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# Inside the Hidden World of Homeless Women

Experiences of Belonging through Care Practices among Homeless Women in Eindhoven

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Experiences of Belonging through Care Practices among Homeless Women in Eindhoven

by

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*“I don’t want pity, I want understanding.”*

*Samira, interview, 11 March 2022*



## Foreword

This thesis is written for the final phase of the Master program of ‘Cultural Anthropology: Sustainable Citizenship’ of Utrecht University.

It was made clear at the beginning of this schoolyear that due to possible COVID measures we had to conduct our anthropological field research within our country of residence. This meant a change in possible subjects, since my scope was suddenly limited to focus within the Netherlands. I had been putting some thought in several subjects that intrigued me, but there was one in particular which kept my interest. This interest was sparked sometime around mid-September when students were allowed to follow classes at the university again after most COVID measures were lifted. For me this meant I had to take the train to and from Utrecht a couple of times a week, since I lived in Eindhoven. These train rides were notoriously early, and it was around the Eindhoven station, mostly around 7 o’clock, that I suddenly started to notice the presence of several homeless people. I wondered what their story would be and how they ended up where they were at this point in their lives. I also wondered about why I would only, with a few exceptions, see homeless men. “There surely must be homeless women too?” This was a world I had (luckily) never been in contact with, so I had not a clue. Neither did people around me. Which is exactly why I thought it would be the perfect field to focus my research on.

I would like to give a special thanks all women I spoke with and who have opened up to me about their experiences in life and often turbulent pasts. It has been such a privilege to hear their stories. I want to give thanks to the employees of the shelters and organizations I was in touch with. Especially *‘t Hemeltje* for letting me be a part of their team of volunteers and get to know the homeless community through their eyes. Finally, I would like to thank my supervisor, Danse de Bondt, for being patient with my writing process, giving me relevant feedback and for thinking along with me when I was overwhelmed with data.

I feel very privileged to have conducted the research of this intriguing subject. I therefore hope this research will be just as interesting for you as a reader, as it was for me as a researcher.

Kim Scholts

Eindhoven, 30 June 2022





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## Introduction

“The rats have more rights in my city than I have” (Lilian, interview, 4 April 2022).

Reasons to why people are or feel in- or excluded from care practices can depend on several intersectional factors such as gender, race, social or economic class. Being homeless can create a stigma of substance abuse, even when someone claims they do not use. Lilian, a 55-year-old who has been homeless for almost 17 years and is a well-known homeless woman to cause trouble in Eindhoven, said she was once “reported to the housing association that you are causing nuisance from needles on the street. I've never put a needle in my arm, I let the blood bank put it in that I'm O-negative” (Lilian, interview, 4 April 2022). As a result of different treatment homeless people feel or are seen as lesser citizens than their equals who are perceived to have full rights (Arnold 2004, 46). The effects of such disadvantages can influence feelings of belonging and/or inequality (Yuval-Davis 2006, 201). One of the women I shortly talked with had her fingers full of rings which I first complemented, but told me why she had them: “*You* can easily call the police, but they don't listen to me, so I have to take care of myself” (homeless woman, informal talk, 6 April 2022). She felt that she was treated differently because she was not like ‘normal people’ due to having lacked oxygen at birth from which she still suffers. Whether or not people have a sense of belonging to society can be influenced in part by the in- or exclusion of care practices (Thelen 2021, 7).

Helping citizens is one of the main functions of a social welfare government, yet not all citizens receive social security and care in the same way due to decentralization of welfare regimes (Read and Thelen 2007, 9). According to Yuval-Davis (2011, 54) the rise of neoliberal globalization has impacted the way welfare states are structured due to the privatization and the subsequent shift of responsibility towards welfare agencies, and in line with to Read and Thelen (2007, 9), the individual. The Netherlands handles *Wet Maatschappelijke Ondersteuning 2015* (Social Support Act), which went in effect in 2015. Its core principle of is that citizens should be responsible for their own care and social support. By appointing the responsibility among citizens in caring for one's own situation, the government puts the responsibility of self-making and being made with the citizen (Ong 1996, 737). A citizen should rely first on their networks of family, friends, and neighbours if they are unable to maintain themselves. When all of these possibilities fall short, only then government and professional support come into play (Rijksoverheid n.d.). This shows there is a distancing between the state and the citizen. Eindhoven has seen a shift in the decentralization of the

involvement of the municipality within the homeless community in the beginning of 2021. They aimed to stop the fragmentation of the four main homeless organisations in the city: *Springplank040*, *het Leger des Heils* (Salvation Army), *NEOS*, and *Ervaring die Staat*. The public-private cooperation is between the municipality and the main contractor *Springplank040*, an organization which supports and helps homeless people to find the best possible route for them. They are now responsible for working with and dividing subsidies among themselves and the three other main homeless organizations in Eindhoven (Nonner 2021).

There is a lack of focus on women within homeless research (Radley, Hodgetts and Cullen 2006, 438; Baptista 2010, 164; Phipps, Dalton, Maxwell and Cleary 2018, 2), which leads to create assumptions about them, as prior research is predominantly based on homeless men (Bretherton 2017, 4). Care practices provided by homeless organizations can (subconsciously) reinforce inequalities between groups of people through making differences between the ones who are cared for (Allahyari 2000, cited by Thelen 2021, 5). During my fieldwork I saw what perceptions in lack of care can do among homeless women. It can contribute to feeling powerless, lonely, not belonging, and being stripped of one's rights to conform to the rules of shelters. Most of the experiences and traumas these women have had, such as losing the ones they thought they could trust and not feeling heard, contribute to a lack of trust in the organisations which are there to help them. By being repeatedly let down in their expectations of the type of care they would like to receive from homeless organizations their perception of their rights as citizens have declined. Their experiences in becoming, being, or having been homeless, in various ways had affected their feelings of belonging to society. Despite the national statistics showing a decline in the number of homeless people and actions taken by the stakeholders to improve the situation of the homeless in the city, the trend of a rising number in people becoming homeless in Eindhoven remains. With this research I intend to provide an insight in the lives of homeless women living in either shelters or on the street, in a city that is not known for its prominent population of homeless people. With this insight I want to show how women are affected in their citizenship through experiences of exclusion by homeless caring organizations which subsequently affect how they find belonging within the city of Eindhoven.

This thesis portrays how practices of care influence the ways homeless women in Eindhoven not only experience their position within, but also how they experience their belonging to society. This will be done through answering the following questions:

- How is the complexity of care provided and perceived by both employees and homeless women?
- How do homeless women experience ambiguous forms of care in Eindhoven?
- How do homeless women cope with possible feelings of exclusion?

With this, I will answer the main question: How do practices of care influence experiences of belonging to society among homeless women in Eindhoven?

### **Connecting Care, Citizenship and Belonging**

Throughout this thesis I use the concept of care, citizenship and belonging to gain an understanding in how homeless women perceive and position themselves in the world around them. In anthropological discourse, care is an unstable and constantly moving concept and can refer to a range of different practices (Buch 2015, 279). The definition of care knows many different explanations. Thelen (2021, 1) mentions that “Some focus on unpaid activities of social reproduction within households, while others also include paid care in institutions.” Care happens in various settings in many different ways. But as Black (2018, 80) puts it, care in anthropology focusses on relations with others and oneself that are morally and ethically defined both make care related to social actions meaningful. With the concept of care I specifically mean social care which constitutes the provision of social work, personal care, protection, social support, or social assistance homeless women do or do not receive from actors such as the state, homeless organizations, but also friends and/or family in order to live comfortably. I use the concept of care as a practice of fulfilling needs and helping homeless women in Eindhoven who do not have the means to do this on their own. Homeless women are often in a precarious situation where they need help to get their lives back on track. However, almost all women I spoke with told me they have a lack of trust in those institutions that provide care because they feel they have been continually let down (fieldnotes, 4 April 2022). Whether it was because of failed communication, not being heard in their needs, or because there is not match between them and care givers. Thelen (2021) along with other authors (Brown 2010; Garcia 2010; Aulino 2019), claims there should be a shift to focus on the negative associations to giving or receiving care from both kin as state organizations. She continues to argue that this means care is part of both the processes of belonging and numerous forms of inequality. Care provided by kin and organisation may contribute to oppressive patterns of structural violence (Aulino, 2019), and reproduce insecurities (Hashimoto 1996). Not only can receiving care be

seen as humiliating or to be limiting one's agency (Ma 2020), the act of caring can also reproduce and contribute to inequalities as it defines contrast between actors (Thelen 2021, 6).

Furthermore, I use the concept of care in relation to belonging and inequality as proposed by Thelen (2021). Because Thelen (2021) does not give one definition of belonging relating to care, I define it in line with Yuval-Davis (2011, 35) her explanation of it as feeling at home, feeling safe, and having an understanding of how to make sense of the world and locate oneself in it. Even though I use this definition of belonging, I want to point out that this concept can mean something different for every individual and can change over the course of time (Yuval-Davis 2006, 199). There are different intensities to feel belonging to for example one's nationality, religion, or language. Those feelings of belonging that a group can bring also creates the dichotomy between 'us' and 'them' and can be produced on both an individual level as on a collective level (Yuval-Davis 2011). The feeling of belonging to society among homeless women is often affected by (reinforced) inequalities which their position brings, making them feel as if they are at the bottom of society. Care should make one feel safe, but if that is not the case feelings of exclusion can result and affect one's sense of belonging (Ignatieff 1994, 24). Thelen (2021, 1) argues that with (a lack of) care practices membership of a collective can be confirmed, create inequality, or even contribute to exclusion. Care affects the ones that give or receive it through intricate arrangements between the actors (Thelen 2021, 1). Homeless women in Eindhoven are financially cared for by the state through social benefits, but also socially through care provided by several private homeless organisations, and sometimes friends or family.

According to Buch (2015, 282) practices related to care can depend on the social setting and needs of the care recipients. For homeless women this means that the type of care they receive from organizations or their social circle, depends on the type of needs they have. This is very personal, someone could need a psychologist to talk to, simply get some rest to get their life in order or need help with insights in the workings of bureaucracies to get homeless benefits. Research done by Rebecca Allahyari (2000, cited by Thelen 2021, 5) on volunteers in two homeless shelters in the United States shows that different progressive and conservative understandings within shelters and moral visions of need can turn into different ways of carrying out care practices among homeless people. Differences were made for example by deservingness of care based on needs. I noticed such differences as well in the shelters I visited during my fieldwork in aspects such as what is expected of people who visit a shelter, but also who is allowed at the shelters and who is not. Even though the organizations all have the same

goal of helping the homeless, some organizations are focussed on actively helping people by finding either a job or a home, others simply want to offer homeless people a safe space to rest.

Even though care is expected to be a universal right for all citizens, not everyone receives the same amount or quality of care. Studies have found that both individuals and groups of people are selected – or not selected – on their suitability of being objects for care (Thelen 2015, 505). This is especially the case with vulnerable groups such as homeless people who are perceived to not fit in because they do not meet the criteria of “good citizenship” (Leibovits 2020, 326). This might not always be the case, but people could feel like they are being judged on whether they deserve care or not. A large group of homeless people residing in a winter shelter in Eindhoven was put back to the streets earlier than expected in order to make room for Ukrainian war refugees, which was not appreciated by many people associated to the homeless. I was talking to several employees at the end of March who complained about the impact this would have on the homeless people who were sent away, but also how it for them showed how the government and municipality perceived the homeless – as not worthy of being treated like full citizens. There is a subsequent construction of contrast between those who are perceived to deserve and not deserve care, forming communities of caring while at the same time excluding others. In this sense caring creates a sense of belonging and differences between groups of people and individuals. According to Read and Thelen (2007), a decentralization of care from ‘the state’ to specialized institutions is a step away from the responsibility of the collective and more towards an individual way of caring. As the Social Support Act of the Netherlands indicated, the citizen should take care of themselves before help is offered. The way how homeless organisations feature themselves and the acts of care they provide can lead to different ways in how homeless people are treated and understood (Allahyari 2000). People who need help are the ones that have failed in their being self-made (Ong 1996).

### *Citizenship*

According to sociologist T.H. Marshall (1950) citizenship is a status given to those who are full members of a society. Those who have this status are on an equal footing in terms of the rights and responsibilities that come with it. However, there is no universal principle to what those rights and responsibilities are or how different people are expected to fit into the same category. Over the course of time discussions arose around the issue of de-homogenization of citizenship as an abstract idea as it places categorically different people in the same abstract concept of ‘the citizen’ (Yuval-Davis 2011, 48). As the anthropologist Sian Lazar (2013)

mentions, the notion of citizenship has various aspects to how it is used and by whom. He states that at its core, citizenship is how people “live with others in a political community”. The ability of citizens to influence politics, namely their participation in decisions that have an impact on their lives, is a prerequisite for several political membership practises (Lazar and Nuijten 2013, 3). This ability depends on the attainment of ‘full’ citizenship and on how well or actively persons define themselves as good or active citizens (Lazar and Nuijten 2013, 4). This covers citizenship as a concept of membership, but it remains ambiguous. According to anthropologist Isin (2009) most literature and research has focussed on different, yet related aspects of citizenship, namely citizenship as status or as practice. The focus of the former lies on the citizen and looks into issues such as residence, immigration, and naturalization, whereas the latter is more concerned with integration, nationalism, and cohesion (Isin 2009, 369). These are not exclusive and there are many more forms of citizenship that are discussed in contemporary literature, but the starting point of the concept is that it relates to membership of a nation state (Isin 2009).

Arnold (2004, 17) argues that there are basically two fundamental principles that are not always mutually exclusive but do influence modern Western citizenship as both status and practice. The first being economic participation, by which there is an emphasis on the whether or not someone contributes to the economy through labour. This subsequently highlights the importance of economic independence. Here the emphasize lies with citizenship as practice in integration in society by financially investing in the nation through acts such as working and paying taxes. The influence of neoliberalism has extended to all aspects of human behaviour relevant to citizenship being covered by economics (Ong 1996, 739). Ong (1996) asserts in her study of cultural citizenship, that in the neoliberal age, people are expected to be self-made and self-reliant. Those who, due to any reason, are unable to do so and have to rely on the welfare state are considered as a burden to society and hence as ‘bad’ citizens (Ong 1996, 739). Homeless people are because of their lack of self-reliance and contribution to society in this sense critiqued on their position in it (McRobbie 2008, 7). The second aspect Arnold (2004, 18) mentions is in line with Yuval-Davis’ (2011, 48) on the problematic homogeneous character of the concept. When one fails to meet the homogeneous character and economically participate can lead to becoming a political other (Ong 1996, Arnold 2004, 18). There are of course many factors that lead up to this position within society, all depending on individual and structural explanations related to social inequalities (Radley et al. 2006, 442). Homeless women are already made into others through labels such ‘homeless’, or in Dutch ‘*zwerver*’ (hobo). Terms like these inherently carry a stigma with them which already connects a negative

assumption to a person. It does not only point to their physical dislocation, but also implies a cultural rejection (Arnold 2004, 18).

Agamben (1998) argues with his notion of *homo sacer* that human life is at its core related to political power. Based on the legal theory of the ancient Romans, he notes there is a separation between animal life (*zoé*) and political participation (*bios*), the latter being the ‘good’ life. All citizens start from simple life and pass to political life, therefore simple life is necessary for political participation. According to Agamben (1998) a *homo sacer* is a person worthy of death but banned from legal execution or religious sacrifice. *Sacer* means sacred but in a sense that he may be killed with impunity, since he is stripped of all his rights and reduced to “bare life” (Agamben 1998, 193). By being able to denote citizens to *homo sacer*, the sovereign power has the ability to decide over life and death, and thereby creating a political order. This is based on the exclusion of bare life, which is accomplished through temporarily suspending the law through a state of exception. This suggests the political order can only be decided by the sovereign power. However, I argue that actions of care from institutions also have an influence on denoting citizens, but on a more local and individual level instead of only through state power, by ethical and political judgement of the other (Yuval-Davis 2006, 203).

A full citizen of a state has access to certain rights the system provides, in condition to serve various duties and responsibilities towards the nation (Marshall 1950, 253). Rights can range from political to cultural ones, whereas duties mostly consist of obeying the law, participating in the labour market, and paying taxes (Yuval-Davis 2006). As previously mentioned, care practice can have the power to exclude one from certain rights which citizenship can offer (Thelen 2021). These rights include freedom, safety, being able to make a lawful income, and being protected by the law (Lazar 2013, 52). However, even with possession of full citizenship and formal rights, one can still lack full opportunity of participating within society and not be treated as or feel like a full member of the state (Yuval-Davis 2011, 46; Lazar 2013). This would be the case with homeless people who are not self-sufficient and mostly rely on social welfare, which leads to not being treated or feeling to fully belong to society (McRobbie 2008, 7). In this sense people can end up being excluded from certain formal rights that citizenship normally offers them (Arnold 2004, 3), and strongly criticized by others (McRobbie 2008, 7). When citizens are not able to fully participate in society as homeless people often do not, they tend to be seen as lesser or ‘bad’ citizens compared to their political equals who are perceived as full, or ‘good’ citizens (Arnold 2004, 46; Leibovits 2020, 326). Due to this, homeless people – especially women who are poor and of colour – are according to Leibovits (2020, 325) more susceptible to exclusion from political



participation because they are less likely to be self-sufficient and independent and therefore only have liminal citizenship. These already marginalized groups are often positioned in even more precarious situations, are seen as economically dependent and thus deviant from the ideal citizen (Arnold 2004, 6). Homeless people in this case have in essence become like Agamben (1998, 8) his *homo sacer*, they are reduced to bare life by both society and institutions and included in the juridical order only through the virtue of their exclusion. These people do have formal citizenship but are not considered as full citizens. Who these people are will be further explained in the next part.

## Into the Field

The Netherlands has about 36 thousand homeless people of whom a third mostly live in the four biggest cities: Amsterdam, Rotterdam, the Hague, and Utrecht. Instead of focussing on one of the cities with high numbers of homeless people, I focus on Eindhoven, the fifth largest city in the Netherlands which has not received a lot of attention with their policies in the homeless community. Within the city there are four main homeless organisations: *Springplank040*, *het Leger des Heils* (Salvation Army), *NEOS*, and *Ervaring die Staat*. My field research was conducted all over Eindhoven, but I will give a short summary of the organisations I was in touch with most often. I do this in order to provide an understanding of their activities when I mention the organisations throughout the thesis. *Springplank040* is the main contractor and focusses on getting homeless people back into society as efficiently as possible through promoting self-reliance and the principle of work first (Springplank040, 2021). Since 1 April 2022 *Springplank040* fully arranges the *Centrale Inloop*, a day shelter and the location where people can go to when they become homeless. Here they will talk with coordinators from *Springplank040* and the municipality to get a sense of the situation this person is in. When everything goes well this person should receive help as soon as possible. Up until 1 April 2022 the Salvation Army managing the *Centrale Inloop* but pulled out due to different opinions on the workings of the system. The Salvation Army also has a location in the city centre which indefinitely houses up to 12 residents. One of the other main organisations is *NEOS*, however, I had little to no contact with these employees and homeless people because this organisation is mainly focussed on vulnerable people often connected to domestic violence – something I did not focus on during this research. Furthermore, there is *Ervaring die Staat*, an organisation focussed on a bottom-up approach and empowering homeless through meaningful activities. They also aim to raise awareness on themes such as homelessness,

poverty, and loneliness among a larger audience in order to help break through stigmas. Moreover, *'t Eindje* is an infamous night shelter which houses the long term homeless who have most difficulties getting out of their problems. Besides these organisations there also are several other ecclesiastical bodies which operate independently. The ones I had frequent contact with were *inloophuis 't Hemeltje*, and Saint Catherine Church. On Mondays I volunteered at *'t Hemeltje*, which was open from 12:00 to 15:00 from Sundays to Thursdays and offers a warm meal, possibility to shower, wash and get a new change of clothes. The Saint Catherine Church had a similar open house where people can get a warm lunch and find a place to get some rest, but also offer services such as free daily meals, dental care, help with bureaucracies. Besides that, the church organised several events for the homeless in Eindhoven, such as a free clothing fair and a free three course dinner.

My research population was focussed on homeless women. However, before conducting this research I did not have clear picture of who the homeless women of Eindhoven were. It was through contacting shelters that I got to know who who could or wanted to be potential participants (Runnels et al. 2009, 60). Even though homelessness is the common factor between the women I research, they are not a homogenous population as there are a variety of factors and backgrounds that may have influenced the lives of these women. These factors entail aspects as class and age, but also sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, education level, and spirituality, to name just a few. Some are homeless for a longer period of time, whereas others are only shortly homeless. Homelessness does not discriminate by age, however, due to ethical reasons I focussed on women aged 19 up until 59 years old. I focussed on women who are in possession of the Dutch nationality, thus thereby excluded migrant workers and refugees who have become homeless during their time in the Netherlands. I conducted informal conversations, interviews, and participant observation with a total of ten homeless women. Eight of these women were currently living in a shelter, one was living outside, and one had formerly been homeless. Three of them were religious and practiced this in their own ways – one very radical in her Christian believes, another less so, and one of them was Muslim. One of these women was bisexual. Nine out of ten were single, one had a fiancée. Furthermore, I interviewed and had informal talks with multiple employees of the previously mentioned organisations. Among them were outreaching managers working at *Ervaring die Staat*, the street pastor from the Saint Catherine Church, security guards working at both the *Centrale Inloop* and *'t Eindje*, coordinators from *Springplank040*, and employees and volunteers at *'t Hemeltje*.

## Methodology and Positionality

Throughout a three-month research period this anthropological thesis was conducted from 7 February until 1 May 2022. During these three months I have conducted research using several ethnographic methods, which included participant observation, in-depth interviews, informal conversations, and photo elicitation. I have studied how feelings of belonging among homeless women in Eindhoven are influenced by being or having been homeless in relation to the care practices provided by homeless institutions. I spoke with a total of 10 homeless women and several employees and volunteers of the previously mentioned organisations. As requested by all of the homeless women, they will remain anonymous throughout this thesis to ensure their safety and privacy, since most of them were in rather precarious situations. Lilian, however, is the only exception to the anonymity. During her time of being homeless she has made quite the conducted many interviews with newspapers, collaborated with the municipality of Eindhoven and even participated in a few TV programs to spread awareness on homelessness, hence she wanted her name to not be anonymized. Because of the small field of research, the homeless organizations have remained their original names as well for clarity but are not always linked to specific homeless women to ensure the anonymity of the latter.

Participant observation was one of the most important methods in conducting this qualitative research. This entails according to DeWalt and DeWalt (2010, 12) taking “part in the daily activities, rituals, interactions, and events of a group of people as one of the means of learning the explicit and tacit aspects of their life routines and their culture.” I was conscious of the group of homeless women being a particularly vulnerable group which is precisely why I got in touch with them through homeless shelters. I wanted to make sure that the women I with whom I would speak were mentally stable and could give informed consent to participating with my research. As I expected beforehand, it took some time to get in touch with the right people as I was a new face in a relatively small community. However, I managed to make the right connections and speak to a total of ten women who were willing to, either shortly or in-depth, tell me about their life and experiences as being homeless. With three of them: Lillian, Samira, and Stacia – of different age, religion, and background – I established rapport and carried out several informal and in-depth interviews. I joined them during regular, day-to-day activities and routines such as going for a walk or coffee, picking up medicine, and having lunch or dinner together. With these activities I submerged myself into a world I was previously not familiar with and build rapport with these three homeless women. The building of rapport was something that I did not want to rush, and should not be rushed (O’Reilly 2009,

175). By taking part in their daily interactions, encounters, and events I learned more about the overt and covert facets of their way of life (DeWalt and DeWalt 2010, 13) and developed a better understanding of their (social) life and its fundamental processes (O'Reilly 2012, 86). I noticed that most of the women were happy to talk about their lives with someone who was not part of a homeless organisation. The more we established a level of trust, the easier they found it to have open conversations about topics they wanted to talk about, such as past experiences that have made a mark on their lives. Through this I got more insights on their personal experience on what it is like to live outside, in shelters, or to hop to different couches from friends or family.

Another method I used throughout the research were semi-structured interviews and informal talks. By conducting semi-structured interviews, I used a pre-made list of topics and questions which I was planned to ask the participants (Bernard 2002, 165). It gave both me the opportunity during an interview to go off topic if it was deemed interesting. To gain more insights in how the organisations with which the women are in regular touch, I carried out both semi-structured interviews and informal talks with a variety of employees. Among the employees were outreaching managers, a street pastor, security guards, coordinators, and several volunteers. They all gave me some insights into the workings of the system, but also shared their perspectives on the women who they know or knew to be homeless. Especially for preparing interviews with homeless women, I considered certain topics to not be relevant for the purpose of this thesis, such as possible traumatic experiences from the past, and therefore not ask about it. However, some of the women did bring up certain events of their past themselves. In line with the ethical aspects of this research I checked with the women whether they were okay to continue the interview or would rather stop. This only happened once, when I spoke to a woman who suddenly started crying and telling me about her sexually abusive past. During that moment I was slightly confused by the sudden change in the conversation, so I suggested we took a break to give her a breather. I had considered in advance to stop an interview when experiences of (illegal) traumas might be brought up, but when this happened, I also did not want to blow off the conversation when she might feel the need to talk about it. In spite of her tears, she wanted to continue to talk, but after a couple more minutes I decided it would be best to stop the conversation. I only this once had to end a conversation sooner than expected, but it showed the traumatic past some women still have to deal with.

In addition to this, I also volunteered in one of the *inloophuizen* in Eindhoven. I did this in order to become a familiar face in the community and with that gain more trust, but also to give something back to the community. There I was able to occasionally speak to both

homeless women and men who visited the *inloophuis*. Besides that, I considered sleeping at a night shelter to experience what it would be like as a woman. However, I had already decided before the start of my field research not to experience this. Mainly since these beds are for people who *really* need it and because I was aware of the shortage in beds available in Eindhoven. This did limit me to experience what it is like to be homeless at night, but also spent more time with the women, and built an even stronger rapport.

Throughout the field research I have had to consider my positionality as a researcher constantly. I knew beforehand that the most obvious and biggest difference between me and the women I would speak to was that I had a place of my own to go back to. However, during fieldwork I realized even more that I was in a privileged position. Especially in the beginning of February when the days and nights were cold and wet, I was extra aware there were people outside who had nowhere else to go. Besides that, power dynamics in research often are in favour of that of the researcher, and not of the participant (O'Reilly 2012, 68). I needed to consider that within my position as researcher, interlocutors might look up to me as someone who could improve their situation. Unfortunately, I was in no such position to do this and sometimes felt powerless in being unable to help them with struggles they faced, such as the frustrations of bureaucracies of the municipality or finding a place to live.

I also needed to consider that I was going to be with homeless women on a daily basis and might hear about or end up in situations I did not anticipate beforehand. These could entail illegal activities such as dealing or buying drugs, hear about prostitution, or other illegal acts of the kind. Even though this was not the aim of my research, I did have to prepare on how I should respond to hearing or experiencing such situations. My response would, dependent on the type of activity, if it was happening now or in the past, whether it was something that had an effect on them or the research, for me to consider whether I should continue the research or for example would need to inform external parties about it. However, I had to recognize that when intervening the research by informing an external party about certain illegal activities, I would go against the confidentiality and trust the participant has put in me (Silverman 2016, 34). I was something that I had to consider when I was first invited to visit the tent camp Lilian was staying. I was warned by an employee of one of the homeless organisations to watch out for the kind of people I could encounter there – referring to possible drug addicts who could be unpredictable. However, I had visited the location before with an outreaching team member, so I was not unfamiliar with the camp. Other than that, the location was tolerated by the municipality, so not entirely illegal. I decided to go because I knew she was expecting me, and

I felt I could not let her down or show I did not trust her by not showing up. I got the personal phone number of the employee who warned me, just in case, but in the end, other than it being very cold and wet, the tent camp felt like a safe place to be because Lilian cared for those who were there.

## **Structure of the Thesis**

In researching how feelings of belonging among homeless women in Eindhoven are impacted by practices of care, I dive into several points to further elaborate on the main question. Starting with Chapter 1, I will further elaborate on the operations and interactions between the organisations and the workers that I was most closely associated with. Additionally, I will draw attention to the variations in how homeless persons are cared for, how they might lead to conflict in the community, and how they may affect the citizenship of homeless women. Chapter 2 explores how the women I spoke to may believe that their opinions don't matter as much as those of other Eindhoven residents. In this context they often feel as though care facilities are not making an attempt to better their circumstances, and as a result, they are unable to receive the treatment they believe they are entitled to. I will thereby consider the in- and/or exclusion that women may experience through the practices of care provided by homeless organisations (Thelen 2021). In the third and final chapter I will explore the affects the feelings of exclusion through care practices can have on several of the homeless women. Even though their formal rights Dutch citizenship brings are barely affected, there are informal rights to their citizenship that they feel are limited. Feelings of exclusion also bring about a lack in feelings of belonging such as within a community or to the city of Eindhoven. Such feelings are often occur tacitly and are different for every individual (Wood and Waite 2011, 201). I found that the homeless women do find small ways of coping with this lack of belonging. Through social and spatial dynamics, they find ways to integrate and thereby experience sense of belonging (Fields 2011, 259). These empirical chapters aim to describe the experiences I have had during my research in the field. They built on one another to finally work towards the conclusion. This thesis will be concluded by stating the importance of shining a light on homeless women who are both in society and in academic literature left in the dark. By bridging the empirical research with academic literature on care, citizenship and belonging I want to paint an understanding of the limiting effects of the rights of homeless women in Eindhoven.

## Chapter 1 – Complex Organisations

I discovered during my fieldwork, there are a lot of organisations, policies, and places to go to for homeless people. It took some time to get to know more about the decentralization of the municipality and which organisations were responsible for what, I only got intrigued more. In this first Chapter I will provide a better grasp of the organisations and the structures they are in. I will do this through the workings and relations between the organisations and the employees with whom I was involved with most into more detail below. On top of that I will highlight the differences in caring for homeless people and how this can cause tensions in the field.

### Fragmentation and cooperation

Until January 2021, there was a lot of fragmentation among the many homeless organisations in Eindhoven. I met with Lennard, a middle-aged man who worked at the *inloophuis* for the past three years and has a past of addiction and homelessness. During our talk he told me the following about his views of the system: “There were a lot [of places for social care], and what was also striking to me was that everyone was sort of on their own island” (Lennard, interview, 31 March 2022). As Lennard mentioned to me, most shelters and institutions were focussed on doing their own thing within the system to help homeless people who needed care. He continued to mention that he “Felt like the organisations actually had no idea who was doing what or where. I thought that was really crazy.” In the past there was little intercommunication between organizations, which did not favour the throughput of people. The process of getting the appropriate help could even take up to 6 or 8 weeks, or even longer (Hoekstra 2021). The role of the municipality within this way of working was to find out what a person needed, which was done at a small location in the city centre. When this was figured out, a person in need of shelter was sent to wherever a bed was available. However, this meant that someone with relatively minor problems could end up in several different shelters, one of which was ‘*t Eindje*. This night shelter is tucked away under a large parking lot, and it was not until this research started that I realized a homeless shelter was located there. To me it always looked a lot more like an entrance to the basement of the parking lot. I had my first visit there at the end of February, and met up with one of the *Springplank* coordinators, a woman in her mid-twenties with a background in social work. She was stationed there for the day and told me: “The people who reside here are mainly long-term homeless people who camp with various problems such as drug addictions and have a lot of difficulties getting out of that circle” (coordinator, interview, 21 February 2022). She mentioned there were plans to close ‘*t Eindje* at the

beginning of 2021, but as of my research it is still open and houses homeless people. Reason for this was according to her: “There simply is a lack of beds in the city, so this shelter is operating much longer than it actually should.” Being sent to this location meant that someone who deals with only a few issues could end up among people who camp with much more serious problems such as a drug addiction. This lack of care in placing people with different needs together, made that the problems a homeless person deals with could get worse by staying among people with even more troubles on their minds. This working of the system could create, as one employee from the *Springplank* said, “inhumane situations”.

Hence the municipality of Eindhoven came with a way to tackle this fragmentation and improve the workings of the social shelters in the city. This involved a decentralization of the municipality by taking a step back in the social care process of the homeless people and shift responsibility towards the private, more specialized organizations. Since January 2021 one main contractor, the *Springplank*, is appointed for the next five years and will receive and divide the yearly subsidies of 9.5 million euros among the other organisations (Hoekstra 2021). The process for homeless people through this new way of working should be much faster, a result the municipality also wants to see (Hoekstra 2021). Renate Richters, alderwoman for youth, care and welfare, poverty and integration, said about the new system that “within two weeks someone who needs help should have appropriate shelter and guidance customized to the individual” (Nonner 2021). To improve one’s situations, people should be placed at a location based on the problems they have, not simply where there is a bed available. This social policy has been implemented for a little over a year now, but “organisations still have cold feet and there are still some teething problems” (Lennard, interview, 31 March 2022). Even though there is better communication between the different homeless organisations, some women still feel like they are being “tossed around” by the system. Marie was the first woman I interviewed and when I met her, I immediately felt comfortable. We sat face-to-face in the living/dining area of *’t Eindje* at a small table for two. She was a large, 58-year-old women whose voice was loud but kind and felt like someone down-to-earth you could easily joke around with. However, she immediately started to tell her story. She had a good upbringing with loving parents who encouraged her swimming career. “It was actually when I fell madly in love with one of my colleagues at a bar where I worked, that it all went downhill.” At the age of 19 she got in contact with meth and heroin through her colleagues and got addicted. Over the course of her life, she tried several times to get clean, but it was not until she was 57 and her mother died, that she was able to stop. “I got picked up by *Bemoezorg*, at my mother’s place where I lived and put me in a shelter. But I have been going back and forth between various locations, where people



keep focussing on different goals” (Marie, interview, 11 March 2022). With this story of Marie I want to show that even though there the changes are applied, the operations are still not optimal for everyone to create a bit of a steady foundation to improve one’s situation.

This new way of working unfortunately did not fit all opinions of the people who are part of the social care system for the homeless. Because several of the ecclesiastical bodies in Eindhoven, such as the Saint Catherine Church, *inloophuis ‘t Hemeltje*, and the Salvation Army, did not agree with the new approach they decided not to join. The starting point is offering help, but according to the street pastor of the St. Catherine Church: “This quick way of working does not fit everyone” (street pastor, interview, 24 February 2022). Esther, one of the employees at *‘t Hemeltje*, said something in similar vein: “This system is mainly focussed on people who *just* got homeless. I think the long-term homeless are still missed within the new system. It is one of the reasons *‘t Hemeltje* has decided not to participate [with the new system]. We think all people should *always* be welcome” (Esther, interview, 17 February 2022). With all people Esther means both the long-term homeless who are known to cause unrest, but also the migrant workers who are not allowed at other shelters. These migrant workers are labelled as *niet rechthebbend* (not entitled) and frequently visit *‘t Hemeltje* and the church. In their perspective the homeless people are not seen as people but categorized in those who are allowed to receive care and those who do not. The street pastor working for the Saint Catherine Church told me his thoughts on this exclusion: “Thinking of the bed-bath-bread-arrangements everyone should be able to get shelter. The fact that migrant workers are denied entrance is something that dazzled me and many alike here at the church, that they and women among them, are not allowed inside [night shelters]” (street pastor, interview, 24 February 2022). Esther told me about the values of their location and how this is different from the other non- ecclesiastical shelters in Eindhoven. “We are like a living room, a community where everyone can come to rest, without us wanting anything from them, and where they hopefully can feel a bit more connected with society” (Esther, interview, 17 February 2022). The differences in ways of helping between the professional organisations and the ecclesiastical bodies makes that fragmentation is still present.

Similar to Allahyari’s (2000) research at different homeless shelters in the United States, a difference can be experienced in how people are treated in line with values of organisations. Whereas the ecclesiastical bodies such as the Salvation Army have, according to Lennard: “broad knowledge and a social heart and sees making connection as a starting point. *Springplank* is more of a business organization” (Lennard, interview, 25 April 2022). Such differences in values also make for other tactics in approaches towards homeless people

and what is expected of them. When looking at two of the day shelters in Eindhoven, *Centrale Inloop* and *Inloophuis 't Hemeltje* they both have a different character and policies when comparing them. When I first visited the *Centrale Inloop* in the beginning of March, I already noticed a contrast in atmosphere compared to *'t Hemeltje*. Even though both shelters are located near the busy Kruisstraat in Woensel Zuid, which does not have the best reputation, the entrance of the *Centrale Inloop* is tucked away between several businesses in a side street from the Kruisstraat, whereas *'t Hemeltje* is located in a residential area. When I first entered the *Centrale Inloop*, a security guard and a woman were sitting behind a table at the entrance and looked me up and down, visibly puzzled about my presence. They wrote down my name and after explaining the reason I was visiting I was free to walk around. The open space was decorated with a long table, a few comfortable looking lounge chairs which were accompanied by a rug and some plants, and a couple computers in the back. However, despite the clean look and decorations the *Centrale Inloop* felt colder, and a bit more clinical even, than *'t Hemeltje* which almost felt like a living room. That same day I talked to one of the people who welcomed me, Silom. He was the first security guard to start there three years ago at the *Centrale Inloop* and told me about who was allowed in the shelter: “Together with the municipality it was decided that from February [2022], the unentitled homeless people who have no *regiobinding*<sup>1</sup> to Eindhoven would no longer be allowed to enter the shelter” (Silom, interview, 3 March 2022). Reason for this was that there were too many people visiting the *Inloop* which could cause unpleasant situations. Someone was caught bringing “a kitchen knife, we found bottles of wine in the toilet, empty bags [for drugs].” Because of this and several other incidents there was an increase in security. “It was previously run by the Salvation Army, so due to their openness and Christian attitude, there was no security at all back then. But after some time... it got unmanageable. *Springplank* got in control, after which we started with one security guard, but we are now with three to ensure the safety of the people.” A change in the organisation and its culture also changed the rules to be stricter. An increase in guards was implemented to show the shelter is a safe place to be and cares for the well-being of the homeless who visit. However, the presence of guards always seen as a place being safe. During an interview with Lillian at the ends of April, she said about guards at *'t Eindje*: “What are those guards for? It's better to get rid of those and put in a few experience workers, because then you create a completely different atmosphere. It's almost like you're a criminal when you go there.” Lillian points out

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<sup>1</sup> *Regiobinding*, or being bounded to a region, means that a person cannot go to another city to enjoy a better shelter.

that the treatment she gets when visiting night shelter 't *Eindje* makes her feel as if her rights as a human being are taken away. One is searched when entering the shelter and constantly kept an eye on. The impression of the presence of the guards feels more restricting for her than it does to Silom, who sees it as a place being safe for people to visit *because* people keep an eye out. Another difference between organisations I was told about by Esther, about a rule they handle at 't *Hemeltje*: “When someone makes a mistake, they risk getting a sanction and can’t come back for a week or two, but afterwards they can always visit again” (Esther, interview, 17 February 2022). They stand for forgiveness and inclusiveness of everyone who wants or needs to make use of the care that is offered to make people feel included. Esther continued: “In other places such as the *Centrale Inloop* people can get banned for life if they make a mistake.” That is in line with what I was told by Frans, one of the coordinators working for *Springplank* at the *Centrale Inloop* with whom I shortly spoke on 8 April: “When we catch someone stealing within the shelter, we make sure that they will get banned because we do not want these people here and they don’t have to come back. [The homeless] know that, but it does happen sometimes.” It shows a zero-tolerance policy of *Springplank040*, which clashes with the more forgiving character of for example 't *Hemeltje*, which follows more Christian values.

In this chapter I explained how the fragmentation of the past has led to the recent decentralization and rearranging how the homeless care organisations within Eindhoven cooperate. Tensions in the field happen mostly between organisations and their ideas on how homeless people should be cared for. Even though there has been a centralization in offering care, a difference in values on who needs or deserves what kind of treatment, still causes the system to experience some fragmentation but in terms of values. The ecclesiastical organisations have different views on the treatment that the homeless should get. They are charities which do not want to force action or change but simply offer a safe space to get some rest. Whereas the specialized organisations, such as *Springplank040*, actively aims to offer help in order to get someone’s life back on track as quickly as possible. Since every homeless person is different I do believe there is nothing wrong with both of these approaches. There is a need to have various options for care because no one is the same in their needs. Nonetheless, these differences subsequently result in a different way of taking care which causes friction in what is perceived as the *best* way. Which leads me to the next chapter on the perception of women on the care which is offered by the homeless organisations.

## Chapter 2 – (Not) Being Cared For

“The rats have more rights in my city than I have” (Lilian, interview, 4 April 2022).

This chapter discusses how some of the homeless women with whom I talked can feel like they are treated as lesser citizens that do not matter as much as other citizens in Eindhoven. I found that in the perception of these homeless women there sometimes is a lack of effort put in by care institutions to improve their situation and in that sense are unable to get what they feel they deserve. Throughout this chapter I will introduce the women who do not feel cared for by those people who can have an effect on their situation. I discuss how the perceptions of women on the care they receive might result in experiences of in- or exclusion from care practices. This could affect their agency and thus the power they feel they have to change their own situation. Some of the women I talked to feel a distance between themselves, friends and family and other citizens in Eindhoven and with this they could feel excluded from and lose a connection with society (Arnold 2004, 3).

During several conversations I have had with homeless women, it became clear to me that the care some of them received is not the care they feel they should have deserved. On 11 March 2022, I had my first talk with Samira, a 53-year-old woman staying at *'t Eindje*. She told me that because of several setbacks she has had in her life, she agreed in a desperate attempt to earn more money to a cannabis plantation in her apartment. About a year ago, she was caught. She panicked and, in an impulse, jumped from her three-story-high balcony, breaking both her legs and injuring several other parts of her body. After being all by herself in the hospital, she was discharged and ended up living in several shelters. Even though she has been getting help from a coordinator who helps her deal with her process of getting back to a normal life, she still feels she is not adequately helped:

I want a room in another shelter, but they say I cannot get it. But why? For some reason I have been put on a black list, but they don't tell me why. Am I still being judged because I had the weed plantation? Because I know a man who also had one, but he does have a house now! That feels like discrimination, I tell you. (Samira, informal interview, 13 April 2022).

Unfortunately, I could not check or confirm her presence on a black list. However, after some research on the internet I assumed that she was put on a certain list by a housing corporation in Eindhoven because of the weed plantation in her previous house. This would mean she has been on there for about a year, but also that she can be refused to get a house for up to five years. Even though Samira is getting help, she feels like she does not get what she wants, which

is to have a place of her own where she can have privacy. However, she cannot get this due to her past with a weed plantation. The way the system works is something she finds hard to grasp. With this example I want to show that women can feel like they are fighting bureaucracies which can be too difficult to understand for people who are not actively involved in it.

After several talks with different women, I figured that they all had a different conception on what the type of care is they would like to have. Care can mean something different to everyone, it can be someone who listens to what she has to tell, a helping hand in figuring out bureaucracies or a someone who can motivate the other into doing what needs to be done. In that sense care can be both verbal and non-verbal actions (Mol, Moser and Pols 2015, 10). Care practices, or lack thereof, provided through shelters and other institutions can cause tensions between the receivers and the givers (Buch 2015, 282). Especially when the care-receivers feel like they are not getting the care and help they would like to see fit for them. In Samira her case she wants more than just a bed and a roof over her head, she wants to have privacy. However, the people Samira thinks are able to help her at the shelter are often unable to make concrete change her situation.

### **Feeling like second hand citizens**

Throughout the research period I got to talk to ten homeless women and a variety of employees and volunteers working with them in homeless shelters and other organizations. During the past months I realized that there are a lot of organizations and initiatives for people without a roof over their heads. From several interviews I found that the people who work for homeless organizations and shelters do their work with a lot of care and good intentions. Erik, an employee at *Ervaring die Staat* who I joined on one of his walks through the city, told me about caring for the homeless people he works with: “Homeless people distrust the system. So by keep showing up and building a level of trust I want to show a human side which they can trust again” (Erik, interview, 17 March 2022). It shows the time and care someone wants to invest in those who need it. I did, however, not realize until I talked with several of the homeless women how this care is experienced.

How care is given and who deserves care is very much depended on and within societies, as not everyone is deemed to deserve care (Thelen 2015, 505). In Eindhoven exclusion of care often is based on the region to which one is bound or country of origin. Night shelters within Eindhoven refuse migrant workers and refugees because they are not Dutch citizens. Day shelter the *Centrale Inloop* does not accept people who are not from the region

of Eindhoven, to avoid overcrowding and possible dangerous situations. Both individuals and groups of people can be selected – or not selected – on their suitability of being objects for care, which can be based on aspects such as gender, age, ethnicity, and social status (Thelen 2015, 505), or in Eindhoven on one's city or country of origin. In Samira her case, she felt that she was excluded from receiving appropriate care because of her past actions which, due to her economic situation, put her in her current situation. Because of reasons unknown to her she was told she was put on a black list by the housing cooperation, meaning that she is not eligible for a house or studio from a specific shelter in Eindhoven. She told me: "I don't know why I am still on that black list; I am behaving well but somehow some man with children who also had a weed plantation suddenly is able to get a house!" (Samira, interview, 13 April 2022). This exclusion of certain rights because of being put on a black list can be seen as justified by the housing corporation as being unworthy of care due to past behaviour (Black 2018, 82). According to Arnold (2004, 17) this is especially the case with homeless women, who are perceived to not be worthy of care based on criteria such as lack of economic participation, dependence of social welfare, or the stigma that surrounds homeless people.

There also remains a shortage in space for the homeless to sleep within Eindhoven. During the interview I had with Lennard he mentions this shortage: "It already is difficult to find a house, but there remains a lack of space and beds for homeless people to sleep within the city" (Lennard, interview, 31 March 2022). People therefore often have to find other places to sleep such as outside or when possible, with friends or family. However, one of the members of the outreaching team told me that sleeping on the street happens less among homeless women than among men (fieldnotes, 18 March 2022). Shelters often only have one room for women due to their low numbers, which means that when numbers start to unexpectedly grow, they have to improvise with the same space to house more women. During my research I spoke with several homeless women who felt their rights as Dutch citizens were not deemed important. This was especially the case when in March 2022 the winter shelter for homeless people in Eindhoven was cleared a couple of weeks sooner than expected. Normally the winter shelter, which can house a total of 90 people, would close when weather starts to get better at the beginning of April. However, temperatures were already rising in mid-March. Therefore, the decision was made by *Springplank040* to temporarily house Ukrainian war refugees at the winter shelter. This made a big, mostly negative impact on the homeless who thought to reside there until the beginning of April. Karin, a former homeless woman who now works at one of the homeless organisations shared her frustration about this: "It's awful that our own people are just kicked out for people who are not even citizens of the Netherlands!" (Karin, interview,

29 March 2022). For many alike it felt as if the rights of homeless people were denoted below that of the refugees who actually, in their eyes, were in a similar situation (fieldnotes, 29 March 2022). This was not only a problem for the people who were kicked out, but also caused unrest among people in other shelters who had to make room for the dislocated homeless. Two of the people who felt that change were Samira and Marie, who had to share their bedroom with another woman who had to look for another place to sleep. Especially Samira got annoyed and frustrated by this change.

It was on a relatively warm Wednesday afternoon in April 2022 that I met up with Samira. While we walked around one of the squares in the center of Eindhoven Samira sighed and starts of with “A lot has happened, Kim.” The last few months she shared her room with one other woman, Marie, who has become one of her closest friends. About a week ago they had gotten an extra female roommate who was dislocated from the winter shelter due to the arrival of Ukrainian refugees. Their room now tightly fitted three beds, so there was little room for personal space. Samira ranted to me: “She is constantly drunk and stays awake until late and has peed several times on the floor and in her bed! She walks around naked, which I really do not like and she went through our personal belongings!” Samira, visible irritated, stopped walking every now and again to look at me directly to make her point. “I have asked the guards several times now if I can get a different room, but they won’t do anything about it. I *just* want to get some rest.” (fieldnotes 13 April 2022)

She feels she is not heard by the organizations that are there to help her – feels she deserves more care. Even though the night shelter is known to be a place where “long term homeless people who struggle with addictions” (coordinator, interview, 11 March 2022) reside, Samira and Marie were able to find their rest there together. However, both of them were unable to get much sleep or rest with the continuing disturbance (fieldnotes, 29 march). It made them feel there was a lack of care at the shelter for them which made them feel like they did not count. “I keep trying with the guards and coordinators to do something about this woman, but nothing is happening!” (Samira, interview, 13 April 2022).

### **Care and a Lack of Agency**

Those who receive care are often seen as relatively helpless and not capable to provide for themselves because they have needs that they cannot fulfil (Tronto 1993, 120). Such needs among homeless are for example financial stability, and a place for themselves. Homeless people often rely on the assistance the government provides, such as social benefits, but also on the care that is offered by specialized organisations. Those caregivers can perceive this need

of care as a neediness which confirms a lacking autonomy that could create pity for care receivers (Tronto 1993, 120), in this case homeless people. How caregivers perceive the need of a homeless woman depends on the relation between the care giver and receiver. A homeless woman in a shelter who is cared for by professionals can feel like she is put in a powerless position. At the beginning of March, I was first introduced to Samira. The employee who arranged this was at first a bit hesitant whether she would set me up with her: “She is known to have a lot of self-pity, considers herself to be the victim, and cries a lot” (coordinator, interview, 11 March 2022). It felt like the employee looked down on her due to Samira being very emotional. However, because we were in the controlled environment of *‘t Eindje* where could keep an eye on us she considered it okay for us to meet. After our first talk I understood why her emotional state was mentioned. She cried a lot while telling her story, during which I checked multiple times if she was okay to proceed with the conversation. She indicated that she wanted to share it with me because she knew that what she did was wrong, but the decisions were made during a different time of her life. A couple of weeks later during another informal talk, she shared with me her feelings on how she was treated by the people from one of the previous shelters she was in: “I felt so ashamed of myself because of how I was treated by them. They made me feel worthless, as if they did not care for me. They could never understand what I was going through” (Samira, interview, 11 March 2022). She felt they did not believe her and that she abused the medicine she had for the recovery of her injuries from the jump from the balcony. Unfortunately, I was unable to confirm this with the other employees. When she was living in a previous shelter she felt she was predominantly seen as a homeless woman who made a bad decision: “Am I still being judged for what I did in the past?” Samira felt that she already paid for her mistakes, but nonetheless was still being punished by the way she was treated. Not only Samira, but also several other women I have spoken with indicated (in)directly that they felt powerless within their position in society and the possibility to change their situation. Another such a case on feeling powerless within homeless organisations comes from Lilian, who told me about the contact she had with one of the people from an organization who helped her:

Because I had an unprofessional professional that I asked at one point, whether he couldn't just give me the e-mail address of the debt collector [with whom she had to get in touch]. He told me he had already erased all the information. Excuse me? You should keep that for so many years, mate! That totally screwed it up for me (fieldnotes, 19 April 2022).



The professional in question is a person who in Lilian's eyes failed to care for her and manage certain bureaucracies she was involved in. Thereby he lacked the power to help Lilian with her needs and change her situation, which in turn causes frustration with Lilian who again gets disappointed by the people from the system. Francien told me about how a couple of years ago she saw homeless women try to get priority in housing by getting pregnant: "it did not always meant that you got priority, certainly not anymore now. But if you think you will get priority by getting pregnant and you don't, well... you're suddenly in a pretty difficult situation" (Francien, 10 March 2022). According to Francien women tried to find ways to change their situation any way they could, even resorting to getting pregnant. The hope to make a change is present, which is an important part in the process to try and make a change (Finfgeld-Connett 2010, 464), however they lacked agency to bring about change in their situation.

Living in a shelter means that one must adhere to a set of rules to be able to stay there. Such rules in shelters have the potential to empower, but also dis-empower people (Kissman 1999, 383), and are set up to implement a sense of structure and predictability (Finfgeld-Connett 2010, 465). Even though it can limit one in their freedom, rules are set for long-term benefits of the homeless and control behaviour such as drug abuse. At the beginning of April, I met up with Stacia at the shelter where she stayed. Before we went outside for coffee, I was invited to have a look at her private room, which she was very happy with: "All private rooms are furnished with a bed, table, and closet. It's nice to have a place of my own, instead of a shared room. I just cleaned it because we can get unexpected checks whether the room is clean." These checks are done to keep a tidy living among the residents and to avoid it getting messy. Stacia does not mind: "It's one of the rules. If it gets too messy you risk going back to a shared room." Residents are not allowed to make big changes the room such as painting it, but it is okay to slightly adapt it: "You can move furniture around and with sticky tape put photos or posters on the wall." She smiles and points to a few pictures of herself with her fiancée above her bed. This way she can still make it a bit more personal (fieldnotes, 1 April 2022). Such rules forces residents to behave accordingly in order for them to smoothly get back to living in a place of their own. This shelter where Stacia is staying is focussed on getting its residents with less severe problems back into society and living on their own again. It can be a long and slow process, but through individual help the shelter aims to accelerate this. Even though living in a shelter can limit one's freedom, it is done to provide some rest in someone's life to make steps towards a better future.

Some shelters exercise a curfew, where one needs to be inside before 8 or 10 o'clock in the evening – depending on the shelter – to either claim a bed or to simply keep them off the

street in the evenings. This is frustrating for some women who feel constrained by this. One of them was Emina, with whom I first met mid-March through a coordinator at the *Centrale Inloop*. She was in her late 30s, had a raspy voice, and even though she had an insecurity in the way she moved and talked, she also had an air of independence around her. The two of us were sitting outside the *Centrale Inloop* where she smoked a cigarette she just rolled and talked about the shelter at which she stayed: “It’s a really good place to be, but I often think it’s an annoying time that you have to be in by 10 o’clock. Especially during summer, I would like to stay out longer” (Emina, interview, 5 April 2022). Even though Emina realizes that the curfew is for the best, she still feels held back in her freedom. For some it might be difficult to conform to the rules, but a certain level of routine.

There are two shelters that have an 8 o’clock curfew but have a reason for it. This was explained to me when I had the interview with Silom a few weeks earlier, he told me that:

Having to report before 8 o’clock at night has a reason that [homeless people] don't understand. We have list of reserves. At *'t Eindje* there is a capacity of 30 people, but it may happen that there are 32 or 35 people who signed up. The first 30 are on the list and everyone after that is on reserve. If someone of the list does not show up before 8 o’clock, someone from the reserve list will have a spot. In this way we try, with that system, to fill every night shelter as optimal as possible. Because at 8 o'clock we still have time to move people around, if someone is at one place which is full but another location still has space, we can send them there. That's the main idea behind the curfew (Silom, interview, 3 March 2022).

This curfew might be strict, Silom tells me there are some exceptions to the rule: “We call them *bijzondere klanten* [special guests] who are usually women. So, if someone is later than 8 o’clock, we will not refuse them and handle a different door policy for them. They are treated more leniently” (Silom, interview, 3 March 2022). This shows that the guards who work at the doors are able to see individuals and their context, and not simply deny everyone entrance when someone is late.

Throughout my field research I found that Lilian was the one with the strongest opinion about how the system works. Women who have been on the streets for a longer period, such as Lilian, are the ones who reject care as it was and now is offered. She did not agree with the rules that were handled, and the way people – especially women and migrant workers – were treated by people at the organisations: “The system is failing on every level. There are not enough shelter places (...) The rules, some places have so many rules that is unbearable for some people. Then they are already doomed to fail within such an institution” (Lilian,

interview, 19 April). At the time of my research, she was living in a tent to have the freedom she would not have in a shelter. People who decide not to abide by the rules are seen as *zorgmijders*, or care avoiders, which creates a stigma around them that suggest they do not want to receive care at all. But Lilian pointed out, “maybe the right type of care just is not available for someone yet” (Lilian, interview, 19 April). Lillian wants to change the system, which she sees as suffocating. How Lilian goes against the system is line with what Deborah Fingeld-Connet (2010, 464) notes about homeless women acting in an often counter-productive manner, she has rejecting assistance and wants to be self-reliant. However, refusing it could in a worst-case scenario lead to being rejected from society (Arnold 2004, 3; Thelen 2021, 6). These people are seen as *zorgmijders* (care avoiders) who actively deny care and have the most difficulties in retuning to a ‘normal’ life in society (Lennard, interview, 25 April 2022). In March I had a short interview with Freek, a middle-aged man who works as a coordinator at *t Hemeltje*, who thinks that organisations could be a bit more flexible in their rules: “People often suffer from the strict rules. I think they need stability that also offers flexibility, but that’s difficult... I do think, however, there should be more institutions where you can think outside the box with flexibility in the rules and a more generous attitude” (Freek, interview, 14 March 2022). He sees that rules are limiting people in their freedom, which can hold them back to accepting care. Freek is someone who is part of the ecclesiastical body, which is why I believe he also believes in a more generous attitude among shelters in the system. This limiting of freedom is one of the reasons that Lilian wants to create a community where people can live together without the rules of organisations.

### **Inclusion through Care**

To have positive outcomes in the care that is provided there should be a level of trust from both sides. Not only that, but according to Deborah Fingeld-Connet (2010, 464) sometimes it also involves swallowing one’s pride and trying to function in a system that might not always work for every individual. This is especially the case for homeless women who often camp with trust issues due to their past experiences and traumas. Even if there is little trust in the organisations, some women do accept the help because they know they do it for themselves. Stacia is one of those women: “I’ve been let down many times by the system so many times now. I don’t really trust the way it works, but I do open up to the people who are here to help me because I know when I cooperate, I do it for my future” (Stacia, interview, 25 March 2022). Stacia mentions she learned from her role model, her father who passed away 8 years ago, that: “By being open

and honest about yourself to those who help you, really helps your process, but not everyone does that.” A lack of freedom now, can mean more freedom in the future. However, Joan Tronto (1993, 108), a previous professor in women’s studies, wrote about the ethics of care and argued that perceptions of needs among care givers can sometimes be wrong. Due to miscommunication or simply a misjudgement, someone can receive care that she does not feel as appropriate. Even if the perception of a need is correct, how the care givers choose to meet that need can cause new problems. In this sense it is important for caregivers to create a connection and level of trust to know how homeless women feel in order to appropriately help them.

The caregivers with whom I spoke are helping homeless people with the best intentions. Erik, the outreaching manager from *Ervaring die Staat* aims to build trust told me that: “I want to try and make the homeless who are out on the streets feel a little cared about, that they know they can reach out to me if they want to” (Erik, interview, 17 March 2022). He sometimes encounters women who live on the street and about them said the following: “They’re almost not women anymore, the ones that survive the streets have become so tough and seasoned... They’re almost men.” He explained to me during our day together that even though these women have a lack of trust, he wants to show with a slow and individual approach the human side of the system “that is often missing.” Esther, one of the women working at *‘t Hemeltje* where I volunteered, told me about her experience with homeless women who visit there. At one of the tables in what they call the living room, she explained that she has chosen this location to work because all homeless people are “*always* welcome” (Esther, interview, 17 February 2022). Unlike other shelters in the city, there is no security to show the trust in the homeless people who visit. Esther said that not many women visit the location, but those who do often have been homeless for quite some time. “The long-term homeless people are overlooked in the current way of working. It works best for those who have only been homeless for a short period”. Lennard confirmed that the women who visit *‘t Hemeltje* mostly are the ones who have been in the homeless circuit for quite a while. When they visit the *inloophuis* he said he does not “treat them any different than the men who visit, but I do keep an eye out for them because they are often in a position of dependency on men which makes them more vulnerable. So, when they are here, I want them to feel safe” (Lennard, interview, 25 April 2022). This shows that women might not be treated differently within organisations, they are noticed and kept an eye out for.

Knowing that there are people who care for you makes that one feels valued and belongs. Through care practices and rules handled at homeless organisations and shelters, the homeless women I spoke to experience an exclusion from society. Several of the women felt misunderstood by the coordinators which resulted in them not receiving the care they expected they deserved. With these feelings of exclusion enhanced by care practices, homeless women experience a difference from the other citizens of Eindhoven. In this way, care is part of the processes that engenders belonging. Therefore, I will go further into the citizenship that is experienced among homeless women the next chapter, and how this affects feelings of belonging to Eindhoven and society as a whole.

## Chapter 3 – “You’re Not Seen as a Human Being”

“I’m in a very dramatic comedy and I don’t know who is directing” Lilian, interview, 20 April 2022.

In this third chapter I will continue from the feelings of exclusion and how these contribute to affecting the sense of belonging and citizenship among homeless women in Eindhoven. I will start with how several of the homeless women I spoke with do not feel like real citizens who participate in society and feel that others do not see them as such. Even though they still have the rights that are part of formal citizenship, it is within that realm of formal citizenship that their informal citizenship is affected. I will cover several forms of citizenship that connect to the lives of homeless women, such as cultural citizenship (Ong 1996), which relates to belonging and being part of a community. From there I will proceed to look into coping mechanisms women resort to such as connecting with other homeless people, claiming a space of their own, or finding salvation within religion. It is through these ways that women try to find a sense of belonging on a smaller scale within society.

### Different Kinds of Citizenship

Despite feelings of exclusion through care practices, homeless women are in fact still citizens of the Netherlands. These feelings of exclusion which are present among some of the homeless women, as described in the previous chapter, were mostly attributed to the institutions that promise appropriate care to help them. However, such feelings do not take away the rights that are bestowed upon them as members of both the city of Eindhoven and as citizens of the Netherlands. The formal rights citizenship provides are not so much eliminated by their homelessness since they can still participate through acts as voting, working, having a postal address, and receiving social benefits. Regardless, that does not mean they are in a precarious situation and can feel held back because of their homelessness. Stacia was one of the younger women I spoke with about being homeless. She was forced to live in a shelter as she was kicked out of her boyfriend’s house by his father and could not afford to pay rent. “Everything was fine with me living there, until he suddenly changed his mind about me and kicked me out” (Stacia, interview, 25 March 2022). Stacia told me about some of the decisions that has forced her to make: “I had to quit nursing school because I was homeless. I really enjoyed [school], but just could not combine it with living in a shelter” (Stacia, interview, 25 March 2022). The motivation to participate in society is there, but her being homeless influenced the decisions

she was able to make in life and in that sense limited her freedom. According to Lazar (2013, 52) one of the rights a citizen has is freedom, something which is restricted when someone is homeless. Even though a shelter can provide some safety and a place to find rest, it does not add up to the privacy a place of one's own can provide. Besides that, both day and night shelters have rules which one must abide to, to be able to sleep or live there – such as being inside before 8 or 10 o'clock at night. In line with what Arnold (2004, 46) argues, by accepting welfare or making use of shelters one can find a form of protection, but also lose rights through authoritative policies that decrease freedom.

In line with what Inbal Leibovits (2020) argues, homeless women have in a sense *liminal citizenship*, instead of full citizenship. With liminal citizenship Leibovits (2020 326) means that despite having extremely few resources to advocate for their own needs, wants, and complaints, liminal citizens are subject to laws and rules that are imposed upon them. This limited holds true, however, I do argue that homeless women still have the rights of full citizens, even though for them it does not always feel like that. On April 1<sup>st</sup> I joined Stacia on one of her weekly trips to the 'mail office' at the *Centrale Inloop*. She lived in a shelter just outside the centre of Eindhoven, so we had to bike for about 15 minutes to get there. People who do not have an address are registered at the *Centrale Inloop* with a *postadres* (mailing address) and have a mailbox there. Stacia told me that "it's not really a mailbox but more like a filing system like they used in old detective series." There is an important rule to this mailbox: you have to check and pick up your mail weekly. We entered a small office which a lady behind a desk who after asking Stacia's name, opened a filing cabinet and pulled out two envelopes. "I need to stop by every week to check if I have mail or not, because if I do not, I risk losing my weekly money from my social benefits from the government. But the thing is, I don't get mail every week." It seems like a small task to stop by to check for mail, but as Stacia said as well: "I haven't had mail for 3 weeks in a row, so it could very well be that I don't get mail this week either" (fieldnotes, 1 April 2022). There is a big risk to losing a source of income over something that might seem fairly mundane. This rule which is imposed can put pressure on performing certain actions. However, by having a mailing address, Stacia still holds the formal rights that it brings, she is registered with the municipality and with that is able to receive social benefits and is allowed to vote. Stacia is homeless and limited in her freedom while living in a shelter, but she still is a citizen who holds formal rights.

Citizenship in Ong's (1996, 737) perspective is a cultural process of self-making and power dynamics which results in consent through various forms of control measures by the state. Making the self, however, is constrained by several factors such as race, gender, and

economic and/or class. Therefore, when homeless women in precarious situations perform their citizenship, they have a higher risk to be judged by others. Aihwa Ong (1996, 738) describes the cultural practices and beliefs that result from negotiating the frequently ambivalent and contested relationships with the state and its hegemonic structures which define the standards of belonging within a national population, as cultural citizenship. She defines this simply as “a dual process of self-making and being-made within webs of power linked to the nation-state and civil society” (Ong 1996, 738). Two important aspects of this type of citizenship are identity through self-making and being-made through recognition by others. A homeless woman who is being limited in her self-making and thereby her agency, can in this sense be limited in the power to improve her position. Next to that, especially the latter aspect of recognition is something homeless women seem to miss in their daily lives. Being recognized as an equal human being often means a lot to a woman in a precarious situation, thereby affecting their cultural citizenship. This shows from a conversation Francien had with a homeless woman which she told me about:

A couple of years ago there was this woman here in Eindhoven who had 3 children living with her mother. A woman who was living on the street and who had to stand up in certain ways for herself, let's put it that way. I was talking to her with another colleague when at one point she suddenly said: “You see me as a whore too, you think I'm selling myself and things like that.” She got a little fierce about that. But we told her that even if that would be the case, we have no judgment about that. We don't see you like that either, we see a young woman sitting here who has a very difficult life. That conversation showed me, I felt in my toes, how she as a woman had to survive on the street alone. While we often have an opinion or image of a woman on the street, that woman on the street just as well has an image of women who do not have to survive in such a way, and that image is not always correct either. At the end of that conversation, we saw each other as equals, which was a very pleasant experience for everyone (Francien, interview, 10 March 2022).

Even though Francien stated that she did not judge the homeless woman on her activities, by saying the homeless woman had to stand up in certain ways for herself she did indicate that she was doing sex work to survive. In this sense she still used a stereotype of homeless women. Women are expected to be self-reliant, ambitious, and individualised. It is precisely so that McRobbie (2008, 7) argues that those who are perceived as being on the fringe of this scape are, due to their flawed position, more strongly criticized by others than they previously would have been. Something homeless women themselves often also think. When I talked with Samira, she also wanted to explain several times that she “would never do drugs or... do that



with a man to get by. I will find other ways to survive” (Samira, interview 23 March 2022). That Samira wanted to let me know that she would not resort to sex in exchange for benefits shows that she felt the need to distance herself from this stereotype of what a homeless woman would do to get around and be recognized as a woman who is self-reliant.

Homeless people are frequently perceived as being welfare reliant, present-focused, and irrational by those who are "good citizens"—the self-sufficient taxpayer, rational, and citizen of the future (Leibovits 2020, 326). Homeless persons are in that sense bad citizens and seen as “Others” as they fail to conform to the homogeneous character and to engage economically (Arnold 2004, 18). There is a stereotype of homeless women selling their body for a living, but there also is a stereotype surrounding homeless people being too lazy to work (Leibovits 2020, 327). I found this to not be entirely correct. Being able to work is context based and differs per person. It was a cold and rainy day on April 4<sup>th</sup> when I found myself in Lilian’s tent. She told me about her experience a couple years ago with working and being homeless:

I had a good job, but I had to give it up because I was not allowed to sleep inside a shelter during the winter [shelters did not allow her dog inside]. I couldn't work anymore because the cold affected my muscles and my body. (...) I’m not too lazy to work. I mean I had a great job, but I had to quit because the system did not cooperate with me (Lilian, interview, 4 April 2022).

Through Lilian’s case I want to point to the disadvantage she experienced in being homeless but still wanted to participate in society. As she said, she felt like she had to make the choice to stay outside because of her dog Lava, which according to the rules of shelters was not allowed inside. Lilian told me, “That dog is the most important factor in life. She keeps me clean [from drugs], and she is my motivation to keep going. (...) I would never send her to a dog shelter. If I lost the Lava, I would lose a part of myself” (Lilian, interview, 4 April 2022). Therefore, she made the decision to stay in a tent instead of a shelter to avoid losing the dog. Nonetheless, she kept working because she enjoyed it, until she started to notice the winter cold affecting her body. Because homeless women often do not have a stable place to go back to, are not accepted in shelters because of pets, struggle with trust issues, or traumas from the past, they can find it difficult to keep a steady job (Leibovits 2020, 328). According to Leibovits (2020, 327) there is a stereotype surrounding homelessness based in a neo-liberal context as personal failing within society because someone is too lazy to work, has substance abuse issues, or camps with traumatic experiences and mental illnesses. Some of the women with whom I spoke, showed several explanations for this. Samira was unable to work due to her injuries from which she was still recovering. As explained above, Lilian would like to work, but is

unable to do so due to her living in a tent. These reasons are not written on their backs, which makes for a stereotype to stay present, and they are seen as bad citizens by other economically participating citizens.

When there is an opportunity to participate in the labour market, two of the women I spoke with did want or had taken it. I had a short talk with Lisa, a young woman of around 25 who because of an unstable home situation, had slept outside several times. When we spoke, she told me she had volunteered a few times at one of the shelters in Eindhoven. “It gives me so much energy to be able to do something back for the community. I could really do this every day of the week” (Lisa, interview, 11 April 2022). However, due to her involvement with other homeless people, she decided together with the shelter it to be better to take a step back. Stacia, however, did have a job. Even though she is living in a shelter and is partly under curatorship, she thinks it’s important to keep working when she can do this. “I really think it’s important for me to earn my own money, even though I have to bike 20 kilometres to a game arcade at a holiday park, I really like doing it. It’s money I made myself” (Stacia, interview, 1 April 2022). With Stacia her case I want to show that when women are able to take care of themselves it can give them feeling of control over their situation and provide in a sense more freedom.

However, I will not only be looking at the formal aspects of various citizenships as being or feeling a part of society. The next section will focus on feelings of belonging (or not) to society and how homeless women cope with this.

## **Coping through Belonging**

Everyone belongs – either to a culture, social groups, or social relations, but everyone does with a different intensity (Wood and Waite 2011, 201). Feelings of belonging are inherently linked to having a safe place within the world in order to make sense of it (Yuval-Davis 2011, 35). But when one is lost or unable to find a place they can call home in the world, how can one feel like they belong? The homeless women with whom I spoke all still had some kind of way of belonging to society in Eindhoven, which I will further go into in this section. Although for most of them their social circle on which they depend and project these feelings on had gotten much smaller, those feelings were still present. Every woman I spoke with had her own idea of belonging. An important thing to note about belonging is that it is not something that is easily expressed, but often something that is tacitly experienced (Wood and Waite 2011, 201). Something which should not be surprising as we talk about the concept as *feelings* of belonging. However, I do think that through several actions women showed ways in how they feel like

they belong to society, in their own way. I would like to suggest these are coping mechanisms to their homelessness.

Homeless women can experience various forms of belonging such as on a social or spatial level, but on a smaller scale (Fields 2011, 259). When I conducted the interviews with Samira and Marie at *'t Eindje* they already shared a room together for several months. Marie told me about Samira: “She is such a strong woman for who I have so much respect. She’s a real tough one” (Marie, interview 11 March). The circumstances at the night shelter were not optimal for finding rest, as they shared the common areas with severe drug addicts and long-term homeless people. Nonetheless, in the little room where they slept, they both found comfort and thereby a sense of belonging with each other. In their own ways they are able to care for each other through offering a shoulder to cry on, listen to each other, and accepting each other for who they are. When I was shown the room where they both slept Samira said: “If Marie needs something of my stuff such as shampoo or clothes, she can just take it.” While Marie was resting on her bed, she humorously responded: “The shampoo yes, your clothes... I don’t fit those!” The sense of social belonging also showed from one of the conversations I had with Samira about living in the shelter: “If it wasn’t for Marie, I don’t know how I would have survived this... place. I feel like [Marie] is the only one who really knows what I’m going through” (Samira, interview, 23 March 2022). In Samira her case she has not told her family about her homelessness because she feels ashamed of it. The sense of security and acceptance Samira experienced with Marie demonstrates the value of engaging with the few people who understand what they are going through. When Stacia became homeless, she “lost quite a few friends who stopped contacting [her]” (Stacia, interview, 1 April). With this I want to highlight the social belonging is often extra important because few “real friends” as Stacia called them stick around when one becomes homeless. It shows how social stigmas associated with homelessness might prevent people from integrating with others.

In line with what Thelen (2021, 6) mentions, the feeling of being a member to a variety of social groupings, such as the nation and society as a whole, can result through care. Someone can be acknowledged as being part of a community by having their needs fulfilled through care. In the process of and experiences in receiving care, one creates expectations of how it should be given (Thelen 2015, 507). In this sense receiving care could result in the desire to change or provide care to make others feel like they belong. Lilian does this by creating and claiming a place within the city – with her tent camp – to help others who are also in the same position as her:

Kim: Do you think that [other homeless people] living here [at the tent camp] can give them the strength to take the steps they want to take?

Lilian: Yes. Because, yeah... Here they can feel they belong. Despite their handicaps or flaws, here they are allowed to be who they are. They are also allowed to make mistakes here. I'm not going to immediately disapprove of people (Lilian, interview, 20 April 2022).

It takes time to take appropriate care of others by listening and to acknowledge someone. It is not an easy task, especially when one is in a precarious position herself. Nonetheless (a lack of) care, or in Lilian's case a disappointment in care, can reinforce the urge to care for others in the same situation (Thelen 2021, 10). In one of my talks with Lennard he mentioned his WhatsApp contact with Lilian and how he sees the way she wants to take care of others:

Sometimes she asks a question of which I think, is this a realistic thing to ask? You can't just build a campsite for homeless people – it's a nice dream and she does it from the goodness of her heart, but she doesn't think of details, such as laws, hygienics... She sees something like that a little too simplistic (Lennard, interview, 25 April).

Deborah Finfgeld-Connett (2010, 467) argues that numerous issues can cause and perpetuate homelessness among women, which appear to be related to ill-developed problem-solving and decision-making abilities. Feelings of rage, betrayal, and powerlessness, as well as mental health and drug misuse issues, can all serve to worsen such “non-adaptive thinking patterns”. Lilian wants to provide people with a sense of belonging, but in her enthusiasm to include and care for others, she fails to think about how building a campsite for homeless people can work in a society built on rules. Lennard added that: “As happened before, at some point she will lose control over the situation and attract the wrong type of people.” This will cause what she built to crumble, and she has to start over somewhere else.

Whereas Lilian actively wants to do something for others in the present, others first want to improve their own situation before taking care of others. Both Stacia and Samira shared with me their aspiration and goals to bridge their past and current experiences of the care they received to their future within homeless care through giving care and acknowledging others in the same situation as them as equals. Within that context they want to apply their understanding of appropriate care to those who are in similar situations as they were in. Even though Stacia had to quit school because she was homeless, she still has aspirations to go back to school to study in the future:

In a couple of years, I want to start the study social work here in Eindhoven when my life is a bit steadier. I want to be able to help women who are in similar situations as I have been, because I know what they go through. I think it's really important that someone who cares for you, understands how you feel (Stacia, interview, 25 March 2022).

Stacia mentioned it important that someone comprehends what a homeless woman might have experienced. When someone is aware of this, they know much better what someone might expect from the care they would like to receive (Baptista 2010, 178) Whereas Stacia wants to invest in her future and help people, Samira suggested she would like to do volunteering and care for those who have no one else to provide them with a feeling of belonging: "That's how I want to give back. I know what it is like to be all alone, knowing that no one will visit you. When someone puts a little effort in you, that already means a lot" (Samira, interview, 23 March 2022). The several times I met with Samira I sensed a feeling of appreciation for my presence by simply spending time with her and letting her share her story and experiences with me. Michael Ignatieff (1994, 25) beautifully said: "To belong is to understand the tacit codes of the people you live with; it is to know that you will be understood without having to explain yourself." Samira did not feel recognized in her position in being homeless. The feeling of belonging is that one feels recognized and is understood by others (Ignatieff 1994, 24). Samira found this with Marie, with whom she could simply *be*. Her experiences with care and feeling a lack of belonging inspired her to one day contribute and give back to caring communities.

Others found belonging within Eindhoven through their believe in a particular religion. Two of the women with whom I spoke, actively believed and practiced their faith in either Christianity or Islam. They experienced this as a way of maintaining a grip on their situation and holding hope for the future: "I put a lot of hope and trust in Allah. Every night I read the Koran from which I really calm down. (...) It gives me strength to keep going, even when things get difficult" (Samira, interview, 11 March 2022). During my research the Ramadan took place from 1 April to 1 May, it was then that Samira had an especially difficult time. Samira was still recovering from her injuries and had difficulties sleeping and keeping up with fasting, but: "I know Allah will accept me for who I am and forgive me my mistakes." She believes that even though she is not a perfect Muslim, her devotedness will pay off. With this she finds a sense of belonging through religion, even though she does not feel a part of society in Eindhoven. One of the other women I talked to was Anja, who I met in the same shelter as Stacia. She was sitting across the table from me during our meet up and had a very soft glow about her. Anja, a 28-year-old and self-appointed radical Christian woman, sees life as

something positive in which she is guided by the Lord. “I know that the presence of faith within other believers is not as radical as it is within me” (Anja, interview, 25 March 2022). Anja did not remember exactly when she got homeless, but it was during her college years that she was unable to pay her rent. With no other place to go she ended up with a boy who introduced her to Christianity. “Everything I do and the people I meet are all part of God’s plan.” Anja finds a sense of belonging and a purpose within Eindhoven through Christianity – she spreads the word of the Lord by walking around the centre and going to church when she can.

Through sense of belonging in aspects such as religion, role models and people who offer help, women can also find hope for the future. Hope is critical in their process and motivation to work on themselves (Finfgeld-Connett 2010, 464). One’s sense of belonging will change depending on the situation one is in, as Yuval-Davis (2006, 199) mentioned that belonging will always be a dynamic process.

As Wood and Waite (2011) stated, everyone belongs to a social group, collective, or community. However, the intensity one feels to this depends on the person and the context they are in. Five of the ten homeless women with whom I spoke do not feel like real citizens who, at the time of this research, had the ability to participate in society. Besides, they feel that others do not see them as real citizens, even though they still have as many rights which formal citizenship brings. They feel a sense of belonging in their own way, mostly through spatial or social ways through finding similarities or communion with others. Their sense of belonging affects the way they practice their citizenship. Whereas Samira and Stacia for example want to be part of ‘normal’ society again, Lilian aims to be heard in her position and actively oppose and change the rules of the system to conform with her needs. Lennard told me in our interview that he thinks that: “There is always some form of perspective for everyone. It’s just not realistic for some people to think that they will live independently with a good bank account and *huisje, boompje, beestje* (home sweet home)” (Lennard, interview, 25 April 2022). They have been separated from society for too long and will have trouble to fit in again. “The longer someone has been on the streets, the harder it is to get back to a ‘normal’ life.” In this sense I believe that women such as Lilian will try to find their own community and care for those who also fail to feel like they belong to society as a whole.

## Conclusion

In this final part I will conclude the previous three chapters and shortly summarize what the main remarks. It will furthermore be linked to the societal debate and the academic context in which the thesis is put. The goal of writing this thesis for me was to look into how women are affected in their experiences of exclusion through homeless caring organizations which subsequently affect how they find belonging within the city of Eindhoven. Every person has their own story which has led to their homelessness. However, even though this homelessness is the shared factor between the women with whom I spoke, they are a heterogeneous group with their own experiences and different backgrounds. This is however a group that has remained rather invisible, not only on the streets but also in academic literature. By shining the light of my thesis on this group I have aimed to bridge the societal and academic world and make my analysis relevant outside of the academic community.

### *Complex care institutions*

In the first chapter I introduced the current system that is present in Eindhoven to show the complexity of the care that is given. Fragmentation of the past and the recent decentralization lead to a new way of arranging homeless care organisations within Eindhoven. With this chapter I aimed to construct a better overview of the situation in which homeless women in the past and currently are. During my fieldwork I encountered tensions in various ways. Mostly on a social level between organisations in how they practice the care for homeless people. There is a difference in values on who might need what kind of treatment, which causes the system to still experience a slight form of fragmentation – which was tried to be contested by centralizing the care with the specialized organisations. Therefore, not all organisations that are present in Eindhoven are a part of this new system due to differing opinions. Ecclesiastical bodies have a different attitude towards the type of treatment the homeless should get. They don't want to force people into acting or changing their ways but as charities want to provide a safe space where homeless can rest. Whereas the specialized organisations, such as the *Springplank*, actively aim to help people get their lives back on track. I believe both of these approaches have nothing wrong with them, because homeless people are a heterogeneous population which needs to have various options to get care because no one is the same in their needs. Nonetheless, these differences subsequently result in different ways of taking care which causes friction in what is perceived as the *best* way. Which leads to the next chapter on how women perceive to be affected by the care which is offered.

### *(Not) Being Cared For*

In the second chapter I focussed on how homeless women perceive care practices and how they feel the treatment affects them. Compared to other groups of homeless people I encountered during my field research, such as migrant workers who lost their housing and were not allowed at night shelters because they are not eligible, Dutch homeless women on the other hand still have a right to care services that are provided in Eindhoven. However, most of them still felt that the treatment they received or possibly could receive would not be adequate. They feel that their needs are not met and are therefore they think they are not cared for in ways which are best for them. These unfair treatments are either blamed upon their position as a homeless person, as was the case with Samira, or the working of the system which is failing to provide competent care they would have liked to receive, such as with Lillian and Emina. This constant disappointment results in a lack of trust in other people and the institutions that aim to help them. Women such as Samira, Emina, Marie, and Lillian experience a lack in their agency and thereby a freedom to experience rights as other citizens in Eindhoven have. However, as Stacia's perspective on her current position showed me, a lack of freedom now, can mean more freedom in the future.

Life can be difficult for them. They often experience little privacy by living in shelters and have to abide by set rules. Homeless women I spoke with were almost always under conservatorship, something everyone actually was glad about knowing their finances were kept in check. However, this does limit their financial freedom. On top of that living without a home means living under a stigma. There are societal ideas of people, especially women, who are homeless and what they might have done to end up without a home. The women I spoke with all wish to have a stable, simple life with people they care about and to be able to care for themselves.

### *You're not Seen as a Human Being*

Homeless women have rights to acts of care within the system of homeless people, just as they still have their formal rights that are part of their Dutch citizenship. However, as Leibovits (2020) calls it *liminal citizenship*, their citizenship is limited in other ways. They feel like they are held back in their ways of moving through society, due to the rules they have to comply to in order to still receive care to continue a stable life.

When being excluded from care and thereby also lacking feelings of belonging, I found that women will try to find meaning in the small things they might feel they have some



influence on. One of these ways is through social acts with others. Samira and Marie find peace and belonging with each other. Lilian on the other hand also added a spatial context and wants to share a feeling of belonging by gathering like-minded people who are also homeless together in a place she claimed. Religion was with three of the women I spoke to a way of finding comfort and hope. Their belonging to something much bigger, they had faith that their situation will change for the better. Being a part of and thus feeling like one belongs to something is never a static process; rather, it is a naturalised production of a specific hegemonic kind of power relations (Yuval-Davis 2006, 199). When homeless women can change their situation around, their feelings of belonging will most likely also change.

In conclusion of the above, thesis will lead me to answer the main question, as posed in the introduction:

How do practices of care influence experiences of belonging to society among homeless women in Eindhoven?

I look back on the conclusions I have hitherto discussed, since it multiple aspects to it. Homeless women in Eindhoven are part of a system that has and still is facing changes to improve care that can be given. As women are only a small part of the homeless population, it makes for them to be subject of the alterations which are made for the homeless in general. Homeless women still have their citizenship with its formal rights, but this gets limited in its informal ways through the rules under which they have to live. The impact this has on the experience of citizenship among homeless women can subsequently affect their sense of belonging which can make them despise the system of which they are a part. When one declines this care because it might affect their freedom, it will label them as *zorgmijders* and make it even more difficult for organisation to provide adequate help. Through the connection between care, citizenship and belonging homeless women experience limiting effects of their rights in Eindhoven.

## Afterword

I would like to end on a personal note and in a few words look back at the past five and final months of the master of Cultural Anthropology. I was able to conduct fieldwork among a group of people in Eindhoven which I would have otherwise (hopefully) never met. They are people who struggle to find their place, have faced many setbacks throughout life, or simply have made some wrong decisions. For me it has been a process with constant changes due to getting to know more about the field whilst being fully submerged in it. I never thought how extensive the care practices within the city are, and the things that are arranged for the homeless. It has made me discover a different side of the city I live in and how the homeless people make use of it. It has made me realize my privilege in having a home and people around me to whom I feel I belong to and know that care for me. But also, how fragile this all can be. I know that becoming homeless can happen to anyone, even me, and even you as a reader.

I truly hope the women I met will be able to find their way within this world.

Kim Scholts

Eindhoven, 30 June 2022

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