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DISCOURSES ON HOME AND RETURN IN SWEDEN

**Similarities and differences in discourses on home and return between government officials
and refugees from Afghanistan in Sweden**

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Abstract

Repatriation has been proclaimed as the important right of an individual to go back home and returnees are often seen as substantial force for development and reconstruction of their home countries. It is assumed that once the reasons that force people to flee are eliminated, people will want to return back. There is a separate repatriation program in Sweden that aims to support those who decide to return, though not many people apply for help and the number of returnees per year is relatively small. The purpose of this study is to look at the differences and similarities of the discourses on home and return among policy-makers and refugees. The results show that the notions of home and return are quite similar, whereas different meanings are attached to the concept of 'belonging'. I suggest that if belonging of refugees to the Swedish society is recognized, their agency is also acknowledged, thus increasing the possible contribution that refugees can bring both to host and home countries.

Key Words: refugees, repatriation, return, home, belonging, discourses, agency, Sweden, Afghanistan, identity, refugee cycle

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List of Abbreviations

UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
HDR	Human Development Report
AVR	Assistance Voluntary Return
SMB	Swedish Migration Board
IOM	International Organization for Migration

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1. INTRODUCTION

Involuntary or forced movement of people reflects a certain failure of development efforts in countries. People flee because of civil conflicts, oppressive regimes, and lack of rights for minority groups among other causes. It is assumed that as soon as the reasons that forced people to flee are eliminated, people would want to return back (Black, 1999: 7). In 1991 Sadako Ogata, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees from 1991 to 2001, framed the return within the concept of human rights: "...the right to return to one's homeland is as important as the right to seek asylum abroad" (speech at the University of Notre Dame, September 1991). Repatriation is always included into the UN peace-building agenda, and UNHCR special attention is directed at the reintegration process to help both returnees and local communities attain all their political, civil, economic, social and cultural rights. When it's successful, the return of refugees can be a substantial force for development and reconstruction of the home country by joining the labor force, starting-up new businesses or participating in the elections of a new government.

However, sustainability of such repatriations is questionable. Due to the insecurity and weak socio-economic structures in the post-conflict countries, returnees may face renewed violence, human rights abuse or extreme poverty leading to further displacement (UNHCR, 2006: 19). Therefore, many refugees are not in favor of going back when their security is not guaranteed. However, the perception that people want to return back home and that they are needed to re-build the country (especially if we talk about a massive exodus of people) influences the policy-making process in the countries that in a way stimulates repatriation. UNHCR admits that sometimes there are accelerated or coerced 'push' factors from the asylum countries that drive people to return rather than 'pull' factors of peace and security in the country of origin (Ibid: 19).

Refugees are very often perceived as vulnerable and in need for help. At the same time the Human Development Report (2009) points out that the majority of migrants, far from being victims, tend to be successful, both before they leave their original home and on arrival in their new one (HDR, 2009: v). Koser and Van Hear argue that the majority of refugees that are seeking asylum in the more developed countries possess professional skills, have education, a certain entrepreneurial spirit and money for travelling. This means that they constitute a group of skilled people who might be needed in the post-conflict construction efforts (Koser, Van Hear,

2003: 3). However, the authors specify that such refugees are the least likely to return home even after the conflict, and although being numerically insignificant, may represent “the greatest immediate loss and the greatest potential for countries of origin” (Ibid: 3). Therefore, it is also important to look at how refugees can contribute to the post-conflict reconstruction and thus to the development of their countries of origin while staying abroad. Today it is done through remittances, involvement in political parties, donations to various organizations, and facilitation of ‘social remittances’ (sharing of ideas, values, cultural artifacts) (Ibid: 4-11). It is important to acknowledge that refugees can contribute to economic, social, cultural and political development when their human rights and fundamental freedoms are realized at most (Irvine, 2007: 1). This might be the case for those who reside in the developed countries.

As soon as one leaves a certain place, s/he is always associated with the idea of returning back, especially if we are talking about the refugees who left the place involuntarily. Today’s discourse on migration or displacement is the discourse of place that links individual to a particular place or community within a nation state (Hassanen, 2007: 7). Return or repatriation in the official documents of international organizations is always connected with homecoming. UNHCR proclaims that “for millions of refugees around the world, going home remains the strongest hope of finding an end to exile” (UNHCR, web-site). However, for people living in exile ‘home’ and ‘return’ represent complex and multi-dimensional notions. Migrants and refugees develop pluri- or trans-local understandings of home (Koser, Al-Ali, 2002: 6). Due to many reasons it does not always necessarily mean that they want to relocate to their countries of origin and it is important to make their voices heard.

1.1. Research problem and question

There are two types of programs developed to support the return of asylum-seekers and refugees in Sweden. One is the assistance voluntary return program (AVR) that targets the asylum-seekers whose case is still in progress and the ones whose application was rejected. It provides incentives for people to return in safety and dignity and helps with financial support and reintegration back in their home society. It can be challenging to justify the voluntariness of the decision-making in such situation if the person’s application was rejected and he is obliged to leave the country.

The other type is the repatriation program which supports the refugees with temporary or permanent protection. Here the decision is on the refugees' side. If they would like to return, the program provides travel allowances and supports with job search. It also developed materials for people to be better prepared for going back and offers consultancy for individuals. What do refugees think about the return and why did they start thinking about this? Is it connected to nostalgia for home or sense of non-belonging to the Swedish society? Or do people not consider returning because they already feel integrated into the Swedish society and do not want to feel as strangers when they are back?

At the same time another question is why is the government ready to spend money for the return of people who can legally stay in the country? Do they want to support people's right to return home? What are the notions of home and homecoming among the policy-makers in Sweden that are communicated to the refugees? In my opinion, these perspectives shape not only the way how the repatriation program is structured but they also reflect how the role of refugees is seen in the Swedish society.

The research question is: *What are the differences or similarities in the discourses on home and return between government officials and refugees in Sweden?*

In order to answer the question I will look at several aspects based on previous discussions. It is important to explore the meaning of home for refugees to understand if people are naturally linked to a specific place or home can be created in different places. At the same time, I will analyze the connection between refugees and host countries through the concept of belonging and see how it influences their perspectives on home and return. I will also investigate if return is wanted among refugees and is perceived as homecoming. Similar positions will be analyzed in the materials of the repatriation program.

With this paper I do not aim to challenge the repatriation program in Sweden. I would like to compare the perspectives of policy-makers and refugees on home and return and analyze the possible implications that such similarities or differences can lead to. This paper aims at exploring the topic by looking at individual perspectives of refugees that might vary greatly due to diversity of the refugee experience. However, I believe that certain common characteristics can be found.

1.2. Structure of the paper

This paper is structured in the following way: in the beginning I will provide a review of the existing literature on return and home. Then I will move to the theoretical part describing the concepts of ‘home’; ‘place attachment’; ‘homecoming’; ‘belonging’. I will continue with the overview of the methods that were used to answer the research question, provide justification of the selected methods and describe in detail how the analysis was done.

After that I will briefly describe the repatriation program in Sweden and will proceed with the analysis of its discourse on home and return. I would like to do it from the position of a refugee, meaning that I will explore the materials that are prepared for the possible returnees and how the return process or home are portrayed there. This will help me to identify the discourse that exists around repatriation in Sweden and how it is presented to people it targets. Then, I will look at the side of refugees and how they view the same terms based on the conducted in-depth interviews. Then the comparison between views will be presented in order to answer the research question about similarities and differences in discourses. Finally, I will present the conclusions from my research and reflect on possible implications of existing discourses.

1.3. Definitions and terms

I will focus only on the refugee population (people with legal protection), excluding the asylum-seekers. Asylum-seekers normally do not spend a considerable amount of time in a new country before the decision on their status is made. Therefore, their perspectives on home will not be as provocative to explore as the views of refugees who have lived in Sweden for a longer period of time. Refugees also go through the integration programs and are legally part of the society. In addition, the decision to return among asylum-seekers is often driven by the absence of legal basis to stay in Sweden. On contrary, refugees are legally allowed to stay in the country and make the decision themselves.

In the literature on returning, one can come across two similar terms: voluntary repatriation and voluntary return. Return is mainly used for asylum-seekers and repatriation for refugees. In Sweden these terms are always used separately. It is clearly stated at the Swedish Migration Board (SMB) web-site that return is for asylum-seekers and repatriation is for refugees. Although I focus only on refugee population I will use the terms ‘return’ and ‘repatriation’ as synonyms to refer to a desire of an individual or a voluntary act to go back home. This is done

because there is often no distinction between the terms in the academic literature and for the refugees I talked to, return and repatriation were two words describing the same thing – getting back to their country of origin. Yet, the term ‘repatriation’ will be mainly used when talking about the official discourse.

I will also use different terms to describe the countries: the ones where refugees are fleeing to as ‘host countries’ or ‘new home countries’, and the countries where refugees flee from as ‘home countries’ or ‘countries of origin’. I will further talk about the contested meanings of these word combinations; however, since there is no commonly agreed term, I will use different ones.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In 1990s repatriation came to be perceived both by academicians and policy-makers as the integral part of the refugee protection process and as the end of the refugee cycle – “logical ending of the unfortunate need to seek protection away from one’s home” (Hathaway, 1997: 558). This was the time of many UNHCR repatriation initiatives and scholars started to study the experience of refugees who went back home. They were pointing out at the economic, social, psychological difficulties they experienced during reintegration (Eastmond, 1999; Majodina, 1995; Ghanem, 2003; Bascom, 2005).

This led to the fact that the perspective on repatriation as the end of the cycle was challenged. Many scholars maintained that the return for refugees should be seen as the beginning of a new cycle or a new life (Black and Koser, 1999; Muggeridge and Dona, 2006). For those who lived in exile for a long time or even were born in exile, return might be an establishment in an unknown social and physical environment and cannot be called the end of any cycle (Hassanen, 2007: 27).

Various studies considered *motivations for return*. Peace and safety in home country are claimed to be the most important aspects that refugees take into consideration when they think about the return (Black et al., 2004; Zimmermann, 2012). However, these are not the only ones as decisions are usually made with broader considerations in mind (Koser, 1997, 2002; Phuong, 2000; Al-Ali et al., 2001, Rousseau et al., 2001; Bloch and Atfield, 2002; Kibreab, 2003; King, 2000; Massey, 2002; Manuh, 2003). The ‘push’ factors from the host countries and the ‘pull’ factors from home countries are emphasized by scholars among the key ones in forcing the refugees to take a specific decision (King, 2000; Black, 2006). King demonstrates that economic (higher wages and economic development vs. redundancy or an economic downturn), social (nostalgia vs. racism or difficulties with reintegration) or political factors (mainly from the host country and may include incentives for voluntary return, various restrictions to enjoy citizenship rights) can motivate people to return (King, 2000: 14-15). Housing and access to the land, family factors, degree of integration and eligibility for welfare schemes in the host country, possibility to come back to the host country, redress or compensation are also considered among push and pull factors (Rousseau et al., 2001; Black, 2004; Bradley, 2008; Kibreab, 2003; Hovil, 2010).

Nostalgia or longing for home is only one of the possible factors that motivate people to return. Scholars argue that the first visit back home is important for refugees as it helps them to

re-engage both with the host and home countries (Muggerduge, Dona, 2006: 415). Braakman and Schlenkoff emphasize that return visits help to renegotiate identity and feelings of home and create opportunity to check assumptions, images and memories against reality (Braakman, Schlenkoff, 2007: 18, 19).

This discussion is closely linked with the topic of *the refugees' agency*, which is addressed by scholars. Hammond points out that sometimes people are expected to return back home even if the conditions in the host countries are better than in their countries of origin. She points out that “in a world where development, modernity and progress are given high priority, it is ironic that returnees should be expected to choose to forgo a higher standard of living for the ‘pleasure’ of going back to their country of origin” (Hammond, 1999: 231). However, the discourse that repatriation is ‘a cure’ and people need to be back to ‘their place’ leads to the fact that little attention is paid to whether people want or are able to return to their birthplaces, or maybe they should migrate to another place with better economic opportunities, less conflicting communities and more respect towards political, religious and human rights (Ibid: 233, 235). According to Moussa (1993) the label ‘refugee’ stays with the person until he is back to his home country, and this defines social and economic policies of host governments. A refugee reflects the loss of ‘homeland’ as he was forcefully ‘uprooted’ or ‘displaced’ (Kalm, 2008: 119). Such depiction of the refugee creates a feeling of empathy (Soguk, 1999; Nyers, 2006; Hayden, 2006). Hovil’s findings from her research suggest that refugees have creativity and resources and are best placed to make decisions about their own safety; therefore, repatriation should be refugee-driven and not considered as help for vulnerable people (Hovil, 2010: 26).

Another topic which is discussed in literature is the *sustainability of return*: what happens with people after they return. Hammond suggests that the vocabulary of returning which emphasizes ‘reintegration’, ‘reconstruction’ and ‘rehabilitation’ should be re-focused on ‘construction’, ‘creativity’, ‘innovation’ and ‘improvisation’ (Hammond, 1999: 12). Several scholars point out that potential contribution of returnees to the construction of peace and post-conflict state formation should be better recognized (Stepputat, 1999; Black, 1999). However, later research shows that many returnees are still highly vulnerable due to socio-economic reasons or poor integration (Danish Refugee Council, 2011; Omata, 2011). This is not what for many is associated with ‘homecoming’.

Braakman and Schlenkoff point out that a certain 'stereotypical refugee' with standard needs and characteristics was created and due to this 'refugee-isation'; there is a tendency to address generic issues and problems, rather than looking at individual needs (Braakman, Schlenkoff, 2007: 13, 14). Still, from my perspective, the gender aspect could be addressed better. More than 20 years ago Indra said that 'people are refugees first, women and men second...gender is never a variable' (Indra, 1987, 12-13). This tendency is still seen within the research. I found only a few examples of research focusing on women who might have specific perspectives due to their roles, responsibilities and vulnerabilities. For example, Moussa (1993) in her research on Ethiopian female refugees shows that their house is what is being missed the most among women and social relations in exile were highly valuable for them.

Another aspect which can be noticed in literature is that return is often perceived as a family matter. We will see later that scholars point out parents-children relationships and differences in their perspectives; however, they rarely demonstrate possible differences between decisions and views of men and women. In my opinion, this is an important missing part in the existing research.

Finally, most of the studies on repatriation are focused on the people who have returned to their home countries. I believe that once decision is made and people return reflection on the situation might impact their perspectives on how they were thinking before. I think that in order to understand the perspectives on home and return potential returnees should also be the focus of the academic research. I believe that this is where my research can be beneficial.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

As return or repatriation in the official discourse is always connected with homecoming, the notion of ‘home’ will be described first. This will help me to understand the diversity of possible perspectives on the concept while doing my analysis. Can home only be in the country of your origin or is it possible to construct home in a new place? How does life in exile influence the perspective on home? This discussion is mainly connected with the relation of people towards their countries of origin. However, it is also important to look at home from the perspective of attitude towards the host country. Therefore, the concept of ‘belonging’ will be also discussed. Can a person belong to two places at the same time? Belonging also provides explanation of social inclusion and exclusion that are important in the refuge context as they can shape the perspectives on return. Finally, the notion of ‘return’ will be discussed in order to problematize the idea that return is always wanted among refugees. Does return mean coming back to one’s home place? How is return connected with the feelings of home and belonging?

3.1.Home

Home as place

Home has been defined first and foremost as a *spatial context* (Porteous 1976) and as the basis of one of the most fundamental geographical dichotomies: home versus non-home (Terkenli, 1995: 325). Savage suggests that “in a mobile, global environment, location in fixed physical space may be of increasing relative significance in the generation of social distinction” (Savage et al., 2005: 13). People may feel ‘at home’ in a variety of spaces: house, street, neighborhood or the whole country (Morley, 2000: 48). The possibility to construct home depends on the physical conditions or material situation in the place (Pederson, 2003: 9). Therefore, home may be seen as related to place, because it provides resources, rights and livelihood routine and can be also associated with specific physical environment (Ibid: 9). Silva (2009) emphasizes the point that we live in the home-centered cultures and it brings additional pressure to ensure that one has a specific physical place that can be called home.

Defining home as place is particularly reflected in the refuge context. Gren describes the battle over land between Israelis and Palestinians when the former destroyed or emptied the Palestinian villages knowing the significance of houses and its connection to deep-rootedness for

Palestinians (Gren, 2002: 4). Desire to relate to a specific place for refugees is also connected with recognition of rights (especially land ownership) or legitimacy associated with the place (Hovil, 2010: 20).

While being in exile, people develop imaginary connections to their previous homes. Malkki maintains that people “invent homes and homelands through memories of places that they will never corporeally inhabit” (Malkki, 1995 cited in Morley, 2000: 39). Memories about homes develop certain fixed or frozen images of the homeland which is very often idealized. Naficy argues that “in exile ‘home’ colonizes the mind” (Naficy, 1993 cited in Morley, 2000: 50). The image stays frozen “as a higher moral, cultural and social authority’ and ‘ethnic performances and cultural artifacts become nostalgic extensions of mythologized homeland” (Silva, 2009: 700).

At the same time, memories of refugees about their home are also shaped by the experience they had before fleeing. In addition, already before leaving the country of origin people might develop the attitude of lost home and non-belonging. Many refugees leave their country precisely because they have already lost their homes there - in a physical as well as emotional sense - and feel like strangers within their own countries, because the government they identified themselves with has, for example, been replaced by a regime which is hostile towards them (Ghorashi 2001: 111).

Therefore, in case home would be only conceptualized as a physical space, it would be impossible for people on a move to feel at home or to have more than one home. Thus it is critical to explore other possible notions of home.

Home as individual's identity

Home is also represented by the *individual's identity* which can no longer be defined through being in a certain place but rather represented by daily lives. Terkenli suggests that the individual starts building certain behavioral and cognitive routines which will further become part of home because “they represent recurrent, familiar points of reference in time, space, and society” (Terkenli, 1995: 326). Rapport and Dawson maintain in a similar vein: “Being ‘at home’ and being ‘homeless’ are not matters of movement or physical place. One is at home when one inhabits a cognitive environment in which one can undertake the routines of daily life and through which one finds one’s identity best mediated – and homeless when such a cognitive

environment is eschewed” (Rapport and Dawson, 1998: 10). This shows that home can be brought along to different places.

In the refuge context Hammond calls the transformation of the unfamiliar physical place into a personalized social space as ‘emplacement’ through constructing material base of living and daily life (Hammond 1999: 233). Wish to reproduce culture and traditions associated with home helps to define a sense of self, of one’s identity (Al-Ali, Koser, 2002: 7).

Home as social relations

Another element of home reflects the relationship between space, individual and other people that inhabit the area. Home is a “nodal point of *social relations*” (Olwig, 1998 cited in Pedersen, 2003: 8). Descombes (1995) defines a homeland as a virtual space or ‘rhetorical territory’. He maintains that “the character is at home when he is at ease in the rhetoric with the people with whom he shares life. The sign of being at home is the ability to make oneself understood without too much difficulty, and to follow the reasoning of others, without any need for long explanations” (Descombes, 1995 cited in Morley, 2000: 17). Within this territory, “one can speak to the other without providing background information. No footnotes are needed; from few words, much can be understood” (Heller, 1995 cited in Morley, 2000: 17). The feeling of ‘home’ depends on the welcoming looks of others, rather than looks of either hostility or curiosity when you are a foreigner (Morley, 2000: 48). In the refuge context this comfortable environment can be represented through diaspora which helps to create the home feeling because people are connected through the same cultural heritage.

3.2. Belonging

Duyvendak (2011) says that all recent discussions on place and space can be categorized into two groups. He labels the first one as ‘universalists’ who argue that people’s attachment to places has been declined due to increased mobility of people: “places have become less *attachable*...while people have become less *attaching*” (Duyvendak, 2011: 24). On the opposite side are the particularists who claim that places where people live will continue to matter as they provide the sense of ‘home’ in a fast changing world (Ibid: 24). In such view belonging also becomes a contested term: feeling of attachment is not ‘given’ to people anymore (Duyvendak, 2011: 25). “Belonging is not that of an individual to a fixed community rooted in place, but rather one in which the place becomes valuable to the individual” (Savage et al., 2005: 80).

For refugees it is often difficult to decide where their home actually is; therefore, the issue of belonging becomes a critical one. People who have to live in exile are under constant pressure to integrate into society, on one hand, and to retain their socio-cultural connections to their communities, on the other hand (Braakman and Schlenkoff, 2007: 9). This creates several versions of the same person depending on situation and circumstances and sometimes these versions contradict each other (Ibid: 9). Therefore, many people ask themselves: “where do I belong?” (Shah, 2000).

Yuval-Davis argues that feeling of belonging is very much about “*emotional attachment*, about feeling at home” (Yuval-Davis, 2006: 197). It is also connected with *safety* as suggested by Ignatieff: “Where you belong is where you are safe; and where you are safe is where you belong” (Ignatieff, 1993 cited in Yuval-Davis, 2006: 197). Scholars point out that with time it becomes difficult for refugees to understand which community they are more attached to: host or home. Many of them express that they feel like a foreigner when they visit their home countries while living in exile. In my opinion, this quote in the work of Braakman and Schlenkoff represents this very clearly: “I spent six very nice weeks in my homeland, but I can't completely live there anymore. When I arrived at Frankfurt Airport, I felt as if I was home again. A few days later I again missed my homeland Afghanistan in all its beauty and poverty. I think the Afghans who grew up here in Germany like me will never be able to fully choose one side. It's just like a little child that has to choose who to live with – its mother or its father” (Braakman, Schlenkoff, 2007: 20). According to Korac, the feeling of being a stranger in the home country accelerates the sense of home and belonging to the host state (Korac, 2009: 121). This emotional attachment to home country gets lost.

Castles suggests that today we see the creation of ‘new modes of migrant belonging’ that enhances the developed of transnational communities, multiple identities and multiple citizenships (Castles, 2002 cited in Reitz, 2002: 1016). Gustafson argues that the basic assumption in migration research is that immigrants have little or no belonging to the host country; however, it gradually develops in the process of assimilation (Gustafson, 2009: 495). Recent research on transnationalism and diasporic populations shows that with time migrants develop a sense of belonging both for home and host countries (Ibid: 495).

Here comes up the problem of exclusion and inclusion within the society. As Yuval-Davis argues people’s experiences of exclusion or inclusion partly shape their feelings about the new

locations (Yuval-Davis et al. 2005: 526). Duyvendak suggests that the debate around integration of immigrants in Western Europe is framed in terms of ‘Who belongs here?’ thereby polarizing the natives and newcomers (Duyvendak, 2011: 37). The argument of strong connections between people and places reinforces the understanding of place as belonging to people who ‘have roots’ in that place (Kalm, 2008: 115). It also means that the territory of the host state belongs to its citizens and the rest (asylum-seekers, refugees etc.) are others and belong to some other place (Ibid: 115). The binary of ‘us’ and ‘them’ can define the politics of belonging (Yuval-Davis, 2006). In the context of this research, it means that the decision to return might not be driven by the desire to come back ‘home’ but to escape from the place which does not recognize one’s identity, does not include the individual in its community. Braakman and Schlenkoff show that the desire to return is sometimes connected to a feeling of being deprived of something, a sense of not belonging to the society completely (Braakman, Schlenkoff, 2007: 11).

3.3. Return

Finally, we approach the concept of return in relation to home and belonging. I started by pointing out that return is often connected with homecoming. This idea contains the implicit assumption that a given population has its own proper place, territory or homeland (Allen and Turton, 1996: 10). At the same time, it is critical to look at the concept of home as *a temporary phenomenon*. The concept of home changes with time, age and one’s individual development (Terkenli, 1995: 330). The environment of the host society with its own social dynamics, values and norms affects the identity and attitude of refugees and this influences the conception of home (Hassanen, 2007: 23). This change also influences the feeling of belonging. Processes of identity are about ‘becoming’ rather than ‘being’ and people operate strategically and relationally in shaping their senses of belonging (Al-Ali, Koser, 2002: 19). Similarly the country is also constantly changing as well as people who stayed there (Warner, 1994: 171-172). Therefore, return might not mean going back to the same, but possibly changed place.

Therefore, the equation that return means homecoming is rather problematic. Warner argues that return should be perceived as *new arrival*. He suggests that refugees are not rehabilitated, re-adapted or re-integrated. Instead they habitate, adapt and integrate (Ibid: 171-172).

Warner maintains that return differs from new arrival only because people have been in this place before (Ibid: 171-172). However, even this might not be the case for everyone. Zieck points out that “less than half of those refugees who return home will actually return, the majority will just enter the country of origin” (Zieck, 2004: 49). She refers to the UNHCR statistics (2004) which demonstrates that 50-60% of refugees are born in exile.

Braakman and Schlenkoff (2007) point out that the refugees born outside of their country of origin do not have the same connection to home as their parents and this creates certain misunderstanding between generations. Parents they interviewed in the study stated that they were losing their children to the ‘Western culture’ and that their children do not feel connected to the land of their forefathers in the same way as they do (Braakman, Schlenkoff, 2007: 14). They emphasize that children not only “do not love Afghanistan”, but they will not even “be able to go back” (Ibid: 14). Children might not share the same attitude towards the country of origin of their parents as they have already developed it towards a place where they were born or raised. Therefore, return is connected with *individual’s identity* and where the person feels at home. Children especially face identity dichotomy and struggle to define where they actually belong.

4. METHODOLOGY

I chose to apply qualitative methods that give researcher the opportunity to be in the ‘world’ of the people who are studied (Hassanen, 2007: 39). One of the important aspects of qualitative methods is that they help to understand and explain the social world. They also help to look into the meaning rather than for statistical descriptions or generalized statements (Hassanen, 2007: 40). My research question also does not aim to produce generalizations, but rather collect qualitative information.

The choice of specific methods depends on the way how the researcher views the reality, how the research question is framed and what the particular subject of the study is (Hassanen, 2007: 40). For my research I chose to apply discourse analysis to compare the perspectives of the government organization and the refugees. While the documents and web-sites material were analyzed on one hand, interviews were conducted with the refugees who are currently residing in Sweden, on the other hand. As Flick says, there is no “ideal way” which fits every study (Flick, 2009: 141). Therefore, I suggest one of the possible combinations of methodological approaches which, from my perspective, serves the best to answer the research question of this study.

I will particularly look at the group of refugees from Afghanistan due to variety of reasons. First of all, as described earlier, the situation in the home country influences the decision to return due to the environment and conditions that people will face upon return. Focusing on people from one country will help to investigate deeper those ‘pull’ factors for a specific nation. Secondly, despite the fact that UNHCR has completed main repatriation programs of large groups of refugees back to Afghanistan, people continue to flee. According to the SMB statistics, the number of people from Afghanistan seeking asylum in Sweden has increased from 435 cases in 2005 to 4122 cases in 2011 (SMB statistics, 2011). In 2010 Afghanistan was one of the top three countries of asylum-seekers’ origin together with Serbia and Somalia (UNHCR, 2011). Still Afghan people face forced returns from many countries. In Sweden, Afghanistan was also in the list for an additional payment for reestablishment support from IOM from 2007 till 2011. Finally, I had a personal interest to engage with Afghan refugees in Sweden due to my internship experience of working with Afghan asylum-seekers in the reception center in Hungary in summer 2011. All these factors motivated me to look specifically at the refugees from Afghanistan.

4.1.Discourse analysis

Discourse is a social language created by particular cultural conditions at a particular time and place; it expresses a specific way of understanding the human experience (Whisnant: 4). Hence, through studying discourses in a society, it is possible to analyze the systems of thoughts, ideas, images and other symbolic practices within the society (Ibid: 1).

In general terms discourse means a text in a context and evidence to be described empirically (Titscher et.al, 2000: 26). The important aspect to emphasize here is that discourse should be understood as action, meaning that it delivers a certain message (Ibid: 26). Since I am interested in notions of home and what message the policy-makers and refugees convey, I find this method the most applicable to achieve the aims of my study. Discourse analysis also provides an opportunity to explore alternative discourses that contest dominant cultural and socio-political state hegemonic narratives.

For the analysis I will use the discourse theory by Laclau and Mouffe, which says that discourse constructs the meaning of the social world, and due to instability of language, it can never be permanently fixed (Jorgensen and Phillips, 2002: 6-7). They talk about different discourses which represent their own way of thinking about the world and are constantly in struggle between each other to achieve hegemony, which means to fix the meaning of language in their own way (Ibid: 7).

Laclau and Mouffe introduce the concept of nodal points which I will use in the analysis. They show that “nodal point is a privileged sign around which the other signs are ordered; the other signs acquire their meaning from their relationship to the nodal point” (Ibid: 26). Such concepts, functioning as nodal points, influence the discursive mass and thereby limit the possibilities of meaning for discourses that are related to nodal points. Each element of the discourse derives its meaning in relation to the nodal points (Ibid, 2002: 37), as they fix the meaning of certain notions for a time. In my case I identified the following nodal points: ‘return’, ‘home’, ‘belonging’. Those language structures and nodal points are not fixed, but they are reshaped in every concrete situation, for example the use of language. This means that everything can get a new meaning in another context. Therefore, I will analyze the meanings attached to the nodal points in the specific context of refugees and government.

It is important to specify the concept of floating signifiers which are the signs that different discourses struggle to fill with meaning in their own particular way. Nodal points are

floating signifiers, but whereas the term ‘nodal point’ refers to a point of crystallization within a specific discourse, the term ‘floating signifier’ belongs to the ongoing struggle between different discourses to fix the meaning of important signs (Ibid: 28). After looking at the nodal points, I will look at other various signs (floating signifiers) that I found important for the discussion.

Limitations

One limitation is that it is often difficult to draw a clear dividing line between what is literally meant by certain descriptions and what is metaphorical, especially during the documents analysis (Potter, 2004: 180). I conducted complementary interviews with government representatives which was helpful in looking at intended meanings of certain descriptions.

Another aspect is my personal interpretation of the meanings. I come from another country and culture (different from both Sweden and Afghanistan); therefore, I possess no knowledge outside of the discourse. My personal characteristics as a researcher will also influence the interpretation of the material and the analysis can also be a certain discourse on the issue.

During my literature review I came across several researches on Afghan communities which were done by people who either spoke the language or had Afghani roots. I believe that this was beneficial for their research since similarity in the background can help to ensure the most relevant interpretations. Yet, my work is more of a non-positivist critical study and I do not claim to come up with an objective interpretation of the reality. I found my position as an outsider valuable since I tried to problematize my understanding of concepts and not to pre-suppose certain meanings which might be the case for the person with similar background. During the interviews I was constantly asking what interviewees actually meant by certain words, for example: ‘almost’, ‘safety’, ‘comfort’, ‘cultural misunderstanding’, ‘better’, ‘family’, ‘personal connections’. Some aspects will definitely be missed by me being an outsider; however, I believe that new perspectives could be brought up. When presenting my analysis, I used many quotes to be as transparent with my interpretations as possible.

Finally, I will look at materials of two different organizations. This might open certain variations in the discourses and might make it difficult for the analysis. However, since all these represent the official viewpoint on the issue of return, I think it will be rather beneficial to look at those differences.

4.2.Semi-structured interviews

Interviewing is a method of maintaining and generating conversations with people on a specific topic (May, 1997: 120). Talking to the subjects of study enables the researcher to know how they see and understand their world (Kvale, 1997). I organized semi-structured interviews, where certain questions were specified, but there was also a possibility for the interviewee to elaborate on questions or answers. This type of interview allows people to answer more on their own terms, while at the same time still providing a structure for further compatibility (May, 1997: 123). This flexibility combined with the open-ended questions allows the collection of data that might otherwise be missed, and helps to run comparisons later and analyze the data. During the interviews, notes were taken instead of voice recording due to the fact that many refugees refuse to be recorded because of distrust and history of oppression (Omidian, 2000: 59). I also noticed that interesting aspects were brought up by the respondents during the informal discussions before or after I stopped taking notes.

To ensure a more efficient analysis of the interviews, the data should be organized into certain categories, e.g. experience, feelings, knowledge, demographic (Milkelsen, 2005; Punch, 2005). Flick suggests that a semi-structured interview is characterized by introducing “topical areas and by the purposive formulation of questions based on scientific theories on the topic” (Flick 2009: 157), therefore, the questions used in the interviews were taken from the theoretical discussion on home and return. I structured the interviews in the following blocks:

1. Personal information about the interviewee and refugee experience in Sweden
2. Personal understanding of home and belonging
3. Questions on return and motivation

The semi-structured way of organizing interviews helped me to have a free flow of discussion with participants. Very often the questions were asked in a different order depending on the topics raised by the respondent.

I used the snowball technique to identify the interviewees for my study. According to Altamirano (2000) and Jacobsen and Landau (2003) the snowball technique of sampling is a way of selecting respondents and acquiring information as the research proceeds, rather than using the already defined sample from the beginning. New respondents are found through contacts of those people who have already participated in the interview. Bloch notes that refugee research often uses this sampling to locate respondents because refugees are difficult to access and identify

using other means (Bloch, 1999: 371). My first respondents were found through the student network, Afghan cultural communities and the non-governmental organization Tamam, which supports the integration of asylum-seekers and refugees in Sweden. Further people were identified through the interviewees as the snowball technique suggests.

Based on my personal experience of interaction with Afghan people and comments of the scholars who did research within Afghan groups, I expected difficulties in setting up interviews with women, which indeed happened to be the case. Even when I was asking my interviewees for new contacts they came back to me with contact details of men. This possibly has to do with certain cultural peculiarities. In the end I could interview three women of different ages whose contacts were found through Tamam organization and other interviewees. I should add here that this happened only after a certain level of trust was established between me and those respondents who helped to connect with women.

Several demographic characteristics were taken into consideration when selecting interviewees, such as sex, age and marital status. What was also important for my study is how many years they have been living in Sweden. As shown in other studies, this might affect the decision on return and attitudes towards home. I also interviewed not only those who were born in Afghanistan, but also the ones who have been born already in the host country and represent the so-called second generation. Although they are not officially called 'refugees', they represent a very interesting group for this study because they reflect that a 'refugee' can be understood not only from the legal perspective, but also from the perspective of ethnical belonging to the society. Other general characteristics were the following: if the person has visited Afghanistan since fleeing; if the person lives here with family; if the person has lived for a long time somewhere else than Afghanistan before coming to Sweden.

Thirteen interviews were conducted with people currently residing in Malmö, Lund and Eslöv. Among respondents, 10 were male (age range from 17 till 60 years old) and 3 were female (17, 25 and 39 years old). One person represented the second generation and two persons have lived in Sweden for more than 15 years. Three respondents have not been in Afghanistan since they left the country and two do not have any memories about Afghanistan because their families moved when they were very little. Three respondents live in Sweden alone; the rest are here with their families. Four people were raised or lived for longer than two years in other countries: Greece, Pakistan and Iran.

Me as a researcher

Omidian argues that in the field of refugee research, trust seems particularly difficult to achieve due to their past experiences (Omidian, 2000: 60). Refugees might also be afraid that information would go to the authorities (Bloch, 1999: 379). My personal experience of working with asylum-seekers also showed that people will share information with you only if they can trust you as a person. Therefore, I approached this issue in the most careful way. I am a foreigner here in Sweden and that seemed beneficial for establishing the connection with respondents. I believe that this created a more open dialogue as I did not represent any connection to Sweden and thus could not challenge or criticize any of their statements. In addition, respondents assumed that I could relate to what they were saying as I am also an outsider in Sweden. Very often I heard from the respondents: “You know what I mean because you are also not Swedish” or “we are Asians, we have a bit different culture”. At the same time, as my previous personal experience shows, Afghan people usually have positive response towards me being Russian. I found this also helpful. Some respondents spent some time in Moscow on the way to Sweden and this helped us to connect. Besides my experience of working with Afghan asylum-seekers in the refugee reception center brought certain level of sympathy among the respondents.

Limitations

The first limitation that needs to be acknowledged is the representativeness and bias of the sampling of the refugee population. Due to particular selection of the interviewees, geography of study being limited to only three cities and small number of interviews, the study might not be representative. However, the aim of my research is explorative and it should help to get information on various perspectives and motives of the refugees. In addition, I tried to target people through various channels to increase the representativeness.

Another limitation is the language. As I do not speak Swedish, interviews were mainly conducted in English which limited the broad range of possible interviewees. It was especially hard to find interviewees from the elderly group or women who in most cases speak only Swedish. One interview was conducted in Russian with the person who lived in Moscow for 12 years and spoke the language fluently. Three interviews were conducted in Dari and were translated by other interviewees. The translation might also have led to certain nuances being missed or misinterpreted.

5. ANALYSIS

5.1. Repatriation program in Sweden

Until 1980s the focus in work with the refugees in Sweden was mainly on integration; however, the guidelines for immigration policy of 1968 already emphasized the importance of immigrants being able to keep contacts with their language and culture and thereby keep the possibility of a free choice between staying in Sweden and repatriation. The initial suggestions for re-immigration policy were adopted in 1989 where the basic principle was that any repatriation must be voluntary. It was proclaimed that pressure by the state or local government to persuade a person to return home was not accepted and all immigrants must feel that Sweden is their home country until they decide otherwise (Government Proposition, 1996: 7). Other principles of repatriation are: flexibility based on needs and abilities of people; active participation of the refugees in the design and implementation of activities; long-term approach to return; availability of reliable information about the situation in the countries of origin; reintegration efforts and follow-up once the person is back (Government Proposition, 1996: 8-9).

5.2. Documents discourse analysis

For the analysis of the government discourse on home and return in Sweden I will use the texts from the section named 'Repatriation' on the SMB web-site. Information there is divided into several sections: general information about the SMB work on repatriation; what to consider before leaving Sweden (including the separate file 'To consider before leaving Sweden' which contains detailed information on how to prepare for repatriation), material about repatriation allowances (including the separate file 'Voluntary repatriation' with information on what is expected from the person and what support he can receive) and a section about the residence permits. All the texts described above are in English and are available in this language at the SMB web-site. These texts will constitute the first block of analyzed materials.

There are several links at the general section about repatriation on the web-sites of the Swedish pension fund, the tax agency, UNHCR, CSN loans and Stockholm City Voluntary Repatriation program which was of the most interest for this research. This link leads us to the web-site of Stockholm municipality and specifically to the section called 'Frivillig återvandring' (Voluntary repatriation). There we can find a general introduction to the issue, contact

information and links to two documents: 'Frivillig återvandring' (Voluntary repatriation) and 'En dag ska jag återvända' (One day I will return). Information from this web-site and the two documents constituted the second block of analyzed materials. I believe that the above should be looked into, because the links are provided at the official web-site of the SMB; therefore, anyone who is interested in repatriation has access and in a way encouraged to go and check information on this web-site. Secondly, there is a reference to this Stockholm program in other documents of the SMB from the first block of my analysis. This shows that SMB accepts the way how the program deals with the issue of repatriation. It is important to mention here, that information is only in Swedish. As I am not a native Swedish speaker, the translation was performed, and the analysis of the translated English material was done. The texts contain less practical details about repatriation but are more focused on the decision making process about the return.

In order to understand the development and realization of the program better, two people were contacted. One person was responsible for the repatriation program within the SMB, and his contacts were obtained through the SMB web-site. He shared the government document 'Proposition 1996/97: 25' which contains the history of repatriation program and identifies the key standpoints of the Swedish government on the issue. The second representative was a contact person from the Stockholm program whose contact details are published at the Stockholm municipality web-site. She shared the history of their program and the specifics of their operations today. I used this information as contextual knowledge for my analysis.

In addition to analysis of the nodal points and other floating signifiers I will also look at the pictures that are used in the texts as they also reflect certain meanings. In addition, linguistic elements within the texts will be analyzed which, in my opinion, can reflect certain social relations between the authors and the target group of this information.

5.2.1. *'Home'*

Several terms can usually be found in different texts about return or repatriation: home, country of origin or home country. They are normally used to describe the same phenomenon; however, from my perspective, each expression has its own nuances that can reflect conscious or unconscious perspective on the topic. The SMB web-site material mainly contains the word combination 'country of origin', e.g. 'if you are thinking about repatriating to your country of origin'; 'if you are considering re-immigrating to your country of origin'; 'cash support for the

initial period in the country of origin'. Even more frequently we find the word combinations 'the country you are moving to' or 'native country', for example, 'find out about the healthcare system in the country you are moving to'; 'you should also inform family and friends in the country that you are moving to'; 'cash amount to help you resettle in your native country'; 'allowance to visit your native country'; 'move out of Sweden to live in your native country'. The words 'origin' and 'native' mainly refer to a specific place where the person was born or something that belongs to a person by birth (e.g. ancestry that the person gets connected to). The word 'home' is used only in two cases and in the following context: 'journey home' and 'trip back home'. These words appear in the section about travel allowances. In my opinion, the meaning here is connected with travelling and this is very often associated with excitement and joy.

Once the text talks about decision-making process or practical issues, it refers to dry and emotionally neutral concepts of 'native country' or 'country of origin' or even more neutral 'the country you are moving to'. However, once it talks about the actual travelling, it uses the word 'home' reflecting the emotional connection one may have towards return. From my perspective, it shows that the government does not intend to use specific words that might influence the decision-making process of an individual; therefore, mainly using neutral wording for the notion of 'home'. Overall we can point out that in our context the main association of 'home' here is with a certain *specific place* - country.

In the beginning of the Repatriation section it is said that one of the tasks of the SMB is "to make matters easier" and "support individuals...to determine whether and when they wish to return". Information published by the SMB mainly refers to the practicalities connected with the return. It talks about what the person needs to check about the country he or she plans to move to: health and education system, work, safety and security, housing, finances, what happens with their legal status when they leave Sweden and what kind of allowances they can get. In this way country of origin or home gets a very technical meaning: it is the place where you work, live in a house, and receive health-care, where your children go to school. However, it does not talk about home as a network of certain relations with people or as a set of beliefs and values. It does not support people with the decision-making in terms of their connection with their 'new home' and how they feel about leaving it. As seen previously, the following aspects are important for the 'home feeling' and are important to consider: new networks refugees have established in

Sweden, will they feel accepted when they are back, will they feel like strangers or like regular citizens, what is their image of the country of origin, what are the attitudes and beliefs that they inherited here but might not be relevant or accepted when they are back.

As shown earlier home is not only about physical space, but also about relations and identity developed by the society over period of time; therefore, repatriation is about being able to integrate back into the society as well. This is not specified in the texts; however, it is an important aspect for people who are thinking about the return. This might be the most relevant for young people whose identity formation could have been influenced the most by the Swedish society.

In the materials of the Stockholm municipality the most frequent word combination is the 'home country' ('hemland'). In most of the cases the word 'country' stands next to the word 'home' also referring to a specific *physical place*. The other words that appear in connection with 'home country' are 'old' and 'new'. It might seem to mean that one can create two home countries; however, we will see later that indecision about where you want to be might create dissatisfaction, so it is in a way advised to take a stand on where your home is.

Another aspect that is emphasized here is *nostalgia* for home: "I long so much for my country but I am afraid to change my life". There are several phases of the repatriation process defined where the first one is called 'nostalgic phase' and is described as "dreams and idealization of the old life at home; the desire to return". We discussed earlier that memory and certain idealized image of the home country is very strong among refugees and it is these memories that connect people with home. From my perspective, this is what the material refers to. The material also refers to an idea that a certain better image of the home can be created even for people who had bad experience before exile: "If you have experienced war or disaster in your home country then the terrible feelings will still be easily remembered when thinking about your home country. However, the situation at home might change and then the emotions will not match the reality". From my perspective, it shows that home is seen as something positive that can be changed for better.

Stockholm materials also refer to the *temporary character* of home that was discussed in the theoretical part. The concept of home changes with time, age and one's individual development. In the documents we read that "social networks (family, relatives, colleagues, friends, neighbors) change over time when you live in exile. The old home will never be the

same as before. Many people that you know are not there anymore”; “the situation at home might change”; “when you compare your new life at home with one you had before”.

The previous quotes also refer to the importance of *social connections* and *network* for the ‘home’ feeling. The other examples of that are: ‘they have friends here, so I think it will be the most difficult for them to repatriate’; ‘in the new home country Sweden you created new social contacts’; ‘being a member of any club in your home country’. Apart from home feeling contacts also help with the sense of belonging. The fact that you have friends in your ‘new home’ can demonstrate that you are included in the group. If you are mainly in contact with people of your origin, it might mean that you have a feeling of exclusion. As we have seen earlier people’s experiences of exclusion partly shape their feelings about the new locations. It is important for an individual that the society recognizes your identity – this is something that is expected from home. As discussed earlier, such reference to contacts is missed in the SMB materials.

5.2.2. ‘Return’/ ‘Repatriation’

The Stockholm text is called ‘One day I will return’ (‘En dag ska jag återvändra’) which from the beginning points out that repatriation is about decision-making and definite desire to go back. One of the associations for repatriation in this text is with the *dream*: “A dream that for many will never become a reality. A dream which does not allow feeling fully at home in the new home country, and also will be distant and difficult to implement”; ‘dreams of the old life at home’; ‘the desire to repatriate’. It emphasizes the importance of feeling at home for an individual and until the decision is taken the person cannot be well integrated to create a ‘new’ home. It is similar to the idea that repatriation is often associated with ‘homecoming’ and that it is the most desirable solution for the refugees for whom the refugee cycle finishes once they go home. In this way repatriation is a desired solution or a ‘dream’ as emphasized in the text.

One metaphor that is used in the text is with the foot of an individual being in two different places: “It is like having one foot in one country and the other in another country”. In such situation one can “never truly find...way home”. The fact that the individual has to make a choice demonstrates that one can have only one home and it is for the individual’s own good to define where the home is for him or her. As it is said in the text, “the feeling of not knowing and not being able to decide creates frustration and hidden dissatisfaction and impedes the integration into the new home country Sweden”. Repatriation is seen here as *decision-making*. In the end of

the day it is for your own peace to make a decision. Rapport and Dawson suggest that home is often perceived as “socially homogenous, communal, peaceful, safe and secure” (Rapport and Dawson, 1998: 31); therefore, return will mean coming back to this place. However, as pointed earlier, even strong longing for home might not be able to outweigh practical considerations about economic opportunities, prospects for children, and security.

Another meaning attached to return is *journey*: “It does not matter if return journey will take several months or several years”. We discussed previously that journey has a very positive connotation. It is pointed out here that it might be a lengthy process, but calling it ‘journey’ might represent that this process will be pleasant.

There is another reference to repatriation as a *process*: ‘return should be well-planned and implemented at a slow pace’; ‘help returnees during the whole process to establish their roots in the home country again’; ‘create new social networks and not feel strange in your local community’; ‘processing stage’; ‘create the structure of the process’; ‘I will always know where I am within the repatriation process’. Here we can see that it is not only decision-making or planning, but also an aspect of re-integration back that is emphasized, and it is pointed out that it is a process and not something that will happen immediately once you are back (‘implemented at a slow pace’). As shown before there is an assumption that on return, people will be easily re-integrated back; however, this is not a simple process and the text points this out. It openly admits that the person might seem ‘strange’ even in ‘your local community’. The phrase ‘establish roots’ means that you might need to start from the beginning which refers also to the point that the return is not the end of the refugee cycle but the beginning of a new life. There is more evidence for this in the text: “when you return and [start to] build your life in the home country ‘from the start’”. We see here that return is not only the journey, but also *reintegration*. Many scholars point out that the process should not be called ‘re-integration’ or ‘re-adaptation’ but rather ‘integration’ and ‘adaptation’. Here I would say that the meaning of the latter is being presented, although it is called as ‘reintegration’: ‘a switch and adaptation to the old home country begins’.

At the same time, what is missed, from my perspective, is what might happen if the person cannot adjust back to his/her local community. It is assumed that this ‘reintegration back’ can never be a failure and it will always lead to the feeling of finally being home. However, for example, returnees to the former Yugoslavia faced the situation that their past was destroyed and

what they saw was a nationalist and exclusionist reality which they could not recognize as home (Jansen, 1998: 86). This can happen with any person who returns back because of this temporary character of home explained before. From my perspective, this is an important aspect that is not discussed in the text. There is one reference to this point in the SMB text: “Don’t forget to talk about what will happen if you can’t return or if everything doesn’t work out as you had hoped”. At the same time, I believe that it is essential to give more attention to this.

There is one more metaphor where the return is presented as a *bridge*: ‘I will think about return as building a bridge’; ‘a bridge that will connect two geographical places: the new and the old home countries’. In one paragraph it is again referred to repatriation as a process: ‘the bridge is built in phases’; ‘that makes it easier to have an overall idea of the repatriation process’. From my perspective, such a metaphor also represents that it is important to connect the life you had in the host country to your ‘new life’ back home. The person can connect two realities together (one about your home country and one about your host) and can or should in a way carry ‘through the bridge’ what he acquired during his time in the new place. The changes in identity, norms and values that the individual went through will be also brought back to his home country. And this is what might make it easier or more difficult to integrate back home. In my opinion, the ‘bridge’ analogy could also mean that the person might return back to the ‘new home country’ and this is something that could be more explicitly emphasized by the authors of the text.

5.2.3. ‘Belonging’

Since the SMB materials are very practical I could not find any specific reference to the term ‘belonging’. At the same time, the Stockholm materials represent certain views on this.

Often in the text we find that the word combination ‘home country’ is connected with the words ‘my’ and ‘your’ that demonstrate certain meaning of *ownership*, from my perspective. Once the person owns something it means that this object belongs to him/her, s/he has control over it. In our context this reflects a certain level of belonging that an individual always has to his/her home country. As discussed earlier, the concept of ‘belonging’ in refugee studies is often connected with the idea of belonging home and it is demonstrated in this example as well.

However, refugees in a way have no control over their homes anymore as they were forced to leave. At the same time, as we talked before, for many refugees it is often difficult to decide

where their home actually is and where they belong. They are under constant pressure to integrate; however, it is always perceived that the home country will always stay 'theirs'. One study on Afghan people showed how hopes of people to return dimmed due to the slow development of peace-building process in Afghanistan and they had to re-evaluate their bonds with their places of origin and their host countries (Braakman and Schlenkoff, 2007: 10). In such cases the new homes became 'theirs'. Another aspect emphasized before was that hostility and violence experienced by people might create a feeling of 'non-belonging' and many flee precisely because they lost their belonging to that society. The text emphasized in another paragraph that the situation in the country might have changed and that emotions of people might not reflect the reality. Nevertheless, it is still essential to recognize that not all people can refer to their home country as 'theirs'.

I would like to point out another aspect in this regard. When something is labeled as 'my' it means that there is something that is 'not mine'. As we see, 'my' or 'your' is mainly referred to the home country and are never used together with the word combination 'new home country'; it always refers to the country of origin. Does it mean that the host country is 'not mine' or 'not yours'? We discussed earlier that home is 'a site of exclusion' which constructs the separation between people who are rooted or belong to specific place and those who are not. At the same time, this might encourage people to think whether they feel that they belong to this society or not, e.g. if they can call Swedish society 'my country'. Some refugees return not because of the desire to be back home, but to escape from the place which does not recognize their identity. Therefore, this should be an important question to address. Nevertheless, the authors in a way talk about belonging to a new society as well: 'some have found it difficult to adapt to Sweden and others have managed to integrate very well', but it is not really elaborate.

Belonging is also presented as *connection to relatives*: "some of the family and relatives are here in Sweden and some are back home. Where do I belong?" From one side, it reflects the notion that belonging and feeling at home is not only about space, but that interaction with other people also influences the construction of home for an individual. Notions of home and belonging are mediated in intersubjective relationships. Often the sense of belonging is connected with the desire to reproduce traditions and cultures that are associated with 'home' (Al-Ali, Koser, 2002: 7). This is often done through relatives and family. The message in the text

indicates that even if you are not ‘at home’ but with your family, you can develop a sense of belonging to that particular place.

5.2.4. *Floating signifiers*

Now I would like to briefly point out several other signs that I found in the text and consider important for the research purposes.

First of all, in the texts we find the idea of *helping, facilitating or supporting* refugees either in the decision-making process to return or with practicalities and things to consider once the decision is taken. From my perspective, such usage of the words in the SMB text reflects the initial standpoint of the Swedish government about repatriation that is described in the ‘Proposition’ document. In 1989 it was approved by the government that as a basic principle, any repatriation must be voluntary and the focus should be on the best possible conditions for the future of the individual whether he or she stays in Sweden or chooses to repatriate (Proposition: 1). In the beginning of the Repatriation section of the SMB web-site it is stated that “one of the Migration Board's tasks is to make matters easier for those, refugees and other people, in need of protection and holding permanent residence permits, who wish to repatriate to their countries of origin”; “The goal is to support these individuals so that they will themselves be able to determine whether and when they wish to return to their countries of origin”. The Stockholm materials emphasize that “the city also offers support for voluntary repatriation’ and their repatriation project “can be very helpful”. The message, that people who work for the repatriation are there to help refugees at any stage of the repatriation, is noticeable through all the texts.

In my opinion, this is connected with the topic of *refugees’ agency* that we touched earlier. The discourse that repatriation is ‘a cure’ and people need to be back to ‘their place’ lead to the fact that little attention is paid to whether people want or are able to return to their birthplaces. In Sweden the choice to repatriate is always made by the refugees. At the same time, I found the text ‘One day I will return’ rather ambivalent from this perspective. In my opinion, the title already reflects the taken decision. The sentence “Perhaps it is time to make a decision about repatriation even if the final answer to the question means something totally different from what was expected in the beginning” seems encouraging people to take that decision. Further it explains how they can be helped and thus the process will be smooth. I do not mean to say that

there is a hidden agenda behind this information to encourage people to leave Sweden. I refer more here to the fact that the text is available for everyone, meaning those who have taken the decision to return, those who are still thinking and even those who decided not to return. Some messages might be misinterpreted and create specific attitude among people. In my opinion, material on repatriation should address diverse groups of people.

Another sign that we notice in the texts and also in any research about repatriation is the idea of being or going ‘back’: ‘if you go back you will miss your new friends’; ‘some [relatives] are back home’; ‘you move back to a country where you have lived before’. Though it is not extensively used in the texts I analyzed, I find it important to briefly mention this aspect. Being or going ‘back’ means getting into certain stage, place or activity that one had before. I will not elaborate much on that as I discussed it more in details earlier, but for many refugees repatriation does not reflect the return to their previous lives or something that they had in the past. People and places change with time; therefore the concept of ‘back’ is, from my perspective, very ambiguous to be used in the refugees’ context.

5.2.5. *Linguistic and visual elements*

I found interesting the *usage of the quote* in the beginning of the text ‘One day I will return’. The quote is from Hazena from Mostar: “We talk a lot about returning and that we plan to do so. But we do not know when. The kids want to do it. At the same time, they have friends here, so I think it will be the most difficult for them to repatriate”. It reflects several aspects that will be brought up later in the same text: decision-making for repatriation and planning to do so; connections with people in the new location. It also demonstrates that children want to return as well. We talked earlier that for children the decision about their home can be hard. They incorporate new values and norms faster than their parents. They might not have lived in their countries of birth for a long time to inherit all the traditions and values or might even be born outside of their parents’ country of origin. The quote demonstrates that even “kids want it”. From my perspective, this might not reflect the different situations that refugees might face when discussing return with their children. This aspect is missed further in the text but can be rather essential in the decision-making process for many people. If the project aims to support people to decide, this should be addressed in more detail.

The text and the page of the Stockholm municipality web-site have a specific *selection of pictures*. We see a mountain valley covered with green grass; the lake and the forest surrounding it; the view of a city in the night lights. These pictures, from my perspective, represent certain calmness and peace; the author connects repatriation with these images and possibly would want such meanings to be communicated to the readers. We discussed earlier that there is a mythical vision that home is peaceful and safe and it is in a way reflected in the selection of pictures. It communicates that once returned the person will be in peace and harmony. From my perspective, the pictures in such context should have a positive connotation. It just seems as if it is only when they are back to their home countries that such feeling would appear. Yet, it is still possible that people might also connect these pictures to their lives in Sweden.

There is one *linguistic element* that I think is important to look at. The text ‘One day I will return’ is written from the first person point of view: ‘I long so much for my country’; ‘I am afraid to change my life’; ‘how do I feel about my return’; ‘where do I belong’. The text is also written in the present tense, thus referring to the current situation of an individual. It seems that the author is going with the reader through his or her considerations and might even reveal certain internal and even unspoken thoughts of the reader. The author wants to demonstrate that he knows the process the reader goes through and wants to create a certain level of trust with the reader. He wants to demonstrate the empathy towards people who are in the difficult decision-making process about the return. At the same time, when writing in the first person, the author is restricted to a single point of view. Everything what is said is seen and processed through the mind of the author and not everyone might be able to relate to the text.

There are also certain types of questions that are asked: ‘where do I belong’; ‘how do I feel’; ‘what are my alternatives’ etc. In my opinion, such empathy and expression of understanding from the author’s side creates a sense of empathy towards the people. I do not want to underestimate the complication of the issue or challenge the practical experience that authors had with people thinking about return. Moussa (1993) said that naming certain issue as a ‘refugee problem’ represents the relationship of inequality between recipients (refugees) and ‘givers’ (government organizations or NGOs). Possibly, my point of view on this is also influenced by people I met during my interviews who did not seem frustrated about the idea of return and what to do once they take such a decision. In my opinion, as soon as people are

perceived as being in a vulnerable situation and are approached in such a way, it might encourage the feeling of helplessness among them and this should be avoided.

5.3. Interviews discourse analysis

During the interviews with the respondents we agreed that I would not use their names and would not make any reference to their personalities. Therefore, in the text below I will be using age and gender characteristics to identify the respondent.

5.3.1. 'Home'

In most situations respondents said that 'home' means several things for them: place, friends, family, security, comfort. They would start by pointing out one aspect that first comes to their mind and then once they elaborated, more associations would come up.

As mentioned earlier, home has been first defined in spatial terms referring to a *particular place*. This is similar to what respondents were mentioning: "home is my city and street in Afghanistan" (M, 29) or "Afghanistan will always be my home. Home has two sides: where I live (right now this is Sweden for me) and where I was born – the country, this is Afghanistan" (M, 55). Another person said: "I will never forget about my home country because I was born there, raised; my relatives, ascendants have been living there. Of course, I did not forget about this place. I am still in contact with people there. I did not disconnect or break relationship with that place" (M, 60). This points out to the profound link between people and the land that we were talking about before. People feel the connection with the place where they were raised; this is where their roots are.

Another notion of home for respondents was the one of *safety and comfort*. During the analysis of government materials I already came back to the idea that home is perceived as peaceful and secure. Such perspective is specifically important for the refugees from Afghanistan who often flee from the country because of the conflict and unstable situation. "No security – no home. Home means security", told me one of the interviewees (M, 29). Even the idea of comfort was connected with safety by one of the respondents: "A comfortable situation is when you are far from war and where people can educate" (F, 17). Comfort was also referred as harmony and absence of problems: "Home is where you somehow feel comfortable, you accept everything; it

is like harmony. You do not have problems with language, culture, nothing to worry about” (M, 19). This represents that for many people home is a peaceful and comfortable place.

Somehow such notions of home are always connected to the country of origin which is seen as peaceful and safe. I referred to this when analyzing the picture in one of the Stockholm municipality documents. However, currently people are residing also in the safe and peaceful place where there is no war and all of them have access to education. The peaceful pictures can represent Sweden as well. This is also evident from the response of one of the interviewees: “Sweden is my home. It is calm and peaceful here” (F, 44). However, some respondents did not feel fully at home here. Home is a complex notion and other factors should be taken into consideration when considering what constitutes home for an individual.

As mentioned earlier, *social networks* of refugees, usually represented through diaspora, help people to integrate and create a feeling of home in a new place. People have the same heritage passed down from the forefathers, and it helps to create bonds and connections between people easily. Every respondent emphasized the importance of his or her connections to the Afghan community. “We know lots of Afghan families and have Afghan friends. We meet during holidays when we gather together and celebrate. Important is that we can keep in touch even if we do not meet, even if it is just to give each other call” (M, 60). Another one says in a similar way: “I met lots of Afghan people in Sweden and I like spending time with them. They are my main friends. We talk our language, eat our food, celebrate holidays” (M, 48). This represents another sign of being at home which I mentioned earlier, when people understand each other without difficulties and no additional explanation is needed for one’s behavior.

Especially the importance of *family* was emphasized. For some it is impossible to feel at home even if they have friends here, but family is in another country: “Sweden is my home, but not for 100% because my family is not here” (M, 24). Another respondent mentioned that he has everything here, but only half of his heart is in Sweden: “My second half is with my family back in Afghanistan” (M, 48). Family is an important factor for people to build social network through which refugees integrate into society. In my opinion, this aspect was specifically brought up by most of the respondents because of special ties to the family in the Afghan culture.

The specific emphasis on significance of having connection with Afghan community and culture was made by the older generation. They referred to the importance of children “to learn what we are doing and follow our traditions in the future” (M, 60). One of the respondents said

that “when young people do not know their own roots, they consider themselves alone. It is important to understand your parents and speak their language” (M, 55).

It is still important for younger generation to be connected to the Afghan community. “Through Afghan people we know traditions, culture better; we can communicate easier because we speak the same language”, says the 17-year old female interviewee. Some spend time with Afghan people because they do not feel here at home “in a way of a life-style” and it is easier for them to be among people from the same culture (M, 21). However, children find it important to understand the host society and have a feeling of belonging to this community to really feel at home. “Home for me is where I do not feel like a stranger; where you feel you belong. Friends you can find anywhere. This is the place where you understand the culture and where you adapted and have the same mentality” (M, 25). Another person adds that he wants “to respect the Swedish culture and feel a part of it” (M, 29).

What we see here is the difference of the perspectives among generations that we talked about earlier, and it is relevant not only for the families whose children were born outside of their home countries. I presented before the examples when parents were claiming that their children were lost to the Western culture or that they do not love Afghanistan like they do. I heard similar point of view from my respondents: “Young people do not want to leave; they have adapted already here. They think that this is their own country”, told me one of the respondents (M, 55). Then he continued that the families “always remind them or keep them connected to their roots and where they are from” (M, 55). The similar idea was expressed by another person: “It is important for my children to know about our culture: how we eat, make food and what is the Afghan culture” (M, 40).

I do not want to underestimate or challenge the importance of knowing one’s own culture. All of respondents admitted the value of being connected to the Afghan community and have social relations when they are understood without difficulties. I am referring to what young interviewees told me that some parents raise children in Sweden like in Afghanistan and it is “of course difficult for them to integrate into the society because of their parents’ influence” (M, 24). One of the respondents who lived in Sweden for 15 years had to leave his parents and live separately because he “wanted other things that parents could not accept” (M, 25). Parents’ perspectives influence the perception of the place as home among children. Those respondents who live here without parents still interact with many Afghan people. However, they admitted

that they feel more integrated in the society, more Swedish, more adapted to the new mentality, thus feeling more at home (M, 29; M, 24; M, 25).

5.3.2. *'Belonging'*

The issue discussed in the previous part leads us to the problem of being 'in between' two places for many young people. Many children face problems of defining where they actually belong. One of the male respondents says: "Swedish will never see me as Swedish, but Afghan will always see me as Afghan. On a surface I am still Afghan, although I speak Swedish fluently" (M, 21). He was born in Sweden and represents 'the second generation', but even for him understanding his identity is important and he does not have this clarity. Another one mentions: "I am not a real Afghan now because I ran when I was only twelve. But I am not a real Swede too" (M, 19). I would like to quote one of the respondents who lived in Sweden for 15 years:

In Sweden sometimes I feel like at home, but sometimes not. Sometimes I feel that I am Afghan because I was brought up in Afghanistan. Sometimes I feel more like a Swede. I have an identity crisis. When I am around Afghan people (e.g. during weddings) I feel excluded. I do not speak the language fluently; I have different opinions; mentality, not the same as they have. I feel like a stranger. I came to Sweden when I was very young, so when I am around Swedes I think that I understand them. But sometimes I feel that I will never understand them. For example, in Afghanistan we are very hospitable. When I come to the Swedish house, they are good with you, but not hospitable; what is ok for them might be rude for us. When I am outside Sweden and people ask me: where are you from? I say I am Swedish, I forget my Afghan part. Sometimes I feel connection to Afghanistan when I watch movies; I see that I have interest in some culture. In a way I feel at home with Afghan people but like a stranger (M, 25).

I mentioned earlier that the issue of belonging is especially critical among refugees and this impacts their sense of home and even more their perspectives on return. People who live in exile are under constant pressure to integrate into the host society, on one hand, and retain the connection to their communities, on the other. This is especially evident among younger people who also have influence from their parents. In my opinion, belonging here is identified *as acceptance or change of one's thinking and mentality*. One of the respondents told me: "Who are our children? If you ask them, where are you from? They will say - from Afghanistan. But it does not mean that they are foreign to Sweden. Their mentality, thinking, considerations, understandings, logic are already different, it is local. They are more Swedish than Afghan" (M,

55). “Year to year I will become more Swedish and Swedish”, said one of the young respondents (M, 29). This represents for him that he will change even more and possibly feel more as a part of the society. It was argued earlier that there is an assumption that immigrants have little or no belonging to the host country, however, gradually they develop this sense of belonging in the process of assimilation. As seen in the interviews, it is especially evident among young generation as it is easier for them to go through this assimilation.

Another way of looking at this is through the concept of *inclusion* and *exclusion* I referenced earlier. Respondents were pointing out as this aspect as an important factor for their home and belonging feeling. One of the respondents said: “Although I grew up in Iran, I do not consider it home. It is difficult for people from Afghanistan to live in Iran, they are not accepted there. Iran is not home for us. Although I grew up there, we did not get citizenship, I could not go to school” (M, 24). Another one comments: “I spend time with Afghan community. They do not ask me where I am from. They do not challenge or ask about my identity. Another reason why I might move from Sweden is racism” (M, 24). He continues later that he prefers to think that he is a part of the society, but says that “the other side doesn’t really want to accept that. I do not speak Swedish as a native language. They see that and do not want to give me job” (M, 24). This shows that ‘push’ factors on the side of the host countries can stimulate people to return even if they cannot connect to their countries of origin as truly home countries. One of the respondents mentioned that the problem of exclusion is faced even by the second generation and people who live for a long time in the host country and speak Swedish without the accent: “even for the second generation as for me it is the same: they still feel this ‘us’ vs. ‘them’ because of their last names; they feel excluded; also from how we look. In smaller places with fewer foreigners you integrate faster, like what happened with us in Kalmar. But we also lived in one village where we were the only foreigners and we did not know anyone and the feeling was like the village and us” (M, 25).

I would like to further discuss the topic of *language*. The respondents during my interviews had several references to this issue. One of the respondents said:

Language helped me a lot to connect to the society. In the beginning it was very hard and difficult. I could not understand anything. Now there is no difference for me if I speak Swedish or Pashto. I have an Afghan friend and when we meet, I do not even realize that we both speak Swedish and not Pashto. Because I understand the language and can communicate, I feel connected to this place and that I belong here (M, 29).

When talking about possible return one respondent said that he was not sure if he should stay or not and the first thing he mentioned in connection to that was that he didn't speak Swedish very well (M, 19). He added that he "would prefer to go back to Afghanistan if possible or to move to the English-speaking country" (M, 19). "If I have a pressure to talk with people (if I am not fluent in language, for example), I do not feel at home. If I speak my mother tongue, I am at home" (M, 21). I said earlier that belonging is about feeling at home. As my interviews show language can be one of the aspects to the sense of belonging and home.

I would also like to bring up an interesting example of the female participant who mentioned that she has almost no contact with Afghan community which was very surprising to hear. She used to have many friends from Afghanistan, but now she is mostly in touch with the Swedish women. "They [Afghan women] like to talk behind the backs, gossip. I do not like that. For example, if I want to divorce, then I do not want them to talk about this" (F, 44). The first reference she made about her feeling at home in Sweden was that she liked to be here because "women can improve their lives here, study, do what they want and think. They have power here. In Afghanistan men have power; they tell you what you should do and what you should not do" (F, 44). Sweden gave her an opportunity for self-realization which would not be possible in Afghanistan. On my question if she feels that the Swedish women think differently she said: "I understand them. I think I belong to them. I am satisfied" (F, 44). It was shown earlier that feeling of belonging is not 'given' to people anymore. This is a place which becomes valuable for an individual. From my perspective, this happened with this woman and her sense of belonging to the Swedish community represents *the place where she could realize herself*. She is not even considering return because she "will never be able to live in that society anymore" (F, 44). Right now Sweden represents her identity.

A similar aspect was mentioned by another respondent: "Sweden made me who I am, how I think, my mentality – everything was created here" (F, 25). She also mentioned that belonging is where she can be herself; "where I am with people I want to be with and society I want to be in" (F, 25). From my perspective, home and belonging feelings are very much connected with how people identify themselves. As mentioned earlier, often refugees re-create their daily routines once they are in a new place to have the home feeling and keep their identity. However, this 'emplacement', that was described previously, can happen when constructing new daily routines that are reflecting the host society, thus shaping the individual's personality in a

different way. People might not identify them with the Afghan culture anymore, but through acquiring new set of values and believes reinforce their belonging to the host state and weaken their belonging to what once has been their home.

5.3.3. 'Return'

When asking the questions about the return I noticed that respondents were very often not sure what actually they think about that. I always felt the feeling of hesitation. Everyone had his own explanation about why they would take certain decision and there was much more than just longing for home.

As I discussed earlier, return is very often connected with *homecoming*, going back to your roots, to your own land. I still heard this understanding from my respondents who represented older generation. For example, "People mainly return because they miss their homes" (M, 55) or "I am old, I would prefer to move back to my home" (M, 60). Another one says, "My father has a house in Afghanistan and friends. He doesn't sell the house, because he thinks he will return. My father wants to return very much" (M, 25). This desire not to sell the house in one's country creates a feeling that there is still some connection to the place where the person was born and lived for a long time. Another respondent (M, 21) told me the story of his father who sold his house because they needed money in Sweden, and he had a feeling that he cut the main link he had to his homeland.

At the same time, based on my observations, I would like to point out that in addition to this nostalgia feeling the notion of return is also connected with the sense of belonging to the host community. Respondents were mentioning that for the older generation it is more difficult to change and adapt to new culture; therefore, they mainly think about Afghanistan and would like to return. Young people adjust faster and thus feel more comfortable in Sweden. "When I moved to Sweden, I was 17 years old, so it was not that difficult to adjust and accept the culture. But for people who move here when they are older, it is much more difficult. Those people who want to move back are old people. Young people do not want because their minds have changed", said one of the respondents (M, 24). Here is a similar idea: "My parents would like to return, they are old, it is difficult to change already at this age" (M, 19).

From my perspective, this represents another notion of return and that is a *decision on where you belong*. When you are thinking about return, it is also your thinking about which community you want to be part of – Afghanistan, Sweden or any other country. Some people referred to Afghanistan as a place where they already feel like strangers: “I cannot imagine myself living there. I will be like a stranger or more as a tourist there” (M, 25) or “When I went to Afghanistan I felt like a stranger there, like a guest, things were unknown for me” (M, 24). Such reference was made by people who lived in Sweden for quite a long time and signifies that probably they already got adjusted to the Swedish society. Another person prefers to return to Iran because she spent most of her time there and identifies herself with that country and culture: “I would prefer to go to Iran. I know everything about this place: language, culture, traditions. Coming back to Afghanistan is like coming to a new place. Parents prefer Afghanistan and children – Iran. I think I will feel like a stranger in Afghanistan” (F, 17). Someone has not decided yet and find it difficult: “I miss Afghanistan and it is really hard to choose. Everything is good with my family there – they have house, job, money, school. If you ask me why I do not come back, I do not know what to say. It is hard for me to decide. I am half here, half there” (M, 29). It is similar to what we saw earlier: the longer the person stays in a new place the more connected he becomes and the more difficult it is for him to decide where he feels most at home.

At the same time, for those who are considering going back, even if this is an older generation with stronger attachment to their countries of origin, return is seen not only as home coming and going back to roots and to previous lives. From my observations during the interviews, return is also seen as an *opportunity*. “If I know that it is safe there and I am not integrated here, I will definitely return. Even if I am integrated, I would still go back, there are more opportunities in Afghanistan: you know people, language. Afghan people are more proactive than Swedes. You can do business there” (M, 19). Such perspective represents the beginning of something new and even something exciting. This is similar to what we have seen before, that for many refugees return is not about re-integration or re-adaptation but integration and adaptation. People perceive going back to Afghanistan as a new arrival and starting a new life. Another person says that his “dream of Afghanistan is that it is a safe country with opportunities for people to live their lives and make progress: education, work, make career without danger” (M, 21). However, he continues: “I do not think that this is possible in my life time” (M, 21). The similar motive is raised by another respondent: “I cannot return back.

Economically situation is not good for me now” (M, 40). We saw earlier that the opportunity to live a good and comfortable life in Europe often outweighs the longing for home especially if the person has children and family. Opportunities that the person gets if he returns or stays are very important considerations and return is often connected with such reflections. “When I returned to Afghanistan in 2008 I felt that I am back home and it was a nice feeling, but I saw that this place was not for me because of no security and opportunities for good life”, says one respondent (M, 29).

When I asked people about factors that might influence their decision on return, safety was one of the considerations, but then job and opportunities to earn money were always mentioned as well. We also saw that the feelings of inclusion and exclusion make an impact as well. At the same time, some people feel strong ties to the place where they were born and grew up. From my perspective, it shows that return is a very complex notion that incorporates many factors. It corresponds to the King’s concept (2000) presented earlier that it is a combination of economic, social and political factors that influences the decision and perspectives on return.

5.3.4. *Floating signifiers*

I would like to briefly outline one interesting aspect that I noticed during my interviews and find important for the discussion. It is connected with the idea of *refugees’ agency* that I brought up several times earlier. One of the respondent commented to me:

If I could do in Sweden what I want, it would be much better. I have relatives in Canada and the US. When they came there, they could not speak English very well, but they already could start working. Job means money and this is good both for government and for people. They use refugees. Here they spend money and time to make you Swede. They think that if you are a refugee, you cannot do anything and they need to teach you everything (M, 19).

From my perspective, this reflects certain relationship of inequality between the host governments and refugees that defines the ‘refugee problem’. I problematized this aspect earlier and pointed out that dependency of people on governments circumscribes the sense of agency among people. People feel that they are perceived as in need to be educated.

This is very much connected with the idea of *refugees’ contribution* both to the host and home societies that I was referring to in the beginning. Refugees are expected to get help because they are seen as being in a vulnerable position. This in a way undermines their agency and opportunities that they can get to live a full life. At the same time, respondents demonstrated that they would like to use their skills and knowledge to contribute:

My country needs good people that can help our country. I hope that my children come back and help Afghanistan and poor people there. I can help my country by giving a good education to my children in Sweden. At least I can help right now like this. I always think about going back and doing something good for my country. We also collect money here now and then send it back to Afghanistan. Right now situation there is not OK, there is no system; corruption is everywhere. If education is good, if jobs are ok, then the country doesn't need me. People need us now (M, 40).

Another person mentions: "I am interested in making sure that it is better there in Afghanistan, that children can study, women have rights. I try to make everything possible from here to help Afghanistan" (M, 55). One more respondents says, "Living all my life in Afghanistan, even if it is peaceful, is impossible for me but I would like to go and work there for some time. Afghanistan needs people who are more open-minded; this is good for the country" (M, 25). This shows that refugee communities abroad can participate in the development efforts in their countries of origin. They have such desire and possess necessary resources to make this happen.

However, it is interesting to note that they are eager to do so not only for their countries of origin, but for the host communities as well. One of the respondents says: "I feel like I am a part of the society because I speak the language. I get help from Sweden and want to contribute back. I would like to join the army, for example" (M, 24). Another one mentions: "Here I also do not want that someone throws the glass on the street. I am interested in making this society better too. If life here gets better, my own life gets better too" (M, 55). I quoted Moussa (1993) who says that the label 'refugee' stays with the person until he is back to his home country and defines social and economic policies of host governments. In my opinion, the perspective on refugees as people in need for help or struggling with integration or desire to go home creates the image that undermines their possible contribution and benefits that they could bring to the host societies.

5.4. Comparison of discourses

The research question aimed to look at similarities and differences of discourses on home and return represented by policy-makers and refugees. In addition, I looked at the notions of belonging since the emotional attachment and the concepts of exclusion and inclusion are very connected to the home feeling and influence the perspectives on return. Below I will briefly present the summary of what I have found during my analysis and present the comparison.

The notion of home as a place, as described in the theoretical framework, is reflected both in the government materials and the responses of the refugees. Home is connected to a *place* where people were born and have their roots, as well as where they were raised and spent their childhood. In the discourse of the policy-makers we could see that very neutral terms are used: country of origin or country the person is moving to. In my opinion, with this government intends to not use certain words that might have an emotional connotation among people and thus influencing their decision-making process on repatriation.

At the same time, very strong notion among refugees was that of home which is connected with their *families*, as well as the *network* of Afghan people with whom they feel at home. Such connections with people of the same cultural heritage help them to re-establish their daily lives in order to preserve their identity. This reflects the fact that through these behavioral routines and social connections home can be brought to different places. Importance of social network for people is also reflected in the Stockholm materials, but is not mentioned in the SMB texts. In the latter home is presented in more technical terms as a place where people work, live in a house and children go to school. I find it important to emphasize that in the Stockholm materials social network is associated not only with home but also with the asylum country which, in my opinion, represents the recognition of the fact that people get connected with the host community as well and these ties also contribute to their home feeling.

This leads us to the concept of *belonging* which is closely attached to the one of home. From the perspective of comparison I have done, the notion of belonging is perceived in a slightly different way between policy-makers and refugees. In the analyzed texts it was mainly connected to the *home communities*, which is communicated through the constant usage of possessive pronouns such as ‘my’ or ‘your’ home country. Belonging was also presented as a *connection to relatives*, which reflects the earlier point that family can help to develop a sense of home feeling in a new place.

At the same time, when talking about their belonging, the interviewed refugees were mainly referring to the *host society* and how they *connect* with the Swedish community. They mentioned acceptance or non-acceptance of the Swedish norms and values and the change of mentality that they go through in the process of assimilation. For them belonging was about feeling comfortable in the host society, trying to understand this new way of thinking, rather than only keeping the connections to the Afghan network. This was especially evident in the

responses of the younger generation. This reflects the discussion in the theoretical part where belonging is about emotional attachment and home feeling, but it is also related a place which becomes valuable to the individual. Change that people go through while living in a new society leads to re-evaluation of the norms that they inherited in their home countries. This makes it difficult for people to define which community they are more attached to.

When talking about belonging, a reference only to the home community does not reflect the connections that people develop towards the host countries when they go through their integration. It was argued earlier that the assumption that immigrants have little or no belonging to the host country is not relevant anymore. On the contrary, for certain people host communities reflect their individual identity more than their home societies. It was particularly expressed by female interviewees who found the gender relations in Sweden more appealing to them than what they have experienced in the Afghan culture.

Being accepted by the Swedish community appeared to be very important for younger generation in their home feeling. Some of them expressed the desire to change more to be able to connect with Swedish people better. This is closely linked with the concepts of inclusion and exclusion that shape refugees' feelings about the new place. It is important for them to feel included because only then they feel like being in a comfortable situation and at ease with the surrounding environment which they call home. Respondents mentioned that because they do not speak Swedish language as native they are not getting jobs. Some said that they will never be accepted because they look different or have non-Swedish names. This struggle that people go through is missing because belonging in the documents on repatriation is referred only as the attachment to one's home country. As was argued in the theoretical discussion, binary of 'us' vs. 'them' is what refugees face in the host societies and that impacts their home feeling and perspectives on possible return from Sweden. One of the respondents mentioned that racism was one of the reasons why he might consider leaving the country.

All these aspects become important when the notions of return are discussed. The changing perspective about home was previously problematized in the theoretical part. We have seen this reflected in the changes of mentality and a set of values that an individual goes through in a new place. Some respondents shared that they felt like strangers when they visited Afghanistan. Therefore, return for these people will not necessarily mean re-integration back into home community, but rather a new integration process. Similar perspective is seen in the analyzed

texts. Although named 're-integration', the process described there was more about establishing the roots again, creating new social networks and adapting to the environment. What is emphasized in the materials is that return is a process and should be implemented at a slower pace. I find it important that this aspect is communicated in the analyzed material as it reflects the refugee experience.

At the same time, what is not mentioned in the text is what happens if the person cannot integrate back. As it was pointed out in the literature review, the existing research on refugees experience after return shows that many returnees are still vulnerable due to socio-economic reasons or poor integration. Refugees are aware of that through their networks and it affects their perspectives on return. The Stockholm document aims to help people with the decision making on return and, in my opinion, should include this aspect. Refugees were expressing this point specifically. However, reflecting on their experience of travelling to Afghanistan they feel that returning might be difficult. Those who have not visited Afghanistan since flight admit that they see the difference between them and other people within the Afghan network which means that integration back in the country might not be possible anymore.

Finally, another notion of return within the text was connected to a dream and a desire to get back home. Such perspective was shared among refugees as well, but was mainly communicated by the older generation. Return is connected with homecoming and for some people going back to their roots is their wish. As stated earlier, refugees have various considerations in mind when they think about return. Even those with a strong longing for home decide to stay in the asylum countries. The similar perspective was shared by the respondents. In addition to safety and security in Afghanistan, job opportunities and prospects for children were among key considerations. Some respondents would return in case these factors are in place; however, they admitted that this most probably was not feasible in their life time.

In the end I would like to add that perspectives of refugees depended on age, gender and amount of time spent in Sweden. What the research that I conducted showed is that the older generations would like to return and still consider Afghanistan their home. They are more connected to other Afghan people and find it important for their children to know the Afghan culture. The younger generation feels more adjusted to the Swedish society and feels more belonging here. However, this depends on the amount of time spent in Sweden. The longer the person stays here the more Swedish he or she feels. There are gender-based differences as well.

Men find Afghan network very important in their experience here, possibly, because of similar values that are shared among people. For women Sweden represented the new set of values which they found more reflecting their identity.

6. CONCLUDING REMARKS

What does this difference in perspective on belonging mean? In my opinion, it represents that if the notion of belonging to the host society is not really acknowledged, then the person is perceived as always living in the situation of thinking whether to return or stay. However, some people might already feel integrated and this issue of hesitation is not relevant for them anymore. Possibly they would rather prefer to think how they can contribute to the host society and their home country while still living in Sweden. In my opinion, this comes back to the question of the refugees' agency. Garvie argues that refugees are perceived as "double homeless" in "...the loss of both a home and a homeland" (Garvie, 2001: 6). Such assumption presumes ties to the country of origin which may reflect a Western image of the 'refugee' rather than a refugee's experience (Kissoon, 2006: 78).

I came across a work of Bergman (2010) who analyzed the empowerment of asylum-seekers from Afghanistan in Sweden. In the paper he presents the thesis of Johansson (2005) on the discourse on Swedish migration and politics where the author argues that the Swedish politics on migration is built on a discourse of the nation state seen as an example of civic construction, but still possessing ethnic features (Bergman, 2010: 88). Johansson maintains that Sweden's focus on integration is very much about images of what is Swedish, what Swedish nationality is and what is 'best' for Sweden (Ibid: 88). Large groups of asylum seekers are quickly seen as belonging somewhere else and difficult to be integrated (Ibid: 88). Later Bergman shows the results of Brune' analysis of the role of media in the national discourses (2004) where the author points out that media helps to contrast the Swedish 'we' to the refugee's undefined 'Swedishness' (Begrman, 2010: 89). The immigrant or the refugee only becomes a 'subject' when presented as victim or the exception (Ibid: 90).

Such deep and diverse analysis of the Swedish official discourse on refugees' integration and return was not part of my study, but I found the aspects that Bergman pointed out in his work as very much related to my findings. He further argues that there is certain paternalism in

relations between nation states, when those in power see other people as "culturally backward" (Ibid: 94). As refugees come from the underdeveloped world it is difficult for them to integrate. In addition, they are also needed to develop their own countries which can be done with help from the development assistance. Therefore, repatriation is seen as the best solution both for refugees and for their home societies (Ibid: 94).

This is very similar to the official international discourse on repatriation which I talked about in the beginning. From my perspective, the way how belonging is portrayed in the Swedish documents on return also in a way reflects this discourse. Refugees are not forced to leave. This is specifically pointed out in the Government Proposition. The decision to repatriate should always be taken by the refugees. All analyzed materials were prepared to support the decision-making or the preparation process after the decision is taken. Throughout the text we read that SMB and Stockholm municipality are there to help, facilitate, support. The evaluation of the repatriation program was not the focus of my analysis; I was more interested in the discourses. Still, at the end of the interviews I was asking people if they would consider applying for help when they decide to return. Most of them replied negatively arguing that they would do it themselves through the support of network or relatives. Some mentioned that the best that Sweden could do is to help Afghanistan, not refugees in Sweden. One of the respondents said: "If you want to help, do something on the state level, not on individual level here" (M, 21).

In my opinion, this reflects again that refugee problem should not be seen as refugees vs. the world that is helping them. It should rather be understood as finding solutions together with refugees and looking at them as the agents of their own experience. It was mentioned earlier that refugees can bring the most contribution to the country development when their human rights and fundamental freedoms are realized. This is very often the case with refugees in the developed countries. In my opinion, if the agency of refugees in the asylum countries is better acknowledged then they could be more beneficial for both societies. Possibly, as the result of this acknowledgment we will be able to find a separate page at the SMB web-site about what the person can do if s/he does not plan to return but wants to contribute. In such a way the migration authorities responsible for the refugee program and Swedish development efforts could come together.

Based on my readings on voluntary returns and repatriations my initial expectations from the study were to find key differences in the notions of home perceived by refugees and

government of Sweden. Therefore, the research question addressed mainly the concepts of home and return. However, during my analysis I discovered additional relevant aspects that could enrich my study. It was essential to bring into research the notion of belonging. When I was talking with people working on repatriation issues in Sweden, they all seemed dedicated and passionate about what they were doing. I believe that they are doing a really important job. My intention is not to challenge the existing program, its content or approach towards helping refugees to repatriate if they decide to do so. Through my findings I want to add to the current understandings of the issue and point out that refugee problem could be addressed in a more holistic manner if the solutions are developed not *for* refugees but *together with* refugees. In my opinion, this can be effectively achieved if the belonging of refugees to the Swedish society is recognized and there is confidence in their agency.

7. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Involuntary or forced movement of people reflects a certain failure of development efforts in countries. As people leave their countries of origin not by their own will, it is assumed that as soon as the reasons that forced people to flee are eliminated, people would want to return back. Repatriation is seen as a human right of an individual to go back home and returnees are perceived as a substantial force for development and reconstruction of the home country.

At the same time, we observe that still many people continue to flee and apply for asylum-seeking in different countries due to insecurity and instability of the post-conflict countries. In the host countries refugees are often perceived as vulnerable and in need for help. Today's discourse on migration is the discourse of place and once people are back to their home countries, their refugee cycle ends. However, for people living in exile, 'home' and 'return' represent complex and multi-dimensional notions. Due to many reasons it does not always necessarily mean that they want to relocate to their countries of origin and it is important to make their voices heard.

This research aims to look at differences and similarities in the discourses on home and return between government officials and refugees from Afghanistan in Sweden. It is done through discourse analysis of materials on repatriation prepared by the Swedish Migration Board on one hand, and semi-structured interviews with refugees, on the other. Analysis of language helps to understand the way in which society is functioning and how certain societal structures and power hierarchies influence the opportunities of people. In my opinion, this comparison will help to reveal certain social relations between the migration officials and refugees. Theoretical framework on notions of home, return and belonging served as a basis for my analysis.

The notion of home as a place is reflected both in the government materials and the responses of the refugees. Home is connected to a *place* where people were born and have their roots, as well as where they were raised and spent their childhood. At the same time, a very strong notion among refugees was that of home which is connected with their *families*, as well as the *network* of Afghan people with whom they feel at home. This reflects the fact that through these behavioral routines and social connections home can be brought to different places. Importance of social network for people is also communicated in the Stockholm materials, but is not mentioned in the SMB texts.

At the same time, the notion of belonging is perceived in a slightly different way between policy-makers and refugees. In the analyzed texts it was mainly connected to the *home communities*, which is communicated through the constant usage of possessive pronouns and reference to *connections with relatives* that are mainly associated with the countries of origin. Yet, the interviewed refugees were mainly referring to the *host society* and how they *connect* with the *Swedish community*. While living in a new society, people go through the change of values and norms, which leads to re-evaluation of their relationship with the home countries. Being accepted by the Swedish community appeared to be very important especially for younger generation as only then they feel in a comfortable situation and at ease with the surrounding environment which they call home. However, they often feel that they will always be seen as foreign to the Swedish society because they do not speak Swedish language as native, look different or have non-Swedish names.

Changes of mentality and a set of values influence the perspective of people on their homes. Some respondents felt like strangers when they visited Afghanistan after fleeing. Return for these people will not necessarily mean re-integration back into home community, but rather a new integration process. A similar perspective is seen in the analyzed texts. Although named ‘re-integration’, the process described there was more about establishing the roots again, creating new social networks and adapting to the environment. I find it important that this aspect is communicated in the analyzed material as it reflects the refugee experience. At the same time, what is not mentioned in the text is what happens if the person cannot integrate back. Many returnees are still vulnerable due to socio-economic reasons or poor integration. In my opinion, if documents aim to support people with the decision making on return, this aspect should be included.

Finally, another notion of return within the text was connected to a dream and a desire to get back home. Such perspective was shared among refugees as well, but was mainly communicated by older generation. Return is connected with homecoming and for some people going back to their roots is their wish.

What does this difference in perspective on belonging mean? In my opinion, it represents that if the notion of belonging to the host society is not really acknowledged, then the person is perceived as always living in the situation of thinking whether to return or stay. However, some

people might already feel integrated and this issue of hesitation is not relevant for them anymore. Possibly they would rather prefer to think how they can contribute to the host society and their home country while still living in Sweden.

In my opinion, this relates to the question of the refugees' agency. There exists certain paternalism in relations between nation states, when those in power see other people as 'culturally backward'. As refugees come from the underdeveloped world it is difficult for them to integrate. In addition, they are also needed to develop their own countries which can be done with help from the development assistance. Therefore, repatriation is seen as the best solution both for refugees and for their home societies.

In my opinion, this reflects again that refugee problem should not be seen as refugees vs. the world that is helping them. It should rather be understood as finding solutions together with refugees and looking at them as the agents of their own experience. If the agency of refugees in the asylum countries is better acknowledged then they could be more beneficial for both societies. Possibly, as the result of this acknowledgment we will be able to find a separate page at the SMB web-site about what the person can do if s/he does not plan to return but wants to contribute. In such a way the migration authorities responsible for the refugee program and Swedish development officials could come together.

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8.2. Discourse Analysis Material

8.2.1. Swedish Migration Board web-site

General Section on Repatriation: http://www.migrationsverket.se/info/491_en.html

Before Leaving Sweden http://www.migrationsverket.se/info/3336_en.html

Repatriation Allowances http://www.migrationsverket.se/info/3339_en.html

Document ‘To Consider Before Leaving Sweden’

http://www.migrationsverket.se/download/18.56e4f4801246221d25680002448/stodpkt_en.pdf

Document ‘Voluntary Repatriation’

http://www.migrationsverket.se/download/18.56e4f4801246221d25680002438/ater_en.pdf

8.2.2. Stockholm municipality web-site

General section <http://www.stockholm.se/atervandring>

Links to the documents ‘One day I will return’ and ‘Voluntary return’

<http://www.stockholm.se/atervandring>

9. APPENDIX

9.1. Interview guide

General questions

1. Introduction of the thesis, me as a researcher, objectives of the interview, confidentiality issue, if the person does not want to reply on certain question, he can for sure not do it
2. Age
3. When did you arrive to Sweden? How long do you have a residence permit/status for?
4. Did you live anywhere else before Sweden but after leaving your country? If yes, where?
5. Do you have a family with you here? If yes, who is with you?
6. Do you have a family back in Afghanistan? If yes, who?
7. What is your highest completed education?
8. What did you do in Afghanistan (employment – what kind / studying)?
9. What are you doing in Sweden now?

Understanding of home and homecoming

1. What do you consider your home (native country, region, town, street, house)? What are your associations with home (safe, peaceful, secure)?
2. Do you feel at home in Sweden? If yes, why? How did you manage to create the home feeling here? If not, why?
3. What role does the Afghan community play in your ‘home’ feeling?
4. Do you miss Afghanistan?
5. Are you in contact in any way with your home country? Do you think that if you come back you will ‘meet’ the same Afghanistan that you fled from?

Basics about return and motivation

1. Have you ever thought about returning?
2. Have you been to Afghanistan since you came to Sweden? How do you feel about Afghanistan now? If you travelled, did you feel at home there?
3. If you return one day, where do you think you will go? The same place you lived before or some new place?
4. What are (would be) the key underlying factors to consider returning: jobs, money, education, housing, health, status, discrimination, freedom, safety/security, age, assistance programs, facilities/shops, welfare benefits, democracy? What is the most important for you?
5. If you are initially against returning, would there be something that can potentially change your mind and decide to go?
6. Have you discussed the idea of returning with your family? If yes, what do they think? If no, why not?
7. Have you discussed the idea of returning with your friends or members of your community? If yes, what are the main perspectives of people? If not, why?

8. Do you know people who have returned? Why do you think (if you know) they returned?

Repatriation programs

1. Have you ever heard about repatriation programs of the Swedish Migration Board?
Which of these benefits (or other) do you consider possibly helpful?
2. Would any form of assistance make a difference in making a decision to return? How?
3. If the government could do only one thing to help people who wanted to return, what would it be?

End of the interview

- Is there anything you would like to add about return or home?
- If I have more questions, can I contact you again?
- Do you know anyone who might be interested in participating in the interview?

9.2. List of respondents

1. Ali, 19 years old, Eslöv, born in Afghanistan, 3 years in Sweden
2. Taher, 21 years old, Malmö, born in Sweden, 21 years in Sweden
3. Soheil, 25 years old, Malmö, born in Afghanistan, 15 years in Sweden
4. Male, 27 years old, Malmö, born in Afghanistan, 7 years in Sweden
5. Nori, 29 years old, Lund, born in Afghanistan, 5 years in Sweden
6. Alex, 24 years old, Lund, born in Afghanistan, 5 years in Sweden
7. Khalid, 40 years old, Malmö, born in Afghanistan, 4 years in Sweden
8. Male, 48 years old, Malmö, born in Afghanistan, 2 years in Sweden
9. Habib, 55 years old, Malmö, born in Afghanistan, 12 years in Sweden
10. Male, 60 years old, Lund, born in Afghanistan, 10 years in Sweden
11. Jasmin, 17 years old, Eslöv, born in Iran, 1,5 years in Sweden
12. Female, 25 years old, Lund, born in Afghanistan, 4 years in Sweden
13. Female, 44 years old, Lund, born in Afghanistan, 11 years in Sweden