



Asylum Seeking in an Age of Globalization

An Ethnographic Study on the Life Experiences of an Iranian Woman in The Netherlands

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Master Thesis Communication & Information Sciences

Track: Intercultural Communication

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February 2016

Abstract

This research examines the process of asylum seeking in an age of globalization, as experienced by an adult woman from Iran, named Azar. Ethnographic research methods were used to achieve an in-depth understanding of the social, cultural and societal aspects of this woman's life as an asylum seeker. Next to interviews and long conversations with Azar, observations were conducted in her church community, to gain a deeper comprehension of her sociocultural environments. In this study, Azar's life narrative is presented and analyzed, using anthropological and sociological concepts. The main findings of this research indicate that although government policies focus on limiting integration until refugee status is received, integration shows to be a natural process, which cannot entirely be limited through policy-making. Moreover, the fact that asylum procedures are often dealt with through a lens of strong national ideologies, leads to injustices within the procedures, as the diverse socio-cultural, historical and political backgrounds of asylum seekers are often neglected.

Keywords: asylum seeking; life experiences; liminality; identity; integration.

Acknowledgements

Along the process of writing this project, many individuals have been of great support and motivation.

A first ‘thank you’ should go to my supervisor, Max Spotti. He was there throughout this entire process, to guide, correct, challenge and motivate me. Without your knowledge and support Max, this thesis would not have been what it is now. Working for you has truly been an inspiring experience.

I am also thankful to Jan, for being the second reader of my thesis and for inspiring me to do research on asylum seekers through his lectures on language and globalization.

Also, I would like to thank Bas and Patti, my thesis mates. We have motivated, inspired and helped each other and I am grateful for having gone through this experience together with you.

Next to that, I am thankful to the Evangelical Baptist Community for welcoming me and allowing me to conduct my research in their congregation. A special thanks goes to Jeroen, who was a very helpful gatekeeper into the community and helped me to get into contact with my informant.

Furthermore, I am thankful to my friends. They have tolerated my lack of social life and have continued to support me in this writing process. A special thanks goes out to Monique, who has spent immeasurable hours with me in the library and has been of great support.

I am also very thankful to my mother and my grandmother, two very strong women in my life. They have inspired me to study and have always supported my decision to pursue an academic master degree.

Finally, I am deeply grateful to Azar, my informant, for this research would not have been able without her willingness to share her story. During our conversations and meetings I encountered her strength and her courage to be open about her story to someone she hardly knew. She opened my eyes for a reality which I had never experienced before from such a close distance, which is the reality of being an asylum seeker in today’s world. This helped me in my research, but also most certainly has helped me grow as an individual.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1. Background

The term ‘globalization’ is often linked to the idea that services, capital, people and goods are increasingly available at a global level (Bleiker, 2012). Kearney (1995) extends this idea by defining globalization as ‘social, economic, cultural and demographic processes that take place within nations but also transcend them, such that attention limited to local processes, identities and units of analysis yields incomplete understanding of the local’ (p. 548).

Appadurai (2000) seems to agree with this by arguing that globalization creates local problems of which the context transcends the local. In other words, in order to understand local processes one needs to consider the translocal contexts in which they are grounded.

Vertovec (2007) takes the notion of globalization a step further, and refers to the emanating demographic and social patterns in contemporary Western societies with the term ‘super-diversity’. He uses this term to ‘underline a level and kind of complexity surpassing anything the country has previously experienced’ (Vertovec, 2007, p. 1024).

Previously, diversity was defined by solely considering ethnicity and country of origin. However, examining diversity only taking into account these two variables does not provide an honest portrayal of what contemporary diversity encompasses (Vertovec, 2007). To gain a complete understanding of diversity, other variables next to ethnicity and country of origin need to be considered. These additional variables are nicely summarized in the following statement:

‘super-diversity is characterized by a tremendous increase in the categories of migrants, not only in terms of nationality, ethnicity, language, and religion, but also in terms of motives, patterns and itineraries of migration, processes of insertion into the labour and housing markets of the host societies, and so on’ (Blommaert & Rampton, 2011, p.1).

Super-diversity in Western societies is increased by the recent flows of asylum seekers seeking refuge in Europe. According to the Global Trends report 2014 of the UN Refugee Agency, 59.5 million people

were forcedly displaced from their homes by the end of 2014. The reasons why these people escape their countries are manifold, such as persecution on the basis of political or religious beliefs, racial discrimination, economic distress or membership of a particular group (The UN Refugee Agency, 2011). In a report published by the UN Refugee Agency (2011) the term membership of a particular group is described as follows:

“A ‘particular social group’ normally comprises persons of similar background, habits or social status. A claim to fear of persecution under this heading may frequently overlap with a claim to fear of persecution on other grounds, i.e. race, religion or nationality” (p.17).

When examining the ‘guidelines on international protection’ issued out by the UN Refugee Agency (2002) it seems that gender persecution could be considered to belong to membership of a particular group.

In the media, the term ‘asylum seeker’ and ‘refugee’ are used interchangeably, which sometimes misrepresents the message conveyed. Therefore, it is important to understand the distinction between an asylum seeker and a refugee. According to the 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees (The UN Refugee Agency, n.d.) a refugee is someone who ‘is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion’ (p.3). An asylum seeker is someone who claims to be a refugee, but is waiting for their application for refugee status to be approved (UN Refugee Agency, 2001-2015).

However, a critical remark should be made with regards to the definitions of asylum seekers and refugees, namely legal definitions and labels invented by policy makers often do not do justice to the complexity of displaced people’s lives and therefore should be used critically by social scientists and policy makers (Black, 2001).

1.2. Problem statement

During the past century, the composition of migration flows to Europe has changed significantly. In the 20th century, migration mainly consisted of contracting labour migrants from countries outside of

Europe, for example from Algeria to France, Pakistan to the UK, Morocco to The Netherlands and Turkey to Germany. These workers settled down and were reunified with their families, which resulted in 'large, increasingly organised and well-settled communities' (Vertovec, 2010).

Over the past two decades, flows of labour migrants have still entered Europe. However, additionally to these workers, floods of asylum seekers and refugees are entering Europe as well. According to the UN Refugee Agency, until now 1,015,078 refugees have entered Europe in 2015 through sea in the Mediterranean (UN Refugee Agency, 2016).

Vertovec (2010) mentions that 'today newer, smaller, transient, more socially stratified, less organized and more legally differentiated immigrant groups comprise global migration flows' (p. 86). Regardless of the fact that this migration influx into Europe consists of individuals from different backgrounds, social and legal statuses and with different futures, these people are often generalized and referred to as 'immigrants'. Not much consideration for the current intricate social structures of migration has been placed on the public agenda, which still mainly considers models used for previous migration flows (Vertovec, 2010).

The narratives that asylum seekers create of their own lives are of much interest to researchers. Eastmond (2007) mentions that these narratives 'glean the diversity behind over-generalised notions of the refugee experience' (p. 249) and identify how individuals 'ascribe meanings to lived experiences' (p. 248). The needs and experiences of forced migrants vary per individual. Turton (2003) agrees with Eastmond (2007) on the diversity of the 'refugee experience' by stating that 'the truth is that there is no such thing as 'the refugee experience', and there is therefore no such as 'the refugee voice': there are only the experiences, and the voices of refugees' (p. 7). Gender, sexual orientation, age, abilities, ethnicity and social class are variables that add to the diversification of refugee experiences (Sigona, 2014).

Additionally, narrating experiences is not a straightforward process for asylum seekers. Anthias (2002) states that this is 'partly because narratives are produced in relation to socially available and hegemonic discourses and practices' (p. 511). These discourses and practices are dependent on the social context the asylum seeker finds himself in, and therefore will vary according to the social situation (Anthias, 2002).

Life-stories are the only channel that help us understand life in situations that are not easily accessible otherwise (Eastmond, 2007). Interviews on life-stories conducted by the responsible immigration institutions are generally not made public, and therefore relatively little is known on asylum seeker's lives and histories. This research focuses on analysing an asylum seeker's narrative, in order to understand how this individual does asylum seeking in The Netherlands in an age of super-diversity.

1.3. Relevance

Researching the narratives of asylum seekers both holds scientific and societal relevance. Given the fact that asylum narratives are not abundantly available, scientific research with regards to these life stories is relatively limited as well. This research adds to existing knowledge on topics such as identity-construction, integration, liminality and practical professional knowledge.

Socially speaking, this knowledge is beneficiary as well. It helps us individuals to understand the challenges asylum seekers face in the super-diverse world of today, so that we can cater their needs in the best possible way. Moreover, it provides policy-makers with knowledge on the principles at play in asylum seekers lives, so they can adjust their policies accordingly and deal with issues more effectively.

Finally, reporting on asylum seeker's stories will hopefully raise awareness in our society on the detrimental experiences these people have been through and on the fact that there is great diversity in their backgrounds, stories and futures.

1.4. Outline

This thesis is divided into five chapters, each dealing with a specific part of the research process. The first chapter considers the societal and legal context of the study, the research focus and the societal and scientific relevance. Chapter two introduces sociological and anthropological concepts which provide a theoretical framework for understanding the life experiences of asylum seekers in today's globalizing world. Further, chapter three presents the research design, the data gathered during fieldwork and the methods used for analyzing this data. The fourth chapter provides a historical, political and social background of Iran, presents the informant's narrative, and in turn analyzes this narrative, highlighting

key incidents in order to understand, amongst other things, the process of identity-making in the informant's life. Chapter five consists of a conclusion, readdressing the research focus and presenting additional considerations on asylum and globalization.

Chapter 2: Conceptual framework

This chapter provides a theoretical overview of concepts that were deemed relevant for the research prior to fieldwork. These concepts, that are called sensitizing concepts, have the role of facilitating the study of an asylum seekers life in the broader context of globalization. Their function was to turn the head of the ethnographer, in possible directions of where to look without precluding the possibility of having other concepts emerging from the data. Here, I start by introducing the concept of identity, after which I address the notion of chronotopic identities and religious identities. Further, I examine the concept of practical professional knowledge, and explain how this concept can be used to analyze the life of an asylum seeker.

2.1. Identity

Identity is a concept difficult to define, encapsulating a variety of social processes. Therefore, researchers hold different opinions on what identity exactly entails. For example, Peek (2005) states that 'identity is generally used to define and describe an individuals' sense of self, group affiliations, structural positions and ascribed and achieved statuses' (p. 217).

Identity should be regarded as something that is constructed in an ongoing process throughout life and therefore is never complete. Also, identity construction is always performed within representation (Hall, 1990). Indeed, identities are performances existing in and through different spheres (the home, the nation, transnational diaspora) and social contexts.

Additionally, identities are not simply performed along 'one Cartesian axis of difference', where A is A, because s/he is not B, but are a by-product of interaction on multiple scale levels. In other words, identities are 'intersectional' in nature. For instance, rather than researching one's feeling of belonging with only considering gender, other social variables should be examined as well, such as class, ethnicity, social status etc. (Valentine, Sporton & Bang Nielsen, 2009). Further, we will not be looking at the construction of identity solely in one socio-cultural space, but across the cultural spaces inhabited by the individual, to see what kind of identity bricolage does take place. The term 'identity' is an all-encompassing concept. For the sake of the analysis, I focus on chronotopic identities and religious identities.

2.1.1. Chronotopic identities

Identities are performed in different spheres and social contexts, and therefore ought not to be understood as monolithic structures of belonging. Rather, individuals perform different identities in different situations. For example, a waiter working at a restaurant is dressed up smart, serves customers food and drinks and is dealing with guests politely. When this same waiter goes out clubbing with his friends after his work shift has finished, he dresses and behaves differently. While at work he does not drink alcohol, he does drink when in the club. While at work he would never dance, in the club he most certainly will. Blommaert (2015a) refers to these various life situations with the term *chronotopes*, and poses that an individual's identities are organized within these life *chronotopes*.

Certain characteristic behaviors can be identified as an inherent part of these *chronotopes*, through which individuals can be identified as belonging to a specific group. To illustrate the above, for each individual their student life contains particular activities, varying from sitting in a lecture hall listening to a professor and taking notes of the matters he discusses, to being a member of a student association, attending a multitude of parties and consuming large amounts of alcohol. These particular activities, consumption habits, conversations and interaction patterns make one recognizable as a student and provide a context for one's behavior (Blommaert, 2015a).

The term *chronotope* was first used by Bakhtin in literary theory. According to Bakhtin, narrative time and space are not separate categories, but rather form a fundamental unity that provides a context for understanding behavior (Bemong & Borghart, 2010). He followed Kant in the idea that 'time and space are in essence categories through which human beings perceive and structure the surrounding world' (Bemong & Borghart, 2010, p.4). In short, the term *chronotope* refers to the fact that 'temporal' and 'spatial' relationships are interdependent and should be regarded in this manner when studied (Bemong & Borghart, 2010).

Identities, thus, are inhabited by the subject who performs them within particular time and space compressions that historicize identities not as products of the moment, but as products of human interaction inserted in a bigger discourse, whether public, political or else. The concept of *chronotopes*

therefore helps to evade separating behavior and context analytically and assists in analyzing the interdependent relationship between the two in understanding identity construction (Blommaert, 2015a).

Chronotopes also provide a context for understanding how historical events can be used as a ‘meaning-attributing resource’ in an individual’s discourse (Blommaert, 2015b). Further, Blommaert (2015b) states that ‘chronotopes as historically configured tropes point us to the fact that specific complexes of ‘how-it-was’ can be invoked as relevant context in discourse and affect what can and does happen in discursive events’ (p. 111).

A closely related notion providing a context for understanding an individual’s behavior is the concept of ‘historical bodies’. Scollon and Scollon (as cited in Blommaert & Huang, 2009) use the term ‘historical bodies’ to refer to an individual’s life experiences. More specifically, they define historical bodies as an individual’s ‘life experiences, their goals and purposes, and their unconscious ways of behaving and thinking’ (p. 7). Human beings carry these ‘historical bodies’ with them in social action, which sets the stage for what they can and cannot do in social action. These ‘historical bodies’ have been shaped in certain social spaces and influence the ‘communicative competence’ of individuals (Blommaert & Huang, 2009).

It can be argued that these ‘historical bodies’ influence the behavior of individuals within certain *chronotopes*. For instance, someone who has been a professor for his entire life, knows what kind of behavior is expected from him when entering a lecture hall filled with students. His ‘historical body’, thus his life experiences as a teacher, assist him in behaving as normatively expected from a teacher in a lecture hall. If this same person would have no experience teaching whatsoever, his behavior most probably would deviate from the expected norm to some regard (Blommaert & Huang, 2009). Hence, an individual’s ‘historical body’ also provide a context for understanding why someone behaves in a particular manner in certain time-space compressions.

Chronotopic identities play an important role in understanding the life of an asylum seeker. Examining an asylum seeker’s narrative taking into account time and space configurations and the life experiences of the individual provide a context for understanding his history, his behavior and the way in which he make sense of his new life.

2.1.2. Religious identity

Religion and its accompanying rituals form a vital element of any identity, especially if this religion and rituals have been part of an individual's life since childhood. Even if a human being decides to not follow the religion later on in life, elements of his identity will still relate to religious experiences and rituals (Bhugra et al., 1999).

Throughout literature, religious identity is defined in a multitude of ways. For instance, religious identity is seen as association with a certain group or denomination, attending church services, the priority religion has in an individual's life, the experience of being reborn and so on (see Dollinger, 2001).

Peek (2005) explored the process of religious identity formation in a group of second-generation Muslims in America. She states: 'religious identities are actively constructed by individuals and groups in our social world, in addition to being define, challenged, accepted or rejected by other people, communities and institutions' (p. 236). Her findings showed that the process of forming a religious identity is dynamic and continuous. An individual's religious identity is not a 'static phenomenon', but rather changes and evolves as life takes its course. Hence, the importance of certain identities in the so called 'identity salience hierarchy' changes over time, due to the fact that as people grow older they are more or less committed to certain identities (Peek, 2005).

Griffith and Griggs (2001) agree on this, as they pose that 'religious commitment waxes and wanes over the lifecycle' (p. 15). Additionally, these researchers mention that these fluctuations in religious commitment sometimes produces phases of self-examination and exploration. In the case of traumatic life events, for example death, illness or divorce, people often start re-evaluating and examining the self, including spiritual/religious beliefs and practices. These theories seem to be very applicable to understanding the religious identity of an asylum seeker, as having to forcedly flee a home country, often under severe circumstances, is an experience which can most definitely be referred to as a traumatic life event, strongly influencing the continuation of an asylum seeker's religious beliefs and practices (Griffith and Griggs, 2001).

Smith (as cited in Peek, 2005) is in accordance with Griffith and Griggs' assumption, as he proposes to view immigration as a 'theologizing experience'. The entire process of forced migration often leaves asylum seekers confused and feeling alienated. A natural response to such mental stress is to turn to religion as a source of strength, hope and familiarity. Smith (as cited in Peek, 2005) remarks that as a consequence of this behavior 'religion can assume greater importance for immigrants' definition of self and group affiliations than was the case in their homelands, where religion may have been taken for granted or at least been of lesser importance'.

I propose an alternative response to the mental stress often associated with forced migration, which is a turn away from previous religious systems. Individuals who find themselves in such situations often ask themselves why God would allow something like this to happen to them, and pray for a solution to their problems. At some point, they might find that God does not respond to their prayers, upon which they gradually lose their beliefs. Moreover, some asylum seekers have had negative experiences with the prevailing belief system in their country. Therefore, they consciously choose not to affiliate themselves any longer to that particular belief system and to its canons.

Finally, Griffith and Griggs (2001) used Marcia's (1966) identity-status categories to examine how an individual's spiritual journey may develop over one's life course. In total there are four categories, namely diffusion, foreclosure, moratorium and achievement. The diffusion stage refers to individuals who have never been interested in religion and therefore never explored it, or to individuals who do not identify with a belief system, although they were raised in a certain spiritual/religious tradition.

In the foreclosure stage, individuals adapt to the demands of others, and therefore become spiritual conform. They adopt spiritual/religious beliefs and behaviors in order to be accepted by others. Individuals who find themselves in the moratorium stage experience a period of self-questioning and examination, asking themselves who they are and what they truly believe in. Griffith and Griggs (2001) state that these individuals are 'in the process of reformulating and internalizing religious beliefs' (p.18).

Finally, the achievement status signifies a period in which religious or spiritual beliefs become entirely internalized and people convert themselves to a particular belief system. These various identity-status categories might aid in understanding the religious identity formation process of an asylum seeker

who has been through traumatic life experiences and is on his own spiritual journey for truth (Griffith & Griggs, 2001).

2.2. Practical professional knowledge

Another interesting notion that should be discussed in light of asylum narratives is the concept of ‘practical professional knowledge’, which is a term derived from the field of educational research. The notion of practical professional knowledge arose from a drastic change with regards to how educators viewed classroom practices (Connelly, Clandinin & Fang He, 1997).

Previously the characteristics of a teacher (warmth, strictness etc.) and his teaching methods were viewed as the most important assets for student learning. In contrast, nowadays educators view a teacher’s knowledge and how this knowledge influences his teaching as most significant (see Connelly, Clandinin & Fang He, 1997; Verloop et al., 2001; Abdelhafez, 2014). The terminology used in literature to refer to the concept of practical professional knowledge is messy. For example, Connelly and Clandinin (as cited in Connelly, Clandinin & Fang He, 1997) use the term personal practical knowledge and define it as:

‘A term designed to capture the idea of experience in a way that allows us to talk about teachers as knowledgeable and knowing persons. Personal practical knowledge is in the teacher’s past experience, in the teacher’s present mind and body, and in the future plans and actions’ (p. 666).

The term practical professional knowledge has two basic components in it: ‘practical’ and ‘professional’. Tamir (1991) defines practical knowledge as ‘the store of information and skills that guide and shape a person’s behavior’. He refers to professional knowledge as ‘that body of knowledge and skills which is needed in order to function successfully in a particular profession’.

A variety of variables influences a teacher’s practical professional knowledge, such as ‘individual experiences, personal history, personality, subject matter, etc. (Verloop *et al.*, 2001). Brown and McIntyre (as cited in Verloop *et al.*, 2001) state that personal knowledge ‘guides a teacher’s actions in concrete and specific situations’ (p. 443). Coleman (1991) mentions that the teacher in his study possessed an ‘unwritten’ and imperceptible range of knowledge influencing his perceptible actions. He

goes on to mention that this type of knowledge cannot be seen separately from experience and, to illustrate his point, compares practical professional knowledge with an iceberg. The observable part of the iceberg is merely a small reflection of the actual size of the iceberg. Therefore, in order to fully understand the practice of teaching, the invisible and unobservable knowledge of a teacher should also be studied.

The concept of practical professional knowledge is not only useful for understanding educational practices, but it can be applied to a large gamut of disciplines, professions and areas of life. One could argue that teachers are not the only individuals possessing practical professional knowledge. In fact, each human being has experiences, a personal history and knowledge with regards to a profession which influences decisions and actions. To illustrate, a student has knowledge on how to study efficiently in order to pass exams, or a housewife knows how to sort out her household's laundry properly (according to her own conceptualization of what properly is) to ensure that the white garments stay clear and white.

Practical professional knowledge is a concept useful for understanding asylum seekers experiences as well. Comparable to a teacher using his practical professional knowledge in order to make decisions in particular situations, an asylum seeker draws on this same practical professional knowledge to resolve problems and deal with certain situations in his life. For example, an asylum seeker has to decide on which country to travel to, how to get there, what to do after arrival and many more issues alike. With regards to research on the lives of asylum seekers, the concept of practical professional knowledge provides us with a means to understand the experience and behaviors of asylum seekers in a different light, gaining a more in-depth understanding of what it means to be an asylum seeker.

Chapter 3: Research design

3.1. Introduction

The purpose of this research is to understand the process of asylum seeking in an age of globalization, as experienced by a 37-year old woman from Iran, named Azar (for an extensive introduction to Azar and her narrative, please see the data analysis). There is a theory in educational research that suggests that humans are ‘storytelling organisms’. This theory poses that on an individual and on a social level, human beings lead ‘storied lives’, being an individual understood here as a continuously evolving and unfolding text (Geertz, 1972). Thus, researching an individual’s narrative is crucial in understanding how that individual experiences the world (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). In line with this theory, Azar’s narrative is the central focus of this research.

To gain an in-depth understanding of Azar’s asylum seeking story, insights are needed into the social, cultural and societal aspects of her life. An individual’s actions and behaviors are influenced and pervaded by social meanings, such as ‘intentions, motives, attitudes and beliefs’. Understanding people’s behavior requires a research approach that uncovers these social meanings instigating one’s behavior (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983). In order to achieve this in-depth understanding, qualitative methods were used. To be more precise, I used ethnography to reveal the social, cultural and societal processes and meanings that take place in Azar’s life during the time span of her asylum.

The main goal of ethnography is to understand what people think, what people do, and what people think they do as they do what they do. It is important to comprehend that ethnography is an inductive science, which means that it works from empirical evidence to theory, and not vice versa as is often seen in other research (Blommaert & Dong, 2010).

Willis and Trondman (2000), state that ethnography is ‘a family of methods involving direct and sustained social contacts with agents, and of richly writing up the encounter, respecting, recording and representing at least partly in its own terms, the irreducibility of human experiences’ (p.5). In other words, fieldwork is a very important element of ethnography, in which researchers follow their informants for a lengthened period in their daily lives, observing their behavior, listening to conversations and asking questions (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983). This chapter provides an overview

of the fieldwork carried out for this research, explaining step by step which data has been gathered and how the data was analyzed. The chapter concludes with ethical and scientific considerations on behalf of the researcher.

3.2. Fieldwork

The fieldwork for this research consisted of multiple visits to an Evangelical Baptist Church in The Netherlands and various meetings with my informant, Azar. In total, the fieldwork lasted around one month. This section of the chapter explains into detail how the process of multi-sited fieldwork for this research evolved over the time-span of this research.

3.2.1. Studying the community: the EBC

Prior to the fieldwork, it was necessary to identify communities and organizations accessible for me as a researcher, in which encounters with asylum seekers could occur. I was especially interested in meeting an asylum seeker, thus someone who still had an ongoing legal procedure and had not received a refugee status yet. After attempts to gain access to asylum seeking centers were turned down due to the massive influx of new asylum seekers, alternative approaches were required. I was familiar with the Evangelical Baptist Church and its members, and I knew that there was a considerable amount of refugees and asylum seekers attending the services. Therefore, the decision was made to attempt to acquire access to this community.

In principle, church communities do not have a clear distinction between public and private domains. On the one hand, church services are a public event to which everyone is welcome. On the other hand church is a place where individuals feel safe and do not expect to be observed. Therefore, permission was asked to two key figures within the community, one being the lead pastor and the other one being Jeroen, a member of the community who looks after the asylum seekers and provided me with entrance into the community.

The following four Sundays, I attended the church services, made observations, wrote field notes and talked to people, especially asylum seekers. Observations were conducted together with a fellow ethnographer, which provided me with the advantage of being able to compare field notes and insights

gained from the field. Our ethnographic pathways departed once we identified our own respective research foci. More information on my findings during the observations can be found in the next chapter.

Given the fact that I was specifically interested in getting acquainted with an asylum seeker, I received help from Jeroen in identifying who would be suitable as an informant and who would be willing to partake in my research. It is important to note two matters with regards to studying the EBC community. First, studying this community was not a goal in itself, but rather a means to meet asylum seekers and to identify an informant. Second, observing this community provided me with an understanding of a sociocultural space in which my informant spends significant time, which provided a context for understanding her narrative.

3.2.2. Studying the informant: Azar

Soon after the first Sunday of observations in the EBC, it became clear that Azar would become my informant. She was at a point of her legal procedure that suited my research entirely, and she was more than willing to help by sharing her story. I received her email-address from Jeroen and contacted her to make a first appointment.

I met her on the next Sunday (October 4, 2015) after the church service and had a first introductory chat, in which I learnt more about her current life situation. After this first meeting, community observations continued on Sundays, but my personal focus shifted more to Azar, trying to map-out who she interacted with and to which group in the community she belonged. After the observations within the community reached a point of saturation, I proceeded my research by contacting Azar and having personal meetings with her, exploring her life, experiences and narrative in general. A detailed overview of the data obtained from this research can be found in the next section of this chapter.

3.3. Ethnographic corpora

The resources for this research consist of observations and field notes made in the EBC on Sundays and field notes on ‘deep hanging out’ between Azar and me. Moreover, a recording and a transcript of a long open-ended interview with Azar, a book published by the ‘*Centraal Orgaan opvang Asielzoekers*’ (COA) in which Azar is featured with her story and a short documentary series called ‘*Onze Man in Tehran*’, consisting of four episodes and broadcasted by the VPRO, were also used as resources for this

study. This section of the chapter provides a schematic overview and an explanation of the resources gathered for the research. Table 3.1 illustrates the corpora as a whole and its division.

Corpora	Respondent(s)	Methods of Data Collection	Resources	Method(s) of Analysis
Sub-corpus I	EBC and Azar	Observations		Grounded theory
		Field notes		Grounded theory
Sub-corpus II	Azar	Observations		Grounded theory
		Field notes		Grounded theory
		Interviews		Socio-culturally rooted discourse analysis
			COA-book	Content analysis
			Documentary series	Content analysis

Table 3.1. Schematic overview of the research design

3.3.1. The community's corpus

As mentioned, the resources gathered within the EBC consisted of observations and field notes during church services, and after church services during the moment in which the congregation gathered to have coffee. During the services, I ensured to sit in the back of the church, so I could have a good overview of everything that happened. I did my utmost best to write everything down, even though some things seemed irrelevant or uninteresting.

The goal of these observations was to comprehend the atmosphere within the community and to understand the social relations within this sociocultural space, especially focusing on the asylum seekers. During the coffee moment, it proved to be more difficult to stand at a distance, observe and take field notes, as quickly people would approach me for a conversation. Therefore, I ensured to write down all the information I gathered from the conversations as soon as I came home from the church service. Writing down the information and going over my notes helped me to recall interesting events and information, and provided me with an opportunity to analyze these events and place them within

the larger sociocultural context. Please see table 3.2 for an overview of all the observations conducted in the EBC.

It should be noted that a gap exists between the two last observations. This is due to the fact that the first three observations were used as a means for broad orientation on the community, to distinguish relationships and dynamics in this socio-cultural space. After this broad orientation, I moved forward and had personal meetings with Azar, in which I learnt about her story and her life. Once these personal meetings were held, I went back to the community for a fourth observation, to place the knowledge I had obtained from Azar's personal life into the broader picture of this socio-cultural space.

Date	Day	Resources	Duration
04/10/2015	Sunday	Field notes	3 hours
11/10/2015	Sunday	Field notes	3 hours
18/10/2015	Sunday	Field notes	3 hours
08/11/2015	Sunday	Field notes	3 hours
Total			12 hours

Table 3.2. Observations at the EBC

3.3.2. The informant's corpus

In order to gain an understanding of Azar's life and her experiences as an asylum seeker, it was important to spend a considerable amount of time with her, following her in her daily routines, observing her behavior and asking questions to comprehend the social meanings in her life. For the first 'deep-hanging out session', I joined Azar to the asylum seeking center on a Sunday afternoon after the church service. I walked with her to the train station to travel to the asylum seeking center, had lunch with her and walked around the asylum seeking center.

This first session served as a means to build trust between us, as the information I needed from her for my research was very personal and confidential. The main point that became clear through this session was the social and cultural situation in Iran and events in Azar's life causing her to seek asylum

in The Netherlands. The information Azar provided me with was noted down subsequently to our meeting.

The second session occurred the Tuesday after the first session, on October 27. Azar had mentioned that she works on Tuesdays in the '*Open Leer Centrum*' at the asylum seeking center, and I asked her if I could join her to see what she does. On Tuesday I met her at 10 am and we went to the '*Open Leer Centrum*', and I observed her working. Additionally, we had a considerable amount of time for conversation, and had access to a computer, which resulted in Azar using the Internet to show me a lot of cultural, political and social events that took place in Iran. This provided me with a context of her socio-cultural situation and a deeper comprehension of her behavior and her statements. In total, I spent six hours with Azar that day, learning about her history and experiences.

During this session, she also introduced me to a short-documentary series, named '*Onze Man in Tehran*' (meaning: 'Our Man in Tehran'), broadcasted by the VPRO (VPRO, 2015). It was produced by the Dutch journalist Thomas Erdbrink who lives and works in Iran and provided me with much needed background on cultural practices in Iran. Notes on this six-hour session were made after the meeting had ended. Additionally, she handed me a book published by the '*Centraal Orgaan opvang Asielzoekers*', which is the organization responsible for the intake of asylum seekers in The Netherlands. In this book, stories of asylum seekers from various countries, among which was Azar's story, were covered. This book did not provide me with new information about Azar's life as such, but did support in adding structure to and insight into Azar's narrative.

Finally, the long open-ended interview took place again on a Sunday after church. I utilized this session as an opportunity to ask questions about events in Azar's life which needed more clarification. Moreover, it provided me with an occasion to record her narrative, which greatly assisted in analyzing her story later in the research process. Table 3.3. Illustrates the field work conducted with Azar personally, and the resources that arose from this fieldwork.

Date	Activity	Resources	Duration
25/10/2015	Conversations with Azar	Notes	4 hours
27/10/2015	Conversations with Azar	Notes	6 hours
03/11/2015	Documentary series	Notes	3 hours
04/11/2015	Reading of COA-book	Notes on Azar's story	20 minutes
08/11/2015	Long open-ended interview	Recording and transcript	2 hours

Table 3.3. Overview of meetings and research on Azar's life

3.4. Methods of analysis

Various methods were used to analyze the data gathered during the research. First, the observations conducted in the EBC, the observations with Azar personally and the field notes derived from these observations were analyzed using grounded theory. This research method is helpful in analyzing and interpreting 'naturally occurring data' (Spotti, 2007). The approach of grounded theory is to use the data as a 'basis for the construction of a theory' (Spotti, 2007). In other words, instead of having a theory and testing the data against this theory, the data are analyzed and used as a foundation in order to come to a theory, which is 'grounded' in the data. With grounded theory, the researcher does not preconceive a theory prior to his study. Rather, he starts his research with a general focus and 'allows the theory to emerge from the data' (Corbin & Strauss, 1990).

Second, the long open-ended interview conducted with Azar was analyzed using a socio-culturally rooted discourse analysis. According to Tonkiss (as cited in Spotti, 2007) this specific kind of discourse analysis commences with 'a general interest in a certain phenomenon within the life of a socio-cultural space and it strives at grasping the meanings that the members of this specific space attach to this phenomenon' (Spotti, 2007, p. 30). Moreover, discourse analysis serves as an instrument for understanding how identities are ascribed and subscribed to by specific members of the socio-cultural space at hand. For instance, someone who regards himself as a foreigner needs to have certain features in order for others in the community to recognize him as such and to 'ascribe his identity as a foreigner' (Spotti, 2007). Using discourse analysis to analyze the interview with Azar enabled me to understand

the meanings Azar attaches to certain phenomena in her life and provided me with a means to identify various identities she has ascribed to and currently ascribes to in her life.

Third, the book from '*Centraal Orgaan opvang Asielzoekers*' featuring Azar's story and the notes on the documentary series '*Onze Man in Tehran*' was analyzed using content analysis. This method of analysis can be used to analyze text data. According to Hsieh and Shannon (2005) 'research using qualitative content analysis focuses on the characteristics of language as communication with attention to the content or contextual meaning of the text' (p. 1278). Content analysis aims to increase insights and understanding of the incidents that are being studied (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Using this method of analysis for these resources provided me with an opportunity to gain deeper insights into Azar's narrative and Iranian culture.

The theories and insights that arose from these analyses were further explored using Key Incident Analysis. According to Erickson (1986), 'a key event is key in that it brings to awareness latent, intuitive judgments the analyst has already made about salient patterns in the data. Once brought to awareness these judgments can be reflected upon critically' (p. 151). Key incidents can be defined as 'distinct occurrences or events which require some attention, action or explanation; they are situations for which there is a need to attach meaning' (Fitzgerald, 2000, p. 190). In order to identify key incidents from my data I extensively reviewed my field notes, interview notes and recordings. Additionally, in light of this research, key incidents can be seen as specific events which strongly assist in understanding how people do asylum seeking in an age of globalization. Key incident analysis is useful in the sense that it provides a 'thick' description of events and grants an opportunity to understand data in a larger sociocultural context (McAllister et al., 2006).

Finally, Kroon and Sturm (2002) make a link between Key Incident Analysis and emblems, which are art works from the 16th and 17th century with a main goal educating people on moral matters. Just like with emblems, key incidents assist in gaining 'universal knowledge from the particular'. Moreover, both emblems and key incidents are 'a reduced representation of reality offering a key to open up reality, to gain insight into micro-processes that would otherwise remain unnoticed' (Kroon & Sturm, 2002, p. 13).

3.5. Note from researcher

A first thing that should be noted is that the name of the informant is fictional, due to matters of privacy and confidentiality. Moreover, the names of the key figures in the Evangelical Baptist Community are also fictional, in an attempt to keep these individuals unrecognizable for the general public. Secondly, the fact that I hold Christian beliefs myself and that I am familiar with attending church services, provided me with an inside knowledge of the research field which has both advantages and disadvantages.

An advantage is that relating to my informant in her spiritual experiences was effortless, which ensured that a relationship of trust was swiftly established. Moreover, it enabled me to understand the deeper layer underlying her religious experiences. A disadvantage of this insider knowledge was that it was harder for me to ‘make the familiar strange’. It cost me considerable effort to step back and analyze my data from a distance, not letting my reasoning be influenced by personal experiences but only allowing a scientific light to shine on the data. I hope I managed well.

As an ethnographic researcher, I fully acknowledge that I have a culturally learned mental framework through which I interpret the world around me. Additionally, I acknowledge that my personal experiences in life also influence the way in which I perceive the world, hence it is hardly impossible to state that inductions are pure, and not influenced by personality and characteristics of the researcher (Erickson, 1986).

Further, it should be noted that some instances in Azar’s narrative do not correspond to available literature on the topic. However, I decided to adhere to Azar’s version, as this was her experience, which is important in achieving a broader understanding of her life as an asylum seeker. Finally, I do not attempt to achieve generalizable results with this research. In general, human beings have different life experiences; hence asylum seekers experiences vary greatly as well. However, this study does contribute to the knowledge on the life experiences of asylum seekers.

Chapter 4: Data analysis

4.1. Introduction

Time and space configurations serve as a context for one's identity and behavior. Therefore, in order to understand Azar's narrative it is important to explore the sociocultural context of the data. Before I proceed with presenting and analyzing the data, I provide an overview on Iranian politics, present background information on the church community and introduce my informant.

4.2. Sociocultural context of the study

4.2.1. Iranian politics – 1953 until present

Iranian politics is mixed and mingled with religion into a concoction which can be called 'theo-democracy'. In 1951, Mohammad Mossadeq was the prime minister of Iran. His intention was to nationalize Iran's oil industry, which had been under British control since 1913. The CIA and the British intelligence services devised a coup to refrain this. The popular Mossadeq was forced aside and the Shah gained all power (previously, the country knew a constitutional monarchy in which the king only had limited control). He revealed himself to be a ruthless dictator and a 'humble servant' of the West. This is partially the root of the troublesome relationship between America and Iran (VPRO, 2015).

In 1979, a large revolution took place, resulting in the deposition and exile of Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi (the ruling monarch from 1941 onwards) (Central Intelligence Agency, 2015). The revolution marked the ending of the year-long rule of the Shah, who had always been criticized for being secular and pro-Western. The Shah was succeeded by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, a religious scholar who preached a strictly religious, anti-American ideology. With this succession, Iran became an Islamic Republic. Khomeini rewrote the constitution and ordained the 'supreme leadership' to be the highest position within the state of Iran. Moreover, he bestowed the supreme leader with ultimate control over the state.

Since the revolution of 1979, America is Iran's scapegoat. America receives the blame for everything that happens within the country. At the beginning of this revolution, there were three prevailing slogans within Iranian society: 'freedom', 'independence' and 'the Islamic Republic of Iran'.

The freedom was seen as freedom from American dominance (and dominance from American allies) (VPRO, 2015). After his death, ayatollah Khomeini was succeeded by ayatollah Ali Hosseini Khamenei, who is Iran's supreme leader since 1989.

In 2005, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad became president. During his time as president, Ahmadinejad introduced a populist agenda and combined nationalism with religious slogans. In addition, he wanted to terminate corruption with regards to oil revenues by dividing these profits between the poor. Ahmadinejad also used his power to provide his proponents with influential positions. As a result, his supporters controlled large oil and chemical industry projects and achieved business and economic power (Morady, 2010). According to Morady (2010) 'Ahmadinejad was committed to accommodating the interests of an emergent bourgeois class, fueled by oil income' (p. 51). Finally, he was known to silence strikes and protests by women and students in a cruel manner (Morady, 2010).

In 2009, Ahmadinejad was available for re-election and was supported by Khamenei, the supreme leader. Other candidates were Rezaie, Karoubi and Mousavi, the latter gaining most popularity of all, due to the fact that Mousavi promised a liberal stance towards social questions. Also, during Ahmadinejad's previous period the people of Iran had noticed the unfulfilled promises of his populist agenda. Ahmadinejad's reelection in 2009 caused a huge controversy in Iran, resulting in peaceful demonstrations and protests accusing Ahmadinejad of electoral fraud. This movement is also known as 'the Green Movement' (Morady, 2010). An interesting feature of this movement was the enormous turnout of women from all segments of society taking part in these demonstrations (Tahmasebi-Birgani, 2010).

According to Tahmasebi-Birgani (2010) 'there was no doubt in anyone's mind that Iran's body politic was invaded by feminine power' (p. 78). This is an interesting aspect, given the inferior societal position women are given in Iran. The demonstrations during and after the 2009 election were not the first time Iran has experienced political uprising. However, the size and scope of the 2009 incidents was much different from anything experienced before. In Tehran and other cities within the country, millions of people went onto the streets to demonstrate (Morady, 2010). Tahmasebi-Birgani (2010) states that 'after massive protests against the rigged election, the government and its security forces brutally attacked the peaceful demonstrations of people in the streets of Tehran and other cities' (p. 78).

In Iran, there is a strict societal division between men and women. For example, there are separate buses for men and women, separate swimming pools etc. Moreover, there is a strong divide between what happens in public and in private environments. In public, women are obliged to wear veils, burkas, hijabs and chadors, while in their private environments they do not have to cover themselves. If one leaves their private domain and goes out in public, the rules and regulations of the state apply. For instance, one is not allowed to play Western music or loud music in the car and one is not allowed to congregate in large groups (unless one has a permit to do so). As a woman one cannot sing spontaneously on the street, because women are not allowed to sing solo in Iran. This does not mean that these things do not occur in Tehran; people only engage in such activities if the state is not (physically) around. In other words, everything is possible, but nothing is allowed (VPRO, 2015).

The government in Iran constantly observes her citizens. The power of the Iranian government is partially derived from a policy of ambiguity and unpredictability. This is a part of the tradition and culture as well. One does not know what the sentence will be when committing a crime. Different prisons and punishments exist for the same crime. One might be forgiven, while another might be in jail for 10 years. Therefore, citizens are always intimidated (VPRO, 2015).

4.2.2. The EBC

The Evangelical Baptist Church (from now on referred to as EBC) exists since 1971 and calls itself a group of believers who want to follow Jesus in all aspects of life and are unified because of that reason. On the one hand, this community wants to reach out to people with the gospel. On the other hand, they want to grow in their faith themselves and are helping and stimulating each other to realise this objective.

Every Sunday morning the church congregation gathers in the sports hall of a secondary school. Since 2011, Frank Rademaker has been the pastor of the community. He leads the church, together with a team of elderly. The church community is ethnically diverse and consists of, among others, Dutch (white European), Dutch-Indonesians, Africans, Afghans and Iranians. Membership to the overall church community is negotiated based on beliefs. If someone aspires to become a member of the church, he/she will have conversations with the elderly and will have to give a personal testimony in one of the

Sunday services, upon which they will be a member. Baptism is an additional requirement for being allowed to execute leadership tasks.

A relatively large section of the community is comprised of asylum seekers (or refugees), mainly coming from Afghanistan and Iran. In total, the group of asylum seekers consists of around 20-30 people. The size of the group fluctuates, due to the fact that sometimes asylum seekers receive their status and move to other cities, depending on where they receive housing.

Years ago, a Dutch member of the EBC called Jeroen decided to go the asylum seeking centres nearby to determine if there would be asylum seekers interested in coming to church. Some Iranians and Afghans were interested and as a result the group of asylum seekers within the EBC started to expand. Currently, the asylum seekers mainly learn about the existence of the church from each other. They bring their friends and introduce them to Jeroen, who has started taking a ‘fatherhood’ role, by helping them with all sorts of practical issues (paper work) and praying for them. Outside of the community, Jeroen teaches Dutch to the asylum seekers and gives Bible studies. Membership of the Afghan/Iranian community is mainly based on ethnicity and interest in Christianity.

Smaller communities exist within the EBC. For example, the asylum seekers tend to divide according to ethnicity; the Africans, Afghans and Iranians mostly only communicate with people from their own country. The Afghans and Iranians do sometimes interact, mainly because Farsi (Iran) and Dari (Afghanistan) are quite similar languages.

During the church service the asylum seekers are all seated in the back of the sports hall, forming a separate group from the rest of the congregation. The service is translated from Dutch to Farsi by an Iranian woman called Nousha. After the church service (at around 11h30 a.m.) the entire congregation has coffee and tea in a different hall within the secondary school. When drinking coffee, the asylum seekers from Afghanistan and Iran always sit in the same corner of the hall and form quite a tight community. The asylum seekers all seem to be awaiting Jeroen’s arrival in the coffee area to speak to him about issues and ask for prayer. It is not very easy for outsiders to enter and start a conversation, unless one knows someone from the group.

It is interesting to notice that the African refugees do not mingle with the Iranians and Afghans. The Africans seem to integrate quite well into the overall church community, which is understandable

given the fact that there are only two asylum seekers from Africa. Asylum seeker's motivations for coming to church are somewhat hard to define (depending per person). Some of them come to church on Sundays to be build up in their faith and to meet with other Christians. Others might not be as interested in Christianity, but use it as a means of receiving help, mainly from Jeroen.

4.2.3. The informant

The protagonist of this study is a 37-year old woman from Iran, named Azar. She was born and raised in Tehran, the capital city of the country. Her family is Muslim, and she has a younger and an older sister (the latter has been living in The Netherlands for 20 years). Her dad was a Muslim, but allowed his children the freedom to form their own beliefs. Her family has raised her to be an independent woman, and she has been supporting herself financially since the age of 18. In Tehran, she worked as a secretary for an energy company and studied Tourism Management. She left the country in 2011 and has never been able to return again.

Jeroen introduced me to Azar for the first time in the EBC, after the church service when the entire congregation was having coffee together. She was stood in a corner at a table and made a solitary impression. Jeroen had asked her beforehand if she wanted to help me with my research and she had agreed to be my informant. We had a first introductory conversation and exchanged phone numbers with each other.

A couple of years ago, Azar met a woman in the asylum seeking center who brought her to the EBC. Before that time, Azar went to an Iranian church in Zwolle, but because of distance and expenses she decided to search a church in her living environment.

Azar has been in her asylum procedure for around four years now. At the time of the fieldwork (September-October 2015) Azar was awaiting the IND's decision with regards to her asylum application. A more comprehensive account of Azar's life story will be provided in the next section of the report, as her narrative forms the data on which the analysis is based.

4.3. Presentation of Azar's life narrative

I will present Azar's life stories in three separate sections, namely 1) her life back in Iran and her forced departure, 2) her arrival in The Netherlands and her acclimatization and 3) her perspective on the future.

4.3.1. Azar's life in Iran and her departure

Before Azar left Iran, she was living a quiet life. She was working for 14 years as a secretary at an energy company and had a long-term relationship. At some point she decided to study Tourism Management and for her studies she had to fulfill an internship at the National Museum of Iran in Tehran. After her internship she received a job offer from the National Museum and worked there. She mentioned that she was living a normal life.

However, her life changed entirely when 'the Green Movement' arose. Together with her younger sister and a group of female friends, Azar participated in street demonstrations against the election of Ahmadinejad as president. She remarked that 'during the demonstrations, people on the streets were entirely quiet. No one was screaming slogans. At one point, there were almost 4 million people on the street without making a sound'.

Khamenei (the supreme leader of Iran) opposed these demonstrations and the security forces attacked the demonstrators. Skirmishes started between the public and the security forces. For a second time, Azar stated 'my life entirely changed after that'. She recalled the following: 'one time in winter in 2010, I went on the street with a friend of mine to demonstrate in silence. The security forces became aggressive. They hit me with a stick and kicked me everywhere: my head, my legs and my back. It was very dangerous; I did not know what would happen to me if they would arrest me. When you are arrested by the police, you are probably hanged. Or tortured. My colleague noticed me on the street being followed by Khamenei's security forces and helped me flee. He was riding a motorcycle and took me on the back.'

Azar and her friends were demonstrating because they wanted more freedom in Iran. According to Azar, the women in Iran are being oppressed. The government decides what they wear and do in their lives. She mentioned that most demonstrations were done by women of all ages, not by men and stated

that ‘the women want to be free. They don’t want to have to wear a headscarf, they want to have a free life. Therefore, the women and the government fight each other. It’s a constant battle’.

During the demonstrations a lot of people told Azar: ‘why don’t you go to other countries and look for asylum if you don’t like the way things are in Iran?’ to which she responded: ‘no, I love my country. I want to stay here in my country and do something for our freedom. I believe we can change something’. Her mother also discouraged Azar and her sister from taking part in the demonstrations, because her mother was afraid for problems. Others said she was crazy for demonstrating, because no one would support them anyways and nothing would change. Not because they agreed with the regime, but solely because they did not want to get into trouble. However, Azar thought to herself: ‘why not? I am crazy to accept all these rules they are opposing on me’.

Azar said that she does not regret anything of what she did. In 2011, Azar decided, together with her younger sister, to visit her older sister who lives in The Netherlands. After some trouble with the passports, both women received a Visa and travelled to The Netherlands. Azar did not have a job in Iran when she came to The Netherlands.

When talking about Iran, Azar often refers back to 36 years ago, when Iran still had a Shah. She mentioned that the Shah and his wife were good for the country, that they were modern and that they rebuilt Iran from nothing. She said that during the times of the Shah, the Iranian people had the freedom that they are fighting for now. When she spoke of these things, she did so with great emotion and said that it is a time which she is longing back for.

4.3.2. Azar’s arrival in The Netherlands and acclimatization

After spending a couple of months with her sisters in The Netherlands, it was time for Azar’s younger sister to go back to Iran. She had a job in Iran at the time and therefore she received a shorter Visa than Azar. Azar’s mother was waiting at the airport for her youngest daughter to come home, but the daughter never arrived. The mother started asking questions to the staff at the airport, but no one was able to provide her with answers.

Azar’s mother encouraged Azar to extend her Visa in The Netherlands and to stay there longer, because she was afraid that upon her return in Iran, something bad would happen with Azar as well.

Azar went to the IND (Dutch Immigration and Naturalization Services) and extended her Visa for 10 days. After a couple of days, Azar's mother received a phone call from the army, saying: 'we have your youngest daughter and we are looking for Azar. If she comes back to Iran we will arrest her immediately'. In the end, it turned out that Azar's neighbor in Iran knew about her sister's and Azar's participation in the protests and had informed the secret service of this matter.

Azar became afraid. Her older sister advised her to apply for asylum in The Netherlands, because staying after the Visa had expired would be illegal. Together with her older sister and brother-in-law, Azar went to Ter Apel in November 2011 to file her application and was invited for a first interview on the 2nd of December, 2011. After a range of different interviews following the 2nd of December, the IND told Azar that they would need to research her story and therefore she had to wait for six months.

After these six months had passed, the IND made Azar wait for another six months, after which her lawyer intervened and mentioned to the IND that they would have had to clarify her legal status. The IND decided negatively, upon which Azar chose to appeal the decision in court. Her appointment in court eventually got cancelled and she did not hear anything from her lawyer and the court for 18 months. She decided to change her lawyer, who received a letter from the court in September 2014 stating: 'our apologies, but we have accidentally archived Azar's dossier'. She was invited for a new appointment at the court on the 9th of February, 2015 and received a positive decision. However, the court mentioned that the final decision would be in the hands of the IND, and at the time of the research she was still waiting to hear from the IND. ¹

Azar mentioned: 'I am not afraid for a negative outcome. I am a Christian, and I believe that God protects me. I am not afraid; I trust Him entirely.' In Iran, Azar was born into a Muslim family, but her father was not very strict. The children were not forced to do typical Muslim things, such as fasting and praying. Moreover, Azar mentioned that she never really was a Muslim, because she had difficulties with believing the Qur'an.

¹ Currently (December 2015) Azar again has multiple interviews with IND about her life in order for the IND to make a final decision on her application.

Two years ago Azar was feeling very depressed. She was anxious, stressed, and cried all the time. She was far away from her family and friends in Iran and felt extremely lonely. She recalled: ‘one night I was so anxious and cried a lot. A friend of mine, who was a Christian, came and talked to me. He started talking about Jesus and gave me a bible. I started reading the bible and felt peace inside. The next day I talked to my friend and told him that I wanted to learn more about Jesus’.

Azar reported an inner change after she became a Christian. Before, she was angry at everything, but now she feels quiet and peaceful. Moreover, she could not love people, but now she says she can love her enemies. She mentioned: ‘my sister is with my enemies for four years already, but I don’t hate them anymore. I pray for my sister and my enemies. I pray for our Iranian government and I try to forgive them. I forgive everyone that hurt me and did wrong to me’. She also remarked that she does not feel lonely anymore. She stated: ‘it is hard to explain for me why I don’t feel lonely anymore after meeting Jesus. But look, if you know that someone is with you all the time, spiritually, you cannot feel lonely anymore. I feel Jesus everywhere around me. I also feel less lonely because of the people I have met in church, especially meneer Jeroen’. Interestingly enough, although Azar mentions that she was not raised strictly and had the freedom to choose her own beliefs, her mother in Iran does not know that she converted to Christianity and is not allowed to find out either.

Jeroen has tried to find Azar a volunteering position in a nursing home. So far, he has not accomplished to find anything, but Azar appreciates the fact that he is trying to help her. Three years ago Azar went to Vluchtelingenwerk herself to ask if they could help her find a volunteering position in an elderly home, but she has not heard from them since. Moreover, she mentioned that Jeroen helps her to develop her faith, through the bible studies he organizes at the asylum seeking center. Jeroen also helped Azar by giving her a letter for the IND testifying about her Christian faith. Azar mentioned: ‘but my dossier does not deal with my conversion; it only deals with my political problems. Actually, my problems have doubled now. Iran is not an option for me anymore; I cannot return to my country. I miss my country a lot, but I cannot do anything about it. If the ayatollahs are gone, we have freedom and we can return to Iran. My sister has already lived her 24 years, and she said that if the mullahs would leave Iran, she would return’.

When asked how her sister helped her to settle in The Netherlands, Azar responded that her sister did not help her much, because Azar did not allow her to. Azar wants to be an independent woman, and tries to do everything herself. She mentioned: 'she [Azar's sister] has her own family and her own problems. I don't want to keep her busy with my problems.' Azar's sister is married to a Dutch man and has been living in The Netherlands for 24 years. Therefore, she has reasonable knowledge on Dutch social conventions. Azar mentioned that her sister did help her to understand the Dutch culture. She said: 'she [Azar's sister] tells me: Dutch people do this, Dutch people do that. You are not allowed to do this or that. When I'm with her family-in-law, I understand their behavior.' Currently, Azar spends Wednesdays until Saturdays at her sister's house.

Azar wants to behave like Dutch people do. 'You need to adjust to where you live. When I want to be in touch with Dutch people I need to do as Dutch people. I believe it's your country; I am the foreigner and I need to adjust to you'. Azar finds Dutch culture very interesting. She states: 'they speak a lot and hard, express themselves easily and are very direct. Iranians are not very direct. We speak politely to each other, but we talk badly about each other behind our backs. I feel that being direct is good behavior in The Netherlands and I want to adjust to that'. She mentions how she would like Iran to be a European country, but how this unfortunately is not the case. For example, in Iran people are not allowed to go on a terrace to eat or drink something with friends. Azar finally has the freedom in The Netherlands which she fought so hard for in Iran.

Azar understands that some Dutch people are scared of asylum seekers that come to The Netherlands. She says: 'some asylum seekers are sometimes acting a bit strange'. When Azar sees an asylum seeker in the supermarket who is acting a little strange she purposefully distances herself. She does not want to be associated with such asylum seekers. In other situations she is fine with being regarded as an asylum seeker, because she says that is what she is.

Throughout the years, Azar has gotten to know people through the EBC and the asylum seeking center. She tries to connect to people from other cultures, to help them with their lives in the center. She mentioned: 'people are nervous in the center if they have to wait and are not allowed to do anything. It is a very tiring situation, it is difficult to live in an asylum seeking center. I try to explain them things

they do not understand. Mostly, I tell them what the procedure is and that they need to do something with their life, learn Dutch for example.’

According to Azar, many asylum seekers are waiting for their lives to start. Azar does not want this to happen for herself. She thinks that asylum seekers can already start building a new life while still in the asylum seeking center. Azar is trying to do this through working in the ‘*Open Leer Centrum*’ in the asylum seeking center on Tuesdays from 10 am to 5 pm. The ‘*Open Leer Centrum*’ is a room filled with computers for asylum seekers to spend time on the Internet. Azar is responsible for keeping a list of the visitors and for maintaining order and receives 10 euros for the full day of work. Azar mentions that she sees possibilities in The Netherlands everywhere and that she pursues everything to build a life for herself here, inside and outside of the asylum seeking center. She states: ‘I am going my own way, and I won’t allow anyone to hinder me from doing so’.

4.3.3. The future

Azar has no relationship at the moment. Three years ago she had a Dutch boyfriend, who she dated for two months. However, his family told him that she was merely interested in him to get a status and he decided to end the relationship. At first, Azar was angry and sad, but later she understood why these people thought that way.

Azar reported that now she would not want to have a relationship, because she still does not have a status. For Azar, having a residency permit is a prerequisite for having a relationship. She stated: ‘look, I believe that a man and a woman have to build their life together. If one person is working and the other one is not doing anything, I don’t see it as being the real life. They both have to work, and build their life together. So, if someone wants to marry me, I have no job.. I cannot with someone. Being independent is very important to me. I can’t be dependent on a man’.

Azar mentions that she has no prospect for the future here in The Netherlands, because everything is dependent on receiving a permit. She hopes to receive a status, to start with education and to find a good job. She said: ‘I am becoming older, I am 37. After three years I will be 40 and it will be difficult for me to find a job’. She also mentioned: ‘I want to work here, just like Dutch people and I

want to have a normal life. With a family, and probably get married and have a baby. A normal life, not a special life, just normal’.

4.4. Analysis of Azar’s life narrative

Here I analyze Azar’s narrative making use of the concepts elaborated upon in the conceptual framework, namely: practical professional knowledge, religious identity, and chronotopic identity. During the process of fieldwork, other concepts also appeared to be relevant for analyzing Azar’s life story, i.e.: liminality and integration.

4.4.1. Liminality

‘People are nervous in the center if they have to wait and are not allowed to do anything. It is a very tiring situation, it is difficult to live in an asylum seeking center.’

The anthropological concept of liminality and the inherent notion of ‘rites of passage’ were invented by van Gennep in 1909 and later elaborated upon through the works of Victor Turner (Thomassen, 2015). The term ‘liminality’ originates from anthropology, but is applied in various other disciplines today. For instance, it is used in conflict studies, international relations, literature, psychiatry and education.

Liminality refers to situations in which individuals find themselves in an ‘in-between’ phase in their lives. In these ‘in-between’ phases, traditional structures are disrupted and uncertainty exists with regards to the survival of traditions and the future (Horvath, Thomassen & Wydra, 2015). Bousquet (1987) refers to this intermediate state as ‘living in limbo’; a transitional stage in which one has left the old, but has not yet been accepted in the new. Turner (1969) clarifies this by describing the transitional stage as: ‘a phase in which the characteristics of the ritual subject are ambiguous; he passes through a cultural realm that has few or none of the past or coming state’ (p. 359). In other words, the person is not who he/she was before, and is not yet the person he/she is to become.

A concrete example of liminal experiences is the situation within the Middle-East, where after the revolutionary periods within Arab societies, difficulties are experienced with moving on from the revolution. There in fact, a permanent state of liminality occurs, as their societies do not have the same

structure as before the revolutionary period, but also have not reached the desired structure either. Quite frankly, everyone's life is filled with such liminal experiences.

Liminality concerns change, and how individuals deal with this change in their numerous social and cultural situations. It should be noted that liminal experiences do not solely occur within ritual structure, but can also simply happen to individuals (Thomassen, 2015). Asylum seekers are often regarded as individuals living in a liminal phase. In this period, these individuals often feel 'neglected and forgotten', especially if they have been waiting for months or even years for the verdict on their case (Bousquet, 1987). This is painfully true in Azar's situation, as she reported that her dossier had accidentally been archived for almost a year. She really was forgotten.

In order to enter into a liminal phase, an individual has to go through certain experiences, which can be referred to as 'rites of passage'. Van Gennep (1960) defined this term as 'ceremonial patterns which accompany a passage from one situation to another or from one cosmic or social world to another' (p. 10). He divided these 'rites of passage' in three different stages: 1) rites of separation (pre-liminal), 2) transition rites (liminal) and 3) rites of incorporation (post-liminal) (Van Gennep, 1960).

In the first phase, symbolic behavior indicates an individual's disconnection from previous social structures and/or social conditions (Turner, 1969). Azar did not follow specific rituals that would separate her from her previous life. However, certain situations occurred in her narrative which could be regarded as 'rites of separation'. In Iran, Azar was very active in opposing the regime and the cultural conditions that she did not want to comply with. In a sense, this can be seen as an act of separation. By demonstrating against the regime and the imposed rules (especially on women) she 'detached' herself from common practice (thus social structures) in Iranian society. The demonstrations then could be regarded as the symbolic behavior Turner (1969) mentions to indicate an individual's detachment from previous social structures.

Azar left her *heimat* with the intention of returning, never knowing she would never be able to. Even when extending her Visa for 10 days, Azar still intended to return back afterwards. However, life decided differently for her.

She mentions:

‘Iran is not an option for me anymore; I cannot return to my country. I miss my country a lot, but I cannot do anything about it.’

And,

‘My older sister advised me to apply for asylum, because staying without Visa would be illegal’.

The fact that Azar did not personally choose to leave Iran permanently, but was forced by the Iranian government to not return is in line with Thomassen (2015) and clearly illustrates how not all experiences with regards to rites of passage and liminality occur within ritual structure. In Azar’s narrative, it becomes clear that these experiences happened to her, without her being able to exert influence. Additionally, one could argue that the day on which Azar, together with her sister and her brother-in-law, went to Ter Apel to file an asylum application is the symbolic behavior signifying her separation from Iranian social structure, as she applied for a permit to build a new life in The Netherlands and symbolically left Iran behind her.

After filing the asylum application Azar moved to the transitional (liminal) phase of the ‘rites of passage’. She entered a period of being ‘in limbo’, having to go through difficult and long interviews and waiting for a decision from the authorities with regards to her asylum application. Turner (1969) argues that in this phase, ‘the characteristics of the ritual subject are ambiguous’. This is clearly evident in Azar’s life, because it is not clear who she is. On the one hand she is not an active Iranian citizen anymore. Even more so, she is a fugitive from her own government. On the other hand, she is also not yet the person who she wishes to become: a Dutch citizen actively partaking in society.

Amongst other reasons, this is due to the fact that asylum seekers are subjected to a policy of exclusion; they are accommodated in asylum seeking centers and thus cannot enjoy regular living patterns and are not allowed to work in The Netherlands. Thus, we could argue that Azar, as a legal persona, finds herself in a ‘liminal space’; she has left her homeland, but is not yet legally accepted in The Netherlands (Hynes, 2006). In accordance with Horvath, Thomassen and Wydra (2015), Azar finds

herself in an 'in-between' phase in her life, with a lot of uncertainty towards the future. She could either be rejected a residency permit and become illegal or receive a refugee status, which allows her to function fully in Dutch society.

Within this liminal phase in her life, micro-hegemonic experiences of liminality can be distinguished as well. When Azar came to The Netherlands, she had lost her faith in Islam, and decided to go on a spiritual wander to find a belief which she would feel more comfortable with. In this stage in her life, she was 'in-between' religions. Although Azar never really saw herself as a Muslim, living in Iran born to a Muslim family she did have to comply with traditions to a certain extent and carried a Muslim identity, if only partially. In this 'in-between' phase, far away from most of her family in a foreign country, Azar was no longer that person. However, she also had not found another belief yet to suit her spiritual needs, and it was not clear which religion she belonged to.

Finally, the incorporation phase refers to the individual being reincorporated into society. With regards to this stage, Turner (1969) mentions 'the ritual subject is in a relatively stable state once more, has rights and obligations vis-à-vis others of a clearly defined and structural type, is expected to behave in accordance with certain customary norms and ethical standards [...]' (p. 359). If Azar receives a refugee status, she will move through the incorporation phase, in which she will enter Dutch society. She will receive a residency permit, housing and will be able to start orienting herself on education or look for a job and build on her life here in The Netherlands.

Interesting to see is that technically speaking, Azar is still in a liminal phase. She does not belong to Iranian society anymore, and is not allowed to fully partake in Dutch society yet. However, due to the fact that in the meantime she has become a Christian and is a frequent visitor of the EBC, she has a community to which she belongs and which she regards as her family. In that sense, one could say that Azar has already entered the post-liminal phase of incorporation, due to the fact that this community provides her with stability and she is expected to behave according to certain norms and values.

4.4.2. Chronotopic identity

'The Shah and his wife were good for the country, they were modern and they rebuilt Iran from nothing. We were free'.

The term chronotopic identity refers to the interdependent relationship between time and space, providing a context for people's identity and behavior. Azar was born in 1978, a tumultuous time in Iranian history in which the Iranian people were preparing for revolution. One year after Azar was born, the Shah was deposed and the ayatollah seized power in Iran. The regime in Iran changed from secular and pro-Western into strict Islamic and anti-Western.

Azar was still very young when these events occurred. However, when she recalls the affairs she does so in a manner which implies that she has experienced them as an adult. Azar longs back to the rule of the Shah, although she has never experienced life under the Shah herself. It is possible that this is the case, because she was raised by parents who experienced the rule of the Shah, and maybe they raised her with this idealistic image. Another explanation could be that Azar, when living in Iran, belonged to the younger generation of Iranian society who are eager for change and freedom, and regard the rule of the Shah as a period in which people had what they are longing for.

As mentioned, Azar did an internship at the National Museum of Iran for her Tourism Management studies. During this internship, she learned a lot about Iranian history. Maybe she compared the current Islamic regime with the regime of the Shah, and concluded that although the Shah's regime was cruel, it was better than the current regime because the people were allowed more freedom in daily life. Whatever the explanation is, it is clear that the time and space arrangement of Iran in the 1970's/1980's provide a context for Azar's view on the ruling period of the Shah. Moreover, Azar's 'historical bodies', or in other words her life experiences, such as her upbringing, her belonging to a certain generation and her internship at the National Museum of Iran also provide a context for understanding her constant reminiscence of the past.

Additional chronotopic identities can be identified in Azar's life. For example, in Iran, Azar had to comply with the strict rules of public behavior in the Islamic Republic. She had to wear a veil when going outside, and was restricted in certain areas of life because she is a female. Moreover, Azar

probably had to comply with her parent's faith to some extent, out of respect for her parents. These behaviors were necessary for Azar to adopt, as violating these normative rules would have serious repercussions. This behavior should be placed within the space of Iran, being a strict Islamic Republic, controlling almost everything its citizens do in public. Again, Azar's 'historical bodies' influence her behavior within this chronotopic identity as well, as she most likely has seen the consequences of non-compliance to these normative rules in her surroundings.

Additionally, the fact that Azar converted to Christianity should be considered in the time and space configuration in which it took place. As mentioned, Azar never really identified with the Muslim faith of her parents. However, if she would have remained living in Iran, she most likely would never have broken so clearly with Islam, as this would have had serious repercussions for her life. Her conversion should be placed within the time and space of her arrival in The Netherlands, where she felt the freedom she had always been longing for deeply. Here in The Netherlands, she experienced the liberty to question her own beliefs and search spiritually for the truth.

Furthermore, Azar mentions:

'I am fine with being regarded as an asylum seeker, because that is what I am'

Azar seems to embrace her identity as 'the foreigner' and 'the asylum seeker', a role which is a result of the time and space configuration in which she finds herself, which is typified by a move from Iran to The Netherlands, a country with a different culture and language than her homeland. This chronotopic identity conditions the rights and the level of agency she has (more on agency later).

4.4.3. Religious identity

'I am not afraid for a negative outcome. I am a Christian, and I believe that God protects me. I am not afraid; I trust Him entirely.'

Azar was raised as a Muslim, but never received a strict upbringing. She was granted the freedom to form her own beliefs and to take her own decisions with regards to religion. One could argue that this is

exceptional for the time in which she was born. Azar mentioned that she never felt like she was a Muslim, because she had difficulties with believing.

Once in The Netherlands, Azar felt lonely, stressed and was in despair due to her situation in life. These feelings led her to orient herself on different religions and beliefs, as she was looking for something to hold onto. Eventually, after a long process, she decided to convert to Christianity. Her faith helps her in difficult times, especially during her four-year (and counting) asylum procedure. She also noticed an inner change after converting to Christianity, as if she became a new person and the old Azar had left. She mentions:

‘My sister is with my enemies for four years already, but I don’t hate them anymore. I pray for my sister and my enemies. I pray for our Iranian government and I try to forgive them. I forgive everyone that hurt me and did wrong to me’.

Azar is able to forgive others, feels peaceful inside and does not feel lonely anymore. As mentioned in the conceptual framework, Peek (2005) mentions that the concept of identity is often used to ‘define and describe an individuals’ sense of self, group affiliations, structural positions and ascribed and achieved statuses’ (p. 217). Linking this definition of identity to Azar’s narrative, we can that Azar’s sense of self is strongly related to her religious identity, as she has experienced profound changes in her persona and refers to herself as being a Christian, as an explanation for why she has no fear.

Moreover, Azar affiliates with Christians as a general group, as she is a member of a church community and partakes in bible studies. Finally, Azar reports that her dossier with IND does not deal with her conversion to Christianity, but only with the political problems she has in Iran. In line with Peek (2005), this indicates a discrepancy between Azar’s ascribed and achieved statuses, thus between her legal identity construction (ascribed status), which is dependent on institutional decisions and her religious identity construction (achieved status), which is developed based on inner spiritual criteria.

Applying Marcia’s (1966) identity-status categories to Azar’s religious process in her life, one could argue the following. In Iran, when Azar was part of a Muslim family and living in an Islamic Republic, but not really believing in Islam, she found herself in the foreclosure identity status category.

Individuals in this category are spiritual conform; they follow religious beliefs and behavior in order to be accepted by others (Griffith & Griggs, 2001).

Azar reported that her parents allowed her the freedom to form her own beliefs. However, her mother is not allowed to discover that Azar became a Christian. Therefore, I assume that, although her parents were not very strict on the Islamic traditions, Azar was somewhat expected to comply with the rules of her parent's religion. Also, living in a conservative country as Iran, where everything in public is strictly controlled by the (Islamic) government, Azar would have had to follow certain rules as well in order to not get into trouble, such as wearing a headscarf in public. Individuals who refuse to conform are punished, jailed or even hanged. Therefore, Azar had to adapt to this behavior in order to be accepted by her family and by the government.

In the first years of her life in The Netherlands, Azar moved into the diffusion status, a term which refers to individuals who were brought up with a certain belief or religion, but have lost their faith and no longer identify with that particular belief system (Griffith & Griggs, 2001). Azar mentioned that she never really identified with Islam, so in that sense the diffusion status of her religious identity already started back in Iran, before she came to The Netherlands. However, once in The Netherlands, she made the final decision to break with her parent's faith and no longer identified with the religion whatsoever. I believe that the move away from her family, into a liberal Western country, provided Azar with a context in which she experienced the freedom to break with Islam for good. Perhaps she would have always lingered in the foreclosure status if she stayed in Iran, because there was too much at stake for her.

After a while she progressed towards the moratorium stage, a season in which individuals examine and question their identity and beliefs (Griffith & Griggs, 2001). This period of self-examination and search for a belief system often results in individuals researching many different faith perspectives (Wuthnow, 1998). This is exactly what Azar reports as being part of her spiritual process. She mentioned that she experienced a period in which she was on a spiritual search for truth. Of course Azar could have broken with Islam and could have decided to not identify with any religion or belief system. However, she decided to find truth for herself, a decision which should be placed in the context of her life situation and her forced migration experience.

Smith (1978) states that 'notions of pilgrimage and expectations of personal and cultural change magnified concern for a basis of moral and religious authority that could provide a sense of permanence of those adapting themselves to shifting social realities' (p. 1179). Smith (1978) refers to migration as a 'theologizing experience'.

Immigrants often experience ethical and behavioral disorientation, and go through a stage of alienation and confusion when arriving in a new country. As a result, they turn to religion to provide them with something to hold onto in tribulation. Presumably, this is what Azar experienced as well. She was in a foreign country, with the prospect of never being able to return to her homeland, with life being very uncertain and unstable, feeling hopeless, lost and lonely, probably feeling alienated and confused and desperately in need of a constant factor in her life and a belief to hold unto. Azar states that in this period of spiritual exploration, she examined different faiths.

After this season of searching, Azar entered the achievement status, in which she found faith in Christianity and converted. Griffith and Griggs (2001) mention that in this stage 'religious beliefs and experiences are integrated into core spiritual values as practitioners conscientiously seek spiritual growth and maturity' (p. 19). This is what we see happen in Azar's life as well. Specific examples of how Azar tries to attain the spiritual growth and maturity that Griffith and Griggs mention, is coming to church almost every Sunday to receive renewed peace and learn more about God. Additionally, she joins the bible studies that Jeroen organizes and she reported that it helps her to develop her faith. Additionally, she shares her faith with other asylum seekers in the center, in an attempt to help them on their spiritual journeys.

Studies have shown that next to fulfilling religious and spiritual needs, church communities also provide material, psychological and social support (see Hurh & Kim, 1990). These findings are confirmed through Azar's narrative. As mentioned, Azar is in an unstable situation in her life due to the fact that she is an asylum seeker. She mentioned that Jeroen prays with her to support her psychologically, he practically helped her by writing a letter testifying about her Christian faith for the IND, she meets other Iranian Christians in the EBC for social support and builds a social network in the church community.

Finally, as mentioned in the conceptual framework, identities are performances existing in and through different spheres (the home, the nation, transnational diaspora) and social contexts. Azar's narrative clarifies how such religious identity performances can evolve and transform over time, as life spheres change. Her family situation and her home country provided a context for her Muslim identity, while her experiences with forced migration and the social context in which she finds herself currently created circumstances which influenced her religious identity and made transformed her from being a Muslim, to being a spiritual seeker, to being a Christian.

4.4.4. Practical professional knowledge

'She [her sister] helps me to understand the culture. She says: Dutch people do this, Dutch people do that. You are not allowed to do this or that. When I'm with her family-in-law, I understand their behavior. I understand what Dutch people are going to do'.

As mentioned in the conceptual framework, the term *practical professional knowledge* can be seen as the knowledge and skills someone possesses in order to function as needed in a certain profession, function or role. In the case of an asylum seeker, *practical professional knowledge* would most likely consist of know-how with regards to cultural norms and values in The Netherlands and the asylum procedure.

For Azar, her older sister who has been living in The Netherlands for around 24 years and married a Dutch man have played a crucial role for her to build this knowledge. Azar stays at her sister's house from Wednesday to Saturday each week. In her sister's household, Dutch is mostly spoken with her brother-in-law and her niece and nephew. This helps Azar to learn Dutch more quickly, because she has to speak it in order to communicate with her family. Azar mentioned that sometimes her sister improves Azar's Dutch when she pronounces something erroneously or uses a wrong word in the context. Given the fact that the ability to speak Dutch is very important to build a life in The Netherlands, this helps Azar massively in her integration process.

Her sister and her brother-in-law are also very helpful in teaching Azar about Dutch culture and about norms and values. Social conventions are not always easy to distinguish, given the fact that

conventions can be 'below surface', small, intricate rules that one might not even be aware of. Therefore, it was hard for Azar to specify exactly what she has learnt from her family about Dutch culture. However, she did her best to make an indication.

For example, she has learnt at what times Dutch people eat and what they eat specifically (and Azar tries to conform to this), she has learnt that Dutch people shake hands when they first meet a person instead of giving kisses or hugs, she has learnt that it is normal for men and women to give three kisses as a greeting (in Iran, men and women do not do this), she has learnt that it is normal for Dutch people to go out on a terrace and enjoy foods and drinks with their friends (something which is forbidden in Iran), and she has learnt that Dutch people communicate directly. Azar tries to conform to all these behavioral patterns as much as possible, which indicates a micro hegemonic act of self-regulation with regards to the construction of her identity. She tries to adopt as much Dutch behavior as possible, in order to be regarded as part of society. With regards to Dutch communication styles, Azar mentioned:

'They speak a lot and hard, express themselves easily and are very direct. Iranians are not very direct. We speak nicely to each other, but we talk badly about each other behind our backs. I feel that being direct is good behavior in The Netherlands and I want to adjust to that'.

In The Netherlands, Azar is only allowed to work for a certain amount of money, due to the fact that she is receiving government support. She works every Tuesday at the 'Open Leer Centrum' at the asylum seeking center for 10 euros. However, she wants to do more than that, fill her time with useful things and therefore she has tried to build a network herself. Three years ago, she contacted Vluchtelingenwerk to ask if they could arrange a volunteering position for her at a nursing home, but unfortunately they never responded.

Next to her family, Azar mentions 'meneer Jeroen' as someone who is helping her to build a life here in The Netherlands. After Vluchtelingenwerk did not respond to her request, she turned to Jeroen to ask him if he could help her find volunteering work. Jeroen made some calls to nursing homes in the surrounding areas, but so far has not been able to find her anything. He is currently continuing the search, and actively engaging to try and expand Azar's network in Dutch society, which might help her later on, once she receives a refugee status and continues to build her life in The Netherlands.

4.4.5. Integration

'I am the foreigner, and I need to adjust to you. I don't think the Dutch people should adapt to my culture, no. I am Iranian, I am the foreigner, and I need to adjust to the culture'.

Along with the previously mentioned increase of asylum flows into Europe, the public debate on integration has strongly increased as well. In these debates, the terms integration and assimilation are often used interchangeably (Schneider & Crul, 2010). However, these concepts are not quite the same.

Integration refers to 'the incorporation of immigrants into the spaces and realms of life of a host society' (Nagel & Staeheli, 2008, p. 417). Integration is a process, in which majority and minority groups mediate the meaning of social membership (Nagel & Staeheli, 2008). The degree to which incorporation into a host society takes place varies. For example, some asylum seekers have a limited knowledge of the host country's language and find it hard to deal with the different cultural norms and values, whereas others quickly become fluent in the language and adjust to the culture without hesitation.

Integration is a troublesome concept to come to grips with. The term 'integration' in itself is built on the assumption that one part of society (the dominant group) is integrated, while the other part of society (the subordinate group) is not or needs to integrate more (Van Krieken, 2012). Moreover, questions arise such as: when is someone fully integrated? When does someone know a language well enough? When has someone adopted the prevailing norms and values sufficiently?

Assimilation is an important term when considering the various degrees of integration. Massey and Mullan (1984) define assimilation as 'the process by which a group comes to resemble, on a variety of dimensions, some larger society of which it is a part' (p. 836). In other words, assimilation refers to complete absorption or merger in the dominant culture (Taft, 1957), by means of adapting to the host country's language, norms and values (Ehrkamp, 2005). With assimilation, immigrants are basically required to reject their culture, traditions and language (Castles, 2002). Overall, in literature a distinction seems to be made between cultural assimilation and structural assimilation.

Cultural assimilation indicates that an individual has adopted the 'values, norms, patterns of behavior and expectations' which are necessary for a minimum functioning in a society. Without cultural

assimilation, it is very difficult for an individual to survive in a culture (Eisenstadt, as cited in Fitzpatrick, 1966).

Societal assimilation refers to the process in which immigrants are absorbed into 'primary groups' of a host society, in which they experience acceptance as a member of the social group. Membership of these groups can range from associations to marrying someone with the host country's nationality (Eisenstadt, as cited in Fitzpatrick, 1966). Societal assimilation entails the merging of two cultures into one, so that eventually only one cultural group exists. In some literature, societal assimilation is also referred to with the term 'structural assimilation' (Fitzpatrick, 1966).

Many scholars in the field of migration studies have argued that integration within a society is linked to residential segregation. In other words, if the degree of social segregation between groups is high, the degree of assimilation will be low (see Peach, 2006). Some researchers take it even further and argue that spatial assimilation is a key factor in the overall process of assimilation (Massey & Mullan, 1984). This is due to the fact that residential segregation reduces encounters with the majority population, hindering immigrant's integration into the main society (Haverluk, 1998).

Critiques on these assimilationist theories are that the experiences of immigrants and their own understandings of what they see as integration are not considered sufficiently (Ehrkamp, 2006). Moreover, British Arab activists argue that integration does not demand assimilation, certain residential patterns or rejection of transnational connections, but rather is a reflection of commitments individuals make to participate in their residential areas (see Nagel & Staeheli, 2008). Therefore, it is not only important to research the residential patterns of immigrants, but more so how these immigrants perceive their membership in the places where they work and live (Nagel & Staeheli, 2008).

Instead of using the term integration, some social researchers prefer using the term 'inclusion', and investigate the process in which immigrants are incorporated into certain areas of society, such as employment, education, housing etc. In short, inclusion indicates 'how immigrants and refugees have access to, use, participate in, benefit from and feel a sense of belonging to a given area of society' (Castles, 2002, p. 115). In order to understand the social inclusion process taking place in asylum seeker's lives, it is also important to consider the concept of social exclusion, which according to Castles

(2002) deals with 'rights, resources and entitlements' seen as normal when one belongs to a certain society, but to which asylum seekers do not have access.

Resistance against the previously mentioned liminal phase is a process with which asylum seekers start to obtain a feeling of inclusion or belonging. This resistance can take various forms, for example through acquiring the language of the host country, building relationships with individuals who are 'settled' in the country or through doing voluntary work (Hynes, 2006). Another means of creating belonging for asylum seekers is building social networks, providing them with familiar surroundings. These social networks in turn help asylum seekers to withstand the forms of exclusion imposed on them (Hynes, 2006).

In her narrative, Azar reported on her views on integration. She mentioned:

'I want to do as the Dutch people do. You need to adjust to where you live. When I want to be in touch with Dutch people, I need to do as Dutch people'.

Azar trying to behave 'as Dutch people do' clearly shows micro-hegemonic acts of self-regulation of her own ethno-cultural identity. In other words, Azar is attempting to adopt the necessary behavior to be viewed by others as a member of the group. Moreover, it shows that she is eager to take part in Dutch society. Azar hopes that eventually she will find a job in which she can use and develop her qualities and with which she can contribute to the Dutch economy. Additionally, she would like to start a family and have a normal life.

Eisenstadt (as cited in Fitzpatrick, 1966) mentions that in order to be culturally assimilated, one needs to adopt the norms, values, patterns of behavior and expectations of the host society, in order to achieve a minimal level of successful functioning. With regards to Azar, we can conclude that cultural assimilation has taken place in her life. Throughout her narrative, she mentions several times how she appreciates the Dutch culture for what it is, and how she wants to adjust. She has adopted the Dutch norms and values and functions surprisingly well in Dutch society.

To some extent, I think Azar is socially assimilated as well, as she is a fixed member of a primary group, namely the EBC church community. Moreover, at one point Azar reported that she had a relationship with a Dutch man, which also indicated into the direction of social assimilation. However,

she still identifies herself as Iranian, and takes pride in her country's history and language. This is something which is not considered to belong to social assimilation, and therefore I think this concept only applies partially to Azar's life.

As Peach (2006) mentions, scholars in migration studies regard spatial assimilation is a must in order for immigrants to assimilate in the host country. In other words, these immigrants should not be residentially segregated. Azar's narrative seems to invalidate this statement, as she has been living segregated from mainstream Dutch society for the largest part of her life in The Netherlands. She has been living in asylum seeking centers around the country for about four years now; environments which are populated by other asylum seekers and do not allow much encounter with Dutch citizens. However, despite these living conditions, Azar is assimilating into Dutch society. Therefore, Azar's narrative advocates for investigations on asylum seeker's own views and perceptions on integration, membership of society and belonging (see Ehrkamp, 2006; Nagel & Staeheli, 2008).

Azar has been subject to practices of social exclusion, as she is forced to live segregated in an asylum seeking center and is not allowed to study or work. However, social inclusion is also a part of her life, as she feels like she belongs to the family of the church community. Additionally, she often spends time with her sister's family, where she learns a lot about Dutch culture, assisting her in her process of integration.

Hynes (2006) mentions that resistance against the liminal life stage helps asylum seekers to create a feeling of inclusion and belonging. Additionally, individuals are constantly engaging in constructing a meaningful self, a process which is also referred to as 'agency' (Gubrium & Holstein, 1995). Gubrium and Holstein (1995) state that 'in constructing agency people make use of what is shared and available in their immediate circumstances' (p. 558). This resistance against a situation of being 'in limbo' and creating agency is also very pertinent in Azar's life.

Firstly, since she arrived in The Netherlands, Azar has been investing considerable efforts in acquiring proficiency in the Dutch language. Additionally, she tries to help others in the asylum seeking center, who are struggling to deal with their personal troubles. Azar helps them to find their way in their surroundings, such as finding the local supermarket. She mentioned: 'mostly, I tell them what the procedure is and that they need to something with their life, learn Dutch for example'. It is interesting

to see how Azar does not only resist her own liminality, but also encourages others to do the same, to create meaning for themselves within the boundaries of what is possible as an asylum seeker in The Netherlands.

Azar is convinced that asylum seekers can start building a new life while still in the asylum seeking center, thus in a liminal phase in their lives. She is trying to do this herself, by working one day a week at the '*Open Leer Centrum*' at the asylum seeking center. By doing this, she feels that she is making herself useful and that she is contributing something to Dutch society. Another manner in which she is trying to create belonging is searching for a volunteering position at a nursery home. These attempts at resisting her own liminality and creating agency for herself provide Azar with a sense of belonging and meaning.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Global problems in today's world elicit large floods of people fleeing their home countries and seeking asylum in safer harbors. As a result, local 'problems' emerge, of which the underlying context is anything but local. The 'problems' with asylum seekers today in Europe – whether Western and Eastern European countries may face different contingencies and specific political, socio-economic, cultural, religious and linguistic issues – they are rooted in globalization, and create increasingly super-diverse societies.

This research explored the process of asylum seeking in The Netherlands, through the experience of Azar, an Iranian asylum seeker. Ethnographic research was conducted, providing deep insights into Azar's sociocultural environment and her social meanings. Though this study only deals with the experience of one individual and cannot be generalized to a wider population, the findings from this research do provide knowledge and insights into the principles that are at play in an asylum seekers life, which in turn assist in increasing awareness and understanding of the situation in which asylum seekers find themselves.

In this ethnographic study, a variety of sociological and anthropological concepts were utilized to analyze Azar's narrative, shedding light on a number of interesting social and cultural processes. First, religion contributes strongly to an individual's identity-making process. For Azar, this became clear through the fact that she went through a period of spiritual search, after which she found faith in Christianity. From her discourse, it became clear that this religion provides her with a feeling of security, as she does not longer fear the future. Additionally, she does not feel lonely anymore, as she feels God everywhere around her. Her faith also provides her with a sense of belonging, as she is a member of the EBC, which she regards as a family. It is argued that challenging situations, such as diasporic forced migration elicit religious or spiritual feelings and interests within individuals, as they start searching for meaning, hope and something to hold onto. It is difficult to state precisely if this was the case in Azar's situation as well, but it is most certainly possible that her process of seeking asylum in The Netherlands has contributed to her search for spiritual truth.

Further, policy-imposed liminality influences ones legal status and ones entitlement to basic rights and opportunities within a host country. It also contributes to individuals having a sensation of

not-belonging, as they do not longer take part in the societies of their home countries, and are not fully accepted in the host country yet. However, other factors in an individual's life can still contribute to the creation of a sense of belonging, for example performing voluntary work or making an effort to learn the language of the host country. This opposing of policy-imposed liminality is also present in Azar's life. She has been making considerable efforts to find a voluntary position at a nursing home. Moreover, she has been following Dutch classes and is anxious to learn it. These are but a few examples of how Azar has tried to create a sense of belonging in a country in which she is largely excluded from mainstream society. Moreover, her religion provides her with a sense of belonging, as she has found a community in which she is welcome and where she is able to initiate relationships with fellow Christians. According to legal definitions Azar is in a liminal phase, though in religious terms she has already entered the phase of reincorporation into society.

Closely related to this sense of belonging is the concept of integration. In public and political debates, the asylum seekers searching for refuge in European countries are often referred to as a problem, or considered as a threat for the continuity of our European societies. Concerns are especially raised with regards to the integration of these asylum seekers into mainstream society. Over the past years, governments have been imposing policies of social exclusion onto asylum seekers, keeping asylum seekers excluded from mainstream society and only allowing them to integrate after receiving their refugee status. The reasoning behind this policy is that return to a home country becomes easier for an asylum seeker if he or she is not integrated into the host society yet.

However, as Azar's narrative has showed, integration is a natural process that cannot be entirely brought to a halt by policy-making. For example, she has learnt (and is still learning) the Dutch language, has family living in The Netherlands whom she visits often, speaks of willingness to behave herself like Dutch people do, wants to contribute to Dutch society through work, has friendships with Dutch individuals and even had a romantic relationship with a Dutch man at some point. Moreover, she is actively participating in a Dutch Christian community and has been trying to find voluntary work, to create meaning for herself and to contribute positively to Dutch society. These are but a few examples of how Azar has tried, and is willing to, integrate into Dutch society. Although she is in a legal situation which supposedly should limit her integration, the opposite is true in Azar's case. Integration plays an

important role in her narrative. One could argue that the current government policies with regards to integration only have the effect of leaving asylum seekers idle, which in most cases only leads to depression.

Finally, Blommaert (2001) mentions that in asylum procedures an intricate array of ‘discursive practices’ and ‘language ideologies’ exist, which are being used to judge the trustworthiness of an asylum seeker’s story. In his other work, Blommaert (2009) states that ‘while asylum seekers belong to a truly global scale of events and processes, the treatment of their applications is brought down to a rigidly national scale, a very modernist response to postmodern realities’ (p. 415). Thus, governments and institutions view asylum seeker’s lives and experiences through eyes strongly affected by national ideologies of how things ought to be, while in fact, the narratives and experiences of asylum seekers do not occur in a vacuum, but evolve over time in sociocultural, historical and political spaces strongly different from those of most host countries (Blommaert, 2009). This discrepancy between national ideologies and the reality of asylum seeker’s backgrounds leads to many injustices in asylum procedures. Hence, it is important that governments and institutions learn to view the lives of asylum seekers within the sociocultural, historical and political time and space frames in which they occur.

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Appendix A

This Appendix presents various excerpts from the original Dutch transcript of the long open-ended interview conducted with Azar. The letter I refers to interviewer (me) and R refers to respondent (Azar).

Excerpt 1 – Situation in Iran

I: Fijn dat je dit wilt doen, dat je mij wilt helpen.

R: Ik vind het ook fijn.

I: Ja (..), jij komt uit Iran. Misschien kun je mij vertellen (..) hoe was je leven in Iran? In wat voor familie ben je geboren? Kan je mij daar iets over vertellen?

R: Ja (..) eh.. ik werkte in Iran, ik had een werk, ik eh werk eh, werkte eh, voor ja veertien jaar, ik had een ervaring, enne ja mijn leven was heel rustig, eh ja, ik eh, studeer, ik eh ja ik werkte, maar mijn..

I: Wat studeerde je?

R: Ik studeerde eh.. Tourism Management in eh soort van eh MBO opleiding enne ja ik heb afgestudeerd en eh ik moet ik moest eh over mijn studie doen ja bijvoorbeeld ik had eh ik had een stage in National Museum in Iran 2 maanden en eh ik moest.. eh ik bedoel ik mocht op National Museum in Iran blijven werken.

I: Dus na je stage mocht je daar blijven werken?

R: Ja.. enne ja mijn leven ja een heel rustig leven was dat. Toen eh.. de groene beweging begon.. eh.. mijn leven is veranderd, helemaal veranderd.

I: Want wat eh wat eh gebeurde er toen allemaal precies? Wat is de groene beweging precies?

R: Ja eh.. groene beweging eh is eh is over de.. eh verkiezing in Iran in 2009.. en eh ja er was een verkiezing. Wij, de Iraanse puber, wilde eh wilde meneer Moussavi onze president worden maar die ayatollah Khamenei, de supreme leader van Iran, bepaald die andere man dat wij wilde niet, helemaal niet, hij was gek, ja. En toen ja, verkiezing was voorbij en Ahmedinejad die Khamenei bepaald om

president te worden, ja hij werd onze president en wij wilden niet. Dus wij demonstreerden en gingen op straat.

I: Ok, dus in demonstraties op straat. En wat deden jullie precies tijdens deze demonstraties?

Schreeuwen?

R: Nee nee nee! Wij hebben geen schreeuw, wij waren helemaal stil. Niet eh slogan, ik weet niet in Nederlands, slogan, helemaal, kijk in één keer, waren bijna vier miljoen mensen op straat zonder geluid. Niemand schreeuwt, niemand.. ja zijn gewoon stille demonstratie op straat. Maar ja, Khamenei wilde dat niet, dus wij eh zij hun soldaten vielen ons aan.. dus eh wij begonnen vechten tussen pubers en eh ja de het leger van eh ja Khamenei bedoel ik. En ja.. dat was gebeurd en mijn leven is helemaal veranderd. Één keer eh in eh winter 2009 nee 2010 was dat enne ik met één vriendin van mij waren wij op straat en eh ja.. het wordt een beetje aggressief.. werd heel aggressief.

I: Jij werd aggressief of het werd op straat aggressief?

R: Ja op straat. En eh mijn collega zag mij op straat en het leger van Khamenei eh volg mij dus was heel gevaarlijk. Als ik eh opgepakt werd door politie door eh door leger van Khamenei ja ik weet niet wat gaat gebeuren. De leger sloeg mij met de eh met schoen en met hun stok van eh...

I: Ze sloegen je met een stok?

R: Ja.. overal.. in mijn hoofd.. in mijn rug.. mijn been is eh.. ja.. enne ja een collega van mij zag mij en ik vluchtte... ik vlucht door mijn collega. Hij had een eh motor en ik zat achter hem en vluchtte van de eh ja..

I: Dus hij zag hoe jij geslagen werd, en pakte jou op de motor en nam je mee?

R: Ja.. ja.. was heel eh.. maar ik ben niet spijt van. Geen spijt. Ik wilde iets.. ik wilde.. wij de pubers wij wilden vrijheid.. meer vrijheid.. wij mogen niks doen in Iran.

I: Want wat voor vrijheid wilde je precies?

R: Ja.. de vrijheid van speech.. enne.. ja.. de vrijheid van eh.. ja.. ik heb gezegd tegen jou de vrouwen mogen niks in Iran, de overheid bepaald wat ze moet dragen, wat ze moet doen in hun leven, ok? De

vrouwen zijn in eh druk, onder druk, de meeste demonstratie op straat waren de vrouwen.. niet mannen.. ja jonge mannen wel maar niet de eh midden aged mannen, maar vrouwen alle leeftijd waren op straat. Vrouwen zijn heel onderdrukt in Iran.

Excerpt 2 – Azar's journey to The Netherlands

I: Het punt waarop je naar Nederland kwam, kan je me daar iets over vertellen?

R: Ja.. tijdens de demonstratie eh iedereen tegen mij gezegd.. ja waarom ga je niet naar die andere landen om asiel aan te vragen en ik zei nee ik ga niet eh mijn land.. ik houd van mijn land, ik wil hier in mijn land blijven. Ik wil voor eh onze vrijheid iets doen.. ik geloof het.. wij kunnen iets doen voor onze overheid. En ja de demonstraties is voorbij en wij besluiten om met mijn jongere zus hier naar Nederland te komen om mijn oudere zus te bezoeken. Het was eh ja 2011. Enne ja toen wij eh wij kregen visum. Ik had een beetje probleem met mijn paspoort te krijgen. Enne ja.. wij kwamen hier en mijn zus moest terug naar Iran, omdat zij werkte en haar verlof is voorbij en toen ik had geen werk dus ik mocht meer visum, maar ja haar verlof is eh voorbij.

I: Ok, dus zij kreeg een visum zolang zij vakantie had en jouw visum duurde langer omdat jij toch geen werk had.

R: Ja enne hij ging terug naar Iran enne toen zij op vliegveld eh in Iran was eh pakte zij door de politie in Iran. Enne ik wist het niet waarom.. zo mijn moeder zegt.. ja jij moet eh wachten.. iets gebeuren in Iran.. Jouw zus moest naar huis komen maar zij komt niet. Ik ging naar vliegveld maar eh niemand antwoord me niks.

I: Toen jij dat hoorde ben jij of je moeder naar het vliegveld gegaan?

R: Mijn moeder eh ging naar vliegveld om mijn zus op te halen. En zij kwam niet en niemand reageert niks en mijn moeder zegt ja jij moet voorzichtig zijn.. kan jij je visum verlengen een tijdje? Ja misschien kan en ik ging naar IND in Hoofddorp en ik verleng mijn visum, maar na de eh arrestatie van mijn zus eh kreeg mijn moeder de telefoon van de leger, zij werken voor de Khamenei.. en de leger bedreigt mijn moeder. Wij hebben je jongere dochter wij zijn op zoek naar jouw dochter Azar..

als zij hier in Iran komt wij pakken ze meteen. Dus.. ik eh.. ik word een beetje bang enne ja.. ik moest eh ja.. ik bedoel.. mijn oudere zus ja.. zei ja je moet asiel aanvragen. Je kan niet hier blijven zonder visum, dat is illegaal ja.. hier wonen.. dus je kan asiel aanvragen.

I: Dus jouw zus heeft aan jou het idee gegeven om asiel aan te vragen?

R: Ja.. omdat ik geen visum meer had. Ik heb voor 10 dagen verlengd mijn visum en die 10 dagen is voorbij dus ik niet hier illegaal in haar huis blijven. Dus ik ging naar Ter Apel om asiel aan te vragen.

Excerpt 3 – Azar's conversion to Christianity

I: Ben je bang dat die beslissing weer negatief gaat worden?

R: Nee, ik ben niet bang.

I: Hoe komt het dat je niet bang bent?

R: Ja toen ik eh in eh bekering ja omdat ja omdat ik bekeer van.. ik was geen Moslim eigenlijk maar ik bekeerde mijn religie.. ik word Christen en ik geloof in God dat hij beschermt me, hij steunt me. Ik ben niet bang.. ja.. ik vertrouw hem heel veel.

I: Je bent als moslim opgevoed.. je zegt dat je geen moslim was, maar je hebt het wel meegekregen in je opvoeding?

R: Ja, ik word geboren als Moslim, mijn vader was Moslim, mijn moeder is nog steeds Moslim, maar mijn vader was niet zo heel streng, wij vinden iets wat wij wilden begrijp je mij? Het was niet verplicht om Moslim dingen doen, niet vasten, wij hadden heel open opvoeding. Dus wij mochten kiezen.

I: Jullie mochten zelf kiezen of je als Moslim wilde leven of niet?

R: Ja, ja.

I: En toen kwam je hier in Nederland. Hoe ben je christen geworden?

R: Ik had een vriend die in onze AZC woonde. Hij was een Christen en eh ik was 2 jaar geleden ik was zo nerveus, zo zenuwachtig. Ik was de hele tijd huilen.

I: Hoe kwam het dat je jezelf zo voelde toen?

R: Ja eenzaam.. kijk.. en ik was ver weg van mijn familie.. mijn zus.. mijn zus ik weet niet waar is zij. Ja.. eenzaam.. enne ja.. ik mis mijn land, mijn familie, mijn vrienden, mijn vriendinnen. Enne ja.. één dag ik was zo zenuwachtig en huilde heel veel. En hij kwam eigenlijk bij mij kletsen en hij begon over de Jezus te praten. Enne.. hij gaf mij een Bijbel en ik begon te lezen. En ik voel me een beetje rust. En een dag daarna ik zei tegen hem ik wil meer over Jezus weten. Enn ja hij stuur mij aan andere kerk in Zwolle. Ja ik begon daar in Zwolle in een Iraanse Christen maatschappij en ik begon daar en ik begon met bijbelstudie daar. Maar omdat de kerk heel ver weg is ik zei tegen hun ik zei heel ver weg voor mij ik kan niet elke zondag hier komen. En zij zeggen tegen mij ik ken hier een andere kerk ken jij Jeroen en ik zeg: ja ik heb gehoord over Jeroen en zij zeggen ja jij kanne daar heen gaan. Hun is een heel goede kerk in Tilburg en toen ben ik hier gekomen.

I: Dus je bent christen geworden door die vriend in het AZC. En hoe zou jij als je kijkt naar hoe je was en hoe je nu bent, nu je christen bent, hoe ben je veranderd?

R: Ja kijk.. ik was boos op alles. Ik gillen maar nu ik word een beetje rustiger. En ik hield niet van mens niet. En nu ik kan eigenlijk mijn vijanden houden begrijp jij? Kijk mijn zus is al vier jaar bij mijn vijand is, maar ik hekel aan ze niet meer. En ik eh ja ik bid voor mijn zus en mijn vijanden en voor onze overheid. Ik bidden voor ze om hun ogen te openen. Ik probeer hun te vergeven en ik bid voor ze. Ik vergeef alle mensen die eh fout voor mij gemaakt. Mijn vijanden.. die overheid is nu voor mij vijand maar ik bid voor ze.

Appendix B

This Appendix presents the original field notes of the first two observations in the EBC, which took place respectively on the 4th and the 11th of October, 2015. This example of field notes serves as a glimpse of what I encountered in the field and how I processed this information. Names referring to certain individuals from within the community have been left out for confidential reasons, and have been replaced with (...). To clarify, Bas is the fellow ethnographer who joined me in my observations.

Sunday, 4th of October, 2015

9h50: Arrival. Meeting up with Bas. At the door there is a young guy standing, shaking people's hands as they come in, saying: 'welcome', and, 'God's blessing'.

9h52: Walked into the sports hall, saw Jeroen (our contact person) standing close to the refugees speaking to another guy called (...). They both work with the refugees in the church.

9h55: Walked up to Jeroen to introduce Bas to him. Jeroen asked us to not take photos of the refugees, as this could be a sensitive matter to them. We made him clear that all we are intending to do is make some notes, no photos. He said that if we have any questions, we can always come and ask him.

9h57: Sat down in the interpreting area, in the back of the church. Noticed that all the refugees/asylum seekers are seated at the back of the church. Translation happens from Dutch to English, and then often from English to Farsi.

11h30: When the church service ended the refugees/asylum seekers were shaking each other's hands, but not with the rest of the community.

11h31: Two guys, (...) from Uganda and (...) from Sierra Leone took care of cleaning up the chairs. Bas met (...). (...) seemed rather absent sometimes. He came in late and had to leave earlier as well. When talking to him, he sometimes did not give a clear response.

11h32: We (Bas and I) were still standing in the sports hall, Jeroen was there as well and I saw that right away a refugee couple went up to Jeroen, shook his hand and started talking.

11h33: Bas and I walked into the line for the coffee. I was speaking to a woman who asked me to interpret that morning, about how the interpreting went (it was my first time). When talking, I saw that in the coffee area little groups started creating themselves. There was a group of 4 young refugee guys (...), from Afghanistan, probably with some friends. Students were standing talking to each other and a group of somewhat older refugees with children were standing in a group as well. There were two families with younger children interacting with each other. They had a foreign background as well.

Bas and I decided to go talk to (..) and (..). (..) started sharing his story. He has been in The Netherlands for 5 years now. He has his own house in Tilburg and received the asylum status. He lives on his own. Often (..) is coming over. Quite soon he started talking about how the Dutch government does not allow him to work, and that this is driving him crazy. He wakes up, sits on his chair, drinks coffee and then the day is over. It messes with his mind. He is allowed to do factory work, but that is not something he enjoys, and makes him go crazy as well. He said that being idle is a slow poison. He also mentioned that he had to flee for his life, and that the Dutch government expected him to bring his certificate in order to work. He had his own dentist practice and claims to have earned more than 100k per month. He also mentioned that he what he earns here in a month, he earned in 15 min in Uganda. He mentioned that he doesn't mind that he doesn't have a car, he doesn't mind that he doesn't earn a lot of money. He just wants to work. He has deep frustration about the fact that he knows a lot and is intelligent, but is not allow to show his level of skill.

He has friends here from all over Africa. They are only from Africa though. He does some work online, answering questions about dentistry to keep himself busy and his level up to scratch, but he doesn't consider this as work.

He did not understand why the government would waste his intelligence and knowledge, by not allowing him to work. He told us that in Uganda, he was a dentist. Now, he came to the Netherlands and is nothing. He said: 'I'm idle'. He went to the UF (?) and they told him that he should learn Dutch.

He started with a course in Utrecht, payed by the UF, but that was a course that only lasted for two months. He says it is impossible to learn Dutch in two months and that therefore he failed the course. Then the UF told him to move to Tilburg and take the course here at ROC. He arrived in Gilze, has been there for 6-8 months. He had to pay for this himself but had money issues. He went to Tilburg University, enrolled for the Dutch course, but was asked to pay the money right away. He said he needed some time to send the documents to the UF so that they would pay for his course. The university did not want to wait that long, he didn't have enough money to pay it from his pocket, so the plan blew up. He then went to MST, where according to him a lot of refugees come to take Dutch courses, and follows Dutch there to reach level 4. They finished one book and he is now waiting for the teacher to tell him when they are starting the second book.

(...) says it is impossible to learn Dutch in two months, because he has so many other worries on his mind. His family is still in Uganda, and he is here stuck in an asylum situation, not being allowed to work. They are dependent on him for money, but he doesn't get much income. This stresses him out majorly. I asked why he had to leave Uganda, and he said it was because of politics. He said: 'politics in Africa is always dirty'. He trusts no one here except for Jeroen. Jeroen came to the asylum seeking center and asked him to come to church. Bas asked for future plans. (..) says he wants to leave, doesn't know how and what, but wants to leave. He lost all hope. He is angry, because he does not understand why he is not allowed to do anything.

I asked him how this community is helping him and then I got interrupted by the pastor.

When talking to the pastor, I noticed that the group of young refugee guys, also containing (..) stood up and walked to the door. There was a girl joining them now as well. The girl saw that Jeroen was approaching them, pulled (..) arm, made him turn around and greet Jeroen. They had a conversation and then shook hands and hugged each other.

My conversation with the pastor (about his work in Tilburg and my plans after January) continued a bit further and then we were made clear it was time to go home. This was around 13h00.

Sunday, 11th of October, 2015

09h52: I arrived at the church. I entered the building and again a man was standing at the door to give us a welcome (different guy than last time). He said: 'welcome and blessed service'.

09h54: I walked into the sports hall. Again, there was a clear distinction between refugees sitting in the back and other community members sitting more in the front. Bas and I decided to sit on the side this time on benches, so that we could kind of have a better view on what was happening in the service.

The order of the service was as follows:

1. Welcome.
2. Announcement that the flowers of the week were for (..) and (..), for all the things they do for the community.
3. Further announcements: someone's operation was successful, and another guy fell and therefore had to get an operation soon.
4. Prayer.
5. Worship.
6. Collection of gifts.
7. A song for the children, after which they went to their own 'service'.
8. More worship.
9. Teaching by pastor.
10. Worship.
11. Blessing + end.

During the service I realized that last week more people were present at the service. Also, a lot more refugees were present last week. (..) and (..) both were not at church. (..) was there this time, but he did arrive later. I also noticed that there were quite a lot of Asian people (among which there were Indonesians) that were sitting more towards the front in the church.

11h35: After the church service ended, we went to the coffee room again. We stood in the line to get a coffee, and then decided to sit alongside the window, which is at the side of the room. This normally is the corner where the refugees kind of gather, and would be a good spot to just sit and observe the

things that were going on in the environment. I noticed again that quite quickly, groups started to form. Students from the same student association sat together at a table, drinking coffee and chatting to each other. The refugees started to gather as well, not in one big group, but in smaller groups. I saw an older and a younger woman together, 3 guys were standing together (all from Afghanistan), and there was another table at which 3 women were sat. It seemed like the Indonesian/Asian population in the community also tends to stick together. In that sense, there really are different communities within the one overarching community.

I was sat on my own on the table alongside the room. Bas had decided to go and try have a chat with one of the Afghan guys. After a while, a guy from the student association came up to me to have a chat (I was acquainted with him), because he saw that I was sitting alone. I mentioned to him that I was observing and therefore sitting alone, and he said he'd come sit next to me so I would not look so lonely. Shortly after, a girl I know from Tilburg also came and talked to me, because she had seen me sitting there alone. I introduced the girl and the guy to each other. Another girl from the student association joined, and Bas came and stood with us as well. We were about to start a conversation when Jeroen came in the group and said he wanted to introduce me to Azar. Together with Bas I followed Jeroen to the other side of the room, where Azar was standing alone at a table, with her back against the wall, at the side of the room. I shook her hand, she gave me three kisses. The conversation felt a little weird at the beginning, because I did not really know what to say. I asked her how she is doing, and she said 'good'. I thanked her for being willing to help me with my research, and she responded that she was happy to help and that she actually liked it as well. I explained that the idea of the whole thing is to not just have an interview, but to spend time with her over a longer period, to hang out, have coffee, cook a nice meal together and to get to know each other. I also explained her that she would get to know me, and I would get to know her and her story. I asked if it was okay for Bas to join us as well, and she really had no problems with that. I asked her for how long she has been here in The Netherlands and she mentioned that she has been here for four years. I complimented her on her Dutch, because it is really good. I asked her where she lives, and she said in the AZC in Oisterwijk. I asked her how she feels about being there, and she said it was okay, but that she feels

very lonely there. She is mostly living with Syrians, Somalis and Eritreans. It is really hard to communicate with them, because Azar speaks Farsi and they speak their own languages. Also, the other refugees do not speak English or Dutch, so it is extremely difficult to talk to them. She knows about two more Iranians living in the AZC, but she does not really know them. She asked us if we would come see her in the AZC for our research, and I said yes. She also said something about knowing two other Iranian women, but they received their status now and are building their lives, so she is not really in touch with them anymore.

She asked me where I live and I said that I live close to the University, in a small apartment with 3 other girls, and that I don't have a lot of privacy. I said that I'm 25 now and that I am longing for having my own place, more space for myself and more privacy. She recognized it. I asked her for her age and she said she is 38. I asked her if she worked or studied in Iran, and she said that she studied Tourism Management. She had a job in that field as well, but then it stopped (?). I asked her if she works here in The Netherlands, and she replied that she is not allowed to work. There was this organization which helped her here in Tilburg (I don't remember which organization this was) and she had to get a certificate for some kind of level. She did not get that, and they stopped helping her, so she cannot study here or get a job. She said that she has nothing here. Her studies don't help her. She needs to start all over. I asked her for her plan for the future and she says she wants to study Social Pedagogical Studies. She has been waiting for her permit for four years now and said that her dossier was put in the archive for 1,5 years. She is just waiting now for a verdict.

She has a sister in Schiedam, who came to The Netherlands 23 years ago. Her sister married a Dutch man and has her permit. They have a child of 17 and a child of 11 (or 13?). Her sister worked at Hans Anders, but stopped working to take care of her children. She stays with her sister very often.

I asked how often she comes to the church, and she says she tries to as much as possible. I asked who she knows here in the church, and she pointed to a young guy with a black v-top from Afghanistan. She knows him. For the rest it did not seem like she knew a lot of people in the church. She travels alone from the AZC to church.

I asked if it was difficult for her to be living in an environment with so many different cultures. She said that she didn't find it difficult, because she has no problems with other people. She did mention that Syrians often fight with Somalis, because of a clash of culture. She also said that the young people (teners) fight with each other often.

I carefully asked her if she has a phone. She said yes and we exchanged phone numbers. I asked if she has whatsapp and she said yes I have skype, viber etc etc.

After our conversation, Bas and I had a wee chat with each other. I saw a group of 2 refugee women and one man sitting with Jeroen in a circle. Their heads were bend over, they were talking to each other quietly, and it seemed like they were sharing some worries with each other. Jeroen opened his bible and they read something together. After, they prayed with each other. They were sitting in a circle and holding each other's hands, while praying with the four of them.

After a while I walked up to Jeroen and thanked him for introducing me to Azar. I also mentioned that I really want to help the church community with the refugee work they are doing. He said that they are looking for people who can speak Dutch with them. They do get Dutch classes officially, but having conversations with people and stimulating them to speak Dutch does not really happen there. I said I would be more than willing to help. I also asked if the refugees have lunch together after church. He says that this is not really the case. The ones coming from AZC in Gilze go back to Gilze, the ones from Oisterwijk go back there.

I said that I noticed that the different cultures do not really seem to mix. Jeroen confirmed that. He said that the people who speak Farsi do have contact with each other during the week. Also, he said that people from Afghanistan and Iran do mix a bit. However, refugees from the African countries do not mix in at all. They definitely form a separate group.

In the meantime, I also saw (..) speak to a man. We did not get the chance to speak to him today, but we could hear him speak loudly. It looked like he was telling his story again and was pouring out his

frustration on someone. Bas commented that it looks like this Sunday morning coffee time after church is a way for him to spill his beans and express his frustration.

I asked Jeroen for the contact details of (..). It seemed a little difficult last week to get a good conversation with (..) going, so it might be better to contact (..) and ask him if he would be willing to help us. He is still waiting for his permit as well, speaks Dutch and is quite an easy going guy. Jeroen said he would send me an email with (..) in CC, so that we could get in touch.

Appendix C

Excerpts of the book published by the ‘Centraal Orgaan opvang Asielzoekers’ featuring parts of Azar’s narrative are presented in this Appendix.



OVER EEN PAAR JAAR?

Dan heb ik hopelijk een
verblijfsvergunning,
een baan waar ik mijn
kwaliteiten in kwijt kan
en waar ik kan bijdragen
aan de Nederlandse
economie en misschien
een leuke vriend.
Ja, eigenlijk hoop ik
dat ik dan een gewoon
leven heb.

Vrij in Nederland



☛ Natuurlijk mis ik mijn vrienden uit Iran en mijn oorspronkelijke werk, maar hier heb ik iets dat ik in Iran nooit zou krijgen: vrijheid van meningsuiting. Ik voel me vrij in Nederland en doe wat ik wil. Drie dagen per week studeer ik Nederlands (mogelijk gemaakt door de UAF, Stichting voor Vluchteling-Studenten, die hoger opgeleide vluchtelingen helpt bij studie en werk) en ik werk een dag per week in het Open Leer Centrum van het azc. Ik zie hier zoveel mogelijkheden en ik ga overal achteraan. Ik ben een leven aan het opbouwen binnen en buiten het azc en ga met vrienden van mijn studie naar de bioscoop. Ik zie hier om me heen dat veel asielzoekers wachten. Wachten op hun leven. Dat zal mij niet gebeuren. Ik ga mijn eigen weg en sta niet toe dat ik door iets of iemand belemmerd word in mijn doen en laten. Toen ik net in Nederland kwam, ben ik me gaan oriënteren op verschillende geloven. Ik voelde me niet thuis in de Islam. Ik ben er zelfs bang voor. Ik vond me in de Bijbel en Jezus, voor mij is hij de redder. Iets waarvoor ik in Iran vermoord zou worden. Ik ben anderhalf jaar geleden gedoopt tot Christen en sindsdien voel ik me een veel rustiger mens. ☛