Understanding asylum: the story of an accomplished asylum seeker in the Netherlands

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Abstract

The aim of this thesis paper is to discuss the question of what it is to be an asylum seeker in today's age of globalization. A multi-sited ethnographic research method was used in order to observe the personal case study of a post-asylum seeker who comes from Syria. This attempt was to understand and observe him and his socio-cultural positioning in the host society. Concepts of integration and identity are employed to convey his trajectory and experience in a context of super-diversity and transnationalism at a time of globalization.

Key words: Asylum seeker, integration, identity,

"*You are your own forerunner, and the towers you have [built] are but the foundation of your giant-self. And that self too shall be a foundation.*"

— Gibran Khalil Gibran

The Forerunner (1920)

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1. Introduction

In 2014, many people from Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Serbia and Kosovo, and Eritrea (the top 5 source of countries of asylum seekers, according to the UNCHR) have been seeking asylum to the West in order to be granted safety and security considering the war and terror in their countries. Among the 44 industrialised countries, according to the UNHCR records, there was about 866,000 asylum seeking applications registered in 2014. In comparison to 2013, which recorded 269,000 applications, this increased to 45% the following year. Under the Geneva Convention (1951), one is considered a refugee if s/he is unable to return back to the country they are originally from because of a threat of being persecuted. This could be because s/he is of a certain race, believes in a particular religion, comes from a different nationality or even a member of a specific political group (UNHCR, 1951). Distinctively, one who seeks asylum is a person who looks for international protection "but whose claim for refugee status has not yet been determined" (Phillips, 2013). Under the Geneva Convention, a person has the right to seek asylum "from persecution in other countries" (UNHCR, 1951) that they believe grant security and better life for them and their families.

According to CBS Statistics Netherlands (2015), the Netherlands has received a total of 24,535 asylum requests in the year 2014, which is assessed by the Immigration and Naturalization Service (IND). Eurostat, on the other hand, shows that the Netherlands received a total of 24,495 asylum requests (Eurostat). Whereas, UNCHR demonstrates that the Netherlands received 23,800 asylum claims the same year (UNCHR). Therefore, this explains that there is no precise number as to the amount of asylum claims that a specific country receives as there is a massive majority requesting asylum almost at a daily basis. Nevertheless, the Immigration and Naturalization Service is responsible for evaluating application forms for foreigners who want to be granted asylum and thus, want to be able to reside in the Netherlands (IND, 2009). However, there are certain procedures to go through and interrogations in order to be accepted as an official refugee. Their personal narratives need to be reliable and legitimate as to why they are seeking asylum, which is then controlled by immigration officials for credibility and plausibility of the narratives (Shuman and Bohmer, 2015). These narratives need to contain a valid identity, specific and detailed location of areas in their home countries, motivation for seeking asylum and, if possible, a chronological account of events that have brought the applicant to flee (Maryns, 2005). Under this strict asylum procedure, if the applicant is unable to meet the requirements of accuracy, then this will unfortunately influence the legitimacy of the narrative.

Gatekeeping is when an institutional asymmetry allows either the approval or rejection of an individual whose behavior or narrative did or did not conform to the expectations within a context due to differences in background and cultural and/or linguistic resources (Tranekjær 2015). Thus,

"[t]he [...] asylum procedure [...] is a legal-administrative procedure that involves discursive gatekeeping process" (Maryns et al, 2005). In other words, if an individual comes from a specific country or region, for the asylum procedure, they should be proficient in the language of the region they have lived in and should be able to give specific factual details of the area and region they have lived in. However, Blommaert (2009) argues that the asylum seeker, similar to any other individual, "belongs to a truly global scale of events and process". Thus, narrowing down the asylum seeker's application to a firm national scale leads to many problems, such as of justice (ibid). He gives the case study of Joseph from Rwanda who appealed for rejection of his application due to the fact that he did not speak the language of the region. However, due to a series of events that caused Joseph to move frequently (but unwillingly) and to be forced to know other languages, he was unable to give details of the region his house was in Kigali and did not have a good maintenance of the local language: Kinyarwanda (see Blommaert's *Language, Asylum and National Order,* 2009). Due to the difference of culture and linguistic resources, Joseph's narratives were judged as implausible.

Nonetheless, once asylum seekers manage to be granted a legal refugee status in a host country as the Netherlands, issues of identity and integration start to emerge. The main factor of integration, in a host country being the Netherlands our case in point here, is the requirement to learn the official language, in this case Dutch. One main factor of a modern society is order (Blommaert *et al.*, 2012), and to have order is to have one main language. Therefore, to be a full member of a modern nation implies to be a full member of an "ethnolinguistic community: a community defined by one language and one culture" (*ibid*). Therefore, being proficient in a different language rather than the main language of the host country becomes irrelevant for acquiring a Dutch citizenship (Spotti, 2007) as this does not maintain that linguistic hegemonic order. Having a difference of language and thus, culture may affect this integration making it extremely difficult for the asylum seeker to adjust to the host society. Therefore, comes the issue of one remaining as an outsider because their culture and identity remains striking. On the other hand, Becker (1963) gives another perspective of being an outsider, which is someone who is seen as the rule-breaker. Considering our example here, "illegally" crossing national boundaries without official papers gives the asylum seeker an image of the rule-breaker and thus of the outsider. "[T]he deviant act occurs because some characteristic of the person who commits it makes it necessary or inevitable that he should" (Becker, 1963). Therefore, for the asylum seeker this irregularity of travelling and entering a country illegally is an actual condition sine qua non to escape from an unsafe environment and seek security elsewhere. Although this sort of reasoning is what gives the right for an individual to flee, citizens of the host country may still view the asylum seeker as an outsider, leading to antagonism, segregation, illegitimation. On a study about community antagonism towards asylum seekers in South Australia, Klocker (2004) revealed that "[a]sylum seekers were constructed as 'burdensome', 'threatening' and 'illegal', and opposition to

them was set within the discursive framework of a 'Self/Other' binary". This, therefore, allows the asylum seeker to have the sense of being an "outsider", and integration becomes harder to achieve.

When speaking a different language other than the national one, soon we step into a dichotomy discourse of us versus them. That is, soon the assumption of "otherness" within mainstream society comes into play pressing institutions to shout for integration and assimilation — in which to be part of the society one needs to match mainstream norms and values among which we find speaking the official language of the host country. As Blommaert et al. (2012: 3) point out: "[a] community defined as one language and one culture" (ibid). Knowing the language of the host culture makes it easier for integration and acceptability in that culture. In his theory and collection of lectures (1974-1975) about the *Abnormal*, Michel Foucault describes the norm as an aspect that gives the right to power and it is "an element on the basis of which a certain exercise of power is founded and legitimatised" (2003). Thus, the main language in the host country is the norm as it is given more power and thus asylum seekers that speak other languages are, hence, abnormal and considered irrelevant to the host society.

1.1. Relevance of the Study

Asylum led migration cannot be understood without tackling also the concept of globalization. Globalisation is "about the spatiality of contemporary social organisation, about meanings of place and space associated with intensified world-level forces [...] and raised global connectivity [...]" (Amin, 2001). This flow of information and people helps in connecting what is distant to "a single time frame" (Papastergiadis, 2013). Migration is the movement of people, information and resources (ibid) which in part makes what globalisation is. This current migration flow in Europe, often presented as Europe's refugee crisis by public, political and lay people's discourse, has seen the entrance of a wave of people who want to seek asylum within globalisation allows the notion of superdiveristy to take place —what Blommaert terms as "a diversity within a diversity" (2013: 4). In other words, super-diversity is a conceptual by-product of globalization. In his study on super-diversity in the UK, Vertovec (2007) explains how Britain is home to many people from around the world (either due to labor migration, asylum seeking, colonial migration, students, etc), which makes it a country of diverse cultures. Blommaert (2013) introduces super diversity through two major changing forces. Firstly, the end of the Cold War in the 1990s allowed for an easier and accessible migration flow to the West for many different reasons (i.e. more vehicles from Eastern Europe seen more frequently in Belgium or the presence of many students from the People's Republic of China in many European universities). The second force leading to super diversity is the Internet, which gave a more complex but new flow of information accessibility globally.

Through this movement of information and migration flow in a super diverse global society where there is accessibility, it is, therefore, interesting to understand the subject who is impacted by

movement, change of culture and integration. Against this background, it follows that a topic such as entering the lives of asylum seekers is extremely relevant in today's society and current global affairs. The Netherlands has accommodated many asylum seekers in the recent years, especially from countries such as Syria, as war and other conflicts remain persistent there. Therefore, it is significant to understand the life of an asylum seeker after having been granted status tackling the drives and barriers that are in front of his integration process as well as his own professional knowledge in doing and becoming integrated. Moreover, this thesis falls into a wider spectrum of scientific research on asylum seekers and the complex matter of identity construction. Research has drawn about the procedures and credibility of narratives of asylum seekers, but barely enough research has focused on discussing the daily contingencies of being an asylum seeker being called to integrate. In such a diverse and global environment, what it means to the asylum seeker to integrate in such a different culture and how this influences their own identity.

1.2. Research Question

The main focus of this thesis is to understand the meaning of being an asylum seeker in an age of globalisation. More specifically, this study highlights on the topic of integration and it will look at the success story of a Syrian asylum seeker who has been granted the status of a refugee in the Netherlands. Further, this thesis specifically covers topics about integration of the asylum seeker in question after having been granted refugee status in the Netherlands. In so doing, it questions the complexity of either the progression or the complete change of their identity during the process of assimilation to the host society. This will also cover the refugee's perception of success in the host society, difficulty or easiness to integrate. Most importantly, this thesis seeks to understand what it is for the asylum seeker to have a success story; was it by being granted status, having a job, a family reunion, and security and safety. By observing and uncovering through the 'professional' life of the asylum seeker, this thesis gives a voice to the affected in order to understand clearly and concretely of his/her experience.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1. Identity

When discussing the concept of identity, the first question that comes to mind is "Who am I?". The latter is quite a difficult question to answer, because there is no standard explanation to it. One needs to take into consideration the many things that happened in his/her life experiences, where they are from, where they grew up, their (socio cultural) surroundings and the many (ethno-cultural) aspects that have shaped him/her when evaluating the question of "who am I?". Therefore, there is a wide range of study concerning how identity should be defined and what it should be prefixed by - cultural, ethnic, collectivistic, individual, only to name a few. "Individual identity is comprised of aspects of self that arise from personal characteristics, as well as social categories in which the individual claims memberships" (Kreiner et al., 2006). Therefore, identity does not only consist of the individual but also contains aspects of the individual in the social.

If we take language to be the first way into the study and understanding of identity, we see that although there is a link between language and identity their relationship remains tricky to say the least. Nor language can and does define a person's ethical or national identity neither can it be a marker for social control which tends to disable minority groups especially in multilingual societies (Pavlenko and Blackledge, 2004: 2-3). In his book "*Developing Identities*", Spotti (2007) explains that the majority language (in his example, Dutch) is not only a "language of instruction" but it also gives information about the culture (p.2). This in part enables a successful integration to the minority groups in the host culture. However, as Spotti (2007: 2) argues, this factor, as a consequence, becomes a challenge for a minority child's identity development. Not only does the child from a minority group attempt to maintain their ethnic affiliation but is also exposed to the host culture as well. This identity construction conundrum is also applicable to asylum seekers during the process of learning the majority language because as a result they are simultaneously integrating into the host society.

Identity does not remain intact because through all these different forms of identity, it shapes itself through time. As Somers (1994) explains, in order to avoid making identity have a stable meaning, we need to "incorporate into the core conception of identity the categorically destabilising dimensions of *time, space,* and *relationality"*. Therefore, how has identity changed through time, through locations and the surrounding relationships. These variables have an affect on what shapes identity. In any sort of level, identity is composed of various forms which differ "in accessibility and salience across situations; and certain aspects are more central and stable while other aspects are subject to ongoing interpretation and change" (Kreiner et al. 2006).

For asylum seekers, the question of identity becomes extremely complex. As they move from one place to another in order to seek security at a host country, their identity remains questionable and could be readjusted. Forced or voluntary mobility can shape the asylum seeker's identity and belonging while integrating in the host society (Valentine, 2009). Through narrative theory of identity, Somers (1994) interestingly explains that it is through narratives that we are able to understand the social world and it is through it that we are able to establish our social identity. She expands "that all of us come to *be* who we *are* (however ephemeral, multiple, and changing) by being located or locating ourselves (usually unconsciously) in social narratives *rarely of our own making*" (ibid). This is particularly relevant in Valentine's study (2009) about Somali refugee and asylum seekers in the United Kingdom and Denmark, where she explores the meaning and relationship of identity, belonging and space. Through interviews, she took into consideration their individual histories of migration, their sense of attachment and how they personally understand identity. Here, identity could be understood as a development that has been accomplished through all these different spaces an asylum seeker has gone through.

Identity can also rest on how an individual feels more recognised and accepted as part of a community, inclining therefore more toward the concept of identification process of the individual. Brewer and Gardner (1996) give the difference between interpersonal and collective identity as "social extensions of the self". Interpersonal identity is done through intimate relationships such as parent-child, friendship, lovers, even personal relationships within a membership (ibid). Furthermore, on a study of the social self, Brewer (1991) explains that personal identity differentiates the character one holds with others in a particular social context. Therefore, a person's character changes in a certain social context or a particular relationship (I.e: parent-child, doctor-client). According to the positioning theory, it is the "explanation of positions as relation processes that constitute interaction with other individuals" (Tirado & Gálvez, 2007). That is to say that positioning enables the structuring of personal narrations and the context in which the members of the group position themselves specifically (ibid).

On the other hand, collective identity does not involve personal relationships within a social group (Brewer and Gardner, 1996). Social identity is categorising the self into an "inclusive social unit that *depersonalises* the self concept, where *I* becomes *we*" (Brewer, 1991). In other words, being in a particular group, there is more of a unified collective identity rather than an individualistic personal one. For asylum seekers, during the process of identity redevelopment through past and new relationships, it is important to understand what kind of community they personally associate and position themselves to, if any, and how this plays a role on how they identity themselves currently as newcomers.

2.2. Identity as a Chronotope

In her study about individual narratives of patients during nursing care, Jane Harden (2000) mentions chronotope as a type of narrative. In so doing, Harden uses Bakhtin's (1973) explanation of chronotope which is defined as an "inseparability of time and space" and which helps to give an actual representation (2000) of a narrative. Blommaert (2015) defines chronotope as "the intrinsic blending of space and time in any event in the real world" (p.106). Therefore, the moment individuals narrate their lives it becomes only natural for him or her to link it to both space and time when recounting that is to those specific spatio-temporal conditions in which a certain event, contributing to the construction of his or her identity, took place. From a discourse analysis perspective, this allows the listener or reader to "locate the subject within the discourse" (Harden, 2000). Time and space are, thus, an essential entity during any narrative of any individual and help the analyst in reconstructing the process of identity formation. Bakhtin (Richardson, 2002: 17) gives examples of a few types of chronotopes in a fictional text, such as the chronotope of the road. He explains that,

> "[o]n the road the various spatial and temporal series defining human fates and lives combine with one another in distinctive ways, even as they become more complex and more concrete by the collapse of *social distances*" (ibid)

It is what he explains as the fusion of time and space in which the road enables a new beginning, "setting out on a new course", "the course of a life" (ibid).

Practices and narratives that are represented in the work of an individual's identity include particular time and space conditions (Blommaert, 2015). For instance, events that change an individual's time and space includes that person's change of discourse or narrative, ways of interacting, redefinition of behavior depending on the context, and so on (ibid). This applies to the identity shaping of an asylum seeker at a host country, as well. As they travel away from their countries, they gather with them experiences during a specific time and space that will eventually redefine their identities. It is a factor they look back to as they enter and assimilate to the new culture, for example, while narrating their stories to the immigration offices. Meaning is given to a narrative only by knowing the time and space of the individual's experience, and thus, "we can only know something about other people's experiences from the expressions they give them" (Eastmond, 2007).

2.3. Practical Professional Knowledge

Practical knowledge is a term commonly used in studies concerned about teachers and their knowledge as educators. It includes a lot of factors such as "personal practical knowledge […] , the wisdom of practice […] , classroom knowledge […] , and the folkways of teaching" (John, 2000). Furthermore, the practical part is basically a cluster of actions that have been implemented in certain

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learning situations in a teacher's life, which are essentially pedagogical basis that have been taught from experiences and that become activated in certain forms during teaching (ibid). It should be noted, however, that there is a relationship between practical professional knowledge and practical personal knowledge. Tamir (1991) defines practical knowledge as the information storage and skills that shape and lead our behaviors. Professional knowledge, on the other hand, is the information and skills that are required in a profession. Moreover, he adds that both are linked, as professional knowledge depends on "individual cognitive structure" and "that personal attributes affect the application of professional knowledge" (ibid). Thus, the knowledge carried out and conveyed by teachers during their classes is the know-how they have picked up through life.

In their study about teacher's professional knowledge, Clandinin & Connelly (1996) illustrate three factors within professional knowledge: time, space, and place. "[A] sense of expansiveness has [the] possibility to be filled with diverse people, things, and events in different relationships" (ibid). Therefore, interactions through personal relationships or even non-personal (for instance, within a community) in a certain time and location have a tendency to shape a teacher's professional knowledge. In a specific case study about the Bay Street School in Ontario, Canada, Clandinin & Connelly (1996) specifically concentrate on Stephanie whom they describe as

> "[...] a member of a minority group, she was respected as insightful about her experiences […] her teacher stories, particularly those constructed around her image of classroom as home and the image of teacher as maker, were heard and responded to."

Bay Street School was known to admitting many young immigrant pupils. Therefore, Stephanie grew up in the Bay Street community and had a certain identity and specific life experiences this allowed her to have a practical professional knowledge that some other teachers lacked of in the school.

However, there has barely been any study concerning the practical professional knowledge of an asylum seeker or any other individual for that matter other than a teacher. After constant reading about this term, many aspects and factors concerning the practical professional knowledge could also be linked to an individual's way of dealing with their "professional" lives. For instance, what factors of the practical professional knowledge of an asylum seeker does he use through the process of integration in the host country? Practical professional knowledge is linked to one's identity, and is also an entity that is shaped through time and space. Moreover, there maybe some factors the individual decides to omit through integration in the host society.

2.4. Integration

Countries, such as the Netherlands, that accommodate many foreigners, have applied an integration policy as part of its organisation for migrants and asylum seekers. The Netherlands defines it as the

"policy that promotes the amalgamation of different population groups into Dutch society" (IND, 2009). In other words, it is a policy that makes sure that minority groups understand and integrate into the Dutch culture in order to actively and successfully take part in it. This process will create a sort of unity between the minority groups and the locals. This way of policy additionally aids the asylum seeker to feel a "sense of belonging and national identity" (Phillips, 2010). Furthermore, countries such as the United Kingdom and the Netherlands recognise the rights of minority groups for them to nonetheless "maintain their difference[s], legitimis[e] their claims for distinctive collective identities and [seek] to meet demands for culturally responsive public services, [such as] housing" (ibid). Therefore, these kinds of policies not only do they oblige the asylum seeker to integrate in the new culture and access its resources, but they also allow them to keep and practice their own.

In the host country, integration for an asylum seeker tends to be a struggle as they "exercise their civic rights as well as their duties" (Nash et al., 2015) by learning the language and assimilating to the new culture. Surely, difference of language and culture stand as a slow process of integration for the asylum seeker as they have to adapt to the majority group. Moreover, as explained above, the person's identity shapes itself through this process of integration. The issue then lies in the sense of belonging in the host society and/or community. Valentine et al. (2009) draw this issue which was described by a Somalian respondent, that "it is not enough to claim a self-identity; rather, belonging requires that an identity is recognised or accepted as such by a wider community of practice". Therefore, the community as well as the surroundings, have an impact on the asylum seeker to accept his/her culture and to attempt to understand his/her position and struggle in a different country.

There is a link among identity, practical professional knowledge and integration when dealing with an asylum seeker and the matters that characterize his/her life. These three factors help shaping an individual's character and behavior through life experiences, which as a result helps the individual acquire certain skills s/he may be able to use in his/her future (i.e: for instance career-wise). Adjustment during a specific context may help an individual shape his/her current self, which is a conveyed factor in an asylum seeker's narrative. In other words, when recounting about their current lives in their host country, it is understood that assimilating into a new culture by learning the language and country's way of life may reshape their knowledge and know-hows that have previously shaped their identity. Therefore, as an asylum seeker is required to follow and respect the system of the host country, what becomes of their identity during the process of integration in such a new and different culture? Following a refugee from Syria who resides in the Netherlands, the present study analyses these matters.

3. Methodology

3.1. Introduction

The following chapter discusses the methods and the research methodology deemed fit for this particular thesis and follows on the design of the study used. This study rooted in an interpretive ethnographic tradition avails itself of a series of ethnographic means of data collection. Ethnography here though is not just a method of empirical interpretive enquiry in order to investigate and observe an asylum seeker's social status through an age of globalisation. Rather, ethnography here is an epistemological endeavour that focusses on "intersubjective small-scale interpretive work" (Blommaert and van de Vijver, 2013) trying to unravel the meaning attached by people to their doings while engaged across different, and at times overlapping, socio-cultural spaces. As Willis & Trondman (2000) explain as:

> "a family of methods involving direct and sustained contact with agents, and of richly writing up the encounter, respecting, recording, repressing at least partly *in its own terms*, the irreducibility of human experiences"

It is also a method that allows a deliberate observation (ibid) of a person's life experience in a socio cultural space, at a certain specific time in his/her life. Ethnography, being therefore more than just a method for data collection, helps in achieving an overview along with an analysis of what embodies a person through his or her life experiences. Ethnographic research is the observation of a subject's daily activities that comes along with their beliefs, knowledge (through experiences and education), and behavior (Blommaert and van de Vijver, 2013). It allows the respondent "some kind of voice [of living his or her] conditions of existence (Willis & Trondman, 2000).

Ethnographic research, or as in this case, the adoption and adaptation of ethnographic methods for data collection, is needed not only to observe a respondent's daily behavior and routine across the groups and spaces he or she is part of, but it also gives an idea of the context, in other words the time and place. The way a person speaks about their lives is also influenced by the context s/he is in. For instance, Blommaert & van de Vijver (2013) point out that the same sentence can be expressed differently "depending on who, when, where and how it was formulated". They emphasise that context not only does influence what a person means through what he says it also makes that person through its practice part of a discourse in which identity is constructed by the person in question for others and in the eye of others. Furthermore, context can also be an essential factor for analysing interaction as "[it] is provided by the history of the situation, past interactional sequences, and future interactional sequences" (Vrasidas, 2001). Therefore, ethnographic research highlights the time and

space of a person's narrative in order to give a clearer idea of the respondent's positioning of him or herself as well as his or her social interactions within the institutions that either formally or informally may coerce him or her to inhabit a certain identity rather than another in order to become part and parcel of the mainstream.

The interpretive ethnographic approach taken up in this study has helped in many ways. First, it has helped in analysing the familiar in order to touch on the readers life experiences, and which similarly allows the familiar to be seen differently. The researcher observes the behavior of the subject, and the meaning given to that behavior by the subject — "[i]interpretive inquiry attempts to understand the multiple layers of meaning represented by human actions and how they are interpreted by those involved (Vrasidas, 2001). This form of ethnographic research was helpful to understand Ahmad's way of living, because through discussions and observations of his doings in the different sociocultural spaces he inhabits I was able to extrapolate and establish emerging concepts that characterize what he thinks he does as he does what he does. The research focus — "What it is to be an asylum seeker" — deemed to be too broad in the beginning and it is in an enquiry of this kind that ethnography comes to in to save the day. As we read, "[i]n such cases, ethnographic research provides a valid and important way to find out what IS happening and to help research-practice teams plan their activities" (LeCompte & Schensul, 2010). Additionally by spending time with Ahmad, I was able to observe his behavior in his home and in his socio-cultural groups, and the way he explained himself through his past experiences and the perception he has of his future in the Netherlands.

Only after ethnographic research did help me to clarity emerge through the field notes. For instance, it was through ethnography that I was able to understand what kind of identity Ahmad related more to. What this study attempted to find out, is an unbiased view of Ahmad's life before as an asylum seeker and currently as a refugee. The effort of assimilation into the host society and the structure of his identity were subjects that came up during this method of research. Moreover, concepts such as positive integration in the host society were unraveled. During his anthropological work in primary school classrooms, Jackson (1990) admitted of having no idea of what exactly to look for nor how to look for it, however he trusted his intuition of that being revealed later during the fieldwork. During this phase of his work, he realised that he had to make what is familiar appear strange, "to strip it of almost all of its human significance […] to concentrate, on the physical events…" (ibid). He intuitively observed instead the number of contacts between teacher and student rather than what has been said between teacher and students. With Ahmad, I was able to observe what he made of his everyday life, with who he interacted and the way he interacted with these people. I was able to make of his everyday behavior "the strange" in order to find an interpretation of it. Ethnography is a helpful method in dealing with the issues of attempting to study social life among the pressures exerted in a globalised world (Gille and Riain, 2015). For instance, the issue of identity

representation of an asylum seeker in a host country; what does s/he become and how does s/he see themselves now.

3.2. Fieldwork

Most of the research was conducted by spending time with Ahmad. The first meeting with Ahmad was done at a cafe in Tilburg, where we started by getting acquainted with each other. What has made the encounter easier was the fact that we both shared the same social background, we are both foreigners from outside Europe or as it is named in the Netherlands, *niet westerse allochtoon* (a non-western foreigner). Further we had the language, it being Arabic, on our side. The language we have used, in fact, has been a common ground factor (Clark *et al.,* 1983) in which the subjects had a common reference they mutually believed in or belonged to. "Language is viewed as collaborative activity that uses existing common ground to develop further common ground and hence to communication efficiently" (Carroll, 2003). Therefore, with the use of a common language, Ahmad was instantly open about his life in the past and his expectancies in the future in his host country.

Further, an ethnographers' job is to engage in the life of the person they are studying and to observe the place in which the person lives as well as place it in a social and cultural context (Myers, 1999; Lewis, 1985). Later on, Ahmad invited me to his Dutch class and an international gathering such as of InterNations[1], where he is able to meet other fellow internationals, mostly expats, for drinks and a good time. The Dutch class was a 2 and a half hour class in which Ahmad took his B1 level language course. "Scientific ethnographic research is conducted in the field settings where the research enters as an "invited guest" or partner to learn what is going on." (LeCompte & Schensul, 2010). Hence, thanks to this method, it was easier to meet Ahmad in his social group and have an easier access to his life as an observer and to take field notes.

The ability to move from a different context to another in order to observe the respondent's daily interactive locations is what is termed as a multi-sited ethnography. It demonstrates

> "the construction of multi-site fields, including the selection of sites; the quality of relationship with informants in such fields; the temporal aspects of fieldwork and of the sites themselves; the dominant types of data in multi-site studies […]" (Hannerz, 2003)

The reasoning behind multi-sited ethnography is the fact that an ethnography of this kind is not constrained to one place only, which is something that tends to be misleading (ibid). During fieldwork, ethnographers are able to move around different sites sometimes unexpectedly which

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[1] Is an organisation that helps expats to meet other expats abroad "and find new information about their new environment" http://www.internations.org

Marcus (1995,1998) later names as an emergent multi-sited ethnography. Rahm (2012) explains it as a "mutli-sited research imaginary […] The term "imaginary captures the manner in which the object of the study […] is a co-construction by the researcher and the researched". Further, Hannerz (2003) explains that there is an "interconnection" between "translocal linkages" and "whatever local bundles of relationships which are also part of the study". In other words, following Ahmad's life in the Netherlands as a refugee ended up being a multi-sited ethnographic research, which linked his social and personal life, as he adjusts to his new home and retained links with his most recent past before migration. It follows the relations in the social life he is leading (i.e. in the different social settings he attends) which is linked to the way he describes himself currently. Additionally, as Ahmad attended Dutch classes three times a week in Eindhoven at the Avans school, it was also interesting to get further feedback from another informant who is foreign to him and yet close enough figure associated and linked to Ahmad. Ahmad's key figure was his Dutch teacher, Mvr. Poppels, who has taught him twice already at his A2 and B1 levels of Dutch language courses. Talking to the key figure was to have an exterior view point of Ahmad, in order to understand how he is seen by the close social group he frequently attends.

3.3. Ethnographic Corpora

The ethnographic research done on this thesis paper is based on an assemblage of three sub-corpora (as shown in Table 1.1). The first one were field notes done at Ahmad's home. The second one, was the InternNations meeting in Breda. And lastly, that done in Ahmad's B1 level Dutch language course in Eindhoven at the Avans school. The first sub-corpus is mostly a deep ethnographic observation of Ahmad's home, his way of life and a discussion and thoughts of a variety of subjects from his past in Syria to his present and future life in the Netherlands. The second sub-corpus covered the international and expatriate community Ahmad would go to once a month. Finally the third sub-corpus was an intensive observation of the Dutch class community which Ahmad was a member of as a classmate, and how active he was there. Moreover, I also attempted an interview via email with his Dutch language teacher, Mvr. Poppels, in order to discuss about Ahmad as a student.

Table 1. Schematic Overview of the Research Design

Corpora	Respondent(s)	Sources/Instruments	Method(s) of Analysis
Sub-corpus I	Ahmad	Observations Field notes Informal discussions with the informant	Key incident approach Grounded Theory
Sub-corpus II	InterNations members Ahmad during InterNations meeting	Observations Field notes InterNation website Observations Field Notes	Content Analysis Discourse Analysis Key incident approach
Sub-corpus III	Ahmad during the Dutch language class Mvr. Poppels, Dutch language teacher	Observations Field Notes Interview via e-mail	Key incident approach Grounded Theory

Table 2. Fieldwork observations

Date	Activity	Duration	Product
October 9th-10th 2015	Observations in the daily life of Ahmad	2 days	Field Notes
October 16th 2015	Observations at the InterNation meeting in Breda with Ahmad	2 Hours and 30 minutes	Field Notes
October 21st 2015	Observations at Ahmad's B1 Dutch class in Eindhoven	2 Hours and 30 minutes	Field Notes
November 2nd 2015 (key figure answered)	Interview via email with Ahmad's Dutch teacher Mvr. Poppels	N/A	Interview via email

3.3.1. Ahmad's Corpus

This corpus was to have a close up of Ahmad's place and way of living. It was fieldwork done in his apartment in Breda. It consisted of a long discussion about his life in the past in Syria, his journey to come to Europe, his current life in the Netherlands as being his new home, as well as his future expectations. The stories were not necessarily recounted in order of chronology, nevertheless, were later organised through the field notes taken. After looking over the field notes, patterns of concepts emerged which described Ahmad's way of being presently. As Erickson (1985) explains that the fieldworkers' presence in the actual setting enables "deliberate decisions about sampling and by intuitive reactions as well".

3.3.2. InterNations' corpus

The second corpus was mostly an invitation by Ahmad to an event organised by expats in the Netherlands. It is mostly a night out with fellow internationals in the Netherlands where one mostly socialises, has a few drinks and generally has a good time. Ahmad knew about it from a friend of his back in his A2 level of the Dutch language course, where he believed would be an opportunity to meet new people from places around the world and socialise more. After a full observation of the night and the way Ahmad attempted to socialise and present himself, I was later able to take field notes. As I was a guest at the event, I also participated in the socialising but, nonetheless, kept in mind the purpose of my visit.

3.3.3. Dutch language classes

Ahmad presented me to his teacher as a researcher but also as a friend who alike him is a foreigner living in the Netherlands. This corpus consisted of one visit to the B1 level Dutch language class, in which Ahmad was a student. I was seated next to Ahmad, and took field notes while I observed Ahmad's participation in class and the way he worked. Whilst they were required to speak Dutch in class, Ahmad was, nonetheless, a very active participant in class, as he would be answering questions quite frequently and also would be asking questions to understand things clearly.

It was also interesting to have an idea of what other people, whom were close to Ahmad, thought of him. Therefore, after the Dutch language class, I asked his teacher, Mvr. Poppels , for an interview, as she is his key figure. Mvr. Poppels was unable to meet up for a one on one interview for personal reasons of tight schedules, however, she accepted an online interview via email. She was able to answer a series of 4 questions, each consisting of or followed by probe questions, in order to explain more the answer and perhaps give alternative meaning to the answer (Schuman, 1966), in which she gladly accepted to answer efficiently and elaborately.

3.3.4. Observer's position

To have a successful research is to "gain valid insights into the informant's point of view" which helps to "establish trust and to maintain it throughout the course of the study" (Erickson, 1985). After a few meetings with Ahmad, I noticed that he saw me more as a friend rather than a researcher. This was also achieved by the fact that we spoke the same language, and thus, understanding meanings and expressions was not a challenge. Because of this, some information received seemed to be familiar. However, through data analysis, the familiarity turned to be "strange" by accepting that there is multiple meanings to certain familiar behaviors and "providing for an *objective analysis* of *subjective experience"* (Vrasidas, 2001). Additionally, Ahmad did not seem to restrain himself as he recounted his life experiences in Syria, the trajectory he took to get to Europe and his current life in the Netherlands and thus, was explicit with the details of his life stories and what he currently believes in.

3.4. Methods of Analysis

A few methods of data analysis were used during research of this thesis, of which were: content analysis, discourse analysis, grounded theory and mostly key incident approach (henceforth KIA). Content analysis approached the examining of the content of InternNations website to understand its purpose and to gather an image of what the organisation and their meetings were about (Spotti, 2007: 28). Discourse analysis on the other hand allowed an understanding of the purpose of interest of the people (including Ahmad) who join the InterNations organisation and its meetings (ibid: 30). Grounded theory method and KIA were used as an analysis for the discussion with Ahmad and Mvr. Poppels' interview. The grounded theory method approaches the analysis of the data, and through this analysis enables the construction of a theory, which emerges during research (ibid: 32; Strauss & Corin, 1994). The key incident approach which by further looking over and over again to the field notes I had collected, which in other words meant, reviewing the ethnographic corpus I had, enabled testing the validity of the assertions (that I had drawn during the fieldwork) in order to find confirming or disconfirming evidence — the latter meaning that the researcher disapproves a key assertion (Erickson, 1985). During the review of the data, the researcher attempts to find "key linkages", which are essential for the major statements the researcher wants to make (ibid). It is what makes the researcher achieve meaning to the data retrieved through fieldwork, by observing behaviors and anaylsing the respondent's narrative:

> "The researcher is the instrument and it is the researcher's job to uncover those meanings and lift the veils to unravel the multiple layers of meanings represented by human action. One can only achieve an understanding of the situation by closely attending to and documenting the particulars of the given setting." (Vrasidas, 2001).

Therefore, by closely observing and documenting Ahmad's life, I was able to grasp meanings attached to his behavior and embedded and authored through his discourse on integration and life in the Netherlands. Therefore, through analysis and data review, concepts emerged that were key definitions that underlined concepts such as identity construction (Spotti, 2007: 35) for Ahmad, as well as integration in the host society. Moreover, a researcher utilises an intuitive approach during fieldwork that enables the emergence of "relevant research questions and conclusions regarding pattern" (Erickson, 1985). Intuition was also a major key factor in defining emergent concepts through the review of the data. This demonstrates the ability to connect the researcher's gathered data, the key assertions as well as theory (Vrasidas, 2001). Additionally, this is what Willis and Trondman (2000) term as TIME — a theoretically informed methodology for ethnography — "which seeks to establish analytically productive relations between theory and data", two essential factors to achieve a confirmed evidence.

Concern of this type of method of research is whether these findings are reliable and valid. "[R]eliability is concerned with the replicability of scientific findings, [while] validity is concerned with the accuracy of scientific findings" (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982). What makes a vignette ethnographically valid is the merging of "richness and interpretive perspective" thanks to the analysis (Erickson, 1985). A vignette is a clear description of a place that conveys or presents details of that place (Vrasidas, 2001). To Vrasidas, the vignette was helpful as it clarified concepts for him during the analysis. Reviewing and rereading field notes and having had contact with Ahmad frequently, to produce categories, discover assertions and finding key linkages made the findings more or less valid and thus, reliable as it it is a way to allow the reader enough evidence to judge the credibility of the findings (Vrasidas, 2001).

4. Analysis of the Case Study

This chapter will first start with an introduction to Ahmad's past life in Syria, his trajectory to Europe as well as the time he spent in the AZC. Next, it will cover some concepts that have emerged during the analysis of the data from the field notes. These concepts emerged through the analysis of data on Ahmad's personal success story as a Syrian asylum seeker. These concepts are the following: individualism, language as a positive prerequisite for assimilation to the host culture, as well as the use of soft and hard skills in a work place during integration to the host culture. All these concepts emerge entangled together through the ethnographic research on Ahmad's life as a successful asylum seeker in the Netherlands as the host country. This section focuses more on Ahmad's residency in the Netherlands than to his past life in Syria.

4.1. Ahmad's life narrative: Un passé composé [2]

Ahmad, born in Damascus, is in fact of Palestinian origins dating back from his grand parents who have arrived to Syria as refugees. Syria consisted of a wide Palestinian community, including those of second and third generations. Although, the children and grand children have been born in Syrian land, they were still considered Palestinian and were never given a Syrian nationality but instead a Travel Document as they are considered stateless. Ahmad and his family, therefore, are always considered as Palestinian Syrians. Although, he says that throughout his lifetime in Syria, Syrians "always opened their doors to them" (an Arabic expression used in order to explain that they have always been welcoming). However, he did stress that as they are always considered Palestinians, this means that they are indeed as an outsider.

Ahmad speaks specifically about his life in Syria during the time of the civil war. He says that there was a lot of insecurity, uneasiness and mistrust felt amongst people. Homes would be slaughtered if not by the Syrian regime led by Bashar Al-Assad, then by the opposition group, the Free Syrian Army. Anyone could be caught and imprisoned at anytime. For instance, Ahmad was caught right in front of his friend's house, after he visited the funeral of his friend's brother. There was no reasoning behind the imprisonment but what Ahmad recounts is that it was truly a traumatised month of his life. In prison, no one had an idea of what time or day it was. They would experience insults, torture, inhuman behavior, at times they would be blind folded as well. What is worse is that they had no idea of the reasoning behind their captivity nor did they know when they will leave the

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[2] The choice of using the terms "*passé composé*" as a title to this section is to make reference to the events that have happened in the past and have been finished for Ahmad, and in which he wishes to leave in the past as he believes that he is starting anew in the Netherlands. The use of the french past tense "*passé composé*" lies on the fact that it is used for past events that have ended. Moreover, it is a tense that is used in order to recount or narrate events that have happened in the past. In this case, Ahmad's past is seen as the life he had in Syria and the time he spent at the AZC (the asylum centre in the Netherlands).

prison; there was no contact with the outside world and many even disappeared (due to either being held in prison elsewhere or even to death, and thus their families had no idea of their whereabouts). Ahmad did not believe he would come out of the prison alive, and all he was able to think about was his mother who would be devastated to hear if he had died or is never heard of again.

After a month, Ahmad managed to get out of the prison, it was a total relieving time for him. However, he knew afterwards that there is no way he wanted to stay in Syria anymore. He was almost done with his studies in medicine and vowed to himself that after finishing he will leave the country. During his last year at university, Ahmad went through a time of depression, he admits that he would go to university drunk almost everyday. Many people experienced depression as chances of dying at any point were very high.

Trajectory to the West

Ahmad left Syria in March 2014 from a city called Al-Qamishli, north of Syria, in which he had to walk a few hours in order to be smuggled into Turkey. Through Turkey, he tried to leave by boat around three times, however, every time they always encountered a problem and were stopped by the police. By the fourth time, they manage to get smuggled by boat from the island of Bodrum, Turkey, to the island of Kos, in Greece.

In Greece, Ahmad attempts to leave the country via fraudulent papers or fake passports, however, fails 8 times. On June 2014, Ahmad tried again for the 9th time, fortunately, he succeeded and leaves from the island of Rhodes to Amsterdam by plane. From then started his journey in the Netherlands.

The asylum centre

Ahmad stayed a total of 6 months in the asylum centres, in which he went to 5 different camps as they would be relocated sometimes. He admitted he felt different, in the sense that he felt he was seen differently by the locals. He felt that every time he went out of the centre, all eyes were on him; that he was seen as a refugee, a foreigner, or as an outsider. This again led him to feel depressed, demotivated and he felt like he did not want to stay there anymore. He thought that he was simply a number; one of the many asylum seekers who come to Europe. Yet again he had no choice but to be patient.

This process of confusion and demotivation is what is termed in Arnold van Gennep's *Rites de Passage* as liminality. This liminal phase is the second phase between the pre liminal phase — the state of being detached from a certain community or group — and the post liminal phase — the subject has reached the final state of being stable (Gennep, 2011; Tuner, 1987) . The liminal phase is when the individual enters the state of ambiguity and confusion as he/she has no attributes of the past and hasn't reached the attributes of the future. This is what Ahmad has experienced during the process

of waiting in the refugee centre. He experienced a state of demotivation and discouragement — although at that point he has reached the host country. However, it was the process of waiting in a country where language and culture were completely unfamiliar and alien.

In reality, he later realised that no one really cared and realised that it was actually all in his head. This motivated him to put himself out there and volunteer within the camp by helping out people and translating to them (from arabic to english, for instance). The fact that he took action made him realise that he was accepted as he was by the Dutch staff members within the camp. He realised that Dutch people are kind to Syrians as they are understanding of their situation back home.

4.2. Interpretation

4.2.1. The Individual: 'No one will change who I am or tell me what to do'

After Ahmad successfully received his status in the Netherlands in August 2014, he decided to leave the past behind and start anew. He admitted explicitly that after the danger and uneasiness he experienced in the past, he took the decision to spend less time with Syrians and refugees. A specific focus on the self appears regularly throughout the discourse with Ahmad. It seemed that he developed a sense of individualism in order to escape the past and commence with a new beginning in a different culture. Berry *et al.* (1997) describe a few attributes that define individualism, in which having personal goals tends to be more prioritised than in group goals and where there is more of an emotional detachment from in groups. In other words, an individual only gives focus on him/herself and their personal aims. This means making personal decisions autonomously with no either worries or influence of ones surroundings.

During my visit to his apartment, Ahmad explained that his host country has provided him with freedom and security. Mostly, "*I feel like no one has influence on me anymore. I am free to make my own decisions*". This concentration on the individual is mostly due to his past. The fact that he lived in a collectivistic society back in Syria, where in the past years, people's actions were almost monitored by the government or the opposition group, an attribute described as a "behavior regulated by in group norms" (Berry *et al.*,1997:15). One had to be extremely careful of his/her actions in order to remain safe. The situation reached a level of being black or white; either people would be visited by the army of the regime or by the Free Syrian Army (the opposition group) for followers. There was no security.

> "*I saw so many hard things before, but now I feel like a better person. Now it is a new start for me. No one will change who I am or tell me what to do.*"

Moreover, religion plays a big role in such a country. According to the World Factbook, Syria

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has 87% of Muslims and 10% Christians, only to give a brief overview, with no mention of atheism[3]. Ahmad considers himself an atheist, an identity hard to be approved in Syria, which he says is looked down upon, is not understood, and most importantly not accepted. Bellah *et al.* (1985) explain individualism amongst Americans as being self-reliant, independent and separated from a religion, family or community. Similar to the U.S, the Netherlands grants which is a factor Ahmad particularly admires and deeply appreciates. Being allowed to be who he is and to be able to make his own decisions separated from a specific religion, government or any other in group community is something he does take for granted.

> *"I want to make new friends that have the same mindset as me and that would accept me for who I am."*

Ahmad explained that back in Syria, he did not want to be part of any of what was happening. He developed a sense of solitude and seclusion due to the reality of the cold war in the country. He wanted to get away from it all, as insecurity and uneasiness around him grew vigourously. Similar to many people, he explained that he developed a form of depression. As a sort of getaway, many took drugs and even drank alcohol (undoubtedly covertly). Ahmad admits that he drank a lot on a daily basis, and has become almost of an alcoholic. At times he would even go to school drunk, because to him and many others that was the only way to get through the day. Looking back at his past and reflecting on the decisions he took is what Denzin (2003) terms as a performative [auto] ethnography. This sort of self observation helps in contemplating ones own actions and behaviors, gives a sense of critical consciousness (*ibid*) and changes the person to the better. Although discussing about education and democracy as pedagogies, Denzin believed that performative [auto] ethnography aids in reflecting on the world in order to change it (*ibid*). Reflecting on his behavior, Ahmad knew that it was due to these circumstances that he felt a loss of hope.

When Ahmad entered the *Asielzoekerscentrum* (asylum seeker centre)[4] in 2014, he felt that he was forced into a community of refugees where he felt seen as only an asylum seeker and nothing else. This thought triggered a sense of depression because he felt different from the locals. He felt exposed as only a refugee and not actually himself. He said that every occasion he would leave the AZC, he felt that everyone was looking at him as one of the many refugees that entered the Netherlands. This to him meant an outsider and a foreigner, which affected his identity.

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[3] The World Factbook. Central Intelligence Agency. Retrieved 17th November from:
https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/sy.html
[4] Centraal Orgaan Opvang Azielzoekrs. https://www.coa.nl/en

"I felt like I was just a number; like one of the many asylum seekers who come to Europe."

However, he did not want to be seen as part of a community he did not feel much associated with, although at the time he was indeed an asylum seeker. This to him was not representative. He wanted to be detached from this community of asylum seekers and focus on his identity: the *who I am now?* and *what I want to be and should be to lead a better life*. Triandis explains it as "self-reliance with hedonism and separation from in-groups" (1986). Individualism is not only the independence from a community or a social group but also makes an individual self-indulgently autonomous. For Ahmad, this is an essential factor as it enables him to work on his self-identity without the influence of the outsider. He started volunteering during his stay in the AZC, as he was waiting for his status to be processed as well as the accommodation he will be granted.

"I decided to put myself out there, even if I was in the camp. So I volunteered in the camp by helping out people and translating to them."

This made him realise eventually the value of individualism and that, subsequently, nobody really cared whether he was an asylum seeker or not and that "*it was all in my head*". This explains an identity crisis to asylum seekers as they enter the host country seeing as frequently, the European culture tends to be different than their own. They come to the realisation that this is the country they will be living in and thus, commences the point of integration to the host country.

4.2.2. Cleverness coupled up with Culture

Naturalisation is the legal process in which a non-citizen of a country obtains citizenship or a nationality in the host country[5]. As explained in the Dutch Immigration and Naturalisation services, it is another way to obtain the Dutch citizenship (IND, 2009). This, naturally, comes with certain conditions, which are as follows:

- The applicant needs to be an adult
- should reside legally in the Netherlands
- should have a permanent residence permit
- should have integrated sufficiently
- should have a good behavior and not have committed any crime or behave in any way dangerous to the Kingdom.

For the most part, in order to gain a permanent residence permit in an EU member state, the

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[5] Naturalisation defintion retrieved from: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Naturalization

non-citizen, in this case the asylum seeker, would need to pass a language test (Böcker & Strik, 2011). Language, for instance, is one of the most essential factors of assimilation. To the receiving country, in order to have successfully assimilated, the non-citizen should know the mainstream language, that is the language most spoken or the main language of the host country, in this case, Dutch. Moreover, in order to be successful in the host country, learning the language would be beneficial. In his study about assimilation into the British culture, Blackledge (2004) explains that immigrants are required to learn the English language sufficiently in order to fulfill their duties as citizens. He further explains that:

> "a process of normalisation occurs, in which it comes to appear natural that one language or one variety dominates others, is more legitimate, and provides great access to symbolic recourses" (ibid: 72)

During his stay at the AZC, Ahmad became aware that he needed to interact with the staff members and volunteers to help in order to be accustomed to the Dutch language and culture. He understood immediately that by conforming to the host culture and integrating successfully, the language is a definite must. As asylum seekers enter the host country, they are required to start learning the host language. Ahmad understood that in order to be successful in his new life and in his new country, he should start with the language, which he admits gives him a lot of motivation.

During fieldwork, Ahmad had already reached the B1 level in Dutch language after a year living in the Netherlands. Sometimes, he said, he goes through days where he only speaks Dutch and no inclusion of English as a mediated language. His motivation also increases, as he wants to continue with his studies. Back in Syria, he was a medical student and after finishing his bachelor's in medical studies, he decided to leave the country as he felt unsafe and feared for his life. Because he did his medical studies in Arabic, he needs to adapt to the Dutch medical jargon as well. He is aware that in order to continue in this road, it is necessary to know the Dutch language. As he is following Dutch classes, he is trying to finish the required level as soon as possible in order to follow up with medicine.

> "*It will help me adapt quickly, even if I simply need to give out coffee to people.*"

Ahmad applied to volunteer work at a local hospital in Breda where the interview for this post was conducted in Dutch. He successfully got the internship and explained to me proudly that the interviewer (who was a Dutch national) was impressed by his ability to speak Dutch already which he believed is good enough to start work at the hospital. Ahmad later told me "I told you I feel good in Holland. It is just the beginning". This process of successful assimilation through the dominant language aids the non-citizen to a positive outcome at a host society that is initially different from

theirs, allowing for a hopeful and positive future.

Cleverness in this case is associated with the willingness to acculturate in the host culture. Ahmad's Dutch teacher, Mvr. Poppels, clarified that a bright student is not someone who scores high in class "*but also someone who understands the Dutch culture*". As Blackledge (2004) explains, it becomes a common-sense or self-evident that not being able to speak the mainstream language creates disorder to that country. Therefore, the more the hegemonic language is recommended the more it simplifies integration. Mvr. Poppels, Ahmad's key figure confirms that by saying "*I think this course offers them an opportunity to find a better job in the Netherlands*" as it is beneficial and brings privileges for their lives in the Netherlands later on. The unification of a culture through a common language contributes to the construction of the identity of the culture (Bourdieu, 1998). This principle of common sense is only regular if a non-citizen is willing to integrate to the host society, if not, they will be considered "out" (Blackledge, 2004).

In the United States, for example, in order to be a "good American" citizen, proficiency in the English language is mandatory (ibid). This is also the case in European countries as the naturalness of a homogenous language has become dominant (ibid). Knowing the language enables the naturalisation process in order to integrate in the host society and to be able to live within the Dutch daily environment. Learning the language, shows a willingness to integrate into to the host society (Böcker & Strik, 2011) and loyalty toward the host country. Mvr. Poppels' view about Ahmad, is that he is a motivated and intelligent student which makes him a good example to other classmates. Because of his willingness to know the Dutch language, this makes him the perfect example for other asylum seekers to integrate to the host society. In other words, wanting to be proficient in the Dutch language conveys that he has made a very clever decision to conform to the dominant culture.

For Ahmad, this is a necessity as he has accepted the Netherlands as being home now. He understands that if he is willing to be successful in the Netherlands, then language here is of importance. "[I]mmigrants' ethnic communities and the environment in the host country certainly influence their decisions and behavior, including their propensity to naturalise." (Yang, 1994) Thus, in order to successfully naturalise, the host country aids this process by administering their dominant language to make it clear to the non-citizen that its use brings easier assimilation and success. It is thus considered a common sense for the immigrant to acquire the national language, as it shows proof of progress "from 'being a foreigner' to 'being an integrated citizen'" and hence, the foreigner becomes recognized by the nationals (Spotti, 2011). Thus, learning the language is a major part of the naturalisation process and demonstrates the influence of the host country. Moreover, the community Ahmad lives in is what he described as "*very diverse*", in the sense that it contains people of many nationalities. Furthermore, Dutch people also live in that same community making it rich with diverse cultures and influential, as they would communicate in the same language.

Bourdieu's analysis of dominant language views the "underpinning of linguistic hegemony as an integrated linguistic market, one integrated under the sponsorship of the state" (Woolard, 1985). In other words, this type of hegemony is good for the well being of the state, and this as Bourdieu explains, provides to the development of the national identity (Bourdieu, 1998; Blackledge, 2004). Additionally, this sort of dominant linguistic hegemony will further mean the rejection of any other language and identity (Bourdieu, 1998) that will deem ineffective to the state. Therefore, non-citizens such as Ahmad are aware that in order to be successful, their own language alone will not conform to the naturalisation process, thus, Ahmad's effort to reach the required language as soon as possible in order to integrate well. Therefore, as Blackledge argues over British political discourse:

> "this language ideological debate is not a struggle over language alone, but over the kind of society that Britain imagines itself to be, either multilingual, pluralist, and diverse, or ultimately English speaking, assimilationist, and homogenous" (Blackledge & Pavleno 2004: p.18)

4.2.3. Soft and Hard Skills: a basis for integration

Another concept that emerges from this data and that is reported in this first analysis is the soft and hard skills of a non-citizen in a host country. "Skills […] are measurable forms of knowledge or social practice that acquire value to the extent that they add to a worker's value in the labour market" (Urciuoli, 2015). It is the practical professional knowledge of a person that has been acquired through years of experience and knowledge. This allows the person to develop certain skills that would be helpful to be applied at a work place for example. Skills could be broken down into two segments: hard and soft skills. Skills are considered hard when they are about "techniques or forms of specific knowledge" and soft when they are "modes of social being" (Urciuoli, 2008; Urciuoli, 2015; Laker & Powel, 2001). Thus, a worker is considered to have what Urciuoli (2008; 2015) calls a "bundle of skills". While integrating to the host society, Ahmad, for example, uses his "bundle of skills" to get through this assimilation and succeed in it work wise.

Soft skills is a way to adjust our self "with the dominant practices, institutions and beliefs." (Urciuoli, 2008). In order to assimilate to the host society, Ahmad is aware of the factors that he needs to undertake in order to succeed, such as language. For instance, Ahmad studied medicine in Syria which is taught in Arabic. After finishing his medical studies in Syria, he decided that it was time to leave the country. As he arrived to the Netherlands and managed to get all his proper documents done, he took the decision to finish his language requirement as soon as possible in order to continue his medical studies. However, continuing medical studies in the Netherlands means that he needs to have knowledge of the medical jargon in Dutch. "*I see it as a challenge*", he said, since he wants to make the effort to finish the language requirement so he could continue with his medical studies. The dominant language here is Dutch, and he will need to adjust his soft skills in local medical jargon in

order to continue with his studies. Moreover, the fact that he considered to volunteer in a hospital in order to practice his medical studies in Dutch, is also a sign that his skills are re-adapting to the dominant culture. Soft skills "establish the type of person valued by the privileged system in ways that seem natural and logical, they constrain what counts as valued knowledge, and they demonstrate willingness to play by the rules and belief in the system" (Urciuoli, 2008).

In this sense, Ahmad's soft skills are those that are welcomed by the dominant culture as he is integrating well by learning the language in order to succeed. The fact that he is following the rules of the state, and assimilating to the knowledge he needs to work on conveys his adjustment to the system.

> "A soft skill refers to the cluster of personality traits, social graces, facility with language, personal habits, friendliness, and optimism that mark each of us to varying degrees." (Urciuoli, 2008)

Ahmad's effort in learning the Dutch language and his personality to be willing to learn the language as quickly as possible validates his soft skills. "*If I manage to go to the hospital twice a week, and three times a week studying, it will be good practice for me.*" However, Urciuoli (2015) states that being able to have and even develop communicative interactions would be considered a soft skill while ways to know a language is actually considered a hard skill. These communicative interactions are what Ahmad is going to attempt to re-adjust as a volunteer in the hospital.

Hard skills are the technical aspect of knowledge. Being proficient in a language is considered to be a hard skill. Additionally, having technical knowledge of a specific study such as medicine is also considered a hard skill. Hard skills contribute as a valued addition to an employment (Urciuoli, 2015). For instance, if Ahmad's decision in continuing his medical studies applies, then eventually his knowledge and work in medicine will be a "value added to the employers" (Urciuoli, 2015). "Soft skills complement hard skills, which are the technical requirement of a job." (Urciuoli, 2008) The technicalities that Ahmad holds, is his previous fixed knowledge of medicine before, which initially makes it his hard skill. In order to use his existent hard skill, he will need to use his soft skill in order to learn the Dutch language and use the Dutch medical jargon.

However, hard-skills could be re-adjusted as well, similar to soft skills. It is understood that hard-skills are the technical knowledge that a person holds. This technical knowledge can also be altered when one enters a new labour market. For the case of Ahmad, although having had a fixed knowledge of medical studies back in Syria, this technical knowledge through practice (of further medical studies, volunteer and/or career work) will be expanded and improved in the future. Moreover, it could be that coming from a third world country somehow de-values his knowledge in

the Netherlands, as he is not from Europe. Furthermore, having the hard skills being a counterpart to the soft skill leads to a reformation of Ahmad's "bundle of skills". As Urciuoli (2008) describes "[t]he ideal, of course, is someone strong in both job and personal skills", which is a person that has both hard and soft skill competency. Conclusively, the concepts of individualism, cleverness, and a "bundle of skills" all contribute to Ahmad's acculturation to the host culture. Language in this case plays a major role in allowing him to positively integrate (for instance, in the job market). The fact that he willingly acts individualistically in order to achieve his goal in the host society provides a link to the way he grasps the language. He wants to give his full concentration on meeting the required level of Dutch proficiency in order to succeed in the Netherlands. This conveys a positive point of cleverness and intelligence as viewed by the host society, such as his Dutch language teacher, Mvr. Poppels. Moreover, by acknowledging the skills and/or the knowledge he has (the practical professional knowledge he acquired through previous experience and educations), this will nonetheless allow for further integration during volunteer work.

> "Soft skills represent a blurring of lines between self and work by making one rethink and transform one's self to best fit one's job". (Urciuoli, 2008)

This is what is called as a reflective positioning (Blackledge & Pavlenko, 2004) which enables the individual to position him/herself, in the society, which in this case is the non-citizen towards the host society. Moreover, a state, such as the Netherlands, sees this sort of behavior and goals as positive and clever. This attitude and mindset of having the person believe that their soft and hard skills are valued allows the person to feel that he/she is contributing to a bigger organisation, or in this example, contributing to the state (Urciuoli, 2015). Therefore, being part of a state implies to comply to its rules, for instance, by learning the dominant language. And by learning the dominant language means taking part and accessing the wider range of resources provided in the host country by fulfilling their duties as [potential] citizens (Blackledge & Pavlenko, 2004).

4.2.4. The Transnational

The idea that an individual is part of a globalised society instead of a one nation-state is summed up in the label transnational. During the 1990s, the term has emerged more frequently in order to define immigrants "who live their lives across borders and maintain their ties to home" even if their countries of origin are geographically distant (Schiller *et al.*, 1992). In other words, although these people reside and settle in a certain nation state, they still belong and maintain connections in their country of origins (Schiller *et al.*, 1995). Snel *et al. (2006)* define the modern transmigrant as one who is able to be at home in several locations, is able to speak different languages and "participates in cross-border social networks and political movements, and sometimes makes a living with transnational economic

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activities". Related to super diversity, transnationalism is thus, a product of globalisation (De Fina & Perrino, 2013) — for economical reasons, educational reasons, or in this case, migration flow towards a better and secure society away from their country. Considering the latter, how does this type of transnationalism apply to the asylum seeker, and most importantly how does it affect their identities? And how does it influence their integration?

For starters, at this particular period of migration movement, asylum seekers are indeed transnationals, as the reasons behind their resettlement in another country is due to wars and insecurity at their country of origins. Therefore, this is a good enough justification they will carry with them in order to be able to relocate in a host society. However, it depends on the individual and the situation of escape whether the asylum seeker is able or willing to stay in contact with his family and friends from back home. Ahmad, as much as he is trying to adapt and assimilate to the Dutch society, he is not out of touch with his family and friends (back home and in other countries abroad). I was sitting with Ahmad in his apartment in Breda, when he receives a phone call from his mother. His mother currently resides in Denmark with his father, and thus, they were asking about the well being of each other. The conversation then tilted about his cousins who at the time just left Lebanon and were getting ready to start the trajectory to Europe. They were talking about possible routes they should take knowing either from personal experiences or from experiences of friends or family. This example demonstrates a case of transnationalism of a post-asylum seeker who although is settled in the host country will always be in touch with what happens back home and the others' routes of settlement:

> "Contributors demonstrate how, for example, immigrant groups and transnational individuals maintain ties with their home countries through a variety of virtual and physical connections that allow them to be at the same time part of 'here' and 'there'" (De Fina & Perrino, 2013)

Further, it conveys the knowledge transnational migrants share to pass on information to other people to move. Migration is a resource of information through a certain transnational movement, which results into discussions about what and how to do this sort of migration, and helps people to use this infrastructure of globalization in order to migrate.

Jakubowicz (2012) argues that many individuals and societies are more oriented towards transnationalism. With immigrants for instance, the idea of having a 'perfect' integration into the host society is no longer a reflection of the reality of how people live their lives anymore (*ibid*). This is a very interesting perspective to the concept of transnationalism as it clearly combines an individual's present targeted culture with the individual's past home culture. As much as Ahmad assimilates to the Dutch society he will always have a connection to back home, whether it be with the Arabic language, contact with family and friends, or/and staying up to date with the refugee crisis and what

happens back home. Jakubowicz (2012) terms this as having a hybrid identity, in which both cultures overlap; a phenomenon common amongst immigrants. This sort of identity does not respect the traditional way of assimilation and is in fact "a feature of people's increasing transnational orientation" (*ibid*). Transnationalism, therefore, is a representation of asylum seekers in the host society, as they struggle to assimilate they will never completely detach from their own culture for many reasons. Hence, although asylum seekers face an institutional pressure to integrate according to the host country, this element of transnationalism will never allow them for a full integration.

5. Conclusion

This thesis gained an insight into the life of a person from Syria, by the name of Ahmad, who has gone through the legal process of being an asylum seeker and has obtained an approved refugee status. It demonstrated the new life Ahmad is trying to adjust to, through an approach of integration to the host country. Furthermore, it touches on Ahmad's behavior, experiences and realisations of the requirements he has to match as he now lives in the Netherlands. Being in the Netherlands helped him to understand and accept an individualistic identity. For instance his personal achievement to learn and retain the language of the host culture in order to establish a successful life in the Netherlands. This approach of doing well in class and learning the language efficiently was termed "smart and clever" by his teacher, Mvr. Poppels; he seems to be portraying the idea of the perfect asylum seeker in the host country. In order to be successful in the host country and take part in attainting its resources deservingly is by knowing the majority language. This essentiality of learning the majority language of the host country is in reality more a question of integration. The main language of the host country initially is required in order to be well integrated into mainstream society. The idea of conforming to the main language is to achieve a cohesive and homogenous society and thus diminish social disorder, which is seen as stemming from the lack of language skills in the language of the host (Blackledge, 2004).

In terms of identity, it could be adjusted and constructed during a specific time and space (hence, context), which may have an influence on an individual's previous knowledge and skills. This is associated with chronotopic identity (Blommaert, 2015), which is a term used in order to define a person's character and behavior judging from his/her narrative by knowing the story's context (time and space). Therefore, because of his trajectory pre-asylum seeking and during the asylum seeking process, Ahmad seizes an individualistic identity in which he feels he should be judged by who he is rather than where he came from and how he came. This individualistic approach to issues of integration, helps Ahmad carving out an identity that has as key the wanting to achieve his personal goal of learning the required level of the Dutch language which in this case matches institutional pressure put on newly arrived migrants. This will help him gain independence and achieve his goal into continuing medical studies. This drive has enabled him to put himself forward and out there, and volunteer at a hospital, which he achieved by getting interviewed in Dutch, with as far as a B1 level in the Dutch language. This example highlights achievements of an individualistic nature and agentivity which, in the eyes of the host county, bring to bear an achievement of good integration by playing out the right institutional cards. Ahmad's narrative and character helped to give an idea of the context he is in and thus, his positioning as well as his interactions with his surroundings.

Ahmad mostly feels secure in his new life, and this is an attribute specifically shared by almost all asylum seekers. Fleeing his country is due to the fact there was no safety back at home and the expectation of death was very high. Arriving to the host country and as much as he tries to forget the past, he will always carry with him an element from home; for instance, his language. This type of concept is what is termed as transnationalism. What makes Ahmad a transnational is that he is still in contact with his family and friends from back home (either ones that have made it abroad or are still in Syria). Moreover, the fact that he speaks his language, and this is a factor that will never change, does not imply that he will not be able to assimilate to the host country. Although the latter requires the asylum seeker to learn its majority language, it is what Ahmad is primarily attempting to accomplish to succeed and integrate. Therefore, this is what makes a society transnational exactly because of its super-diversity during this rich period of globalisation.

Ahmad, is an individual, like any one of us, attempting to succeed in life, attempting to maintain a uniqueness and a certain identity and passing through life by learning from experiences as he goes along and seizes knowledge and skills; which are elements that will be used someday during the right moment and the right time. Similar to any human being, and not proper to asylum seekers alone, Ahmad engages into an identity bricolage or identity construction (Hinnenkamp, 2003: Spotti, 2007) that allows him to gain access and climb the mainstream social ladder but that also allows him to be a transnational individual who has the knowledge that allows other people to migrate and to enter a life of new chances away from images of state abuse both in the country of origin as well as in the host country.

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Appendix 1

Field Work

Friday 9th-10th October

Ahmad's Place

The neighbourhood/residence he lives in is full of internationals (Arabs, Somalians, Asians, etc). According to Ahmad, the local Dutch people that live there as well are apparently very kind (in a sense that most of them do accept the internationals that live around there).

- went to Ahmad's place. it is an apartment in Breda. Has two rooms, a big living room. a kitchen. toilet and bathroom.

  - Friday night, and it was also the last day before payment day of allowance he was practically broke. so he didn't manage to go out.

  - Chilled at his place. smoking. eating. music in the background. a very relaxed environment, accommodating in a sense.

  - talked a lot about present and past

  - Layal, his neighbour and current friend, also Syrian. he met her in InterNation meetings and happened to be living in the same residence as he does. He lives in the 10th floor and she lives in the ground floor. They hang out with each other quite often. (I sense that there might be something between them).

    - InterNation: is an international organization that "helps expats to feel at home abroad, meet people and find information about their new environment"[6]

- His bedroom and living room have drawings on the wall. He likes to paint and draw. Artistic fellow.

- We listened to quite a few arabic music, which he does enjoy listening to. Not a complete detachment from home.

- He has been 10 months at his place now.

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[6] Intenations website: https://www.internations.org/about-internations/

- He says it is hard to be close to neighbours.

- Studies three times a week. Friday is his relaxing day. and Saturday is usually going out with his mates.

Currently

He is accepting and adapting that this is home to him. For him, home now is where security and ease of mind is. Ahmad feels sometimes that he is seen as the deviant (the other), however, he wants to be able to change that and be seen as an individual rather than a refugee. This is what motivates him.

- Has Dutch class three times a week in Eindhoven. (B1 classes end this week, and the exams start).

    - Says that class contains more refugees.

        - Contains: 4 Syrians, 2 Iranians (Persians), 2 Afghans, 1 Pakistani, 1 Ugandan, 1 Ethiopian, to name a few

- Doesn't want to mingle with other Syrians (in general not particularly the ones from class).

- Wants to be mingling and befriending other nationalities as he wants to be seen as an individual.

- I would totally start from new, start from 0 because I stayed in Syria in a horrible state

    - I am secure psychologically. I feel safe. People around me make me feel safe as well and are helpful

    - Feel like back to normal now. Happier

    - I feel like no one has influence on me anymore. I am free to make my own decisions

    - I saw so many hard things before, but now I feel like a better person. Now it is a new start for me. No one will change who I am or tell me what to do

    - Feels hopeful here, feels like there is a chance.

    - Feels that here people respect you. he feels happy and wouldn't want to change that.

- Identity wise: be himself and accepted as who he is.

- learning the language pretty fast as he is a B1 level. Sometimes he goes through days with only speaking Dutch and no English.

- Syrian community here is also quite closed, he says, so he wants to avoid rumours and any sort of generalisation.

- Says that his mindset has changed as well. Before at some point he was not motivated to study medicine.

    - now he sees it as a challenge.

    - makes effort to finish language requirement so he could continue with Dutch

    - wants to go volunteer at hospital in order to practice language as well as the language of medicine.

        - says that it will help him adapt quickly, even if he simply needs to give out coffee

        - Says that he wants to talk to people as soon as he starts the internship or volunteer work at the hospital. he can't wait for that. it will be good for him if he went for twice week working or three times a week studying, it will be very good practice.

- Wants to make new friends that the same mindset as his and would accept him for who he is

    - Makes example of how if he makes Syrian friends here he would want them to have the same mindset as his (atheist, drinks/smokes…). Because even in Syria people didn't accept him for who he is.

- Only when I have a problem, do I get nightmares from the past

    - he gives examples of needing to pay bills and money is not enough (so sometimes he needs to get loans from friends, which he does pay pay. and vice versa).

    - Has a limit to pay for things which he says makes him more responsible that way. He says it makes him more motivated to work and find a "life" here (in the sense of finding a future and career).

    - He no more wants to rely on allowance always because it is not enough.

- As much as he is trying to adapt and assimilate into the Dutch culture, he still keeps in touch with his family that around Europe and still in Syria (cousins, aunts, uncles, etc)

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- He had a conversation on the phone with his mother to check on cousins who had just left Lebanon at that point and are starting the trip to Europe. Talked to mother about how they are leaving and how they should be leaving (about possible routes they should be taking from experience or friends' experience).

Past

Past is seen as the life he had in Syria and the time he spent at the AZC - the refugee centre.

- In Syria

  - mentions that back in Syria, he was seen as a Palestinian, as they are a big community there.

    - although he is a 3rd generation Palestinian, he could never get a Syrian passport, only has a travel document as he is considered stateless. I was seen as a Palestinian Syrian.

    - but he says that Syrians opened their doors to them (Palestinians), and he was born and grew up there so he does feel himself as a Syrian.

    - But as a Palestinian you are always seen as an outsider.

  - was very uneasy. no security whatsoever. no trust.

  - He was imprisoned once as he was going out of a friend's brother' funeral.

    - stayed there for a month. says that he was lucky it was only a month

    - one had no idea what time of day it is, or even what day it is.

    - he thought that he wasn't going to make it and all he could think about was his mother who'd be devastated to hear if he died or is never heard of again[7]

    - was given racist comments from guards as a Palestinian

  - he admits that he was drinking a lot, almost like an alcoholic. Would go to university drunk.

    - People felt that that was the best way to get through the day. Many used to take drugs as well

- In AZC

  - when he just arrived, he felt different. He felt as if he was seen differently even from locals.

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[7] many people apparently disappear after being imprisoned. no one knows whether they are dead or alive.

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- He felt a sort of depression. At the beginning, he felt like he didn't want to stay there anymore.

- he felt every time he went out of the centre, that everyone was looking at hime differently. Felt that he was seen as a refugee, an outsider, a foreigner

  - But in reality, he realised people didn't care. he felt that it was all in his head.

- he felt like there wasn't a motivated life in the centre.

- he felt like he was just a number. One of the many asylum seekers who come to Europe.

- decided that I should put myself out there, even if i was in the camp

  - volunteered within the camp.

  - used to help out people and translate to them (could be from arabic to english for example).

  - admits that many Dutch people are kind to Syrians as they are understanding of their situation back home.

InternNations

Ahmad really makes an effort to go out there mingle with internationals. He really wants to open up to the outside world instead of remaining in one specific community. Although, he is slightly a bit shy, he makes an effort to integrate.

- InterNations meeting was held on Friday the 16th in Breda at a lounge next to a Theatre.

- Idea is to meet expats in the Netherlands, have drinks and chat

- the left corner was of internationals from divers places

  - I got to meet people from Columbia, Aruba, Poland, Ireland, Portugal, Belgium. Even a couple of dutch people were around

- Ahmad knew about this place via a friend when he used to take Dutch classes in Tilburg before.

- Ahmad went to a few of InterNations gatherings before and so knew a few faces already.

Next Day

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- Saturday 17th, we met a friend's birthday, also Syrian named And Al Kader.

- Gathering consisted of three Syrians, an Italian, 3 Greeks, 1 Polish and I

- Ahmad was very relaxed, super smiley. Chatted with everyone, of course the was easier to communicate with the his Syrian friends as well. Nonetheless, he still talked to people around.

Ahmad's B1 Dutch Class-21st October (Held at Fonty's Eindhoven)

- Teacher: Marianna

  - A very welcoming and accommodating lady

  - speaks 100% Dutch in class. slow and with a clear pronunciation

  - teacher seems fun in the way she teaches as they seem to laugh a lot (she even brought stroppwafels)

  - she makes the class very interactive.

  - during group work she moves to every single group to check whether they are managing with the in class assignment and helps out if needed

  - nobody seemed bored in class, everyone seemed well concentrated and following up to the teacher's lesson

  - At the end of class, someone said that it is a classmate's birthday, teacher wrote down the lyrics the "birthday" song in Dutch and they all started singing

    - gives it some sort of an accommodating feeling to the class

- Classroom

  - They started as 16 students, but this day they were 13 in class.

  - a very multinational class

  - a very outgoing class. students speak to each other in Dutch even if teacher is not in class.

  - lots of in class group work. students talk to each other in Dutch. English rarely used

  - even if they are not in the same group, they help each other out

- when group work is done, they chat to each other in Dutch.

- At some point, another representivie or teacher entered and wanted them to fill in a survey and other forms for the Fontys Dutch intensive classes. The survey was in Dutch and they all (including Ahmad) were able to write comments in Dutch

- Ahmed

  - Participates a lot in class

  - asks questions and answers in Dutch quite often

  - concentrates well and a good student

  - smile is always on his face

  - Jokes around sometimes but not in a naughty way like within the context. Still in Dutch. (don't understand much so i am assuming he does joke around)

  - works hard in class assignments that he is given and doesn't seem lazy at all to do them

  - listens to the teacher. When she reads something, he repeats it to himself slowly in order to practice the pronunciation.

    - Says "Yeah" (to himself) as a responsive way of understanding what has been said or explained in class

  - Also writes meaning of words in arabic if he doesn't understand the word

  - after class work is done he discusses with his classmate (of Chinese origin, so he says) and tells him that he is planning to continue studying medicine here. He also mentions that he got an interview to volunteer at a hospital in Breda.

  - Only once or twice did he speak in arabic with the other Syrian guy, however, it was still in the context of the assignment

- Ahmad mentioned to me that most of his classmates have been in the Netherlands for for 5 years and just reached the B1 level. Whereas him and the three other Syrians and the Ethiopian boy have been only a year in the Netherlands and have already reached the B1

- It is pretty impressive. I did sense a feeling of pride and motivation of him to be putting so much effort and being on top of things

- Almost at the end of class, Marianna asked me about my thesis and I told her exactly what it is about (before I asked whether I could ask her a few questions about Ahmad), she immediately said "Ahmad is an enthusiastic and motivated student".

Appendix 2

Questions aimed for Key Figure: Mvr. Poppels, Ahmad's Dutch Teacher

Introductory questions

Set interviewee at ease

Explain purpose of interviews

1. Can you tell me a bit about yourself?
  - What is your name? Mvr. Poppels
  - What is your profession? Dutch teacher level A0 – B2
  - What is your age? 45

2. Tell me about your profession.
  - Have you always been a teacher? Yes, I have been a teacher for over 20 years now. I have been teaching German, French and the last 15 years only Dutch for foreigners.
  - Did you always want to be a teacher? Why? If it was not your choice, how did you end up doing it? I always wanted to be a teacher. I played with my dolls as a child and I taught them to read and write.
  - Why did you want to become a teacher of Dutch as a foreign language? At first I wanted to be a teacher as a foreign language but eventually I became a teacher of Dutch because I like to meet students from all over the world. It is like I travel around the world every day.
  - How long have you taught Dutch as a foreign language? About 15 years. I started with only German students, but after a year I had international students from all over the world.
  - What are the things you like and don't like about it?
    - could be content-wise, student-wise, institution-wise

I like teaching students the language and the culture. I prefer motivated students above 18. I have experienced that that is the best audience for me. I also like creating exams because I like creativity. I work for several universities. I like variety. Sometimes it is hard to combine all the lessons. I only have a few meetings a year and that is enough for me, as I do not like meetings a lot.

- What is the most difficult part about being a language teacher? Adjusting to all kind of situations. The type of student has changed over the years and the universities as well. Dealing with unmotivated students is probably the hardest thing. How about the easiest part? Being a teacher is the easiest part, because that is what I am.
- Is your relationship to your students strictly teacher-student? It is more or less teacher –student, but some students I know better than others. I keep in contact with them through Facebook.
    1. Do you know more or less about their personal lives? Some students tell me a lot about their family and personal lives and others don't. During class we sometimes discuss personal issues and I can read about them on Facebook.
    2. Would you want to know about their personal lives? I see a lot of students, so it is impossible to get to know them all personally. But I am always interested in what they tell me. I ask questions myself as well.
  o What kind of advice would you give another foreign language teacher? Be yourself and like what you do.

3. Tell me about your current B1 class.
- How are your students?
    1. Do they all have the same level and understand you equally? No , some students do have a much higher level than others. Some students work much harder and are more motivated.
    2. Who is the brightest in your class?
        a. Why? I have several bright students. A bright student is not only someone with the highest scores on the tests but also someone who understands the Dutch culture.
    3. Who is having a bit more difficulty than the rest?

a. Why? Some students have more difficulties because they learn slower. That depends on their personality but also on their mother tongue and motivation. I cannot give you any names because of the privacy of the students.

Moving on to main points: asylum seekers/Ahmad

4. How many asylum seekers do you teach in class? Since a few years the number has grown. I do not know the exact numbers. But we do have a class at the moment that only consists of asylum seekers.

- Does your class always contain a considerable amount of asylum seekers? Yes, we do have a few, but also expats.
    1. Would you be able to give me a ratio that gives a comparison to expats for example. In this group it is about fifty fifty I guess, but the other group we have has only asylum seekers.
- Who are the most common asylum seekers that would attend your classes these past 5 years? We have students from the Middle East, Africa. Countries like Syria, Eritrea, Afghanistan
- How do you feel about asylum seekers? I think this course offers them an opportunity to find a better job in the Netherlands. It is an investment in their future. I am glad I can be part of that. I like all students who are motivated to learn the Language. Ahmad is a good example of a very intelligent and motivated student. I like working with him and I am sure he will find a good job in the future. If all students were like him, we did not have any problems. He is an example for the rest of the group because of his positive attitude.

5. Moving on to Ahmad. I understand you taught him for two courses already A2 and B1. How is he as a student?

- Good student, bad student, willing, motivated, lazy, annoying…? Does he have concentration problems? See, previous item.
- What do you find particularly interesting about him?
    - What do you admire? Or dislike about him?
- He is very motivated and works together with other students very well. He is really interested in the course.
- How do you see him?
    1. Do you think he has a potential here in the Netherlands? Yes, definitely. Do you think he will be unsuccessful? He can be successful if he keeps working like he did the past year.

2. How does he interact with the rest of the classmates?

    a. Is he socially awkward? Easy going?

        He is easy going and puts a lot of interest in others.

3. Do you see him as knowledgeable or indifferent/ignorant?

    He is motivated and intelligent.

4. Do you see him as smart or dull? He is absolutely smart. I wish I had more students like him. He is the reason that I wanted to participate in this investigation.