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Connection between refugee housing policy and belonging in Norway

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Abstract

Since the 60's, the number of refugees and asylum seekers in Norway has increased, resulting into more specific integration policies towards refugees by the Norwegian government. One part of the integration policy is housing of refugees. The housing of refugees in Norway is organised through so called dispersal, which means that refugees are settled evenly between the municipalities. The government of Norway is arguing that the spatial scattering of refugees is necessary for two reasons: 1) it gives the municipalities a better chance to offer services for refugees that are needed for their integration process; and 2) it creates more contact between the so called "ethnic Norwegians" and refugees when they come in contact with each other as neighbours. This thesis is evaluating the refugee housing policy's implementation and the government legitimisation of the policy through interviews conducted with 12 refugees in Hordaland and Rogaland counties. Using the framework of belonging, the thesis builds up two main arguments: 1) the way the housing policy is implemented has a possibility in affecting the refugees' belonging to the society, which is especially the case if refugees are settled in municipalities they do not want to live in, the waiting time in the reception centre for a house is long or when people face discrimination on the private housing market) and 2) the neighbourhood argument by the government that dispersal creates functional neighbourhoods by generating interaction between host population and refugees, lacks evidence.

Keywords: refugee, Norway, housing policy, dispersal, belonging

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Annex 1

1. Introduction

Refugees are largely seen as being a threat or a burden to the state they migrate to and thus commonly asked to “integrate” into the country they wish to settle in. As Anthias et al. (2013) argue, the term “integration” has been used only for certain type of migrants. For example, expats from Western countries are rarely asked to integrate into a “culture” of a country. For refugees, however, the term “integration” is a common term to be applied to. There are many views on how refugees should be integrated but nearly no discussion on 1) into what are the refugees to be integrated; or 2) for whose benefit and under which terms is this “integration” taking place?

In order to enforce the integration on refugees who arrive, governments have established various integration policies. Generous integration programmes and hospitable political climate have generally been connected to Scandinavian states’ approach towards forced migrants. However, despite their reputation, none of the Scandinavian countries have been able to get rid of the inequalities (economic, political or social) between host population and immigrants (Valenta & Bunar, 2010). The number of refugees and asylum seekers in Norway has been steadily increasing since the 60’s and the formation of integration policy has been directed specifically at this group of people.

According to Valenta & Bunar (2010) housing is, together with employment, the most important part of the integration policy in Norway. In 2004, Norway adopted a new integration measure in the form of a 2 year ‘introduction programme’, which offers vocational training and teaching in Norwegian language and culture. Due to increased responsibility for municipalities to offer the services included in the introductory programme, the housing process became more restricted: since 2004 people have not been able to choose their first settlement municipality, which is now determined by the government officials (IMDi, 2015). Although the refugee housing policy in its current form was officially approved in 2001, the restrictions on individual choice over municipality intensified after the introduction programme was put in place (Government Bill 2000/1; IMDi, 2015). This change was justified by the government with the increased numbers of refugees coming into the country together with the cost of services the municipalities were asked to offer: it was believed that the people had to be *dispersed* evenly between municipalities in order to provide quality services for the refugees and to create functional neighbourhoods (Borevi & Bengtsson, 2014). In other words, the state legitimised the control over the individuals with extensive welfare measures and the assumption that so-called ethnic segregation would have a negative effect on new comers’ inclusion process. Underlying the legitimisation of the government was (and still is) an assumption that if refugees could freely choose

where to live, it would automatically result into ethnic segregation since people would want to live near others from their country of origin. Moreover, the government believed that people would mainly want to move to bigger cities like Oslo, which would create a lot of pressure in these municipalities (in terms of providing services for refugees). For this thesis I aimed to evaluate the housing process' effect on the refugees' belonging to the Norwegian society and question the government's legitimisation of the refugee housing policy. Since I wanted to find out how people *have felt and experienced* the housing process, I knew from the beginning I had to interview people who have gone through the housing process themselves. In total I interviewed 12 people for this study and the analysis of the interviews will be presented in chapter 6. However, before the interview data is presented, it is important to make the reader familiar with the topic of neighbourhoods and Norwegian refugee integration in general. In chapter 1.1, more specific explanation on the refugee housing policy is provided. This is followed by the explanation of government's argument for the policy and it justifies the restricted autonomy in the initial housing process. Chapter 2 provides a more specific explanation of the recent migration to Norway and the role of the welfare state in politics and integration of refugees. This will give the reader background information about Norway's integration scheme towards refugees and help to understand the way in which the welfare state has shaped these policies.

As will be shown in chapter 1, the argument for refugee housing policy in Norway is connected to segregation of immigrants and the idea that ethnically mixed neighbourhoods would facilitate the integration process of refugees by making refugees interact with the host population more. Therefore it is important to familiarise oneself with the academic debate and literature review on neighbourhoods, segregation and dispersal, which is offered in chapter 3.

The thesis continues to provide an overall presentation of theories belonging in chapter 4. The theories provided in this chapter will work as a theoretical framework of the study. The theoretical part explains the importance of understanding the phenomena also outside of the general framework of "integration" and offering belonging as an alternative that is concentrating on the refugees' own experience. Thus, the term "belonging" is introduced as a theoretical basis through which the empirical data of the study is analysed.

The thesis continues explaining the methodology of the study in chapter 5. The research was carried out as a qualitative research with semi-structured interviews. This chapter also highlights the challenges during the fieldwork and ethical conduct of the study.

The final part of the study presents an analysis of 12 interviews of people with a refugee background. The emphasis of the analysis concentrates on the personal experience of the refugees during the initial housing process and identification with neighbourhood. More specifically, I intended to find out the following factors and their effect to the interviewees' belonging: 1) waiting time in the reception centre 2) the process of getting housed (through private contracts and with government help) 3) importance of a specific location to the interviewees 4) neighbourhoods' effect on participants' social contacts.

As a conclusion of the gathered interview data with the participants, the aspect of restricted autonomy during the housing process was identified having an effect on the refugees' inclusion and belonging process to the Norwegian society. The data showed that restricted information during the time in the reception centre hampered the participants' trust of the reception centre workers and on the private market the participants experienced clear discrimination, which resulted into resentment and feeling of not being accepted, thus leading into a "cycle of mistrusting relationships" as identified by Raghallaigh (2014). For some of the participants, location of the initial settlement municipality did not matter, whereas for others it mattered a lot. For the participants who the location had a great importance, said it was because they were eager to live nearby services (like university) or because they wanted to maintain life style they were used to living before they arrived to Norway. The data showed that in case a person was placed in a municipality s/he did not want to live in, it had negative consequences on his/her inclusion process and belonging to the Norwegian society. The interview data (unlike the government assumes), did not show any proof that dispersal would generate deep relationships between host population and refugees. The interview data showed that the people had only restricted contact with their neighbours: most people only greeted their neighbours without having any other relationship with them. Some had formed a deeper relationship with their neighbours but in these cases there were other unifying factors as well (like children of same age who had become friends). Some of the interviewees expressed willingness to engage with their neighbours more. Most of the participants formed their social contacts either at work or in free time activities and they were not connected with neighbourhood they were living in. What was apparent in the data was that the participants' social connections and ways to interact with neighbours and other people varied greatly. The ways in which people connected with their co-ethnic group, other migrants or so called "ethnic Norwegians" was highly personal: for example, not everyone wanted to have deep relationship with people from the same country. It was clear that only living next to someone did not naturally evolve into any relationship between people. This was evident with co-ethnic neighbourhood relations as well as social interaction between refugees and so called "ethnic Norwegians". In other words, the

interview data dismantles the government's argumentation of dispersal creating 'functional neighbourhoods'.

1.1 Refugee housing policy in Norway

As a term in general, "housing policy" means all the aspects of housing rules and support by the government. Andersen (2012) divides housing policy into seven different categories: 1) tax support, 2) establishment of a social housing sector, 3) rent/ price control, 4) financial support for the households, 5) financial support for reconstruction and low cost housing, 6) rules for financing of dwellings and regulation of the access to dwellings. This thesis is concentrating on the housing policy of refugees on their initial arrival of first two years in the country. The refugee housing policy in Norway concentrates mainly on Andersen's (2012) point number 6 "regulation of the access to dwellings" in the form of spatial dispersal policy.

In Norway, like in many other countries, housing procedure for refugees differs from the procedure of other immigrant groups. Since refugees are subject to certain regulations, (like for example in Norway, the introductory programme for 2 years), their autonomy in choosing a place to live is restricted. On the other hand, they are also assisted by the government more than other migrant groups. In this thesis, the term "housing policy" is used solely to describe the housing policy of refugees. One part of the refugee housing policy in Norway is so called "dispersal". Dispersal refers to the control over people's geographical location, commonly aiming to spread people evenly within a country (Damm & Rosholm, 2009). In Norway, dispersal policy is practiced through having control over refugees' initial settlement municipality.

1.2 Housing process of refugees

One of the first forms of assistance that refugees receive is assistance in housing. Norway developed its housing policy for refugees after Sweden and Denmark, which gave the Norwegian authorities the chance to learn from its neighbouring countries' experience (Borevi & Bengtsson, 2014). Borevi & Bengtsson (2014) argue that because Norway could compare Sweden and Denmark's policies, Norway's refugee housing policy resulted into something of between Sweden and Denmark's: the government rejected the Swedish model where refugees can choose their place to live and also the Danish one, with a complete government control over settlement place. Trying to learn from its neighbouring countries', Norway decided to base its housing settlement policy on an idea of a so called 'steered settlement' (*ibid*). By doing this, the government is aiming to have a policy where the opinions of the people who are to be placed are heard but the final decision of a settlement place lies in

government and municipalities (Borevi & Bengtsson, 2014). Government policy of housing of refugees argues, however, that great importance should be placed on the individual and individual's wishes when it comes to the municipality choice (Government Bill 2000/1¹).

The government is trying to form neighbourhoods with a mix of majority and minority representatives, which is one of the reasons the steered settlement is adopted (Borevi & Bengtsson, 2014). Kaare-Andreas Krog, a senior advisor from IMDi² explains that actually IMDi works together with the municipalities trying to house people in a municipality where there already are some people with a same ethnic background (IMDi, 2015). In this way the government is trying to form neighbourhoods with a certain demographic composition of migrants and so called "ethnic Norwegians", which is commonly believed to be constituting the most "functional neighbourhoods", as further elaborated in chapter 3.

In Norway, after a person has received a refugee status s/he has the right to move into permanent housing. IMDi is in charge of the housing procedure for the refugees. Housing is arranged through dispersal, which means that refugees are scattered equally between municipalities in order to guarantee placement into a municipality, which has the capacity to offer the required services (Ministry of Children, Equality & Social Inclusion, 2014).

If a person has arrived in Norway as an asylum seeker and required the status of refugee in Norway, s/he is living in the reception centre and waiting to be housed. Reception centres are places where asylum seekers wait for the decision of their asylum claim living together with other asylum seekers/refugees. The reception centres are meant to be providing temporary housing before a refugee can move into a permanent apartment. Resettled refugees arriving with the United Nations (UN) quota, already have a refugee status, which is why they do not need to apply for asylum when arriving in Norway and they are usually taken straight to their apartments on arrival. However, in some cases they might also have to wait for a while in reception centres before taken to their first house, although this is not common (IMDi, 2015; Interviews with David, Nelson and Amalia).

The settlement municipality is assigned to the refugees by IMDi: refugees themselves have little or no say in the housing process (IMDi, 2014¹). It should be noted, however, that people can wish a settlement municipality but settlement in the chosen municipality is not guaranteed. In case a person

¹ The Government Bill (2000/1:17) over housing of refugees was approved as a policy by the parliament but the document referenced is the official document of the Bill.

² IMDi (Integrerings- og mangfolds direktoratet) is the government Directorate of Integration and Diversity. It is in charge of implementing government policy and it is also responsible of the housing process of refugees in Norway.

is financially independent and does not wish to take advantage of government benefits or a 2 year long introduction programme³, s/he is free to find a place to stay in any municipality in Norway. However, if one wishes to take part in the introductory programme or needs financial support from the government, one has to take the settlement place offered by IMDi (IMDi, 2010; IMDi, 2015). This means that although wishes of the person who is about to be settled are taken into consideration, s/he does not get a full independence over the choice. Rather, the authorities take the last decision in assigning a settlement municipality even if it would be against the individual's wishes (Borevi & Bengtsson, 2014). Kaare-Andreas Krog points out that nowadays some municipalities in Norway accept so called "private contracts". This means that as long as a refugee finds a place to stay him/herself, s/he is eligible to have a place in the municipality and start the introduction programme. However, granting the municipality place through private contracts is voluntary for the municipalities and only a very small percentage of the municipalities give a municipality place to refugees through individual contracts. Thus, most refugees are still housed through the process with IMDi (IMDi, 2015).

How the housing process through IMDi works is that IMDi requests settlement places for refugees from municipalities depending on the size of the municipality. After that, municipalities will inform IMDi how many refugees they are capable to host. It is completely voluntary for the municipalities to house the refugees (IMDi, 2014¹). In fact, according to IMDi, the voluntary acceptance for municipalities to house refugees is slowing down the housing procedure and making the waiting period in the reception centre longer (IMDi, 2014¹). There are no sanctions towards municipalities who do not house the amount of refugees IMDi has requested; in fact, a relatively small number of municipalities house as many refugees as IMDi requests (IMDi, 2015²). According to IMDi (2015²), for 2015 only 170 out of almost 400 municipalities have accepted the number of refugees requested, meaning that majority of the municipalities has agreed to take smaller number of refugees than requested or none at all. This raises the question of municipal authority in the housing process of refugees. After all, the number of refugee places requested by IMDi is not big; it varies from as little as 8 places in very small municipalities up until 500 in Oslo area (*ibid*).

IMDi identifies the slow transition process from reception centres as being a problem in the housing of refugees. According to IMDi, refugees have to wait for a house on average little more than 7 months (IMDi, 2014¹), the official guideline is six months for adults and three months for unaccompanied minors to be waiting in the reception centre before housed (Government Bill, 2000/01). IMDi also

³ Introduction programme for refugees is elaborated more in chapter 2.1.4

points out that the waiting time has been increasing every year and some refugees, especially the ones with special needs, have reported waiting times as long as 3 years (IMDi, 2009; IMDi, 2015). The municipalities argue that there is not enough housing available, which makes the waiting period relatively long (NRK, 2013). Kaare-Andreas Krog from IMDi, understands the housing challenges municipalities are facing but stress the severity of the problem stating that having to wait for several months or more in a reception centre can make it more difficult for refugees to start their lives in Norway (IMDi, 2015). At the moment around 5000 refugees are waiting in the reception centres to be housed (IMDi, 2015).

Although the municipalities claim not having enough resources to take in the requested number of people, feasibility of this argument can be questioned. According to Ministry of Children, Equality & Social Inclusion (2014) and Kaare-Andreas Krog from IMDi (IMDi, 2015), for each refugee taken in, the municipalities get financial assistance from the government, which should cover the cost for their integration up to 5 years, leaving the municipalities little to argue for the financial burden refugees would cause. However, some municipalities argue that the grant they are given by the government is not enough to cover all the costs of having refugees. Also a report carried out by IMDi shows that in 2013 the costs were higher than the grant in some municipalities (IMDi, 2014²) and according to Expert Interviewee 1⁴ this can be especially the in small municipalities where the grant should cover the whole establishment of the refugee integration system. By this, Expert Interviewee 1 means that in bigger municipalities there are already many services that can also be utilised in the refugee integration programme, which might not exist in the smaller municipalities, which is why the initial cost of accepting refugees can be higher than the government grant offered. On the other hand, having analysed housing policy's implementation of eight different municipalities in Norway, Wilskow (2010) points out that the implementations of the guidelines and agreements with IMDi during housing process differs greatly between municipalities.

1.3 Government legitimisation of dispersal

Borevi & Bengtsson (2014) argue that a common aspect of a refugee housing policy in general is a tension between 1) Individuals' autonomy in decision making; and 2) Fulfilment of certain political goals of the state (like social cohesion through creating desirable neighbourhoods and social connections). Goals of the government should be achieved without violating the rights of the new

⁴ Expert Interviewee 1 is a person interviewed for this thesis who works in a small municipality within refugee integration. S/he wanted to stay anonymous, which is why s/he will be referred to as "Expert Interviewee 1".

comers, which is the essence of the tension. Borevi & Bengtsson (2014) look at the Scandinavian governments' justification for the restricted individual autonomy regards to housing. They point out that the Scandinavian governments legitimize the restricted autonomy of individuals in settlement process with three sets of arguments; *legal status* -, *resource*-, and *neighbourhood argument*. By *legal status argument* they refer to full citizenship that most refugees who are to be housed lack. *Resource argument* means the vulnerable position that refugees have on the housing market and the ability of the local government (municipalities) to provide services needed. The last, *neighbourhood argument*, describes the intent to create sound neighbourhoods for all. Out of these three sets of arguments, Norway uses two: *resource*- and *neighbourhood argument* (*ibid*). Djuve (2010) explains that the Norwegian government legitimizes the restrictions on individual autonomy in integration measures because the state believes they have to empower refugees in their initial start of their arrival. The assumption behind this is that the refugees might have various understandings of political systems or the way a society functions in general, which is why they need someone to guide them in the beginning. Thus, refugees are not considered as fully autonomous, which is why restrictions on their autonomy can be put in place.

Many governments offer an argument of "burden sharing" for dispersal, referring to the equal distribution of the costs and services used for refugees (Andersson, 2003). Dispersal is argued to divide the cost between the municipalities and eradicate demand for social housing in minority dense areas (Damm & Rosholm, 2009). It is also argued that refugees have to be scattered around evenly in order for the municipalities to have the capacity to offer the support needed (Damm & Rosholm, 2003). Thus, dispersal policy is seen as fair and beneficial for the municipalities and refugees themselves. The government of Norway argues that in case everyone could freely choose where to live, they would choose to live in and around Oslo; area with shortage of proper houses. This would lead into cramped living situations and harm the refugees themselves, especially small school aged children (Borevi & Bengtsson, 2014). Thus, the inability for municipalities to offer proper housing and other services is used as an argument for the nature of the housing policy itself (*ibid*). This is what Borevi & Bengtsson (2014) call the *resource argument*, which they state is the most common argument for the restricted autonomy in refugee housing in Norway. However, the government recognises that for refugees themselves, it would be the best option to choose freely where to live but this would create too much pressure on some of the municipalities (Government Bill 2000/1).

In addition, the government of Norway also uses the *neighbourhood argument*. It states that when dispersed around the country, refugees will come more in contact with Norwegians and create needed bonds with the host population. However, the government is also trying to make sure that the

municipalities people are settled in would also have other people from the same ethnic group/nationality, arguing that this would offer security for the newly settled refugees (Government Bill 2000/1). Thus, the government takes the responsibility on deciding which kind of neighbourhoods are functional and good living environments: “right” kind of mix of immigrants and so called “ethnic Norwegians”. This kind of neighbourhood planning is based on the common belief that ethnically mixed areas function the best.

1.4 Justification for the study

In 2004 Norway adopted a new integration scheme for refugees: the introductory programme. The programme offers teaching in language and culture for refugees in their two years after their refugee status has been granted. This reformation in the integration scheme also shaped the housing policy for refugees, restricting people’s autonomy over their initial settlement place (IMDi, 2015). The post 2004 integration measures have been welcomed by the government of Norway since it has resulted in higher level of employment and increased language skills for refugees (*ibid*: Valenta & Bunar, 2010). Thus, the introduction programme has been considered as being effective in integrating people into the Norwegian society and consequently, restricted autonomy in the housing policy justified. However, not much research has been carried out on the migrants’ experiences about the housing process. A report carried out by IMDi in 2009 tried to find out the refugees’ views on the initial housing process.

No additional data on refugees’ own opinions was found besides this report carried out by IMDi in 2009. The report comprises people’s opinions about the housing process. According to the report refugees did not feel directly dissatisfied about the municipalities they were placed. However, some expressed discontent on the accommodation itself, stating that it is not sufficient for their needs (IMDi, 2009). They also underlined some shortfalls on information provided regarding the accommodation process. Moreover, the refugees felt that their voices were not heard; they had only little influence as to where they were placed. Instead, they felt they were told what to do. They described the communication with the officials as more receiving instructions than having a mutual discussion (*ibid*). The findings of the report are not in line with the government policy on the housing of refugees, which states that refugees’ wishes over the settlement municipality should be given great importance because this would reduce secondary migration from the initial settlement municipality to other parts of Norway (Government Bill, 2000/1). Even so, there is one fact to indicate that refugees enjoy the municipality they have been settled into; secondary migration out of the municipalities is reducing. According to IMDi, 76% of the refugees that were settled in 2006, are still living in the initial settlement municipality (IMDi, 2014¹). Also Kaare-Andreas Krog explains that because of the

introduction programme, many people have learned Norwegian language and gained job experience, which has enabled them to gain employment also in smaller municipalities (IMDi, 2015).

Since this was the only report found in measuring people's opinions about the housing process in Norway, it was important to examine the topic further. Personally, I was intrigued to know how the refugees themselves find the restriction on their initial settlement place. In the past I have met people in the UK who have gone through a housing process where they were forcefully located in a municipality they did not want to live in. This sparked my interest in the refugee housing policies. Moreover, the more I thought about the whole housing process, it seemed incredibly complicated: combination of lack of houses, individual wishes where to stay, possibility of getting a municipality place through private contract and municipalities' voluntariness in settling refugees in Norway (which according to IMDi makes the housing process longer). In addition, I wanted to produce a thesis solely concentrating on the refugees' opinions since more than often, they are treated as a burden for their settlement state and consequently, research conducted is frequently directed at measuring their productivity in the society. The attempt of this thesis is to shift away from measuring the housing policy's efficiency in traditional integration measures like employment and language skills. With this thesis, I aim to challenge the Norwegian government's legitimisation over the housing policy by ethnically mixed neighbourhoods being the most functional ones. Moreover, I want to explore the functionality of the implementation of the policy: how is the process and what effect does it have on refugees' inclusion in Norway. In doing so, the research is highlighting the importance of independent decision making and belonging in the settlement process of refugees.

1.5 Research questions

In order to challenge the government legitimisation of the policy and explore the functionality of the policy's implementation, it is important to outline specific research questions to be answered within the study. The main question this thesis is trying to answer is:

“How does the Norwegian refugee housing policy affect refugees' belonging in the society?”

The main question is divided into two sub-questions:

1. *How does the restricted autonomy (control over one's life) during housing process affect the feeling of belonging of refugees?*

With this question I aim to find out how the refugees feel about their autonomy being restricted during the initial housing process. More specifically, restricted autonomy in the settlement process is evaluated by participants'⁵ opinions and experiences in:

- Waiting time in the reception centre and information of the housing process provided by the municipality
- The importance of deciding the initial municipality
- Private housing process
- The importance of the initial settlement municipality having qualities that the participant appreciates

2. *What role does neighbours and neighbourhood have on refugees' sense of belonging?*

As pointed out in the earlier chapter, the Norwegian government is legitimizing dispersal policy by aiming to create mixed neighbourhoods of ethnic Norwegians and migrants. Thus, it is important to find out if the participants have contact with their neighbours and if this has an effect on the sense of belonging. This is evaluated by asking the participants their daily interactions with their neighbours and activities in the neighbourhood.

⁵ “Participants” refer to the people who were interviewed for this study. All of these people had required a refugee status in Norway, gone through the housing process and participated in the introduction programme by the government.

These two questions are important in evaluating the government's argument of the housing policy of refugees. The first question is mostly related to the way the housing policy is implemented (through spatial dispersal), whereas the second sub-question is related to the legitimisation for this practice (the functional neighbourhood). By examining these two points through migrants' own opinions and experiences, the research is aiming to question the ethics behind and functionality of the housing policy.

2. Forced migrants and Norway

2.1 Definition of a refugee

The 1950 Refugee Convention is a convention initiated by the United Nations that among many other states, Norway has ratified. It obliges the government to give protection to the individuals considered as refugees. According to the Convention, a refugee is a 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.” (UNHCR, 2010, p. 14).

Every year the government sets a quota for the number of refugees to be offered a resettlement place in Norway. Resettled refugees are divided into two different categories: 1. People who have already been interviewed and granted a refugees status (selection mission cases), and 2. People who are interviewed on their arrival to Norway (dossier cases). Most of the resettled refugees (selection mission and dossier cases) are referred by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and Asylum Seekers (UNHCR). A person can also enter the country as an independent asylum seeker, in which case the decision of the refugee status will be decided in Norway (ICMC, 2013; UDI, 2014). In addition, a single person who has been granted a refugee status can apply permission for her/his family to stay in Norway. In case the permission is granted, the family members can reside in Norway under the refugee status. This process is called family reunification (Djuve, 2010).

2.2 Recent migration history, refugees and welfare state

In order to understand how the housing policy (and integration policies in general) in Norway have developed, it is important to take a quick look at the recent migration history to Norway: who were the people coming in, what was the government's response and how has the response changed (and why)? Moreover, the welfare state's role cannot be dismissed: how does it connect to the formation of integration policies?

The 60's marked the beginning of the era of new migration to Norway. In the late 1960s Norway received considerable amount of immigrants from new countries of emigration, mainly from Yugoslavia, Turkey, Morocco and Pakistan (Brochmann & Hagelund, 2011). Immigration to Norway in the late 60's was mainly labour migration and there were nearly no restrictions to enter the country.

However, recession in 1966-67 and the oil crisis in 1973-74 resulted into economic downturn and among other Western European states, Norway started to impose restrictions on immigration, which concentrated mainly on low-skilled labour migrants coming from countries considered “poor”. The first restrictions were in place in 1971 and they culminated into a full stop on low skilled labour immigration in 1975, which was further adopted as a permanent policy in 1981 (Brochmann & Kjeldstadli, 2008).

Unlike it was commonly expected, the workers who arrived during the 60’s did not go back to their countries of origin when the economic situation got rough: instead, their families joined them (Brochmann & Kjeldstadli, 2008). The phenomenon of labour migrants staying in their new settlement country was seen largely in the whole Western Europe. Governments had thought that migration would directly respond to the fluctuations of the economic market but the stay of labour migrants proved this thought false (*ibid*). Brochman & Kjeldstadli (2008) argue that the reason that they stayed was the new found economic security in Norway. Despite the immigration stop, people still continued coming in; either by joining their families or as refugees under the 1950 Refugee Convention (*ibid*: Brochmann & Hagelund, 2011).

Brochmann & Kjeldstadli (2008) point out that the restrictions on unskilled labour migration were put in place in order for the state to be more equipped to facilitate integration of the migrants that had already settled in Norway. Also Brochmann & Hagelund (2011) stress that these restrictions were justified by a view of immigration being viewed as a social challenge to the state: the government emphasized the low living standards of immigrants and argued that if the labour migration would not be restricted, the migrants might become a socioeconomic burden.

In fact, up until 70’s Norway, like many other European states, did not have any formal integration policy (Brochmann & Kjeldstadli, 2008). Together with the restriction on entry for labour migrants Norway introduced its first integration policy in the 70’s, which aimed especially preventing the formation of new “slums”, areas mainly populated with migrants living in poor conditions (Brochmann & Hagelund, 2011). Thus, the restriction on further labour migration and introduction of integration policy was strongly connected. The initial integration policy in Norway, which was heavily influenced by the model Sweden adopted, was based on the idea of multiculturalism. The policy emphasised free choice of the individuals, mutual adaptation in the inclusion process (by majority and immigrants), as well as equal rights and responsibilities of immigrants to the native Norwegians (Brochmann & Kjeldstadli, 2008).

2.3 Norway and refugee integration after 80's

Although Norway had received some refugees before (some refugees had entered during and after the WW II as well as after the Soviet occupation of Czechoslovakia and Hungary), there was a rapid increase in the numbers of refugees and asylum seekers in the 1980's (Brochmann & Hagelund, 2011). It was assumed that the welfare state⁶ would even out the differences between new comers and host population, resulting into pleasant co-existence (Valenta & Bunar, 2010).

The integration policy that was put in place in 1970's and embraced freedom of choice, was aimed at the labour migrants. After the sharp increase of refugees during the 80's, it was recognised that the living conditions of refugees in Norway were low (Brochmann & Hagelund, 2011). At the end of 80's, the integration policy concerning refugees started to shift away from multicultural model of the 70's more into a direction where freedom of choice was restricted. This meant that the new comers were expected to learn Norwegian and take part in the Norwegian society (Brochmann & Kjeldstadli, 2008).

The change in the integration policy in the late 80's- early 90's was a response to the growing unemployment and low living standards of immigrants (Djuve, 2010). A survey to measure living standards of refugees⁷ in late 80's shows that the labour market participation among refugees was low and dependence of the social security system high (Djuve & Hagen, 1995). Thus, the belief that the welfare state would automatically even out differences between migrants and host population, was challenged. Brochmann & Kjeldstadli (2008: 229) point out that this era started the conversation of the dilemma between "solidarity and freedom". By this, Brochmann & Kjeldstadli refer to the discussion on the inclusion of new comers and say it is a compromise between 1) helping the migrants to increase their attributes (e.g. Norwegian language skills) so they have better chances in doing well in the Norwegian society and 2) giving the freedom of choice in deciding into what extent does one decide to conform with the majority. It is a complex debate that still prevails strong: how should the new comers "be included"? Since the 90's the concentration of the integration policy has increasingly been shifted towards labour market participation.

⁶ The Norwegian welfare policy is considered very generous one: together with the other Northern European states, Norway has a reputation of being an inclusive country with equal opportunities for everyone. The welfare state is meant to cover everyone's basic needs "from cradle to grave" by offering wide amount of free or low cost services, such as health care and education, which is funded by taxes from Norwegian population. The welfare state also covers all the immigrants who are residing in Norway with official permit granted by the state. The system is appraised outside Norway and also widely accepted by the Norwegians themselves (Brochmann & Skevik Grødem, 2013; Fog Olwig, 2011).

⁷ The research was carried out in Oslo area and it included people who had arrived in Norway at the late 80's (Djuve & Hagen, 1995)

Brochmann & Skevik Grodem (2013: 61) argue that the extensive welfare state is one of the reasons for the labour market orientation of the integration measures. They call the relationship between welfare state and labour market an “institutional equilibrium”, where both of the components complement one another. This means that on the one hand, welfare state takes care of its citizens and provides jobs. On the other hand, it is believed that the generous welfare benefits have to be met with active labour market where everyone contributes as much as they are capable. According to Brochmann (2003), there is an idea of equality, which lies in the heart of the welfare model: everyone should have an equal opportunity and start in their lives. However, in order for the state to be able to provide the services that guarantee the equality, the labour market needs to be vibrant. Therefore, it is believed that if the welfare model is to be maintained, immigrants should be made part of it and enter the labour market as soon as possible. This union of labour market and welfare state is seen to be endangered by migration in general: both to and from Norway as well as in and out of EEA (Brochmann & Skevik Grodem, 2013). Brochmann & Hagelund (2011) argue that especially the increased inflows of refugees have been considered as a threat for the welfare state: refugees are seen less capable of entering the labour market and more in need for state services. At the moment, the integration policy in Norway is heavily concentrated on labour market access of immigrants through the two year introduction programme.

2.4 Introduction Programme

The introduction programme is an integration measure specifically directed at refugees. The programme was a response to previous integration measures, which were criticised as being ineffective in increasing the labour market mobility of refugees (Djuve, 2010). The programme is concentrated on preparing the immigrants for future employment by offering wide range of services, mainly in the form of training in Norwegian language and social studies (550 and 50 hours, respectively). In the beginning of enrolment to the programme, an individually tailored integration plan is created together with the one who takes part in the programme (i.e. the refugee) and the municipality worker. The programme is available only in the first settlement place and a prerequisite for government benefits. The participants have an obligation to follow the programme for the period of 2 years (Ministry of Children, Equality & Social Inclusion, 2014²; Søholt & Wessel, 2010). However, if the participant enrolls into a study programme or finds a job before the 2 years are finished, s/he is free to leave the programme (Djuve, 2010). The introduction programme has been largely appraised for its benefits for the state and refugees themselves (Djuve, 2010; Hagelund, 2005). According to IMDi, the integration programme in Norway seems to be rather successful in getting people employed

or into study programmes (IMDi, 2014¹). 47% of the refugees who completed the introductory programme in 2013 found employment or entered education straight away (*ibid*). However, even though the percentage is high, the results show that it has been steadily declining, being 54% in 2006 (*ibid*; Normann & Egg-Hoveid, 2013).

The introductory programme is closely connected to the housing process of refugees in Norway. Before it was put in place, the refugees had more freedom to choose their initial settlement municipality (IMDi, 2015). The government states that one reason why people have to be dispersed evenly around the country is that the municipalities would have the resources to offer this service rich introduction programme (Borevi & Bengtsson, 2014). Thus, the extensive services by the welfare state legitimise the government control over the initial settlement place.

3. Segregation, Dispersal and Neighbourhood

As stated above, more extensive services for refugees also sparked discussion on idea of dispersal policy in Norway. Moreover, dispersal policy was (and still is) believed to be creating 'functional neighbourhoods' (Government Bill 2000/1). Many European states (all Scandinavian states, Finland, Netherlands, Germany and UK to name a few) practising dispersal policy justify it as a preventing mechanism to avoid residential segregation and so called "ethnic enclaves", where a neighbourhood is inhabited predominantly by ethnic minorities (Damm, 2009). As pointed out earlier, also the government of Norway legitimises the lost control in settlement place by creating functional neighbourhoods. It is assumed that neighbourhood with a mix of ethnic minorities and majority representatives is the most functional one (Borevi & Bengtsson, 2014). In the housing policy of refugees it is stated that by creating these mixed neighbourhoods, so called "ethnic Norwegians" will get in touch with people of refugee background, which otherwise would not be the case (Government Bill 200/1). This argument presupposes that so called mixed neighbourhoods would generate social contacts between "ethnic Norwegians" and refugees. To me, the argument also underlines an assumption that these relationships are *most likely* to be formed among neighbours. In other words, there is a prevalent conception of a right kind of neighbourhood, which would help the refugees in their initial settlement to Norway. However, the idea of dispersal, de-segregation measures and neighbourhoods' effect on people's everyday life remains debated. This chapter provides the academic debate on neighbourhoods and segregation: do they really have such a big impact as the government believes?

3.1 Economic effects of social relations with co-ethnics and host population

The debate about neighbourhoods is often connected to the socio-economic gains for the immigrants in living in or outside their ethnic community and social capital gained in these particular types of communities and social groups. In other words, the debate evolves around what kind of social relations are formed and which way they influence the new comers' inclusion to the society. Pinkster & Völker (2009) argue that who we know defines what kind of resources are available for us to better our own lives. According to Koopmans (2010), contact with the host population is especially vital when it comes to finding a job: although co-ethnic ties are important, majority population has more valuable information and social connections regarding employment. Some argue that in a segregated community, people might engage with their ethnic peers to such an extent that it prevents them from interacting and forming relationships with the majority population (Li, 2004). This is believed to have negative consequences on employment prospects and acquiring the language skills of the host society (Damm, 2009; Koopmans, 2010). Thus, dispersal can be seen as beneficial for the people affected by the policy, since in this way they get in touch with the host population easier and gain vital social connections (*ibid*).

Some scholars argue that dispersal policy has more of a negative effect to new comers' inclusion to society by denying the formation of co-ethnic ties, which are argued to provide comfort especially for the newly arrived refugees (Andersson, 2003; Larsen, 2011). Larsen (2011) points out that co-ethnic ties not only offer comfort and support, but also work as sources of information about the host country and the way the society works in general: from interaction with state officials to performing everyday tasks such as grocery shopping. Robert Putnam calls this guidance from co-nationals as *bridging* and *bonding* (Hope, 2011). In other words, co-nationals have a vital role in the initial settling process as guiding new comers and generating trust between the settlement country and the new immigrants (Larsen, 2011). In addition to creating trust and providing information about the host country itself, Damm (2009) argues that ethnic ties are also beneficial for employment prospects. Also Li (2004) points out that neighbourhood described as an "ethnic enclave" has been beneficial for some migrants in terms of employment. In their study about dispersal's economic effects on refugees in Denmark, Damm & Rosholm (2009) found out that having more co-ethnics living in the same area does not necessarily help a new comer to find a first job. However, Damm (2009) argues that the number of co-ethnics affects positively on the professional level of the job and thus the salary received: despite skill level, the ones living in ethnic enclaves were earning up to 18% more than new comers living in areas with ethnic majority. Similar results have been found in Sweden, where concentration of ethnic minorities improved the earnings of new comers (Edin, Fredriksson & Åslund, 2004). After dispersal

policy was adopted and people were scattered in various places creating mixed neighbourhoods, earnings dropped up to one quarter and amount of welfare benefits distributed rose (*ibid*).

3.2 Neighbourhood's effect on social contacts

Larsen (2011) explains that the idea behind spatial dispersal policy is that new comers would develop social ties by simply living in a same area with majority representatives: every day encounters are believed to develop social contacts that new comers can benefit from. However, in her study on dispersal of refugees in Denmark, she found out that this was not always the case (*ibid*). Although Tigges et al. (1998) discovered that the type of neighbourhood had a big impact on the life quality and social isolation in terms of networks on African Americans in Atlanta (Georgia, US), Vervoort et al. (2011) point out that in-depth analysis on neighbourhood effect is lacking. Also Musterd (2003) argues that in fact substantial evidence of the neighbourhoods' effect on individuals and their social contacts and life quality in European context is missing. Whereas in the United States the neighbourhood has an effect on the life quality of its residents, in Western and Northern European countries the impact is small, almost non-existent (Ostendorf et al., 2001). This is due to the social structures and level of government involvement in these countries in general. In the US, a liberal welfare state and its market oriented structure makes the residents more vulnerable to the neighbourhood they live in, whereas in many countries in Europe, social welfare benefits and housing support guarantee a certain living standard, which minimises the neighbourhood effect (Friedrichs et al., 2003; Ostendorf et al., 2001). Musterd (2003) suggests that policies promoting de-segregation do not necessarily promote integration in society. On the other hand Ostendorf et al. (2001) and Musterd (2003) do recognise that labour market orientation (like the one in Norway) in policies have an impact on the inclusion process. Moreover, Pinkster & Völker (2009) argue that even when mixed neighbourhoods are artificially created through state policies, they do not guarantee social relations that individuals can benefit from. As Pinkster & Völker (2009) explain, people mostly interact with people similar to themselves, which is why social relations with community members who are different might remain limited. Vervoort et al. (2011) found in their study of neighbourhoods in Netherlands that social contacts are more in line with the personality of an individual. An outgoing person who have contacts with co-ethnics also have contacts with nationals and other ethnic minorities (*ibid*). However, Vervoort et al. (2011) argue that neighbourhood composition has some level of effect in social relations. They discovered that in neighbourhoods with a strong presence of a same ethnic group, the co-ethnic relationships seem to be stronger and more frequent and consequently, contact with neighbours of the native population is less frequent. However, presence of other minorities did not increase their social contacts within ethnic groups. Moreover, the lessened social contact with natives in a neighbourhood with strong population

of a same ethnic group was only found as decreased contact with native *neighbours*, not with other more in-depth relations (*ibid*).

Musterd (2003) claims that the impact of the neighbourhoods in social integration in the European context is exaggerated and more than anything, a response to the growing immigrant population. There is a prevalent assumption that segregation (especially ethnic segregation) hampers social inclusion: a view that has been embraced by European Commission and policy makers (*ibid*).

3.3 Morality in dispersal

As demonstrated above, scholars disagree on the neighbourhood's effect on social relations and inclusion in society. There are many ways to look at segregation and neighbourhoods concentrated with ethnic minorities. Whereas some argue dispersal is enabling the new comers finding valuable social connections (Koopmans, 2010; Li, 2004), others say it is harmful for the people's social inclusion (Larsen 2011). However, what is more important to think about in relation to this thesis, is whether or not it is needed for the belonging of the refugees (the theories of belonging are elaborated in the next chapter). As identified by Musterd (2003), the effects of segregation in the European context remain unclear. Although government of Norway (as many other governments) portrays dispersal as a necessary aspect in promoting integration, the policy has also been criticized as being coercive and thus, slowing down the inclusion process of refugees (Fair, 2006; Larsen, 2011; Valenta & Bunar, 2010). For example, Hynes (2009) argues that dispersal of refugees hampers trust towards the host society, which is an important aspect in refugee relations. The morality of the policy is put to question by Andersson (2003), who states that dispersal policy has an ethical dilemma, when someone else decides where one has to settle and argues this type of policy always being racially loaded. Andersson (2003) points out that in Sweden, the discourse partly evolves around an argument that ethnic segregation does not happen out of free will but is rather a consequence of subordination and discrimination from the majority, (argument also echoed by Koopmans, 2010). Thus, dispersal can be seen as helping the immigrants getting equal housing to the nationals (*ibid*). Following this, Andersson (2003) raises an interesting question; if this is the case, why not deal with the actual problem, racism, instead? Also Musterd (2003) calls the de-segregation measures by governments merely a direct reflection of the xenophobic assumptions of ethnically segregated neighbourhoods being disruptive and argues that integration policies would be more efficient concentrating on enhancing equality in general instead. Arguments by Musterd (2003) and Andersson (2003) should be kept in mind when thinking about the morality of this policy. If the policy's goal is to create functional neighbourhoods (and enhance relations between majority representatives and refugees), it means that the underlining

assumptions is that the neighbours would naturally start communicating and form relationships as a consequence of living next to each other. In the case this does not take place, the neighbourhood argument behind dispersal falls short. As pointed out by Borevi & Bengtsson (2014), the government of Norway legitimises the restricted individual autonomy over settlement municipality (and so for, dispersal) by the argument of functional neighbourhoods but also by dividing the cost of refugee settlement between municipalities. In chapter 6 (the analysis of the interviews of the refugees who were interviewed for this study) it is also evaluated if the government neighbourhood argument holds water according to the data gathered. The next chapter highlights the theoretical reference of the concept of 'belonging' through which the interviews for this study were analysed.

4. Theoretical framework

4.1 Integration

Housing of refugees falls under the refugee “integration policy” in Norway. Integration is a widely used term and concept in immigration related academic research (Ager & Strang, 2010) and government reports (Ministry of Children, Equality and Social Inclusion, 2013). The term is commonly used as a description of the level of socio-economic adaptation of immigrants in their settlement country and it has often been measured by the immigrants’ employment level and knowledge in local language (Valenta & Bunar, 2010). This has also been the case in the research of refugee settlement and housing in the Norwegian context. Almost all of the research/reports I found, use ‘integration’ as a concept in studying the relation between immigrants and housing in the Norwegian society (see for example Sørholt et al., 2012; Tronstad, 2014)⁸.

However, Ager & Strang (2008) point out that the academic sphere has problematized the term integration and that scholars like Castles et al. (2001) argue the term being controversial and debated. As Anthias (2013) points out, the whole term and framework of integration is very hard to utilise in research and due to its vague definition in general, using “integration” as a term gives more room for generalisation of migrants. Anthias et al. (2013) stress the ambiguous nature of the concept “integration”: it is widely used but means different things depending on context. Thus, “integration” as a term on its own, has no meaning at all and every meaning possible at the same time. What Anthias et al. (2013) argue, is that “integration” as a term has a connotation of population management and thus implies that immigrants are to adopt the habits of a majority society (*ibid*). Moreover, Anthias et.al. (2013) stress that integration as a term, and more specifically “being integrated” or “failing to integrate”, has been used in a context of only certain type of migrants:

“... integration discourses and practices are not directed at migrants or ‘expats’ coming from developed countries: nobody asks Americans or Japanese in Paris or French or Italians in the UK to ‘integrate’, to demonstrate their knowledge of the language or to share supposedly French or British values.” (Anthias et al. 2013: 3).

What Anthias et al. (2013) refer to, is that integration has been used as a soft word for population control, which is only attached to certain group of people: it is closely related to class and race. This

⁸ For more related studies see:

<http://www.imdi.no/no/Kunnskapsbasen/Innholdstyper/Laringsressurser/2014/Litteratur-om-Bosetting/>

has been the case especially with refugees, who are many times considered as homogeneous group with little to contribute to their new settlement country.

What Ager & Strang emphasize in their paper “Refugee Integration. Emerging Trends and Remaining Agendas” is the feeling of *belonging* (Ager & Strang, 2010). They found out that belonging to the society was especially important for the refugees who felt that the country they are staying in is their permanent place of residence (*ibid*). Since one of the aims for this thesis is to find out how people feel about the housing process and if (and if so, how) it has affected them, it is beneficial to use theories that refer to feeling of belonging. Research that is measuring only economic integration and labour market participation or social contacts with host population might disregard refugees’ own experience and thoughts. Moreover, as already pointed out earlier in this chapter, “integration” as a term has been criticized as a top-down concept. Thus, using the term integration would undermine the whole core idea of the research, which is to find out people’s own views on the topic. Especially when concept of autonomy is studied, it would be paradoxical to use a term that in itself has been used to undermine the autonomy of refugees in the first place.

Therefore, the concept of belonging is used as a theoretical reference point in this thesis. Ager & Strang (2008: 178), who tried to define the definition of ‘integration’ by interviewing refugees and asking what they think integration is, point out that refugees themselves talked about *belonging* as an “ultimate mark of living in an integrated community”. Belonging to the interviewed refugees meant close family ties and friendship, respect and shared values. Ager & Strang emphasize that the idea of shared values within the refugee narratives did not rule out diversity or individual identity (*ibid*). Even the Norwegian government recognises belonging as a vital part of inclusion into the society. In the brochure of ‘Comprehensive Integration Policy’ it states that “Trust and sense of belonging are requirements for safe and inclusive community for all who live in Norway” (Ministry of Children, Equality and Social Inclusion, 2013:14), although the document lacks an explanation what is meant with the term ‘belonging’.

4.2 Belonging

What sets belonging apart from integration is that belonging as a concept is not focusing on the skills that the individual has acquired in order to fit into the society (e.g. language skills) or economic profitability of the individual (e.g. employment). The focus on belonging is in the thoughts and opinions of the person affected (in this case, the refugees). As May (2011:374) points out, belonging is an approach that “provides an alternative to top-down structural theorizing that is characterized by a focus on how changes in society require people to adapt.” Therefore, belonging as a concept

concentrates solely on the experience of the individual (in this thesis the migrant) and does not take into account that much how refugees' presence might affect the society at large.

Various scholars have different explanations for belonging. Seamon (1980) describes belonging as the right to use space, Lambert et al. (2013) argue it's a feeling of meaningfulness and Fenster (2005) argues that to 'belong' has a strong sense of being able to participate in everyday life decisions. Nicole Samson offers compelling account for belonging. She describes belonging as "...deeply felt attachments to people, groups or places that give meaning, security and self-assurance in people's lives." (Samson, 2013: 8). What Samson emphasizes is that a person can feel belonging to an actual physical place but also, for example, to a group of people, which does not have to be geographically fixed (*ibid*). Samson further explains that during her research on belonging of women with migration background in a particular street in London, she has found out that belonging is experienced on the level of everyday, usually through family, religion, work or food (*ibid*). May (2011) points out that belonging is multifaceted, it is constructed of various aspects of a society and us as humans. Moreover, since societies and people change constantly, belonging is not achieved once and for all but rather, a person has to continuously claim his/her belonging (*ibid*). May points out that many aspects of life affect sense of belonging: it is connected, not only to the society and societal change but also to ourselves as beings. We, as humans, are also multifaceted with different age, gender, occupation, religion, sexuality and we have individually gathered experiences in life that have shaped us the way we are now (May, 2011). Hence, a person's understanding of oneself also shapes the feeling of belonging.

For Lambert et al., (2013) belonging is the feeling of meaningfulness- a feeling that one's life is worth something and that it has a *meaning*. One way to achieve meaning to one's life is belonging to a social group: forming social connections is vital for humans and thus, seen as a major part of feeling of belonging by Lambert et al. (2013) and May (2011). What Lambert et al. (2013:1) describe as belonging is a formation of positive relationships but more precisely, relationships that foster "a secure sense of fitting in". According to Lambert et al., a person needs to feel fully accepted in order to belong. Thus, they argue that not every positive relationship generates the sense of fitting in and belonging: it is the specific kind of relationships that give meaning to individual's life through which belonging is achieved (*ibid*).

4.2.1 Trust

In the Integration Policy, the government of Norway mentions 'trust' as a "requirement for safe and inclusive community for all who live in Norway" (Ministry of Children, Equality & Social Inclusion, 2013:14). Also during the interviews for this thesis an aspect of trust became an evident factor in

facilitating the kind of relationships that are described by Lambert et al. (2013). The interviewees expressed the lack of trust especially in terms of the relationships between them and the municipality workers. Explaining the trust formation of refugees, Raghallaigh (2014) presents an argument by Robert Wuthnow, who states that trust is linked to social structure: it is context specific and the assumptions and expectations that are related to a certain relationship play a big role in whether trust is created or not. Moreover, previous life experiences affect the formation of trust among refugees, Raghallaigh (2014) argues. Trusting relationship between a service provider (i.e. in this case, the reception centre workers) and refugees is hard to form. This might be because of refugees' previous experiences (which have possibly been negative) with the state officials, which they would automatically connect to the reception centre workers. Hynes (2009:98) stresses that "within refugee studies, trust is a central theme." This argument is also echoed by Knudsen (1995) who argues that trust is constantly contested during refugee's journey. Knudsen goes further in explaining that identity of a person as in 'who I am' is linked into who the person trusts (*ibid*). During the interviews it became obvious that the lack of trust was hampering the refugees' relationships with the municipality workers and their belonging to the Norwegian society.

4.2.2 Power structures in belonging

However, May (2011) points out that everyone is not allowed to belong. What May (2011) argues is that there are hierarchies within belonging. In May's words, people claim belonging, which others have the power to grant or reject. Whether or not someone is allowed to belong is commonly decided through societal norms of what is seen to be normal by the majority and since the societal norms are tightly connected to power structures, they tend to serve the ones in power (May, 2011). May argues that belonging is more than being familiar with a culture, place or a group of people: it can mean that a person is totally emerged into the everyday life in a place, but still feels that s/he does not belong there (*ibid*). McIntosh (2015) points out that in Norway, the national idea of what is "Norwegian" is directly connected to who is granted belonging. In other words, ideas of what is typical in Norway, includes or excludes people from belonging. McIntosh highlights that what constitutes national belonging as an idea in Norway (like in many other parts of Europe) is language, territory and culture, which are simultaneously connected to racial identity (whiteness). Also Gullestad (2006) points out that there is a prevalent conception of what is "Norwegian": an idea of a national identity. Norway is seen as a peace loving, equality embracing country with no colonial past. This idea of Norway as a country has led to the idea of "Norwegian". Moreover, there is a widespread idea of the population in Norway being homogenous and sharing the same ancestry and 'culture'. The perception of the nation has resulted into Norwegian national identity that excludes people who do not fit into the idea

of “Norwegian” of their national belonging. Gullestad argues that in order to be granted the national belonging, it is more important to speak Norwegian and look like what is considered to be Norwegian than have a citizenship or be a part of the political nation (*ibid*). Gullestad (2002) also puts forward a concept of what she calls “imagined sameness”, which according to her is very strong in Norway. By this, Gullestad means that in order for people to feel equal to others, they also have to feel they are similar. This connection between equality and similarity leads into search for the “similar” qualities in a person in order for him/her to be regarded as equal. Gullestad stresses that the “imagined sameness” and its connection to equal worth as a human is present and produced in every day interactions (*ibid*).

4.2.3 *Belonging and decision making*

One of the aspects of the refugee housing policy in Norway is that it partly restricts decision making power of refugees. This is especially prevalent in the dispersal aspect of the policy where government can in the end decide the initial settlement municipality of the person. Fenster (2005) describes decision making being a big part of the feeling of belonging of an individual. This also includes decisions people take in their own private lives as well as being able to influence decision making concerning the place they live in. Fenster talks about the access to choice in choosing which area to live in: by choosing the area, a person also chooses, which area s/he *wants to belong*. Thus, by utilising Fenster’s (2005) idea of choice over living area and belonging, it can be questioned if the dispersal policy is restricting the belonging of refugees by denying full autonomy in deciding where to settle initially.

Although identified as part of belonging, the freedom of choice (in case of this thesis, where to live), however, is seen more as a privilege than a right (Benson, 2014; Pinkster, 2014). As Benson (2014) argues, middle-class⁹ can select a place where to belong. They have the ability and right to move and choose the place they want to move into. Pinkster (2014) argues that when choosing an area to live in, people base their decision on symbolic meanings over the simplified notion of “dwelling” itself: it is carefully evaluated if the neighbourhood possesses attractive qualities and inhabits people who are perceived as similar. Benson (2014) also argues that past experiences of living in certain types of neighbourhoods also affect what type of neighbourhoods people are more prone to move into later on in their lives. This is due to the fact that people perceive as being more “at home” in places that are similar to their previous neighbourhoods, which is especially prevalent in the rural-urban divide (Benson, 2014). Benson (2014) argues that identity is closely attached to the place people live in and this is connected to belonging. However, Benson also points out that a person’s identity can change

⁹ Even though this is the case also for upper class, Benson (2014) only refers to middle-class.

due to place and in this way develops a belonging even though s/he did not feel attached to the place in the beginning. After all, identity is also not fixed; it changes through time and life experiences.

Fenster (2005) claims that the access to choice and decision making is always bound to power. By this, she means the power structures that are in place that either enable or restrict the choice and participation in decision making. The effect of power structures on individual depends drastically on individual's status in the society. Thus, belonging is not always bound to the individual, it can also be a politically loaded privilege given only to specific individuals, who are chosen by others around. The person-centered approach of belonging makes it ideal to utilise as a theoretical reference point in this research. Since I am solely concentrating on the refugees' own experiences and opinions, belonging gives a better framework to draw upon than for example, 'integration'. What I really appreciate in May's (2011) concept of belonging is how it takes into account person's own understanding of him-/herself in the process of belonging. This means that everyone's journey of belonging varies and everyone experiences their belonging differently. In other words, you cannot detach the individual from the process of belonging or homogenise a group of people in order to achieve belonging in a certain way. Thus, it can be questioned if the way the housing of refugees is carried out in Norway disregards the identity of an individual and in this way affects belonging of the person.

In this thesis Fenster's (2005) notion of decision making in belonging and Benson's (2014) explanation of residential choice are ideal to explain the connection between participants' ideas and experiences on dispersal: if and how it has affected them. Moreover, in the analysis of the interviews, Lambert et al.'s (2013) explanation on social connection's that foster fitting in and acceptance was used to clarify the connection to the participants' interaction with their neighbourhood. Gullestad's (2002, 2006) concept of Norwegian national identity and how it works in granting or rejecting people of their belonging worked well in explaining the social hierarchy of between white Norwegians and refugees: examples of this were found in the interview data, especially in the individual housing process of refugees.

5. Methodology

The aim of this research was to find out how migrants' themselves experienced the housing process and connected with their neighbourhood. Taking into consideration that feelings and personal stories were to be emphasized, qualitative method was chosen over quantitative one. As Silverman (2006:43) argues "The main strength of qualitative research is its ability to study phenomena which are simply unavailable elsewhere." I felt this was the case in this study because I did not want to find out *how fast* the housing policy helps people to find a house, *what kind* of neighbourhoods are created through the policy or how does this policy enhance *economic integration*, which is commonly measured in employment and financial independence. What I was more interested in finding out was how people *felt* they were treated during the process, if they felt that they could impact the process and how they believed it affected them. Moreover, I wanted to find out if the partly restricted autonomy over where to live (over a house/apartment and settlement municipality) had any importance to them. In addition, I was interested in finding out how much neighbourhood had an effect in people's lives. It was important to include the connection to neighbourhood in the study, since as already pointed out earlier, creating functional neighbourhoods is one of the government's argument for this policy to take place. Thus, in the research I was trying to find out how the participants experience their neighbourhood: if they interact with their neighbours and if these relations are affecting their everyday life.

One way would have been to produce a questionnaire measuring people's views. However, since I was trying to capture the *feeling* of the settlement process, it was crucial that I, as a researcher, could respond to the participants and their stories instead of limiting the whole experience to a questionnaire. Making this a quantitative study might have also been misleading since even though it might have been easier to generalise the findings, it would have dismissed the personal stories and people behind these stories. Moreover, an answer to the question "how did you feel?" (which lies in the essence of this study), can be more nuanced in the interview setting. Simply put, a narrative can tell much more than a short answer, which would have been produced by a questionnaire or other quantitative method for that matter.

I chose to do semi-structured interviews with the idea that this would allow me to steer the topics of conversation, but still leave much room for the participant's own input. The purpose was also to give the interviewees freedom to share topics I had not thought of, which could further enrich the research and might even challenge my own perceptions. David & Sutton (2004: 88) describe the semi-structured interview at its best being "conversation with purpose". My aim was to create this conversation within a setting where the interviewees would feel comfortable. However, it was easier

said than done and quite a few methodological difficulties occurred during the process of data collection.

While conducting the interviews I had a hard time not trying to completely control the setting and ask specific questions in a specific order. While transcribing the interviews, I realised a few times that I failed to follow up on points which were brought up by participants by not asking any further questions. Instead, I was so focused on the questions I wanted to get an answer to that I missed the opportunity to continue the conversation in the direction the interviewee was taking it. This made the interviews at times almost quantitative where the interviewees would answer in a very short, superficial manner. As van Liempt & Bilger (2012) argue, quantitative interviews are more formal and hierarchical whereas qualitative interviews aim to establish a relationship and conversation between the interviewer and interviewee. For example, during one of my interviews I asked the interviewee a question for which I usually got the longest, most in-depth answer: "Could you tell me about your arrival to Norway?", for which the interviewee answered "*It was good. From start to finish.*" (Interview with Sese). Even though I tried to ask more detailed questions related to his arrival and housing, I failed to create a conversation like atmosphere where the interviewee would have felt comfortable describing his settlement process in Norway. This could also be result of the interviewee just being short worded in general or being shy to tell his story to a complete stranger. As Knudsen argues, sometimes refugees are short worded because they do not trust the person they are talking to: silence gives control and power to the interviewee (Knudsen, 1995). After discussion with my supervisor during the interview process I became more aware that my formal interviewing style might make the respondents nervous and I was able to relax more and not to focus on the specific questions that much on my last six interviews. Thus, during the last interviews I managed to create more relaxed atmosphere and the interviews resembled more of a conversation than a formal question-answer setting.

5.1 Sample

From the beginning of the research process, it was clear that I should interview the people who are affected by this policy. Since ultimately the research discusses the possible intrusiveness of the policy, interviews with refugees were inevitable. As Djuve (2010: 405) points out: "whether or not the measures are experienced as an intrusion can best be answered by those who have or have not been intruded upon."

In total I interviewed 12 people for this thesis. Three of the participants were women and the rest nine were men. The age range of the participants is quite wide: The youngest ones were in their early 30's and the eldest interviewee was 62 years old. The participants in this research all have a refugee status

and they have been in Norway between 1 to 11 years. They all arrived to Norway after 2004, which is after the current form of 2 year introductory programme for refugees had been introduced. This introductory programme also changed the housing process of refugees, having more restrictions in choosing the settlement municipality (IMDi, 2015). Nine of the people interviewed were quota refugees and three interviewees had entered Norway as asylum seekers. I originally wanted to get a somewhat even number quota refugees and people who had entered as asylum seekers since as pointed out in earlier, the housing process is different for these two groups of people. However, this was not possible due to difficulty in getting in contact with the refugees in general: the ones who were willing to participate happened to be mainly quota refugees by chance. Yet having three participants who had gone through the housing process after seeking asylum in Norway still enriched the data of the research and shed light to the complexity of the housing process for this group of people.

I decided not to select a specific nationality since I believed that in the process of housing national background would not really matter that much. Moreover, as Glick Schiller and Caglar argue, research, which looks at migrant groups based on their ethnicity, presupposes that people belonging to a certain ethnic/national group would automatically share more with each other than other members of society (Glick Schiller, 2008; Glick Schiller & Caglar, 2013). This is what is described as the “ethnic lens” that naturalises ethnicity and its use as a major part of the analysis in the research. As Glick Schiller & Caglar (2013: 495) point out, when research is carried out with the “ethnic lens”, it is from the start positioned with an idea that “...ethnic or ethno-religious identities, beliefs, practices, networks or practices are central to the lives of people of migrant background”. Although similarities among members of an ethnic group might exist, it should not, however, be taken for granted. Similarities among ethnic / national groups is something that the researchers assume, it is not something that is necessarily there. In the end, my interviewees were from five countries: Burma (5), Liberia (3), Eritrea (2), Egypt (1), Syria (1).

The only criteria for the selection of the interviewees was that the person has a refugee status, s/he has come to Norway after 2004 and that s/he is an adult and had entered Norway as an adult. For unaccompanied minors the whole settling process is different. Moreover, children who come with their parents do not have full autonomy in their own lives or responsibility in taking care of themselves. Thus, their initial settlement process is different from adults. Adults are responsible for themselves and arguably, their thoughts about their own rights, wants and needs are more evolved than those of a child.

Most participants live in Hordaland county (1 in Askøy, 7 in Bergen and 2 in a small municipality outside Bergen) whereas two live in Rogaland (1 in Stavanger and 1 in a small municipality outside Stavanger).

I also interviewed two professionals on the field in order to get their view on the housing process. One of the professionals interviewed was Kaare-Andreas Krog, who is a senior advisor in IMDi and he has many years of experience in refugee housing process and working together with the municipalities. Kaare-Andreas Krog gave a lot of useful information on the housing process in general and he wished to have his full name on this thesis. The other professional interviewed is currently working in a municipality in refugee integration and s/he has inside knowledge on the selection process of how refugees are granted a municipality place. S/he wanted to keep his/her identity as a secret, which is why s/he will be called Expert Interviewee 1.

5.2. Data collection

5.2.1 *Participant recruitment*

The participant recruiting had a promising start. In November 2014 I contacted two professionals working in the field of immigrant housing and refugee settlement whose contact details were given to me by my supervisor. I also contacted some reception centres around Bergen. Upon my arrival to Norway in January 2015 I immediately contacted several non-governmental organisations and the Bergen municipality, asking for any possibility or advice to recruit participants. At first it looked promising. Initial response to my study was great, people were eager to help me finding interviewees. I also volunteered at a local community centre, serving as a sewing club leader and an English tutor, where also many people with a refugee background attended. Moreover, I participated in a weekly women's cooking group. In addition, I had two personal contacts who promised to help me finding contacts. After one week of my arrival in Bergen I had many contacts, which gave me the impression that getting the participants would be easier than I had earlier anticipated.

5.2.2 *Challenges in participant recruitment*

However, everything did not go as smoothly as I had first thought. I got two participants through my personal contacts. I also interviewed a person working in the community centre. After that I found it extremely hard to continue with the interviewing process.

When I started participating in the activities of the community centre (cooking and sewing) I did not mention my research at first. I thought this would be the perfect way to get to know the people first and in this way we could form trust before I bring up my study and interviews. van Liempt & Belger (2012) argue that trust is a crucial element in successful qualitative research, especially with vulnerable migrant groups since not trusting can be part of their coping strategy in the society at large. Also Knudsen (1995) argues that trust is not only important but also rather hard to achieve. Knudsen describes this as "trust on trial" meaning that refugees constantly negotiate if they should trust a

person or not. During my fieldwork I also realised how hard it is to achieve the trust of possible interviewees.

I was pretty sure some of the people I had weekly interactions with would accept my request for the interview, but I could not have been more wrong. On my initial request of two women who I had got fairly close with, I received an answer I was not expecting. Not only did they refuse to be interviewed but they also got visibly upset, saying that I was trying to use our friendship for my own benefit. I was a little surprised since I had only proposed the interview. Moreover, I thought that I had raised the question of participating in the study the most casual way possible: they asked me about my thesis, which is when I asked them for an interview. They were not completely wrong though: I had thought about interviewing them and thus, was expecting to benefit from our friendship (although this was not the only reason I was spending time with them). The trust between me and the women was clearly not there even though I thought it was. I had felt completely comfortable with the women and just *assumed* that the feeling was mutual. After that, my relationship with the women stayed more formal and I did not bring up the question of interviewing anymore.

Another refusal came from a girl who also attended the same cooking group. I got along with her very well: we shared interest in politics and every week ended up discussing different political topics. She first agreed to be interviewed but I could see how uncomfortable she felt. She said:

"I agree but only because I know how hard it is to write a thesis. But you know, we have just been interviewed so many times".

Her comment echoes directly Knudsen's (1995) argument that refugees have been interviewed so many times in a setting where the interviewer has held the power that they are left wary of any interview situation. In this particular case I felt like I had pressured her for the interview so few days later I had an email conversation with her and she told me she did not feel comfortable talking about her experience although she said she could provide me with general information about how refugees are housed in Norway. I respected that. After this, my relationship with this girl was formal and restricted to only small talk: we never talked about politics again the way we used to. These two occasions with the women and the girl really affected me and my enthusiasm in carrying on with the research for a while. I started to question the research and my motives. Who was I doing this for? For a short while, I was even thinking about changing the topic of the research to something I would not have to interview refugees. I felt that I was being intrusive and failing to gain the trust of people. I had already thought about the topic for a long time, I was enthusiastic about it, my thoughts were somewhat evolved around it and I did not want to quit, so I decided to stick with it. However, I became

more cautious and aware of the complexity of the dynamics between me as a researcher and the possible participants.

What these two occasions made me more aware was that I, also, have an ethnicity. Although their refusal to participate in the study might be a result of many things (for example something I had said or done, my personality or their general mistrust of researchers), I feel that me looking like a Northern European also played a part. I was someone who could not be trusted, someone who has not gone through the same process. I realised that even if I did not want to be the white Northern European when I was doing the research, it is just not possible to get rid of this status, even for a short period of time. I became more aware that people also make presumptions based on my appearance and that I cannot necessarily achieve trust no matter how good my intentions are, how many places I volunteer or how many immigrants I know. The trust was not there even though I had spent time with these three women and as far as I could tell, they had also enjoyed my company. On the other hand, the lack of trust might also be a result of the fact that I did not tell the women that I was doing a research when I first met them. Revealing the research later on might have come across as keeping information about myself and my motives hidden.

After these two rather strong refusals for my study, whenever I encountered a person I could possibly interview, I was scared to propose it or to talk about my research because I was afraid of being intrusive. I did not want people to think of me as another white person who wants to get information out of them. I had a hard time understanding that even though I did not *want* to be that person, ultimately, that is who I was. The topic of the research was hard to bring up especially because I always had to first find out if someone is a refugee before asking them for an interview. This, of course, is a very sensitive topic and asking if someone is a refugee is not the best conversation starter. So in the end I was puzzled by how to approach people: strictly formal and introducing my study or, alternatively, try to form some kind of relationship first and then ask. I started to apply the former because of what happened with the three women before, and also because it made me more relaxed after that. In this way I felt that at least people would know from the beginning about my research and maybe this would prevent them of feeling betrayed. I would first ask people if they wanted to participate and later go and ask again. I did not get any participants like this, which can be a result of various factors: me being too insensitive, people not trusting me or people just generally being disinterested in taking part of the study. Also, I found language being one hindrance in participant recruiting. Not many people I asked for an interview spoke English and I can only speak a little bit of Swedish. Thus, most of my conversations with people were very elementary and mixed between Norwegian, Swedish and English. Therefore, I came to the conclusion that when common language is

missing (and there is no one to translate), the quality of the interview will be extremely poor and it is better left undone. I just found it hard to find a convincing way to talk about my study and make people understand I was trying to get *their* voices heard.

5.2.3 As a young woman in the field

If my ethnicity played part in the research process, so did my gender. As a woman in the field I found the researcher- researched power relations being reversed at times. In number of occasions I felt that people were trying to take advantage of me because I was a woman. As Holliday (2007) suggests, the interviewees can also be involved in negotiating the research event, which might lead into culture making: negotiating the specific details over this particular relationship. This happened more than once during the research process. One time an older man who had agreed to an interview, came to the sewing club I was leading. He gave me seven pairs of his pants and said he can give me an interview if in return I fix the pants for him. He was very persistent declaring he cannot sew even though I told him I can show him how. On another occasion a young man wanted me to interview him in his apartment. When I suggested another location, he placed an ultimatum: the interview should take place in his apartment or not at all. He was a single man, which is why I was afraid that if I would go to his home he would get a wrong impression. I did not sew the pants of the older man and I was too afraid to go to the apartment of the single man, which is why I did not interview these people. Had I done so, I feel that I would have crossed some ethical boundaries. I did not want the people to feel that they *have to* take part in the study, which is why I also wanted to avoid any situation where the participant would feel that s/he is giving the interview in exchange of a favour.

The last encounter happened when a man who agreed to give an interview wanted to rearrange the meeting place. Instead of meeting at the community centre, he asked me if we can meet in a shopping mall instead. I agreed and went to the spot where we settled to meet in. To my surprise he was not waiting for me alone, he was with his wife and baby. I asked if we should go and sit down for the interview. The man told me he cannot do that and his wife looked at me and said “you have five minutes”. I asked some questions just out of a formality and left. I didn’t take this interview into consideration in my sample. Looking back, I could have maybe started to interview the man and during this interview I might have gained the trust of his wife. His wife never cut off the interview, I myself felt so uncomfortable that I asked only few questions and left. Maybe if I would have started the interview and engaged the wife in the process as well, she would have felt more comfortable with the situation and let me do the interview for more than five minutes. This did not even come to my mind

when I was at the shopping centre standing in the middle of a crowd of shoppers on a busy Saturday afternoon. As Holliday (2007) explains, not many people understand what a qualitative researcher is and what she does- the whole concept is unfamiliar, which I felt was the case with these people. I felt awkward and got the impression that the couple disliked me. But maybe this shopping mall was a better setting for them, maybe they felt like there was less pressure in the mall? In this way, they might have tried to make something that seemed very formal a little bit more casual. Whatever the reason was, I feel that it was a combination of me being a young woman and a researcher who cannot be trusted. Later I got a text message from the man saying "*I'm sorry, my wife googled you.*". Thus, I was not only considered a threat as a researcher but also as a possible seducer of a husband.

In the end, I managed to get 12 participants. I planned to use the snowball method, where participants would spread the word and ask their friends/ family to participate the study. Partly the snowball method worked: I got to interview a man who then asked his friend for an interview as well. In another occasion, I interviewed a person who asked two of his friends if they can be interviewed and these two people both asked one of their friends. Moreover, I also went to introduce my study in an introduction programme for high skilled refugees in Bergen and I got two interviewees from there. In the very end of my field work I also got two more people to interview who had heard of my study through a common friend, and who then expressed their willingness to participate.

5.3 Data analysis

The interview data was analysed within and across case analysis as identified by Ayres et al (2003). First all the interviews were read through several times and significant statements in each interview were identified and these statements were organised into various themes. This was done in order to get an idea of the individual's experience, what Sandelowski (1996) calls an essential part of qualitative analysis: the individual case must be understood before making a comparison. After this, the emerged themes were compared between the cases in order to identify differences across the participants' experiences and to present the data in more generalised form.

5.4 Ethics and data storing

Before the interviews all the participants gave consent to participate in the study and to be quoted. They were explained the purpose of the study and given a separate document containing information of the study and the contact details of the researcher and the researcher's supervisor. The interview data was kept in a secure location in locked folders on a computer and an external hard drive, which

only the researcher had access to. The participants were told they could withdraw from the study any time they wish to do so, even after the interviews were conducted.

All the participants were promised that their identity would be kept anonymous, which is why the names of the participants have been changed and specific details of their lives are not revealed when presenting the analysis.

5.5 Limitations of the study

It has to be noted that the study has some limitations. First of all, the sample of 12 interviewees should not be considered as a representation of the views of all the refugees in Norway. Moreover, more specific concentration on certain location (i.e. interviewing people living in a certain municipality or neighbourhood) might have made the study more focused. In that way, specificities connected to the place could have been taken into consideration in the analysis. However, this was proven impossible because getting interviewees was challenging in itself and focusing on a certain place would have limited the participants to the inhabitants of that specific place (and thus, made the recruiting harder). Moreover, a rural/urban separation could have also narrowed down the research in a way that would have allowed more specific concentration on the qualities of a place people were settled in. On the other hand, the participants are from five different places and it was interesting to compare if there is any similarities in their stories when the settlement municipality is different.

In addition, language restriction needs to be taken into consideration. One of the interviews was translated and two were carried over phone. The two phone interviewees ended up being completely different from each other: the other one stayed very short whereas in the other interview I felt that the person opened up to me about her experience *because* the interview was not conducted face-to-face. This interviewee told me about her private life and feelings in very detailed manner, which did not happen with any other interviewee. Other interviews were conducted face-to-face in English. In two interviews there was quite a big language barrier and at times the interviewees did not understand my questions. However, I do not think that this completely dismantled the data for the whole interview because these interviewees were still able to have a normal conversation in English.

An aspect that should also be reflected upon is my own perceptions as a researcher. As Holliday (2007) suggests, a researcher needs to realise that the gathered data is *always* different than the social reality it is taken out of. Thus, no truth can be told through a single piece of research but only the researcher's interpretation of the data that she has gathered. Like every other researcher, I also have my own perceptions of how society is experienced by others and my own ideas how things should be done. In

other words, I have my own value set of what is just and what is not. Taking this into account, my own perceptions might have shaped the research either during the analysis or the interview process (for example, while posing the questions during the interviews). However, I was trying to be aware of this when I conducted the interviews and analysed the data and in this way minimising the bias. However, some researchers argue that especially research in sociology always has a bias: researcher is part of the research and thus affects the results of the study (Bryman, 2012).

6. Analysis of the interviews

This section provides the empirical part of the study by presenting an analysis of the 12 interviews of refugees living in Norway. In connection to the research questions (as presented in chapter 1.4), the interviewees were asked to describe their housing process in Norway and their narratives were followed by more specific questions about their experience (for a complete interview guide, see the Annex).

The interviews were analysed in the framework of belonging. Since belonging is a personal experience and essentially, a feeling, it was somewhat complex to find out the connection between the theories of belonging and participants experiences. More importantly, since I was researching the housing process, I had to identify the connection between the sense of belonging and participants' experience of the housing process and neighbourhood. Within the narratives of the interviewees I was trying to identify any aspects in connection to the theories of belonging. What I found the most useful theories to explain the interview data was Fenster's (2005) notion of decision making in connection to belonging, Gullestad's (2002) idea of Norwegian society granting or rejecting one's belonging and Lambert et al.'s (2013) explanation of belonging being constructed mainly from close connection with people and feeling of fitting in (being accepted). Also the notion of 'trust' was identified as an important factor during the housing process for which Raghallaigh (2014) offers a good explanation for. It should be noted that the analysis of the interviews is my interpretation of the participants experiences and essentially, about their belonging/not belonging. Therefore, it should not be considered as a direct representation of how the participants felt but rather, my analysis on their feelings and experiences in connection to the theories of belonging.

In the beginning of each section a small compilation of all the interviews is presented for the reader to get the overall picture of the participants' general answers. After that, a more in depth analysis of participants' thoughts and experiences is provided, connecting the interview data to the housing policy of refugees and its implication on refugees' belonging.

The first part of the analysis is concentrating on the housing process of the participants in Norway: initial arrival, waiting time in the reception centre, finding apartment through private contracts and participants' ideas of location (and its importance to their lives). "Part 1" is thus discussing the participants' experiences of the implementation of the policy. "Part 2" of the analysis continues to discuss the interviewees' experiences after they were housed and especially their social relationships in- and outside of their neighbourhood. This part of the analysis is aiming to question the

government's legitimisation for the housing policy, which partly lies on the idea that ethnically mixed neighbourhoods would generate more interaction between host population and refugees.

6.1. Part 1: The housing process

6.1.1 Waiting in the reception centre

For every respondent their initial arrival and housing process in Norway was different. Half of the participants (6)¹⁰ were picked up from the airport and housed straight on the arrival. However, the other half (6) of the respondents had to wait for a suitable house in a reception centre. Out of these six people, three had arrived to Norway as asylum seekers (in which case they were already living in a reception centre when their housing process started) and three through United Nations' resettlement quota (in which case they were taken from the airport to the reception centre). The housing process was very different for the ones who got housed straight away from the ones who had to wait in the reception centre: the ones who had to wait experienced uncertainty about where they would live and when they would be housed in the first place. This section is highlighting the main points participants brought up about their experience concerning the process of housing while waiting in the reception centres and thus, is only concentrating on interviewees with six of the participants who had to wait in the reception centre. The most prominent aspect the interviewees brought up was the communication with the reception centre staff that the participants found dysfunctional at times. The participants felt that they were not being listened to or that information given to them about the housing process was only partial.

6.1.1.1 Experience of quota refugees

Three interviewees who had arrived with the United Nation's quota, had to wait for a house in the reception centre. Out of these three, one person (Amalia, a woman from Liberia) said she did not mind waiting in the centre because she knew it was temporary. However, Nelson and David, brothers from Liberia, said that having to wait for a house really bothered them because they did not know this before they arrived to Norway (they thought they would be taken straight to a house). David and Nelson's story is somewhat unique: even though they were quota refugees, they had to wait in the reception centre for almost four months and when they arrived they did not have assigned municipality. This is normally not the case with refugees who arrive with the United Nations resettlement programme (IMDi, 2015). The brothers told me that it took a while until they were

¹⁰ Number in brackets indicates the number of participants.

housed because it was summertime and most of the staff was on their summer vacation, which delayed the process.

When David and Nelson arrived in Norway, they were picked up from the airport and taken to a reception centre without further explanation how long they have to wait for a permanent place to live. Moreover, they felt that there was no one to ask how the housing process works or proceeds. Although both of them described the workers in the reception centre as “good” and “friendly”, David also brings up the confusion due to lack of information:

“First we were taken from airport. And this person [reception centre worker] also told us what was gonna happen and we were gonna be taken to that place [reception centre]. The first day I didn’t like it actually, I wanted to go back...so that we got to know later that we had to wait. We didn’t know how it goes about. Today I know how things work out. Example, you have to go, they have to decide, it takes time. It only never happens in one day you know. So it was very slow out. To wait.” - David

When I asked if there was someone who they could have asked about the housing process David replied with irritation in his voice:

“We didn’t know who to ask...there is no way of asking, we just had to wait.”- David

An aspect that is clear from David’s statement is that he was mostly irritated for the fact the he did not know how the housing process proceeds. It seems that he was uncertain what is going to happen next: where they will be placed and when. He said that the only thing he could do was to wait. Similar statements were given by his brother Nelson who said the staff in the reception centre did not cooperate with them when they were trying to explain they wanted to find a flat for themselves:

“yeah the people [staff in the reception centre]...generally they were ok but I don’t think they were giving enough information we needed because sometimes for example... we tried to tell them that ok...we are not used to this...we want to find another place or something like that. It was like 'oh you guys have to be here it's like those who don't have a particular place yet have to be here' and stuff like that. While some others who were there they had to push themselves out to move forward. So it was like yeah.” –Nelson

With “some others” Nelson meant other people who stayed in the reception centre. Nelson told me they saw how some people were putting in more effort in pressuring the workers to find a house for

them and how they were trying to be more aware of the housing process by doing their own research and asking other migrants. Nelson said that this is what him and David started to do as well and the pressure they placed on the workers got them in the end to a municipality they wished. On the other hand, the fact that the brothers managed to change the assigned municipality is a sign of flexibility in the implementation of the policy. To me it indicates that in the end, David and Nelson's wishes were heard by the reception centre workers. It should be noted though that in the narratives of David and Nelson, they did not mention flexibility: they only pointed out they felt information was kept from them.

6.1.1.2 Experience of asylum seekers

Three of the participants, Nahom, Sayid and Osman, arrived to Norway as asylum seekers. Thus, they first had to wait for their asylum applications to be approved and only after that they were eligible to start the housing process through IMDi. All of their asylum claims were decided within 100 days. For all the three, the housing process was very different. Osman, a 23-year old Eritrean man found a flat through his social contact and got a municipality in Bergen rather quickly. He says his experience on the housing process was positive: he only waited for the house a little over a month.

However, this was not the case for another Eritrean man, Nahom. Nahom came to Norway three years ago and he is currently living in Bergen. He was first placed in the reception centre in a small town around two hour drive from Bergen and later he was transferred to another reception centre in a small village just outside Bergen. Out of all the interviewees, Nahom had the longest waiting time for a house: almost two years after his asylum application was approved. He said the waiting period was extremely hard for him because he could not properly start his life while he was living in the reception centre. Nahom stressed that during the process of asylum application the officials (police and other government workers) in Norway treated him with respect and his arrival and progress of the application was beyond his expectations. He also said that the people working in the reception centre were giving a lot of information on the housing process through IMDi. However, Nahom told that the staff mentioned nothing about the fact that one could also arrange an apartment through a private contract and in this way, get a permanent municipality place¹¹. He said he found out about the private

¹¹ The ones who have not yet been assigned a municipality, can also find a municipality through a private contract. This means that as long as the refugee finds a place to stay for himself, he can also participate in the introduction programme in that municipality. However, the municipality has to agree on this and only a small percentage of the municipalities accept refugees through private contracts at the moment. Kaare Andreas Krog from IMDi says it is impossible to know the exact number of the municipalities that accepts refugees with private contracts because the number changes constantly. Bergen is one of these municipalities (IMDi, 2015).

way from his friends he had met during his first months in Norway. He expressed disappointment with the staff members' attitudes towards searching a flat outside the housing process through IMDi:

"...clearly there's is a problem for the new comers... especially for the refugees[...]. I don't know [if] the person who has the responsibility to assign us or to some has contact with IMDi, he was not happy if someone gets private house or something like that. He doesn't encourage persons to get a private house...to get a private house and to be...to get a municipality in another place. So he was not encouraging us to do that. We just had to wait. I don't know what benefit he has, I don't know but he likes the person to wait and sit until themselves are assigned him to whatever place they needed. So it was not easy. It was difficult for us. But if someone gets private contract with any kommune [municipality], he doesn't have a power to say 'no' but he tries to hinder the process." -

Nahom

Although Nahom explained that the staff in the reception centre tried to hinder the process of finding an apartment on their own, he did not describe what way this happened. However, Nahom had the feeling that he could not completely rely on the staff for assistance. The thing that is clearly obvious from Nahom's statement is the lack of trust between him and the reception centre staff. He feels that they were not doing their best to help him and that they were opposing him getting the apartment on his own. This can be noted by him thinking that the worker *benefits* from him waiting and that he would *like* people to wait. Also, when Nahom was talking about this, judging from his body language and tone of voice, I could sense he was upset: waiting almost for two years to be housed was not easy for him.

Also Sayid, a man who came to Norway as an asylum seeker from Syria, had a similar experience with the municipality staff. The reception centre in which he was placed was in a small municipality in the north of Norway and he describes his arrival to the reception centre with a sarcastic tone in his voice:

"the 'great assistance' was, when we reached the camp in the north there was a meeting with the guy working there. He was very 'helpful'. He told us you will stay here for one and a half year and if you are lucky you will get a kommune [municipality] just nearby. Unfortunately there are no work places in this small town. And the nearest big city is Tromsø, which is four hours from here. And by the way there is an airport you can use. The ticket to Oslo is 1000 NOK. And now it's summer ferie [summer holiday] so in September we will have a meeting when I will tell you how you can make this thing faster."

So he was very 'helpful' by that meeting. It just meant to me; look and search for any other way to get out of that place. Yeah. And I asked friends and I read some information and I found out that there is another option, which is private contract.” – Sayid

Sayid also expresses his frustration in waiting and describes the time in the reception centre as the most horrible time of his life. When he was talking about his arrival and stay in the reception centre, he was tense and I could sense frustration in him. He was clearly annoyed with the ‘welcome speech’ by the reception centre staff (as described in the quote above). From his statement I can note that he was eager to get the housing process started and waiting over the summer for the information how to get a municipality place faster was not an option for him. Thus, he felt indifferent about the assistance: he believed he could do it faster himself. Moreover, I sensed that Sayid wanted to clarify that even though he did not feel that he got a lot of assistance from the reception centre, he was capable to deal with the situation on his own.

6.1.1.3 Compilation of the interviewees’ comments

Osman and Sayid succeeded in getting a house very quickly (as further explained in next chapter) but Amalia, Nahom, Nelson and David had to wait to be housed through IMDi. Osman and Amalia told me they found their housing process smooth and their time in the reception centre pleasant. This was not the case for the rest of the participants, however. What is evident from David, Nelson, Nahom and Sayid’s statements is the fact that they did not think that the staff was doing their best in assisting them. They all felt that the staff is keeping information from them, which is slowing down their process to get permanently housed. David, Nelson and Sayid were placed in the reception centre during summer when many people working at the centres were on holiday, which (according to the interviewees) slowed down the housing process. All four men said there was no one to ask about how the housing process proceeds: they were just asked to wait. These findings are similar to the IMDi (2009) report, in which refugees expressed that they were not given enough information on the housing process and they felt their opinions were not heard.

6.1.1.4 Connection to trust

What I understood from the statements from the four men (Sayid, Nahom, David and Nelson) was that since they felt that the municipality workers were not doing everything that was in their power to make the housing process quicker for them, the interviewees started to be suspicious of the reception centre workers’ motives and thus, started trusting their contacts with other migrants more. The interview data can be directly connected to Knudsen’s (1995) argument who states that during

the refugees' journey, the trust is constantly contested with every new people they meet, especially with government officials. This contested trust was evident on the interviewees' statements. Trusting relationship between a service provider (like in this case the reception centre workers) and refugees is hard to form: there is a power imbalance from the start that the refugees feel sceptical of. As Robert Wuthnow (in Raghallaigh, 2014) points out: assumptions and expectations related to certain relationship affect greatly if trust is formed or not. In other words, the interviewees expected that the reception centre workers should assist them in their housing process with their best ability and after judging the situation they got into the conclusion that this expectation was not fulfilled, which also prevented trust from forming. Raghallaigh (2014) also points out that previous experiences with the government officials may affect the perception refugees have in general, which might have also been a cause for the lack of trust of the interviewees (although this was not specified by any of the interviewees).

6.1.1.5 Migrant networks as source of information

Despite the fact that the reception centre workers gave out only partial information to the refugees (or at least that is what the refugees felt), five out of six of the participants who had to wait in the reception centre found out about the opportunity of private contracts through their personal contacts and started to look for a house¹². All of the men got information through their friends who they had met during their time in Norway. Osman found an apartment through his personal co-ethnic contact and especially Nahom and Sayid emphasise that they got a lot of information from other refugees. For Nahom, the Eritrean community in the town he stayed in the reception centre and Bergen was useful whereas Sayid communicated with people he had met in the centre where he was waiting for his asylum claim. This is a good example of how the migrants get information from each other and how they also might trust the information they get from each other more than from the municipality workers. It is natural to ask for advice from people who are in the same situation or who have gone through the process themselves but from the interviews I got the feeling that the immigrant networks were the primary source of information due to the lack of information given by the reception centre staff (or the lack of trust between the refugees and the reception centre staff). This is especially interesting in the case of Nahom who was waiting for a house almost for two years and who said that the most valuable information he got regarding the housing was from the Eritrean community he had got to know (and not for example, the municipality workers). Also Sayid said that after his housing process (elaborated more in next chapter) he told his story to many other refugees so they would not

¹² The only one who did not find out about the possibility of private contracts was Amalia, who said she did not mind waiting in the reception centre.

have to stay and wait long in the reception centres, which indicates that he was eager to spread the information he now knows about the housing process forward to other refugees.

6.1.1.6 Connection to belonging

Two aspects were identified in hampering the belonging of the interviewees during their waiting period in the reception centre: lack of trust with the reception centre workers and waiting time in the reception centre. For example for Nahom, his process of belonging to Norway was prolonged because of the long waiting time in the reception centre. As Nahom himself put it, it was “...hard to start *living*” in the reception centre. What I understand with this, is that Nahom really wanted a place where he could settle down: a place to call home. The reception centre as a place does not symbolize stability: it is a place where many people are in a difficult situation- some waiting to be housed and some waiting for their asylum application to be approved. Nahom, Osman, Sayid, Nelson and David all said that being in the reception centre was an extremely unpleasant experience. David and Sayid even described it the most horrible time of their lives¹³. Thus, it can be noted that for none of the respondents who had to wait in the reception centre was the beginning of their time in Norway particularly pleasant. Moreover, for four of the participants the time they waited was also shadowed with uncertainty (of what is going to happen and when) and mistrust (towards the workers in the centre). Thus, these four people lacked a secure relationships needed for belonging with the municipality workers as described by Lambert et al. (2013). However, for example Sayid and Nahom already started to form their social groups during their time in the reception centre. Nahom (who is from Eritrea) connected with the Eritrean community and Sayid with other refugees from a variety of backgrounds. For Nahom, the Eritrean community became extremely important during his time in the reception centre: he said he got the most information from people in the community and formed friendships. He explained his relationship with the other Eritreans was his ‘anchor’ to the society. As Samson (2013) argues: one’s belonging does not require an actual physical place- belonging can be developed towards a group of people as well. It can be argued that Nahom and Sayid started to form their belonging to the society through their immigrant networks already during their time in the reception centre. David and Nelson point out that during their time in the reception centre, they did not connect with many others from outside the centre they were staying at. However, they came to Norway together with one more of their brothers and thus, already had a safety net of a family to support each other. As a conclusion, the time spent in the reception centre affected the participants

¹³ It should be kept in mind that the interview conversations were related to the refugees’ lives in Norway. This is why by describing something as “most horrible time of their lives”, participants might only refer to their life in Norway and not their pre-migration life (this was not specified during the interviewing process).

belonging in a way that it brought uncertainty in their lives when they did not know what is going to happen next. Moreover, negative effects could be noted from the relationship between reception centre workers and refugees: the trust was not always there, which created friction in the relationship. Nonetheless, the time in the reception centre did not seem to hamper the formation of social contacts of the refugees, which they formed with their co-ethnic groups and other people with migration background.

6.1.1.7 Professionals' comments on the waiting time in reception centre

As pointed out in chapter 1, the waiting time for housing was identified as a problem in the housing process of refugees. Among the interviewees for this thesis, the waiting time was especially prevalent in the case of Nahom, who had to wait for a house for two years. In connection to the waiting time in the municipality, Kaare Andreas Krog from IMDi says that everyone should be housed within six months but unfortunately this is many times not the case. Krog says that some refugees have to wait even three years for a municipality and that especially single people are hard to house because of the shortage of single apartments (IMDi, 2015). Expert Interviewee 1, a professional who I interviewed for this study, shared an interesting piece of information relating to the housing process. Working in a municipality within refugee integration, this interviewee said that the municipalities can see the profile (age, gender, nationality) of the refugees and select people who they think are suitable for that particular municipality. The Expert Interviewee 1 said that this gives the municipalities freedom to choose for example families or certain nationalities if they prefer to do so and further argues that this prolongs the housing process for ethnic groups which have received negative attention in the media (like the Somali men). The Expert Interviewee 1 told me that he has seen this selection process (based on nationality and age) taking place in the municipality where s/he works in. For example, the municipality s/he works in, does not accept men from certain country at the moment because of the high number of young men the municipality has from this particular country already. However, Kaare-Andreas Krog from IMDi did not confirm the argument of the selection process (as described by Expert Interviewee 1) but he did point out that IMDi is trying to place certain amount of people from same ethnic groups in municipalities so that the refugees would not be denied possibility for co-ethnic ties. If the selection process as described by Expert Interviewee 1 takes place, it can be argued that it might lead into a discriminatory behaviour from the municipalities in terms of selecting the people they consider having the "most attractive" qualities and in this way extend waiting period for some people. However, no more information on this selection process was found than the statement from the Expert Interviewee 1.

6.1.2 Refugees and private housing contracts

Some of the participants were trying to make the housing process faster by trying to find a house for themselves outside the process with IMDi. As described earlier in chapter 1.2, one of the ways for a refugee to get a municipality place is to find an apartment on his/her own. This is only possible when one has not yet been assigned a municipality by IMDi. Thus, normally only people who have arrived as asylum seekers to Norway can utilise this path since the quota refugees have already been assigned to a municipality on their arrival. Moreover, it is only possible when the municipality agrees to this and currently only few municipalities accept refugees through private contracts.

Kaare-Andreas Krog from IMDi says that the private contract is an alternative way for the refugees to try and get a municipality place faster. Although he recognises that it is hard for refugees to find a flat on their own, he points out that sometimes people find apartments through their social contacts (like Osman and Sayid). Moreover, Krog states that within the past few years he has witnessed increasing amount of people finding apartment through their networks. He says that through these networks it is easier to find an apartment because the people who have been in the situation themselves (waiting for the house in a reception centre) are many times eager to help others finding an accommodation (IMDi, 2015). However, many refugees are left outside of the option of private contract. First of all, if one does not speak Norwegian or English, it is impossible to even try to get a private accommodation on your own. As Krog says, almost all the refugees get still housed through IMDi and only a small percentage finds a place through a private contract (*ibid*).

Even though private contract is an opportunity for the refugees to speed up the process of housing, it is not easy to find a place on their own. Three of the respondents arrived to Norway as asylum seekers and all of them looked for a house on their own around Bergen (two of them managed to find one). Also David and Nelson, brothers who came as quota refugees, tried to look for a flat for themselves but they were not able to find one and thus, were housed by IMDi¹⁴.

One of the interviewees who managed to find a place on private contract was Osman, a 23- year old man from Eritrea. He found a flat for himself through a personal co-ethnic contact he had and he is still living in the same apartment. Osman told me that his flat is in a good condition and he has had no problems with it. He said that before he got the apartment through his network, he was trying to look

¹⁴ In David & Nelson's case looking for a place on their own was possible even though they were quota refugees because they did not yet have assigned municipality. Why they did not have a municipality assigned on their arrival is still not clear for David and Nelson.

for a flat without anyone's help and points out it was hard trying to convince the landlords he was the right tenant, especially because they preferred people who are fluent in Norwegian.

Another participant who managed to find a flat through private contract is Sayid, a Syrian man in his 30's who, at the time of the interview, had been in Norway for a year. He explains that when he arrived to the reception centre in the north of Norway, he felt like he had to get out of there; he could not imagine living in the place where the reception centre was. After finding out that it is also possible to get housed through a private contract, he started to contact many municipalities asking if he can have a place there. Many refused but Bergen municipality replied that he could move to Bergen as long as he would find his accommodation himself. Sayid started to search for an apartment and he found a room in Bergen in 15 days. Sayid told me that everyone he communicated with (Bergen municipality, IMDi and the reception centre workers) was surprised by how quickly he found a place to stay. He found the apartment through an acquaintance for whom he paid 5000 NOK commission (excluding the rent and deposit of the flat). But the joy of finding a place turned out to be a nightmare for Sayid. When he arrived to the house, he found out it was full of insects and unbearable to live in. He did not even unpack his belongings during his time there. Sayid faced a dilemma: he had already received a municipality place from Bergen and moved out of the reception centre. Thus, he had to stay in Bergen (or otherwise he would lose the benefits from the government)¹⁵. However, he could not stay in the apartment. Consequently, he had to find a new place on his own. He moved out of the apartment after one week and stayed on his friend's couch, trying to look for another place but found it extremely difficult. Sayid said that he felt no one wanted to rent for a refugee and the house owners always required fluent Norwegian from their tenants.

At one point, Sayid wrote to a house owner that he is a dentist (which is his profession) who is looking for a flat. When he arrived to the house viewing, he was welcomed with suspicious questions by the landlord:

"When I went there he [the landlord] looked at me and he said: 'are you sure you are a dentist?' and I said: 'yeah I'm sure'. [he said]: 'aaa, do you have your degrees with you?'. So I [said]: 'I can't take my degrees everywhere I go'. Anyway, I didn't like the apartment but I showed them my dentistry ID from Syria. [he said]: 'hmmm, do you have another

¹⁵ See chapter 1.2

ID?'. I said: 'well, I'm coming to see the apartment. I'm not coming to an investigation.' ”

-Sayid

The quote highlights the landlords mistrust on Sayid and the fact that it was important for him that Sayid is a dentist. Perhaps his profession was important for the landlord and he wanted to check that he was not lying. However, one can wonder why he questioned his profession only when he saw him face-to-face. Would he have asked Sayid to prove his profession had he been Norwegian? Sayid did not get this apartment and he continued searching. In the end, Sayid found an apartment with an approach he said was his last chance. He wrote an email to many landlords with a title “do you rent for immigrants?”. In this email he was telling his whole story how he got to Norway from Syria and why he had come in the first place. He said he got an invitation for an apartment viewing and the landlord accepted him as a tenant. He is still living in the same place.

Also Nahom tried to get a flat on his own and said he had many difficulties during the process. He said all the landlords required skills in Norwegian, which he found weird since all of the landlords he communicated with spoke English. The reason for the requirement of fluent Norwegian by the landlords was that in case someone needs to notify the people living in the apartments (about construction of the house or other general things regarding maintenance), Nahom would not understand the messages because his Norwegian is poor. He said he travelled several times two hours one way (from the municipality where he was staying in the reception centre) to Bergen for the house viewings. Nahom said that every time before he came to view the house he spoke with the landlords on the phone. During these phone conversations communicating in English was not a problem: it was only when they saw him in the house viewing when they told him about the language requirements. Nahom describes the process as follows:

“I was in Norway so language means they don't say 'so are you from Norway or not?' just they want to rent their houses to the Norwegians first, I think. Because they ask language. Every person who comes from outside is not perfect, doesn't know Norwegian language so it was very difficult to get the house. To come [...] to see the house how it looks like or if it's...we don't have any choice whether it looks... whether it is small or it is not comfortable or something like that. But what you need is to get kommune [municipality] in Bergen. I came many times to Bergen to see how the house looks. Actually whether it looks small or if it is not comfortable. Whether or not I'm comfortable I don't have a choice. Just I need to get kommune [municipality] in Bergen. But they don't give us priority. Priority [is], they say, language and so on. We were not perfect in the language so I totally,

I was wasting my money to come here [Bergen] and so on so it was difficult for me. I chose to wait for the house from IMDi.” - Nahom

What is obvious from Nahom’s statement is that even though he was looking for the apartment on his own and seemingly could choose the place to live, he did not feel that way. He repeated several times during the interview that he just wanted any apartment in order to get the municipality place in Bergen. As also put forward in the quote above, he highlights twice that he did not have a choice in choosing where to live. This was the case with Sayid’s story as well: he had to take whatever place was offered to him. Thus, even though one might think that searching for a house through private way offers more freedom, according to the interviewees’ stories it is a rather restricted process where the refugees do not have a lot of choice (if at all).

6.1.2.1 Compilation of Sayid and Nahom’s experiences

For both, Sayid and Nahom, searching for a place to live on their own was extremely challenging. According to Nahom and Sayid, the most difficult part was to communicate with the landlords and trying to convince them to rent them their apartment. All three, Osman, Sayid and Nahom were encountered a request that they found odd: to be fluent in Norwegian in order to qualify as a tenant. Although requiring Norwegian skills might be important for the landlords in order to be able to communicate with their tenants fluently, especially Sayid and Nahom felt that it was only a way to politely refuse renting the apartment to them. After all, both of the men were fluently communicating with the landlords in English. Moreover, what was more interesting for Nahom, was that he was told about the language requirements only in the apartment viewing, when the landlords met him in person. Both, Nahom and Sayid, seemed to face what appears to be clear discrimination on the private housing market. Andersen et al. (2013) points out that since there is a severe lack of rental apartments in Norway compared to the demand, it is easy for the landlords to discriminate migrants on the rental process. As pointed out by Kaare-Andreas Krog, option of private contract gives a chance for refugees to get housed, especially for the ones who already have social contacts in Norway (IMDi, 2015). However, taking into consideration the difficulties in finding an apartment due to discrimination, getting housed through a private contract does not seem like a very realistic option for most of the refugees. Sørholt (2001) found similar results on discrimination in her study on the housing market in Oslo. She argues that all of the three ethnic groups (Pakistani, Tamil and Somali) that were part of her study faced discrimination on the private rental market but the discrimination was the most obvious for the participants from Somalia: the landlords openly said they will not rent for foreigners. Similar discriminatory practices to the private housing market have also been identified in the Norwegian

labour market. For example, people are less likely to get hired if they have foreign sounding names (Midtbøen & Rogstad, 2012).

6.1.2.2 Connection to belonging

Nahom and Sayid's experiences on the private housing market can directly be connected with Gullestad's (2006) point of what is considered to be Norwegian and consequently, who is allowed to belong. As Gullestad (2006) and McIntosh (2015) point out, speaking Norwegian is an important factor in this but also, race plays a part in the equation. The fact that some of the requirements (like the language requirements for Nahom and in the case of Sayid, proving his profession) were placed only after the landlords met them is a rather clear indication that their visual appearance made the landlords wary of renting out the flats to them. Although the discrimination might have been completely unconscious by the landlords, Sayid and Nahom felt it and they did not feel like being measured as equal to white Norwegians. According to Lambert et al. (2013), one needs to feel fully accepted in order to feel like one belongs. Sayid and Nahom both said that looking for an apartment was stressful in itself but adding up the requirements for Norwegian language they felt it was near to impossible. I felt that the men were a little resentful about the housing process as well: it created a setting of 'us' vs. 'them' from the beginning of their settlement in Norway. The experience of discrimination thus affected their trust in the Norwegian society at large and resulted into what Raghallaigh (2014:5) calls "vicious cycle of mistrusting relationships". This cycle is formed when the refugees realise they are not trusted, which also makes them not to trust. As pointed out in the earlier chapter, Sayid and Nahom also expressed feelings of mistrust towards the reception centre workers. Hence, they started to mistrust the staff in the reception centre and the mistrust continued to other areas of the society after the landlords expressed their mistrust towards them. Skevik Grødem & Skog Hansen (*forthcoming*) also argue that since it is extremely hard to enter the private housing market (due to shortage of houses and discrimination) the housing process affects the refugees' ability to trust the society at large.

As expressed by the Sayid and Nahom, finding a flat on their own seemed nearly impossible. As indicated in the chapter before, both also said that they felt the municipality workers did not want them to search a place on their own. It might be that the difficulty of the process also leaves the reception centre workers wary of mentioning the private way (or promoting it as a liable option). During the house searching process on the private market the refugees are left completely on their own and thus, there are no mechanisms that could minimize discrimination on the rental process.

Thus, even though the private contracts can work for some who have private contacts (or who are lucky and persistent) it seems like a farfetched option for most of the refugees.

6.1.3 Participants' views on location and dispersal

Whereas the participants were found to have some restrictions on their choices when searching for a place to stay through the private contract, this is also the case while the refugees are housed through IMDi. It is important to remember that most of the refugees get housed through IMDi and not through private contracts. The dispersal policy in Norway gives the government the authority to decide the initial settlement municipality of refugees, although most of the times the refugees get to wish a municipality where they would like to be placed. This is why I wanted to ask the interviewees if it mattered to them where in Norway they would be placed in. All participants were asked if it mattered in which part of the country their initial settlement municipality was. By doing this I was trying to identify if the dispersal part of the policy mattered to the interviewees. The answers varied: most of the participants (8) said they did not find the exact location important, whereas the rest (4) said it matters a lot. Majority (8) of the interviewees got into the municipality they wished. Thus, not many participants had a personal experience living in a place where they did not want to live in. Interestingly, some of the participants who got into the municipality they wanted, emphasized the importance of the location in the initial settlement process, whereas some of the people who were placed into a municipality which was not their first choice, did not think of it as important.

Some (6) of the participants pointed out that their main goal was to come to Norway (or to Europe in general), which is why the location in Norway during the first two years did not matter: the most important thing was to be safe in Norway. Amalia, a 40-year old woman from Liberia, said she had been dreaming about coming to Europe for a long time and when she was accepted to the UN refugee quota for Norway while living in Sierra Leone as a refugee, she says she could not have been happier. She was eager to come to Europe and start her new life:

“no it wasn't matter to me [location in Norway]. to me it's like, ugh, I just want to... I just want to leave, I just want to come to Europe.”- Amalia

Nahom, a man from Eritrea, explains that for him, the most important thing was to live in peace, which is why the actual location in Norway did not matter that much:

“I came to Norway not to live in Bergen or in Oslo. Just I came to the place where I can live in peace. I know the value of peace. I came from Africa, I know the value of peace more than anyone else. Those who do not know peace, who lived in peace for all their life, they don't know what peace means.” –Nahom

Also Theingi, a 62-year old lady from Myanmar who has been in Norway for six years, says location in Norway did not matter to her. She was placed in Stavanger with her husband. She told me that before she and her husband arrived in Norway from Thailand (where they had been living in a refugee camp for two years), the officials who dealt with their settlement process in the camp promised them they will be placed in Bergen because they have relatives there (this was Theingi and her husband's wish). Upon their arrival, also another family from Myanmar came on the same day: one family was placed in Stavanger, other one in Bergen. Unfortunately they mixed up the families and Theingi and her husband were placed in Stavanger instead of Bergen. While telling the story she laughed and said:

“our family went to pick us up from the airport [in Bergen] but they found the other family instead. It was some kind of a mistake.” – Theingi

She further explained that she felt no need to make a complaint that they were placed in a wrong city or asked to be moved to Bergen like it was promised. For her, the most important thing was to be safe in Norway:

“we had no preference about the location or cities. We just want to, to get to Norway that's it. So we were happy.” – Theingi

However, I found contradictions in some of the participants' stories. Even though Theingi told me the location did not matter, later on in the interview she told me about her relatives who were placed in the north of Norway in a small village with no contact with other people from Myanmar and no Myanmar food available. She told me life was hard for her relatives due to lack of jobs and leisure activities and that she would not be happy living in a place like that. Also San, a 35-year old man from Myanmar, first said he did not care which part of Norway he was placed, but later on told me about some other people he knows who live in a small village in the northern part of Norway. He said he feels sorry for them for their life being so difficult because there is no other Myanmar people living nearby or Myanmar food available. He added that he was happy to be living in Bergen. In addition to Theingi and San, also the other participants from Myanmar said that living close to a supermarket where Myanmar food was available was important. They all pointed out that it is important for

them to be able to cook “food from home”¹⁶. Samson (2013) says that food can have a great importance in preserving one’s identity and thus, having an effect on belonging to a place.

Also Nahom, who said location did not matter at all, was actually trying to get a municipality in Bergen himself. He told me during the interview that he *really wanted to* live in Bergen because of the job opportunities and strong Eritrean community. In other words, he had a strong preference where to stay and in the end he got a municipality in Bergen where he is still living in. All of these three contradicting statements by Theingi, San and Nahom highlight the appreciation they have for a place they are living in now. Maybe they had not really thought about the question of choosing their location in Norway before, which is why their statements contradict. Moreover, they had not experienced how it is to be located in a place where they do not prefer to stay in, which is why they cannot draw on their own experiences and they can only *imagine* if living in a location that was not their first choice would matter to them.

The participants (8) who expressed that their initial settlement place would not matter, were placed in or within a short commute (maximum 30 minutes) from a city where they could use all the services they needed. Moreover, their overall experience with the services they had received from their municipalities had been positive (introduction programme, translation services and additional help from the municipality staff). On contrary, the ones (4) who said that there is an importance with the initial location, were all dissatisfied with the place they were put. All of them were initially placed into a small municipality far away from services they wanted to use.

Yu, 30-year old woman from Myanmar who came to Norway as a quota refugee together with her father in 2008, expressed disappointment with her initial settlement municipality. Yu and her father were placed in a small municipality two hour drive away from Stavanger. According to her, there were not many opportunities for her to develop herself but in addition, the village was far away from basic services. Yu told that her initial experience in Norway was sad and depressing and it was partly because of the municipality she was placed in. Yu’s feelings were combined with her dissatisfaction with services for refugees (namely, the introduction programme), which in her opinion was not taking her wishes to study into consideration. In the end, Yu decided to move away from the small municipality to Stavanger, even though that meant that she lost all her benefits from the government¹⁷. She describes her experience as follows:

¹⁶ All the five participants from Myanmar used the expression “food from home”.

¹⁷ As pointed earlier in, participation in the introduction programme is a prerequisite for government benefits. For more specific explanation see chapter 1.2

“So I was very sad. I don't accept it. But most of the people they don't move the kommune [municipality] or something. Because if you move from one kommune [municipality] to another kommune [municipality] and they [the government] don't help anymore. So I saved some money and I moved to Stavanger. At the time I didn't have money or they don't help. So I lived in the... I work in the sushi shop and I take some money and I applied to school there and I call the school and I apply the stipend [scholarship]. After I work in Amnesty International. And yeah, it's kind of like that. So I just find my way. They don't help.”- Yu

Yu's case is an extreme example of what can happen if a person is not satisfied with the settlement municipality and its services. For Yu, the main reason to move was her willingness to study, which she thought was impossible in the initial settlement municipality.

Also brothers David and Nelson were dissatisfied with their initial settlement place. On their arrival to Norway, David and Nelson were put into a reception centre waiting to be housed in a small municipality (one and half hour drive from Bergen). Both of the brothers said they were not happy with the location: they wanted to move to Bergen with more people and services around. Nelson pointed out that living in a small municipality was a very big change for the brothers because before they were living in a bigger city:

“Because it's like I was living in [a big city]. It's like...it's bigger than even Oslo. You know it's a big city. So it's not a lifestyle we used to live in and with the lifestyle or something all of a sudden carried to something very small. It's like you are going to live there but it's not like what you wanted. You know? You want a bigger place yeah. More contact or something.” –Nelson

Also David was very clear about wanting to live in a bigger city:

“We also wanted to come to Bergen. We said we wanna come to Bergen. Wanna go to university like I told you. Because I wanted to study here. Because it [initial municipality in Norway] was about an hour away from Bergen. Oh yeah, I would have not been happy [in the initial municipality in Norway]. And I wasn't afraid to say that. I didn't want to be where I was.” -David

In the end, after talking with the municipality and reception centre staff, David and Nelson got settled in Bergen instead of initial settlement municipality.

Sayid, a man from Syria, who came to Norway as an asylum seeker said he really wanted to decide himself where to live. He had a clear goal in mind: he wanted to continue his education, which is why he wanted to live in a place with a university. Sayid started to look for a municipality which accepts refugees with a private contract. He was put into a reception centre in the north of Norway and he said he could not imagine living in a place like that:

“I came from a big city from Syria. There are five million people living in that city, like the whole Norway. I can't live in a place where two hundred or three hundred people live in there. Which by the way I didn't see anybody of them. When I went to Rema 1000 [grocery store] I was the only one who was shopping there. I even asked the employees ‘where are the people?’ and they said ‘well it's summer, they are in Spain’. Well in winter it's minus 40, they must be home [inside their house]. How they meet? I don't know.” – Sayid

6.1.3.1 Compilation of the comments

All of the four participants (Yu, David, Nelson and Sayid) for whom location mattered a lot, said they wanted to live in a bigger city because they wished to study and develop themselves further. Moreover, Nelson and Sayid mentioned that living in a small place would have been difficult for them because they were *used to* living in a big city before. This is directly linked to Benson's (2014) argument of people feeling more home in a similar place where they used to live and are more prone to move into places that are similar where they have lived before. As Benson argues, this is especially the case when moving between rural and urban places: it might be hard for someone who has lived in the countryside all his life to identify himself with people in the city and vice versa (*ibid*). Also, as Knudsen (1995) points out, refugees have had a life before they migrated, which they bring with them in the new country of settlement and they tend to identify themselves more with the previous (pre-migration) self than as refugees. This is the case especially with the three men (David, Nelson and Sayid) who emphasized their lifestyle in bigger cities in the countries they used to live in. They told me they were not only used to living in bigger cities but they also had active social lives and Sayid and David had their own businesses, which kept them busy.

In Nelson's statement something interesting can be noted. He says that it is indeed possible to live in a small place but that is not what he *wants*. This, to me, tells that he values autonomy quite highly in his life and he knows himself and what he wants. Moreover, he adds that he wanted more contact than what the small place could offer. Longing for contact with other people can also be found in Sayid's statement, where he is wondering how people meet in a small village when it is cold in winter.

It seems that he was afraid that the same absence of people he experienced in the summer would continue to be permanent part of his life.

May (2011) argues that belonging is closely connected to our identity and how we see ourselves. The case of these four participants shows their claiming of belonging very clearly. They knew what they wanted and they were ready to get it. In the case of Yu, she even risked her economic stability in order to move into a bigger city. Also the other three were persistent in their wish to live in a bigger place. As David put it *“and I wasn’t afraid to say that. I didn’t want to be where I was”*. Moreover, all of the four interviewees who found the location important, valued their autonomy and were persistent in keeping the power over their own life decisions (deciding where to live). This is also connected to Fenster’s (2005) description of access to choice where to live in. In Fenster’s terms, by being able to choose where to live (Bergen/Stavanger), the interviewees also chose where to belong. In terms of location, Nelson and Sayid both emphasized social contacts, which are important for belonging according to Lambert et al. (2013). However, what seemed to be the most prominent with David, Nelson and Sayid’s statements was to be able to maintain life style that they were used to living. I felt that this reflected how the men viewed themselves and living in a bigger city was, in a way, part of their identity.

The participants’ answers can directly be connected to the dispersal aspect of the Norwegian refugee housing policy. The government of Norway also states that the refugees wishes where to stay should be taken into consideration when they are dispersed around the country (Government Bill 2000/1). More than that, the government also recognises that having full autonomy in deciding the initial settlement municipality would be the best solution for the refugees but this cannot be done due to the fear that certain municipalities would have too much pressure in facilitating services for refugees (Government Bill 2000/1). Whereas four out of all 12 participants found the location mattering a lot, additional three participants gave contradictory statements saying that location does not matter but still expressed requirements on place they would like to stay in (like having co-ethnics and certain services around). Hence, seven out of 12 participants expressed certain requirements on their initial settlement municipality and as pointed above, they felt pretty strongly about it. Taking this into consideration, it can be stated that for some refugees maintaining a certain lifestyle or having particular services around (like university) is extremely important and denying to choose the environment to live in can affect negatively to their belonging (like for example, in the case of Yu). However, for some people it did not seem to matter (although it should be kept in mind that the

interviewees' who said location does not matter were all placed in big municipalities or in municipalities rather close to big cities).

6.2 Part 2: Neighbourhood and social contacts

This part of the analysis is highlighting what happened to people after they were settled down in their assigned municipalities. How did people connect with their neighbours and how did they find social contacts in Norway in general?

As pointed out in chapter 1.3, one of the arguments the government of Norway gives for the dispersal is forming functional neighbourhoods. On the other hand, chapter 3 highlighted the debate on neighbourhood's effect on individual and their social contacts and Musterd (2003), Friedrichs et al. (2003) and Ostendorf et al. (2001) argue that the effect a neighbourhood has on person's social contacts and living standard in a country with a strong welfare state is extremely small. Thus, it was important to ask the participants how they experience their neighbourhood: do they connect with people within the neighbourhood and if so, how. Moreover, the participants were asked to elaborate on their social life in general and to describe how they have formed their social life in Norway. From the interviewees' description of their social life, the participants' belonging is evaluated with regards to the theory of Lambert et al. (2013) who claim that specific social contacts facilitate belonging. More specifically, Lambert et al. point out that the relationships that give ground to belonging are the ones that generate a "secure sense of fitting in" (Lambert et al., 2013:1). Thus, it is evaluated if participants found this type of relationships and if so, where they found them (in or outside neighbourhood). By doing this, the government's neighbourhood argument for dispersal is put under scrutiny.

6.2.1 Social contacts in the neighbourhood

Most (10) of the participants were living in a so called "mixed neighbourhood" with neighbours of Norwegian¹⁸ and immigrant backgrounds, whereas two of the interviewees had only Norwegian neighbours. Almost all of the participants (11) said that they feel safe and comfortable in their neighbourhood. Some (3) also said they can ask their neighbours for help whenever they need. This

¹⁸ In this case "Norwegian" was specified by the interviewees themselves, which is why the specification of what is meant by "Norwegian" remains unclear. However, during the interviews I got the impression that by Norwegian, the interviewees meant white, Norwegian speaking people born in Norway.

might have been the case with the other participants as well but they did not bring it up in the conversation.

Majority (9) of the participants described relationship with their neighbours being restricted to the general greetings: they had little or no contact with them. There were three participants who expressed having a certain level of regular interaction with their neighbours. One said he sees his neighbours when their children are visiting each other, another told me he had got acquainted with his neighbours because there are not that many other people around and they even have meals together sometimes. The third participant who said he has regular interaction with his neighbours, was Nahom, a man from Eritrea who came to Norway three years ago. He explained it was easy to get to know some of his neighbours because they are also from Eritrea. However, the interaction with his Norwegian neighbours has been limited:

“So even though I have Norwegian neighbours, we don't have contact that much. We meet in the downstairs just where we check our post or something like that. You say 'hi' and even though if you try to make the chatting a bit longer, just they give you short answer and 'hadet, hadet'. Okey, bye bye.” –Nahom

From Nahom's statement one can sense, on one hand, a description of the contact with his neighbours but on the other, willingness to engage with his neighbours more. Nahom says that he frequently meets up with his Eritrean neighbours and they have a close relationship: the Eritreans in his building have become friends with each other. On the other hand, the only casual interaction that Nahom describes with his Norwegian neighbours is greeting them in the hall way. During the interview Nahom said that he felt like the Norwegian neighbours did not *want to* interact with him. This can also be noted in the quote above as well where he says that he tries to make conversation longer when he meets them but the neighbours cut the conversation short. Thus, he sees himself as the initiator of the social contact and also the one who is being rejected. However, the reaction by the neighbours might be how they greet all of their neighbours and they might not have realised that Nahom wanted a deeper social contact with them. This is not the way that Nahom experienced it though: he said he believed the neighbours are sceptical of him. As pointed out before, Nahom felt that in the reception centre the staff did not have his interest as a priority and he became sceptical of the workers. Also during his search for an apartment he got rejected by the landlords several times. These experiences might have hampered his trust to other Norwegian people resulting into cycle of mistrusting relationships as described by Raghallaigh (2014). Hence, it might be that Nahom's neighbours do not want to get to know him or, it might be that due to his past experiences Nahom feels that Norwegians in general do not like him, which makes him wary. It might also be these two aspects combined. Also

other (10) participants expressed the difficulty to engage with their neighbours. Majority of the respondents said it was more difficult to interact with the Norwegian neighbours than with neighbours with immigrant background. However, the participants stressed that even though it is hard to get to know to the Norwegian neighbours, they have not experienced any hostility or explicit discrimination from them. All of the participants who expressed challenges to engage with their Norwegian neighbours, explained that it is part of the “Norwegian culture” or “Norwegian society” and the way people interact in public is more reserved than in their home countries. While most (6) felt indifferent about the lack of interaction with their Norwegian neighbours, others (4) felt bothered by it. Yu, a woman from Myanmar who has lived in Norway for seven years gave strong opinion about the lack of interaction with her neighbours (who are all Norwegian) and she compared the relations to her experiences with neighbours back in her home country:

“But in Norway it's different. In Burma or for example Africa they could go to this house to another house and this kinds of entertainment. But in Norway, house is... it's [weather] cold that's why house needs to be very very safe and even you shout inside the house no one cannot hear outside. So every day you cannot see after 6[pm] no one go outside. Mostly no one. It's they just stay home. So most of the people coming to be crazy, you know? It's just not normal. You know what I mean? Because even we have money, even we have food and even we have pizza we need that. That is too different. Too different.”
-Yu.

The statement reveals her longing for contact with her neighbours but it also shows how serious she sees the implications of the lack of social relations being. As already portrayed earlier, Yu’s arrival to Norway was not pleasant and she was placed in a small village in rural area of Norway together with her father where they did not have much contact with other people. Moreover, her father tried to take his life due to depression after they arrived in Norway (when they were living in their first house in the settlement municipality), which might be a factor for her strong feelings about the lack of communication in the neighbourhood and her statement of “most of the people coming to be crazy”. Yu’s statement clearly reveals her longing for more interaction. What comes out strong in Yu’s argument is her stressing of the contact as essential, something that we *need* as humans. She did mention that she has close friends (who are mostly people with migrant background and also other people from Myanmar) but they do not live in the same area. Thus, her statement is directly describing the lack of bonding in the neighbourhood. Yu’s description of the social bonds is very similar to

Lambert et al. (2013) who argue that in order to belong, one has to have meaningful social contacts that foster acceptance- these types of relationships are vital for human belonging.

Also Sayid found it harder to form relationships with his Norwegian neighbours. Like most (9) of the participants, Sayid, lives in a block of flats with Norwegians and people with migrant background. Sayid also described a time when he was determined to get to know to his Norwegian neighbours by offering them lamb meat as a gesture of friendship, hoping it would lead into social relationship of some form:

"Like once I had this some kind of meat of lamb, which I bought. And I had 2 kilos in the fridge. So I was going out of the apartment and I saw two people from the same building and I told them "do you eat some meat?" They say "yes". Ok you can take them. And I was like "yeah we can drink something" and they were "yeah". And I didn't see them after that."- Sayid

With this gesture, Sayid tried to establish a deeper relationship by suggesting a common get together, which might have been a new situation for the neighbours (and they did not know how to act). For example, Sayid waited for them to invite him for dinner and he was disappointed when this did not happen. Even though he said that in the end this did not bother him that much because he has a dynamic social life outside of his neighbourhood, I could sense from the way he told the story that he was somewhat upset that his neighbours accepted the meat but never communicated with him after that. Sayid also told me that in his building, it was easier to get to know to another person from abroad and described his relationship with a neighbour from Mexico:

"yeah I met a neighbour who was from Mexico and he was complaining that for two years he was living in that neighbourhood. He didn't know anybody. But like we are from outside Norway, we know each other. I think in Mexico and in the Middle East the same social life like you meet everybody, you can say hi without being crazy to everybody. Yeah."- Sayid

This statement reveals that Sayid had shared thoughts about the lack of interaction in his neighbourhood with his neighbour from Mexico. They found a common understanding on how to act among neighbours, which made them separate from the Norwegians. Even if Mexico and Syria are far from each other geographically and probably have differences in the way of everyday life, in Norway these two men (Syrian and Mexican) found common ground due to their immigrant background (more specifically, for not being Norwegian). This could be connected to Pinkster & Völker's (2009) argument that people tend to connect with people who are more similar to them and who they have more things in common with. However, even though Sayid said that he has other immigrants as his neighbours, he said that the Mexican neighbour is the only one he has got acquainted with. In the case of Sayid and

his Mexican neighbour, they were both men and around the same age and Sayid described him as “a cool guy”, which for me resembles that he liked the neighbour’s personality as well. In other words, they had much more in common than just being immigrants. Also Amalia, a woman from Liberia, said that she lives in a block of flats where her neighbours predominantly have migration background. However, she said that she does not talk to any of her neighbours: she said does not feel the need to and that their lives are just so different they do not have time for socialising with each other. Thus, it should be noted that relationships between refugees do not form naturally by living next to each other *just because* people are refugees.

Also Faiz, an Egyptian writer in his 30’s who came to Norway in 2012, told me that he has no contact with his neighbours (Norwegian or immigrants) and he prefers to have it that way. He described himself as an introvert and said it would be weird for him to just start talking to a neighbour. He further explained that he lives in a housing complex in Bergen that has a bad reputation because it is a social housing where many people have alcohol or drug problems. He still lives in the same house where IMDi placed him three years ago. Faiz says he enjoys living in his apartment because there are no strict rules for example about playing music in the middle of the night. He emphasized that even though the block flats he is living in have a bad reputation in Bergen, he has never had any problems living in there, nor has he felt unsafe. Faiz further noted that he is completely happy living in a place with a “bad reputation”. In fact, he said he prefers to live there because, as he puts it, “the neighbours are relaxed”. Faiz’s explanation reveals that desirable neighbourhood is not similar for everyone and people have different preferences in where they want to settle and who they interact with. Even though Faiz does not have social contact with his neighbours, he has found his social life elsewhere: he has got to know many people in Bergen through his personal interests and job as a writer. What the participants’ answers show to me is that the way the refugees connect with their neighbours is extremely diverse and highly dependent on the individual. Refugees, just like everybody else, have diverse personalities and different preferences. Some prefer to have a lot of connection with their neighbours whereas would find communicating with their neighbours awkward and out of their character. Some of the participants have formed a connection with their neighbours but this was because they have something in common such as children who play together or matching ages and personalities. However, as pointed out, many (10) of the participants said that they have difficulties in connecting with their Norwegian neighbours and some of the interviewees felt like the Norwegian neighbours did not want to communicate with them and this was the case especially with Yu, Nahom and Sayid.

6.2.2. Social contacts outside the neighbourhood

As pointed out above, most participants (9) have not established social relationships with their neighbours. However, all interviewees have formed social contacts within Norway. The participants have found their social circles in their jobs, hobbies or religious activities (like going to church or volunteering in a church). Most participants (11) said they have Norwegian friends as well as friends with immigrant background, whereas one participant said she has no contact with Norwegians.

David describes his social contacts as “rich” in Norway and says his opportunities are endless:

“There are many possibilities for me. I have a lot of network, a lot of contacts. It's up to me how I'm gonna use it. (laughs). There is a lot of things. I can even start a business, I can join the politics and do whatever I want to do now.” - David

David further goes on to explain that he plays football, volleyball, tennis and chess, and he is participating as a volunteer referee and organiser in various sport events. Similar answers were given by most of the participants. When asked about their social contacts, they told me all their hobbies and people they know. For example Amalia described her free time as follows:

*“My spare time normally [...] I go to this women group in the centre of Bergen. It's a women group, women empowerment group. Normally I go there and... I'm engaging other activities as well on the frivillig [volunteer] activities like we are having this African night now and normally I go to Red Cross to do this frivillig [volunteer] works and other places.”
-Amalia*

However, when I asked about the frequency of their interaction or when I asked about close friends, many would say their family (husband, wife and children) are their only really close relationships in Norway. For example, Sese, a man from Myanmar, explained that it is hard for him and his wife because they have a baby they have to take care of. In his words:

“Living is a bit difficult here, we don't have relative and yeah [we are] only two.” – Sese

Some participants did not know if their social contacts and relationships are close, which might also be connected to the lack of trust they have on the relationships they had created.

6.2.2.1 Ties with co-ethnics and people with migration background

Almost all (10) of the participants said it was easier to get to know to people with an immigration background, either people from their home country or people from other parts of the world who have migrated to Norway. One participant, Faiz, said he does not want to have anything to do with other Egyptians because according to him, they do not share same political views with him, which makes it hard for him to interact with them. Some participants (6) emphasized the importance of relationship with people from their home country. One of these people was Nahom, who said that he chose to move to Bergen because of the Eritrean community there. He believed it would be easier for him to get a job and find social life through the community. Nahom also said that he has relation with Ethiopians:

“I have networks especially with Eritrean. But also with little bit with Ethiopians although there is conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea, the conflict is in between the border of Ethiopia and Eritrea. Ethiopians are the most close persons to us: we have similar language.”- Nahom

The other five participants who emphasized that living close to co-ethnics was important were all from Myanmar and they all knew many people from their home country who were living around Norway. Theingi, a 62-year old Myanmarese lady says that younger people from Myanmar visit her often and they cook together. She said she has strong ties with the Myanmarese community:

“We [Theingi and her husband] have strong ties with the community [...] from Myanmar though I don't visit them but very often they visit me and they are coming and helping us out if we need. And yes of course I have very strong bonding with [...] own community.” - Theingi

All of these five participants from Myanmar also shared concerns about older people from their country who do not have people from Myanmar living close to them. For example, San, a man living a small municipality near Bergen, knows an elderly couple living in Tromsø. Even though this couple is not related to him, he still carries a concern about their wellbeing:

“what is important is to have people nearby also from same country and where they are living. At the same place. Now we have, nowadays ...came more Burmese people everywhere. But most of them they can't decide where they can live they just picked up and sent in a place. But earlier what I said to that the people who don't speak other language than ...for the communication for them...it's very difficult for them to live in. That couple I told you earlier they are the only one who living in Tromsø in North.

So it will be better that they place them to nearby same country people, people from same country.”- San

What is evident from San’s comment is his concern for this elderly couple he knows. In addition, he is giving his opinion on the housing process pointing out that people should be able to choose to live close to people from their country, especially when they do not speak English (which was the case for the couple living in Tromsø). I do not know if it was a coincidence that all of the Myanmarese I interviewed expressed these concerns or emphasized that living close to co-ethnics is important to them. It might be that just these five interviewees were keen to preserve their co-ethnic ties or it might be an indication that also many other Myanmarese keep in touch with each other within Norway. Be as it may, I do believe that it shows that if the ties within the immigrant group are strong, they manage to keep in contact even if they live far from each other (after all, the participants talked about connections with people all around Norway, from Kirkenes to Oslo). It should also be noted that most of these contacts among the Myanmarese were formed during their time in Norway so they were not relatives or close friends before arriving to Norway. All of the Myanmarese participants emphasized that it is important for them to have connection with someone who is from the same country. Moreover, for example Theingi said that she does not have Norwegian friends even though she lives next to Norwegians but she is connected to the Myanmarese people in Norway even with ones who live up in the North.

6.2.2.2 Data’s connection to the government’s neighbourhood argument

What can be noted from participants’ statements was that social relationships were more affected by their personal preferences and free time activities than by the neighbourhoods they were living in. There was also no one common behaviour pattern among the participants in connecting with neighbours or finding social contacts in Norway in general. The only similarity that was found was the Myanmarese respondents’ eagerness to have contact with their co-nationals. However, also Nahom expressed that living close to other Eritreans is important (although Osman, another Eritrean interviewee did not find this important). Thus, wanting to maintain contact with co-ethnics cannot be regarded as something common for the Myanmarese community in general. What was clear from all of the Myanmarese participants, was that these close relationships were formed also with the co-ethnics who lived very far away. When the interviewees were talking about “their community” (as they would call it), they talked about it with affection. I got the impression that the Myanmarese community really gave the people (at least the five interviewees) some kind of meaning and sense of unity within Norway, which is exactly the kind of relationship as Lambert et al. (2013) argue is needed

for belonging. Not all of the interviewees expressed having close relationships within Norway, although everyone said they have friends who they can interact with. The only participant who said upfront that she is lonely was Yu, who said that she lives with her husband in a small village, which is very quiet and she would like some more interaction with other people.

The data also echoes Pinkster & Völker's (2009) argument that people tend to make friends with people who are similar to them. According to the data, the people have to have more things in common than just migration background or same country of origin in order to form a relationship: personal interests are the biggest unifying factor. This is also one of the obvious reasons why neighbours do not communicate with each other: they do not necessarily have anything in common. In addition, connecting with neighbours also depends on individual's personality as argued by Vervoort et al. (2011). The fact that personality affects the way people interact with neighbours was also evident in the data. As stated earlier, quite extensive efforts were taken by one of the participants (Sayid) to get to know to his neighbours (like offering the lamb meat and suggesting a get together) but the level of interaction also depends. Sayid seemed like overall active and social person and for him, it was not unusual to try to communicate with his neighbours. This was not the case for all of the participants and some, like Faiz, described themselves as shy and introverted, which is why they also do not get in contact with their neighbours.

Taking into consideration the interview data, the government's argument for the dispersal of housing policy falls short. The reason for this is because behind the government argumentation partly lies an assumption that so called ethnically mixed neighbourhoods would generate more interaction between the immigrants and the host population, which according to my interview data does not take place. On the other hand, the participants also did not necessarily get in contact with their neighbours even if they had an immigrant background: according to the data, that is simply not strong enough reason for people to form relationships. Although many of the interviewees found it easier to communicate with their neighbours who were not Norwegian, this did not mean these relationships would develop into deep and meaningful relationships in the refugees' lives. In other words, the interview data is in line with the arguments presented earlier in this thesis, which state that neighbourhood has only a small (or irrelevant) effect on people's social contacts (Friedrichs et al. 2003; Musterd; 2003; Ostendorf et al. 2001). What was apparent in the data, however, was that the immigrants and so called "ethnic Norwegians" come together when they have a common interest, which can result into a friendship. On the other hand, the interview data did not show any proof that these relationships would necessarily develop into deeper relationships between Norwegians and immigrants.

In the government Integration Policy, it is stated that the government should facilitate meeting places where people from different backgrounds could meet and in this way, foster integration. It is not specified, however, where and what these meeting places should be, only that they ought to be organised through non-governmental and voluntary organisations (Ministry of Children, Equality & Social Inclusion, 2013). As pointed by Musterd (2003), concentrating on other measures to foster inclusion would be more beneficial for the interaction between host population and immigrants than just focusing on de-segregation measures of immigrant population. Musterd argues that de-segregation measures are reflection of anti-immigration sentiment where areas that have large migrant populations are seen destructive (*ibid*). As the interview data shows, the refugees do not necessarily communicate with each other even if they live as neighbours. Moreover, even if some of the participants emphasized co-ethnic ties, this was not the case with everyone. Thus, could it be that there is some truth behind Musterd's argument? Could it be that the dispersal policy would be, at least partly, based on the general fear of 'immigrant enclaves' as an idea?

7. Concluding remarks

The main goal for this thesis was to evaluate how the Norwegian housing policy for refugees affects refugees' belonging. As identified in chapter four, belonging is a person centred analytical approach and belonging to a society an individual process. The interview data shows that the refugee housing policy partly fails in facilitating refugees' belonging in Norway because it fails to recognise that refugees are a diverse group of people who have various wishes on their housing and living area. What the interview data highlights is the difference between the participants. Not every refugee is the same; refugees, like all other people are individuals with different wants and needs. This also goes for the housing and location in Norway as well as neighbourhood and social contacts. Although the government is adopting a so called steered housing for the refugees, where refugees' opinions should have an emphasis (Government Bill 2000/1), according to the interview data this does not always take place. Even though the participants' stories were all different, also five main findings were found within the data.

The data indicated that 1) the participants expressed that the housing process was at times dysfunctional; information given during waiting period in the reception centre was found partial, which hampered the relationship between the refugees and reception centre workers; 2) refugees were predisposed to discrimination on private housing market, which made finding a house on their own extremely difficult; 3) not being able to choose the initial settlement municipality affected some

of the participants belonging negatively, especially in cases where the participants were settled in a municipality which did not offer services that were considered important for the individual (such as being able to study in a university); 4) mixed neighbourhoods did not on their own facilitate any kind of relationships (between co-ethnics, among immigrant groups or between the refugees and Norwegians); 5) participants commonly found their social relationships outside their neighbourhood either in or outside their own national/ethnic group. These five main findings are further elaborated below.

1) Dysfunctional housing process and insufficient information

Most of the participants (4 out of 6) who were not housed straight on their arrival (namely, the ones who arrived as asylum seekers and the quota refugees who had to wait in the reception centre for a while) felt that the staff in the reception centres was not providing enough information on the housing process. More specifically, the refugees said that they felt the workers wanted to keep information from them and that they did not do their best to make the housing process easy for them. What was also found disturbing by the interviewees, was the uncertainty what will happen next: they did not know how the housing process was to proceed. The fact that the participants believed the reception centre workers are deliberately keeping information from them or keeping the housing process from moving forward, indicates a lack of trust between the refugees and the reception centre staff. The lack of trust (that was experienced by four out of six interviewees who had to wait in the reception centre) made the participants trust their immigrant networks more in terms of information on the housing process. It was not specified if this lack of trust was present only concerning the information given on the housing process or generally between the participants and reception centre staff.

In addition, some found the waiting in the reception centre to be too long, which is already identified as a problem in the refugees' housing process by IMDi (2015). Waiting period as long as two years (as was the case for one of the participants) can affect negatively on the belonging process of a person. As one of the participants explained: "... it was hard to start living [in the reception centre]". (Interview with Nahom).

2) Discrimination on private housing market

Although applying for housing through private contracts offers an alternative way for refugees to be housed, the data indicated clear discrimination of the participants on the private housing market. Landlords requiring fluent Norwegian and degree certificate only when they came face-to-face with the interviewees were clear signs of racism. Due to discrimination, participants found looking for the house on their own hard, if not impossible without any personal contacts. As one can imagine,

experiencing discrimination of any kind prolongs the inclusion and belonging into the society. As Raghallaigh (2014) points out, when refugees feel like they are not trusted (as in this case by the landlords) they are also more prone not to trust, which creates an unfortunate cycle of mistrust and suspicion. This was also found in the interview data: some of the interviewees were left bitter and wary of the society's acceptance of them after the discrimination on the housing process.

3) Importance of location of the settlement municipality

Participants also expressed their frustration in being placed in a municipality where they did not feel comfortable in. More specifically, if the interviewees felt like the municipality they were placed could not facilitate the lifestyle they wished to uphold (for example, living in a city instead of country side) or alternatively, if the municipality could not provide services they wished to use (such as opportunities for studying), they wished to move to another municipality. The participants who were most bothered by their initial settlement municipality were placed in small municipalities far away from services they wanted to use. Thus, it was obvious that the participants were mostly bothered by the prospect of being settled in rural and isolated places. This indicates that if a person is dispersed in a place where one does not feel comfortable in, it might have a possible negative effect on the belonging process: the place you live can really determine the possible ways to interact with the society (for example, in isolated rural places it might be hard to have a vibrant social life). As pointed out by Fenster (2005), by choosing where to live, one also chooses where to belong. It was also obvious that some of the interviewees wanted to choose a place similar to where they lived before arriving to Norway in order to preserve aspects of their pre-migration life. This could be identified as a way to preserve one's identity, which is also tightly connected to belonging as identified by May (2011). Part of the interviewees said location of their initial settlement municipality did not matter at all. However, it should be noted that all of these interviewees lived near services they wanted to use and in (or near) a big city.

4) Connection with neighbours

Interview data showed no connection to the assumption that neighbourhoods with "ethnic mix" would generate relationships between refugees and so called "ethnic Norwegians". In fact, most of the interviewees said they do not normally talk to their neighbours and that the interaction has not gone further than the general greetings. The ones who did have connection with their neighbours have formed this relationship because they have something else in common as well (like having children). In line with the argument by Pinkster & Völker (2009), the data indicated that the refugees did not form their social relationships with their neighbours, but rather at their work places and

hobbies. Borevi & Bengtsson (2014) argue that the government of Norway legitimise the restriction on individual autonomy by stating that dispersal creates “functional neighbourhoods” where people from different ethnic backgrounds are put together in the same municipality, which would create social relationships of some form. Although the government of Norway does not specifically use the term “functional neighbourhood”, it puts forward an argument that one of the advantages in dispersing refugees around Norway is that the Norwegians and refugees would live as neighbours (Government Bill 2000/01). In addition, the Bill states that dispersal ‘... will probably facilitate that refugees and Norwegians come into contact and get to know each other’ (Borevi & Bengtsson, 2014: 13). If one compares the government argument to the data gathered, it is easy to note that the particular argument of “functional neighbourhoods” was not verified.

Moreover, the government of Norway is also trying to make sure that when people are placed in a municipality, they would not be the only one from that national/ ethnic group (Borevi & Bengtsson, 2014; Government Bill 2000/01: 17). Thus, according to the government, a “right mix” of refugees from different places and “ethnic Norwegians” would form a neighbourhood that functions best. For some people living next to co-ethnics provides security but as pointed out in the interview data, for some living next to co-ethnics was not important. In fact, one participant was trying to avoid people from his own country due to his past experiences of discrimination in his homeland. Thus, the data shows that not every refugee wants to live close to the people from their own country or preserve the co-ethnic ties. Moreover, the connection with neighbours was also dependent on the participants’ personal characteristics: the ones who were social in general tried to have a connection with their neighbours whereas the ones who described themselves as shy and introverted found the idea of communicating with neighbours strange.

5) Participants’ social contacts in general

The social connections that the participants had, had mainly been formed outside the neighbourhood setting. Many participants had contact with Norwegians and they said they have Norwegian friends but they seemed to stay within the social setting where the relationships were formed in the first place (e.g. the work place or a church). Many expressed difficulty in making Norwegian friends mainly due to not being fluent in Norwegian language or because they felt it is hard to start a conversation with a person one does not know (according to many of the participants talking in public to strangers is more uncommon in Norway than in their home country). Only one participant said she has a very close relationship with a Norwegian (who is her husband). Two of the participants started to develop

their social connections while in the reception centre and they told me they are still in contact with some of the people they met there. Some of the interviewees emphasized co-ethnic ties and they had close connection with the people from their own country (aspect found especially within the Myanmarese participants). Interestingly, co-ethnic ties for the Myanmarese interviewees were developed regardless of their geographical location within Norway and relationships were formed even between long distances (some had connections in the north of Norway while living in Bergen). The participants had got to know the other Myanmarese living all around Norway through their friends, acquaintances or relatives. Thus, the interview data also shows that geographical location does not necessarily deny the formation of any relationships. This is completely contradictory with the assumption that lies behind one of the government's argument for the housing policy that assumes living next to a person would initiate a social relationship with him/her.

As a conclusion

According to the interview data, the housing policy partly fails to facilitate belonging of the refugees. This does not mean, however, that it would be dysfunctional as a policy at large (whether it would be found functional or not would, of course, be highly dependent on who evaluates the policy and how). The government has made the decision to give the municipalities great amount of power in terms of deciding whether they will house refugees or not, which works well, for the municipalities. The municipal authority means, however, that the autonomy of the refugees in terms of deciding the initial location in Norway is restricted. It is also stated in the Government Bill on housing of refugees (which compared also alternative ways to the housing scheme in Norway) that for the refugees, it would be better to choose where to live themselves but since this might strain some municipalities too much, it is better to restrict the autonomy of the refugees instead (Government Bill 2000/1). In other words, the government respects the autonomy of the municipalities more than the refugees' and believes that the services the municipalities provide are more important for the refugees than choosing where to live. However, it is unclear if the municipalities would be able to offer the extensive introduction programme even if refugees could choose where to live. If refugees could choose where to live, it might place more pressure on the bigger municipalities like Oslo, as argued by the government (Government Bill 2000/1) but it also seems that the government is implying it would be impossible to have individual autonomy over a settlement place and extensive introduction programme at the same time. However, no one can be sure if these two (introduction programme and refugees choosing their initial settlement place) could co-exist, since it has not been tried out.

What would facilitate the belonging more would be more flexible manner of implementing the housing policy. In other words, the refugees should be treated as individuals during the housing process. This is also emphasized in the Government bill for housing of refugees: individual wishes, especially about the settlement municipality should have a great emphasis (Government Bill 2000/1). Just like anyone else, refugees are individuals with different wants, needs and wishes for their life, which should be taken into consideration during the housing process. Some parts of the data show some flexibility in its implementation: for example, the interviewees Nelson and David were able to change their settlement municipality because they wanted to study, which was not possible in the municipality first assigned to them. As May (2011) argues, how a person sees him-/herself has a big impact on one's belonging. In other words, belonging and identity are closely connected, which is why the place one lives in can have a negative effect on ones belonging especially if s/he feels like it does not provide what is needed to develops his/her identity or choose freely what s/he wants to do with his/her life.

The most significant effects on participants' belonging were noted when the interviewees felt that they were treated unjustly. This was prevalent especially in the process of private house hunting (being discriminated by the landlords) and also during the waiting period in terms of partial information (lack of trust in relationships between the reception centre workers and refugees). These two aspects are closely connected to the participants' belonging: the refugees did not feel like they were completely accepted, which is an essential part of sense of belonging (as argued by Lambert et al. 2013). The discrimination on the private housing market was quite obvious from the participants' narratives and everyone who searched for a house themselves described it somewhat hopeless situation: the interviewees thought it was almost impossible. Maybe establishing a support system or mechanism to counter discrimination when refugees are trying to get housed on a private market could improve their chances of being able to rent on the private market as well. As pointed out earlier, most of the refugees still get housed through IMDi. The interviewees clearly expressed that they felt the reception centre workers were not giving enough information on the housing process, which further affected their ideas on the reception centre worker motives. Whereas it is impossible to know if the workers were holding information or if this is what the interviewees *felt* they were doing, special attention should be given in forming the initial relationship between the service providers and refugees. The reception centre workers should also mention the possibility of getting a municipality through private housing market (all of the interviewees told they were not provided this information in the reception centre) even though, as already pointed out, it is not necessarily the most probable way for the refugees to get housed.

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Annex 1

Interview guide/ Questions for participants

1. Could you tell me about your arrival to Norway?
-when and how did you come? What happened?
2. How was your initial stay in Norway?
-How did you feel?
3. Did you know anyone before you arrived? Do you have family in Norway?
4. Did you live in the reception centre while waiting for an answer to your application/ or after you arrived?
 - How long did you wait for your decision for refugee status? After that, how long did you wait until you were given an apartment?
 - What kind of information were you given in the reception centre regards to housing?
 - How was the information delivered? (through common meetings, individual meetings)
 - How long did you wait in the reception centre?
 - What did you do in the reception centre while waiting to be housed?
 - How would you describe your time in the reception centre?
5. If they arrived to Norway and were straight housed (already having a status before arriving, like quota refugees):
 - What kind of information were you given before you arrived? (regards to housing or other things, was it sufficient? did it prepare you well?)
 - Did you know the place where you were going? Did you know anything about Norway?
 - Did you have any preference on where to settle?
 - What kind of city/neighbourhood did you want to settle?
 - How long did you have to wait for a house/municipality place after you a got a positive decision on your refugee status (at the country of departure)?

When in municipality:

6. Could you describe your time after you had your first apartment?
-do you remember your thoughts? Expectations? Feelings?
7. How was your first house/place you were settled in? (trying to find out if it was sufficient for his/her/family needs)
8. How did you find social contacts?
-How were they and with whom
9. What kind of service were you offered by the municipality/state?
- did you use these services? If so: Did you find them beneficial for you? How?
If not: why?
10. Would you have rather been settled somewhere else?

- If so: why? Where?
- If not: would you have been unhappy of being settled somewhere else? where?
- 11. Was it of any importance to you to live around Norwegians/ people from your own country?
- 12. How many places have you lived in Norway?
- 13. If they have moved after initial settlement place:
 - How was the place you were first settled in? why did you move out?
- 14. How many places have you lived in Bergen? (have you moved from one area to another?)

In relation to Norway/ Bergen (another municipality) as a locality:

- 14. How do you find Bergen? Do you like living here?
 - Trying to find out what people think about the services, safety, atmosphere in general, people in Bergen, contact with other people.
- 15. How is this neighbourhood? How do you like it? why/ why not?
- 16. What is important in a neighbourhood for you?
 - people from same country/ other Norwegians living there
 - services
 - safety
- 17. Who are your neighbours? What kind of relationship do you have with them?
- 18. Do any of your friends live in the same area as you? Where do they live? Are any of your friends your neighbours?
 - Trying to find out how often they talk and the nature of the interaction in general
- 19. Would you consider yourself as an active member of the society? In which ways?
- 20. What do you do on your spare time? Where and with who?
- 21. Do you feel like you belong here? What do you understand with belonging?
- 22. Would you say you feel like home in Norway? Why/why not?
- 23. Do you see yourself living here (in this city/place) for a long time or are you planning to move somewhere else? Why?
- 24. What do you find important in housing refugees?
- 25. Is there anything you would change in regards to housing refugees in Norway?
- 26. Is there anything that I haven't asked in this interview that you would like to add?

