Mosaics of Home and Self

Exploring the Effects of Forced Displacement on National Identity and Trauma,
and the Role of Religion as an Identity Marker

Student: Meike Numeijer, S5741211

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Supervisor: Joram Tarusarira

Second Supervisor: Manoela Carpenedo Rodrigues

Faculty of Religion, Culture and Society

University of Groningen

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Abstract

This paper investigates the effects of forced displacement on the experience of national identity and national trauma. Additionally, it explores the crucial role of religion as an identity marker and tool for social cohesion, and how the feeling of belonging changes through displacement. I have used existing literature on national identity and trauma, belonging, migration, religion, and identity. Furthermore, I have formulated hypotheses based on the concepts of national identity and trauma, and the role of religion in the conceptual framework. With the literature and conceptual framework as a guide, I have conducted interviews with forcibly displaced persons. In these interviews, I found that victims of forced displacement do feel connected to other victims, however not especially based on nationality but rather on shared experiences. The participants also did not feel that their nationality was an important part of their identity, and they also often lacked a rigid sense of belonging. Lastly, although many participants do not actively practice a religion, religion was identified to be a valuable tool for social cohesion, tradition, and identity.

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Introduction

In 2024, 32.175 people requested asylum in the Netherlands because of war, violence, conflict, or persecution. Together with the 38.377 people in 2023 and the 35.535 in 2022, this shows an enormous need for asylum and safety for entire families who have been forced to flee their households in the hope of finding a safer environment elsewhere.[1] Victims of forced displacement aim to find safety away from physical violence and persecution through asylum in other nations, in this case the Netherlands.

The question this research tackles, is how identity and trauma moves and changes through borders. What marks and defines individual and collective identity? Does identity shape itself through religion[2], language, or culture? And does trauma become a part of this identity? In this paper, I use the term forced displacement rather than forced migration. Displacement is defined as:

> *The movement of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters.[3]*

The term forced migration is only used in quotes from other researchers.

The public discussion and discourse about refugees arriving in the Netherlands has been tense for many years. Recent social media discourse analysis has shown that 'headlines, pictures and terms used in posts are inciting fear, alienating refugees and create tensions between host society and refugees.'[4] The general discourse focuses on the effects of displaced people on the citizens in the host country. In Dutch news outlets like the NOS, the Dutch perspective on the arrival is highlighted through interviews with Dutch citizens.[5] There is a gap in the research on the intersection of forced displacement, national identity, national trauma, and the role of religion. And where the focus is not on the experiences of people living through forced displacement but on the experience of hosting nations[6]. This lack of knowledge and understanding of the intersection of these subjects in the lived experiences of forced displacement victims, leads to a disconnect between several segments of society. Much of the negative discourse is held in a heavily polarised playing field. According to professor

[1] "Cijfers over vluchtelingen in Nederland"
[2] Harrison Oppong, "Religion and Identity," 10-16
[3] IOM UN Migration, "Glossary on Migration"
[4] Sutkutè, "Public discourse on refugees in social media", 72-97
[5] Rams, "Van Syrië naar Nederland"
[6] Van Heelsum, "Aspirations and frustrations," p.2138

of politics Tom van der Meer, centrist parties and consequently centrist political views are no longer present in Dutch politics.[7] The content of centrist parties wasted away, and what was left behind were empty and thus contradicting stances, which has led to polarisation. There is a disconnect within Dutch society, especially towards forcibly displaced people.

The importance of this research lies in the recognition and acknowledgement of the difficulties that people encounter when forced to flee somewhere that does not align with their sense of identity and belonging. How do you acknowledge past traumas in a destination country? And does fleeing strengthen the sense of national identity or weaken it instead? These are important questions to ask and ones that are not represented enough in contemporary literature. The findings of the research are crucial to better understand the changes that significantly sized groups arriving and residing in the Netherlands are experiencing and how local communities, municipalities, and the state can keep these findings in mind while formulating expectations of integration, for example in policies. Currently, the focus within integration policy lies in the adaptation to the country of destination without enough attention to the mental and emotional consequences of the events that have led to the displacement. These consequences can be significant for the concept of identity and belonging, that in turn influence the process of integration.

In addition, this paper contributes to the existing academic discourse on the effects of conflict and consequential trauma on the perception of national identity, nor on the nexus of the subjects discussed in this paper. According to Rahim et al.[8] there is currently little discourse on how 'stressful life events are related to cultural identity conflict,' therefore this paper pays attention to this specific topic and adds to the already existing, but limited, discourse. The results of this paper provide an insight into lived experiences, to increase awareness and knowledge, and contribute to bridging the gap between communities of various cultures and nationalities in the Netherlands.

I investigate how forced displacement affects the experience of national identity and national trauma through the following questions:

How does forced displacement affect the experience of national identity and national trauma in forcibly displaced persons in the Netherlands?

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[7] Van der Meer, Waardenloze politiek, p. 4
[8] Rahim et al., "Associations among migration risk factors," 1434–1451

1. How has forced displacement influenced the experience of national trauma amongst displaced persons in the Netherlands?
2. How does forced displacement affect the sense of belonging among displaced persons in the Netherlands?
3. How do displaced persons in the Netherlands reconcile with their sense of national identity?
4. What role does religion play in the sense of national identity and belonging among displaced persons in the Netherlands?

The introductory section provides details on the topic of the research as well as the research objectives and questions. Furthermore, I explain the societal relevance of this paper. Afterwards, I present the literature review in which I discuss the research already conducted on this topic or similar topics, the conceptual framework, methodology, the findings of the in-depth interviews, and the discussion. The findings and their societal relevance are finalised, and subsequent research opportunities are discussed in the conclusion. I delve into the notions of national trauma, identity, and the feeling of belonging, how they intertwine and correlate to each other among groups of displaced persons in the Netherlands. I look at how such an intrinsic part of one's identity changes and morphs itself through situations like war, conflict, persecution, and fleeing. An important part of this research is the role of religion in the formation and retention of identity and in the feeling of belonging for forcibly displaced persons. I analyse this through qualitative research methods that are further explained in the research design section of the methodology.

The overarching objective of this research is to understand how national identity is perceived by forcibly displaced persons currently residing in the Netherlands and how, or if, national trauma has influenced this sense of identity and belonging. I have chosen to discuss the case of the Netherlands because of the intense discussion about refugees arriving and staying in the Netherlands in the last decade. To this day, opinions about the so-called 'refugee crisis' are divided in both public and political debate. In neither, the experience nor opinion of said refugees is considered. In addition, using the Netherlands as a case study allows for qualitative research in the form of in-depth interviews alongside secondary literature research, this equips the research with an extra dimension.

The conceptual framework that is used is the concept of national identity and belonging as mentioned by Madsen and Van Naerssen[9] who describe belonging in

combination with migration and diasporas. Additionally, I discuss national trauma as seen through the lens presented by Arthur G. Neal.[10] Neal discusses aspects of trauma in the individual and in the collective. Furthermore, his work shines a light on the influence of national trauma on 'restructuring a self-identity and reestablishing one's place in the broader scheme of human affairs.'[11]

I research the sense of belonging, which is tightly knit with the concept of national identity, in displaced people in the Netherlands. Through in-depth interviews I investigate how forcibly displaced people in the Netherlands experience belonging in countries of destination. To continue, I explore how the participants reconcile with the concept of national identity, for example through religion. In addition to the interviews, I use the theory by Madsen and Van Naerssen that was mentioned above and the work of Yuval-Davis.[12] As well as belonging as described by Inaç and Ünal[13].

Lastly, I analyse what factors play a role in the formation of national identity and belonging. As mentioned before, the research also investigates the role of religion as an identity and community marker. And how the role of religion, and the impact it has on forcibly displaced persons, changes through the different stages of displacement. For this I use the concepts by Eghdamian[14] and Şafak-Ayvazoğlu et al.[15] as well as additional literature.

Through these methods, this research aims to connect both theory and concepts to qualitative research methods. And by doing so, shining a light on the lived experience of 32.175 victims of forced displacement in the Netherlands.

[9] Madsen and Van Naerssen, "Migration, Identity, and Belonging," 61-75
[10] Neal, *National Trauma*
[11] Ibid*.,* p.4
[12] Yuval-Davis, "Intersectionality, Citizenship, Belonging," 561-574
[13] Inac and Ünal, "National Identity",
[14] Eghdamian, "Religious Identity," 447-467
[15] Şafak-Ayvazoğlu et al., "Acculturation of Syrian Refugees," 555-578

Literature review

Entire populations have become displaced throughout the years because of violence, war, and persecution. Such intrusive events are bound to leave an impact not only on the individual victims but on communities as well. As explained by Audergon: 'When whole communities suffer atrocity, the trauma stays in the fabric of family, community, and society for generations.'[16]

By diving into the existing literature, I was able to identify a gap in the research. Namely the relation between forced displacement and the experience of national identity and trauma. This literature review sets the stage of the context in which the research operates.

National trauma

The concept of national trauma has been researched in various contexts. Within nations, there is a shared identity, and in times of crisis and conflict this identity can be altered. Hirschberger[17] defines national trauma, otherwise known as collective trauma, as the 'psychological reactions to a traumatic event that affect an entire society.' For Hirschberger this goes hand in hand with the notion of collective memory. This definition suggests that conflict and war create a trauma beyond the individual experience. Large-scale trauma can create a deeper bond between the victims. Hirschberger argues that group identity, such as national identity, and cohesion sometimes become strengthened when the group experiences a 'feeling of shared fate and destiny' and the shared traumatic experience becomes woven into the identity.[18]

This raises critical questions, further explored by Audergon[19], who also discusses collective trauma. According to the author, it can take individuals and communities generations to start acknowledging the events of the past. She describes her experiences working with traumatised communities in post-war forums in Croatia[20], where the author pays attention to community building. In her work, Audergon discusses the 'splitting' in community reactions to severe trauma that she has seen in her work. 'Splitting' occurs when one part of the community suffers the trauma and another part wishes to leave the past in the past, thus not recognising the trauma as one of the nation or community. This happens most often in situations where minority groups have trauma inflicted on them by a socially

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[16] Audergon, "Collective Trauma," 16-31
[17] Hirschberger, "Collective Trauma"
[18] Ibid., p.4
[19] Audergon, "Collective Trauma," 16-31
[20] Ibid.

dominant group. The socially dominant group can either be the majority or people in (political) power. The phenomenon is common for groups who have oppressed or inflicted trauma on others, because these groups do not want to take accountability and rather wish to forget what has happened altogether.

These aspects described by Audergon seem mostly relevant for cases where a minority within the nation's society is targeted. However, if we look at conflicts, for example in the Middle East, it is not minorities who are targeted but the entire population. Where only a few are the exception for violence. This brings us to her next point, the trauma that is caused by the betrayal of someone that was supposed to be in charge of your protection. Consequently, in political conflicts the betrayal is done by the government who is supposed to oversee the protection of its citizens but instead became the oppressor and abuser. This is a significant contributor to trauma.[21]

Building on this research, Nytagodien and Neal argue that atrocities can cause an estrangement of the self with others even within the same nation. A culture of non-sharing about 'unspeakable' events can be created because the events in question are too uncomfortable and too awful to name.[22] This silence causes a solitary experience of grief and trauma, even when it is simultaneously a collective trauma. The authors argue that an unspoken rule becomes central within generations to not speak about the trauma that has been inflicted.

To elaborate on this claim, Janoff-Bulman argued the following:

As collective traumas become embedded in the social heritage of any given group of people, a central dialectic consists of a desire to repress or deny what happened, as well as a perceived necessity to proclaim or speak loudly about the terrible events that occurred.[23]

Janoff-Bulman's argument reaffirms in turn the point made by Audergon, that societies can have separate reactions when insufferable trauma has been inflicted. That one part of society will want to share the experiences and demand retribution, while others will wish for silence regarding the whole ordeal. Perhaps to save face, or because the guilt or shame is too much for the perpetrator to handle.[24]

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[21] Audergon, "Collective Trauma,", p.22
[22] Nytagodien and Neal, "Collective Trauma", p.467
[23] Janoff-Bulman, *Shattered Assumptions*
[24] Nytagodien and Neal, "Collective Trauma", p.466

National identity

How national identity is defined is essential for this paper. To get a clearer look at the meaning of national identity, and the prior research on this theme, I look at the work of Inaç and Ünal.[25] The authors describe identity as the descriptor of 'existence and belongingness.' In other words, what differentiates you from the other? One of the main contenders for such an indicator is nationality, the feeling of belonging within one's nation and corresponding culture. According to the authors, the notion of national identity serves as a 'guarantee and base of the national existence.'[26] This means that national identity is a cornerstone of individual identity and provides a safety net to fall back on. It creates a basis between you and the other citizens of a nation you share norms, values, traditions, language, customs, and history with. The notion of national identity also provides a 'we feeling'[27] within a society, a certain place within the global field that is shared between the citizens of that nation.

Extending this perspective, an important argument raised by Hirschberger that is essential for the scope of this paper, is the idea that national trauma can also negatively impact the notion of identity. An important contributor to this is religion. Hirschberger argues that core belief systems can become disrupted and unbalanced because of intense trauma. Often these belief systems are core elements of national identity. According to Hirschberger this counts for both victims and perpetrators:

> *Collective trauma may threaten collective identity; it may raise questions about the significance of the group, and about core belief systems for both victims (e.g., "where was God when the trauma happened?") and perpetrators ("How could my people commit such crimes?").[28]*

Migration, identity, and belonging

The goal of this paper is to recognise in what ways forced displacement changes, or upholds, the experience of national trauma and identity. Something that cannot be ignored when discussing identity, is the concept of belonging. I will further elaborate on this in the conceptual framework section, however, in this current section, I discuss how these concepts have been researched previously. How identity is formed and constructed, and how belonging is created, is much discussed by Madsen and Van Naerssen.[29] According to the authors,

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[25] Inaç and Ünal, "The Construction of National Identity," 223-232
[26] Ibid., p.230
[27] Ibid., p.231
[28] Hirschberger, "Collective Trauma", pp.3-4

identity almost always adjusts during and after migration, for the simple reason that these adjustments help accommodating to the residence. However, the authors simultaneously dismiss the argument that 'linkages and ties with the home country gradually fade away and what remains is perhaps the (unlikely) dream of returning upon retirement.'[30] Rather, the authors argue that cultural identity, ties, and traits remain strong and that a strong feeling of national identity can remain even after the settlement in a new destination. These arguments are crucial for the findings of this paper since they change the outlook on identity formation, belonging, and eventually even integration. When strong ties to the country of origin remain, it is likely that feelings of national identity will endure, or perhaps become stronger, even after forced displacement.

In the section above I briefly mentioned the idea of the 'other' being an integral part of the sense of belonging and identity. This is also recognised by Yuval-Davis.[31] However, Yuval-Davis also stresses the importance of recognising the difference between identity and belonging, and that obtaining one does not equal the obtaining of the other. The author explains that these two concepts do not necessarily go hand in hand because of the identification factor, stating the following:

> *People who are constructed to be members of other ethnic, racial and national collectives are not considered 'to belong' to the nation state community, even if formally they are entitled to.[32]*

This statement can be viewed in two ways. That is, from the viewpoint of the newcomer who will start building a life in an environment but maintains a feeling of belonging to their home country. Or from the viewpoint of the citizens in the country of destination, who accept newcomers arriving but do not feel that these people belong to their host country.

The role of religion

The intersection of religion, identity, migration, and forced displacement has been studied before to a certain extent. Grzymała-Moszczyńska and Kanal discuss the realm of religion and migration and argue about the role of religion in stages of displacement. The authors describe how religion can either be a reason for staying or leaving the country of origin in times of

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[29] Madsen and Van Naerssen, "Migration, Identity, and Belonging", 61-75
[30] Ibid. p.68
[31] Yuval-Davis, "Intersectionality, Citizenship, Belonging," 561-574
[32] Ibid.

violence, war, and persecution. 'At the psychosocial level, belonging to a threatened religious group may be a direct reason for making the decision to leave as in the case of Christians, Ismailis, and Yazidis.'[33] Religion also plays a role during the route to the country of destination, as pillar of support, finding meaning, and as an identity marker during the journey.[34]

The experience of religious minorities is also discussed and highlighted by Khatereh Eghdamian[35]. Eghdamian presents interviews held with Syrian Druze and Syrian Christian refugees, both religious minorities in Syria. The participants spoke about the religious dimensions within overall wellbeing, and the notions of inclusion and exclusion. The church, for these participants, was the main provider of social contacts and network. The church and the community were described as a source of comfort and a haven[36]. A contact source where other Christians can meet[37], note here that nationality was not as important to these participants as religious affiliation. Eghdamian's work further highlighted the difficulty experienced by Syrian refugees from religious minorities. The author described that the refugees experienced social isolation, the only exception being their contacts from their religious communities. She states:

> *Among these refugees, then, the relationship between wellbeing and a sense of inclusion or exclusion was intimately connected with their social networks that were entirely tied to their religious community.[38]*

This argument is supported by Frederiks[39], who argues that migrants, once in the country of destination, have religious communities that serve as 'sheltered spaces where people's dignity and self-worth is affirmed…'[40]

This trend continues in the work of Şafak-Ayvazoğlu et al. who have studied the acculturation of Syrian Muslims in the Netherlands and came to similar conclusions as the authors previously mentioned. The authors conclude that when minority groups experience tensions, distance, and devaluation between themselves and the dominant social group, the minority group enhances its social ties with their own minority in-group.[41] Additionally, the

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[33] Grzymała-Moszczyńska and Kanal, "Research on forced migration," 204-215
[34] Ibid.
[35] Eghdamian, "Religious Identity," 447-467
[36] Ibid., p.458
[37] Ibid.
[38] Ibid., p.459
[39] Frederiks, "Religion, Migration, and Identity", 9-29
[40] Ibid., p16
[41] Şafak-Ayvazoğlu et al., "Acculturation of Syrian Refugees," p.562

authors argue that sample participants with a stronger religious identity showed a lower commitment to the Netherlands and also reported distance between and rejection of Dutch culture and society.[42] The participants also exhibited difficulty forming attachments with Dutch people because of religious differences, for example drinking and relations with the opposite sex being *haram* (what is forbidden in Islam). This created an additional boundary between the Syrian refugees and Dutch citizens.[43]

According to Rahim et al.[44], who have studied migration risk factors and psychological well-being among young Syrian adults in the Netherlands, 'stressful life changes' such as forced displacement and the consequent mental health issues can influence the 'postmigration process', like integration within the host society.[45] Furthermore, the authors show that migration related stressors, e.g. losing social networks, social status, and loss of family, can negatively influence their sense of belonging in addition to 'bereavement for aspects of their lives and identities'.[46] Belonging and personal identity are significant markers for cultural identity.[47]

The elements discussed in this literature review, national identity and trauma, belonging, migration, forced displacement, and religion lay the basis for this research. In this chapter, I have gone through the prior research regarding subjects that give context to the research question of this paper, and I summarised the arguments made. So far, I have recognised a gap within the literature about the intersection of these topics and the relation between. Which is what I will research through in-depth interviews. The subjects mentioned are the basis for the formulation of the questions and discussion topics. In the following section, the conceptual framework is presented. This framework elaborates on the most important concepts that are mentioned in the literature review and how I use these for this paper.

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[42] Ibid., p.563
[43] Ibid., p.568
[44] Rahim et al., "Associations among migration risk factors," 1434–1451
[45] Ibid., p.1446
[46] Ibid.
[47] Ibid.

Conceptual framework

In interest of researching the effects of forced displacement on the experience of national identity and trauma, it is necessary to line up clearly how these concepts are formed. After diving into the framework of these concepts, I explain how this is used and relevant for this research. The concepts, as explained by these researchers, were chosen due to multiple reasons. Neal[48] discusses trauma on both the individual and collective scale which is helpful for the scope of the paper, and he shines a light on restructuring the identity of the self which is relevant for answering the sub-questions. This is significant for the scope of this paper because of the attention to finding a sense of belonging, engaging with new communities, and building identity after life changing experiences such as forced displacement.

Additionally, during the literature research, Neal's work came forward many times in other studies. It is therefore deemed as a relevant and trustworthy theory on national trauma. Madsen and Van Naerssen[49] were chosen because they discuss belonging significantly more in the realm of migration and diasporas[50] than other colleagues have done. Inaç and Ünal[51] discuss (collective) identity formation specifically in the case of migration which is needed for answering the research questions and formulating the interview questions of this research. Eghdamian[52] focuses on the role of religious identity in displacement for the individual and the social group. Lastly, Şafak-Ayvazoğlu et al.[53] discuss religion as an identity marker and social cohesion tool in the case of one of the largest refugee groups in the Netherlands, namely Syrian refugees.[54]

National trauma

Concepts such as national trauma and identity are difficult to pinpoint since they are emotion-based and therefore the definitions will differ immensely between individuals. Therefore, in this paper when national trauma is mentioned, the following definition is handled: '...those events that had a major impact on the institutional structure of society and fed into overriding forms of collective fear and anxiety.'[55] According to Neal, national trauma does not have to cover all individuals within a society simply because society itself is so large and complex

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[48] Neal, *National Trauma*
[49] Madsen and Van Naerssen, "Migration, Identity, and Belonging", 61-75
[50] IOM UN Migration, "Glossary on Migration": 'Migrants or descendants of migrants whose identity and sense of belonging, either real or symbolic, have been shaped by their migration experience and background…'
[51] Inaç and Ünal, "The Construction of National Identity," 223-232
[52] Eghdamian, "Religious Identity," 447-467
[53] Şafak-Ayvazoğlu et al., "Acculturation of Syrian Refugees," 555-578
[54] "Cijfers over vluchtelingen in Nederland"
[55] Neal, *Collective Trauma,* preface p.x-xi

that often people respond to atrocities with indifference.[56] It is too much or too difficult to relate to oneself. The concept of national and collective trauma refers to an experience that completely disrupts the social norm, societal structure, and the daily psychological and physiological regulation.[57] Which is exactly the case within situations of war, terror, and violence. Such conditions disrupt the entire social being and cause identity to be a detached and unidentified idea rather than that which individuals can hold on to. Causal explanations are an essential element of this. Causal explanations, according to Neal, are the assumptions made by individuals, and consequently the collective, about the cause and effect of every aspect in life. This is done by everyone in order to live in a world that is understandable.[58] Valuable assumptions for constructing the world are 'how human intentions, decisions, and actions relate and together shape the course of events.'[59] A loss of causal explanations, due to forced displacement, can affect ideas on national identity and the experience of national trauma for its victims. Neal explains that the difference between individual and collective trauma not only lies in the number of victims, but mostly in the cohesion between victims after the fact. Where an individual experience and trauma can cause rejection of the victim and isolation, the national trauma can be a source of cohesion. Emotions are recognised and affirmed by the group as being justified and correct.[60] He likewise makes a distinction between the impact trauma can have on society explaining that some traumas bring along permanent change in the social structure whereas others 'merely' have a significant impact on the emotional state of the nation.[61] The collective, and thus the national trauma, grows from a shared experience that falls outside of the happenings of daily life, during extraordinary events.[62] The concept of national trauma provides a framework for analysing how collective traumatic experiences influence the connection displaced persons feel with compatriots who have suffered the same experiences. The concept demonstrates that when trauma is experienced on a large scale, the victims often flock together instead of experiencing isolation. Based on this framework, and the findings of the literature, I hypothesise that *experiences of trauma on a larger scale causes compatriots to feel more connected to each other (H1).*

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[56] Neal, *Collective Trauma*
[57] Ibid., p.4
[58] Ibid., p.13
[59] Ibid.*,* p.13-14
[60] Ibid.*,* p.4
[61] Ibid., p.5
[62] Ibid., p.9

National identity and belonging

The literature above clearly describe the altering effects traumatic events can have on whole nations, and on the individual human psyche. According to this concept, severe events significantly shape the national identity. The identity takes shape after the society responds to a crisis. For example, winning a revolution and changing the trajectory of the nation provides society with a feeling of pride, fighting for the just cause of the people, or a feeling of unity and togetherness when fleeing from injustice in the domestic domain.[63] Neal explains the national identity as a 'system of meaning'.[64] The system of meaning is also a concept that was provided by Hirschberger, whose points I have reviewed in in the literature review, and validate Neal's concept. Hirschberger's concept explains that 'trauma fosters the sense of a collective self that is transgenerational, thereby promoting a sense of meaning and mitigating existential threat.'[65] The systems of meaning that are in place provide social continuity[66], an identity, a set of norms and values, customs, and habits for a society to hold on to. A crisis of identity and meaning happens when the usual assumptions regarding the continuity of social norm can no longer be made[67], as is the case in times of war and displacement. According to Neal, such systems of meaning provide the society with the foundation to rebuild themselves towards a 'moral community.'[68] This moral community is what sets the society apart from the rest. It builds upon the 'us vs. them' mentality and is established through 'sacred symbols.'[69] Such as memorial sites and monuments remembering the events that shaped the national identity into what it has become. This is confirmed by Madsen and Van Naerssen who argue that symbols and rituals serve as a 'construction of a common, usually heroic, past.'[70] For example, says Neal, the Canadian national identity is shaped along the lines of 'we are not Americans,'[71] segregating themselves from the others and by doing so defining an in-group. This concept is affirmed by Madsen and Van Naerssen who argue the following:

> *Borders between countries ideally delineate and signify different identities on both sides of those borders and the projection of countries (especially when regarded as nation-states) as significant cornerstones of identities.*[72]

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[63] Neal, *Collective Trauma*, p.23
[64] Ibid., p.21
[65] Hirschberger, "Collective Trauma", p.2
[66] Neal, *Collective Trauma,* p.31
[67] Ibid., p.31
[68] Ibid., p.22
[69] Ibid.
[70] Madsen and Van Naerssen, "Migration, Identity, and Belonging", p.62
[71] Neal, *Collective Trauma*, p.23

This once more shows that the formation of an 'us vs. them' or an in- and out-group is highly efficient for the formation of national identity. Based on Neal's concept of national identity I hypothesise that *forced displacement causes a strengthened feeling of national identity in pursuit of staying connected to the nationality and country of origin (H2).*

A concept that is crucial when discussing identity, is the concept of belonging. According to Inaç and Ünal, the feeling of belonging has a great impact on adopting possible other identities, such as national identity within the country of destination.[73] The feeling of belonging is described by the authors as 'the 'we-feeling' which is shared by all individuals living within certain geographical frontiers'.[74] Significant for the concept of belonging is not simply nationality or ethnicity, but the idea of a shared interest in the future orientation of the country that serves as a basis for belonging and national identity.[75] The common interest in the wealthy future for the country in which everyone feels they want to and should be a part of. This is an indispensable part to research within forced displacement. Does this common interest stay in place, or does it move through borders together with the person?

Moreover, the authors argue that borders are an integral part of identity formation. Because identity construction is a flowing process and not static or set in stone, it adjusts, reorders, and re-borders itself continuously.[76] Which is why national identity is crucial to research in the realm of forced displacement. Does the identity move together with the people, or does it cling to what once was? Madsen and Van Naerssen touch upon this issue stating, 'how does one maintain identity and sense of self in the presence of major "illegal" flows through the border area they call home?'[77] According to the authors, these flows elicit two responses. Either people on the move connect intensely with the host state or protest the state and its policies. To go even further, the authors argue that people on the move 'look explicitly across the border to another nation, if not its state embodiment, in a transnational manifestation of identity.'[78] It can be imagined that when forced to flee the country of origin, with or without family, under traumatising circumstances, destabilises the once static perception of identity and belonging. It is crucial in such situations that one remains hopeful and has trust in the country of destination, which can all be contributing factors to the

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[72] Madsen and Van Naerssen, "Migration, Identity, and Belonging", p.62
[73] Inac and Ünal, "National Identity", p.225
[74] Ibid., p.230
[75] Ibid., p231
[76] Madsen and Van Naerssen, "Migration, Identity, and Belonging," p.62
[77] Ibid., p.67
[78] Ibid.

idealisation and manifestation of identity in a new home. These concepts show that for the formation of national identity, it is important to form an in- and out-group, an 'us vs. them' mentality, in order to understand who you can forge a connection with and to feel belonging within a group. Based on these concepts I hypothesise that *displaced persons experience a less intense feeling of belonging because of a forced and unwilling removal from home and community (H3)*.

In the context of forced displacement, or migration in general, transnationalism is a concept that is often at hand. Madsen and Van Naerssen define transnationalism as 'belonging both to the community of the receiving country and community in the country of origin.'[79] Because of modern communication methods such as constant online news outlets, texting, phone calls, emails, and the internet, it is easier to maintain in some form a strong feeling of identity with the country of origin. With as a result that diasporas do not integrate or 'fade away' as fast or as efficiently as they used to.[80] This concept provides a framework for understanding how national identity is sustained through forced displacement. This leads to the hypothesis that *displaced persons try to reconnect with the sense of national identity through traditions and customs, also in the country of destination (H4)*.

Madsen and Van Naerssen especially highlight the case of the Dutch integration methods over the years, and the effects of transnationalism on these policies. As stated in their work, the response of several Dutch politicians through the years to migration 'streams'[81] has not always been welcoming. Some Dutch politicians took it upon themselves to plead for a strengthening of the Dutch national identity by highlighting the importance of traditions and history.[82] It can be assumed that in social contexts such as these, transnationalism, and national identity corresponding with the country of origin rather than with the country of destination is deemed dangerous, hinders integration, and a threat to cohesion.[83] It should be emphasised that the formation of national identity according to traumatic events can go either one of two ways, depending on whether the nation, or any other collective, belongs to a perpetrator or victim group. This can also change the perspective on what the national identity should consist of. If the nation has conveyed behaviour which was traumatic for the other, it can become an expectation for this to be a part of the national identity. To ensure

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[79] Madsen and Van Naerssen, "Migration, Identity, and Belonging,", p.68
[80] Ibid.
[81] The word streams is used in Madsen and Van Naerssen to describe a relatively larger number of migrants. It is important to note that words like these are often used to paint a worse picture of the situation than the reality is.
[82] Madsen and Van Naerssen, "Migration, Identity, and Belonging", p.70
[83] Ibid., p.71

remembrance, especially if there has not been adequate repentance for the victim.[84] Traumatic events, either on an emotional or structural level, tend to be either highlighted, severely relativised, or ignored in order to save the image of the moral community that lies the foundation for the collective identity.[85]

The role of religion

Neal's concept of national trauma has shown that impactful collective experiences can be a source of cohesion. This is also shown to be true for religion. Eghdamian's work shines a light on Syrian religious minorities residing in Jordan. And, among others, the role of religious identity in 'experiences of and responses to displacement.'[86] In her work, Eghdamian discusses the meaning of wellbeing as experienced by her target group, Syrian Christian, and Syrian Druze refugees. The results of the interviews have shown a strong correlation between the experience of wellbeing, social cohesion, and religion. With the exception of their personal religious communities, the interview participants experienced isolation, exclusion, discrimination, and sometimes even physical or verbal violence based on their religion.[87] Therefore, the divide between religious minorities and the host community was strong.[88] An interesting and useful point made, is that assimilation and adaption to the host community can be both inclusionary and exclusionary simultaneously.[89] This is because while it is important for forcibly displaced people to integrate in the host community, it often happens that there is no room for all habits and traditions of the displaced community. Eghdamian works in the context of Christians and Druze in majority Muslim societies, but the same can be said about religious minorities in a secular/Christian country. This goes hand in hand with the statement that religious identity of displaced minority groups can be overlooked in the host country.[90] Contrary to these findings, Eghdamian shows that religion can also be a helpful tool for social cohesion and play a role in mobilising individuals and communities.[91]

Şafak-Ayvazoğlu et al. also describe the concepts of religious identity and social cohesion, this time in the case of Muslim minority groups in the Netherlands. These results are similar to the ones above. Religion impacts acculturation, according to Şafak-Ayvazoğlu et al.[92] by being a strong identity marker and tool for social cohesion within minority groups.

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[84] Neal, *Collective Trauma*, p.30
[85] Ibid., p.32
[86] Eghdamian, "Religious Identity," p.448
[87] Ibid.
[88] Ibid., p.459
[89] Ibid.
[90] Ibid.
[91] Ibid., p.464

However, a stronger religious identity and strong social ties to the religious community leads to a disconnect and lack of attachment to the host community and culture.[93] The research additionally shows that minority groups who deal with exclusion and social distance connect with the minority even more.[94]

These concepts of religious identity and social cohesion are combined for this research. The overlap in the results of these two research initiatives show the importance of investigating the role of religion as an identity marker and how this role changes through forced displacement. And these concepts provide a strong framework for analysing how religion exactly works as an identity marker and which role it plays in social cohesion through displacement. Based on these concepts I hypothesise that *religion is a significant identity marker and plays an important role in the feeling of belonging within a community and country (H5).* These hypotheses are presented again in the discussion, within the context of the data obtained through in-depth interviews. Based on this data, the hypotheses are either proven correct or rejected.

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[92] Şafak-Ayvazoğlu et al., "Acculturation of Syrian Refugees," 555-578
[93] Ibid.
[94] Ibid., p.562

Methodology

In this chapter I describe the research design and methods that I use to answer the question in place. The methodology guides the response to the following question: *'How does forced displacement affect the experience of national identity and national trauma in forcibly displaced persons in the Netherlands?'* The primary source of knowledge is provided through in-depth interviews. In these interviews I have asked various questions regarding the respondent's personal experience. How the interviews are structured and the questions that are asked can be found in the sections below.

This research is qualitative and interpretive.[95] Qualitative research is loosely defined by Mason as research that is 'concerned with how the social world is interpreted, understood, experienced, produced or constituted', 'based on methods of data generation which are both flexible and sensitive to the social context in which data are produced', and 'aims to produce rounded and contextual understandings on the basis of rich, nuanced, and detailed data.'[96] As I use interviews and additional literature analysis, the research is deemed interpretive, due to interviews exploring the individual and collective experiences without immerging in the target group as a researcher. With interpretive research, people are seen as the primary data source, and their point of view is considered the data rather than the view of the researcher.[97] In the next section I discuss the specific methods that are used as part of this research.

Methods

In-depth interviews

The concepts and experiences covered in this work are person-bound and can therefore differ among individuals. To ensure that these experiences are covered properly and meaningfully, in-depth interviews are necessary. The interviews are semi-structured; I have prepared an interview guide prior to the interviews, where I described the questions meant for the participants. This interview guide helped in the preparation, and it has been added as an annex to this paper. The interviews are semi-structured, to leave room for follow-up questions wherever this is relevant or necessary. The less rigid structure leaves room for the conversation to flow in a natural manner that gives the interviewee space to mention everything that comes to mind and for the interviewer to ask questions that come up along the way. Semi-structured interviews are not only useful for allowing more information but also

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[95] Mason, "Qualitative Researching," p.56
[96] Ibid., p.3
[97] Ibid., p.56

when other circumstances, such as language barriers, make it difficult for the interviewee to understand the gravity of the questions asked. A semi-structured interview allows the researcher to make adjustments and shifts, or to cut out questions altogether, as was the case with some of the interviews conducted for this paper. Finally, the semi-structured interview can feel to the interviewee as 'conversation with a purpose'[98] which is also an element of the informal, comfortable interview atmosphere which I believe is crucial when discussing heavy topics such as the ones in this research.

The total sample consisted of nine individuals. To ensure a large enough scope for the research methods, I have chosen not to select on nationality, ethnicity, or religion. Instead, my interview sample was selected based on similar displacement backgrounds or reasons for displacement, war, violence, and persecution. I reached my target group in numerous ways. With the help of contacts who work with 'Dutch as a second language' (N2T) classes, through contacts at the university, and through contacts made during my Bachelor thesis. I found participants through random connections and acquaintances. Finding enough participants turned out to be quite the challenge, however, since I anticipated that this would be the case, I planned in enough time to find participants, conduct interviews, and analyse the results. In addition to these methods, I used snowball[99] sampling, where I asked my available participants to connect me with any other relevant and interested persons in their circles. Although this can lead to some limitations, such as possible selection bias since the sample is less random or a more homogeneous sample, it is still a valuable form of sampling. This limitation was handled by having multiple chains of participants that came from various first contacts that are not familiar with each other. The participants were contacted through my contact persons first and at a later point by me via text message and email. In some cases, the participants were contacted by me directly via email. As preparation for the interviews, I shared the informed consent form. This form was also reviewed together on the day of the interviews. The interviews were in person to ensure a comfortable and smooth working atmosphere which is of importance with heavy topics such as these. Once an interview was conducted through Google Meet due to planning and distance issues. Although this is not an ideal situation for interviews, it did allow me to be more flexible in my sample. It is important to note that the interviews were sometimes done with the help of Google Translate for the translation of questions and answers. Besides offering the interviewees the possibility to do the interview in

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[98] Mason, "Qualitative Researching," p.67
[99] Ibid., p.142

either English or Dutch, some of the interviewees indicated they were not comfortable with speaking either language and therefore wanted to have a conversation with the help of an online translation tool. A downside to this is that both questions and answers are simplified with these tools leading to a reduction of depth. Despite this perhaps having led to simplified questions and answers than in other interviews, the online translation tool did allow for some interviews to happen at all. And therefore, led to interesting conversations and insights.

The interviews discussed subcategories that covered the research questions established in the introduction. The categories are personal information and displacement experience, connection to the environment and country of origin, identity and its preservation, the experience of trauma and the Netherlands' approach to these topics. For each subcategory, questions were prepared and there was room for further discussion and follow-up questions. The exact, prepared, questions can be found in the interview guide that is added as an annex to this paper. In practice, the prepared questions were not always asked exactly. The final questions can be found in the transcriptions of the interviews. These are not added to the annex for the sake of the length of the document but can be retrieved upon request.

After finding participants and conducting interviews, it is necessary to attach meaning to the answers that have been given. There are multiple steps to the analysis of the interviews, the first one being transcription. I requested permission to record the individual interviews, eight participants agreed with being recorded. These recordings were then transcribed with the transcription tool Good Tape. Good Tape is a subscription-based transcription tool. I chose this specific tool due to the enhanced privacy settings. Good Tape is fully GDPR-compliant, data is encrypted using Advanced Encryption Standard (AES-256) and stored within the European Union, and the files are never used for training AI models, cyborgs, or Skynet.[100] In addition to transcribing the interviews manually, afterwards I listened to the recordings again and adjusted or added where this was necessary. During two interviews I did not record. Once because permission was denied, and once during the online interview because the sound was suboptimal. In both cases, I simply wrote down notes during the conversations and made summaries of the interviews instead of transcriptions. In the interviews done with online translation tools, there was less spoken language. Therefore, the recordings were shorter and contained less speech, making it doable to also summarise these interviews rather than transcribe.

The transcription of interviews is not solely useful as a reminder of what has been

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[100] "Security"

said. To analyse the results of interviews it is important to provide meaning to certain concepts, words, or phrases that are mentioned. Coding is a necessary step in the analysis of qualitative data. By connecting certain code words or phrases it becomes possible to see patterns in the answers and truly see if participants provide you with similar answers or if these are further apart. Coding is described by Saldana as follows:

> *In qualitative data analysis, a code is a researcher-generated interpretation that symbolizes or "translates" data, and thus attributes meaning to each individual datum for later purposes of pattern detection, categorization, theme, assertion or proposition development, theory building, and other analytic processes.*[101]

By analysing summaries and transcriptions it is possible to see recurring themes and patterns, also because similar questions are asked to the participants. For this paper I have used both inductive and deductive coding, meaning that the codes have emerged from the data and codes emerged from the research prior to conducting data. Within the coding methods I have used descriptive and thematic coding. First, I applied general themes in the collected data to identify patterns in the answers, then specific descriptors were added to the themes to make distinctions within the broader analysis. Coding can be done through online programmes, however I chose to do this manually since this was still doable with the amount of data. The finalised codes and attached excerpts from the interviews can be found in the annex made into a codebook. While coding the transcripts of the conversations I decided to divide certain answers and quotations in three sections namely: the broad use of religion for the analytical perspective, insider, and outsider perspective, and lastly religion as an intertwining element.

Validity[102] of the research can be at risk within research conducted through semi-structured interviews by a single researcher. To ensure validity, meaning if this research measures what it is supposed to measure, I have used literature and the interview guide to manoeuvre the interview and coding process. Additionally, I have used direct quotes from the interviews.

This study uses qualitative research design, in the form of in-depth interviews, to explore and narrate the individual and collective experiences of forcibly displaced persons in the Netherlands within the realm of identity, belonging, and trauma. This approach was chosen to gain deeper insight into the lived experience. The use of semi-structured interviews allows me and the participants to share and ask freely, to ensure that important information is

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[101] Saldana, *The Coding Manual,* p.33
[102] Mason, "Qualitative Researching," p.39

not passed over. Limitations within the research design are due to the use of snowball sampling which can create a selection bias or a homogeneous sample. This is resolved by not relying on a single participant but using more contact persons and thus having multiple chains of participants. Participants are targeted through purposively chosen contact persons, where there is no snowball sampling at hand. These methods, together with the literature and the conceptual framework, provide a strong foundation for the findings and the analysis which are presented in the following chapters.

Findings of the research

The concept of nationality, belonging to one's country, and feeling pride in one's country, can already be abstract depending on individual background. What if you and your family moved a lot when you were younger? What if you have two or even more passports? Or what if you were born in one country while your entire family was born in another? These are all questions that highlight the abstractness of nationality and the individual experience. However, what happens to the concept of identity and belonging when you have been aggressively forced to leave your home? What happens when entire populations are forced to leave their home? And what happens to the concept of identity when it is faced with intense trauma? These are some of the questions that this research concerns itself with. Previous chapters describe the findings of preliminary research. In the literature review, research on national trauma showed that traumatic events can affect entire societies and become part of the collective identity.[103] This research also mentioned the difference in coping mechanisms within the same nation, depending on the role in the trauma.[104] Research showed that national trauma can also deeply impact the feeling of identity, with shaken belief systems.[105] And lastly, that feelings of national identity can remain strong even after migration.[106] These findings led to the hypothesis that *forced displacement causes a stronger feeling of national identity through the shared experience of trauma*. Here I disclose and present the findings of these interviews.

The interviews cover the topics personal information and the displacement experience, connection to the environment and country of origin, identity and its preservation, the experience of trauma, the Netherlands' approach to refugees. They were questioned in a more random order rather than the one prepared, following the flow of the conversation. This was allowed for by the semi-structured approach of these interviews. For the sake of clarity, I exhibit the evidence thematically. These themes are derived from the codes that were used to analyse the findings of the in-depth interviews. The themes are presented in the following order: Displacement journey, Emotion and traumatic experience; National trauma; National identity and belonging; Attachment and forging connections; Identity formation; The role of religion; Governance of forced displacement. The questions have been asked to a sample of nine participants, both male and female, from the ages of 21 to 50. Four participants were

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[103] Hirschberger, "Collective Trauma", p.4
[104] Audergon, "Collective Trauma," 16-31
[105] Hirschberger, "Collective Trauma," pp.3-4
[106] Madsen and Van Naerssen, "Migration, Identity, and Belonging," pp. 61-75

Ukrainian, three Syrian, one Iraqi, and one Turkish. Syria, Iraq, and Türkiye are the top three countries with most asylum claims here in the Netherlands and are therefore useful and representative sample participants.[107] Three participants consider themselves Muslim, one Yezidi, and one Christian. Four participants do not consider themselves particularly religious, however the religious influence in their lives has been Christian as well. The interviews have been transcribed and/or summarised and afterwards coded through the means of deductive and inductive coding. For a more extensive explanation of the sample, the progression, and the analysis of the interviews, please see the methodology, and the code book in the annex.

To ensure valuable insights into the long-term effects of forced displacement on the experience and feeling of national identity and trauma, I searched for interview participants who have been residing in the Netherlands for a longer period of time. Consequently, none of the interview participants were residing in asylum seeker centres at the time of the interview but rather have already been given a residence permit and housing. A longer stay in the Netherlands allows for an adjustment to life in the destination country and perhaps more importantly, time away from one's country of origin, culture, and compatriots. These factors lead to a defined idea of one's identity and the feeling of belonging. Additionally, it gives time to reflect on one's own (traumatic) experiences in a steady environment. All participants have been residing in the Netherlands for a period extending from one to eleven years and have all been granted a residence permit. Furthermore, some participants are in the process of becoming Dutch citizens and adding to their registered nationality.

Displacement journey, emotions, and traumatic experiences
In this first segment, I present the findings that I categorised under these themes with help of the codebook. When asked about the journey that led them, the participants, towards the Netherlands, answers varied. Some participants travelled for a few weeks or months, for others the journey took up to a year and a half, including the waiting period in other countries such as Greece. However, all participants explained similar experiences of significant stress and fear regarding the experience of displacement, both on the journey itself and the circumstances that led to the journey. 'In Ukraine there was panic. Everything fell. I lived in a proper home, 1 kilometre away a missile was dropped' (participant four), 'my mother lives 60 kilometres from the front. Every day I hear these boom, boom, boom, every day. My son asked what [that sound] is'[108] (participant five). Two Ukrainian participants shared these

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[107] "Cijfers over vluchtelingen in Nederland"

experiences when they spoke about the situation at home. Both also explained the fear they still feel as a direct result. This fear, as a consequence of traumatic experiences, was also shared by other participants:

> *In the beginning in Greece and also here in the Netherlands, I always had nightmares about this. Yeah, it just stays. Ten years ago, I was not like this. I had different ideas. I saw life differently than I do now* (participant three).

The participants described fear during almost all stages of their displacement. There was fear of being caught fleeing by militant groups. This was mostly described by Middle Eastern participants, or fear of the unknown, what life and treatment would await. The participants often used words such as 'nightmares,' 'forced,' 'alone,' 'unsafe,' or 'never forget.' This shows the intensity of the situation. Fear, however, was not the only prominent emotion that was shown when speaking about the displacement journey. In addition, uncertainty was a significant factor for the participants. Similarly to fear, this was not focused on one single element or period but reigned over everything. 'I was planning on only coming for one or two months, I thought that it would end' is what one participant said regarding her coming to the Netherlands. Now, three years later, it is still not certain when she will be able to return. These answers highlight the lasting effects of forced displacement on the overall emotional and mental well-being of forcibly displaced adults. Uncertain situations in the country of origin, and the country of destination, but also uncertainty regarding the state of one's family, the factors create room for interpretation and fear of the unknown or of the worst possible outcome.

National trauma

Building on this, I present the findings regarding the experience of national and collective trauma before I continue to national identity. In general, the participants admitted to experiencing a bond between themselves and their peers.[109] Not only in relation to nationality, ethnicity, religion, or language, but also regarding surviving war, violence, and all traumatic experiences thereof. The answers of the interviewees told of personal traumatic situations and of collective situations. Participant three:

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[108] The quotes used in this paper are sometimes not direct but rather translated. This is because some of the interviews were conducted and transcribed in Dutch. For the sake of clarity and continuity all quotes have been translated to English and also paraphrased where necessary.

[109] With peers, I refer to other forcibly displaced adults. These peers can be from similar ethnic and national backgrounds or from different backgrounds.

Actually, we [Yezidi's] were all forced to leave my city. I experienced it also because of my religion and because of escaping bad situations. All of that has changed me. There are also bad situations. But we [participant and peers] talk, I still talk about it. Because there is no other way. It has happened. Many people I know get mental health problems because of everything. And people just want to work, to send money home because the parents cannot do anything there.

In this quote the participant describes the shared experience where essentially his entire city had to evacuate to find safety and shelter. Mainly because practitioners of his faith are discriminated against. During the conversation, the interviewee explained the bond that is forged over knowing someone has suffered the same or in similar ways to you. Participant six had similar thoughts regarding the situation for inhabitants of Syria. He said: 'if you are not Alawi, you are not going to have a chance.' He aimed at the now fallen Assad regime in Syria, that strongly favoured people from Alawi faith. The interviewee explained that thus, when you meet other Syrians, it is important to know what denomination they adhere to. In case they are adherents to the regime. However, the interviewee expressed how for all non-Alawi citizens of Syria, there is a collective memory and trauma regarding the treatment of the Assad regime. Participant seven echoed these thoughts, and proclaimed that: 'It was unsafe, I had to tell lies about myself.' In this quote, the participant thinks back to the polarisation in Türkiye, where the followers of the Erdogan-government and opposition supporters are diametrically opposed to one another. When I asked the participant if she feels a connection to other Turkish people in the Netherlands based on nationality, she highlighted the important fact that she first must know 'whose side they are on, and if these people are against us [the participant and her family].' She continued:

There is no justice in Türkiye, that is why we came here. My father had to go to prison and stayed there for about four years. That was very difficult for us. We were in poverty and really had the feeling of living without a father.

With this statement, the participant expressed traumatic experiences in the country of origin, which according to her, are not unique. Türkiye exists as a strongly polarised state; it is known that there are opponents to Erdogan but there are also supporters. Not knowing who is on which side can create dangerous situations. This creates a collective feeling of fear for everyone who does not adhere to the government. The national fear and trauma are also described by participant eight: 'I will never forget. Syrians have two faces. We are free but we cannot forget. We have changed.' While saying this, the participant is thinking about the

cruelties his family has had to endure under the Assad regime. And of the harrowing escape route he took together with other refugees to survive. Participant eight feels the presence of collective trauma strongly. He describes the bond he feels with others from Syria who have had to endure similar things. This collective suffering makes him only more persistent in his fight for and faith in the revolution. He describes it as not only peace for the non-Alawi Syrians but rather for all Syrians everywhere.

National identity and belonging

When having to find a way in an unstable situation and emotional state, it is crucial to find connection and a sense of belonging wherever possible. Belonging is one of the key concepts in this paper and refers to the 'we-feeling' that is felt and shared by individuals living within 'certain geographical frontiers.'[110] As described in the literature review, the sense of belonging goes further than nationality or ethnicity. Belonging and national identity go hand in hand and are formed strongly on the basis of 'shared interest for the future orientation of the country.'[111] To understand the effects of forced displacement on the feeling of national identity, belonging is a key element that cannot be ignored. However, according to the in-depth interviews, belonging is not a straightforward concept in the case of forced displacement. Often, the participants expressed mixed feelings of belonging or even dual belonging, both in the country of origin and destination. One participant explained: 'I have two hearts, one I left behind, one started beating here. The respect and regulations I searched for I found in the Netherlands, but my feeling is in Syria' (participant nine). Participant three had a similar experience with feeling belonging, or perhaps not feeling belonging, in two countries:

> *I was gone from my city for ten years. And, my feeling, my heart, was completely cold. But when I visited, I had a strong feeling that this is my village, my city, my country, my home. That really is home.*

For participant three it is important to note that he is Yezidi, a religious minority in Iraq. He and many of his community live together in a particular city in Iraq. As a result, this participant more often speaks of 'his city' rather than 'his country,' due to the discrimination that is shown towards his people by other countrymen. Other participants showed a stronger feeling of belonging for either the country of origin or of destination. Participant one explained: 'There is a connection, these people [Ukrainians] look like us, we have the same mentality. There has been a war in my country, but I have lived for and loved my country. I

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[110] Inac and Ünal, "National Identity", p.230
[111] Ibid., p.231

have become prouder.' Participants four and five, both also from Ukraine, had another opinion. 'Now I think my home is the Netherlands', 'I feel that my home is the Netherlands. Because the future for my son is better here.' Participant eight had a similar feeling regarding the Netherlands: 'The Netherlands is more like a home to me now. Because I live here and because of the reason we had to leave Türkiye.' Again, other participants felt no clear sense of belonging at all. Participant six explained his feelings as follows:

> I have no feelings about my home country. For me, I have no belonging for anything. I do not belong to my country because I have never visited. I don't belong to Saudi Arabia because I could not complete my life there. I do not belong to my religion. My only belonging is to my family.

As can be seen from the quotes, the feeling of belonging to one particular country is not a given. Only one participant clearly stated a strong feeling of belonging to her country of origin while the remaining eight participants either felt belonging in two communities or in none. These findings reveal that national identity and belonging, which go hand in hand, are not as set in stone as one might initially expect. During the in-depth interviews, particular participants expressed mixed feelings regarding their nationality and their nation. Many hold the opinion that there is love for their country, but because they have experienced suffering and grievances, this love and pride has faded. Participant three said the following about why his parents and grandparents perhaps feel more pride towards Iraq than himself: 'The longer you are there, the stronger this bond becomes. Nationalism is different now. Perhaps if I had been born 10.000 years ago, I would have been more proud.' In this quote, the participant, who is thirty years old himself, explained that he has never witnessed a truly peaceful Iraq. He has only known Iraq for bringing suffering to him, his family, and his people. This sentiment was shared by participant six who said: 'We miss our village, but we only suffered in Syria. We only see suffering because of this nationality, because we have this passport.' Participant four agreed to these statements in a separate tone: 'I am not a patriot. And I am not proud of Ukraine.' Other participants viewed their nationality as something flexible, or even unimportant or meaningless. Participant seven was very adamant about the unimportance of nationality. She said: 'I am Turkish, but my nationality is not the reason that I am who I am.' Participant nine did feel some form of attachment to her nationality but as with many others, this was not for one nation only. 'But I am not only Syrian, where I feel comfortable is home. Just because I was born there does not mean that my nationality is fixed.' One contradicting opinion was proposed by participant eight, who said: 'I am proud to be Syrian. This feeling

has only grown stronger since the revolution.' Nevertheless, contrary to the stated hypothesis, the participants do not all experience a strengthened attachment to national identity after forced displacement.

Attachment and forging connection

This directs attention to the idea of attachment, a notion that was discussed considerably during the in-depth interviews. I questioned three forms of attachment, namely attachment to the country/community of origin, attachment to the country/community of destination, and attachment to peers. The first focused on contact with friends and family and maintaining customs and traditions. The second focused on specific actions taken to connect with the host community. The third focused on the forging of connections based on similar, traumatic, situations.

All participants showed a great interest in connection to the country and community of origin. Everyone who still has family and loved ones residing in warzones try to be in contact with them as much as possible. The ability for contact is often dependent on the availability of electricity and internet connections, which are most often unstable or lacking. Participant four shared: 'I call [my family] five times per day. It is an awful situation.' Other participants focused more on the content of the conversations, and on ensuring a positive atmosphere. Participant nine: 'My family is not completely honest when they say how they are doing, to make sure I don't worry too much. I am also not completely honest, so they don't worry too much about me. It is a precaution.' This was echoed by participant four who said: 'we make jokes [during the calls], first I was stressed but then you repeat the same thing a lot. Now it is ok, there is no stress.' When asked about maintaining traditions and customs while living in a new country, most answers of the interviewees were similar. Almost all participants celebrate the same holidays as they did before the displacement. For many this coincides with feelings of familiarity and connection to their family and loved ones, and culture. However, celebrating traditional holidays can be difficult in this environment. Participant six: '[We celebrate] Ramadan and Eid. You have to visit people and people visit you. Here it is a bit hard, we adjust it.' Participant seven was outspoken about the many customs that are kept in place: 'We really have many customs. For example, eating together. It is not a rule, but we do it.' and 'For example Eid al-Fitr and Ramadan, they come from religion, but it is also tradition. And either together as well. We find family really important, that is also part of our religion.' Two Ukrainian participants however, admitted to only celebrating Dutch holidays anymore because of differences in the calendar. 'Celebrating traditions is a bit hard because

Christmas is on another date in Ukraine, which means we don't have the day off' (participant four).

Because all interviewees have been residing in the Netherlands for a minimum of one year, all participants have active social lives. All participants agreed on the importance of keeping busy and on finding a community. When asked about the connection to the community of destination, there were distinct answers. Some participants were quite confident and enthusiastic when talking about the destination community. 'We are friends with everyone. We cannot understand everything, but the principle is the same' (participant one) or 'the Netherlands have given me everything that Syria couldn't, it brought me from death to life' (participant eight). Some participants told of the difficulties with adjusting to a new life and a new culture. 'It was difficult, but in Greece more than here. Because then I took a bigger step [than from Greece to the Netherlands]' (participant three). He elaborated: 'going back to Iraq is not an option anymore. So, I just had to accept and start my life here'. Participant three explained the difficulties that can come when trying to fit into a culture and having to adjust or perhaps even change yourself: 'I have also built a new personality to be able to integrate here properly in the Netherlands.' In contradiction to this prior section, the interviews also brought forth situations of detachment. An inability to forge connections to and with the destination community. Participant nine, for example, said the following:

> *They* [Dutch people] *are not from our faith and not from our culture. We have come from a very difficult situation, and I am trying to make it better. Interacting with my people is easier because they know the language and culture. Dutch people have less understanding of this. Then I have to explain everything.*

In this particular example, the participant was explaining how she tries to instil Syrian and Christian culture in her children as much as she can while raising them. In her experience, this has proven quite difficult because her children attend a Dutch school with Dutch children and there is a significant difference in customs. On the other hand, because she and her children practice Christian faith, she does experience more flexibility in practicing this faith in the Netherlands than in Syria regarding public holidays and church community.

When asked about forging connections with peers, all participants agreed that enduring similar traumatic experiences and suffering forces a bond with each other. This bond is forged through understanding and a free space to speak and to share, but also to leave it behind and focus on the future instead. Participant four elaborated on the question: 'Of course [there is a bond], we help each other every time. But sometimes there are fights as well. And

every time we speak about the situation in Ukraine.' Participant six told a story about how he met his best friend in a store because he heard him speaking Arabic while in the Netherlands: 'I tell him everything and he tells me everything because we have the same experiences.' Participant three has a similar habit: 'When I meet new people and this person was also in Greece, during the same period, I immediately ask where this person stayed.' Participant three explains his efforts to meet peers while in the Netherlands. Besides currently being part of a choir specifically for refugees, he explained other hobbies that put him in touch with likeminded people. Participant three: 'Before the choir I was with another group, an Arab reading group.' Two participants are volunteers. When I asked what brought them to the organisation, there were numerous reasons. A prominent reason was the wish to connect with and help other forcibly displaced people. May it be through simply talking to one another, or helping with translating official documents, the participants felt great joy being able to connect in such a way.

One component that is crucial when discussing attachment in whatever form and to whichever community, is language. Language has been brought up by all participants individually, provoked and unprovoked, with one participant saying, 'language is the key.' The key, he says, to connection. Both as a connection to Dutch society but also to find and forge connections to the country of origin in a new place. Participant seven explains: 'We are getting used to the culture now, but the language is a problem. I understand Dutch and I speak it as well, but not like a Dutch person.' This shows the disconnect between people caused by language barriers. Both participants four and five expressed their difficulties with the Dutch language: 'I find the language difficult' (participant four) and 'I don't have time to study Dutch' (participant five). On the other hand, language is a crucial element to stay connected to one's roots. The participants agreed with the statement that language is a binding factor. Participant three: '[I feel] connection because we speak the same language, also because we are from the same country.' This sentiment was agreed upon by more participants: 'I love Arabic. If I speak Arabic with someone who speaks Arabic, you are going to be more open to each other because we are in a country where no one speaks Arabic' (participant six) and 'in the area there are not many people who speak Arabic' (participant three). The latter quote expresses a dependence on others who do speak Arabic, sometimes that draws people together in an area where you are one of few.

Identity formation

In the discussion of national identity, belonging, and attachment, it is fitting to discuss individual identity as well. What does one deem important for their identity and what is not important at all? During the interviews I asked the participants how they stayed in touch with their own identity throughout and after displacement. As shown in a previous section, the nationality factor is not as important for all participants. When asked what is indicative for them, there were some similarities. The most prominent similarity was the language factor. Across all participants it was agreed that language is important to feel connected to one's roots but also for integration in the community. Afterwards, the participants had various ideas of what was important for personal identity. Components such as work and personal hobbies were mentioned a few times. 'I love my job,' said participant five. Participant four expressed 'When you ask this, I think about my job. I do not know why but I think about my job. And I have running as a hobby, it is very important.' All interviewees seemed slightly confused at first when I asked about personal identity, therefore most stuck to broader themes such as nationality, religion, and belonging. Participant seven was expressive about religion not being an important factor for her personal identity: 'But actually, I think that those things [religion] are not too important [for identity]. It is according to the people themselves. Being friendly and kind is important.' This contrasts the quote given earlier by participant nine who said, 'Christianity is more my nationality [than being Syrian is].' Accordingly, this next section will discuss the indispensable role of religion in this research.

The role of religion

A valuable component of this research is the role of religion. Before conducting the interviews, I prepared questions regarding the faith, or lack thereof, of the interviewees. There were participants who would not consider themselves particularly religious. For example, participants one and two said they are religious 'maybe sometimes, during the holidays.' On the other hand, for the majority of the participants, religion certainly is an important component. Both religion as a tradition that have turned into customs, and religion as true faith. When asked whether there are certain traditions that have been kept alive after the displacement, there were similar reactions. Participant seven said '[I am Muslim] but I do not wear a hijab, it usually is mandatory, but it is also up to the individual.' Participant eight said: 'Religion is normal for my family. Religion in Syria is how you act with yourself and with the people. If you act good with yourself and with the people, you are a good religious person.' Religion here is described as the common instead of the exception, which is more often the case in the Netherlands. In that sense, it can act as a bridge between people. For participant

three, a Yezidi (religious minority) from Iraq, this experience was different. When I asked him about the importance of his faith, it was clear that his faith and upbringing in the religion was valuable. However, he also expressed the following: 'For me, actually, religion was always a problem. Not because of the religion itself but because of the environment.' With this quote, participant three attempted to explain the struggles of being part of a religious minority in a country fallen victim to a regime that actively hunted practitioners. He expressed the fear and sadness that comes with being attacked by fellow countrymen and being forced to flee at the hands of 'his own people.' He continued:

> *That is when I started thinking about the idea of the religion and also about hiding it in my life. I am Yezidi, but I will hide it, because it only costs me. It has only made life harder for me.*

Even though he was initially proud and happy in his religion, the political and unsafe circumstances because of violent discrimination against his religion have forced him to practice only in private. When asked if he had found a Yezidi community in the Netherlands, his answer was 'Barely. I have not found many Yezidis here. Maybe only a handful. I do know of many Yezidis in Germany; I also have family and friends there.' I asked him if he discusses his religion in these circles: 'No, it is just in the background. We never really discuss religion or anything.' Hiding his religion may look like an individual choice, but the opposite seems to be true. He explains that during his life in Iraq, there was a lot of difficulty finding work and providing for oneself and family if you adhered to certain religious minorities. He continued:

> *I could not work because I am Yezidi. My mother was a women's hairdresser. She had worked there but the owner told her, do not say anything about your religion. Say that you are Christian. Ankawa is for the Christians so there I could work, thankfully.*

This anecdote is in stark contrast to the experience of participant nine, a Christian, who felt tremendous support through her faith and religion. She spoke about the period right before escaping Syria when her husband had just passed away. She said:

I prayed when he passed and asked for help with carrying out these heavy tasks. God is always with you. I felt strength, care, and peace in myself. I heard the sounds of God saying, "I am with you."

For her, religion is a very important and strong element in her social circles. The participant and her three children all attend an Arab Christian church every week. This community is very tight-knit and serves as a strong support system for her and her children. She finds like-minded people and her children are faced with their culture and people in addition to the Dutch culture they find at school. The participant says that such a large and strong community is also very helpful, because there are always people who can help you. Participant seven has another outlook on the importance of religion. She and her family are Muslim, but although her faith in Allah is strong, she mentions that for her, religion is also a habit of some sort:

Our traditions come forth from religion. Like Eid al-Fitr and Ramadan come from religion, but they are also traditions. Eating together as well.[112] For example, I live alone but I call my mother every day. And she calls me almost every day, because we have a strong bond. We find family very important, which is also part of our religion. Many traditions come from religion. But religion comes from the heart. If you believe something, you really believe it. It is also a protection. Because I feel stronger when I believe something. I do not feel helpless. Somebody is with me, I know that.

Although not all participants are of the same religion, or have the exact same views on religion, religion has been a present and crucial element before, during, and after the displacement.

The governance of forced displacement

Near the end of the interviews, I asked the participants about their opinion regarding the governance of the topics in this paper. Both the governance of displaced people in the Netherlands and the governance in the country of origin, which led to the displacement. Because the participants are from a total of four countries, there are distinct opinions on the governance in the country of origin. Regarding the Netherlands, however, opinions were generally harmonious. Besides expressing gratitude towards the Dutch government multiple times, there were critiques about the time management of Dutch politics. A few participants explained that when they came to the Netherlands years ago, processing refugees took less

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[112] A part of this quote has been used in an earlier section in this chapter as well.

time. At the moment, people often have to wait months before receiving clarity. Participant three says the following on this topic: 'Once you [Dutch politicians] start discussing a situation, you start deciding on someone else's future. These people are dependent on you. It all takes too much time here.' Participant nine holds a similar opinion. When asked, she starts speaking about the current political climate in the Netherlands and the discussion of sending back Syrians or denying them refuge since the fall of the Assad regime. 'These new people, they are even worse than the Assad regime,' she says. She then goes on about how this is handled in Dutch politics. 'I miss the humanity. They [Dutch politicians] need to look at individual situations.' Regarding the current Dutch political climate, the participant expresses that even now, while residing in the Netherlands, there is much uncertainty. Overall, the participants have been content with the treatment of the Dutch political system towards them, but less so now, years later, with the treatment of displaced persons arriving today.

In this chapter I have presented the findings of the in-depth interviews. These answers, given by a sample of nine participants from various backgrounds, provide a glimpse into the personal experience of forced displacement. Multiple topics were elaborately discussed, and the answers were analysed and divided based on codes. These codes and attached quotes can be found in the annex. This codebook does not always mention the entire quote. The exact transcripts of the interviews with the full quotes can be retrieved upon request. This section does not yet contain the analysis of these answers. The analysis of and meaning behind these answers come together in the discussion.

Discussion

The previous chapter presented the raw findings of the in-depth interviews. With the results of the interviews, I answer the following research question: *How does forced displacement affect the experience of national trauma and national identity in forcibly displaced persons in the Netherlands?* In addition, the results answer the following sub-questions:

1. How has forced displacement influenced the experience of national trauma amongst displaced persons in the Netherlands?
2. How does forced displacement affect the sense of belonging among displaced persons in the Netherlands?
3. How do displaced persons in the Netherlands reconcile with their sense of national identity?
4. What role does religion play in the sense of national identity and belonging among displaced persons in the Netherlands?

In the discussion I use these results as the basis for an analysis, combined with previously discussed literature and the conceptual framework.

Before starting the in-depth interviews, I formulated hypotheses based on the literature and conceptual framework. The findings of the in-depth interviews were presented thematically. Thus, for the sake of clarity, the most important results will be summarised here and again be presented in the same thematic order. As explained previously, because some subjects came up during the interviews instead of during the preparatory research, not all themes have a stated hypothesis.

Displacement journey, emotions, and traumatic experiences

An important result was the lasting and persisting feelings of fear and stress after displacement experiences. Participants described intense feelings of fear during multiple, or all, stages of their journeys. As well as the fear that came with the feelings of uncertainty of the continuation of the journey, or about the wellbeing of loved ones. In the interviews, participants shared that they had not expected to reside in the Netherlands as long as they have. Not knowing when or if they are able to return home, has taken its toll on some of the participants. During several points throughout the interviews, it was noted that a majority of the participants do talk about past experiences and the hardships that have resulted from them. This finding contradicts the data from the literature. Here, Nytagodien and Neal argue that

traumatic experiences cause a non-sharing culture, because the events are too painful to speak about.[113] However, these conversations have only been with people who have been living in the Netherlands for a few years. It would be interesting and valuable to see, in future research, if people who have stayed in their home countries share their experiences similarly to those who fled.

National trauma

H1 states that *experiences of trauma on a larger scale causes compatriots to feel more connected to each other.* This hypothesis is based on the concept of national trauma as coined by Neal[114], in addition to the literature research. The findings of the interviews have clearly shown that the participants experience a shared feeling of trauma regarding their displacement journeys. This feeling encompasses fear, nervousness, sadness, and anger regarding the experience of displacement and integrating in the host country. The participants described feeling a bond between themselves and other displaced persons, who they did not previously know, that was based on similar traumatic experiences. In this case, fleeing from and surviving war, violence, and persecution. One participant explained 'I will never forget. Syrians have two faces. We are free but we cannot forget. We have changed.' In this quote, the participant does not only describe himself but also his people. He uses the word 'we' instead of 'me,' this exhibits a shared experience. There is no longer talk of the individual but of the entirety of the nation that has had to endure war. Hirschberger supports this idea, as was shown in the literature. As described in the literature review, Hirschberger[115] argues that through collective traumatic experiences, group cohesion can increase. Hirschberger's argument is supported by Neal in the conceptual framework. Neal's concept states that while individual trauma can be a cause for isolation, collective trauma can be a source of cohesion. Emotions are recognised and deemed correct and fair by the group.[116] These findings prove H1, *enduring trauma on a national scale, further connects compatriots to each other*. A second important result in this theme is the polarisation within nations, between citizens themselves. Participants six and seven described how within both Syria and Türkiye, the citizens were set up against each other. This caused a distrust towards certain groups in the society. In Syria, there has been much discrimination and violence towards anyone who is not from the Alawi faith. In Türkiye, whether one does or does not support the Erdogan-

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[113] Nytagodien and Neal, "Collective Trauma," p.467
[114] Neal, *Collective Trauma*
[115] Hirschberger, "Collective Trauma
[116] Neal, *Collective Trauma,* p.4

government, is important information. The participants explained how this polarisation has caused various experiences of collective trauma depending on the social group one adheres to. This split within societies has been described by Audergon in the literature review. She argues that in conflicts where minorities are traumatised by a socially dominant group, in numbers or in (political) power, there is a split in who suffers trauma and who has inflicted.[117] The situation that Audergon described, is affirmed by both participant six and seven, and by participant three who is part of the minority group of Yezidi faith in Iraq. This can also be linked to the concept of national trauma by Neal. His concept states that sometimes national trauma can alter the social structure of a nation.[118] It can be argued that because of a split between communities, caused by the persecution of certain social groups within a nation, the social structure is changed. Communities are forced to flee, face violence, loss of rights and quality of live. Moreover, Neal's concept states that when a nation or a dominant group within a nation has inflected trauma on other communities within the nation, it can be expected that this becomes a part of the national identity.[119] The findings of the interviews thus also correlate with these findings of the literature.

National identity and belonging

H2 states that *forced displacement causes a strengthened feeling of national identity in pursuit of staying connected to their nationality and country of origin.* This hypothesis is based on the concepts of national identity by Madsen and Van Naerssen[120] and the concept of national identity by Neal[121]. In addition, H3 states that *displaced persons experience a less intense feeling of belonging because of a forced and unwilling removal from home and community.* This hypothesis is based on the concept of belonging by Inaç and Ünal[122].

An important result derived from the interviews is that a sense of belonging becomes less fixed during and after displacement. The majority of the participants described that they no longer felt belonging in their home country but rather in the Netherlands. For reasons such as hostility in their country of origin, weakened sense of trust towards government, and overall traumatic connotations to the country. This result supports H3 that belonging is not rigid during displacement. These findings prove the idea that a sense of belonging within a community can change when you are (forcibly) removed from that community, and when the

[117] Audergon, "Collective Trauma," pp. 16-31
[118] Neal, *Collective Trauma,* p.5
[119] Ibid., p.30
[120] Madsen and Van Naerssen, "Migration, Identity, and Belonging,"
[121] Neal, *Collective Trauma*
[122] Inaç and Ünal, "The Construction of National Identity,"

community becomes scattered. A second crucial finding was the weakened importance attached to the concept of nationality and nationalism. Most of the participants did not regard their nationality as an important identity marker and did not necessarily feel connected to compatriots because of their nationality, but rather because of shared experiences. This contradicts the statement made by Hirschberger that group identity strengthens during 'group experiences' and when 'the shared traumatic experience becomes woven into the identity.'[123] In the literature review, Inaç and Ünal[124] shared the statement that nationality is a cornerstone of individual identity. However, the results of the research contradict this statement strongly. It is believed that this is due to the instability caused by displacement. There is no longer a steady, trusted, homebase to fall back on because of violence and persecution. Perhaps there is no stable government to rely on or there is discrimination on religious grounds. These factors contribute to not having a haven in one's country and therefore losing secure attachment to one's nationality. Many of the participants have spent several years in the Netherlands by the time of the interviews. During this time, they have built up their lives, their children have built up their lives. They have started careers, found a home, and received education. Overall, they have felt at peace and have been able to see what the future has in store for them when there is time and resources that don't have to be spent on surviving. All these factors have contributed to forging a sense of home and belonging in the country of destination. These specific conclusions correspond to the findings of Madsen and Van Naerssen who argued that during displacement, people can look towards the country of destination as a manifestation of the life they have been missing at home.[125] This can be seen in a specific interview result where participant nine said '...the respect and regulations I searched for I found in the Netherlands…'. To conclude this theme, the findings of the research prove H3, *the feeling of belonging becomes weaker and unstable during displacement*. H2, *the feeling of national identity becomes stronger during displacement,* is rejected based on the lack of correlation between the findings and the preparatory research.

Attachment and forging connection

Even though most of the participants do not feel a strong connection to their nationality, all participants described a strong bond with loved ones and compatriots who had to stay in the home country. This topic and these findings came up naturally during the interviews and therefore do not have prior corresponding research. During the interview, results came

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[123] Hirschberger, "Collective Trauma", p.4

[124] Inaç and Ünal, "The Construction of National Identity," p.230

[125] Madsen and Van Naerssen, "Migration, Identity, and Belonging," p.62

forward of all participants that everyone invested much time and effort into integrating in the host community. However, a more fascinating discovery is the notion of detachment that was found during a particular interview. This participant was adamant about instilling Syrian and Christian culture into her children. She shared her struggles with connecting to the host culture and expressed how the difference in language, faith, and culture pushed her more towards her home community. This attachment to the people back home while also maintaining some connection to the host country is supported by Madsen and Van Naerssen who call this transnationalism.[126] As explained in the conceptual framework, this happens because of modern communication methods. Due to the ever-present stream of news, text messages, and phone calls, it is easier to stay in touch with the people, customs, and traditions back home. The findings of the interviews align with H4, *displaced persons try to reconnect with the sense of national identity through traditions and customs, also in the country of destination.*

Identity formation

The results on the preservation of individual identity were rather expected. For all participants, language was the most valuable element, because of its importance in connecting with the people around you, both with people from home and host countries. Afterwards, an unexpected answer emerged. Namely, the importance of work and career. Although the participants were often slightly confused about this question, when thinking about what was important in their daily lives, work was one of the first answers. It was noted that the interview participants had difficulty with recognising personal identifiers, elements that, for them, were telling of their individual identity. There were some answers about sports, family, and religion. But most participants spoke about work and keeping busy. This loss of self and unstable identity is mentioned by Neal in the conceptual framework. Here, Neal argues that in times of war and violence, individuals lose their sense of self because of the lack of causal explanations. Causal explanations are the assumptions made about life. Daily assumptions about 'how human intentions, decisions, and actions relate and together shape the course of events.'[127] It is understandable that the worldview of, and how the world is understood by, the participants is shaken down to the core due to the intense and traumatic experiences they have had to endure. When the meaning of life is consequently unstable, the meaning of the self becomes unstable as well.

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[126] Madsen and Van Naerssen, "Migration, Identity, and Belonging," p.68
[127] Neal, *Collective Trauma,* pp. 13-14

The role of religion

H5 states that *religion is a significant identity marker and plays an important role in the feeling of belonging within a community and country.* This hypothesis is based on the concepts of religious identity by Eghdamian[128] and religious identity and social cohesion by Şafak-Ayvazoğlu et al.[129] For the majority of the participants, religion has played a present, stable role in their lives prior to the displacement. The significant differences in the results start to occur when the conversation moves toward during and after the displacement. One intriguing discovery is that for many of the participants, religion is not always something that is actively practiced as such. Religion, for them, is an element within their society that simply is there to follow. It has become tradition and custom, instead of something followed solely by practicing religious people. Therefore, it can be argued that religion is more than an individual choice, it is also a strong adhesive that joins communities together. It is something that provides community, like-minded people, and often a safe place**.** These findings are in harmony with the concepts by Eghdamian and Şafak-Ayvazoğlu et al. who both describe religion to be a source of social cohesion and state that religious minority groups often flock together. This proves H5 that *religion is a significant identity marker and has an important role in one's feeling of belonging within a community and country*. With this in mind, we move further into the results, where a divide is made between the participants for whom religion is merely an ingrained tradition and custom, and for whom religion is an actively practiced faith. Within the latter group, there was one very significant and telling finding that resulted from the conversations. One participant, who adheres to Yezidi faith, a religious minority in Iraq, described his experience with his faith through displacement. During the conversation he explained how, since his religion has only brought him into dangerous situations, he decided to hide his faith the moment his displacement journey began. This participant expressed that his religion no longer made him feel safe since religious minorities were persecuted in Iraq and brought him in danger. According to the participant, victims of forced displacement often hide their faith if they are of a religious minority. This is in line with research by Grzymała-Moszczyńska and Kanal that argues that being part of a threatened religious minority can be a direct reason for leaving the country.[130] In addition to the framework provided by Eghdamian, whose sample experienced isolation, exclusion,

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128 Eghdamian, "Religious Identity," 447-467
129 Şafak-Ayvazoğlu et al., "Acculturation of Syrian Refugees," 555-578
130 Grzymała-Moszczyńska and Kanal, "Research on forced migration," 204-215

discrimination, verbal and physical violence on the basis of their religion.[131] It would be beneficial to pay more attention to this concept in future research. Furthermore, it was found that for many participants, their faith was indeed a stable factor also during and after the displacement and a crucial cornerstone of their individual identity. This contradicts the statement by Hirschberger in the literature review that argued that core belief systems, such as religion, can become disrupted when enduring intense trauma.[132] The results have shown that for many it has become more tradition and culture rather than belief, and for others religion has become a dangerous characteristic that must be hidden.

The governance of forced displacement

This last theme was, once more, an unplanned topic that emerged naturally from the conversations. Therefore, it is necessary to do more research on this in the future and there has not been a hypothesis formed on this topic. The opinions of the participants were harmonious regarding the governance in the Netherlands. All participants felt a lot of gratitude and, besides some opinions regarding the lack of speed at which the government works, were generally very happy and appreciative of the treatment they had received upon arrival. Additionally, there was one participant with a more outstanding opinion on the treatment of refugees currently arriving. She explained how she was missing humanity in this treatment. This comment was made mostly regarding the recent developments in Syria, where the Dutch government spoke about sending back Syrian refugees since the government is now deemed as stable and peaceful. Regarding the governance in the home country, the answers were a bit more divided. One expected reason for this is that the participants come from a total of four countries. However, still many of the participants described distrust and anger towards their governments. This is in line with the findings of Audergon in the literature review. She states how in political conflicts there is often a feeling of betrayal, felt by the citizens at the hands of the government. The government who was supposed to oversee and protect but failed to do so, resulting in much distrust.[133]

I have selected the most valuable, significant, and surprising findings that emerged from the in-depth interviews. In the discussion, I analysed the compelling results and attached meaning and conclusions to them through analysis and drawing from the research done in the literature review and conceptual framework. As can be seen in the discussion, the preceding

[131] Eghdamian, "Religious Identity," 447-467
[132] Hirschberger, "Collective Trauma," pp.3-4
[133] Audergon, "Collective Trauma,", p.22

research often corresponds with the data of the research but at times also contradicts. This is where the true importance of this research comes in. The findings of the research display the lived experiences of individuals who have endured intense trauma through forced displacement. These lived experiences shine a new light on the already existing research. However, it is important to note that there is still a lot to cover in future research. As I have mentioned above, it would be interesting to see how victims who have stayed in their country of origin respond to and talk about national trauma. Several topics emerged during the interviews that were unexpected and therefore have not received enough prior research. Examples are the notion of hiding one faith during displacement because of cruel treatment in the country of origin, and the opinions on the governance of displacement in both the country of origin and destination. These topics emerged naturally during the research and according to the response of the participants, it can be stated that the topics are of enough importance to deserve further attention and research. In the following, and last, section I summarise the entirety of the process of this paper and discuss the social relevance of what has been researched. The limitations and necessary future research as well as the answers to the research questions are presented in the conclusion.

Conclusion

As I conclude this research, I present the closing chapter of this paper. In this conclusion I look back on the conducted research. I answer the main and sub research questions, and I address the limitations that have come up during the process. Additionally, I review the societal and scientific relevance of the research and remaining topics that have come up that should be addressed in future research.

The goal of this paper was to answer the question: How does forced displacement affect the experience of national trauma and national identity in forcibly displaced persons in the Netherlands? In the introduction, I introduced the question and sub questions that were contrived from the problem analysis and research objectives. The literature review revealed the previously done research in the relevant fields surrounding the subject of the paper. In the conceptual framework, I dove deeper into the workings of the main concepts of national trauma, national identity, and belonging through the works of a select group of researchers. In the methodology, I presented how the sample participants were found and chosen, how the research was done and how the data would be analysed. The findings display the results of the research in a structured and straightforward manner. And lastly, in the discussion, meaningful conclusions were drawn from the findings through interpretation and relating it back to the results of the literature. All of this in order to answer the research questions.

Answering the research questions

General research question

How does forced displacement affect the experience of national trauma and national identity in forcibly displaced persons in the Netherlands?

Forced displacement is a life changing, intense, and traumatic event with lasting consequences for the victims. The results of the interviews have shown that national and collective trauma can forge a strong bond between victims. However, this is not limited to compatriots but rather to peers who share similar experiences. Nationality can strengthen this further, but this is dependent on the specific political environment in said country, since polarisation within a nation can cause distrust between compatriots. The results show that nationality is not a significant identity marker for the participants. Due to displacement and unstable (political) situations in the home country, the participants no longer felt a safe and stable attachment to their nationality. However, through upkeep of traditions and customs, and

religious traditions and practices in the host country, the participants try to stay connected to their national identity.

Sub-questions

1. *How has forced displacement influenced the experience of national trauma amongst displaced persons in the Netherlands?*

According to the findings of the in-depth interviews, forced displacement affects the experience of national trauma through recognising this experience among peers even after displacement. The participants described feeling a bond between themselves and other displaced persons if the others had also experienced similar traumatic events such as war, violence, or persecution. Thus, this was not based on nationality per se. This bond could also be felt between people of the same nationality, but similar displacement background was a more important factor than nationality. These results also coincide with the findings of the literature research.

2. *How does forced displacement affect the sense of belonging among displaced persons in the Netherlands?*

The results of the interviews clearly showed a lack of sense of belonging among the participants. Forced displacement, traumatic experiences in the home country, and difficulty in finding attachment in the host country all contribute to a non-rigid and unstable sense of belonging. In some cases, the participants described a sense of dual belonging. Not belonging to strictly the home or host community, but to both. This was often due to the connection through culture, traditions, language, and loved ones in the home country, and finding safety and a stable life in the host country. In summary, the sense of belonging was not strictly attached to the home country, however for some participants it was still. Especially for the participants who have not been residing in the Netherlands for that long and still wish to go back (participant one and two). These results are in line with the findings of the literature research.

3. *How do displaced persons in the Netherlands reconcile with their sense of national identity?*

An interesting discovery of the interviews was that nationality actually was not relevant or important to the participants. The bond they felt with compatriots was not based strongly on

nationality but rather on shared experiences. This means that participants can feel a similar connection to people with the same experiences but with other nationalities. An important result is that this is also dependent on the political environment in the home country. The results showed that if there is a strong polarisation within a nation based on religion or political views, this can be a source of distrust and detachment between compatriots after displacement. This finding strongly contradicts the results of the literature. I speculate that this is because of the instability brought by displacement, there is no stable homebase to go back to, and perhaps a government who one cannot trust. These elements loosen the attachment to nationality rather than it being a cornerstone. The interviews found that the participants do try to reconcile with their national identity through keeping in contact with loved ones who have stayed behind, finding peers, and speaking in native tongue, in addition to keeping up traditions and holidays. These last two are also where religion often comes into play because religion is a source of tradition and cohesion according to the results of the interviews and the literature research.

4. *What role does religion play in the sense of national identity and belonging among displaced persons in the Netherlands?*

Religion has played a role in the life of a majority of the participants. For many, religion was more a tradition that they were brought up with rather than a practiced system of belief. In that sense, religion plays a significant role as an adhesive for community members and compatriots. Religion brings likeminded people and a safe place within a community. However, in the context of displacement, the interviews also found that religion can be considered a dangerous element that must be hidden, due to active persecution. In this example, religion was the opposite of a safe haven. In general, among the participants, religion was a crucial cornerstone of their identity. Before, during, and after displacement. Yet, not always as hypothesised because of core belief systems but rather because of the attachment to community and tradition.

The limitations are the factors that have withheld the research from reaching its full potential. These limitations can hopefully be taken into account in future research. The main limitation for this paper was a time restraint. The interviews were now done among a sample of nine participants. In future research, communities would be better represented through a larger participant sample. This was sadly not possible this time. Some of the sample participants were found through snowball sampling, this can be a limitation because people

from similar environments can give similar answers. However, this was only a small part of the sample. Because the participants are all non-native English or Dutch speakers, language barriers were sometimes a limitation to the depth of the questions asked and answers given. For example, when online translation tools were used for two participants, the questions and answers had to be simplified.

The contents and results of this paper are useful for policymakers, humanitarian organisations, and educators since it contributes to an informed understanding of the consequences of forced displacement in multicultural societies. In addition, this research contributes to the academic debates around these concepts by investigating the nexus of forced displacement, national identity and trauma, and the role of religion. An intersection that has not been explored often in the current and past discourse. Forced displacement is the reality for millions of people globally, still to this day. Research on national identity and how this concept morphs and shifts through displacement gives valuable insights into psychological and social changes people experience which can be consequential for relevant topics such as integration, or segregation and alienation. This counts for national trauma as well. The consequences of forced displacement linger for generations and take its toll on mental health and social connections. Both within similar communities and in relation to the host country. It is crucial to look at the religion factor when researching these issues. Religious belief systems are at the base of many communities and provide stability, social cohesion, and serve as an identity marker. And while this can be strongly disrupted through displacement, it can cooperate in restoring these disruptions as well. Although the discussion on the role of religion is often ignored, it is blatantly clear that religion is a powerful tool in identity formation, for the individual and the collective.

While addressing the current gap in the research, the effects of forced displacement on the experience of national identity and trauma, I encountered supplementary subjects for future research. During the interviews, the participants described the notion of hiding one's faith during displacement due to persecution in the country of origin. It would be valuable to investigate further the effects these experiences can have on belief systems in victims and generations after. The interviewees often raised the topic of governance of forced displacement. Therefore, it would be beneficial to look into the opinions of victims of forced displacement on the governance in both country of origin and host country. Furthermore, I have now researched national identity and trauma after displacement. I believe that it would be relevant to research the effects of war and violence on national identity and trauma in post-war regions, amongst people who have not been displaced. Lastly, as I have mentioned in the

limitations, this research was done among a smaller sample due to time constraints. It would be valuable to do this research again but on a larger scale.

  To conclude, in this paper I have looked at the lived experiences of those who have suffered at the hands of forced displacement, and consequently the construction of collective identity. By paying attention to the voices of individuals, important insights have been gained that are useful for future implementation. While doing this research, I have spoken to resilient people who have shown the remarkable ways in which one can build themselves, their lives, and their communities back up after having lost everything. Acknowledging the struggles of these people and entire communities is at least one step towards building understanding and supportive societies.

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Annex I: Code book

<u>Purpose of the codebook</u>

This codebook was designed to attach meaning to information obtained through the semi-structured interviews that have been conducted for this paper. In the table below different codes, their meanings, and the attachments in the interviews can be found. Most of these codes have been thought of beforehand and were decided upon based on preliminary research. During the literature research certain themes and elements within the topic of choice were recognised and therefore included in the codebook. Inductive coding was used to recognise important information that would otherwise not be covered with the premade codes. With inductive coding, the codes emerge from the data. In this codebook I use three coding techniques: descriptive (basic labels), process (capture actions), and thematic (broader themes) coding.

The column 'specific interview' notes the exact interview and participant that said the quote used in the column prior. Therefore, P1 stands for participant 1 to maintain anonymity. The quotes in the code book are Dutch and English, depending on the language in which the interview was held.

Code Theme	Subcodes	Description	Example/quote from interview (if it stands out)	Specific interview
Religious affiliation	Religion as an intertwining factor	Whenever religion is seen as a connecting factor between people by the interviewees. I.e. when traditionally religious holidays are celebrated even when the interviewees do not consider themselves a part of a religious community.	"Maybe sometimes, during holidays" "Nee is gewoon op de achtergrond. We hebben het ook nooit over religie ofzo." "Ik draag geen hoofddoek, het is verplicht eigenlijk maar het is zegmaar van die persoon zelf." "Religion is normal for my family."	P1 & P2 P3 P7 P8
	Broad use of religion & importance for analytical perspective	Whenever the term religion or terms associated with religion is used within conversation. Enabling a broad use of the term allows for a better analysis of the importance of religion for the interviewees.	"Voor mij eigenlijk, religie was altijd een probleem. Niet door de religie zelf maar door de omgeving." "Toen begon ik een beetje om door zeg maar mijn ideeën en ook door de religie	P3 P3

			om zeg maar te verbergen uit mijn leven."	
			"Ik ben Jezidi maar ik ga het verbergen, want het kost me alleen maar, het maakt het leven gewoon moeilijker voor mij."	P3
			"Religion in Syria is how you act with yourself and with the people. If you act good with yourself and the people, you are a good religious person."	P6
			"Religie wel. Ja, speelt ook een belangrijke rol volgens mij."	P7
			"God is altijd bij je".	P9
			"Ik voelde kracht, zorg, vrede in mijzelf. Ik hoorde geluiden van God, "Ik ben bij je.""	P9
	Insider/outsider perspective	Religion as a factor that can create an in- or out-group with all possible consequences.	"Ze had gewerkt daar, maar de eigenaar heeft tegen haar gezegd, zeg niks over jouw religie."	P3
			"Ankawa is voor Christelijk dus daar mocht ik gelukkig werken."	P3
Language	Importance of language	Importance of language can be shown in various ways. For example, the importance of language for integrating and finding one's place within a newly found community. However, this can also be the importance of language as a bridge that connects one with people of the country of origin.	"In de omgeving zijn er ook niet te veel mensen die Arabisch praten."	P3
			"Taal is de sleutel."	P3
			"Verbondenheid omdat eigenlijk dezelfde taal spreek, ook dat ik van hetzelfde land kom."	P3
			"Ik heb moeite met de taal."	P4
				P5

			"Ik heb geen tijd om Nederlands te studeren."	
				P6
			"I love Arabic. If I speak Arabic with someone who speaks Arabic, you are going to be more open to each other because we are in a country where no one speaks Arabic."	
				P7
			"We wennen aan de cultuur nu. Maar de taal is een probleem. Ik snap en versta Nederlands, ik spreek het ook maar niet als een Nederlander."	
Attachment/ connection	Contact with friends/family at home	The extent to which interviewees keep contact with friends/family in home countries and the emotions brought up by this contact. Also, the connecting to the home country.	"Dan zie ik mensen uit Irak ofzo dan zeg ik ook die komt uit mijn land weet je."	P3
			"Ik bel vijf keer per dag. Het is een vreselijke situatie".	P4
			"We maken grapjes, eerst had ik stress maar nu herhaal je veel en is het oké. Geen stress."	P4
			'Haar familie is niet helemaal eerlijk over hoe het gaat zodat zij zich niet teveel zorgen gaat maken, de deelnemer is niet helemaal eerlijk zodat haar familie zich niet óók nog zorgen gaan maken om haar. Dit is dus uit voorzorg.'	P9
			"Twee kapiteins op één schip kan niet."	P9
	Maintaining traditions/customs	What traditions and/or customs do interviewees keep in place to maintain a sense of connection to the home country?	"We celebrate Christmas, New Year and Easter".	P1
			"Ik vind dat ook leuk om te doen want ja, ik ben gewoon Jezidi. Dat voel ik ook soms."	P3
			"Serê Salê, Khidir Ilyas, Tawaf, Al-Jama'iyah, Rojiyên Êzî, Eida Êzi"	P3

			"Traditie vieren is beetje moeilijk, want [kerst] is andere datum in Oekraïne dus we hebben geen vrij".	P4
			"Nee alleen Nederlandse. De Oekraïense niet, ik denk niet dat ik het goed vind."	P4
			"Ramadan and Eid. You have to visit people and people visit you. Here it is a bit hard, we adjust it."	P6
			"Ik ben muslim, Ramadan was vorige maand. Het was wel gezellig omdat we niet alleen met Turkse mensen vierden maar met mensen die muslim zijn."	P7
			"We hebben echt veel gewoontes. Bijvoorbeeld samen eten. Het is niet een regel maar we doen het."	P7
			"Bijvoorbeeld Suikerfeest en Ramadan enzo, die komen vanuit religie maar het is ook traditie. En samen eten ook. We vinden familie echt belangrijk, dat is ook onze religie."	P7
	Connecting with destination community	Certain actions taken by the interviewees to find a connection with the community in the country of destination.	"We are friends with everyone. We cannot understand everything, but the principle is the same."	P1
			"Het was moeilijk, maar in Griekenland meer dan hier. Want toen was ik echt een grote stap heb gedaan."	P3
			"Wij in … zijn echt heel sociale mensen. Na de middag ga je buiten om mensen te ontmoeten. Geen afspraken, geen iets gepland ofzo."	P3
			"Terug naar Irak is geen optie meer. Dus ik moest gewoon accepteren en mijn	P3

			leven beginnen."	
			"Ik voel me ook Nederlands. Als ik op vakantie ga en Nederlandse mensen horen praten, dan zeg ik meteen hoi en dan praat ik met hun ook."	P3
			"Maar ik heb ook een andere persoonlijkheid opgebouwd om hier in Nederland goed te integreren"	P3
			"I don't like to have that much waiting time. When I first came here, I know no one. I speak with no one. I start to make problems with my family. I have nothing to do. You're bored out of your mind."	P6
			"I like the Netherlands people because they are direct and kind. And I am direct and kind."	P6
			"Ik kan zeggen dat ik nu gewoon meer sociaal ben. Mijn ouders hadden minder contact."	P7
			"The Netherlands have given me everything that Syria couldn't, it brought me from death to life."	P8
	Connection to other forcibly displaced people	Is there a connection forged over the experience of similar situations or is this not of importance?	"Voor … was ik met een groep, een Arabische groep, een lezen clubje."	P3
			"Als ik nieuwe mensen ontmoet en die persoon was ook in Griekenland, in dezelfde periode, dan vraag ik meteen waar."	P3
			"Natuurlijk, wij helpen elkaar elke keer. Maar soms ook ruzie."	P4
			"Elke tijd we praten over de situatie in	P4

			Oekraïne."	
			"Like I tell him everything, he tells me everything because we have the same experiences."	P6
			"Deze ervaringen scheppen een band. Dat gevoel bindt ons. Maar ik ben nu hier, ik wil over hier praten."	P9
Detachment	No connection to destination community and country	It is possible that interviewees find no connection with the destination community. This can be for various reasons such as language barriers or the hope to return home in the near future.	"I don't feel compassion for other people."	P1
			"Voel ik soms dat ik niet begrepen ben ofzo."	P3
			"Niet van ons geloof en niet van onze cultuur. Wij zijn van een moeilijke periode gekomen, ik probeer het beter te maken."	P9
			"Met mijn groep omgaan is makkelijker want kennen taal en cultuur. Nederlandse mensen hebben minder begrip hiervoor. Dan moet ik alles uitleggen."	P9
Nationalism		A strong sense of belonging, attachment, pride and love for the country and community of origin.	"Het [nationalisme] is echt wel anders. Misschien als ik 10.000 jaar geleden ben geboren dan ben ik meer trots dan nu."	P3
			"Hoe langer ben jij daar, hoe sterker die band wordt."	P3
			"Ik ben niet patriot. En ik ben niet trots op Oekraïne"	P4
			"We only see suffering beause of this nationality, because we have this passport. But we hope it will get better."	P6

			"Ik ben Turks maar mijn nationaliteit is niet de reden dat ik nu zo ben."	P7
			"Maar ik ben niet Syrisch punt uit, waar ik me comfortabel voel is thuis. Alleen omdat ik er geboren ben staat het niet vast voor mij."	P9
Emotion	Fear	Fear in connection to experiences of forced displacement, fear in connection to the circumstances of loved ones, fear for the future.	"My day begins with news from Ukraine and ends with it as well."	P2
			"Gewoon onderweg kunnen zij op elkaar doodmaken."	P3
			"Ja ik ben bang als ik nieuws lees. Alleen, het is stupide mensen, het is dom mensen die maken korte video en maken me stress."	P4
			"If we go back to Syria, they're going to put us in the military. And we're going to die like two weeks after that."	P6
			"We waren samen met mijn zus in Turkije bij onze opa en oma. Voor mij was het niet eng maar het was wel eng voor mijn zusje."	P7
	Anger	Anger in connection to the experience of forced migration, anger in connection to political climates, anger in connection to the treatment of forcibly displaced persons.	"Zelensky zou moeten naar oorlog. En 400 diplomaten in pakken zouden moeten naar oorlog. Daarna wij gaan."	P4
	Sadness	Sadness in connection to the experience of forced displacement, sadness due to missed loved ones or missed sense of home.	"Ik denk 200 kilometer, ik huil. Ik ben bang, ik alleen, het is niet goed."	P4
			"We miss our village, but we only suffered in Syria."	P6
	Uncertainty	Uncertainty regarding political climates, uncertainty regarding	"I was planning on only coming for one or two months, I thought that it would	P1

		future in the country of destination, or regarding the future of loved ones.	end"	
			"Ik had het gevoel alsof ik in de oceaan was gegooid en ze tegen mij zeiden, "vogel het zelf maar uit.""	P9
	Pride		"Ja nu ben ik trots, niet verdrietig. Dit is het beste wat ik kon doen voor mijn zoon."	P4
			Op de vraag of nationaliteit belangrijk is voor ze: "nee"	P4 en P5
			"I'm proud to be Syrian. This feeling has grown stronger since the revolution."	P8
Belonging		A sense of comfort, happiness, fitting-in within a certain community. This can be either in the country of origin, destination, or within a certain association, neighbourhood, etc.	"There is connection, these people look like us, we have the same mentality"	P1
			"There has been a war in my country but I have lived for and loved my country, I have become more proud. But I don't love it that much anymore."	P1
			"Ja, ik was 10 jaar uit mijn stad. En zeg maar, mijn gevoel, mijn hart waren helemaal koud. Maar toen ik daar was heb je echt dat gevoel dat dit mijn dorp is, mijn stad, mijn land, mijn thuis. Dat is echt thuis."	P3
			"Nu denk ik mijn huis Nederland."	P5
			"Ik voel mijn huis is Nederland. Want toekomst voor mijn zoon is hier beter."	P4
			"I have no feelings about my home country."	P6
			"For me, I have no belonging for anything. I'm not belonging to my country because I've never visited. I'm	P6

			not belonging to Saudi Arabia because I couldn't complete my life in it. I'm not belonging to my religion. My only belonging is to my family."	
				P8
			"Nederland is meer als een huis voor mij nu. Omdat ik hier woon en vanwege de reden dat we uit Turkije weg moesten."	
				P9
			"Twee harten, één hart liet ik achter, één hart begon met kloppen hier."	
				P9
			"Wat ik zocht qua respect en regels heb ik gevonden in Nederland, maar mijn gevoel is in Syrië."	
Governance		Any connection to the governance of forcibly displaced persons. This can be governance in the home country or country of destination.	"Op die tijd dat jij begint met over een situatie te praten, dan begin jij de toekomst van anderen te beslissen. Deze mensen zijn afhankelijk van jou. Het duurt heel lang [in Nederland]."	P3
			In Oekraïne is veel corruptie."	P5
			Verschil in verwachtingen van het zorgsysteem.	P4
			"Regering Oekraïne helpt me nooit, niets. Ik ben erg op boos op de regering met deze situatie."	P5
			"Ik ben boos op Oekraïense overheid, altijd mensen, deze overheid, deze laatste mensen."	P5
			"They tell me like you can wait. If you really want a job you can work at a barber shop."	P6
			"Nieuwe mensen zijn nog erger dan het	P9

			[gevallen] regime."	
			"Ik mis de menselijkheid. Bekijk individuele situaties."	P9
Traumatic experiences		Traumatic experiences themselves and possible aftermath of these experiences.	"In het begin in Griekenland en ook hier in Nederland, ik had altijd nachtmerries erover. En ja, het blijft gewoon achter."	P3
			"Wij zijn allemaal eigenlijk gedwongen uit mijn stad."	P3
			"Ik had gewoon goede leven. Maar gevaarlijk, geen goede situaties, geen toekomst."	P3
			"Tien jaar geleden was ik niet zo. Ik had gewoon andere ideeën. Ik zag het leven anders dan nu."	P3
			"Ik ervaarde ook door mijn religie en door vluchten ook slechte ervaring. Dat heeft mij allemaal veranderd."	P3
			"Er zijn ook slechte ervaringen. Maar we praten, ik praat nog steeds erover, want het is niet anders. Het is gebeurt."	P3
			"Veel mensen die ik ken, die krijgen nu psychische problemen door alles en mensen die willen gewoon werken om geld te sturen naar thuis want ouders kunnen niks doen daar."	P3
			"In Oekraïne was paniek. Alles viel. Ik woonde in een goed huis, 1 kilometer verderop viel een raket."	P5
			"Mijn moeder woont 60km naast het front. Elke dag ik horen deze boef, boef, elke dag. Mijn zoon vraagt wat het is."	P4

			"If you're not Alawi, you're not going to have a chance."	P6
			"Er is geen gerechtigdheid in Turkije, daarom zijn we hier gekomen. [Mijn vader] moest naar de gevangenis, en bleef daar ongeveer vier jaar. Dat was heel moeilijk voor ons. We hadden last van geld [armoede], en we voelden wel het gevoel van leven zonder vader."	P7
			"Het is wel onveilig, ik moet leugens over mezelf vertellen."	P7
			"I will never forget. Syrians have two faces. We are free but we can't forget, we have changed."	P8
			"Die angst zit in mij, de politie ging mijn kinderen aaien, er ging een berg van mijn schouders af."	P9
			"Pijn is in het begin groot maar wordt minder. In het begin was het voor mij grote pijn, ik moest erover praten."	P9
Identity		Factors that are important for defining one's identity.	"Als jij dit vraagt, dan denk ik over baan. Ik weet niet waarom, maar ik denk over baan. Over werk."	P4
			"Ik hou van mijn werk."	P5
			"Ik heb ook een hobby, hardlopen. Erg belangrijk."	P4
			"Maar eigenlijk vind ik dat die dingen [religie] niet te belangrijk zijn. Het is volgens die mensen zichzelf."	P7
			"Vriendelijk zijn en lief zijn is	P7

			belangrijk."	
				P7
			"Taal, nationaliteit, spreekt een belangrijke rol maar, niet over mijn karakter. Voor mij niet."	
				P9
			"Christendom is meer mijn nationaliteit."	

Annex II: Interview guide

Dutch

Goedendag, wat fijn dat u er bent. Neemt u gerust plaats. Hoe is uw dag tot nu toe?

Laat ik mezelf even voorstellen: mijn naam is Meike, en ik studeer aan de universiteit van Groningen. Momenteel werk ik aan mijn afstudeeronderzoek, dat zich richt op de relatie tussen vluchtelingen ervaringen, nationale en collectieve trauma's, en identiteit. Kort gezegd onderzoekt mijn studie hoe mensen een gedeeld gevoel van verbondenheid ervaren met een land of gemeenschap, en hoe ingrijpende gebeurtenissen die ervaring kunnen beïnvloeden.

Toestemming voor opname en notities

Is het voor u in orde als ik dit interview opneem met mijn telefoon? Dit helpt mij bij het later verwerken van de antwoorden, zodat ik uw woorden en betekenis zo nauwkeurig mogelijk kan weergeven in mijn onderzoek. Daarnaast zal ik af en toe notities maken in dit boekje.

De opnamen, notities en uitgeschreven interviews worden uitsluitend door mij bekeken en beluisterd. In het uiteindelijke onderzoek zullen de resultaten anoniem verwerkt worden, wat betekent dat uw naam nergens genoemd zal worden. Hoewel mijn onderzoek door verschillende mensen gelezen zal worden, blijft uw identiteit beschermd. Gaat u hiermee akkoord?

Hier heb ik ook een toestemmingsformulier waarin deze voorwaarden nogmaals worden uitgelegd. U kunt dit ondertekenen als u dat prettig vindt, maar het is niet verplicht, aangezien het geen officieel document is. Heeft u op dit moment nog vragen over wat ik zojuist heb uitgelegd?

Ik wil benadrukken dat u zich tijdens het interview altijd vrij mag voelen om te stoppen, bepaalde vragen niet te beantwoorden, een pauze te nemen of zelf vragen te stellen. Dit is volledig

vrijblijvend. Het interview zal ongeveer 45 minuten duren, maar mocht u eerder weg moeten, laat het dan gerust weten. Dan kan ik de vragen daarop aanpassen.

Als u er klaar voor bent, kunnen we beginnen met de eerste vragen. Is dat goed?

Onderwerp 1: Persoonlijke gegevens en de vlucht

- Kunt u voor de opname uw naam en leeftijd herhalen?
- Wanneer bent u naar Nederland gekomen?
- Met wie heeft u gereisd of bent u gevlucht naar Nederland?
- Hoe heeft u de ervaring van vluchten beleefd?
- Ervaart u nog steeds moeilijkheden, angsten of andere gevolgen als gevolg van uw vlucht?

De volgende vragen gaan over uw gevoel van verbondenheid met uw nieuwe omgeving en uw land van herkomst.

Onderwerp 2: Verbondenheid met Nederland en het land van herkomst

- Hoe heeft u de aanpassing aan uw nieuwe omgeving en de Nederlandse samenleving ervaren?
- Voelt u zich nog steeds verbonden met uw land van herkomst?
- Hoe ervaart u uw relatie met mensen uit uw land van herkomst?
- Voelt u zich met hen verbonden op basis van nationaliteit?
- Heeft u in Nederland een gemeenschap gevonden? Ervaart u hier een gevoel van verbondenheid en erbij horen?

In de volgende vragen bespreken we uw persoonlijke identiteit.

Onderwerp 3: Identiteit en behoud daarvan

- Welke aspecten van uw identiteit zijn voor u het meest belangrijk? Zijn er elementen waarin u zichzelf herkent? (Bijvoorbeeld religie, taal, cultuur).
- Welke rol speelt taal in uw gevoel van verbondenheid met zowel uw land van herkomst als Nederland?
- Zijn er bepaalde tradities, culturele uitingen of gewoonten die u actief in stand houdt om uw identiteit te behouden?
- Heeft u bepaalde stappen ondernomen om een gevoel van (nationale) identiteit terug te krijgen na uw vlucht?
- Bent u gelovig? Zo ja, welke geloofsovertuiging past het beste bij u?
- Beschouwt u uw nationaliteit als een belangrijk onderdeel van uw identiteit?
- Herkent u zichzelf in de normen en waarden van uw land van herkomst?
- Voelt u trots met betrekking tot uw nationaliteit?
- Heeft uw vluchtervaring uw kijk op uw identiteit beïnvloed?

- Hoe ervaart u de balans tussen het behouden van uw oorspronkelijke cultuur en het aanpassen aan de Nederlandse samenleving?

We gaan nu verder met vragen over trauma, zowel op individueel als collectief niveau. Is dat in orde?

Onderwerp 4: Ervaring van trauma

- Denkt u dat u bepaalde ervaringen of gevoelens deelt met uw landgenoten? Bijvoorbeeld gedeelde ervaringen van oorlog of geweld die een gevoel van onderlinge verbondenheid creëren?
- Kunt u toelichten waarom u dat zo ervaart?
- Wat vindt u van dit soort verbondenheid?
- Haalt u hier andere aspecten uit, zoals een gevoel van vertrouwdheid of onmiddellijke vriendschap? Of heeft u juist liever geen contact met mensen die een vergelijkbare ervaring hebben doorgemaakt?

Tot slot heb ik nog een aantal vragen over hoe Nederland omgaat met deze thema's.

Onderwerp 5: Hoe Nederland omgaat met vluchtelingen

- Hoe beoordeelt u de manier waarop Nederland omgaat met de onderwerpen die we zojuist hebben besproken?
- In hoeverre voelt u zich erkend of begrepen door de Nederlandse samenleving met betrekking tot uw achtergrond en ervaringen?

Afsluiting
Dit waren alle vragen die ik voor u had. Nogmaals ontzettend bedankt voor uw tijd en openheid. Dit helpt mij enorm in mijn onderzoek. Als blijk van waardering heb ik hier een kleine attentie voor u.

Zou u de uiteindelijke resultaten van het interview nog willen inzien? Ik kan deze naar u opsturen zodra ze klaar zijn, maar dit kan nog enige tijd duren.

Mocht u in de toekomst nog vragen hebben of iets willen toevoegen, aarzel dan niet om contact met mij op te nemen via e-mail of telefoon. Nogmaals hartelijk dank en ik wens u een fijne dag verder.

English

Good day, it's great to have you here. Please feel free to take a seat. How has your day been so far?

Let me introduce myself: my name is Meike, and I am a student at the University of Groningen. At the moment, I am working on my final research project, which focuses on the relationship between refugee experiences, national and collective trauma, and identity. In short, my study examines how people feel a shared sense of belonging to a country or community and how significant experiences shape that feeling.

Permission for Recording and Note-Taking

Would it be alright if I record this interview on my phone? This helps me process the answers later, ensuring that I can accurately capture what you have said and meant in my research. Additionally, I will be taking some notes in this notebook from time to time.

The recordings, notes, and transcribed interviews will only be seen and heard by me. The final results in my research will be anonymised, meaning that your name will not be mentioned. While my study will be read by others, your identity will remain protected. Do you agree with this?

I also have a consent form here that outlines these conditions once more. You are welcome to sign it if you prefer, but it is not required, as it is not an official document. Do you have any questions about what I just explained?

I want to emphasise that at any point during the interview, you are free to stop, skip any questions you do not wish to answer, take a break, or ask your own questions. There is absolutely no pressure.

The interview will take approximately 45 minutes, but if you need to leave earlier, please let me know, and I will adjust the questions accordingly.

If you are ready, we can begin with the first set of questions. Is that alright?

Topic 1: Personal Information and the displacement experience

- Could you please repeat your name and age for the recording?
- When did you arrive in the Netherlands?
- Who did you travel or flee to the Netherlands with?
- How did you experience fleeing your home country?
- Do you still face difficulties, fears, or other consequences as a result of your flight?

The next questions will focus on your sense of belonging, both in your new environment and in your country of origin.

Topic 2: Connection to the New Environment and Country of Origin

- How have you experienced adapting to your new environment and Dutch society?

- Do you still feel connected to your country of origin?
- How do you perceive your relationship with people from your home country?
- Do you feel a sense of connection with them based on nationality?
- Have you found a community in the Netherlands? Do you experience a sense of belonging here?

Now, I would like to ask you some questions about your personal identity.

Topic 3: Identity and Its Preservation

- Which aspects of your identity are most important to you? Are there elements in which you recognise yourself? (For example, religion, language, culture).
- What role does language play in your sense of connection to both your home country and the Netherlands?
- Are there specific traditions, cultural expressions, or customs that you actively maintain to preserve your identity?
- Have you taken any steps to regain a sense of (national) identity after your refugee experience?
- Are you religious? If so, which faith do you feel best aligns with you?
- Do you consider your nationality an important part of your identity?
- Do you recognise yourself in the norms and values of your country of origin?
- Do you feel a sense of pride in your nationality?
- Has your experience as a refugee influenced your view of your identity?
- How do you experience the balance between maintaining your original culture and adapting to Dutch society?

Now, we will move on to questions about trauma, both on an individual and collective level. Is that alright?

Topic 4: The Experience of Trauma

- Do you believe that you share certain experiences or feelings with people from your country? For example, shared experiences of war or violence that create a sense of connection?
- If so, why do you feel that way?
- What are your thoughts on this kind of connection?
- Do you find value in this connection, such as familiarity or immediate friendship? Or do you prefer not to have contact with people who have gone through similar experiences?

Finally, I would like to ask a few questions about how the Netherlands deals with these topics.

Topic 5: The Netherlands' Approach to Refugees

- How do you assess the way the Netherlands deals with the topics we have discussed?

- To what extent do you feel recognised or understood by Dutch society regarding your background and experiences?

Closing

These were all the questions I had for you. Once again, I want to express my sincere gratitude for your time and openness. Your insights are incredibly valuable to my research. As a small token of appreciation, I have a little gift for you.

Would you be interested in reviewing the final results of the interview? I can send them to you once they are ready, though this may take some time.

If you have any further questions or would like to add anything in the future, please feel free to reach out to me via email or phone.

Once again, thank you so much, and I wish you a wonderful day!