

**Intentions to return to Syria:
The case of Syrian refugees residing in the Netherlands**

A qualitative approach

Master Population Studies

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“Imagination is more important than knowledge”

-Albert Einstein

“You never know how strong you are until being strong is the only choice you have”

-Bob Marely

Abstract

Return migration studies have shown the difficulty of the decision-making process for migrants and refugees to return to the country of origin. Studying return intentions relies on showing what factors can relate to the choice of return to the country of origin. However, return can be different among different group of migrants. There is a lack of literature regarding return intentions of refugees who are living in exile, and this study aimed to add an understanding of return intentions when actual return is not yet possible. Refugees are forced migrants and may have a different perception towards return and it is not known how they perceive and intend return before actually being able to return. Many Syrian refugees would have not left Syria if it were not for the war that started in 2011 and is still ongoing.

This study aims to understand return intentions of Syria refugees in the Netherlands from a qualitative approach and within the Reasoned action approach theoretical frame work. Thirteen in-depth interviews were carried out and analysed. Finding revealed that intentions differ when distinguishing between permanent and temporarily return. Also intentions can be expressed with certainty as well as uncertainty. The concepts of the Reasoned action approach gave in-sights into the explanations of return intentions. Return was expressed to be difficult when considering the reasons for leaving and imagining reintegration. On the other hand, motives for return were related to return intentions. Participants showed independency and did not comply strongly to norms. However, official procedures, safety and personal capability were taken into account when thinking about return intentions. Lastly, even though thinking about return is a part of the participant's daily lives, it did not seem to affect their thoughts and perceptions on integration and building a new life in the Netherlands. Further research may be required to follow changes in intentions and gain an understanding of what may trigger these changes.

Keywords: Return migration, Return intentions, Forced migration, Syrian refugees, the Reasoned action approach.

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1. Introduction

Migration has been increasing internationally which demands ongoing research, such as studying motives for migration. Understanding the motives for migration gives more knowledge on migratory and return migratory patterns (UN, 2016).

Over the years, research on migration shows that reasons for migration vary among people, as some people migrate for better job opportunities or following family members, while others migrate to seek safety and security, and subsequently, reasons to return after exile will vary too (Klinthall, 2007; Makina, 2012). It has been shown that people intend to migrate either permanently, seeking better living conditions in the host country than the country of origin, or temporarily, studying abroad for a few years and ultimately returning to their country of origin. Eventually migrants' intentions towards return may change due to their experiences abroad (Bilgili and Siegel, 2017).

Return migration and return migration intentions studies revealed the difficulty of making the choice of return. They shared that reasons for return were depended on the presence of family in country of origin, whether people had children of their own, or it was the process of returning home when the country of origin is considered 'home' (Omata, 2013; Konzett-Smoliner, 2016). However, studies distinguish between the types of migration, whether economic migrant or forced migrants (Klinthall, 2007; Makina, 2012). There have been some studies on the return of refugees and wishes of refugees to return (Di Saint Pierre et al., 2015). What is not known, is the 'imagined' return and the intentions of people to return to their country of origin while returning is yet not possible. It is important to understand return from the refugees' perspectives and narratives and why would they intend to return or not because they do not always actually return when they are able as expected (Essuman-Johnson, 2011). This study will focus on the Syrian refugees living in the Netherlands because they are not able to return to Syria due to the ongoing conflict (IND, 2016b).

1.1 Return migration and intentions

Return migration is acknowledged when the migrant is returning to his country of citizenship (OECD, 2001). Studies on return migration started to explore what type of migrants have returned, their reasons and motives and therefore, return migration has been conceptualized within migration theories (Cassarino, 2004). These theories aim to explain the return migration phenomena which included the neoclassical economics, the new economics of labour migration, the structuralism and the transnationalism theories (Todaro, 1969; Stark 1991; Cassarino 2004; Portes et al., 1999). The concern with migration theories was their focus on only economic migrants, whereas international migration is made up of a diverse flow which also include forced migrants, such as asylum seekers and refugees (Stalker, 2003). Moreover, they do not aim to understand the intentions of migrants to return before actually returning.

The importance of return migration intentions, just like migration intentions, relies on predicting what type of migrants are more likely to return to their country of origin and what they need in order to do so, thus helping in shaping policies for both sending and receiving (Cassarino, 2004). It is considered that intentions serve as good predictors for later behaviour of migration in the future (Van Dalen and Henken, 2013). Thinking about return to the country of origin, therefore intending to return, is a part of the migrants' lives and it is referred to as the 'myth of return' (Anwar, 1979), therefore, intentions to return migration are associated with the behaviour of migrants in the host country, such as learning the language and integrating in the host country or investing money in the country of origin rather than in the host country (Chabé-Ferret et al., 2016). Previous literature has shown the lack of

information about the attitudes of return, motivations, personal experiences and feelings related to return (Klinthall, 2007).

Research on refugees' return to their country of origin has been introduced due to the complexity of refugees' return after years in exile (Omata, 2013). Return was considered to be the end of the refugee cycle, because it was expected that after the war ends in a country, refugees would return permanently as a repatriation return (Toft, 2000). However, refusing repatriation by refugees has been noticed, challenging the UNHCR of what is considered safe and liveable in the country of origin after the war is over, in order to return (Essuman-Johnson, 2011). Refugees have their concerns of what is safe to rebuild their lives and reintegrate again in their country of origin upon repatriation (Zimmermann, 2012).

Yet these studies were about refugees who already had the ability to return, but it is not known how refugees view and consider return while still in exile unable to return. Expecting refugees' return does not mean their actual return, therefore understanding their return intentions prior of their ability to return helps with exploring reasons and motives related to their return or refusal of return.

To study the intention to return, this study will make use of the Reasoned action approach. The theory of reasoned action and its improved model, the theory of planned behaviour, have been used in research on migration intentions and return migration (Lu, 1998; Muggeridge and Dona, 2006; Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975; Ajzen, 1991). However, the recent updated version of the previous theories, the Reasoned action approach (Fishbein and Ajzen, 2010), has not been found in migration intentions.

1.2 Syrian refugees in the context of Netherlands

Today Syria is facing war that had started as a revolt against the Syrian president back in 2011 (Rodgers et al., 2016). The war caused the beginning of a forced migration era for the Syrians (Ostrand, 2015). Millions of Syrians were forced to leave their homes due to the war, becoming either internally displaced refugees in Syria or refugees in neighbouring countries such as Turkey and Lebanon (UNHCR, 2014). Another option was seeking asylum in European countries, amongst which is the Netherlands, which recognizes both the Geneva convention on refugees and the European convention on human rights and grants asylum to people after their case is investigated (IND, 2016b). A total of 20,780 Syrians were registered to be present in the Netherlands in 2015 (CBS, 2016).

The population growth in the Netherlands has been growing mainly because of the increased influx of migration (CBS, 2017). Amongst the influx of migration are the asylum seekers, in which the majority of them were Syrians that made up of 34% of total asylum requests (IND, 2016b). Moreover, the Syrian refugees count the most for the population growth of the Netherlands (CBS, 2017).

In November 2015, around 400 refugees stated their wish to leave the Netherlands, among them many Syrians who did not even start the asylum procedure yet (Idetroch, 2016). Those who wish to return can do so as their return is mediated by the International Organization for Migrants but for Syrians it was not possible due to their critical case (IND, 2016b). Because the situation in Syria today is uncertain, it may increase the difficulty of Syrian refugees' return decision, or even make it impossible. However, thinking about return, imagining it or even intending to return in the future can be part of their daily lives (Grieshaber, 2016). Omata (2013), explained the complexity of the refugees' decision to return to their country of origin, because it was a continuous weighing between considering options and conditions in both host and origin country to actually return. Therefore, it shows the importance of studying the refugees' perspectives on return while they are not being able to return and how it can be related to their daily lives.

1.3 Relevance and Objective

Refugees have an impact on the host country, politically, socially, and economically, therefore many studies have been implemented in order to help in shaping policies of the host country, such as migration policies, integration policies, work permit policies, and health system policies (OECD, 2016). Often studies in the Netherlands concerning refugees were implemented to study refugees' health statuses and conditions, their social integration experience and their progress in the labour market in both quantitative and qualitative approaches (Bakker et al., 2016a; Bakker et al., 2016b; De Vries et al., 2016). Research of the refugee's intentions to return to their original country was not established in the Netherlands and this field may contribute to policies of integration and repatriation. Studying the intentions of refugees to return and how these intentions play a role in their daily behaviours, can help in understanding the refugees' perceptions of what is needed for return or integration. It was suggested that policies of return will not carry out optimal solutions unless researchers understand the perception of refugees regarding return (Zimmermann, 2012).

In the Netherlands, many departments are involved in procedures concerning asylum seekers, such as Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers (COA), Immigration and Naturalisation Service (IND), and the Repatriation and Departure Service (DT&V) (European Migration Network, 2012). If the asylum seeker were granted an asylum, other procedures follow that include housing and learning Dutch as part of integration policies in the Netherlands. Asylum permit holders are allowed to enter the labour market as well as the educational system (IND, 2016b). Integration policies for refugees in the Netherlands are aiming to find the ultimate solution for a successful integration (Engbersen et al., 2015). As for individuals who have been denied the asylum or their residency permits are no longer valid, are required to leave the Netherlands and the DT&V is responsible for their repatriation (DT&V, 2016). In 2008, one of the aspects the policies of migration the Netherlands focused on was 'promoting permanent return and reintegration' (European Migration Network, 2012). This diversity of departments and procedures concerning refugees shows how migration policies play a role in other policies, such as integration policies, in many divisions. Migration policies in the Netherlands are always improving to achieve sustainable migration movement, and obtaining an efficient and fast procedure of entry to the Netherlands and integration as well as repatriation from the Netherlands (European Migration Network, 2012). Therefore, studying refugees' intentions to return to their country of origin may help in migration policies in order to understand what type of refugees may stay or return.

This study aims to understand return intentions of Syrian refugees who are currently residing in the Netherlands in a qualitative approach. The literature lacks research on the intentions of the refugees' to return and the goal of this research is to explore how refugees intend to return while return is not yet possible rather than actual return. Moreover, this study is expecting to explore how do these intentions and thoughts about return relate to their daily lives and concerns.

1.4 Research question

From the previous, the main research question was formulated:

In the context of the Netherlands, what are the intentions of Syrian refugees to return to Syria, and how do these intentions play a role in their daily lives and concerns?

The sub-questions developed were the following three questions based on the Reasoned action approach (Fishbein and Ajzen, 2010):

1. What are the behavioural attitudes that are believed by the Syrian refugees regarding return to Syria?
2. What are the subjective norms perceived by the Syrian refugees regarding return to Syria?
3. What is the perceived behaviour control that Syrian refugees believe to control them regarding return to Syria?

1.5 Structure of the thesis

This thesis includes five main chapters, the introduction, that has been presented so far, was the first chapter. Further on, the second chapter discusses the theoretical framework of this study, and also presenting the literature review and the conceptual model. The third chapter, methodology, elaborates on the research design of the study and the methods and analysis used. The fourth chapter, findings, presents the results obtained. The fifth is the last chapter, discussion and conclusion, which describes the main outcomes of this study, the limitations in this study, and further research which may be required.

2. Theoretical Frame Work

In this chapter, the theoretical background the study was based on is explained. The Reasoned action approach and its relevance in this study are described. Then the conceptual model is presented and finally the literature review found related to this study.

2.1 Theory of reasoned action approach

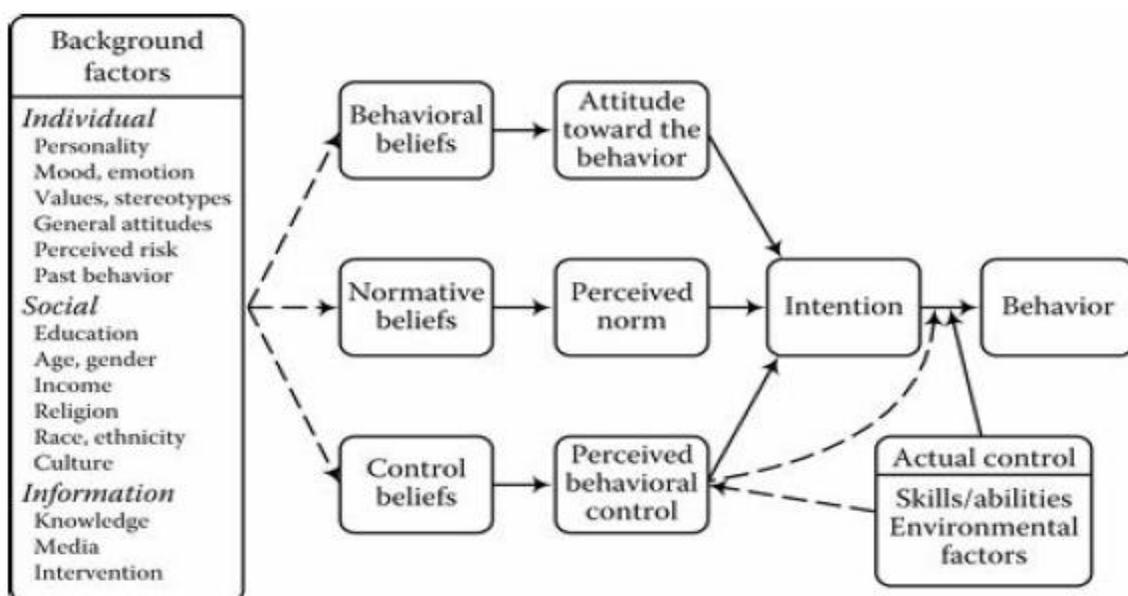
Within this study the Reasoned action approach by Fishbein and Ajzen (2010), has been chosen to analyse the intentions to return of Syrian refugees. The Reasoned action approach is an updated version of Fishbein and Ajzen theories of reasoned action and theory of planned behaviour.

The theory of reasoned action was first introduced in 1975 by Fishbein and Ajzen. It theorized that behaviour can be predicted by intentions, and intentions are controlled by behavioural attitudes and subjective norms (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975). Then it was improved in 1991 by Ajzen to become the theory of planned behaviour. In this updated version the concept perceived behaviour control was added, as it can lead to intentions as well as controlling an individual directly towards the behaviour (Ajzen, 1991). The need for this update was due to the importance of taking the individual's background characterises into account as they may play a role in one's behavioural attitude and subjective norms (Fishbein and Ajzen, 2010).

The three theories discussed that human behaviour is derived from the intentions, therefore changes in intentions can lead to changes in the behaviour (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975; Ajzen, 1991; Fishbein and Ajzen, 2010).

In the context of the Reasoned action approach, intentions for behaviour are guided by three concepts; behavioural attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behaviour control. These three dimensions can variate towards an intention to carry out a certain behaviour taking into account one's background factors (Fishbein and Ajzen, 2010). A model of reasoned action approach is shown in figure 1. The next paragraph will explain the concepts of: intentions, behavioural attitude, subjective norms, perceived behavioural control and background factors.

Figure 1. Theory of reasoned action approach model.



(Source: Fishbein and Ajzen, 2010)

2.1.1 Concepts of the Reasoned action approach

Intentions in the Reasoned action approach are meant to be the predictor of the behaviour. It indicates the individual's readiness or will to perform a certain behaviour. Intention is mediated by behavioural attitudes, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control (Fishbein and Ajzen, 2010).

Behavioural attitude is defined as "the latent disposition to respond with some degree of favourableness or unfavourableness to a psychological object" (Fishbein and Ajzen, 2010, p.132). Hence, it is the opinion of the individual towards carrying out a specific behaviour. Behavioural attitude is controlled by behavioural beliefs one has. The behaviour could have a negative attitude believed by the individual or a positive attitude, either attitude determines a stronger or weaker intention towards that behaviour (Fishbein and Ajzen, 2010).

Subjective norms specifies the role of the individual's significant others or the societies norms which may play a role in how an individual perceives a behaviour and the role of these norms in the decision to carry out a certain behaviour or not. Subjective norms are controlled by normative beliefs one knows and expects. An individual will take into account the judgement of his loved ones and the social pressure he will face concerning the behaviour. The individual will consider other's opinions that will affect his intentions that will lead to the behaviour (Fishbein and Ajzen, 2010).

Perceived behaviour control is defined as "the extent to which people believe that they are capable of performing a given behaviour or attaining a certain goal." (Fishbein and Ajzen, 2010, p.180). In other words, it is what the individual believes that could control him, either the own capability or the outside surroundings that might facilitate or hinder him to carry out a behaviour. An individual will consider the difficulties he ought to face in order to perform a behaviour. The more obstacles he has to face the more or the less it may influence his intention's strength towards that behaviour (Fishbein and Ajzen, 2010).

For example, intentions towards performing physical activity as a behaviour has been theorized (Motalebi et al., 2014). The positive behavioural attitude towards physical activity can be related to a belief that with physical activity one will lose weight and become healthier. Subjective norms can be related to partners who expect the individual to lose weight and therefore perform physical activity. Perceived behaviour control is the ability to go to the gym in order to carry out physical activity (Motalebi et al., 2014).

Background factors are the characteristics and attributes of the individual in three aspects. Firstly, the individual characteristics include, for example, the personality of an individual that was shaped throughout his life and his previous experiences that will make him evaluate the situation. Secondly, the social characteristics include the education level one obtained, the gender and age, and the culture of the person. Thirdly, the information and knowledge an individual has obtained from what he knows already and what has been learned from other sources (Fishbein and Ajzen, 2010).

Although the Reasoned action approach has been used manifold and in a wide variety of fields, it was also questioned by critiques in the matters of sufficiency and rationality (Conner and Armitage, 1998; Reyna and Farley, 2006). The question of sufficiency was about the need to add more concepts to the theory in order to explain behaviour, such as past behaviour. Critics said that people who experienced a behaviour in the past will use that experience when they face the same behaviour again (Norman and Smith, 1995) considered that addition of individual characteristics in the Reasoned action approach supported more focus on the past experiences. Moreover, by critics the theory is considered to be rational and excludes the effect of human spontaneously and emotions on the behaviour (Reyna and Farley, 2006). However, Fishbein and Ajzen argued that their theory does not assume rationality,

because people do not necessarily analyse the behavioural attitudes, subjective norms and perceived behaviour control before carrying out a behaviour, instead these concepts can be performed spontaneously (Fishbein and Ajzen, 2010).

The evolution of the theory has brought about significant changes and is still considered a powerful tool in research on the development of behaviour as it is able to explain and predict behaviour, therefore, it has been used in studying intentions and changing behaviour interventions (Ajzen, 2012; Van Dalen and Henken, 2012; Lu, 1998; Muggeridge and Dona, 2006).

In this study, the data will be approached from both deductive and inductive perspective and will therefore be able to notice concepts other than only the theoretical concepts. The qualitative approach makes it possible to consider other orientations of the refugees in developing their intentions to return.

2.2 Relevance of the Reasoned action approach

The focus of this study is to research the intentions of Syrian refugees to return. Previously, return migration intentions have been studied through the international migration theories. Within the field of migration, three main theories on return migration are the neoclassical economics (NCE), the new economics of labour migration (NELM) and transnationalism.

The neoclassical economics theory, associates return migration of the migrants with their initial purpose of migrating, which is seeking better economic opportunities. Therefore, when they fail to achieve their purpose they may return as an outcome of “failed migration” (Todaro, 1969). Following the new economics of labour migration theory, unlike the neoclassical economics, migrants return to their country of origin as a success after they achieved their purpose of migrating and they return as an expected step to be taken in the end cycle of their migration (Stark, 1991). The study of De Haas et al. (2015), sought to investigate what determines the intentions of Moroccan migrants across Europe to return to Morocco and they concluded that their results did not support the NCE and NELM theories. Return intentions were not related to failure or success, but rather to how integrated the migrant is in the host society (De Haas et al., 2015). Therefore it may be concluded that actual return research is different from intentions research. Moreover, it was argued that taking into account the type of migration is important, because the NCE and NELM do not explain the behaviour of forced migrants (Klinthall, 2007).

The third theory is the transnationalism, which implies that the migrants keep their connections with both their host and origin country as they move back and forth between them. It shows that migration is not a linear process and return is not the end of the migration cycle (Portes et al., 1999). Carling and Pettersen (2014), found that migrants’ transnational activities in Norway were related to their intentions to return to their country of origin, which means that intentions can be studied within the transnationalism context. However, Al-Ali et al. (2001), showed the limitations of the transnational theory in the context of refugees. It can be viewed as refugees cannot pursue a transnational activity since they are forced migrants who were pushed to migrate due to conditions in the country of origin (Al-Ali et al., 2001). Therefore, even though intentions of return migration can be viewed in the transnational theory, it is not convenient to separate the theory from the type of migrants this study intends to study.

The previous theories mentioned were in the economic and sociological context of international migration. Another context is the psychological context. Kunuroglu et al. (2016), reviewed the differences and limitations of these approaches, then studied them on Turkish return migrants. The psychological approaches that were reviewed included the model of acculturation and cultural shock,

acculturation strategies and model of cultural identity (Kunuroglu et al., 2016). However, the literature did not include them in migration intentions but rather in actual movement (Kunuroglu et al., 2016). It is worth to mention that there are many theories about intentions such as the folk concept of intentionality, discerning intentions in dynamic human action, and intentionality of intention and action but they were not found to be involved in migration intentions (Malle and Knobe, 1997; Baldwin and Baird, 2001; Searle, 1980).

Moreover, it is the Reasoned action approach and planned behaviour theories that aim to explain behaviours from intentions and is commonly used in migration intentions and decision making research themes. It was concluded in findings of several studies that the theory of reasoned action and planned behaviour has a valuable contribution in explaining intentions (Lu, 1998; Muggeridge and Dona, 2006; Sabharwal and Varma, 2016). Lately, Di Saint Pierre et al. (2015), did discuss that the theory of planned behaviour did not explain the wishes of refugees to return and thus it was criticized for its limitation. They argued that studying return when return is not yet possible should be called wishes, in which the theory of planned behaviour does not explain wishes or traits. However, it could be argued that wishes are desires and are part of the belief desire intention model, desires are what lead to intentions (Bratman, 1987). Fishbein and Ajzen argued that wishes can be translated into intentions when the behaviour can be carried out (Fishbein and Ajzen, 2010).

The latest model of Fishbein and Ajzen however, the reasoned action approach, was not found in return migration theme yet. Therefore, based on the previous, this study aims for a psychological theoretical approach for understanding the intentions of returning to Syria of Syrian refugees in the Netherlands.

2.3 Literature review

In this section, concepts related to the topic of research are explained to clarify the refugees' type of migration and status, and subsequently how it is related to the Syrian refugees' case. Then based on the Reasoned action approach, the findings of previous studies that seem to be related to behavioural attitudes, subjective norms and perceived behaviour control are reviewed. The literature found considered two separate groups, refugees and other migrants. Literature about refugees are either about those who have returned or have the ability to return. Literature about other migrants are about their return to their original country or the determinants of their return intention.

2.3.1 Definitions and overview

Refugees are forced migrants and a refugees is defined as “A person who owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable, or owing to such fear us unwilling to return to it.” (UNHCR, 1951).

Syrian refugees are people that are citizens and permanent residents of Syria who fled Syria since the beginning of the Syrian civil war in 2011 and sought asylum in other countries (OCHA, 2016). It was found in Germany that many Syrian refugees wish to return to Syria but the German government and the International organization for migrants (IOM) stated that it was not possible to send them back to Syria because it is considered a war zone. Although there is no data available about how many wish to return or are returning on their own, travel agents and asylum case workers indicated that the number of Syrian refugees leaving Germany was increasing (Grieshaber, 2016).

In general refugees who escaped the war and sought asylum in a host country, start over with their lives by trying to move on as they integrate in a new society. Still they keep imagining return as a part of their daily lives, because living in exile reminds them of sadness and longing to the past (Said, 2000).

Rogge (1994), argued that refugees mostly see their time in exile as temporarily and think about return permanently. Although, in some cases refugees refuse to return claiming that return is not the reverse state of being a refugee (Riiskjaer and Nielsson, 2008). However, the ‘myth of return’ is a concept that all refugees can relate to. It means that returning is a part of their lives and they will be thinking about return in a way that is related to their daily behaviours in the host country. It refers to the imagining return ‘myth’ as well as actual return ‘return’ (Anwar, 1979). Refugees who see their time in the host country as temporary are more related to the myth of return than those who think of residing permanently in the country of asylum (Al-Rasheed, 1994). When refugees consider their time in the country of asylum as temporary they often do not integrate within the host society. They would perform their own groups and their talks would be about their country of origin (Al-Rasheed, 1994).

Muggeridge and Dona (2006), argued that refugees think about return and imagine it. When they actually return some could realize it immediately while others needed time to realize return as reality (Muggeridge and Dona, 2006). Nevertheless, making the decision to return permanently to their country of origin was argued to be difficult and complex. Refugees compare their living situation in the country of asylum with the country of origin after war and consider family, financial and political aspects (Omata, 2013). Moreover, people’s personal experiences and perspectives as well as emotions play a role in the difficulty of deciding to return (Mortensen, 2014).

Moreover, Di Saint Pierre et al. (2015), studied the ‘wishes’ of refugees in the Netherlands to return to their country of origin. They found that those less likely to wish to return were more socially integrated. Yet refugees who were more integrated perceived more discrimination, which was related to an increased wish to return to their country of origin. According to their finding the authors concluded that only a limited number of refugees will ever go back (Di Saint Pierre et al., 2015). The lack of literature to support their findings shows the importance to study the perspectives of refugees to return to the country of origin based on their experiences.

In the literature, authors referred to the decision making process to return as a complex matter (Stepputat, 2004; Warner, 1994; Rogge, 1994). Certain intention towards return was referred to as an ‘assertive desire’ while hesitation between willing to stay in the host country and returning to country of origin was referred to as an ‘ambivalent desire’ (Senyurekli and Menjivar, 2012). It was argued that this complexity was related to many factors that will be discussed further.

2.3.2 Definition of home and intentions to return

Returning to the country of origin after spending time in other countries is often related to the concept of ‘home’ (Ghanem, 2003). Some refugees considered returning to their country of origin is simply returning ‘home’, other refugees saw ‘home’ as any place they would be safe and comfortable in (Omata, 2013; Malkki, 1995). However, Warner (1994), said that refugees who return should be called returning to their country of origin and not ‘home’. On the other hand, Ghanem (2003), said the refugees’ idea of ‘home’ may change based on their experiences. Some refugees will value the ‘home’ they left behind while others will spend their time in exile building a new life in the host country (Ghanem, 2003).

Therefore, how people perceive their country of origin plays a role in return intentions (Mortensen, 2014). It is important to know how refugees define ‘home’ that might be related to their intentions towards returning to Syria.

2.3.3 Views on reintegration and intentions to return

Return migrants as well as refugees face a reintegration process in the country of origin upon return. Reintegration was difficult because the country of origin and the refugees and migrants themselves change over time in exile (Warner, 1994). Refugees who changed over time indicated that they had integrated in the country of asylum and cannot ‘fit in’ again in the country of origin (Warner, 1994). Changes in the country of origin includes changes in the roads, streets and service systems that made refugees feel as strangers (Muggeridge and Dona, 2006). Nevertheless, some individuals decide to face reintegration and remain permanently in the country of origin, while others refuse to adapt and return to the host country (Warner, 1994; Sabharwal and Varma, 2016). Reintegration included adapting to the culture and living conditions in the country of origin. For example, Indian women migrants had to adapt to the Indian conservative lifestyle after returning from the US as well as adapting to the non-constant availability of electricity (Sabharwal and Varma, 2016). Refugees who returned and also experienced lack of good living conditions in the country of origin decided to return to the country of asylum (Rogge, 1994; Riiskjaer and Nielsson, 2008). Living conditions in the country of origin are compared to those in the country of asylum. The lack of electricity and water and the absence of good education and health systems pushed refugees to refuse permanent return (Stepputat, 2004). Moreover, damages and destructions of roads, building, facilities and houses are the consequence of many years of war. Some Afghan refugees had not repatriated because they had lost their houses or there was no satisfying accommodation to settle in (Afghan Research and Evaluation Unit, 2006). However, an actual return as a visit released refugees from living in uncertainty in the country of asylum and helped them in deciding to remain there or to return permanently to their country of origin (Muggeridge and Dona, 2006).

2.3.4 Characteristics of the migrant/refugee and intentions to return

The difficulty of returning to the country of origin is also related to the characteristics of the migrants and refugees. It is considered that an individual can make a decision easier if they are single than with a spouse and children (Konzett-Smoliner, 2016). Some refugees prefer to stay in the host county for a better education for their children (Hardgrove, 2009). Moreover, refugees refused to return to their country of origin because schools and health facilities were demolished after the war. Therefore, it was considered to be unsuitable for children to return to a place that lacks such facilities (Afghan Research and Evaluation Unit, 2006). On the contrary, some migrants intended to return because they wanted their children to be raised in the culture and traditions of the country of origin (Sabharwal and Varma, 2016). It has to be emphasized that the age of children also played a role in return intentions. Refugees with younger children had strong intentions to return unlike refugees with older children (Omata, 2013), because individuals with younger children did not consider the ability of their children to adapt in the country of origin as much as migrants with older children (Sabharwal and Varma, 2016). The ability to reintegrate among family members as individuals are different (Konzett-Smoliner, 2016).

Families do not only include children in the host country but also parents in the country of origin. Migrants intend to return to the country where their parents as their ‘love ones’ are to be close to them and take care of them (Senyurekli and Menjivar, 2012). Moreover, refugees with families in the country of origin intended to return while refugees who had no families in the country of origin hesitated in returning. Families in the country of origin help refugees in housing or finding a job (Omata, 2013).

Moreover, migrants or refugees are often influenced by their parents as significant others (Muggeridge and Dona, 2006; Hardgrove, 2009). For example, parents were considered peers for Indian migrants who have migrated to study abroad and obtain a diploma, as it was expected from them to return after they complete their education and be with their families. This peer from family occurred due to the responsibilities they had to carry out to their families (Sabharwal and Varma, 2016).

2.3.5 Social context and intentions to return

It was studied by Maletta et al. (1989), that refugees who fled the country may have the pressure to face people who stayed, when they imagine how the social life would be when they return. The feeling of 'survival guilt' was mentioned as they carry the guilt of leaving others behind, therefore refugees fear the social pressure upon returning to be accused of enjoying their lives in exile and not being a patriot, such as those who stayed (Maletta et al., 1989). Some migrants return due to the sense of loyalty and patriotism to the country of origin (Gmelch, 1980). During Angola's repatriation in 2014, people who fled the Democratic Republic of Congo and returned after the war ended in Angola mentioned returning as an act of patriotism (Schmitt, 2014).

Refugees who fled, seek safety during war as well as post-war, therefore, they do not return when the country of origin is not 'safe' (Rogge, 1994; Zimmermann, 2012). What is considered 'safe' differs among individuals because it is based on their knowledge obtained from previous experiences during the war (Crisp, 2003). For example, Liberian refugees of Krahn ethnicity feared persecution by the regime even after the war, as they were threatened by the regime unlike other ethnicities (Omata, 2013). Moreover, safety is not something refugees are able to control, nevertheless, they take into account alterations in the regime and the political conditions to be able to return (Muggeridge and Dona, 2006).

Another aspect that encouraged the refugees to return is obtaining the permanent residency in the country of asylum (Muggeridge and Dona, 2006). The permanent residency was considered a guarantee to reenter the country of asylum if they refused permanent return (Stepputat, 2004). Legal statuses play a role in determining the intentions of returning to the country of origin (Senyurekli and Menjivar, 2012). On the other hand, residency is not always a control for those who are not interested in it (Stepputat, 2004). For example, a facilitation to return to the country of origin is when migrants refuse dealing with procedures of residency and visas (Sabharwal and Varma, 2016).

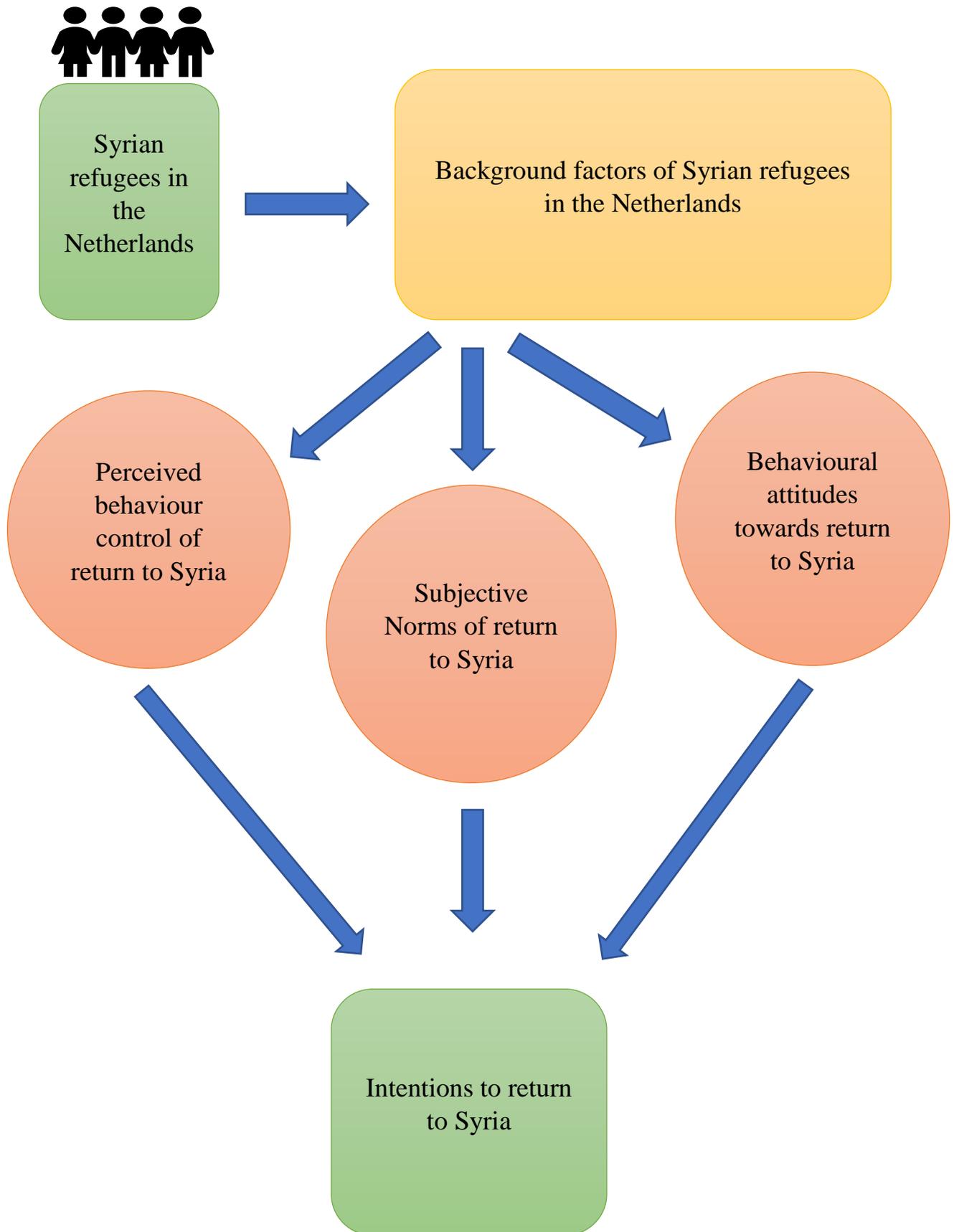
In the Netherlands, it is assumed that refugees would stay temporarily and eventually return to their country of origin, therefore, they are granted a conditional residency (IND, 2016b). Syrian refugees are granted a residency of five years and they are permitted to apply for a permanent residency afterwards (IND, 2016a).

However, return decision making and return intentions are related to the people's personalities and personal desires and experiences (Van Dalen and Henkens, 2012). Thinking about 'home', facing reintegration, considering families in host country and country of origin, and considering safety and legal procedures played a role in deciding to return and determining return intentions, according to previous studies. All these aspects combined make it difficult and complex when thinking about return.

2.4 Conceptual model

Based on the objective of the study, and the literature review, the conceptual model shown in figure 2 was formulated. The Syrian refugees in the Netherlands are the population under study in which their return intentions are to be explored, through the concepts of the Reasoned action approach by Fishbein and Ajzen, (2010). This study is based on the behaviour of returning to Syria. Since the main interest is the intentions to return and not actual return the conceptual model does not take the concept of behaviour into account. Based on the research sub- question, the study aims to find out the behaviour attitudes, subjective norms and perceived behavioural controls the Syrian refugees have that can relate to their intentions to return to Syria. Moreover, background factors are to be determined after recruiting the participants to investigate the relation between the background factors and the remaining concepts.

Figure 2. conceptual model



3. Methodology

The research methods applied in this study will be explained in this chapter within the following six paragraphs. A qualitative approach was used in this study thus paragraphs 3.1 and 3.2 will discuss the qualitative design of the study and the method of in-depth interviews used, respectively. Paragraphs 3.3 and 3.4 will clarify how participants were recruited and how the data was analysed, respectively. Ethics will be issued in paragraph 3.5. The last paragraph 3.6 will describe the researcher's positionality in this study.

3.1 Research design

Qualitative research means studying narratives and experiences of the people using methods that involve people's perspectives (Flick, 2015). Qualitative research is conducted for several purposes, among them is when the researcher is interested in exploring a topic from an emic perspective, which means to understand that topic issued from the people's point of view (Hennink et al., 2011).

In a qualitative approach to research, often researchers study from an interpretative paradigm. When researchers use an interpretative paradigm they process experiences and stories produced from people's viewpoints and acknowledge the subjectivity of both the participants and the researchers (Flick, 2015). The starting point of the study is then derived from the experiences of the people, subjectively, then followed by the analysis of the information which also includes the subjectivity of the researcher. In other words, the interpretative paradigm involves two concepts; *verstehen*, which "refers to understanding the issues from the interpretive framework of the study population, or from the insider's perspective.", and *understanding*, which "refers to understanding issues from the researcher's own interpretive framework or the outsider's perspective." (Hennink et al., 2011, p.38). Together *understanding* and *verstehen* can achieve the purpose of the qualitative research in a interpretative paradigm (Hennink, 2011).

The aim of this study was to obtain an understanding of the Syrian refugees' intentions to return to Syria from their own perceptions and experiences (*verstehen*). Therefore, to understand the what intentions to return of Syrian refugees are, a qualitative approach was carried out. The experiences and perceptions of the refugees were then interpreted by the researcher (*understanding*), and grasped within the concepts of theory and other research.

3.2 Data collection

Data in qualitative research are words, also called textual data. There are several methods to collect textual data, amongst which observation, focus groups discussions, and interviewing are the most common methods in ethnographic research (Hennink et al., 2011). The observation method is carried out when the researcher aims to understand people's practices, which is not the aim of this study. Moreover, focus group discussions can give a variety of perceptions, however, it is not favoured in sensitive research topics for ethical concerns (Flick, 2015). Interviewing was chosen in this study, specifically, individual in-depth interviews for what it provides.

An interview is defined as "a face-to-face verbal interchange in which one person, the interviewer, attempts to elicit information or expressions of opinion or belief from another person or persons" (Maccoby and Maccoby, 1954, p.499). In-depth interviews are conducted when the researcher is interested in people's perceptions to understand an issue (Hennink et al., 2011). Deeper insight and detailed information can be obtained from in-depth interviews. Individual in-depth interviews provides the time for the interviewee to express him/herself at will. Moreover, personal narratives are rich in viewpoints of the interviewee, thus facilitating to understand the context of the research topic. (Dunn,

2016). This study followed in-depth interviews aiming to obtain the advantages of interviewing. Nevertheless, intentions to return may be a sensitive topic, hence, it is convenient to use interviewing to be able to control anonymity and sensitive topics. This will be discussed more in paragraph 3.5.

A semi-structured interview was used in this study. Using an interview-guide, the semi-structured interview was developed based on the conceptual model and the Reasoned action approach (Fishbein and Ajzen, 2010) ensuring covering the topic of the study efficiently. This was approached by transforming the concepts of Reasoned action approach into questions, e.g. to understand perceive behaviour control one of the questions was: what will facilitate your return?

The advantage of a semi-structure interview is the flexibility it provides, e.g. the same order of the questions is not necessarily followed in every interview (Dunn, 2016). The interview guide included opening questions, key questions and closing questions (Hennink et al., 2011) and included primary and secondary questions (Dunn, 2016) (see appendix 1 for interview guide). Opening questions were to warm up and prepare the participant for the main topic, then smoothly transit to key questions that were mainly about this research, finally moving on to closing questions to end the interview in a good manner. Primary questions were the main questions and secondary questions were used as probes (Dunn, 2016). Because semi-structure interviews allow the researcher to be flexible, during the interview it was a purpose to achieve a natural flow of the questions (Flick, 2015).

The interview guide was written in both Arabic and English. The interview guide was first tested via two pilot interviews. After these pilot interviews the interviews were discussed with the supervisor. The interview guide appeared to be sufficient and only minor changes were applied later. For example, after the fourth interview, a question was added because the participant talked about a specific topic that seemed to be related to the research. This topic had not been thought of beforehand. Moreover, during the interviews other questions came up for clarification or extra details after the participant had started talking about something specific, interesting and related to the research. Adding to that, the order of the questions was not always the same because it relied on the flow of the conversation, one of the advantages the semi-structured interview provided. Before starting with the closing questions, the researcher checked whether all topics were covered. It occurred that some questions were already answered as the participant was telling a story and speaking fluently about several topics at once.

During the interview process, the researcher left some decisions up to the preference of the participants. First, the participants were asked to choose the environment in which they would like to be interviewed. It was important to conduct the interviews in comfortable environment for the participants so they would feel relaxed and confident (Dunn, 2016). For that, the researcher asked the participants to decide the place and time of the interviews, and if they would like someone else to be present during the interview to assure their comfort. Eventually, nine interviews took place in the participants' home and the researcher travelled to their city of residence. One was carried out in a public place, and one was at the researcher's house.

Secondly, the participants were asked whether they would like to have a video-call interview or face-to-face interview. Two interviews were video call interviews via skype in which the participants and the researcher were at their houses. This interview technique fell under the concept of computer-mediated communication interviewing, which was related to research in the new millennium when the researcher cannot reach the participant directly (Dunn, 2016). The advantages of the skype interview were setting the appointment of the interview easily and both parties were in a comfortable environment, however, disadvantages were missing some body language from the participant and facing some technical problems.

Lastly, the participants would choose the language of communication they preferred, resulting in the conduction of eleven interviews in Arabic, Syrian dialect, with some Dutch and English words or phrases in between, and two interviews fully in English. As a researcher, understanding Arabic, English and Dutch gave the flexibility to the participant to allow them to express themselves without the effort of thinking to find the right words.

The interviews were recorded using an application on a mini-ipad called 'quick voice pro'. Before the interviews, the participants were made aware that the interview would be verbally recorded. They had to consent to the recording of the interview. Also the participants were informed about the moments the researcher would start and stop the recorder. The duration of the interviews were between 35-50 minutes. Moreover, the researcher established rapport by introducing herself in details and talk about general topics before starting interviewing and recording to assure good communication and gain the participant's trust. The researcher would also answer any questions the participants had before, during and after the interview.

Field notes were also used during the interviews to remind the researcher of questions or specific words and topics generated during the interview. A reflection on every interview took place after the interview. The researcher reflected on details of the interview, the participant's different responses to the questions, the advantages and disadvantages in every interview, and on herself as an interviewer to improve what could be improved for the next interview.

3.3 Recruiting participants

The study was within a qualitative context, meaning that participants were not aimed to be a representative sample. The interest was more focused on individuals' in sights and perspectives (Hennink et al., 2011). The aim was selecting Syrian refugees who were living in the Netherlands.

Two other characteristics were taken into consideration. First, the Syrian refugees' age was to be between 25 and 45 years, as this age range represents the majority of Syrian refugees in the Netherlands (CBS, 2016). Second, the Syrian refugees' duration of residency in their social house was to be over a year, which means they already had their residence permit to stay in the Netherlands (Government of the Netherlands, 2017). Refugees who are not settled are more likely to want to return due to their unstable situation (Zimmermann, 2012). This research aims to understand refugees' perspectives of return, therefore, it is suitable to interview those who are more likely to be settled in a house to eliminate the instability effect on return intentions.

Strategies for recruiting started with the researcher. Since the researcher is a part of the research population herself, recruitment was done through personal acquaintances that the researcher had no personal relations with. They were asked whether they would like to participate or whether they could introduce the researcher to their acquaintances. The participants were contacted by either calling them or via social media if they were among the researcher's contacts. Afterwards the snowball method was used to be able to find more participants. Snowball technique means asking the participant who was interviewed if they knew someone else that could be interviewed. To avoid the limitation of this technique by being within the same social network, the first acquaintances were contacted from different social networks in different cities in the Netherlands (Hennink et al., 2011).

Since the interviews were conducted in Arabic, speaking Arabic gave the advantage of selecting a diverse group and not restricting it to only those who are able to speak English. However, two interviews were conducted in English by the participants' choice, because they were able to express themselves perfectly in English. The interviews were conducted from March till May, 2017.

With that, thirteen participants were included in this study. Since the research focused on personal stories and perspectives, the in-depth interviews provided rich data and detailed information (Dunn, 2016). The personal characteristics of the participants is displayed in table 1.

Table 1. Characteristics of the participants

No. & Alias	Age	Gender	Material status	Children	Level of education	Duration in the Netherlands	Level of Dutch
1.Fares	32	Man	Single	-	Bachelor	≈ 3 years	B2
2.Hassan	26	Man	Single	-	Bachelor	≈ 1.5 years	B2
3.Diana	30	Woman	Married	2		≈ 3 years	B2
4.Mustafa	42	Man	Married	2	Bachelor	≈ 3 years	B2
5.Amer	27	Man	Single	-	Bachelor	≈ 1.5 years	C1
6.Jamal	32	Man	Single	-		≈ 3 years	B2
7.Tarek	27	Man	Single	-	Bachelor (incomplete)	≈ 2.5 years	B2
8.Amal	25	Woman	Relationship	-	Bachelor (incomplete)	≈ 2 years	B2
9.Rami	26	Man	Relationship	-	Bachelor	≈ 3 years	C1
10.Saad	29	Man	Single	-	Bachelor (incomplete)	≈ 4 years	B2
11.Eman	29	Woman	Engaged	-	Bachelor	≈ 2 years	B2
12.Sundos	26	Woman	Married	1	High school	≈ 1.5 years	A2
13.Samar	33	Woman	Single	-	Bachelor	≈ 2 years	B1

Eight men were interviewed and five women. The age range was 25-33 with one participant being 42 years of age. All the participants have been living in the Netherlands for over a year. Moreover, all participants were highly educated with the exception of one participant who completed her studies till high school. Lastly, the participant's situation may change and the characteristics presented in table1 were based on the time the interview took place. For example, some participants were still proceeding in their Dutch courses, others had the intention to continue their studies, and some may develop changes in their material status which may play a role in their perspectives of return later in the future.

3.4 Data analysis

Analysing qualitative data is based on describing words and finding meanings in the textual data, which is referred to as content analysis (Dunn, 2016). Before starting the analysis, textual data should be obtained from the interviews. That was carried out by transcribing and translating.

Firstly, the researcher wrote a verbatim transcript (Hennink et al., 2011), in which everything said by the participant was literally written down, adding symbols that describe pauses or incomplete sentences. The transcript also showed comments that described explanations, feelings, movements, hand gestures and tone of voice. For the transcription the website o-transcribe.com was used to play the recording 50% slower than the regular speed to be able to synchronize typing with listening. Every interview took 4-5 hours of transcribing.

Secondly, the Arabic transcripts were completely translated into English. In this process, the data was subjected to some loss of information, for some words in Arabic cannot be completely explained in English, such as proverbs and metaphors because they are also related to the Syrian culture.

A third party helped with translating by checking the interpretation to obtain a sufficient level of interpretation. The third party has worked professionally in interpretation between English and Arabic. Every transcript took also 4-5 hours of translating and interpreting. Finally, the transcripts were anonymized and treated with confidentiality, which means that any information that can be traced back to the participant was eliminated.

The transcripts then were coded. Both deductive and inductive codes were developed. Using the Atlas ti.7 software, each transcript was downloaded in the program to be coded. Deductive codes were generated from the study's theoretical framework. The deductive codes were based on the concepts in the Reasoned action approach (Fishbein and Ajzen, 2010). Inductive codes were generated from the participants' different experiences and perceptions, e.g. Attitudes-reintegration process (deductive code), forced (in-vivo code), Feelings-towards Syria (Inductive/emotion code). Lastly, family codes were produced based on both deductive and inductive codes (see appendix 3 for the code tree).

For the last step, content analysis was carried out. Content analysis can be either manifest content analysis or latent content analysis (Babbie, 1992). Latent content analysis was used in this study, which was looking for themes within the transcripts. A theme was analysed also by comparing the narratives of the participants rather than focusing on one narrative. The software helped with organizing the data but then analysing was done by critical, comprehensive and repetitive reading. Since this study followed an interpretative paradigm, findings were written based on the researcher's interpretation of the data in a scientific manner. Moreover, choices had to be made when finalizing the results, because concepts were interlinked and a single transcript was rich in information.

3.5 Ethics

Research ethics is defined by O'Connell-Davidson and Layder (1994), as "the conduct of researchers and their responsibilities and obligations to those involved in the research, including sponsors, the general public, and most importantly, the subjects of the research." (O'Connell-Davidson and Layder, 1994, p.55). Ethical issues in research are challenging thus the researcher should pay attention to ethical matters (Dowling, 2016). In qualitative research the data collection procedures includes invading someone's privacy, therefore it should be described properly (Dowling, 2016).

Participants should be informed and well aware about the topic and the objective of the study and their role in it. It should be delivered to them in a comprehensible manner (Hennink et al., 2011). Therefore, the participants were first contacted to be informed briefly and secondly, would receive, via email, a detailed information letter that included information about the study, the interview and their part in the study (see appendix 2 for the information letter). Among the information mentioned was that participation was voluntary and the interview would be recorded. It was explained to the participants that they had the right to stop at any time during the interview or withdraw at any time during the research. They were informed that relevant topics to the research during the interviews would be converted to a form of data to analyse, and then to be strictly used to complete a master study at the Groningen university. As for the consent of the participants, their verbal consent was recorded by the same voice recorder application used for recording the interview just before starting the interview.

Another ethical aspect taken into consideration was minimizing the harm. Harm could be for both researcher and interviewer, and it could be physical or psycho-social (Dowling, 2016). It was highly unlikely the participants would be physically harmed, but they could be influenced on a psycho-social level, because the interview topics could be perceived to include sensitive topics. Therefore, participants were informed that they were not obligated to answer all the questions, so if they did not want to talk about a specific topic they would let the researcher know. If they changed their minds after

answering, the information they gave would be erased upon their request. Moreover, further details were not asked during the interviews in cases of sensitive issues. Instead the researcher gave space for the participant to share what they were willing to share and stop at will. Sensitive issues included details of the detention and torture and loss of loved ones. Moreover, political topics were avoided for both the participant and the researcher's benefit because it may cause discomfort and loss of trust. Political views about the war in Syria both the participant and the researcher have may cause a negative influence on the research, thus it ought to be avoided especially because it is not one of this study's concerns. Finally a draft of chapter 4 was sent to the participants to proof read what would be written in this study.

Lastly, anonymity and confidentiality are very important in qualitative research, since the researcher gets to know the participants personally and listens to personal information (Flick, 2015). In this study, the participants were assured that the interviews would be anonymous and that their information would be treated with complete confidentiality. They were informed that only the researcher had access to the voice records of the interviews, but that transcripts could be reviewed by two other people, the supervisor of the researcher and a third party that helped with translation when needed. Therefore, the researcher has anonymized the transcripts, and critical information in the transcripts that might lead to identifying the participants was not mentioned. Finally alias names were used in this study.

3.6 Positionality

Applying reflexivity is part of ensuring rigour of qualitative research (Stratford and Bradshaw, 2016). By that, I was able to know about the necessity of making changes and was aware of my performance and progress. The reflexivity I translated into reflection on my position during this research, on which I will explain more in this paragraph.

This explanation will help the reader to understand my part not only as a researcher but also as a person conducting this study. Because qualitative research includes subjectivity and this study follows an interpretative paradigm, it is helpful to know the positionality of the researcher.

The process of qualitative research was very challenging, especially because it contains subjectivity in its' cycle. As a researcher I have conducted quantitative research before and I am accustomed to being objective during the research process. But as a Syrian refugee myself, interviewing other Syrian refugees, speaking Arabic, the Syrian dialect to be specific, listening to other Syrian refugees stories and having my own experience and intentions, it was a challenge for me to be a researcher. For example, some participants were emotional during the interview. Talking about returning to Syria turned out to be a sensitive topic. I would ask them if they would like me to stop the interview and bravely they continued immediately or after a short break, and I appreciated their participation very much.

I was attracted to start studying masters of population studies for the opportunity to work with Syrian refugees in a scientific research. In the beginning of this master programme, I decided on the topic and I thought as being an insider it would be easier for me than other nationalities to conduct such as study. In reality, finding participants was not easy. On the other hand, I was able to understand the culture and spoken metaphors. It was a pleasure to witness the participants being able to express themselves with their own language and words, I was familiar with the places they talked about and the traditions they expressed. I was told the phrase "you know.." several times, yet I did ask for clarifications sometimes. I understood the black humour and sensitive topics they spoke of. Moreover, interpreting was based on my knowledge as a Syrian, so I did not ask for further explanation for few concepts assuming that I did know what they meant.

The power relation in this qualitative study was a reciprocal relationship, which means “the researcher and the researched are in comparable social positions and have relatively equal benefits and costs from participating in the research” (Dowling, 2016, p.36). Because the participants and I are Syrian refugees and the study was conducted about Syrian refugees, the closest relation to have occurred in terms of power is a reciprocal one.

Some participants had been interviewed before but not by a Syrian, so when they reflected positively on our interview it made me realize that I had made the right choice and that I was up for continuing the rest of the research cycle.

What had not occurred to me was the details of the process and how they would affect me. During the interviews I stayed calm and neutral but during transcribing I would become very emotional. Emotional moments during transcribing were caused by the personal stories the participants openly shared with me. What was mentioned during the interviews also reminded me of specific events. Personally, I originally had the same opinion of some participants and at the same time was really impressed with other perspectives that I did not have. Some opinions made me reconsider my original intentions regarding the research topic. It was until the coding process that I was able to see the interviews as clear textual data and be more objective to interpretively analyse concepts and write the findings.

Finalizing this study made me realize how much I have learned and gained from this experience. I have learned about the qualitative process, about interviews, how to take care of the participants and their identity and how to establish rapport. I appreciated all the positive attitude of the participants. I was motivated to work harder for the future especially with people who experienced the consequences of a war.

4. Findings

In this chapter, the results will be discussed in five sections in order to answer the research question and sub-questions. Analysis was based on how participants approached their intentions, though they cannot return yet, as they were discussing stories and topics related to their intentions.

4.1 Intentions to return to Syria

In this section, intentions to return to Syria expressed by the participants are introduced with some background characteristics related to return intentions.

The participants often brought up their perception on their choice to return, as a starting point for thinking about return. Participants often related their choice of return to their choice of leaving Syria. Since they were forced to leave, they consider that returning may not be their choice either. Mustafa said:

Mustafa, 42: *“We did neither choose to leave nor will we choose to return, we moved from a small prison to a large prison”*

It can be concluded that Mustafa acknowledges himself being a forced migrant. He was forced to flee the war, referring to Syria as the small prison, and seek refuge in a safe country, referring to the Netherlands as the large prison. The resemblance of both countries to prison refers to his lack of choice, and the Netherlands being the larger one due to his ability to move around more freely than Syria. Because the choice was not considered as a free choice, most did not consider it as an option to return to this day.

However, when participants expressed their own intentions, they differed. These differences originated when participants distinguished between permanent return and temporary return. The participants identified temporary return as either a brief visit or a specific period of time. Permanent return was identified as returning to live in Syria. It has been mentioned that refugees think about their stay in the host country as either temporarily or permanently (Klinthall, 2007), however the concept of return is unclear since it refers to both visits and permanent return (Parutis, 2013). Amal explained:

Amal, 25: *“Return means that I want to go back to that place and visit it but not to go back and stay there. I want to help with something, like the people who stayed and were not able to run away.”*

Amal clearly distinguishes between temporary and permanent return, as she implies that she is not intending to settle in Syria. Though she intends to visit or to stay for a period of time. Therefore, it can be noticed that the intention to return has differed when Amal differentiated between temporary and permanent return.

In this study, some participants expressed their intentions with certainty (assertive), while others with uncertainty (ambivalent). It was argued that refugees intend for certain to return ‘one day’ (Zimmermann, 2012). From the previous quote it can be understood that Amal expressed her certainty in temporary return and not permanently. Other participants expressed certainty too, Eman said:

Eman, 29: *“Nothing will stand in my way but the war, like if there were no war I will return, even if there is no job, even if the things I used to enjoy are not in Syria anymore, I don’t have a problem with anything.”*

During Eman’s interviews, she expressed her strong intentions to return and live in Syria as soon as she is able. While Rami said:

Rami, 26: *“No, not at all, not in my life will I ever enter the Middle East, all of the Middle East not only Syria [...], my life has changed, it is impossible for me to return.”*

Rami expressed his certainty of not returning to Syria when he was asked about his intention to return, and he reassured his intention when he said that he will not return even for a visit. Alternatively, uncertainty in intentions were also expressed, as Fares said:

Fares, 32: *“Of course I will return, but the question is, would I return permanently or not, I still wonder, and that is difficult for always.”*

Though Fares is certain of his will to return, he still hesitates when he thinks about the manner of return. It can be concluded that distinguishing between the manner of return whether temporarily or permanent plays a role in the intention of return. Moreover, intentions can be expressed with certainty as well as uncertainty.

In the participants group it showed that some characteristics of the participants played a role in how they considered their return intentions. Other characteristics such as age and gender seemed to not play a role in return intentions. Some of these characteristics may be worthwhile to highlight in relation to return intentions, while return is not an option yet.

The participants indicated that children and partners play a role in their intentions to return to Syria or not. It was often expressed that being single is easier when considering intention to return than being committed to a partner and being a parent. Mustafa and Jamal said:

Mustafa, 42, married, two children: *“I have to think about my children, I have a heavy load, when one is by himself it will be easy do you understand me (-).”*

Jamal, 32, single, no children: *“The larger the family gets the more difficult this decision will be, but one by himself, it remains easier than if he were committed to someone.”*

Both Mustafa and Jamal expressed that it would be easier to think about return if it were an individual decision than having children because decisions would always concern the children as a priority. It can be shown that single participants without children are concerned about children as much as participants who are married and with children. Other studies have found that children and partners play a role in the choice of return, even if participants were single or without children (Parutis, 2013; Konzett-Smoliner, 2016). It has been shown in this study that participants consider their children as well as their partners when they think about return.

4.2 Behavioural attitudes towards return intentions to Syria

In the following sections, concepts of behavioural attitude, subjective norms and perceive behaviour control related to intentions are described. These sections are findings derived from the deductive codes that were based on the concepts of the Reasoned action approach.

In this section the attitudes to returning to Syria will be explained in five paragraphs. Participants consider the behavioural attitudes to be the personal ideas and beliefs about the consequences of return with the personal evaluation of return (Fishbein and Ajzen, 2010).

In this study the negative and positive thoughts of the participants related to returning to Syria may play a role in their intentions to return. In general, the participants indicated that their attitude was expressed differently comparing between permanent and temporary return. Nevertheless both manners of return were stated to be difficult on a personal level as well as their surroundings.

4.2.1 Reasons for leaving Syria

Previous experiences included leaving Syria because of the reasons that pushed the participants to leave. Leaving was expressed by the participants to be difficult and therefore, it was often related that returning will be also difficult. It was discussed that if the reasons that forced them to leave remained in Syria they will not intend to return.

The participants spoke about consequences of the war. Though the main reason to leave Syria was due to the war, some participants tolerated the war until they experienced its consequences. The war resulted in the displacement of some participants after losing their house. Also the lack of electricity, food and water and the threat of safety because of the bombing, kidnapping and murder were factors that forced people to leave. These aspects were taken into consideration when explaining thoughts about return as Diana said:

Diana, 30: *“Because of the war, [...], at the same time, like when there was no milk and you would try to get it for your son...like it was from all aspects [...], if there were no water, no electricity and conditions after the crisis are so bad, like no way of living, there is no way one can return (-).”*

Diana’s reasons to leave were the war as much as the lack of electricity and milk for her child. She believes that if the same reasons that pushed her to leave still existed, she would not want to return. It shows that it is important to people to have basic needs to maintain their lives for themselves as well as their loved ones, that can be linked to e.g. the pyramid of Maslow (Maslow, 1943).

Some participants experienced detention by the Syrian regime or were threatened to be detained. After the protests had begun in 2011, many were detained by the Syrian regime and tortured or gone missing (Human rights watch, 2017). The fear of being detained was one of the main reasons that made them leave Syria. These participants still consider being arrested upon return because past experiences of torture is related to negative memories about Syria. Eman and Rami were both detained and have said:

Eman, 29: *“If they had not taken me and I feared for myself that something might happen to me, [...], I would have never in my life left Syria [...], I don’t have a problem with anything, I only have the war problem, mostly the regime not the war, because once I return the regime will take me in, that is my problem (-)”*

Rami, 26: *“I was detained for 33 days by the regime, it was the worst period of my life, it turned to a phobia from the regime and from the security forces, but I had to stay in Syria for another year and a half after the detention just to graduate from the university. Not in my life will I ever enter Syria.”*

Both Eman and Rami express their fear of being detained again and that detention was their reason to leave. However, Eman explains that if that reason were eliminated she would want to return. As for Rami, he had a clear opinion about his intention to never return to Syria. Eman and Rami experienced detention and yet had different intentions towards returning. Therefore, having the same experience does not lead to the same intention. This difference can be related to other beliefs such as feelings of belonging to Syria. During the interviews, Eman expressed that belonging to a place gives her comfort, while Rami mentioned that he never felt belonging to a place matters. It seems that Eman’s positive feeling of belonging is more important than her negative memory of detention. However, both Eman and Rami realize that their basic needs, freedom or feeling of belonging, are their basic needs of well-being. Belonging is often linked as a basic need for the human being and it has been shown to relate to one’s wellbeing (Baumeister and Leary, 1995).

Moreover, laws in Syria were related to the past experiences of some participants that pushed them to leave, such as the military service. Military service is mandatory in Syria for men when they reach 18 years of age (Winckler, 1999). Before the war, military service has been observed to be a reason for men to leave Syria (Beitin, 2012). In this study participants expressed that when the war escalated they left Syria to avoid military service and thus to not be forced to join any armed force. They believed that returning would mean being engaged in the war. Therefore, participants mentioned that as long as Syria is a war zone, they will not return. Fares said:

Fares, 32: *“If you are living in the regime’s territory as a guy, in the end you have to join the military, and if you are in the opposition’s territory you will have to fight with them [...], I do not want to die honestly”*

Fares left Syria to avoid being involved in the conflict, because joining the conflict meant that he had to either serve the military or join oppositions’ troops. Obviously, Fares wanted neither, as he expressed his fear of death. Military service in this study was related only to men.

Lastly, some participants expressed their reasons to leave were based on their culture of origin and not immediately by the starting war, namely because of their homosexuality. In Syria, homosexuality is prohibited and the penalty of homosexual activities is prison for at least three years (West, 2016). Therefore, some participants in this study stated that it was not only the war that forced them to leave Syria but also their homosexuality. They expressed their homosexuality is not accepted in every society. Hassan and Amer said:

Hassan, 26: *“There is something in my motto of life that once I stepped one step forward I never go one step back [...], so it was not only the war but also my homosexuality [...], my gay friends left me aside when they realized that I came out because it was also dangerous to them.”*

Amer, 27: *“I am a homosexual guy, [...], it is a huge huge huge taboo still in Syria and we will never get over it [...], it is like going backwards, I will never go back there.”*

Both Hassan and Amer believe that returning means taking a step backwards in life. Hassan clarifies the dangerous situation of being a homosexual person in Syria because as he came out his homosexual friends left him to remain ‘safe’. Also Amer expresses the rejection of homosexual persons in Syria as they are not accepted in the Syrian culture. Parutis (2013), argued that some migrants have ‘alternative identities’ when they are accepted in a host society and not in the society of the country of origin. Also Hassan and Amer stated their ability to express themselves freely in the Netherlands unlike in Syria. Their believes of being accepted is important to them when they consider returning to Syria.

It can be seen that the main reasons for leaving Syria played a role in the behavioural attitude of the participants and thus their intention to return. Makina (2012), found that the intention of return of migrants often changed if the reason for migrating was solved in the country of origin. In this study, returning to a place that still has the reason for leaving it invoked negative feelings towards return.

4.2.2 Reintegration and re-establishing

While talking to participants why they felt differently about returning permanently and returning temporarily, they indicated that a permanent return was more difficult due to two reasons; the first is facing a reintegration process and the second is re-establishing a life from scratch.

In this study, some participants explained how they changed during their stay in the Netherlands and that if they imagined the necessity of reintegration in the Syrian society if they were to return, they were to change their daily lives again. Reintegration in the country of origin after years living abroad

may be difficult, as people change during their time in exile and feel different than people who remained (Riiskjaer and Nielsson, 2008; Parutis, 2013). Tarek said about this:

Tarek, 27: *“I fear that during this period I changed my habits and when I want to go back to Syria it will take another period of my life to adapt again with them”*

Tarek clearly explains that it took him time to change his habits and fit in the Netherlands and he fears facing reintegration as it will take time too to change again. It shows that participants find it necessary to be adapted in the society they live in, and they will change themselves in order to ‘fit in’. They believe that change needs time and effort, therefore, it played a role in expressing the difficulty of returning to Syria.

Reintegrating is not only facing society, but also facing changes that occur in the country of origin. During the interviews, some participants shared their concerns of not knowing how to deal with the new Syria after the war ends because it would have changed. These changes are occurring during their time in exile and they would remember Syria how they last left it. Fares said:

Fares, 32: *“The living areas of the people have changed, and the people have become segregated according to their sects, this is frightening: will I be able to live among this new demographic distribution or not? Yes that is frightening”*

Fares emphasizes on his fear towards the changes that are occurring in Syria. He is afraid of being ‘lost’ within the new demographic changes that are happening in Syria as consequences of the war. He believes that Syria is segregating into different groups, and he doubts his ability to adapt in the ‘new Syria’ after the war. He fears not knowing which group would he belong to since he has been in exile during the period of war and did not witness the changes. Often, reintegration into the society and the country was studied after return took place (Riiskjaer and Nielsson, 2008; Parutis, 2013). However, in this study, it can be noticed that refugees imagine the difficulties of reintegration even before the possibility of return.

Re-establishing a life upon returning to Syria and starting over from nothing was expressed by the participants. That included that they ought to find a house, a job and settle within a new routine of working hours and social life. The participants are aware of the re-establishing process and worry about going through it. It was imagined to be difficult because they had already established a life in Syria before the war and had to do it again in the Netherlands after the war. One of the participants in this study, Jamal, said:

Jamal, 32: *“It is really difficult, the thing is that people do not understand and cannot estimate the effort, weariness and the time that we spend to try to re-establish yourself from scratch [...], another thing is the ‘integration process’ the more one integrates in the Netherlands, the more difficult it becomes to leave everything and go back to Syria and start again (-).”*

Jamal expresses his attitude towards return as it takes a lot of effort and time to start over. The outcome of return according to him is re-establishing a lifestyle again. He expressed that he had done it twice already and not willing to do it for a third time. This can be also related to the participant’s past behaviour rather than imagining return. His intentions are expressed based on his past experience of re-establishing a new life rather than imagining its difficulty. Rogge (1994), showed how refugees struggled upon return because they had problems with re-establishing their lives.

Returning to Syria means reintegrating and re-establishing a life. These aspects were considered to be difficult by the participants and were part of their attitudes towards return.

4.2.3 Identifying home

'Home' was a concept that showed to be related to how the participants felt about returning. How participants identified 'home' related to their intention to return. Participants who wanted to return permanently identified home as the country one was born in. Participants also expressed that considering Syria as 'home' gives them the a feeling of belonging. Belonging can imply belonging to land or belonging to a specific society (UNHCR, 1985). Saad and Eman said about their thoughts of 'home':

Saad, 29: *"One returning to his homeland, to where he was born, where he lived his memories, where he lived his childhood, where his friends and family are, his job....like home! [...], I cannot tell you 'ik voel me thuis' (I am home) in the Netherlands like they say in Dutch, I don't feel that, niet thuis! (not home)"*

Eman, 29: *"Sometimes people say home is any land you live on and feel comfortable, no! Home is the thing that when you were born it remained in your heart, [...], home is where you were born in and you are attached to and feel you belong to [...], no matter how many places you go to you should always remember that your identity is from that country [...], I do not consider Netherlands my home, it is a very beautiful country and the people are hospitable but considering it my country will create a conflict in my head, there is a country that is my home and a country that I feel comfortable in, but no...if there is a possibility of return I will not in my life say I will stay in the Netherlands."*

The participants explain in the previous quotes what home means to them as the both intend to return. Saad, explains home is the place where he was born in and spent his childhood in. He further expresses how he does not consider the Netherlands as 'home'. It is worth mentioning that as he was expressing in Arabic, the phrase relating to his feeling towards the Netherlands was mentioned in Dutch. Eman, was expressing her meaning of home obviously, as it is the place of birth and a place to belong to, and disagreeing with people who would define home as a comfortable place. According to her she cannot feel that the Netherlands or any other country could be her 'home' because belonging to Syria gives her comfort. Feeling that she has a place that she comes from and her identity is from that place comforts her that she is not lost and that she can state where she originally comes from. Moreover, Eman distinguishes between countries considered good to live in and a country which is 'home'. Similarly, it was found that feeling attached to the country of origin was related to return intentions (De Haas et al., 2015). Migrants who originally intended to migrate permanently then chose to return was because they missed their 'home' (Gmelch, 1980).

However, participants who did not desire to return permanently identified home as the place one feels comfortable in. Home was the place of living and feeling secure and free. Hammond, (1999), argues that 'home' for refugees does not imply necessarily to the country of origin. Diana said:

Diana, 30: *"I can tell you that I am realistic [...], yes the home is where you live and feel comfortable in, like if you do not feel comfortable with the people, place, and it is not safe to live in, I will not say "a cup of coffee in my homeland is worth the world" no I cannot tell you that."*

Diana explains that 'home' is where the place that is safe and secure. She relates home to her basic needs of safety. She emphasized on not considering Syria as 'home' when it is not safe by using a Syrian expression of not 'valuing a cup of coffee' over her safety in Syria. Therefore, as long as Syria is not safe, thus it is not 'home', she will not intend to return.

Moreover, temporary return was not related to the concept of 'home'. Some participants felt temporary return was considered to be part of the decision making process of returning permanently.

They imagined that several visits regularly to Syria would help them to decide a permanent return or not. Fares said:

Fares, 32: *“If I were able to see my family once a year, I would be able to make up my mind, this doubt I have, I would be able to say ‘no way’ the situation in Syria is unbearable and I cannot build a future, then I would decide to live in Netherlands and visit that place I love.”*

Fares expresses his thoughts about the possibility of testing the situation in Syria thus to decide permanent return. If he the Netherlands were a better place for him then he intends to keep regular visits to see his family. Also other studies showed that several visits to the country of origin helped migrants to decide permanent return, therefore they kept a transnational movement (Conway et al., 2009).

Beliefs of what is ‘home’ were related to return intentions. Intentions were stronger towards return when the country of origin was considered ‘home’. Alternatively, when ‘home’ is not related to a country but rather to a place with good living conditions, intentions to return seemed to differ and pushed towards the country that provides better living conditions, such as providing security.

4.2.4 Family and rebuilding Syria

Previously, participants expressed why they may or may not return to Syria. In this paragraph, the focus shifts towards reasons which would support participants attitudes towards returning to Syria. In this study, reasons found to motivate the participants to intend to return were family reasons and rebuilding Syria.

The idea of return was approached as an outcome to be with family, especially parents. Regardless of the manner of return, some participants expressed that returning to Syria would never occur to them if it were not for their loved ones who live in Syria, Fares said:

Fares, 32: *“The thing that remains that will make me go back and live in Syria is my family, that is the only thing, well to stay there for the rest of my life...is my family, my parents, my siblings, are the main reason for me to return if I am to return.”*

Fares clearly expresses his will to return for family reasons. Returning for him means achieving his objective of being with his family, though he cannot determine his manner of return. Moreover, thinking about parents’ death occurred to Hassan, as he said:

Hassan, 26: *“Sometimes I also think what if one of my parents, God forbid, died soon, of course I would love to be there to put them in ground, but then...it is a horrible thing to think, but then it is also something... if I don’t grief, it can be stuck in my soul all the time, so I really have to be there to grief.”*

Hassan expresses his desire to return to be able to grief for a parent’s death. Similarly, missing the family and the death of a parent were described as the main reasons for refugees in the UK to visit their country of origin (Muggeridge and Dona, 2006).

Another motive to return was the participation in rebuilding Syria. The desire to join in the rebuilding phase that Syria will go through after the war was described by the participants. Some participants expressed the goal of acquiring skills in the Netherlands to use them in a project that will contribute to helping the society in Syria. Samar said:

Samar, 33: *“I do like to return to do something, build something in Syria, for example something with education, I care a lot about the education, something with transitional justice, that is very difficult and complicated but I like to have a role in Syria, so return to me is with a role.”*

Samar expresses her intention to return in order to participate in rebuilding after the war. During the interview, she stated her aim to complete her masters education to acquire the skills necessary to help in projects needed in Syria. It was found previously that refugees do have the desire to 'rebuild' their country of origin after the destruction the war caused and use their obtained skills in the host country in the benefit of their country of origin (Zimmermann, 2012; Stepputat, 2004). Moreover, Eman said:

Eman, 29: *"The Netherlands is beautiful and everything but if I stay here the Dutch are not going to go and rebuild Syria you know, the Syrians here should go back and rebuild."*

Eman indicates that Syria will need all Syrian to return in order to rebuild it after the war. She believes that rebuilding is a matter that will concern only the Syrians and they ought to not depend on other people to rebuild Syria. It can be explained that the participants felt that they will be needed to rebuild Syria, therefore they are motivated to acquire skills and find use of those skills in the benefit of their country of origin.

The reasons and motives of the participants in this study played a role in their attitude towards return and subsequently their intentions to return. It has been shown that return intentions are often related to the reasons and motives to return (Gmelch, 1980).

4.2.5 Children

Children in this study played a role in the attitude towards return intentions of the participants with and without children. Regardless of what participants personally wanted, their priority was with the children. Participants who intend to return but would not, is because they believe that the benefit of their children is in the Netherlands rather than in Syria. Mustafa expressed his beliefs about returning would be related to how the situation for his children would be as he said:

Mustafa, 42, married, two children: *"To make it short, do I want to return? Yes certainly! How? if there were some fundamental things to return upon, not for me but for my children."*

Mustafa expresses his personal intention to return in a positive attitude that was shifted to a negative attitude when thinking about his children. He assures that living conditions ought to be optimal in order to return, for his children. Participants in this study supported the notion of the benefit of the children would be in the host country, the Netherlands.

Some participants believe that their children cannot adapt to the country of origin because they are growing up in the host country and it is considered their 'home' or they imagined that children in general would not be able to adapt in Syria. Moreover, some participants imagined that they would want their children to at least visit Syria to see the country of origin of their parents. It has been shown that children of migrants visit the country of origin repeatedly for ethnical reasons and see where their parents originally came from (Schimmer and van Tubergen, 2014). Jamal said in that regard:

Jamal, 32, single, no children: *"If there were children and the war ended, they might be older and speaking Dutch so they will prefer to live in the Netherlands, so it will become even more difficult as time passes, so I will decide to return as a visit, one or two months, vacation, to see my family, to show my children where their father came from then return to Netherlands to carry on with their lives."*

Jamal clearly expresses his concerns about his future children. The older they get, the less likely he will intend to return permanently because the Netherlands is better for them. Nevertheless, he still intends to maintain regular visits with his children to introduce them to Syria and the Syrian culture. During the interview Jamal expressed his feelings towards Syria and his attachment to the Syrian

culture, though his return intentions were not based on that. Therefore, he would like his children to be familiar with that place and maybe they would understand him more personally. Children played an important role in the attitudes of the participants as they can alter their personal intentions of return for their children.

It can be concluded that permanent return was expressed in both positive and negative attitudes by the participants. Positive attitudes were related to the thoughts about 'returning home' and feelings of belonging to a country. Alternatively, negative attitudes towards return were impacted by the reasons that forced the participants to leave Syria, imagining reintegrating and re-establishing a life upon return, and the benefit of their children. Children can be considered as significant others too, therefore can interlink with subjective norms that will be discussed in the following section.

4.3 Subjective Norms and return intentions to Syria

Subjective norms are the influence of the significant others in return intentions. Also, subjective norms can play a role in the pressure the participant may feel from others or society to return. Participants may consider return as what is expected of them to do.

In general, it was a prominent observation that the group of participants in this study felt independent from the norms or expectations within their environment. Even though they take into consideration the desires of their loved ones.

The loved ones of the participants that were mostly mentioned to influence their return intentions are parents. Some participants argued that they knew what their parents wanted regarding return but still do not intend to follow their desires if it is not reasonable for them. Participants who mentioned that their parent's wanted them to return indicated this was because their parents wanted them to be close to them. Parents want their children to be present as they grow older and this shows a close family attachment among the participants. Amer said in this regard:

Amer, 27: "They influence me honestly, but I am also rational. I know that if I listen to what my dad says every day about return, I will go back tomorrow. That is because he really wants to see me, also my mum, their main concern is not...not me getting older and them getting really old, it is not seeing me getting old next to them, this is their concern you know."

Amer obviously states the influence of his parents in his life but he chooses to not be controlled by his emotions. His main concern was taking care of his parents as they grow older. During the interview he expressed his preference of his family coming to the Netherlands rather than him returning to Syria. This rationality expressed by the participants shows that return is not a simple step to take, but rather a process to think about in details. Moreover, it was expressed by some participants that if there were no other way to see their parents they might eventually comply to the norms. Jamal said in that matter:

Jamal, 32: "If my family decided and told me to return because they want to see me, and if I were not able to bring them to the Netherlands, then it would be possible, not certain, but possible that I return."

Jamal, like Amer, would prefer his parents to come to the Netherlands rather than he returns. However, if there were no other option for him to see them and be with them he would comply to his parents desire and return as soon as he is able. It has been shown that migrants who intended to migrate permanently found themselves returning due to taking care of family members as what is expected from them (Gmelch, 1980).

However, imagining subjective norms in the future was also expressed by some participants. They included imagining what expected children and future partners would think. The role of children was mentioned in the previous paragraph as part of the attitudes towards return. However, participants with and without children expressed how children can play a role in how participants would comply to social norms. They believe their children would expect them to not return to Syria in the future, therefore, they may not return for their children's desire. Diana said:

Diana, 30, married, two children: *“Honestly I don't like to tell you it doesn't matter to them, no instead I think they would want to stay in Netherlands, they arrived very young, so to them when you put them in a place when they are young they would think this is the right place, like when I was in Syria I did not know anything outside Syria so I saw it as the right place.”*

Diana expressed what she believes her children would expect of her as she compared the situation to herself as when she was a child. Comparing her children with herself as a child may be the only way to expect how children would think. She grew up in Syria, had her friends, her school and her house. She imagined herself as a child being moved from her environment and that would be against her desires. Her children are growing up in the Netherlands and in their familiar environment, therefore, if they would not want to return she would certainly comply to that norm.

Though, married or in relationship participants did not emphasize on the effect of their partner, the single participants who imagined a future partner did. Single participants expressed that since returning to Syria would no longer be an individual one they ought to take into account what their partner would expect of them whether in staying in the Netherlands or returning to Syria. Jamal said:

Jamal, 32, single, no children: *“If one were married to a Syrian and she wants to stay in the Netherlands, she is working, then it will be hard to tell her: leave everything and let's go back, it doesn't work that way, and if one were married to a Dutch it is even more difficult, how can you tell her to leave and go back with you.”*

Jamal takes into account what his future partner may expect him to do. He stated the role of the background of a partner, whether Syrian or Dutch. His intentions towards return were affected by his significant other, in this case his possible partner. It has been noticed that intentions to migrate are related to having a partner, in which couples would want to follow each other (Van Dalen and Henkens, 2012). It seems that not only current partners but also imagined partners in the future may play a role in return intentions.

Lastly, the society in general was also considered to play a role in creating social norms for the participants. Not only social norms which existed in the Syria, but also in the Dutch society were discussed. Though most of the participants showed the absence of facing social pressure, few participants mentioned that if a flow of Syrian refugees would return to Syria they would return too. Saad said:

Saad, 29: *“If it is safe again, real safe, and people started to return and work, I will return [...], if they returned, my family and friends too, my close friends, if they returned they would encourage me and tell me come back it is all good, like it is not 100% safe but it is safe enough, these factors can encourage me to return.”*

Saad explains that if people started to return, even though it would be partially safe, he would intend to return. He explains that he would be encouraged to return if he were assured by the people who returned that it is safe enough to return. Moreover, other participants indicated they felt pressure from their Dutch friends, as Hassan said:

Hassan, 26: *“True, a lot of people don’t want me to go back, especially Dutch people. They say: No, no, no, you cannot live there. NO, no you are fine in the Netherlands.”*

Hassan clearly indicates that the Dutch would expect him to not return to Syria as it is not the best place for him. Whether it is due to his homosexuality or the war, they believe that the Netherlands is better than Syria. Hassan does comply to that as he does not wish to return permanently and returning temporarily was related to his desire in participating in rebuilding Syria.

Participants in this study seemed to be independent from the social pressures they may feel from their significant others. Their attitudes towards returning and the control they perceive to have to decide to return, in the following section, seemed to play a larger role in the return intention than the norms upon returning to Syria. This may be related to their situation as being forced migrants. They were forced to leave, therefore they may be relating their thoughts about return to that concern rather than the norms.

4.4 Perceived Behaviour Control and return intentions to Syria

Perceived behaviour control is the perspective of the participants of what could play a role in controlling their ability to return. Participants described this concern by revealing factors that could hinder or facilitate return. In the Reasoned action approach, it is theorized that the concept of perceived behaviour control can lead to intentions as well as leading the individual towards a behaviour directly (Fishbein and Ajzen, 2010). Here that would mean that the participants may perceive barriers to their decision to return to Syria or interfere with their intention to return.

Some participants highlighted the role of official procedures during the interviews. Participants mentioned that though they are expressing their intentions, opinions and perceptions, it does not exclude the fact that in the end it might not be their decision. They thus take into account official matters and that they might be forcibly sent back against their intentions. Diana said in that regard:

Diana, 30: *“Do not forget that it is not up to us, for example if Syria returned to the way it was, they would tell us to return, you know our residency is conditional, not certain, but if it were my choice it depends (-)”*

Diana distinguishes between being obligated to return due to the conditional residency and having the choice to return as she discussed her personal conditions. She keeps reminding herself that the permanent residency is not a certain matter, therefore, regardless of what she desires she might eventually be bound to the official procedures and be forced to return. Moreover, Tarek said:

Tarek, 27: *“We were afraid of the elections and we were among the most people who were watching and following the elections, us Syrians, we know about them maybe more than the Dutch, because we are aware that any decision might affect us. I wish the decisions will not affect our future as we are building it. The surrounding circumstances affect me because as my own decisions I know what I want (-)”*

Tarek clearly expresses his concerns about procedures in the Netherlands and official matters. Similarly to Diana he acknowledges that even though he knows what he wants it is not in his control if official decisions determined his return. Official procedures can be viewed as the direct control towards the choice to return.

It was noticed that all participants described returning in the context of ‘safety’. Their ability to return was based on the level of safety in Syria. They also expressed that they cannot control conditions of safety but it will facilitate their return to Syria.

Some participants expressed safety from a political point of view. The current Syrian regime as well as other militias were considered dangerous and were related to the ability to return. Therefore, only upon changes in the political system of Syria and the elimination of other militias will the ability of return take place. Saad explains in this regard:

Saad, 29: *“I have a reason or a dream, first of all that the current regime will not remain that is ‘number one’, the second thing those extremists, like ISIS and the terrorists also ‘number two’, if those two things are gone I think Syria will be safe again. If Syria became a democratic country, a proper one without the current Syrian regime and extremists, and we have real freedom real democracy, at that point I will return immediately!”*

Saad clearly expresses what is ‘safe’ according to him, as it is changes in the current political system with the elimination of any terrorist militias. Moreover, he desires democracy and freedom, in which he cannot provide himself, and he states his certain personal ability to return if his desires were accomplished. The end of war was shown to not be enough in previous studies too, and the ability of refugees to return was related to political conditions (Riiskjaer and Nielsson, 2008). Saad expressed his personal ability to return which can show certain capacity, other participants questioned their own ability to return even when it will be possible to return. Amal answered when she was asked about her mental, physical, and emotional capability to return:

Amal, 25: *“No, it is not that easy, no! But I do wish that after a few years that I would be able to return. Or at least be ready to do such a thing.”*

Amal strongly shows her personal concerns to be able to return even though she does intend to return temporarily. During the interview she expressed that it would be a difficult step for her, because thinking about return is different than actual return. Thinking was considered easy but to return, it would require courage to face old memories when she left Syria. She feels her personal emotions will play a role in controlling her ability to return, though she does hope that she will gain that courage in the future and be capable of returning. It can be concluded that participants take into account their own capacity when thinking about return.

Moreover, another procedure to be taken in order to feel safe or free is obtaining the Dutch citizenship. Syrian refugees can become Dutch citizens via naturalisation if they completed the conditions required (IND, 2016a). Emphasizing on this concern, all the participants in this study mentioned the importance of obtaining the Dutch citizenship, this permanent residency in the Netherlands and the Dutch passport. This concern is mutual among refugees in previous studies, for refugees would not return to the country of origin without guaranteeing the ability to move freely (Stepputat, 2004; Muggeridge and Dona, 2006). Some participants expressed having a Dutch passport as a ‘safety net’. Hassan said:

Hassan, 26: *“If I have my nationality and I know within inside that if something bad happens to me I can anytime come back to a safe land, I would go to Syria [...], every time that I feel fear or something, I can always go back to the embassy saying you know what I am not safe here anymore please I want to go back to Netherlands, for example!”*

It was understood from Hassan that acquiring the Dutch citizenship will make him feel safe because he can guarantee his return. Therefore, he would return to Syria knowing that when he feels danger he can easily leave again. Moreover, the Dutch passport was expressed to be a ‘facilitator’ which facilitates movement across countries, this creates a certain autonomy over controlling ones’ own decision to travel elsewhere in Europe. Jamal said:

Jamal, 32: *“One is trapped and not able to travel and the reason for that is the passport he holds like my Syrian passport, that is a problem so becoming a citizen solves this. If I had the Dutch passport I can travel and move with no obstacles, [...], the idea is that the person is the same human being nothing has changed, he is the same height the same face the same everything but has a Syrian passport, so he cannot go and see his parents [...]. If I had another passport, the red passport, being the same person, I can enter [name of a country], and that is ‘unfair’ but it is out of my control, I can complain about it but in the end I can only change the passport, so in that case become a Dutch citizen.”*

Jamal elaborates on the situation of why he needs the Dutch passport. During the interview he spoke of a country, where his parents are, that rejected to give him a visa because of his passport. Obtaining a Dutch passport will allow him to be able to see his family and move freely. Though he states that the passport situation is not fair, he does acknowledge that it is not something he can control. Her personally believes that one should be capable of moving around with his own Syrian passport but since it is out of his control to travel freely with such a document, he would change his passport. That will enhance his ability to move around being the exact same person with a different passport, in this case obtaining the Dutch passport, being a stronger document than the Syria passport.

However, only one participant in this study, Eman, mentioned that her intention to return is so strong that she might not want to complete the years required to obtain the Dutch citizenship. What controls her intention now is the war. She does not feel she has the autonomy to do whatever she intends, because of this external factor. Eman said:

Eman, 29: *“If they said after 5 years you can obtain the citizenship and I had completed the requirements ‘why not’ I do aspire to get the citizenship, eventually that is a strong passport that can carry you anywhere [...], , if the war stopped, [...], if I can return tomorrow I will return, I will not wait to complete the years required for the citizenship”*

Eman feels that she has the skill to obtain the Dutch citizenship, but that is not her priority if it were not necessary. She acknowledges the importance of obtaining a Dutch citizenship, therefore, it is a rational thing to apply for it if she fulfilled its requirements. During the interview, she expressed that she will not waste the opportunity of achieving a Dutch passport after completing the years it requires. As she had put an effort during these years and accomplishing a Dutch passport, though it is not a priority, would be the rational thing to do.

Considering official procedures, safety, and personal capability seemed to be related to the perceived behaviour control in this study that played a role in return intentions. Though official procedures and safety seemed to be outside of the control of the participants, obtaining a Dutch passport and the personal ability to return participants expressed to have control over within the coming years.

4.5 Daily lives and Concerns in relation to thinking about return and intentions to return

This final section will discuss the role of intentions in the participants’ daily lives and concerns, in which were based on inductive codes.

The participants in this study, regardless of their intentions to return, expressed their daily lives of trying to be productive. Therefore, intentions to return did not seem to be a direct role in their daily lives. Even though it is mandatory to learn the first level of Dutch as part of their integration (IND, 2016a), they still proceeded learning higher levels of the language in order to study or to find a job. Samar said:

Samar, 33: *“Syria doesn’t skip my mind because my house and all my stuff is related to Syria, I cook Syrian food [...], But I am studying Dutch intensively now. I have a lot of activities, there is a musical play I am participating in, there is here a place where they always have activities for Syrians the new neighbours and the old neighbours, they call us the new neighbours, so I work with them.”*

Samar expresses her busy schedule that is filled with different activities and volunteer work besides learning Dutch. Though she does think about Syria as the decoration of her house is related to the Syrian culture, she explains that her active lifestyle has pushed thinking about return to the back of her mind. It can be concluded that, when time is spent on activities in the participants’ daily lives in the Netherlands, thoughts about return do not play a role in their daily behaviours. The argument of the ‘myth of return’ and intentions to return may play a role in the behaviour of refugees (Al-Rasheed, 1994; Chabé-Ferret et al., 2016), did not seem to show in this group of participants.

Moreover, some participants mentioned that a ‘long-term plan’ is not in their system anymore, instead they only have a ‘short-term’ plan. East Europeans who were interviewed have implied that though they would return eventually, “At the present they live on a day-by-day basis and do not make long-term plans because their return is anything but certain.” (Parutis, 2013, p.164). Jamal said:

Jamal, 32: *“Well one of the lessons this war taught us was not to have ‘long term plans’, I had it in Syria and I was really disappointed [...], the future is always ‘foggy’ no one knows what will happen, so live day by day, I am living here in Netherlands, I am learning Dutch as if I will become a Dutch citizen tomorrow, I am studying (masters) as if I will find a job tomorrow, at the same time I stay in touch with my family and loved ones, and the Arab world, Syria, generally through the internet or newspapers or watching the news.”*

Jamal clearly shows that his intention return does not affect his daily life but he does prefer to live day by day. He expresses his disappointment of his previous plans because he became a forced migrant, therefore he does not desire to have long-term plans but rather short-term plans and not think too much of the future because it is ‘unknown’. It shows that for the participants it is difficult to predict how their lives will turn out, as they noticed that in the unexpected change in their lives when the war started. This unexpected change makes them realize that they can have intentions to do things, but that these may not turn into behaviour, because of unexpected events, which may cause the change of their minds. It shows the difference between intending to return while return is not yet possible and intending to return when actual return can take place.

The ‘unknown future’ was mentioned by some participants emphasizing on their situation based on the time the interview took place. They expressed that the possibility of changing the intentions they spoke of during the interview can always change. Senyurekli and Menjivar (2012), argued that intentions and return considerations do not remain constant over time in exile. Mustafa answered the following when he was asked about the possibility of changing his intentions that he expressed:

Mustafa, 42: *“Sure! I am talking to you from a weak stance, it just happened that when you talked to me I was not at my best period [...], what do I fear here in the Netherlands? I will say the future, why? Because it is unknown!”*

Mustafa describes during the interview his daily concerns about his future in the Netherlands, while he was in the process of finding a job and applying for a master program. The timing of the interview did not take place during his best moments, which may have played a role in how he thought about his intentions to return. He felt much stronger about the intention to return because he had his daily struggles with finding a job.

Lastly, the state of being a refugee was a topic brought up and discussed by the participants. Some participants expressed their negativity towards being called ‘refugees’ while other participants did not mind being called refugees. It may be concluded that it was related to a social status, because they had high social status in Syria and they are not entitled to that status in the Netherlands, alternatively being a refugee is a lower social status. Jamal said in this matter:

Jamal, 32: *“The thing is that we as refugees are sensitive towards this topic, we must constantly prove that we are good, and that is a disaster, [...], I want the Dutch to understand that I am a normal person that has ‘all kinds of behaviours’ I might be ‘moody’, I might be ‘friendly’, so it depends, [...], I have tried to deliver the message that do not treat me as a refugee, instead treat me a normal human [...], like I always try to show that I am good, I am generous, I have an opinion, so that is exhausting, so deal with refugees normally like any other person.”*

Jamal expresses how he behaves daily in order to prove himself. He declares how ‘exhausting’ it is because like any other human he might not be in a good mood but then he forces himself to do something against his will to avoid being called ‘not good’. He is concerned that the Dutch might relate the reason of ‘not good’ to his status as a refugee and not as a normal human behaviour. Therefore, he elaborates on the sensitive stance the refugees are in, which forces them to act differently than if they were in their country of origin. Moreover, Rami said:

Rami, 26: *“ The image of the refugee is that person who crossing the borders and jumping walls to arrive here and does not know how to speak English and is uneducated. That is how they see us generally [...], I try to show that we are not like that, we are human in the end, like we can speak English and we are university graduates, we were put in this position, it is not something we love doing, like the ‘uitkering’ (financial benefit) is not a dream to me, it was a huge burden till I got rid of it. That image is all wrong, so I mean by proving ourselves is to change that image, at least I speak for myself, it is how I treat you (addressing the Dutch), that I speak your language, I have learned it quickly, I did voluntary work, I am not just sitting there doing nothing.”*

Rami obviously explains that he believes the stereotype of the refugees ought to be changed and he works on that from his side every day. Jamal and Rami have different intentions towards returning to Syria but they both expressed how their status of being a refugee plays a role in their daily lives similarly. Jamal who intends to return, temporarily or permanently, may have related his intentions to his daily behaviours which are exhausting, and this behaviour is related to being a refugee. On the other hand, Rami, who does not intend to return, works on proving not to be seen as ‘only a refugee’, because he does not want to return. It has been shown that the intentions to return of migrants were related to the difference of social status between the host country and the country of origin (Parutis, 2013). Moreover, it has been noticed previously that some refugees do not prefer being called ‘refugees’ (Al-Rasheed, 1994).

These findings were presented to provide more details about how participants perceived the connection between return intentions and their daily lives and concerns. The ‘myth of return’ seemed to not play a role in the participants lives. The participants showed that even though they think about return, it does not hold them back in their daily activities. In fact, they are devoted to learn Dutch and busy trying to be productive in their lives, either by working, volunteering or studying. Moreover, they do not have long-term plans but prefer to live day by day. However, the status of being a refugee did play a role in their daily behaviours, as they are perceived different when they would be in Syria.

5. Discussion and conclusion

In this chapter, the outcomes of this study are presented. Firstly, the findings of this study will be discussed then secondly, the role of the Reasoned action approach in this study will be presented. Subsequently, the limitations of this research and further research will be discussed.

5.1 Conclusions and discussion of the results

Previous studies showed that migrants choose to migrate temporarily or permanently and therefore prepare themselves to leave (Chabé-Ferret et al., 2014), however, forced migrants do not have that option and they face the reality of leaving with perhaps no initial intentions to migrate (Klinthall, 2007). The group participants of Syrian refugees in this study, are forced migrants that did not choose to migrate, but as they arrived the Netherlands, they started to think about their stay as temporary or permanently. However, forced migrants and economic migrants show to consider return almost similarly in this study. Both types of migrants consider the reasons that pushed them to migrate regardless of what the reasons are and relate them to their intention to return before being able to return. Also, the ideas mentioned to consider return were based on similar concepts such as ‘home’ and ‘family’.

It is still not certain how to define return, however, this study about refugees’ opinions identifies return as both permanently and temporarily. In other words, a return is the first time to go back to Syria after leaving it the very last time and seeking refuge. Permanent return to Syria is to return and settle there and temporary return is a visit of a specific period of time. When distinguishing between permanent and temporary return, the intentions of the participants in this study were expressed differently, therefore this study calls the need of defining return according to the migrants/refugees themselves. The need for a definition was shown in a previous study (Parutis, 2013). Though, one previous study was found to distinguish between permanent and temporary intentions to return (Bilgili and Siegel, 2017), this study also differentiated between permanent return and temporarily return thus found a better understanding of how participants in this study think about return according to their manner of return. The intentions found related to a temporary return were expressed more certainly than intentions to permanent return, which was expressed with more uncertainty. It has been shown that migrants also hesitate when they think about permanent return (Senyurekli and Menjivar, 2012).

In this study, the expression of certainty of intending to return permanently was shown to be related to returning ‘home’. Also hesitation between staying in the Netherlands and returning to Syria was shown to be decided if a temporary return took place. Moreover, certain intentions to not return to Syria were shown to be related to past experiences that invoked negative memories. Earlier studies showed that refugees can relate to one of three types of refugees, the first group, is always certain of their return, because it is a return to their homeland. The second group, thinks about the host country as much as country of origin and is considering several things to decide where it is better to live, but considers this a quite continuous process. The third group, are those who do not wish to return at all (Al-Rasheed, 1994). This study has encountered all three perspectives in relation to permanent or temporary return.

When considering return, both permanent and temporarily, many aspects were taken into account when expressing intentions to return while return is not possible. Among the diverse background characteristics of the participants, having children seemed to play the most important role when thinking about return, while age and gender did not seem to play a role in return intentions of the participants.

Behavioural attitudes of return were expressed negatively and positively and with mixed emotions. Personal reasons for leaving Syria were related to past experiences that shaped the beliefs towards return. In this study, war was not the only the reason that caused participants to leave Syria. Experiencing detention and the military service were also reasons to leave Syria, and if these reasons remained even if the war ended some participants would not want to return. Moreover, being homosexual forced some participants in this study to leave Syria and would not consider return even after the war due to the society in Syria that does not accept homosexual activities. Therefore, this study emphasizes the importance of considering the reason of migration in order to understand future intentions of return.

Return in this study was believed to be difficult because it is related to the necessity of reintegrating and re-establishing a life from 'nothing'. Reintegrating was not shown in previous studies to be related to return intentions but rather to return decision-making after actual return had happened (Rijskjaer and Nielsson, 2008; Parutis, 2013; Warner, 1994; Sabharwal and Varma, 2016). This study found that thinking about reintegration is a part of return intentions even when return is not yet possible. Moreover, re-establishing a life from 'nothing' was considered difficult based on past behaviour, because participants who thought about re-establishing a new life had already done that in Syria as well as in the Netherlands. Therefore it is important to bear in mind past activities that have already been performed in relation to return intentions such as re-establishing a life from 'nothing'.

The concept of 'home' was related to the attitudes towards return intentions, for example, when Syria was considered 'home' by some participants, they expressed their intentions to 'return home'. This study showed that personal identification of 'home' plays a role in return intentions even when return cannot be executed yet. Most previous studies on return migration and return intentions relate 'home' with return because 'home' has shown to guide intentions of return (Omata, 2013; Malkki, 1995 Storti, 2001; Ghanem, 2003).

Lastly, motives and reasons to return in this study showed to play a role in the attitudes towards return. Motives included family reasons and participation in rebuilding Syria after the war. Family reasons were based on the desire to see loved ones and be beside them, especially parents. Also, the desire to participate in rebuilding Syria was shown to be a strong motive for some participants to return, for both permanent and temporary return. It has been expected that refugees would return to their country of origin to participate in rebuilding after a war is over (Essuman-Johnson, 2011). This study has shown the personal desire towards rebuilding the country of origin after a conflict.

Children, as mentioned earlier, played an important role in return intentions. Children were considered in both attitudes and subjective norms of return intentions. Children are the priority, therefore, parents intend to behave according to their children's benefits rather than their personal desires. Moreover, it was imagined what the children would expect their parents to do in the future and therefore it was intended to comply to such expectations.

The participants on this study experience subjective norms and expectations not only from their imagined children but also parents, the Syrian society and the Dutch society. Independency and individuality seemed to be dominant over the opinions of significant others. Therefore intentions were related to personal opinions rather than complying to the norms that were known. Subjective norms was shown to play a smaller role in intentions to return before being able to return compared to the attitudes and controls perceived. This might be related to the absence of feeling social pressure.

Perceived behaviour control was considered the outside control of returning, the capacity, and the autonomy of return intentions. Official procedures were considered to control the choice of return even when the intention to return and actual return could not take place. The possibility of being forced to return was expressed to control their behaviour regardless of personal desires, and that was related to being forced to migrate. However, imagining the ability to return differed among individuals based on their own feelings and experiences. Some individuals feel ready to return immediately when they are able to return while others find it difficult to return directly when return is possible. Moreover, the possibility of controlling external factors were diverse. Considering safety was also the control perceived, however the autonomy of controlling the safety of Syria politically is not possible, while the autonomy for acquiring the Dutch passport for safe movement is possible. However, when actual return took place among refugees in previous studies, it was shown that they thought about official procedures and did not return before obtaining permanent residency (Stepputat, 2004; Muggeridge and Dona, 2006; Zimmermann, 2012). This study shows that participants in this study do not think about their personal desires in return intentions and direct controls of return separately, even when return is yet not possible.

This study has also observed the daily lives and concerns of the participants in relation to their intentions to return. The daily lives and concerns showed to be of great importance to have an idea of how return intentions may be a part of the daily lives of the forced migrants in this study. Though the participants think about return regularly, it did not seem to interfere with their daily behaviours. They were studying Dutch in order to integrate as well as studying, working or searching for a study or a job. Even though return intentions did not play a role in daily lives, thinking about Syria is part of daily lives and concerns, whether it was by keeping up with the news about Syria, decorating the house in a traditional Syrian way, cooking Syrian food, or by staying in touch with Syrian people. Therefore, the 'myth of return' seemed to somehow exist in the refugees' minds in terms of thinking about return but not in terms of interfering with their daily lives, because they were behaving in a way that return may not be possible. Bolognani (2016), argued that the 'myth of return' is to be closer to fantasy. This study does support that the 'myth of return' can be related to fantasy because it is part of wishing to return one day but not necessarily possible.

This study adds to the literature an understanding of return intentions when actual return is not possible yet. Participants in this study considered difficult aspects of social and political factors. Also, forced migrants in this study can be distinguished from other migrants in some factors such as the reason for migrating in relation to return intentions, while they are comparable in other respects, such as their intentions to return to be with their parents.

5.2 Discussion within the theoretical framework

This study approached return intentions when return is not possible within a theoretical framework based on the reasoned action approach. Within the context of this study, it seemed that attitudes towards return intentions when actual return is not yet possible were expressed in an experiential perspective rather than instrumental. This has been observed in this study, because the believes for return were approached within emotional attitudes, by expressing what participants desire the things that could give them the pleasure to return, rather explaining about return as a good or bad behaviour.

Within the findings, it was shown that the participants knew what the norms would be and what could be expected of them but they would not comply to parents or social norms but rather comply to their children or partners' norms. Lastly, within the controls perceived in this study, the autonomy of being able to return was expressed as either possible, by obtaining the Dutch passport, or not by being controlled to official procedures. However, the capacity and the ability to decide was either a definite ability or a 'not certain'-ability.

The theory of reasoned action approach gave strong in-sights into the explanations of the intentions through behavioural attitudes. However, amongst the participants in this study the norms they may comply to and the facilitations/obstacles they thought to control them did not seem to play a role in explaining intentions to return of these participants. Moreover, theoretically perceived behaviour control should serve as a good explanation for behaviours rather than intentions. Because this study did not study actual behaviour of the participant group, it may not have played a role for the participants in this study.

Also in this study we did not encounter the question of rationality, for which the theory has been criticized. However, this study does support the question of sufficiency in reasoned action approach because the concept of 'past behaviour' was shown to play a role in the intentions towards return. The past behaviour of re-establishing a life from scratch was related to attitudes towards return but it can be considered separately along with other past behaviours if they existed.

In the light of return migration theories, this study does not support the neoclassical economics and new economics of labour migration theories in explaining return intentions of Syria refugees. Returning due to failure of their plans or after achieving the aim of migrating were not enough for the participants to intend to return. Moreover, in order for them to start a transnational activity they need to be able to return. In the meantime their return is not possible because Syria is still a war zone.

5.3 Limitations and further research

The Reasoned action approach can give in-sights into the ideas and thoughts of refugees' opinion towards return that cannot return yet, however another theory alongside with it might be better, to distinguish between desires and intentions. For example, Miller (1994), has distinguished between traits, desires and intentions when a theoretical framework of considering having a child. Moreover, the belief desire intention model, theorises that desires are what turns to intentions. Because this study was researching on return intentions as the actual behaviour of return cannot be approached, another theory can explain the variation between the roles of the Reasoned action approach concepts in these intentions.

Also, this study did not research the readiness and ability of return because return is not yet possible. Further follow up studies can be approached when return is possible in order to understand return migration within a return migration theory context. Cassarino (2004), has revisited the conceptual approach of return migration taking the resource of mobilization and the preparedness of the migrant into account. The concept of preparedness may be a part of return intentions as well as actual return.

During the interviews, it was apparent that quite some participants used Dutch words that can indicate their integration. Although this study did not focus on integration of the refugees in the Netherlands, it may be interesting to know more about the integration of refugees. Earlier studies have shown that diverse groups of refugees can integrate differently in the host society (Platts-Fowler and Robinson, 2015). Therefore, further research on integration in relation to return intentions can be considered.

Moreover, this study was based on 13 participants' stories and perceptions. The stories and experiences gathered during the study were based on the current situation the participants were in. Therefore it is important to know that the participant's opinions were based on their reflection on their lives and what they knew at the moment of the interview took place. People's situation change and with that their opinions may change too, thus it cannot be said what would they do exactly when the war would actually end. Therefore, follow up studies with the same participants can show changes in return intentions and help in understanding what invokes such changes. Follow-up studies can also take place with more participants with more diversity in their background factors. This can be approached by

combining methods of qualitative and quantitative research. Combining such methods can achieve a representative sample. Also by including more participants it can give a diversity of characteristics that could be studied concretely to understand how they play a role in intentions. Third, follow up studies would give a deeper understanding of what has triggered the changes or stability of previous intentions.

Lastly, there was a lack of research regarding return intentions of refugees who are still in exile. Studies with refugees can take place regularly to see their change of intentions and provide new literature on this topic.

6. References

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Appendices

Appendix 1 Interview guide

Interview guide:

Name:	Level of education:
ID for the study:	Occupation in Syria:
Gender:	Occupation in Netherlands:
Age:	Dutch level:
Marital status:	Children:

Background factors:

Can you tell me a little about yourself?

Can you tell me about your living conditions here in the Netherlands?

Probe: who do you live with? Who are your contacts? What do you do? How is your Dutch language?

How was your life in Syria?

Probe: feelings towards Syria (before the war and during, before coming to Netherlands).

What were your main reasons to come to Netherlands?

Probe: deciding to leave, the journey.

Can you explain to me how you feel about your life here?

Probe: made the right choice?/ living conditions, culture, nature, hang outs, food.

Opening about return:

If the war ended right now, would you want to return at this moment?

Why?

How often do you think about returning to Syria?

Probe: main things to consider for returning.

Have you ever left Syria (lived somewhere else other than Syria) before the war? How did you decide to return or why?

Did you have the intention to leave Syria before?

Attitudes:

How do you define home(land)?

Now that you are here for (#) years, how do you feel about Syria now?

Probes: belonging (home/country of origin)? Emotions? People?

What would (not)returning mean to you?

Can you imagine how would the return go?

Probes: define return (visit/permanent).

Can you describe to me if you are able (emotionally/mentally) to return?

Subjective norms:

Who will encourage you to return?/Who will hold you back from returning?

What do you think your loved ones would think about your decision?

How would these people influence you? Why?

Probe: connections with family, friends, partners, social network in Syria, Netherlands, other countries.

Perceived behaviour control:

What would you need to return?

What do you consider when you think about return?

What will facilitate your return? What will hinder your return?

What will make you (not)return?

Towards the ending:

Do you think that your intention will change over time?

Ending:

How did you feel while talking about this topic?

Appendix 2 Information letter



university of
groningen

faculty of spatial sciences

Intentions to return to Syria: The case of Syrian refugees residing in the Netherlands

النسخة العربية في الصفحة الثانية

Information letter:

This study is carried out for the master thesis at the University of Groningen, Faculty of Spatial Science, Population Studies. Information about the study is mentioned in this letter, for further information, or if you have any questions after reading this, please ask me.

The goal of this study is to understand Syrian refugees' intentions to return to Syria; Refugees who have been granted asylum and living in a social house in the Netherlands.

Participation: the study will be based on individual in-depth interviews. The interview will be recorded by a voice recorder application, and the duration of the interview will be between 45 and 60 minutes. You will be asked about your basic background information and your intentions to return to Syria; what relates to your intentions to return or not to return. No preparation for the interview is required as it is only about your perspectives and opinions.

You can choose to speak in your Syrian dialect, classical Arabic, English, or a mix between Arabic and English. You can choose where the interview will take place and if you want anyone else to be present other than the interviewer (researcher).

Your participation is voluntary; you have the right to withdraw at any moment of the study with no justifications. At any time, you can also choose to remove specific answers.

A copy of the recorded interview and the final thesis can be sent to you upon your request. The reason for recording is to be able to transcribe the interview later on and then analyse it. Only the interviewer will listen to the interview. As for the transcripts, the interviewer and her supervisor from the University of Groningen will read it. Translation from Arabic to English is required, this will be done by the interviewer, but in some cases a third party might be needed. The information you give will be treated with full confidentiality and anonymity. This information will not be identified.

The results of this study are used to complete a master thesis in population studies at the University of Groningen.

I will voice record your consent please before starting the interview. This record does not obligate you to participate, the purpose of it is just to confirm that you voluntarily participated and your role in this study is clear to you.



تتم هذه الدراسة من أجل بحث ماجستير في جامعة خرونغن، فرع العلوم المكانية، دراسة مجتمعات. محتوى هذه الرسالة هو معلومات عن الدراسة، من أجل المزيد من المعلومات أو الاستفسار بعد قراءتها، الرجاء سؤالي.

غاية الدراسة هي فهم نوايا اللاجئين السوريين المقيمين في هولندا للعودة الى سوريا. يقصد باللاجئين من قد حصلوا على إقامة في هولندا ويقومون في بيوتهم.

المشاركة: الدراسة مبنية على مقابلات فردية متعمقة. المقابلة مسجلة عن طريق تطبيق يسجل الصوت، ومدة المقابلة من 45 الى 60 دقيقة. سوف يتم السؤال عن معلومات أساسية حول خلفيتك وعن نيتك للعودة لسوريا من ناحية ماذا يؤثر على هذه النية. التحضير للمقابلة غير ضروري لأن المطلوب هو رأيك ووجهة نظرك فقط.

تستطيع الاختيار التكلم باللغة العربية الفصحى أو العامية السورية أو الإنكليزية أو مزيج من الاثنين. تستطيع اختيار مكان المقابلة و إن أردت حضور شخص آخر غير الباحث (الذي سيجري المقابلة).

المشاركة طوعية ولك الحق بالانسحاب متى شئت وبأي لحظة وبدون تبرير. وبأي وقت تستطيع اختيار حذف إجابة معينة بالمقابلة. يمكن ارسال التسجيل الصوتي لمقابلتك ونتائج البحث النهائي لك بناء على طلبك. سبب التسجيل هو لكي يكون بالإمكان الاستماع إليها عدة مرات وكتابتها وتحليلها وتجنب خسارة أية معلومة. من يستمع للتسجيل هو الباحث فقط. أما عن قراءة نص المقابلة المكتوب فكل من الباحث و المشرف على البحث سيفعل ذلك كما يوجد احتمال قراءتها من قبل طرف ثالث لدواعي الترجمة إن لزم الأمر. كل هذه المعلومات سيتم التعامل معها بمنتهى السرية و بدون الكشف عن هويتك.

نتائج الدراسة سيتم استعمالها لإتمام بحث الماجستير.

سوف أسجل موافقتك صوتياً قبل بدء المقابلة. هذه الموافقة لا تعني أنك ملزم بالاشتراك بل هي فقط للتأكيد على أنك تشترك طوعياً و أنك تفهم بوضوح ما هو دورك في هذه الدراسة.

Appendix 3 Code Tree

Attitude- Being a refugee
Attitudes- Comparing between Syria and Netherlands/Syrians and Dutch
Attitudes- Family in Syria
Attitudes- Future
Attitudes- NL
Attitudes- NL- Dutch citizenship
Attitudes- NL- Future in NL
Attitudes- NL- The Dutch
Attitudes- Reasons to stay in NL- Freedom
Attitudes- Reasons to stay in NL- Homosexuality
Attitudes- Returning to Syria- Before the war
Attitudes- Returning to Syria- Imagining return
Attitudes- Returning to Syria- Imagining/thinking- Conditions in Syria
Attitudes- Returning to Syria- Imagining/thinking- Syria after war
Attitudes- Returning to Syria- Imagining/thinking/intentions- Future-Unknown
Attitudes- Returning to Syria- Personal conditions to return/Personal needs
Attitudes- Returning to Syria- Reasons to return
Attitudes- Returning to Syria- Rebuild Syria
Attitudes- Returning to Syria- Reintegration process
Attitudes- Returning to Syria- Re-establishing
Attitudes- Returning to Syria/Intentions
Attitudes- Syria
Attitudes- Syria- Syrian regime
Attitudes-Reasons to stay in NL- Children
Attitudes-Reasons to stay in NL/Imagining- Family
Attitudes/Feelings- Interview/Talking about returning to Syria
Culture shock (in-vivo)
Decision making- Leaving Syria
Decision making- Leaving Syria- Attitude of leaving Syria
Decision making- Reasons to leave Syria- Conditions in Syria due to the war
Decision Making- Reasons to leave Syria- Detention by the Syrian regime
Decision making- Reasons to leave Syria- Military service
Decision making- Reasons to leave Syria- Safety/Experience personal story
Decision Making- Reasons to leave Syria- Threatened/Safety
Decisions making- Reasons to leave Syria- Homosexuality/Society

Decisions making- Reasons to leave Syria- No future
Decisions making- Reasons to leave Syria- Personal/Society/Syrian regime
Experience- Beginning of life in NL Vs. Now
Experience- Change of plans/desires
Experience- Journey/Arrival to NL
Experience-Beginning of life in NL
Feelings- Change of feelings towards Syria after the war/leaving Syria
Feelings- towards NL
Feelings- towards NL Vs Syria
Feelings- towards return
Feelings- towards Syria
Feelings- towards Syria- Missing/what is Missed
Forced (in-vivo)
Identifying- Home
Identifying- Home- Elements missing now
Identifying- Self identification
Intentions- Leaving Syria before the war
Intentions- Returning to Syria before the war (Before 2011)
Living conditions- Before the war (Before 2011)- Syria
Living conditions- Before the war (Before 2011)- Other countries
Living conditions- Change of habits- Attitudes
Living conditions- Currently in NL/Plans
Living conditions- Currently in NL/Plans- Motivation
Living conditions- Currently in NL/Plans- Social network
Living conditions- Currently in NL/Plans- Social network- Family in NL/Europe
Living conditions- Currently in NL/Plans- Social network- Family in Syria
Living conditions- Currently in NL/Plans- Social network- Language of communication
Living conditions- Currently in NL/Plans- Social network- Syrians
Living conditions- Imagination/thinking- Daily concerns
Living conditions- Imagination/thinking- Future plans
Living conditions- Integration- Dutch citizenship requirements
Living conditions- Integration- Dutch habits/Lifestyle
Living conditions- Integration- Dutch words used
Living conditions- Integration- Studying Dutch
Living conditions- Past plans
Living conditions- Social Integration
Living conditions- Social Integration- Activities/Volunteer/Work

Living conditions-Imagination/thinking- Memories
Living conditions Imagination/thinking- Dreams/Nightmares about Syria
Living conditions Imagination/thinking- Time spent thinking of Syria/Family
Nothing is certain in life (in-vivo)
Perceived behaviour control- Facilitate return to Syria
Perceived behaviour control- Hinder return to Syria
Perceived behaviour control- Hinder return to Syria- Experience
Perceived behaviour control- Official procedures
Respect my decisions (in-vivo)
Subjective norms- Brothers
Subjective norms- Children
Subjective norms- Father
Subjective norms- Imagining future family
Subjective norms- Influence of loved ones
Subjective norms- Mother
Subjective norms- Parents
Subjective norms- Siblings
Subjective norms- Sister
Subjective norms- What do they think about leaving Syria
Subjective norms- What do they think about Staying in NL
Subjective norms- Spouse
The course of life (in-vivo)
Wish (in-vivo)