

LANGUAGE INTEGRATION AND CITIZENSHIP

How Dutch language integration of Syrian refugees in Rotterdam influences the belonging to a Dutch citizenship



Valérie van den Bemt

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Master Thesis 2020-2021
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Date: 14-08-2021
Word count: 21872



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“Integration is a crucial starting point for newcomers in our society”

Lodewijk Asscher, minister of social affairs and employment in 2017.¹



The regulations for the integration exam.' Photo by: ANP

¹ Geers, M. 2017. "Inburgering." *Sociaal Bestek* 79: 30-31.

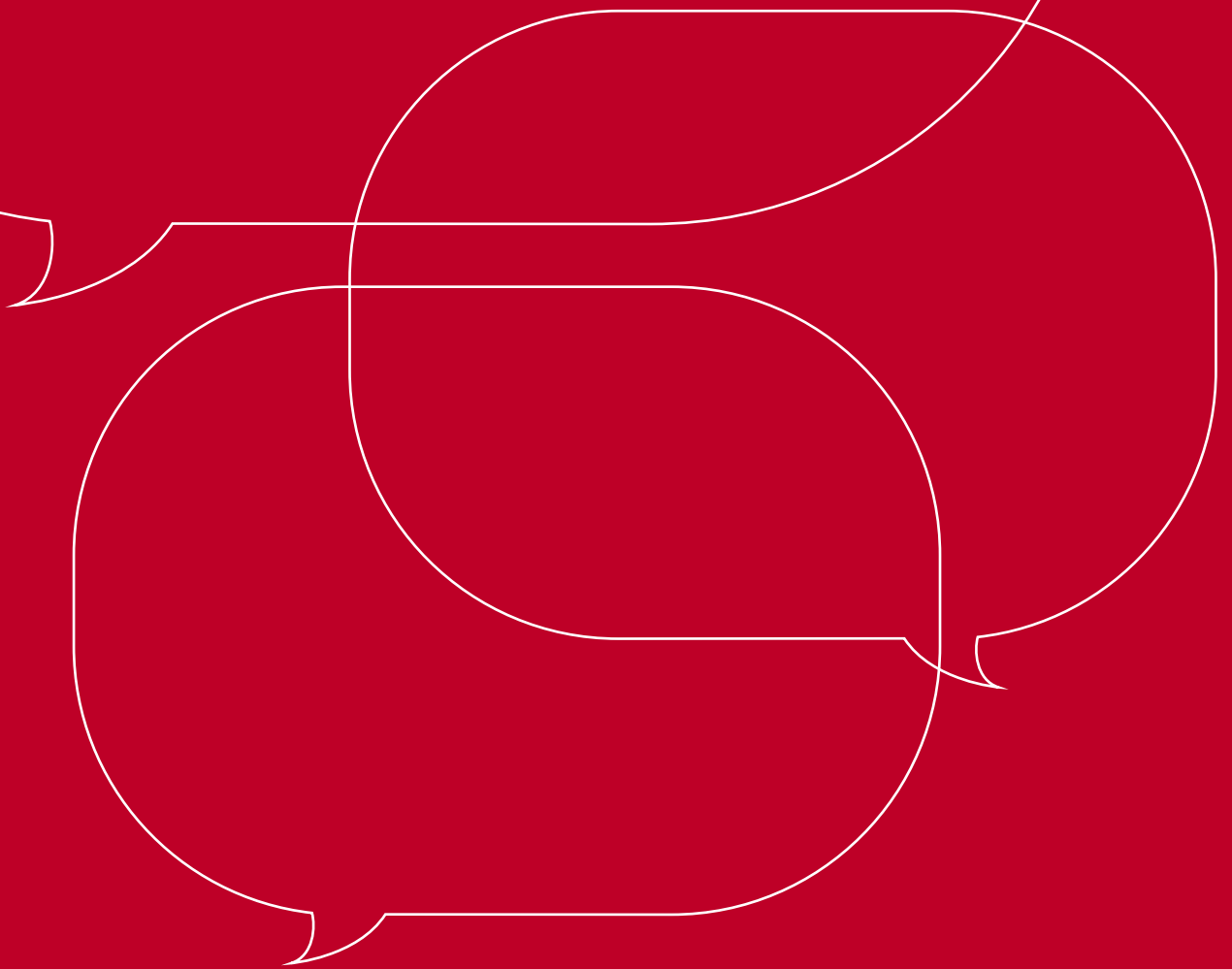
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Acknowledgment

During my research for the Master Cultural Anthropology: Sustainable Citizenship, I had help from different individuals, which I am very thankful for. First, I would like to express my gratitude towards my supervisor Joost Haagsma for his expertise and guidance during this research. Furthermore, I would like to thank the organizations, Het Nederlands and Vluchtelingenwerk, and the teachers, Veronica and Lars, for giving access to their language classes and introducing me to some of my participants. Additionally, I want to thank all my Syrian participants I have met during my research for being very hospital and helpful. Finally, I would like to express my appreciation towards Martijn van den Bemt for helping with the graphic design of my thesis and Sean Surtees for assisting me with the English language.

Introduction



“Ting”. The door opens. “Assalamu alaikum!” A man enters the Syrian bakery store, Al Albaik bakery, and greets Mohammad, the Syrian owner of the store. Mohammad puts his face mask down to his chin and greets the man as well. “Alaikum salam”. They begin to talk enthusiastically in Arabic and the man walks towards the counter. In the counter there are several Syrian sweets and pastries. They give the store a sweet smell when you walk inside. The two men talk loud with each other, because of the Arabic music blasting through the shop. Mohammad grabs a remote control and turns the music down. He invites the man with hand gestures to come in the backroom. The backroom of the store is mainly filled with big ovens and kitchenware for making the sweets. Much kitchenware is on top of each other, which makes it a bit chaotic, but not necessarily dirty. The man grabs a chair and sits next to me. “Oh, it is a long time that I have spoken Dutch. I am not sure if it is still good”, says the man. “I have more Arabic friends than Dutch friends here in the Netherlands, so I almost always speak Arabic.” “Ting”, a woman enters the store. “Hello?” We hear from the backroom. Mohammad goes to the front of the store and greets the customer in Dutch. “Come”, Mohammad says to me, and I walk to the front. “This is my friend. She always comes here to buy”, says Mohammad to me and he points to the female customer. The woman must laugh and continues with her order. I walk back to the backroom to continue the conversation with the man. “I have done a study medicine at the university of Syria, but this diploma is not enough in the Netherlands to be something higher than a dentist assistant”, he says. “But I do not feel like doing another university study in the Netherlands, because the Dutch medical words are too difficult. I have done my integration exams and I am now at B2 level, but you still need to be at a higher level when you want to study medicines in the Netherlands and find the same job you had in Syria.” Mohammad comes back. “We order lunch?” he asks us at four p.m. “Yes”, says the man. “We will order real Syrian take-out. There is a shop here in Rotterdam that has Syrian food”. Both men begin to talk in Arabic and Mohammad calls the place. He orders in Arabic. After a few minutes, Mohammad hangs up. “They will come in a few minutes and a friend will join us soon as well” he says to me. “You know the place and the people more than me”, I say to Mohammad while I laugh. “Of course, I know everyone here! I am Al Albaik. The prince of Rotterdam!” He responds while putting his arms wide. We must laugh.²

Nowadays, there is a certain idea on how migrants should integrate in Dutch society. Here, a successful integration involves respecting freedoms and equalities by learning the language, working and active participation in the society. These aspects can be seen back in the vignette, where both men know the language of the new society, Mohammad is owning a bakery in Rotterdam and the men seem to be active in society. The way integration should be interpreted has been an important aspect in the integration debate of the Netherlands over the years. According to van der Brug et al. (2009), integration was more focused on socioeconomic aspects after the Second World War. Then, it was not important whether immigrants integrated into the Dutch society or were segregated from it as long as they provided a contribution to the economy of the Netherlands. Also, the Dutch government expected these immigrants to return to their nation-state of origin when they finished working. This has changed since the 1980s, when the Dutch government started to focus more on migrants who stayed with their families in the Netherlands and on the segregation of different groups (van der Brug et al. 2009, 6-7). Integration policy started to focus on keeping the own identity of the migrants and integration became voluntary. This view changed again in the 2000s when the Civic Integration Newcomers Act was enabled. Here, integration, for example learning the Dutch language, became obligatory for all migrants and keeping the own identity of the nation-state of origin became less

² Participant observation and informal conversations in the bakery Al Albaik Bakery of Mohammad, a 34-year old Syrian male refugee living in Rotterdam – 18 February 2021

important in the eyes of the policy makers (van der Brug et al. 2009, 8-9). Nowadays, migrants still need to take over the language of the new society to fully integrate. The vignette above shows that migrants do this to live and work in the new society. Here, Mohammad has a conversation in Dutch with the Dutch customer to sell his sweets. Also, Mohammad's friend argues he is at B2 level regarding the Dutch language, but needs to improve his Dutch to study medicine again. Refugees arriving at the new society must apply to the same rules as other migrants. This means that they must integrate into Dutch society after they are acknowledged as official refugees, even when they are expected to go back to their nation-state of origin (Huizinga and van Hoven 2018, 1). This is the case for Syrian refugees, who have fled Syria after 2011 because of the civil war (Bruynseels et al. 2014, 1-2).

This issue relates to the debate on integration. Here, the concept of 'integration' has a different meaning in different contexts. One of the most known definitions comes from Berry et al. (2002, 354), who argues that integration is an approach where cultural integrity is maintained and, at the same time, the newcomers in the society seek to participate as an integral part of the larger social network. Integration consists of adopting the social and cultural labels of the new nation-state and, at the same time, keeping the national identity of the nation-state of origin (Boski 2008, 143). Eriksen (2010, 151) goes further with this interpretation by explaining that integration can be used as a term to describe the compromises between assimilation and segregation. Here, Eriksen (2010) links integration closely to the identity of the dominant society. When migrants adopt the culture, language, norms, and values of the nation-state, they often tend to overtake the identity of this society as well (Eriksen 2010, 180). However, Colson (2003) argues that integration can be different for refugees. According to him, migration of refugees is seen as involuntary migration, which means that they have different reasons to leave their nation-state and move to another one (Colson 2003, 2). Their reasons are more politically related, and their push factors are often larger than their pull factors, because they are forced to leave their nation-state (Castles and Miller 2009; Colson 2003, 13). Besides their different reasons, it is also important to note that refugees often are temporarily in the new nation-state, whether other migrants migrate to settle in their new environment. Because of this, they might consider it unnecessary to integrate into the new nation-state, because they will only stay temporarily. This refers to the debate about to what extent refugees need to integrate into the new nation-state. According to Colson (2003), anthropologists try to provide forums through which their own research findings reach both the public and policymakers and give voice to these refugees (Colson 2003, 5-13). As a research goal, this research will also provide a platform for Syrian refugees through this research to show their voice in their own integration into the Dutch society.

When refugees are integrating in a society, this can be related to receiving a citizenship. Different authors are in debate on the conceptualization of citizenship. According to Schinkel (2010) and Fermin (2010), citizenship can be seen as a certain membership within the society or nation-state. I argue that this can be a formal citizenship as well as citizenship as a feeling of belonging. Schinkel (2010, 268) refers formal citizenship to the juridical codified rights of citizens. This means that integrators receive equal rights within the society when receiving a formal citizenship. Eriksen (2010, 180) agrees with this by arguing that citizenship is related to the right to equality for migrants within the society. However, Schinkel (2010, 266-272) argues that migrants who have received formal citizenship can still lack integration and, therefore, can lack citizenship as a feeling of belonging to the new society. Here, immigrants who are not actively integrating enough according to the society do not fully belong and can be seen as non-citizens or second-class citizens. Schinkel (2010, 268-269) has a critical view on the idea someone can only be a real citizen when he or she is an active citizen. He prefers to look at the moralization of citizenship. In contradiction with the authors Schinkel (2010), Fermin (2009) and Eriksen (2010), other authors, Isin (2009) and Ong (1996), do not perceive citizenship

as a membership. They argue that citizenships are power relations between groups. According to Isin (2009, 371-372) the difference between membership and citizenship is that citizenship is almost always more than being an insider. He argues that citizenship is about the behavior between groups that are within the society whether membership is the behavior within these groups. These power relations are different than the legal rights of Eriksen (2010) and Schinkel (2010). Ong (1996) argues that citizenship is a dual process of self-making and being-made that is related to power relations within the society. Here, becoming a citizen depends on how the person is being-made as someone who controls or submits to the power relations and how the self-making of the person effects the fields of power. This research will contribute to the debate of the conceptualization of citizenship regarding Syrian refugees, because, as well as their integration, receiving citizenship can have a different meaning for them. More specifically, I will focus on the relation between language integration and receiving citizenship. According to Eriksen (2010, 77-119), language is a social construct that is part of the citizenship of a society. Schrover and Schinkel (2013, 1135) and Fermin (2009, 13) agree with this by arguing that learning the language of the new society can give access or denial to Dutch citizenship. Lytra (2016, 19) and Anderson (2016), argue that language is seen as a part of a membership and related to the boundaries of certain groups and societies. Here, Anderson (2016, 6-46) argues that through language, there is a possibility of imagined communities, where individuals feel connected as a community without ever having to meet each other. Lytra (2016, 3-4) argues that a certain language can be seen as a form of power to include and exclude people from this group or society. Within this research, I will show how important language is regarding to not only formal citizenship, but also for citizenship as a feeling of belonging.

When looking at the debates about integration and citizenship, Bucken-Knapp et al. (2018, 1-2) argue that the idea of integration and citizenship is often only focused on the policy-makers' point of view within the literature. Therefore, they argue that these integration ideas and measures of experiences have shortcomings. Huizinga and van Hooven (2018) are among the few scholars who focus on the interpretation of integration and citizenship by refugees through qualitative interviews, where they argue that the feeling of belonging of the Syrian refugees are undervalued in the context of refugee dispersal in the Netherlands. Because of this, it is important to gain more knowledge on how refugees interpret these concepts and how they experience citizenship as a feeling of belonging. As a research goal, I want to contribute more knowledge to the debate about the concepts of integration and citizenship by focusing on the interpretation of refugees instead of the 'native born'. The goal of the Dutch government is that these refugees will become part of the Dutch society, but, as Schinkel (2010) argues, this is not always the case after the integration trajectory, because their feeling of belonging towards the society can differ. Therefore, I argue this anthropological research will contribute to the debate about whether Syrian refugees feel they are Dutch citizens after their integration into the new society. It is important to look critically towards the Dutch integration system and look if it really helps the integration of the refugees from Syria or that they still feel like outsiders in the Dutch society.

This is also a topic in the social debate. The Dutch media often show how well Syrian refugees are integrated in Dutch society and how well they feel 'at home' (Echt Amsterdams Nieuws 2020).³ The media shows how the Syrian refugees most of the time have a job and speak the language, as Mohammad shows in the vignette above (Soudagar 2020). However, according to Soudagar (2020), Syrian refugees do not have a say in their integration into the Dutch society. She argues that integration means becoming a real citizen of the society, but the integration system is often only

³ Echt Amsterdams Nieuws. 2020. "Syriër Ayham voelt zich thuis in de stad: 'Hier in Nederland kun je alles bereiken wat je wilt'" Accessed August 14, 2021. <https://www.at5.nl/artikelen/204685/syrier-ayham-voelt-zich-thuis-in-de-stad-hier-in-nederland-kun-je-alles-bereiken-wat-je-wilt>

focused on the view of individuals who are born in the Netherlands. Here, integration is only focused on learning the Dutch language and accepting a job opportunity. However, the opinion of Syrian refugees about whether they feel fully integrated is not heard.⁴

Therefore, I have conducted qualitative fieldwork between 1 February 2021 until 30 April 2021, on the feeling of belonging of Syrian refugees within the Dutch society through the integration of learning the Dutch language. To conduct this research, the research question is:

How does learning the Dutch language through the language schools influence the Dutch citizenship of Syrian refugees in Rotterdam?

Within this research, I will focus on learning the Dutch language through the language schools. It is mainly interesting to look at how Syrian refugees learn the Dutch language and if this gives them access to the Dutch citizenship. The Dutch government argues that learning the Dutch language can make Syrian refugees more integrated in the Dutch society, whereas Soudagar (2020) explains this is not always the case, because passing the language exams does not necessarily mean the refugees feel part of the Dutch society. Besides this, the refugees start learning the Dutch language after they are acknowledged as refugees and granted a temporary residence permit. They do this in the language schools, which they must choose by themselves (Huizinga and van Hoven 2018, 1; Vluchtelingenwerk n.d.).⁵

Research population and location

My research population consists of Syrian refugees who have integrated or who are currently integrating in the Netherlands. The Syrian civil war caused many Syrians to flee to other countries (Bruynseels et al. 2014, 1-2). The peak of Syrian refugees coming to the Netherlands was in 2014. In October 2019, 103.000 first-generation Syrian migrants were residents in the country. According to Dagevos et al. (2018), many Syrian refugees chose to flee to the Netherlands, because the opportunity to receive a residence permit is shorter than with other migrants in this country. Here, the Dutch state expects refugees to go back to Syria when it is safe again (CBS 2020, 91; Dagevos et al. 2018, 2; Dagevos et al. 2018).⁶ However, my research population consists of Syrian refugees who not only are currently integrating, but also participants who are integrated and are waiting for a Dutch passport or already received the passport, which means they are formally Dutch citizens. The Syrians can build a future in the Netherlands, because they currently do not have to go back to Syria. Dagevos et al. (2018, 1) many Syrian refugees do not have a job despite their high education. This is because many Syrian refugees who arrived in the Netherlands have a university diploma, but this diploma is seen as less valuable than a university diploma of the Netherlands. Most Syrian refugees are not motivated to start education again. Besides this, many Syrian refugees have difficulties learning the language through the integration system despite being active with it. This means that many Syrian refugees do not pass the integration exam (Dagevos et al. 2018, 1; Huizinga and van Hoven 2018, 2). The participants for this research prepare themselves via language schools in Rotterdam (Vluchtelingenwerk

4 Soudagar, R. 2020. "Een Vluchteling heeft niets te zeggen over integratie." Oneworld, July 2020. Accessed August 14, 2021. <https://www.oneworld.nl/lezen/politiek/migratie/een-vluchteling-heeft-niets-te-zeggen-over-integratie>

5 Vluchtelingenwerk. n.d. "Rotterdamse aanpak." Accessed August 14, 2021. <https://www.vluchtelingenwerk.nl/zuidwestnederland/rotterdamse-aanpak>

6 Centraal Bureau Statistiek. 2020. "Jaarrapport Integratie." Accessed August 14, 2020. <https://longreads.cbs.nl/integratie-2020/de-transitie-van-onderwijs-naar-arbeidsmarkt>

n.d.).⁷ A reason for the low percentage of diploma holders and high job seekers can be that most of the first-generation Syrian refugees in the Netherlands were in the age group of 18 to 35 when they arrived to the Netherlands since 2011 (Vluchtelingenwerk 2020; appendix 1).⁸ This means that they were still at the beginning of their adulthood (Vluchtelingenwerk 2020, 12). However, around this age group most of the Syrian refugees score the highest in learning Dutch. According to Dagevos et al. (2018, 87-88), Syrian refugees who came to the Netherlands in 2016 and 2015 score lower in learning Dutch than refugees who came in 2014. It is interesting to note that most Syrian refugees are actively learning Dutch when, at the same time, the Dutch state still expects them to be here temporarily. According to Dagevos et al. (2018, 1), the Syrian refugees do not expect to go back to Syria soon, because it is still not safe (Vluchtelingenwerk n.d.).⁹ This means that they expect to build a new life and future in the Netherlands. Because of this, the research population of this research will be first generation Syrian refugees in the age group of 20 to 40 years old, who arrived in the Netherlands since 2011 when the war started. This population are adolescents who were at the beginning of their adolescent life when they arrived here and, therefore, many of the Syrian refugees do not expect to go back soon to Syria. Because of this, they are part of the future of the Netherlands. Also, many Syrian refugees already had families in Syria whom they have brought with them to the Netherlands as well.

According to the CBS (2019), 2.800 Syrian migrants have mainly settled between 2015 and 2019 in Rotterdam, the second-largest city of the Netherlands.¹⁰ This means the city has the most recent Syrian refugees. For this reason, the research location is Rotterdam. The Syrian participants are living in different parts of the city and went or are currently going to language schools in Rotterdam. It is important that the participants integrated or are integrating in Rotterdam, because Rotterdam seems to be different than the rest of the Netherlands. Although Long (2015, 43) argues that the Netherlands put more focus on mono-cultural society through the integration process, Rotterdam has been marked as very ethnically and culturally diverse. According to CBS (2020, 47), more than half of the residents in Rotterdam have a migration background. The city has 190 544 citizens in 2020 who are first generation migrants (appendix 2).¹¹ This has increased over the years. 39 percent of the residents have a non-western background. Therefore, this working-class city has emphasized diversity in terms of immigration and integration for a long time. It is important to note that individuals with a migration background were not termed as the 'other' or 'foreigners' when they were legally living in Rotterdam. Therefore, there has been no distinction between them and citizens who have a Dutch background. However, there is a discussion about newcomers who do not yet formally belong as citizens of Rotterdam, because they are not fully integrated (van Ostaijen and Scholten 2014, 684-685). This ideology of diversity is related to the integration system of Rotterdam. Between 2006 and 2010, there was a strong inclusive focus within the integration process on social cohesion, participation and bonding of citizens in Rotterdam. Here, citizenship as a feeling of belonging was important. This feeling of belonging was related to the diversity of the citizens, which means that citizens of Rotterdam were connected, because they were culturally and ethnically diverse. Integration seemed to be completely absent or reformulated in terms of safety issues (van Ostaijen and Scholten 2014, 686). Also, van Ostaijen and Scholten (2014, 687) argue that the integration system in Rotterdam is more

7 Vluchtelingenwerk. n.d. "How to integrate." Accessed August 14, 2021. <https://www.vluchtelingenwerk.nl/forrefugees/inburgeren?language=en>

8 Vluchtelingenwerk. 2020. "Vluchtelingen in getallen 2020" Accessed August 14, 2021. https://www.vluchtelingenwerk.nl/sites/default/files/u36436/vluchtelingen_in_getallen_2020_v11.pdf

9 Vluchtelingenwerk. n.d. "Syrië: miljoenen mensen op drift" Accessed August 14, 2021. <https://www.vluchtelingenwerk.nl/feiten-cijfers/landen-van-herkomst/syrie-miljoenen-mensen-op-drift>

10 Centraal Bureau Statistiek. 2019. "Poolse en Syrische immigranten per gemeente." Accessed August 14, 2020. <https://www.cbs.nl/nl-nl/achtergrond/2019/44/poolse-en-syrische-immigranten-per-gemeente>

11 Centraal Bureau Statistiek. 2020. "Bevolking; leeftijd, migratieachtergrond, geslacht, regio, 1 jan. 1996-2020". Accessed August 14, 2021. <https://opendata.cbs.nl/statline/#/CBS/nl/dataset/37713/table?dl=57501>

focused on socio-economic aspects and less on the cultural aspects, which means that full integration meant having a legal job and a social network. However, learning the Dutch language, norms and values are also important in the integration system of Rotterdam. The city shows this by having different private language schools where Syrian refugees can learn the Dutch language, norms and values. One of these language schools are Het Nederlands and Vluchtelingenwerk. Het Nederlands is an organization founded by Syrian refugees who are already integrated in the Dutch society.¹² Their mission is to help other immigrants with their integration in learning to read, write, listen and speak in Dutch.¹³ Vluchtelingenwerk is an organization that has a language school and different projects to help the refugees learning Dutch. Besides this, Vluchtelingenwerk (n.d.) cooperates with different organizations, companies, schools and active citizens as well.¹⁴ During the first part of my fieldwork, both organizations did the language classes online because of Covid-19. This changed during the second part. In this research, I focused mainly on the language classes of these two organizations, which will be further explained in the methodology.

Methodology

As I have described above, my research consisted of Syrian refugees living in Rotterdam, who went or are still learning at a language school. To reach my research population, I had to become active within different language schools and in the Syrian community of Rotterdam. This is because in qualitative and anthropological research, 'being there' is an important instrument for the data collection. Here, it was important for me to reflect on myself besides the Syrian participants, which means that I had to take my presence and my behavior into account as well as it could influence the behavior of my participants (DeWalt and DeWalt 2011, 29-36).

To access my research population, I decided to find the first Syrian refugees living in Rotterdam through acquaintances. These first refugees became my participants as well as my gate keepers for the Syrian community. Through the snowball effect I got in contact with more Syrian refugees in Rotterdam and, therefore, I was able to expand my number of participants. Besides this, I got into contact with two organizations who teach the Dutch language in Rotterdam: Vluchtelingenwerk and Het Nederlands. Both organizations became important gatekeepers, because they introduced me to other Syrian refugees from Rotterdam. By using the networks of these organizations and the snowball method, I was able to reach my research population and gather more data. Also, both organizations allowed me to observe their language classes where Syrian refugees would learn Dutch. Mainly the language school Het Nederlands allowed me to join a language class with Syrian refugees every week, where I could observe how the teacher taught the students the language, norms and values. Despite being able to participate in the classes of Het Nederlands and Vluchtelingenwerk, I argue that this was not enough to see a full picture of various language classes and their ways of teaching Dutch. The views of other language schools and their classes were shown by the Syrian participants.

During my fieldwork in Rotterdam from 1 February until 30 April, I was doing offline fieldwork as well as online fieldwork. In the field, I collected my data through participant observation and informal conversations, while 'hanging out' with participants, teaching the Syrian students Dutch or being a language buddy for my research participants. These different methods were important for the interpretation of my data, because I was able to gather different data. With my Syrian participants, I

12 Meeting with the owners of Het Nederlands – 18 February 2021

13 Het Nederlands. n.d. "Over ons." Accessed August 14, 2021. <https://www.het-nederlands.nl/over-ons/>

14 Vluchtelingenwerk. n.d. "Rotterdamse aanpak." Accessed August, 2021. <https://www.vluchtelingenwerk.nl/zuidwestnederland/rotterdamse-aanpak>

conducted 17 semi-structured interviews. Besides this, I also had small unstructured interviews with two teachers of Vluchtelingenwerk and Het Nederlands, because they could give me a better picture on how they teach language classes. During these small interviews, we discussed the language classes and the integration system. The semi-structured interviews with the Syrian participants covered the topics about the language schools, the Dutch language, Dutch citizenship, Syrian identity and living in Rotterdam. The interviews I conducted gave me a good image to answer my research question. Therefore, I consider this method as one of the most important data-gathering method.

However, it is important to note that the opinions of the participants can differ from their behavior. Therefore, the other important method I used during my fieldwork has been participant observation. According to DeWalt and DeWalt (2011, 1-2), participant observation is a method in which a researcher participates in the daily activities, interactions, rituals, and events of a certain group of individuals. I have used this method most of the time during my fieldwork when I was with participants or the teacher at the language school Het Nederlands. While I was participating, I observed by learning the explicit and tacit aspects of their life routines and their way of integrating in the Dutch society. I did this, because it is important for the researcher to get closer to the participants (Emerson et al. 1995). During participant observation in the field, I have had informal conversations with my Syrian participants to gain more data that I did not gather during the interviews. The data I received during informal conversations were mostly about the experience and criticism during the integration within the language schools, which some participants did not mention during the interviews. Also, participants elaborated on their arguments they had during their interviews through informal conversations. The informal conversation was interesting, because they led me to new and interesting subjects I had not thought of before I entered the field. For example, the participants talked about their experience with fraud of different language schools in Rotterdam. Also, I was surprised how important the language buddies were, which the participants explained to me mainly during the informal conversations.

Due to Covid-19, I did online participant observation and online informal conversations during my fieldwork. According to Lo Iacono et al. (2016, 103) these online methods are becoming more important as the internet is now a powerful tool for research. Here, a lot of language classes were taught online instead of in real-life. Because of this, I followed a few online language classes through Zoom and Microsoft Teams. A great advantage of using these methods as a qualitative research tool were that I was able to reach more participants and join language classes (Lo Iacono et al. 2016, 109). I would have not been able to reach these participants and language classes offline due to Covid-19. Besides this, joining online language classes gave me more insight into the differences between the online and offline classes. During the online classes, I participated by teaching smaller groups the Dutch grammar and, at the same time, had informal conversations with the students. Also, I have done a few online conversations with Syrian students and a Dutch teacher to gain more insight into the online teaching and the effect it has on Syrian refugees towards their Dutch citizenship. However, I argue that my offline participant observations and offline informal conversations were more beneficial towards my research, because I gained more interesting data by 'being there'. Here, I was more able to have deeper and longer conversations with my participants, whereas my online conversations were shorter and contained fewer interesting data.

During this fieldwork, I have been contenting with my offline and online methods. However, I only did fieldwork from 1 February 2021 until 30 April 2021, while most anthropological research takes one year or longer to gather enough data to have a complete view of the research subjects. This means that I had limited time to collect the data. Because of the time limitation, I was not able to dive deeper into the other ways of learning the Dutch language besides from the Dutch language schools.

Also, I was not able to dive deeper into the belonging towards the citizenship of Rotterdam.

Also, I argue that I conducted a small-scale research, which is an aspect of anthropological research. This means that I only reached a small amount of the Syrian refugees living in Rotterdam. Because of this, my research cannot be generalized, and it contains subjectivity. This is because the anthropologist is their own instrument. During my research, I have tried to reflect on myself and be as objective as possible, but it is important to note that anthropological research will contain a certain amount of subjectivity. In my research, I have reflected on myself through my fieldnotes and recordings. This means that while I gathered data, I reflected on my positionality and ethical issues I encountered during my fieldwork.

Positionality and ethical issues

During my fieldwork, I have encountered several ethical issues. First, I have had difficulties with the anonymity of my participants. As I have mentioned earlier, my research goal is to give voice to the Syrian refugees. However, this means the participants should feel comfortable enough to give their opinion about the Dutch integration system. This is important, because they have experienced a corrupt government in Syria and a war where there was no freedom of speech. Because of this, I gave my participants the choice whether they wanted to be anonymous. Here, I explained to them the consequences of being anonymous and not being anonymous. Also, I ensured all the participants that the information they shared would be confidential. The ethical issue that arose was that I explained this in Dutch or English. All the participants were capable of speaking Dutch or English, but they would understand it better in Arabic. Because of the language gap, I had the feeling that sometimes they did not fully understand the consequences of putting their real name in the research. For this reason, I gave them time to think about it and discuss it. I decided to message them when my fieldwork was done and asked them the same question of whether they want to be anonymous or not. The participants who did not respond to my question got a pseudonym as well.

The second ethical issue concerned my positionality. During my fieldwork, I found it important to have a good relationship with my participants. Despite I come from another background as being born in the Netherlands and growing up in this country, I encountered no difficulties with this. The participants were very open and friendly, and it became easy to befriend them. Besides this, my participants saw our friendship as a positive way to improve their Dutch and I was able to help them with their integration exams. However, the ethical issue that arose here was that it became difficult to find a balance between being a friend and a researcher. I had the feeling that most of my participants saw me as a friend and forgot that I was a researcher as well and could use their information for my research. For example, they would contact me and invite me over to their house instead of me putting effort to meet them. I tried to solve this by talking regularly about my research activities and I informed with an informational letter that everything they say could be used in my research. Besides this, I made them aware that they could always tell me when they did not want certain information in the research. With this, I have tried to show my participants that I was also a researcher besides their friend.

Structure

The following chapters will focus on the empirical and theoretical aspects I have gained during my research. The first chapter will focus on the role of language schools in Rotterdam during teaching the Dutch language to Syrian refugees. It will explain the difficulties both groups encounter and how the participants overcome these difficulties in relation to integrating and receiving citizenship. The second

chapter and the third chapter will focus more on the perspectives of the Syrian refugees. This chapter will explain the views of the refugees on learning the Dutch language through the language schools and outside the schools. Chapter three will explore the Dutch citizenship of the Syrian participants and their belonging in the Dutch society. This chapter will particularly focus on the belonging in Rotterdam as well. The results of the three chapters will be summarized and concluded in the discussion and conclusion. Here, I will answer the research question and discuss the debates, research goals and limitations.



1 The roles of language schools in Rotterdam

“Timing. When as a refugee I arrived in the Netherlands, I had to stay six months in the camp, asylum center. Then, I had to move to my own house in Friesland. After that, almost one year I went to school. I was in the Netherlands in September 2015, and I started at school in November 2016. Can you imagine. Almost one and a half year. After that, I started with learning Dutch language. In other countries, like Germany, Sweden and Denmark, you, as a refugee, must start learning the language from the first week when your feet is on the ground of their country. Otherwise, you will not get any money to live, to eat, to drink, to smoke, whatever. You want to live here? You must start learning the language in the first week. Otherwise, we will be out.”¹⁵

This argument comes from an interview with Aziz, a Syrian refugee who has been in the Netherlands for almost six years. In line with the Integration and Naturalization Service (IND, 2020), he explains that refugees arriving in the Netherlands must wait longer to go to Dutch language schools than in other countries (e.g. Germany, Sweden and Denmark). According to the IND (2020), refugees are first isolated in asylum seeker centers where they wait for their asylum requests to be processed. The IND must decide within six months, but sometimes they extend this period to 15 months (IND, 2020).¹⁶ Huizinga and van Hoven (2018) explain that asylum seekers are not allowed to work, study, or learn Dutch during this period. When they are acknowledged as refugees, they are granted a temporary residence permit and they are allowed to begin their integration (Huizinga and van Hoven 2018, 1). Refugees have three years to integrate into Dutch society (DUO, n.d.).¹⁷ As discussed in the integration debate, Boski (2008, 143) and Berry et al. (2002, 354) argue that integration consist of taking over the social and cultural labels of the new nation-state and, at the same time, keeping the own identity from their nation-state of origin. However, the Dutch integration system is mainly focused on migrants taking over the Dutch language, norms and values. This is more in line with Eriksen (2010, 180), who argues in this debate that integration is closely linked to the identity of the dominant society. The refugees are obligated to learn the Dutch language, norms and values to formally pass integration. Here, they must pass the Civic Integration Examination or State Examination NT2. This examination consists of six exams: writing, listening, speaking, reading, knowledge of Dutch society (KNM), orientation on the Dutch labor market (ONA) and participation statement. Writing, listening, speaking, and reading must be at A2 level. The Syrian participants have prepared or are preparing themselves through the language schools in Rotterdam (DUO, n.d.; Fermin 2009, 13; Vluchtelingenwerk n.d.).¹⁸

In this chapter, I will explain how Dutch language schools in Rotterdam help the Syrian refugees with their integration by teaching Dutch. Because the language schools are private, they and the Syrian participants have experienced various difficulties the last few years during the integration of the Syrian refugees. I will argue that despite these difficulties, my participants were still motivated to learn the Dutch language.

¹⁵ Semi-structured interview with Aziz, a 32-year old Syrian refugee living in Rotterdam – 4 April 2021

¹⁶ Immigration and Naturalization Service. 2020. “Processing time asylum: how long will my procedure take?” Accessed August 14, 2021. <https://ind.nl/en/Pages/Processing-times-asylum-procedure.aspx>

¹⁷ Dienst Uitvoering Onderwijs. n.d. “U gaat inburgeren.” Accessed August 14, 2021. <https://www.inburgeren.nl/u-gaat-inburgeren>

¹⁸ Dienst Uitvoering Onderwijs. n.d. “Taking the integration exam.” Accessed August 14, 2021. <https://www.inburgeren.nl/en/taking-the-integration-exam/index.jsp>

The methods of the language schools

It is ten minutes past time. The students at the language school Het Nederlands walk slowly into the classroom and decide where they want to sit. The chairs and tables are placed facing the big whiteboard that is standing next to the door. In between the chairs and tables is 1,5 meter distance due to the Covid-19 rules. Three women decide to sit close near each other on the left, while the men and one other woman are scattered around the classroom. A Syrian employee of Het Nederlands sits at the back of the classroom with his laptop. Everybody starts speaking Arabic to each other, which gives a disorganized impression. After a few minutes, another woman comes in the classroom and greets the students. The woman speaks fluent Dutch. "Well, hello everyone. I know that I agreed with A2 that they would be in another classroom to study together, but because we have too few students today to make two groups, we will do the class in one room anyway". The students nod their heads. The woman comes to me and introduces herself. "Hello, I am Veronica. I am the teacher". I introduce myself and Veronica starts talking to the group again. "So how was everyone's weekend?" Veronica asks. "You know what, we will begin on the left and continue down the row, so everyone can tell what they did this weekend. Raja, what did you do this weekend?" Raja laughs with one of the other women and starts talking. "We drunk Mette together. I have cid her daughter's hair." Veronica writes the last sentence down on the whiteboard. "Can someone tell me what is wrong with this sentence?" The students look at each other and start talking in Arabic. "The sentence is not in the past" says a young man in the back of the classroom. Veronica shakes her head and looks around if someone else knows the answer. "You need to remove the word 'her'", says the man who is sitting next to Raja. "No", says Veronica and she removes the word 'cid'. "I know that this one is difficult, but this word is not in correct present perfect" It needs to be cut and not cid. Does everyone understand that?" The students start to talk chaotically in Arabic to each other. Raja starts talking in Arabic to the men on the other side of the class. "I just let them talk in Arabic, because they can better understand this when it is explained in Arabic", says Veronica to me. "Raja is one of the best in our class. She is already at level A2, even B1, and the men on the right are at level A1. So, she can help them understand it better." The Syrian employee starts to talk Arabic as well and explains to Veronica that she can continue, because the students understand it now. The class becomes more silent, and Veronica continues. "I think I do not know you?" she asks the woman sitting in the middle of the class. "No, I come from a different language school" says the woman. "Which language school was this?" Veronica asks further. "Business Taal", answers the woman. Veronica starts laughing. "Oh, that is the organization that committed fraud. Did you get a new car or a new laptop from them?" she jokes. The woman does not answer this. Veronica talks further. "Who are you and what did you do this weekend?" "I do A2 level at Business Taal. I have a husband and three brothers with him. I mean sons. I live in Rotterdam", says the woman. "I do not think you have level A2 yet, but we will see in this lesson", says Veronica and she continues with asking the next students how his day was.¹⁹

This vignette shows how class of the language school Het Nederlands usually went during my participant observation there. The method of the teacher consists of not preparing, but having informal conversations with students. When a student makes an error in their sentence, the teacher writes down the sentence and corrects it together with the class, as Veronica did above. This kind of method often gives a disorganized impression where the students start to speak Arabic with each other when they

¹⁹ Participant observation during a Dutch language class of Het Nederlands – 18 February 2021

must explain the grammar. When the participants do not understand a certain grammar rule, this will be comprehensively explained by the teacher as well.

Besides Het Nederlands, there are many other private language schools in Rotterdam who use this method during class. Also, Lars, a teacher from Vluchtelingenwerk who teaches level B1, uses informal conversations and the questions from students as the base of the lessons. Within his class, he argues this is better, because he can be more flexible for his students. He explains the following during a conversation after his online class:

*"I will give the example of today. Because the students asked me about making negative sentences last week, I decided to make a lesson out of it today. It is better to be flexible and talk with them about what is happening in the Netherlands or what they need."*²⁰

Both teachers explain that they have mainly informal conversations with their students about everyday topics. According to them, this is important for the Syrian students, because this helps them to talk about everyday topics with other Dutch citizens outside the language school. It would help the problem of Huizinga and van Hooven (2018, 315), who argue that in the beginning of the integration process, many refugees do not know how to have conversations in Dutch. This makes it harder for them to communicate with other Dutch citizens. When the Syrian refugees and Dutch citizens do not know each other, this can bring up prejudice towards each other, which can be an obstacle for the integration of the Syrian refugees. This method of improving the everyday conversations of the refugees can be seen as a way to communicate more with Dutch citizens and countering alienation between the two groups.

When looking at the integration debate, this method of having informal conversations with the refugees is in line with the idea of Berry et al. (2002, 354), who argues that integration is an approach where newcomers try to participate as part of the social network in the society. Through the informal conversations about different subjects, these language schools try to prepare the refugees with this method to participate as part of the Dutch social network. Within this debate, Eriksen (2010, 180) argues the migrants adopt the language, norms, and values of the nation-state during their integration. Although this seems to be in line with the Dutch integration system, where the migrants are obligated to do this through the integration exams, language classes of Vluchtelingenwerk and Het Nederlands show their methods are more focused on accepting and knowing the language, norms, and values rather than the assimilation of these labels.

Although the teachers, Veronica and Lars, argue that having informal conversations as a method to teach Dutch helps the participants to communicate better with other Dutch citizens, other Syrian participants explain that different language schools use other methods as well with the students. According to Bahir and Rasha, two Syrian refugees who went to Prisma language school, their Dutch teacher was also focused on the rules of Dutch grammar besides having informal conversations. Bahir argued that at Prisma he learned *"Only grammar"*.²¹ Other participants argue that their language schools used *"Old fashion-style"*²² or their teacher *"made it like a competition between the students"*²³ This shows that the language schools in Rotterdam use various methods and styles to teach Dutch and did not only focus on practicing their conversation skills. Still, these participants were also focused on having a good conversation with me as well as with each other when they were taught by Veronica and Lars. Despite that the method of having a lot of informal conversation helps the students face less

20 Informal conversation with Lars, a Dutch teacher from Vluchtelingenwerk – 15 February 2021

21 Semi-structured interview with Bahir, a 38-year old Syrian refugee living in Rotterdam – 18 March 2021

22 Semi-structured interview with Aziz, a 32-year old Syrian refugee living in Rotterdam – 4 April 2021

23 Semi-structured interview with Shady, a 35-year old Syrian refugee living in Rotterdam – 19 February 2021

prejudice from other Dutch citizens, it is not necessarily the only method that helps the participants against the alienation that Huizinga and van Hooven (2018) encountered in their research. The Syrian participants could choose the school, which they thought was using the best method. However, all the schools have in common that they teach their students about the Dutch norms and values along with the language. This is because the Syrian students must do an exam for KNM. Most Syrian refugees explain that their language schools talk a bit about the Dutch norms and values during classes. The organization Stichting Nieuw Thuis Rotterdam (SNTR) goes even a step further by taking Syrian refugees to places in Rotterdam to make them speak Dutch and show them the Dutch society. According to Mahdi and Selma, Syrian refugees who were part of the SNTR program, SNTR had more purpose than only learning the language. They explain that SNTR took them to the library or to the doctor to practice their Dutch and show them how everything works. Mahdi explains in his interview that during his classes they “were making a CV and account at *werk.nl* and *LinkedIn*”.²⁴ As SNTR shows, the focus of the language schools is also on the socio-economic aspects of integration, which seems to be in line with van Ostaijen and Scholten (2014, 687). However, they argue that the integration system in Rotterdam is more focused on socio-economic aspects and less on the cultural. In contradiction with their statement, I argue that the cultural aspect is also important as most language schools are putting effort to talk about the Dutch norms and values. As I have mentioned in the introduction, Berry et al. (2002, 354) and Boski (2008, 143) argue integration consists of adopting the norms and values of the new nation-state and keeping the national identity of the nation-state of origin. The language schools in Rotterdam teach the Syrian refugees the new social and cultural labels, which they learn to pass the exams. However, as argued before, teaching the social and cultural labels is in line with Berry et al. (2002, 354), who argues that integration is an approach where newcomers participate as part of the social network in the society. Here, the participants do not seem to take over these labels, but get more familiar with them and learn them for their exams.

All in all, language schools seem to help the Syrian refugees with integrating into the society. However, there has been difficulties with the language schools and the integration system during these last few years, which will be further explained in the next section.

Language schools committing fraud

It is in the afternoon. Shady and I are at his apartment. We are sitting at the dinner table across each other while having a conversation about language schools. Shady talks immediately about the language schools and the integration system were not good when he came to the Netherlands. “Every immigrant who had to integrate into the country was given 10.000 euros and from this 10.000 euros he had to pick out a language school himself and learn the language. It was your own responsibility how you spend this loan from DUO.” Shady drinks a bit of his tea and explains further. “This plan was from Asscher which I find weird, because Asscher comes from the PvdA, which is a left party and for equality. For me, to find a language school by yourself in an unknown country was very hard and I got little help. The information about the language schools were written in Dutch and I could not speak Dutch. Language schools knew that we got 10.000 and tried to lure us in their schools even when they were not good or not really helping.” Shady’s voice changes from frustrating to happy. “Still, I am now glad this plan will change and already has changed since 2020. It is now better than when I came to the Netherlands.”²⁵

24 Semi-structured interview with Mahdi, a 38-year old Syrian refugee living in Rotterdam – 16 February 2021

25 Informal conversation with Shady, a 35-year old Syrian refugee living in Rotterdam – 13 February 2021

As can be seen in the vignette, Shady has been very critical about the integration system, because the government gave him and other Syrian refugees 10.000 euros to find a language school on their own. Many language schools used this as an opportunity to get the money, but not to teach the refugees the Dutch language. This reminded Shady of an article that he messaged me after the conversation. The article comes from De Volkskrant (2020) and is written by Stoffelen, de Zwaan and van Uffelen. They explain that since 2013, the refugees have their own responsibility to integrate into the Dutch society. This means that they can choose their own language school. The idea was that competition between the language schools would improve their quality: the best schools would get the most clients. This became more interesting when many Syrian refugees came to the Netherlands between 2014 and 2016 (CBS 2020, 91).²⁶ Many language schools were created to teach them Dutch. The refugees did not get the money on their own account, but DUO provided it for them as a loan. This rule was made to prevent misuse of the money, but this could not be prevented when the Syrian refugees made a deal with the language schools. This deal meant that the language school takes the money from DUO without giving the integrators language classes. In return, the integrators get a part of the money from the language school. Here, the integrators would not learn Dutch and would not pass the exam, but when they fail four times and they can show they have taken classes for at least 600 hours, they still get the exemption of the integration rules. Stoffelen et al. (2020) explain that everyone can begin a language school even Syrians who do not speak the language fluently, which is the case at the language school Het Nederlands. However, the directors that are committing fraud have various backgrounds. Shady explains that he experienced this fraud at two of his language schools, Delken and Boot and Business Taal. According to him, Delken and Boot “*need your money. Whether you learn Dutch or not.*”²⁷ Shady argues that Business Taal was better, because he had a good teacher. However, he explains the following in his interview.

*The third one [Business Taal], I was lucky, because I got a good teacher, but if you look at the system and the owner of the school. He is one of the biggest thieves in Rotterdam. [...] You just go to him, and you say: I want to buy a laptop and I will not go to school. Could you buy a laptop? I give you 1000 euro and you could keep 500 euro. He was one of the biggest thieves I have ever seen.*²⁸

Besides Shady, other Syrian participants, such as Aziz, have experienced fraud from the director of Business Taal as well and agrees with Shady that this was bad. Also, Mohammad, a Syrian refugee who learned Dutch at language school Prisma, says “*Prisma is good, but other schools are thieves. For example, DUO gives us 10.000 euros. [...] If you do not want to come, you give 300 euro.*”²⁹

As Stoffelen et al. (2020) and the participants show, not all Syrian refugees will learn Dutch through the schools, because the schools do not want to put effort in it. Because of this, they experience delays within their integration process and receiving their Dutch citizenship. As Isin (2009, 371-372) argues, receiving citizenship is not receiving a membership, but a power relation between groups that are living within the society. He argues that becoming a citizen means individuals must adopt modes and forms of the society or challenge them to transform them. An example for these modes and forms is the Dutch language. For refugees, these modes and forms are struggles to claim citizenship as justice. It is through claiming these particular modes and forms that citizenship becomes a site of rights. The Syrian refugees try to receive their Dutch citizenship by integrating into the society

26 Centraal Bureau Statistiek. 2020. “Bevolking; leeftijd, migratieachtergrond, geslacht, regio, 1 jan. 1996-2020”. Accessed August 14, 2021. <https://opendata.cbs.nl/statline/#/CBS/nl/dataset/37713/table?dl=57501>

27 Semi-structured interview with Shady, a 35-year old Syrian refugee living in Rotterdam – 19 February 2021

28 Semi-structured interview with Shady, a 35-year old Syrian refugee living in Rotterdam – 19 February 2021

29 Semi-structured interview with Mohammad, a 34-year old Syrian refugee living in Rotterdam – 24 February 2021

and, therefore, adopting the Dutch modes and forms, in particular their language. When the language schools refuse to help the Syrians to learn Dutch, the refugees do not receive their right to learn this language and, therefore, have difficulties with integrating and receiving the Dutch citizenship. The language schools have the power to progress the integration of the Syrian refugees by teaching them the language or not. As Shady show in the beginning of this section, the refugees are dependent on the language schools and can be easily manipulated, because they do not understand what they must do. In line with Isin (2009), Ong (1996, 738) argues about the power relations as well. Here, she explains that citizenship is a dual process of self-making and being-made that is related to power relations in the nation-state and civil society. Becoming a citizen depends on how the person is being-made as someone who controls or submits to the power relations and how the self-making of the person effects the fields of power. The participants show that they must submit to the power of the society and, therefore, taking over modes and forms, which Isin (2009) discussed. Here, the language schools must help them integrate into Dutch society. On the other hand, Syrian refugees have a certain control over becoming a Dutch citizen as well. They can choose to leave the language school when it is committing fraud and go to a school that is better. As Asscher argues in De Volkskrant (2020), they have control over the 10.000 euro and choosing the language schools. The refugees have the agency to achieve full integration in the society. However, Stoffelen et al. (2020) argue that some Syrian refugees know that they are committing fraud, which means that some refugees are partly responsible for their stagnation of integration as well. Many participants have argued that they look negatively towards these Syrians. Bahir is one of these participants who says the following about Syrians committing fraud with the language schools.

“Some people, they do not go to school. Only getting 600 hours studying and they do four exams. If you fail four times, you can immediately get the Dutch passport. I do not think this is good. It is not nice for them. If he has a Dutch passport and, for example, he wants to go to a hospital or a school or he wants to fly. [...] He cannot give answer. How can that? You have a Dutch passport, but you cannot talk Dutch. You have a Dutch passport, but you cannot make an appointment with the doctor or at the hospital or at school. You cannot talk to your neighbor or, for example, customers service, do you understand?”³⁰

Besides Bahir, Aziz and Shady looks negatively towards these Syrians, but explains their behavior. During a conversation with them, Aziz explains *“In Syria, the government is corrupt as well. So, we feel less bad when we are stealing from the state”*.³¹

Besides the fraud some language schools and Syrian refugees have committed, there has been another difficulty the language schools and the Syrian refugees have experienced. Due to Covid-19, the participants who are still busy with learning Dutch were not able to go to school. Many language schools found a solution by giving online classes. For example, the language classes from teacher Lars were online. These classes begin with having conversations about current informal topics on WhatsApp and, after, on zoom where Lars would explain grammar rules that the students did not understand.

With these difficulties of the language schools, it can be argued that learning the Dutch language comes with a certain responsibility and motivation from the language schools as well as from the Syrian refugees. This will be explained in the next section.

³⁰ Semi-structured interview with Bahir, a 38-year old Syrian refugee living in Rotterdam – 18 March 2021

³¹ Informal conversation with Aziz and Shady, 32-year old and 35-year old Syrian refugees living in Rotterdam – 25 February 2021

Motivation of the Syrian refugees

As discussed above, the Dutch integration system gives most responsibility to the Syrian refugees. They must learn Dutch by themselves and search for the language schools on their own (Huizinga and van Hooven 2018). According to most participants, this is very difficult for them, because they are new in the Netherlands and, therefore, they often do not know how to find the good schools to integrate into the new society. Besides this, participants argue that their migration is involuntary migration. This is in line with Colson (2003, 2), who agrees that refugees have different and often involuntary reasons to leave their nation-state and move to another one than other migrants. The reason for the Syrians is that they had to leave Syria because of the war against the Islamic State or the Syrian regime. Most of them had to leave their families behind and had traumatic experience during their travel. According to Mahdi *“a lot of people [Syrian refugees] are not motivated or find it difficult to integrate. They talk about back in the days”*.³² According to him and other participants, a lot of Syrian refugees are still having their heads in Syria and with their family who are living there. This causes them to be less focused on learning their integration. Syrian participants argue that this and difficulties with the Dutch integration system cause frustration and demotivation. Shady shows a part of this frustration about the lack of help from the government and the schools committing fraud during his interview.

*“Who put the system to learn Dutch? I am sorry, but he is not a smart man or woman. I do not know who put it but maybe Mr. Asscher from... Yes, who put the system, because I am from Syria. I could put for you guys the system like that, because I do not know how to learn but I will not give 10.000 to someone who does not speak English or Dutch and he is alone at that! Of course, these guys will look at you as a 10.000 euro walking in the street and will try to take it from you to their advantage, because you do not speak the language.”*³³

Despite Syrian refugees have difficulties with their language integration because of traumatic events and failures of the Dutch integration system, many of them are still motivated when it comes to learning the Dutch language. In the debate about to what extent refugees need to integrate into the new nation-state, Eriksen (2010, 159-189) argues that there should be a separate category for refugees. He explains that there are many refugees who are temporarily in the new nation-state and return home eventually. Because of this, they consider it unnecessary to integrate into the new nation-state. According to Eriksen (2010), they lack citizenship of the new society. On the other hand, Eriksen (2010) argues that there are refugees who stay in the new nation-state and become half refugee and half labor migrant. Here, all Syrian participants have argued that they will stay here forever, and they do not want to go back to Syria. In line with Eriksen (2010), they become half labor migrants, because they see a better future for them and their children in the Netherlands. Many participants argue that the economy in Syria is not as good as in the Netherlands and, therefore, they want to live here. They are very thankful to have the opportunity to integrate into the new society and they are motivated to learn Dutch by going to language schools. Despite Eriksen's argument that they might lack citizenship, I argue they are motivated to gain this citizenship through learning Dutch at school. Here, Shady argues that *“the system is wrong. So, you should look at yourself and look for you what is your motivation to learn this foreign language, this difficult language”*.³⁴ Other participants have argued that they have been or still are busy with going to the language schools. During my participant observation at Het

32 Semi-structured interview with Mahdi, a 38-year old Syrian refugee living in Rotterdam – 16 February 2021

33 Semi-structured interview with Shady, a 35-year old Syrian refugee living in Rotterdam – 19 February 2021

34 Semi-structured interview with Shady, a 35-year old Syrian refugee living in Rotterdam – 19 February 2021

Netherlands, I have seen that Syrian students show up for class and are active during the lessons. This is in line with Dagevos et al. (2018) who argue that Syrians are busy learning Dutch and are making progress. In the debate of citizenship, showing up and being active in classes can be seen as a part of their active participation and, therefore, being an active citizen. This is argued by Schinkel (2010, 268-269). He shows that an active citizen can be seen as a 'real' citizen in the society who has equal rights and opportunities as other citizens. However, Schinkel (2010) is critical about this idea as well when it comes to not being active enough. Immigrants who are not actively integrating enough, according to the society, can be seen as non-citizens or second-class citizens. This active participation of Syrian participants in language classes and the progress they make when integrating should eventually give them Dutch citizenship as a feeling of belonging. However, I agree with Schinkel (2010, 268-274) that there are expectations from the dominant society towards the refugees that they should be active citizens to be good citizens.

The refugees argue they were expected to fully integrate within five years. Currently, this has become within three years (DUO, n.d.).³⁵ This affects their motivation of learning the Dutch language well. Because of this, the refugees are mainly focused on passing the exams in the beginning and not necessarily on learning the language.

Conclusion

The language schools in Rotterdam play an important role during the integration of Syrian refugees. To pass the integration exams and receive formal citizenship, the Syrian refugees must go to these language schools. During their classes, most teachers use informal conversations as a method, because, in line with Berry et al. (2002) and his argument in the debate about integration, they argue that this leads to more involvement within Dutch society. Mainly with teaching the Dutch language and Dutch norms and values, Syrian refugees could get more in contact with other Dutch citizens. However, a few language schools have played a negative role in the lives of the Syrian participants. Here, they have experienced fraud from some language schools, which shows a failure of the Dutch integration system. Because of this failure, the Syrian refugees had difficulties when their language schools did not help them with their integration. In line with Isin (2009), they experienced difficulties to receive citizenship as a right. Due to this, formal citizenship as well as citizenship as a feeling of belonging can become harder to receive. Even despite the failures of the integration system, Syrian participants are still motivated to learn Dutch and this active participation in the classes should lead eventually to a Dutch citizenship. However, in line with Schinkel (2010), we should look critically towards this active participation, because these are the standards of the new society. Therefore, it is important to know the view on active participation of the Syrian refugees themselves as well. Here, many Syrians participants have argued that being active in language schools is only partly responsible for their integration and receiving Dutch citizenship. This will be further explained by the participants in the next chapter.

35 Dienst Uitvoering Onderwijs. n.d. "U gaat inburgeren." Accessed August 14, 2021. <https://www.inburgeren.nl/u-gaat-inburgeren>



2 The views of Syrian refugees on Dutch language integration

It is evening, and I am sitting with Aziz and Ali on the couch at Aziz his place. We are discussing what their opinions are about the language schools Aziz went to. "Both of them are good if you want to start with Dutch language", he says to me. Aziz goes further by expressing his opinion more. "I think that beginning or starting with old fashion style is better than starting with something modern and new. This is my own opinion. This is my point of view. Maybe someone else will say to you it is not, it is bad, that is not good, it is a mistake, no. In my opinion, it was good experience." Ali nods his head and I agree as well. "It is important that you say your opinion", I respond.³⁶

In the previous chapter, I have shown that the language schools in Rotterdam have positive as well as negative influences on the language integration of Syrian refugees. It became clear that different language schools and their teachers have various ideas of teaching classes to help the Syrian participant integrate into Dutch society. However, I find it important to show how Syrian refugees experience the language integration through the language schools and how this influences their Dutch citizenship. In line with Bucken-Knapp et al. (2018, 1-2), I argue that the idea and experience of integration is often only focused on the policymakers' point of view within the literature. Therefore, these integration ideas and measures of experiences have shortcomings. Previous studies have been lacking the voices of the refugees themselves and, therefore, there should be more research about integration focused on the point of views of refugees. In line with other anthropologists, I will provide this research with my own research findings reaching both the public and policymakers and give voice to these Syrian refugees (Colson 2003, 5-13).

In line with the debate about citizenship and integration, this chapter will provide the experiences of Syrian refugees about learning Dutch through the language schools. In line with Colson (2003), the Syrian refugees can have a different view on their integration than policymakers and other migrants. Here, I will argue that the participants have mainly positive experiences with learning the language via the language schools in Rotterdam. I will explain that they even have language buddies who come to their houses, which are often provided by the language schools as well. These language buddies help them a lot with learning Dutch. However, I will mention that the participants argue that the language school is important for their language integration, but they are not the only way my Syrian participants learn Dutch. Also, most participants mainly speak Arabic outside the Dutch language schools with friends and family.

A positive view on the language schools

"Yes. I find it [language school Cluster] good, because everyone gets attention from the teacher and have enough space to try to speak Dutch with the teacher or with other students. I was happy, because the teacher was very good, and I have learned a lot from them."³⁷

In his argument about the language school Cluster, Anwar explains, that he is having a very positive experience with the language school. Other Syrian participants are positive about most language classes of the language schools in Rotterdam as well. According to them, there are some language schools who were bad, for example, because of the fraud. However, most participants argue their

³⁶ Informal conversation with Aziz and Ali, 32-year old and 33-year old refugees living in Rotterdam - 4 April 2021

³⁷ Semi-structured interview with Anwar, a 35-year old refugee living in Rotterdam – 1 March 2021

2 The views of Syrian refugees on Dutch language integration

language schools are “good”³⁸, “gave courage, support”³⁹ and “they [teachers] really helped me”.⁴⁰ All participants argue that they liked going to classes and experience them as effective. However, some participants argue they find working more important than studying Dutch. One of these participants is Mohammad. In his interview he says the following.

“Yes, yes, I like it [studying Dutch], but studying one year is enough for me. I must work. When I was little, I should study.”⁴¹

Although that Mohammad argues he finds working more important, he also agrees that you should at least know A2 level Dutch to be able to work. He agrees with the other participants that studying Dutch at the language schools is effective for running his own bakery.

Other participants argue as well that they find it very important to learn the Dutch language to be able to live in the Dutch society. This opinion from the Syrian participants is why they are very motivated to learn Dutch, which is described in chapter one. The Syrian participants find it very important to integrate into the Dutch society. Eriksen (2010, 180) argues that the integrators often assume the identity of the new society, which means they take over the language, norms, and values from the dominant group within the society. Here, the participants are very motivated to take over the Dutch language. Eriksen (2010, 180) argues that this is related to the right to equality for migrants within the society, which can refer to receiving citizenship. This fear of not having equality can be seen by the participants. This fear is related to how they see themselves when they do not know the language. A few participants argue that they feel “as a deaf person”⁴² when living in the Dutch society without knowing the language. Bahir argues in his interview the following about not knowing the language in the Dutch society.

“Yes, yes. I find myself stupid. I do not understand anything without Dutch language. Look at the first year when I came to the Netherlands. I do not understand anything. If I want to buy one cookie, I cannot do it. Everyone talks, I do not understand. I find myself, yes, I am stupid. I must talk Dutch. I have to understand Dutch.”⁴³

The example of Bahir shows how important participants find it to learn Dutch to not be excluded from the Dutch society. In the debate about citizenship, Eriksen (2010, 77-119) argues that language is a social construct that is part of the citizenship of a society. With this, he means that being able to speak a certain language can cause individuals to be part of a society. When they are not able to speak the language, it can cause them to be excluded. Sharing the Dutch language in the Dutch society can cause inclusion, but, at the same time, it can exclude the Syrian participants when they do not know the language. Schrover and Schinkel (2013) and Fermin (2009) agree with this by arguing that learning the language of the new society can give access or denial to Dutch citizenship. As discussed in the debate about citizenship, Fermin (2009, 13) argues that citizenship refers to the membership of individuals in a society. This means that having citizenship is seen as a status, which is related to being included in society, while not having citizenship means exclusion. Schrover and Schinkel (2013, 1135) argue that a certain language can be embedded in the nation-state as well when the nation-state is dominated by one society. A shared language in a society can cause inclusion, but at the same time, it

38 Semi-structured interview with Mousa, a 38-year old refugee living in Rotterdam – 12 April 2021

39 Semi-structured interview with Shady, a 35-year old Syrian refugee living in Rotterdam – 19 February 2021

40 Semi-structured interview with Anwar, a 35-year old refugee living in Rotterdam – 1 March 2021

41 Semi-structured interview with Mohammad, a 34-year old Syrian refugee living in Rotterdam – 24 February 2021

42 Semi-structured interview with Aziz, a 32-year old Syrian refugee living in Rotterdam – 4 April 2021

43 Semi-structured interview with Bahir, a 38-year old Syrian refugee living in Rotterdam – 18 March 2021

can exclude individuals who do not know the language. When the participants learn Dutch, they can receive Dutch citizenship. The Syrian participants want to be included in the society and, therefore, they are prepared to study hard at the language schools in Rotterdam.

Furthermore, the Syrian participants have language buddies to improve their Dutch even more. These language buddies are Dutch citizens who visit the participants at their houses or in public places, and have informal conversations with the Syrians to improve their language and help them with juridical issues, finding work or practicing for the integration exams. These language buddies are often provided by the language schools. Through SNTR Mahdi and Selma had language buddies to practice their Dutch. During the interview with Selma, she enthusiastically argues the following about her language buddy.

“Really, yes. Actually, I do not know what to say, because she [her language buddy] has done so much for us. Yes, for reading and writing, yes, speaking.”⁴⁴

In line with Selma, other participants talk very enthusiastically about their language buddies as well. Raja explains during a conversation that she has two language buddies who help her with improving her Dutch language and studying for the integration exams. She argues about one of the language buddies she received from SNTR that *“she really helps me. She always comes at my house”*.⁴⁵ Raja and her husband, Mousa, both have separate language buddies that helps them in their own way.

Going to the language schools and having language buddies show that the Syrian participants are very active in their integration. In line with Schinkel (2010) and Fermin (2009), the participants are taking their own responsibility with their active integration and becoming an active citizen. Here, Schinkel (2010, 269-270) argues that in the current phase of the integration policy, receiving not only formal citizenship, but also citizenship as a feeling of belonging towards society has become the leading principle of being fully integrated. According to Fermin (2009,13), it becomes a choice for active participation by learning the Dutch language and culture and to be a ‘good’ citizen that is loyal towards the Dutch society. This can be seen back when looking at the arguments of the participants. All participants argue that learning Dutch is important to become an active citizen in the Dutch society. Here, they explain that without knowing Dutch, they will not be able to participate within the Dutch society. They have a fear of becoming excluded from it, which means the Syrian participants will not receive the citizenship as a feeling of belonging. Although the participants show that the language schools are very important for their language integration and receiving their citizenship, they also argue that learning Dutch does not only happen by attending the language schools. This will be explained in the next section.

Learning Dutch outside school

“Yes, I live here now in the Netherlands and maybe I will live here my whole life and I always thought that the language is the key for life here. If I do not know the language, I cannot do anything. I cannot have a job. I cannot talk with the people or have contact. That is why I think the first step to live in a new country is to learn the language.”⁴⁶

44 Semi-structured interview with Selma, a 31-year old refugee living in Rotterdam – 26 February 2021

45 Informal conversation with Raja, a 37-year old Syrian refugee living in Rotterdam – 12 April 2021

46 Semi-structured interview with Anwar, a 35-year old Syrian refugee living in Rotterdam – 1 March 2021

This argument of Anwar shows an important idea that all Syrian participants have argued when it comes to the importance of learning the Dutch language: language is key. Almost all participants argue that learning Dutch is the key for being part of society. Here, the participants agree with Lytra (2016, 19) and Anderson (2016, 6-46), who argues that language is seen as an important part of a membership of a certain group or society and related to the boundaries of certain groups and societies. Here, the authors argue that language is a form of power which can include and exclude individuals within an imagined community. As discussed before, the Syrian participants want to be included in the Dutch society to be equal with other Dutch citizens and receive their own Dutch citizenship. Because of this, they are motivated to learn Dutch. To learn the Dutch language, Syrian refugees must go to the language schools and do the integration exams until level A2. However, almost all participants argue that learning the language does not only come from the school and passing the integration exams. Aziz is one of the participants who shows his criticism on the integration exams and how this does not mean that passing the exam means you can speak Dutch. He says the following during his interview.

"In my opinion, these tests, examinations, are just a process to get the nationality. It is not the point to become a Dutch person, citizen. It is not if you get this examination, or these tests, or this degree, certificate... It does not mean that you are Dutch. It is only a process. It is only a way you must pass to become, but some people, many people, got succeed in this examination and yet they cannot speak Dutch. These integration exams are only a way to get the nationality, because you can pass this exam, study hard or if you study shortly, but if you want to be part of the society or be a Dutch citizen or not or... You must speak. You will do that personally from your own principle. I can assure you a lot of people who got nationalities, they cannot even speak Dutch at all, not one word. So, it is not a principle to become Dutch, yes."⁴⁷

Aziz shows in his argument that refugees who pass the integration exam and get the Dutch nationality are not always active in the Dutch society. Learning the language is more than practicing for the integration exams at school. He argues that the integrators must do more than only focusing on passing the exams. Here, Anwar explains more during his interview about the shortcomings of Dutch language schools and how they learn more Dutch from the street.

"We have learned a lot from the school, from the Dutch courses, but I always think that the school is not enough. It is a good way to start learning Dutch, but it is not enough for everyday life. They only give the base, the grammar, but we learn more from the street. We learn the language more from real life than from the school."⁴⁸

As Anwar and Aziz mention, the language schools have shortcomings when it comes to learning Dutch and, therefore, fully integrating in the Dutch society. Still, Anwar argues that they help them mainly in the beginning with learning the language, but it is not the only way the participants improve their Dutch. As discussed in the first chapter, Schinkel (2010, 268-269) argues that, most of the time, there are expectations from the dominant society towards the refugees where they expect the refugees to be active citizens. Schinkel (2010) is critical about this statement during the debate about citizenship and argues that the immigrants are seen as non-citizens of second-class citizens when they are not active enough. However, the Syrian participants agree that they should show they are more active

47 Semi-structured interview with Aziz, a 32-year old Syrian refugee living in Rotterdam – 4 April 2021

48 Semi-structured interview with Anwar, a 35-year old Syrian refugee living in Rotterdam – 1 March 2021

citizens by not only actively participating at school and studying hard for the integration exams. Also, they show this by learning Dutch and improving their integration to receive the full citizenship by learning outside the schools, which means to receive formal citizenship as well as citizenship as a feeling of belonging within the Dutch society. Doing active participation to be more included in society means that the Syrian refugees learn the language from the street. Here, they argue that they learn the language in different ways besides the school. Syreeta explains that, besides the language school Prisma, she learns Dutch from *“watching programs for children or the news”*.⁴⁹ Also, Najila says during a conversation that she *“watch Peppa Pig with my children”*.⁵⁰ Mahdi explains that besides watching TV, he also learns Dutch from his social media. He argues *“I use social media only for learning the language [...]. For me it does not matter. Sometimes I watch YouTube, Facebook, Tiktok [...]. Sometimes I see programs [on social media] and I read what the people react. I learn a lot of words with that.”*⁵¹ Besides learning the language through TV and social media, Shady explains that he goes to a language café in Rotterdam. According to him, people in this language café *“meet up with volunteers who want to speak and practice with the newcomers [...]. It was amazing and it really helps you to learn Dutch. [...] I met up with a Brazilian girl, Portuguese women, people from Sudan, from Syria of course, many people. I made friends there. I still have contact with them. A woman also from Tunisia. So, the Taal café helped me more than school.”*⁵² Other participants argue that having contact with other Dutch citizens helps them with improving the Dutch language as well. As discussed before, Mohammad explains that this goes through his work in his bakery. Working in the bakery helps him to improve his Dutch more than the language school. Also, Raja and Mahdi argue that they speak a lot of Dutch while working as hairdressers.

In general, the participants argue that talking to other Dutch citizens helps them more with learning the language than only school. This means that the Syrian participants see the language school more as a beginning tool to learn Dutch. When they want to improve their language integration, they explain that they learn more from talking to other Dutch people on the street. A good example comes from Ali, a Syrian refugee who learned Dutch for four months at school until level A2. However, he speaks more fluent and knows more Dutch words than someone who is at A2 level. According to Ali, this is because he only speaks Dutch and never Arabic to other people to improve the language. He argues that he *“mainly learned Dutch from the street and not really from the language schools”*⁵³, which is the same Anwar discussed above.

Improving the Dutch language through, TV, social media, work and talking to other Dutch citizens seems to show that the Syrian refugees do not need the language schools to learn the language. However, this is not the case. According to the participants, the language schools are mainly in the beginning an important tool to learn Dutch. The schools are key for starting to learn Dutch, and gives them access to language buddies, which helps them get in contact with other Dutch citizens. The participants argue that schools are important, but they improve their basic Dutch more through being an active citizen in the Dutch society. This means that the language integration of Syrian refugees improves when being active in school as well as outside school. According to Chee and Jakubiak (2010, 119), when refugees are more integrated, they tend to be more included as members into the society and, therefore, they receive the same treatment as other citizens. However, I agree with Eriksen (2010) that this is more difficult than what Chee and Jakubiak argue. Here, Eriksen (2010, 70-167) argues that, despite the motivation of migrants to fully integrate in a society, they often want

49 Semi-structured interview with Syreeta, a 33-year old Syrian refugee living in Rotterdam – 5 March 2021

50 Informal conversation with Najila, a 35-year old Syrian refugee living in Rotterdam – 13 March 2021

51 Semi-structured interview with Mahdi, a 38-year old Syrian refugee living in Rotterdam – 16 February 2021

52 Semi-structured interview with Shady, a 35-year old Syrian refugee living in Rotterdam – 19 February 2021

53 Semi-structured interview with Ali, a 33-year old Syrian refugee living in Rotterdam – 11 March 2021

to keep the identity of the nation-state of origin as well. Because of this, some migrants have a harder time placing themselves within the new society, because their identity of origin can be perceived as an aspect that does not belong in the new society. Therefore, they can get excluded from gaining citizenship. However, I also argue that this is not always the case in every society, but it is partly the case when looking at the mother language of Syrian participants, Arabic. This will be explained further in the next section.

The struggle of being bilingual

“Arabic is very important actually and me and my wife and children always speak our mother language at home. I know that Dutch is important here, but also my mother language is important. I always want to have contact with my parents. My children can have contact with my parents. Maybe we will go on vacation in Syria, to my country. Then I also want my children to talk in my mother language. That is why I think it is very important and the other reason is because of our religion, because our book, Quran, comes with the Arabic language and I always want to read this book and I want my children to learn it [the Quran].”⁵⁴

In the past few sections, it has become clear that the Syrian participants are very motivated to learn Dutch through school and outside school. However, I often noticed that many participants speak Arabic when they are at home or when they talk with friends and family. Participants argue that the reason for speaking Arabic is because it is “easier”⁵⁵ and because “it is my mother language”.⁵⁶ Also, the participants find speaking Arabic important, because they can speak to their family in Syria, they are able to read the Quran in Arabic and their children would not forget their mother language, as Anwar described above. In line with what Huizinga and van Hooven (2018, 315) have shown through a few interviews they took with Syrian refugees, my participants still want to keep their Arabic as part of their Syrian culture in their daily life. As well as the refugees in the research of Huizinga and van Hooven (2018), the Syrian participants want to maintain their ‘Syrianness’ by keep communicating in Arabic with each other. However, the participants did not argue that this is because their heart still belongs to their home country, but because it feels more comfortable, and they understand each other better. The participants have argued that they are not prepared to integrate into the Dutch society to receive their Dutch citizenship when it involves not keeping their Syrian language. This means that they want to keep their Arabic language as part of their identity and life in the Dutch society.

By still talking a lot of Arabic, Syrian participants tend to make friends faster with other people who speak Arabic in Rotterdam. Because of this, they tend to make their own small community in Rotterdam. An example comes from my walk with Amir through Rotterdam. During this walk, he greeted a lot of people in Arabic. Amir told me that he knew a lot of people in Rotterdam. However, when I asked if he knew also Dutch people, he said “it is harder to meet Dutch people”.⁵⁷ Despite that Amir and other participants have contact with Dutch citizens as language buddies, through work and the neighborhood, many friends that I have met from my participants have an Arabic background and the participants speak mainly Arabic with them. I argue that the reason for the participants having less contact with Dutch citizens than citizens with an Arabic background relates to being bilingual. As

54 Semi-structured interview with Anwar, a 35-year old Syrian refugee living in Rotterdam – 1 March 2021

55 Semi-structured interview with Anwar, a 35-year old Syrian refugee living in Rotterdam – 1 March 2021

56 Semi-structured interview with Bahir, a 38-year old Syrian refugee living in Rotterdam – 18 March 2021

57 Informal conversation with Amir, a 32-year old Syrian refugee living in Rotterdam – 29 April 2021

discussed before, a shared language can cause inclusion in the Dutch society (Eriksen 2010; Schrover and Schinkel 2013, 1135). This can also be interpreted by the Syrian refugees. When most migrants learn the language of the new society, they often become bilingual. Here, the participants argue that it feels more comfortable talking and having contact with individuals who are bilingual, because they are often in the same situation. They even prefer speaking Arabic to each other, because they can explain themselves better in Arabic. Here, Shady argues that it *“feels that I talk like a little child when I speak Dutch”*.⁵⁸ He argues that he really can speak with his heart when communicating in Arabic. According to Eriksen (2010, 74), some of the migrants in Europe who are bilingual do also have a double citizenship when it comes to citizenship as a feeling of belonging. Here, the migrants feel a certain loyalty to the new nation-state or society as well as to their old nation-state. This can be related to the Syrian participants, because some of them have argued they feel a belonging to the Dutch society as well as to Syria. However, Schinkel (2010) argues that double citizenship can clash with the idea of many ‘native’ Dutch citizens who can often see integration as a form of assimilation. This means that participants are often expected to speak Dutch in the Dutch society. Here, Syrian participants have two different citizenships and could get into conflict where their loyalties lie (Eriksen 2010, 74). Despite these views of Schinkel (2010) and Eriksen (2010), all participants argue that they currently find the Dutch language more important than the Arabic language, because they live in the Netherlands and must speak Dutch to be part of the society. Therefore, I argue that I do not necessarily see this clash when it comes to the Dutch language. For the participants, the language schools are very important as a tool to start speaking the language in the beginning of their integration.

As I have discussed earlier, during the language classes, participants practice having informal conversations with the teacher and other students which gives them the basic words to use in everyday life. Because of this, participants, such as Selma, *“feel less shy”*⁵⁹ after practicing Dutch. Also, language schools, such as SNTR, provide the participants with their first Dutch contacts by helping them with a language buddy. Even though language schools do not teach the participants everything, they are very important with helping the participants speaking alongside other Dutch citizens outside the schools. This shows also that the conflict Schinkel (2010) and Eriksen (2010) mention, does not fully apply to the Syrian refugees. These Syrians are still willing to be part of the Dutch society, are willing to improve their Dutch language and currently have their loyalties to the Netherlands.

Conclusion

Looking at the debate about showing the views of the refugees on their language integration, the Syrian participants have positive experiences on learning the Dutch language through the language schools. They find it important to learn the language, because it is the key for living in the Dutch society. In line with Eriksen (2010), their motivation of assuming the Dutch language can be seen as a fear of not having equality within the Dutch society and being excluded from receiving citizenship as a feeling of belonging (Fermin 2009; Schrover and Schinkel 2013). Because of this, the Syrian refugees are actively improving their Dutch by having informal conversations with their language buddies besides their language classes. These language buddies are often provided by the language schools. However, participants argue that the language schools are not the only way to learn the language. The Syrian participants argue they should be active within the Dutch society to receive their formal citizenship as well as their citizenship as a feeling of belonging, which is in contradiction with the

58 Informal conversation with Shady, a 35-year old Syrian refugee living in Rotterdam – 13 February 2021

59 Semi-structured interview with Selma, a 31-year old Syrian refugee living in Rotterdam – 26 February 2021

critical view on active citizenship of Schinkel (2010). Although it seems that they learn the language more on the street than in their classes, I argue that the language schools are still very important, because these schools help the participants with getting in contact with other Dutch citizens. Still, when talking to Syrian participants, they often speak Arabic when meeting their contacts on the street, because it is easier, and the Arabic language is very important to them. In line with Eriksen (2010) and Schrover and Schinkel (2013), the participants tend to make faster connections with Arabic-speaking individuals, because their shared language causes inclusion. Furthermore, Schinkel (2010) and Eriksen (2010) argue that this can cause a clash between the refugees and other Dutch citizens, when the refugees do not know where their loyalties lie because of their double citizenship. However, I criticize this, because the participants argue they currently find the Dutch language more important, because they live here. The language schools are an important part here, because they still provide the Syrian refugees with their first Dutch contacts, and it teaches them the first Dutch words. This allows them to integrate better into society and makes them feel more at home in Rotterdam, which will be discussed in the next chapter.



3 The views of Syrian refugees on receiving Dutch citizenship

Mohammad, his employee and I are working at the bakery. The three of us are preparing the sweets so Mohammad could put them in the oven after. During the preparation of the sweets, I speak with Mohammad in Dutch about how he learned about the Dutch culture through the language school, Prisma. "I have learned the history and what the norms are in the Netherlands", says Mohammad. "I have also learned there that, when you see two men holding hands, you should do nothing and leave them alone. I agree with Mohammad, but he continues. "What do you think about this?". I tell him that it is normal in the Netherlands and ask him what he thinks of it. "I do not find it entirely normal. Animals do not do it as well. It is not natural", he responds.⁶⁰

In the last chapter, I have discussed the opinions of Syrian refugees about learning Dutch through the language schools. Here, I have showed that the language integration is very important for the participants, and they learn it in the schools as well as outside the schools. Furthermore, I have discussed in both chapters that language schools do not only teach the Dutch language, but also teach about the Dutch norms, and values. According to Guibernau (2013), the nation-state tries to create a common identity. According to Eriksen (2010, 180), this can be done by integration. Integration is closely linked to the identity of the dominant society. When migrants adopt the culture, language, norms, and values of the nation-state, they often tend to overtake the identity of this society as well. As can be seen in this vignette where Mohammad has learned about the Dutch norms and values as well. Here, Mohammad shows that he had to learn and take over these norms and values to receive the Dutch nationality. However, Mohammad still has his own opinion about the norm that being gay is normal. As I have discussed before in the second chapter, it is important to show the opinions of the refugees when it comes to their own integration, because previous studies have been lacking the voices of the Syrian refugees (Bucken-Knapp et al. 2018, 1-2; Colson 2003, 5-13). Therefore, this chapter will show the opinions of the refugees about the Dutch citizenship and to what extent they feel a belonging towards the Dutch society and the society in Rotterdam.

This chapter will show how Syrian refugees view the Dutch citizenship and how they learned about this through the language schools. They will argue to what extent they see themselves as Dutch citizens and to what extent they feel part of the Dutch society. The Syrian refugees have learned about the Dutch culture, norms, and values through the language schools, but it is also important to see if they have taken over these norms and values. At last, the Syrian refugees will argue to what extent Rotterdam has an influence on their belonging towards the Dutch society. All participants are currently living in Rotterdam and most of the schools they went to are settled there. Therefore, the city can have an influence on the citizenship of the refugees.

How Syrian refugees view Dutch citizens

Everybody in the class of Veronica talks with each other, which gives a chaotic vibe. Veronica is talking with Raja and Mousa at the door about Raja's exam. Eventually, they end the conversation and Raja and Mousa take their seat. "So how was everyone's Easter weekend?" asks Veronica to the class. "Because the 'autochtone' Dutch people celebrated the Easter weekend. Actually, what does autochtoon mean?" The class does not respond, and Veronica continues. "We have autochtoon and allochtoon, but in the Netherlands you are not really allowed to say this anymore. What do we

⁶⁰ Participant observation and informal conversations in the bakery Al Albaik Bakery of Mohammad, a 34-year old Syrian male refugee living in Rotterdam – 24 February 2021

3 The views of Syrian refugees on receiving Dutch citizenship

say now Valérie?" I respond by saying that I think we now say people with a migration background. Veronica has to laugh and writes the two words down. "Yes, I think so too. Autochtoon means that you are not only born in the Netherlands, but also your parents. So, we are all allochtoon", while saying this Veronica points at everyone in the classroom including herself. "But we do not use these words anymore", she says, and she continues with her previous question. "So how was everyone's Easter weekend? Did you celebrate Easter like the Dutch people?" A student responds to her by saying he only stayed at home and watched some TikTok videos with his children. Veronica has to laugh and continues her class.⁶¹

As is shown in this short vignette, language schools, as Het Nederlands, teach about the Dutch identity and 'way of life' besides the Dutch language. Veronica does this regularly by having conversations with her students about how Dutch citizens behave or celebrate, as is shown above. The themes she uses depends on the events happening in the Netherlands or what the refugees want to discuss. The Syrian participants from Het Nederlands argue that they like the way Veronica teaches about the Dutch norms and values, because learning about the Dutch society and how the citizens behave is also part of their exam (KNM) that they must pass to gain the Dutch nationality. In this way, they also prepare for their KNM exam as well. Besides learning about the Dutch society from the language schools, they also learn about this by practicing digital exams on the computer. Mousa is one of the participants who has shown me how they do this online. The exam consists of a short explanation and three possible answers. He must guess within a certain time frame which answer is the right answer. The answers are being read by a voice through the computer. It is interesting to note that the information the teacher gives to the participants about the Dutch society and its citizens seems to be subjective, as can be seen in the vignette above. Here, Veronica argues that Easter Weekend is related to being a Dutch citizen and, therefore, partly with their citizenship. In chapter one, I have argued that Isin (2009) and Ong (1996) perceive citizenship as power relations between groups. However, the way the language schools teach the Syrian participants is more as a membership, which can be seen as being part of the society and is criticized by Isin (2009). This form of membership is argued by Schinkel (2010) and Fermin (2009), which means inclusion within a state or society. The way the language schools teach the Syrians about the Dutch society is mainly related to the critical view of Schinkel (2010) about being only a real citizen when someone is an active citizen. Again, this can be seen back in the vignette where Veronica almost encourages her students to actively celebrate Easter weekend as Dutch citizens do.

Besides the teachers, the participants see Dutch citizenship as an active membership as well to show that they have equal rights. Most participants also learn about the Dutch society outside the schools. Here, they learn about the character traits of Dutch citizens from their surroundings, such as neighbors, language buddies and meeting people on the street. Many participants have had good experiences with other Dutch citizens. However, some participants experienced negative moments. An example comes from Syreeta who had a few arguments with her Dutch neighbor.

"There is a man here, who is my neighbor. One time I was going to school, and I was nine months pregnant. I almost fell from the bicycle. It was raining a lot. I did not know how to react in Dutch, but he came to me when I fell from the bicycle. He said hey lady, go away. You are not allowed to bicycle on the pavement. You must go there with your bicycle, because other people walk here [pavement]. No respect. He just yells. Hey, I am going to call the cops. [...] I got angry, but I cannot speak Dutch, so I scream in Arabic [laughs]."⁶²

⁶¹ Participant observation during a Dutch language class of Het Nederlands – 14 April 2021

⁶² Semi-structured interview with Syreeta, a 33-year old Syrian refugee living in Rotterdam – 5 March 2021

After Syreeta told her experience, she mentioned that she wants to be treated equally as any other Dutch citizen. Therefore, she explains that she will be happy when she receives her Dutch passport. With this passport, she considers herself as formally Dutch and equal with her neighbor. With this example, I see similarities with the Syreeta's experience and Eriksen (2010, 180), who argued that receiving citizenship is related to the right to equality within society. Despite with the critical view on active citizenship from Schinkel (2010), Syreeta's experience show that she agrees with the fact that individuals should be active to receive equal treatment. Here, she argues that she can be seen as an equal citizen, because she learns the same language and drives the car to do groceries as well as her neighbor.

The situation that Syreeta experienced shows that the Syrian refugees can have miscommunications with other Dutch citizens when they do not speak Dutch very well. In line with Huizinga and van Hooven (2018, 35), this can lead to prejudice from both sides. Mainly in the beginning of the integration process, the refugees have difficulties with communicating with other Dutch citizens because of the language. Both groups do not know each other's cultures. They become alienated from one another. This can bring up prejudice from the Syrian refugees towards the Dutch citizens. However, as I mentioned before, the participants have also many good experiences. Bahir is one of the participants who is very positive about his neighbor.

"I give you an example. I have a neighbor here. I walk on the street. I went to school with my children. I have seen him. I think this man is kind, a good man. I have said to him hey, good morning neighbor. He says yes good morning my friend. He says my friend to me, but I am not his friend. He says yes my friend, how are you? Everything good? How is your back? How is this? Do you have a job? I say to him I do not have a job. Yes, okay, that is good. I will see you later. I will find a job for you, do you understand? And those are nice people. I see also other neighbors. [...] Yes, I am always laughing. They have respect for me."⁶³

This example shows that the alienation between the refugees and other Dutch citizens, which is argued by Huizinga and van Hooven (2018), is not always the case. Despite some bad experiences with Dutch citizens, all participants are mainly positive about them and receiving Dutch citizenship. They see the Dutch people as nice, smart, and free. However, some participants say that despite them seeing Dutch people in a positive way, they also see some negative characteristics. Some say they are too direct or too honest and sometimes a bit greedy. According to the participants, they often see these characteristics of Dutch citizens in themselves. However, Syrian participants view receiving Dutch citizenship and being a Dutch citizen differently. This will be explained further in the next section.

Being a Syrian-Dutch citizen

"I want to be seen as Dutch, because there are many rules. The rules are hundred percent better than our rules. I am learning my children the Dutch rules, not ours. [...] For example, they must sleep at half past eight. In Syria, it does not matter. For example, it is no problem if they make a mess. Here, they must clean it up, boy or girl."⁶⁴

63 Semi-structured interview with Bahir, a 38-year old Syrian refugee living in Rotterdam – 18 March 2021

64 Semi-structured interview with Selma, a 31-year old Syrian refugee living in Rotterdam – 26 February 2021

3 The views of Syrian refugees on receiving Dutch citizenship

As Selma shows above, she is motivated to take over the Dutch characteristics and rules I have discussed in the previous section. Also, other participants have argued that they are seeing the Dutch characteristics in their own identity as well. An example comes from Mohammad who describes that Dutch citizens are free. During a conversation in the bakery, he argues that he sees himself as free, but a bit less free as a Dutch citizen. Ayub, a young Syrian man, argues that it is positive to be seen as a Dutch citizen. He says during an online interview that taking over the Dutch identity is positive.

"I am in the Netherlands. It is good to do the same as people from the Netherlands. When you do the same, it is more positive. You must do a kind of mix from yourself and the Dutch identity. Being in the Netherlands caused me to see good people and bad people. [...] I want to marry a Dutch girl in the future, and I want a Dutch passport. I think about the Netherlands as my country. I have nothing in Syria and the Netherlands give me everything. There are many advantages."⁶⁵

Besides that, Ayub argues taking over Dutch behavior and norms, and values is something positive, he also shows that he wants to have the Dutch passport and, therefore, become a Dutch citizen in a formal way. Besides Ayub, Bahir argues he has been very proud to have the Dutch passport.

"Yes, I find this [having passport] very good. I am happy. I live here. I am 38 years old. [...] I live here for three years and immediately I become Dutch. That is why I am very happy. I find this official. This [the passport] is really for me and for my children. [...] I am happy. The first day, I sleep with my passport in bed [laughing]. Yes, I am really happy."⁶⁶

Bahir and most other participants are very proud and grateful they can receive formal citizenship when they receive the Dutch passport. They seem to be very motivated to learn about the Dutch society and take over their norms and values. Almost all participants argue that they feel at home in the Dutch society. However, when I ask the Syrian participants if they feel they are Dutch citizens, I receive a contradictory answer. Here, most of the participants argue they do not fully feel like Dutch citizens when they are integrating or even when they are already fully integrated. The Syrians argue that they have lived most of their life in Syria and, therefore, are not able to forget that they are Syrian as well. Most of the participants see themselves as Syrian-Dutch citizens, which means that they have a combination of the Dutch identity and the Syrian identity. Modood (2019, 136) sees this as multicultural citizenship, where citizenship is based on the idea that citizens are not uniform, but have their own rights and values which makes their citizenship. Although I agree with the idea of multicultural citizenship, this does not mean that the Syrian participants see the Dutch citizenship as multicultural. During the conversations with most Syrian refugees, they argued that they feel they must choose between being a Dutch citizen or a Syrian citizen. However, in contradiction with Huizinga and van Hoven (2018) and Schinkel (2010), the Syrian participants do not feel less belonging with the Dutch society. As has been discussed in the previous chapters, the Syrians feel they have a double citizenship when it comes to citizenship as a feeling of belonging. Still, they argue that currently their loyalties lie with the Dutch, because they currently live in the Netherlands (Eriksen 2010, 189). Furthermore, the Syrian participants argue that living in Rotterdam has an influence on feeling part of the society as well. This will be discussed in the next section.

⁶⁵ Semi-structured interview with Ayub, a 24-year old Syrian refugee living in Rotterdam – 26 February 2021

⁶⁶ Semi-structured interview with Bahir, a 38-year old Syrian refugee living in Rotterdam – 18 March 2021

Being a citizen of Rotterdam

“Actually, I feel I am more Rotterdammer than Dutch. I am used to this place. Yes, actually, I have a lot of contact with Dutch citizens in Apeldoorn. I have visited Amsterdam and Den Helder, but besides those cities, I have been in Rotterdam. [...] When I visit my little brother in Apeldoorn. Yes, I do not feel calm until I am back in Rotterdam. Then I feel calmer.”⁶⁷

As discussed in the previous section, the Syrian participants do not feel they fully belong as Dutch citizens to the society. However, as Mahdi described in his argument above, he does feel he belongs more to the city of Rotterdam than to the rest of the Netherlands. He shows that he feels calmer and, therefore, at home when he is in Rotterdam than when in any other city of the Netherlands. The other participants agree with Mahdi. Here, they argue that citizens from Rotterdam are often “nice”⁶⁸ and “more open and accepting to people from other cities.”⁶⁹ Mohammad agrees with Mahdi that he feels more a citizen of Rotterdam and not a Dutch citizen. The reason most participants give for this because they live in Rotterdam, and they know the city. The other reason is because Rotterdam has a variety in different ethnicities living with each other. According to Long (2015), the city has been marked as very culturally diverse. This can be seen back in the statistics of CBS (2020, 47), which shows that half of the residents in Rotterdam have a migration background and this number has been increasing over the years.⁷⁰ This diversity shows the integration system of Rotterdam as well. According to van Ostaijen and Scholten (2014, 686), it was important that citizenship was related to the diversity of the citizens in Rotterdam between 2006 and 2010. Here, the citizens were pushed to be inclusive while having a bright cultural diversity. However, I argue that this can still be seen in Rotterdam. When I was at the bakery of Mohammad in Rotterdam, Mohammad got customers who spoke Arabic or Dutch. Also, some shop-owners from the same street came to the bakery for a visit. These shop-owners often introduced themselves as Moroccan, Syrian, or Turkish. The Syrian participants argue that they see this diversity in Rotterdam, and it makes them feel more comfortable. An example comes from Selma, who argues that she loves Rotterdam and “feels like I am born here.”⁷¹ She gives an example about her hijab during a conversation.

“Yes, everything walks here. When I first came to Rotterdam, I was afraid that everybody would look at my hijab, but here in Rotterdam, many other women are wearing a hijab. When I wear my hijab, I look normal, like other women in Rotterdam. I feel very comfortable walking in Rotterdam.”⁷²

In her argument, Selma explains how comfortable the diversity of Rotterdam makes her. Another example comes from Aziz, who has lived in Sneek before he decided to move to Rotterdam. He moved to Rotterdam, because he had more contacts in Rotterdam. He explained this during an informal conversation.

67 Semi-structured interview with Mahdi, a 38-year old Syrian refugee living in Rotterdam – 16 February 2021

68 Semi-structured interview with Mohammad, a 34-year old Syrian refugee living in Rotterdam – 24 February 2021

69 Semi-structured interview with Anwar, a 35-year old Syrian refugee living in Rotterdam – 1 March 2021

70 Centraal Bureau Statistiek. 2020. “Bevolking; leeftijd, migratieachtergrond, geslacht, regio, 1 jan. 1996-2020”. Accessed August 14, 2021. <https://opendata.cbs.nl/statline/#/CBS/nl/dataset/37713/table?dl=57501>

71 Semi-structured interview with Selma, a 31-year old Syrian refugee living in Rotterdam – 26 February 2021

72 Semi-structured interview with Selma, a 31-year old Syrian refugee living in Rotterdam – 26 February 2021

3 The views of Syrian refugees on receiving Dutch citizenship

*"I have lived in Friesland, Sneek, but I did not have good experiences there. I lived in a kind of village. I am really a social person, but they were not very social there. I was more in Rotterdam, because I had more friends in Rotterdam. This is the reason why I moved to Rotterdam. I am very happy I did that."*⁷³

Here, Aziz shows that he prefers Rotterdam over Sneek. He also mentions that he *"lives now in Rotterdam, so I am now Rotterdammer."*⁷⁴ Selma as well as Aziz show that them feeling more comfortable living in Rotterdam makes them also feel as they belong more to the society of Rotterdam. Because of the diversity of the city, they view themselves more as a Rotterdam citizen, because they are part of this diversity. As discussed before, the Syrians are very motivated to be part of the Dutch society. However, they do not feel they are Dutch citizens in this society. This shows that they do have the Dutch citizenship and, therefore, have equal rights as other Dutch citizens, but they are not fully Dutch citizens yet. They argue that they are Syrian-Dutch citizens in the society. However, the participants argue that they do feel they are full citizens of Rotterdam, because they live here, and they feel they are part of the diversity that seems to be an important factor to becoming a citizen of Rotterdam. This means that they feel a more belonging towards citizenship of Rotterdam than the Dutch citizenship.

Conclusion

When looking at the debate about citizenship, various authors perceive citizenship differently. The Syrian participants view citizenship more as a membership, rather than a power relation between groups living within the Dutch society. Here, the participants argue that this membership is related with having equal rights with other Dutch members (Eriksen 2010; Isin 2009; Schinkel 2010). Here, most participants have good experience when it comes to having equal rights within the Dutch society. However, some participants argue that sometimes they were not treated equally by other Dutch citizens, which gave them less feelings of belonging. This was mainly in the beginning of their integration, because they had difficulties communicating with other Dutch citizens. This caused sometimes alienation (Huizinga and van Hooven 2018). Furthermore, Syrian participants argue they are very proud to have a Dutch passport and they feel part of the Dutch society. Here, the participants argue that they received their citizenship as a feeling of belonging before their formal citizenship because of their active participation. However, in contradiction with this, most participants do not feel they are Dutch citizens. Here, it becomes clear the Syrian participants perceive the Dutch citizenship as being part of the Dutch society and being active within this society. In line with Eriksen (2010), they argue that their loyalties lie with the Dutch society. Still, when it comes to the identity of Dutch citizens, they argue they are not Dutch citizens, because they only partly assume the Dutch identity. Because of this, the Syrian participants explain they rather refer to themselves as Syrian-Dutch citizens. When it comes to the city Rotterdam, the Syrian refugees argue that they feel more a belonging towards the citizenship of Rotterdam than the Dutch citizenship. In line with van Ostaijen and Scholten (2014), the participants argue that this is because the city is very diverse. Here, they see the diversity as an important factor of the citizenship of Rotterdam.

⁷³ Semi-structured interview with Aziz, a 32-year old Syrian refugee living in Rotterdam – 4 April 2021

⁷⁴ Semi-structured interview with Aziz, a 32-year old Syrian refugee living in Rotterdam – 4 April 2021



Conclusion and discussion

During a small conversation with Shady, we argue about doing research on the integration of Syrian refugees in the Netherlands. Shady argues the following

“Actually, it is very important that you research the influence of learning the Dutch language on the Dutch citizenship of Syrian refugees. It has a lot of influence. The language classes and the integration system were bad when I was integrating. So, it is interesting to show this in your research.”⁷⁵

This argument of Shady can be applied to how important the opinions of the Syrian refugees are. As I have discussed in the introduction, different scholars only focus on how ‘native born’ view integration and citizenship. Because of this, there is not much literature that shows the view of Syrian refugees about their own integration and their Dutch citizenship. It was my research goal to give more voice to the Syrian refugees about the integration into the Dutch society. During this research, I have viewed the language integration of Syrian participants through the language school. I have looked at the viewpoint of the teachers at the language schools as well as the viewpoint of the Syrian refugees. With this, I gained more insight into how the Syrian refugees see their integration, in particular their language integration, to become an equal member of the new society. I also gave them space to show their opinions about the Dutch integration system and their Dutch citizenship.

The language schools teach their students in various ways. Most of the time they used small conversations. According to two teachers at different language schools, this has been a good method for their students to learn how to make conversation in everyday life with other Dutch citizens. With this method, the language schools try to connect the Syrian refugees more with the Dutch citizens, which leads to more involvement within the society, according to Berry et al. (2002). Also, they try to diminish the problem of alienation and prejudice from Huizinga and van Hooven (2018). I argue that this method of the language schools helps the participants with their integration within the Dutch society. However, besides that the language schools help the Syrian refugees with their integration, they bring certain difficulties with them as well. Mainly the fraud that certain schools in Rotterdam committed caused some participants to have difficulties with their integration and receiving their Dutch citizenship. Here, formal citizenship as well as citizenship as a feeling of belonging can become harder to receive. However, I argue that the participants are still motivated to learn Dutch. This is because they see their future here in the Netherlands.

When it comes to the Syrian refugees, they argue that language schools are very important to them, and they have positive experiences with the language classes. They do their best to learn Dutch to be more included in the society, because, as Eriksen (2010), Schrover and Schinkel (2013) and Fermin (2009) argue, a certain language can cause the Syrian refugees to be part of a society and not knowing the language can lead to them being excluded, which is a fear of the Syrian refugees. The Syrian participants argue that learning Dutch through language schools is not enough to fully integrate in society and receive the Dutch citizenship. They explain that they should be more active outside the language schools as well, which is in contradiction with the view on citizenship of Schinkel (2010). They are taking their own responsibility with their active integration by having language buddies and talking with Dutch citizens on the street. The language schools often provide the language buddies and other connections with Dutch citizens to help the participants with improving their Dutch. With this, Syrian participants show that the language schools are important to them while also helping them in the beginning with their integration. However, they do not see the language schools as the main tool to integrate and become part of the Dutch society, but it is still useful for the Syrian refugees to get into contact with Dutch citizens. This is important, because the Syrian participants often tend to become

⁷⁵ Informal conversation with Shady, a 35-year old Syrian refugee living in Rotterdam – 16 February 2021

friends faster with other individuals with a Syrian background.

Because of the language schools, the participants become more included in the society. They learn the Dutch language as well as the Dutch norms and values through the classes. The participants show that they are willing to take over these norms and values. Because of this, I argue that the conflict of Schinkel (2010) and Eriksen (2010) about where the participants' loyalties lie has no influence on their Dutch citizenship. They made it clear that their loyalties lie with the Dutch society, because they live in the Netherlands. Still, most participants argue that they feel they are part of the Dutch society, but not as a Dutch citizen. Although they assume the Dutch language, norms, and values, they feel they are equal to other Dutch citizens, but they do not feel as a Dutch citizen. Here, they show that they see the term citizenship a bit different from Isin (2009), Fermin (2009), Schinkel (2010) and Eriksen (2010). Here, the Syrian refugees see citizenship as receiving equal rights as Isin (2009) argues, but, at the same time, they perceive the concept as a membership of the society, which is argued by Fermin (2009), Schinkel (2010) and Eriksen (2010). Although the participants argue they will be or already are part of the society, they argue that they are not full citizens, because they still have their double citizenship of their former nation-state. Here, they argue they are Syrian-Dutch citizens. However, the Syrian participants argue they can more relate to being a citizen of Rotterdam. This is because of the diversity in the city, and they feel they can relate to this citizenship.

To shortly answer the research question: *How does learning the Dutch language through the language schools influence the Dutch citizenship of Syrian refugees in Rotterdam?* I argue that language schools are a very important tool for the Syrian refugees to integrate into the Dutch society. Mainly in the beginning, the classes are the key getting access to the language and the Dutch norms and values. Due to these classes, the Syrian refugees find their way in becoming part of the Dutch society and receiving their Dutch citizenship in a formal way as well as a belonging to the Dutch society. However, I argue that the language school is not the only tool that can influence the Syrians. The refugees find it very important to also be an active participant outside the school, because they argue that the classes are not enough to receive Dutch citizenship. Besides this, the Syrian refugees argue that language schools can influence their place in the Dutch society. However, these schools do not influence feeling as a Dutch citizen. Feeling as a citizen of Rotterdam, comes from outside the language schools as well.

When looking at the debates I have discussed in this research, I can argue that the concepts integration and citizenship can be viewed differently by integrators than by the citizens and policymakers of the new society. Integration and receiving citizenship do not always mean that the integrators must feel as a full citizen of the new society. In contradiction with Eriksen (2010), it is not necessarily linked to the identity of the dominant society. During my research, I have seen that being integrated can be seen as being able to actively participate in the new society. Here, the integrators are familiar with the language, norms, and values of the new society, but they do not fully have to take over all of them to be integrated. In line with Berry et al (2002) and Boski (2008), integration is maintaining the cultural integrity and, at the same time, seeking to participate as an integral part of the new society. During this integration, I argue and recommend that there should be at least two ways to receive citizenship: formal citizenship and citizenship as a feeling of belonging. Here, formal citizenship is a juridical way of becoming part of the new society, whereas citizenship as a feeling of belonging means the integrators feel they are part of the new society when they receive citizenship. Receiving citizenship is receiving an equal membership as being part of the new society, which is in line with the idea of Eriksen (2010), Fermin (2009) and Schinkel (2010) and is in contradiction with Isin (2009). However, receiving citizenship as a feeling of belonging does not mean integrators feel they are full citizens. The integrators feel they belong to the new society, but do not necessarily feel they are full

citizens of the society. In line with Anderson (2016) and Lytra (2016), I argue that language has an important role in the integration and receiving citizenship, because with the language integrators will be able to communicate with the citizens of the new society. The refugees should know the language of the new society to integrate within the society and receive their formal citizenship as well as their citizenship as a feeling of belonging.

Limitations and further research

It is important to note that there are some limitations experienced by this research. First, the fieldwork of this research was done during Covid-19. During the time frame, the Netherlands was in a lockdown and language schools stopped their classes for a while or taught their classes online. Because of this, many language schools did not allow me to participate in the class, which made it difficult to see how Syrian refugees learn Dutch through the language schools. Besides this, I have only focused on Syrian refugees living in Rotterdam during my research. Here, I have not focused on Syrian refugees living in other cities in the Netherlands, who might have other experiences with their language schools or their integration in general. Therefore, this research should not be generalized to Syrian refugees in the Netherlands. Also, I have not focused on other refugees or other migrants within my research. This means that this research should not be generalized to refugees or migrants in Rotterdam or the Netherlands as well. At last, the focus of this research was on language integration, specifically on learning the Dutch language through language schools. Here, I have discussed a bit of integration of the norms and values of the Dutch society as well. However, this cultural integration is only a part of the integration process. Integration consists of the socioeconomic and juridical aspect as well. I have not focused on these aspects and, therefore, I argue it is important to note that this research does not give an overall view on the concept integration. Due to these limitations, I argue that there should be further research on the subject integration in the Netherlands.

As I have discussed in the introduction, I have done fieldwork from 1 February 2021 until 30 April 2021. This fieldwork is shorter than most anthropological research, which often takes one year or longer. Therefore, I argue there should be further research on the same subject with a longer fieldwork period to gather more and to go deeper in the data. This will give a more complete view of the research subjects. Furthermore, with a longer fieldwork period, researchers will be able to dive deeper in the other ways of learning the Dutch language besides from the language schools in Rotterdam. Besides this, my research is small-scale and is not able to show the experiences and views of Syrian refugees in other places of the Netherlands. Therefore, I argue to do more small-scale anthropological research in other places besides Rotterdam. The different research could be compared and to give a more overall view of the integration of Syrian refugees in the Netherlands. At last, I argue to do more research on other aspects of integration besides language. As I have discussed, language is only a part of the integration process. Therefore, this research does not give an overall view on the concept integration. Further anthropological research on other integration aspects of the Syrian refugees would contribute more to the integration debate in the Netherlands.



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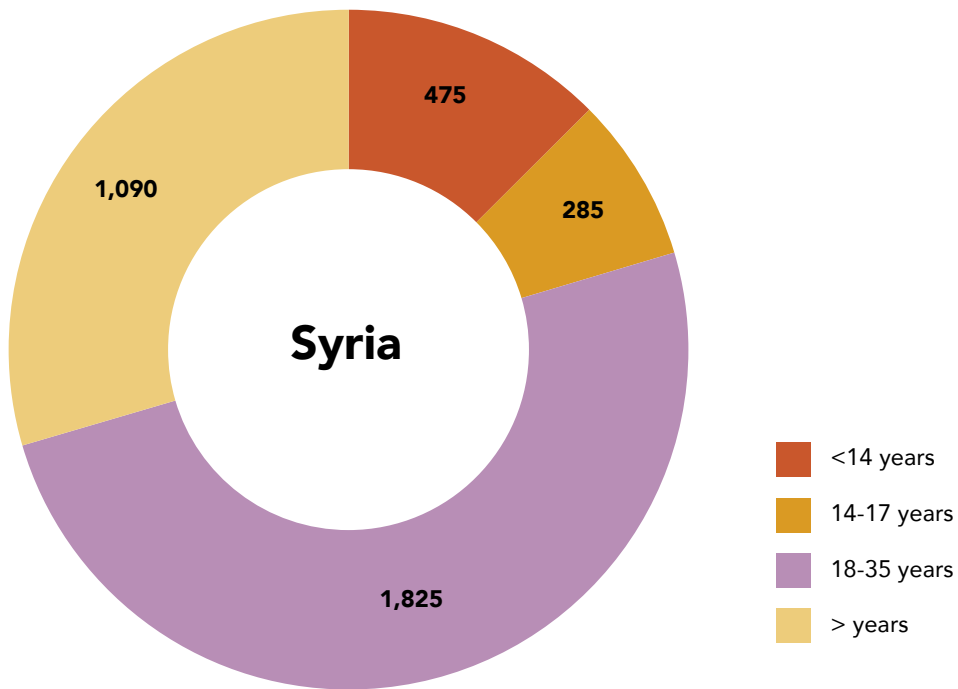
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Appendices

Appendix 1 - First-generation Syrian refugees by age group in the Netherlands 2019



Source: Vluchtelingen in getallen 2020, Vluchtelingenwerk Nederland, 12 August 2020

Appendix 2 - First-generation migrants in Rotterdam 2020

		Total population Men and women	First-generation migrants Men and women
Period		2020	2020
The Netherlands	Total	17407585	2262256
The Netherlands	With migration background	4220705	2262256
Rotterdam	Total	651157	190544
Rotterdam	With migration background	340631	190544

Source: StatLine - Bevolking; leeftijd, migratieachtergrond, geslacht, regio, 1 January 1996-2020

