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Master thesis

Adapting, replacing & overcoming obstacles – Home-making processes of Syrian refugees in Groningen

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Abstract

Within the last few years, refugees became a major public and political concern in European countries who receive refugees, such as the Netherlands. Due to ongoing conflicts, the in-migration of refugees from Syria continues and the question of integration remains. While most research about refugees is done quantitatively, this study specifically explores the home-making processes of Syrian refugees in the Netherlands in a qualitative manner by means of in-depth interviews and mental mapping exercises. The goal was to collect micro-level information and characterize the process of making a new home in the Netherlands after being forced to flee from Syria.

In theory, home is a certain type of place attachment that can be grasped as dynamically, socially and emotionally constructed bonding between people and places. The process of home-making is one of inscribing meaning to a place and attaching to it.

The stories of 10 Syrian refugees from Groningen tell about life in Syria and the current situation in the Netherlands. They reveal different dimensions and varying degrees of feeling home. The mental maps additionally illustrate what aspects of home are identified as irreplaceable, such as family and childhood friends, and to what extent the memories of the participants' past lives in Syria influence their current home-making. Some participants' families are still living in Syria and thus the social and emotional ties to Syria outweigh the attachment to Groningen. Furthermore, establishing social contacts, learning the Dutch language, finding new purpose in daily routines and eventually creating new memories can be considered as most important aspects of home-making. Notwithstanding, as refugees were unfamiliar with the environment, they faced many obstacles that thwart attachment. The essential interrelation of social environment with the habitual behaviour turned out to be more significant than the review of previous studies and literature suggested. Altogether, these findings can be used to expand theoretical literature on home-making and home perception of refugees in general. They also reveal the necessity of following up and focusing on social integration by means of appropriate policies.

Keywords: *home-making, place attachment, transnationalism, migration, Syrian refugees, Groningen*

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Y.N.A. Rudolph

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1. Introduction

This thesis sheds light on the home-making processes and home perceptions of Syrian refugees in the Province of Groningen, the Netherlands. By means of qualitative research, the study explored how Syrian refugees adapt to the unfamiliar environment of Dutch society in order to physically, socially and emotionally attach to it. As this research encouraged Syrian refugees to reflect on their cultural background and its influence on their wellbeing in Dutch society, it can be considered as a cross-cultural study because it compared the uniqueness and differences of cultural beliefs, social norms, shared values and language (Ilesanmi, 2009). It aims to grasp understanding, experiences, perceptions and daily living practices of Syrian refugees who were living independently living in Groningen after enduring most likely unhomely living situation in asylum seeker centres (Blunt & Dowling, 2006). While refugees are often studied through quantitative methods (Engbersen et al., 2015), this study specifically investigates the emic perspective of Syrian refugees on a micro level to understand what obstacles refugees eventually face, to what extent they feel socially excluded and most importantly, what strategies refugees develop to feel comfortable and make a new home.

First, section 1.1 gives a brief overview of the Syrian crisis, its consequences and the asylum procedure in the Netherlands. Section 1.2 then points out the societal relevance and necessity of researching Syrian refugees in a qualitative matter. Finally, the objective and the research questions (Section 1.3) as well as the research paradigm (Section 1.4) are specified.

1.1 Syrian refugees in the Netherlands

The 1951 Geneva Convention forbids its signatory states, including the Netherlands, to send people back to their home countries, when they are considered as refugees and, by definition, face severe threats to freedom and life (Weiss, 1995). The Syrian crisis started with a civil war back in 2011, but it has developed into a highly complex conflict with several national and international actors relentlessly fighting each other. While the different parties are unable to agree to an appropriate solution, there is no end in sight for the humanitarian crisis. As a consequence of war, almost 13 million Syrians felt victim to displacement, which is approximately half of the country's population (Ferris, 2016). According to the United Nations (2017), over five million people have fled the country and are now registered as refugees, primarily in neighbouring countries[1]. In 2016, approximately 335,000 refugees in Europe came from Syria (Vluchtelingenwerk Nederland, 2016). The Netherlands, among

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[1] UNHCR, Syria Regional Refugee Response, Inter-agency Information Sharing Portal, http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php (last visited June 13, 2017).

other countries, grants asylum to people who are endangered when returning to their home country, based on the Geneva Convention on Refugees and the European Convention on Human rights (IND[2], 2016a). At the beginning of 2016, a total of 44,000 refugees in the Netherland had a Syrian background (CBS, 2016). Due to family reunification and the enduring insecurity in Syria, this number is expected to rise.

After applying for asylum at an application centre, refugees will be referred to a reception centre[3] to wait until a final decision on their request is made (IND, 2016b). If a safe return cannot be assured, refugees receive a residence permit for five years (Government of Netherlands, 2017). Due to the ongoing conflicts in Syria, the country remains unreasonably inhabitable for Syrian citizens who consequently do not get send back. But apart from enduring these administrative procedures, what does it mean to leave one's home behind?

Being displaced and forced to flee from home is a life changing experience, since the ordinary physical and social environment gets replaced with a new, mostly unknown environment. Their future and belonging are brought into question (Taylor, 2015). Moreover, once they find shelter in a refugee camp abroad, their struggle has not ended yet because refugee camps are considered to be profoundly unhomely (Blunt & Dowling, 2006). Only after asylum seekers have been granted asylum, they have the right to rent and live in a flat independently. Hence, they are given the opportunity to eventually settle in a foreign country. This raises the question, under what circumstances it is possible to make a new home in another country? Malika, one of this research's participants, illustrates this phase of uncertainty with the following statement which introduces this thesis:

> **Malika**: *Well, ahm, I think, I didn't find my home yet, not entirely completely found it. But maybe someday I will feel it [...]*

1.2 Societal relevance

This topic is societal relevant because the on-going conflict in Syria and the right of refugees to reunite with their family, will eventually lead to more Syrian refugees moving to the Netherlands who are then being put into the exact same situation. By researching assimilation and integration in a qualitative matter, future immigration policies that specifically target refugees can be improved according to the results of this research. Other researchers such as Spicer (2008) and Bakker et. al. (2016) confirm the fears of integration policy critics and state

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[2] IND is an abbreviation for Immigration and Naturalization Service of the Netherlands.
[3] According to the Ministry of Justice (2016), there are three different types of temporary accommodation during the asylum procedure: Asylum seekers' centres, Emergency reception and Crisis reception.

that large proportions of refugees are not socially integrated in the host society or at risk of social exclusion. Social exclusion is characterized by symptoms, such as language barriers or lack of social networks (Valentine, 2008; Bakker et. al., 2016). If the life of refugees is characterized by weak social and emotional ties to their environment, making a home and eventually feeling comfortable in it, are extremely challenging. While most integration policies still focus on housing or labour (Engbersen et. al., 2015), integration policies undermine cultural sensitivity and neglect social integration (Bakker et. al., 2016). Refugees are provided with basic needs, however, once the asylum is granted, refugees do not automatically feel home and still have little knowledge about the host society. By doing a qualitative research, the emic perspective and understanding of home and home-making in this specific group of participants can be comprehended to eventually revise or develop policies, other than considering all immigrants in the Netherlands as homogenous (IND, 2016). Moreover, researching refugees in a qualitative manner holds the crucial benefit of treating them as subjects and actors and not as mere objects and victims. Taylor (2005: 161) stated that "refugee narratives can tell us more about the effects of forced migration and governments' restrictive immigration policies than official monitoring, number crunching or policy forums." Hence, finding out about home-making from a refugee's perspective greatly contributes to the process of understanding integration. Di Saint Pierre et al. (2015) proposed that integration policies must also depend on the refugees' return wishes which strongly depend on the degree of social and cultural integration within the host society.

1.3 Objective and research questions

This study aimed to understand Syrian refugees' strategies and practices to feel comfortable and make a new home in Groningen. The research additionally explored what Syrian refugees perceive and define as home.

Research questions:
What characterizes the home-making process of Syrian refugees living in the Netherlands?
How does this home-making process interact with the perceptions of home?

Sub questions:
How do social relations, the furniture of the dwelling place and the daily routines influence the home-making process?
To what extent are memories and the cultural background influencing the perception of home?

1.4 Researching in an interpretative paradigm

This cross-cultural research was exclusively located in an interpretative paradigm, because it is assumed that meanings are produced and exchanged in interpretative processes, rather than prescribed by rules or the researcher's understanding of a phenomenon (Flick, 2015). There are two reasons that further illustrate the research's interpretative character.

First, its ontological perspective assumes that reality consists of meaning, perception and beliefs that can be examined through qualitative research (Hennink, Hutter, & Bailey, 2011). In order to conduct an examination in terms of the individual process of someone's home-making, his or her individual perception of home must be taken into account.

Second, and of utmost importance, the research aimed to reconstruct the emic perspective and subjective understanding of refugees. This subjective understanding is called 'Verstehen'. According to Snape and Spencer (2008), the concept of 'Verstehen' means to study peoples' lived experiences in a specific context. In other words, the qualitative approach tries to reconstruct peoples' inner perspective within the context they are living in. With regards to epistemological assumptions, the individual perception can never be fully reconstructed by another person such as a researcher. This particularly applies when a German student studies Syrian refugees who are living in the Netherlands because of the grave differences in their backgrounds. These fundamental assumptions are reflected in the methodology that implies the understanding and the tools to encourage people to disclose their inner perspectives, beliefs and emotions. The methods of this qualitative research are embedded in the paradigm's idea of a socially constructed reality. In order to achieve qualified information about the home-making process, the researcher reconstructed the refugee's interaction and relation with the Syrian and the Dutch environment. Furthermore, a qualitative study that takes place in an interpretative paradigm must entail critical reflexivity in every stage of research because the researcher's presence, positionality, interview guide and skills are an integral part of data production (Hennink, Hutter & Bailey, 2011). Further information about the methodology and the reflexivity that ensure validity are provided in the research design.

2. Theoretical framework and conceptual model

The theoretical framework lays the foundation for understanding and conceptualizing home and the process of home-making. Section 2.1 illustrates the importance to grasp home as a specific form of place attachment and in accordance with Low & Altman (1992) as a social and emotional bonding of people and places. The concept of home appears in several dimensions (Scannell and Gifford, 2010) and goes far beyond the physical dwelling. Section 2.2 then sheds light on how the bonding of people and places is created in consideration of academic literature. Finally, section 2.3 combines the theoretical approaches and merges them into a conceptual model which gave guidance to outline the research design.

2.1 Conceptualizing home

Before theoretically framing the process of home-making, a general conceptual idea of home as a certain type of place attachment is indispensable in order to comprehend the participants' behaviour and attitudes. Hence, the theoretical description begins with that item. The framework used in this research can be understood as several theoretical approaches rather than an exclusive theory. Nevertheless, these approaches are coherent and mutually defining each other. They sum up to the idea of grasping home and place attachment as a dynamic, socially and emotionally constructed bonding of people and places (Low & Altman, 1992). The basic assumption for the following theoretical considerations of grasping home and home-making is best described in the three-dimensional place attachment approach of Scannell and Gifford (2010). According to them, place attachment is reflected in the dimensions of a person, a place and a psychological process, which are briefly outlined as follows: The person dimension entails experiences, meanings and memories that a person individually inheres. On a group level, this connection involves symbolic meanings and the shared cultural background (Scannell & Gifford, 2010). The process dimension of place attachment entails all kinds of interactions and relations people connect with places, namely affect, cognition and behaviour. Finally, the place dimension is characterized by social and physical features of a place. Scannell and Gifford (2010) emphasize that every dimension can be analysed separately even though they are intertwined and mutually influence each other.
Home is differently conceptualized in theory, however, according to Horst (2004: 38) "the overarching feeling is that home is something desirable and necessary for individual fulfilment". According to Al-Ali and Koser (2002), the dynamic conceptualization of home encompasses home-related processes, including imagining, creating, unmaking, changing, losing or moving "homes" (Al-Ali & Koser, 2002). Therefore, home is a highly complex term

which goes far beyond the mere place of dwelling. The location is indeed necessary for grasping home and thus must be considered. But more important is the examination of emotions and relations which are given by people to particular places. In this regard, Blunt and Dowling (2006) named two key elements to grasp the concept of home: the place itself plus the entirety of feelings attached to it. Finally, these two elements must be intertwined to conceive socio-spatial relations (Blunt & Dowling, 2006).

A place that is perceived as home can be differently scaled, e.g. country, neighbourhood or house and it depends on the individual perspective to what extent a place is called home. Much more crucial than the differences in the geographical perception of home are the different feelings that are associated with it because these vary greatly. People can relate emotional embeddedness or feelings of security and belonging with a place, while others experience feelings of fear or alienation (Blunt & Dowling, 2006). The range of emotions attached to places also results in different identities that are associated with these places. According to Devine-Wright and Howes (2010), place attachment is also related to place identity, which encompasses physical and symbolic elements of locations that contribute to a group- or self-identity. In the case of refugees, the mix of feelings and identities can even be contradictive. Taylor (2015) states that those who were forced to flee can perceive the loss of their former home in the context of good memories but on the other hand as a place where protection failed and neighbours can no longer be trusted. In the new host country, home can be perceived as both a place of refuge and safety or a place of alienation and discrimination (Taylor, 2015). Notwithstanding, Scannell and Gifford (2010) contend that attachments to new places can indeed emerge, even though place attachments has been disrupted in other places. A look at some home related vocabulary reveals, what grave differences exist when people describe home, e.g. homely, unhomely, homeless or homesick.

2.2 Home for transnational movers

Since refugees and migrants in general belong to the group of transnational movers, theories of transnationalism that explain multiple ties of migrants come to play (Al-Ali & Koser, 2002). While a range of transnationalism theories exist, Taylor (2015) concluded that the essence of these theories allows for the possibility of refugees and migrants maintaining a profound emotional attachment to their former home, while simultaneously making a new home in another country. Hence, instead of simply dividing the former home country and the current host society in two opposing spheres, multiple belonging in a globalized world must be taken into account (Al-Ali & Koser, 2002). Blunt & Dowling (2006: 198) add that "transnational homes are thus shaped by ideas of experiences of location and dislocation,

place and displacement, as people migrate for a variety of reasons and feel both at home and not at home in a wide range of circumstances". John Western (1992) studied home perception of Barbadian Londoners by means of qualitative interviews. While some Barbadian Londoners sought to return, other immigrants had no such intention. However, according to Western, immigrants were, regardless of their intention, striving for a balance between both Barbados and London which indicates multiple and ambiguous ties and attachment that is caused by both memories from the past and everyday living practices in present time (Blunt & Dowling, 2006). As for the past, Rubenstein (2001) emphasizes that simple homesickness must be distinguished from nostalgia. While homesickness can be 'cured' by returning to the place and the people left behind, nostalgia comprises 'romantic memories' of the past that cannot be brought back by simply returning home because they are merely parts of imagination and longing. Moreover, the longer a transnational mover is absent from his former home, the fainter memories of it become. For refugees, who fled a country based on well-founded fears (Weiss, 1999), home has a different value than for other migrants because returning home under prevailing uninhabitable circumstances is not an option. In fact, refugees worldwide are living under most diverse conditions in foreign countries to seek shelter. While refugee camps or reception centres provide basic needs, they are not considered as homely (Horst, 2004; Blunt & Dowling, 2006). However, if returning home is not an option, refugees develop strategies and practices to feel comfortable in their new host society.

2.3 Home-making

Assuming that home depends on emotions, social and personal bonding, the process of making a place homely is ambivalent and highly complex. On the one hand, it is a *material* process which is linked to physical objects, e.g. a house, furniture or photos. On the other hand, it is *imaginative* and revolves around memories and meanings (Blunt & Dowling, 2006). The objects in a place called home express a meaning, either subconsciously or intentionally. According to Miller (1998), our social world is constituted through materiality. Therefore, objects can reveal information about social and cultural beliefs.

While furniture and other possessions are indeed part of the home-making process, the everyday living in a place is more relevant. Like the term itself already reveals, the practice of making a home is an ongoing process. By the practice of living in a particular place it gets inscribed with meaning. As a result, memories and feelings associated with that place begin to emerge. The process of social production and construction of space has therefore been characterised by Low (1996: 862) as "the actual transformation of space---through people's social exchanges, memories, images, and daily use of the material setting---into scenes and

actions that convey symbolic meaning". In this quote, Low added an important premise to the process, namely its social construction, which covers a broad field of people's interactions and their consequences. In other words, not only social interactions but also social relations contribute to the practice of inscribing a place with meaning. French philosopher and sociologist Henri Lefebvre (1991) says that "space (…) is not only supported by social relations but it is also producing and produced by social relations" (Lefebvre, 1991: 286).

To what extent a person is connected to a place can be determined by means of insideness which expresses, to what extent a place becomes the extension of oneself (Rowles, 1983). The element of insideness acts as an addition to the three-dimensional theory of Scandall and Gifford. According to Rowles, there are three different types of insideness that describe the connection between people and places: first, physical insideness, which expresses a person's awareness of the physical environment, based on behaviour rituals and everyday living practise. Second, the social insideness, which is the social meaning of a place that evokes through social interaction and relations in a place. Third, the autobiographical insideness, the meaning a place gets when certain life events take place in it. These events eventually create memories that connect people to the places that are associated with the events, resulting in the identification with a place. Proshansky (1978) defines place identity as a part of self-identity that revolves, among other aspects, around memories, ideas, feelings and experiences and satisfy individual needs. These aspects originate from events that occur in certain places which are consequently linked to satisfaction and thus contributes to the identity development. All these types of insideness and the development of place identity are mutually influencing each other and are embedded in the conceptualization of place attachment in a broader sense.

2.4 Conceptual model

The conceptual model visualizes the interrelation of the different concepts that are mentioned in the theory to describe both, the home-making process and the perception of home. The home-making process, yellowy marked, is depictured as the largest concept because it is the centre of interest. It greatly depends on the prior perception of home and vice versa. The perception of home bases on the place identity that the participants developed in their former home in Syria. Moreover, it comprises all memories, feelings, shared cultural values and material values that are associated with it. These features are deliberately depictured as clouds because they are remains of the past that constituted the perception of home of their former home and now influence their current home-making process in the Netherlands. The participants who were forced to flee from Syria and eventually arrived in Groningen were

then impelled to create a new homely living situation for themselves. In the unfamiliar environment of Dutch society, participants are following the home-making process by means of the concepts that have been previously presented. There is the process of furnishing the dwelling place and inscribing meaning to it through materiality. Presumably more important, however, are the three types of insideness that constitute the home-making process, namely social interaction and social relations, habitudinal routines and significant life events. These components circulate around the home-making process and inhere a dynamic and mutual relation. Even though depictured as singular concepts, the three major aspects of home-making are undoubtedly intertwined as pursuing one aspect commonly leads to consequences for other aspects. For example, if a participant starts to attend university lectures on a daily basis, he does not only get a new routine, he most likely gets in touch with other people and thus takes part in social interactions. To sum up, the concepts of home-making and home perception are ambivalent, material and imaginative, spatial and emotional. The following figure depictures my own presentation, based on theoretical approaches above:
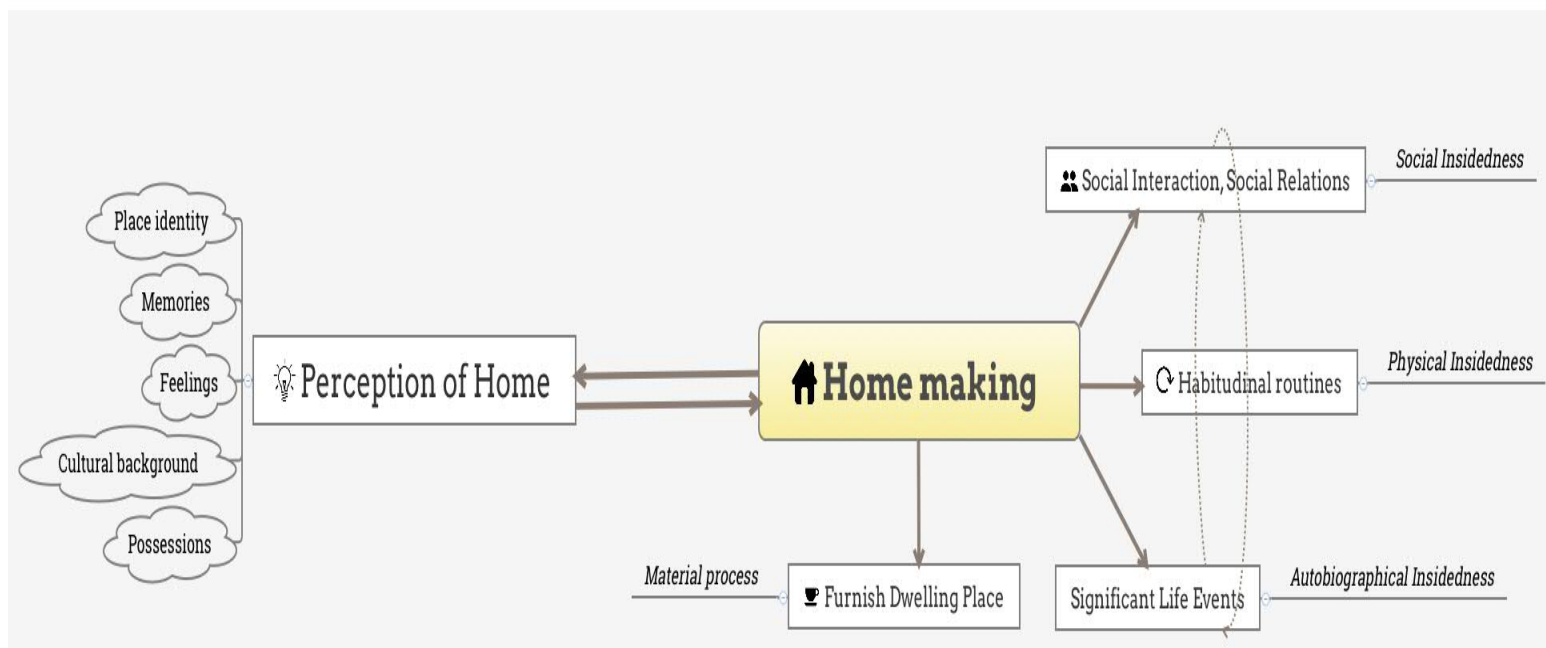

Figure 1 - Conceptual Model of home-making and home perception of Syrian refugees

2.5 Stages of home

In order to fully comprehend the home-making process of Syrian refugees in the Netherlands, one must understand the refugees' unique relation to home which is caused by displacement and reflected in their life paths. Their perception of home is characterized by different stages

of home that are depictured in the following figure which was used for a presentation about this thesis. First, there is the home in pre-war Syria, which features the accustomed aspects of home that the participants perceived as normal. Then, the war started and as a result participants faced severe disruptions in all aspects of life until their former home becomes inhabitable and consequently they are forced to flee. An episode of uncertainty follows. While some participants headed straight towards Netherlands, others tried to make a new home in other countries first, such as Turkey, Egypt or Jordan. Finally, they arrived in the Netherlands where participants are confronted with a completely unfamiliar environment. At first, living in asylum seeker centres before then living independently. The red circle indicates the stage of interest. The following figure is my own presentation based on both theory and participants' interviews:
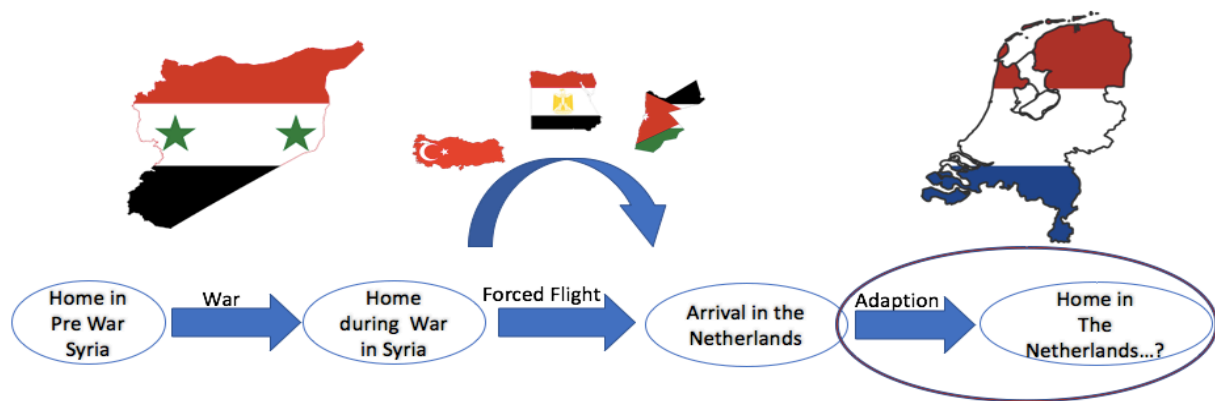

Figure 2 - Reconstructing Syrian refugees' stages of home

3. <u>Methodology</u>

This chapter contains a thorough explanation of the research design and the methodology. Based on the theory and objective, it illustrates what type of research was used (section 3.1) and what methods were applied (section 3.2) to explore home-making and home perceptions of Syrian refugees. Section 3.3 then further specifies and predefines the characteristics of the refugees who were studied. Finally, section 3.4 elaborates on ethical considerations that have been complied during preparation, execution and post-processing of the study in order to protect the participants from any potential harm.

3.1 <u>Type of research</u>

The research interests, expressed through the research question and its sub questions, are exclusively located in qualitative research. This type of research aims to grasp the peoples' emic point of view (Hennink, Hutter, & Bailey, 2011). Due to its flexibility and focus on the emic point of view of the research subjects, Liamputtong (2010) identified qualitative research as appropriate when studying in a cross-cultural context. For the sake of comprehensively reconstructing the Syrian refugees' home-making process and their perception of home, the research design must feature certain assumptions and approaches. The assumptions are mostly covered in the description of the interpretative paradigm, as was discussed in section 1.4. The qualitative research is used to gain in-depth knowledge of a process and peoples' perception, which was the exact aim of this research. Furthermore, it is a sensitive and highly complex topic, that could hardly be comprehensively explained with the answers people tick on a questionnaire, for instance. The qualitative research design of this study considered the complexity and subjectivity of each process and each perception. Hence, the research took place on a micro level. Furthermore, the qualitative approaches share the common belief that this kind of knowledge can only be acquired in a natural setting. This way, the peoples' perception, behaviour and meaning can be put in a context. The meaning that people inscribe to a certain phenomenon reveals itself only in a natural setting (Hennink, Hutter, & Bailey, 2011). Interviews and mental maps were the methods of choice, who are discussed in detail in the upcoming section.

Finally, to ensure that the research was conducted rigorously, the whole study took place under the banner of critical reflexivity, which is established by using multiple methods, thorough reflections in all stages of research and discussing methods and preliminary results with the supervisor (Stratford and Bradshaw, 2016). Furthermore, it is the most appropriate

strategy for minimizing biases and elaborating on the subjectivity nature of the research itself (Dowling, 2016). I've been orientating myself towards Sultana's (2007: 382) summary on her thoughts on rigour research: "It is critical to pay attention to positionality, reflexivity, the production of knowledge and the power relations that are inherent in research processes in order to undertake ethical research". That was particularly fruitful to comprehend in what context and situation the data has been collected because not only the positionality of the researcher (Finlay and Gouch, 2003) but also the process of data collection (Pillow, 2003; Berg, 2007) is an integrative part of knowledge production and thus must be reflected.

Overall, the research process was characterized by nonlinearity. Rather than treating preparation, data collection, data processing and analysis as distinct components in a continuous research process, the steps were circular intertwined. For instance, initial interviews have been transcribed and partly coded before conducting further interviews. Based on these preliminary results, the data collection phase was adjusted by rephrasing, erasing or adding questions to the interview guide.

3.2 Methods of data collection

3.2.1 Interviews

The first method, in-depth interviews, generated the largest amount of data and was thus the prime data source. According to Hennink, Hutter, & Bailey (2011), this type of interviews provides deep insight, personal information and the contextual identification of the interviewee. A researcher should make use of this method, if the objective is to understand perception, beliefs, feelings, motivation or decision making of an interviewee. Since my research interest covers highly individual views and life paths, this research preferred in-depth interviews to focus group discussions. Blunt & Dowling (2006) emphasize that feelings attached to places are distinctive and can even turn out to be opposing. Therefore, in-depth interviews were more appropriate to explore these individual feelings and experiences rather than encouraging participants to discuss about it, such as in focus group discussion (Cameron, 2016). According to Blunt & Dowling (2006), the feelings that are attached to a place differ greatly and are thus better ascertainable with the help of a personal face-to-face interview. Furthermore, the perceptions of home depend, according to the theoretical framework, on the individual's everyday living practises and personal experiences. Therefore, the interviews took not only place in a 'natural setting', they also revolved around daily routines and experiences in places. In the case of the Syrian refugees' home-making process, this data collection took primarily place in their dwelling places, neighbourhood or places they visit regularly. All locations have been characterized as comfortable by each participant. Due to

my interest in home, I did prefer to do the interviews in their dwelling places. Conducting the interviews in the place of interest holds several benefits, for instance, the opportunity of gaining contextual information (van Campenhout & van Hoven 2014). In other words, the researcher can see how the participant talks about and interacts with his environment. However, self-inviting to a Syrian household is considerably rude and inappropiate in the Arabic culture as people tend to show hospitality by inviting other people themselves. After declining an invitation a few times, one is expected to finally accept it. Due to my previous work with Syrian refugees, I have been aware of that and eventually got invited to the participants' homes in most cases. This knowledge can be considered as part of the cultural sensitivity which is according to Liamputtong (2010) essential for cross-cultural research. A known café (Omar, Rafik), a park (Farid) or a university complex (Safia) were other interview locations. All other interviews took place in the participants' homes. This did not just facilitate the interview (Dunn, 2016) it also gave me exclusive insight and the opportunity to take probes from the individual dwelling places. While, for instance, Tarek's mental map revealed his love of nature by means of an image of a perfect home in the woods, the way he cared for his two cats and three Syrian birds might not have been part of the interview, if I would not have seen them wandering around his flat with my own eyes. In every case, the location of the interview was chosen by the participants and thus based on mutual agreement, a condition that generally facilitates the participants to talk freely (Elwood & Martin, 2000).

The semi-structured interviews were based on an interview guide[4] (can be found in Appendix I) that contains different types of questions, mostly open narrative questions, that aim to let the participant talk as freely as possible from their emic perspective. The interviews were recorded with a recording device and to capture non-audible gestures or observations, I additionally took some field notes. In order to reduce the likelihood that the researchers' perceptions and assumptions influence the interviewee, the questions are not suggestive (Flick, 2015). The interview is used to guide the participants' narration towards the research interest, but it remains a risk that by guiding the interview too narrowly, some relevant information might get lost. Since home is a concept that is closely bound to emotions that are inscribed by the process of everyday living, every place has its history that I aimed to find out. Thus, I added elements of an episodic interview, in which interviewees were asked to elaborate on certain stages or phases in their life (Flick, 2015). I asked, for instance, what the participants did first when they moved into their dwelling place.

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[4] The interview guidelines will be constructed in accordance with Cornelia Helfferich's SPSS procedure. To find appropriate questions for an interview guide, she suggests following these steps: 1. Collecting as many thematically relevant questions as possible, 2. Check the questions and especially the types of questions, 3. Arrange the questions regarding to their thematic classification, 4. Subsume and pair the questions with narrative requests (Helfferich, 2011).

To ensure a fluent conversation during the interview, language and jargon need to be appropriate and thus adapted to the interviewee. According to Kruse (2009), the communication pattern needs to suits the everday references and vocabulary of the interviewee to ensure access to individual relevance concepts. The natural language barrier (Participants: Arabic – Researcher: German) had been overcome by conducting the interviews in English. While most interviews went smoothly, the third interview with Malika had to be interrupted in the very beginning. When she drew 'family' as one important aspect of home on the mental map, she started to weep bitterly because one of her relatives had just passed away in Syria. I then gave her some tissues and tried to calm her down. Even though I assured that we did not have to continue, Malika eventually calmed down and took the courage to explain the mental map again. During the interview, she then cheered up a little.

After collecting all data, the subsequent analysis process began. The transcription and coding process were done with the help of two software tools, namely f5 for transcription and MAXQDA for coding. The transcripts facilitated analysis and were thus an essential part of this research. They aligned with the simple transcription system that is described in the practical handbook which comes with the f5 software (Dresing & Pehl, 2015).

After finalizing the transcripts, the coding process set in which, among other benefits, helps to organize, analyse and reflect on the data (Cope, 2016). In general, codes were either deductively derived from the theoretical approaches or inductively from the data itself (Dunn, 2016). Before looking into the transcripts, the major themes of the theoretical framework and conceptual model had to be determined and transformed into codes, namely descriptive codes. These codes consist of patterns and themes derived from the theory and are thus of deductive nature (Cope, 2016). When the initial coding process starts, the pattern and themes are extended by inductively detected themes and interrelations that emerge from the interviewee's responses. During the initial coding process, some in vivo codes have been detected who were of great value. Strauss and Corbin (1990) named this specific type of codes, which are directly emerging from the answers of the respondents, in vivo codes because these codes are participants' literal quotes. The initial coding helps to categorize the data and to get a first grasp on it. In the next step, the researcher develops analytic codes which are either embedded in the research question or brought to light by inductive codes (Cope, 2016). These codes dig deeper into the written word, connecting different topics, actors, processes and places and thus puts information in a context. This becomes particularly fruitful in terms of home and place attachment because even though some analytic codes are derived from theory, the imaginative process and individual emotions attached to places are difficult to reveal and contextualize. Finally, the researcher creates a codebook that compiles and categorizes all

codes (Cope, 2016). In combination with an appropriate coding structure and coding strategy, the codebook is used to scan the first interview and upcoming interviews meticulously.

During this research, the inductively derived codes that revolved around home-making processes as adopting, replacing and overcoming obstacles were particularly fruitful as these exact codes and its sub codes underlined the specific home-related characteristics of transnational movers and helped to structure the 'Findings and Discussion' chapter.

3.2.2 Mental Mapping

To gain further knowledge about the second research question, the perception of home, I used a second method of data collection, namely mental mapping. In this method, the participants get slightly empowered in their role as research subjects because they are free to actively express themselves on paper in accordance with their own preferences and ideas. Participants were encouraged to creatively draw their individual perception of home on a piece of paper by using a ballpoint pen. As stated by Gieseking (2013), this method is worthwhile to gain additional visual data about how participants produce and experience space as well as human-environment relations in general. Therefore, this method particularly suits the research's objective and the theoretical understanding of place as dynamically and socially constructed. The individual perception of home as well as the feelings that are attached to it can be evoked and visualized. The method worked as follows:

The participants were given a piece of paper (A4-size) and a ballpoint pen. Then, I gave precise but brief instructions on what the participants must draw. These instructions cannot be phrased in a way that stipulates the participant on what to draw or confine their mental and creative freedom because only then the participants' implement the task from an emic perspective. The setup as well as the instructions were in accordance with Lynch's steps of mental mapping, who is considered as the founder of this method. In his research, he first asked the participants to capture their first thought on a known space. Then he asked them to draw a map of that space and eventually let the participants either draw or elaborate on the daily routines within that space (Lynch, 1960). Analog to that, the participants in this research are likewise asked to disclose what is important in terms of home and then requested to draw home and its most important features on the paper. When the participant has completed the mental mapping exercise, the recorder gets switched on to capture his or her explanation of the drawing. The interview then begins by asking the participant to elaborate on his drawings before the interview guide is pose further questions.

The mental mapping exercise is done before doing the interview, analogous to the case study of van Campenhout and van Hoven (2013) who studied the role of gender and performance in

place attachment. They asked their participants to draw mental maps of the place of interest, in their case a rugby club, to gain additional information about everyday life practices and the importance of places. Combining interviews with mental maps holds three crucial benefits: First, by doing this drawing exercise, the participant eases up, which helps to establish rapport. Second, the mental map can be used to illustrate arguments that are difficult to express verbally. Third, the mental maps serve as stimuli to pose further questions.

According to Gieseking (2013), mental maps must be treated as complementary elements of interviews and thus must be analysed together with interview transcripts and field notes. Based on the revision of several methodological papers regarding mental mapping, Gieseking made a list of general analytical components and techniques. Basically, the mental maps were analysed in accordance with the deductively derived codes from the theoretical background as well as inductively derived codes from these exact maps.

In retrospect, all participants briefly stumbled in the beginning and commonly complained about their lack of drawing skills which mostly eased up the situation as the researcher assured that no skills were expected at all. The exercise turned out to be an initial information in terms of home perception, as most participants drew accordingly to the task of 'What is home for you, what is important for you in terms of home'. After the pilot interview, I decided to record the participant's explanation of the mental maps to assure that no information would get lost and to initiate every interview in a personalized way s the interview guide has also been individually adjusted according to each drawing. Billal insisted that it was not possible to draw home and wrote down 'memories' instead. This aligned with his conclusive statement that his home in Syria is undoubtedly irreplaceable. Rafik also said that it is not possible to draw home because he would think of too many things, thus he decided to collect his thoughts during the interview and wrote them down afterwards. Summarizing, the participants had rather distinctive approaches to respond to the researcher's instructions to draw a mental map. Three participants drew their former dwelling place or other places of interest in Syria (Adil, Ali, Omar), Safia drew the inside of her current dwelling place in the Netherlands, Chaker drew the Syrian and Palestinian flags and Farid and Tarek drew an imaginary home.

The chosen theoretical framework suggested to considered home-making as a material process with regards to meaningful objects and furniture (Blunt & Dowling, 2006; Miller, 1998). However, objects turned out to be only of minor importance, mainly because the participants had only limited opportunities to take along possessions. Even though objects were part of the interview guide, because of their relevance in the literature on home, the questions regarding objects and furniture have been erased. Safia was the only participant

who discussed material things in the home and she drew her current dwelling place on the mental map and elaborated on the importance of comfort inside her flat:
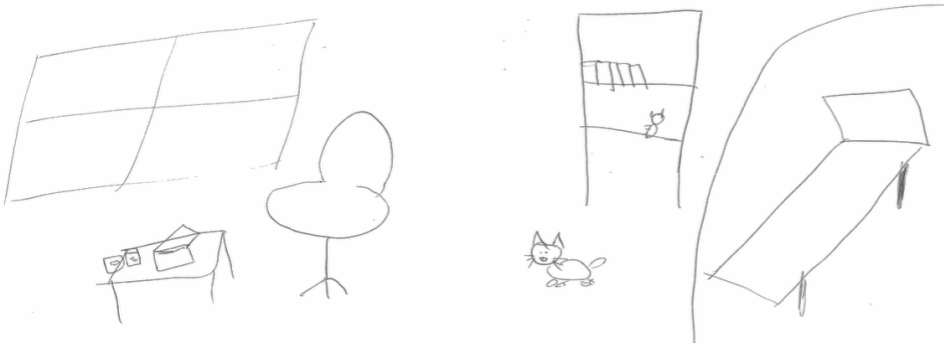

Figure 3 – Furniture and valuable possessions by Safia

3.3 Target group and participant recruitment

The target group of this research had several characteristics. First and foremost, the participants were Syrian refugees who were dwelling in a house or flat in the Netherlands for at least one year. The characteristic of dwelling in a house or flat for at least one year was added to ensure that these people already lived autonomously in a place for some time. Thereby, the likelihood of established routines, a social network and other place attachment activities is higher because the participants have effectively had more time to inscribe their dwelling places with meaning. According to Brown and Perkins (1992), the intensity of place attachment correlates with the length of dwelling. On the contrast, the research of Horst (2004) has shown that refugees who were living in a Dutch reception centre were lacking cultural freedom and autonomy. For reasons of feasibility, it was also crucial that the participants have sufficient English skills, so I can conduct the interviews independently. The interviews and the mental mapping exercises have been performed with male and female participants. There are crucial gender differences in the perception of home and the home-making process. Bowlby et. al. (1997) emphasise that experiences and expectation are critically gendered and thus can only be fully grasped in a societal context. Therefore, gender issues are potentially relevant because gender roles are rather distinctively distributed in Arabic society (Zdanowski, 2014). However, a detailed examination of gender specific home perceptions go beyond the scope of this research.

Thanks to personal acquaintance with a gatekeeper of the Syrian community in Groningen, I did not face difficulties to recruit participants that fit the predefined characteristics. After conducting the first interview with the gate keeper, I asked him about friends and relatives who were Syrian, English-speaking and lived in Groningen for at least a year independently.

Eventually, recruiting by using the so-called snowball method, brought up the participants that I required. However, the drawback of recruiting participants within a relatively small community was that no new knowledge was gained within that particular social network as described by Hennink, Hutter & Bailey (2011). After realizing that, further participants have been recruited by messaging Syrians on local Facebook pages, such as 'Buy and sell in Groningen', 'International Students in Groningen', 'Expats in Groningen' et cetera. Eventually, the researcher recruited further participants that provided new insights, including two participants living in rural areas, villages outside of Groningen. Due to miscommunication, it turned out that one potential participant did not live independently but had to report to an asylum seeker centre regularly. He was also about to move and did never take any actions to feel comfortable in the place he was living, confirming the choice of predefined characteristics. Furthermore, two of the participants turned out be Palestinian and shared this information with me during or right before the interview. Both were born and lived their whole life in Syria and thus felt home there. Therefore, both stories were eventually considered because the absence of the Syrian nationality did not affect both in their sense of feeling home in Syria. Both also shared similar struggles as other Syrian refugees in the Netherlands. In total, ten participants (names appear as pseudonyms) have been recruited. The following table gives an overview of the participants' characteristics.

Name	Sex	Age	Family in the Netherlands	Occupation in the Netherlands	Dwelling place characteristics (type, rural/urban)	Countries stayed in between Syria and the Netherlands	Occupation in Syria
Adil	Male	27	Parents, Sibling	Student	Flat / Urban	-	Student
Ali	Male	26	Cousin, Uncles	Student, Project Manager	Flat / Urban	Egypt	Student + Self-employed
Malika	Female	26	Parents, Sibling	Student	House / Rural	-	Student
Safia	Female	27	Father, Sibling	Student	Flat / Urban	Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey	Student
Billal	Male	27	Cousin	Director	Flat / Urban	Egypt, Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon	Student
Chaker	Male	20	-	Student	Flat / Urban	-	Student + Side job
Farid	Male	21	Parents, Sibling	Student	House / Rural	-	Student
Omar	Male	23	Sibling	Student + Self-development Trainer	Flat / Urban	Lebanon, Algeria, Libya	Student + Self-development Trainer
Rafik	Male	20	Parents	Language Course	Flat / Urban	-	Student + Side job
Tarek	Male	21	Parents, Cousin	Language Course	Flat / Urban	Turkey	High school

Table 1 - Participant's information

General interest (e.g. Adil, Ali, Rafik), Arabic hospitality (e.g. Chaker, Ali) as well as the opportunity to be heard to clarify general misconceptions of the general Dutch population about refugees (e.g. Omar, Rafik, Malika) have been identified as the participant's main intentions to take part in the research. Retrospectively reflecting on my positionality during the data collection, the relationship between me and the participants can be described as reciprocal, meaning both parties held similar positions (Dowling, 2016). I began the data collection process as an outsider with some experience on place attachment as well as qualitative research with Syrian refugees. The participants and me are between 20 and 30 years old, mostly studying, having similar interests and living in or around Groningen. These common grounds greatly contributed to a flawless communication during the interviews.

3.4 Ethical considerations

In order to protect participants from any harm, the most important aspects are to treat the research subjects respectfully and anonymize all sensitive collected data. Syrian refugees and refugees in general are considered as a vulnerable group[5]. The protection of their rights and

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[5] People of vulnerable groups have several characteristics: They are to a certain extent marginalized, socially excluded, have limited opportunities and income and suffer abuse, hardship, prejudice and discrimination (Larkin, 2009).

their well-being must be guaranteed during the whole research process and beyond. To assure that sensitive information kept inaccessible and untraceable, it is the researchers duty to store field notes, recordings and mental maps safely. By using pseudonyms and masking characteristics, the researcher additionally ensures that the participant remains unidentifiable (Dowling, 2016). Furthermore, it is of utmost importance that the research subjects get fully informed about the research and its consequences (Guchteneire, 2006). They also were informed that their participation is voluntary and that the interview could have been cancelled at any point of time. These information, among others, are written on the information letter that was handed out to the participants. Before starting an interview or handing out paper and pen for the mental mapping exercise, the researcher receives written informed consent of all participants (Hennink, Hutter, & Bailey, 2011). By signing the consent form ('Informed consent letter' can be found in Appendix II), the participants declare that they have read the information letter and thus have been fully informed by the researcher about both the study content and their participation. This so called informed consent contributes to a rigour and ethical correct research (Dowling, 2016). In conclusion, all these steps are taken to minimize the any potential harm to the participants (Hennink, Hutter, & Bailey, 2011). Eventually, only two participants signed the informed consent letter. All other participants did either 'trust me', 'had nothing to hide' or just said 'it's fine, don't worry'. It then seemed inappropriate to insist on it because it possibly would had created an interview atmosphere which would have been too formal and inappropiate (Hennink, Hutter, & Bailey, 2011). By anonymizing participants' names by means of pseudonyms, censoring names of friends, relatives, some towns and villages, workplaces, companies, charity organizations as well as protecting contact data of participants, confidentiality had been hold up nonetheless and consent was received verbally.

4. <u>Findings & Discussion</u>

The data that has been collected gives an idea of how Syrian refugees adapt and eventually attach to the physical and social environment of Dutch society. It further reveals what sometimes insurmountable obstacles they face during their preceding stay in the Netherlands as well as their current situation. The acquired data eventually draw a picture of what strategies Syrian refugees develop to feel comfortable in the Netherlands. These exact strategies are considered as home-making practices of which the most important and striking ones are presented comprehensively in this chapter. Due to the individual experience of the participants as well as the distinctiveness of their former lives in Syria, the gathered information encompass a wide range of meanings, perceptions, beliefs and emotions.

All findings, provided through quotes or mental maps, are presented and simultaneously discussed with regards to theory and literature and relativized with regards to the situational context of data collection and participant characteristics.

As for their previous lives, section 4.1 gives insight in the feelings, social ties, routines and cultural characteristics of the participants' lives in Syria. Section 4.2 then further illustrates what severe consequences resulted from the war in Syria such as breach of trust, insecurity and alienation. These first two sections serve as introduction to underline that home-making for refugees largely differs from home-making processes of other people and thus provide contextual understanding. Due to the great amount and importance of the sheer insurmountable obstacles that impede and thwart a strong attachment to the Netherlands, section 4.3 extensively identifies and defines home-making for the participants as 'overcoming obstacles', whereas subsection 4.3.1 encompasses the inductively derived obstacles and subsection 4.3.2 the actual actions that had been taken to overcome these. The analysis revealed that home-making for Syrian refugees does also feature 'adapting' as well as elements of 'rebuilding' because some losses and habits can be compensated, while other cannot. Moreover, the section subdivides home-making in a physical, social and autobiographical dimension, based on the theoretical framework. Even though the participants' most important strategies and actions are subdivided, the analysis confirms their interrelations and underlines its synergies. The last section (4.4) covers what the participants identified and concluded as most important aspects of home and how they define it.

4.1 <u>Social environment in Syria</u>

For the sake of comprehending the current home-making and home perceptions of Syrian refugees in the Netherlands, it is indispensable to first reconstruct their former lives and

understanding of home in the Syria. In terms of social environment, the analysis revealed what aspects of social place attachment are perceived differently in comparison to the Netherlands. In fact, social ties had been perceived more intense in Syria:

> **Ali:** *[…] And the relations, to be honest, the relation between friends or people in Syria at all you know, like if you have like a friendship […] it will be much stronger!*

> **Omar**: *Yeah, it is also in Syria, the network is different than here! […] network is everything there and because the people who are living in places like, their family are really old there, so everybody around they know the name of the family! […] if we say, like my last name, my family name, like everybody around more than 40 kilometres they know it! Because those people, my family, lived in this place for more than 100 years!*

Omar confirmed this rootedness when he says that his family does not just enjoy a good reputation but inhabits the same area for a long time. All participants had lived together with their nuclear family before they fled Syria, with minor exceptions such as brief stays in student accommodations. Consequently, the attachment to the social environment in Syria is considerably strong, meaning that the disruption of ties is comparably more severe.

Collectively, the participants perceived their former social environment as more intense. According to theory, the place attachment that takes place on a group level (Scannell & Gifford, 2010) is rooted in symbolic meanings and the cultural and historic background which is confirmed by the participants who said that the social ties are more intense in Syria. Zdanowski (2014: 37) says that "kinship is the main reference point of social life in the Middle East." Families are deeply rooted by means of numerous family members, cross-generational ties and multi-generational living. Mutual commitment to relatives is considered as a central and crucial value which also reflects on friends, neighbours and people in public.

4.2 Severe disruption and losses

The definition of refugees in the Geneva Convention underlines the graveness and unreasonableness of circumstances that must prevail, so that people are eventually forced to flee their country. With regards to home, Peters (1999) states that due to acute danger, home loses its crucial feature of secure habitability. Brown & Perkins (1992) and Taylor (2015) add that refugees experience alienation, grave disruptions in all aspects of life and severe losses. In that regard, Malika explained that she did not feel safe anymore in Syria, which lead to severe alienation because these feelings contradict the belonging and comfort she previously experienced in her home. Malika described her feeling of alienation with an illustration of an airplane:

Malika: *And, yeah. At home is always that you don't want to leave and, and unfortunately, when I was in Syria every time I, yeah, every time I look to the sky and see an airplane, I wish to go away with it. But, when I now look to the sky and I see, I don't want to be in there anymore.*
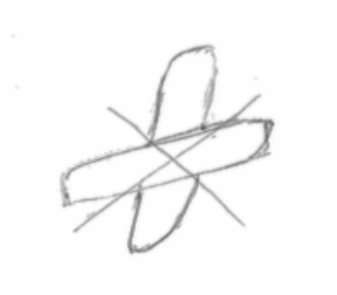

Figure 4 - Airplane by Malika

While she was back in Syria right before she left the country, she felt so disaffected and unsecure that she eventually wished to leave Syria every time she saw an airplane. Even though she explicitly said that she does not feel home yet, she emphasized that she finally felt secure again and seeing an airplane in the Netherlands does not makes her want to leave, like it did back in Syria.

Besides alienation, refugees suffer under the consequences of losing something. Losses range from valuable possessions and achievements to loved ones, which have a great impact on the refugees' mental health and sense of belonging. Some losses are considered as essential to feel home and are thus irreplaceable, such as family or childhood friends. On the contrary, some losses can indeed be coped with or compensated when making a new home in the Netherlands, for instance, by pursuing similar hobbies and activities as in Syria. The strategies and processes that the participants have developed in order to feel comfortable in the new environment are discussed in the next section.

4.3 Home-making

4.3.1 Obstacles

On arrival in the Netherlands, the participants face a broad range of obstacles that impede a sense of comfort and belonging. The obstacles that have been mentioned by the participants have prevailed throughout the time they have been living the Netherlands.

The most persistent barrier in that regard, is the language barrier. Even though all participants took part in language courses, a considerable communication gap remained, causing disorientation and loneliness in the beginning and consisting misunderstanding. According to the participants, language is a key factor to integration in general, but more specifically a key

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factor to social integration, such as stated by Valentine (2008) and Bakker et. al. (2016). Without sufficient communication skills, the participants complained about their inability to express themselves which eventually lead to lacking opportunities to find jobs, pursue hobbies, establish social contacts and make new achievements, factors that Rowles (1983) considered as essential in terms of home-making. Malika, for instance, identified communication as essential with regards to home but complained that she could not express herself properly in the Netherlands. During the interview, she emphasized that mutual understanding is essential to make oneself clear and to understand others. She added that in Syria, this was assured by sharing the same language and the same cultural background with others. On the contrary, she feels that in the Netherlands, she always had to explain herself several times, she did not properly understand others and felt depreciated by people who allegedly did not know about her culture and country. Therefore, she drew two speech bubbles (words in the bubble were not elaborated) that symbolize conversation and communication:
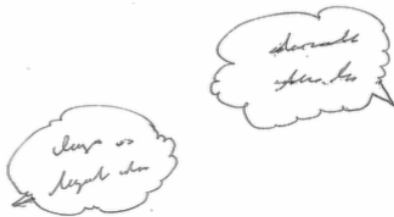
Figure 5 – Communication/Conversation by Malika

However, all participants agreed that the general population speaks English fluently, which facilitated communication to a certain degree but on the other hand made learning Dutch partly redundant.

Other obstacles are legal restrictions and discrimination, factors that socially marginalize refugees and cause feelings of depreciation, exclusion and eventually unhomeliness. While some participants use interviews, work in charity organizations or refugee related events to disabuse people from misconceptions, for instance, by teaching Dutch children about Arabic culture and the struggles of being a refugee (Omar, Chaker), general discrimination prevails. Participants felt offended when they heard accusations of strangers, saying that all refugees came with the intention to exploit the welfare system. The participants of this specific studies had a better socio-economic position in Syria and partly felt ashamed for depending on social welfare. The findings of a study that explored refugees' decision to migrate to the UK from 2002, the belief that social welfare influenced their decision making was proved wrong on a small scale (Robinson & Segrott, 2002).

Especially Omar was deeply afflicted by negative encounters with Dutch citizens, leading to the drastic measure of faking his identity when meeting new people such as his girlfriend.

> **Omar**: *[...] sometimes it was really problem to say that you are Syrian. I speak also Russian, so, sometimes I needed to say that I am Russian so people are not rejecting me!*
>
> **Interviewer**: *Yeah.*
>
> **Omar**: *And, for example, my ex-girlfriend when I met her, at the first day I couldn't say that I am Syrian.*

This behaviour strongly contradicts the idea of place identity as he felt constrained to lie about his very own nationality and identity during an important moment of his life, specifically when meeting his ex-girlfriend. In theory, place identity is part of both place attachment and self-identity as it revolves around memories, feelings and experiences which satisfy individual needs (Proshansky, 1978). Hence, lying about his identity in such a memorisable moment, made him feel very uncomfortable.

However, even though the participants face major obstacles that thwart comfort and belonging, they eventually pursue strategies that can be considered as home-making processes.

4.3.2 Overcoming obstacles – Learning the language

The language barrier has been commonly detected as major issue since the participants characterized language as a key to essential areas of life. These areas of life are reflected in different dimensions of place attachments, such as social or physical place attachment (Scannell & Gifford, 2010). After recognizing this, most participants began to spend more time and focus on learning the language. All participants agreed that after acquiring sufficient language skills, they have not just been perceived differently by Dutch people, they were also able to access jobs, join football clubs or approach neighbours, resulting in ties of enormous value. Chaker, for instance, joined a Dutch football club and said that learning the language made this possible in the first place. Moreover, he felt that people treated him differently.

> **Chaker**: *Yes, I am welcome here. [...] it is because I speak Dutch. Because I saw the difference a few months ago, it was last, in the beginning from this year, actually! It was the Christmas, I do not speak Dutch, I just was speaking English with everyone and I do right now Dutch speaking, but I feel really different with the people, my friends, my Dutch friends. When I speak English, they, they do not do what they do right now! They do not invite me to go with them anywhere! They do not, they would not do a lot of activities with me! But right now, we do a lot of stuff, almost all my day with them right now!*

Also Omar, for instance, who once felt the need to hide his identity, was doing much better because he improved his Dutch and got a job at the Alfa College in Groningen:

> **Omar**: *I showed them what I can do and after that I am now working in Alfa College from 7 months until now [...] They still kind of little fear when I say I am from Syria [...] But I am just saying it, I am not hiding it anymore. When they ask me: Who you are what are you doing here? I say, I am working, I am studying and I speak Dutch [...] and then I say, okay, Ik kom uit Syria!*

When introducing himself to others now, he proudly says that he is working and studying, which does not just boost his confidence, it also gives him purpose, a routine and people who eventually depend on him. Especially purpose and routine as components of cognitive place attachment and physical insideness (Scannell & Gifford, 2010; Rowles 1983) do greatly contribute to participants' sense of belonging as they adapt to the environment.

4.3.3 Physical Insideness

This section covers all place attachments that emerge by means of routines and living practices, such as hobbies, studying, working or any other activities. Since most of the participants' practices are done with others, this area is closely related to social insideness. For instance, by going to university regularly, participants get in touch with other students and eventually find friends. However, physical insideness also gives purpose and a sense of fulfilment and can thus be analysed separately here.

Most participants applied for university quickly because they have been studying in Syria as well and intended to continue their education. In the meantime, some started to work voluntarily (Chaker, Omar, Ali, Adil, Tarek) for charity organizations in Groningen when they had no job or study place at the university yet. Other activities for male participants, besides volunteering and studying, are doing sports in local clubs and. The two female participants took part in extraordinary courses that had been offered by university, namely a salsa and an improvisation course. According to Anton & Lawrence (2014: 459), "involvement in the local area through clubs, volunteering, neighbourhood ties and local association activities is correlated with place attachment and helps people recognise the importance of their sense of place". As soon as other people start to rely on the participants' input and commitment, the ties to the environment are characterized by mutual dependence, whereas refugees predominately depend on others in the beginning of their stay in another

country. In that sense, Anton & Lawrence (2014) describe place attachment also as place identity and place dependence which originate from participating in local activities.

As for the actual differences in the physical environment, participants admitted that they indeed miss the hot temperatures, the Mediterranean Sea or the desert. However, all participants agreed that these factors do not have a lasting effect on home perception. Farid, who is fascinated by the diversity of nature, told me that he missed specific details of his former environment in Syria but learned to appreciate other details in his current environment:

> **Farid**: *[...] So, even I have moved from the Netherlands to another land, like a desert! I will make another small details, which will make me to think how great we are as people, how great the nature made us and, yeah, I am really impressed about the nature, about our diversity [...] But these small details, I make them everywhere I go! Also in my home, I have small details that I like, in our seat now, I have small details I am looking to and I am feeling the energy of the nature. [...] every small details are special. You cannot pick up the details of the Syrian way and put it here in the Netherlands, it would not suit to it. [...] Everything make the picture of these small details as it is in the place it is, so we cannot move it! [...]*

He stressed out that nature is diverse and unique in every single form of appearance, meaning that the environment he was missing in Syria was under no circumstances replaceable. Farid did not explicitly say how exactly he 'made new details' because he could not exactly explain why he felt this way. He emphasized that he learned to simply appreciate the small details of the environment in the Netherlands and thus accept his faith. His very own realization and acceptance of faith contributed to his home-making as it helped him to move on. This strategy of appreciating new details can be considered as adaption as it also revives his fascination for nature in another environment.

Bonding to Groningen as Syrian refugee is not just due to the environmental differences but also due to the great cultural differences challenging. The process is characterized by the loss of old habits but also by gaining new opportunities and new hobbies.

4.3.3.1 Losing old habits

According to Zdanowski (2014) and the participants' statements, the social environment, especially in terms of friendship and kinship, has a higher value in Arabic countries than in European countries. The significance of maintaining social contacts entails routines in which people in Arabic countries, such as the participants in their former lives, regularly come together in common leisure activities. The following quotes and mental maps point out the characteristics that the participants describe as typical Arabic culture and important

component of their former lives, such as smoking shisha together (Fig. 5) or going to a café together (Fig. 6). Even though hobbies and interests are distinctive, the routines and daily lives of the male participants highly corresponded:

> **Chaker**: *[...] they grow up with the, with the Syrian culture, with the Arabic culture! They grow up with every weekend go to the cafe, just smoke Shisha with a lot of people, play some games, then old people drink tea and the, the women sit with each other, we miss this stuff!*

> **Adil**: *But here, it is different. It is so expensive and not so delicious. But the food in Syria is so cheap, so delicious and, yeah! It is a tradition, it is a Syrian or maybe Middle Eastern tradition. Like everybody go every day, especially in the summer. It doesn't matter if it a special event or something, you just go out and eat and enjoy your meal. And I have every day almost breakfast outside, with my friends like. So, I miss the food a lot here.*
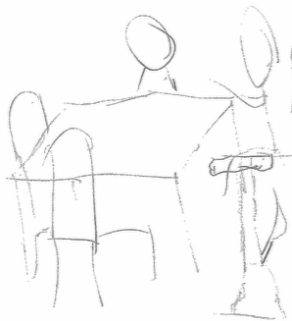

Figure 6 - Shisha café by Ali

Figure 7 - Café by Adil

Communal activities, such as smoking shisha, playing cards and eating together, are described as part of the participants' former routines. In the Netherlands, however, these communal events are not cherished in the same way as participants described Dutch peoples' daily routines as busier and strictly scheduled. Ali also emphasized that he did not deny that smoking Shisha and playing cards is possible in Groningen. Notwithstanding, the social environment where these activities took place is completely different than in Syria and this fact reminded him and his friends that even though they were playing cards like they used to do in Syria, they were strangers:

> **Ali**: *[...] But it is not the same style as there you know like, there like when you are smoking shisha you know here there are a lot of shops for shisha. Playing cards? You can play cards here, but we were doing this between people all doing the same! For example, you are in the club, how do you feel if you are dancing alone and everybody is sitting around. You feel kind of different you don't feel comfortable, yeah, it is kind of the same.*

As stated in the introduction of this chapter, there is an essential differentiation between elements that are replaceable and those that are not. This does not only apply for possessions and social contacts, but also for habits. Losing old habits was either caused by external factors

(e.g. expensive restaurants) or personal ones (e.g. tight schedule). In contrast, living in the physical, social and cultural environment of the Netherlands and especially Groningen, entails previously unknown opportunities to spend the spare time.

4.3.3.2 Using new opportunities

According to the participants, the new environment does also entail a lot of benefits as they characterize Groningen as an open-minded international student city. The participants enjoy the broad study offer and the contact with the international student community. Adil, for instance, said that he felt free to express himself frankly for the first time in his life. In Syria, he felt restricted to openly express his opinion:

> **Adil**: *[…] the social life here, not social life, but I like the open-minded society here. In Syria, you don't have an open-minded society and I think that I learned a lot the last one year. I learned a lot about a lot of things. In Syria, it is still closed community, you can talk only about politics or religion and that's it. And also you can't talk about it openly, you know? So, here I learned and I read about a lot of things, which I would never read about and I would never think about in Syria, yeah.*

Living in Groningen enormously broadened his horizon, resulting in a life situation in which he inheres great advantages compared to his life in Syria. These advantages strengthen his attachment to Groningen, as his knowledge and identity prospers in an environment of newfound freedom. Moreover, he identified partying as a new hobby which not just became an enjoyable and firm component of his everyday life, but gave him the opportunity to meet new people and eventually good friends:

> **Adil**: *I had the same hobbies in Syria as well, but partying was not so possible in Syria that much because when I was there I mean we didn't have, and I lived in a small city, so we don't have clubs. We only party, when there is something, for example, Christmas, New Year's Eve, St. somebody day or like Maries day something like this. So, I used to party like 7 times, 10 times per year. So, I did not have the opportunity to party every weekend, but here it is different and it became as a tradition or something.*

Activities and routines such as partying did not only foster physical place attachment but social place attachment by meeting likewise people who eventually became new friends. The same applies for Safia, whom took part in an improvisation course where she met new friends and had the opportunity to explore herself:

> **Safia**: *My best experience was applying to the improvisation comedy course because I really enjoyed it and I met a lot of international people and you can never say anything wrong you*

can say whatever you want and it is always funny. You really discover yourself while your improvising because you ever say what comes in top of your head.

She said that improvisation courses are generally unknown in the Arabic world and as she described herself as open-minded and curious, she was more than happy to have taken part in the course in Groningen. She specifically enjoyed speaking her mind, a privilege which is according to her and Adil not generally granted in Syria. Following the argument of feeling constrained in public, Safia made an important distinction. She pointed out the different dimensions of home as she distinguished between 'inside' and 'outside' home.

> **Safia**: *Well, I have two aspects of home, one is inside, (raises left hand) one is the outside (raises right hand) [...] I think you can make your own home, if you wanna think in a positive way to be able to carry on with your life you just adapt the word home into your life to make it, you know? In Syria [...] I made my room my home (emphasises) when I go out I try to walk around and force myself being at home [...]*

As mentioned in the conceptualization and reflection on the data collection, home-making as material process with regards to meaningful objects and furniture (Blunt & Dowling, 2006; Miller, 1998) turned out to be not significant. None of the participants identified material things worth mentioning, except Safia. Questions regarding objects and furniture felt sometimes, regarding the severe loss of affiliated persons, inappropriate to ask.

4.3.4   Establish Social Contacts

Since all participants collectively identified social contacts as an essential component of home, establishing new social contacts in Groningen was a major priority for the sake of feeling comfortable and homely. According to the participants, the most important social contacts are relatives and friends:
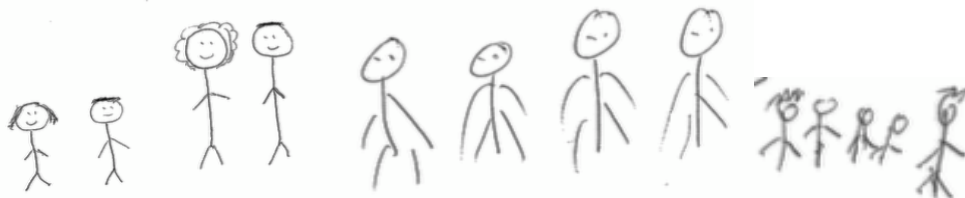

Figure 8 - Family by Malika, Omar and Farid

Figure 9 - Thoughts by Rafik

As briefly mentioned earlier, some participants have or had nuclear family members like parents or siblings who were still living in Syria. Making use of the family reunification law (Adil, Malika, Farid, Tarek) is one essential component of home-making in the Netherlands as it reunites the family and creates social insideness (Rowles, 1983) in Groningen. Farid, for instance, emphasized that the reunification with his family marked a major turning point in his wellbeing and sense of belonging. Like most other participants, he felt disorientated, lonely and uncertain about his future in the beginning. Once his father and siblings arrived, he had begun to feel much better.

Besides family and friends, there are other social actors who influence home-making and home perception such as neighbours. The participants mostly characterized their neighbours as friendly and helpful. However, these ties were considerably weak and not of great importance. Safia was the only participant whose contacts to her neighbours was of greater value because they regularly took care of her cat if she was gone for a few days – and vice versa. She identified her cat as essential to feel comfortable (Fig. 2 at the end of subsection 3.2.2 shows her cat) because she calmed her down and described her cat as 'another soul in her house' and thus she greatly appreciated her neighbours' help.

Finally, establishing social contacts out of a state of loneliness was mostly considered as achievement, which generally strengthens place attachment and hereby introduces the next section of home-making.

4.3.5   New Achievements & Old memories

Another crucial element of place attachment is the identification and the history that is associated with and originates from a place and which is reflected in memories and achievements. A place gets inscribed with meaning, once certain life events take place in it (Rowles, 1983). Achievements and significant memories are differently scaled and located in different aspects of life. As for achievements, participants were particularly proud of how well they are doing in general even though they faced so many obstacles. Hence, overcoming obstacles cannot just be considered as an act of home-making; in retrospect, the successful overcoming itself substantially strengthens place attachment as it is considered as a great achievement. In that regard, Ali gave an illustrative example of his work, as he pinned a newspaper article about his cooperation with refugees in Groningen on his wall:
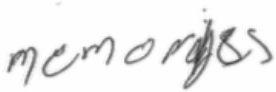
> **Ali***: […] And I start here in Groningen two years ago and if you ask me now, do you want to move somewhere else I will say no! Because I like everything! I feel it, like I build it myself! My relations, my network, my everything, I build it myself, they know now like, okay refugees,*

Ali, Groningen. It's related with each other, you know? Like new activities, you know, like in the newsletter! [...]

Interviewer: *Wow!*

Ali: *I have one there (points to newspaper pinned up on wall)*

These achievements are reflected in the successful establishment of social contacts and the recognition of his good work. According to Ali, having power and influence are crucial to feel home. By expanding his social network and working rigorously, he was able to meet his self-defined needs. Other than achievements, memories can be associated with both positive and negative emotions and are crucial in many perspectives. In general, memories are the product of everyday living practice (Low, 1996) and both consciously and unconsciously contribute to place attachment. The participants told me that they related a lot of memories to the place where they were currently living and thus felt attached to it, such as Omar who was giving presentations in front of a big audience, Chaker who bought a bike before he was buying furniture or Rafik who went swimming during winter. However, due to the unique nature of memories bound to a specific moment in time, they are not repeatable. This gets an even deeper meaning when considering that the participants are not able to even visit the place where most meaningful memories took place. With regards to home, Billal insisted that the memories from his childhood are the most important ones and that these memories are all that is left of his home. He admits that he also memories in the Netherlands, however, they are not as significant as his childhood memories, resulting in his conclusion that home is undoubtedly irreplaceable:

Figure 10 - Memories by Billal

> **Billal**: *Look, you cannot make a new home! (serious) Even if I have now a lot of memories, it is not just like my memories at home because the like most important part in any life's person is the childhood part. When you grow up, when you build your personality.*

This aligns with Blunt & Dowling (2006) who said that refugees' and other migrants' idea of home is often shaped by the memories of the past home. When participants, such as Billal, were talking about their former home in Syria, they also admitted that it has irreversibly changed for worse, resulting in keeping 'romantic memories' about their past. This aligns

with the statement about nostalgia, proposed by Rubenstein (2001: 4). He said that even when migrants return home, "one can never truly return to the original place of childhood, since it exists mostly as a place in the imagination". And when such memories not just shape but define the idea of home, it consequently cannot be rebuilt in another environment. According to Fried (2000), a very strong place attachment can be disadvantageous if it prevents people to consider potential alternatives. This brings me to the last section of this chapter, the question of how the concept of home is perceived by the participants. I began every interview with the mental mapping exercise in which I asked the participants to draw 'home' and its 'most important components' and ended every interview with the request of defining it.

4.4 Home?

As stated previously, while some aspects of feeling and being at home remain irreplaceable, other aspects can be compensated and replaced. This distinction eventually lead the participants to their drawing, final statement or definition about where and what their home is. Omar and Billal had no doubts that Syria remains their home, as their parents and siblings were still living there. According to them, the term home could never be applied to Groningen and the Netherlands because the social and emotional ties to Syria remained more meaningful. Omar used the term 'temporary home' to describe his current living situation:

> **Omar**: *[…] I would say there is no home like my own home! Even with everything, it will never be home, I mean even now my dream is to open my own consultancy, advising and training, even if I open it here or another place it won't feel home. I don't think so! But yeah, a temporary home, I would say, a place where you can find safety and like integrating with the people, with acceptance, of course!*

Even though he certainly denied the possibility of Groningen becoming his home one day, he acknowledged that he felt safe, which is essential certainty considering his past. His mental map supports his opinion, as it displays his family, his studies and his material achievements in Syria and while he is studying and accomplishing new goals in Groningen, his family remains in Syria.

Another finding was that none of the participants said that Groningen is their home. Most participants felt as if they have not completed the process of making a new home yet because of numerous reasons, for instance, lack of language skills or dissatisfaction with work or study situation. However, the intention of eventually making Groningen their home one day is present. In that regard, Ali summarized his thoughts about feeling home and the process of achieving this feeling as follows: first, he said that he perceives home as a place where he enjoys power and influence. In Syria, he owned a computer shop, he had a study diploma and

he a had huge social network in Damascus and he said these aspects were still intact until now. But while he was doing better and better in Syria, his influence and the chance of his shop being still intact decreased steadily:

> **Ali**: *Okay, home for me is when I have power! (definite)*

> **Interviewer**: *When you have power?*

> **Ali**: *Where I have power. Here, I have power now. When I go to Syria AT THIS MOMENT (emphasize) I have more power (laughs).*

> **Interviewer**: *You have more power.*

> **Ali**: *Later, here I have, I am working now on everything I am doing here and my power is growing up in Netherlands and growing less in Syria! [...]*

When our interview was about to end, he summarized his thoughts about home-making of Syrian refugees with an illustration to support his arguments in an intelligible manner. I personally consider this as additional element and crucial benefit of mental mapping as it helped Ali to illustrate and me to understand his argumentation. Before explaining his drawing, one must know that Ali is greatly involved in charity work, translation and administrative work regarding refugees in Groningen, meaning that he knows a lot about procedures, Syrian refugees' stories and their struggles. Together with his own experience, he identified home-making and the eventual feeling of being home as a staircase of inhering knowledge and being used to live in a place:

1) The first step represents refugees in Syria (they) feeling comfortable in Syria.
2) The second step represents the arrival of Syrian refugees in the Netherlands that entails complete unknowingness of how things work in the Netherlands and the unawareness of being unaware.
3) The third step encompasses refugees being aware of unknowingness.
4) The fourth step and final step is reached when Syrian refugees are not aware that they know about the Netherlands.
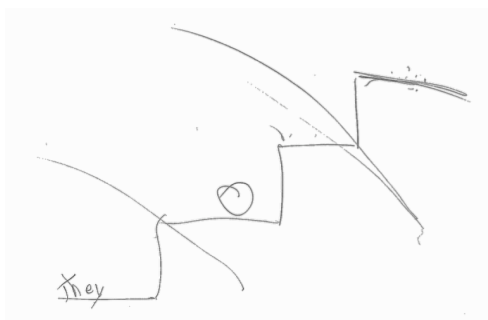

Figure 11 - Staircase by Ali

According to Ali these steps will eventually take several years and once the Syrian refugees have adapted to the Dutch environment to an extent where they equal Dutch citizens and take over their way of thinking, the Netherlands become their new home.

With regards to home, Tarek has been the only participant who drew an imaginary home which is neither located in Syria or in the Netherlands. He drew a cabin in the woods that he would like to dwell in one day and he perceived Groningen as a step to accomplish this dream. He associated a lot of negative memories with Syria because when he was 16 years old the Syrian government put him in jail for two years under false allegations which lead to an extreme level of alienation and breach of trust with authorities. This finding aligns with the idea of imagining home (Al-Ali & Koser, 2002) and as Tarek studies and works to fulfil his dream of living somewhere in the woods, his current life path can be considered as home-making as well, even though it does not aim to create a bonding to Groningen itself.

A very specific case of home perception was the one of Chaker: being a Palestinian from Syria, he belongs to the officially registered group of stateless individuals who are living in the Netherlands (Ministry of Security and Justice, 2017b). Even though he was born, grew up and lived his whole life in Syria, he strongly identified with Palestine as he drew both the Syrian and the Palestinian flag on his mental map:
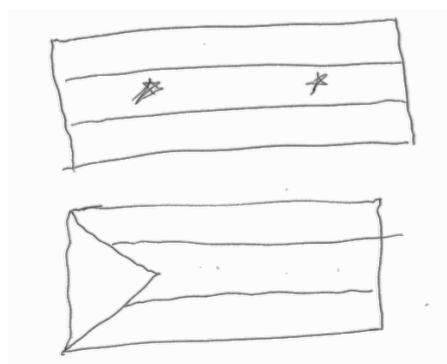
Figure 12 - Syrian flag and Palestinian flag by Chaker

He emphasized that he felt home in Syria because he has never lived somewhere else and felt comfortable before the war started. However, he felt connected to Palestine even though he has not been there once. Moreover, he had a Palestinian flag hanging in his room, which he proudly presented to me. In literature, the flag in his room can be considered as diasporic material homing (Walsh, 2005). A part of material home-making that is perceived as significant reminder of mere places, emotional stories or other comparable links to the former home or the past in general (Walsh, 2005). The connection he felt to Palestine was according to him fostered through stories of his parents and grandparents about the beauty of the

'occupied land' and the injustice they experienced. In a qualitative research that Mohammed Kamel Dorai (2002) conducted in Palestinian refugee camps, he similarly met children of the third exiled generation of Palestinian refugees who insisted that Palestine is their home.

5. <u>Conclusion, limitations and recommendations</u>

This chapter answers the research questions and its sub questions based on the previous chapter. In that process, conclusions are relativized according to the contextualization and reflection on the collaboration of researcher and participants. Before answering the two major research questions, the participants' age is elaborated as it is an essential demographic factor that influences both home-making and home perception. Furthermore, the chapter addresses the research's limitations and provides recommendations for research and policies.

5.1 <u>Reflection on age</u>

Before making any final conclusions, one must take the participant's age into consideration as it is an essential demographic factor that heavily influences home-making and home perception. The participants' young age did only facilitate conversation with the researcher, it also constitutes an essential factor of place attachment in general. As being between 20 and 30 years old, the participants belong to a group that Arnett (2007) described as emerging adulthood. In her conceptualization 'Emerging adulthood: What is it, and what is it good for?', Arnett describes this phase of life as transitional phase to adulthood in the industrialized world which is characterized by little structure, identity explorations, instability and possibilities. In that sense, adapting and attaching to a new place by, for instance, starting a new study program or learning another language is easier to realize for young refugees. Although the effects of age on place attachment are critically debated among researchers (Rollero and De Piccoli, 2010), some researchers such as Hidalgo & Hernandez (2001) state that age correlates with length of staying which eventually correlates with place attachment and place identification because the longer one has lived in one place, the more memories one has inscribed to it and the deeper the rootedness is. They also point out that urban areas involve greater attachment in younger age (Hidalgo & Hernandez, 2001) as they offer a great amount of possibilities, activities and localities. The participants confirmed these statements as they all agreed that the great offer of studies, activities and localities in Groningen paved the way for feeling comfortable. The fact that only young and predominately male participants took part in this research can be considered as limitation, however, in an online article for the Pew Research Center from August 2016, Phillip Connor confirmed that this exact group is most prevalent in the EU-28. In 2015, 73% of all asylum seekers are male of whom 83% were male with consistent age and gender patterns for the biggest asylum seeker groups, such as Syrians (Connor, 2016). Therefore, the study is significant as it researches refugees with the most common demographic characteristics.

How do social relations, the furniture of the dwelling place and the daily routines influence the home-making process?

This research question is exclusively based on theoretical considerations (Rowles, 1983; Miller, 1998; Scannell & Gifford 2010) as these aspects of home-making put emphasize on social interactions, material home-making and habitudinal routines. Social relations are of utmost importance as most participants came to the Netherlands on their own. Most of them felt lonely and disorientated in the beginning as they knew little on how to approach other people at first. Once participants established social contacts, they felt much more comfortable in Groningen. Habitudinal routines were also considered important as days became filled with purpose again after living in asylum seeker centers in which days were characterized by uncertainty and futility. These two aspects are eminently intertwined as the participant's routines were mostly done with others and thus demonstrable strengthened social ties.

The material character of making a new home, which does involve furniture, did not play a major role in this research for several reasons. First, the research's focus predominantly laid on the processes that increased attachment outside the actual dwelling place. In addition, questions about valuable objects have been erased from the interview guide over the course of the data collection. Moreover, not all interviews took place in the participants' flats which prevented me to make observations in the flat and take probes from the environment. However, some participants put great emphasize on objects: One participant was particularly proud of buying a bike, as it symbolized Dutch lifestyle. Moreover, a Palestinian flag was identified as a symbol and reminder of the participant's heritage. Another participant made a distinction between 'inside' and 'outside' home and emphasized that she put great value on feeling comfortable inside the house. Most participants, however, attached more importance to social ties and activities.

To what extent are memories influencing the perception of home?

Memories turned out to have an immense influence on the perception of home for Syrian refugees which aligns Blunt & Dowling (2006) who stated that the refugees' idea of home is often shaped by memories of the past home. None of the participants has ever moved before eventually fleeing the country, also because their families were deeply rooted in the cities and regions they came from. Moreover, most significant life events and achievements have taken

place in Syria and are consequently bound to these places. For refugees, memories become more valuable as they are generally not able to return and places of significance might have been destroyed. Therefore, memories are literally all what is left of their past life, resulting in the realization that home had to be rebuild in another place.

What characterizes the home-making process of Syrian refugees living in the Netherlands?

Summarizing, the most important aspects of making a new home for the participants in Groningen were: pursuing new purpose, establishing new contacts and doing new activities. All participants began or planned to begin a study program in Groningen, which eventually lead to a purposeful daily structure and prospects. Moreover, many participants started to work voluntarily which gave additional purpose and the ability to both, helping fellow refugees and getting to know other people. Most participants felt lonely in the beginning and thus were keen to establish social contacts quickly. However, the language barrier and cultural differences were, among others, identified as obstacles that had to be overcome. Hence, home-making for Syrian refugees can be, despite the generally welcoming atmosphere in Groningen, characterised as a process of overcoming obstacles, adapting and replacing, as habits from the former home in Syria were abandoned, new hobbies pursued and daily routes restructured.

How does this home-making process interact with the perceptions of home?

As visualized in the conceptual model, the home-making process and the perception of home are mutually influencing each other. The memories of and experiences in the former home in Syria provided the refugees with an idea of home on arrival in the Netherlands and participants tried to pursue the same activities and habitudinal routines they had in Syria. However, as the conditions have changed, refugees could not simply live the same way they used to do for several reasons. While some activities stayed the same, the physical, social and cultural environment has changed, resulting in the loss of old habits and the gain of new opportunities. As refugees used their given surroundings to make a new home in the Netherlands, their perception of home consequently changed as they perceived Groningen as their potential home or temporary home. Notwithstanding, for refugees who perceive their former home in Syria as irreplaceable or want to return because of emotional or social ties, the process of making a new home in the Netherlands does not significantly influence their perception. The interaction of home-making and home perception is thus mutual.

5.3 <u>Limitations</u>

The research's result must be treated with caution and before drawing any general conclusions or intending to transfer results to comparable research contexts, it is crucial to acknowledge the limits of transferability. There are multiple methods to evaluate the quality of qualitative research such as the establishment of trustworthiness (Stratford and Bradshaw, 2016) by means of researching rigorously. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), trustworthiness in qualitative research encompasses credibility, dependability, conformability as well as transferability, meaning that findings are applicable in other contexts. While all aspects were considered during the research process by means of circularity and continuous reflexivity throughout all stages of research, the transferability of results has its limits.

First, one must consider that conclusions have been drawn from researching a narrowly defined research group in a specific urban context, namely young Syrian refugees in Groningen. Therefore, these results cannot simply be applied to other groups of refugees in the Netherlands or other host countries because of factors such as age, the societal and cultural differences and other circumstances, such as integration policies or the social environment of other host societies. All participants were either students or prospective students and identified Groningen as multicultural, open-minded student city. Hence, the experiences of living in such a city presumably differ from living experiences in other cities. Additionally, the participants were not explicitly asked about gender issues because it would have gone beyond the scope of this research. However, home perceptions are critically gendered in theory (Bowlby, 1997) and in Arabic societies, patriarchy generally remains present and both genders are distributed social roles in family or public life (Zdanowski, 2014). While traditional role models predominantly prevail in rural areas, these role models are rather inconsistent in urban areas. Thus, the former living place of the participants must be considered when transferring results to other contexts.

Moreover, the research implied some methodological limitations. One crucial limitation in this qualitative research was the participants' possibility to articulate themselves. Although the participants had sufficient English skills to express themselves during the interview, precisely elaborating on the idea of home is a difficult task when done in a foreign language. While many qualitative cross cultural studies are conducted in a foreign language, many researchers are concerned about ethics of translations and the potential loss of meaning and context while doing it (Müller, 2007; Shklarov, 2007; Helms, Lassau & Oslender, 2005). Since the whole study was conducted in English, the potential drawbacks of translating as a researcher remained absent. However, a few participants sometimes struggled to find the right words and only had a limited vocabulary. Pred (1989: 213) emphasized that "language is

acquired in childhood and beyond, is developed and altered throughout life, through socialization, through entering into an already constructed matrix of comprehension, through participating in *location-specific and time-specific practices* [emphasis added], in meaning-filled situations." Pred underlines that language is not just associated with a specific location in a specific time but also developed in these contexts. Consequently, the language that has been developed in these contexts are inseparably linked to everything that revolves around them. Therefore, participants would have been presumably more competent to talk about experiences in Syrian places, which might have been beneficial to understand home-making in the Netherlands, in Arabic language.

Furthermore, as the researcher has erased questions regarding material home-making from the interview guide after the first interviews, some potential insights could have been lost, also because not all interviews took part in the participants' homes.

5.4 Recommendations

This last section briefly elaborates on recommendations for potential research and the development of integration policies in the Netherlands.

Due to the narrowly defined research group of this research, other relevant issues regarding home-making and home perception of Syrian refugees or any other refugees in the Netherlands could be researched more comprehensively. Some aspects that could further researched are gender issues or differentiation of urban and rural home-making of refugees in the Netherlands. Furthermore, the study could be expanded to a longitudinal one by following up participants and interview them again at some point in the future to find out if their sense of belonging has changed and if it has become more intense over time, such as it is proposed by Hidalgo and Hernandez (2001). Another approach to further work with the research's findings is by testing them in a quantitative manner, for instance, by making questionnaires based on inductively derived themes. Consequently, obstacles and barriers as well as preference and relevance structures can be determined more precisely and possibly generalized to create a foundation for policies.

In general, the need for policies reform is low within EU standards. According to the Reform Barometer 2016, the Netherlands ranked 4th out of EU-28 in the Social Justice Index 2015 and had, according to experts, a comparably low need for policy reforms (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2017). Additionally, the need for poverty prevention is determined as low by experts, with slightly higher needs for subgroups such as refugees (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2017). At present, the Dutch government accommodates asylum seekers preferably segregated from the general population (Bakker et al., 2016) which apparently turns out to be anti-integrative, as

participants have only limited possibility and little knowledge about integrating properly. Governments generally argue that integration starts after receiving the refugee status (Bakker et al., 2016), however, many participants in this study claimed to have little knowledge about approaching people properly even after being granted asylum. Di Saint Pierre et al. (2015) identified social and cultural isolation, among others, as influential factors for refugees' intention to return. Therefore, integration policies that not specifically target social and cultural integration lead to a segmented society in which refugees have not even the intention to stay longer.

One of the participants, for instance, complained that he did not know how to approach the neighbours and vice versa. With regards to that statements, I hereby propose to make integration a goal for both, the asylum seekers and the host society. On the homepage of the Dutch government, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment often emphasizes that refugees must take action to integrate (Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment, 2017). To me and the participants this makes perfect sense. However, with regards to the increasing popularity of right-wing parties in Europe and the limited knowledge about refugees and their culture of the host society's general population, the Dutch government could involve the population in the integration. Several terrorist attacks happened in the recent years and in the Dutch domestic context, incidents such as the murder of politician Pim Fortuyn and director Theo van Gogh fostered the anti-Islam atmosphere in political discourses (Entzinger, 2014). In order to establish social cohesion, it is important to take misconceptions and reservations from the native population. For instance, by funding and offering foreign language courses of refugees' languages and increase the effort to reduce discrimination by promoting mutual cultural understanding efficiently. Di Saint Pierre et al. (2015) suggested that integration policies must also consider attitudes of the native majority.

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Appendix I – Interview guide

Interview guide

<u>Information about participant:</u>

Name:

Gender:

Age:

Occupation:

Type of dwelling place:

Dwelling place shared with:

Urban/Rural dwelling place:

In this dwelling place since:

In the Netherlands since:

Former occupation/education:

Former dwelling place:

Briefly introducing the interview

As you could read in the information letter, this research is about home-making and home perception of Syrian refugees in the Netherlands. Therefore, I would like to conduct an interview with you about your experiences, beliefs and perceptions. I would like to emphasize that your participation in my study is voluntary and if you don't feel comfortable at any point of time, we can stop the interview. Moreover, I am going to record our interview and take some notes. I guarantee that all collected data, especially sensitive data such as your name, address, age etc. will be anonymized, meaning that none of your answers can be related to you. The only person that will partially read what you have said, is my supervisor Dr. Louise Meijering, but even she does not know your identity. I will use this interview exclusively for my research and will not give any information to any third parties! Therefore, I want to emphasize that you can be absolutely frank! First, we're going to talk a little bit about your experiences and your wellbeing in the Netherlands. Then we continue with your social environment and eventually with your former living place in Syria.

Do you have any questions about the interview?

Please, do not hesitate to ask!

If there are no questions left, we can start now and I turn on the recorder.

[REC ●]

Block I – Satisfaction with current dwelling place

Key question (Narrative stimuli)	Check – Has this been mentioned? Checklist with concepts/topics– only ask, if not mentioned yet!	Precise content-related questions	Phrases to maintain the conversation and clarify statements – Follow-up questions
Media reports about refugees almost every day, however, most people do not know what it is like to being forced to flee from a country and make a new home in another country. So, my first question is, do you feel comfortable living in your new dwelling place here in the Netherlands and why/why not?	- Comfort - Anything missing? - Feelings - Inconveniences - Independence / dependence - Safety - Best / worst experience	- What exactly makes you feel this way? - What is important for you in terms of feeling well in your own place? - What was your first impression of this dwelling place? - What is the first thing you did, when you moved in here? - What makes you feel good in here? - Is there anything that particularly annoys you in this place?	- [Nonverbal continuity] - Can you give me an example? - How exactly do you mean that? - Could you tell me more about that? - And what happened next? - Can you tell me why? - Can you explain why?

Block II –Adaption to physical environment

Key question (Narrative stimuli)	Check – Has this been mentioned? Checklist with concepts/topics– only ask, if not mentioned yet!	Precise content-related questions	Phrases to maintain the conversation and clarify statements – Follow-up questions
Alright, we have talked about the place itself and how you feel about it. Now, I would like to know how you spend your time. In other words, how does a typical day in your life looks like?	- Routine - Hobbies/Activities - Adaption/Familiarization - Differences in physical environment - Weather / Air - Dutch lifestyle - Insuperable obstacles	- How do you spend your spare time? - What do you like to do on a weekend? - Did you have the same hobbies in Syria? - Are you used to live here? - How long did it take to get used to this place? - How does it feel to live in the Netherlands? - How is Groningen different to your former dwelling place?	- [Nonverbal continuity] - Can you give me an example? - How exactly do you mean that? - Could you tell me more about that? - And what happened next? - Can you tell me why? - Can you explain why?

Block III – Social environment

Key question (Narrative stimuli)	Check – Has this been mentioned? Checklist with concepts/topics– only ask, if not mentioned yet!	Precise content-related questions	Phrases to maintain the conversation and clarify statements – Follow-up questions
Thank you for sharing all this information with me. Since we talked about you personally, I would like to know more about your social contacts. So, how would you describe your current social life?	- Landlord - Room mates - Neighbours - Friends - Dutch/Syrians - Relatives - Communication	- How is the relationship with your roommates? - Do you get along with your neighbours? - Do you speak Dutch? Do you have any problems communicating here? - With whom you spend most of your time here? - Are your friends/relatives important to make you feel more comfortable here and why?	- [Nonverbal continuity] - Can you give me an example? - How exactly do you mean that? - Could you tell me more about that? - And what happened next? - Can you tell me why? - Can you explain why?

Block IV – Perception of home

Key question (Narrative stimuli)	Check – Has this been mentioned? Checklist with concepts/topics– only ask, if not mentioned yet!	Precise content-related questions	Phrases to maintain the conversation and clarify statements – Follow-up questions
Great, we have covered almost all questions on my list, there is only one question left. When you think back about what we've just talked about and all the feelings that emerge	- Former life - Definition - New home - Old home - Two homes - Change of perception - Feelings - Cultural differences - Identification	- What was the most important event your life and where took it place? - What was home for you back then, did you consciously think about it before you fleet? - What emotions do you connect with home? - Can you identify yourself with the place your living in, why/why not?	- [Nonverbal continuity] - Can you give me an example? - How exactly do you mean that? - Could you tell me more about that? - And what happened next? - Can you tell me why? - Can you explain why?

Closing the interview

Alright, our interview is about to end now.

Do you have the feeling that we left anything out? Is there anything on your mind, you would like to add? Is there anything you did not mentioned yet?

Great, thanks a lot for answering my questions and for speaking frankly. This interview will play an important role for my research and I guarantee again that all the information you have just told me won't be given to any third parties and that your data will be anonymized.

[STOP ■]

Information letter regarding the research 'Home-making and home perception of Syrian refugees in the Netherlands'

This letter contains all relevant information about the general goals of and your role as a participant in the research of 'Home-making and home perception of Syrian refugees in the Netherlands'. This research is carried out in the context of a master thesis in the M. Sc. Population Studies at the Rijksuniversiteit Groningen. If there is anything unclear or you have any questions or concerns after reading this letter, please let me know.

Goal

The goal of this study is to understand how and to what extent Syrian refugees, who have been granted asylum and do live independently, make themselves a home in the Netherlands. What experiences, feelings and characteristics are part of the home-making and how is home perceived in general?

Your role as a participant!

The study consists of an interview that will last approximately 45 - 60 minutes, depending on how detailed you would like to elaborate on the questions. Subjects that will be discussed during the interview are related to your daily activities, social network and your

connection to your current place as well as your former living place in Syria. Additionally, before doing the interview, you will be asked to draw a map of features that are important for you in terms of home. Lastly, it is important to note that participation in this research is voluntarily. You can end the interview at any point in time without asked for reason.

What happens with the interview?

With your permission, the interview will be recorded with an audio recorder. By doing so, I completely focus on our dialogue without forgetting any details of the interview afterwards. I assure you that all information will be treated with full confidentiality and anonymity. They will not be traceable or identifiable because the interview will be written down and your name will be replaced with a pseudonym.

Consent form regarding the research 'Home-making and home perception of Syrian refugees in the Netherlands'

I,.., affirm that I have read and understood the attached information letter.

Signature: ....

Date: .... / .... / ....

I, ..., hereby declare that I have fully informed the participant about the content and his/her participation in this research project. If, during the examination, information could potentially influence participant's permission, I will share this information with the participant.

Signature: ....

Date: .... / .... / ....

Appendix III – Codebook

Code	Code description + Subcodes
(I) = Inductive	
(D) =Deductive	

Place identity (D)

Identification with a place that encompasses physical and symbolic elements of locations that contribute to group- or self-identity

Symbolic elements:

    Flag

    Syrian birds

Person Dimension of Place Attachment (D)

Experiences, meanings, and memories that a person individually inheres. On a group level, this connection involves symbolic meanings and the shared cultural background.

Positive Experiences

Negative Experiences

Group level (D)

        Shared cultural beliefs in Syria

        Strong social ties in Syria

        Helping other Syrian refugees in Groningen

Communal events (I)

        Eating together in Syria

        Playing cards together in Syria

        Smoking Shisha together in Syria

Autobiographical Insideness (D)   The meaning a place gets, when certain life events take place in it.

Certain life events (I)

        War in Syria

        Detention in Syria

        Fleeing from Syria

        Obtaining university diploma in Syria

        Finding a new dwelling place in Groningen

Meeting/Breakup with girlfriend in Groningen

Acceptance to study/work

Process Dimension of Place Attachment (D)   Entails all kinds of interactions and relations people connect with places, namely affect, cognition and behaviour.

Physical Insideness (D)   A person's awareness of the physical environment, based on behaviour rituals and everyday living practise.

Activities/Habits (D)

Sports

Working voluntarily for charity organization

Side-jobs

Partying

Studying

Taking part in language courses

Place Dimension of Place Attachment (D)   Social and physical features of a place.

Social environment in Syria	vs.	Social environment in Groningen
Narrow-minded society		Open-minded/multi-cultural society

Strong social ties		Weaker social ties
Big families		Some relatives
Regular contact with neighbours		Superficial contact with neighbours
Childhood friends		New friends (Syrian/Dutch/International)

Physical environment in Syria	vs.	Physical environment in Groningen
Cafés / Shisha-cafés		Urban area
Warm temperatures/sunny		Colder temperatures/rainy
Desert		Many bars/nightclubs
Mediterranean Sea		

Social Insideness (D)　　　　　　　Social meaning of a place, which evokes through social interaction and relations in a place.

Feelings and Emotions attached to a place (D)　　　Entirety of feelings attached to it

Positive emotions in Syria	vs.	Negative emotions in Syria
Belongingness		Alienation
Comfort		Unsecure/Unsafe

Safety/Security		Breach of trust/Breach of faith
Steadiness/Constancy		
Happiness		
Feeling understood		
Positive emotions in Groningen	vs.	Negative emotions in Groningen
Belongingness		Rejection
Comfort		Uncertain/Doubtful
Safety/Security		Loneliness
Regained Steadiness/Constancy		Underappreciated
Relief		Feeling not understood
Happiness		Missing Syria
Hope/Prospects/Optimistic		
Grateful		
Freedom		

Home-making (D)	Process of making a place one's home by inscribing meaning to it and attaching to it by means of everyday living practice which is both a material and imaginative process.
	Material Process (linked to physical objects)

Buying furniture

Buying a bike

Cats/Animals

Home-making as process of adapting (I)

Learning the language

Learning about the culture/habits

Home-making as process of replacing (I)

Finding new hobbies/activities

Finding new studies

Finding new friends

Finding new purpose

Home-making as overcoming obstacles (I)

Learning language

Disabuse people from misconception

Going out alone to establish social contacts

Transnational Ties of refugees (D)   Maintenance of deep, emotional attachment to former home, while making a new home in a host country.

Family in Syria

Friends in Syria

Business in Syria

Memories in Syria

Missing habits/Arabic culture/physical environment