



# **“This is not my place”**

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Male Syrian Refugees Negotiating Their National Identity

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## **Abstract**

This thesis investigates how the civil war in Syria and flight to Sweden has affected male Syrian refugees' national identity. I conducted individual interviews with 10 informants, a focus group with 4 informants and participant observation at a café. In this thesis, national identity is defined as a part of an individual's personal identity and consists of a person's sense of belonging to a specific nation and experiences of sharing different unique attributes with other members of the same nation that makes them distinct from other nations. The pre-war Syrian national identity for my informants was formed by autocracy under Hafiz al-Assad and secular changes under Bashar al-Assad. It was also marked by Pan-Arabism, in the sense of tolerance of differences between ethnic and religious groups, who all were understood as being Syrians and Arabs.

I used the concepts of national identity and liminality to analyze my data. My informants' national identity has remained Syrian because of their wish to return to the Syrian homeland. It has also become weaker in its Pan-Arabism with an increased separation and distrust between different social groups in Syria as well as in exile. Syrian identity has also gotten some negative connotations because of my informants' understandings of and emotional responses to political developments and events during the civil war.

Key words: social anthropology, national identity, refugees, civil war, Syria.

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## **1. Introduction and Problem formulation**

During the last few years, Syria and its citizens have gone from a relatively well-functioning society to civil war with many different actors involved that has killed hundreds of thousands of Syrians and forced millions to flee internally and to other countries. Infrastructure, healthcare, education et cetera. has either been destroyed or set back decades in many places of the country which will have its negative effects on the current and next generation of Syrians (European Commission on Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection 2016; Government Offices of Sweden 2015; United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs 2016). Since it is a civil war with many different actors involved, blame has also been put on different parties and divided the country in different ways which is a big contrast to the unity of for example Pan-Arabism (see explanation in chapter 4) that existed in the country before the war which united the people of Syria (Rabo 2013, p. 108-109; Salamandra 2004, p. 9; Starr 2012, p. 53, 203).

Theories about national identity argue that an imagined community and sense of unity among the members of a nation is a fundamental part of a national identity (Anderson 2006, p. 6-7; Guibernau 2007, p. 11; Malinowski 1944, p. 255; Miller 2000, p. 27, 29). This description is similar to the state before the civil war where Pan-Arabism had a central role. The current state in the civil war is the opposite though, where the unity between different social groups have disappeared. Millions of people have also fled the country and the future political situation in Syria is unknown. Thousands have reached a peaceful Sweden which until February 2016 when I conducted my research had given permanent residence permits to all Syrians (Government Offices of Sweden 2015; Regeringskansliet 2015). My study is also very relevant especially since there is no guarantee that the war will end soon, so the current state and change of their national identity may inform or hint of how the refugees', Syria's and Sweden's future will look like. Since it is an on-going and relatively new conflict, there is also a lack of empirical data on the conflict and that is also why I believe my research is not only needed for the answering of my research question but also for future research on the topic.

My topic and research question will be investigated and answered through the following qualitative ethnographic research methods; interviews, both individual and a focus group, and to some extent participant observation (Bryman 2012, p. 383, 432; O'Reilly 2005, p. 112,

114-115). This will be analyzed through the combination of my chosen theories about national identity and liminality.

My choice of topic is also relevant for my studies in Global Studies with a major in Social Anthropology. The reason for this is because Global Studies focuses on issues connected to globalization, conflict and social change (Iten 2015). My thesis also does this through the civil war in Syria which involves international actors, creates international refugees, effects other countries immigration policies and the social situation for both the refugees and the receiving countries. The issue of national identity in my thesis is also very relevant, especially to my major where the experiences between human nature and identity is one of the cornerstones of the subject (own translation) (Sociologiska institutionen 2016).

## **2. Purpose and Research questions**

The purpose of my study is to investigate if and, if so, how the national identity of male Syrian citizens in exile has been affected by the war in Syria and their flight to Sweden.

Hence, my main research question is;

- How has the war in Syria and flight to Sweden affected the national identity of male Syrian refugees?

My specified sub research questions which will work as guidance for answering the main research question are;

- How do male Syrian refugees experience their life in Syria before the war?
- How do male Syrian refugees experience the flight?
- How do male Syrian refugees experience their life in Sweden today?
- What do male Syrian refugees think about the war in Syria?
- How do male Syrian refugees think Syria will be like in the future?
- Do male Syrian refugees want to return to Syria, remain in Sweden or relocate somewhere else?

### **3. Research methods**

To successfully answer my research question, I have chosen to use qualitative research methods with an ethnographic approach because I need an understanding of my informant's opinions and thoughts (Bryman 2012, p. 470; O'Reilly 2005, p. 114).

The most important and central characteristic of qualitative research is the strive for viewing from the perspective of the people that are being studied (Bryman 2004, p. 61). Examples of qualitative research methods are interviews, both individual and with multiple informants at the same time and participant observation (Bryman 2012, p. 383, 432; O'Reilly 2005, p. 112, 114-115).

There is no prescribed set of ethnographic research methods but instead it is an approach to research which "involves the ethnographer participating ... in people's daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, asking questions – in fact, collecting whatever data are available to throw light on the issues that are the focus of the research" (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995, p. 1). There is no clear distinction between ethnography and other methods but instead it is more about the understanding of human beings and their actions and not about quantification and for this to be possible a closer approach to the field site and the informants is necessary. Therefore, even though there are no defined ethnographic research methods, participant observation is generally seen as a fundamental method (O'Reilly 2005, p. 1-2, 84; Savage 2000, p. 1400) but interviews, both individual and focus groups are also included in ethnographic research processes and all three methods often correlate (O'Reilly 2005, p. 32, 115, 117).

Therefore, I have chosen to conduct semi-structured individual interviewing, a focus group and some participant observation as my research methods.

I will conduct a narrative analysis of the gathered data where I will search and organize themes that are relevant to my study and answers my research question. This will occur through the search for repetitive words or views of something specific in my informants' answers. This is a recommended method of analysis for the purpose of understanding people's experiences (Eastmond 2007, p. 249-250, 252).

### 3.1. Semi-structured interviewing

Interviewing is a method where questions are being asked to the informants for the purpose of collecting relevant data. A semi-structured form of this method entails what kind of questions I asked them (O'Reilly 2005, p. 32, 116).

This was the first and primary method I used in my research for the purpose of understanding how the war in Syria and flight to Sweden has affected Syrian refugees national identity.

All questions for the individual interviews can be found in Appendix 2.

Initially, all of my informants were informed about the reason and topic for the interviews and for what purpose my research would be used so that my informants would not feel ill-informed, confused or even tricked and they accepted it (Bryman 2012, p. 142-143, 473; O'Reilly 2005, p. 62-63, 140). The possibility to remain anonymous in my research was also offered and accepted by all of my informants (O'Reilly 2005, p. 65).

I also made a few other preparations before the individual interview sessions as recommended by Bryman (2012, p. 473) and O'Reilly (2005, p. 95, 150). I arranged with multiple, good quality recording machines. I asked them where they wished to conduct the interviews and offered a quiet and private place like my home. I also decided to conduct the interviews privately since I did not know how they would react to personal questions in front of others, if for example they would become quiet or start focusing on the other informants' answers or the translator's presence and let it affect their own answers. Since my informants' mother tongue is Arabic, I arranged to have a translator available if needed but I preferred to conduct the interviews in English because I would not know what was actually being said between my translator and informants. He was placed outside of the room where the interviews were conducted but still close enough for me to get and use if necessary. He was not needed during the interviews though.

The actual interviews lasted ranging from 30 minutes to 90 minutes depending on how open and how much each interviewee had to say. During the interview sessions, I also wrote down necessary information about them as for example their citizenship because a requirement by me was that they were Syrian citizens (further explained in chapter 3.4). I also noted their behavior when speaking (that could not be recorded) as recommended by O'Reilly (2005, p. 150, 153). I was aware like O'Reilly (2005, p. 150) mentions that me recording the interviews and taking notes made them in a sense less anonymous than if no recordings or notes would

have been made and I informed them about these thoughts but it was no problem for my informants since no revealing details about their identity were going to be mentioned and only me, the interviewer and the respective informant, was going to have direct access to the data.

These mentioned actions are made by me but O'Reilly (2005, p. 222) also states that a researcher has to be aware that one is a part of the world one studies and not a tool that completely objectively is able to conduct research without influencing the informants or being influenced by them. Factors that were extra relevant for me and that could have an impact on the research I conducted were my gender (male, same as my informants), age (26, close to majority of my informants) and origin (Swedish, not the same as my informants – not even Arabic). I believe that being male and around the age of majority of my informants gave me the opportunity to get close to my informants and gather more relevant data since this could have made them more comfortable around me in comparison to if an older woman would have conducted the interviews. The reason is that I believe the informants may think that we have more in common because of the age and gender and this is shown through behavior, language et cetera. Being a male was also probably important with my Syrian informants because I believe that the informants would not be as open or comfortable being interviewed by a female. This became extra apparent when I conducted my participant observation and only saw males at the café. The mixing of males and females among Syrians in different social situations does not seem to occur natural. The downsides however, could have been my origin or religion. I believed that because I was not Syrian, Arabic, Muslim or a refugee could affect them through the fact that they may have believed that I was not able to understand them or their experiences of war and flight. This could have made them less willing to discuss with me in comparison to if I would have had at least Arabic origin. But since my contact person that introduced me to my informants was Arabic, I got the sense that they partially approved of me and were honest.

These reflexive ways of thinking and acting is recommended by O'Reilly (2005, p. 116, 210-211) for the purpose of critical thinking that in the long run improves the research and especially the understanding of the results.

Overall, choosing to conduct the research with a semi-structured form of interviewing is also recommended if the researcher has a fairly clear focus of a specific topic. It involves different kind of questions – both closed ones and open ones which allows the informant to freely speak and make the researcher understand them better while also giving some fixed responses

on questions that are necessary for example for requirements on the informants. Since my research demands an understanding of the informants national identity and their experiences of war and flight but also has specific requirements on them like with for example their citizenship, my choice of conducting semi-structured interviews is the most optimal (Bryman 2012, p. 472; O'Reilly 2005, p. 116). Solely unstructured interview questions would according to me increase the risk of not staying on topic because of the relaxed nature of the method while solely structured interviewing questions would not allow my informants to express their full opinion and therefore, I believe that these two types of interviewing would generate less relevant result than the semi-structured method (O'Reilly 2005, p. 116).

In the formulation of my interview questions I was aware of the issues and topics I wanted to cover and also followed the guidelines proposed by Bryman (2012, p. 473) where I as the researcher use a simple and concrete language so that it will be easier for the interviewee to correctly understand the questions. The main reason for this is because the interviews were conducted in English and their mother tongue was Arabic and my Swedish but all my informants had a sufficient level of knowledge in English to understand the questions and properly answer them. I also tried to avoid leading questions that force a certain type of answer but at the same time keeping them to the relevant topic. An example is that I decided to ask how my informants experienced the flight from Syria in Sweden instead of including the words bad, hard or horrific based on my presumptions of a flight and by that place them in a certain state of mind. By avoiding leading question, I feel that I received more genuine answers that were as little as possible affected by me, the interviewer.

A qualitative semi-structured interview also allows potential follow-up questions that the researcher may find positive for the purpose of answering the research question. I was flexible during the interviews by for example asking follow-up questions when I felt that the informant could tell me some more about a topic that could help me answering my research question. This may be important to use since the aim for the interviewer is to receive rich and detailed answers and an effect from semi-structured interview questions that can come from follow-up questions is that the interviewee may relatively freely answer the interview questions and even ramble that may move away from the preplanned topic but at the same time give an insight into what the interviewee views as important (Bryman 2012, p. 470-471).

This would not be possible by for example sending out surveys with structured questions which are typical for quantitative research. The chance of rambling would be smaller and the

researcher would because of this have a smaller chance of understanding what the informants find the most important (Bryman 2004, p. 46-47; Bryman 2012, p. 470; O'Reilly 2005, p. 120).

This flexible (Bryman 2012, p. 471) type of direct access to informants' thoughts with the possibility of follow-up questions and letting the informants focus on what they find important while staying on topic is why I believe semi-structured interviewing was the most optimal method of answering my research question.

### 3.2. Focus group

Focus group is a method which involves interviewing multiple people at the same time, preferably at least four informants and my role was mostly to be a moderator and let the informants discuss among each other about the theme chosen on beforehand by me (Bryman 2012, p. 501; O'Reilly 2005, p. 132-133).

The focus group was conducted at a date after the individual interview sessions and all questions for the focus group can be found in Appendix 3.

I was familiar with my informants since I had conducted individual interviews with them at an earlier date. Four of my informants decided to participate in my focus group and after discussing it with my personal contacts; I believe a reason for why they accepted the request was because they knew my contacts better than the rest of my informants, so a feeling of obligation towards my friends and me could have existed. Those that did not wish to participate gave the explanation of lack of time or said that they would think about it and call me back if they accepted but no call was received by those.

Those that wished to partake in the focus group were informed of the structure of the method and how it would take place and accepted this (Bryman 2012, p. 142-143, 473; O'Reilly 2005, p. 62-63, 140). As with the individual interviews, the chance of anonymity in my thesis was offered and accepted by my informants but they were aware that it could obviously not fully exist amongst them since they were having a discussion with each other (O'Reilly 2005, p. 65). They were also informed for what purpose the answers would be used and that they would be available for the informants afterwards. It was exactly the same procedure I did before the semi-structured interviewing.

Similarly to the earlier interviews, I also prepared questions on beforehand. The difference between the preparation for the focus group and the semi-structured interviews were mainly the amount of questions. Only a few were prepared for the focus group and the reason for this is because of my time constraint but also because focus groups are supposed to be more about the interaction between the informants and my role was to present the theme and keep it relatively on track with it (Bryman 2012, p. 511; O'Reilly 2005, p. 132-133). The formulation was kept simple for the sake of easier understanding for my informants and I chose questions that I believed were good for the sake of starting a conversation relating to my research question. A translator was also available if needed in another room. For the same reasons as in the individual interviews, I did not want to have the translator present in the same room but he was still close enough to be used almost immediately if needed. The session took place in the same quiet and private space that was used for the earlier, individual interviews (Bryman 2012, p. 473; O'Reilly 2005, p. 95, 150).

As recommended, I also prepared and conducted the interview with recording devices and took notes during the interview so I would enhance my memory of the interview and understanding of the results. I also told them that only I was going to have access to the recordings since recording them in a group in a sense made them less anonymous (Bryman 2012, p. 504; O'Reilly 2005, p. 150, 153).

Since I have a time constraint for my thesis, interviewing multiple people at the same time have the positive consequence of generating further results apart from individual interviews in a very short period of time. It is also an interesting perspective when discussing a certain theme as members of a group instead of as individuals and the result can either be different from the individual interviews or further verifying the results from them (Bryman 2012, p. 501). The focus group lasted around 90 minutes. After conducting the focus group with four of my informants, the results were similar to what they said in the individual interviews and this further verified their previous answers. A reason for this may be that I asked them same questions as in the individual interviews but only fewer. The focus group was planned on short notice and I did not have enough time to figure out new questions and I believe those that I already had were sufficient. The participants in the focus group also knew each other more or less on beforehand which led to a situation where they could tell their opinions comfortably to each other and not change them from their individual interviews. The lack of diversity among the participants also perhaps led to less new viewpoints on the questions.

Since I was doing more listening in comparison to the individual interviews and let my informants bring up follow-up questions to each other, I also felt that important issues to them were being surfaced more effectively than during the individual interviews. This is another positive aspect of focus groups (Bryman 2012, p. 503; O'Reilly 2005, p. 133).

Concerning my gender, age and origin and how these kinds of factors can affect the research process was mentioned and discussed previously under the sub-chapter about my semi-structured interviews. The focus group was different in one way – I felt that my origin played a more significant role. All of my informants were Sunni Muslims around the same age and during short periods of time started speaking Arabic to each other, using more Arabic words that they did not do during the individual interviews and because of my origin, I felt that I was in a way not being included in the group apart from them looking at me every couple of seconds or moments when they were speaking. This was though not a negative consequence for my research since the method encourages conversations between the informants while I, the interviewer, am supposed to observe more than actually be included in the discussions and when the Arabic began, I immediately asked them to speak English, and they reverted back to it without hesitation. Being Arabic though, would have given me the opportunity to understand even those few seconds Arabic was being spoken among them. I did not want to use my translator at that moment either because that could encourage them to continue to speak Arabic amongst each other and exclude me. I could not either guarantee that what my translator was going to tell me was exactly what my informants were saying to each other.

I only conducted this single focus group and even though, the recommendations are on a higher amount, I believe that my single interview is sufficient since I also have results from multiple individual interviews and mainly used this technique as a supplement to the individual interviews since it gave me a rich material. Bryman's (2012, p. 505) recommendations on a higher number of focus group interviews also describe the method as the sole method used during a research process and not like in my situation with multiple methods. Additionally, I was also like I previously mentioned on a time schedule which forces me to certain constraint like the amount of interviews and I could not find any more informants so it was either conducting the single focus group interview or none and I believe combining the one with my individual interviews and participant observation made a sufficient combination.

### 3.3. Participant observation

I have chosen to conduct participant observation as a complement to interviewing with the hope of generating some kind of result that would improve my understanding of the Syrians national identity and the wars and flights affect on it. I chose to conduct the observation at a middle-eastern café where Syrians meet, talk, play cards et cetera. after the recommendation by a few of my informants.

A description of the field site can be found in Appendix 4.

Participant observation is a method that involves listening, observing and even participating in a social setting by for example asking questions and these often correlate for the purpose of getting a better understanding of a social group (Bryman 2012, p. 383, 432; O'Reilly 2005, p. 84).

My informants were aware of my presence, purpose and given the right to stay anonymous during this method as well (Bryman 2012, p. 436, O'Reilly 2005, p. 62-63, 65, 140). However, it was impossible to get verbal consent from all Syrians that I observed since it was a public space and new people were coming and going continuously and hard to know which were Syrians or even involved in the group and not just located close by. My personal opinion about this is similar to O'Reilly's (2005, p. 62); that one should to ones best to protect the rights of all involved in the research but that in certain situation this can be extremely hard to do. My field site placed me in this situation with new "informants" constantly coming and going but I feel that my overt position from the beginning with my initial informants was sufficient from an ethical point of view. Receiving some kind of consent from every single informant and visitor at a public café would not give me an opportunity to actually observe the field site, the interactions between the rest of the informants and getting an idea of the field site's function for them.

I also prepared with the necessary equipment to write field notes like a note pad and pens that describe the events and behavior by the Syrians in the field site. These were short and consist and afterwards evolved because I did not want to focus too much on my field notes during the observation. Mental field notes were also added after the field work was conducted. My chosen process concerning field notes was one that was recommended by both O'Reilly (2005, p. 98) and Bryman (2012, p. 447, 450).

I was at the field site for over two hours where the first hour was spent observing the area and my informants and parts of the second hour was after their approach spent discussing with them about their situation, that the café is a good place to spend some time with fellow Syrians and try to have a normal life et cetera. Because of me assuming an overt role during the research (Bryman 2012, p. 433; O'Reilly 2005, p. 107), I was also aware that the behavior of the informants or the answers they provided could be affected by my presence since Bryman (2012, p. 439) speaks about the fact that informants may for some reason worry when they are aware that they are participating in a study. The upside of being overt is once again from an ethical point of view were I feel that the informants were aware of my presence and purpose and I followed the principle of privacy instead of intruding on my informants (Bryman 2012, p. 436).

But overall, my impression from the observation was that the Syrians – my informants and their acquaintances – were not disturbed by my presence. They spoke and enjoyed each other's company while not paying me too much attention and after a short talk with two of my informants, this was also verified by them. The discussions I had with my informants were also about the same topics we had earlier during the interviews – their leisure time, their situation in Sweden, other Syrians et cetera. and our discussions did not provide any new information but only verified what they had told me during the individual interviews and the focus group. The café mainly filled their leisure time, changed their regular schedule and gave them a sense of having a normal life in the same way as their other hobbies did.

A problem that I was also aware of was the fact that Syrians together in a group speak Arabic to each other and that this would pose a big problem to me since I do not speak Arabic. An Arabic speaking researcher would probably be able to gain a lot more useful data using this kind of method at my field site since I was only able to look and not listen apart from the discussions I had with them. Also, I did not want to have a translator with me whispering to me what the Syrians were saying to each other. I felt that me being there was already a relatively big intrusion which made me feel uncomfortable. O'Reilly's (2005, p. 95) solution to such a problem may have been to learn the language that is used in the field on is studying but that was obviously not possible because of time constraints. Even though the observation and the interviewing have the same goal, this method felt more like intruding in their personal life and space than collecting data for research. I could not blend in and it was obvious I did not share their ethnicity. I was also sitting by myself long periods of time and just looking and listening to others while the majority of the visitors to the café were not aware of my study. I

caught myself thinking more about my awkwardness than about my task which could have worked negatively on my gathering of data at the café. Hume and Mulcock (2004, p. 9) speak about this situation for researchers in the field and acknowledge it to be a relatively normal occurrence.

My participant observation had a natural ending when the informants decided to leave the field site.

Overall, the observation was a relatively small project, but since this is a master thesis, a full-scale ethnography is not possible due to time constraints but conducting “micro-ethnography” in for example a café during a short period of time for my purpose is recommended by Bryman (2012, p. 433).

### 3.4. Approach and Selection of my informants

For an improved understanding of my informants’ answers and my analysis, I will also give a short presentation of every one of them, which methods they participated in and an alias in order to hide their real identities in Appendix 1.

I got into contact with my informants through personal contacts who worked as the gatekeepers in my research (O’Reilly 2005, p. 91). I used two male friends in the age span of 25-30 that are from Sweden. One of them works at an asylum home for refugees and the other has friends that work at asylum homes and also knows refugees privately. I asked them to speak to refugees that live up to my requirements for the study. After that, they contacted former residents of the asylum home they and their friends work at, friends and relatives of those refugees, refugees that they have gotten to know in Malmö lately and in the end I gathered the amount of informants I believed was sufficient for my research.

I was informed before the interviews by other Syrians that were not used in the interviews and by one of my gatekeepers that in their “culture” a presentation and request by somebody “has to” be fulfilled. My gatekeepers knew them on beforehand and arranged everything and since they asked them, I believe that they had some form of trust in me. I believe that contacting them without Arabic-speaking gatekeepers would not lead to the conduction of the interviews and they would be a lot more hesitant or not believe the reason for the study.

I also believe that me relatively young age and interests affected the answers I received from them. I felt that we connected well since we had similar interests and there was small-talk

before the interviews about European football with for example Muhammed and Ahmed. I, one of my gatekeepers and the rest of my younger informants also spoke with each other before the interviews. This situation led to a state where I believe my younger informants viewed me as “just another guy” and this made them feel relaxed. I did not speak as much with my older informants, especially with Jaffar, but they also spoke freely and were relaxed and I believe that my young age could have led to a situation where they felt that they did not have to be extra respectful because I was just a young person.

I chose to conduct my individual interviews with a total of 10 informants and that was enough for answering my research question. Because of the time restraints on my research and practical reasons, I also chose to find my informants and conduct the interviews in the city of Malmö. I do not as well see an upside for my research by leaving Malmö.

My focus group had four informants and I had previously conducted the individual interviews with them and they were chosen because they were the only ones that were interested in participating in the focus group. I believe the reason for their acceptance to it was our relationship to one of my gatekeepers. I also believe this is the reason for why the others did not participate and this was also what the gatekeeper to the participating informants thought. We are all relatively close to my gatekeeper and know him on a personal level and because of this according to him; my informants were culturally obliged to accept my request. These four informants were also the ones that invited me to the location of my participant observation and were present during the observation. After all the methods were conducted, because of how much these four informants were involved in comparison to my other informants, they became my key informants in the study who provided me the most answers. There is no official number of informants that a researcher needs for research but instead one normally has fewer and deeper interviews or more and shorter. Because of my research question that demands informants opinions and thoughts, relatively many questions are needed in my interviews and in combination with the time constraints my master thesis has, I do not think it would be possible to conduct the same research with more informants (Bryman 2012, p. 425-426).

Like I stated previously, I had requirements on my informants and because of that I had to use a purposive sampling method to find and choose my informants. The reason for that is because I have a narrowed down and specific research question that focuses on Syrians and those that have fled to Sweden. All of my informants are hence Syrian with a Syrian

citizenship and Swedish permanent residence permit. I have also chosen not to use Syrian informants from specific minorities like the Kurdish or Palestinian. I chose to have these two requirements on my informants and to exclude Kurds and Palestinians since I believe the role of citizenship, permanent residence permit and origin might highly affect the informants view on their past, current life and future and I wanted to remove avoidable influence on my research when it is a relatively small amount of informants.

Some Kurds and Palestinians in Syria have during history lost their citizenship and been discriminated in other ways (Starr 2012, p. 39) which I believe can affect their emotional attitude versus Syria, both regarding the past, present and the future which can for example affect their view on returning to Syria and that will make it harder to me to understand how the war and flight may have affected their national identity since other factors are involved at the same time. Permanent residence permit also gives the informants a clear choice between staying or leaving Sweden since it then becomes optional and not a decision the government can make anymore and this will according to me give me a clearer understanding of my informants view on their future. So to try to lessen the amount of diversity among my informants that can affect my results on beforehand of other reasons than the war and flight, I have these requirements on my informants. In this way, I believe that the results I find will better answer my research question that focuses on the war and flight and not other reasons. This is also extra important to me since the amount of informants I have is also relatively small.

Even though I have excluded for example Kurds and Palestinians, I have included Sunni Muslims, Alawi Shia Muslims, a Shia Muslim and a Christian in my research. These groups have also not endured as much discrimination as the Kurds or Palestinians during the last decades. Sunni Muslims are also the majority of my informants which also reflects the reality in pre-war Syria well, which gives according to me my research a high representativeness as recommended even if my number of informants is relatively low (O'Reilly 2005, p. 225; Rabo 2013, p. 108).

I have also wished my informants to be adults because of a combination of reasons. Them being adults would not make me contact their guardians in Sweden or elsewhere making it more practical, increase the chances of them understanding the purpose of the research and children would also probably have experienced less during their lifetime and especially before a war that has been ongoing for a couple of years.

They are all also living away from asylum homes because of practical reasons for me. Going through the process of contacting relevant representatives for the asylum homes or the city of Malmö to gain permission to interview refugees would only take up valuable time and since it was possible to find informants in private homes, I chose that path.

All of my informants are also men because I am a man and conducting the research by myself. Having a direct private interview with female informants would perhaps have demanded a female interviewer or a male family member of the female that would have spoken for her or to her and this would change the interview situation at such a big rate that I chose to only conduct interviews with males. There was also a lack of female Syrian refugees in my social network and it was not guaranteed that I would have found one even.

All of my informants also knew enough English which meant that I could conduct the interviews in a language we both knew and no translator was necessarily needed. This was something I chose because I wanted to avoid more translations and situations where I did not know what was being said between my translator and informants.

O'Reilly (2005, p. 39-40) speaks about similar approaches to sampling ones informants when having a research question with certain specifics. Because of the keywords Syrian and Sweden, it was natural for me to choose informants that are Syrian, have fled to Sweden and because of the accessibility that O'Reilly also speaks about, it was easier to also have male and adult informants.

### 3.5. Limitations, Validity and Reliability

The most obvious limitation of my research is its generalizability. The reason for this is like with most anthropological studies the unique interactions and characteristics the study has (O'Reilly 2005, p. 227). The situation in Syria, Sweden and my informants currently are in cannot be replicated and hence the results from my study cannot be generalized onto other or future refugees. At best, the results can be generalized onto similar situation like for example other Syrian refugees in Sweden or a similar country (O'Reilly 2005, p. 225).

I am also of the opinion that my research has a high validity since I answer my research question directly through mainly interviews with Syrian refugees that the entire project is about and complement this with other qualitative research methods. I have a big range of

questions and through interviews where I listen, observe, try to identify the important and relevant issues for the informants and in so try to understand how the flight has affected the Syrian refugees national identity, I increase the validity of my research (Bryman 2012, p. 389-390; O'Reilly 2005, p. 226). The internal validity will because of this also be high since I will have a good understanding of my findings and be able to analyze it with my chosen theoretical framework (Bryman 2012, p. 390).

Since I have conducted my research with a relatively small amount of informants typical for qualitative research, my external validity should be lower since the results from my research can be hard to generalize across different social settings (Bryman 2012, p. 390; Seale 1999, p. 40-41). I am of the opinion though, that the results can to some extent be used to generalize for Syrian refugees in Sweden since I have results from multiple informants with different ages and ethnicities which makes my research less constrained under special circumstances and settings and the research field has been narrowed down to focus on solely Syrian refugees.

My research also has a high respondent validation because of the fact that I have verbally shared my findings from the interviews with my informants (Bryman 2012, p. 391). They did not comment on it specifically but generally accepted my description of their answers. This was mainly done so that both I and the informants could verify that no misunderstandings were made during the collection and interpretation of the research data.

Regarding reliability, my research cannot like most anthropological studies be replicated because of for example the unique interactions the take place in the field and the specific role each researcher has (O'Reilly 2005, p. 227). However, it is possible to conduct a similar study by replicating at least the ethnographic research with the same social role I have had including the same research question and same type of informants. In this way, my research gets a high external reliability (Bryman 2012, p. 390).

## **4. Background: Syria's National Identity, Civil War and Refugees**

Understanding the possible changes of my informants' national identities demands an understanding of what Syria's identity was before the war. I will also explain the civil war and its consequences including the displacement of people.

### **4.1. Syria's National Identity**

The period before the civil war that was run by the Assads', both the father Hafiz and the son Bashar, is the one that formed my informants and created the national identity during that period. One can include many different factors when describing the country but big pillars that shaped all layers of the country and define the era are Pan-Arabism, autocratic rule under Hafiz al-Assad and the relatively secular rule under Bashar al-Assad.

Syria is a country that was and is inhabited by different ethnicities and religious groups like Christians, Druzes, Yazidis, Kurds, Palestinians et cetera. and even though Sunni Muslim Arabs the majority, these different groups have all shared the country during its long history (Rabo 2013, p. 108). This image of the country is verified by other researchers like Salamandra (2004, p. 7) that describe Syria as a country with mixes of religious, ethnic, class and regional identities that sometimes are isolated and sometimes overlap and co-exists with each other.

This diversity inspired the Ba'th Party and the Assads', both the father which was in power between the years 1970 and 2000 and then the son who is currently in power to embrace Pan-Arabism, an ideology about uniting all Arabs (Wedeen 2013, p. 844, 849, 854). Even though minorities like Christians and Alawites have historically not been viewed as Arabs, the Assads' have included them under the label of Arabs and Pan-Arabism for the sake of creating unity within the country which would be positive for Arab interests (Rabo 2013, p. 108; Starr 2012, p. 53, 203; Wedeen 1999, p. 16). Pan-Arabism was also especially important to minorities in Syria because they were concerned with Sunni Muslim domination before the reign of Hafiz al-Assad. Pan-Arabism would instead include everybody in one group – the Arabic (Rabo 2013, p. 109). Salamandra (2004, p. 9) also verifies the existence of the unity within Syria by the Syrian constitution where it is stated that the Arab nation is a cultural unit and all the differences one may see are unimportant in comparison to the Arabic consciousness.

Rabo (2013, p. 110-111) and Salamandra (1998, p. 227), however, argues that the goal for the Assads' was never completely reached and that religious and ethnic differences is something that the population was very aware of and mainly discuss among each other. The population did not view everybody as solely Arabic or Syrian but also as members of their respective ethnicity or religious belonging. This is also what makes the Syrian Pan-Arabism unique – many different social groups were included in the Arabic and Syrian identity while the members were aware of each other's ethnicities and religious belongings but managed to accept this.

Hafiz al-Assad also constantly worked to create a magnificent picture of himself. Despite his work to be regarded as the country's "father", the "combatant", the "first teacher", the "leader forever" et cetera. most Syrians did not believe in this picture. He still may be respected for this leadership qualities and political knowledge, mainly in the political and cultural elite but among the general population the glorious image of Hafiz al-Assad was not believed (Starr 2012, p. 2; Wedeen 1999, p. 1; 2013, p. 849).

His ruling during this period and to uphold his image was authoritarian where the citizens like in many other Arabic countries, feared the rulers including Hafiz al-Assad. He had a security service that was known to use torture and other types of violence for the purpose of civil obedience so that he could remain in power and keep the image and situation of himself and the country as he wished. The fear and loyalty to him reached new heights after the violence between his government forces and a group called Syrian Muslim Brotherhood which ended in a massacre which killed anywhere between 5 000 to 20 000 people in Hama in February 1982 (Wedeen 1999, p. 33; 2013, p. 849).

This situation changed when Bashar al-Assad became the leader of the country after his father. Wedeen (2013, p. 855) writes that during his reign people have been able to speak about Bashar al-Assad without fear or anxiety and instead enjoyed his secular changes in the cities that led to an increased freedom of speech, opening of more restaurants and the renovation of Ottoman areas et cetera.

Overall, one can argue that the Assads' idea of Pan-Arabism has been a big part of the identity and description of the country in the last couple of decades. References to Pan-Arabism have been means to form an imagined community in Anderson's sense (2006). This period has also been characterized by Hafiz al-Assad's autocracy and strict control of the country to the more secular changes that his son, Bashar al-Assad implemented in the country.

## 4.2. The Civil War

Before the civil war broke out, the revolutions and uprisings that occurred in 2010-2011 and were ongoing in other countries in the Arab world were well known to Syrians. Those worked as the inspiration for uprisings in Syria that eventually led to the current civil war. A couple of school children began it by writing a critical text about the regime in Syria on a school wall which led to their arrest, interrogation and torture by the country's security service. This created a reaction among their acquaintances and others who protested against the regime and these kinds of anti-government protests spread and attracted more participants across the country (Wedeen 2013, p. 855-856).

The conflict in Syria has been ongoing since 2011 and has involved multiple actors involving the ruling government before the conflict erupted, numerous so called terrorist groups and neighboring countries. These different parties have not been able to find a political solution that has led to peace in the country and because of this human rights violations and abuses are ongoing. At least 250 000 people have been killed together with over one million injured. Around 13,5 million people are also in need of humanitarian assistance and over 11 million people have been forced to flee their homes and over half of those are internally displaced and the rest have relocated to countries and regions like Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Europe. Other consequences for the population and country have been a shortening life expectancy by almost 13 years, over 50 % drop in school attendance, 40 % smaller economy which has led to a situation where the majority of Syrians have lost their livelihood, destruction of health infrastructure, shortages of medicines, food, water et cetera (European Commission on Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection 2016, p. 1-2; United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs 2016).

With the conflict continuing, these consequences will continue and worsen especially since reports claim that humanitarian assistance in different forms is hard to deliver because of different reasons like insecurity and closing of supply roads. The different involved parties also target for example each other's medical facilities, which makes rebuilding the state harder (European Commission on Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection 2016, p. 2). So the current situation in Syria does not offer the citizens healthcare, education or jobs in the same way as it did before the civil war. Neither does it guarantee the safety of the individual which has led to big amounts of refugees being smuggled to for example Europe on vessels (United

Nations News Centre 2015). This was also verified to different extents by my informants during our interviews.

Even though millions of Syrians have been displaced because of the civil war, to be labeled as a refugee, an investigation into the individuals' situation has to be made. An individual has to live up to the description and requirements in the definition created during the Geneva Convention and that is the following;

“[T]he term "refugee" shall apply to any person who[,] . . . owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.” (Koser 2007, p. 66; Malkki 1995, p. 501; United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees 2016).

When the investigation is final and it is verified that the individual has a well-founded fear or for example persecution for a specific reason then the person has the right of protection and further rights and obligations and receives the official classification of refugee.

Sweden's initial interpretation of the term “refugee” was that all Syrians lived up to the requirements and were awarded permanent residence permit up to the point of my interviews in February 2016. (A proposition has since then been put forward which would give all Syrians temporary residence permits for up to three years instead of automatic permanent residence permits. This law is planned to be enforced in July 2016 (Regeringskansliet 2016). Those that have fled Syria have also reached different living conditions depending on their location but places like Turkey through partial funding from the European Union are supposed to ensure access to education and medical care for the refugees (European Commission on Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection 2016, p. 3). Sweden has also put in place different strategies to cope with the refugees and to give them relatively good living conditions. Medical care is offered to all refugees. Free Swedish language courses are said to prepare the individual for future work. Other educational and leisure activities are also offered to the refugees. Among asylum seekers as well those who have been granted asylum, there is a constant search for private accommodation. Some manage to find apartments or rooms to rent if they have good contacts. Others stay in asylum centers (own translation)

(Arbetsförmedlingen 2015; Regeringskansliet 2015). This is similar to the situation for my informants, having work and/or private housing varies among them.

## **5. Theoretical Framework**

### **5.1. National Identity**

In this chapter, I will present the different parts that together form the concept national identity. The role of the nation, state, history, symbolism, ethics, general attributes and effect on refugees within national identity will be described. The definition and structure of national identity varies depending on the authors and researchers but overall, there are concepts that are repeated in the majority of the literature I have read, and these are the ones that I will present in the understanding of the concept of national identity.

The word “identity” has according to the Oxford English Dictionary its roots in the Latin word “identitas” which comes from the word “idem” which means “the same”. Its basic meaning is the sameness of certain objects like for example that A1 is identical to A2 but not to B1. This is similar to how the verb “to identify” of the term “identity” describes the term; to associates oneself with something or somebody and in such compares between persons or things and finds similarities and differences (Jenkins 2004, p. 4; Nationalencyklopedin 1992, p. 342). But in short; the term identity describes our understanding of who we and others are (Jenkins 2004, p. 5).

This is like I mentioned made through the process of comparing individuals and finding similarities and differences between for example themselves and other individuals and this occurs in everyday interaction. When one finds something that they have in common with another individual, then collective identification occurs and the constructed similarity is the foundation and reason for a possible membership in a collectivity. By default, those that do not possess the similarity are excluded from the collectivity and a boundary is created towards those that do not belong, but a definition and description is made of everybody involved (Jenkins 2004, p. 79).

Consequences can occur from collective identification and creation of groups. Individuals overall seek a positive identity from fellow members in the same social group by favorably comparing their in-group to non-members that are part of the out-group. This leads to a state where one owns characteristics are described as more positive while the opposite happens for the non-members where their unique characteristics are described as more negative (Kinnvall 2004, p. 749; Tajfel and Turner 1979, p. 16-17; Turner and Oakes 1986, p. 240). The reason for this is because groups directly affect the members’ self-esteem and therefore individuals

have the motivation to improve the status of their own group in relation to other social groups. A higher status in comparison to other groups equals a higher self-esteem for the individual (Kinnvall 2004, p. 749). This is not to say that those characteristics are objectively observable. On the contrary, there may be many similarities between groups that still think of themselves as very different for one another (Barth 1969).

Eriksen (2004, p. 51, 54) argues similar to the previous arguments of in- and out-groups but he speaks about the term of “us and them”. He mentions that the more differences, like for example cultural, that exists between social groups, the stronger the unity will be within the groups (own translation). He (Eriksen 1996, p. 16-17) also argues about the role of history for social groups and the consequences it has through the image groups portray to each other. The history of the group that an individual identifies oneself with will also determine the way the individual is viewed by others. This can lead to prejudice against both the individual and the group and it can be used to separate people and label them in extreme cases as enemies (own translation).

A national part of one’s personal identity developed with the idea of nation-states and national consciousness. This originated from among other factors, the development of languages which created different varieties of the same language. An example is Latin into French, Spanish, English et cetera. and that created situations where certain groups may have had a hard time understanding each other verbally but easier when in written and this created ideas that those that could understand each other in some way *belonged* while those that one could not understand did *not belong* (Anderson 2006, p. 44). This function within the term national identity is to this day relevant because language has the ability of communication which strengthens the idea of national identity and if people cannot understand each other then they cannot share a national identity (Guibernau, 2007, p. 14).

Today, national identity is defined as a part of an individual’s personal identity and consists of a person’s sense of belonging to a specific nation and sharing different unique attributes with other members of the same nation that makes them distinct from other nations (Guibernau 2007, p. 11; Malinowski 1944, p. 255; Miller 2000, p. 27). Whether and to which nation an individual may belong to can generally be answered through for example the question; “Who are you?” with among different answers; “I am Swedish.” (Miller 2000, p. 27).

### 5.1.1. Role of the nation and the state in the creation of a national identity

Anderson describes the nation as an imagined political community because the members of even the smallest nations will never know, meet or hear of most of their fellow-members of the same nation but in their mind lives the image of the communion (Anderson 2006, p. 6-7). A quote by Miller describing this situation perfectly describes the idea of a nation with the following; “A nationality exists when its members believe that it does” (Miller 2000, p. 28). The basic foundation of a nation, one’s nationality and national identity is the belief that it exists. Overall though, the nation is always viewed as a deep comradeship between the members (Anderson 2006, p. 6-7).

Miller (2000, p. 29) further argues that within this membership there is a sense of belonging to each other where many actions are imagined as partially our own like with for example sportsmen that represent our nation. Guibernau (2007, p. 12-13) also argues that sharing a national identity creates a deep emotional bond towards other members of the same national community and they can be viewed as a form of extended family where the achievement, values et cetera. that are connected to the entire national group become internalized with the individual members.

States that are interested in creating a single national identity can according to Guibernau (2007, p. 25) act in five ways to reach this goal;

- They construct a certain image of the nation, within the state’s boundaries and comprising a common history and a shared culture.
- They create and spread a set of symbols and rituals with the goal of strengthening a sense of community among its citizens.
- They create citizenship that entitles the citizens to specific rights. This leads to a form of loyalty from the citizens to the state. It also informs who is *included* and who is *excluded* from the community of citizens and thus, who has rights and who does not.
- They create an image of common enemies which gives the consequence of a united community against the enemy even if it is invented.
- They inform the citizens in different ways on the definition of a “good” citizen.

In today’s globalized world, migration is a relatively common occurrence as a consequence to for example wars, and it also has it effect on the national identity of both the migrants and the host countries of migrants. Whether the national identity of the migrants or a specific state

becomes stronger or weaker depends on a couple of different factors. Examples of these factors are the imagined “size” of cultural differences between the nations, the number of immigrants, how long the immigrants are planning on staying in their new country, the legislation regarding immigration in the host country, the willingness among the immigrants to integrate et cetera. An example of how these factors work in reality is if the host country is generally against migration and the migrants because of cultural or racial differences are discriminated then they will create small safe areas within their new host country and this will lead to a sense of unity among the migrants (Guibernau 2007, p. 62-63).

### 5.1.2. Role of symbolism and history in the creation of a national identity

Eriksen (2010, p. 290) writes about national symbolism and argues that the “unique” aspects of every nation will work as their symbol and be the spirit of the nation’s members. Brettell (2003, p. 16) also argues similarly when she states that it is through the symbols that the people represent their united society. Eriksen (2010, p. 290) gives us an example of the physical search for unique traditions in remote areas of Norway and what could not be found in Sweden or Denmark was supposed to represent the spirit of the Norwegians, symbolize the nation and establish the idea that they are unique. To spread this idea, the elite that conducted the research were to bring the findings to the larger cities. The traditions worked as an explanation of what it meant to be Norwegian and what type of characteristics a Norwegian could have and were a part of the definition of the national identity of Norway. National characteristics are thus constructions to some extent. Miller (2000, p. 30) writes about a similar topic and claims that national communities are of the belief that its members share some form of traits that makes them different from others. There has to be some kind of similarity among the members for a national community to exist. The uniqueness within the national community will also be what the member entails unto oneself and its national identity.

Apart from specific attributes and national symbolism, history also has an important role in the creation of national identity. In the same way that members of a national community view their fellow members actions as partially their own through internalizing and solidarity, past actions from members a long time ago works the same way. Battles against for example other nations continue to live through generations and the animosity continues to exist and members have an obligation against those that fought to continue the battle in some way (Miller 2000, p. 28-29). History also gives the group and the individual members an idea of whom they are

because history has in a way created and shaped them and their society to its current look. Denouncing their history would create a meaningless vacuum without explanations on the nation's current situation (Guibernau 2007, p. 15).

### 5.1.3. Shared attributes within a national community

According to Anderson in Malkki (1995, p. 254-255), a nation and its members also share an imagined moral. Miller also writes about the issue of moral and ethics among members of one's nation and those that do not belong to one's nation. He argues that nations are ethical communities where we are said to share the same ethics and have different and more duties and obligations towards those that share the same nationality with us than to those of a different nationality. Within our national border we may also have smaller groups that we feel closer to because of different reasons but overall, our national borders work as a signifier of types of ethics and its location (Miller 2000, p. 27). Guibernau (2007, p. 22) also adds his perspective and describes it similar with that the members view of fellow nationals is that they are seen as more humane than those that are not from the same national community and share the national identity and thus, do not deserve the same level of support.

Other factors like for example race and language also determine whether an individual lives up to the stereotype that is used to generalize a specific nation and it may also determine whether one is seen as a typical member of the nation or not and hence a member of the comradeship and in possession of the morals the community has (Malkki 1995, p. 256). These factors are not what are used for the creation of the idea of national identity but used in the generalization of the members within a specific nation (Miller 2000, p. 28) and overall individual members national identity is constructed by different attributes that are imagined to be shared by all of those who belong to the specific national community (Guibernau 2007, p. 11).

Other aspects that could determine on ones membership within a specific nation is the location of one's birth or ancestry. Malkki (1992, p. 35; 1995, p. 243) noticed during her research with Hutu's and Tutsi's, that even if both groups members were born in Burundi, the Hutus describe the Tutsis as a group that once came from their original home "in the North" and because of this they are classified as not originally from Burundi and instead seen as intruders, thus making their membership of the nation illegitimate and unnatural. Miller (2000,

p. 29) also writes that a fundamental part of the idea of national identity is the connection of a group of people to a specific geographical location but does not necessarily mention that an individual has to be born in the same location to be a part of the national community.

#### 5.1.4. National identity among refugees

Like I have stated before, the rooting of people and its connection to a place is naturalized and seen as a moral and spiritual need for man. Overall, it can be called as the national or natural order of things (Malkki 1992, p. 26, 30). Refugees though, are a group of people that have been forced away from their homeland and put in a liminal stage (see explanation in chapter 4.2.) and not in their previous situation that built and encompassed the different features of national identity I have presented in this chapter (Malkki 1992, p. 34). How this state affects their national identity is the purpose of my essay which will be investigated through my informants and methods but this sub-chapter will shortly present the overall idea of the affect flight has on individuals' national identity.

Malkki (1992, p. 31-32) states that there is a difference between voluntary migration and forced migration when it comes to its effects on individuals' national identity. Simply put, she argues that refugees that have been forced to migrate there is an idea of the threat of death to one's roots, along with the loyalty that a citizenship in a homeland creates unlike with voluntary migrants that instead focus on and try to acclimatize to their new milieu. This is verified by the findings I present in the literature review (see chapter 6); almost all of Shabaneh's (2010), Malkki's (1992) and Turner's (2005) forced migrants showed the same reactions which were a national identity that was remained and recreated in their new location. Turner's voluntary migrants reacted in the described way of Malkki; they acclimatized to their new surroundings and changed their national identity.

The only group that reacted differently to Malkki's descriptions was some of the forced migrants in her own research who had settled and lived with the local population instead of in isolated refugee camps or areas. In Shabaneh's and Malkki's cases, the refugees also had an enemy that according to them was an invader (Shabaneh 2010, p. 215, 223; Malkki 1992, p. 35-36; Turton 2005, p. 275-276). This is big different to my research where a civil war is ongoing and the enemy in many cases is other Syrians and not always regarded as an invader.

Malkki also present older research on this topic that she personally does not agree with but it

gives an idea of the development of the discourse about refugees. She (1992, p. 32) writes that the view of refugees' was generally that their loss of physical connection to their national homeland leads to different negative consequences. An example is the loss of moral bearings but that consequences also can show themselves in other different forms like political or medical. Malkki (1992, p. 32) quotes Cirtautas which gives a characterization of the idea of the typical refugees' moral;

“Homelessness is a serious threat to moral behavior...[The refugees'] conduct makes it obvious that we are dealing with individuals who are basically amoral, without any sense of personal or social responsibility...They no longer feel themselves bound by ethical precepts which every honest citizen...respects...”.

Another quotation by Aall that Malkki (1992, p. 32) also presents is;

“There is a slow, prostrating and agonizing death – of the hopes, the idealism and the feeling of solidarity with which the refugees began.”.

Even though more contemporary research does not have as negative descriptions of refugees, Malkki (1992, p. 33) still argues that the overall view of refugees is that they are generally viewed as a “problem” by their surroundings. She (Malkki 1992, p. 34) also argues that since individuals national identity is constructed in a certain territory, leaving against their will threatens to spoil their national identity in some way.

Overall, the previously mentioned aspects within nations, national consciousness and national identity shows us that a membership with a nation and having a specific national identity has requirements, expectations and duties with the individual like for example some kind of ethics or behavior and in return the membership in a specific national community gives the member an idea of whom they are through the collective uniqueness and history of the national group. Depending on the future situation for the individual, one's national identity may remain or be changed.

## 5.2. Liminality

The concept of liminality speaks about “being in between” for example identities or citizenships. The following citation by van Gennep (cited in Rapport and Overing 2007, p. 3) describes this phenomenon;

“The life of an individual in any society ... is a series of passages from one age to another”.

Examples of this are how a person goes from being a child to adolescent. Rapport and Overing (2007, p. 262-263), two anthropologists, claim that once this kind of passage has begun, a “rite of separation” also occurs where the old identity is removed while the new one has not yet fully been assumed which puts the individual in a liminal stage of transition. This liminal stage can be viewed as a zone of non-identity and non-existence. Van Gennep speaks similarly about the topic and mentions that for a successful change of group which can be an individual’s identity, certain conditions must be fulfilled for the acceptance within the new group. Before that occurrence, an individual has to go through an intermediate stage (Van Gennep 1972, p. 1) – the one that Rapport and Overing earlier called a zone of non-identity and non-existence. Depending on the situation the person in a liminal stage is in, the treatment of them varies from being seen as invisible to spoken about as if they were dead, unclean, dangerous et cetera (Rapport and Overing 2007, p. 263). Rainbird (2014, p. 466) describes the liminal existence as a symbolic death of a former self, family or communion depending on the situation.

This concept is very relevant to introduce since it may be used when analyzing Syrian refugees and their national identity. Syria are in midst of a civil war where different Syrian groups in the form of rebels and the government are in a conflict with each other and the direct reason for why so many of their inhabitants have had to flee their country. Other non-Syrian groups are also involved in the conflict which has destroyed the country and put it back many years. Syrian refugees have fled the country and reached a destination like Sweden where they have been awarded permanent residence permit but at the same time in many cases have not yet learned the language, found work or an own home. One can argue that they are in a liminal stage regarding citizenships because they cannot return to Syria while also not having Swedish citizenship. Liminality can also be shown among refugees in a social context since they leave their functioning lives and reach a destination where their new homes in the form of different kinds of refugee camps makes them powerless. Their mobility, possessions, time, income are limited and they are depended on their surroundings. They have not yet reached a functioning new life in their new country (Mortland 1987, p. 375).

Barth (1969, p. 15) claims and this can specifically be used on refugees that once individuals identify others as strangers and members of another ethnic group then there will be recognition that there are limitations on the shared understanding between them. So, refugees trying to create a new life in an exotic environment will be posed in a situation which can be described as more confusing than their last functioning one. While being generally viewed as

invisible or negative because of the liminal situation they are in, the creation of a new citizenship or even national identity may have obstacles that further keeps them in their liminal stage.

## **6. Literature review**

I will present some research done on the topic of displaced people and how it affected their national identity. Majority of the research presented will not be about Syrians but instead of other groups and the reason for this is that even though the civil war has been on-going for a couple of years, there is not yet a lot of conducted research on Syrian refugees and their national identity. I believe though that the combination of research made on the pre-war Syrian national identity and the national identity of non-Syrian refugees will give a good overview of my topic and also an idea of how my Syrian informants' national identity may have been affected by the war and flight. Christa Salamandra's research was chosen because it focused on Syria, its national identity and was relatively new. Ghassan Shabaneh's, Lisa Malkki's and David Turton's research was chosen because it was similar to my research where the national identity of refugees was studied with the big difference being that the informants were not Syrian refugees. Salamandra and Malkki are also anthropologists which is the study my major is in and this gives me a good understanding of their research methods, theories and result.

Christa Salamandra (1998, p. 227-228) wrote an article before the civil war about the national identity of Syrians and how it is manifested in the country. She focused on the role of television and how it tries to establish a certain national identity among the citizens. She noticed that certain programs are aired during for example the holy month of Ramadan and that the ruling Ba'th Party through these programs tries to create nationalism under the rubric of Syrian and Arab where all Syrian social groups are incorporated. An example can be how through dramatic depictions of the Old Damascus. This verifies the descriptions of Pan-Arabism in chapter 4 where unity among all Syrian groups under the rubrics Syrian and Arab constitute a big part of their national identity. She also claims that the pictures of the Old Damascus that are meant to create unity among the people instead create tension, resentment and hostility.

My informants and the background description of the national identity in chapter 4 verify Salamandra's research. Pan-Arabism is a big factor in their national identity but as Salamandra claims together with other researchers in chapter 4, the glorious image of unity among the people that the rulers try to portray is in fact not the complete reality. It is still though a real indication of their national identity and my informants' view of other Syrians.

Ghassan Shabaneh (2010, p. 215) conducted research on Palestinian refugees that had been forced to migrate and placed in refugee camps created by The United Nations Relief and Work Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) in different places after the 1948 war with Israel. His articles focus was on the role of UNRWA in the reconstruction of the Palestinian identity and nationalism in refugee camps away from their places of origin.

His result includes two important points that are relevant to my research;

- Even though the goal of UNRWA was to integrate the Palestinian refugees in their new locations in for example Jordan, the isolation of refugee camps actually worked as the main reason that prevented them from integrating and instead reminding them of their past and promoted their national identity as separate and distinct (Shabaneh 2010, p. 215).
- This was further verified through history and memories that were verbally told to each other and new generations that were born and raised in the refugee camps. The identity was upheld through for example cultural celebrations where unique Palestinian clothing was worn (Shabaneh 2010, p. 223).

My Syrian informants have also been forced to migrate elsewhere and all of them either live with their family or together with other Syrians in private homes in a similar way as Shabaneh's Palestinian informants lived together with other Palestinians after their forced migration. Time will determine whether my informants will demonstrate the same effect on their national identity as the Palestinians did but my research can hopefully demonstrate on which path they currently are in the question of how their national identity has been affected by the war in Syria and flight to Sweden.

Similar research is presented by Malkki (1992, p. 35) about Hutu refugees that fled from Tutsi's in Burundi to Tanzania to escape a genocidal massacre in 1972. She states that the refugees were divided and placed in two different locations – one group in an isolated refugee camp while the second group was placed in a township where they lived side by side with the local people. She discovered that the refugees that lived in the isolated camp did not leave their past and reconstructed their history as a people and regarded themselves as a nation in exile that will return and reclaim their homeland Burundi. Their former national identity remained intact.

The refugees in the township reacted differently in comparison to those in the isolated camps and changed their national identity. They did not reconstruct their collective identity in the group but instead wanted to assimilate and create a new form of national identity that consisted of a mix between the old and the new where they wanted to be seen as people first and foremost and not as refugees from Burundi for example. Burundi became just a place and not their goal anymore and many even stated that they did not know whether they would return to Burundi even if it was peaceful and safe (Malkki 1992, p. 36).

This research is similar to Shabaneh's and shows us a similar result as well but also one interesting. Those who were isolated in refugee camps had their national identity rather intact and kept dreaming of returning one day to their homeland but Malkki's research also shows us in difference to Shabaneh's research what happens to the national identity of the refugees if they are not isolated but instead placed among the general population. The results were different and showed the opposite; that their national identity became weaker in the form of not wishing to return, not wishing to be identified with their homeland and assimilating to a new country with its own culture. Therefore, it is possible to see different reactions to the national identity among refugees depending on the situation that appears in the receiving country. Another interesting aspect was that the refugees – the Palestinians and the Hutu's had a clear enemy in the form of Israel and the Tutsi's which were regarded as invaders even if like in Malkki's example, the Tutsi's were born in Burundi (Shabaneh 2010, p. 215; Malkki 1992, p. 35; 1995, p. 243). In this perspective, my research is different; Syrian refugees are fleeing from a civil war where the enemy in many cases is other Syrians and this may have an impact on the results I will find. The distinction between living among the general population or isolated is not as clear with my Syrian informants. They are free to move around the general population and some of them also do this through work. At the same time though, they live with either their family or Syrian friends and acquaintances thus making their social life in a way isolated with Syrians.

Other relevant research that has been made on the topic of national identity is by David Turton (2005). He conducted a long-term research project concerning Mursi, a small southern Ethiopian agro-pastoralist group, and among other focuses was the one about their linkage to a specific "place" and which role it has in an individual's identity. The Mursi's have relocated during the research and Turton (2005, p. 258) comes to the conclusion that a specific place cannot be viewed as solely a stage for social activity but also as a product of social activity. A place works as a location where action become meaningful and a shared understanding is

possible so a displacement is not solely about the loss of a place but also about the future struggle to create a new place in the world so that meaningful actions and a shared understanding becomes possible once again.

Turton (2005, p. 275-276) further writes that whether a group finds a new place they are connected to also depends on the way they experienced the relocation. The Mursi's relocated during the research but those that moved to a new place and did not view the relocation as forced felt that their sense of belonging to their new place was natural and no obvious breakage of continuity with their former place was seen. They also started viewing movement and relocation as a part of their self-identity. On the other hand, those that did not view the relocation as voluntary tried to re-establish their place of origin in their new place and a breakage of continuity was more obvious.

The combination of the presented research on the topic shows us that how an individual experiences the relocation, voluntary or forced, and how they live in the receiving country can determine the effect it has on the national identity. Voluntary migration or placing refugees among the general population seems to weaken the former national identity and create a new one with the individual while forced and isolation makes it remain.

This research is relevant to my study mainly because of the two previously mentioned points – how the refugee experiences the relocation and how the refugee lives and experiences the new life. My Syrian informants originate from different regions in Syria, have partly different reasons for fleeing and did so under different circumstances and while living in Sweden in different ways. Some of my informants live with their family while some fled to Sweden by themselves, some live in private apartments with other Syrians but with Swedish neighbors while some live in asylum homes isolated from the Swedish society. Some work and interact with Swedes on a daily basis while some have done nothing during a long period of time and this is why this research is important to present since it shows us how the relative experiences of war, flight and exile of the individual affect their national identity.

## **7. Findings and analysis**

I will present my findings through a narrative analysis of the data I collected from my informants. Eastmond (2007, p. 249-250) writes that we can only understand people's experiences by the expression they give about them. This is a typical understanding in ethnographic research so the narratives can be provided to the research through for example interview questions on a specific topic or through observation in a natural setting. These are exactly the methods I used to gather my data.

One also has to be aware though that the experiences may be different depending on the situation of the narrator. There is a difference between how life was lived, how the person involved experienced or understood it, how it was told to a specific audience, how the researcher interpreted it and how the reader will understand the text. Therefore, an experience is never directly represented but always affected in some way and this will make the results from the analysis of the narratives affected in some way as well (Eastmond 2007, p. 249).

The Syrian national identity was presented earlier in the thesis and could be summarized by mainly Pan-Arabism. The identity of the country could also be influenced and characterized by the strict control of the population under Hafiz al-Assad and the secular changes under Bashar al-Assad. This is the national identity described by researchers but also generally by my informants. Therefore, the results I will present will be mainly how my informants have experienced a change in their national identity but it will also be verified by researchers' description of the former Syrian national identity.

The presentation of the results in my analysis will come from the search and organizing of themes in the narratives that are common, important and answers my research question (Eastmond 2007, p. 252). This will be verified with the help of my chosen theories about national identity and liminality that will show how and where in my informants' national identities the changes have been made.

The three themes that generalize the answers provided to me by my informants and those that I will be using as sub-chapters to present the results are the following;

- Separation by increased boundaries and distrust
- Nostalgia to a positive shared past
- Return to a peaceful Syria

These themes were found by me after the analysis of the informants' answers. I observed that my informants shared and repeated the same words and views on for example the reasons for the civil war depending on their ethnicity or religious belonging and their will for their future.

The first sub-chapter regarding separation will highlight the fall of Pan-Arabism in Syria and the current divided state between Syrian groups and individuals. The second sub-chapter regarding nostalgia will highlight my informants' comparisons between the past and the present and the emotions they attach to it. The differences between these two sub-chapters is mainly that the separation and division that has occurred is viewed by the majority of my informants' as something understandable and acceptable in comparison to other changes I will present in the sub-chapter about nostalgia. The separation is also not described with negative emotions attached to it as with the other consequences from the civil war. The separation can also be viewed on a deeper level; it is not only viewed in the verbal comparison of the past and the present by my informants', but also in general descriptions of the civil war and their relationships with other people and groups. The third sub-chapter regarding the return to Syria will highlight their overall will for their future.

### 7.1. Separation by increased boundaries and distrust

A very common theme that was apparent in my informants' answers was that about separation and experienced differences between different individuals and groups in Syria, specifically with increased boundaries and distrust. This is the opposite of a part of the national identity of Syria before the war – Pan-Arabism that broke down boundaries and differences and instead created unity within the country and trust to fellow Syrians despite their ethnicity, religion or origin. I will present the informants answers regarding this theme and complement this with my chosen theories. This will show that my informants' current national identity in comparison to the one before the civil war is experienced by my informants' as changed to a weaker and negative one. It has been become weaker in unity, loyalty and acceptance of fellow Syrians and Syria.

My informants originate from different parts of Syria, have different faiths, ethnicities and social situations in life but despite this, they had a similar description of their society before the civil war. In their own words, all of them said that they were generally content with their lives and that their society was peaceful which they liked and preferred to the current non-

peaceful state Syria is in. The majority of my informants' also said that that they could not have imagined the current civil war because there were no "real" problems in the country. A few of my Sunni Muslim informants' said that they could have imagined a war or conflict because they have been suppressed and discriminated for a while but not a war of this magnitude. None of my informants' spoke specifically about a unity among the population or mentioned key words like Pan-Arabism but instead mentioned the different minorities multiple times and verified that everybody had lived relatively peacefully together. This verifies the researchers' description of the national identity of Syria presented in chapter 4. This changed and became worse when the war started. Like I stated in the title of this chapter; separation and distrust occurred between groups while they started blaming each other. This was the biggest change in their personal lives and also very relevant to their national identity. The above mentioned descriptions of their pre-war lives and the current separation and distrust that I found in my analysis will now be presented with quotes by my informants'.

There were a couple of very relevant and descriptive quotes provided to me by my informants about this topic. Those that I will not quote in this sub-chapter did not by my understanding and experience from the interviews view the changes of separation and distrust as less apparent but did not formulate themselves as clearly as those that I will quote. An interesting aspect of all of my informants' answers is that the separation that they experience has occurred in Syria, during the flight and in Sweden even though the social situation varies differently from a war-zone to a peaceful place.

The quotes will either come from their answers to a single question or be put together from answers to multiple questions that highlight the topic of separation and distrust. All of them were also said during my individual interviews and not during the focus group or the short discussions during my participant observation.

When I asked Hamid "Do you want Syria to be like it was before the war?" he answered with the following quote;

"Before? No. And it can't go back so I don't really care about it. I think too much has happened to people. Everybody thinks about themselves and we know now who Assad, Alawite, Shia, all of them are. We have known before but it is much worse now."

Hamid is of the opinion that Assad, the Alawites and the Shia have exposed their real self which is a worse version than the fake image they had pre-war. This verifies the separation between groups and the negative image they have of each other.

When I asked Zaid “Could you have imagined a war in Syria?” and later “Why did you migrate from Syria to Sweden?” he answered with the following sentences;

“Yes. I could have imagined a war in Syria. But not like this. Assad has been killing us Sunnis for a long time. Even his father killed us when he was alive. Many are dying in the war but we have to survive against Assad. His killing has to stop now! [...] I had to flee because I and my family were going to be killed by Assad! [...] Syria is in war now, but it has to be so. We are freeing ourselves from Assad and his supporters. We are the true Muslims and still have no power and cannot do anything. We are hunted in my city. Alawi, Shia, Christians, all of them are helping each other against us Sunnis. We are the most [the majority], but still are treated like dogs!”

Zaid views the non-Sunni groups as the oppressors and fundamental reason for the war and sees it as a necessity in order to reach freedom and justice for the Sunnis. This also shows the separation and negative image of other groups.

When I asked Abdallah “Why did you migrate from Syria to Sweden?” he answered with the following quote;

“I had to leave my home because Daesh was looking for me. I don’t know why but I know that my neighbor contacted them and said something. My family knew his family for many years and we come from the same city. There were never any problems but we had to leave because they said that they would kill us because we are Alawi. We had to leave the house my family built and everything we had.”

Abdallahs quote tells us the same as the previous ones but also shows us the depth of distrust and separation. Friends started betraying one another and the trust to members of other ethnicities disappeared.

When I asked Jaffar “Who do you blame for the flight?” he answered with the following quote;

“The Sunnis. Not only Daesh or like you say Islamic State. Because the Sunnis have it easier than us. Everybody talks about Daesh but the Sunnis are a part of them. They don’t have to die. They work with Daesh to get the power and we can see what they do to us when they get the chance.”

Jaffar’s quote shows us not only the separation between groups but also that one believes that there is no limit on what the others groups may do when they get the chance – including massacres.

When I asked Ali “Why did you migrate from Syria to Sweden?” and later “How did you feel about leaving Syria?” he answered with the following sentences;

“I had to flee because the Sunnis would get me [...] Fleeing from Syria was bad. I knew it was going to be bad but it was actually worse than I had thought. Many cried, were scared and you could not trust anyone. Not even your friends. Somebody stole my bag and I had nothing until I came to Sweden.”

Ali verifies the separation and distrust between groups but also that it happens among friends. It is also not only isolated to Syria but other locations like during the flight.

Muhammed answered in a unique way but still had the issue of separation in it. His experienced separation was not like for the rest of my informants; between him and another religious or ethnic group solely but between him and his uncle partially because of his choice of socializing with the “enemy” – another group. He answered the following when I asked him “Where, how and with whom are you living in Sweden?” and later “Have you noticed any differences between Syria and Sweden and if so, which and what is your opinion about them?”;

“I live in an apartment with other Syrians and Iraqis. I used to live with my uncle but I couldn’t anymore. He wants me to work with him but I want to study Swedish like my parents in Syria tells me to do. [...] Not for me but for my uncle. I live with my friends that are Shia [Syrians] because my uncle did not like that I am friends with them and said that I couldn’t live with him if I was friends with them. This is sad because I love him but we had a better relationship before in Syria. He came here before me so I have not seen him in a couple of years and still it did not go good.”

My previously mentioned informants highlighted the separation and distrust between different groups and even in such cases where people were friends before the civil war. Muhammed’s experience showed us though that there has also occurred a separation between family members because of a perceived lack of loyalty.

All of my informants had a clear opinion of who was to blame for the civil war and the majority of my informants generalized and reacted with distrust towards all the members of the ethnic or religious group that they blamed for the civil war. This is also what I found extra interesting; my informants’ experience of separation between religious and ethnic groups and even between members of the same social group and family has appeared during all possible situations and moments of the war. The phenomenon is not isolated to a specific group or a specific situation. This kind of wide separation and distrust between non-fighting individuals is similar to the separation and distrust that exists between the fighting groups. Therefore, one can argue that my informants have internalized the conflict and reacted in the same ways as the different fighting parties have – blame each other for the current situation, view them as

enemies and have no trust in them. So the consequences from the civil war have affected the Syrian society on multiple (both macro and micro) levels.

The only possible exception to this behavior that I was able to hear was from Muhammed. He spoke about his issues with his uncle because of the religious belief of his friends and through this I understood that he kept on living the same way he had in pre-war Syria; with not much extra consideration being made to individuals' religious or ethnic origin. He is aware of their religious belonging and beliefs but does not let it create a separation or distrust within him. At the same time though, he states like I mentioned earlier that a separation had occurred between him and his uncle so it looked a little differently than for the rest of my informants but some kind of split where religious belief or ethnic origin had a role in it had occurred in his life.

The quotes came during the individual interviews but the same rhetoric was also noticeable during the focus group and partially during my participant observation. I had four Sunni Muslims in my focus group that spoke about the reason for the war and all of them agreed that it was the "other" – the Alawite's and the rest of the Shia's that had caused the war. Muhammed agreed to this by nodding his head during the discussion but told me during the previous individual interview that he still keeps on living relatively similar to as in their pre-war situation. They also gave examples of treatment of the Sunnis and when one of them made a similar statement, the rest of them nodded their heads and agreed. Group pressure made have played a role here and encouraged everybody to agree on every issue. They often spoke at the same time making it harder to understand everything but overall, they repeated many of their previously given answers in the individual interviews. The upside of all of them being young Sunni Muslims could have been that they would perhaps not have been completely honest with their answers if it was a mixed group with strangers with different religious beliefs and ethnicities. A similar separated behavior was noticed during my participant observation. My informants sat at a table with other Sunni Muslims and I had the impression by the smiles on their faces that they were enjoying each other's company. Non-Sunni Muslims were not common among them at the café even though Muhammed has non-Sunni Muslims friends.

Overall, all of my informants were polite, answered all of my questions and I was surprised to how open they were with me during our individual interviews when they were telling me about their personal lives. During their description of the current situation the majority of my

informants' tone and body language shifted between topics. It was soft and with almost lack of emotions when they spoke about how bad everything is while starting to use hand gestures when speaking about who to blame for the civil war. This gave me the impression that their words were genuine.

The quotes I presented earlier and the consequences of separation, distrust and fear are not unique to the Syrian war but instead a normal reaction according to Green (1995) and Dickson-Gomez (2003). Dickson-Gomez (2003, p. 337) argues that basic trust among individuals tend to disappear during conflicts. This consequence is exactly what my informants experienced. Green (1995, p. 105) states that long-term conflicts normally destabilizes social relations and divides communities. The fear that exists among people during conflicts also after a time tends to stop being a direct reaction to danger but instead a permanent emotion despite there not being an evident threat. Green (1995, p. 105) also gives an explanation of the fear created during some kind of conflict in the following quote;

“Fear destabilizes social relation by driving a wedge of distrust between members of families, between neighbors, among friends. Fear divides communities through suspicion and apprehension, not only of strangers, but of each other. Fear thrives on ambiguities. Rumors of death lists and denunciations, gossip, and innuendos create a climate of suspicion. No one can be sure who is who. The spectacle of torture and death, of massacres and disappearances of the recent past have become deeply inscribed in individuals and in the collective imagination through a constant sense of threat”.

My informants showed a similar behavior to their neighbors and friends. According to them, it is rational and there is a clear reason for their fear but it has shown the same consequences of dividing communities mostly based on their religious belief or ethnicity. An interesting aspect is that Zaid fled for the same reason as Green states in her quote; rumors of death lists. Also, neighbors like in Abdallah's case became the enemy when the civil war began even if they were close friends before the civil war. The simultaneous occurrence of separation of groups and distrust occurred as a consequence of the civil war.

The usage of specific words by informants' during the interviews also showed that a separation and distrust between groups has occurred. When they were speaking of how peaceful Syria was before the civil war, they used the words “we” or “us” in many descriptions. This changed to the words “they” or “them” while speaking about whom to blame of the current situation in Syria or generally about their society, the flight or their lives in Sweden.

Examples of this occurrence are the following that I have taken out of sentences;

“We had peace in Syria”, “we lived together”, “we were friends” et cetera. to “they want to kill us”, “they want to destroy our country” or “we cannot live with them”.

I experienced that the majority of my informants were passionate about the subject and I did not have to repeat or reformulate questions to get them talking to me or to each other during the focus group. They had strong opinions and ideas and the usage of words like “them” came from a position where they believed that it was completely rational. They knew who to blame and why the civil war kept going and that is why a “them” appeared. It was not something they believed but instead knew.

The description of their society by my informants showed unity before the civil war and newly created boundaries within the country between different groups after the civil war broke out. This is mainly how the boundaries of their society have changed. This development can be verified by for example Douglas’s description of a society, its boundaries but mainly through her description of fear. Fear can explain where the boundaries exist. She argues that a society has a clear form with boundaries and margins to the external and this structure also creates conformity within the society and repulses attack from the outside (Douglas 1991, p. 114). Douglas (1991, p. 121) further writes about margins and argues that they are dangerous by describing the human body and the things like for example blood and urine that leave it through the margins of our body. The area outside our margins, whether it be our body, borders or the societies are viewed as dangerous in comparison to the area within them. Using Douglas description of a society and its boundaries we can tell through fear and the changed vocabulary from “we” to “them” that new boundaries between groups within Syria have been created and increased which has given the consequence of a created distrust and fear towards those not belonging to their group or even new society.

Graham and Khosravi (1997, p. 125) argue similarly to Douglas and describe the “home” as the place that encloses people through boundaries. It includes but at the same time excludes. They also mention the criticism of this picture that the boundaries connected to the home create an idea of safety within the home because one has excluded the oppression and resistance.

This description is very interesting because the enemy for my informants is often entire groups even if there is no specific evidence of every member of that group being a direct threat to them.

This negative association with “others” will also give other consequences. Kinnvall (2004, p. 749), Tajfel and Turner (1979, p. 16-17), Turner and Oakes (1986, p. 240) and Eriksen (own translation) (2004, p. 51, 54) argue that within social groups, there is a collectivistic identification and an instinct to positively describe one’s own group while viewing other groups as negative. The different descriptions and division will also continue to occur since a group’s image directly affects the members’ self-esteem and therefore individuals have the motivation to improve the status of their own group in relation to other social groups because a higher status in comparison to other groups equals a higher self-esteem for the individual (Kinnvall 2004, p. 749). Since the enemy in the eyes of my informants’ is a clear group which is described by either their different religious belief or ethnicity, the unity might also be strong within the groups’ because it is easy to differentiate between the groups (own translation) (Eriksen 2004, p. 51, 54). This will hence weaken the former national identity while making it harder to reverse to the former boundaries.

Eriksen (1996, p. 16-17) also argues that the history of the group that an individual identifies oneself with will also determine the way the individual is viewed by others. This can lead to prejudice against both the individual and the group and it can be used to separate people and label them in extreme cases as enemies (own translation). When Omar mentions that “we know now who they are”, we can tell that the generalization about groups and all of their members is a fact and this has its consequences. Not only will it continue to separate the groups but also create all of the negative consequences from the social fragmentation like the continuing of the war that they do not wish for. Miller (2000, p. 28-29) even argues specifically about this occurrence in connection to conflicts and says that members of a national community view their fellow members actions as partially their own through internalizing and solidarity and this continues over time and past actions eventually becomes yours as well. Battles against for example other nations continue to live through generations and the animosity continues to exist and members have an obligation against those that fought to continue the battle in some way. Guibernau (2007, p. 15) also mentions that if members of a group would change their situation and determine not to follow in the steps of their past members then a meaningless vacuum would be created and their national identity would in a sense have no explanation.

Because of the mentioned consequences from group creations, one can also argue that the current divided situation between groups in Syria is difficult to reverse and likely to remain. It will be hard to return to the united national identity they had before the civil war where

different ethnicities and religious groups did not focus on their differences and instead managed to live by the promoted Pan-Arabism. The reason for this is because the differences between groups that were not as relevant in pre-war Syria have now in the reality of my informants' become the boundary makers.

Like I previously wrote; national identity is defined a part of an individual's personal identity and consists of a person's sense of belonging to a specific nation and sharing different "unique attributes" with other members of the same nation that makes them distinct from other nations (Guibernau 2007, p. 11; Malinowski 1944, p. 255; Miller 2000, p. 27, 30). But the most fundamental part of the national identity is still like Anderson (2006, p. 6-7) argues that people believe that their national identity exists because the nation is an imagined political community and hence the "unique" traits that the members share are constructed.

The former national identity was partially Pan-Arabism where co-existence and acceptance of other ethnicities and religions was the norm and this could be described as the unique Syrian traits. They identified as Syrians and spoke about a "we". Since Anderson argues that the national identity is constructed by its members and only exists when they believe it; it may also change. The informants mostly speak about themselves, their families or their specific social group and not about a united Syria anymore. The nation and its citizens do not view themselves as united and distinct in comparison to other nations but instead there are united with their social group and view themselves as distinct from other Syrian ethnic or religious groups. The nation has been divided into smaller groups and therefore making their national identity local while the former has been weakened since the term Syria involves other groups that are viewed as a threat to them. Because a threat exists towards them, the national identity that is weaker has also become a negative one making their loyalty to be remained within their own newly constructed social group.

## 7.2. Nostalgia to a positive shared past

The previous sub-chapter showed a changed national identity because of the separation and distrust that has occurred between groups. This sub-chapter will focus on a different topic that generates a similar result; a changed national identity mainly because its association has gone from a positive to negative one. This can be viewed by my informants through their constant referral to a positive shared past. This is not only relevant because it is obvious in my informants descriptions of their society but also because the definition of a national identity

and inter-group behavior that I presented in chapter 5 describes the strive for a positive image of one's own social group. Nostalgia is present with my informants and together with their formulations of the current state show that they experience their past as more positive. The details of the positive past and negative present will be presented.

Like I mentioned before; my informants' come from different social situations including their religious beliefs, ethnicity, occupation, wealth, education et cetera. They also had different opinions of the pre-war political situation in Syria. One thing that almost all of them shared though and what this sub-chapter will show is that they preferred their past to the present situation to different extents. A generalization of their answers is that my informants' associate the former national situation and identity with a functioning society, a specific role for them in it, safety, a future et cetera. while the current is marked by apathy with my informants' and a negative future, both for the individual and for Syria. One can argue that my informants' have in a sense internalized the conflict and show a similar reaction of failure. The state lost its function and so did the individuals.

The following quotes will highlight the negative image my informants have of their national identity. The quotes will either come from their answers to a single question or be put together from answers to multiple questions that highlight the issue of a negative association. Ahmed's quote was said during the focus group and the rest were said during the individual interviews. None of the mentioned was said during the short discussions in my participant observation.

When I asked Ahmed "How do you view Syria today?" he answered with the following quote;

"Syria is just chaos today. Nothing works. Before we used to celebrate Syria. Everybody was happy, no war and now my country is destroyed. I am in Sweden with no future, don't know what will happen. I like Sweden, don't misunderstand me but everything was better in Syria before the war."

Ahmed shows us his dissatisfaction with the current state in Syria and with his life in Sweden. The lack of happiness and a clear future are examples of what he dislikes. The opposite situation that existed pre-war was more positive according to him.

When I asked Zaid "What do you miss from Syria?" and later "Have you noticed any differences between Syria and Sweden and if so, which and what is your opinion about them?" he answered with the following sentences;

"I miss that my children were happy and safe. They liked going to school and play with their friends. We were a big family. I can't see my mother and father anymore because

they are in Syria. [...] I understand why we have a war and people kill each other but yes, I miss when it was peace for my country and my children. [...] It was easy to live. I have the same job but it's a different life. In Syria I could take care of them, here my job gives me some money but still we don't have a good life."

Zaid speaks similarly to Ahmed. He prefers and the happiness, safety and generally a better life that existed pre-war.

When I asked Abdallah "What were your plans for the future when you were in Syria?" and later "Have you noticed any differences between Syria and Sweden and if so, which and what is your opinion about them?" he answered with the following sentences;

"I did not have plans for my future in Syria but my children had. We had a good life; they were going to school and had a future. They were going to be educated people! [...] My life here is different than from Syria. I worry everyday what I am going to do and if my children will have a good future. They will never know Swedish like Swedish people and be educated like they could have in Syria. [...] We had a plan and life in Syria before the war."

Abdallah focuses more on the issue of a future. The pre-war situation meant a good and stable future for his children while the current future is more negative because of bigger struggle his children will face. He states that he worries everyday and this negative emotion that is associated with his current life is a consequence of the civil war.

These informants' quotes are an understanding I got from many of my informants that speak about the issue of a shared positive past while the current situation of not knowing how the future will be is not wished for.

Another quote that is a little different was provided by Omar. It was told when I asked him "How do you think Syria will be like in the future?" and later "How do you want Syria to be like in the future?";

"I think better than before. More freedom for us. Maybe the war is good because we can now move forward. We don't have to live like it was before or now. [...] Like I said, more freedom for us."

Omar's quote is interesting since he was the only one that provided me with some kind of positivity about the future despite that many of my informants currently either go to school or have jobs.

Overall, since my informants are nostalgic and not satisfied with the present situation, one can see that the national identity has been changed for them. The collective national project that the Assad's have implemented to some degree has fallen apart, both on macro and

micro level through the collapse of the country and its current civil war and the similar hostility that the individuals' show towards each other and their country.

My experience of the individual interviews was partially described in the previous sub-chapter and it was similar in regard to this topic. My questions focused on the past, present and the future and their behavior also changed when speaking about the positive past and the negative present. There were smiles and hand gestures when speaking about what they liked in the past while showing a lot less emotions when speaking about the current situation. It seemed natural among my informants' and like I previously stated; it made their answers seem very genuine to me.

The focus group went smoothly and my informants' answered my questions without hesitation, spoke to each other but also to me. I was satisfied with their high level of activity during the interview and personal answers which I believed was because I had gained their trust through our mutual friendship with my gatekeeper. I was also told by my gatekeeper that they would not open up to me because of my origin if it wasn't for him and his introduction. I also noticed that my origin played a role in the interview. When Ahmed said "I like Sweden, don't misunderstand me but everything was better in Syria before the war." he was speaking to me and I got the impression that they were not completely relaxed with me. They had to verify that I would not think that they disliked Sweden and I think that it could have affected their answers. During my participant observation, I noticed like I previously stated that my informants had smiles on their faces, spoke, drank tea and enjoyed their time. This was also told to me by them. Even though they spoke more about the will to return to Syria during our discussions at the café which I will develop in the next sub-chapter, one can think that their behavior and the typical middle-eastern environment that they wish to be at is a physical proof of their statements about wanting to return. They missed their previous life where everything was at peace and their time at the café made them happy.

The previously mentioned quotes regarding dissatisfaction of the current situation among my informants and their nostalgia during the civil war to times of peace is recognizable among researchers as well.

Graham and Khosravi (1997, p. 115) describe the situation for refugees like my informants when speaking about exile. They describe being in exile as a state where one has been deprived of a land and the temporal rhythms of life connected to it. They also mention that those that live in exile may also perhaps live in state of misery and are often seen as being in a

permanent state of liminality. This shows my informants thoughts about their positive past, while not knowing their future even though they have a permanent residence permit. They do not however have Swedish citizenship and are not sure of how and where they will live in the future and this is in a way a liminal state where they cannot return to their homeland but at the same time are not a fully integrated part within the Swedish society with a specific role. “The temporal rhythms of life” as Graham and Khosravi describe it, also show us the formulation of my informants about the daily life without meaning while positively speaking about the past that had a meaning, role and function with them.

Graham and Khosravi (1997, p. 126) also argue that people in diaspora often are nostalgic, associate their homeland with the “good old days” and generally a more pleasurable life (1997, p. 126). If one also wishes to recreate the homeland one has to remember and be nostalgic and this will also keep the idea of returning to the homeland alive and lessen the pain of being away from it (Graham and Khosravi 1997, p. 128). The definition of diaspora varies between researchers but the definition of it, including the consequences, can be applied to my informants.

Diaspora is a concept that is used to describe the scattering of groups of people from their homelands to other places in the world (Brazier 2008, p. 24).

Researchers define the concept differently but Safran and Cohen are two with similar descriptions. Safran (1991, 83-84) describes diaspora with that a communities members share several of the following characteristics;

“1) they, or their ancestors, have been dispersed from a specific original “center” to two or more “peripheral”, or foreign, regions; 2) they retain a collective memory, vision, or myth about their original homeland – its physical location, history, and achievements; 3) they believe that they are not – and perhaps cannot be – fully accepted by their host society and therefore feel partly alienated and insulated from it; 4) they regard their ancestral homeland as their true, ideal home and as the place to which they or their descendants would (or should) eventually return – when conditions are appropriate; 5) they believe that they should, collectively, be committed to the maintenance or restoration of their original homeland and to its safety and prosperity; and 6) they continue to relate, personally or vicariously, to that homeland in one way or another, and their ethno communal consciousness and solidarity are importantly defined by the existence of such a relationship.”

Cohen (1997, p. 180) describes it similarly but adds certain characteristics that Safran did not include and also states that diasporas exhibit several of the following characteristics;

“(1) dispersal from an original homeland, often traumatically; (2) alternatively, the expansion from a homeland in search of work, in pursuit of trade or to further colonial ambitions; (3) a collective memory and myth about the homeland; (4) an idealization of the supposed ancestral home; (5) a return movement; (6) a strong ethnic group consciousness sustained over a long time; (7) a troubled relationship with host societies; (8) a sense of solidarity with co-ethnic members in other countries; and (9) the possibility of a distinctive creative, enriching life in tolerant host countries.”

Cohen (1997, p. 133) further adds and states that during the existence in diaspora there is a sense of being rootless even though diasporas have a past and perhaps future destination and individuals may feel that they live between a lost past and non-integrated present.

This description shows my informants' current situation and also describe the reason for it; “to keep the idea of returning to the homeland alive and lessen the pain of being away from it.” My informants like I will further explain in the next sub-chapter show a will to return to Syria but are not sure about the possibility of it. Therefore, their recreation of their homeland through the description of the “good old days” in comparison to the present show that the current situation is negative to them.

My informants have explained in their own words why they experience their current situation as more negative than their past. Malkki (1992, p. 26, 30, 34) also speaks about certain needs that are not lived up to for my informants. She mentions that a national identity that is often considered a rooting for people and connection to a specific place is a moral and spiritual need. When one leaves this specific place against one's will then their national identity is threatened to be spoilt in some way. My informants have shown that they experience that parts of their national identity has been changed to a weaker and negative form through separation. Their moral and spiritual need may also not be satisfied and that is also why they constantly refer back to the “good old days” through nostalgia.

Listening, reading and understanding the experiences my informants have shared with me, it becomes obvious that apart from a moral and spiritual need that my informants may not have satisfied, their imagined national identity has fallen apart to the current negative image of it. They have stopped believing in the unique attributes and national symbols like Pan-Arabism and acceptance of other groups which may have worked as the spirit of the Syrian people (Eriksen 2010, p. 290; Guibernau 2007, p. 11; Malinowski 1944, p. 255; Miller 2000, p. 27, 30) since the actions of the “others” have shown them that they cannot be trusted anymore and have a different moral (non-acceptance) than from their pre-war state (Malkki 1995, p. 254-255). This shows us that their imagined national identity has fallen apart and is not the

same as before because they do not believe in the national identity that existed pre-war which is fundamental for its existence (Anderson 2006, p. 6-7). Striving for a positive identity in a social group like a national is a natural occurrence (Kinnvall 2004, p. 749; Tajfel and Turner 1979, p. 16-17; Turner and Oakes 1986, p. 240) and since my informants have told me that they are less satisfied with their current state, one can tell that their identity has become more negative and that the natural strive for positivity is less successful since the civil war began. Therefore, to experience the old non-existent positively experienced national identity, speaking about the past have become their method. The present has been replaced by associations to the different Syrian groups that are negative in comparison to their past national identity meaning that their imagined national identity has become weaker in uniting them and negative because of the associations. This can be further verified by the usage of liminality on my informants' answers and show that they are in fact in a negatively experienced situation.

Van Gennep (cited in Rapport and Overing 2007, p. 3) describes liminality as the following;

“The life of an individual in any society ... is a series of passages from one age to another”.

Rapport and Overing (2007, p. 262-263), two anthropologists, claim that once a passage has begun, a “rite of separation” also occurs where the old identity is removed while the new one has not yet full been assumed which puts the individual in a liminal stage of transition. This liminal stage can be viewed as a zone of non-identity and non-existence. My informants are currently in this situation where they in many cases have no private housing, work or education and therefore lack an identity (Mortland 1987, p. 375). Their national identity that also had clear points like unity have like I mentioned collapsed and thus positioned my informants between a past functioning life and a future that may perhaps have a function but currently doesn't. Rainbird (2014, p. 466) describes the liminal existence as a symbolic death of a former self, family or communion depending on the situation. This can also be observed with my informants; they are not satisfied with their current situation and are constantly nostalgic to their former lives and country that they also describe as gone, dead or not possible to return to. This gives them the state of a negative national identity – not only because of the symbolic death of their lives and former national identity but also because of the non-identity position they are currently in.

Barth (1969, p. 15) also claims and this can specifically be used on refugees that once

individuals identify others as strangers and members of another ethnic group then there will be recognition that there are limitations on the shared understanding between them. So, like my Syrian refugees that are trying to create a new life in Sweden, they will be posed in a situation which can be described as more confusing than their last functioning one. While being generally viewed as invisible or negative because of the liminal situation they are in, the creation of a new citizenship or even national identity may have obstacles that further keep them in their liminal stage consisting of a lack of a life with a role and constant nostalgia.

I have shown how the liminal stage like my informants are in is a negative emotional situation for them. The current national identity is also weaker and negative because less is uniting them while the current associations with the national identity is with words like separation, distrust, death, lack of role in Syria or its people, lack of future et cetera. They have lost their experienced connection to their old national identity that was constructed partially from the unity with other Syrian citizens and have been forced to migrate. To experience anything positive about their current national identity they have to focus on the past and be nostalgic.

### 7.3. Return to a peaceful Syria

The previous two subchapters that brought up the issues of separation and nostalgia showed us that my informants' national identity has changed to a weaker and negative version in comparison to the pre-war one because of multiple reasons. A third important theme that appeared with every single one of my informants was of the desire to return to Syria if it was peaceful and it became possible to do so. Even if I asked direct questions about their future and possible will to return to Syria, the answers about this theme are directly relevant in the answering of my research question. They tell us that the national identity of my Syrian refugees is still after being forced to migrate, their homeland Syria even though it has changed.

Every single informant expressed the similar wish of a possible return to Syria if and when it will be possible. Four informants gave longer and more descriptive answers about their will to return and reasons for currently staying in Sweden that highlight their Syrian national identity. The following quotes will highlight this and they came from answers to a single question or been put together from answers to multiple questions. All of them were also said during my individual interviews and short discussion during the participant observation and not from my focus group. Muhammed's quote was said during the participant observation and the rest were said during my individual interviews.

Muhammed said the following during our discussion in the café;

“This is a good place because it feels like I am in Syria again. It can be lonely sometimes when I Skype with my family but here it feels like I am home again. It is nice to relax, listen to music, see new people, like a normal life. But I still want to go back home because my family is more important but I have to be here because it is dangerous in Syria. Maybe my family can come here some day but if not, then I will return when I can.”

Muhammed’s quote shows us that he wishes to return to Syria if it becomes possible and that the café works as a reminder and comforter at the moment when he cannot be in Syria. He still has a need to see, feel or experience Syria or Syrians to some extent. This is also logical when observing the surroundings. It had pictures on the walls with Arabic texts, Arabic programs were on the television, shisha and tea was available. It was an Arabic environment to my informants and it also gave me that impression.

When I asked Khalid “How do you think Syria will be like in the future?”, then “How do you want Syria to be like in the future?” and lastly “Do you want to return back to Syria or do you see your future in Sweden or elsewhere?” he answered with the following sentences;

“I hope Syria will be peaceful but I don’t think that is possible. Many are afraid of each other. I saw it in Syria and when I came to Sweden. Before it was good and my family had it good. [...] I will return to Syria one day, Inshallah. Sweden is one of the best countries in the world, very nice people but this is not my place. For now it has to be but I want the war to end so I can go back to my family.”

Khalid shows the same emotions as Muhammed when it comes to the will of return.

Through their quotes we can tell that one of the reasons for the wish to return is that their families have remained in Syria and that is what they associate Syria with.

When I asked Zaid “Do you want Syria to be like it was before the war?”, then “Do you want to return back to Syria or do you see your future in Sweden or elsewhere?” and lastly “Do you think it will be possible to return to Syria?” he answered with the following sentences;

“I don’t think Syria can go back to what it was before the war. Maybe it doesn’t have to; maybe we can have a better Syria. Now people have opened their eyes and we don’t want war. [...] I don’t know when it will stop but I want to take my family back. We had a house, the rest of our family and our lives were in Syria. I am very happy I can be in Sweden and I will stay for the safety of my family but if it will be possible and they can have a future in Syria, then I will return.”

Zaid shows us that there are multiple reasons to the wish of returning to Syria. His family is with him in Sweden and they have it relatively well currently but had it better in pre-war Syria with for example an own house. He wants his children future to be in Syria.

When I asked Youssef “Do you want to return back to Syria or do you see your future in Sweden or elsewhere?” and later “Do you think it will be possible to return to Syria?” he answered with the following sentences;

“I want to return to Syria. I want to go back to my family and everything that I had. I said before that my life here is nothing. I do nothing in the day, no work, no studies, nothing. In Syria, I had a life. Maybe Sweden can give me a better if I wait, but only the war is stopping me from going back. My family wants me here but I can go back if it ends. [...] I don't know when it will end. It has to end sometime but I don't know when. It only gets worse for the people in Syria. My family tells me that there is nothing. No work, no money, nothing!”

Youssef's quote summarizes the previous quotes by my other informants' but shows us that he wishes to return because he “had a life”. “A life” meant either work or studies and the stability that it entails and this is what many of my informants' has less of in their current life.

The rest of my informants spoke similarly but not as descriptive and everybody spoke around the same topic of the will to return even though it is not possible today.

During the individual interviews and focus group, my informants were more “physical” through hand gestures and spoke more intense when the topic of the possibility of returning to Syria was discussed. It gave me like I mentioned earlier, the impression that it was an important subject for them and the wish to return was genuine. This was in a way verified for me during the participant observation. The observing in combination with the short discussions I had with Muhammed and Ahmed, showed that they wished to return and that the café worked as a mental escape back to Syria and the will to be in a Syrian environment. The television showed news regarding Syria, there was Arabic food, texts on the walls and it was the only language spoken in the café. The sense of home seemed important to them.

Even though my origin and lack of knowledge in Arabic made it impossible to understand the people at the café and get a better sense of the role it played in their life, I still felt that it gave a relevant result since I spoke to them in English. The whole process was very uncomfortable for me and I felt awkward. I was the only non-Arabic present and even though they were nice to me, it was uncomfortable “looking” at people, trying to understand something while all the

other people at the café were engaging in conversations together et cetera. This led to a situation where I stared more at my computer than looked at my surroundings. I am not sure if this made me misinterpret the role of the café or miss something important but that was how it was conducted and in the end I was satisfied with the gathered information; especially from the short discussions I had with Muhammed and Ahmed.

The will to return is something common among forced migrants like my informants'. Graham and Khosravi's own research generated similar results where their informant described his own personal situation as a refugee with the following quote;

“My life was a misery when there was no possibility of returning. My head was filled with thoughts of the day I would go back. Return dominated my life.” (1997, p. 127).

This shows that the will to return is a reality among refugees despite their different background and origins. My informants did not articulate or show that “return dominated their life” but it was an aspect of their daily life and a wish despite not knowing when or whether it will ever be possible. Their identity and sense of roots has remained Syrian even if they have established different forms of social lives in Sweden and have different emotions to it. Khalid used like I showed previously the formulation; “Sweden is one of the best countries in the world, so nice people but *this is not my place*.” to describe his situation but it fits perfectly as a generalization of all my informants idea of their current situation in Sweden and will to return to a peaceful Syria. There are different reasons for this wish; stability, better future, family et cetera. but they are all strong enough to make my informants wish to return to Syria if and when it will be possible.

Much of the discussion about a possible return to Syria came from my interview questions concerning the future of Syria and their personal future. One question about their future but one that still speaks about the present that gave me interesting answers because they were short and not very descriptive but made my informants think was;

“Do you still feel that you are a part of the Syrian people?”

They wanted to return but could not answer if they still were a part of the Syrian people but instead sat quietly or repeated the previously mentioned quotes about whose fault it was that the civil war was on-going even if it was not answering my question. They had told me previously in their own words that separation had occurred between groups and that their

experienced national identity had overall changed to a negative one with associations like death but still wanted to return to the old Syria that no longer exists.

Other researchers and anthropologists speak about the same topic and show a similar theme among their informants that were also refugees or forced migrants. They did not though show a changed national identity like my informants have done but the national identity has remained their homeland.

Malkki (1992, p. 31-32, 35-36) argues that forced migrants like my refugees have a different reaction to their national identity than voluntary migrants. She states that refugees tend to have the idea of the threat of death to their roots and they have a loyalty to the citizenship of their homeland. They try to keep the national identity alive. Voluntary migrants though, try to focus on and acclimatize to their new environment which leads to the slow elimination of their former national identity.

Malkki's (1992, p. 35, 36) research showed that the refugees that lived in the isolated refugee camps did not leave their past and reconstructed their history as a people and regarded themselves as a nation in exile that will return and reclaim their homeland Burundi. The refugees in the township reacted differently though; they did not reconstruct their collective identity in the group but instead wanted to assimilate and create a new form of national identity that consisted of a mix between the old and the new where they wanted to be seen as people first and foremost and not as refugees from Burundi for example. Burundi became just a place and not their goal anymore and many even stated that they did not know whether they would return to Burundi even if it was peaceful and safe.

Apart from Malkki's research, Shabaneh's (2010) and Turton's (2005) research that was presented in the literature review, showed a similar reaction to their forced migrants. The national identity of the informants' remained the same and did not change unlike my informants'. Shabaneh's (2010, p. 215) informants showed that the Palestinian refugees remained national identity was a result from living in isolated refugee camps. The isolation prevented them from integrating and instead reminded them of their past and promoted their national identity as separate and distinct. Turton (2005, p. 275-276) also writes that whether a group finds a new place they are connected to also depends on the way they experienced the relocation meaning that if it is experienced as forced then the national identity may remain the same and unchanged.

My informants also experienced their flight as forced and their national identity has remained as Syrian. An explanation to why their national identity has changed in the previously mentioned ways of weaker and negative while Malkki's, Shabaneh's and Turton's informants' did not can be because of the enemy of the refugees in each case. My informants escaped a civil war where their mentioned enemy in many cases is other Syrians while Malkki's (1992, p. 35-36), Shabaneh's (2010, p. 215, 223) and Turton's (2005, p. 275-276) informants enemy was viewed as an invader. Therefore, they could imagine their homeland as it was if only the invaders would leave while my informants' enemy where their old national identity as hence the unity was eliminated once the civil war began. The one main thing that has remained though is their desire to return.

## **8. Conclusion and Discussion**

I have investigated how the national identity of Syrian refugees has been affected by the civil war in Syria and flight to Sweden. My main research question has been:

“How has the war in Syria and flight to Sweden affected the national identity of male Syrian refugees?”

This has been conducted through the usage of multiple qualitative ethnographic research methods. I have interviewed 10 informants individually, conducted one focus group with 4 informants and a small participant observation at a café where some of my Syrian informants spend their time.

To be able to answer my research question I have used the concepts and theories about national identity and liminality.

A national identity is a part of an individual’s personal identity and consists of a person’s sense of belonging to a specific nation and sharing different unique attributes with other members of the same nation that makes them distinct from other nations (Guibernau 2007, p. 11; Malinowski 1944, p. 255; Miller 2000, p. 27). My Syrian informants’ pre-war national identity can be described as a combination of mainly Pan-Arabism (Rabo 2013, p. 109; Salamandra 2004, p. 9; Wedeen 2013, p. 844, 849, 854) but also of a life under Hafiz al-Assad’s autocracy and strict control of the country (Wedeen 1999, p. 33; 2013, p. 849) to the more secular changes that his son, Bashar al-Assad implemented in the country (Wedeen 2013, p. 855).

The concept of liminality speaks about “being in between” for example life stages, identities or citizenships (Rapport and Overing 2007, p. 3). Depending on the situation the person in a liminal stage is in, the treatment of them varies from being seen as invisible to spoken about as if they were dead, unclean, dangerous et cetera (Rapport and Overing 2007, p. 263). It can also be experienced as a symbolic death of a former self, family or communion (Rainbird 2014, p. 466). My informants’ previous “normal lives” were lost and they were still trying to reconstruct both their own identities and their everyday lives in Sweden. They experienced a sense of being in between Syria and Sweden.

My thesis has shown that the civil war has created separation between Syrian groups by increasing boundaries and distrust. The majority of my informants have a clear opinion of who is to blame for the civil war which has led to distrust to members of that specific group and an increased boundary towards them. Members of other groups are negatively portrayed and generalizations are more commonly used. This is the opposite of the pre-war situation between social groups in Syria that lived peacefully together in the Pan-Arabism the Assad's promoted. Even though, the situation between groups was not as perfect as the Assad's tried to portray it, my informants' verified that it was still a relatively peaceful situation where unity and acceptance existed among civilians and much better than the current divided one.

It has also shown that my informants' associate the former national situation and identity with a functioning society, a specific role for them in it, safety, a future et cetera. while the current is marked by apathy with my informants' and a negative future, both for the individual and for Syria. They continuously refer to their past in order to find something positive in their life and keep the idea of their national identity and possible return alive. Their loss of a role in the Syrian society to the current which they also describe as relatively negative because of the idea of their negative future, lack of private home, role etc. has also put them in a liminal role which is described as a negative emotional situation for the individual.

Despite the majority of my informants' view their current national identity as divided and negative, all of them share the same will of returning to Syria when and if it will be possible. This phenomenon is common among refugees as I presented in both the theory about national identity and the literature review. An explanation to this can be because my informants' experienced their relocation as forced.

The combination of the three themes shows us that my informants' national identity has remained "Syrian" but changed in its look. It has gone from a united country with a positive image based on factors like employment possibilities, future for population et cetera. to a divided country with a negative image consisting of dangers, lack of future et cetera.

This study shows us how they view their national identity but also how the future may look for both Syria and Sweden depending on the outcome of the civil war. A continuing of the civil war could mean a future Syrian diaspora in Sweden since they would remain here and continuously refer back to the times when their national identity was viewed as positive. A future study that would be very interesting could research on the development of Syrian

refugees' national identity and how it changes over time and whether my findings will be similar or different. This could be further developed with the inclusion of for example women.

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## **10. Appendices**

### **10.1. Appendix 1. Presentation of my informants**

All of my informants participated in the individual interviews so I will not specifically mention that but I will mention which four was a part of the focus group and at my participant observation.

In summary, all of my informants are men from Syria with Syrian citizenship and Swedish permanent residing permission and between the years of 21 and 51. Six of them are Sunni Muslims, two are Alawite Shia Muslims, one is Shia Muslim and one is Christian. They come from different regions in Syria, have different occupations and family situations.

I will use pseudonyms in order to hide their real identities.

Muhammed is 22 year old Sunni Muslim from northern Syria and has been in Sweden for 1,5 year. He came by himself but has an uncle here that came before him. He currently goes to some kind of school but did not specify further and went to the university in Syria. This informant was also in my focus group and at my participant observation.

Ahmed is a 24 year old Sunni Muslim from eastern Syria, he has been in Sweden for 1 year and came by himself. He also currently goes to some kind of school but did not specify further as well and worked as a delivery man in Syria. This informant was also in my focus group and at my participant observation.

Omar is a 31 year old Sunni Muslim from northern Syria, he has been in Sweden for 8 months and came by himself. He currently does nothing and was a librarian in Syria. This informant was also in my focus group.

Khalid is a 34 year old Sunni Muslim from southern Syria, he has been in Sweden for 9 months and came by himself. He currently does nothing and had a convenience store in Syria. This informant was also in my focus group.

Zaid is a 39 year old Sunni Muslim from northern Syria and has been in Sweden for 2 years with his wife and children. He currently works at a store that sells meat and had the same profession in Syria.

Hamid is a 25 year old Sunni Muslim from northern Syria, has been in Sweden for 1,5 years and came by himself. He currently does nothing and was a farmer in Syria.

Abdallah is a 36 year old Alawite from western Syria, has been in Sweden for 8 months and came with his wife and children. He currently works at a hairdresser salon and had the same profession in Syria.

Jaffar is a 51 year old Alawite from western Syria, has been in Sweden for 7 months and came with his entire family consisting of wife, children, grandchildren and the rest of their families. He currently does nothing and was an accountant in Syria.

Ali is a 23 year old Shia Muslim from northern Syria, has been in Sweden for 1,5 year and came by himself. He currently does nothing and worked with his father in their store in Syria.

Youssef is 38 year old Christian from the capital Damascus, has been in Sweden for 1 year and came with his wife and children. His current occupation is helping other refugees from Syria and worked for a Christian organization connected to the church in Syria where he did activities for young Christians.

## 10.2. Appendix 2. Individual interviewing: Interview questions

Life in Syria:

Can you give me a presentation of yourself in your own words?

Where in Syria do you come from?

What is your ethnicity?

What were you doing in Syria before you decided to migrate to Sweden in terms of working or studying or something else?

Who is your family and are they in Sweden with you?

What were your hobbies in Syria?

Were you a member of any organization in Syria?

Did you have a religion and if so, what was it and how were you practicing it in Syria?

What were your plans for the future when you were in Syria?

How did you view Syria when you were there and did it change when the war started?

What was your opinion about politics when you were in Syria?

Could you have imagined a war in Syria?

Migration:

How was your home and region affected by the war?

Why did you migrate from Syria to Sweden?

How did you experience fleeing from Syria to Sweden?

How did you feel about leaving Syria?

Did you leave Syria on your own or together with other Syrians and how did you feel about this?

Who do you blame for the flight?

How long did the trip take?

Life in Sweden:

Where, how and with whom are you living in Sweden?

How long have you been in Sweden?

What are you doing in terms of working, studying or something else in Sweden?

Are your hobbies the same in Sweden?

Is your everyday life the same or different here and if it is different, how?

Are your religious views and the way you practice them the same in Sweden?

Are you engaged in any way with any organization in Sweden?

What do you miss from Syria?

Have you noticed any differences between Syria and Sweden and if so, which and what is your opinion about them?

How do you view Syria today?

What is your opinion of Assad today?

Future:

How do you think Syria will be like in the future?

How do you want Syria to be like in the future?

Do you want Syria to be like it was before the war?

Do you want to return back to Syria or do you see your future in Sweden or even elsewhere?

Do you think it will be possible to return to Syria?

Do you still feel that you are part of the Syrian people?

### 10.3. Appendix 3. Focus group: Interview questions

Could you have imagined a war in Syria?

Who do you blame for the flight?

How do you view Syria today?

Do you think it will be possible to return to Syria?

### 10.4. Appendix 4. Description of the field site in my participant observation

The café that worked as the field site during my participant observation was situated in Malmö and consisted of two larger rooms which were connected to each other with an opening that did not have a door or a screen. Visitors entered the café in the first room where the bar was situated and it had sofas and tables along the walls with chairs on the other side of the tables. The bar served different drinks but mainly sodas and teas. They also sold cakes,

fruits and other type of light snacks that I could not identify but believed to be typical Middle-Eastern food since I saw it being eaten by some of the visitors.

There was a big television along the left wall, sofas next to it and along the rest of the walls in the second room. All tables had equipment for smoking shisha and drinking tea and there were a couple of paintings on the walls with Arabic texts marking it off as an Arabic space.

During the observation, I positioned myself in the corner of the second room where I had a good view of the television and my Syrian informants to the left of me that were relaxing, hanging out, playing cards, talking to each other, watching the television et cetera. I chose the position because I was relatively close to my informants so that I could see what they were doing and they were aware of my presence which led to natural interactions and discussions with me as well. Other than that, I noticed that there were not any females or children present at the café. There were males of almost all ages present where the older mostly sat with each other and the younger with each other and it gave me an impression that it worked as a male Arab space.