo Name Participant	Gender	Current Age	Interview duration	Included in the first round of analysis (mind-map & summaries) (29)	Amount of times included in the second round of analysis (key findings) (20)	Language of Interview
1		Jamila	Female	58	00:38:56	✓	✓✓	Dutch
2		Tamana	Female	36	00:49:52	✓	✓✓	Dutch
3		Parnian	Female	41	00:30:59	✓		Dutch
4		Mustafa	Male	36	01:00:09	✓	✓	Dutch
5		Suria	Female	30	00:26:39	✓	✓	Dutch
6		Nafisa	Female	50	00:59:02	✓		English
7		Nawid	Male	36	00:35:11	✓	✓	Dutch
8		Samim	Male	30	00:36:06	✓	✓	English
9		Laila	Female	30	00:34:43	✓	✓	Dutch
10		Khaled	Male	58	01:01:58	✓	✓✓	Dutch
11		Shahim	Male	55	00:49:52	✓	✓	Dutch
12		Aria	Female	30	00:57:40	✓	✓✓✓	Dutch
13		Sahel	Male	35	00:29:39	✓	✓	Dutch
14		Shahin	Male	55	00:41:39	✓	✓✓	Dutch
15		Ramin	Male	57	00:54:18	✓		Dutch
16		Shirin	Female	62	00:38:57	✓		Dutch
17		Dunya	Female	53	00:46:03	✓	✓✓	Dutch
18		Marwa	Female	51	00:33:57	✓	✓	Afghan
19		Tamim	Male	46	00:50:53	✓		Dutch
20		Zohal	Female	46	00:26:28	✓	✓	Afghan
21		Yasmin	Female	57	00:37:33	✓	✓	Afghan
22		Milad	Male	30	00:41:20	✓	✓	Dutch
23		Masood	Male	31	00:40:44	✓		Dutch
24		Morsal	Female	50	00:53:18	✓		English
25		Arian	Male	40	00:38:15	✓	✓✓	English
26		Hila	Female	34	00:42:37	✓		English
27		Omar	Male	29	01:15:00	✓	✓✓	Dutch
28		Yalda	Female	29	00:59:04	✓		Dutch
29		Hosna	Female	33	00:48:30	✓	✓	English

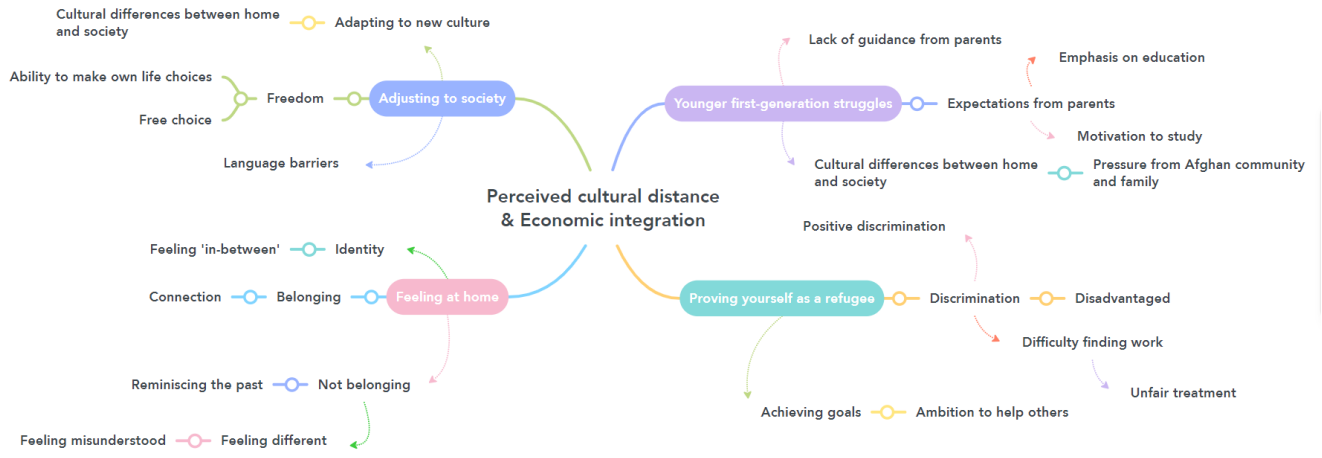
Appendix 5: Summary Analysis

An overview of the summary analysis is provided in a separate document.

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1T_IXQxJFw0H1oYXXsKCizYdtwbRRrGgRCMcP1bq4RxI/edit?usp=sharing

Appendix 6: Mind map Analysis

Initial mind-map:



Mind-map after color coding: