In searching for Belonging—Almost at home abroad

A qualitative study on the way refugees develop feelings of home and belonging in the Romanian cities of Bucharest and Timisoara

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Abstract

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Due to an increased flow of refugees, migration has become an important issue that has raised a lot of concern during the past years. During 2015 alone European member states reported almost two million migrants crossing their external borders. This study *aims* to bring into light how the refugees that arrived in Romania starting with late 2014 till present, after being granted asylum or subsidiary protection manage to accommodate themselves within the communities they choose to settle. It does so by exploring the way these refugees construct and develop feelings of home and belonging abroad. This study research questions are first: how do refugees experience local communities and establish feelings of home and belonging? and second: how does the life course perspective help the refugees get accommodated to their new urban environment? The empirical research to answer these questions is qualitative, relying on in depth, semi structured life history interviews held with refugees that have been granted asylum or subsidiary protection by the Romanian state starting with the late 2014 until present. The findings pointed out: 1) the effect of the life course: (e.g. the events of being uprooted and relocated into a foreign land brought life altering changes in an individuals’ life course). 2) The individuals interviewed showed intimate emotions about their new home and feelings of belonging. 3) The informants perceived their experience as a perceptual process of negotiation with themselves and the local community from which they belong.

Key words: Migration, refugees, life course, home, accommodation, belonging, Romania.
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Stockholm, June 2018

Marius Stefan
# Abstract


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1. Preface

Migration has become an important issue that has raised a lot of concern over the past years. Since 2015 large amounts of people worldwide have been displaced by violence and persecution, and driven out from their country of origin to relocate in foreign lands. According to Frontex (2015), European member states reported almost two million migrants crossing their external borders only in 2015 alone. Even though not a member of the Schengen freedom of movement agreement and as a result of a significantly lower standard of living, Romania was officially considered as being just a transit country. Still, according to the Romanian General Inspectorate for Migration (2016) even just as a country of transit Romania has received 1300 refugees at the beginning of the year 2015. Furthermore, the country committed itself to receive over 4000 migrants from Italy and Greece as a part of the European Union solidarity program. By law a migrant is entitled to protection in the country based on “reasonable fear of oppression on grounds of association to a certain social group, race, religion, nationality, political beliefs, sexual orientation” (Legislative Portal, 2018).

Even though there are not many studies made in relation to the displacements of the group of migrants that started with the 2015 migration crisis I will refer to previous research to understand the process of accommodation, of the way migrants build home and develop feelings of belonging within the host community. In the beginning, before the advent of qualitative research migration based research relied primarily on quantitative based census data from national citizenship and immigration services. However, with the increase in popularity of qualitative research in migration studies, a new understanding of the social environment come into focus. While past refugee based research was dependent on legal studies (Vargas-Silva, 2012: 413), with the introduction of qualitative research the researcher could now go “past the numbers, he could ask questions that concentrated on people’s social and material circumstances, their experiences, perspectives and histories” (Ritchie et al., 2013:23).

Qualitative research as a method will come to complement current research within the field of migration. It will be the vehicle that helps understand the close connection between the process of migration and the feelings of belonging that migrants hold (Valentine et al., 2009; Askins, 2016). The analysis of the narratives of home have also been added to the researcher’s interest within migration and refugee studies (Binaisa, 2013; Tete 2011; Boer, 2014). Notwithstanding within these new insights in migration ushered in by the qualitative research on the topics of home, identity and belonging the bulk of the studies were made having the focus on refugees in western Europe. With that in mind, in Romania not a lot of research has been done regarding refugee’s motions of home, identity and belonging, in fact, the immigration process itself is a relatively new phenomenon in Romania (Hamberger, 2010).

Historically, the Romanian scholarship in refugee research was overwhelmingly concentrated on policy with almost no studies focusing on the integration home building and belonging. This spring the National Romanian Council for Refugees (2018) initiated a call for proposals on “the needs and refugee’s perspectives” in relationship with the integration process [in Romania]”. UNHCR Romania points out that only in 2017 are over five thousand refugees seeking protection in Romania alone. These refugees are confronted with enormous challenges during the asylum-seeking process mostly because the national
authorities for migration possess a stereotypical image of the refugee (Khosravi, 2010: 77) to which later is added the community prejudices reinforced by the media (Florea, 2017).

2. Motivation, Aim, Research Questions and Disposition

2.1 Motivation
As already discussed earlier, both the National Romanian Council for Refugees, (2018) and Hamberger, (2010) argues the lack of research on several issues including immigrant integration. Therefore, the academic motivation for this research thesis has its roots in finding out that there is a deficiency of research in the field of refugee integration in major cities across Romania. There are many analyses on the topic of migrants and refugee integration and belonging, here I would like to give a special mention to Migration from Turkey to Sweden: integration, belonging and transnational community by Baser & Levin (2017) or the Romanian researchers, Chiriac & Robotin (2006), Necunoscuții de lângă noi rezidenți, refugiați, solicitanți de azil, migranți ilegali în România.

This research thesis has a twofold mission. Firstly, this research is about the Romanian refugee experience and is intended to be connected to the wider studies of refugee research at the European level (Neumayer, 2004; Hatton, 2015). Secondly, I hope to contribute to the larger national discussion on refugee accommodation in major cities across Romania (Witec, 2014; Hamberger, 2010; Ulrich, et al., 2010). Additionally, I hope to add a greater understanding to the main context of refugee research by shedding light on how refugees manage to construct and develop feelings of home and belonging within the urban centers of Bucharest and Timisoara in the southern and western Romania. It is my belief that the societies and cultures in the countries where refugees choose to settle can be as unique and different as the refugees themselves. Therefore, as this research unfolds findings can be both surprising and unique.

With that in mind, I would like to conclude this subchapter of motivation with some words from the motivation letter sent two years ago, when I applied for admission to the human geography program “after over six years of working in the hospitality industry and in the wake middle eastern refugee crisis, new questions are rising in my head. How much will the European way of thinking and the culture in general are affected by the new influx of refugees. These new questions combined with the previous multicultural experiences I have had in my life is why I find human geography an interesting subject”.

2.2 Aim and Research Question
Following the motivation subchapter of this study I would add that the scope for this research is to go beyond the focus of the economic and social benefit that refugees bring to the host country. This study aims to bring into light how the refugees that arrived in Romania starting with late 2014 till present, after being granted asylum or subsidiary protection manage to accommodate themselves within the communities they choose to settle, it does so by exploring the way these refugees construct and develop feelings of home and belonging abroad.

Grounded theory will be the main methodological approach to analyze and understand how these refugees managed to construct and develop feelings of home and belonging within the urban centers of Bucharest and Timisoara. The way I am planning to achieve this objective is by traveling to the Romanian cities of Timisoara and Bucharest during the month of March and by holding interviews with the refugees that were granted protection by the state in the last five years. The following thematic perspectives will be considered, first as to better understand how the refugees accommodate themselves within the urban centers of Romania, I believe that is beneficial to first understand the process of moving to Romania. Second access to the local community and establishing a new home, third feelings of belonging, forth the urban environment, fifth feelings of safety and lastly experiencing uprootedness and its effects on the refugee’s outlook for the future.

Research Questions
- How do refugees experience local communities and establish feelings of home and belonging?
- How does the life course perspective help the refugees get accommodated to their new urban environment?

2.3 Disposition
This study is structured as follows: I will start chapter one with a short introduction to the study followed by the motivation, aim and research questions in the second chapter. In chapter three the situation of the refugees is presented from the European context to the Romanian situation. Chapter four, offers an overview of the theories of home, belonging along with the life story perspective used in this study. This is followed by chapter five where the study’s research methodology and design is presented. This chapter includes a presentation of the grounded theory along with the semi structured life story interviews. Furthermore, a discussion about sampling, the selection of cases, a presentation of the participants as well as the ethical considerations and study limitations can also be found in the same chapter. Chapter six presents the interview findings. In chapter seven the main concepts are discussed and connected to the literature. Lastly chapter eight presents the conclusion and briefly discuss further research possibilities.
3. Setting the scene

3.1 The major European migration crisis that started in 2015

“At sea, a frightening number of refugees and migrants are dying each year. On land, people fleeing war are finding their way blocked by closed borders.”

- UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi (UNHCR, 2016)

The year 2015 was the year where the number of refugee asylum applications peaked (European Parliament, 2017). According to the European Border and Coastal Agency Frontex (2016), European Union member states reported 1.82 million border crossings which accounted to be over six times higher than 2014 which itself has been a record breaking year. Even though migrants and refugees have been migrating into Europe from all parts of the world and from continents like Africa, Southern Asia and from the Middle East, but most of them coming from Syria and Iraq -- these two countries have been ripped apart for many years by brutal conflicts and internal violence (Eurostat 2017, Asylum quarterly report).

As a direct consequence of these conflicts, thousands of Syrian and Iraqi people had to abandon their homes and country of origin in their search to find safer places. Initially, they had to relocate initially in the nearby states of Jordan, Lebanon and Israel, (Yaleglobal, 2015; The Irish Times, 2014) but as these countries received too many asylum seekers coupled with an attractive image of the European living standards made many Syrian and Iraqi migrants wanting to reach western Europe. The North African countries of Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia and Libya along with Jordan and Turkey (The International Organization for Migration, 2015) has become the main routes and transit countries into Europe while Greece, Italy and to a lesser extent Spain became the countries of entry into both the European Union and the Schengen area.

Their journey to reach the more prosperous western countries will take these Syrian and Iraqi refugees through the challenges of passing through the Balkan countries as means to re-enter both the European Union territory and Schengen area the countries of Hungary, Slovenia and Austria are at the forefront. Since high numbers refugees wanted to live in the more developed countries with Germany and Sweden at the top of the list this resulted in great economic, political and social problems (Kleres, 2018; Johansson, 2017). While some of these countries were completely bystanders and let such high numbers of refugees pass through their borders, others became completely overwhelmed and resorted to border controls whereas others downright refused to receive any refugees. As a result, the European Parliament and Council attempted to contain or drastically limit the inflow of migrants.

In March 2016, both the European Union and Turkish leaders signed a refugee deal (The Guardian, 2016) in which both parties had something to benefit from respecting the agreement. To summarize; the refugee containment agreement stated that if a refugee is caught entered on the European territory illegally passing through the Turkish borders, Turkey is obliged to retake that trespassing individual on its territory while with the help of UNHCR, a new refugee from the Turkish reception centers will be admitted on the European union territory through the relocation program.
A complete description of the nine action points of the refugee deal agreement can be found in El Pais (2016). In addition, EU pledged three-billion-euro assistance towards improving the refugees that are settled in Turkey access to education and healthcare (DW, 2016).

3.2 Migration and the refugee history of Romania

Known mainly as a country of emigration, international immigration and the procedure of migrant integration is a relatively new occurrence in Romania (Hamberger, 2010). Consequently, after brief migration in Romania literature review, I noticed a wide tendency of the national and international scholarship to focus on emigration rather than immigration (Ciobanu, 2015; Coste, 2005). In fact, before applying to join the European Union, the number of migrants applying for residency and work visas was small, but it grew exponentially since then (Cervinski, 2011). Even though Romania had a record of not making public migration registers before 1989 under the communist party rule, Lazaroiu and Larionescu (2003: 6) reduce immigration in flows during that period to:

Western foreigners visiting for short periods of time usually accompanied by family and friends and were under strict supervision of the authorities. Young African and Middle Eastern individuals, admitted in Romania only for studying purposes. These students were paying large amounts of foreign currency to be able to study in the country. This hard currency provided significant liquidity for state universities.

The influx of foreign student individuals was facilitated by bilateral treaties between Romania and other developing countries generically named ‘Treaties of Friendship and Cooperation’ (Hamberger, 2010). Despite modest immigration levels, Romania attracted through openness towards foreign investments, but in the same time with an ex-communist economy in transition. Both Lazaroiu & Larionescu, (2003: 22) and Hamberger, (2010) offers a description of the first migrants entering Romania during the 1990’s. They were described as follows:

Voluntary migrants attracted by the new economic perspectives, previous individuals that were students during the communist regime along with new applying students. Nationals of China, Turkey, and several Middle Eastern countries among which Syria and Iraq had the largest representation; they came to open family run businesses and hardly hiring locals. The volume of family business migrants adjusted itself by year 2002 when as of Romania applying to join the European Union new requirements for starting a business as a foreign investor were introduced. A new potential investor would be now required to bring 50 000 Euro as a minimum amount of investment as opposed to the 100 USD required in the early 1990’s (Lazaroiu & Larionescu, 2003: 26, 46).

Third country nationals along with the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine relocated themselves in Romania through work visas are the second group of voluntary migrants. Moldovans and Ukrainians numbers are also quite high in the country, mostly because of the adjacent location, large Romanian speaking minorities, but also in the Moldovans case due to the common language and close historical ties between the two countries.

The rest of the economic migrants arriving in the country through work visas are the result of bilateral agreements between Romania and countries around the world and these agreements grew continuously. More specifically, it went from just a couple of hundreds work permits in late 1990’s to almost eight thousand at the end of 2006 (Hamberger, 2010).
According to the International Organization for Migration, forced migrants are represented by the individuals that are forced to leave their country of origin because of “elements of coercion such as threats to life and livelihood, whether arising from natural or man-made causes (International Organization for Migration, 2011). Because of these elements of coercion, the individuals are forced to seek protection as an asylum seekers.

Historically due to its location on the eastern EU border along the East to West migration corridor asylum seekers from the Middle East regarded Romania just as a transit country towards the more developed countries of western Europe. As they choose to move away from their countries for shelter and economic reasons and because of the precarity of the Romanian economy only a few of them choosing to remain (Lazaroiu & Larionescu, 2003: 25).

Hamberger (2010), mentions that large groups from Iraq, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Somalia, the Republic of the Congo, Iran, Albania, Cameroon and Rwanda are nationalities of refugees that arrived before to date as asylum seekers in Romania. Some of the refugees from the Middle East and Africa have become refugees “sur le place” as is the example of the Congolese and Cameronesque foreign students who became “refugees sur le place” while studying in Romania during the 1997-1998 civil war in the Republic of the Congo (Hamberger, 2010).

The general Inspectorate for Immigration (2016), points out the refugee crisis of 2015 has brought a change in the refugee group nationalities with most of the asylum seeker arrivals in 2016 came from Syria, Iraq, Pakistan and Afghanistan.

3.3 The Arab and Muslim communities in Romania

Image 1. Romania - political map

As already established in chapter 3.2 Migration and the refugee history of Romania, the Middle Eastern and African experience with Romania starts between the 1970’s and the late 1980’s when the ruling party decided to open its borders in the name of friendship and
cooperation between the third world countries. According to the bilateral declaration of both Presidents Nicolae Ceausescu and Hafez Al-Assad Syria is an important partner in this cooperation between states (Monitorul Oficial, 1981). During the over twenty years of “collaboration”, several thousand Middle Eastern and African students have entered Romania on student visas. While few were rewarded governmental scholarships, the largest majority of Middle Eastern students in Romania were quite wealthy and their tuition payments were supplying the state universities with foreign currency liquidity. During the early 1980’s it was estimated to be more than twenty thousand foreign students with more than a half being Arabs and the rest Palestinians (Jurnalul National, 2005).

After graduation, most of the students went back and formed small Romanian speaking networks in their countries of origin. Since of their previous status and affluence many of them were promoted in good profitable jobs (Chiriac, & Robotin, 2006: 30). However, many of these former students choose to return and started families here especially during the 1980’s. As mentioned in the previous discussion after the 1990’s many former students returned as business migrants opening small family businesses. The numbers of Arab immigrants begin to dwindle and the tide of arrivals is reversing with the 1996 elections. Because of the changing of legislation, during that period many decided or were constrained to leave which led the numbers of the community to shrink greatly (Chiriac, & Robotin, 2006: 30).

With the conflicts in the Middle East around the turn of the 21st century, several hundreds of refugees from Iraq and Palestine apply for safety and protection in Romania. Even though the great majority of individuals are rewarded protection many of them, attracted by the Western standard of living choose to leave the country after less than a year with some of them choosing not to even wait for a decision (Chiriac, & Robotin, 2006: 30). Since 2005 Bucharest was the city with the highest percentage of Middle Eastern inhabitants from the total foreign population. According to the National Authority for Immigrants cited in the Chiriac and Robotin, (2006: 31) Cluj, Timis and Constanta are the following three counties receiving migrants of ethnic Arabs.

Table 1. Top four Romanian counties with the largest number of Arabs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>Number of individuals</th>
<th>Percentage of total foreigners*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bucharest</td>
<td>3,133</td>
<td>51.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cluj</td>
<td>499</td>
<td>8.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timis</td>
<td>463</td>
<td>7.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constanta</td>
<td>412</td>
<td>6.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>860</td>
<td>13.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*percentage of Arabs related to the total amount of foreign population in each county
Source: Chiriac and Robotin, (2006)
4. Theoretical presentation

In this chapter, the theoretical perspectives are presented as it was thought to help clarify the aim and the research questions results. This chapter will begin by presenting the theory around the feelings of home and belonging from a migration perspective and be concluded by discussing how migration affects the life story perspective of the individuals.

4.1 Feelings of home and belonging

“Maybe your country is only a place you make up in your own mind. Something you dream about and sing about. Maybe it's not a place on the map at all, but just a story full of people you meet and places you visit, full of books and films you've been to. I'm not afraid of being homesick and having no language to live in. I don't have to be like anyone else. I'm walking on the wall and nobody can stop me.”

- Hugo Hamilton, The Speckled People: A Memoir of a Half-Irish Childhood

Within the human geography scholarship, home is presented as a complex notion that is influenced by both the historical and cultural context of the society where the individual resides. This place of residence receives two major meanings. While it can be loaded with personal expectations and subjective feelings. Here, home becomes a creation where the real and imaginary meets, a place of familiarity and personal independence (Heller, 1995:5). The second meaning of home is a more practical one; it comes in the shape of the materialist and state regulatory type of home. Here physical home is considered the place where one reside, it is a space of privacy, a space where one can have an unabridged freedom of expression, a place of property where unwanted individuals and behaviors can be excluded as one's desires (Blunt, & Dowling, 2006). Moreover, within migration research, Samers, (2010) argues that along with the provision of necessities, public spaces like cities and towns, neighborhoods, workplaces, cafes and parks can also provide the stage for lived, meaningful experiences (p.36-37).

In this work, I will concentrate on the subjective aspects of home (Blunt, & Dowling, 2006) bundles the senses of home with the most intimate emotions, a place strongly connected to cultural norms, a space of belonging and refuge for some while for others a place of fear and distress.

Moreover, human geography classics as late 1970’s referred to ‘home’ as a space loaded with the symbolism of familiarity and security. Tuan, (1974) coined the word topophilia in relation to human geography, representing the love that people feel towards significant places in their lives. Relph, (1976) has also weighed in and mentioned a dual facet of ‘insideness’ and ‘outsideness’ that individuals experience in relation to place. He suggests that when individuals feel comfortable and secure in a place they feel ‘inside’ and develop feelings of belonging in relation to the place. On the other hand, if individuals are situated on the ‘outside’ of the place this would make them feel conflicted with a kind of division between them and the rest of society. Yuval-Davis, (2006:197) connects the feeling of being ‘at home’ with the emotion of feeling attached or feeling that you belong to; while for Hooks, (2009:59, 70, 139) home is symbolic to the family, being a place of familiarity, of warm solace, safety and comfort.
Previous research within the field of economic migration revealed that relocation introduces into a migrant’s life a certain degree of distress, thus the natural thing to do for them will be construct ‘homes’ of safety and security within the spaces of migration (Phillips, & Robinson, 2015). According to Brah (1996) for a migrant, the home left behind is as important as the newly established one. Therefore, the home left behind is depicted as a “mythical place”. Even though it represents the migrants place of origin and as geographical location, it is accessible, it is regarded as “a place of no return” (Brah, 1996).

Refugee based research pointed out that individuals as social beings thrives living in collective groups linked by similar culture and beliefs and that people, place and the social aspect are vital for all human beings (Boer 2014:487). Jansen & Löfving (2007:9) goes further and argues of the existence of a primordial link between people and place and that through this link individuals derives their meaningfulness and feelings of belonging from the place they call home. Brunn (2001:18) argues that as refugees are forced away from their homes, from their social and cultural setting or the place they have feelings of belonging, through this forced detachment renders them to feel powerless and vulnerable. Moreover, reflecting this notion of home and belonging Jansen & Löfving, (2007); Al-Rasheed, (1994); Anwar, (1978); Kitcharoen, (2007) brings into discussion the ‘myth of return,’ a common theme used in both migration and refugee studies.

Research has shown that most of the people that have been forcibly uprooted from their homes and home countries are continuing to see their condition in the host country as temporary, in wait of return even though the violence and destruction in the country of origin in ongoing for several years (Al-Rasheed, 1994:202). Al-Rasheed (1994:200-2002) argues against the myth of return considering it to be just a myth. In his opinion uprooted refugees have a “problematic relationship with their country of origin” and that even though the group of refugees may still have relatives in both their country of origin and of destination their relationship with the majority population is intricate. Jansen & Löfving (2007: 9-10) adds that even though the refugee groups envisions their former home with nostalgia and in a romantic way this shouldn’t be understood as a literary desire of return. They connect the place with space, therefore home is constructed around a different time, a time when they felt happy. Brun (2001) describes the displacement from one place to another as “generating economic, legal, cultural, and social challenges and touches upon the very essence of existence” therefore possessing a mental home and homeland provides a “site of resistance” to the present location of the refugee supplying a “powerful unifying symbol for mobile and displaced people” Boer (2014:488).

Because of what Al-Rasheed, (1994:200-2002) called to be a ‘problematic relationship’ between the groups of refugees that choose to become uprooted and the main body of the population from the lands who confronts with civil disorders, politically related wars and revolutions Kunz, (1981:42-43) proposes a three-tier classification of these refugees. The majority identified refugees, are the individuals that share the same convictions and opposition to the events that are taking place within their home countries. These refugees though they oppose their political government they still feel a part of their nation. The events alienated refugees, the group of individuals that despite their ardent desire to be identified with the nation they have been slowly marginalized or discriminated. Groups such as religious or ethnic minorities once uprooted they seldom wish to return to their formal physical home among their countrymen.
The self-exiled refugees, the individuals that due to personal beliefs or philosophies choose to distance themselves from their native nations. As opposed to the events alienated refugees the self-exiled refugees still carry some positive experiences of their former home, but their firm believes keeps them alienated.

Recognizing the need of a more frequent analysis by scholars on the topic of belonging as feeling ‘at home’ through attachments and feeling rooted in a place Antonsich, (2010:647) suggests five factors that would help generate among newly arrived migrants or refugees a place belonging feeling.

- **Personal experiences, childhood memories or other relations** that an individual attach to a specific place along with the continual presence of the family and close families help develop and maintain feelings of place, belonging and are described by the author as representing the auto-biographical factors.

- Both **personal and social ties** are forming the relational factors, these ties improve the lives of newly arrived individuals into a specific place. Antonsich (2010:647) propose these relational factors to be an “essential requirement for any individual regardless of culture or geographical embedness”

- Even though **language** has been declared as being of utmost importance, other cultural factors like **cultural expressions and practices** like food consumption, religion along with traditions and habits appeal to a sense of community and helps the individual establish a sense of belonging.

- The **economic factor** helps provide feelings of safety and makes the lives of both the individual and his/her family more stable from a material point of view. Antonsich (2010:648) pointed to previous research that showed evidence of the sense of belonging towards the host society among refugees who pursued building a professional life was stronger as opposed to the ones who were engaged in casual labor.

- Citizenship and residential permits form the **legal factors** and is regarded as being necessary in producing long term life security feelings and are essential to the dimension of belonging.
4.2 Life story perspective

“It is important, in trying to understand others' positions in life or description of
themselves and their relation to others, to let their voices be heard, to let them speak for
and about themselves first (...) there is no better way to get this than in the person's own
voice”.

- Atkinson 2011

The life story perspective helps open a whole new world concerning social interaction that
has been hidden from the human understanding. Both the life story perspective along with
life story interviews are regarded as the key to its interpretation.

Dykstra, & Wissen, (1999:5) notes that throughout an individual's life there are events
resulting from either personal choice such as moving away from home, marriage, education,
a new job, retirement or as a consequence of events independent of one's decisions such as
divorce, illness, political unrest, a bad economy or war. These events bring life altering
changes in the individual's life structure. These events can cluster into phases which will lead
to transitions into an individual's life, for example, in family life we have transitions as that
of a child, a teenager, spouse, parent or grandparent. The concept of trajectories is
constituted and can be majorly influenced by transitions, within the family life example we
have childhood, adulthood retirement (Dykstra, & Wissen, 1999:6). Elder et al., (2003:8)
notes that transitions produce changes in identity at both personal and social level. Military
service or a refugee moving from a restrictive culture into a more liberal one can be
examples of how transition experience have lifetime consequences. Furthermore, certain life
events can change a person's life direction substantially, these events are coined as turning
points (Elder et al., 2003:8). Example of turning points are when a person's job has been
irrelevant due mechanization. That person will be forced to make a career change or will
have to return to school as an adult. The life course perspective is based on the premise that
life is a string of consecutive events that do not occur randomly but follows a certain
structure and dependency (Dykstra, & Wissen, 1999:5).

Additionally, Elder et al., (2003:10) notes five core principles that affect both the core and
substance of an individual life course.

1. The principle of life-span development, recognizes that human development
does not end at adulthood, but carries on throughout an individual’s lifespan. Moreover,
fundamental biological, psychological and social events and transitions past an individual’s
adult life. For example, social integration among refugees is an example of such late life
adaptation. Elder et al., (2003:11) argues that “greater opportunities exist to collect data on
lives and their changing environments, including relationships, workplaces, schools and
communities”.

2. The principle of the agency implies that through their choices and actions,
Individuals have the power to build and navigate their own lives. Clausen, (1995) through
the example of an adolescent “planful competence” conveys the idea that within their social
circumstance, individuals plan, make choices and compromises between different options
and the sum of all this builds forms life course. A young family's choice for safer
neighborhood in which to raise their children will affect the commuting time to and from
work, thus longer commuting times will in turn affect the family time spent with the children
and spouse.
3. The principle of time and place provides the context in which the life of individuals coupled with the principle of the agency is influenced and shaped by both historical time and location. Elder, & George, (2016:67), mentions the example of children growing up during the mass media and the public education boom of the 20th century. This cohort was shown to have a higher rate of secularization compared to the one previous.

4. The fourth principle is named the principle of timing of lives. Within this principle age and the social timing plays an important role and is of extreme relevance. The timing of an event and/or experience has a greater or lesser implication depending on when it occurs. For example, the life course of an eighteen-year-old getting married and starting a family would be differently affected than an individual taking the same steps during his/her thirties. Moreover, within the refugee research it is pointed out that the overall life of a refugee that is forced to abandon his/her homeland is affected to a greater extent if the individual is in his late years of his/her career as compared to one that is in her/his student years. Within the migration/refugee research this principle is extremely valuable because of the diversity of people that are compelled to relocate. As mentioned earlier, the age and time in life when individuals relocate can completely change the life course and the overall experience.

5. Lastly, the principle number five refers to the notion of linked lives, human lives are interdependent lives. Marshall, & Mueller, (2003:10) pointed out that “lives are not lived in isolation but are embedded through a network of shared relationships” such as family friends or co-workers and that “individual actions are determined by and in turn influence the actions of those to whom we are closely linked”. Within refugee based research, Boer, (2014:487) pointed out that human as social beings thrive living in collective groups linked by similar culture and beliefs and that people, place and the social aspect are vital for all human beings.

In conclusion, one benefit of applying the life theory approach to the topic of refugee research is primarily because it has focus on individual life history. Moreover, within refugee migration research, events such as being forced to leave behind your home, close family and dear friends for reasons such as safety and life integrity could bring altering changes in the individual’s life structure.
5. Research Methodology

In this chapter I will start by discussing the nature of qualitative research followed by the epistemological and ontological perspectives. After this I will offer some direction about the grounded theory that stands at the base of this study followed by a description of the type of interviews employed. Then the research design is presented consisting of sampling, the selection of cases implementation and a summary presentation in the shape of a table of the participants. The chapter will conclude with ethical consideration and limitations to this study.

While the “aim of quality research is generally directed at providing an in depth and interpreted understanding of the social world, by learning about people’s social and material circumstances, their experiences, perspectives and histories” (Ritchie et al., 2013:23), methodologies are the very core of the way the researcher execute his study. As the research findings are connected to the methodology used it is of great importance for the researcher to follow the canons in place.

When referring to the nature of qualitative research Ritchie et al., (2013:3) mentions that a key feature of this method is being able to answer questions like “what”, “why” and “how” and with the help of these questions the researcher will be able to interpret the informant’s social interactions, their views of the world and surroundings, material conditions their history and life experiences. In this analysis, I will concentrate on the refugee’s adaptability by shedding light on how they constructed and developed feelings of home and belonging and how the life event of being uprooted from their places of familiarity and safety affects the refugee’s outlook for the future.

Bryman (2013: 380) mentions three main features that are of worth to note within qualitative research. He mentions the need for a researcher to follow either a deductive or inductive approach to the relationship between theory and research. Within this study, I will be using the inductive approach associated with the grounded theory analysis. Within the inductive theory, the researcher starts with a theme which later is developed into empirical generalizations and as the research progresses preliminary concepts are identified from which later theory is developed.

From an epistemological perspective, Ritchie et al., (2013: 6) defines it as being “concerned with the ways of knowing and learning about the world” and it concentrates on “how we learn about reality”. Therefore, in this thesis I am taking the interpretivist position, in this research I am hoping to understand how the refugees accommodate to their new societies by examining and interpreting the way they enact feelings of home and belonging within their communities.

The final feature that Bryman mentions that a researcher must reveal in relation to his work is the ontological stance.

As means to find an answer regarding the nature of reality and to know about the world I am taking the constructionist position about which Bryman (2013: 380) mentions “that social properties are outcomes of the interactions between individuals, rather than phenomena ‘out there’ and separate from those involved in its construction”.
5.1 Grounded Theory Analysis

The approach used to extract the theory portion of this thesis was done using the grounded approach. Since its publication by Glaser and Strauss in 1967 the grounded theory approach has become a popular framework for transforming primary data resulted from interviews into theory (Bryman, 2012: 567). In grounded theory Corbin, & Strauss, (2008) recommends the researcher to have the initial research question open ended so that the researcher can be open to where the research question will lead.

Corbin, & Strauss, (1990: 4-6) mentions the following procedures that help create theory from “raw data”. Firstly, researchers need to be ready to analyze his data as soon as the “first bit of data is collected”. Secondly, from transcripts with the help of coding the researcher highlights incidents, processes or occurrences which are labeled into concepts. Lastly, concepts can be grouped into categories which help the researcher get a better sense of his/her data. Categories are regarded to be the "cornerstones" of a developing theory and it depends on the researcher to select the most relevant concepts that will answer to the research questions.

All the interviews gathered while in the field were recorded, but to that two were taken with the help of notes. After transcribing the interviews I color coded them under common concepts/themes that later facilitated the analysis. The transcription of the interviews where an interpreter was present was quite difficult because the answers to the semi structured interview were quite short and telegraphic. Additionally, the interpreter combined both English and Romanian when conveying the participant’s answers. Because some of the informant’s life paths took them through other Arab countries previous their arrival to Romania and because the Arabic community in both Bucharest and Timisoara is small, I thought fit to anonymize some of the Arabic countries that might give away their identity.

Trying to find common experiences and patterns among my informants I thought fit to begin my interviews with a theme based semi structured interview guide (see Appendix). Moreover, during the process of transcription and coding and while reading the material I continued to seek common experiences and similarities in my informant’s narratives. In doing so, I wanted to be able to present how the refugees that arrived in Romania with the migration wave of late 2014 until present managed to construct home and develop feelings of belonging within the urban centers of Bucharest and Timisoara.

As I came across common concepts in interviews I then turned to literature and tried to find its correspondent hoping thus to integrate the findings in the larger research based on refugees and creating home and feelings of belonging in their countries of destination.

5.2 Semi structured life history interviews

Complimentary to desk research, I also travelled to the cities of Bucharest and Timisoara in Romania where I embarked in field research during the whole month of March 2018. The primary data collected for this qualitative research consists of in depth semi structured life history interviews held with refugees that have been granted asylum or subsidiary protection by the Romanian state starting with the late 2014 until present.
With their roots in anthropology, sociology and social history, (Jackson & Russell, 2010: 2) the life history interviewing method concentrates in bringing to surface every day experiences in the narrator's own words.

According with Goodson, & Sikes, (2001), one important strength of the life interview is bringing together and having in focus the ‘people’ element of research while also emphasizing the public and private aspects of the social environment. In Jackson & Russell, (2010: 20) opinion there are “no fast and hard rules” for conducting a life history interview. Notwithstanding, since the life history interviews main objective is to document informant’s life experiences in their own words, therefore the researcher should take some extra time to address any concerns the informants might have. Thompson, (2000: 156) suggest that informants are more open to share their most personal experiences if you can use a name from the informant’s own social network as recommendation. Moreover, the researchers should keep in mind their role as professionals and while concentrating on the overall interview process they should show interest and respect as individuals regardless of their opinions or points of view. Since the life history interview involves handling of sensitive, personal information Jackson & Russell, (2010: 21) advises the researcher to carefully consider possible confidentiality and copyright issues.

5.3 Research Design
5.3.1 Sampling
As noted by Bryman, (2012: 425) one issue that many researchers confront with in the qualitative research framework is establishing the sufficient number of informants that needs to participate in interviews. Crouch, & McKenzie, (2006: 483) argues that because the scope of the interview is to showcase the inner workings of the individual's social life, the researcher needs to develop strong bonds with his informants therefore it is fundamental for the researcher to dedicate all his attention to the research field. Hence fewer informants will develop those bonds and “enhance the validity of fine-grained, in-depth inquiry in naturalistic settings”. On the contrary, Onwuegbuzie, & Collins, (2007:289) note the need within a research project to achieve “data saturation, theoretical saturation, or informational redundancy” therefore it is of great importance for the sample sizes not to be too small. Moreover, Sandelowsky, (1995: 179) argued that “numbers are unimportant” in setting the right sample strategy, therefore letting unto the researcher’s judgement and experience to determine the “adequate sample size” sample however Bryman, (2012: 571) recommends the researcher to select samples of the most relevant sources to the aim and research questions.

While there is a continuous debate among qualitative method researchers regarding the sufficient number of informants that needs to participate in interviews, for the scope and purposes of this master thesis study, I have received guideline concerning the minimum and the ideal number of informants.

Because primary data collection relies on sample strategies, Ritchie et al., (2014: 112) extrapolates and links a successful sample strategy to a successful research design. Unlike to quantitative methods, qualitative based scholarship often relies on non-probability samples for its research (Ritchie et al., 2014: 113). As means to “portray particular features” of the refugee population in Bucharest and Timisoara, the non-probability sampling helps me as a
researcher to deliberately select interviews with informants within my targeted criteria of the refugee population. Even though, Ritchie et al., (2014: 113) points out that by using the non-probability sampling this research would not be statistically representative, it will reflect those “particular features” in the population that I am targeting.

Within this sample technique I made use of both generic purposive sampling along with snowball sampling. The generic purposive sampling is an approach that assists with the “selection of cases or contexts”. Depending on his research questions the researcher is free to decide “the kinds of cases needed to address as well as the samples for those cases” (Bryman, 2012: 422). To address a possible financial strain due to an extended stay in the field, the recruitment of informants was designed to take place in my hometown of Bucharest. For that reason, I also tried to keep the bulk of my field work in the same city with just a few days travel to the city of Timisoara to perform the interviews. Therefore, in order to explore how displaced refugees who settled in the Romanian cities of Bucharest and Timisoara managed to adapt to the receiving society and analyze how they use feelings of belonging to create a home abroad my sampling strategy in which I made use of the generic purposive sampling is an approach consisted of the following.

The snowball sampling consists by selecting a small number of to begin with (Bryman, 2012: 424), later this small group of informants recommends other participants that were relevant to the study forming thus a network of informants.
I used the snowball sampling for practical reasons as I have been in the work field for over a month. I had the opportunity to volunteer for an organization in Bucharest which in turn granted me access to contacts while in the same time I encountered the refugee group within the population. This opportunity will open the door towards two interviews within this project.

5.3.2 Selection of cases, implementation and challenges
As mentioned in section 5.3.1 Sampling, the selection of the participants for this study has been made with the assistance of non-governmental organizations that acted gatekeepers. After realizing that my initial approach to contact several non-governmental organizations that are assisting refugees in Bucharest were left unanswered I started doing some networking of my own and with the help of the Swedish Embassy in Bucharest, I got directed to the UNHCR agency in Bucharest and with their help and assistance I got access to key individuals within NGO’s relevant to my study. The position of these individuals within their organizations granted me both access and trust with the informants.

Snowball sampling techniques are commonly used to identify informants Dam & Eyles, (2012), Boer, (2014) and Webster & Haandrikman (2017). Due to contact at a more personal level both in depth life story interviews and snowball method help build relationships based on trust between the informant and the interviewer. Moreover, I also intended to take advantage of the trust and good will already established and invited my informants to introduce me to their neighbors, friends and acquaintances.

Under this consideration, I would like to point out that eight in depth semi structured life story interviews were executed with the help of CNRR: The Romanian National Council for Refugees in Bucharest. The council assisted with recommendations of informants that fit the
criteria of being asylum seekers that have arrived during the years 2015-2018 and been granted asylum or subsidiary protection in Romania. After a thorough presentation of the project, one of the councilors proposed, and later got involved in translating the interview questions from English into Arabic, and later during the interview stage, she even offered to participate as interpreter from Romanian to Arabic and vice versa. The interviews were scheduled with the help of the councilors and conducted by me in the informant’s homes. Because some of the informants were women and due to specific cultural codes of conduct the Arabic female interpreter also played the liaison between me and the female informants.

The second organization that was involved in assisting with interviews in Bucharest was JRS Romania: The Jesuit Refugee Service Romania. Due to a temporary lack of funds the organization could not provide much help however, towards the end of my fieldwork I had the opportunity to hold an interview on the organization’s premises with a Syrian male newly arrived in Bucharest. Two of the organization’s counsellors provided constructive feedback concerning some of the questions for the interviews. While the clear majority of the interviews were set after some sort of contact with the informants, the interview at JRS Romania office was set without any input from my part. That being said, I personally briefed the informant regarding the purpose of my study and received a verbal agreement that informant was comfortable in holding the interview at that specific location.

The four in depth semi structured life story interviews executed in the city of Timisoara were executed with the help of AIDRom: The Ecumenical Association of Churches in Romania. Compared with all the other associations and due to an acute short of staff my contact with AIDRom was the minimum. AIDRom’s involvement was limited to a presentation around the association’s work with refugees and additionally I have been offered a short description regarding the informants that fitted my criteria and their contact details.

One of the biggest challenges I faced was finding informants for this study, because of my focus on refugees that has been granted asylum or subsidiary protection by the Romanian state during a specific window in time, more specifically starting with the year 2015 until present, I quickly realized that the refugee process is more complex and that it will be extremely difficult to find informants within that specific time frame. Therefore, I saw myself needing to slightly adjust the year of arrival, consequently I added to my interview pool even informants that arrived in the country during late 2014.

Another challenge encountered is the possibility for an asylum seeker after being granted asylum to choose to remain housed within the reception centers. To bring into light how the refugees that arrived in Romania starting with late 2014 until present, after being granted asylum or subsidiary protection manage to accommodate themselves within the communities they choose to settle, it does so by exploring the way these refugees construct and develop feelings of home and belonging abroad. Because the refugee reception centers tend to be located at the outskirts of the city, individuals housed in these centers would have less opportunities to encounter the community than their peers who choose to live apartments in the city.
5.3.3 The participants
Table 2. The interview participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Country of origin</th>
<th>City of residence in Romania</th>
<th>Arrival year</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Marital status</th>
<th>Accompanying persons</th>
<th>Language of the interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fifa</td>
<td>50's</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>Syria</td>
<td>Bucharest</td>
<td>Winter 2014</td>
<td>Tailor</td>
<td>Seven classes</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>With husband and children</td>
<td>Arabic/translator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adi</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Man</td>
<td>Syria</td>
<td>Bucharest</td>
<td>Fall 2014</td>
<td>Businessman</td>
<td>Six classes</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>With Wife</td>
<td>Arabic/translator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Batul</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>Syria</td>
<td>Bucharest</td>
<td>Winter 2014</td>
<td>House wife</td>
<td>Six classes</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Three generation family</td>
<td>Arabic/translator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dulce</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Man</td>
<td>Iraq but lived in Arab country 1</td>
<td>Timisoara</td>
<td>2016</td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>University</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Parents and brother</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linus</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Man</td>
<td>Syria but lived in Arab country 2</td>
<td>Timisoara</td>
<td>2017</td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>University</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Alone</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samir</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Man</td>
<td>Syria but lived in Arab country 3</td>
<td>Timisoara</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>University</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>With brother</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memed</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Man</td>
<td>Iraq</td>
<td>Timisoara</td>
<td>2016</td>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>High school</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>With parents and brothers</td>
<td>Romanian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jason</td>
<td>Mid 20's</td>
<td>Man</td>
<td>Syria</td>
<td>Bucharest</td>
<td>2017</td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>A two-year institute</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Extended family</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctor</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>Man</td>
<td>Iraq</td>
<td>Bucharest</td>
<td>2016</td>
<td>Training in a hospital</td>
<td>Medical school</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Wife and children</td>
<td>Arabic/translator/English</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.4 Ethical considerations

Because of the use of life history interviews to gather primary data for this thesis, made me be careful with the way I handle and present the private information to the public. Bryman, (2012) mentions that the informed consent and not harming the participants are the main steps that needs to be followed within research ethics for the qualitative method. Throughout the project, I have tried to respect the steps Bryman outlined as means to protect the participants.

While I was grateful for their willingness of my informants to participate voluntarily to this project, I made sure to take enough time and explain the purpose of the study while also addressing any concerns about their privacy while not applying any pressure into joining the study. Moreover, because I was recommended by organizations that are also involved in assisting refugees to get accommodated to the Romanian society or by other refugees from their network of friends I felt that there was enough trust between us and that the participant’s oral consent was enough without having them sign a paper interview agreement.

Furthermore, because I knew that some of the participants do not speak English nor Romanian, I was able to provide a hard copy in Arabic of the interview questions that the informants could look at during the interview. A scanned copy of the of the Arabic version of the interview questions can be consulted in the appendix section 0.2 Interview Guide in Arabic of this study. In addition, because I knew that some of the interview questions can be quite sensitive, I made sure to let the participant know in advance the possibility of refusing to answer some questions. Further, some of the questions that I deemed myself to be of sensitive matter I made sure to construct them in such a way that they wouldn’t feel pressured to answer.
In the process of transcription all the names of the participants were replaced by fictive names that the participants themselves selected. To avoid the publication of private and sensitive information some of the city and country names were also anonymized. In trying to avoid publication of private information that might possibly embarrass my informants, I felt that I should leave out some of the private experiences and personal life stories that were shared during the interviews. However, while leaving out some private information does not mean that I am trying to cover the truth, I believe that the information I presented to be sufficient for the reader to get an accurate image on how the participants created a home and developed feelings of belonging in the urban centers of Timisoara and Bucharest.

5.5 Limitations

Regarding limitations, one challenge that I faced with this study was not being able to find studies that addresses the topic of refugees and feelings of home and belonging within cities of Romania. The unfortunate world context continues to show the existence of social and political unrest which will continue to bring many more asylum seekers to the neighboring countries, including in Romania. Only recently the National Romanian Council for Refugees (2018) initiated a call for proposals on “the needs and refugee’s perspectives” in correlation with the integration and accommodation process in Romania. In addition, I would like to point out that because of the short period of time available to construct this study and because of the long process to access official records in Romania (thirty days), it was somewhat challenging to gain access to more up to date data regarding the distribution of Arab migrants across Romania. However, while the most recent statistics presented in this study dates from 2005 and can be reviewed in table 1 in section 3.3 The Arab and Muslim communities in Romania of this study, I would argue that even though the numbers of individuals would be different, the ranking of the counties is similar. Since it was pointed out earlier in this study that historically, much of the Arab communities established its roots around either university campuses or as business across the main cities of Romania the cities presented in the study are the main cities in Romania.

Moreover, using an interpreter in research is quite difficult, the meaning of the participant responses, the interpreters and even the researcher’s questions could be lost through the interpreting process and this fact could pose a problem in terms of research claims and results. Another possible limitation would be the interviews themselves, while I tried to be as thorough as possible and to keep the interview focus, I found at times that we deviated towards other topics which it took from the time of the interview, I believe that the interview would have been greatly enhanced in quality by a further follow up interview, where unclear or additional migration experiences could be revealed. Wernesjö, (2015: 454) mentioned of using repeated meetings with his young participants.

Lastly, Longhurst, (2010: 152) invites the researcher to reflect over the power relations and inequality between him as a professional and the participants as this power relation could influence the participant’s responses and change the study results. With that in mind, being from Romania and living outside the country of origin for many years, I understood their situation and consequently it helped us build a relationship of trust among ourselves. However, regarding some of their experiences with the local population, I
tried to be neutral and non-judgmental counteracting thus possible limitations that might have arisen out of this situation.

Concerning the criteria for evaluating qualitative studies Lincoln, & Guba, (1985: 218) propose the concept of trustworthiness as an alternative concept to the classical concepts of reliability and validity (Bryman, 2012: 389). In my quest to establish credibility for this study as a researcher I made sure to the best of my abilities to follow the codes of ethics through the whole stages of this research. Because qualitative research involves a rather limited number of participants and their individual life experiences are quite unique, these results cannot be expanded to the rest of the population (Bryman, 2012: 392); nevertheless, the methodology of this study can be transferred to similar studies. So, in order to make a research study dependable Lincoln, & Guba, (1985: 316-318) invites the researcher to use an audit approach concerning the organization of this study. Concerning this research, I made sure to save all the records on an external device for a better security of the data. The final criteria of the trustworthiness concept named confirmability consists of ensuring that the researcher acted in good faith and showed objectivity. As I cannot guarantee complete objectivity, however, I tried to be as impartial as possible while conducting this research. I invite the reader to revisit subchapter 5.4 Ethical considerations for a more detailed presentation of the ethics for this study.
6. Findings

6.1. Brief description of the informants

In the following chapter I would like to offer a more detailed description of the informants that agreed to participate in this research. Their ages at the time of arrival ranges between eighteen to seventy-year-old. Location wise, five of the interviews were performed in Bucharest and the remainder of four being the city of Timisoara. Even though this is intended to be a limited description I find it necessary to offer the reader the opportunity to connect to the people whose stories we analyze in this thesis. Following I will present the findings of the interviews.

**Memed** is a 28-year-old man from Iraq who lives with his mother and father along with his other five brothers in Timisoara. His ethnic background is Turk and Shia Muslim. He and his family arrived in Romania from Turkey during 2016 with the help of an UNHCR relocation scheme. He is currently employed and speaks Romanian fluently.

**Samir** is a 20-year-old man of Syrian origin, but who was born and grew up in [Arab country 3]. His ethnic background is Arab. Both he and his brother have arrived in Romania in 2015 on a student visa and became a refugee ‘sur le place’ which means that he applied for the refugee status while in Romania. Samir just got married a month before the interview to a Romanian girl who has met in one of his university courses.

**Linus** is a 19-year-old man of Syrian origin, but who relocated with his family to [Arab country 2]. His ethnic background is Arab. Linus arrived in 2016 in Romania as a volunteer on a one year volunteer visa. At the end of his volunteering period he was refused reentry [Arab country 2] on grounds of a not so public law which stated that once a Syrian left the country, she/he was not allowed to reenter. Because of his inability to rejoin his family he was forced to apply for refugee status in Romania.

**Fifa** is a Syrian mother of five in her mid 30’s. Fifa grew up in a conservative family and her biggest dream was to be a clothing designer and considers that her dream vanished away after she got married. Fifa joined her husband in Romania in a cold dark winter day in 2014. Her most treasured memory is growing up in Syria around her family while making herself until through the clothes that she sews.

**Adi** is a Syrian businessman in his late 30’s. While he applied for refugee status in the country in fall 2014, his experience with Romania goes as early as 1990 when he along with some cousins unsuccessfully tried to set up a business. Because of his fast language learning skills, he considers himself to be successfully accommodated to the local society.

**Doctor** is a 42-year-old man from Iraq. Because of the ongoing violence in his city and directly towards his family he felt compelled to start looking for a ‘safe haven’ for him and his household. His journey to safety lasted nine years and took him through lands like Yemen, Russia, Malaysia, Turkey to name just a few. In Romania, he arrived in 2016 and since then went back to the medical school. He is hoping to obtain a degree that will confer him the possibility to profess as a doctor within the European Union.
**Dulce** is from Iraq of 27 years of age. Even though he has born in Iraq, his teenage years were spent living in [Arab country 1]. Because his older brother studied medicine and remained in Timisoara, Dulce had plenty of opportunities to come visit him as a tourist in Timisoara. In 2016 Dulce and his father found out that they lost their job while visiting his son in Romania. By law they could not remain in the country if they are not employed therefore preferred to file for asylum in Romania instead of being deported to Iraq from the place they called home for so many years. Currently almost all the family but one reside in Timisoara, the oldest son resides and became a citizen of Ireland.

**Jason** is a young Syrian man in his mid 20’s. Previous his arrival to Bucharest, he also lived and worked in Algeria for seven months and Turkey for two and a half years. The primary reason he departed from Syria was not to be drafted in the Syrian military to have to “kill his own people”. He chose Bucharest primarily to help his uncle who has a business here and later he hopes to return to Syria to rejoin his family in Syria.

**Batul** is a 39-year-old Syrian mother from Alepo, she and her three generation family were forced to live behind their twenty-five-room house and orchard located in the center of Aleppo. She took great pride in sharing pictures of a wonderful life and now a home lying in ruin. Even though she arrived in the late 2014, Romania was not a foreign destination for Batul as she had relatives that came in Romania during the 1990’s.

### 6.2 Moving to Romania

The top two citizenships granted protection status in Romania during 2017 are Syrian and Iraqi (Eurostat, 2018). These groups were driven out of their homes and country territories because of violent conflicts between some of the population and the forces. The situation created made the lives of ordinary civilians very unstable which ultimately led to a major exodus across lands and borders which effects rippled through all the countries of Europe. This period was named by UNHCR, (2016:5) report as “the biggest refugee crisis in Europe since the second world war” and this situational background of the migration journey for the informants that took part in this study.

Before arriving to Bucharest and Timisoara the individuals or families have lived in different other neighboring countries under different conditions. Their reasons to relocate to Romania are as diverse as the personality of the individuals themselves. Some of them of fear not to be divided as a family chose to relocate to Romania while others seeing a limited future in those initial places sought to construct a better and freer life. The common denominator of all informants is that at the time they were in a vulnerable estate, therefore they examined the prospects to relocate in a place that will improve their chances for a better life in the future.

Using the life course perspective, one understand that throughout an individual's life there are events resulting from personal choices and as a result, these events bring life altering changes in the individual’s life structure (Dykstra, & van Wissen, 1999:5). Romania might not represent an ideal location for many asylum seekers, but from all the informants interviewed only one did not had a personal interaction with a friend, coworker or relative that has either lived, studied or opened a business at one point in the country.
"The universities are cheaper than in the West and the degrees are recognized European Union wide. It is easier to get admitted into the universities here". -Dulce

The largest group of the informants that participated in this study arrived in Romania attracted by the possibility to be admitted into competitive programs such as the medical school, or the school of engineering taking advantage of competitive tuition fees and a more affordable cost of living.

Throughout the interview discussions it showed that even though most of the participants had some knowledge of where Romania was located geographically most of them made the conscious decision to move to Romania because of previous consultation with significant others. Clausen, (1995) conveys the idea that within their social circumstance, individuals plan, make choices and compromises between different options and the sum of all this builds forms life course.

Before arriving to Romania Samir mentioned that he did not know a lot about the place he was thinking of moving to, “because the [Arab country] is a very rich country you don’t care about things. You don’t care about the news... [he initially] thought Romania was like Germany”. However, later a friend of his father that studied in the country during the 1980 described the situation during those times with the Arab saying, “If you are not a wolf, they will eat you”. Worried he went to search on the web more information and concluded that “a country like Romania doesn’t have a lot of information about it... as opposed to countries like Germany”.

Doctor describes a similar experience; his decision was taken after being advised by other Iraqi doctor’s colleagues of his that attended the medical school in Bucharest during their student years. Adi’s experience with Romania and Romanian culture is not new since he tried to open a business in the country during the early 1990’s and now he returned to Romania accompanied by his wife and children as a refugee to escape the Syrian conflict.

“When he heard of Romania and Europe he [Mehmed’s father] said yes because we had all our relatives here in Finland, Germany or Sweden”. -Memed

Memed’s experience stands out as being the only participant that had no previous knowledge of the country. Their decision was more of an opportunity decision. Memed, his parents and his other five brothers choose to be relocated to Romania from Turkey through UNHCR exclusive based on Romania’s location in Europe. Since all their extended family was scattered in countries across the European Union they were afraid not “to go to America or further away”.

One final aspect that Samir experienced and Heller (1995:5) mentioned, is that through moving to other culture creating a new home can represent a space of ‘personal independence’.

“I hated school a lot...there is no choice, is no variety in choosing. When I come here I wanted to be a doctor, you know like... ohhh... to be a doctor is the best honor for you. (laughter) The biggest honor that you would ever have. But now is like why do I have to study something
that I don’t want. Now that I have the choice I want to study something that I have passion about it.” - Samir

6.3 Access to the community and establishing a new home

As mentioned earlier in the theoretical framework of this thesis, creating home or homing desires has become an important topic of study within the human geography as early as 1970’s. Tuan (1974) made the connection between feelings of love that an individual feel towards the significant place in their life. Heller, (1995:5) described ‘home’ as a space loaded with the symbolism of familiarity and security.

“For me the [Arab country 1] never felt like home, Timisoara has a little bit more of a homey feeling than the [Arab country 1]. [...] It has a real nice homey feeling. When I leave Timisoara to Bucharest, I do feel a bit homesick. It has a homey feeling because I did make over here a good group of friends. [...] Maybe I will move somewhere else in the future but I would like to have Timisoara as my home base. I might go places, work for a couple of years and then return”. - Dulce

Despite living for 15 years in the place where he lived his teenager years Dulce has never been able to connect to the local society. Some of the impediments that kept him from calling it home was primarily inaccessibility to citizenship or any form of permanent long stay residence. To explain the impact of the law on non-citizens Dulce shares his best friend’s father story who after 30 years’ work as a chemistry teacher at retirement he was deported back to Syria, a country in the middle of a violent conflict.

Even though Dulce had a hard time constructing home in the place where he lived his teenager years, feeling at home in Timisoara has not been easy either. Despite traveling to Timisoara on several occasions while visiting his brother, the transition to the local Romanian culture came gradually. He described the time when he felt that Timisoara became feeling more “homey” as a direct result of developing friendships with local artists and getting involved in art projects that militates for a greater understanding of refugees in the local community.

Like in Dulce’s case, Batul, Fifa, Jason and Adi had also an anchor that would help them accommodate to their new communities and building a new home.

Refugee based research pointed out that individuals as social beings thrive living in collective groups linked by similar culture and beliefs and that people, place and the social aspect are vital for all human beings (Boer 2014:487). Batul, as new arrival, she felt isolated from the locals and she did not feel that the city has anything to offer her. Her first meaningful experience was with the small Arab community located in her neighborhood, beside that some of the local food brings back flavors and feelings of her lost home.

For Fifa, familiarity means primarily an Arab community therefore she and her husband chose to establish their home in Bucharest. Education for their children ranked also high therefore they chose to rent an apartment close to the Arab school in the middle of the large Arab community of Bucharest.
“I would love to start fresh here, in this area, here I feel that I am among my own, in our community. Here I know everyone... I might not be able to speak with them but just the fact of seeing them every day I feel connected with them, it makes me feel good”. - Fifa

Because of the previous experience of being forcibly uprooted from her home and family ties severed, Fifa is trying to recreate her lost home, a place of stability and comfort. She mentions of a “sweet old man” who lives in an apartment next door “… when I see him and say hi in the morning I have the feeling of seeing my own father”.

In her first interaction with the community, Fifa stated that it took a long time to let past things go, she was still living in the past and hoped for a quick return to Syria, consequently she did not try her best to make friends and learn the local language. A few years later, “after making friends” she began to feel more inclined to learn the language.

Because Adi has lived previously in Romania he feels comfortable and familiar in Bucharest, in fact, because he “had more local friends than Arabs” could learn the language faster and be successful in his cheese business. However, what makes it successful in his cheese business is the informal culture of doing business under the table describing it to be “like the Syrian way of doing business.”

Jason, even though he has strong anchors here he never sees himself as staying in Bucharest. In fact, he moved here at the persuasion of his uncle. However, he admits that having someone familiar in the place is helpful.

“Bucharest is just a pause time and later I am just thinking to come back to Syria. And at the end of the year I will see If I can return to Syria. I will try, I don’t know if it will happen”. - Jason

Yuval-Davis, (2006:197) connects the feeling of being ‘at home’ with the emotion of feeling attached or feeling that you belong to.

“Whenever I am talking to my mother she said I am waiting you, I am waiting you…”. - Jason

Even though Jason has relatives in Bucharest and feels that his experience in the city and community is a positive one he finds it extremely difficult and emotional to let go attachments with his family and loved ones. He gave himself a time frame of returning while also stating that “all my future is about Aleppo.”

While previous informants have previous anchors to Romania, Samir, Memed and Doctor even though they lacked previous attachments, their experience shows they fully accommodated to the new society and local community without any difficulties.

“Romanian culture is nice and weird a little, it has the Arabic impulsiveness and strength, but then it takes so less to be happy.” - Samir

As volunteer Samir had the chance to travel to different cities like Bucharest, Cluj, Sibiu and many other, therefore he could contrast and compare the communities within the cities he visited.
Samir linked the difficulty to find an apartment with the friendliness of the community. While Timisoara is perceived as a city with unfriendly people, the city of Cluj in northern Romania is described as a definite city for him to start a family and establish a new home.

“You think different, you relate to people differently when you go to school and when you have an education.”- Samir

Education is the key to society, having friends or being surrounded by highly educated people helps you adapt very easy. In addition to education age is another factor that opens the doors into a community. Samir suggests that people are more open and less judgmental towards others “we drink the same coffee, we have a lot of things in common. We even listen to the same music…”

Like Samir, Doctor has similar experiences in interacting with the local culture. He used his unpaid resident student internship to build a network of friends and colleagues in the hospital that he works. Moreover, even though he currently lives within the Arab community in Bucharest. For Doctor is not important to have a constant social interaction with other Arabs. In fact, he is hoping to move his children from the private Arabic school to a public one hoping thus for a better exposure and accommodation within the adoptive society.

Even though not a highly-educated informant, Memed’s experience of accommodating to the new culture is similar compared to the rest of the cohort.

“it is like home but a different language... and you get less money.”- Memed

Despite not having a previous knowledge of the local society, Memed found the more open and relaxed of the community in Timisoara a positive thing. Furthermore, the outdoorsy nature, with BBQs outside and backgammon games outside the building apartment made him exclaim “it is like us!”. Because of the few similar cultural aspects Memed mentioned that he would love to start a home in the city and since he was young he imagined himself as living with a foreigner “like in the movies that I watched on TV” therefore he would want to get married to a local girl at the expense of an “Arab girl or Turkish”. Moreover, because he is fluent in Romanian he discovered new opportunities in interacting with the community, he was also able to find without any problems an apartment large enough to house his large household.

6.4 Feelings of belonging

“We have the residency in [Arab country 3] but they won’t let you stay there forever. [Even though you are born there] you would never be one of them. Your only purpose is to work and then you will go. That’s it!”- Samir

Yurval-Davis (2006:197) connects the feeling of being ‘at home’ with the emotion of feeling attached or feeling that you belong. Even though Samir was born and grew up in [Arab country 3] he mentioned that he never felt that he belongs to that society.
“[The community] it’s pretty closed, and they are making everything for themselves, like any advantage for themselves... They believe that you could never be one of us, even though you lived your whole life there and even die there”.

Though the presence of the family and close relatives help develop and maintain feelings of place belonging Samir missed personal relationships with the community and the society in general. While the economic factor helps provide feelings of safety and makes the lives of both the individual and his/her family more stable from a material point of view. Antonsich, (2010:647) noted that personal and social ties are an “essential requirement for any individual regardless of culture or geographical embedness”.

Furthermore, Antonsich, (2010:648) mentions citizenship and residential permits as being necessary in producing long term life security feelings and are essential to the dimension of belonging.
As a young man, Samir sees citizenship and having a passport as a form of validation of himself as a member of the society that he got raised in. In the eyes of the law and the local society he retains his father’s Syrian citizenship, therefore he is a foreigner even though his mother is a rightful citizen of the [Arab country 3] or that he went to school.

Like Samir, Linus and Dulce had a similar experience of moving away for their countries of birth to [Arab country 2 and 1] where because of their nationality they had difficulties in becoming a part of the society.

“The whole middle East Is out of my mind, I forgot about it. I can’t go back to live there again. The whole middle east for me is dead. Because the way they judge you on your appearance and like... Who would accept me?... No middle east at all.” - Linus

Because of his “educated” background and because of a “more liberal way” of being brought up Linus had a hard time fitting in while growing up in Syria and [Arab country 2] therefore he considers being stranded in Romania as something that maybe can be for the best.
As Syrian, he also feels rejected by the Arabic world: “I cannot go to the Gulf countries, I cannot go to Lebanon, I cannot even go to Turkey, I need a visa to Turkey and is also very hard to get one. What do we have left... Egypt, I also need a visa. I can enter for free in Sudan, but why would I want to go Sudan where people are dying of starvation”.

After 15 years of living and working in [Arab country 1] Dulce lost his job which resulted in losing their residency status in the country. Even though he already knew that it will be almost impossible to find a new job, he found it particularly difficult and hurtful the negative public discourse at the time which concentrated on the “Iraqi and Syrians, that they shouldn’t be offered so many employment opportunities in the country.”

“I don’t want to engage with that society!” -Dulce

Furthermore, because of the impetuousness of the move, Dulce and his parents were forced to leave behind attachments to friends, work colleagues, but also physical possessions like
cars or furniture. That and previous unpleasant experience as a student in Malaysia made Dulce to want to sever his ties from the Arab community.

“No, even here the community is not that friendly because they have settled before, during the time Ceausescu.”- Dulce

Moreover, Dulce does not feel he can develop feelings of belonging towards the Arab community in Romania. According to him the local Arab community classifies in four categories:

The old timers: the individuals that have arrived in Romania during the communist times and started an informal black market of illegal goods that at the time was difficult to obtain.

The others: individuals that have arrived during the same time or after, some left some stayed and started “legit currency trading businesses” or became doctors all trying to accommodate to the local culture.

The refugees who are trying to restart their lives and lastly the students from the rich gulf countries or the western nationals that are attracted by the cheap tuition rates, affordable standard of living and by the ease of being admitted to schools like the medical school or school of engineering. The diplomas awarded can enable one to work anywhere in the west.

“The rich college students that come here from the rich gulf countries or the west who got all them money, they are ruining our reputation because they get drunk and wasted and are causing fights and all kind of problems.”- Dulce

Dulce says that because of the way some of these students’ act can make it difficult for the refugees to get accommodated in the local community. Since Timisoara is a small city “the news spreads like wildfire” and as a result locals refuse to rent their apartments to the refugees.

Even though Memed does not go much in detail regarding his experience of living outside his birth country he links belonging with being awarded Romanian citizenship.

“This year I will have Romanian citizenship, I will feel like a Romanian.”- Memed

Memed was only fifteen when he and his household journey for safety started thirteen years ago when they were uprooted from their home in Iraq. After a period of hardship and uncertainty they found safety in the neighboring Syria. However, there was a point during the Syrian conflict where “the city we took shelter fell apart under bombs” thus it felt safer to move back to the homeland of Iraq than to carry on being in Syria. At twenty-two he and his siblings were forced yet again to run for safety because things in Iraq began to escalate, but this time Turkey represented a safety net for them.

6.5 The urban environment
As mentioned previously within the theoretical framework of this study, beside Blunt, & Dowling, (2006) meaning of home as the physical site where one reside or have an unabridged freedom of expression. Samers, (2010: 36-37) argues that public spaces like
cities and towns, neighborhoods, workplaces, cafes and parks can also provide the stage for lived, meaningful experiences.

Attachment to the built in urban environment differs between individuals. Even though Fifa grew up in a medium size Syrian city, she and her children accommodated to her new urban environment through nature. For her, the green areas, the parks and the lakes bring the familiarity of her past home.

For Doctor, Adi and Linus the Ideal urban environment is different than the one they currently reside in.

“I fell in love with Brasov, this is a city that reminds me of home.” - Doctor

For Doctor, even though he lives in the largest city in Romania he firmly believes that smaller cities are the best cities where one could start a home as himself grew up and lived in a smaller city and some of the attributes he offers them are friendlier, more peaceful and where you have the chance to get yourself known by the community.

While Adi chose the smaller city of Sibiu over Bucharest because it reminds him of his home city mainly because both cities are dairy cities, Linus even though he lived in “large cosmopolite cities with a lot of movement and things to do” in Romania, the only city that appeals to him is the medium size city of Cluj which is famous for its cultural life and events.

For the 20-year-old young man Samir, Timisoara is not only the place where he gained some independence, but he also regarded Romania as the “first foreign country visited.” Consequently, Samir naturally compares Timisoara to the cities of [ Arab country 3] or Syria. For Samir diversity within a city ranks high, even though he doesn’t feel a part of the mainstream society of his quasi-native country when comparing the two cities he mentions the great diversity of his home city. From a diversity perspective, Samir sees Timisoara as a homogenous city which it lacks diversity.

Remoteness is a second aspect of the urban environment, “there is a problem with Timisoara, every place you want to go to is far”. When offering a specific example, he uses “the camp for refugees” as a unit of measure. From an architectural perspective while he describes his home city as a modern city with the buildings being “tall and covered in glass”, Timisoara is depicted to be more like Syria.

“The old, the lack of interest in taking care of the façade of the buildings. Syrian people are exactly the same... they like the run-down look (laughter...)”
6.6 Feelings of safety

Brunn (2001:18) argues that as refugees are forced away from their homes, from their social and cultural setting or the place they have feelings of belonging, through this forced detachment they feel powerless and vulnerable. This view is shared by Doctor who described his situation in the middle of the conflict.

“When a political regime collapses or a dictator is overthrown by violence the educated people are the first people that become targeted, they are the most vulnerable people at that specific time.” - Doctor

After what he described “a heartbreaking experience” concerning violence directed towards him and his family, Doctor “felt compelled to start looking for a safe haven”.

“Those places did not feel different than Iraq, I did not feel safe enough to remain.” - Doctor

Ignatieff’s (2003) mentions about the need for a ‘safe haven’ in other words for a migrant “belonging is about feeling ‘at home’, about feeling ‘safe’. Similarly, Doctor describes his journey to safety as being ‘tiring and depressing’, a back and forth nine-year journey to several countries among which he mentions Yemen, Russia, Malaysia, Turkey, Doctor did not feel accommodated nor safe in those societies.

“Long lasting happiness is found whenever human values are respected, when one as a member of the society enjoys both the rights as well as the obligations the society imposes on its citizens. The feeling of happiness is only found in the company of two other important feelings like safety and security”. –Doctor

For Doctor, happiness is connected to feeling safe and secure, when asked of a specific instance in his life when he felt both happy and secure he mentioned being in his home city as a teenager surrounded by friends and most importantly by his family which later because of the war and violence “became scattered all over the world”.

While for Doctor safety and happiness are closely linked to being in a society that is upholding human rights, the rest of the informants were more place specific.

“the people, they are so nice here compared to the Turkish. They are stressed, they are racist towards Syrians [...] when they ask me where I am from and I say from Syria, they treats you like you are nothing. Here in Romania is different, when I say I am a foreigner they say ok, I can help you. In Turkey, they maybe will kick you.” - Jason

Even though Jason considers his time in Bucharest and Romania “just a pause time”, compared to the city he lived in previously, he feels himself welcome and safe. Memed, Fifa and Dulce expressed also similar feelings, for them the safest places were the city centers and around the areas where they live, while the most unsafe they indicated specific neighborhoods or areas with high numbers of Roma minority. From a safety perspective Samir finds safety in the strict rule of law in his home country, or other Arab countries like the UAE. For him, the informal agreements between the locals in order to avoid the law creates the feeling of being unsafe.
While feeling quite safe in and around Timisoara’s city center Linus mentioned an instance in his present situation when he felt vulnerable and unsafe. He mentioned his experience during the time he was housed in the refugee receiving center. Since he had to surrender his passport and had to wait for an official decision during his asylum-seeking application Linus was forced to live in a refugee reception center. He mentioned that due to his more liberal upbringing and being non-religious, the time spent in the reception center exposed him to a lot of abuse and mistreatment from other refugees.

6.7 Experiencing uprootedness and its effects on the outlook for the future

Dykstra, & van Wissen, (1999:5) notes that throughout an individual’s life there are events resulting from either personal choice or as a consequence of events independent of one’s decisions such as in our case political and social unrest that led to a full-blown conflict in the countries of Iraq and Syria. Consequently, these events bring life altering changes in the individual’s life structure. In the paragraphs below I will try to bring some light into how my informants experienced uprootedness and how this experience affected their outlook.

“In Iraq I build a house, became appreciated by my fellow doctors my wife was working within pharmacology business and we had to leave everything behind and run for our safety.”-Doctor

The moving was very difficult for Doctor, he not just lost his home and all the physical objects that came with it, he also lost a well-established professional life and some of the prestige that comes with being a doctor. Samir established in his interview that being a doctor within the Syrian and (possibly) Iraqi society is regarded as “the biggest honor that you would ever have.” Additionally, losing social prestige and physical objects, Elder et al., (2003:10) notes in one of his five core principles that affects both the core and substance of an individual’s life course that within the principle of timing of lives age plays an important role and of extreme importance. Therefore, the overall life of a refugee that is forced to abandon his/her homeland is affected to a greater extent if the individual is in his late years.

“Sometimes I find it impossible to start again but I keep going.” - Doctor

Doctor also mentioned the age as another impediment that added extra challenges to this ‘experience’ when you are in your 40’s. Even though he had plenty of years of experience within his medical field, Doctor is not recognized in Romania as one. Consequently, to get the right to profess within Romania and European Union Doctor had to sell his personal belongings to afford to go back to the medical school.

“I am not tied to any place, this experience made me flexible and adaptable and I know that the first few days in a new place one have feelings of nostalgia but those will pass with time and being involved with work and other activities.”- Doctor

Doctors main priority is getting his professional degree so he can start working while also being paid for it. He does not exclude the possibility of moving to western Europe for a “job with a good salary to satisfy a family of five”.
Like Doctor, Adi does not feel rooted in Romania nor Bucharest. Even though he had a previous experience with the Romanian culture, his children are attending the Arab school in Bucharest, he speaks the language and feels comfortable and safe in Bucharest, if there would be an opportunity to move to western Europe, he will take it without any “second thoughts”. In fact, he tried previously to start a cheese related business in Germany, but it got shut down because of his lack of knowledge in how to follow the German legislation around food storage, delivery and handling legislation.

For Memed life has not be easy, throughout the years he and his family had to relocate several times in several different countries in their search for safety, therefore his view on the unpredictability of life in accordance with his past experiences.

“The way I see it is that we only live once, why should we complicate things. I can live where I want than I will die and that’s it.”- Memed

Therefore, despite the positive aspects of a life lived in Romania, Memed considers that there is no future for him in staying permanently in Timisoara. He sees his future as being partly in Sweden, working with his uncle as a taxi driver for a few years and then coming to Timisoara with his savings.

Batul did not know that she had it within her to be able to adapt to “such a different culture”, she described this move as “eye opening” exposing to new and different kind of people. Her most important goal is to help her children fulfill their hopes and dreams. Right now, while they are in school she acknowledges the need for stability in their life thus she is not seeing herself relocating in any other countries in Europe. Later she would love to be able to return to her roots.

Fifa felt “torn” by the decision to leave behind the only place she was familiar with. Therefore, even though she has members of her extended family “scattered throughout Europe” she finds it difficult to start anew all over again. Like Batul, Fifa still hopes for a resolve of the Syrian conflict so she could return to “the place of [her] origin”, if that wouldn’t be possible she would want to remain in the adoptive community of Bucharest.

Unlike other refugees Samir did not experience being uprooted, his reason to move to Romania was for educational purposes. However, his experience in [Arab country 3] showed a young man who never fitted in the society. As a result, he gain a lot of perspective on life.

“I feel like if you don’t work, if you don’t do something you are nothing.” -Samir

Samir’s move away from home, coupled with the fact that he got married at such an early age made him more mature. As the head of the household he knows how important is to have a good job and have other people respect as a professional. Even though he is twenty years old, when describing his life before moving away, he generically refers to it as “when I was young.”

Because he is aware that he will never become a full citizen of [Arab country 3] and because he learned to appreciate his new-found independence, life privacy and freedom of expression for Samir Romania is described as a definite place to establish roots, to start a family and develop feelings of belonging by “through citizenship”.

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“I prefer to work for example in the UAE and to have a home here. Maybe I will get kicked out of the UAE and is good to have something stable here. I can come on holidays here.”

-Samir

Furthermore, even though he sees his future in a wealthy country where he would be able to work and “have sufficient money to live a good life” he considers Romania as a place of safety and stability a place unlike the state he was born in.

Like Samir, Dulce had a similar experience with leaving in a different country in the Middle East and growing up with that he will never become a full citizen of [Arab country 1]. Therefore, Like Samir even though Dulce is not excluding the possibility of relocating he feels accommodated in Timisoara and Romania through having the opportunity of obtaining Romanian citizenship. Nevertheless, if the opportunity would arise, he still hopes for a return to Iraq in twenty or thirty years.

For Linus, even though uprootedness came unexpectedly he mentioned that he has never felt comfortable to living in the Middle East, therefore this experience might have been “for the best.” Even though he is only nineteen Linus already has a detailed image of his future, he sees himself “graduated, successful starting my business or at least working. Doing what I like or being in a company that I like working for.” Within Kunz’s (1981) three tier classification, Linus describes himself as resembling to the self-exiled refugee; because of the liberal way of thinking and having no religious convictions he chooses to distance himself from the countries in the Middle East. For him even though he hopes to obtain the Romanian citizenship Timisoara is just the city where he will soon he will start his education in. For him even though he has never been there, Canada is portrayed as the best place to live; some of the attributes that seems attractive to him are: the size of the country, the friendliness of the people, the opportunities and remuneration it offers.
7. Discussion

In this chapter I will reassess the research findings that started with section 6.2 Moving to Romania while also connecting it to the theoretical portion of this research, I will conclude this research with possible ideas for further research. The central objective of this research was to analyze how the refugees that arrive in the urban cities of Romania manage to accommodate themselves in the communities they settled therefore below I will discuss the core findings.

7.1. The effect of the life course

Dykstra & Wissen (1999:5) noted that throughout his life, an individual will come to face events resulting from either personal choice such as moving away from home for education, a new job or marriage or because of events independent of someone’s determination such as political unrest, war, a bad economy or divorce. These events bring life altering changes in an individual’s life course. The findings revealed a dominance in the discourses of vulnerability, that Romania was not initially the best location at the time of arrival; however, as the years passed by the research found a clear split between the younger and the more older refugees. While all of them consider their accommodation with the local community somewhat successful, many of them considered their stay in Romania to be a ‘pause’, an event in their life trajectory. While the younger individuals that are attending university courses in their hopes for a better job and salary are planning to move away after graduation to the more developed parts of Europe. Moreover, this research has revealed that the decisions of the more older informants or with a lower education are mostly influenced by the notion of linked lives. As Marshall, & Mueller (2003) pointed out “lives are not lived in isolation but are embedded through a network of shared relationships” such as family friends or co-workers and that “individual actions are determined by and in turn influence the actions of those to whom we are closely linked” therefore the chances that have applied for the refugee status along with their family have greater chances to settle in the country for longer period than their younger counterparts.

7.2 Intimate emotions about places and feelings of belonging

Blunt, & Dowling, (2006) and Yuval-Davis, (2006) connects belonging and being at ‘home’ with an intimate emotion of being attached or strongly connected to a place. The findings reveal that for the informants the physical appearance of the cities is not as relevant as the way they connect to the host society, the housing ownership possibilities or even what is possible to achieve in a place. Even though the cities they established a new home are ‘worlds apart’ from the participant’s home towns, the refugees managed to construct a home independent of the physical appearance of the urban environment, the local culture or language that most population speak.

The ability to have the support of an Arabic community no matter how small, it has also showed to be of importance to the new arrivals. Boer (2014) reinforce this finding when pointing out that human as social beings thrive living in collective groups linked by similar culture and beliefs. The ability to keep some of the cultural beliefs and practices especially for the children has also been highlighted in the discussions. Therefore, there is a high possibility that the Arabic School in Bucharest to be the reason why the city is receiving up to six times more migrants of Arabic descent than any other city in the country (see table 1 in
section 3.3 The Arab and Muslim communities in Romania). Moreover, additionally to being a place of familiarity the local Arab communities that are already established have a practical function, it provides informal places of employment for the newest of refugees. However, while most of the refugees were happy and content with their ties to the Arab community from the country of destination some of the informants felt to be a ‘problematic relationship’ between them and the rest of the Arab community. Kunz, (1981) identified them as self-exiled refugees, individuals that because of personal beliefs or philosophies choose to distance themselves from their community or nation, therefore it is important for them to feel connected and accommodated to the community in the country of destination.

From a safety perspective, considering the refugees arrived from countries that are different from the countries of destination and because they were driven out of their homes because of a violent political conflict the topic of safety ranked high during the interviews. While for the local population safety might be something that can be easily overlooked for them being able to have a safe and stable way of life it was of high importance and it made them feel secure in the possibility of starting a new life in the country. Furthermore, as some of the informants were attending university courses, having access to free education was also ranked of importance from a young refugee perspective. Both the academic atmosphere, the international diversity and the connection one make with locals and students across the world helps them take an interest in being involved with the rest of the community.

7.3 The process of negotiation of home and belonging
One main finding of this study points out how the refugee sense of home and belonging is perceived as a perpetual process of negotiation with themselves and the local community from which they belong. The findings pointed out that several participants even though they feel ‘at home’ in their new communities and looking forward to getting their Romanian citizenship that will enhance the dimension of belonging, but at the same time admitting that Romania is remaining in the country is not attractive from an economic perspective. Antonsich (2010) pointed out that the economic factor enhances the overall feeling of safety and help make the life of the individuals more stable from a material point of view while also highlighting previous research that showed strong evidence toward an increased sense of belonging between refugees that has succeeded in their professional life and the host society.

Consequently, the results point out that the refugees time in school or while waiting to apply for citizenship is perceived as a “pause” time, a period in which they weight their possibilities within the country as well as abroad. While the majority describes the Romanian way of life as friendly, relaxed and welcoming, thus being similar to their home culture, the economical aspect is also of importance. Therefore, this time is a time of negotiating what they themselves value the most.

According to the refugees attending university courses, there is an insufficient interaction between the refugees that are attending English teaching local university courses and the rest of their local peers. This limited interaction makes the newly arrived feel less ‘at home’, despite them hoping to become Romanian citizens, thus making their stay in feel provisory. While some of the participants who have lived in the community longer were able to
connect and develop relationships with the local community however it is a process that requires time and that is in a perpetual state of negotiation through daily interactions.
8. Conclusion

This study aims to bring into light how the refugees that arrived in Romania starting with late 2014 till present, after being granted asylum or subsidiary protection manage to accommodate themselves within the communities they choose to settle, it does so by exploring the way these refugees construct and develop feelings of home and belonging abroad. Relocating to Romania represented a meaningful life event in the refugee’s adjustment with a different way of living. Their decision to relocate to the urban centers of Timisoara and Bucharest was not a spontaneous decision, but was taken in connection with several reasons, to which I mention: educational opportunities, family reunification or business opportunities. The conclusion is that while both cities were able rise to the refugee’s accommodation expectations, long term it failed to offer the amenities that cities in the west can offer.

In terms of access to the community and establishing a new home, participants mentioned that upon arrival they felt difficulties in adjusting to the new culture. In fact, even though much of them had anchors in place such as family, friends or even knowledge before their arrival in the country the participants still find it difficult to adjust to the local culture. However, gradually the city becomes more ‘homey’ with the help of friends, neighbors, and the community. The conclusion is that I found no difference from an access to the local community perspective. While the most educated informants found it easier to connect with their analogous peers, as educated people are less likely to be judgmental and tend to be more open with new-comers, the informants with less education found it also easy to connect with their equivalent counterparts, they use common community practices like outdoors BBQs, outside the apartment buildings backgammon games and football to build friendships with their local neighbors.

From a belonging perspective, I had the opportunity to interview four participants that grew up or lived for a long period of time in countries that prevented their access to any form of citizenship, indefinite time of residence or any legal form of long term stay. This study pointed out that those informants even though they lived for a long time in those societies, they had a very hard time feeling that they belong in any way to the society. During the interview, they talked extensively about the subject and showed themselves preoccupied and eager to obtain the Romanian citizenship.

The rest of the informants while they felt themselves welcome and happy to reside in Romania they not feel that they belong or desire to feel they belong to the local society. Some of them see their presence in Romania as something temporary and are waiting for a return.

From a urban environment perspective, much of participants had the opportunity to travel to other larger cities across the countries and therefore they could get a feel of the variety of local cultures and city sizes. In conclusion, I found that the ideal city to live in matched the size of the cities and towns the informants grew up in. However, because of the need of access to local resources and Arabic community the informants settled in the larger cities. Additionally, from a safety perspective while prior to their arrival in the country they mentioned having life experiences where they felt threatened and unsafe the Romanian cities they chose to settle in felt safe, especially in the city center.
Concerning the experience of uprootedness and its effects on the refugee’s outlook for the future, it has shown that while all of them found it difficult to move away from their homes including Samir, who has been a refugee ‘sur le place’. However, the most difficult experience of starting over again was felt among the older refugees. In conclusion, it has been found that even though difficult the process of uprootedness and relocation has shown the informants that it is possible to start again into a new place and among a new culture. Nevertheless, almost many my informants have shown to be well informed concerning their opportunities in different parts of Europe and dedicated to follow their goals. The majority shown that even though they showed some signs of belonging to the urban spaces and communities in Romania they did not see themselves as growing permanent roots and making a home in Romania. In fact, the results were split. Some of them felt their time in Romania to be a “waiting zone” until university graduation or until the conflict in Syria will cease, while other were planning to retain some ties such as Romanian citizenship and a physical home in the country while traveling to more developed countries in Western Europe for work.

For future research, it will be worthwhile to exploring deeper the theoretical framework based on time geography of spatio-temporal ‘waiting zones’ from a migration perspective. As previously mentioned, I found that while the clear majority of the informant felt happy, comfortable and mentioned that several cultural resemblances between the Romanian and Syrian culture, their time in the country was “just a pause time” (Jason), a phase in their life course until graduation, until receiving Romanian citizenship or until the Syrian political and social conflict comes to a resolve. Additionally, from a discussion with a member of the non-governmental organization that assist the refugees I understand that the propensity for the refugees that live in Timisoara to settle and integrate within local communities for a longer term is very small compared to Bucharest. It would be beneficial to research deeper and see if the location of Timisoara in the west, closer to Hungary and the Schengen area is a factor compared with the location of Bucharest in the south east.
References


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Nationsonline image 1: http://www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/map/romania-political-map.htm. Retrieved on 1 June 2018


Appendix

0.1 Interview Guide in English

Set questions:
Current residence:
Ethnic background:
Arrival year in Romania:
Age:
Name:
Completed education:
Work situation:
Date of interview:

First theme

Life in the old days
1. If you think of a time, a time when you felt happy?
   a. Where were you located?
      - in the country of origin?
      - city, small town, rural area?
   b. Tell me of the people that were around you during that time? - family, friends?
   c. Tell me about your occupation during that time?
      - student, working, during childhood
   d. What did you used to do in your free time?
   e. What were your hopes for the future during those times?
      - pursuing an education, a better job, starting a family, buying a house, moving abroad?

Second theme

The unpredictability of life
1. Did you ever think that you will live in Romania?
   a. What was your previous knowledge about this country before?
2. Do you want to discuss the decision of leaving your country of origin?
   a. How did this experience influenced the way you look at life?
3. Is there anything under the asylum seeker application process that made you feel welcome or unwelcome?
Third theme

**A new beginning**

1. Living in the city.
   a. Was living in *Bucharest* your choice or were you assigned here?
   b. What is your living accommodation situation?
      - permanent apartment contract/time limited apartment contract?
      - single living accommodation/sharing with friends or strangers?
      - how did you find your accommodation?

2. Is anything in Bucharest that reminds you of your previous home?
   a. why or why not?
      - the smells, the sounds, city buildings, food, climate, sports?

3. Do you feel that you could start a new life and build a home in the city?
   a. why or why not?
      - if not what should the city or community offer?
   b. what parts of the city do you feel safest in the city and why?
   c. what parts of the city do you feel the least safe and why?

4. In your interaction with the community do you feel welcome?
   a. how easy is it to make Romanian friends?
   b. what language do you use to communicate with the local community?

Fourth theme

**What about the future...**

1. Tell me about your hopes for the future and ambitions
   a. Are you planning to remain in the city?
      - why or why not?
   b. Are you considering in moving?
      - another city in the country, somewhere else in Europe, in the place of origin
   c. Why or why not considering of moving?
      - family, education, better job perspectives

2. Do you have family here with you?
   a. in any other European country?
   b. in the country of origin?
   c. if planning to start a family what place would be that?
0.2 Interview Guide in Arabic

السؤال

الإقامة الحالية:
الخلفية الأثنتين:

العمر:
الاسم:
التعليم المكتمل:
العمل:

تاريخ المقابلة:

الموضوع الأول:

الحياة في الأيام الماضية:

1. عندما تفكر في وقت، شعرت فيه بالسعادة؟
   - ابن كنت؟
   - في بلدك الأصلي؟
   - مدينة، بلدة صغيرة، منطقة ريفية؟
ب. صف الناس الذين كانوا حولك خلال ذلك الوقت؟
   - العائلة، الأصدقاء؟
   - أخبرني عن مهنتك خلال ذلك الوقت؟
   - طالب، العمل، خلال مرحلة الطفولة
د. ماذا كنت تفعل في أوقات فراغك؟
ه. ماذا كانت أمكلاك المستقبلية خلال تلك الأوقات؟
الموضوع الثاني:

عدم الفقدة على التنقيط بالحياة

1. هل نوّعت أنك ستعيش بعدها ما في رومانيا؟
   أ. ماذا كانت معرفتك السابقة عن هذا البلد؟
   ب. هل تريد مناقشة قرار مغادرة بلدك الأصلية؟
   ج. كيف أثرت هذه التجربة على الطريق التي تنظر بها إلى الحياة؟

2. هل هناك أي شيء في طلب اللجوء جعلك تشعر أنك مرحباً بك أم لا؟

الموضوع الثالث:

بداية جديدة:

1. الحضن في المدينة:
   أ. هل كان الحضن في بوخارست اختيارك أو قد تم تعيينك هذا؟
   ب. ما هو وضعك السكني؟
       - عدد شقة دائمة / عدد زمني محدود شقة؟
       - سكن معيش واحد / مشاركة مع الأصدقاء أو الغرباء؟
   ج. كيف وجدت مكان سكنك؟

2. هل هناك أي شيء في هذه المدينة يذكرك بوطنك السابق؟
   أ. لماذا و لماذا لا؟
   ب. الروائح، الأصوات، مبانى المدينة، الطعم، المناخ، الرياضة؟

3. هل تشعر أنك يمكنك بدء حياة جديدة وبناء منزل في المدينة؟
   أ. لماذا و لماذا لا؟
   ب. أي جزء من المدينة تشعر فيه بالأمان ولماذا؟
ج. ما هي أجزاء المدينة التي تشعر أنها أقل أمانًا و렴ًا؟

4. في تفاعلك مع المجتمع هل تشعر بالترحيب؟

ا. ما مدى سهولة أن تكون أصدقاء رومانيين؟
ب. ما هي اللغة التي تستخدمها للتواصل مع المجتمع المحلي؟

الموضوع الرابع

ماذا عن المستقبل ...

1. أخبرني عن أملك للمستقبل وطموحاتك.
هل تخطط للبقاء في المدينة؟
- لماذا نعم وماذا لا؟
ب. هل تفكر في الانتقال إلى؟
- مدينة أخرى في رومانيا ، مكان آخر في أوروبا ، بلدك الأصلي.
ج. لماذا أو لماذا لا تفكر في الانتقال؟
- الأسرة ، التعليم ، وظيفة أفضل؟

2. هل لديك عائلة هنا معك؟
ا. في أي دولة أوروبية أخرى؟
ب. في بلدك الأصلي؟
ج. إذا كنت تخطط لتأسيس عائلة ما هو المكان الذي سيكون فيه ذلك؟