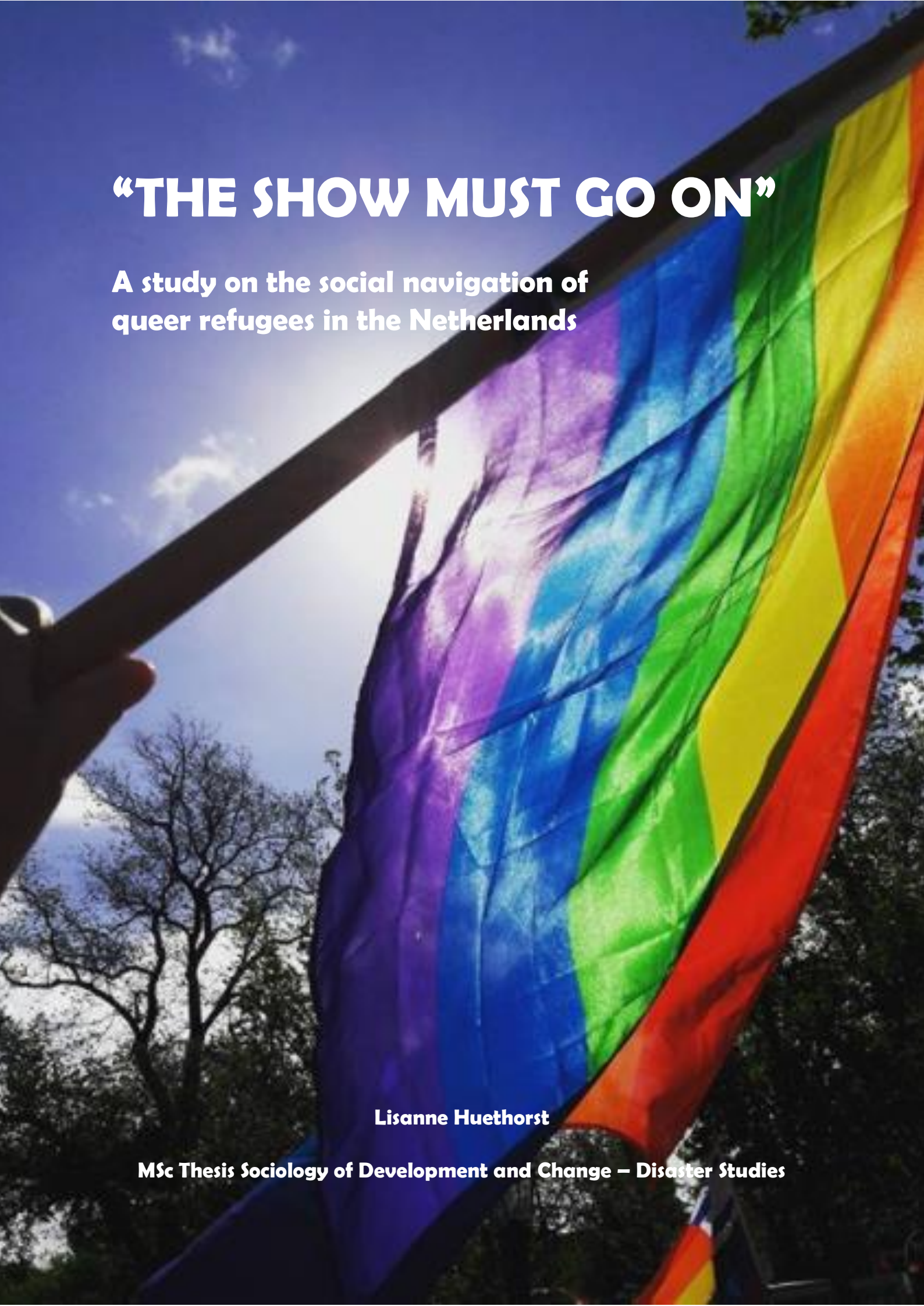

“THE SHOW MUST GO ON”

A study on the social navigation of queer refugees in the Netherlands

Lisanne Huethorst

MSc Thesis Sociology of Development and Change – Disaster Studies

This thesis tries to display the struggle queer refugees have experienced and still face when settling in the Netherlands, but most importantly, it tries to emphasise their strength to fight, to forgive and to believe
as how one informant aptly articulated:

The Show Must Go On.

March 2018

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Cover photo: *Queer refugee rights demonstration during the Pride Walk, Amsterdam 2017*
The photograph is taken by the author herself.

FOREWORD

That sunny Wednesday afternoon in June was the day that I would meet my friend Elie for the first time. I was in the centre of Amsterdam in the red-light district to attend a meeting of the organisation Secret Garden, a LGBT refugee organisation. Slightly uncomfortable, I introduced myself to the four guys at the table feeling the eyes of prostitutes in the back of my head. Meanwhile, Elie asked me some questions about my interest in joining the group and I saw the others looking at me in a strange way. The founder Emir and a volunteer Carla were critically overhearing my objectives for doing research and whether I was gay or straight seemed to be of high interest among the members of the group.

It took me almost three months to find out Emir telling another person: *"This is my colleague Lisanne".* Here we go.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This research would not have been possible without all the great people I have met during the conduct of my fieldwork. I feel privileged drinking tea together, sharing dinners and dancing all night. Thank you for making time for me, opening your homes and sharing your stories. I am cheerfully looking forward to the years of friendship that are ahead of us.

I would like to thank *Secret Garden,* Emir and Elie, for welcoming me with open arms. I have felt part of your organisation, your family. And I still do. You have given me the opportunity to grow by reflecting on my assumptive world over and over again. Thanks for all the smiles that I received because I was naïve again when talking about sex: *"Oh, Lisanne, you are so innocent".*

The stories of all would not have been written down if it were not for the support of my dedicated supervisor Lotje de Vries. Asking sharp questions, providing new ideas and being critical helped me to create this thesis. Your guidance has motivated me along the whole process and I want to thank you for that.

Warm regards go to all my friends for supporting me with food and coffees during the endless library days. I am grateful for the countless brainstorm sessions and motivational speeches. Special thanks go to Sanne for her computer account, Judith for her jokes and my roommates for all their patience.

To sexual diversity and social inclusion,
I dedicate the following research.

Shukran

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Queer refugees in the Netherlands have been confronted with severe persecution because of their sexual orientation or gender identity that forced them to leave their countries of origin and seek for protection elsewhere. Some arrive in the Netherlands where they apply for asylum as the country is perceived as liberal and open towards sexual diversity. They, however, are confronted with a discrepancy between their expectations and reality. Asylum claims are evaluated based on Western cultural narratives and the Dutch society seems to be reluctant towards queer refugees.

This ethnographic study tries to display the opportunities and challenges queer refugees have experienced and still face when settling in the Netherlands. It focuses only on those who have been forced to flee because of sexual orientation or gender identity persecution, and who have applied for asylum in the Netherlands. Their migration trajectory exists out of four phases: cause, physical movement, application and settling. Each phase is characterised by the re-evaluation and reconstruction of identity towards the ever-changing sociocultural background; and by the creation, negotiation, engagement and maintenance of social networks. How do queer refugees navigate everyday life in the Netherlands?

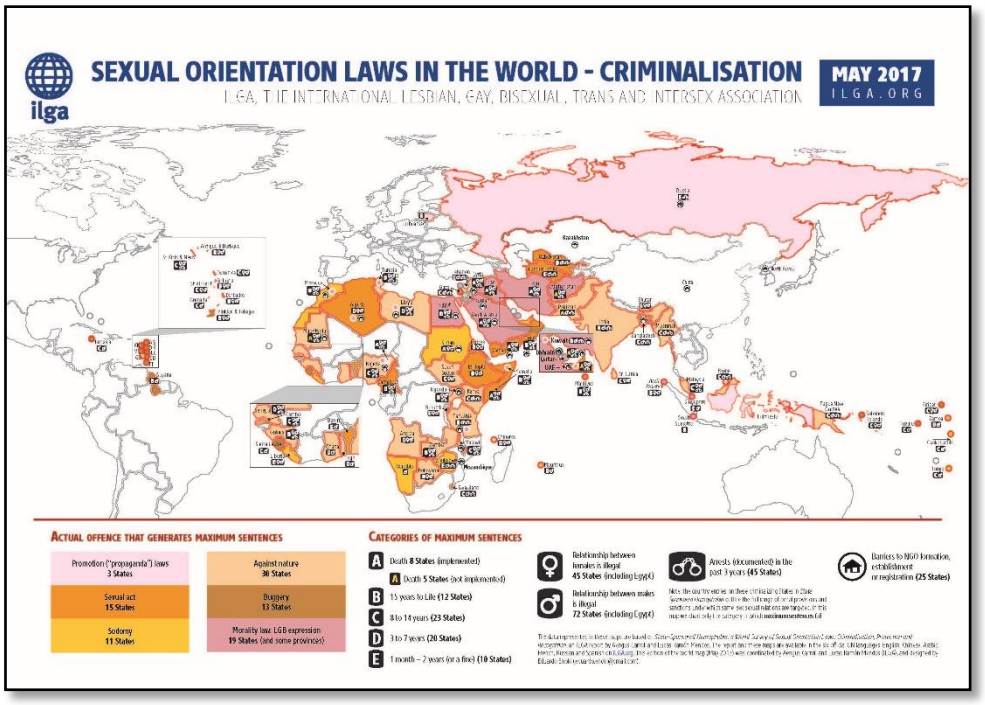
This research investigates the social navigation, identity constructions and social networking of queer refugees in the Netherlands. The data is obtained during five months of fieldwork as a volunteer at a, mainly out of Arab people existing, queer refugee non-governmental organisation in Amsterdam, the Netherlands. It consists of eleven in-dept interviews with queer refugees themselves, seven interviews with social workers, participant observations and small talk.

This study argues that the imposed categorisation as refugee means that the queer individual finds itself again amongst people from the same cultural background. The intersection of the conflicting identity categories queer and refugee influences queer refugees in the Netherlands to continuously evaluate and construct their identity in different situations. This depends on stereotypes, norms and social categories, but moreover, on whether one obtained legal status or not. When living in the Dutch asylum shelter, the refugee identity category is at front and one's queer parts are covered. And during an interview with government officials or amongst other members of queer refugee support organisations, informants are, in one way or another, forced to put their queer parts at front. One's queer identity is not experimented with or evolved at one's own pace because the queer side of the identity construction is outweighed by the refugee categorisation. This social complexity asks for refined social navigation skills by continuously alternating the 'heterosexual performance' with the 'homosexual performance'. However, their messy web of social networks around the queer identity provides a safe and important anchor whilst socially navigating everyday life in the Netherlands as *the show must go on.*

CONTENTS

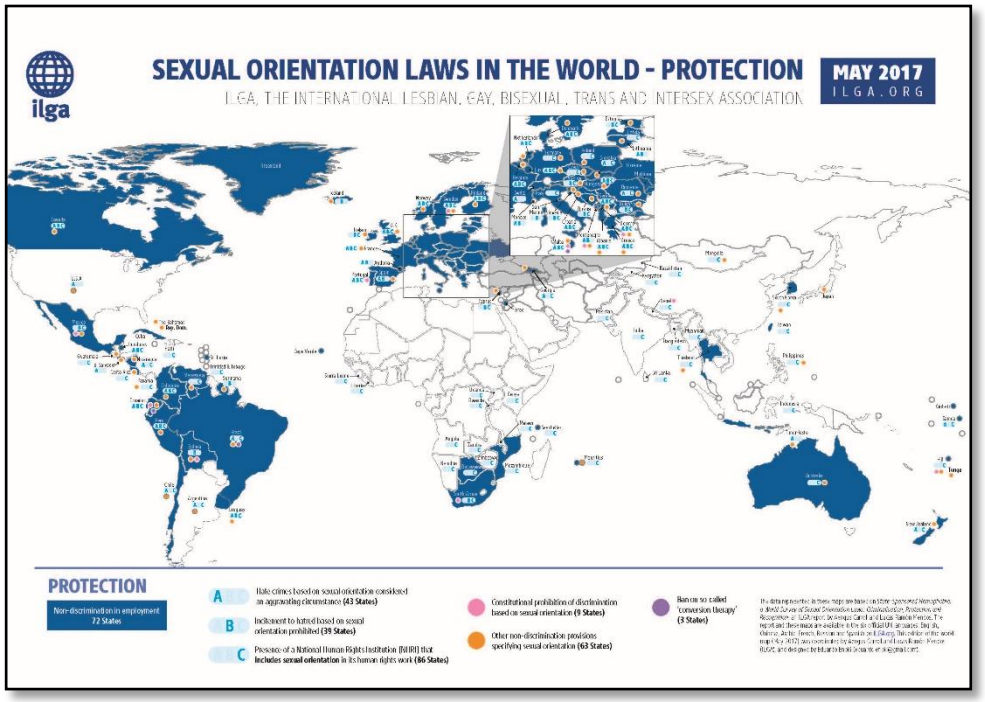
MAP ONE[1]:

An overview of countries with anti-homosexuality laws.



MAP TWO[2]:

An overview of countries that protect LGBT's.



[1] ILGA. (May 2017). *Sexual Orientation Laws in the World – Criminalisation.* Retrieved from http://www.ilga.org/downloads/2017/ILGA_WorldMap_ENGLISH_Criminalisation_2017.pdf

[2] ILGA. (May 2017). *Sexual Orientation Laws in the World – Protection.* Retrieved from http://www.ilga.org/downloads/2017/ILGA_WorldMap_ENGLISH_Protection_2017.pdf

1. INTRODUCTION: SEXUALITY ON THE MOVE

During that first meeting of Secret Garden that I attended, we talked about the Dutch asylum application based on sexual orientation or gender identity persecution. The outraged vibe in the group towards, in their terms, 'fake gays' caught my attention. The asylum claims of many of these queer refugees were hindered because of the strict procedure in the Netherlands. However, the procedure was this strict because of the high influx of refugees in general and fraudulent individuals claiming to be gay, as I was explained.

During the ethnographic fieldwork for this research, I was a volunteer at the queer refugee NGO Secret Garden I have noticed that these 'fake gays' create much anger with 'real gays' because of their negatively influence on the chances of obtaining a legal status. Many lesbians, gays, bisexuals, or transgender (LGBT) worldwide are confronted with discrimination, stigma and violence. The anxiety for persecution forces LGBT's, and as I will refer to them as 'queers', to cover or deny their sexual orientation or gender identity and generates difficulties regarding their self-acceptance (Jordan, 2009). And some even lose hope because of "this persecution can be so severe that the individuals involved have no choice but to seek safety elsewhere" (ILGA, 2017, p. 150). 'Queer refugees' then are forced to leave everything they know and take their *sexuality on the move.*

1.1. THIS RESEARCH: A CASE STUDY

Worldwide media and politicians have proclaimed that Europe currently deals with a so-called 'migration crisis' (e.g. Clingendael, 2016; BBC, 2016). The Dutch Immigration and Naturalisation Service (2017) reported that 1,206,510 people have applied for asylum in the European Union between September 2016 and September 2017. Afghanistan, Iraq, Nigeria, Eritrea, Pakistan, Albania, Bangladesh, Guinea and Iran are countries many refugees originate from (IND, 2017a). Over the year 2017, about 31,300 asylum applicants were registered in the Netherlands. These refugees originate mostly from Eritrea, Syria, Iraq, Cuba, Iran, Algeria, Morocco and Afghanistan (IND, 2017b). "Tens of thousands of people are given refugee status every year (in EU), but often only after long and damaging periods in limbo, and long, expensive and wasteful procedures" (Schuster, 2011, p. 1404).

This ethnographic research limits itself only to those people who have been confronted with severe sexual orientation or gender identity persecution that made them to leave their homes and apply for asylum elsewhere. Practicing homosexuality is illegal in over seventy countries and may even lead to the dead penalty (Movisie, 2016; ILGA, 2017). Human beings "fleeing persecution for reasons of sexual orientation or gender identity can qualify for international protection" (UNHCR, 2013a; UNHCR, 2013b, p. 71) and many queers therefore seek for safety in the European Union as it has determined that queers can apply for asylum based on this ground. This is visualised by *Map One: An overview of countries with anti-homosexuality laws* and *Map Two: An overview of Countries that Protect LGBT's*. The United Kingdom, Norway and Belgium are the only European countries that register some information about sexual orientation or gender identity based asylum claims. An

indication of the number of asylum claimants based on this ground in the Netherlands is not provided because of the protection of personal data and national law (EMN, 2016).

The case study of this research is focused on queer refugees in the Netherlands because the country is perceived as the frontrunner of queer emancipation for its liberal societal attitude emphasising amongst others that every human being should be free from fear, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity (Buijs, 2016; ILGA, 2017). Having experienced gender or sexuality based persecution, however, does not mean being queer is enough to be granted asylum immediately. Because, as it turns out, it is hard for people to prove their sexual orientation beyond reasonable doubt (Movisie, 2016; IND, 2008; College voor de Rechten van de Mens, 2013; ILGA, 2017). I have hear many stories of queer refugees who were hindered by 'fake gays' when applying for asylum as a refugee claimant based on sexual orientation or gender identity persecution. Performing a homosexual act in order to claim asylum is not something rare in the Netherlands, as I have been told by the social workers I have spoken with. It is horrific when decided upon as 'not gay enough' when you have gone through traumatic experiences, and especially when others negatively influence the already strict asylum procedure by 'performing a gay act'.

Queer refugees are frustrated by their double stigma when in the Dutch society because of being categorised as both 'queer' and 'refugee'. They are confronted with Western 'fixed' categories of sexual orientation or gender identity during both the asylum procedure as well as when settling down (Jordan, 2009; Buijs, 2016). And in addition to that, it is difficult for queer refugees to live in the refugee shelters with people from the same background. They find themselves to be stuck again between the people they have fled from forcing them to continue covering their sexual orientation or gender identity, whilst the Dutch asylum procedure asks them to emphasise their queer identity. This intersection of queer and refugee demonstrates how queer refugees 'negotiate' their identity construction and adjust, attune, cover, or perform a heterosexual 'act' whenever the social arena demands (Chadwick, 2017; Brown, 2012; Schachter, 2013; Van Meijl, 2006). This complexity asks for refined social navigation wherein queer refugees continuously alternate the 'heterosexual performance' with the 'homosexual performance' which has worsened the physical and psychological health of many (Vigh, 2009; Matthies-Boon, 2017).

1.2. PROBLEM STATEMENT: TOWARDS QUESTIONS

This research derives from the socio-political ambiguity all in regard to the migration trajectory of queer refugees, their identification, social navigation and social networking. I have indicated four phases in the trajectory of queer refugees. The first one will be the *cause* of migration determined by sexual orientation or gender identity persecution, characterized by fear, covering, identity denial or even no self-acceptance. This persecution leaves the victim fragile in the shattered assumptive world. It touches inherently on the self as for it influences identity construction when one's queer parts are not recognised let alone accepted by all he or she knows (Bradatan, Popan & Melton, 2010; Hogg, Terry & White, 1995; Matthies-Boon, 2017; Jordan, 2009; Schachter, 2013). The second phase is the actual *physical movement*, causing continuous changes in one's identity perception in relation to the uncertain social contexts. Narratives, norms and attitudes may differ in time and space, and thus covering/reverse covering of the sexual or gender identity alternate. Where one's world was not sufficient enough to find coherence in the identity construction of queers, the intersection of queer and culture is re-evaluated against the background of the ever changing new socio-geographic contexts whilst migrating. Each social context therefore asks for another chosen or suppressed identity construction based on stereotypes, norms, existing social categories and intended deliverables related

to that specific situation (Hogg, Terry & White, 1995; Campbell, 2000; Vigh, 2009; Heller, 2009; Bauman, 2000; Bauman, 2001; Schachter, 2013; Yoshino, 2007). The third phase would then be the *application* where Western cultural narratives of a linear identity development and 'coming out' are central. Queer rights in the Netherlands have been progressive and its protective laws create an image of openness towards varied sexualities and genders. However, when arriving in the Netherlands, queer refugees are confronted with a discrepancy between their expectations and reality. The credibility of their asylum claim depends on Western stereotypes of sexuality and fixed gender identity categories (Buijs, 2016; Hekma, 2000; Jordan, 2009; Murray, 2014; Vigh, 2009; Kuyper, 2015; Spijkerboer, 2016; Movisie, 2016; Lewis, 2014). The fourth phase I indicated is *settling*, related to social inclusion and exclusion, in- and out-group categorisation and the continuing of unsafe feelings because of being a 'queer refugee'. This phase includes bridging by connecting different social networks, and bonding by finding similarities and the provision of support (Bradatan, Popan & Melton, 2010; Murray, 2014; Jordan, 2009; Vigh, 2009).

Most academic research, however, seems to limit itself to generally phases one, two and three when it comes to the intersection of 'queer' and 'refugee'. The interactions of persecution, stigma and covering in shaping identity during complex migration trajectories have been explored here. Nevertheless, the intersection of having a queer identity and the genuine refugee flight during the fourth phase has not been addressed adequately. One's identity construction and social navigation are interrelated with time and space, and to the negotiation of access to social networks during settling to build a future in the Netherlands. Therefore, I wonder how identity is socially constructed based on reason of flight, experiences at arrival and ideas for the future. I also wonder to what extend the, whether or not uncovered, identity of 'queer' is present at arrival in the Netherlands and how this changes over time as people settle in. Once a week, at the meetings of the organisation Secret Garden, queer refugees' identity construction is primary gay and the status of one's asylum procedure seems unimportant. However, how do the organisation and its members compromise the rest of the week?

I argue that the queer-side of one's story, life navigation and identity negotiation is outweighed by the refugee status that determines the everyday life of queer refugees in the Netherlands. At the same time, the social life around the queer identity is an important and safe anchor whilst settling in the Netherlands. The relational aspect of social identity construction and network formation visible here and I have formulated the following research question: *How do queer refugees navigate everyday life in the Netherlands?* And I will answer this question by focusing on two sub questions: 1) *What identities or categories do queer refugees assume and why?,* and 2) *What social networks are queer refugees engaging in and what for?*

I use the word 'navigation' to emphasise the empowerment of these individuals being all but virtuous victims and rather should be approached as social, rational and active agents directing their own lives. However, navigation also invokes existing social forces that limit us to influence the movements of everyday life (Vigh, 2009). Then, I use 'engage' for the research question to emphasize the interaction between the agent and their social environment. Jordan (2009) also uses this term to "reflect the creative, emergent, relational and socially mediated agencies that refugees bring to the work of settlement" (p. 168).

The stories of queer refugees in the Netherlands themselves are exposed because the central aim of this study is to understand the intersection of queer and refugee when in the Netherlands. It also aims to contribute to the creation of policies that are based on cultural diversity and also to the creation of opener norms on sexual diversity (also recommended by Jordan, 2009). Hekma (2000, p. 89) explains

that the “important contribution that anthropology makes nowadays to research on homosexuality lies in its focus on representations and social contexts”. This ethnographic research derives from interviews and conversations with queer refugees who are in the Netherlands for at least six months. I will try to explore and explain the complexity of their social navigation, movements, feelings, social relationships and identifications. I chose to study this from the perspective of queer refugees in the Netherlands themselves. Hence, this research will focus on individuals with their own story, experiences and ideas instead of generalizing ‘the queer refugee’.

This thesis aims to provide an in-depth insight in the social navigation of queer refugees in the Netherlands by exposing their identity constructions and social networking strategies. In chapter two, I operationalise the central concepts of this thesis, refugee and queer, and elaborate on the scientific discussions surrounding the used theoretical lens. Theories on social navigation, multiple identities, intersectionality and social networks are analysed. The third chapter aims to display, explain and reflect upon the methodologies used to conduct my fieldwork. It also emphasises the general complexities regarding accessing the field and my positioning as a researcher in light of my ethical considerations. Chapter four highlights the intersection of being queer in the Arab world, where after chapter five explains the challenge to prove one’s sexual orientation or gender identity persecution. The sixth chapter sheds light on being queer in the Netherlands in general and how informants perceive this ‘tolerant’ country. In chapter seven, I argue that the categorisation of refugee as such outweighs other identity constructions of queer refugees in the Netherlands. Chapter eight is the final chapter in which I conclude on the findings of my research.

2. CONCEPTS AND THEORIES: BORN THIS WAY

To gain a closer understanding of queer refugees navigating everyday life in the Netherlands and how this relates to the fluidity of identity and the engagement in social networks, this chapter explains the concepts of 'refugee' and 'queer' and explores theories on social navigation, identity, intersectionality and social networks. This will help us to understand how individuals can *play* with their identity to guide themselves, in other words, socially navigate multiple identities, through the Dutch society and within different social networks.

Whilst doing fieldwork, I have seen a large number of posters, T-shirts and Facebook-posts to fight international ignorance towards being queer. I want to shed light on one of the most outstanding and striking sentence to shout out your sexual orientation or gender identity to the world: *"We are born this way."*

2.1. CONCEPTUALIZING 'THE QUEER REFUGEE'

With explicit focus on people who have left their home communities because of their sexual orientation or gender identity, in other words, on the individuals who are in the Netherlands claiming to be a refugee because of *belonging to the particular social group* of queers, this research further problematizes the issue of refugee. Fleeing because of being queer, because of one's *identity*, is inherently stronger related to the self in comparison to more 'ordinary' reasons for flight such as war. This relates to Malkki's (1995) comments not to generalize *the* refugee. Each migration trajectory differs and as personality is at the roots of this genuine refugee flight, queer refugees may be perceived as both highly strong as well as highly vulnerable.

Beyond the highly personal experience of people on the move, what are the exact official definitions of their refugee status and how does this impact on their lives?

2.1.1. Refugee

The informants of this research are all asylum seekers who have fled because of their sexuality or gender. An asylum seeker is someone who claims to be a refugee in the 1951 Geneva Refugee Convention's definition, requesting for (international) shelter, safety and security, but whose request has not yet been definitively processed and determined. Receiving countries have the international obligation based on the Geneva Refugee Convention to protect refugees and thus have to determine whether an asylum claimant is a refugee or not (UNHCR, 2014).

The general definition of 'refugee' that has most been used internationally is introduced in Article 1 A(2) of the Geneva Refugee Convention in 1951 (UNHCR, 2010):

> *"owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside of the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it."*
>
> (UNHCR, 2010, p. 14)

This definition has been used as a guidance and rights-based instrument in international law and, as explained by the UNHCR (2010), it is based on three principles "most notably non-discrimination, non-penalization and *non-refoulement*" (p. 3). It applies without discrimination because of race, religion or country of origin, and later in time, no discrimination to "sex, age, disability, sexuality, or other prohibited grounds of discrimination" were added (UNHCR, 2010, p. 3). It must be noted that the principle of *non-refoulement* is at the basis of the convention. It secures that "no one shall expel or return (*'refouler'*) a refugee against his or her will, in any manner whatsoever, to a territory where he or she fears threats to life or freedom" (UNHCR, 2010, p. 3). The Convention furthermore includes rights such as access to court, primary education, work and provision for documentation.

Some refugees are confronted with the Dublin Regulation whilst forcedly migrating. This is a regulation that aims to prevent people to submit their asylum application in multiple EU Member States at the same time and to keep the responsibility for one's claim with one single jurisdiction, and thus that no other Member State needs to examine the claim (UNHCR, 2013b; Schuster, 2011). Despite the Dublin Regulation originates from the idea to harmonise migration movements through EU Member States, it received a number of critiques as it burdens the countries of first arrival because of geographically being at the borders of the EU the most, including Greece, Italy, and Spain; and in addition to that, it forces refugees to choose unsafe routes to move across the continent undocumented (Schuster, 2011). Schuster (2011) therefore calls the regulation a "symbolic weapon" (p. 1404). She furthermore emphasises in her article that "it is not recognition that makes one a refugee, but the circumstances that caused one to flee" (p. 1392); and when one is not evaluated as a refugee, he or she still has to deal with the categorisation of (failed) asylum seeker and turns undocumented refugees into 'illegal migrant' (Schuster, 2011, p. 1393). As for the principle of *non-refoulement* to states where their lives are still in danger, the Dublin Regulation replaces the responsibility for the asylum seeker to states outside of the EU, such as Turkey, where the socioeconomic position of queer refugees remain highly unsafe (Schuster, 2011). Some refugees refuse and decide to live secretly and undocumented in the state of reception and prefer waiting eighteen months before the responsibility for evaluating their claims accepted over moving across Europe 'illegally' again (Schuster, 2011). This leaves a large group of undocumented refugees being in limbo institutionally, legally, economically and socially, where every day is characterised by uncertainty.

And although being legally categorised as 'refugee' secures the three principles of the Geneva Refugee Convention, Liisa Malkki (1995) explains that the term refugee is a sensitive term and should be approached with care. Generalizing 'the' refugee is harmful as the label should be perceived in different ways. For example, the term refugee can be a social, legal or practical category, and next to

that, it is approached differently by scientists, policy-makers and the general public. The changing socio-political and cultural environments affect forced migrants in multiple ways: "Nationalism and racism, xenophobia and immigration policies, state practices of violence and war, censorship and silencing, human rights and challenges to state sovereignty, development discourse and humanitarian interventions, citizenship and cultural or religious identities, travel and diaspora, and memory and historicity are just some of the issues and practices that generate the inescapably relevant context of human displacement today" (Malkki, 1995, p. 496). Putting the label 'refugee' is thus not something generalizable for a 'kind' or 'type' of person or situation. It rather is a broader descriptive category influenced by different socio-economic aspects, and historical and psychological experiences. For the individual categorised as 'refugee' the term itself possibly makes them feel angry, sad or shameful. It "removes all that you are", was how one of my informants expressed it (I11, 29-09-2017, Amsterdam).

Forced migration because of one's identity is something inherently personal and private. Not being accepted by your government, society and especially the closest people around you touches upon the self and is at the core of one's being. "Trauma entails a confrontation with actual or threatened death, serious injury or sexual violation, either directly or indirectly through relatives and friends", and when traumatised, individuals feel alienated from others (Matthies-Boon, 2017, p. 625). Within her article, Matthies-Boon (2017) explains that people make references to the world around them, the self and the other, and when having faced or experienced cruelties, they are confronted with the fragility of their existence and the shattering of one's assumptive world. It therefore influences social relations and the appreciation of life negatively and hinders integration efforts.

> *"The community that used to provide a cushion against pain is corroded and now becomes the perpetrator of pain. Such violent social relations thus both forestall the possibility of reintegration and shatter one's trust in one's social surroundings."*
>
> (Matthies-Boon, 2017, p. 633)

Refugees in the Netherlands are confronted with a dichotomy between "ethnic minorities and natives, between 'us' and 'them'", as introduced by Scholten and Holzhacker (2009, p. 98) as 'a clash of civilizations'. They explain that the Dutch public perceives itself as tolerant towards cultural diversity, however, at the turn of the millennium, because of globalisation and migration, the 'national imagined identity' became at stake. Ghorashi (2005) says that the Dutch public felt dissatisfied about "the growing number of asylum seekers, with the assumption that most of them are not 'real refugees' (p. 187). Politicians have tried to redefine the national imagined identity and distanced itself from the description in pluralist terms (Scholten & Holzhacker, 2009). The current political discourse pressurizes asylum seekers to prioritise the "social-cultural adaptation to Dutch values and norms", to assimilate with the Dutch culture (Scholten & Holzhacker, 2009, p.97). Refugees, therefore, often feel as 'unwelcome guests' when arriving in the Netherlands (Ghorashi, 2005).

Building further on that, Jordan (2009) explains that each culture has its own complex interpretation of sexualities and genders and therefore, whilst seeking refugee protection, queer refugees are evaluated "against expected trajectories of refugee flight and against Western narratives of LGBT

identities, coming out, or gender identity dysphoria" (p. 166). This complicates the objectivity of queer migrant studies because of limitations towards 'universal' perspectives on sexuality or gender. In addition, interpretations are made easily when it comes to 'genuine' reasons to flee. It is thus of utmost importance to recognize this unique position of queer refugees in particular whilst conducting this research.

2.1.2. Queer

Concentrating on individuals who are in the Netherlands because of *belonging to a particular social group* by being lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBT), I will define sexual orientation and gender identity as COC (2017) and Movisie (2015) also explain:

> *"Sexual orientation refers to a person's sexual feelings, desires, practices, romantic feelings and identification, including homosexual and lesbian (same-sex orientation), heterosexual (opposite-sex orientation) and bisexual (both same-sex and opposite-sex orientation). Gender identity refers to how a person's biological sex (male and female) relates to their feelings and expression of the social categories of gender. Transgender refers to people who don't feel that their biological sex matches their gender."*

And according to the UNHCR (2013a):

> *"Sexual orientation refers to each person's capacity for emotional, affectional and sexual attraction to, and intimate relations with, individuals of a different or the same gender or more than one gender" and "Gender identity refers to each person's deeply felt internal and individual experience of gender, which may or may not correspond with the sex assigned at birth."* (p. 20)

Inspired by Jordan (2009), in this research I will refer to the refugee claimants as *queers* or *queer refugee* because the concept 'queer' contains the diversity of the group and the struggle that LGBT refugees commonly experience. According to Jagose (1996), queer is a category of identity formation. She explains that "it is not simply that queer has yet to solidify and take on a more consistent profile, but rather that its definitional indeterminacy, its elasticity, is one of its constituent characteristics" (Jagose, 1996, p. 1). For this research, I will use 'queer' defined as the dramatization of:

> *"incoherencies in the allegedly stable relations between chromosomal sex, gender and sexual desire."*
>
> (Jagose, 1996, p. 3)

Although I will use the concept of queer, I sometimes use the abbreviation of *LGB or LGBT* as I explicitly need to accentuate that this group is heterogeneous in nature.

2.1.3. The core concepts' interrelation

By explaining the core concepts of this research, I hope to clarify the complexities with being categorised as refugee. Queer refugees in particular are a socially, economically, legally and politically vulnerable group within the refugee system. To have their asylum claims determined upon positively, queer refugees need to "quickly learn the narratives and the powerful structures within which they are located with the result that the migration stories are compelled to contain statements which hue closely to the hegemonic narrative while simultaneously complicating it" (Murray, 2014, p. 454; Jordan, 2009). For many informants of this research, the categorisation of 'refugee' has been a completely new identity term, that was imposed by the international refugee apparatus (Murray, 2014). The intersection of queer and refugee, being categorised as 'queer refugee', asks for an excellent and subtle social navigation through the system to direct life.

2.2. NAVIGATING MULTIPLE IDENTITIES

To understand the decisions of queer refugees during their migration trajectory and whilst being in the Netherlands, it is important to understand how they interact with social life and seek for opportunities, and how they re-arrange their multiple identities to make the best of their situation and negotiate access to social networks in an advantaging manner, as for I will explain below.

2.2.1. Social navigation: motion within motion

Human beings are social and flexible beings interacting in a constantly changing social setting. When social situations change, individuals adjust their behaviour, perspectives, attitudes and/or even norms to adapt to the new context. Not only individuals are internally changing, but also their environment simultaneously is. This is what Vigh (2009) means by social navigation: moving social agents in a moving world. He elaborates on social navigation as "the way agents act in difficult situations, move under the influence of multiple forces or seek to escape confining structures" and "to make the best of emergent social possibilities in order to direct their lives in an advantageous direction" (Vigh, 2009, pp. 419 and 423). However, social navigation rather emphasizes moving *within* the social environment, being multidimensional and temporary, instead of *on* the social environment.

> *"It is the act of moving in an environment that is wavering and unsettled, and when used to illuminate social life it directs our attention to the fact that we move in social environments of actors and actants, individuals and institutions, that engage and move us as we move along."*
>
> (Vigh, 2009, p. 420)

The concept of social navigation thus emphasizes the relationship between agency and social forces and is a useful concept for this study when looking at the engagement of queer refugees with everyday

life in the Netherlands. It explains the way individuals move in their social environments as well as the fluidity of these social environments themselves: "*motion within motion"* (Vigh, 2009, p. 420). Most studies look how social structures move or change over time as well as how individuals move within these social structures. Social navigation differs at this point because it visions the *intersection* and *interactivity* between the fluid, continuously changing social environment and the flexible, dynamic social agent. This interactivity includes thoughts, hopes, imaginations, but also struggles. It relates to both the actual social present as well as to the socially imagined (Vigh, 2009). Social navigation thus allows us to focus on the intertwined relationship of social structures and individuals themselves, and to understand how people manage and manoeuvre within "situations of social flux and change" and "act, adjust and attune our strategies and tactics in relation to the way we experience and imagine and anticipate the movement and influence of social forces" (Vigh, 2009, p. 420).

Immigrants, whether queer or not, deal with difficult, uncertain and unsafe circumstances that force them to be flexible in regard to the reconstruction of identity, creating social networks and engaging with social life. This is exactly what social navigation is about. Queer refugees are social agents adapting themselves to the ever-changing environment before, amidst and after their migration trajectory. This is in line with Bauman's (2000) approach of contemporary liquid times in which individuals navigate through incoherencies of the society being in constant flux. It is liquid in terms of interchangeable and short-term identities and relationships (Moroni, 2014). The unfolding environments impact the position and options individuals have and navigation requires flexibility and preadaptation in unpredictable times.

Vigh (2009) also mentions that these conversations between social agent and social forces display our limited level of power because "we are never completely free to move the way we want, and rather than being vulgarly voluntaristic, navigation actually points our attention to the fact that we move in relation to the push and pulls, influence and imperatives, of social forces" (p. 432). With existing limits of controlling the social environments, and with limited security, people can never fully influence life to seek for groups to belong to. Social belonging creates certainty and security in uncertain times, something that queer refugees especially are longing for after being forcedly displaced.

It is, however, important to emphasise that navigation implies some extend of empowerment as well because when "we move in our social world our horizons change around us, affecting both our vistas (and hence points of view) and our attainable social positions" (Vigh, 2009, p. 426). The world should not act upon you, but you should act in relation to how the world engages you (Vigh, 2009). Social navigation therefore assumes the active role of people and their ability to influence their social environment as well as how the social environment influences the people themselves. The assumption of human agency creates empowerment of the queer refugee and leaves him or her not as a powerless subject to a situation or position from which one cannot escape. It comes with vigilance for changing social structures, together with its challenges, opportunities and limitations. "Invoking 'navigation', we thus tacitly acknowledge that the agent is positioned within a force field which moves him and influences his possibilities of movement and positions" (Vigh, 2009, p. 433). In this research the term navigation is used to uphold these hybrid dynamics between choice and force, between empowerment and suppression. I thus underline the structure agency debate of Giddens (1984), emphasising the social agent's capacity to independently making its own free choices within a social structure influencing the agent's possibilities. The dialogue between the active social agent and its social environment creates an interaction of both force and choice, suppression and empowerment.

One social navigation tactic to overcome suppression is covering. This is explained by Heller (2009) as "the process through which people individually and collectively downplay characteristics identifying them as members of oppressed and marginalized groups. In contrast, reverse-covering occurs when an individual is compelled to display or perform stereotypical aspects of his or her identity" (p. 295). Individuals, here queer refugees, thus may use these social tactics to socially navigate everyday life and to engage with the social environment (Heller, 2009, p. 294). Queer refugees are often pressurized by this social environment because of the limited special treatment in asylum law. As mentioned before, queer refugees often were forced by their societies of origin to cover or even reject their sexual orientation or gender identity. During the migration trajectory and application processes, these individuals need to make their cases credible generating the need for reverse covering in order to be granted asylum (Murray, 2014; Jordan, 2009). "Statutory language does not explicitly require asylees to 'act gay', but as detailed below, the various elements of an asylum case, the subjective perceptions of the decision-makers, and recent cases punishing those who did not reverse-cover, give rise to a de facto reverse-covering demand" (Heller, 2009, p. 297; Lewis, 2014).

Operationalisation of social navigation

Social navigation is operationalised as the movement of a social agent within its social environment. The dialogue between the active agent and the social forces both supresses as well as empowers the individual to make the best of social possibilities to direct life in an advantaged direction. This interaction with and within the dynamics of social life shape the circumstances of their lives by adjusting their identity to the constant influence of social forces and change, however, connoting power limitations. One can tactically cover identity characteristics or perform stereotypes to avoid being categorised to a marginalised social group. By the hybrid conversations, the individual re-arranges its multiple identity (motion) within the constant changing social environment (motion).

2.2.2. The social construction of identity

Social environments are thus fluid and continuously changing and individuals move within this motion to influence it again. By this interaction, the multiple identities of which each individual exists are negotiated, re-arranged and reconstructed (Sen, 2007). These identities are all present at the same time, however, constructed and influenced by and within a particular context (Schachter, 2013; Van Meijl, 2006; Sen, 2007). The construction of one's identity in liquid contemporary times is not only build at solid and stable ascribed identities by nature and nurture, however, also by achieved identities such as profession or social class (Bauman, 2000; Hogg, Terry & White, 1995). Where the ascribed identities make one's societal role more clear, the achieved identities converse with assumed roles or social possibilities (Vigh, 2009; Schachter, 2013). This dialogue between social forces and the social agent, assuming multiple ascribed and achieved identities, continuously directs everyday life towards an advantaging balance of social possibilities. The multiple dimensions of oneself is thus referred to as identities for this research.

One's identity is thus socially constructed in dialogue between agent and force, towards a set of identities that is suitable in and for that specific context (motion) and will be continuously renegotiated by and within the evolving environment (motion) (Schachter, 2013; Vigh, 2009). This idea of identity construction as fluid, flexible and context specific is in agreement with Van Meijl (2006) who explains that identities differ from time to space, creating that other identities are less at front. Some identities are naturally part of the self, like being a woman, or because one needs to conform sociocultural conditions, for instance by acting straight.

Identity is partly internalised by nature and nurture, however, how identities are achieved or externally imposed by social forces and environments also influences the construction of the self. And according to Schachter (2013), the multiple identities may potentially conflict as each situation asks for another set of commitments. He emphasises how different identities "need to be re-evaluated in light of new circumstances afforded by growth and social context. Some are affirmed, and others rejected" (Schachter, 2013, p. 74). Queer refugees are thus forced to re-arrange their multiple identities in accordance to, however, hence also *within* (Vigh, 2009), the continuously changing social environment. However, and in agreement with Campbell (2000), where individuals associate themselves differently to their identities per social context, the layers of identity are not mutually exclusive but rather cumulative. This means that queer refugees determine, both by force and choice, which identity construction, or layer, is relevant and at front at any immediate cultural context at any particular time (Campbell, 2000; Vigh, 2009).

The empowerment of the social agent to decide upon the reconstruction of its multiple identities indicates to some extend an element of choice (Sen, 2007; Jordan, 2009; Utas, 2005; Heller, 2009). This is what (Schachter, 2013) explains as an identity construction towards a more essential self within that time and space: a 'self-consistent' identity. The decisions are based on loyalties, trust and reciprocities which differ per social situation wherein specific identity constructions will be activated by. Van Meijl (2006) explains, in contrast to Campbell (2000), that the choice for one specific identity construction makes that the individual, at that moment, neglects another construction and "specific experiences, particularly negative experiences, may lead to the active suppression or even splitting of unwanted identities, which slow down the dialogical movements between different identities" (p. 930). The embracement of the theory of multiple identities implies an empowerment of the individual to re-construct the self in accordance to the social environment to navigate everyday life, however, identities can also appear to be constricting or externally imposed, such as being categorised as refugee. In that case, the re-arrangement of one's identity can be experienced as limiting the desired identity construction and as losing control over the self.

In explanation of the social construction of identity, Hogg, Terry and White (1995) explored the relation between 'identity theory' and 'social identity theory' within the idea of the socially constructed self as both theories "address the social nature of self as constituted by society and eschew perspectives that treat self as independent of and prior to society" (p. 255). Identity theory results, however, from the idea that self relates to society and interacts with social behaviour through the mutual influence. The social identity theory moreover emphasises group processes and intergroup relations to explore "the relationship between social structure and individual behaviour" (Hogg, Terry & White, 1995:255). Both theories explain the construction of the multidimensional self.

Identity theory states, according to Hogg, Terry and White (1995), "that as a reflection of society, the self should be regarded as a multifaceted and organized construct" and as emerging "from people's roles in society" (p. 256). This, however, is negatively pointed out by authors such as Schachter (2013) saying that postmodern social conditions create the fragmentation of one's identity, as well as Bauman (2000) explaining that the contemporary liquid modernity creates incoherencies when socially constructing life. The fragmentation of self is often pressing on those who are disadvantaged or stigmatized in society (Bauman, 2004). Schachter (2013) argues that people need some consistency in life, next to the freedoms and flexibilities they require. However, because of the increased fluidity of life by globalisation and Internet, as explained by Bauman (2000 and 2004), individuals need to work harder to realise or maintain this consistency with the self, their self-consistent identity, to adapt

to the faster changing social environment and all its possibilities (Vigh, 2009). This consistency can be found within social groups. Hogg, Terry and White (1995) explain this by referring to social identity theory.

> *"The basic idea is that a social category into which one falls, and to which one feels one belongs, provides a definition of who one is in terms of the defining characteristics of the category, a self-definition that is a part of the self-concept […] Each of these memberships is represented in the individual member's mind as a social identity that both describes and prescribes one's attributes as a member of that group, that is, what one should think and feel, and how one should behave."*
>
> (Hogg, Terry & White, 2995, p. 259)

The dynamically intertwined relationship of intergroup relations and one's identity construct is emphasised by Hogg, Terry and White (1995) as social identity theory and identity theory, to explain how identities are constructed, internalised and used to define the self. They explain how identity theory discusses the process of "labelling or naming oneself as a member of a social category", whilst social identity theory is about the process of self-categorisation by evaluating the self in relation to in-group similarities, norms and behaviour (Hogg, Terry and White (1995, p. 262). This aligns with Bradatan, Popan and Melton (2010) who explain the process of group formation with the acceptance of common norms, beliefs, attitudes and values within the group and the exclusion of everything what is not. However, Campbell (2000) argues that this idea of social identity construction fails to allow the possibility that people can identify with more than one category, re-arrange their identity in different social contexts, or move between different social categories or groups without losing the other dimensions of their identity construct. This is also in agreement with the structure agency debate of Giddens (1984).

During the migration trajectory, social contexts vary over time and space, causing that identities are continuously re-constructed and expressed differently in order and strength, depending on stereotypes, norms and social behaviours in each and every other environment they appear, either spatial or social. And where norms and behaviours regarding gender and sexuality are fluid, social identity construction regarding the queer parts of one's identity is as well.

In addition to social identity theory, Bradatan, Popan and Melton (2010) explain that the social identity of individuals is constructed relationally and context specifically; created and maintained through contact with others and that speaking the language, knowing cultural norms and finding your way in society are needed to reconstruct identity in that new social environment. The way refugees engage in the socioeconomic context of the country of settlement can be understood at the boundaries of group formation, especially, "while the definition of social identity implies the existence of both an in-group, with whom the individual identifies, and an out-group, from whom the individual distances him/herself, the transnational identity implies the concomitant identification with two different national groups" (Bradatan, Popan & Melton, 2010, p. 177; Hogg, Terry & White, 1995). This identification of oneself with different social contexts, norms or relations simultaneously relates to

queer refugees because of their connectedness to amongst others their country of origin, the migration trajectory and/or the international *queer community*.

Operationalisation of identity

For this research on how queer refugees in the Netherlands navigate everyday life and their identity construction, I operationalise identity as multiple, hybrid, and fluid over time and space. Identities are constructed and re-arranged by social relations, differ per context and are created by both force and choice simultaneously. Thus, identity is fluid rather than rigid and its construction is highly dependent on contexts and social relationships, requiring different sets of actions and behaviours (Hogg, Terry & White, 1995; Sen, 2007; Bradatan, Popan & Melton, 2010). The self is not prior to society, however, continuously in dialogue because the social roles are to be determined. Social identity theory emphasizes how one's identity is reconstructed in relation to the existence of both an in-group and an out-group by self-categorisation and self-enhancement. Hence Campbell's (2000) explanation that the social and contextual mobility leads to individuals associate themselves with different identities that are "not mutually exclusive, but cumulative layers, where the immediate cultural context determines which layer is relevant at any particular time" (p. 32). Individuals thus can identify with more than one category without losing other identities.

2.2.3. Intersectionality: queer refugees in a heteronormative society

As identity is socially constructed and multidimensional, being constantly in dialogue with and within the social forces of the social context, I emphasise that the meaning of different identity constructions changes at each intersection of two or more identities. Intersectionality creates room to look at "the relationship among multiple dimensions and modalities of social relations and subject formations" (McCall, 2005, p. 1771). This is in agreement with Chadwick (2017) explaining that "intersectional theory argues that we cannot approach gender, race, class or sexuality as single or discrete issues or [identity] categories" (p. 6). Intersectionality "deals with the issue of how different social identities, not necessarily conflicting, interact in the social sphere to create even more particular identities" (Schachter, 2013, pp. 72-73). Rather than consider separate identity categories, for example homosexuality and being a refugee, intersectionality leaves room for the creation of a unique third identity category (Chadwick, 2017) at the intersection of sexuality and forced displacement: *queer refugee*. However, because intersectionality is a theory for looking at a social phenomenon or identity construction at the intersection of two or more concepts, categories or identities, it immediately and paradoxically creates its own downside as well: the separation of these different concepts, categories or identities by emphasising their interconnectedness (Brown, 2012).

Chadwick determines three forms of intersectionality based on Crenshaw (1991, in Chadwick, 2017, p. 7). First of all, structural intersection, which is the everyday oppression related to social positions, because of economic status, citizenship or race. Secondly, political intersection, referring to the silencing of these marginalised groups. And lastly, representational intersectionality, referring to both "the ways in which marginalised subjects are devalued in socio-cultural norms, discourses and representations and the ways in which critiques of oppression themselves contribute to marginalisation". The consideration of the marginalised position at the intersection of identity categories, emphasises the minor position of these groups and therefore creates a downward spiral of the interaction of society towards marginalised groups (Chadwick, 2017; Brown, 2012).

Having representational intersectionality in mind helps to understand the context in which queer refugees navigate everyday life as being a marginalised social group of which position continuously is

confirmed by the Dutch society as such. In addition to this, Massey and Ouellette (1996) explain that existing stigmas within society put, either direct or indirect, pressure on one's identity construction. Despite many states have laws protecting queer individuals from discrimination, many public services lack inclusive thinking regarding LGBT normalization. Massey & Ouellette (1996) argue that the Netherlands' "normative sexual orientation is still heterosexual" (p. 58), however, I would use the term dominant rather than normative.

Queer refugees are confronted with the dominance of heterosexuality within the Dutch society and find membership within queer social groups that provide a 'buffer' for possible failure in any of the roles or the times their sexuality is not accepted and should be covered (Massey & Ouellette, 1996; Heller, 2009; Yoshino, 2007). This so-called heterosexual 'norm' originates from Western ideologies such as the ideology of sexuality as one identity part, and the ideology of complementary genders (Buijs, Duyvendak & Hekma, 2009). Many queer individuals "try to 'pass' or maintain the appearance of the heterosexual norm while also maintaining a separate, hidden, gay social identity" to eliminates possible immediate public threats (Massey & Ouellette, 1996, p. 75). Queer refugees find themselves at the intersection of sexuality on the one hand and geography or culture on the other. This, as Brown (2012) argues, influences one's identity reconstruction amidst heteronormativity and homophobia, "reflecting […] both oppression and privilege in intersections of identities" (p. 543).

I use Massey and Ouellette's (1996) explanation of this duality of oppression and privilege, as they argue that there is a point in gay, lesbian, and bisexual development at which the individual realizes its differences from heterosexual individuals. This might cause confusion with the identity of the self as the person may become uncertain of his or her sexual identity and therefore also of other parts of his or her identity, that is always redefined with the oppressive heterosexual dominance in mind (Massey & Ouellette, 1996). Brown (2012) furthermore explains that transgender individuals also face these difficulties as "transphobic homonormative gay and lesbian spaces" appear to be sexist and insecure (p. 543). Being queer makes that you always must be aware of your identity management and the story you share. This might influence one's self-esteem because individuals intend to "hold on to heterosexuality as the 'normative' standard" (Massey & Ouellette, 1996, p. 75).

The idea of identity confusion highlights the individual's conflict between evolving homosexual orientation and "his or her presumed heterosexuality" (Massey & Ouellette, 1996, p. 58). Furthermore, this confusion regarding sexual orientation may create conflict with the self, not only with the presumption of heterosexuality, but also with any other identity the person may carry. However, again, the confusion and construction depend on the social environment and relations in which the individual navigates (Vigh, 2009). The only way to eliminate the identity conflict in relation to being lesbian, gay or bisexual is to change perceived gender roles and defined characteristics in society, and to be aware of our heterosexually biased socialization.

> *"If heterosexually biased roles negatively impact the self-esteem of gay and lesbian children, the challenge for society, in embracing the gay and lesbian person, may involve not only accepting gay and lesbian people without stigma, but also liberalizing social and sexual scripts."*
>
> (Massey & Ouellette, 1996, p. 75)

The social and symbolical meaning of gender and sexuality is, in agreement with Wekker (2017), at the intersection with ethnicity and race, although I would rather say cultural background. She argues the issue of race and colonialism in the Netherlands in the light of everyday racism. In her experience, many white Dutch find themselves open towards migrants, other ethnicities and sexual diversity, however, perceive the self as superior to people of colour. This ignorance is what Wekker calls 'white innocence'; the fear and avoidance in the Dutch society of the intersection of ethnicity and gender in the light of the colonial past. She therefore displays the interconnectedness of the self, as tolerant and liberal in culture, and the Other, unwilling to assimilate, in the Western modernity that originates from the colonial times. The public letter written by the Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte in March 2017 is mentioned in related articles and declares:

> *"We feel a growing unease with people who abuse our freedom to spoil things here, even though they have some to this country precisely to enjoy that freedom. People who will not assimilate […] People who harass gays, jeer at women in short skirts, or call normal Dutchmen racists. Behave normally or go away."*

(see https://vvd.nl/briefvanmark/; translated in Prendergast, 2017)

This letter shows the paradox within the Netherlands being a white-dominated society, constantly marginalising minorities but perceiving itself as open to cultural and sexual diversity (Wekker, 2017). This is something that Murray (2014) also writes about and explains the problem of the dominant 'migration to liberation nation' narrative which is "literally and figuratively straight in their temporal, spatial and sexual orientation in that they follow an essentialist linear path of sexual identity development" (p. 453). It enforces ongoing silencing of experiences of homophobia, racism, sexism and classicism, "which are generally upheld by the bureaucratic institutions of the neo-liberal nation-state and capitalist discourses" (Murray, 2014, p. 454; Jordan, 2009). Murray (2014) explains that queer refugees assumingly are happy to arrive in a liberal nation that is open towards sexual and gender diversity; a society that is the opposite of their 'uncivilised' society characterised by homophobia. However, the Dutch asylum procedure is based on this narrative and therefore positions the queer refugee outside of liberation because one's claim is evaluated against stereotypes and linear ideas of queer identity development (Murray, 2014). This is something that Buijs (2016) refers to as a 'Dutch paradox': the ambiguity between the liberal image of the Netherlands regarding queer rights on the one hand and the traditional asylum policies based on conservative ideas towards sexual diversity on the other. Processes of integration and feeling home are always related to the dynamics and the (unequally generated) differences of race, class, gender and sexuality in society (Chadwick, 2017; Brown, 2012). Some of the queer individuals therefore decided to keep their sexual orientation or gender identity a secret (Jordan, 2009). A historical and cultural ignorance that queer refugees are confronted with during their asylum process and whilst settling in the Netherlands.

Operationalisation of intersectionality

By operationalising intersectionality, I tried to emphasise that the multiple identities cannot be approached as single or discrete categories. Each intersection initiates another opportunity or conflict, depending on one's social context. A third identity is created at the intersection of multiple identities

and relates in its own way to the social environment in which the individual navigates. This creation of a third identity category to criticise marginalisation immediately worsens that marginalisation as well, as representational intersectionality explains. And in addition to that, approaching a marginalised position at the intersection of two or more social identity categories paradoxically puts an emphasis on these separate categories again. At different intersections, queer refugees in the Netherlands are confronted with a heterosexual dominance within the Dutch society and a 'Dutch paradox' influencing them to re-evaluate their identities, negotiate access to social networks and to navigate everyday life.

2.2.4. Towards social networks

Theories on identity initiate an element of choice and therefore also align with the agency in social navigation through social networks. Willems (2005) explains that social networks can be used as a coping strategy in the socioeconomic spheres of forced migration. Social networking is a social process that "links one with his/her social network members" committed to one's own making (p. 54). Putnam (2001) uses social capital and social networks as one and explains his central idea that "networks and the associated norms of reciprocity have value" (p. 1). Norms and values are shared, trust is nurtured, and mutual support is expected to be provided, whether material or immaterial (Willems, 2005; Putnam, 2001; Sabatini, 2009).

The element of choice makes networks fluid, context specific and a social construct. It is therefore important to note that social networks are far from homogeneous and entail multiple dimensions. Networks incorporate different aspects of life, such as culture, institutions, social norms and relational networks (Sabatini, 2009). Individuals construct their own personal network both by force and choice, and Wellman (2002) explains that its "boundaries are more permeable, interactions are with diverse others, linkages switch between multiple networks, and hierarchies are both flatter and more complexly structured" (p. 10). The networks may be fragmentary, loosely-bounded and relational, and as these differ per community or context, one's identity characteristics are re-arranged and constructed in conversation with and within its social environment. Communities are rather social than spatial as they are built on shared interests, norms or common identity features (Wellman, 2002). Social networks can thus be understood as the links and shared values between individuals in society which enables them to trust each other and to cooperate. Putnam (2001) explains that social networks are about investing in social relations to gain its expected returns. Sabatini (2009) emphasizes his perspective on social network as a praxis, specific to certain activities or contexts and "defined by its function" (p. 429).

Social networks can thus be dense and interconnected, where shared values and trust are at its basis. When trust-based relations become tighter, it creates 'bonding' because these strong ties are "considered building blocks for relationships with broader social networks" (Sabatini, 2009, p. 430). Individuals are often brought together by similarities such as nationality, gender, age, class, ethnicity or sexual orientation (Stevens, 2016; Willems, 2005). Homogenous strong ties provide more support than heterogeneous and thus weaker ties: "strong ties or ties between individuals with common characteristics are more important conduits of social support than weak ties or those between individuals with dissimilar characteristics" (Willems, 2005, p. 64). Homogeneous networks thus provide more support than diverse heterogeneous networks because of their density and easy access to information and tools.

In addition to the bonding aspect of social networks, these can also 'bridge' heterogeneous groups by connecting networks that know many differences, both visibly and invisibly (Putnam, 2001; Sabatini, 2009). These ties can be either strong or weak, nurture or hinder social cohesion, however, always connecting people. The connection with a social network, whether homogeneous and strong or heterogeneous and weak, relates to ones' identity construction and contributes to a sense of belonging (Sabatini, 2009). Wellman (2002) explains that "people can use ties to one network to bring resources to another" (p. 15). This interaction between social networking and identification is at the basis of the navigation of everyday life in regard to the forced migration of queers as many social relationships and identifications change when ones' context changes. New networks are created where nationality and gender are at front and "as social constructs, cultural conceptions are embedded in the historical, economic and political structures of the cultural community" (Willems, 2005, p. 66).

In line with the idea that social networks are not held back by physical borders, also invisible borders are overcome. The Internet can be seen as a social environment through which individuals navigate and converse to re-arrange their identity construct. Social conflicts or uncertainty can be overcome online where queers "can choose to be visible or invisible while exploring, control the pace of interactions and experiment with self-expression as their identity evolves and integrates with their offline worlds over time" (Fox & Ralston, 2016, p. 635). In their article, Fox and Ralston (2016) explain that online options can guide the evolving identity, especially for queer individuals during their coming out because they are seeking for similarities, social groups or role models to re-arrange their identity. "Knowing how to network (on- and offline) becomes a human capital resource, and having a supportive network becomes a social capital resource. The cost is the loss of a palpably present and visible local group at work and in the community, that could provide social identity and a sense of belonging. The gain is the increased diversity of opportunity, greater scope for individual agency, and the freedom from a single group's constrictive control" (Wellman, 2002, p. 15). Being part of online (anonymous) discussions, defending gay rights, creating a dating profile or sharing information is related to and continuously influencing one's identity reconstruction.

Operationalisation of social networks

Social networks are committed to one's own making, based on trust and reciprocity. These contribute to a sense of belonging and social cooperation. Bonding social networks exist of homogeneous ties and are often dense, based on similarities and providing social support. Bridging social networks are more likely to connect heterogeneous groups, either visibly or invisibly as the boundaries of networks are rather social than spatial. Online social media offers opportunity, exploration and resources when evolving one's identity and navigate everyday life.

2.2.5. The central theories' interrelation

For this research on the social navigation of everyday life of queer refugees in the Netherlands, the reconstruction of their multiple identities and the way they engage with different social networks, I have explained the theories on social navigation, identity, intersectionality and social networks.

This chapter shows how individuals negotiate with and behave within their surrounded context by a fluid and continuing dialogue. By this dialogue, identity is re-evaluated and reconstructed by leaving some parts at the background and putting some more at front. The re-arrangement of the assumed multiple identities is at the basis of social networks because of one's intended gains from each network. One individual may be connected in various social networks which depends and differs per social context in which the individual again evaluates and reconstruct its identity to negotiate access

to the networks. This happens at the intersection of one or more identity categories where individuals (reverse) cover identity parts to avoid being marginalised by the assumed or intended in-group. At each intersection, a third combined identity arises. In this way, the individual socially navigates each moment of and position within everyday life. For this research, both the identity construction and the navigation through social networks are dynamic and interrelated; both creating opportunities, however, also challenges; and both need to be made, negotiated upon and maintained.

3. METHODOLOGY AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS: BEING 'STRAIGHT'FORWARD

This research used a qualitative approach to come to a closer understanding of the perspectives and identities of queer refugees. Within this chapter, I explain how I gained and maintained access to the field as well as I elaborate on the research methodologies I have used to obtain the qualitative data needed to answer my research question. Furthermore, I reflect on the complexities, opportunities and considerations I have experienced and worked with in an as ethical way as possible.

Qualitative research leaves room for subjectivity and sense-making because information is gathered in a social, complex and hybrid context. Explained by Braun and Clarke (2013), qualitative research refers to understanding "the beliefs, assumptions, values and practices shared by the research community" in order to grasp a sense of meaning and process rather than cause and effect (p. 4). I did not aim to find 'the' solid, singular, absolute truth because I believe in multiple versions of reality. I therefore aimed to explore and to illuminate the realities of queer refugees in the Netherlands. To do so, I approached this qualitative research ethnographically. The ethnographic approach created room for the understanding of dynamics and processes within one's context, whilst participating, asking questions informally, watching interaction, and listening to stories for an extended period of time (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995; Richards, 2005). I agree with Braun and Clarke (2013) explaining that in qualitative research, knowledge should not be considered outside of the context in which it was generated, either in an interview setting or within "the broader sociocultural and political context of the research" (p. 6).

This thesis is interpretative and descriptive in nature as the aim is to create an in-depth description of how queer refugees navigate everyday life, and of the fluid role of one's identity. It, therefore, reflect only a partial understanding of experiences and perceptions of the participants (Haraway, 1988). The interpretations of informants are prioritised in reporting the research and, next to that, the focus is at people's own framing of their lives in "their own terms of reference rather than having it pre-framed by the researcher" (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 24).

Whilst conducting qualitative research, I as a researcher have tried to be aware of the ethical considerations that came along whilst doing research. Especially when studying this marginalised group vulnerable and limited by its labelled identity of 'queer refugee'; from the point of getting access, finding respondents, choosing questions, using different methods, towards the publication (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011). Ethical decision-making is context specific and as researcher I have always tried to balance the need for knowledge against my ethical concerns (Goodhand, 2000). I came across some ethical dilemmas for which I will explain my considerations throughout this chapter. One personal challenge was about my sexuality that could be determined as 'straight' and my Dutch personality as 'direct', creating my striking appearance as being *'straight'forward.*

3.1. ACCESSING 'THE FIELD' AND ITS PARTICIPANTS

This thesis focuses on queer refugees in the Netherlands both with and without obtained refugee status and who are all in one way, either strongly or not, connected to the organisation Secret Garden in Amsterdam. I decided to undertake this study in Amsterdam because the city has once been appointed as the "gay capital of the world" (Buijs, Duyvendak & Hekma, 2009, p. 149) where the queer scene has developed itself and organisations can work freely. I interviewed a wide variety of people, including queer refugees who obtained status and queer refugees who are undocumented, or how some will call them 'illegal migrants', in the Netherlands because of the Dublin Regulation (Schuster, 2011). Next to that, I spoke with social workers from non-governmental organisations (NGO's) and people from governmental organisations to gain a closer understanding of the organisational context queer refugees are getting in contact with. Amongst the organisations that participated in my research were *Secret Garden*, *Prismagroup*, *Safe Haven*, *COC Cocktail*, *Dutch Council for Refugees*, and *Pink in Blue*. I will elaborate on these organisations in the next chapters because these were repeatedly mentioned during my fieldwork as supportive and important spills in the queer refugee network.

Of these organisations, the NGO Secret Garden was welcoming me to attend meetings and work with them as a volunteer for a period of five months. Hence, that the 'field site' is never isolated because of the interconnectedness with other dynamics apart from the researcher's delineated field (Driessen & Jansen, 2013). I lived in Amsterdam and my involvement with Secret Garden included attending the weekly meetings, delivering content for some of these meetings, translating, facilitating, and co-organising events such as the *Canal Pride*, the *International Queer and Migrant Film Festival Amsterdam* and *OrienDam 2018*. Furthermore, I attended courts on asylum cases, many demonstrations and protests, and several parties. I also connected with queer refugees online via social media, predominantly members of Secret Garden. I started conversations and my online visibility contributed to the mutual accessibility of researcher and informant. Being part of the organisational network was a complementary manner to gain access and trust because my informants also study me as 'the researcher' (Brown, 2009). Therefore, my perceived identity and related self-representation as a researcher, both online and offline, influenced the access to in-depth information, as Brown (2009) also explains. The time as a volunteer at Secret Garden provided insights on how queer refugees navigate everyday life during settling in the Netherlands as well as on the construction of their identities.

The research population consists of a diverse group in terms of sexualities and genders, country of origin, language, age, and socio-economic backgrounds, but also in the amount of time already staying in the Netherlands. I have decided not to make a distinction between these categories whilst entering the field and conducting interviews as I believe that the intersection of queer and refugee is a strong category in itself (Malkki, 1995). However, one could see this as a limitation to this research.

Participants were found via Secret Garden as well (see Appendix A for an overview). Another volunteer researcher shared some names of queer refugees who would be willing to participate in my research. Via this snowball method, my position as volunteer as well as student was used to free ride on his already build trust relations. The members of Secret Garden are predominantly men who identify themselves as gay, bisexual or queer; women who identify as lesbian, bisexual or queer; and transgender individuals who comprise less than a quarter of the membership. Secret Garden is diverse ethno-culturally (Jordan, 2009) with Farsi speakers from Iran together with Arabic speakers from Middle Eastern countries or Northern Africa. Most members are Arabs. Other members originate from Sub-Saharan Africa, former Soviet Union states and Latin America. For this research, I

interviewed eleven adults: ten homosexual men and one lesbian woman who all have been in the Netherlands for six months to four years. Nida from Pakistan was the only lesbian woman that came to the organisation on regularly basis when I was a volunteer. She participated actively in many discussions within and outside of the organisation.

Because of my inability to speak Arabic or Farsi fluently and because I wanted to avoid cooperation with an interpreter, I spoke English with all informants who spoke that language well and some were even able to speak Dutch sufficiently. Individuals involved were between 25 and 45 years old, except for Nasim who will become 60 soon. Their socio-economic background varied from rural poor illiterate to urban middle-class status as well as elite high-educated backgrounds. Almost all of them had been to college or university in their country of origin. Only one was illiterate. Many pursued further education in the Netherlands. Some were looking for a job mentioning bank officer, hotel manager, fashion designer, music professor, dentist and social worker.

3.2. RESEARCH METHODS

To be able to answer the main research question and the sub questions of this research, I used semi-structured interviews, small talk and observation as well as documents, literature and webpages. My involvement during weekly meetings of Secret Garden for an extended period of time, watching what happens and listening to what was said, made me asking questions informally and formally. This enhanced the validity of my research because I have tried to work with the participative, dialogical and relational setting of informants and their "perspectival subjectivity" (Van der Riet, 2008; Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 21). Therefore, as Jordan (2009) describes, the struggle for credibility of this research created a dialogical understanding.

3.2.1. Small talk

The first research technique that I have used is small talk which I will explain according to the description of Driessen and Jansen (2013). Driessen and Jansen (2013) recommend small talk as "it provides access to information that is difficult to get otherwise and could be central to understanding the local culture" (p. 250). They explain how small talk is central to social interaction and functionally multifaceted as I, the researcher, hung around to develop cultural sensitivity of the so to say 'sub-culture' of queer refugees. Small talk has been used as the hidden core technique of this study to strengthen or correct data obtained by interviews and observations, and to get a closer understanding of the research' context.

By approaching the research in an ethnographic manner, I got "insights into hierarchies, social conflicts, or people's experiences" trough participating during the weekly meetings and many other events (Driessen & Jansen, 2013, p. 251). Small talk is useful to uncover new topics of interests, provide more context-based information and create trust with informants (Bernard, 2017). It furthermore helped to overcome my "strangeness, newness and otherness by multisensory and multi-layered exchange as a means to bridge the personal and cultural divide" (Driessen & Jansen, 2013, p. 252). It is thus of utmost importance to establish and maintain a good relationship with informants. Building trust is essential to gain and maintain access to the field (Norman, 2009).

I have tried to not be as straight forward as Dutch people are said to be because this could hinder open conversation on sensitive topics. By having many thoughtful chit-chats, I have tried to create a thick description of the social and cultural environment of queer refugees in the Netherlands. Fun fact, as

Driessen and Jansen (2013) aptly point out: "The need to talk and listen may also lead to overeating. This is partly the result of local hospitality norms, since sharing of food is a central aspect of sociability in many societies" (p. 256). I indeed have had many Arabic dinners and lunches together with informants or general members of Secret Garden in order to blend in.

Furthermore, as Driessen and Jansen (2013) describe, I needed to be cultural sensitive in my language use and public attitude. Hence, I did not immediately ask nor about their sexual orientation or gender identity neither about the reason to migrate, about the concept of refugee or about the acceptation of the self at first. It is important to note that there are some ethics to take into consideration as the information obtained through small talk is gathered during informal conversations as to which people were not constantly remembered of my position as a researcher (Driessen & Jansen, 2013). It took me one month of seeing Secret Garden members almost daily to come to that point that I could ask some members of the group to share a bit more about their lives back home or about their sexuality. There was no room to ask transgender men or women about their struggles or transition as I felt this group concerns vulnerability and trust issues more. Nevertheless, I have tried to surrender myself to all ways of expression, body language and greetings, to "smile, laugh, and touch in culturally appropriate ways" (Driessen & Jansen, 2013, p. 258). In line with this, Braun and Clarke (2013) explain that "a warm and friendly manner puts people at ease and helps establishing trust" (p. 10).

3.2.2. Observation in a participatory manner

Secondly, I have made observations in a participatory manner during the weekly meetings of Secret Garden. In addition to that, I attended different queer migrant or queer refugee related events across the whole country. Observation is, according to Braun and Clarke (2013), the systematic collection of data while using all senses in order to examine people in their own social context and its situations. These observations not only contributed to generate my own experiential knowledge (Jordan, 2009), but also contributed to contextual and in-depth knowledge generation. It is a technique for which I took part in the social structures in which queer refugees find themselves, their interactions and events in order to understand explicit aspects of their lives (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011). Small talk and informal talks, as explained above, are inherently connected with observing because of their complementary synergy.

Observations were also needed to generate knowledge about queer refugees and their social environment in Amsterdam. During and after observing I made field notes of the information gathered and, in addition to that, I continuously reflected on my appearance during observing, interviewing and volunteering (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Making field notes kept me aware of my thoughts, feelings and influence regarding the research. It showed how I approached data as notes helped me to clarify thoughts, assumptions and subjectivity (Birks, Chapman & Francis, 2008). Stereotypes and Western narratives on coming out that queer refugees have to deal with daily because of being in procedure, became visible during the observations (Murray, 2014; Jordan, 2009). However, apart from data collection, observing in a participatory manner helped with creating trust between me and my informants, to make them feel comfortable enough to be observed or recorded (Bernard, 2017).

The added value of participatory observation for this research was to make sense of the social environment queer refugees in the Netherlands live in. I hung out with these individuals, we danced together, we had conversations, shared dinners and listened to each other's stories in respect and trust. By doing so, I obtained a better understanding in the social structures they find themselves in, but it also helped me to meet other new informants and to check my findings (Braun & Clarke, 2013; White

& Pettit, 2007). The differences of perspectives and identity construction became clearer as I have tried to hold the perspective of those being researched in order to see and respond to all that influence their behaviour and views from within (Desai & Potter, 2006).

Hence, participant observation is complementary to small talk as occurring at the same moments. The previous mentioned two qualitative research techniques helped me to access interviewees and gave me insights about their navigation of everyday life. I have informally chat with many members of Secret Garden and observed inter- and intra-group dynamics. Complementary to the observations and small talk, I have conducted eleven semi-structured interviews with queer refugees. I am in agreement with Driessen and Jansen (2013:249) mentioning that "there is a thin and fluid boundary between open and informal interviews and small talk" (p. 249). This connection will be elaborated upon below.

3.2.3. Semi-structured interviews

The third technique I have used to gather information involved conducting in-depth semi-structured interviews with, as mentioned before, eleven participants (see Appendix A for an overview). The interviews were guided by a topic list (see Appendix B for the lists) and I have asked them about their experiences in the country of origin and during the migration trajectory, about their asylum procedure, about their lives in the Netherlands and about their dreams for the future. Furthermore, I informed about abstract terms like identity, their feelings towards being queer and being refugee and the perspectives of society towards their feelings. I listened carefully and used open-ended questions to invite elaboration continuously. Participants shared their stories with emotion and in their 'own language' and terms (Braun & Clarke, 2013) as wherefore we took all time that was needed. I paid attention to details in their answers in attempt to reveal more of the complexity of their experiences, movements, behaviours, feelings, social relationships and identifications (Murray, 2014). Mostly, we were together for one full day to get used to each other, to build the 'cocoon of trust' as a safe and open space to reveal one's story. To make sure all participants felt comfortable, all interviews took place at their own homes in the Netherlands, whilst quietly drinking a cup of tea or after skating through the city. In this way, I hoped that they would feel at ease to speak openly. To help participants expressing themselves and "formulate their own analysis", my role was moreover the facilitator that listens self-critically (Desai & Potter, 2006, p. 6). Hence that an interview is fluid, might be complex and could be confronting since we talked about intimate topics (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011). It therefore was of utmost importance to avoid judgments. The recorded time of the interviews resulted between 45 and 100 minutes of tape.

In addition to these interviews with queer refugees themselves, I firstly interviewed seven social workers who work with these individuals on daily basis to gain a better understanding of the field I was operating in (see Appendix A for an overview), because "findings regarding migration trajectories must be understood in the context of the timeframe of the study" (Jordan, 2009, p. 179). Next to the aim of interviewing social workers who would provide me information on the context of queer refugees in the Netherlands from an organisational perspective, the interviews also provided me information on how to behave among amongst the research subjects during my fieldwork. In order to do no harm, I have tried to be aware of the potential unintended negative effects of my research on the informants or on the context of research by obtaining pre-knowledge of the context itself and its culture (Goodhand, 2000).

Preparing an interview guide gave me something to hold on to during the interviews and made sure that each interview was conducted in more or less the same way to strengthen the validity of the

research (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Boeije, Hart & Hox, 2009). When I found out during the first two interviews that I missed some interesting features and needed to re-structure the guide, I adjusted the guide by involving it for later interviews. I have spoken with interlocutors in a formal interview setting just once, however, hung out and informally talked with them frequently.

One demand particularly was to make the guide as such that it was understandable for participants as the topics are intimate and private or even taboo (Braun & Clarke, 2013). By leaving room for using own terms, I have tried to avoid that informants would close up when talking about sensitive matters such as their sexuality or gender, and the traumatic forced migration trajectory. This because the topic of this research concerns something private, intimate, hard at times, secret and maybe even confusing. As mentioned, it is of utmost importance that the terminology used during this research provides only appropriate terms in the context of sexual orientation and gender identity. In line with this, the UNHCR (2013a) explains that "the term homosexual should be avoided as it tends to make lesbians invisible, does not encompass bisexuals, transgender and intersex people, and may be considered offensive" (p. 20). Therefore, I avoided to use these terms and facilitated the opportunity for the participants to describe their sexuality or gender in their own language. Some did indeed not use words as 'homosexual', but rather used 'it' or 'queer, as two Turkish male members of Secret Garden once described during the weekly meeting: "I am not gay. What is gay, bi, trans? I am queer!"

Next to the used terminology during the interviews, it is my priority to ensure and secure the anonymity of the participants in order to do no harm (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011; Goodhand, 2000). I therefore always started each interview with explaining my research and its aim at first, where after I clarified their rights. I emphasised that there were no right or wrong answers and that I only wanted to grasp an understanding of their realities. Lastly, I made sure that participants felt at ease by explaining their anonymity and sincerely asking if they were fine with me recording the interview with an audio device. To assure their anonymity as voices might be recognised, I erased all tapes when translated (Braun & Clarke, 2013). This explanation of confidentiality and anonymity was adequate to receive consent from every individual. This is a principle that entails the right of people to decide for themselves whether they want to participate in the research or not (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011) and Jupp (2006) explains the principle as:

> *"The responsibility on the part of the social researcher to strive to ensure that those involved as participants in research not only agree and consent to participating in the research of their own free choice, without being pressurized or influenced, but that they are fully informed about what it is they are consenting to."* (p. 49)

To secure confidentiality, I also have asked all participants to think of a name they love that I could use to refer to them in this thesis. Several participants came up with new names while others liked to be referred to with their real name.

3.2.4. Transcription, coding and analysis

The data analysis, as advised by DeWalt and DeWalt (2011), has been a process of reviewing, summarizing, cross-checking, looking for patterns, and drawing conclusions from my data. I

continued doing this during the period of field research as well as afterwards by looking through notes to indicated possible gaps or new opportunities. This helped me to make sense of the data obtained to structure all information better.

Jordan (2009) explains that "during the interviews, as participants recount their memories, they enact past, present, and possible future selves-in-relation to implicitly present others" (p. 168). They make sense of an event by narrating with taking the audience into account. The researcher's sense-making of the informant's narrative is not a neutral act as information is interpreted with his or her own background (Haar, Heijmans & Hilhorst, 2013). This makes knowledge partial and situated as explained by Haar, Heijmans & Hilhorst (2013), and therefore I continuously reflected upon my subjectivity when gathering and interpreting data as reading over transcripts multiple times entails "interpreting these many selves in-relation narrated in recounted events, and in the interview interaction" (Jordan, 2009). Therefore, I repeated questions during informal conversations at other moments besides during the interview itself. Hence, some quotations needed to be corrected in light of understanding and respecting, because English or Dutch are not the first language of the participants. Nevertheless, I have tried to remain the quotes as close to their own chosen words as possible and however, they possibly suggest some unavoidable interpretations of my own or to alter the meaning substantially (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

I have transcribed all interviews where after each transcript was coded in a coding-scheme based on the complementary work of induction and deduction. The scheme was created deductively based on theories such as identity, social navigation and networking. Then, I improved the coding-scheme inductively by critically reviewing it based on the transcripts I was reading carefully (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006; Charmaz & Belgrave, 2012). Combining inductive and deductive coding created hybrid codes and encouraged me to structure all data strongly to find a closer understanding of the meaning of the stories. However, some stories were not to be put within the boxes of the coding-scheme and therefore I created combined codes as well. New insights were found, and the red lines of the data were conceptualised by analysing and restructuring the codes.

Furthermore, the interviews with organisations provided data that helped me generate an overview of the context of queer refugees in the Netherlands and, therefore, were useful during the critical reading of all data obtained from participants. Then, all data from transcripts of interviews with queer refugees was brought together "into dialogue with my own field notes" and transcripts of interviews with organisations in order to highlight the experiences and efforts of queer refugees when they elaborated on feelings towards migration, the refugee system, organisations, settling and identity (Jordan, 2009, p. 168). I found it difficult to analyse identity, social navigation and social networking separately because they are intertwined, interrelated and dependent on each other. I have tried to distinct the three concepts and to elaborated on their intersections simultaneously whilst writing the analysis.

3.3. REFLEXIVITY AND POSITIONING

Qualitative research leaves room for the researcher's interpretation and subjectivity that is influenced by theoretical and societal discourses (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Being the research' instrument itself makes the story of this thesis more or less 'my' story towards the subject rather than the story of 'queer refugees' themselves as I brought my personal background, values, perspectives and assumptions to the field. When taking this subjectivity into consideration continuously during qualitative research, "our humanness, our subjectivity, can be used as a research tool" (Braun &

Clarke, 2013, p. 36). How my informants perceived me has logically influenced their attitudes, formulations and shared information.

The interaction between me as a researcher and the participant, and the mutual perceptions about each other, determined the flow of the conversation, its openness and the answers chosen. I was aware of participants perceiving me as 'that young, innocent, Dutch girl' with whom they will not easily share details about their sexuality or the gay scene because of cultural reasons or out of respect to women. And next to that, because of me being Dutch, I also have felt that some participants were emphasising their willingness to integrate in the Dutch society as if they had something to prove. The interaction and each other's appearances thus influenced attitudes and answers, however, this does not mean that some data is 'wrong'. The interaction actually says something and creates a deeper understanding of data obtained. In line with this, "the ability to reflect on, and step outside, your cultural membership, to become a cultural commentator – so that you can see, and question, the shared values and assumptions that make up being a member of a particular society – this involves identifying your own assumptions, and then putting them aside so that you research is not automatically shaped by these" (Braun and Clarke, 2009, p. 9).

The identity differences between me and my informants can be seen as an issue. This issue I have tried to tackle by reflecting on my thoughts and observations whilst doing fieldwork. Reflexivity is a core principle of qualitative research and involves self-reflection of the researcher, its processes, representation, power relations and other structures during field work. It clarifies the researchers' values, frame of reference and perspectives (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Making notes to record observations and conversations helped me to remember moments more carefully. Keeping this log of research activities, an overview of the fieldwork period, challenges, opportunities, choices and feelings created a basis for the context of analysis.

During fieldwork I kept on questioning myself concerning positioning, identification and interactions. How do people position themselves to others and to me? And how am I positioning myself in relation to the social environment and the informants? (Jordan, 2009). Brown (2009) explains that informants also study the researcher and, therefore, I have always observed their body language and communication. Braun and Clarke (2013) build further on this by arguing how we have multiple insider and outsider positions when during field research. I was an outsider because we did not share the queer or refugee identity, however, we did share some common thoughts on the refugee system, support organisations and human equality. This positioned me as an insider of the group again.

The outsider position is something that I felt at the first moment I attended a meeting of Secret Garden where I felt the eyes in my back, the back of 'that only Dutch girl'. I repeatedly explained during my fieldwork that I was there to conduct research on queer refugees, but always emphasised that I was there because of my personal interests and volunteer work as well. I have chosen to position myself as a quiet but cheerful person that listens carefully to whatever people share. Members, however, always asked me about my sexuality and found it suspicious that I am straight, female, Dutch and did not speak any of their languages. What is she doing here? Why is she interested in our stories? By strategically occupying a place in the kitchen by doing the dishes every Wednesday, I created an image of me being part of the organisation and, most importantly, being trustworthy.

Only after three months of working with the organisation, I felt really part of Secret Garden because I received many compliments on my work, was greeted with kisses on my mouth and referred to as 'our colleague'. Nevertheless, I was still always introduced as being straight which interestingly says also

something about the positioning of their sexuality whilst constructing identity (Campbell, 2000). They did not allow me to belong to 'us' (homosexual/Arab) as I was perceived as 'them' (heterosexual/Dutch). I have tried to overcome this by focussing on positioning myself as an open-minded person who just wants to learn as much as she could and putting my straightness on the background. So, I did not share that I am a heterosexual at first, but when people asked me about it I decided not to lie as it could endanger the trust in relationships I had freshly build.

Some questions are still left regarding my position in the field that align with Jordan (2009): "How to write about the shifts and realignment in identity that occur with migration, without reproducing a transnational version of the coming out story; How to ensure access to refugee protection for those facing homophobia or transphobic persecution, without reifying Western identity categories; How to represent the traumas that occur under persecution and precarious migration without fuelling a politics of rescue" (p. 179). A further research on these questions is recommended.

3.4. GENERAL COMPLEXITIES

I have tried to attend as many events, meetings and conversations in several cities to explore the daily lives of informants as much as I could. However, being based in Amsterdam shaped my research fundamentally as the focus was distinctly on Secret Garden related matters. This organisational bias created a narrow angle to start and conduct research. In addition to that, being Secret Garden biased unavoidably generated an Arab-bias as well. I therefore have to emphasise that most information of this research is submissive to Arab members of Secret Garden. This, nevertheless, influenced the research positively as well, because it made the intragroup relations stronger and trustworthy. Departing from a position resembling to a trust-based insider position, increased the ability to gain and maintain access to in-depth information about queer refugees' navigation of everyday life in the Netherlands.

These trust-based relationships, however, also created some complexities in regard to confidentiality (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011). Some informants have shared particular information that is extremely private and me writing about it seriously would be of high risk for them. These are risks in terms of being cut off from social network ties, suffering physical violence and declining the asylum request. I therefore have chosen to leave some information out of this research, or to reframe a few details when unavoidably needed. Next to the highly private information a few have shared with me, also information that I found on social media needed to be handled with care. I could not directly question what I observed on online profiles within group conversations, as others interpret my words as naive, Arabophobe or anti-homosexuality. This because I was totally framed as that one straight Dutch girl and I therefore needed to be constantly aware of how others perceived me.

The starting point of studying their navigation is them actually identify themselves as 'queer'. This, however, created a sexual or gender bias when investigating the matter. The assumption of a present queer identity is originated in the organisational bias because informants were found via Secret Garden and, therefore, identities as 'queer', 'refugee' and 'Arab' were at front. By reflecting on my assumptions, organisational bias and identity bias I have tried to endure my awareness in order to understand its relation to the data obtained.

The influence of me being unable to speak Arabic or Farsi should be recognised as one of the most important limitations of this research. Speaking a common language is at the basis of doing ethnographic fieldwork. When mastering the participants' language, the researcher can easily 'join'

conversations and the added value of small talk will be utilised (Driessen & Jansen, 2013). Therefore, I am aware of missing out on relevant information sharing at moments members were laughing, whispering, screaming or gossiping. And, in addition, I was not able to formally interview transgender men (Female to Male, 'FtM') or women (Male to Female, 'MtF'). This was because most of them did not speak English and as for this language barrier, I wanted to avoid interpretation mistakes. I agreed with Driessen and Jansen (2013) explaining that "using interpreters in fact means being completely cut off from the benefits of participation in small talk exchanges, apart from being entirely dependent on the willingness and ability of a mediator to translate statements in as precise and detailed a fashion as possible" (p. 252). This is truly a limitation to my research as I could not interview transgender men or women, but, foremost, because I was not able to jump into gossiping at all times, and thus some "hearts and doors" remained closed (Driessen & Jansen, 2013, p. 257).

4. COVERING: THE INTERSECTION OF BEING QUEER IN THE ARAB WORLD

Queers living in the Arab world often cover or deny their sexuality or gender fearing persecution by public authorities or relatives. Although they manage to perform their heterosexual act, many have been confronted with physical and psychological violence. These experiences in the country of origin influence the identity reconstruction of queer refugees as well as their navigation through everyday life before, during and after arriving in the Netherlands and starting their asylum procedure. Therefore, I have asked informants to share their stories of being queer in the Arab world and as one member of Secret Garden explained once: *"We are all 24-hour actors".*

When hearing homosexuality is a disease Jwoian, a young man from Kurdistan Iraq, did not want to identify himself with it at first. His family used to say that it was something dirty, not allowed and not possible. They perceived homosexuality as a disease and Jwoian did not want to identify himself as being a "sick person" (I2, 16-08-2017, Amsterdam). The perception of homosexuality as a disease is something several informants mentioned during the interviews. Words related to sexual orientation or gender identity often do not exist in their mother tongue. Culture or religion regard homosexuality as a sexual and despicable act rather than something related to feelings of love.

Whether it is for cultural or religious reasons, human rights are violated in many countries worldwide. Queers endure discrimination, familial persecution, physical violence and torture in the name of law. Most informants were persecuted by their own families to protect its 'honour'. This is extremely traumatic and has made some of the informants vulnerable while others seem to be resistant to stress about these situations. Besides being persecuted by one's own family, several informants also had to endure inhuman treatment of the state or decided to leave their country preventively. From the moment he came out, Jwoian did not feel secure or at peace with both his surroundings and his own self. Being homosexual made him leave his home, his family. This has never been his choice, however, he had to leave that "prison" (I2, 16-08-2017, Amsterdam). Because of his homosexuality, he was not allowed to have friends, go shopping or go to the gym.

Besides the everyday restrictions, many young Arabs are pressurised to marry after a certain age. This has forced some informants to resort arranged marriages with lesbian women. However, none of these marriages I have heard of have been successful. Chadly, a cheerful young man from Tunisia, was pressured by his family wanting him to marry a woman as the community started gossiping. He chose to leave his home preventively and moved to Kuwait. Obtaining a work visa for Kuwait was much easier than for a European country and, above all, he absolutely did not want to live 'illegally' (his words) somewhere. Chadly perceived Kuwait as a kind of platform from where he travelled the whole world working as a flight attendant. In 2009 he visited the Netherlands for the first time as a tourist and he felt immediately at home. He kept on visiting the Netherlands every other month "just to walk around and breath again" (I11, 29-09-2017, Amsterdam). The example of Chadly deciding carefully

to migrate to Kuwait demonstrates the agency and empowerment of the individual to choose how to navigate everyday life (Sen, 2007; Jordan, 2009).

However, in contrast to Chadly's story, other informants such as Jwoian's displayed the suppression of social forces. The difficulties with maintaining a heterosexual appearance next to one's homosexual secret life, downplaying identity characteristics in order to avoid being categorised as queer, challenged many informants for years (Massey & Ouellette, 1996; Heller, 2009). The continuous dialogue between the social agent and its social environment to direct life in an advantaged way, both empowers and forces them to adjust their identities (Vigh, 2009). The interaction of suppression and empowerment is essential to social navigation, together with its power limitations at the intersection of being queer in the Arab world (Vigh, 2009).

Nida, a clever Pakistani woman, for example, could not preventively escape an arranged marriage. She was forcedly married to an older man to whom she still refers to as 'my husband' despite he had mistreated and raped her for years. "Because in Pakistan, anybody can rape you, anybody can kill you, anybody can touch you. It will always be the girl's fault" (I10, 22-09-2017, Heerhugowaard). Although the violations, she could not tell her family out of shame and to protect the family's honour. In conformity with Nida's story, Mrs. Carla Pieters, a respected volunteer at Secret Garden, explained that almost all queer refugees she has met over the years have been sexually abused by relatives or community members who, according to Carla, "see conscience as a jacket one can put on and off" (O1, 12-06-2017, Amsterdam). Mrs. Pieters is a Dutch activist at heart and offers severely traumatised refugees who cannot survive in the Dutch refugee shelters a bed and a listening ear.

The divergence between the social present, being mistreated within one's arranged marriage and the ignorance of the self on the one hand, and the socially imagined, public acceptance of the self and the queer parts on the other, intensify miserable and hopeless feelings for some (Vigh, 2009). Others are able to convert these feelings in strength and fortitude to change their social situation. The limited level of power when negotiating identity reconstruction at the intersection of being Arab and queer (Chadwick, 2017), however, has provoked informants to cover identity parts, to hide themselves and even to leave their homes.

The Iraqi senior Nasim got shot in the streets of Bagdad because of his homosexuality. He got divorced and his three children still live in the Middle East. Having his own house with a small garden where the sun is shining makes him a satisfied older man. However, when I asked him if his family is informed about his sexuality, he responds very reluctant and restrained. The reluctance of Nasim is something more informants have shown when discussing sexuality and gender during the interviews. Many still feel the forces of their Arab communities supressing their identity reconstruction and navigation of everyday life in the Netherlands. In line with this, Hogg, Terry and White (1995) argue that the self is not prior to society and, as identity is reconstructed in dialogue with society, the openness or even acceptation of one's queer parts is missing.

To surrender to one's queer identities is inevitably related to surrender to the belonging to the social group of queers (Hogg, Terry & White, 1995). The question of belonging is at the boundaries of contemporary society and divides all in 'us' and 'them' (Bauman, 2000). Through the resignation to the in-group of queers, the out-group is determined as well, as Bradatan, Popan and Melton (2010) explain. It leaves no room for queer refugees to socially navigate and ensure their agency. The individual needs to distance itself from the identity construction back in the country of origin, however, this is something many informants of this research refused to do. As follows, the acceptance

of being queer conflicts with ideas about sexuality in their country of origin. This intersection underlies the identity reconstruction and social navigation of queer refugees in the Netherlands.

By reason of these persecution stories, informants had no choice but to leave everything behind to seek for asylum elsewhere. And in view of gay rights protective laws, the Netherlands was a country of first choice to many, however, not all could move to the Netherlands directly. Some informants applied for a visit visa and arrived legally while others made it to the Netherlands by moving across Europe undocumented. Differences were dependent on financial matters, country of origin, legal constituents or urgency reasons. One of my informants for example, Nami, a critical university student from Iran, flew with a visit visa to France and wanted to continue his journey to the United Kingdom, however, got intercepted at the airport in the Netherlands. Because of the Dublin Regulation, a regulation that aims to prevent people to submit their asylum application in multiple EU Member States at the same time and to keep the responsibility for one's claim with one single jurisdiction (UNHCR, 2013b; Schuster, 2011), he was obliged to go back to France. Nami refused and stayed undocumented in the Netherlands.

The organisation, members and colleagues of Secret Garden are also highly critical towards this Dublin Regulation because it removes the legal right to welfare and a fair examination of asylum procedures. In addition to that, it hinders people to be reunited with their families (Schuster, 2011). Waiting for eighteen months on top of the already protracted asylum procedure is awful and depressing. Yet, Nami preferred to stay in the Netherlands even if this would mean he would be in limbo (Schuster, 2011), to build a life secretly and undocumented, for these eighteen months before being officially allowed again to start his asylum procedure in the Netherlands.

> *"Honestly, yes, I had to hide myself, because when you are 'illegal', that is different, you know. You do not want a lot of people to know your story. They can be dangerous for you. One call is enough to destroy your whole life. If they catch you in these eighteen months, they send you back to the country you have your visa from."*
>
> Nami, 25 (Iran)
> (I9, 20-09-2017, Amsterdam)

When I interviewed Nami, the eighteen months were almost over and at that time, the most important thing for him was to start the asylum procedure. And just like him, also Nida has not obtained a permit yet because of the Dublin Regulation. She had left Pakistan with the help of a human trafficker and ended up in Poland. She continued her journey to the Netherlands and applied for asylum there, discovering she was not able to do so because of the Dublin regulation forcing her to stay in Poland. The Dublin Regulation forces asylum seekers to rely on smugglers who decide on destinations rather than strategically migrate to countries based on relatives, social networks, language or education (Schuster, 2011). She as well preferred to stay and in limbo waiting for eighteen months to apply again for asylum in the Netherlands and to see whether her claim would be evaluated positively or not (Schuster, 2011).

Nami's father and older sister know he did not leave Iran for studies, but because of his homosexuality. His parents are separated, and he is the youngest of four children. His sister joined him at the Gay Pride in Amsterdam 2017. Nami did not want to elaborate on the exact trigger that made him leave his country, however, he explained that he met a gay couple online that made him think of his position in society.

> *"They were living in the same city that I was studying in, but I never met them. Because they had a lot of parties at their place, and I was afraid that if I would go there and the police comes, I will lose my study and stuff, so I never went to their place. So, that is why they are here, because somebody threatened them in Iran and they had to leave. They are also gay. They are two partners living together."*
>
> Nami, 25 (Iran)
> (I9, 20-09-2017, Amsterdam)

Nami thus made it to the Netherlands to prevent himself from possible future persecution. In contrast to Nami's story of prevention and entering Europe by air, the gentle young man Haphal made his way through the continent by train, boat and foot after experiencing traumatic physical and psychological abuse in Syria. For seven years Haphal had a secret relationship in Syria with a straight man. This relationship gave him the feeling of sexuality, but he did not know that there was something such as actually *being* gay. When Syrian authorities discovered the relationship, Haphal had to go to prison for one and a half months. After being released, he fled to Lebanon where he found out that that more people are like him.

> *"First, in Syria, I thought there is not something like gay. Then, in Lebanon there are many gays. I looked: gay, gay, gay, men, men, men. Now I understand, I am gay."*
>
> Haphal, 27 (Kurdistan Syria)
> (I6, 05-09-2017, Amsterdam)

The reaction of Haphal displays how the individual's identity interacts with society, how it is constructed within the boundaries provided by that society, and how individuals can categorise themselves related to an in- and out-group (Bradatan, Popan & Melton, 2010). I have heard during a discussion night that many queer refugees are doubting about their queer identity: am I gay, am I trans, or am I just feminine? Something that Haphal's story displays as well.

Living in a heterosexual dominated society thus influences identity formation when being a homosexual man by suppressing the development of queer identity characteristics (Murray, 2014; Massey & Ouellette, 1996; Vigh, 2009). Because of the social context of the Middle East or Northern Africa differs from the Netherlands, the perception of the self as homosexual differs as well, as also shown by Haphal's story (Campbell, 2000). It aligns with identity theory as informants socially

identify with and categorise the self as queer when visible in society (Hogg, Terry & White, 1995). The intersection of queer and being from Northern Africa or the Middle East can be called, as introduced by Chadwick (2017), structural intersectionality and political intersectionality. These terms fit because they point towards the oppression by social groups and the silencing of the marginalised group of queers. Hence that the idea of sexuality as part of one's identity is based on Western ideologies (Buijs, 2009).

After Lebanon, Haphal continued to Turkey where he as a Kurdish man had a minor position. He went to Greece by boat and arrived by train and by foot in the Netherlands, after a short stay in Germany. His good friend Sham also emphasises the hard times back in Syria.

> *"It was so suffering. Since I was a teenager, I feel about my sexuality, I really feel, I want to go to Europe, I want to go to a place where they respect it, where at least I can speak about it. Because in Syria, I really, really, I had this feeling. In Syria, because it is a Muslim community, everything about homosexuality is bad. So, I always had this bad feeling that I am less than other people. I cannot talk about my feelings, I cannot feel even within myself, in university I tried to kick this feeling out of myself. Because in university in Aleppo, I had so many straight friends who were always talking about girls. So, for me, nobody talked about homosexuality or anything. So, I tried to be straight, and I was really depressed for one year. But later, when I had access to the Internet and saw what homosexuality in the world is, I feel better. The war is coming, so I was suffering al this time, I need someone to talk, I need someone to see what I feel, I need someone to understand."*
>
> Sham, 28 (Syria)
> (I7, 05-09-2017, Amsterdam)

Sham has always lived a double life as he prioritised his Arab identity features above his homosexuality at its intersection. He covered strategically and performed heterosexuality to navigate everyday life in Syria (Massey & Ouellette, 1996). However, the Internet helped him to overcome uncertainty regarding his sexuality and evolved his identity construction as queer, as also explained by Fox and Ralston (2016). Sham thus lived a double life, but when the war came, problems regarding homosexuality were more at the background of his life as the conflict occurred in every small detail of daily life and he was obliged to join the army against his will. Despite he was afraid to leave his family and home country, he had to flee in 2013 because his mother wanted him to move out of war.

> *"I never dared, I did not have the power to think seriously about that. I know there is the sea-part where people use boats, and for me, I cannot swim. I see many people who died drowning. I did not want that but imagine how a mother*

can push her son for that, even for that. 'If you do not die there, you will die here', my mother said, 'try to do that, go, try to escape from this country. We cannot leave anymore. If we die, we are lucky. I am old, but you are young, so you have to go' […] I am very afraid, very afraid. For me, my preference was to die more in Syria than on the sea."

Sham, 28 (Syria)
(I7, 05-09-2017, Amsterdam)

As shown by the quotes of Sham, other reasons besides sexuality or gender can trigger or force someone to migrate. In an odd way, the Syrian war forced Sham to leave, to go to Europe, something he imagined doing already for years. However, his anxiety for the migration trajectory and his ties back home made him preferring life in Syria over living in Europe, he could not disappoint his mother. Maybe he could skip the boat. He searched for people to join him, but all his friends already left the country, mostly to Germany. One day he found someone to go with and three others joined eventually as well. The five of them went to Lebanon where Sham had to live on the streets, with no access to water, sanitation or food. Therefore, he decided to continue by boat to Turkey and stayed in Mersin and Izmir for a while where after he went on a twelve-hour boat drive to Greece, surprised that he survived. Later, Sham moved through Macedonia, Serbia, Hungary, Austria, and Germany.

"Sometimes by bus, sometimes walking at the borders of course, some trains. And the most dangerous was the boat, and to go through Hungary, because that time, the Hungarian government, they were very very bad. They treat very bad with refugees, because many people pass there, so they were tough."

Sham, 28 (Syria)
(I7, 05-09-2017, Amsterdam)

Eventually Sham decided to go to the Netherlands because he had heard that the Dutch government respects homosexuals. And just like him, almost all informants arrived in the Netherlands alone because of not knowing who to trust with their story. While the Dutch government expects people to be plainly open about their sexuality upon arrival, covering one's queer identities turns out to be a much more common strategy. Many downplay their sexuality to not be associated with the marginalised group of queers pressurised by their social context (Heller, 2009), however, difficulties appear regarding defining one's role in society (Hogg, Terry & White, 1995). And as explained previously, many do not even know how they feel, let alone how to describe their sexuality. The Egyptian Tarek also made it to the Netherlands all by himself as he never felt as if he belonged in the Arab World but somewhere else. He has created a new family around him.

"No, I do not have contact with family or friends back home, that makes me very sad. You know, I have a discrimination

problem back in Egypt. But I can understand, because when they arrest me, nobody talked because they were afraid of the police arresting them. So, carefully. I understand them, it is fine, but it is… the pain, it is my family. Because I went, after they arrest me, when I lived in Kuwait, I went three times to Egypt again because my mother was sick. That was the last time, 2015, that I was there. They were planning to arrest me again, that is why I ran. I went running from Egypt to the Netherlands."

Tarek, 43 (Egypt)
(I4, 25-08-2017, Amsterdam)

Ramzi, a music teacher and singer from Aleppo, as well came to Europe in 2015. He was a political activist protesting against the Assad regime after he had been imprisoned for months. "It was terrible, and I do not want to talk about that", he explained during a dinner at his house (I5, 28-08-2017, Almere). After living in Turkey for a few years he arrived in Greece by rubber boat, together with 65 unknown others. It was a horrific experience, he said, but he had to do it as he was about to be killed. In Syria being homosexual is forbidden and therefore his parents can absolutely not know. Meanwhile, his brother has doubts and sometimes arranges conversations with women that he potentially could marry one day. Sometimes Ramzi has to play along to avoid suspicion. His family remains uninformed about his sexuality. We have Skyped with his family in Aleppo after having that dinner together. Nowadays, his sister lives in Germany and two other siblings are still in Syria with their parents. Their family house and business got bombed by the Assad regime, as Ramzi explained: "Everything was destroyed. It is awful, and it hurts" (I5, 28-08-2017, Almere).

4.1. CONCLUSIONS: WE ARE ALL 24-HOUR ACTORS

Sexual orientation and gender identity based persecution unavoidably touches upon the innermost of one's being. Some of the participants of this research managed to overcome their trauma in one way or another, while others still struggle daily. The stories I have shared may sound like fiction, yet they are not. Some have left everything they know because of avoiding an arranged marriage or severe violence as for political activism, while others try to approach their migration trajectory as an opportunity to work, to study or to evolve their queer identity. The stories of most informants demonstrate their agency and empowerment to choose how to navigate their lives, whilst, at the same time, however, they are in one way or another forced and suppressed by their families or governments to cover identity parts or even to leave their countries of origin.

Informants live a 'double life', by adjusting, attuning and covering their identities (Heller, 2009) as well as by performing a heterosexual act for years (Massey & Ouellette, 1996). The downplaying of characteristics could even lead to the rejection of these parts, shown by the limited words to describe sexuality or gender and by the missing frame of reference (Schachter, 2013). Some do not even know what homosexuality is let alone to associate it with feelings of love, and they might see this rather as a sexual act. Many informants experienced identity confusion because of their homosexual orientation in relation to their presumed heterosexuality in the heteronormative society (Massey & Ouellette, 1996; Buijs, Dyvendak & Hekma, 2009).

The construction of an embedded queer identity was largely missing, as informants explained. Their identity was reconstructed and negotiated continuously because of the sociocultural suppression and rejection in their country of origin where queer parts of people's identities were not recognised when being in dialogue with society (Hogg, Terry & White, 1995; Vigh, 2009; Schachter, 2013; Van Meijl, 2006). This shows the interaction between the social agent moving under the influence of multiple social forces, however, having society prior to the self at times (Vigh, 2009: Hogg, Terry & White, 1995). Coherence with life has not been found in the Arab world and informants have been seeking for in-group inclusion to reconstruct their identity by categorisation the self, and to find a social identity by evaluating the boundaries and relations within the social category (Hogg, Terry & White, 1995). The Internet is important for queer refugees to both experimenting with their multiple identities as well as evolving their queer identity, but also to seek for migration opportunities (Fox & Ralston, 2016).

The intersection of being queer and Arab is to be re-evaluated in the new socio-geographic context.

5. PROVING: ARE YOU 'GAY ENOUGH'?

The Netherlands is perceived as an open and tolerant country towards sexuality and gender diversity because it was the first country worldwide to legalise same sex marriage in 2001. And to build on that, the position of queer refugees has been improved over the years as well. However, there are still some challenges in practice, especially when it comes to the restrictive way that the International Human Rights are interpreted in the national asylum apparatus where civil servants determine the credibility of an asylum claim. They also evaluate the stories of the one's that have been persecuted because of their sexual orientation or gender identity. The sanctioning of homosexual acts in the country of origin is, however, not always recognized as a *well-founded fear* leading to the infringement of one's freedom based on discriminatory grounds (Spijkerboer, 2016; College voor de Rechten van de Mens, 2013; UNHCR, 2010). How do queer refugees negotiate with and navigate through the Dutch asylum system to credibly prove their claims? Within this chapter, I will try to find a closer understanding of how queer refugees in the Netherlands whether or not *"play the gay card"* as some individuals I have met described to do.

Upon arrival in the Netherlands, asylum claimants firstly register at the Dutch migration office, ***Immigration and Naturalisation Service***[3] (IND), in Ter Apel that evaluates the refugees' cases which is the start of the asylum procedure. The assessment of the application for a residence permit is based on the Dutch Aliens Act, *Vreemdelingenwet 2000* (IND, 2015). Each case will be evaluated and investigated with personal details, migration trajectory and geographical and cultural background taken into consideration. The asylum claimant can get help from a lawyer during the procedure. In rule, every individual gets three interviews with the IND to build his or her case. The first actual interview is focused on the identity and itinerary of the claimant, where after reasons of the claim will be questioned and investigated during the second interview. The third interview is focussed on the reason of the claim and the exact cause of leaving the country of origin (Movisie, 2017). An interpreter will help during the interviews with translating, however, this often causes friction because of trust issues with government officials (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2015). The decision of one's case depends on the country of origin, on the demonstration of one's genuine queer identity and on its related experienced or feared persecution. Queers who claim asylum in the Netherlands have to *prove* why it is dangerous and even impossible to go back home. Only then the IND can evaluate the *credibility* of one's story: whether the person is a 'genuine' refugee or not (IND, 2015).

The evaluation of asylum cases has been improved since 1971 when the Netherlands became the first country worldwide to consider sexual orientation or gender identity as a justification to claim asylum as a refugee. Nowadays, this law has been adopted within the European rights system as well (Spijkerboer, 2016). Individuals seeking for protection by the Dutch government will be determined as genuine refugees and will be provided asylum under the act on foreigners *Vreemdelingenwet 2000* only when:

[3] https://ind.nl/

- The person has fled his or her country of origin when because of fear of persecution. These reasons can be: race, religion, nationality, political conviction, or sexual preference. The refugee cannot find protection in its country of origin.
- The person risks dead penalty, torture, inhumane or humiliating treatment or punishment.
- The reasons are humanitarian, often trauma
- The general situation in the country is bad because of war, conflict or violation of human rights.
- The husband/wife, partner, father, mother or under aged child has been provided asylum in the Netherlands.

(Overheid.nl, 2017; IND, 2015; https://www.vluchtelingenwerk.nl/)

The IND, on behalf of the Dutch government, interprets the cases of people who have left their country of origin because of their sexual orientation or gender identity as queer refugees on ground of *belonging to a particular social group*. The court reaches a final decision on the asylum request.

The major inherent weakness of the system concerns civil servants determining the credibility of one's claim, something that touches upon the most private parts of one's identity and can actually only be concluded upon by the refugee claimant him or herself. Lewis (2014), however, says that "claims for asylum are often dismissed as insufficiently engaging with the Refugee Convention" (p. 964). And to make the credibility assessment even more complex, many queer refugees have no knowledge about the option to apply for asylum based on sexual orientation or gender identity. Next to that, it is for most queer refugees difficult to share their stories because having homosexual or transgender feelings is considered something highly private (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2015). Performing homosexuality is forbidden in many countries and most queer refugees have never learned how to express themselves regarding sexuality or gender, especially not towards governmental officials. This confinement makes it even more difficult to build a strong case and to have your claim being evaluated positively (Jordan, 2009).

In non-Western cultures homosexuality is often seen as something that you *do* or *feel* rather than who you *are* (Movisie, 2017). Being gay or trans is thus highly difficult to prove when hiding has become natural, as explained in the previous chapter *Covering: The Intersection of Being queer in the Arab World* (COC, 2017; Movisie, 2017). Some informants found it highly inappropriate to use words like 'sex' or 'homosexuality' in their native language, as one informant mentioned (I10, 22-09-2017, Heerhugowaard). Queer refugees suddenly are forced to talk about this part of their identity that they have never developed and have always denied or covered. Even behaving conform the Dutch cultural norms and expectations, called reversed covering (Heller, 2009), now has become a strategy to gain asylum (Murray, 2014). Individuals may intensify identity features and perform stereotypes because their social context pressurises them to do so, to escape their confined role in that context, however, not always successfully. The pressure from the IND to make their cases plausible, but also the pressure from their families to be successful in Europe, causes stress, depression or even (gender)identity disorder (Spijkerboer, 2016).

The asylum procedure is a stereotype-based checklist of how a homosexual or transgender individual should behave, feel and think as well as the struggles he or she should have experienced because of being queer (Jordan, 2009; Murray, 2014). Lewis (2014) states that the credibility assessment needs "to move away from the idea of 'discovering truth' toward a recognition that adjudicators are responsible for making decisions in the face of 'empirical uncertainty" (p. 970). According to the Syrian queer activist Aimar, normative laws based on the Western culture are the real problem here

(I1, 16-06-2017, Amsterdam). This aligns with Jordan (2009) and Murray (2014) who criticise the refugee determination based on Western narratives of linear sexuality or gender development and conservative LGBT stereotypes. An Iranian couple who attends meetings of Secret Garden regularly waited for years on a positive evaluation of their asylum claim, however, the beard of one was perceived as too masculine for the IND to approve the claim. 'Gays should not look that masculine', they were told. The couple joined the movement *#NotGayEnough* together with many others I have met during my fieldwork did. The organisation that is at front of *#NotGayEnough* is ***LGBT Asylum Support***[4], helping queer asylum seekers who just arrived in the Netherlands to connect them to Dutch organisations. They aim to help queer individuals to avoid them to fall into social isolation, but also with building their case during the asylum procedure by teaching how to talk openly about their sexuality or gender. During my research, I have heard many positive remarks about this organisation being highly activist in nature and its workers standing strong protesting with their petition *#NotGayEnough* against the policies of the IND rejecting 'real gays'. They work closely together with different queer refugee organisations including Secret Garden, Safe Haven, Queer Welfare and COC Cocktail to pressurize the Dutch government for a more individualised and cultural sensitive asylum apparatus. I will elaborate upon these organisations later in this thesis.

To be evaluated as 'gay enough', some share private details during the asylum procedure or desperately show videos of themselves 'performing homosexuality'. Sex videos, however, cannot be used as legal evidence of someone's 'gayness' (Lewis, 2014). The provision of sex videos probably originates from the demand from officers to prove their sexual orientation and the stereotype-focused asylum procedure that is based on Western perspectives on homosexuality (Jordan, 2009; Spijkerboer, 2016; Murray, 2014; Lewis, 2014). Jordan (2009) explains in her article on queer refugees in Canada, that "in their hearings, they struggled with and against Western cultural narratives of sexual and gender identities, coming out and gender dysphoria" (p. 165). Buijs (2016) calls this the 'Dutch paradox' because queer refugees are confronted with these conservative asylum procedures whilst expecting liberal attitudes. The intimate subject of sexual orientation or gender identity is now to be defined by policy staff determining the 'real' or 'legitimate' queer refugee. Different variables such as cultural differences or trauma are hardly taken into consideration and there is limited special treatment within refugee laws and policies to justify the Dutch asylum process (I1, 12-06-2017, Amsterdam).

Furthermore, one person I spoke with was not believed to be transgender (FtM) as he could not explain his assumed 'linear' gender development clearly to the IND at first. He received a negative decision and now runs for a second time. In addition to that, Carla from Secret Garden told me about translators being not willing to translate peoples whole story as words like 'gay' or 'coming out' regularly refused to be translated. Both the asylum seeker and the IND officer are not aware of this because of the language barrier. Let alone that in the first place many queer refugees are afraid to share their private stories to a Dutch, often very direct, government official because of the humiliating experiences with the police or other officials in their home countries causing trauma, fear and shame.

One client of Carla once told her that his translator was gagging because of his story and refused to translate. Others pointed out problems with translators as well. And in addition to the lack of willingness of translators, the connection of a refugee claimant and his or her translator has not always been made wisely. An example of this was when I went to the court of one of the queer refugees. The assigned translator for that court appeared to speak another dialect of his local language. The decision of the court was negative and being assigned to an inadequate translator probably did not have a

[4] http://lgbtasylumsupport.nl/nl/

positive impact on that. This shows how narrow the IND measures one's claim and how strict it is judged at court. Credibly proving your well-founded fear on ground of sexual orientation or gender identity persecution has been shown as highly difficult to do, but also to determine upon.

I therefore would have find it of high interest to share knowledge with an IND officer to get an understanding of their queer refugee related issues and their perspective on the asylum procedure and claim for credibility. Unfortunately, I received zero responses to my e-mails and phone calls. Something I would interpret as that researchers are not welcomed by anyone working for the IND.

When an asylum claim has been denied by the IND, the individual then has the legal right to stay at the camp for a maximum of four weeks. After this period, he or she needs to departure from the Netherlands and will be guided by the ***Repatriation and Departure Service*** (DT&V). The DT&V is "responsible for preparing, encouraging and organising the departure of foreign nationals who are not entitled to remain in the Netherlands" (Rijksoverheid, 2017). When the individual cannot leave the country within the set amount of time, it has the right to stay at a special camp, a 'freedom restricting location', for at most twelve more weeks (https://www.coa.nl/). However, after being denied asylum, some queer refugees stay in the Netherlands undocumented and look for another way to continue their flight (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2016). The ***International Organisation for Migration***[5] (IOM) is an independent inter-governmental organisation that provides practical information for refugees and assists people who are denied asylum in the Netherlands to reintegrate in their country of origin (IND, 2015).

Proving one's sexual orientation or gender identity to Dutch governmental officials is thus challenging and for some of my informants a traumatic experience. Where translators are rejecting the use of homosexual related words, also queers themselves struggle with expressing the queer part of their identities since words as 'homosexuality' or 'coming out' do not exist in one's dictionary. Nida prefers to rather express herself in English than in Urdu because, as she explained, she still is "a Pakistani girl" and she therefore will feel ashamed (I10, 22-09-2017, Heerhugowaard). Nida thus never talks about topics related to sex with her Urdu-speaking friends. And in addition to that, a client of Carla was fascinated by the word 'masturbating', that he now was allowed to *think* the word, let alone to say it out loud. He was impressed about the normality of using the word and that there was no shaming.

> *"It was terribly sweet that a 30-year old turban-wearing Turkish man comes to you and shyly says 'Carla, the one thing we talked about the other day, I did it [silence]. And it was very nice. Really good'. Those are amazing moments."*
>
> Carla, 65 (The Netherlands)
> (I1, 12-06-2017, Amsterdam)

Despite of the difficulties some queer refugees experience during the procedure, others manage to fulfil the requirements that the IND seek for and obtain status as so to say, 'right away', within half a year. Many refugees, for instance, could demonstrate that they had already created an online social

[5] https://www.iom.int/about-iom

network. They are socially active in chatrooms, on dating websites or apps which creates migration opportunities as well as helps them with evolving their queer identity. Especially as queer refugee it is advantageous to be part of an online social group to seek for similarities and role-models to overcome uncertainty regarding the identity reconstruction before, during and after the migration trajectory. As Fox and Ralston (2016) furthermore explain, the Internet provides a high level of control of the space of interaction in which the individual can explore and experiment with its multiple identities.

Chadly, for example, already had profiles on different dating websites for homosexuals. He lives in the Netherlands for four years now and is one of my informants who has a slightly different story. Because his limited freedom and he was obliged by his family to get married, he exchanged Tunisia for Kuwait where he became a flight attendant. Right before Christmas in 2012, he visited the Netherlands and in January, he got ill and went to the hospital in Kuwait. After two weeks he received the results and the doctor told him to go to another hospital for a blood test. This actually was a medical prison where they eventually told him to pack his belongings and leave the country within two hours: diagnosis HIV positive.

> *"This was really intense. A very difficult period. For me it was a shock as well! I did not receive any information, nothing. And the people were so afraid for my, as if I was contagious. They were wearing masks and everything. This hurt so much. Ignorant people. It was, so to say, a blessing in the skies, eventually, haha."*
>
> Chadly, 34 (Tunisia)
> (I11, 29-09-2017, Amsterdam)

His friends back in Amsterdam told him to move to the Netherlands entering by tourist visa, and so he did. At that time, his medical situation worsened: a severe brain virus. When the virus eventually was under control, Chadly had to learn to talk and to walk all over again. It took him years to recover and he lived for months in the rehabilitation centre where he, on the bright side, met his current boyfriend. Because of his medical situation, Chadly later asked for asylum and obtained a positive on his claim. He did not have to live in a refugee shelter at all, which was a great relief to him: "I am so grateful, you know, that I received another chance to life" (I11, 29-09-2017, Amsterdam).

The example of Chadly shows that some queer refugees do not claim asylum based on their sexual orientation or gender identity alone. The Netherlands also provides permits to people who are in need for medical treatment, mostly for HIV/Aids, when this is not available in their country of origin. Also, being a victim of honour related violence, domestic violence or human trafficking can be the ground of one's asylum claim (https://ind.nl/). Refugees who aim to live permanently in the Netherlands can apply for a permanent residence permit. People are eligible for permanent residency only after obtaining temporary asylum residence permit for five years and still meet these conditions. One needs to have obtained a civic integration diploma, should be registered in the Municipal Personal Records Database, as well as should have a valid residence permit until the IND makes a new decision. Also, family reunification that last for five years with a maximum time span of ten months outside of the country can make one eligible.

Despite all challenges regarding the credibility assessment of one's asylum claim during the procedure, the Netherlands has improved its policies towards a more protection- and human rights-based procedure (Spijkerboer, 2016; COC, 2017). It focuses more on when the claimant became aware of his or her sexual orientation or gender identity and on the process of self-acceptation, something that differs per individual. Room for improvement remains at the intersection of Human Rights law, Asylum law and individual cases in practice and the development of self-acceptations should be prioritised more (KIS, 2015). Carla pleas for more cooperation between the IND and queer refugee support organisations. After all, a universal or objective measurement will always be impossible when it comes to human beings.

How long the asylum procedure will take is unclear and during this time the ***Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers***[6] (COA) is responsible for the reception, supervision and departure of asylum seekers. The mission of the COA is to

> *"ensure in a professional manner that people in a vulnerable position are accommodated and supported in a safe and liveable environment in a manner that ensures that the reception of aliens remains controllable for politicians and society and enables us to give account for our acts."*
>
> (https://www.coa.nl/en)

From the time they claim for asylum to the moment of receiving an answer to their request, asylum seekers are entitled to reception and can therefore find shelter at different COA locations in the Netherlands. After their registration at Ter Apel, the individuals have at least six days to rest and prepare for the interviews with the IND to start their asylum procedure (IND, 2015). After a maximum of four days, the individual will be transferred to another location of the COA where the asylum process can start. The General Asylum Procedure mostly has a time span of twelve days. Then, the IND will explain the evaluation of the refugee claim and tells the individual whether its claim has been granted or refused. Sometimes a further observation, investigation and evaluation is needed. The individual will be transferred again and to which location depends on the outcome of the evaluation by the IND.

The refugees themselves call the refugee shelters of the COA, the a*sielzoekerscentra* (AZC), 'camps'. Therefore, I will use the word camp in this thesis when referring to the AZC just like my informants do. As Ghorashi (2005) describes, while in the camp "the asylum seeker has little or no opportunity for independent decision-making about basic elements in his or her own circumstances" (p. 188). Asylum seekers are allowed to work on voluntary basis or at the camp itself for a small payment with "a maximum of 24 weeks with pay. Any income is deducted from their clothing and pocket money" (https://www.coa.nl/). Individuals are allowed to stay at the camp for only a maximum one year. In addition to the reception, the COA arranges for weekly allowance and access to basic civil services such as healthcare insurance (Movisie, 2017; https://www.coa.nl/). The supervision of the COA depends on the specific phase of the individual asylum procedure. Refugees have the legal right to start a new process again when rejected. Then, the individual starts an Extended Asylum Procedure

[6] https://www.coa.nl/

and the COA is still responsible to provide in basic needs and services. Before submitting this extra request, the person does not have the right to reception or supervision.

That Chadly did not have to live in a camp took much stress from his shoulders. This relief is reasoned by the example of one Iranian member of Secret Garden who once explained me his anxiety for staying in the camp. When living in the camp, other Arab refugees had threatened to rape him because of his feminine looks and 'accused' him to be gay. He sought for other places to stay during awaiting the determination of his procedure. In the meantime, he has received his permit, however, he still has not been assigned a house from the municipality yet. Therefore, he is still moving every three months for a new Dutch family to live with via the organisation *TakeCareBNB*.

The story of being threatened within one of the camps is unfortunately not a rare story. In all conversations I had during the months of fieldwork, unsafe and violent incidents in the camps were shared and all informants heavily criticised the COA and its promises to secure safety at all times. Although the COA dedicates a whole chapter on their website to safety within the camp, explaining that its staff is trained to deal with conflicting situations, safety is not guaranteed. Within the camp, queer refugees often (I would rather use 'mostly' or 'always') face discrimination, bullying, violence and threats as their 'housemates' are from countries or cultures that are intolerant towards LGBT's. They feel stuck with the similar people that they have fled from and hide their sexual identity out of fear (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2015). Many suffer insomnia, anxiety, stress, depression, trust issues or suicidal thoughts. The COA bears responsibility for the access to medical psychological support for these individuals (IND, 2015; Movisie, 2016; Movisie, 2017; Gemeente Amsterdam, 2016).

Next to the unsafe situation, living in a camp also restricts people in their personal activities as rooms are shared and privacy is not much provided. More importantly, many homosexual or transgender refugees often feel anxious towards the other people living in the camp, foremost coming from the Middle East where homophobia and transphobia strongly exists. Sham therefore has always been extremely careful with expressing himself, inside and outside of the camp. He covers his homosexuality and does not easily share his story. In addition to Sham's explanation, also Tarek is frustrated about living with the same kind of people he had fled from.

> *"These people, they are responsible that I do not see my family anymore. I do not see my father, my mother, I do not know if they have died or are alive. It hurts me so much, it makes me you know, a person without soul. Without any soul. Because, I was thinking of my mother, my father, they did not accept me while I loved them so much."*
>
> Tarek, 43 (Egypt)
> (I4, 25-08-2017, Amsterdam)

Tarek developed an Arabphobia and post-traumatic stress disorder because of everything he has been through back in Egypt and Kuwait, which created a non-liveable situation in the camp where most people fled from wars and conflicts in places like Syria and Iraq. Queer refugees cannot express themselves out of fear for violence and history repeating itself. They try hard to act straight and avoid standing out. Tarek explained that his roommates in the camp put water in his bed to make him go out

of the room. After multiple incidents, Tarek was transferred together with other queer refugees to the camp in Alphen aan den Rijn for more safety. This was a camp where more queer refugees were allocated to. A moment that he calls "the beginning of hell" (I4, 25-08-2017).

Tarek was one of the ten protesting queer refugees in the camp of Alphen aan den Rijn because also there, they were threatened and violated. They started a protest by a two and one-half day hunger strike to ask attention for the discrimination, aggression and violence within that camp and the provision of a safer place to stay (Movisie, 2016; Omroep West, 2015). A Dutch newspaper wrote that hunger strikes, self-mutilation or suicide are regular occurrences amongst queer refugees in camps and sexual abuse is reported weekly (Rosman, C. & Winterman, 2016). Sometimes the COA allocates queer refugees to the female department for safety reasons, as it did with these queer refuges. The specialised queer department of the Dutch police, ***Pink in Blue***[7], that focusses on anti-LGBT discrimination and violence, is positive about these departments (O2, 21-06-2017, Amsterdam). However, it has made the identity and reason of flight of these individuals obviously visible and created a more insecure environment for them.

> *"They put me in the female department because I am gay. So, they think it would be safer, but it was worse because it was hundreds of men looking at me and laughing and asking why I was in the female department."*
>
> Tarek, 43 (Egypt)
> (I4, 25-08-2017, Amsterdam)

Being visibly homosexual or transgender in the camp has worsened the physical and psychological health of many queer refugees in the Netherlands. Many of them therefore stay 'in the closet' out of fear and as Aimar strongly stated that "an AZC is the worst thing for a gay refugee" (I1, 16-06-2017, Amsterdam). The intersection of queer and refugee is a tremendous challenge when amongst Arabs (Chadwick, 2017). You are a refugee first, before being a gay refugee.

Queer refugees can report incidents of violation, humiliation and discrimination at the department of Pink in Blue confidentially, safely and without any judgement. The department exists for 18 years which makes it unique in the world since it is well integrated within the police network and an important part of the queer refugee scene. It works closely together with organisations such as the municipality of Amsterdam, health organisations and social support organisations amongst others Secret Garden, COC and ASKV (O2, 21-06-2017, Amsterdam).

Amsterdam Steun Kommittee Vluchtelingen[8] (ASKV) supports undocumented refugees with the legal process, social issues and housing provision: *Bed, Bad, Brood*. Next to that, the organisation assists asylum seekers with psychiatric help, Dutch language courses and other needs. They also provide special attention to queer refugees who got a negative on their asylum procedure. The work of ASKV corresponds with the work of ***Safe House***[9], an organisation of the Dutch health care system

[7] https://www.politie.nl/themas/roze-in-blauw.html
[8] http://www.askv.nl/
[9] http://www.ggd.amsterdam.nl/jeugd/veilig-thuis/

that welcomes every human being: young and old, men and women, heterosexual and homosexual, and with any culture whatsoever. It aims to break the circle of unsafe situations and provides social support. When for example the COA notices incidents of violence within a camp, it can report this at Safe House which will try to find a solution in cooperation with different organisations.

Tarek explained that when he finally could go to the Safe House in Rotterdam, he felt welcomed for the first time in his life. The people living there were accepting him just as he is and during the interview he kept on stressing that he was grateful to live there. Also Jwoian felt relieved when he moved to a Safe House for one year: "I left a note for my family 'I am gone. Do not look for me anymore'" (I2, 16-08-2017, Amsterdam).

Haphal from Kurdistan Syria was impressed when he heard about the specialised police department. It became clear that these police men and women have their heart with this vulnerable group. They, however, struggle with their accessibility to the group as queer refugees are often reluctant towards government officials. Pink in Blue improves its visibility by visiting camps regularly and attending several queer refugee events, all to make the incentive to step to the police as low as possible. The externality of going to the camps was that other refugees got to know about Dutch social norms, values and rules. Although the barrier to speak out, Pink in Blue reported many incidents within the camps, especially in 2015 when the influx of refugees increased (O2, 21-0-2017, Amsterdam).

Nida as well experienced a difficult time when living in the camp because she felt extremely unsafe.

> *"I heard when I was open to people, talking back, but I also noticed that when it was night time, and boys from Arabic countries, you know, they just go and if it is a transgender, they just go and bang the door and they want to have sex with them in the night. And in the morning, they do not even remember. They did not want to share this, or respect them (transgender men and women), but they want sex with them. So, I was scared of that also because I heard them talking […] "And then I met my friend, a Pakistani gay. He told me that he had a boyfriend, and he was super with it! He is using Grindr and I was like 'what is Grindr?' He showed me all the man pictures and I asked if there are also apps for girls. I did not know. He said if I wanted to smoke. So, I said 'no I do not smoke' but then I smoked, and it felt good. It was the first time I smoked a cigarette. It felt really nice! And I felt happy and I did not know why but I actually felt happy when he told me about him having a Dutch boyfriend and he is going out on dates with men and he likes men. And I was like: 'that tis really nice that you are so open!' And then I shared my feelings with him. He said: 'it is completely okay'."*
>
> Nida, 33 (Pakistan)
> (I10, 22-09-2017, Heerhugowaard)

These experiences show that having a friend in the camp is of utmost importance when being from another culture, in a new country whilst feeling uncomfortable towards your identity and not knowing what comes next. One's self-acceptance and self-esteem can fall or rise with that one special friend, as Nida explained here. This relates with Hogg, Terry and White (1995) explaining that individuals need to find consistency with social groups to feel belonged. It provides certainty of who you are in terms of the characteristics of that group. By making a friend, Nida feels membership towards the social group of queers, contributing to her self-categorisation as such (Hogg, Terry & White, 1995). This applies for all informants explaining that when having social relationships with queers, similarities are visible and multiple identities are explored as well as evolved (Fox & Ralston, 2016). Hence, however, that the identification with a particular social group in a particular social environment not implies the ignorance, denial or absence of other identity dimensions (Campbell, 2000).

Here as well, it would have been of my high interest to talk to the COA about its experience with queer refugees within the camps and during the asylum procedure, with light on safety related issues. Despite of many e-mails and phone calls to several departments and locations, I could not get in touch with an employee of the COA. After a few weeks I received a phone call from the policy secretary working there, apologizing for the delay of response and explaining that there was no-one available to answer questions for any kind of student-research. Nevertheless, she shared that there were no special locations to secure the safety of queer refugees in the Netherlands. This is in contrast with my conversation with someone from the Dutch Council for Refugees, explaining that many queer refugees are send to the specific camps because of their relatively safer environment for this vulnerable group. Unfortunately, I could also not get in contact with someone from these camps. One woman on the phone explained that the employees know the just and clear policies regarding queer refugees. However, she said that each location could have its own interpretations to it. This is something she acknowledges to be confusing but difficult to monitor.

It was unfortunate to not go into details more. The organisation seems to be reluctant towards criticism, and to be afraid of misinterpretations and name-shaming. It is an immense bureaucratic authority, performing conform Dutch policies and evaluated by the government, however, alienated from the people they aim to support.

Eventually, Nida needed to leave the camp because the COA and DT&V were about to deport her back to Poland because of the Dublin Regulation. Her story came to the ears of a Dutch transgender woman who currently works with queer organisations and she offered Nida to live together until she is allowed to apply for asylum in the Netherlands again.

In contrast to the IND and COA, the ***Dutch Council for Refugees***[10] (VWN) positions itself close to the people they offer their help. It is an independent and non-governmental organisation defending the rights of refugees to a fair asylum procedure and access to basic civil services such as housing, medical healthcare and work.

"We are devoted to promoting the fair and just treatment of people in a vulnerable position: those who were forced to

[10] https://www.vluchtelingenwerk.nl/

leave their home because of war, political violence, their sexual orientation, race or religion."

(Vluchtelingenwerk Nederland, 2016, p. 1)

VWN provides information and advice to the refugees themselves, but also to special asylum lawyers in order to build cases and to help with the asylum procedure (IND, 2015). They for example already check background information about the countries of origin before queers have their first interview with the IND. This support is free of charge and completely confidential. Furthermore, VWN supports refugees integrating in the Dutch society (Vluchtelingenwerk Nederland, 2016; https://www.vluchtelingenwerk.nl/). VWN represents refugee interests on the political level by lobbying with the Parliament and by doing research. For example, they advocate for refugees learning to participate in the Dutch society already during the asylum procedure (Vluchtelingenwerk Nederland, 2016).

The VWN is the first to talk with the refugees at arrival. Their prior goal is to find peace with them and to calm them down. Then, they provide general information about the asylum procedure in the Netherlands and the trajectory that starts afterwards. All to gain as much trust as possible within these few days in order to guide them throughout the questions of the IND about their sexual awareness, relationships, the queer scene in their country of origin, their coming out and the reason to leave. The VWN helps them to build their case because the refugees themselves do not have access to the resources needed for that, such as a computer or mobile phone as the IND takes these for investigation.

I have spoken with a social worker of the organisation who took his full afternoon to answer my questions and showed me around the office. He explained me that he was impressed of the topic of this thesis as he sees many difficulties with this special group of refugees. He emphasised the cultural differences and the challenge of personal acceptation within the group of queer refugees.

When the asylum procedure has been evaluated positively, the individual is granted a residence permit. The ***municipality*** that is near the camp takes up the responsibility and arranges a suitable home. It can also be that the individual has been granted a house in another region because of employment, education or special medical services. Due to Dutch bureaucracy and the limited availability of housing, the provision of a house can take up to a maximum of twelve weeks (https://www.coa.nl/). However, on another sub-chapter on the website of COA, it says that "residence permit holders move to their new home within fourteen weeks after they have been granted a residence permit". The type of the house differs per individual as it depends on mobility and family-size. Some are granted a house with shared facilities while others will live in a family house. From the moment a house got accepted, the refugee does not have the right to reception in a camp anymore.

Currently, Nida is living safely and quietly now she feels room to be who she wants to be. When I asked her about her thoughts of words like queer, gay and LGBT, she immediately reacted with.

"Family. It means family to me […] For me, it was very difficult for a girl. […] I really miss my family. And I really feel when I go with LGBTQI people, all together, I feel like I

am back in my family acceptance, I can dance, I can do whatever I want to do […] Before, I was hiding, all my life I was hiding my sexuality. But now, I am okay with it. I really tell people that I am lesbian. I do not really hide it. I tell to almost everyone that I am lesbian […] I really do not care. […] Everybody telling me: You are a Pakistani girl, going on a boat, there will be media, pictures. I said: I do not care! I lived my life, over thirty years, caring for the family, for the country, the religion, and doing things that I do not really wanted to do. Now I want to do things that I really want to do! […] "I miss the bonding with my family in Pakistan, but now I really feel when I go with queer people, all together, like I am with my family again. And of course, there will always be clashes and fighting within each family."

Nida, 33 (Pakistan)
(I10, 22-09-2017, Heerhugowaard)

Just like Nida, Chadly feels very proud to be queer.

"I am proud to be homosexual! Straight people are so boring! […] Being gay makes me proud because it makes me different […] I overcome so much. I am proud of myself. Really. I can win […] Homosexuals are special, I think. Strong […] I feel so, so happy."

Chadly, 34 (Tunisia)
(I11, 29-09-2017, Amsterdam)

The first Gay Pride he attended, together with getting a house assigned and admitted on his current studies made Chadly feel grateful. And Tarek and Nami as well feel like Amsterdam is a beautiful place to be whatever you like to be.

"LGBT or being gay, that is me. It is me. It is part of me. It is my identity. It is part of me. It is not if you are straight or gay or bisexual, it is part of you. It is part of me. It is part of me. It is me […] I say it because I am proud of it. It is something of me, of my personality. I am not going to keep or hide it anymore for some people that say that I should not tell it. Because it is something important that I want people to know […] It is not around me. It is me."

Tarek, 43 (Egypt)
(I4, 25-08-2017, Amsterdam)

"It is who I am. There is no strange feeling or different feeling, it is just who I am. Me not telling people in the past was because of the situation of the country I was living in, but now that I am in a country in which I can be who I am no matter what other think about me, why shouldn't I be just who I am?"

Nami, 25 (Iran)
(I9, 20-09-2017, Amsterdam)

Nevertheless, Nami also explained that he is trying to make his gay-part not the biggest part of his identity because, after all, heterosexuals do not shout their sexual orientation either. He emphasises that his identity is multidimensional as he also wants to identify himself as a student who loves to read, to learn languages, to be social. Some of his friends only have homosexual friends and became heterophobic at one point. This aligns with Buijs, Duyvendak and Hekma (2009) explaining that people seek for a social buffer when one's identity construction is not accepted in one of the groups he or she belongs. The queer friends of Nami intensified the inner-group relations, with whom they identify with, and repelled themselves from the out-group of heterosexuals (Hogg, Terry & White, 1995; Bradatan, Popan & Melton, 2010). Nami himself, as explained in light of social identity theory of Hogg, Terry and White (1995), evaluates his identity construction in relation to the in-group norms and behaviours as less heterophobic.

Despite most informants mentioned to currently accept themselves as being queer, this does not directly mean that they express it either in the Netherlands or to their ties back home. Many find their sexual orientation or gender identity still highly private and hide it even for their closest friends, family or neighbours. Tarek for example explained that he covers his sexuality when he goes to the supermarket in his neighbourhood as there are many Arabs around. And where many informants only have gay friends, Sham also has straight friends to whom he covers his sexuality. However, they might have some doubts.

"Yeah, I cover, and I am satisfied about that. I am okay. I do not mind. I do not feel bad if I keep it a secret, okay. Because it is not about being risky, it is no danger if they know. But it is about people, they became unfriendly with gays. Some people, really, like in this neighbourhood maybe some people will act. They do not like, okay, I understand. But that is why I keep it. Yeah, I feel okay, it is fine for me, really […] In Syria, we always do it like this. People do not ask. Dutch people are very direct and straight-forward. In Syria they ask: 'where were you, what did you do, with whom were you with'. When I was out with friends, then people will know I am gay. But one time it happened when we were meeting in the evening and we talked about something and then we reached a certain point where they could ask me: 'When you

lived in AZC, why you go out so much, who do you meet, who are they, your friends?' yeah, I just lied. I did not say the truth […] Because maybe one day, we will fight, and they will use it against me."

Sham, 28 (Syria)
(I7, 05-09-2017, Amsterdam)

5.1. CONCLUSION: PLAYING THE GAY CARD

To claim asylum in the Netherlands, queer refugees have to prove their experienced sexual orientation or gender identity persecution. Many informants indicated how difficult this has been because of Dutch policies to determine one's sexuality or gender are based on Western cultural stereotypes and images of LGBT behaviour and appearance (Spijkerboer, 2016; Jordan, 2009; Murray, 2014; Buijs, 2016). The IND evaluates the credibility of one's story and queer refugees are challenged to share everything they have been through with government officials whom they are used to distrust, as for the discriminatory or violent experiences in their countries of origin. Furthermore, translators sometimes appear to be inadequate or even to reject translating because of homophobia or Arabphobia. And in addition to that, informants are often not used or capable of expressing themselves in regard to their sexuality or gender because homosexuality in many countries is something that you *do* rather than who you *feel* or *are* (Movisie, 2017).

When covering parts of one's identity or performing a heterosexual act has become natural, the credible description of one's well-founded fear is to be problematized (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2015; Jordan, 2009). Out of despair to prove to be 'gay enough', some queer asylum seekers perform stereotypes and intensify their homosexual 'performance' due to the pressure of the Dutch asylum context (Heller, 2009). Having an online social network may help with this construction of one's gay identity. Role-models are found in similarities and help to overcome identity related doubts, whilst being in the controlled space of Internet interaction (Fox & Ralston, 2016).

Whilst waiting for their procedure, informants stay in the camps of the COA where they still experienced anti-gay discrimination and violence. Also here, queer refugees try to act straight and to avoid standing out as the intersection of queer, Arab and refugee appears to be problematic within the camp (Chadwick, 2017). Some were transferred to female departments or even to a safe house outside of the camp, however, it made their sexual orientation or gender even more visible and publicly known (Movisie, 2016; Gemeente Amsterdam, 2015). Being forced to live amongst people from the same cultural background has worsened the physical and psychological health of many queer refugees in the Netherlands. Some even look for other housing options. Finding a friend to rely on is pointed out to be the most important for queer refugees in the Netherlands at the point of arrival and during their time in the camp.

Self-acceptance and identity construction are challenging when traumatised (Schachter, 2013). Therefore, finding consistency within the social group of queers that provides similar characteristics contributes to self-categorisation and feelings of belonging (Hogg, Terry & White, 1995). People naturally seek for a social buffer when one's identity construction is not accepted in one of the groups he or she belongs (Buijs, Duyvendak & Hekma, 2009). Queer refugees in procedure find this within queer refugee organisations. Despite of the positive influence of having queer friends whilst living in the camp, informants explained to continue the coverage of their queer identity in general (Heller,

2009). As most were still in procedure, the categorisation as refugee is at front and, not unimportantly, queer identity features were not explored or evolved yet due to missing social and physical space of freedom (Fox & Ralston, 2016). And in addition, many find their sexual orientation or gender identity highly private and hide it even for their closest friends, family or neighbours.

Despite most informants mentioned to currently accept themselves as being queer, this does not directly mean that they express it either in the Netherlands or to their ties back home. Almost all informants are educated, have had jobs, values, dreams and found love: identities to express as well. However, to behave conform Dutch expectations and stereotypes of a 'real' queer, reversed covering (Heller, 2009), now has become a strategy to gain asylum.

6. SETTLING: BEING QUEER IN THE NETHERLANDS

After proving to be 'gay enough' by endless bureaucratic paperwork, the human aspect is at its turn: develop your life in this new country. By this chapter, I try to situate the social navigation of everyday life by queer refugees in the Netherlands. It provides an insight in how the Dutch society relates to queer refugees in general in order to find a better understanding of their social network in terms of institutions and organisations. How about *"queering the stage"*?

The local government of Amsterdam aims to offer a safe environment for queer refugees seeking for protection by providing specific support and reinforcing the queer network in the city (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2016). According to the research of the municipality of Amsterdam (2016), four percent of the Dutch male population is gay, and three percent of the female population calls herself lesbian. This is different in Amsterdam, counting eight percent homosexual men, one percent bisexual men, four percent lesbian women, and two percent bisexual women. There are no numbers available about transgender men or women in the Netherlands or Amsterdam, however, research demonstrate that one per 250 people is transgender. Because of privacy laws, the exact number of asylum seekers on ground of their sexual orientation or gender identity in Amsterdam is not provided (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2016).

Furthermore, the municipality of Amsterdam conducted research about the situation, opportunities and challenges concerning LGBT's based on the aim to improve the social acceptation in the city by focussing on safety, resilience, access, visibility and awareness (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2015; Gemeente Amsterdam, 2016). The research showed that 70 percent of the Dutch citizens feels positive towards gay men and lesbian women, however, some are feeling uncomfortable with the expression of intimacy in public (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2016). This general positive attitude towards homosexuality is in line with the research of Kuyper (2015) stating that 92 percent of the Amsterdam public has positive feelings towards homosexuality as well. She furthermore explains that the majority of the Dutch public accepts LGB's equality, but that intimate behaviour such as kissing in public or holding hands may create resistance. This is especially the case for feminine male appearances, stereotypical homosexual behaviour and homosexual acts from kissing to anal sex. Heterosexual men indicated to "fear being hit on by a gay" (Buijs, Duyvendak & Hekma, 2009, p. 150).

In 2013, over 500 incidents of anti-queer discrimination were reported within Amsterdam, however, not even one third of all victims made a declaration (Movisie, 2015, p. 5; O2, 21-06-2017, Amsterdam). In April 2017, a march through Amsterdam was organized to seek attention for the negativity towards queer individuals and to fight anti-gay violence in response to the abuse of two homosexual men in Arnhem (Het Parool, 2017; NOS, 2017). Many perpetrators are not directly rejecting homosexuality in general and say that sexual diversity is part of the Dutch society, however, in their eyes, gays should not appear, behave and intimately act homosexual in public. Anti-gay

discrimination and violence are mostly based on one's perspective on sex and gender, which differs geopolitically (Buijs, Duyvendak & Hekma, 2009; Kuyper, 2015). Negative experiences force many queers to change their behaviour in order to cover their sexual identity.

Investigations on the perspectives of the Dutch public towards queers explain that mostly youth, 70+ people, religious people and people from ethnic minorities struggle with the acceptance of this diversity (Movisie, 2015; Kuyper, 2015). Queer individuals face discrimination on regularly basis, verbal violence, sexual abuse, threats or physical violence because of their sexual orientation or gender identity, either at home or in public (Movisie, 2015). Furthermore, almost 50 percent of the Amsterdam citizens feels the need to know whether someone is a man or a woman when they meet for the first time (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2016). Especially young Dutch citizens with a migration background feel negative towards queers (Kuyper, 2015).

Buijs, Duyvendak and Hekma (2009) explain in their report that the public debate on the multicultural society and its insufficiency to recognize Dutch values of tolerance towards homosexuals, threatens the image of Amsterdam as 'gay capital' of the world. The municipality of Amsterdam, therefore, investigated feelings of unsafety and found that 27 percent of all gay men feels unsafe in the city, that women feel unsafe more often and that about 23 percent of the gay men and eighteen percent of lesbian women experienced discrimination (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2016). Many queers face violence or aggression on regularly basis. This number is the highest amongst transgender individuals as 43 percent have been violated at least once in 2015 and 37 percent faces discrimination once per month (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2016).

During the interviews, I have also informed about my informants' perspectives on the Dutch society in general and their experiences with the gay community in particular. The Dutch society is described by the Syrian Aimar as hyper masculine where guys tend to be more open-minded about having gay friends than anywhere else in the world. According to him, men are less likely to perform only one fixed gender and appear to "play with it, change it" (I1, 16-06-2017). And in addition to that, Aimar also mentioned that the gay community is structured hierarchically where the gay man is the least disadvantaged if he is masculine, and the female gay man is slightly more disadvantaged facing more homophobic discrimination. Then, the transgender women or men are the most disadvantaged as they find themselves challenging gender norms. Who you are in this ladder will determine how much you will get discriminated as a refugee, as a LGB or T refugee, Aimar explained. Nevertheless, all informants emphasised how special they find it that you can be yourself in the Netherlands.

> *"It feels like something very big, when you have the possibility to say 'yes' or 'no' easily without someone pushing you or beating you. It is, I don't know this meaning, I never tasted it, because I came from a country where I should shut up my mouth for everything […] If I feel that one will do bad to this country, I feel this is my home, my home country […] I am not asking people to love what I am doing, but I need some respect."*
>
> Tarek, 43 (Egypt)
> (I4, 21-08-2017, Amsterdam)

Tarek has never felt at home in the Arab countries where he has lived. Because of traumatic experiences from being abused in prison in Egypt to the everyday discrimination in Kuwait, he highly appreciates the honest and direct culture of Dutch people. He wants to work and "give the rest of his life to this country" (I4, 21-08-2017, Amsterdam). The freedom, safety and happiness Chadly feels make him call the Netherlands home. He said to love the people always complaining and whining about everything, and smiled.

Rifat, a young quiet man, explained that back in Syria it was too dangerous to walk hand in hand in the streets, to kiss or to hug. And aligning with his experience, Sham explained that all people in Syria will reject you and hate you because of your homosexuality. However, despite of the pressure of the IND, other Arabs or the Dutch public, Nami feels no need to change himself for anyone else whilst being in the Netherlands. This, because it is the law that protects you. Campbell (2000) explains that the immediate cultural context determines the identity construction that is at front and, therefore, the multiple identities are re-arranged by both social forces and the agent's choice (Sen, 2007; Van Meijl, 2006; Vigh, 2009).

The Netherlands offers a place to develop and improve oneself because you can be honest with yourself and accept your sexuality, as Sham tells me. His dialogue between the self and the social environment is explained by many informants. By this interaction, as explained by Vigh (2009), life is shaped and identities are adjusted to the continuing influence of social forces. Being open about your sexual identity is a prerequisite for feeling free and safe as all informants showed.

Feeling this freedom of expressing oneself is something of utmost importance for the individuals I have met during my fieldwork. However, mind that these people also explained that they are at all times very cautious about sharing their identities, especially the parts of being queer and refugee. Also during the conversation with VWN, it was mentioned that traumatic experiences influence the way he or she accepts him or herself: "one fears to talk about it and others are visibly gay" (O3, 29-06-2017), Amsterdam). Hence, cultural differences also influence the extend of sharing information about oneself. This easily creates tensions amongst queer refugees and many have been discriminated by non-Dutch people.

> *"I cannot change it. If I could, I would, for my family […] I was born this way […] On the streets I act gay by behaving differently, looking differently, acting masculine, wearing fancy clothes. It is real life acting […] During the Gay Pride I walk on the streets half-naked in high heels wearing make-up and a tank-top. Then I feel self-confident. […] Someone wished me dead. People. Moroccans. Mostly Moroccans. They wished me dead. Said that I am an animal and not a human. They spit on me multiple times. They shouted and called me a faggot […] And in the city centre, people look at me* insjallah, *you must die. I wish you death. Allah will punish you' […] This is painful."*
>
> Jwoian, 32 (Kurdistan Iraq)
> (I2, 16-08-2017, Amsterdam)

In addition to Jwoian's experience, Ramzi explained that he will not be open about his homosexuality because many Arabic people and Moroccans live in his neighbourhood, making him feel unsafe. When we walked hand-in-hand on the streets he said that he felt glad as everyone now would think that we are a straight couple. Discrimination is still something that is a day-to-day struggle for most queer refugees, however, Nida said that she was not troubled much. She thinks that it is because of her not having the stereotypical 'lesbian look' with short hair and a masculine attitude. People mostly react negatively to the combination of an Arabic appearance and stereotypes of queer-like behaviour. This intersection should not be seen loose of one another (Chadwick, 2017; Brown, 2012). It makes many queer refugees feel unaccepted, different and alone. Feeling traumatized whilst being in another country and culture might create the risk of loneliness and social isolation, let alone when being an Arab queer refugee in the Netherlands (EenVandaag, 2017; Chadwick, 2017).

Informants indicated not to feel part of the Dutch gay community because they are merely connected to multicultural gay networks. Tarek said to be a little bit disappointed in the Dutch 'gay scene' because he found many queers quite lazy and explained that there are only a few places besides the party places to socialize with other gays. He said that the Dutch gay community does "not have an identity" (I4, 25-08-2017, Amsterdam) and that Amsterdam is not the gay capital of the world anymore.

> *"Amsterdam is still a beautiful place to be whatever you like to be. If I would wear a dress now and put a wig on, no one will stop me. But I will hear some names or laughing, this is killing more than if someone beats you."*
>
> Tarek, 43 (Egypt)
> (I4, 25-08-2017, Amsterdam)

Nami also said that the gay community in Amsterdam is not very dense. He finds Dutch gays "quite weird" and feels like there is always a competition between them to hunt and objectify each other (I9, 20-09-2017, Amsterdam). Difficulties with the intersection of being queer, Arab and refugee are mentioned by the majority of my informants.

> *"I was in a bar at night, not speaking any English or Dutch yet, only Arabic, when a man came to me and asked me if I wanted to drink something. I excused myself for not understanding what he was saying and luckily the Arab-speaking bartender helped me with translating the conversation. The man then directly asked me to have sex with him so that I 'could buy a house'. I shouted 'no!' and was confused. I threw my drink angrily in his face and then the bartender called the special gay police for me.*
>
> *I felt abused, humiliated and small."*

Haphal, 27 (Kurdistan Syria)
(I6, 05-09-2017, Amsterdam)

Tarek pleas for more bonding between Dutch queers and non-Dutch queers, to share values and cooperate (Putnam, 2001). An important aspect to create this, as Chadly mentioned, are the parties in De Reguliersdwarsstraat, the well-known streets in Amsterdam full of gay bars. Similarities of homogeneous groups reinforce bonding networks and are supportive in nature (Sabatini, 2009). Chadly describes the community as multifaceted with queens, diehard partying, bar gays, invisible gays, the 'Amsterdam' gay, staying-at-home gays and of course the couples. He said that one could categorize him within all these boxes, having a boyfriend who he loves to just stay inside and watch a movie, but he also calls one particular gay bar as his second home. Sham, however, explained to remain very careful with beginning a relationship as in the end, the gay community as it appears is about parties, sex and drugs, something that disappoints him. Like others, he feels that the Dutch queer community is disrespectful and distanced.

This fragmentary social network of queers in the Netherlands is hierarchically complex and its boundaries are flexible (Wellman, 2002). And although queer refugees feel much safer and freer than in their countries of origin, the Dutch 'gay community' appears to remain elusive and closed (De Zwaan, 2017a; EenVandaag, 2017). Wekker (2017) refers to this as 'White Innocence': the self-perception of Dutchmen as liberal and tolerant, however, at the same time, creating the out-group of non-Dutch ethnicities and labelling them as 'unwilling to assimilate'. This excluding attitude towards queer refugees is often subtle, however, powerful when it comes to othering and segregation, and "when exclusion is subtle, the consequences are not: suicide, depression and psychosomatic issues occur more amongst queer individuals in comparison with heterosexuals" (Buijs, 2016). Furthermore, Buijs (2016) explains the paradox between the perception of the Netherlands as liberal and open to sexual diversity on the one hand, and the asylum policies and public attitude based on stereotypes of queers on the other. He calls this, as explained, the 'Dutch paradox' wherein people expect openness, freedom and safety, but will find Dutch hypocrisy, reluctance and segregation. This only enlarges the marginalisation of the minority of queer refugees in the country (Wekker, 2017) and shows how "processes of homing and migration cannot be adequately theorized outside spatialized relations of power in which unequal differences of race, class, gender and sexuality (amongst other factors) are generated" (Murray, 2014, p. 468).

During the interview with the founder of the Prismagroup, we talked about the paradoxes within the Dutch society and he mentioned the concept of 'homonationalism'. He explained this as the way Dutch queers use their homosexual identity to pretend that they are tolerant towards all other sexual orientations and gender identities as well, just because they claim to have Western 'inclusive' norms and values. This, however, creates the discriminatory idea that other (Muslim) countries are less tolerant and that the Dutch nation is superior when it comes to sexual diversity. The 'Dutch paradox' in relation to the 'homonationalism', influences the psychosocial wellbeing of queer refugees in the Netherlands as they have to strategically balance the ways in which they express themselves in different situations to navigating everyday life (Vigh, 2009). This vulnerable intersection of being queer, Arab and refugee is why organisations as Secret Garden, Safe Haven and Prismagroup are committed to the specific group of Arab and Muslim LGBT's.

As mentioned in chapter three on methodology, this study started with the collaboration with ***Secret Garden***[11], an Amsterdam-based NGO working with queer asylum seekers, refugees and migrants. The organisation was founded in 2008 and helps queer refugees with the steps of the asylum procedure and with tools to mingle in the Dutch society. Members come together every Wednesday, between fifteen and fifty people per evening, to talk about different topics such as being gay or transgender in the Netherlands, stereotypes, violence and rights, HIV/Aids or queer activism in the Netherlands and worldwide. Emancipation and empowerment are central to the bottom-up approach of the organisation. To guarantee room for trust and to speak openly about taboos, the organisation works with theme-evenings (O1, 12-06-2017, Amsterdam). Each and everyone is welcome to join the activities, and the founder, Emir, explained during an informal conversation: "We do not only help individuals, but the whole community".

During the interviews, I have asked informants about their engagement in support organisations like Secret Garden because the cultural differences and language barriers assumingly could obstruct the connection with Dutch citizens. Refugees, and queer refugees in particular, find themselves often socially isolated and, amongst others, the research of EenVandaag (2017) shows that 24 percent of the Syrian refugees in the Netherlands say to have no Dutch friends. Friendship is an important indicator for the level social bonding and integration, however, challenging to achieve whilst not speaking the local language yet. Queer refugees in the Netherlands are confronted with their assumption of being arrived in a liberal nation that is open towards sexual and gender diversity, however, continue facing reluctance, rejection and homophobia (Murray, 2014; Buijs, 2016).

The social network of queer refugees turned out to be not only consisting of organisations located in Amsterdam, but also out of organisations located in other Dutch cities. This shows that the Dutch queer refugee network has a nation-wide range. Special queer migrant or refugee organisations, such as Secret Garden, offer a strong bonding character because of their focus on mutual features like being queer or coming from the Middle East. It aligns with Putnam's (2001) reference to social networks and the investment in social relations. Members of Secret Garden expect returns in terms of information, shelter and friendship. The organisational network is used by members as a coping strategy during the forced migration trajectory (Willems, 2005) and is often recommended by others abroad. Therefore, the queer social network can function as a safety net. Tarek explained that he already knew about Secret Garden back in Egypt and that this was the reason to come to the Netherlands. As explained, he went through traumatic experiences when living in the camp.

> *"We decided that we did not want to go outside, even not to take the food. I called Emir. So, Emir came, and the newspaper wrote about us stopping with eating. We refused it only because we were afraid."*
>
> Tarek, 43 (Egypt)
> (I4, 25-08-2017, Amsterdam)

Informants repeatedly referred to the founder of Secret Garden, Emir, as someone who one could call any time. A friendly person, open, warm and providing the feeling of having a family again. Chadly

[11] http://www.stichtingsecretgarden.nl/

explained that he knew about the organisation via his Dutch boyfriend who contacted Emir for help as the IND came over to the rehabilitation centre to take interviews. Emir visited him almost every Saturday to give information about the asylum procedure. And in addition to Chadly's experiences, when Nida went to Secret Garden for the first time, Emir did not ask her anything directly regarding her sexual orientation.

> *"I did not tell him that I am lesbian. He did not ask me if I am lesbian or so. But he just came to me because I think he just knew."*
>
> Nida, 33 (Pakistan)
> (I10, 22-09-2017, Heerhugowaard)

Queer refugees do not always trust support organisations easily because of their trauma and inhumane experiences. Nida was at first invited to go to a meeting of Cocktail Eindhoven and only dared to go after one gay man from her own country and several other transgender women ensured her that it would be safe and, above all, much fun. Back then, she thought it was a trap.

The organisation ***Cocktail in Eindhoven***[12] is part of the overarching organisation ***COC***[13]. This organisation already exists for 70 years, making it the oldest LGBT organisation of the Netherlands and the first one worldwide. Since 2016, the sub-group Cocktail focuses on gathering and empowering queers coming from different cultural backgrounds. They furthermore facilitate buddy-projects where queers from other cultures are connected with Dutch queers to find connection in society and to avoid social isolation. Cocktail in Eindhoven has welcomed me for multiple times to their monthly walk-in parties where I have also met many members of Secret Garden again.

In contrast to the welcoming vibe of Cocktail Eindhoven, the organisation ***Cocktail in Amsterdam***[14] appeared to be less open to heterosexual volunteers. It organises two monthly low-key events focussing on different theme's, including sexual education, prevention of sexual transmitted diseases, human rights, and Dutch or European cultural norms and behaviours. Next to that, they organise sociocultural activities and events to facilitate making new connections. Lesbian, gay, bisexual or transsexual asylum seekers or refugees are welcomed. And because I am straight, they told me 'no' at first. I could not attend their meetings or buddy-project because of being heterosexual. Only after one of my informants introduced me to one of the organisers, I was allowed to attend a bingo-evening and later to conduct an interview (O7, 21-08-2017, Amsterdam).

The hesitative attitude of Nida and her eventually positive experience with Cocktail in Eindhoven shows how intergroup relations are cautiously explored to construct the multidimensional self (Hogg, Terry & White, 1995; Bradatan, Popan & Melton, 2010). Self-categorisation by creating social relations with other queers is important for group formation, self-acceptance and identity construction in the new social environment (Campbell, 2000). Giving yourself over to your queer feelings, just like Nida did, is dynamically intertwined with the social construction of one's identity as well as that within the boundaries of the belonged social group (Hogg, Terry & White, 1995). Currently, Nida

[12] http://coceindhoven.nl/asiel-cocktail/
[13] https://www.coc.nl/
[14] https://www.cocamsterdam.nl/thema/activiteiten/cocktail

does not want to miss one single party of COC Cocktail Eindhoven anymore. She also often attends meetings of Secret Garden and is a volunteer with the Prismagroup in Utrecht. The participants of this research mention different organisations when they speak about creating a social environment for them to hang out.

> *"At least I have friends, I attend some meetings, Secret Garden, COC. I see people around me, they accept, they are talking about us like human, we are human, really."*
>
> Sham, 28 (Syria)
> (I7, 05-09-2017, Amsterdam)

The ***Prismagroup***[15] in Utrecht, in addition to Cocktail in Amsterdam, also turned out to be reluctant towards welcoming heterosexuals. However, eventually the founder of the Prismagroup agreed on having an interview wherein he explained that the organisation mainly focuses on bi-cultural LGBT's. This group finds itself between two 'fireplaces' with all challenges that come with that: being bi-cultural, religious and queer (O5, 30-06-2017, Amsterdam). Also queers with a migration or refugee background are welcome to get in touch with like-minded people and to get informed. It is a strongly dense group with respect as core principle of the monthly meetings that focus on empowerment and mobility. The Prismagroup works closely together with Queer Welfare since it is founded by the same person. ***Queer Welfare***[16] supports bi-cultural LGBT's and queer refugees who for instance wish to attend social or informational meetings or who need psychosocial help by financing their travel expenses to strengthen their mobility. This will contribute to the integration on cultural, social and political level. Regrettably, during the conduct of my research, the organisation had to stop due to financial issues.

Secret Garden and the Prismagroup worked closely together with ***Safe Haven***[17] and thus many queer refugees I have spoken with, attended events of these organisations. Safe Haven was an organisation that focuses itself on the connection between queer refugees in the Netherlands. During the cause of my research, the organisation had to stop due to private and financial matters. They used to organise a monthly day-event where they provided dinner and performances. They were advertising with the slogan: 'all nationalities are welcome'. During these events, people played board-games and the dinner was prepared by the attendees themselves. People could share their stories in a living room-like setting to which the people listened carefully. According to the founder, small and individual focused organisations are needed because VWN cannot meet the personal needs of all individual queer refugees. He explained me about their success: "We are old men, showing security, solidarity and safety" (O4, 29-06-2017, Amsterdam).

In the conversation with the founder of Safe Haven, the importance of cultural awareness and sensitivity when working with this group became clear. He explained that sometimes queer refugees attend activities of other organisations that align with their country of origin, however, at those occasions they do absolutely not share about their sexual orientation. Therefore, queer refugees rather

[15] http://prismagroep.webklik.nl/page/persbericht
[16] http://welfare9.webnode.nl/
[17] https://www.facebook.com/refugeeswelcomeamsterdam/posts/549276688578951 *and* http://www.buurtkamercorantijn.nl/safe-haven-gestopt/

attend meetings of particular queer organisations like COC. Unfortunately, they "will find themselves different from being a white homosexual and will not feel at ease" (O4, 29-06-2017, Amsterdam). The founder of Safe Haven is critical towards COC because he finds it "a white club that does not understand anything of other cultures and feels little connection to the people they say to support" (O4, 29-06-2017, Amsterdam). According him, COC Cocktail uses strong and sensitive terms and topics to talk about without noticing the vulnerability of the group. Sharing experiences is at the basis of cultural sensitive organisations such as Secret Garden and Safe Haven working closely together with predominantly Dutch queer organisations.

Ramzi often goes Amsterdam by bike to the meetings of Secret Garden and he also appreciates going to the monthly parties of Cocktail Eindhoven. Nasim and Jwoian mostly feel connected to queer refugee NGO's including Safe Haven and Cocktail Amsterdam and like to dance and drink tea together with other homosexuals or transgender. Aimar explained that he works with different organisations because he speaks Arabic and would like to help translating. Chadly became a volunteer with Secret Garden as well and is also a member of a cultural arts committee in his neighbourhood, where people know about his sexuality.

Social networking with organisations is used to find connection with members of the social group of queers, gaining information about the asylum procedure and to find access to the Dutch society in general. Queer refugees in the Netherlands rather engage and create ways to build their lives in a world that is signified by constant change (Bauman, 2000). Therefore, networks are context specific, socially constructed and expanded whilst navigating under influence of the forces of being a queer refugee in the Netherlands in order to enlarge social possibilities and direct life in an advantaged direction (Putnam, 2001; Willems, 2005; Vigh, 2009). Social networks are not homogeneous as they have multiple dimensions and shared links (Sabatini, 2009). Where queer refugees' queer networks are across the Netherlands and produce returns, such as information about the asylum procedure and friendship, their culture-related social networks, mostly family ties, have a long-reach to the country of origin. The boundaries of different networks are permeable and flexible because of the diversification of interaction that creates links between the different networks (Wellman, 2002). Information from the visible Dutch queer network is often exchanged through invisible queer networks abroad (Wellman, 2002), as explained earlier by Tarek who knew about Secret Garden already back in Egypt.

The necessity of an organisation like Secret Garden during the asylum procedure as well as during settling in the Netherlands, is emphasised frequently by informants. They, however, also mentioned that this important role of special queer refugee support organisations changes over time when these individuals have obtained their permit yet and gradually find their way in the Dutch society (Willems, 2005). The following quote of Haphal describes, as also explained by Sabatini (2009), social networking as a praxis because it is to be defined by its function.

> *"In the past, yes, I went to Secret Garden, but now, I am too busy with work and school. Before, I had time, no work, just the camp, always meeting Emir for questions about 'I feel sick', 'I do not speak Dutch', 'I do not have a friend'. We went out for dinners together, or a cup of coffee, just quiet. I like Emir so much. He is like a home to me. He looked for a*

lawyer and helped me to arrange everything here in the Netherlands."

Haphal, 27 (Kurdistan Syria)
(I6, 05-09-2017, Amsterdam)

6.1. CONCLUSION: QUEERING THE STAGE

Being in the Netherlands is not without any struggle for most queer refugees. Firstly, they are asked to share all details of their sexual or gender identity in order to prove that they are genuine refugees. Proving a well-founded fear is challenging when sexuality has been an act rather than an identity feature. Talking about one's most private parts to governmental officials whilst hiding has become one's second nature, leaves room for miscommunications and even for not fitting the Western stereotypical image of sexuality, coming out and gender transition. The asylum procedure should be improved towards a policy based on self-acceptation and awareness of one's own sexual or gender identity. However, secondly, the acceptation of oneself is hindered by the closed societal attitude within the Netherlands. Anti-homosexual discrimination and violence remain a challenge in this multicultural society, especially within the refugee camps, and the Dutch 'queer community' appears to be elusive and closed. As a result, queer refugees often feel socially excluded from the Dutch society, the language and its culture. This context of queer stereotypes and a 'Dutch paradox' situates the challenges queer refugees face whilst navigating everyday life and socially negotiating identity during settling in the Netherlands.

Secret Garden knows no social hierarchical difference between individuals who have not obtained a permit yet and those who have. However, there is a difference in how these two groups use existing social networks and what the associated deliverables are. This varies from providing information about the asylum procedure to finding temporary housing, from friendship to job opportunities. Without obtained status, an individual expresses itself differently in regard to its sexual orientation or gender identity and in regard to the categorisation of refugee. Informants who have obtained status focus more on learning the Dutch language, the integration course and the possible steps after that: for instance, study or work. Here, the role of the queer network is to serve as a bridge towards the Dutch society. This is what Sabatini (2009) explains by connecting heterogeneous groups, either in a visible or invisible way. People who are in the asylum procedure concentrate more on building their case, on proving their 'queerness' and on coping with the violence within the camp, as mentioned before by Sabatini (2009) by bonding efforts to create strong supportive ties depending on similarities. Queer refugees who have received a negative outcome on their court face other problems such as providing themselves in their basic needs until they go in appeal.

The social and organisational life around the queer identity is thus an important and safe anchor whilst settling in the Netherlands. Searching for similarities, role models or other people with a coming out story, helps with the reconstruction of one's identity and creates a sense of belonging, as mentioned by informants (Sabatini, 2009; Fox & Ralston, 2016). Friendship is, however, challenging to achieve when in the new cultural context. Queer refugees uphold identities of being wealthy and social by doing sports or work voluntarily. However, when evaluating the self within the Dutch queer community, the self-enhancement within the in-group of which Hogg, Terry and White (1995) speak,

informants indicated to not feel completely part of it. They perceive the Dutch queer community as distanced, disrespectful and only focused on physical appearance and sex.

Queer refugees in the Netherlands, therefore, continuously reconstruct their identities in different social contexts depending on stereotypes, norms and social categories, but moreover, depending on their asylum procedure and living situation. Their social navigation and networking, both by societal force and personal choice, foremost connects them to new opportunities and ties within the group of people from the same geographical region and queer community (Putnam, 2001). These social groups are not homogeneous because there are intergroup differences, however, group formation processes help with one's self-categorisation, acceptation and identity construction as it is found at the borders of the social category (Campbell, 2000; Hogg, Terry & White, 1995). This self-categorisation differs per social context, asylum status and the related returns: when to be (self-)categorised as Arab, refugee or queer? (Campbell, 2000; Hogg, Terry & White, 1995; Willems, 2005; Putnam, 2001).

The bonding aspect of social networking whilst forcedly migrated is of utmost importance, just like the information gain about the asylum procedure and the Dutch society (Sabatini, 2009). As informants explained, cultural background or stereotypical looks of LGBT are necessary to become accepted within the group of Dutch queers, IND workers or the general Dutch public. Reverse covering and to assign the self as a member of a social group, like identity of Hogg, Terry and White (1995) explain, thus links them to other social networks (Willems, 2005). Queer refugees in the Netherlands appear, however, to be highly cautious about sharing their feelings and identities as they also find connection within their own nationality groups. They remain vulnerable at the intersection of being queer and refugee. In addition to that, their social networks are not homogenous or solid at all because these also entail other dimensions than queer, refugee or Arab, such as hobbies, education or work. Nevertheless, the social network whilst in the Netherlands limits itself to the queer and refugee network, especially when not obtained status yet. The social network is used as a praxis (Sabatini, 2009) to prove one's sexuality or gender in order to positively claim asylum and to navigate everyday life in the Netherlands.

7. COVERING ALL OVER AGAIN: BEING STUCK IN THE CATEGORISATION OF 'REFUGEE'

The previous chapter shows that the acceptation of the self and the reconstruction of identity is challenging because of the Dutch public seems to be reluctant towards queers. And in addition to that, informants also indicated that the externally imposed label of 'refugee' hinders their social networking and identity reconstruction whilst in the Netherlands. By this chapter, I explain how the refugee status determines their everyday life and argue how this strong label of refugee outweighs the queer-part of one's life and identity. As one of the people I have spoken with described: *"It removes all that you are".*

Forced migration because of sexual orientation or gender identity persecution creates a challenging intersection with the Arab part of one's identities as well. To shed light on the intersection of the identities 'Arab queer' and 'refugee' in the Dutch society is crucial for understanding their navigation of everyday life. Questioning informants about their feelings towards refugee as a concept and as a part of their categorised identity evoked resisting reactions.

> *"I never accepted myself as a refugee. Even when I did the procedure. I always want to make revenge from the people that made me a refugee. There is nothing wrong with being a refugee. But they put me in this situation. It is not my identity, it is a stamp. I am a human, I have name, I have country, I have identity, I have past. They took all this out and put me as a refugee. This is of course pain. But it is okay, I try to accept it. Try to understand it and try to say there is nothing wrong with being a refugee […] But I do not feel myself refugee anymore. I feel myself rather Dutch now."*
>
> Tarek, 43 (Egypt)
> (I4, 25-08-2017, Amsterdam)

> *"No, my family does not know that I am gay. But they know I am, I can belly dance and they love that. Maybe some family members feel I am. […] All people go to Europe for work, so*

that is what I told my family. But here, I am a refugee. I want to work, because I lost everything, my work in Syria."

Rifat, 29 (Syria)
(I8, 08-09-2017, Beverwijk)

Chadly feels shameful towards the label refugee and said that he *is* not one. He perceives it as a label and forced categorisation that other people have put on him, and on many others. Chadly explained that he finds it nonsense and that "being labelled as refugee reduces one's identity to only one thing, but there is more" (I11, 29-09-2017, Amsterdam). This is an example of what Malkki (1995) already pointed out: labelling someone as refugee creates stereotypes of what 'kind' of person this individual is. And therefore, Chadly will never tell people he is a refugee just like that because he does not want to be put in that box with all the societal stereotypes that come with it. Experience shows that people will treat him differently.

"People then will look down on you. And if I say I am a refugee, they start speaking English to me. I found that really annoying, really. Yes. A very intense label."

Chadly, 34 (Tunisia)
(I11, 29-09-2017, Amsterdam)

In addition to Chadly, Aimar also explained feeling linguistically discriminated because he does not speak Dutch and people ask him when he will start to learn the language as refugees are 'supposed to do'. Nida said that you will have less to say in social life when you are a refugee. Nami as well problematizes the label and told a story of an Iranian friend dating a Dutch man who said, "if my friends know that I am seeing a refugee, they will stop having contact with me" (I9, 20-09-2017, Amsterdam). Tarek explained me the daily struggle.

"I was in a gay club in Rotterdam and I was with a refugee friend. And one of the people of Grindr wrote to my friend: go away with your friend, Islamic friend, bastard refugee! I left because I do not like the way, he is not honest […] In the Kingsday 2016, I was in Rotterdam in the gay street, the drag queen that was presenting came to me: 'oh you are from Egypt, so nice. Did you come here alone?' Yes, I came alone. 'You did not bring your family?' No, I came by plane. 'such luxury!' And I felt she is a bad person, she laughed about the pain of the people. It is not good to laugh about people that came by boats to run from the war or from being killed because being gay. And you are one of the community, you are a drag queen, and drag queens are always feeling insecure because of what they do. So, it is not nice to make

fun of this! She laughed at all refugees: 'did you came by swim like everyone?'"

Tarek, 43 (Egypt)
(I4, 25-08-2017, Amsterdam)

Nevertheless, Nami himself tries to keep it real.

"Well, it is the truth, and you have to deal with it. You cannot change it. But, the thing that makes it a little bit uncomfortable for you is the fact that when you are a refugee, people have two kinds of behaviour with you: one kind of people are the ones that feel sorry for you and they want to be nice with you. And sometimes it is fake, you know. It is not because of who you are that they want to be nice with you, but because you are a refugee […] It is not for who I am, but for my situation. [...] And the other group are people that hate refugees […] I prefer people to be nice with me because of who I am, not because of me being a refugee."

Nami, 25 (Iran)
(I9, 20-09-2017, Amsterdam)

Some anxiety exists amongst the Dutch general public towards Arabs and Muslims (Velasco González, 2008; Ghorashi, 2005), however, religion seems not to be a prior aspect of life for most queer refugees I have met. Jwoian, however, feels himself to be a Muslim and accepts all other religions as well. This aligns with Sham, explaining that he practices the Islam, but in a flexible way. Nida is the only Christian participating in my research. Chadly explained that "God will never hurt you" (I11, 29-09-2017, Amsterdam), however, Tarek is more reluctant towards religion.

"No, I am not religious! I stopped because I felt that it is not fair. It is not fair. They helped to make me gay, because I did not choose to be gay, I was born to be this. I feel like people or the pope judges me. […] It is not fair […] I believe in myself."

Tarek, 43 (Egypt)
(I4, 25-08-2017, Amsterdam)

The everyday life as a refugee in the Netherlands begins after receiving the residence permit from the government and a house from the municipality. The house, basic money, language and integration courses are provided by the Dutch government. This, however, is not enough to live a prosperous life as many informants explained. Haphal and Sham became close friends via Secret Garden almost two

years ago. Together with ten Syrian friends, they created a financial system in which everyone inserts fifty euro's a month and each month one person gets the five hundred euro's at once to make an investment. Sham mostly sends this money back to his family as his mother sold all her jewellery for him migrating: "It needs a lot of money, this trip" (I7, 05-09-2017, Amsterdam).

To meet their own welfare requirements, some have chosen to do sex work in order to "make money fast and easily" (O6, 10-07-2017, Amsterdam). A Dutch newspaper wrote in an article that one gay refugee was offered a house in exchange for sex: "When I protested, he kicked me out of his house" (De Zwaan, 2017a). This example shows the limited level of power queer refugees have. In addition to that, their level of education and other qualifications are often not recognised by Dutch employers (Ghorashi, 2005). The wealth of some depend on one's exotic appearance, especially on the social mobile application *Grindr* (De Zwaan, 2017b). Some of the queer refugees I have spoken with use this as an opportunity to make some money to finance their basic needs and *sell,* or better *rent*, their bodies. Gay and trans refugees are less likely to find a job, and possibly find their way to prostitution more easy (De Zwaan, 2017b). This corresponds with Jwoian's story.

> *"The first time I met him we had sex. I tell you honestly. I did not like it. But, yes. It happened. He was not my love. I did it for the money. That was it. I worked via him. For a while, he arranged clients for me at his house. Yes, sorry, I needed the money. I was fired by my other job, could not get an* uitkering *yet. What could I do? Family? I am too ashamed towards my family to tell."*
>
> Jwoian, 32 (Kurdistan Iraq)
> (I2, 16-08-2017, Amsterdam)

According to a queer film producer I have spoken with, most money is spent on gay parties or clothing as appearance is of high value in the queer scene and, therefore, many are working out every day. Not to look 'queer', but to feel fit and strong because "this is their lifestyle, their identity, their business card, income and most importantly: the one thing they are able to control in life and they enjoy" (O6, 10-07-2017, Amsterdam). Aligning with this, Sham mentioned that many gays, also within Secret Garden, are only interested in having sex rather than in one's personality or character.

In addition to the financial system of Haphal and Sham, and to the extent of sex work amongst queer refugees, some have regular but illegal jobs as well. Nami for example paid his rent with black money earned in an Iranian carpet shop and, to make ends meet, someone from a queer support organisation financially supported him as well during the eighteen months of living in limbo in the city. This shows how his investment in creating a queer social network in the Netherlands has been a coping strategy and contributed to settling (Putnam, 2001; Willems, 2005). Not everyone at Secret Garden knows that Nami is undocumented, or 'illegal', because of the Dublin Regulation. He does not share that he is undocumented openly, because this might be dangerous for him. He therefore prefers to keep it for himself, something that being in limbo forces one to do (Schuster, 2011). Nami furthermore told me about an Iranian organisation he works for by translating news in Farsi. They also organised a boat for the Canal Pride 2017 in Amsterdam.

Some of the queer refugees rather prefer a quiet and safe life while others pick up queer activism again, like Nami does. According to him, there are not many people concerned about the situation regarding LGBT rights in Iran and he feels it is a kind of purpose to do whatever he can do to help others whilst being in a safe country now. He hopes that something will change in the future.

During my fieldwork I went through many social media profiles of queer refugees showing pictures of gay activism, of same-sex relationships or of queer parties. Rifat explained that he has two different profiles on social media, one for his queer friends and another one for his family who he actually mostly contacts via texting. When I asked Nami about all gay-activist pictures of him that are published on social media, he said to not worry at all as they do not show that he is undocumented. He explained that it is quite common in Iran to have multiple Facebook profiles and that the majority of the older generation is not on social media. Nida, however, said to not think of who is watching her online. She does not care.

The liquid times that we live in, conceptualised by Bauman (2000), makes individuals have no solid focus on their identity construction, but rather a flexible and incoherent focus because of the Internet (Moroni, 2014). Having two profiles on social media, a straight and a gay one, shows how these (online) networks are socially constructed per context and how these are coping strategies during the migration trajectory (Willems, 2005). Being openly homosexual on the Internet contributes to the creation of social relations as values are shared, identities evolved and opportunities explored (Putnam, 2001; Fox & Ralston, 2016). However, hence that most queer refugees in the Netherlands that I have spoken with remain highly cautious and deny any suspicion of other refugees, Arabs and family ties.

Haphal is only in contact with his sisters via the telephone who asked him about that other guy, Sham, shown on many pictures on his social media profiles: “Haha, that is Sham, my best friend. *Wallah*, not my boyfriend!” (I6, 05-09-2017). Haphal’s sister once reacted positively on a picture of him only wearing a tight swimming slip. She found it great that Holland allows people to swim in that little clothing. She interpreted this as a freedom rather than something stereotypically gay because ‘gay does not exist’. Like many others, Haphal and Sham live a double life because their families cannot know. His family asks him repeatedly whether he already has met a beautiful Dutch girl. It becomes clear that networks are rather social than spatial and, in addition to this social function, Wellman (2002) as well emphasises the complexities of social networks and how one’s social context thus influences the use of these networks strategically.

After he will be provided a permit, Nami wants to study Social Sciences at the University of Amsterdam. He prefers to have more straight friends because he almost only knows gay people, however, meeting them appears to be difficult when being in limbo and not being able to study or work. He prefers not to dream about love because it will happen whenever. Nida also explained the struggle of being under the Dublin Regulation. What do you do when you cannot work, cannot do anything because you are “illegal”? (I10, 22-09-2017, Heerhugowaard; Schuster, 2011). And next to that, she faced traumatic experiences in the past which developed a mild anxiety for men and is afraid to be alone with them.

> *“So, sometimes it is nice to have this sexuality. I do not really hang out with guys, maybe only the gay guys, I do not go out with gay guys alone for a party, but if I see like there*

are more people I know, then it is okay. But yeah, it is still difficult for me to trust a man. Any person who is gay and too much manly, masculine, I can feel like he can hit me and I cannot fight back. So, I really take resistance from that."

Nida, 33 (Pakistan)
(I10, 22-09-2017, Heerhugowaard)

Trauma confronts one with the fragility of oneself and touches upon one's assumptive world (Matthies-Boon, 2017). It therefore influences social relations, as shown by the example of Nida, and may affect navigating everyday life within the Dutch society. Despite of her traumatic experiences in the past, she attended the *Queer Faces, Migrant Voices* program of the *International Queer and Migrant Film Festival* in Amsterdam. Working with this group of queer migrants, Nida has found listening ears for her story, self-confidence, pride and trust. This show identity exists by confirmation of the other, by confirmation as member of the in-group with whom one identifies (Bradatan, Popan & Melton, 2010). She found consistency within this social group which contributes to her feelings of belonging and self-acceptance because it provides a definition of who she is in terms of characteristics of this category. This aligns with the approach of social identity theory by Hogg, Terry and White (1995).

All informants explain how difficult it is to start over from scratch and Nasim, for instance, wants to continue the Dutch language course in order to apply for the dentist school again and to be socially included by his social confirmed professional identity (Bradatan, Popan & Melton, 2010). Back in Iraq, Nasim had been a dentist already for many years, but for the Dutch qualifications he has to do a refresher course. Nasim is now 57 years old, but his "heart is only twenty" (I3, 21-08-2017, Amsterdam). When he will work again, he will have the money to invite his children to come over in Amsterdam. Sham moreover focuses on starting his studies in Biotechnology next year. But, as soon as the war in Syria is over, he wants to go back.

"I cannot say it is worried, but I can say, when the situation in Syria is good, we go back. I wish that really, to stop everything. But I cannot do this stuff. I will go to Syria where people are finishing the war, are really tired, stressed, and where there is no good atmosphere as here in Holland. We will be shocked. But I have to train for that, really, I start work on that […] One day I go back. That is my home, where we must live."

Sham, 28 (Syria)
(I7, 05-09-2017, Amsterdam)

However, and in contrast to Sham, Tarek aptly expressed his desire to live in the Netherlands peacefully.

"I want to continue my life. I came here to live, not to die. I came here after everything that happened to me. I came here to start. And it was so painful to be a man like me. It is the beginning. To start from the beginning. It is hard for me. But I want to live. I want peace […] I want to live with people that love me […] I found love, home, safety here. I want to keep it like this. I want to fight […] this is the real place. That is why I want to work, why I want to give the rest of my life to this country […] I want to be okay. I want to sleep. I want to start a new life with a new family. With new friends. With everything new […] I am sure that I will reach it."

Tarek, 43 (Egypt)
(I4, 25-08-2017, Amsterdam)

After he reached that, he aims to learn the language as soon as possible so that he can start a short refresher course in hotel management, something he is already educated in. His dream is to work in high positions and eventually to open a restaurant of his own. The meaning of happiness for him, and for the others I have spoken to, is not to have money, but to work hard, study good and be happy. Rifat finds himself already in the trajectory to find a job and follows interview trainings now next to the Dutch language course. He prefers to continue living in a small city near Amsterdam.

"I wanted to live in here. Why? Because I like the black market here, the bazar, it is the same as in Syria. It has the same set up, the same Arab products. I buy everything from there, chicken, meat, bread, Arabic bread. It is only ten minutes by bike. Everything by bike. Of course, haha" […] I want a future with a child. Not with a woman, but with my man. And we are living at the same place, same house. The future will be good for me […] but I do not thing far ahead in the future. Every day comes. I live now. Okay, today. Future I do not know. But my dreams, okay, I live with my man and we have children […] Maybe by adoption."

Rifat, 29 (Syria)
(I8, 08-09-2017, Beverwijk)

Also, Nida prefers to stay in the Netherlands if she gets a positive on her procedure. She has created a circle of friends via the queer refugee community, has a girlfriend and started to get to know the country and its culture. Starting all over again in another country is not an option for her. After getting her permit, she wants to start with a master's programme in Management and Human Resources since she sees herself as a bank officer. Besides that, she would like to work in a beauty salon. But foremost, she wants to continue her queer activism. Many focus on learning the Dutch language first and it is, however, of utmost importance to recognise that not all refugees are literate. For example,

Haphal learns to read and write for the first time, and all in Dutch. A Dutch friend of him helps him with practicing the language.

> *"I always have to talk Dutch to him. I have to talk very fancy. My teacher thinks that I am doing great with speaking, but writing is still difficult…I never wrote before in my life […] Before I was not able to read or write in Kurdish or Arabic, only talking. Now I learn how to read, and I understand things, a new life."*
>
> Haphal, 27 (Kurdistan Syria)
> (I6, 05-09-2017, Amsterdam)

Together with Sham, Haphal works voluntarily with elderly people to get more comfortable with the language. The elderly know about their sexuality and being accepted makes them very happy. And furthermore, informants who already obtained status all attend language courses three days a week. Getting comfortable with the Dutch language is Haphal's priority. Nasim and Rifat felt stressed for the exams: "It is too difficult! I feel stress, stress, stress" (I3, 21-08-2017, Amsterdam). Learning the language is indicated as highly important because all want to work and participate in society. Nasim for example, reads all newspapers every day and summarises the news in Dutch. Aimar points out the importance of obtaining status first in order to continue with working or studying and to build one's own social network.

> *"If you happen to be educated, you are more likely to get a better job, more likely to live in a nicer place, which means most of the time a nicer neighbourhood and you are less likely to face discrimination."*
>
> Aimar, 28 (Syria)
> (I1, 16-06-2017, Amsterdam)

All that Ramzi knew has been destroyed by the Syrian war, something he is devastated by. When he showed me videos of the bombings on his house and shop, he described how much it hurts. For now, he feels the urge to learn the language first, where after he would like to pick up his political activism again next to being a singer and going to the conservatorium. He already speaks Arabic, Turkish, English, Dutch and a little bit of Russian because of his migration trajectory. Learning the local language is the most important to find connection with one's new environment. However, when freshly arrived in the Netherlands, many naturally look for social connection at the circle of people from the same nationality. This is a two-way process and the biggest concern of Sham is that his family will find out about his sexuality.

> *"They will hurt my family. Really. It will hurt if they know about that. Like my sister can be divorced because of that.*

Could you imagine that? Really. So, my biggest trouble in this issue is my family. I do not want to hurt them a lot."

Sham, 28 (Syria)
(I7, 05-09-2017, Amsterdam)

Also, Haphal misses his family terribly and even suffers insomnia. However, on the positive side, his brother might move from Istanbul to Amsterdam. For now, Haphal mostly focuses on training his body to get fit. He would love to go back to Syria just once so that he can visit the place where his mother is buried.

"I never want to go back to Syria […] Syria, Turkey, Lebanon, stop, my new life is here. My new family is here […] I want to learn Dutch well. And after five years, insjallah*, Dutch passport […] I only want to go to my mother one time, just, you know, one hour."*

Haphal, 27 (Kurdistan Syria)
(I6, 05-09-2017, Amsterdam)

Furthermore, he would like to have a house for himself, his own restaurant and many friends. On the contrary, Tarek said never to go back to Egypt because he is 'famous now' and everyone knows about his sexuality. He will be in danger. His 'fame' originates from an interview he did with the Dutch radio which they broadcasted with his full name and country of origin and background information. It was published on several social media websites together with his picture, his face, without any permission. He immediately called Emir until after three days his picture was deleted from the websites, however, he will not easily feel safe again. Tarek is struggling with a post-traumatic stress disorder and Arabphobia. As Matthies-Boon (2017) explains, the confrontations that cause trauma make individuals feel alienated from others and the surrounded world as they know it. Tarek suffers insomnia and stresses out when he hears Arab speaking people outside of his window.

"It is, sometimes, I feel like I am very strong, but every time I have the punch, it comes through Arab people. I cannot, really, I cannot deal with them. I cannot, I cannot, I cannot, I try all my best and I cannot […] All my life, even here. Even here […] It is too heavy. But I do not have a choice. I have to move on. I want to move on. But I cannot so I have to go this time again [to the psychiatrist]. I do not feel comfortable to talk actually […] it was a room, a closed room with four nurses and one doctor. I feel myself in court. I did not find comfort there. I want to feel more comfortable to trust, to talk, to let them help me. Because when you feel not comfortable, nothing is going to happen […] "Now that I choose my new personality, and I choose my life, and I

choose my family also. So, everything is always my choice now. You know, not like before […] I want to be myself. I want the people around me to be not negative energy, I want that they give me the positive vibes. I need positive people around me […] Almost all of my friends are Dutch, some English people or Spanish. European. I have some Arab, like the transgender. Almost all of my friends are transgender, because they also feel that the people do not want to walk next to them, with them, or are at shame to walk with them."

Tarek, 43 (Egypt)
(I4, 25-08-2017, Amsterdam)

Despite the negative experiences of Tarek, others are positively creating a social life that is not build upon their refugee status. Nasim for example, often drinks coffee with his neighbours who, however, can absolutely not know about his homosexuality. Only one Dutch friend knows. The rest of his friend group is multicultural including Moroccan, Turkish and Arab friends. Rifat's family helped him to move out of Syria as they thought he left the country for work. Now he spends time mostly with his boyfriend, but also enjoys time with friends from Secret Garden. He is not in contact with his Arab neighbours because he does not want them to know about his sexuality.

Most friends of my informants are scattered around the Netherlands, or even around Europe. Ramzi does not speak with any of his friends back in Syria anymore. He joined a refugee music group in the Netherlands to sing, dance, laugh and express himself again. Here he found some true friends, all refugees from all around the world. However, hence that none of these people must know about his homosexuality. This shows the double life he is living. He uses this network to bridge the gap with both the Dutch society as well as with his profession as a singer. Bridging social networks means to connect heterogeneous groups (Sabatini, 2009). At one night, Ramzi and I decided to go to the queer night in an Amsterdam bar after the meeting of Secret Garden. Walking on the streets, Ramzi stopped and took my hands.

"Lisanne, I have to tell you something. But I do not know, maybe it is strange. But, you are my first female friend. I do not know how to talk to you, how to behave. How do I do with girls? It feels strange in a positive way."

Ramzi, 32 (Syria)
(I5, 28-08-2017, Almere)

Ramzi and I became friends easily, however, many of my informant's friendships with Dutch individuals started because of sexual interests at first. Sham and his Dutch best friend for example, have met on *Grindr* and the Dutch guy asked for a relationship repeatedly. In the end, he accepted Sham as a friend and he supported Sham a lot during his asylum procedure. Sham also has straight Syrian friends who he met in the camp and who do not know about his sexuality. His Syrian gay

friends might also go back to Syria when the situation is calmed down again, so he will meet them there again and finally has something to share his thoughts with when in his country.

In contrast, Jwoian had to break all contact with all people from his past for his own safety. Eventually, he got in touch with his mother very little again. They know that he lives a quiet life in Amsterdam and that he misses them a lot. He explained to have no real friends, which is something he struggles with every day. The man who arranged sex work for him is still helping Jwoian with financial matters. This man was the only one there when Jwoian needed someone. He currently refuses to have sex with him though. This example displays how Jwoian has struggled through both the force of his socioeconomic situation and his personal agency during settling in the Netherlands (Vigh, 2009). The expected returns of social relations differ from time and space, as shown by Jwoian's story, and thus one's investments and social strategy during the migration trajectory differ as well (Putnam, 2001; Wellman, 2002; Sabatini, 2009).

Despite all that my informants have been through, they all are decisively positive towards the future and the chances it will entail. Chadly would like to get married with his boyfriend and to have a nice job. Firstly, he wants to finish his studies in social work at the University of Applied Science in Amsterdam.

> *"I am excited, for the future. It will be great, there is no other option! I have faced the worst. So now everything that comes will be great."*
>
> Chadly, 34 (Tunisia)
> (I11, 29-09-2017, Amsterdam)

7.1. CONCLUSION: IT REMOVES ALL THAT YOU ARE

By this chapter, I have aimed to visualise how the refugee status determines everyday life of queer refugees in the Netherlands. The strong externally imposed category outweighs the queer-part of one's life and identity, and even that of other identity constructions as well. Informants are logically categorised by the process as refugees, because of the Geneva Refugee Convention's definition. They have left everything behind and all have other places they (no longer) call home. The participants of this research, however, all reject the consequences of this imposed label as they do not perceive it as an identity feature. It rejects their multiple identities and denies their social agency and empowerment by reducing them to only that one category. Society will treat you differently, people think you are less skilled than them and sometimes even feel ashamed of being befriended with you. This imposition ignores all traumatic experiences queer refugees may have gone through back home and during the migration trajectory, but also when arrived in the Netherlands (Malkki, 1995; Matthies-Boon, 2017).

The intersection of being an Arab queer that is categorised as a refugee, influences relations with family members or friends as they cannot be aware of the refugee's sexual orientation or gender identity. Some do not share about their homosexuality openly because they still feel discriminated or threatened by Arab neighbours, class mates or colleagues in the Netherlands. The Dutch general

public remains reserved towards both queers and refugees. However, the Dutch queer community appears to be sex-focused as informants indicated that refugees are discriminated against when searching for jobs, studies or friendship (Buijs, 2016). The social navigation of queer refugees through the Dutch society is influenced by the struggle between both the socioeconomic forces and the personal agency. They have to cope with their alienated feelings towards the identity categories of Arab, (Dutch) queer and refugee (Vigh, 2009; Matthies-Boon, 2017).

These social conflicts or uncertainties can be overcome online because the Internet creates room for exploring social relations and evolving one's queer identities, choose whether to be visible or not (Fox & Ralston, 2016). Many have multiple profiles on social media to facilitate their double life: one on which they appear to be heterosexual and through which they connect with ties back home; and one more queer-like on which they can find similarities and feel connected with the queer social network (Fox & Ralston, 2016; Sabatini, 2009). The online possibilities support the evolvement of one's identity construction, as informants explained. Sharing information on platforms or having an online dating profile supports the development of self-acceptance, identity formation and social network building for many of the queer refugees in the Netherlands that I spoke with (Willems, 2005; Putnam, 2001). Hence, that the discrepancy of online and offline social environment, or double life, should not be made (Campbell, 2000; Wellman, 2002). Also offline, queer refugees have separate social networks and are separating gay and straight friends, Dutch and Arab ones or the people they need support from.

Thus, the online and offline social queer life and networks around one's queer identity is an important grip to hold on to whilst settling in the Netherlands as a refugee, especially when being undocumented in the country. Being in limbo waiting for the responsibility for examining one's claim is accepted by the Dutch government makes them less able to make new connections because they are not allowed to work or study (Schuster, 2011). However, some have illegal jobs or doing sex work to provide in their basic needs (Willems, 2005; De Zwaan, 2017b). They find social connections via refugee music groups, queer migrant projects, refugee student associations or refugee queer parties. These connections contribute to identity confirmation and self-acceptation, as well as to finding one's way in the new social environment (Hogg, Terry & White, 1995). Learning the language is rationally prioritised by many, however, not easily feasible in practise because of the limited contact with Dutch citizens, apart from some Dutch queer connections at parties or LGBT refugee NGO's.

Some of my informants indicated to wish to go back to their country of origin when times get better. This corresponds with the liquid modern times Bauman (2000) introduced, in which identities and life visions are interchangeable, flexible and short-term because of the unpredictable social contexts in which they navigate. Most importantly, all feel the risk to hurt their families in one way or another when people find out about their sexuality. They can lose their own ties, but even worse, as told by my participants, they fear persecution or divorces of family members because of their sexuality or gender identity is not accepted within the home community. As explained in chapter 5 *Covering: The Intersection of Being Queer in the Arab World*, queer refugees in the Netherlands thus continue covering up identity parts all over again. The queer identity is covered and sometimes even rejected when with Arabs, and the refugee categorisation is pushed to the background as much as possible to enlarge socioeconomic opportunities within the new Dutch context.

8. CONCLUSIONS

With this thesis, I have tried to expose the stories of queer refugees in the Netherlands. The people I have met have showed their anger, disappointment, strength, victories and doubts: stories that may sound like fiction, however, are all too real and stand symbolic to many similar experiences of living, breathing human beings.

I aimed to understand the intersection of queer and refugee when in the Netherlands by exploring the complexities of queer refugees' social navigation, movements, feelings, identifications and social relationships. I wondered how identity is socially constructed based on reason of flight, experiences at arrival and ideas for the future. And therefore, my central question was: *How do queer refugees navigate everyday life in the Netherlands?* In this conclusion, I will provide answers to this question and to the sub questions. I will offer my final reflection on the identifications of queer refugees in the Netherlands and on the social networks queer refugees in the Netherlands engage in. I will do this by following the introduced four phases in the migration trajectory of queer refugees: cause, physical movement, application and settling.

Phase one: cause

When carrying out the research, the organisation and people I have worked with turned out to be mostly Arab. Queers in the Arab world severely fear persecution by public authorities or even by their relatives which made covering or even denying their sexual orientation or gender identity become natural to them. Arab queers are confronted with physical and psychological violence although they try to manage their heterosexual performance. Persecution because of one's identity leaves the victim fragile in its shattered assumptive world. It touches inherently on the self as for it influences identity construction when one's queer parts are not recognised let alone accepted by all he or she knows. All informants were, in one way or another, forced to leave their homes either preventively or abruptly. Although the confrontation with anti-queer violence was not the direct trigger for all, the queer identity has evolved before, amidst the forced migration trajectory as well as after. The intersection of being queer and the flight creates a new categorisation as 'queer refugee' (Chadwick, 2017).

Phase two: physical movement

The disapproved homosexuality or gender dysphoria is displayed at the intersection of the conflicting categories Arab and queer. The heterosexual dominance within one's culture sometimes even leads to the non-existence of words to describe sexuality or gender supressing one's mind to associate their feelings with sex rather than with love. The interaction between suppression (covering their homosexuality) and empowerment (provoked by the decision to flee), whilst being the motion (social agent) navigating within motion (the changing social environment when forcedly migrating), demonstrates how Arab queers negotiate their identity construction and adjust, attune, cover or perform a heterosexual 'act' whenever the social arena demands (Vigh, 2009). They will continue the evaluation of their identity in the changeable socio-geographic context and will socially navigate over phase three and four as well.

Phase three and four: application and settling

Arrival in the Netherlands proved for many to be less easy than hoped for. The image of the Netherlands as liberal and tolerant falls apart when queer refugees are confronted with the discrepancy between their expectations and the reality in praxis. The credibility of asylum claims is evaluated against Western stereotypes and images of LGBT behaviour and appearances, and the IND expect queer refugees to be open and descriptive about their traumatic life story. This turns a difficult task for people who were used to distrust government officials, and when denying your sexuality has become natural. Many had never even spoken or used sex-related words out loud.

Queer refugees in the Netherlands continue covering their queer identity when living in the camps or in multicultural neighbourhoods and simultaneously emphasising their queer identity to prove their asylum claim. They are again confronted with Arabphobia and homophobia from the IND and within their new neighbourhood. And in addition, they continuously alternate the 'heterosexual performance' with the 'homosexual performance' which has worsened the physical and physiological health of many. Queer refugees easily feel confused about their sexual or gender identity: is it something you do (a sexual act) or something you are (part of your identity)?

Even after a positive evaluation by the IND that one apparently has proven to be 'gay enough', the acceptation of oneself can be hindered because of the Dutch society appears to be less open and liberal as one thought it would be, referred to as the 'migration to a liberal nation' narrative. Queer refugees often feel socially excluded from the Dutch society, the language and its culture. This context of LGBT stereotypes and a 'Dutch paradox' situates the two major challenges queer refugees face whilst navigating everyday life and socially constructing identities during settling in the Netherland: proving the credibility of their claim and the categorisation of being a refugee.

The label of refugee is even more at front during the asylum procedure where queer identity constructions were neither explored nor evolved yet due to missing social and physical space and freedom. And when being granted asylum, the refugee categorisation outweighs the queer identity as many find their sexual orientation or gender identity highly private and hide it even for their closest friends, family or neighbours. The self-acceptance of one's queer identity thus might have been achieved, however, queer refugees in the Netherlands do not necessarily express this to either their ties in the Netherlands or back home. And, not unimportantly, informants indicated other features such as education, profession, values and dreams, as important parts of their identity construction as well. Queer refugees in the Netherlands all pity the pressure to behave conform Dutch expectations and stereotypes of a 'real' queer, as for reversed covering has become a strategy to gain asylum. Being firstly socially categorised as refugee in any social situation, indeed neglects all other identities and, therefore, queer refugees in the Netherlands reject this categorisation. It denies their social agency and empowerment.

The two identity constructions of Arab and queer still conflict at their intersection when in the Netherlands (Chadwick, 2017). The Arab identity forces one to cover the queer identity whilst navigating within the related social environment of refugees or Arabs. These identity layers are thus not mutually exclusive but rather relevant at any particular time, as identity theories explains (Campbell, 2000; Bradatan, Popan & Melton, 2010; Hogg, Terry & White, 1995). Where the Arab world was not sufficient enough to find coherence in the identity construction of informants, the intersection of queer and Arab is re-evaluated against the background of the new socio-geographic context, the Dutch society, wherein queers seek for in-group inclusion to reconstruct their identity by self-categorisation within and against the boundaries of the social category of queers. However,

amongst Dutch queers they are categorised as *#NotGayEnough* or as refugee. Each social context thus asks for another identity construction based on stereotypes, norms, existing social categories, and intended deliverables. And the navigation through these contexts is all but easy.

The NGO Secret Garden makes no visible or intended hierarchical difference between undocumented refugees or refugees who already obtained a permit. However, these two groups strategically use social networks differently as they seek for different deliverables. The expression of one's queer or refugee identity differs as well as where on the one hand refugees with a positive evaluated claim focus on integration, language and future; and on the other hand, refugees who are still in procedure concentrate on the provision of a credible asylum claim by emphasising their queer identity and related network. The self-categorisation and social networking of queer refugees in the Netherlands depend on the open or suppressive social context and the intended deliverables needed at that time to navigate everyday life (Wellman, 2002; Putnam, 2001; Willems, 2005). The ties within queer refugees' social networks are not homogeneous as there are intergroup differences. Secret Garden's members for example originate from different countries and speak other languages. However, similarities are found at the borders of in-group relations of the queer group, as explained by social identity theory, and the queer refugee re-evaluates the self continuously per social environment, both influenced by force and choice. This bonding aspect of social networking helps to build friendships and creates feelings of belonging.

In addition to offline social networking, online social networks are created because similarities and role-models are found to evolve and accept one's queer identity. The Internet facilitates experimentation, exploration and evolvement of queer refugees' queer identity as it provides a safe space to overcome uncertainty about oneself. When online, queer refugees do not have to weigh their identities with social expectations, norms or images. Having multiple social media profiles is considered normal as it is a useful tool to facilitate one's double life consisting of both the homosexual appearance as well as the heterosexual performance. The limited possibilities to create social connections when being in limbo because of the Dublin Regulation, especially shows the importance of online social relations to create possible future opportunities. Social media are used to find social relations, queer information and migration tools, all to embed in the offline life as well to socially navigate towards advantageous opportunities (Vigh, 2009).

Nevertheless, not everything is shared within offline nor online social networks as queer refugees remain highly cautious with sharing their stories, experiences, values and identities. Social networks of queer refugees in the Netherlands are primarily used to prove one's sexuality or gender in order to positively claim asylum and to navigate everyday life. The intersection of being Arab, queer and refugee still influences daily life: when to be (self-)categorised as Arab, refugee or queer?

8.1. CONCLUDING REMARKS: THE SHOW MUST GO ON

This thesis tried to display the struggle queer refugees have experienced and still face when settling in the Netherlands, but most importantly, it tried to emphasise people's strength to fight, to forgive and to believe. Therefore, I have looked at the social navigation of queer refugees within the Dutch society. As social navigation -motion within motion- relates to the fluidity of multiple identities, this research displayed how queer refugees in the Netherlands play with and easily switch between their multiple identities to negotiate access within their messy web of social networks. These networks most importantly include the Dutch queer refugee network and social networks with people from their country of origin. When approaching queer migration, it is important to remember how the

heterosexual performance and the homosexual identity continuously alternate with each other depending on the status of one's asylum procedure and social network indicated as useful to invest in because of its needed deliverables. Some go far to hide identity parts by living a double life and indicated that being gay has "ruined their lives" (I2, 16-08-2017, Amsterdam), while others feel forced to adopt the assumed queer identity based on Western narratives and stereotypes or are "completely out" (I11, 29-09-2017, Amsterdam).

Queer refugees in the Netherlands pity the reduction to only the categorisation of refugee, together with its stereotypical images that marginalises this special group. Each and everyone feels their values and dreams are more important identity features and ensured me of their incredible beauty. Nevertheless, the central argument of this study is that the refugee status thus determines the everyday life of queer refugees in the Netherlands and highly obstructs the evolvement of an embedded queer identity. And at the same time, the refugee queer network has proven to be a safe and necessary anchor whilst navigating through the Dutch society. More nuances regarding the complexities of the everyday life of queer refugees in the Netherlands could be made for sure, and I am well aware this thesis offers my interpretations of my informants' interpretations, and that this thesis therefore is my story. I have seen the personal strength of queer refugees that empowers them to build further on their future, seeking for social belonging as *the show must go on.*

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10. APPENDIX A

A.1. LISTS OF INFORMANTS

Interviews queer refugees	Name	Age	Nationality	Sexual orientation	Date of interview	Interview location
Interview 1 (I1)	Aimar	28	Syria	Homosexual man	16-06-2017	Amsterdam
Interview 2 (I2)	Jwoian	32	Kurdistan, Iraq	Homosexual man	16-08-2017	Amsterdam
Interview 3 (I3)	Ali	57	Iraq	Homosexual man	21-08-2017	Amsterdam
Interview 4 (I4)	Tarek	43	Egypt	Homosexual man	25-08-2017	Amsterdam
Interview 5 (I5)	Ramzi	32	Syria	Homosexual man	28-08-2017	Almere
Interview 6 (I6)	Haphal	27	Kurdistan, Syria	Homosexual man	05-09-2017	Amsterdam
Interview 7 (I7)	Sham	28	Syria	Homosexual man	05-09-2017	Amsterdam
Interview 8 (I8)	Rifat	29	Syria	Homosexual man	08-09-2017	Beverwijk
Interview 9 (I9)	Nami	25	Iran	Homosexual man	20-09-2017	Amsterdam
Interview 10 (I10)	Nida	33	Pakistan	Lesbian woman	22-09-2017	Heerhugowaard
Interview 11 (I11)	Chadly	34	Tunis	Homosexual man	29-09-2017	Amsterdam

Referred to as (I1, 16-06-2017, Amsterdam)

Interviews social workers	Organisation	Date of interview	Interview location
Interview organisation 1 (O1)	Secret Garden	12-06-2017	Amsterdam
Interview organisation 2 (O2)	Roze in Blauw/Pink in Blue	21-06-2017	Amsterdam
Interview organisation 3 (O3)	Vluchtelingenwerk Nederland	29-06-2017	Amsterdam
Interview organisation 4 (O4)	Safe Haven	29-06-2017	Amsterdam
Interview organisation 5 (O5)	Prismagroep	30-06-2017	Utrecht
Interview organisation 6 (O6)	Morgensterfilms	10-07-2017	Amsterdam
Interview organisation 7 (O7)	COC Cocktail Amsterdam	21-08-2017	Amsterdam

Referred to as (O1, 12-06-2017, Amsterdam)

11. APPENDIX B

B.1. INTERVIEW GUIDE INDIVIDUALS

Introduction research

Emphasize before the interview/informed consent:

- The interview is anonymous and will not be shared with third parties
- Answers are experiences and thoughts – there is no right or wrong
- There is no obligation to answer and we can stop the interview at any time without any reason

Background information

- Can you tell something about yourself?
  (E.g. Age, gender, country of origin, language, religion, sexual orientation, profession/education, family, friends, obtaining status)
- Can you tell me about your life in your country of origin?
- When did you flee? Why? Who supported you to flee? With whom did you flee?
- Is your family still there? Friends? Are you still in contact with them?

Life in the Netherlands

- Can you tell me about your life in the Netherlands/Amsterdam? (in general: experiences)
- How does your week look like? (job/activities/education/friends/sport/fun/other)
- What are your experiences with the Dutch society in general?

The intersection of identity categories: 'queer' and 'refugee'

- What does the term gay/LGBT/queer mean to you? (describe/experiences/examples)
- What does the term 'refugee' mean to you? (describe/experiences/examples)
- Do you live by one or both of these terms? Can you explain?
- How do you feel about the 'queer community' in the Netherlands? Do you feel part?
- Have you ever had unpleasant experiences in the Netherlands that you would consider discrimination? (violence/fear/stereotypes)
- Do you ever emphasize being gay or hide it? Strategically? When and why? **(repeatedly coming back to this question)**

Social networks

- Who helped you with finding a place to stay in Amsterdam? With whom do you live?
- Do you know your neighbours or people that live close to you?
- When you are feeling sick, who do you call? (why/describe/example/feelings)
- When you need to share your feelings/experiences/talk about your day, who do you call? (why/describe/example/feelings)
- When you need money, who do you call? (why/describe/example/feelings)
- What do you receive from the people that help you? (deliverables)
- Do you have to do things in return?
- Which organizations have you been in contact with? (why/describe/example/feelings/deliverables)
- What is / who are important to you? (why/describe/example/feelings/deliverables)

- Do you feel like you have to cover parts of your connections for other connections? Do you feel safe to talk to people about other people that support you? (conflicting with each other)
- Do you feel part of a specific 'community'? (queer/refugee/Arab/ethnicity/profession) (why/describe/example/feelings/deliverables/returns)
- Do you want to have any other (or more or less intensive) contacts in your life right now? Do you miss something? Why? (explain)

Future and aspirations

- What makes you feel 'at home'/at ease/uncomfortable in the Netherlands? (why/describe/examples/feelings)
- Are you involved in activism / politics? Can you explain?
- Do you feel connected with the Dutch society and locals from Amsterdam?
- Where do you see yourself in 10 years?

Any questions/remarks/suggestions?

B.2. INTERVIEW GUIDE ORGANISATIONS / SOCIAL WORKERS

Introduction research

Emphasize before the interview/informed consent:

- The interview is anonymous and will not be shared with third parties
- Answers are experiences and thoughts – there is no right or wrong
- There is no obligation to answer and we can stop the interview at any time without any reason

The organisation / social worker

- Could you tell me something about the organisation (aim/mission)?
- How did you find the organisation? And why did you want to work with them?
- What is your role within the organisation?

The organisation and queer refugees

- What is the organisation's target group? And how to gain and maintain access to them?
- What are the demographics of the members?
- Which sexual orientation or gender identity is present among the members?
- Does the organisation approach queers/LGBT's and refugees as two separate categories/groups? How do you and the organisation perceive queer refugees?
- How do you manage stigmatisation, marginalisation and discrimination? What is your/the organisation's experience with these issues?
- Do you perceive a double stigma? Have you experienced conflict at the intersection of a member's queer and refugee identity categorisation?
- How does the organisation cope with these issues? (challenges/opportunities)
- Does the organisation cooperate with other organisations? What is the organisational network?

Network of the queer refugee (as perceived by the organisation/social worker)

- What is the assumed network of queer refugees in the Netherlands? (profession/study/hobby/house/money)
- How do they gain and maintain access to these social networks?
- Can you describe these networks in terms of density/deliverables/opportunities/challenges/ethnicity/age?
- How are these networks organised? When is one part of it (inclusion/exclusion)? And how are decisions made (hierarchy/openness)?
- Why do members want to be part of the, whether or not queer refugee, networks?
    - Gains? (information/power/feelings of home/similarities/wealth/friend/goods)
    - How are benefits divided between members of the network? Equally? Dependent on what? Based on what conditions?
    - What are the negative effects or restrictions of being member of a particular social network? Does it conflict with other networks or identities?
    - Which social groups, networks or relations are, in your opinion, most important for queer refugees in the Netherlands?
    - Are they in contact with Dutch citizens, either queer or not? (how/extend/why)

Questions/suggestions?