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**Emerging Voices of Young Syrian Refugees and  
Their Experiences of Integration in The Hague:  
Frequent Displacements, 'Safe Space', *Habitus***

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## List of Acronyms

COA:	The Dutch Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers
IND:	Dutch for Immigratie en Naturalisatiedienst, meaning Immigration And Naturalization Service
UNHCR:	United Nations High Commission for Refugees
EU:	European Union
CBS:	Netherlands Statistics
NL:	The Netherlands
DUO:	Ministry of Education, Culture, and Science
MBO:	Secondary Vocational Education
HBO:	Higher Professional Education
CVIA:	Civic Integration Act
CVIC:	Civic Integration Courses
HIM:	Holistic Integration Model
IOM:	International Organization of Migration
GovNL :	Government of the Netherlands

## Abstract

Studying refugees' integration from the perspective of refugees themselves is crucial, as integration is usually studied from the perspective of policymakers. This research asks: **How do young Syrian men in The Hague experience the 'integration' process after a series of physical and mental 'displacements' and 'onward mobility'?** Previous studies suggest when a refugee feels safe and stable in the host country, this facilitates refugee integration, whilst frequent displacement is likely to do the reverse. One difficulty associated with the Dutch integration system is the frequent displacement between the reception center and camps in The Netherlands. Also, another form of displacements can happen under Dutch asylum-seeking policies, when young Syrian men leave dispersal locations to bigger cities for work opportunities, education, or due to repeated movements during the asylum process itself. This study uses elements from a holistic integration model, based on Anger and Strang's model (2008), to understand how integration is experienced by young Syrian male refugees after a series of frequent displacements. Onward mobilities can be seen as one of the survival strategies of young Syrian refugee men, for whom integration becomes an obligation due to pre-conceived masculine roles, influenced by families life in Syria, the age of the young men, and perceptions of 'safe spaces' after multiple displacements. This research will contribute to gaining deeper insights into how these young men perceive the process of integration into Dutch society by centering on their stories. In this study, I asked them about blind spots in the Dutch integration system, life after displacements and their aspirations regarding for future in The Hague. Through the lens of Bourdieu's *habitus*, I seek to imagine Dutch refugee integration policies from the perspective of young Syrian refugees who experienced a series of displacements and chose to move to The Hague leaving their dispersal locations chosen by the Dutch state. Given the new Civic Integration Act 2021, some lessons learned could be valuable for municipalities' stronger role in integration. Recommendations include the need to provide information about 'safe space' initiatives in The Hague, working on understanding the socioeconomics of young Syrian refugees, while processing their applications, and the importance of increasing the number of reception centers and their capacity to limit the number of displacements within The Netherlands.

## Relevance to Development Studies

Kelly and Lusi (2006: 831) in their research article argue that studies have treated immigrants (and refugees) as an "objective analytical category" rather than studying the experiences of immigrants themselves. By understanding how participants position themselves within Dutch society, we see how power relations are negotiated and reproduced in The Netherlands. In this study, I suggest that frequent displacements and onward mobility(ies), even within a country, tend to increase instability and fear, negatively affecting overall feelings of acceptance and belonging. Using a model adapted from Anger and Strang's model (2008), this study analyses selected personal narratives of young Syrian men in The Hague around mobility and displacement. The study illustrates how North-South and West-East relationships are reproduced through discursive practices of young Syrian refugees'

displacement and mobility, belonging, dependency and integration, including around Dutch citizenship and the labor market. Finally, drawing on Bourdieu, the study reflects on how changing the *habitus* as a result of frequent displacements and onward mobility can affect integration negatively. This is in part because stability and safety are facilitators of refugee-centered integration processes.

## **Keywords**

Young Syrian refugees, (In)stability, Displacement, Refugee integration, The Hague, Perceptions, Stability and safety, Habitus, Masculinity, Onward mobility



# Chapter 1: Introduction to the Topic

## 1.1 Introduction

This study aims to explore connections between experiences of repeated displacement(s) of young Syrian refugee men arriving in The Netherlands and their onward mobilities. Onward mobilities refers to young men's chosen relocation from the dispersal locations allocated under the Dutch immigration system. In this study, I investigate how onward mobilities from dispersal locations decided by the municipality in NL can involve further displacement, hampering the integration of young Syrian men within Dutch society. While onward mobility might seem to be a voluntary by these young men, its voluntariness can be questioned. Based on the findings, young Syrian men moved on from dispersal locations for many reasons, including education, finding a job, and the desire to be closer to other Syrians in larger cities. Onward mobility comes after a series of involuntary displacements young Syrian refugees have already gone through before arrival in NL. Such repeated forced displacement can reinforce psychological trauma negatively affecting these young men's prospects for integration. Syrian refugees may have little choice but to relocate from dispersal locations, given the expectations of their role as men who provide financial support for their families. After leaving asylum-seeker centers, they experience considerable uncertainty and mobility is a response to feelings of not being at ease.

In effect, the young refugee men who participated in this study had undergone between two and nine separate forced displacements from leaving Syria up to arriving in The Hague. How these repeated emotional and physical displacement(s) and onward mobility to The Hague affected these young refugees' integration will be investigated in this study. This research adapts Bourdieu's concept of *habitus*, an influential concept in sociology, which whilst difficult to define, refers to how people interact with the world around them and forge a sense of 'home' (Bourdieu, 1978: 86). In short, *habitus* refers to the norms, values, attitudes, and behaviors of a particular class or social group in a set of social and physical spaces (Bourdieu, 1978). Frequent displacements prior to arrival in NL and further displacements after arrival, including through onward mobility to larger cities like The Hague, implies frequent changes in *habitus*. This can undermine integration, as investigated in this study.

Finally, this study investigates how young Syrian men generate their own pathways towards their future in NL. These pathways can involve learning Dutch, attending Civic Integration courses, and seeking out 'safe space' initiatives. One such 'safe space' is introduced in this study, PitZtop in The Hague. The efforts and plans of the young Syrian men to support integration and obtain a Dutch passport are part of their search for safety and security. How these young refugee men see themselves in this process and whether they feel like active agents, or helpless victims of a heartless asylum system, are among the questions I ask.

Overall, this study touches on the effectiveness of refugee integration programs, recently overhauled in a new Integration act which is not however relevant for the cohort of young

refugee men I spoke with. Why they left the dispersal location for bigger cities, when frequent displacements can pose a problem for integration, is a question answered by considering the perspectives of the young Syrian refugee men themselves, all of whom were interviewed in The Hague.

The Government of Netherlands's website states that the three foundational aspects of integration are Dutch language proficiency, knowledge of Dutch culture, and being able to secure a job ([Government of The Netherlands, 2022](#)). This highlights how social relationships is missing during the integration process, according to GovNL website page regarding the New CVIA 2013. As Damen remind us, most studies on Syrian refugees in Europe focus on their access – or lack of access - to basic services such as education, health, and employment. By comparison, Syrian refugees' socio-cultural situation and their feelings about their social relations are relatively under-researched (Damen et al., 2022). This study investigated the importance of social connections, likely to be interrupted or discontinued in the case of frequent displacements before coming to NL, and thereafter. For example, all asylum seekers must register at Ter Appel and then can be moved from one camp to another according to the camp's capacity (Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers website, Unknown year). Unlike these repeated displacements, their onward mobility was seen as 'chosen'.

Under the Civic Integration Act 2013, young Syrian refugees men find it hard to obtain decent work unless they speak good Dutch. Yet because of the frequent movements of these same young Syrian men within NL, it is difficult for them to commit to and complete the Civic Integration courses and Dutch language. This undoubtedly has potential effects on their ability to follow the formal requirements of integration into Dutch society.

## 1.2 Research Problem Statement

The Dutch asylum system requires frequent movements from one place another, and this has been criticized by scholars, especially when young males have to frequently change schools, jobs, location, and accommodation. These forms of displacement have social, emotional, and educational consequences. Some young refugees have problems due to a lack of continuity in the learning process, which can negatively affect their position in Dutch society (de Hoon et al., 2020). Research indicates that most refugees in NL end up moving away from their dispersal locations. After two years, one in five refugees has moved to another region or city. Within ten years, half of all refugees move from where they were originally dispersed to, to other towns and cities (Gerritsen, Kattenberg, and Vermeulen, 2018).

To date, roughly 75% of all asylum seekers are young men under the age of 35 at the time of arrival (Centraal Bureau van Statistiek, 2022). The share of men overall rose to 67 percent in 2020, approaching the same level as in 2014 (Centraal Bureau van Statistiek, 2022). Integration became very important for the Dutch government because of the increasing number of asylum applications in recent years. The aim of the integration policies, according to the GovNL, is to help asylum-seeking applicants contribute to their own future and the future of Dutch society, by studying, finding a job, and becoming financially independent.

Simultaneously, this strategy aims to produce less reliance on the Dutch government for social welfare provisions ([Government of The Netherlands, No Date](#)). This study is building on Marloes de Hoon, Maarten Vink and Hans Schmeets' work about Syrian refugees which hypothesizes that young Syrian refugees seem like they have the agency to move away from the dispersal locations. When in reality, this onward mobility mirrors the wrong choices of the Dutch for the Immigration And Naturalization Service (IND) to place Syrian refugees away from work opportunities in larger cities (de Hoon, Vink and Schmeets, 2020). Some who now find themselves in The Hague, previously felt isolated in smaller towns, cut off from the Syrian diaspora, educational institutions, and work opportunities. In this research, I suggest that whether it was through mobility or displacement, such movements and relocations lead to frequent changing of *habitus* and have consequences for how refugees experience processes of integration.

The most recent report regarding Syrian Civic integration which was published by The Netherlands Institute for Social Research showed that the Civic integration program participation rate for Syrian refugees has a low completion rate. Most status holders must complete a CIVC and pass all applicable examinations within three years. However, just 10% of responders are Syrian refugees who completed both steps, according to the study (Institute for Social Research, 2018). Previous studies explained this low participation in integration courses was because of the lack of time to learn Dutch or attending CIVC because of the need to have a job to support the families financially (Dagevos et al., 2018; Huizinga and van Hoven, 2018). The same report showed that, only 12%, mainly young people and students, have paid work. 4 out of 5 are employed in the lowest two occupational levels, and often below their qualification level (Institute for Social Research, 2018).<sup>1</sup> Ironically, if the young male refugee spent his time and efforts on CIVC and did not have a job, this would lead to much greater dependency on social welfare, looked down upon by both Dutch citizens and government.

## 1.3 Context and background to the research

### 1.3.1 Background

This paper focuses on young Syrian men because they are the group most likely to migrate from their initial residence in Syria in fear of political persecution and security conditions in Syria. These young men undergo multiple physical and psychological forms of displacement long before their arrival in asylum-seeker centers in their destination country. In war-torn Syria, more young women than men are obliged to remain with their families. While according to Fischer and Malmberg (2001), young people, in general, contribute the most to internal migration. In this study, I engaged with young Syrian men aged 18 to 35, and I focused on this specific group for the following reasons:

1. The Syrian war has been going on since 2011 and millions have been killed according to United Nations High Commission for Refugees, are missing, imprisoned, or

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<sup>1</sup> This was the latest study, unfortunately, I could not find any recent ones

displaced. The Syrian refugee crisis became “the world’s largest refugee crisis in decades” (UNHCR, 2022).

2. Secondly, men in this specific age group are expected to provide financial income for their families, while females are generally obliged to stay home in line with the general notions of a patriarchal society (World Vision, 2022). Therefore, this group of men would have expectations placed on them because of their gender, reflecting a sense of their masculinity including moving to bigger cities to find jobs.
3. Lastly, young men in this age group are more likely to be mobile themselves multiple times, in their efforts to find work in the Dutch labour market. Their flexibility in accepting jobs below their qualifications and in being prepared to complete their education, along with them being single, and without parental responsibilities, tends to add to this mobility.

It is worth mentioning that a new Civic Integration Act started its implementation at the beginning of this year 2022. The new CVIA 2021<sup>2</sup> came into place due to the limitations, gaps, and poor effects of refugee integration policies under the previous CVIA, something this study seeks to shed light on.

Finally, The Hague was chosen for the research due to a lack of studies on young Syrian refugee men’s integration. In addition, The Hague is not only the ‘legal capital of the world’ implying that is the city of social justice and equality (Castellanos-Jankiewicz and Hommes, 2022) but also one of the most segregated cities in NL with high levels of socio-spatial inequalities (Sleutjes, de Valk and Ooijselaar, 2018). Despite this, as the third-largest city in NL, there are job opportunities, and therefore, many young Syrian men end up moving to find work (Dagevos et al., 2018; Huizinga and van Hoven, 2018).

### **1.3.2 The Syrian refugees in The Netherlands**

Under the old Dutch immigration system, once Syrians arrived in NL, they would be expected to apply for asylum through the IND, they are then transferred to asylum-seeker centers which are usually located in rural areas such as Ter Apel. There, they are required to wait, usually for an extended period, until their application is processed. After that, they are reallocated to the social housing offered by one of the local municipalities, depending on housing availability and offers of accommodation in different parts of NL (Rijksoverheid, no date; De Hoon 2017: 11). There is no official duty on the refugees’ part to accept this offer, however, and they can settle anywhere they like, renting homes of their own, for example, and finding work. However, since the waiting lists for social housing are often many years long, private rental of property is usually too costly, these pushes many of refugees to accept the housing offered by the municipality. Since refugees lack social networks in their new country, this makes it difficult to secure housing through friends and relatives (van Liempt

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<sup>2</sup> The new CVIA was supposed to be implemented on July 1, 2021. But because of COVID-19, the implementation was postponed by six months to January 2022. (Rijksoverheid, 2020)

and Staring, 2021). It is not until IND grants Syrian refugees a temporary residence permit, for example one valid for five years, that the integration process properly starts (*inburgeren*). Then, to successfully integrate; the refugee must pass the Dutch language test. In case of failure without a legitimate reason, the refugee must pay a fine of 1250 euros and has another two years to redo the exam (General Asylum information, 2020). This kind of integration policy has been criticized for imposing too much pressure on asylum seekers and for creating an unsafe and unstable environment for those who seek to integrate (Schinkel, 2018).

### 1.3.3 Blind Spots in the Old System

The new CVIA came into place after several loopholes in the integration system. However, many issues have not been addressed such as the choice of the dispersal location or the reason why refugees might leave their dispersal location in the first place. The new CVIA did not also address the importance of social connections which might be discontinued due to the frequent displacement of refugees. Despite the comprehensive research and debates related to the effectiveness of refugee integration programs in NL, the previous CVIA had many problems. This made the integration harder for refugees which motivated the Dutch government to replace it with a new CVIA based on Blankvoort, van Hartingsveldt, Rudman and Krumeich's work (2021). Many young refugee men move away from their families in the dispersal location to another location, usually to a city where job opportunities are seen as better. This might be problematic because this can affect the young men's commitment to learning Dutch and attending language courses that are part of CVIC in their initial place of residence. A whole series of displacements, from Syria to neighboring countries and then to NL, followed by displacements within NL from Ter Apel to multiple refugee centers and onward mobility to The Hague, may undermine refugee integration. Multiple displacements and onward mobility, as studied by Burridge and Gill, can affect refugees' lives, making them feel less safe, less stable, and with less sense of belonging and active citizenship. However, many Syrian refugee families end up changing their initial residence, sometimes because they do not feel safe staying in the accommodation provided. The absence of stability and safety can delay their process of integration further, increasing their (dis)location and their integration (Burridge and Gill, 2017: 36).

### 1.3.4 New CVIA

The new CVIA emphasizes the importance of finding a job as a prerequisite to integrating into Dutch society ([Government of The Netherlands, 2022](#)). The new CVIA places more responsibility on the local municipality to provide CVIC for refugees. This departs from the situation under the previous CVIA, which governed all those who were interviewed for this study. Under the previous CVIA, refugees had to look for and sign up for CVIC themselves, with private providers. Unlike the previous act, the new CVIA provides a personalized plan after a comprehensive intake process with assigned case managers ([Government of The Netherlands, 2022](#)). Under the old CVIA the newcomer had to learn the language first and then go to work. The new CVIA allows for the newcomer to learn the language and work simultaneously, which may well help newcomers to integrate into Dutch society more rapidly.

However, Anne Albas, the Civic integration program manager at the municipality of The Hague, said the new CVIA did not address the lack of knowledge or agency to choose the dispersal locations. Nor did it consider the socio-economic reasons which may push young Syrian men to leave their dispersal locations and move on. Yet there are no impact studies conducted to evaluate the efficiency of integration of refugees under the new system. This will need to be a topic for future research and is not covered in this study on refugee experiences under the previous system. The new CVIA 2021 addressed the long waiting periods for decision-making on asylum cases; but it has not changed the issue of dispersal locations, a decision still in the hands of the IND centrally. The uncertainty factor associated with displacement thus remains.<sup>3</sup>

## 1.4 Research Objectives and Questions

### 1.4.1 Research objectives

The objective of this research is to indicate how frequent youth displacement(s) and onward mobility to The Hague affects their participation in the CVIC by the Dutch state. While answering the research question, this research will focus on how the frequent changing of the homes accompanying the changing of *habitus* even if they chose to move to The Hague. The changing of *habitus* can occur as a result of moving across multiple social contexts because of displacements and onward mobilities under unexpected situations (Navarro, 2006: 16). This shapes the contribution of young Syrian men towards integration. Also, this affects young Syrian refugees' perception of 'safe space' which is part of the safety and stability facilitator. This research also aims to unpack various themes such as masculinity, age, and culture influence their integration story and relates them to the effect of displacement on integration in chapter 4.

This research will classify how specific requirements such as complicated work permits or requirements or language obstacles or lack of social connections affect integration. Also, how the Dutch government should enhance their efforts into investing in removing those obstacles. Finally, another objective is to explore to what extent The Hague resembles a 'safe space' for integration for these young Syrian refugee men, who have moved to it as their final destinations.

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<sup>3</sup> It is worth mentioning that implementation of the new CVIA 2022 had a slow start, and many mistakes were made, according to the same source at the municipality of The Hague. There were cases where the old and the new Civic integration cases got mixed up in the database, for example. At the time I spoke with a key worker at the municipality representative on May 17<sup>th</sup>, 2022, the municipality of The Hague had received only 14 cases in total under the new CVIA of 2022. This was in marked contrast to the old integration system, under which around 500 newcomers were resettled to the city of The Hague each year. This research thus engaged only with young Syrian men who fall under the previous Civic integration law of 2013. The aim is to understand different 'layers' or levels of integration, including the facilitators and obstacles.

## 1.4.2 Main question

**How do young Syrian men in The Hague experience the ‘integration’ process after a series of multiple ‘displacements’ and forms of ‘onward mobility’?**

## 1.4.3 Sub-questions

- How does the changing of *habitus* for young Syrian refugees affect their feelings of instability, and how does integration affect integration in return?
- What are young Syrian refugee men’s perceptions, negotiations, and local practices around their masculinities in the Civic integration processes?
- What is the role of ‘safe space’ initiatives in The Hague in helping newcomers to The Hague overcome the effects of displacement and onward mobility?

## 1.5 Justification for this Study

I am interested in studying the experience of young refugee men who began their integration process before January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2022, and still fall under the former CVIA 2013. According to the website of the GovNL: “It applies to everyone who first falls under the Civic integration requirement on or after that date” ([Government of The Netherlands, 2022](#)). The justifications for studying the previous CVIA and focusing on the effects of repeated displacement on young Syrian men in The Hague, are as follows:

1. Firstly, this study will deeply understand the effect of the onward mobility from one place to another for financial, educational, or for social reasons such as to be reunited with the diaspora in larger cities. All this is studied from the perspective of young Syrian refugee men, residing in The Hague after a series of displacements.
2. In addition, this study is designed to understand how the availability or absence of safety and stability, including lack of agency in choosing dispersal locations, can affect integration under the previous CVIA.
3. This research aims to highlight the refugee men’s own perspectives on integration ‘from above’, points of view that are often overlooked in favor of perspectives of the Dutch state and of Dutch society.

For this purpose, my methodological approach was conducting observations at the ‘safe space’ initiative and conducting in-depth interviews with young Syrian men who eventually moved to The Hague after a series of displacements, which will be discussed in depth in chapter 3.

## 1.6 Chapter Outline

First, this introductory chapter has illustrated the problem this study aims to investigate, its importance, the context of the problem and the research questions guiding the study. Chapter 2 is a theoretical overview of relevant concepts in the literature used to analyze data generated to answer the research questions. Chapter 3 elaborates on methods of gathering

data for the study, and the methodology used to analyze that data. Chapter 4 will discuss the main findings, covering the first two sub-questions. Chapter 5 will discuss in detail the ‘safe spaces’ and alternatives of the ‘safe spaces’ Chapter 6 is the conclusion which draws out key findings and make some tentative recommendations.



## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter lays out the concepts and theories that guided the process of analyzing young Syrian men's experiences of 'integration' in NL. van Geel and Mazzucato (2017) studied Ghanaian youth as a case study to examine mobility themes in the narratives of young Ghanaians, investigating categories other than the usual concept applied to young migrants, of ethnicity. Inspired by this study, my own research adapts the concept of mobility, by including dimensions of mobilities and displacement(s) that impact youth outcomes. This approach allows for a more holistic view of how young migrants' international mobility and displacement affects them once they arrive in their destination country. Rather than focusing on the timing of one international move, the concept of mobility applies to the on-going needs and objectives through space of young or old. The proposed typology is based on recent advances in migration and mobility studies, which emphasize time as a dynamic, non-linear dimension of how migration is experienced and given meaning in people's lives. Three dimensions of time can be identified: the frequency of moves, their timing in a life-course, and their duration (van Geel and Mazzucato, 2017: 2150). Using the concept of *habitus*, this study builds on this typology of how the locations lived in, and the people whom youth migrants are connected to or disconnected from as a consequence of their mobility, operate as key elements in their integration experiences.

### 2.2 Overview of Integration Studies

Penninx and Garces-Mascareñas described integration as, "the process of becoming accepted in society" (Penninx and Garces-Mascareñas, 2016: 14). However, Schinkel (2013) describes refugees' integration as a process aiming to ensure the national society as relatively homogenous. Under this model, migrants, including refugees, have a duty to integrate into society, disregarding what migrants themselves might think about their contribution to the outcome of integration (Schinkel, 2013: 2-3).

Integration as a Syrian refugee in NL is a process involving many challenges, including the quality of social ties to locals and access to housing and employment. In addition, the traumatic effect of previous and on-going displacement can intensify feelings of lack of safety and undermine hope in future prospects. The goal of this study is to fill in research gaps found in previous empirical studies and to further elaborate on the effects of displacement on the integration of young Syrian men. Ilse van Liempt and Sara Miellet (2021) studied that when Syrian refugees who were transferred from Turkey to NL received information about their resettlement, this left a positive impression and high expectations of resettlement. However, the same Syrian refugees reported a hugely negative experience after they arrived in NL due to a lack of information about their dispersal. Not only that, but the Syrian refugees faced limited access to social rights including education which made their integration

process harder, especially in the small Dutch towns where many Syrian refugees ended up dispersed to (van Liempt and Miellet, 2021: 2390). This study investigated the experience which Syrian refugees had to go through after they arrived in NL. Their experience includes how Syrian refugees were given very limited information, about their dispersal locations, they lacked access to services, and their waiting periods were remarkably long. The same study shows that most Syrian refugees, especially young Syrian men, end up moving on from their dispersal locations to larger cities to find better job opportunities, better education services, and build social relationships which resemble the functional level according to the holistic integration model (van Liempt and Miellet, 2021: 2391; Hynie, et al., 2016)

Ager and Strang (2008: 181) argue that a sense of safety is paramount for a feeling of integration. The focus of this thesis is rather on how the absence of stability and the series of displacements that young Syrian refugees experience, affect their integration and sense of belonging. One limitation from Ager and Strang's model is the absence of acknowledgment of past experiences, trauma, dreams, aspirations, or narratives for refugees before they arrive in the host society. For this research purposes, this research focused on the facilitator of the safety and stable environment which is essential for integration effectively into the host society by multiple scholars. A Holistic Integration Model was developed based on Ager and Strang's model (2008) to understand the social, physical, and institutional environment that accelerates connections at all these levels and access to resources and building relationships. Based on that, understanding integration from the perception of young Syrian men requires studying the multiple levels. These levels range from the subjective experience of young Syrian refugees themselves to the objective markers between refugees and their social environment, to the nature of the social environment itself. The elements of these different levels of integration are interdependent both within and between levels. Their influence is moderated by the intersection of multiple aspects of identity and personal experiences (Hynie et al., 2016: 5).

## **2.3 A More Holistic Integration Model**

The following holistic integration model was developed by Hynie, Korn and Tao (2016) based on Ager and Strang's model of integration but emphasizing multi-level issues in the integration process and considering the socio-political context of refugee resettlement (Hynie et al., 2016: 7). In another published work by Hynie, McGrath and Bridekirk (2019), they explain how the interrelation of levels and elements is made more apparent and space is made for refugee experiences, multi-level locations and social identities (Hynie et al., 2019: 38). Hynie explained that this model focuses on the central role of the social, political/ideological, and socio-economic environments the newcomers encounter upon arrival in the host community (Hynie et al., 2019). Hynie explains that: "A central motivation for the development of this model was also the importance of considering the larger sociopolitical context in which refugees settle." (Hynie et al., 2019: 38). This model was developed to study Syrian refugees' resettlement in Canada, comparing support needs and integration pathways of Privately Sponsored and Government Assisted Refugees, and the impact of these pathways on their long-term health and well-being (Hynie et al., 2019).

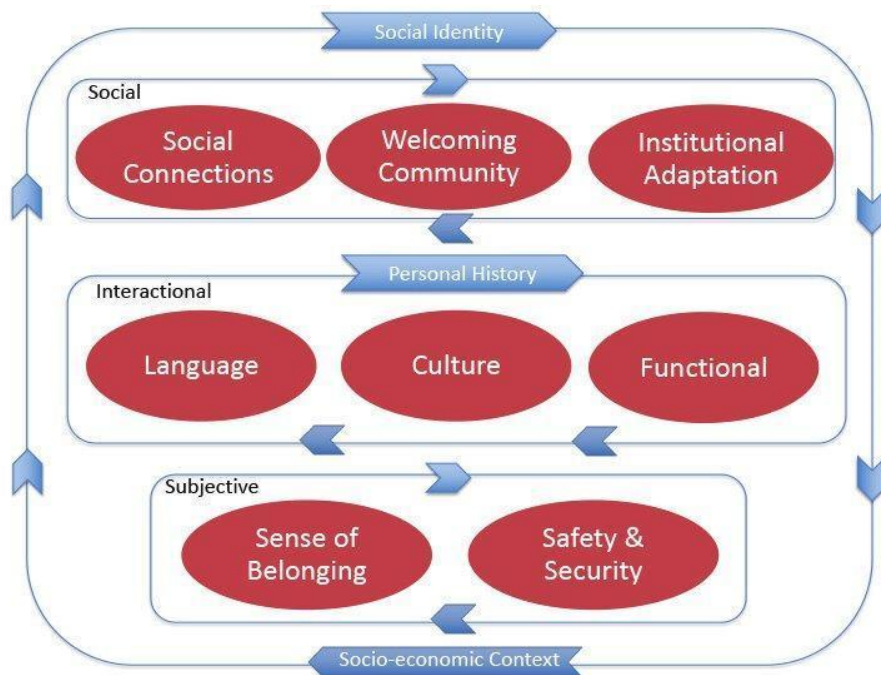


Figure 1. Conceptual framework based on Ager and Strang's integration model focuses on sociopolitical aspects of integration, Source: Hynie et al. 2019: 38

According to this model of Hynie and others (2019: 38), the subjective sense of belonging, safety, and security are directly related to the social identity of the refugees in the socio-economic context. They are derived from the facilitator of the integration of safety and stability in the integration model by Ager and Strang (2008). Inspired by the multi-level model of Hynie, I adapted this to analyze the data collected from the interviews and connect it with the personal history of language and culture and the social level of the diagram. The purpose of this is to investigate the relationship between displacements and how it shapes the absence or availability of a sense of belonging and safety. Consequently, how it affects their integration positively or negatively. Each of these three levels are addressed in order, in Chapter 4.

## 2.4 Displacement and Mobility

People migrate from their home countries to other countries due to human rights violations, environmental hazards, government failures, structural economic inequalities, wars, and fear of political persecution. Many scholars differentiate between the definitions by declaring that migration is voluntary, while displacement is involuntary (Forest and Hagen-Zanker, 2017)

According to the International Organization of Migration (IOM), there are different definitions for a migrant<sup>4</sup>, a displaced person<sup>5</sup> and an asylum-seeker<sup>6</sup>. However, According to the GovNL, any migrant or displaced person can apply for the asylum-seeking process if it is dangerous for them to go back to their home countries ([Government of The Netherlands, No Dateb](#)). Asylum seekers including Syrians are forcibly displaced people who left their countries because of war and claim refugee status ([Government of The Netherlands, No Dateb](#)).

de Hoon, Vink, and Schmeet (2020: 2) argued that the lack of agency in choosing the dispersal location in NL often leads to 'onward mobility'. The same research illustrated the high levels of mobility of Somali refugees to more urbanized municipalities in NL was because of the availability of refugee assistance services and the desire to reunite with the Somali diaspora. The results of the case study showed that refugees coming from cities often relocate to urban areas in the host country (de Hoon, Vink and Schmeet, 2020). This research built on the important finding of the study which relates mobility before arriving at the host country with onward mobility. This research investigated the futuristic plans of young Syrian men and how these relate to their integration into the Dutch society in The Hague.

According to van Heelsum (2017), under the Dutch immigration policies, Syrian refugees, after a series of multiple displacements often have a slow start in NL. van Heelsum explains that Syrians receive Dutch language classes only after a considerable waiting period, whilst being isolated in remote asylum-seeking centers, and not being allowed to work. These gaps in the Dutch immigration system and the problems in the receiving society undermine the integration of Syrian refugees who may be blamed for having agency and choosing "not to integrate" (van Heelsum, 2017: 2148). Building on van Heelsum's work, regarding the stress which accompanies the integration process in NL, this study investigated what hindered the Syrian refugees' integration. This included the bureaucratic systems of migration and integration in NL, and the lack of mental health care provided to Syrian refugees

## 2.5 Bourdieu's *Habitus* and Displacement

According to Bourdieu, *habitus* is, "a subjective but not individual system of internalized structures, schemes of perception, conception, and action common to all members of the same group or class" (Bourdieu, 1977: 86). Bourdieu's notion of *habitus* is used to unpack the multi-stranded, various connections between home, camp life, and life in dispersal locations, such as life in The Hague, and from the perspectives of young Syrian men. According to

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<sup>4</sup> a migrant is: "a person who moves away from his or her place of usual residence, whether within a country or across an international border, temporarily or permanently, and for a variety of reasons." (IOM, 2019)

<sup>5</sup> a displaced person is a: "displaced persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee .... to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters" (IOM, 2019).

<sup>6</sup> an asylum-seeking person is: "An individual who is seeking international protection ... whose claim has not yet been finally decided on by the country in which he or she has submitted it." (IOM, 2019).

Bourdieu's theory of class, capital and habit are two important factors in the production of knowledge. *Habitus* focuses on individual's attitudes and dispositions, whereas capital comprises engagement in cultural activities and access to social resources. His strategy is based on his more extensive sociological *habitus* theories and practice areas (Bourdieu, 1984). He emphasized the flexibility and specificity of his research topics, demonstrating how the setting of a given social space has a significant impact on social capital.

One of the few holistic studies of displacement as it affects refugees, is Sluzki's (1980). In general, he notes that in the immediate weeks and months after relocation, refugees may experience much apparent stress. The participants are frequently unaware, according to this study, of how stressful the overall event of displacement has been and in how many ways it affects them. During fieldwork I noticed how, after arriving at the reception centers and staying there until the asylum application was processed, young Syrian men felt confused. They were unsure about their sense of home and this profound change in their *habitus*. They had to deal with a complex set of immediately surrounding actors, including other refugees in the camp, NGO workers, and COA (Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers) staff.

Sluzki adapts Bourdieu's study of *habitus* and adds that for Bourdieu, changing of *habitus* is an almost automatic process which occurs as a survival mechanism to overcome the potentially traumatic experiences of displacement. Absolute survival, or meeting fundamental requirements, is the individual's main goal in the period immediately following relocation (Sluzki, 1980: 5-6). For months, many refugees are able to put a relative stop to the adaptation process and adjustment, therefore the tensions tend to go inactive during this time. When young Syrian men are relocated to their designated dispersal locations in NL, they may start to form another sense of belonging to their new 'home'. Yet many young Syrian men later decide to move on from that dispersal location to larger cities. Therefore, the notion of belonging to a stable 'home' is still very unclear. I am using *habitus* through displacement, and what dispositions it creates and engenders for the young Syrian men refugees who left Syria as children and were thrown to the hostile reality of becoming men in NL. Bourdieu's 'third way' helped me to conduct a thorough investigation of the practices and *habitus* of youth in communities impacted by conflict and frequent displacements. This might significantly advance efforts to find locally appropriate ways to include youth in and assist in recovery processes (Baines and Gauvin, 2014). The recovery process includes the recovery from the traumatic experience of multiple displacements. Consequently, how these efforts are shaped by masculinities and are affected by deep impact of multiple displacements and, and how this affects integration efforts.

## 2.6 Masculinity

Studying gender involves looking at men's issues as well as women's, as has been argued by Scott (Scott, 1986). This study builds on Connell's work about masculinity, as a lens to view the sense of masculinity of young Syrian refugee men. Young Syrian men's situation is treated as part of a hierarchical gender order, which affects men through a series of displacements that bring them to The Hague (Connell, 2005: 829). Conducted over two years, Suerbaum in

her study “What does it mean to be young for Syrian men living as refugees in Cairo?” studied attitudes, manhood, masculinity, and notions of uncertainty among young Syrian men left Syria between 2011 and 2013 to Cairo. Suerbaum concluded that young Syrian men from Syria often gave different reasons for leaving Syria from the expected ‘fear of persecution’ that is the classic basis for refugee status. Instead, the young Syrian men interviewed reported that they had lost their trust in the older generation. They felt difficulty in confronting certain “unknown emotions” (Suerbaum, 2017: 129) regarding their transition to being men in exile.

Suerbaum suggests when studying the perception of young Syrian men in exile under forced displacement, we must study their characteristics, including vulnerability, uncertainty, and the loss of context. Not only that but what accompanies the journey of exile and how this affects their sense of themselves (Suerbaum, 2017). The present study has similarly sought to investigate how young Syrian men’s emotions can affect their integration and this will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 4. Some of the Syrian men in the age group between 18-35 left Syria when they were teenagers and witnessed the transformation from childhood to manhood in NL. Others were already married, with children when they left. All had to decide on their future amidst a series of displacements and uncertainties. The narratives of young Syrian men, illustrate how they felt thrown into a hostile reality, from leaving Syria as refugees and then being displaced again, to multiple destinations even before arriving in NL. Denied any form of stability, young Syrian men did not always know how to act and respond as ‘young men’ in the new context (Suerbaum, 2017).

Huizinga (2017) conducted a study on the masculinities of young Syrian men in NL after displacement where is focused on masculinities produced around paid work. He concluded that young Syrian refugees in NL accept jobs lower than their qualifications to practice their masculine obligations towards their families. This study has adopted masculinity, as explained by Connell, as a social and temporal construction, bound to change with age of men and their period of arrival in The Hague, and their number of displacements, and levels of education.

## **2.7 ‘Safe Space’, Invented or Invited spaces**

While Holley and Steiner defined ‘safe spaces’ as: “environments where participants feel secure enough to take risks, honestly express their views, and share and explore their knowledge, attitudes, and behaviours.” (Holley and Stienner, 2005: 50). According to Miraftab, the notion of political participation should be freed from the rigid binary of formal and informal arenas because it excludes a large group of society. Political participation should be expanded to include the significance of the community-based arena as an informal arena of politics through which the voices of the disadvantaged and vulnerable can be represented and heard. Miraftab (2004: 1) differentiates between the two concepts: invented and invited spaces as two examples. Invited spaces are informal arenas which include non-governmental organizations that apply collective actions and initiatives to provide the vulnerable with coping mechanisms and prepositions to support their survival mechanisms to practice their right of citizenship (Miraftab, 2004: 1). In most invented spaces, collective actions are directed towards challenging the status quo by resisting all forms of dominant power

relations and accompanying forms of authority (Miraftab, 2004: 1). PitZtop is an example of a 'safe space' initiative to facilitate the Civic integration between newcomers from all nationalities and Dutch people in The Hague. I argue that CVIC form invited spaces for young Syrian refugees because refugees have an obligation to attend those spaces to process their formal application. Such invited spaces often fail to provide room for the coping and survival mechanisms of young Syrian men. Some instead turn to the kind of turn to the invented or semi-invented spaces such as community organizations, in their efforts to challenge the status quo. I argue that PitZtop is an invented space because while it does not necessarily directly challenge the status quo, it allows people to construct solid social connections with newcomers which ,in turn, challenges the status quo and that is equally important.

## 2.8 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the main theoretical framework and key concepts used to engage with the data collected for this study. This chapter has hypothesized that factors such as masculinity, age, number of displacements have a significant role during the process of changing *habitus*. This affects the perceptions and feelings of young Syrian men about integration and shapes their perspectives on their past, present, and future, including their life in The Hague. The next chapter discusses in detail the methodological approach adopted for collecting and handling the data, given the need for sensitivity to young Syrian refugee men's experiences of displacement and instability.

## **Chapter 3: Methodological Approach**

### **3.1 Introduction**

In this chapter, I will explain my methods of finding and generating data for the study through interviews and participant observation. This research draws on six in-depth interviews and on informal participatory observation over several months, to understand how young Syrian men's frequent displacement affects their integration. I conducted observations and noted remarks from young Syrian refugee men while observing their attitudes and social interactions in a 'safe space' in The Hague.

### **3.2 Research Methodologies**

Two research methodologies were used in this research and are explained as below. I used various reports, lectures, and writings published by institutions like the IND, especially related to refugee integration.

#### **3.2.1 Observation**

This study observed the interactions of young Syrian men in a non-profit organization called PitZtop, where young Syrian men and other newcomers create their own 'safe spaces' after arriving to NL. Some of the young Syrians moved to NL in the past ten years; many had spent years in Turkey, Greece, or elsewhere before arriving in NL. Observations were mainly a way to better understand the young Syrian refugee men's behavior and social interactions in a relatively 'safe space', away from the spaces they had to attend including CVIC. O'Leary emphasizes that observations can be used along the continuum of research approaches and can generate rich, in-depth qualitative data to enrich analysis and findings (O'Leary, 2017: 152). Observations allowed me to collect both verbal and non-verbal data which will be discussed in detail in chapter 5. The purpose of the observation at PitZtop was to trigger valuable informal observations by visiting a place where the participants felt relatively safe, and therefore relatively relaxed. Participant observation aimed to understand how the participants interact within a 'safe space' without necessarily focusing on whether this helps participants 'integrate' according to the host society's norms (Emerson et al. 1995: 112-113).

Through participant observations at the PitZtop during a BBQ gathering, I had various informal conversations which lasted between 15 and 30 minutes. I was invited by the founder of PitZtop, Emmylou Aben, to a barbeque gathering at the center in Wilhelmina van Pruysenweg, The Hague. Themes generated through these chats with and among young Syrian men were unplanned (see appendix II). These open-ended, informal discussions helped me shape my in-depth interviews in advance. For example, notions like masculinity, history of family and the social and economic status of refugees back in Syria and how the number of displacements shaped integration processes. This added to the depth of analysis possible, since I reflected on topics that arose, challenges, and themes



### 3.2.2 Qualitative Interviews

I conducted in-depth interviews for insights through the personal narratives of the interviewees. The six in-depth interviews which were with young Syrian men who have been through a series of displacements, moving to Syria to neighboring host countries and then finally to and within NL. There were some common features of the settlement process, such as the lengthy asylum-seeking process, random assignment of dispersal locations in NL, and the overlooking of pre-existing trauma. As I wanted to explore the definition of refugee integration from the perspective of young Syrian men; the questions were focused mostly on daily behaviours, interactions within Dutch society, barriers, a sense of belonging, and effects of multiple displacements. In-depth interviews were conducted to make the interview as flexible as possible and for the comfort of the refugee men, to be more likely to generate genuine answers (O’Leary, 2017: 239). As I sought to understand their experiences, emotions, and perceptions, I found qualitative interviewing to be the most suitable method to do so. Table 1 below provides the real or given names of all the young Syrian men interviewed, with details of their age, marital status, education, employment, and displacements. This table can also be consulted for dates of interviews.

#	Given Name/ Date of Interview	Status	Age	Date arrival	Dispersal Location	Educ’n Level	Job	Status	No. of displacements pre-
1	Muhannad / July 25 <sup>th</sup> , 2022	Single	27	2019	Nijmegen	N/A	Mechanic	Permit Residence Holder, currently attending CVIC	5
2	Yazan/ July 28 <sup>th</sup> , 2022	Single	25	2017	Leeuwarden	Bachelors student	Infirmar worker	Permit Residence status holder	4
3	Kaddouri/ August 3 <sup>rd</sup> , 2022	Single	24	2021	Poodle	Secondary Vocational Education (MBO)	Delivery at a restaurant	Permit Residence status holder, currently attending Dutch language classes. He has not started his CVIC yet	3
4	Qusai (real name)/ August 8 <sup>th</sup> , 2022,	Single	21	2017	Den Haag	Higher professional education (HBO)	Pizza Restaurant	Dutch Citizen	1
5	Ehab (real name)/ August 10 <sup>th</sup> , 2022	Married	35	2015	Den Haag	Bachelor of art degree holder	Travel Project Manager	Dutch Citizen	4
6	Mahmoud (real name)/ August 28 <sup>th</sup> , 2022	Single	25	2017	Poodle	MBO	Seller Aktion	Permit Residence status holder	6

Table 1- Detailed information of participants interviewed in TH for this research

Interviewees were given the chance to choose the date, location, and language of the interview so as to prioritize the comfort of the interviewees so they could express themselves without too much stress or effort and could find ways to express their feelings and their

opinions (Dunn, 2016). Five interviews were conducted face to face, in public spaces and one online, between July and August. The duration of the interviews was from 50 to 60 minutes. Four of the six were recorded after obtaining consent from the interviewees. For the remaining two, detailed notes were taken.

### **3.4 Limitations and Obstacles**

Some challenges which I have faced during my fieldwork are challenges that I anticipated but some such as finding participants who are willing to take their time to talk were a bit unexpected. All those whom I interviewed had jobs or Dutch language courses, and I appreciated the time which they have given me. Some limitations were found regarding timeframes, and language barriers. I faced limitations in terms of finding the right time of day to coordinate with the young refugee men to interview them. Some had part-time jobs at restaurants and bars and so on which affected their availability. When two interviewees were unable to find a suitable time, I sought other contacts. Another limitation was translation, especially of official Dutch government reports and research, not available in English.

### **3.5 Ethical Choices and Positionality**

Reflecting on this study, my work for almost three years, implementing educational projects and psychological support projects for young Syrian refugees in Azraq and Zaatari camps in Jordan, seems very relevant to my position as a researcher. My main goal, as a former humanitarian worker, is to contribute to allowing room for the narratives of refugees, beyond the task of administering and managing physical camps in the host country. To give a voice to expression of emotions of safety/unsafety, stability /instability was especially important for me in my work, as I hoped this could help to create a safe territory beyond the physical plane (Hilhorst and Jansen, 2010)

Being a woman, however, has made it more difficult to conduct interviews with Syrian men since in some regions of the country interactions between men and women are different and oftentimes more unequal. I initially had the idea that males could not have viewed me as a respectable researcher, and as a result, they might not have opened up to me, which could have impacted the interviews. During my fieldwork, two of the male participants held to an ideal image of themselves and their experience and did not really express many answers when asked about the frequent displacement. However, I do believe that my Palestinian identity has shaped many answers by the other refugees who opened to me because they viewed me as a Palestinian since we had one common thing, we all had to leave home at a certain point in our lives. Regarding my positionality as a Palestinian refugee with Jordanian nationality and residency in NL, I understand and am fully aware of the privileged position I have and of my responsibility as a researcher. I can only hope to gain insight into how young Syrian refugee men experience their lives in NL. I wanted to understand more about how their repeated displacements affected their integration process over time

This research takes into consideration the fact that young refugee men have often gone through very difficult experiences during their series of displacements since leaving their hometowns. They were trying to find their way in the host community under uncertain circumstances about their residence status. Additionally, young Syrian men refugees face the stress of the asylum procedure, live with the uncertain situation of family members in Syria and carry with them the effects of past displacement and resulting psychological trauma. All their past experiences are understood to affect these young men's integration in the present and their future expectations (Suerbaum 2017; de Hoon and Schmeet 2020; van Liempt and Staring, 2021; Huizinga and Van Haven, 2021)

### **3.6 Conclusion**

This chapter has shown how fieldwork, in the form of in-depth interviews and observation, was organized and managed. I tried to follow anthropologist Jennifer Johnson-Hanks's definition of a specific age group described as 'fluid'. She argues that reaching adulthood takes place through various paths, at different times and is not the same for each individual (Johnson-Hanks, 2002: 868). All six young men I spoke to had very different 'pathways', as interviews revealed. The next chapter provides an analysis of the interview and other data collected, considers the integration of young Syrian men, and illustrates their stories of displacement. The next chapter also investigates the initial thoughts of the young Syrian refugees about being in NL, reasons they left the dispersal locations and their thoughts and experiences on the milestones of integration, including obtaining residency and nationality in some cases.

## Chapter 4: Perceptions, Practices, Feelings: Integration After Displacements and Onward Mobility

### 4.1 Introduction

Based on the data collected, the key findings were classified into five main themes, each the subject of one section in this chapter. In the following order, the chapter deals with five themes. (1) Shifting masculinities, and how pre-conceived expectations of men influenced by Syrian culture created a financial obligation on young men to provide financial support to their family, influencing their integration process. (2) Social and institutional bridges, based on the holistic integration model, which stresses social connections as essential for integration. (3) At the interactional level, having a job, and speaking Dutch can help individual refugees come to terms with their new social environment. I consider how young Syrian men reconcile becoming Dutch, with Syrian culture and beliefs. (4) Safety and Security. How individuals, subjectively experience belonging and insecurity, and how the absence or presence of such facilitators affects their integration. (5) *Habitus* and Home. In the last section of the chapter, I relate frequent displacements to feelings of fear for the future, a search for stability and the question of *habitus* for young Syrian refugee men.

### 4.2 Young Syrian men's Shifting Masculinities

Although Syrian men hold more power than women in Syrian society because of the gender roles, after arriving in host community, they can become more vulnerable due to their status as asylum seekers (Suerbaum, 2017). Young Syrian refugee men may be privileged because of the power dynamics in relations with Syrian women, but they lack privilege in relation to the 'hegemonic masculinity' (Connell, 2005: 829) in comparison to Dutch men, because they are labelled refugees. Simultaneously, Syrian men may appear relatively privileged compared to some other, less privileged ethnic groups in NL. Some refugees of lower status may even view Syrian men as privileged, since they are more likely to be granted refugee status or because of their lighter skin tone. Kaddouri said:

"I feel safe in my neighbourhood in NL; however, we received many threats from other African<sup>7</sup> neighbours in case we do oblige to some of their requests"

This situation can be related to what Connell (2005: 829) defines as hegemonic and subordinate masculinities. He explains how and why some men hold dominant social positions over women and over other, subordinate men. Subordinate masculinity refers to men who do not fit into the construction of hegemonic masculinity and are therefore treated as lower on the gender hierarchy (Connell, 2005).

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<sup>7</sup>: Kaddouri was not sure which part of Africa those men were from. However, he referred to them as Africans multiple times because of the colour of their skin.

Suerbaum (2017), studied how the role of masculinities of displaced Syrian young men in Cairo makes them accept a job below their academic and experience qualifications. There was nothing worse for Syrian men than losing their ability to practice their masculinity by performing their duty to support their family financially back home (Suerbaum, 2017). In this study, young Syrian men have jobs and earn money and work for longer hours outside the house to prove their productivity in the Netherlands and to fulfil the preconceived manhood obligations as Syrian men. They were willing to seek almost any job so long as they could earn income and not become unemployed. When asked about masculinity and obligations towards his family, one of the participants, Ehab, answered:

“Of course, as a young Syrian man, you always have to prove your masculinity to be socially accepted through having a job even if you have money”

Ehab explained how the integration process and experience was really different for him than for his wife, because he had “more obligations as a man”. He explained that this included: attending CVIC, validating his certificate, getting a job in the Dutch labour market, saving money for his small family in NL, sending money back home (remittances), and learning Dutch and forming his own social group (social capital). On this issue, Mahmoud agreed, but added that this obligation was extended to his wife:

“Because I am a man, I must work as a social obligation. Not only that, even my wife must work, for money, the future, and her personality. Women can work only for themselves but as a man, I also must pay my family back.”

I was not able to confirm whether Ehab’s wife lacked the same family obligations as her husband, but both Ehab and Mahmoud felt it to be a definite part of their masculine role. Even women who worked, like Mahmoud’s wife, were seen as free from these manly obligations. I asked them why, and they replied saying, you are from a relatively similar culture, since you are a Palestinian Jordanian. “So, you know how it is” as Mahmoud said.

Many young Syrian men left Syria when they were children; therefore, they have become men in NL after multiple displacements carrying preconceived expectations about how a man should behave. These conceptions stem either from Syrian society back home, or from a society they lived in during their displacement. My analysis builds on Suerbaum’s finding that some young Syrian refugees may wish to prove their masculinity as a way of retaining their connection with their home in Syria. When young Syrian men in NL end up leaving their dispersal locations for various reasons, this may be another means to empower their own sense of manhood. Yet it also is problematic since it can generate further isolation (Dagevos et al., 2018; Huizinga and van Hoven, 2018).

While someone might argue that this can be a reason for young Syrian men to escape family obligations, the participants showed that the main reason they came to The Hague was because of availability of job opportunities. In this way, young Syrian men hoped to provide financial support for their families who were located in different parts of the world. As Yazan said,

“I moved here because I had many friends who live here, and I wanted to live in a city where I can work to send money back to my family in Syria. The situation there is horrible”

Qusai, the youngest participant, who has been living in NL for almost 6 years, added that in his case, this social obligation became shared with his sister, to give back to her parents. He argued that “this would not have been the case if my family stayed in Syria.” This shows that the younger the Syrian refugee is, the more likely for the refugee to accept the shift of gender roles among men when influenced by the dominant norms of the host society too. Suerbaum’s analysis suggests there is no single, unified framework of experience for the relationship between the uprising, war in Syria and the turning of boys into men. Rather, the focus should be on the individual efforts of every single young Syrian man to demonstrate his masculinity and his ability to support his family and contribute to his own and his family members’ future (Suerbaum, 2017). The alternative for young men of working age would seem to be a sense of shame and having failed to meet their obligations.

## **4.2 Social and Institutional Bridges: Society Level**

Social bridges with other refugee communities in the reception center and with non-migrant local people in dispersal locations, are both essential for integration into Dutch society (Hynie et al., 2016: 5). Social bonds include social connections between Syrian refugees, among family, friends, neighbours, Syrian diaspora, and camps’ life connections. However, contacts made at reception centers are soon broken due to frequent displacements between camps in NL and onward mobility to cities. Social disconnection can negatively affect the integration efforts of young Syrian men. When asked about camp life, Kaddouri explained:

“The people whom I met at the camp, who later became my friends, helped me overcome my loneliness”

Kaddouri explained that when young Syrian refugees are moved from one camp to another, the longer their application takes to be processed, this makes the resettlement process longer. However, building social connections with other Syrian refugees and with Dutch people, can make it easier for refugees to feel at least some temporary stability. Kaddouri even told me that the main reason that he moved to The Hague was to connect to the Syrian diaspora.

When discussing institutional adaptation defined by the government’s integration policies, some participants agreed that the Dutch government's efforts at Civic integration are bureaucratic and complex, even for young Syrian refugees who are keen to put considerable effort into integration. Kaddouri added:

“I want to integrate in any way with or without classes, not for the passport, I want to integrate to the Dutch society to live”

However, Yazan passionately added that integration has to be reframed, since efforts to integrate should not be individual or only apply to Syrians. The Dutch government must consider the healing process for all refugees. As Kaddouri adds:

“The efforts must be reframed, integration policies shall be personalized and not generalized to all refugees. Dutch state must consider the traumatic displacement history for all refugees,

Syrians and Palestinians have different displacement stories, but somehow, they are treated the same.”

Lastly, Mahmoud, who finished his CVIC at least 4 years ago, added that the manuals are very different from the reality. In terms of job opportunities, the situation is harder, and that it took Mahmoud way longer to secure a job as a Syrian refugee in The Hague than he expected, this caused more stress which affected his integration negatively because he could not focus on CVIC.

### 4.3 Interactional Practices: The Local Level

The interactional level includes the ability of the newcomer to learn the language and become immersed in the culture of the host community (Hynie et al., 2016: 6). These factors reflect how refugees integrate into the host community including language, culture, and functional integration. Functional integration includes the markers of integration which reflect the access to education, housing, employment, and health services (Hynie et al., 2016: 6). All of my research participants have jobs, even those who receive welfare from the Dutch state and some of them even moved to The Hague to get one. All participants said that these are not their dream jobs, however, they are working to receive more money, practice their Dutch language, expand their social circle, to prove their productivity ,as men, to their families and as refugees to the host community. Ehab said:

“ As a young Syrian man, I always have to prove your masculinity to be socially accepted through having a job even if I have money”

When referring to the Dutch culture, Qusai explained his worries regarding accepting all aspects of Dutch or Western culture like drinking alcohol, and pre-marital sex, are both against his own Syrian cultural beliefs. However, he added that not accepting Dutch culture can hinder integration with some Dutch people, even if you speak the language well. Qusai added that for him to integrate: “I accepted the parts of the Dutch culture which align with my religion (Islam)”. He explains that his own sense of stability came from committing to Syrian culture and values, whilst respecting Dutch traditions, values, and culture. As Qusai mentioned:

“We celebrate Christmas, New Year’s Eve, and other Dutch holidays, even though we (him and his family) are Muslims. It is so beautiful to show Dutch neighbours that we share those celebrations with them so they can celebrate Ramadan and Eid with us.”

Ehab, the eldest of the participants, thought the Dutch language was the number one factor for integration:

“...for some young Syrian refugees who just arrived here, I really advise them to learn the Dutch language and work hard. NL has many job chances. The older you are, the harder it is for you to learn the language and integrate. I have a 40-year-old friend who never learned how to integrate. He lives by himself and only receives social welfare money. Do you think he is integrated?”

However, all of my participants said that Dutch language courses were not enough to perfect the language, and that displacements hinder their commitment to those courses. They all had to put in extra effort to learn the language by making individual efforts, such as watching YouTube videos in Dutch. Based on my own analysis and the research of Huizinga (2016), it is easier for younger Syrian refugees to learn the Dutch language. However, Qusai added that his parents only learned Dutch so they could pass the exam and obtain citizenship meaning they do not speak Dutch at home. The integration system that the Dutch government planned, does not necessarily work for all ages, and might work better if it considered the varying age, gender, and social background of particular refugees.

#### 4.4 Safe and secure? Subjective Micro-practices and Processes

Safety and security primarily mean having, “a safe house in a safe neighborhood and freedom from crime and harassment” (Hynie et al., 2016: 6). Mahmoud said that he only felt safe and stable once he got his own accommodation in Westeinde<sup>8</sup>. Participants in this research defined economic stability as the most important aspect of their own security, as Syrian refugees in NL. One might argue that refugees’ feelings of safety, security, and status in the host country are very subjective feelings, specific too each individual (Hynie, 2016: 6). However, as participants explained, having a job, and speaking Dutch although important factors, cannot alone support integration. They all agreed that additional personal efforts were needed beyond the Civic integration modules provided. Participants utilized invented ‘safe spaces’ such as PitZtop to practice their Dutch language skills, and one young Syrian man applied for a job at the organization and he became a full-time facilitator. When I asked him why, he said:

“I want other refugees to have to same good experience that I had in this place; I want to be part of their ‘safe space’”

When asked about ‘safe space’, Kaddouri answered that his life in NL is his ‘safe space’, but when diving into details, I realized he spends much of his time on social media platforms like Facebook. He seems not to have Dutch friends, his friends being other Syrians only. Due to the frequent displacement of young Syrian refugees, they tend to create their ‘safe space’ using social media platforms for example, due to their poor social life and separation from their meaningful ones (van Liepmt and Staring, 2020; Alencar, 2018) and to retrieve information about services in the host community, to maintain family and social relationships, and to narrate their own experiences in creating a sense of connections (Gillespie et al., 2016).

All participants defined integration for them as mainly the social connections they have with people rather than relating it to a place or nation. Mahmoud said:

“I was not able to study for the CVIC or work because I feel unstable because of my parent's safety back in Syria. I am always worried for them. In the Civic integration exam, I was absent in my mind even though I knew the answers to the questions, and I even studied for them.

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<sup>8</sup>It is a province in The Hague



But my mind was absent, and it was with them (my family). If the person is not safe, he cannot integrate or work.”

Even though, Mahmoud is psychically safe here, but he feels instable and unsafe because of his family safety back in Syria. This affected his integration negatively. For Mahmoud, reading a book is a ‘safe space’:

“Only if I have time, I have so much on my plate, work, learning Dutch, talking to my family back home.”

This shows that young Syrian refugees have many obligations to do, as men, as refugees in NL to integrate into Dutch society. Mahmoud said that the Dutch that he learned in the CVIC was not enough to talk the language properly. The idea that integration is a ‘two-way’ process, and that both parties (refugees, Dutch citizens, and the state) have to contribute towards the process of integration, is not fully taken on board yet in NL. Mahmoud did not even have time to attend any ‘safe space’ initiatives to overcome the “...very shocking experience of displacement” as he described his journey coming to NL. Mahmoud prioritizes working extra hours to obtain extra money to send his family back in Syria.

In this study, I focused on the experiences of young Syrian men who live in The Hague. Many live in Rijswijk, one of the many segregated neighborhoods in the city. Many of the participants described Rijswijk as ‘Mini Damascus’ during fieldwork, because many people in this neighborhood speak Arabic. They regularly meet other Syrians or Arabs, and participants expressed that what they studied in the integration manuals is very different from the reality they experience. One major finding was how spatial segregation in the city can hamper integration because social inequalities cause neighborhood segregation in The Hague. Therefore, social inequalities are reinforced by physical segregation of specific areas in which refugees tend to live (Hintjens, van Staple, Hamid Ali, 2022).

## 4.5 Fear, Home, Displacement and *Habitus*

The fear of persecution or being sent back to Syria was highlighted by some participants like Kaddouri where he said:

“I am safe but not sure about the stability, I am always scared of being sent back to Syria, or if another war happened here. The fear is not related to citizenship, just to let you know.”

Kaddouri expressed that he misses any feeling of stability in NL, even after some time. This is not related to his position as a Dutch citizen, but because he too fears being sent back home to Syria or witnessing another war. In both cases, he fears he would have to relocate yet again, uprooting his *habitus*, and again losing all he has built up in NL, to become a refugee in another place. When I asked about the meaning of home, Yazan, a naturalized Dutch citizen answered:

“I do not know what the meaning of home for me is, I am still searching for it.”

This shows that obtaining a Dutch citizenship, does not mean that Syrian refugees feel home in NL. For Yazan, after 9 displacements, the effect of displacement is deeply negative that it stops Yazan from feeling at home without having his family around him.

Other refugees lose the sense of belonging once they are reallocated to another dispersal location where they must start generating new feelings of belonging. This series of displacements to new places with unknown expectations can trigger trauma resulting from displacements before arrival in NL. Such cycles of displacement and relocation can undermine any sense of feeling at home. As Muhannad said:

“It feels like I have lost 15 years out of his life for nothing, moving around from one country to another, every displacement, I had to start from the beginning, each time gets harder and not easier like many people assume, I was very frustrated when I moved to The Hague but later on, I did not know to get used to it, or I had to get used to it, to live, to learn Dutch, to attend the courses, to integrate, the effect of displacement was really deep, sorry I cannot describe it, but it took me a long time to integrate”

What he says here is quite heartbreaking and shows how painful can be the mention of the term ‘integration’, as it has proven very indefinable for Muhannad. However, Qusai, who had the least number of displacements and who had his family members in The Hague, had a more successful integration process. He describes it like this:

“I got over the war phase (smiling). For me, thank God, my situation is way better than others. When I came here, I had my cousins and friends and my brother. I imagine for other people, it must have been hard for my other friends, they faced difficulty having to make friends all over again and starting life all over again. It is like you removed a fish from the sea and put it in another place. It is going to be hard, no friends, no relatives. I got over this phase easily because I had my friends, and relatives. I lost my friends in Syria, but Allah rewarded me with my cousins, and brother here. My sister lost all her friends, and she was seriously damaged. But I was not that hurt. It affected my integration positively because I was surrounded by my people.”<sup>9</sup>

As illustrated in Chapter 2, changing *habitus* is a process which involves the adaptation and breakdown of social and symbolic systems around the person. In the Dutch context, when young Syrian men are displaced to multiple camps for different periods, social systems change accordingly which hinders their stability over time. Consequently, the absence of stability affects their efforts at integration. The next chapter will discuss in detail the alternative spaces for many young Syrian refugees after a series of displacements, the reason behind joining these spaces and what keeps them committed to such ‘invented spaces.’

## 4.5 How Does it All Relate?

When asked about the effect of displacement on integration, Qusai said:

“If someone does not feel safe, he or she will not integrate. After the misery that a refugee was living in, he or she psychologically cannot integrate because his first aim is to seek mental

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<sup>9</sup>: He meant his family members and cousins

and psychological comfort. If it is not there, he or she will not be able to put any effort to do to integrate.”

I build on Rosenoff work about “A *Habitus* of War and Displacement?” to incorporate the idea of *habitus* by Bourdieu to an understanding of the long-term war effects on *Habitus*. The specific focus on the intersections of macro-level social structures (the social connections) and micro-level subjective agency (sense of belonging, safety, and stability). When asked about the meaning of integration, Yazan said:

“To have a level of balance between your homeland’s culture and the host society’s culture, to be able to speak the language and connect with people, to have a role in the society, to be independent”

This can be seen within the practical actions of the young Syrian men refugees by learning the Dutch language and culture and having a job, which they see is initial steps to integrate in their new home. Here, *habitus* is used as a point of merging of process-oriented subjectivity where young Syrian refugees changed their *habitus* for survival and what it creates for young Syrian men who became men among uncertainties (Rosenoff, 2010: 50). The *habitus* of the young Syrian refugees has incorporated the realities of frequent displacement and fleeing the war into the socialization process (integration) of newcomers to the host society. Yazan told me that his first steps in The Hague is to reconnect with a Dutch friend that he met when he was a refugee in Greece and to meet her friends.

Bourdieu points out that the changing of *habitus* is actually a combination of subjective processes within the reality and structures of the host community. The changing of *habitus* can be examined by looking at the survival strategies that one uses to negotiate the ‘reality’ of displacement (Bourdieu in Rosenoff, 2010: 55). Building on Rosenoff’s work (2010: 60), there is a need to shift the analysis from the experience of war of the young Syrian refugees to the mode of practicing survival including changing *habitus*. When asked about what has helped him to integrate when he first arrived, Muhannad answered:

“I think one lesson that is making this integration process, whatever that is, easier for me was having a job and establishing social connections with Dutch people”

Due to the discontinuation of the social connections of the young Syrian men arriving after multiple displacements, under the institutional adaptation including IND’s policies. Once young Syrian refugee arrive to The Hague, they start learning Dutch and becoming familiar with the Dutch. they view this as the most important integration facilitators into the Dutch society pushing away the effect of traumatic experience of fleeing war in the back of their head ,but not completely. When I asked Muhannad about what he missed the most in the camps’ experience, he said: “ my friends I met in the camp”. Young Syrian refugees primary survival strategy relies on changing their *habitus* in the host community including forming social capital to help refugees overcome the negative effect of displacement and to integrate into the Dutch society.

However, young Syrian men prioritize finding jobs in order to financially support their family in Syria or NL to prove their productivity to the Dutch community. Ironically, even if they speak the language, are immersed in the culture, and have a job, this does not

mean that they integrated like Yazan, who is a Dutch citizen but does not feel integrated. This can explain why many young Syrian men in this study sought to find 'safe spaces' even though they are Dutch including the Syrian men whom I met at PitZtop who are still attending the 'safe space' initiatives even though all are formally Dutch citizens.

## 4.6 Conclusion

About my first sub-question: How does the changing of *habitus* for young Syrian refugees affect their feelings of instability, and how does that affect integration in return? The major finding which was generated is that changing *habitus* is a survival mechanism which slows down the process of feeling safe or stable but it does not necessarily stop the integration process. Changing *habitus* just makes it longer, takes more time and effort from the refugee and more complicated especially in case the refugee was older, had a greater number of displacements, refuses to seek for any mental health help, or was single or came to NL by himself without his family.

To answer my second sub-question: What are young Syrian refugee men's perceptions, negotiations, and local practices around their masculinities in the Civic Integration processes? I Investigated how the young Syrian men negotiate the perspectives, expectations and practices expected from them as 'men' but simultaneously balancing their actions towards integration as 'refugees'. Young Syrian men prioritizes finding a job to financially support their families in Syria or NL.

Simultaneously, it seemed young Syrian refugees were unconsciously seeking to 'integrate', as refugees, by forming social connections. Social connections were formed with other refugees at every displacement that they have undergone, and not only with Dutch society through the formal integration process. Young Syrian refugees in this study have all finished or still attending CVIC which they think of it as an obligation to receive the permit residence or the Dutch passport. But they do not think of it as the perfect integration platform to form their sense of safety or to be able to form solid social connections. Instead, they form social connections outside those Civic Integration classes in their workplaces, neighborhoods, or alternative 'safe spaces' which will be discussed in depth in the next chapter.

## **Chapter 5: Alternative ‘Safe Spaces’**

### **5.1 Mental Health Situation in the Camps**

In NL, young Syrian men’s mental health is affected by often long journeys, involving a series of traumatic displacements. According to Goosen (2014), young Syrians are greatly affected by frequent location changes. In addition, the situation inside asylum reception centers contributes to worsening mental health problems for many Syrian refugees (Bakker, 2016; Esses, Hamilton, and Gaucher, 2017; Montgomery, 2009). Asylum-seeking reception facilities are not designed to contribute positively to refugees’ mental health and well-being. On the contrary, they can negatively affect asylum seekers, worsening trauma due to isolation, restrictions on movement, and the fear of detention. All this increases anxiety and uncertainty regarding the future and obtaining refugee status. In addition, asylum seekers are coping with the dispersal of their family members, and a lack of safety for those still in Syria, whilst managing to cope with frequent changes in accommodation and location that make staying in touch difficult (Asgary and Segar, 2011; Bakker, 2016; Bakker, Cheung, and Phillimore, 2016; Esses, Hamilton, and Gaucher, 2017; Grove and Zwi, 2006). In his Syrian culture, Mahmoud explains that faith is the main healer of any mental agony. When asked about a ‘safe space’, he added

“No, no ‘safe spaces’ are provided. Even finding psychiatrists here is very hard because some people do not believe in mental health, religion is more important, I pray to Allah and that is better, I personally believe in religion more than mental health.”

Among the several obstacles to integration are language and culture barriers, some Syrian cultural and religious beliefs, a lack of economic opportunities, and limited access to the health care systems in NL (Esses, Hamilton, and Gaucher, 2017; Asgary and Segar, 2011). This illustrates the relationship between mental well-being and contributions to society through integration. However, many additional barriers may explain why refugees fail to seek health care. This chapter will discuss the ‘safe spaces’ in details and its relation to integration into the Dutch society.

### **5.2 Pitztop: Fostering a Sense of Belonging and Safety in the Hague**

Pitztop is a non-governmental organization which was founded in 2016 to reduce the social gaps between refugees and Dutch people (PitZtop website, 2021). According to Emmylou Aben, the organization's founder, newcomers to The Hague face a huge social disconnection(s) after their frequent mobility within NL. According to Aben:

“PitZtop is a creative, economically attractive hospitality community idea that is vital to helping newcomers integrate into the community, establish successful lives, and possibly foster a sense of belonging.”

PitZtop resembles Hynie's suggestion that new citizens, if they have access to common gathering areas with locals, can integrate much more quickly and easily into Dutch culture (Hynie, et al., 2016: 5). Miraftab (2004: 1) too has made a distinction between 'invited' and 'invented' spaces of citizenship. The first refers to grassroots action supported by the government, the second refers to grassroots action to resist ongoing hardships and social inequality, generally independent of formal government-supported institutions. As explained in Chapter 2, PitZtop resembles an invented space. PitZtop as an alternative to the formal invited spaces which was created to overcome the lack of social connections in invited space (in Civic integration classes there are mostly refugees, and a teacher or two). Refugees have to attend these classes, but some young Syrian refugees chose to attend the 'safe space' initiatives in the hope of forming wider social connections.

After I conducted my observation, I understood why PitZtop might be a very attractive space for many newcomers. The organization has come to offer a 'safe space' where newcomers can connect with both locals and other newcomers. Attendees share a set of values that everyone agrees on, including hospitality, and an open space to meet other refugees and locals. Attendees build common ground, share experiences, and build habits of trust. Under the current Dutch immigration laws, it is rare for refugees to get to know other refugees personally. This problem is underlined by the concept manager of PitZtop, Emmylou Aben. An absence of connection both with other refugees and with Dutch people can produce broken social relationships, affecting opportunities for integration into Dutch society negatively. PitZstop aims to offer a 'safe space', connecting established residents with newcomers, and building bridges for those who wish to feel more at home in Dutch society.

These informal contacts with Syrian refugees were prior to the in-depth interviews conducted over two months in July-August 2022. The young Syrians at PitZstop walked me briefly through their displacement stories while we drank tea. Themes for discussion were generated during conversations, and not necessarily by me. The main reason why most of the men attend<sup>10</sup> this specific 'safe space' was to establish social connections with other refugees and overcome shared feelings of social disconnection. They sought to overcome their own fears, gaining access to new sources of information, and to Dutch people. It was a way to cope with the shock of leaving their homeland, Syria via dangerous routes using small boats to seek asylum in NL. It was noteworthy that very little psychological support had been provided to any of these young men since arrival in NL (fieldwork notes, June 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2022)

### 5.3 Effect of Displacement and Alternative 'Safe Spaces'

When discussing 'safe spaces' with Muhannad, he said that in his home with his parents and sisters who came through a family reunification application. In Muhannad's case, maintaining, focusing, and validating his family's social connections are the subjective attitudes and the core of the *habitus* he seeks to form to overcome the negative effect of

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<sup>10</sup> I followed up with the organization and with the Syrian refugees whom I met the first time and they said that they are still going to PitZtop as much as they can, and that they are planning to continue attending the 'safe space' initiatives, even though they were naturalized on the same day I met them on June 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2022.

displacement. Muhannad regularly visits public gardens and talk with older people in Dutch to practice his Dutch and to form more social connections. When I asked Muhannad why he does that, he said, “it makes me happy”. These conversations with older people resemble the cultural activities and form the social capital which makes Muhannad gain more knowledge and therefore, feel safe, according to our interview. According to Bourdieu, social capital includes participation in cultural activities and cultural material resources, and *habitus* focuses on subjective attitudes and dispositions (Bourdieu, 1986: 21) , just like in this example, explains Muhannad’s attitudes towards his safe space

Yazan, almost 26 years old when we spoke, had the greatest number of displacements, and said he was depressed for the first year after arriving in NL. He did not learn a word of Dutch, integrate, or meet new people. He added that no official psychological support was offered, nor any guidance towards ‘safe space’ initiatives. He added:

“I forced myself to leave this depressing episode and move to The Hague where I had visited earlier and met many international friends. Because of those friends, I am currently learning Spanish to leave and pursue my education in Spain.”

Yazan never found his own ‘safe spaces’, even though he now holds a Dutch passport. He clearly does not feel integrated, due to the instability he faced throughout his life but also because he imagines that in Spain he will feel more at home. Yazan added:

“I do not think I am integrated at all even though I am Dutch. I do not think I will ever integrate. Also, I am still looking for my home, but I do not think I will ever find it.”

Yazan had arrived after numerous and very traumatic experiences as described by him. Yazan’s psychological situation was never addressed and he even added that while he was in his deepest depression, he could not learn Dutch and remained completely alone by himself for a long time due to his poor psychological condition. When asked about any future onward mobility plan, Yazan answered that he would move to Spain because maybe he believes he would feel more at home there and have a better integration experience. He is already learning the language and has Spanish friends (his social capital). These are two major facilitators for integration in the host country and which were missing when he arrived in NL due to his fragile state of mind. Another finding is that Yazan chose to move to The Hague; it was his own choice and was based on knowledge he previously had about the city. His expectations had been that it would be a good experience because he already had many friends here. In his case, onward mobility was a positive experience with regards to integration, as he started to practice more Dutch, he volunteered in multiple organizations, and formed his own social connections, changing his *habitus* and habits. Smoking weed was one new habit he acquired, and he felt it helped Yazan fit, and more fully integrate into the Dutch society.

Qusai is the youngest participant and the only Palestinian-Syrian and Dutch citizen. He arrived in NL after his father applied for family reunification for him. Qusai did not seem to mind his several displacements in Lebanon and Egypt. Qusai felt fairly certain his family, cousins, and friends could form a set of ‘safe spaces’. He did not have to seek it elsewhere, outside the family circle. This certainty and the availability of safety and stability created a

solid foundation for Qusai to learn Dutch, attend Civic integration classes and start a new life. Qusai is working with his friends to form a social activism group for Palestine. One of his motivation and goals in NL is to contribute to freeing Palestine.

The 'safe space' with his family around Qusai made it easier for him to practice his rights of political expression in NL (Miraftab 2004). For Qusai, his 'safe space' existed even before his arrival. His expectations did not change significantly, and when modifying his *habitus*, he was aware those displacements were temporary and was confident he would soon be on his way to NL. His confidence in reaching his destination made the journey of displacements bearable. This can explain why Qusai was the only participant who did not feel the need to adopt new ways of coping, such as by smoking weed, or drinking alcohol. Among the participants, he seemed to have stayed the closest to his original Syrian culture.

Mahmoud arrived in NL after six separate displacements and expressed that the number of frequent displacements he had to go through affected his ability to feel stable and consequently his ability to form social connections in NL. The rejection of his family reunification application for his parents directly worsened his feelings of unsafety, and sense of instability. He said he was not able to go to Civic integration class or learn dutch because of his feelings of distress. Mahmoud added: "I will never feel integrated until I see my family again, here in TH".

Mahmoud said that due to his limited free time, he barely has any time to find a 'safe space'. He pointed out that the Dutch government does not take any traumatic experience of Syrian refugees into account. Mahmoud's uncertainty was lessened finally when he found accommodation in The Hague. Even so, he feels unintegrated within Dutch culture.

Most of my older research participants (older than 25) such as Ehab expressed the feeling they have lost a lot by being forced to leave Syria, including their jobs, social connections, and financial properties. For older refugees, the effects of displacement were much harder as they lost much more. They took longer to recover and to integrate because they found it hard to feel safe or stable. Ehab is the oldest participant in this study, he left Syria as 27 years old, and interestingly, he identified art as his 'safe space'. Ehab said:

"A 'safe space' for me is a place where I can escape stress. That for me is painting and drawing. I have not yet reached the point in my life, where my 'safe space' becomes my business since part of any 'safe space' is financial independence. My family is also my 'safe space'. (It is) a place that I create for myself to be alone and escape my pain."

Ehab's experiences of forced displacement were perhaps the most disturbing of all those interviewed. He said he took a long time to recover and to start to integrate. Ehab became an abstract artist to express the deep impact of his emotions on canvas. He holds a degree of arts from Syria and worked in Saudi Arabia for 4 years as an interior design. Ehab is the only participant who had a bachelor's degree, obtained in Syria, and seemed quite familiar with the Dutch system, and its errors. Ehab was open to addressing all of this, as a Dutch naturalized citizen. Ehab is the only married participant in this study and he said that his wife and children have helped in pushing Ehab to integrate faster, for their sakes. He adds:

"... I was totally shocked when I first came here, my motivation went down, and I questioned my future. There were moments where you feel happy and satisfied when you see your efforts



are being recognized. Progress and appreciation are key for development. That feeling I had it in Saudi Arabia but not here. Here I had to find my way (integrate) one way or another, for my family to (be able to) live here.”

Lastly, he added that:

“I am very stable in The Netherlands. I am also independent. I have a future here. I think it is super hard for me to reallocate again, learn another language, and get to meet a new culture. I am tired of relocations. I also have a job here that helps build my future.”

Ehab’s experience was highly shaped by age, experience, marital status, education level and his prior socio-economic level in Syria. As the only married participant and as a father, this has positively shaped his efforts to find a job, to learn Dutch, and to attend the CVIC. Ehab’s bachelor’s degree in art has given him a more constructive opinion about the new CVIA. In his opinion, new CVIA still has many issues because it did not address the importance of securing a job in the labor market as soon as the young Syrian refugee relocates. Lastly, Ehab is the only participant who valued the importance of recognition in the workforce because he felt it back in Saudi Arabia which he misses in the Dutch labor force as a Syrian refugee. The effect of displacement was very negative for his integration experiences but he had to change his *habitus* and find a way to integrate for the sake of his family, their future, and his children.

## 5.4 Unexpected Answer

“The Netherlands, they gave us what no one else gave us. If Syria was not destroyed, I would visit it someday, but why should I go back now? When is everything destroyed?”

This was Kaddouri’s answer when I asked him about his sense of belonging towards NL or Syria. Kaddouri is from Aleppo and arrived in 2021, and 24 years old. He is the most recent arrival among my respondents and was reallocated to three different locations before he arrived in The Hague. He expressed the opinion that frequent displacements had not affected his stability as much as the fear of being sent back to Syria. His fears did not relate to getting, or not getting, a Dutch passport. As Kaddouri explained, integration under the Dutch system does not ask whether a refugee or migrant feels stable, unstable, or whether consequently, integration becomes an unwelcome obligation.

Kaddouri is still learning Dutch and has not yet started the CVIC. Kaddouri added that the Civic Integration efforts by the Dutch state were good and that they should be stricter to avoid accepting “threatening people” as he called them.

His answers regarding CVIC were very positive which was an unexpected result. This can perhaps be explained by the ‘honeymoon’ phase in which he still is. According to Abkhezr (2018: 25-26), this phase is a brief period of time, which normally lasts a few months to few years, and is thrilling. The newcomer encounters different circumstances and attracts others’ interests. In this period, young Syrian refugees like Kaddouri are still enjoying their first stage of life here and are exploring the immigration system. Kaddouri is not yet a Dutch citizen and is still learning Dutch. He did not feel any deep effects of displacement in his

integration efforts (Abkhezr, 2018). Kaddouri's interactional local practices are still developing as he is still learning Dutch. Yet it is interesting that his sense of stability and safety, whilst still unclear, is geared towards NL. When I told Kaddouri about PitZtop, he said that he has never heard about such initiatives in The Hague and he promised me to look into it more, when I asked him few days later about his commitment to that, he said that he did not have the time to go to any initiative. My analysis is that he is a very shy person and he was not very confident about Dutch language level and that he is not ready to leave his comfort zone (his Syrian friends circle) yet since he is still new in NL.

## **5.5 Conclusion**

Regarding my third sub-question: What is the role of 'safe space' initiatives in The Hague in helping newcomers overcome the effects of displacement and onward mobility? The role of those 'safe spaces' is very important because they form a solid foundational space for refugees to form their initial social connections especially if they came single or by themselves. Social connections are denied during the CVIC. Under old or new Civic Integration Acts, there is denial by Dutch policymakers of the need to pay serious attention to the traumatic experience that refugees have had to go through before they arrive in NL. Lastly, the new CVIA will be discussed in the next chapter along with some conclusions and recommendations.

## Chapter 6: Conclusion

### 6.1 A New Life in The Hague

Based on the data collected, resettlement itself does not cause too much anxiety for young Syrian men. Rather, it is the fear associated with an unknown future that concerns them, the pressure to integrate, and the association of subsequent displacements with the first displacement events, during the war in Syria (Sandalio, 2018). Displacement does not end when the young Syrian men arrive in NL. Later, when many young Syrian refugees move from their dispersal locations to bigger cities like The Hague, they do so for various reasons. In moving again, they seek to reconnect with the Syrian diaspora, to pursue higher education, meet the international community, or find a reasonably paid job so they can send money to their family. Onward mobility to The Hague stems from uncertainty about the future. Yet these young Syrian men overcome the fear of leaving their dispersal locations in the hope of being able to secure a better future for themselves. Ideas around masculinity influence their decision to leave dispersal locations and fulfil their financial responsibilities toward their families. Based on interviews conducted, younger, single refugee men found this onward mobility easier, compared to the older and married men. The younger the refugee is, the less he seemed to have been exposed to the negative effect of previous displacement(s). Some were determined to push these negative feelings behind them, and to move forward. It did seem that the greater the number of previous forced displacements the young Syrian refugee men experienced, the longer it took them to recover from traumatic experiences of displacement and the longer it took them to feel at home, and to integrate. Qusai was the only young Syrian participant who arrived after his father applied for a family reunification for him, and was the youngest among those interviewed, when he was first displaced. Qusai had the shortest displacement times and because he had his family with him, he consequently seemed to suffer the least of all from the effects of displacement.

### 6.2 Questions and Answers

I tried to answer the first sub-question in Chapters 2 and 4: How does the changing of *habitus* for young Syrian refugees affect their feelings of instability, and how does it affect integration in return? The answer is a subjective answer depending on personal history, marital status, and socioeconomic context. Answering based on HIM, when the Syrian refugees know that the fixed social connections are secured for them, such as Qusai, their changing of *habitus* as a result of frequent displacements, is going to affect their integration less deeply and less negatively. The more uncertain are the young Syrian refugee men about their new life in NL, the longer integration may take. Changing *habitus* becomes a survival strategy, realized once they reach their new home. However, some young Syrian refugee men left Syria on their own felt and they felt unsure about their new home, such as Yazan. In his case, the displacement process negatively affected Yazan since he felt he might have to keep repeating the process

of moving, until he arrived at a safe and stable new home. Yazan's displacement had very negative effects on his ability and willingness to integrate, and it became deeply negative for Yazan to keep repeatedly experiencing displacement, up to 9 separate times. Yazan reached the point where he still felt unable to feel safe or stable in the present time or to find a sense of belonging. Even though both Qusai and Yazan are Dutch citizens and are only 4 years apart, their experience of integration is different; just because Qusai arrived through a family reunification application to NL where his father, cousins, and uncles already there. Whereas Yazan had to start his integration process in a country alone, where his family stayed back in Syria and his father passed away recently.

To answer the second sub-question, I gathered my data and analyzed it in Chapter 4: What are young Syrian refugee men's perceptions, negotiations, and local practices around their masculinities in the Civic Integration process? All of the participants of this study said that more important than attending CVIC, is their duty to practice their masculinity, by providing functional financial support for their parents. Even when the financial situation of the family was relatively good, earning money as a young man was more important for them as a form of integration, than attending CVIC. All the participants agreed that they learned Dutch in part so they could translate for their parents, and to adjust to some aspects of Dutch culture that they considered compatible with Syrian culture.

To answer the third sub-question: What is the role of 'safe space' initiatives in The Hague in helping newcomers overcome the effects of displacement and onward mobility? I dedicated Chapter 5 to answer it. 'Safe spaces' are invented spaces that help young Syrian men to form social connections, where they arrived after a series of displacements and onward mobilities. Invented spaces can be contrasted with invited spaces, which operate with state support, and therefore rarely challenge government interventions or the status quo (Miraftab, 2004). PitZtop resembles an invented space, quite different from the integration platforms and intended 'safe spaces' that local and state government have envisaged, like CVIC. These are formally intended to be primary locations for Syrian refugees' integration in NL. One young group of Syrian refugees, all brothers, go to PitZtop regularly because they were invited there as soon as they arrived in The Hague. They in turn invited other family members to this 'safe space'. These young Syrian refugees chose to spend their spare time attending regular activities in PitZtop, because they have contacts with other refugees and construct social capital built on relations of trust. I argue that these invited spaces help refugees change their *habitus* by forming social connections. In turn, it helped overcoming the traumatic effect of multiple displacements and helps refugees to integrate faster into the Dutch society.

Muhannad, Qusai, Yazan, Ehab, Mahmoud and Kaddouri did not attend any 'safe space' initiative because they moved to The Hague to find a job or to pursue their education. They took most to learn Dutch as an extra effort, work to gain extra money to send money back to Syria. As a result, they did not seem to have extra time to attend any 'safe space' initiatives as they had to unconsciously come up with their 'safe space' within their time, effort, financial ability, and spatial locations. When I asked them about their familiarity with 'safe space' initiatives, they informed me that they were unaware of such possibilities or did not have time.

## 6.3 Stands on the New Civic Integration Act

When referring to the new CVIA with one of the Civic integration program managers in the municipality of The Hague, she said that the random allocation across NL is still a feature of the new CVIA. Even though the CVIA 2013 has been replaced by the new CVIA 2021, disregarding previous experiences means that repeated displacements will continue to pose a problem among Syrian and other refugees. All interviewees agreed on the fact their engagement with the CVIA 2013 under which they fall, is mainly geared at obtaining a residence permit or a Dutch passport. The young Syrian men claim that 'social integration', where they mix within Dutch society arises from a strong personal motivation to communicate with Dutch people. This is not readily obtained by attending CVIC classes or passing language exams. In real life, integration is complicated by most Syrians living in specific -and generally poorer - parts of The Hague.

## 6.4 Conclusion

At the beginning of the research, I thought the answer to my main research question: **“How do young Syrian men in The Hague experience the ‘integration’ process after a series of ‘displacements’ and ‘onward mobility’?”** would be that the effect of multiple displacements is to undermine integration. The previous research of van Heelsum suggests that the effect of displacement will tend to negatively impact most refugees’ integration into NL, negatively overall. After this research, however, what has emerged is how important are the socio-economic circumstances of individual refugees. These circumstances include age, family in their destination, the number of prior displacements, their level of education, the dispersal location, their commitment to masculine obligations, and the home city in Syria. These all shape the effect of displacement in relation to possibilities for integration. Frequent displacement affects refugees negatively, especially if there is no psychological support for newly arrived refugees or no ‘safe spaces’. When integration becomes a duty for refugees, as it soon does, then they do their best to attend CVIC and obtain the residence permits.

Muhannad, Yazan, Kaddouri, Qusai, Ehab and Mahmoud all had different responses regarding a question on the effects of displacement on integration. Muhannad, who came to NL when he was almost 20 years old, is now 27, and addressed the relationship between age and the ability to integrate, as follows:

“The younger the Syrian refugee is, the more he would adapt faster to the new environment, circumstances, and the effect of displacement would be lighter since the young Syrian refugee did not have much to lose back home.”

This quotation by Muhannad sums up the factors which shape the effect of displacement on young Syrian refugee’s integration.

This paper recommends that the GovNL should make more effort to increase the number of reception centers, since Ter Apel, is the only initial reception center in NL, cannot cope with rising numbers now seeking asylum. GovNL should increase the capacity and number of camps so refugees do not have to keep moving, reinforcing their displacements.

Instead, GovNL could plan more strategically how to attract young Syrian refugee families into rural areas rather than settling in larger cities like The Hague. In addition, municipalities must provide more Arabic-language information about ‘safe space’ initiatives and community groups for Syrian refugees who have all had to undergo multiple displacements. This can make their arrival a trigger of previous traumatic experiences.

Lastly, IND must consider the mental health of young Syrian refugees who were displaced multiple times in terms of evaluating their skills. Also, IND can improve the validating process of previous certificates from Syria. As a result, refugees would not have to work for longer hours to gain more money because this might hinder their contribution to integration. The GovNL should strategically plan to include young Syrian refugees into Dutch society even when they are still in reception centers and camps for asylum seekers. As this will help refugees form social connections with Dutch people later in their dispersal locations. This would better prepare young Syrian men to integrate within Dutch society.

Further research is needed into the best ways of providing support for refugee integration and Civic engagement, as part of naturalization processes. There should be a greater emphasis, first of all, on the human rights principles that are supposed to protect all refugees. There should be more attention on creating ‘safe spaces’ by offering young Syrian men (and other refugees) information about them. This way, this could be the beginning of moving towards a more refugee-centered, trauma-informed approach to integration in future.

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# List of Appendices

## Appendix I - Information letter in English

This study is carried out for the master thesis at the Erasmus University Rotterdam, International Institute of Social Sciences, Development Studies. Information about the study is mentioned in this letter, for further information, or if you have any questions after reading this, please ask me.

The goal of this study is to understand refugees' integration from the perspective of the Syrian refugees and how the displacement has affected their integration into Dutch society.

Participation: the study will be based on individual in-depth interviews. The interview will be recorded by a voice recorder application, and the duration of the interview will be between 45 and 60 minutes. You will be asked about your basic background information and your experience with the integration under the Dutch integration policies to be granted permit residence of Dutch citizenship; what relates to your contributions to integrating into the Dutch society and how the displacement affected your experience. No preparation for the interview is required as it is only about your perspectives and opinions.

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

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

A copy of the recorded interview and the final thesis can be sent to you upon your request. The reason for recording is to be able to transcribe the interview later and then analyze it. Only the interviewer will listen to the interview. As for the transcripts, the information you give will be treated with full confidentiality and anonymity. This information will not be identified.

The results of this study are used to complete a master thesis in development studies at Erasmus University Rotterdam.

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

## Appendix II- Participants of observations

Number	Name	Party	Nationality	Medium/Date of Interview	Topics generated
1	Qais	PitZtop	Syrian	Participatory observations- June 23rd, 202	Displacement. Camp life social connections
2	Mohammad	PitZtop	Syrian	Participatory observations- June 23rd, 202	Palestine diaspora
3	Ahmad	PitZtop	Syrian	Participatory observations- June 23rd, 202	Safety in NL Effect of displacement
4	Hasan	PitZtop	Egyptian	Participatory observations- June 23rd, 202	