Identity and sense of belonging among Syrian refugees in Sweden

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Abstract

The purpose of the thesis study is to illuminate the feelings of identity and belonging of the Syrian refugees in Sweden by focusing on the Scania region. This is examined by using the concepts of individual, collective, and ethnic identity, along with the concepts of stereotyping and belonging. This qualitative study is based on five personal interviews with the Syrian refugees who came to Sweden after 2011 due to the civil war in Syria. The study is divided into four different sections; self-identification, stereotypes as perceived by the interviewees, belonging, and the role of the language; also, the paper involves the arguments of the interviewees' responses in regard to the theoretical framework of the mentioned methods. The study demonstrates that the Syrian refugees have a sense of being in-between Sweden and Syria.

Keywords: Syrian refugees, Sweden, sense of belonging, identity, ethnicity, stereotyping

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1.Introduction

The Syrian civil war has been ongoing with different actors since 2011. This war has increased the number of displaced people in the world, particularly almost 5.6 million Syrians have been displaced throughout the conflicts. (UNHCR, 2019a). Because of the breakdown of the security and humanitarian circumstances in Syria, a large number of Syrians have migrated to different countries to find a safer place. Sweden is one of the prominent countries that have been affected the most in the Syrian refugee crisis. For between the years 2010 and 2018, the proportion of the Syrian refugees in the asylum applications in Sweden corresponds to 40 per cent out of all applications (Migrationsverket). Along with this figure, Syrian refugees face many challenges themselves in adapting to the Swedish community in various ways. These challenges influence and shape the Syrian refugees' identity and feeling of belonging in the host country. In this way, the purpose of the study is to explore their self-identification, collective identity, ethnic identity and sense of belonging in a detailed manner.

There are many Syrian refugees living in Sweden, especially in Malmö, where I am conducting personal interviews. I have been wondering how they identify themselves and what their sense of belonging is among different communities. That is the main reason why I have decided to focus on this study topic. Furthermore, this study is significant and relevant regarding IMER studies, because many studies have been done on the subject of integration and immigration of Syrian refugees, but there are no much studies about their identity and sense of belonging in Sweden. Therefore, I strongly believe that this study will contribute detailed knowledge of the identity, and sense of belonging among Syrian refugees in Sweden.

1.1 Aim

The aim of the study is to get more in-depth knowledge on the identity formation and the sense of belonging of Syrian refugees who came to Sweden after 2011 because of the Syria civil war. In order to better comprehend the identity and the sense of belonging of Syrian refugees, I will make my study more specific by analyzing the Syrian community living in the Scania region.

1.2. Research Questions

The research questions will be answered by using the qualitative method.

- How do Syrian refugees define themselves in terms of identity in Sweden?

- What is the sense of belonging among Syrian refugees?

1.3. Delimitations and Limitations

There are several delimitations for the study. The first relates to regional delimitation, as all the interviewees live in the Scania region in Sweden. Therefore, Syrian refugees living outside the Scania region may have different experiences concerning their identity and sense of belonging. In this regard, this study partly reflects the lack of representation; however, I believe that this study will contribute to existing knowledge of the Syrian refugees living in Sweden. The reason to limit only focus on those people who live in this place is because of the limits of the thesis, and time. Another delimitation is connected with a group of people investigated in this study because this group is restricted to only Syrian refugees who came to Sweden after 2011 because of the civil war and also have been working or studying in Sweden for a while now. Another significant delimitation is directly associated with the age of the interviewees. The sample of interviewees is between 26-52 years old to get as many different results as possible concerning the topics being studied. This is one of the main reasons why I chose both young and middle-aged individuals in my study. The last delimitation concerns the language used in conducting the interviews. As all interviews took place in English, I did not have to use any translator in this study. It can be said that the meaning of the conversation might have been lost, even though the language of the interview has been in English. However, I could ask the interviewees the follow-up questions to get the answer very well throughout each interview. What is more, the face-to-face interviews provided me with the opportunities to correct any misunderstandings, and to get a clear picture of their perspectives towards their identity and sense of belonging.

1.4. Structure of the thesis

The thesis begins with an introduction, aim, and research questions to provide the reader insight into the research at first. The following part is related to the brief explanation of the background of Syrian civil war and the Syrian refugee crisis and the Syrian refugees in Sweden since 2011. Then, the previous similar researches will be outlined in the field, along with the description of the concepts of identity, stereotyping and sense of belonging and their interrelationship with each other in the theoretical framework. This section will be presented through the methods used to fulfill the overarching aim of the research. Then, the data gathered throughout the research will be analyzed from various aspects. In the last section, the research will cover the main conclusions and suggestions to encourage future studies.

2. Contextual Background

In this section, I will clarify two significant concepts used in this study. After then, the Syrian civil war, and the Syrian refugee crisis will be explained in brief summary in order to have a view of the group being studied. Furthermore, this section will deal with various aspects of the Syrian immigration wave to Sweden since 2011.

2.1. Clarification of terms

In this section of this paper, I will explain the description of the concepts both "immigrant" and "refugee" and the main distinctions between these two terms. A widespread misconception is that "immigrant" and "refugee" are synonymous concepts. The concept of immigration occurs when someone goes to settle permanently in another country. In order to have been considered an immigrant in Sweden, citizens of countries outside the Nordics areas are supposed to have a residence permit (IOM, 2009).

According to the 1951 UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, " a refugee is identified as a person who is outside his or her country of nationality or habitual residence; has a well-founded fear of being persecuted due to his or her race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion; and is unable or unwilling to avail him or herself of the protection of that country, or to return there, for fear of persecution."

In the light of this information, a refugee is a person who needs protection, and for that reason, they have been forced to flee to live in another country. Therefore, refugees always aim to get the residence permit during their country of residence as they cannot go back to their country where their lives and freedom have been in danger (Cowart 1993, p.43).

2.2. The overview of the Syrian civil war and the Syrian refugee crisis

The "Arab Spring" movement, which began firstly in Tunisia in 2010, spread to many Arabic countries. The anti-government protests occurred all the country in Syria in 2011, including the other countries in the Middle East. The Syrian clash became a brutal war among the rebel groups and the army and the government defenders. As it became complicated day by day, the United Nations failed to end the war. Another point of the UN failure was that Russia benefited from its veto power to protect its allies, even though the UN Security Council tried to deal with the conflict to protect the people of Syria (Mood, 2014).

After the civil war started, many Syrian refugees firstly had to flee to the neighboring countries. According to UNHCR's statistical yearbook, almost 5.6 million Syrians have become a refugee in the neighboring countries until April 2019 (UNHCR, 2019a). That figure is the result of an eight-year conflict period. The largest refugee population in the world is made up of Syrians (Asylum quarterly report, 2019). In particular, Turkey took in more Syrian refugees than any other countries in the world with nearly 3.6 million (UNHCR, 2019a). The number of Syrian refugees presented in these countries is higher than the UNCHR figure of the registered Syrian refugee population because some of the Syrian refugees do not would like to register officially for their safety and also have difficulties reaching to the registration point.

The Syrian refugee crisis still influences on the regional and global level, where they challenge on economic and security issues, although the UN and humanitarian institutions provide them with substantial economic aid. A large number of Syrian refugees have been at greater risk their lives by going through the border of countries illegally, especially on the way from Turkey to Greece. Although both these two countries in the region as well as international actors try to prevent these illegal transitions, it seems like they are still not very successful.

Although the war in Syria comes to its final stage, the conflicts are violently continuing between the Syrian regime and the resistance in some regions. Moreover, some neighbouring countries, especially Turkey, continue to attack some regions of Syria from time to time because of their security and national concerns. This might lead to a new wave of hundreds of thousands at any time, which means that it can both make the region even more unstable and adversely affect the political, social and economic aspects of countries at the international level. Therefore, in order to make a military ceasefire and political transition, peace talks are aimed by international actors and organizations by bringing militant groups around the same table.

2.3. Background of the Syrian refugees in Sweden

As a result of the flow of migration to Europe since the civil war broke out, most of the European countries, including Sweden, have started much more attention to the integration and reception of refugees. Especially, between the years 2014–2015, Sweden was one of the countries that took the most asylum applications in an OECD country (OECD, 2016). Between the years 2010 and 2018, the main majority of asylum applications in Sweden are made up of Syrians with a rate of 40 per cent (Migrationsverket). Because of a great number of applications for asylum, the Swedish policy-makers changed its legal amendments such as the temporary asylum law, which caused the reduction of the asylum applications of Syrian refugees to Sweden.

Before the civil war broke out, a small number of Syrians were living in Sweden. According to Statistic Sweden, in 2011, there were approximately 4,961 citizens of Syria residing in Sweden (Migrationsverket). However, the figure has started to change significantly as the tension of the war has increased since 2012, which led many Syrians to find asylum in Sweden. Especially, in 2013, it had doubled the number of Syrian refugees seeking asylum-applications from 7,814 in 2012 to 16,317. The number of Syrians rose rapidly by the end of 2015 when it culminated at 51,338 (Migrationskervet). That figures increased over time provide information about how Sweden has turned into a popular destination for the Syrian refugees.

As the Syrian refugee population in Sweden increased significantly, the number of Syrian-births reached to185,991 until the year 2018, which makes them one of the biggest newcomer groups in Sweden (Statistic Sweden).

The employment market and the migration policies of the government have been affected in a negative way following an unexpectedly high number of the Syrian immigrants to Sweden. For instance, 2015 was the year when a large number of Syrian asylum requests were very intense. Therefore, that year was called the “refugee crisis” in public opinion (Emilsson 2018, p.3). In response to the unexpected situation, the government took a few significant steps by changing the immigration policies and law that might have attracted many people for asylum requests to Sweden. This shows a crucial political alternation for Sweden that has generally implemented on acceptable and tolerant policies towards asylum requests (Admir, 2018). These changes in the law significantly caused to reduce the rate of Syrian asylum requests as well as the rate of asylum requests in other nations.

3. Previous research

Firstly, David Oleksy (2016) aims to explore the national identity formation of Syrian refugees in Sweden. In his thesis study, "*Male Syrian Refugees Negotiating Their National Identity,"* he focuses on Syrian refugees who had to flee different countries due to the civil conflict and which factors influenced the formation of the identity. The method used by him relies on qualitative data. In that sense, he conducts individual interviews with ten interviewees. In order to better analyze the data, he employs the concepts of national identity as a personal identity and a sense of belonging (ibid, p.24). At this point, it is essential to divide the term national identity into both personal identity and sense of belonging, because this provides some useful insights into the key themes that the author tries to define. This study reveals that Syrian immigrants have a sense of being in-between Sweden and Syria (ibid, p.58). However, they define themselves as Syrians in a way. The researcher shows the importance of the relation between the two concepts as a result of identification with a group. Because of ethnic group membership, they categorize themselves as Syrian refugees. Another result of the research is that all of the interviewees share the same idea of returning to Syria, even though they view their country as divided with negative images based on factors such as being in danger, lack of the future.

Another significant study is the one from Anna Järlind (2015), "*A Qualitative Study About Place Identity Amongst Refugees in Umeå, Sweden*." She focuses on personal feelings of refugees with the concept of place, which is mainly associated with the notion of identity. In her study, she tries to point out that identity is in close relationship with a place, which is one of the research results. Within the framework of this understanding, she examines whether the refugees feel belonging to Umea, a Swedish city. This research is performed through qualitative study and interviewed eight people, having a variety of backgrounds such as Nepal, Somalia, Afghanistan, Eritrea, Burundi, and Ethiopia. Furthermore, all interviewees have been studying Swedish and have been living in Sweden for more than five years. The results reveal that they feel at home even though the Umea is significantly a different place for the refugees. The feeling of safety and social activity are the most significant reasons that make each of the refugees feel much at home. Furthermore, the study of Anna Järlind provides a significant perspective to show how personal identity is constructed and changed by the social interactions between both daily life and physical place. Therefore, the study demonstrates the significance of the relation between identity and place.

The research of Bernadet Mati (2015), "*Identity Formation Among Individuals With Assyrian Background in Sweden,"* investigates on how those who have an Assyrian background have shaped and changed their identity and have been affected by the mainstream society (ibid, p.2). The researcher makes the qualitative research on Assyrian immigrants' identity formation and belonging, which constitutes the main conceptual and theoretical part of this thesis study. The interviewees consist of 16 persons ranging from 20 to 70 years old. They were wanted to define themselves with a narrative approach (ibid, p.16). The researcher used the purposive sampling technique to make sure if he interviewed people with different backgrounds such as age, gender. This is, to some extent, the most useful parts of the research, in line with identity formation.The researcher underscores that all of the interviewees have quite similar experiences on the topic being studied, although they have various experiences and ages in Sweden. Another finding is about group-identification, which is quite important amongst persons and groups to develop a sense of belonging. Group-identification is defined as a combination of culture, colour, religion, and common past values. That is all very well because the arguments he shall put forward are relevant to the identity construction of Assyrian.

Finally, another study that should be emphasized is the fieldwork of the Dalia Abdelhady (2011) which is called "*The Lebanese Diaspora: The Arab Immigrant Experience in Montreal, New York, and Paris."* It seems to be similar to my research in a way. She conducts detailed research related to the identity formation of the first generation Lebanese refugees who had to leave from Lebanon due to the brutal civil conflict. She collects the necessary data at the end of each semi-structured interviews in Paris, New York, and Montreal (ibid, p.36). The study shows that the first generation of Lebanese refugees are proud of having their identity, even though they have been abroad for a long time. They still define themselves as being Lebanese because of family tie and culture. Furthermore, the interviewees highlight that they are excluded by mainstream society, although they try to do their best to live in these countries (ibid, p.24). Moreover, they believe they are ignored in some cases because of their identity as well as their physical features. Despite their experiences of exclusion and discrimination in some cases, they are still willing to live abroad because they believe that their children would have the important opportunities here for their career in the future.

4.Theoretical Framework

This section constitutes the conceptual structure of the thesis that focuses on the concepts of identity, stereotyping and the sense of belonging. These three concepts that will be explained in detail are associated with each other, and belonging will be used with regards to individual, collective, ethnic identity, and stereotyping.

4.1.Identity

Identity is not only an academic word but also a common word used in daily life. Researchers separate the term into several different sections. In this study, there are three main significant terms, which is individual, collective, and ethnic identity, respectively. Focusing on the notions of these identities will provide a broad perspective in order to get a high degree of understanding of identity in this study.

Identity is about knowing "who is who" and "what is what" (Jenkins 2008a, p.5). Identity is just understood as a process of "being*"* and *"*becoming*"* (ibid, p.17). While "being" can be considered terms as ethnicity, gender, religion, occupation, "becoming" is rather the ongoing construction process of identity. Therefore, identity is not just there, waiting to be explored via social interactions, but is something that people construct, change, and also associate oneself with someone else (ibid, p.17). These understandings enable us to understand multidimensional identification. Thus, identity is conceptualized as a result of the identification process both in terms of similarities and differences amongst individuals (ibid, p.18). In other words, identity is a consequence of the process of identification. However, there are individual and collective aspects related to the questions of how identity is constructed. Therefore, the way an individual identify oneself varies greatly depending on the circumstances.

Jenkins explains the world as constructed and experienced by humans in two different orders; "the individual order" and "the interactions order," respectively (Jenkins 2008a, p.39). While the individual orders are more about how we define ourselves, the interactions order reflects what individuals think about us (ibid, p.42). In this sense, these two orders show us how our perceptions are defined, shaped and changed by society. In Jenkins's explanations, it could be understood that identity is constructed within social interactions. Therefore, the interaction has a significant influence on the formation of identity. With this interactionist perspective, Jenkins highlights that identity is a fluid concept related to the process of being or becoming, although primordialism like the psychoanalyst claim that identity has a fixed understanding.

Anthony Giddens (1991, p.53-54) states that identity is related to the expectations, and thoughts individuals have about themselves and others. While individuals make more than one choice in the post-modern order, they are much less influenced by their own ethnic groups as opposed to the interactionist order. In this sense, being born "Swedish" or "Syrian" does not predetermine an individual's future identity as it does in the interactionist order. Giddens also explains that a simple thing like your name could be a part of your identity, meaning that certain social codes could describe personal identity. In this sense, being "Swedish" or "Syrian" might represent an individual's social identity.

4.1.1. Individual identity

The self "can be both subject and object," which means that it takes place with an understanding of both "experience with" or "experience of" one's self (Mead 1934, p.136-137). According to Mead, the self just appears in determining the positions of other individuals toward ourselves, which makes us internalize our feelings and thoughts about ourselves and others. Therefore, the self is a result of social experiences. In order for an object to turn into one's self, there must be communication among individuals (ibid, p.138). For instance, language is seen to be one of the crucial activities in the development of self (ibid, p.142). This is one of the prominent features of the self because the self occurs in communication with other people.

Meads' theory of self-identity separates the relation between the "Me" and the "I," which is two different parts of the self. Here, the "Me" (self as object) represents the organized or learned the attitudes of others and society (ibid, p.175). Whereas, the "I" (self as subject) is a response of individuals towards the attitudes of others and society (ibid, p.203). There would be no self without both the "Me" and the "I" (ibid, p.214).

Rapport and Overing highlight that the concept of liminality is very crucial to analyze the self-identity of refugees in the host country, meaning that "being in-between" makes them feel in between two cultures, and identifying themselves with one identity is quite complicated (2000, p.229). In that sense, liminality might be in both time and space; liminal periods may take for a short or a longer period. Therefore, in liminality, there is no certainty regarding time and space.

4.1.2. Collective identity

According to Jenkins, the term collective identity is about "similarity among and between a plurality of persons, […] who either see themselves as similar or have similar behaviour and circumstances in common" (2008a, p.103). However, the only similarity is not enough to know

"who is who" and "what is what" because collective identity also refers to the importance of individual differences within a group of people. For instance, someone's name is one of the significant characteristics in defining individual differences. At the same time, this represents the collective similar features within that group. As Jenkins highlights, "to say who I am is to say who or what I am not, but it is also to say with whom I have things in common" (ibid, p.21). Jenkins also states that ethnicity has a significant effect on the formation of identification and categorization of a group (ibid, p.87). Individuals tend to get to know better about themselves and others through ethnicity, and thus, their ethnic self-identification with one group reveals significant differences as compared to the other individuals and groups. In that sense, the ethnic self-identification as part of both group-identity and categorization is significant in defining the features of collective identity. Group identification based on inner collective is being shaped by those who are the awareness of belonging to their group membership (ibid, p.105). However, categorization is a result of the perceptions of the outside of the group identified as sameness (ibid, p.105). In this point, as Jenkins highlights, "there are no groups, ethnic or otherwise, without social categorization" (ibid, p.170).

4.1.3. Ethnic identity

According to Horowitz (1985, p.53), "ethnicity easily embraces groups differentiated by colour, language, and religion; it covers races and nationalities." As ethnicity includes a wide range of features such as religion, language, and culture, it is quite complicated to define an ethnic group. For instance, although the term language is one of the essential features of ethnicity, it is still not enough to separate an ethnic group.

Tajfel (1981, p.255) explains ethnic identity from the perspective of individuals' self and social identity that stems from the information of being a part of an ethnic group. Thus, it is understood that everyone has an ethnicity regardless of whether an ethnic group is large or small. However, an individual can behave differently from his/her group members in various social interactions because an individual may have multiple identities with the group he/she belongs to.

Jenkins (2008b, p.14) argues that ethnicity is based on cultural differentiations. The first level, ethnicity has the common values with cultural features but it is constructed and changed through social interaction over time. The second level, ethnicity is not stable and unchanging, meaning that it has a very broad fluid concept. The third level, ethnicity is both individual and collective, internalized in individual self-identity and externalized in the categorization of others.

4.1.4. Perspectives of ethnic identity

There are two main perspectives on ethnicity, which describes the concept of ethnicity either as fixed or as changeable depending on the circumstance and time. Clifford Geertz (1996, p.40) brings the "Primordialism" view that is one of the significant perspectives in defining ethnicity. According to this perspective, ethnic groups have primordial attachment, which stems from the "assumed givens of social existence" such as culture, language and kinship. Ethnic identity has fixed and unchangeable aspects as primordial attachments are quite difficult to change. Unlike Primordialism, the anthropologist Fredrik Barth (1969) argues the "Instrumentalist" perspective as a social identity that is constructed via social interaction in every aspect of life. Barth argues that the components of an ethnic community such as language and culture are created by way of each other's interaction. For instance, when one ethnic group get in contact with other groups, this causes the drawing of the ethnic boundaries between groups (Barth 1969, p.16). Therefore, ethnic identification occurs via social interaction among various groups. Giddens (1991, p.106-107) has this kind of view saying that, in this post-modern order, ethnicity is changeable as it is associated with persons' life instead of the quality in itself. From Gidden's perspective, an individual can deliberately determine his/her own identification depending on social changes. Also, Jenkins (2008b, p.17) adopts the instrumentalist perspective of ethnicity, describing it as a feature of relationships, depending on the circumstances and time**.**

4.2. Stereotyping

The term stereotyping is described as a generalized and widely accepted belief about individuals that comprised of a particular group, or as a process of categorization (Henri Tajfel 1981, p.116). Stereotypes based on social groups are the result of the interactions of individuals, which means that stereotypes can change over time. In other words, stereotypes tend to systemize information about members of any special groups. For instance, some certain cultural characteristics are of particular importance for specific groups of people. This situation shows that it is very difficult for individuals to stay away from stereotypes (Macrae, et al., 1993, p.78). This also especially takes place in conditions where people are threatened and worry about their lives (ibid). Thus, stereotypes usually consist of prejudices that can take the forms of disliking, anger and fear. The use of stereotypes might be much more negative aspects than positive ones.

Tajfel (1981, p.132) argues that a group categorizes other groups depending on stereotypes, which lead to in-group (us) and out-group (them). As a result of this social categorization, we divide the world into two parts: "us" and "them." The use of stereotypes is an important tool to

understand the differences between groups and our social world (ibid). Therefore, individuals' positions within society are different from the others by creating stereotypes in which people categorize themselves to interpret the social environment. Thus, the individual can find oneself position in the dominant or subordinate group through stereotypes**.**

4.3. Belonging

Belonging might be considered as "emotional attachment," feeling "at home," or "safe" (Yuval-Davis 2011, p.10). The feeling of belonging is much connected with identity, membership, and culture. However, Yuval-Davis, in this point, argues that belonging is a much deeper emotional need rather than different objects of attachment (ibid, p.18). For instance, the concept of a place provides a sense of belonging to people, which gives them duties as well as to make them feel safe. Therefore, feelings about duties and safety are the essential components of belonging.

According to Yuval-Davis (2006, p.199), there are three significant levels in the formation of a sense of belonging. The first level, belonging is being built through social and economic factors by emphasizing individuals belong to a particular group. In this sense, belonging is not fixed, but being consistently active. The second level is associated with emotional attachments and identification, which implies that identities reflect belonging and membership. The last one is connected with the politics of belonging, which means that refugees' belonging is politicized in the host country. Thus, this concerns the ideological boundaries which lead to the distinction between "us" and "them."

Belonging also relates to the sense of community since community members share with their community various similar things to form a sense of belonging among themselves (Cohen 1982, p.2-3). Community refers to relationships based on the notions of similarities and differences, creating certain boundaries among communities. Therefore, the boundaries, especially ethnic boundaries, can be understood as part of common shared experiences such as language, territory and religion, and also build a sense of unity with others. Belonging to any community leads to dividing the population into "us" and "them" which make people aware of their values, cultures and identities (ibid, p.6).

In this thesis study, there are some significant discussions of what the concept of home is and how it is defined. Brah (1996, p.192) discusses that home is not only a material place where individuals would like to live in physically but also an abstract place where they have emotional attachments and security. Therefore, the term home can be much more than any physical place.

Beside this perspective, home is the lived experience of a region or can be the dwelling as well (Mallet 2004, p.84). With these two perspectives, the concept of home is quite significant to understand social relations in terms of both physical or symbolic place because this term can be complicated for refugees to feel at home with just one place. The concept of the home might change some of the main features over time that refugees have acquired throughout their life. Therefore, an individual's sense of belonging might be variability in many ways in which the places could be called home.

As can be understood, there is no one single definition about the idea of the feeling of belonging since it has many aspects such as the various natural relations of belonging, and experiences of inclusion/exclusion (Anthias 2006, p.21). It could be said that belonging is not only about group membership and the features of identification with the others but also the social location and the emotional attachment we tend to build (ibid).

5. Methodology and Method

The qualitative method is a suitable way to gather and examine further information in the social sciences (6&Bellamy 2012, p.35). Therefore, this research is based on the qualitative research method that was conducted with five interviewees through semi-structured personal interviews. The qualitative approach enables the researcher to get knowledge of interviewees' life stories, thoughts, experiences and feelings concerning the topic being studied (Creswell 2014, p.185). In this way, the qualitative method is suitable for this research as it ensures in-depth information via face-to-face communication, which causes me to look at the behaviors of the interviewers in a natural way. Therefore, I tried to acquire a large amount of data on this topic through semi-structured personal interviews carried out in Malmö, where Syrian refugees have such a high population. Such an approach enables me to comprehend about crucial aspects of how Syrian refugees have developed their identity and sense of belonging.

Why I do not prefer to use quantitative research in this study is that it does not ensure in-depth knowledge related to the interviewees' experiences and feelings on the topic. In this case, getting in-depth information regarding the interviewees makes it much easier to elaborate experiences of their identity and sense of belonging. Furthermore, choosing the interview method is much more effective than survey questionnaires in this study, especially when there are some sensitive issues (Gray 2007, p.175). Throughout the semi-structured interviews, I had the opportunity to change or make certain points clear to get the information from the interviewees. Therefore, the possibility of misunderstandings between the interviewer and the interviewee is minimized.

5.1. Philosophical standpoint

When it comes to the philosophical standpoint, my ontological position rests upon "relativism" that identifies "how something exists" (Rosenberg 2012, p.131). Relativists consider various aspects of reality, shaped by the context, and the truth evolves and changes, thereby, the truth is created by meaning and experiences (6& Bellamy 2012, p.55-59). With this understanding, knowledge is based on "the subjective nature," which means that any social phenomena occurs through individuals' definitions, and beliefs. In this sense, the reality is a social construction (Rosenberg 2012, p.135). In this study, the term "identity" is being constructed through human relations on a daily basis. Therefore, this study hinges on a social constructivist approach.

As a researcher, I am involved in this study along with my ideas, and preconceptions about the study, which emerge from the understanding of the science of "interpretation" or "hermeneutic" (ibid, p.118-120).

5.2. Semi-structured interviews

According to Mathers et al. (2002, p.27), "face-to-face or personal interviews can be the best way of collecting the high-quality data. A skilled interviewer can explain the purpose of the interview and encourage potential respondents to co-operate; they can also clarify questions, correct misunderstandings, offer prompts, probe responses and follow up on new ideas in a way that is just not possible with other methods." Even though there is no precise method in social sciences, the semi-structured individual interview is the most applicable for this thesis. One of the significant features of semi-structured interviews is that there is an interview guide to ask all of the interviewees. All of the questions were meticulously prepared by the interviewer. The interviews began with several general questions with the aim that the interviewees feel much more comfortable towards the interviewer. Thus, the trust relationship was ensured between the interviewer and the interviewee. The open questions used in this study were useful because it provided the researcher to clarify the responses from the interviewees. With this method, all the interviewees presented their own challenges and perspectives individually, which gave directly the detailed picture of their daily social life concerning identity and feeling of belonging. Such the method provided the opportunity for comparing several interviews to better comprehend the themes (Silverman 2006, p.286). This also allowed the interviewer to deeply investigate the collected data. Asking follow-up questions through semi-structured interviews led to a dialogue between the interviewees and the interviewer (May 2011, p.134).

One of the significant features of this approach is to record the data for the analysis because the records enable the interviewer to re-listen the conversation and to avoid misunderstandings after each interview.

5.3. Inductive approach

The research hinges on an inductive approach that generally begins with a research question. The researcher does not intend to verify or falsify any theory in such an approach. The aim of an inductive approach is hence not to assess established theories, but rather to gain new insights into existing scientific knowledge (6 & Bellamy, 2012, p. 110-111). In the inductive approach, I used the understanding of "subjective interpretation," meaning that the experiences, thoughts

and perceptions of the interviewees are presented by the interviewer in detail (ibid, p.230-231). Accordingly, my main aim was to focus on taking the interviewees' various aspects of the main topic being studied**.**

5.4. Sample selection

This research was held through in-depth interviews with four men and one woman. All of the interviewees that were chosen in this research arrived in Sweden after the year of 2011. The age of the interviewees ranged from 26 to 52 years to receive as much and various responses as possible for this study. Furthermore, all of the interviewees have been either highly educated or have worked in any private sector in Sweden.

It should be taken into consideration that the key results of this research are mostly based on men's perspective, which makes this research gender-based, even though there is one woman interviewee. Before conducting my research, I aimed to provide gender balance via my network in Sweden. However, I recognized that it was quite hard to find female interviewee. There were a few of reasons why I could not include enough of female interviewees in this study. The first reason was due to cultural aspects, as it was challenging for me to include female interviewees in such conservative communities. Another important reason was related to the time limitation of the research. As I had to complete the research over a certain time, I could not spend much time to find suitable female interviewees.

I was able to reach the interviewees via snowball sampling, which enabled me to find potential interviewees by asking the first interviewees. (Creswell, 2013, p.158; May 2011, p.131). Why I preferred to use the purposive method was that I wanted to make sure whether the interviewees had different backgrounds such as age, employment and education. Although my social network was quite limited, a sufficient number of interviewees were involved in this research by way of the snowball method.

With this method, I first made contact with a friend of mine who had to flee to Sweden. I told him in relation to the aim of the research and in which ways the research would be conducted. After that, he wanted to take part voluntarily in the research. After I interviewed him, he helped me to find a sufficient number of the Syrian refugees in Sweden. Furthermore, I used the social media network such as Facebook to make contact with other Syrians in the Scania region. After then, I was able to find one of the well-known and widely used groups called "a group of expats in Malmö." I talked one of the administrators who were responsible in the group, and he allowed

me to share brief information regarding my research in his Facebook group to find more Syrians in the Scania region. Then, a few Syrians contacted me for an interview. However, I decided to interview only two of them that were eligible for this research. Other three interviewees were involved through the snowball method.

5.5. Data collection

The primary source and material of this paper are made up of individual interviews conducted with five Syrian refugees. All the interviews took place in two months, April and May in 2019. In the present study, I interviewed five refugees at different places, following the request of the interviewees, which probably made them feel much comfortable and confident in explaining their feelings and thoughts with me regarding the main topics of the study. One of the interviews took place in the city library of Malmö, where I spent much time throughout all my studies in Sweden. All the other interviews were held both at Orkanen and Niagara buildings at Malmo University. Before starting all interview, I asked the interviewees whether they would like to do the interview in English or Arabic language. According to the request of the interviewees, the interviews were taken place in English via face-to-face communication. Being both English and face-to-face communication in each interview provided with the proper conditions for me to correct any misunderstandings by way of asking questions. Therefore, I did not have to use any Arab translator to understand the natural conversation. Apart from only one interview, who did not want to record the conversation, the other interviews were digitally recorded, and then I assured that their names got nicknames because of their confidentiality. With the permission of four interviewees, I used the audio-recorder to go through the interviews again in more detail. Each interview took place in one hour or two hours, depending on the experiences and language skills of each interviewee.

Another significant material used in this research is some prominent books and articles in the field related the theoretical framework of the research. Benefiting from such academic sources at different levels gained me a deeper perspective to define and understand some important points of the relevant topic. It should be noted that very well academic research is shaped by the researchers who have had a new perspective, depending on the aim and content of the research (Gray 2007, p.4).

5.6. Ethical considerations

Researchers deal with a number of ethical challenges such as informed consent, anonymity, and confidentiality in the following each aspect of the research (Somekh and Lewin 2004, p.56). Therefore, in this study, all interviews took place within the frame of ethical considerations.

I informed all the interviewees clearly about myself and my study, which made them ready and feel comfortable before each interview. Therefore, all interviewees were told that the aim of the interview was for a thesis study performed on the identity construction and sense of belonging of the Syrian community in the Scania region. And then, I requested their verbal consent to be interviewed voluntarily as well as to record the conversations. Furthermore, I promised them to destroy all four types after the guide. All of the interviewees were told that they would withdraw whenever they wanted and that they could not reply to sensitive questions during the interview (Somekh and Lewin 2004, p.57). The names of all interviewees were changed to ensure privacy and confidentiality. This is also how their confidentiality was assured by publishing anonymous knowledge collected from them for the study. Moreover, specific personal information related to the interviewees was not revealed.

Last but not least, I avoided asking sensitive questions related identity, belonging etc., although there was no vulnerable situation in this study**.**

5.7. Validity and Reliability

In this study, validity and reliability are two important concepts for the researcher (6&Bellamy 2012, p.21). In this way, the purpose of the paper is to give information concerning these two concepts, in pursuant of the main themes of the study. Validity concerns whether the results of the research are precise in the perspective of the interviewer and interviewees (Creswell 2013, p.20). In other words, according to Steinar Kvale (1995, p.27), “Validation comes to depend on the quality of craftsmanship in an investigation, which is continually checking, questioning and theoretically interpreting the findings of the research.” I used many different research methods to achieve validity. I reviewed all the records and compared them to the research questions for going through the certainty of the findings collected during the interviews. This procedure was done by sharing the transcripts and the finished papers with all interviewees (Creswell 2013, p.202). Moreover, follow-up questions were done with the interviewees, which provided them with an opportunity to make comments on the results. In this way, this increased the validity of the study (ibid, p.202).

Reliability is about how we measure things and achieve consistency (6 & Bellamy 2012, p.21). In other words, reliability means the research is steady and consistent, which enables different researchers to use the same materials and follow the same procedures in order to achieve similar outcomes obtained in previous studies (Creswell 2013, p.203). While the interviewees respond in a different way to many different interviewers in the same phenomenon, the replication of the same research can be suspicious. Therefore, the replicability could be an issue in the qualitative analysis (6 & Bellamy 2012, p.94).

With the aim of ensuring the reliability in such qualitative research, the coherence of knowledge collected through interviewees needs to be succeeded. This only happens while the process of the research is confirmed via several examinations such as being the definition of themes, and field notes (Campbell 1996, p.129). Therefore, in this research, I attempted to document the whole process transparently and audio-record interviews and transcribe in the original language and in English. The questions asked to the interviewees are found in the appendix section of the research. Furthermore, audiotapes were used to provide transparent by avoiding errors. Shortly, all of the research methods and data collection were clearly described and operationalized by maintaining transparency. However, there is a significant point which could affect the reliability of this research. As I investigated the Syrian community living in the Scania region, other parts of the Syrian community in Sweden may have different experiences and feelings regarding the topic being studied.

5.8. Role of the researcher

The researcher has an important effect on increasing the validity and reliability in the qualitative analysis (Creswell, 2014). The researcher is generally engaged in experiences of interviewees, which may affect the analysis and the explanations attributed to data throughout the thesis study (ibid, p.186-187). In this part, I will take a look at my role in the research that I am conducting.

In this case, I am not a part of the Syrian society. I have an outsider status. My role is at a neutral level in the research, although I am the primary instrument in data collection, examination and interpretation. In addition to being impartial in conducting that research, the ongoing refugee issue in my country, Turkey, has gained me a deeper perspective to deal with this significant phenomenon impartially. Nevertheless, I may have been affected by the interviewees' attitudes due to my nationality, Turkey, even though I have a positive opinion for the research. Therefore, since the research has been done in a constructivist way, I am aware of my bias on this subject matter, which might affect the result of the research. This might cause a little bit of a challenge

for me to be impartial and non-judgemental in my thoughts. Despite all of these issues, I believe that I will pay particular attention to looking at interviewees' experiences in a detailed manner, demonstrating the results as transparent and exact as possible, and explaining the problems with an impartial perspective. On the other hand, having a Turkey background could be an advantage for all interviewees, which makes them feel much comfortable in explaining their experiences and thoughts because of a similar culture we have. Moreover, having a similar culture helps me to understand and analyze their situations better.

5.9. The interviewee profiles

Before introducing all of the interviewees, it is worth noting that their names were changed for their privacy and confidentiality, according to their requests. Furthermore, their names do not reflect any religious characteristics as Syria is one of the countries with religious diversity in the Middle East.

Davud is 31 years old, living on his own. He studies his master's degree in the field of social sciences. He came to Sweden in 2015.

Mazhar is 24 years old. He studies his bachelor of arts degree. He works in the private sector. He came to Sweden in 2015. He lives with his sisters.

Lisa is 38 years old. She works full-time as a project assistant. She came to Sweden four years ago. She received her bachelor's degree in teaching in Syria.

Farjad is 25 years old. He came to Sweden three years ago. He lives with those who have many different nationalities. He works in a known company in the Scania region.

Kezman is 52 years old, has three children. He has his own business in the Scania region. He lives with his family. He came to Sweden eight years ago. He received his bachelor's degree in accounting in Syria.

6. Findings

In this part, I account for the data provided by the interviewees and apply those with significant identities as well as with the concepts of stereotyping and belonging that I mentioned above in the theoretical part. The questions on identity construction and belonging are interrelated with each other. Therefore, belonging is associated with an individual, collective, and ethnic identity.

After carefully analyzing the consequences of the interviewees, I opted to focus on some of the significant themes that were suitable for this study. The themes consist of identity, stereotyping and a sense of belonging. In order to conduct study into themes, many factors were identified, including self-identification, stereotypes as perceived by the interviewees, belonging, and the role of the language.

6.1. Self-Identification

As Jenkins (2008a, p.5) explained above, identity is based on the idea of "who is who and what is what." As people reflect upon their identities in various ways in their daily life, the concepts of identity become crucial in the world. The identification between individuals and collectivities is a significant part of identity (ibid, p.18). Therefore, in this part, it is very important to look at how the interviewees identify themselves.

When looking at the responses from the interviews, there is a variety of significant similarities regarding self-identity among the Syria refugees. During the interviews, it is quite obvious that some of the interviewees are living a state of being in between Syria and Sweden. This is one of the main problems that the Syrian refugees face in the host country, at least in the case of my informants because this provides a sense of confusion as they have both a background with their own values, and are influenced from the values of Sweden. This also gives a deep understanding of how their identities are shaped in time. However, it does not appear in the responses of all the interviewees. This is especially shown in Davud's and Farjad's responses.

"Even if I do not say where I am from, the people around my environment know where I came from and see me differently just because I do not look like them as a Swedish, and my accent is also different from them. But, I feel like Swedish in many ways too because I got used to the Swedish lifestyle. However, I was in Syria all my life before coming to Sweden. Therefore, it is clear for them that I am a Syrian refugee."(Davud)

Davud defines himself according to his appearance and accent, which is not difficult for him to distinguish from the features between a Swedish and a Syrian person. It seems like that he feels uncomfortable with his identity because of the negative perception of the society towards Syrian refugees, which makes him feel much belonging to his homeland. On the other hand, he feels belonging to Sweden in many ways. In this sense, as Jenkins (2008a, p.5) argued, it is not clear to define "who we are what we are not" since identity is being formed and changed over time through social interaction, Jenkins means in a way that individuals cannot describe the term identity as completed due to the process of "being" or "becoming" something that individuals would like to have (ibid, p.17). In this way, Davud feels like to be a citizen of the world he gave a clear example below. Thus, it seems that his identity gets influenced in various ways.

Davud highlights that he feels that his Syrian identity has become much weaker after coming to Sweden.

"Before coming to Sweden, my Syrian identity had become stronger because, in Syria, we were all Syrians and had the same values and tradition. Therefore, I was always proud of my Syrian identity until I left my country. Here, I did not start to feel Syrian because here you can see the people all over the world, which made me feel the somehow cosmopolitan person. And then I realized that the identities did not matter."(Davud)

With this statement, Sweden has provided Farjad with a sense of security as well as basic human rights, which affects his identity and where he belongs to. This is associated with how Giddens (1991, p.53-54) defines individual identity that identity is the expectations and thoughts people have about themselves and others. Furthermore, Farjad shows the characteristic of primordial related his ethnicity because he believes that his ethnic identity actually exists by birth and thus, it is quite difficult to change his ethnic identity. This statement recalls how Geertz describes the concept of ethnicity as "assumed givens of social existence" such as culture and language. He confirms that ethnic identity is constant and unchangeable as the emotional features of ethnicity which are rooted and could not be defined by individuals (Geertz 1996, p.40).

"One of the reasons why I love Sweden is that it has provided a sense of security. In my country, I could not go somewhere due to the civil war, but here I feel much better than Syria. Another reason is that Sweden has provided some important human rights such as free education, and health services support. However, despite all of these good things, I cannot change my identity because identities reflect who you are and where you come from." (Farjad)

On the other hand, Kezman, who is the oldest of the interviewees, highlights that he does not tend to define himself as a Swedish. He has the strongest feelings regarding his ethnic identity and his homeland, in contrast to the other interviewees. In this sense, he is more explicit when it comes to his self-identification. This understanding can be linked to Jenkins's statements on how our perceptions get defined and influenced by social interactions (Jenkins 2008a, p.39).

"I do not feel like Swedish because I was born and grew up in Syria within a Syrian culture and values. Therefore, it is easy for me to describe myself in Sweden because I feel still Syrian, despite everything. My identity is 100 per cent Syrian." (Kezman)

"I preferred to identify myself as Syrian before coming to Sweden. However, here I started to feel more Arabic than Syrian when I make friends from Middle Eastern countries, especially from Lebanon and Jordan, because I realized that we had the same culture in the Middle East and all over the world. This is why I identify with the Arabic identity in Sweden."(Mazhar)

With this statement, Mazhar feels more Arabic than the Syrian identity in the host country. In this way, Mazhar's self-identity is associated with a collective identity (Jenkins 2008a, p.103) because he found his self-identity by comparing similarities with the collective identity of his own community. In particular, language and culture are important factors in discovering these similarities. This kind of identification is about the definition of the collective identity explained by Jenkins:

"Collective identity is a similarity among and between a plurality of individuals who either see themselves as similar or have in common similar circumstances and behaviours" (2008a,p.103).

"I came from Syria. Therefore, it is easy for me to identify who I am. Therefore, I do not feel like Swedish. We have different features and lifestyle from Swedes. For example here people are not as friendly and talkative as Syrian one. So, it is very difficult for them to make friends in a Syrian way." (Lisa)

The reason why Lisa does not feel Swedish is because she has cultural differences in the host country. This kind of feeling has an important effect in terms of internalizing her self-identity. (Jenkins 2008b, p.14) because she is quite aware of belonging to her ethnic group identity by finding out many different values about herself and other people. Therefore, cultural difference is a significant factor in shaping her self-identity, which leads both distinguish from other ethnic groups in the daily life and group identification and categorization (Jenkins 2008a, p.105).

In conclusion, Davud and Farjad are in between both the Syrian and the Swedish cultures and values, causing them a feeling of confusion in relation to their identity. They have a variety of negative and positive features from both the cultures. Therefore, it is clear that they usually are in between two cultures in which they are not able to define with a certain identity. This kind of feeling is in line with Rapport and Overing's (2000, p.229) explanations that we are neither here nor there; making this liminal stage a zone of social-cultural non-identity. On the other hand, Kezman and Lisa identify themselves as Syrians. Their identity is based on the cultural differences in their daily life, which is a part of group identification. As Jenkins mentions above, group-identification occurs as a result of an internal process while persons define themselves with others (Jenkins 2008a, p.21). In this way, an individual's belonging to a special group has a significant impact on the formation of his or her identity. As in the case of Mazhar, he prefers to identify himself with much more Arab identity than Syrian because his environment plays a significant role in defining his identity. As argued by Jenkins (2008a, p.103), one of the main reasons such identification is that he particularly finds similarity rather than differences through a common ethnicity. Therefore, ethnicity has a significant impact on such the identification in which individuals have a mutually effect with others through shared things like language, which is a part of how Jenkins refers to collective identity.

6.2. Stereotypes as perceived by the interviewees

Another significant point that should be highlighted is how the interviewees consider that they are identified by Swedish society. The formation of identity not only describes how individuals define themselves but also how they are identified by others (Mead 1934, p.135). The way other people see you have a significant impact on how you define yourself, which describes social identity and self-identity as the significant features of identity. All of the interviewees generally have similar answers in the matter of the research questions. They believe that Swedish society has a tendency to exclude them, although they try to do their best to live in the Swedish society. Moreover, they think that they have been ignored by the individuals of the society due to their physical characteristics and their Syrian refugee identity. Therefore, they are categorized into a group depending on stereotypes, which divides the world as 'us' and 'them,' and leads them to keep their own personal and group identity towards others (Tajfel 1981, p.132).

In this part, the way the majority perceives the interviewees have a significant impact on how they identify themselves. This could be understood in all of the interviewees' answers. Davud, for instance, stated:

"I feel like a stranger due to my accent and my physical characteristic while talking Swedish around me. Another thing is that the term refugee makes Swedish people disturbed. Especially, being a Syrian refugee is not a good thing for them, because I know how they see us such as Muslim and outcast people, therefore, we will be living forever with labelling these differences negatively." (Davud)

Davud narrated that his physical appearance and the language accent are physical characteristics in defining himself. Due to these reasons, his ethnic origin is easily distinguishable from the mainstream society. Therefore, he is categorized by the society with terms such as Muslim and outcast, which is how Jenkins (2008a, p.105) explains the process of categorization, saying that categorization stems from the outside of the group defined as similar. This is why categorization is part of the external process, internalizing Davud's feelings about his ethnic identity.

"I am seen as a war refugee by the mainstream society. Even if some of the Syrian people moved here to live in the rest of their lives before the war, or they already have Swedish citizenship, they will always be labelled as a refugee in a bad way. Therefore, I sometimes do not feel belong to this society." (Mazhar)

Mazhar has a similar opinion with Davud related to the perception by the individuals of Swedish society. He is comparing with those who came to Sweden before the civil war or had a Swedish passport so that he shows me he is categorized as a war refugee. Therefore, his identity has been seen by the mainstream society in a negative way, which leads to the formation of stereotypical ideas. As Tajfel (1981, p.132) mentions, the necessary process in stereotyping is categorization because individuals are categorizing some things or groups to show that we are different from others. As in the case of Mazhar, stereotypes are linked to the conflict in his own country, which means that stereotypes generally have many negative aspects (Macrae, et al., 1993, p.78).

"I would say some Swedish people look like angry and challenging to make friends in the Syrian way. I really do not know why they had such an idea towards us. This might be due to cultural differences because here Syrian refugees get money from this system without working. I think this situation makes them feel angry toward us." (Lisa)

She has the opinion of some Swedish being angry and trying to get away from Syrian refugees. This represents the cultural differentiation, which influences her sense of belonging as well as her identity. As Jenkins argued (2008b, p.14), cultural differentiations have an important effect on the formation of ethnicity. Furthermore, she believes that some of the people in Sweden have some stereotypes towards the Syrian refugees. This is also related to how Tajfel (1981, p.116) explains the notion stereotyping by stating that it has been described as a generalized and widely accepted belief about people who consist of a particular group.

"I think they look at me in a different way because of my ethnic origin. When I am sitting with Swedish friends, I do not feel more comfortable with them. Even if I sometimes do not care how they see me, but sometimes when I am working or doing something with them, I feel like that I do not want to make a mistake in front of them because I do not want them to say to me that he could make a mistake because of being a refugee. In this way, I am trying to prove myself as much as I can because I just want to show them what a refugee would do in the world." (Farjad)

Farjad has drawn a boundary between himself and others, which show that he is quite aware of his ethnic identity in the host country. In that context, his experience is related to Barth's (1969, p.16) explanation that individuals create ethnic boundaries among themselves while interacting with each other, which leads them to protect their own values, and lifestyle in the host country. Furthermore, he states that he was in trouble because of having his Syrian identity because he sometimes felt the need to correct himself towards his friends and colleagues. This could be linked to Mead's self-identity theory related to the distinction between the 'Me' and the 'I.' In this case, Farjad directly gives a response to the attitudes of individuals of the Swedish society by trying to prove himself, which is how the 'I' self as subject took place (1934, p.203).

"I do not spend much time with Swedish people when I have free time because they have their social environment because they try to classify by a Syrian refugee to me in a bad way. Also, my Swedish is very good in comparison with other refugees. However, I think I will never be a part of the Swedish community because I have dark eyes and black hair." (Kezman)

Kezman has a similar opinion as in the case of Davud related the perception of the mainstream society. These both interviewees demonstrate to us that the appearance of a person can be easily understood who that person is and where that comes from. This is related to how Giddens (1991, p.53-54) defines the relationship between identity and social codes by stating that some simple things like your appearance or accent might be a significant factor in your identity. In this way, being a Syrian reflects one of the basic characteristic features of Kezman's identity.

In conclusion, except Lisa, all other interviewees feel that they are negatively perceived by the large section of the society such as war refugees, Muslim, and outcast. As they have different physical characteristics or accents and whenever they speak Swedish, they feel as if they have been seen by mainstream society differently. These kinds of stereotypes based on social groups are the result of the social interactions of individuals. Therefore, stereotypes tend to systematize information in relation to the group identity. As discussed by Tajfel (1981, p.132), they feel that they have been categorized into 'them' by the mainstream society who defines themselves as 'us,' which makes them draw a boundary between themselves and the others. This is how they can find their own position in the dominant or subordinate group. On the other hand, Lisa thinks that mainstream society has some stereotypes because of cultural differences. This is related to how Jenkins (2008b, p.14) explains the relationship between ethnicity and cultural by stating that the ethnicity is based on cultural differences based on shared meanings, which means that stereotypes are cultural notions prevailed through particular social contexts.

6.3. Belonging

As mentioned previously, many scholars have defined several factors that determine the sense of belonging among the interviewees. Thus, I intend to focus on what kind of factors influence the way they define their sense of belonging from their perspective. Throughout each interview, I realized that some of the factors have important effects on the interviewees to be an important part of the society, and also identify them that they are different from the individuals in the host country where they have felt excluded in many ways. The understanding of belonging seems like that the interviewees have always encountered this concept in their daily lives.

"Sometimes, I feel I belong to here because Malmö has a cosmopolitan atmosphere; this makes me feel as if I am at home. But sometimes, I feel like a stranger to Sweden, even if I challenge to adapt to Swedish life because when I think of my ethnic origin, I recognize that I belong to Syria and its culture." (Davud)

With this statement, Davud shows the importance of ethnic identity about how he feels related to a sense of belonging because of the way others see you are as important as the way you see yourself. This is in accordance with what Yuval-Davis (2006, p.199) describes that the relation between belonging and identity: "Belonging can be an act of self- identification or identification by others, in a transient and stable way." In that sense, his ethnic identity reflects belonging that is built by that rights and duties based on his own identity. On the other hand, he feels that he belongs to Sweden due to the cosmopolitan culture of the city of Malmö. In this way, As Yuval-

Davis (2011,p.18) argued, the relationship between location and identification is very important for the formation of a sense of belonging, which makes it much more difficult for Davud to get a clearer view of his sense of belonging.

"I do not have any common with Swedes due to my identity and cultural values, although I have many Swedish friends. When sometimes they talk about topics like movies and magazines with each other, I feel like they do not prefer to speak with me much. I think they see me in a different way. This makes me feel not belonging to Sweden. The more interesting for me is that despite all of these things, I do not feel belonging to Syria at all." (Farjad)

In the case of Farjad, it is clear that the experience of exclusion affects his sense of belonging. However, he does not feel any belonging to Syria at all. He has quite a sense of confusion, as he does not know where he really belonged. These kinds of feelings can be linked to Anthias's (2006, p.21) discussion on the meaning of belonging and why the definitions of belonging have a variety of aspects.

Mazhar, Lisa, and Kezman's experiences are related to Yuval- Davis' (2006, p.199), and Brah's (1996, p.192) explanations that belonging is associated with emotional attachments, a sense of feeling safe and at home, and in the way that they express a variety of experiences in their sense of belonging in the host country.

"I have felt at home here because I have integrated this society by working, studying, following Swedish media, and having friends. In particular, I have spent much time with Swedish than my own nationality so that I have brought my Swedish skills to a better level. All of this that I have mentioned are some important reasons why I have felt part of society." (Mazhar)

Mazhar states that he feels much integrated into Swedish society in a way. In this context, his feeling of belonging is constructed via a variety of social factors by emphasizing him belong to the Swedish community. Therefore, as Yuval-Davis (2006, p.199) has discussed, "belonging is always a dynamic process, not a fixed structure." His explanations also demonstrate how he tries to socialize into a new society by communicating with people who are the outsiders of his own community. Also, I recognized that some interviewees generally feel lucky in comparison with the refugees from their own community as well as the other communities because it is not common to have a good job and good education amongst the refugees in the host country. It is generally believed that the integration of low skilled refugees into a new society is not easy and

take much time. As in the case of Mazhar, being an educated person makes him integration into Swedish society easier.

According to Kezman's narration, feeling safe and secure seems to significantly affect his sense of belonging. Accordingly, he explains:

"Sweden has given my safety. I feel here much safer than Syria. Therefore, I am not worried about my life here, and also here I am free to discuss politics in every topic. I have been grateful for this country due to these reasons that I didn't have in my country. Beyond that, an important question I should say is that I am afraid of the rise of the Sweden Democrats. For that, I am super afraid of my life in the future."(Kezman)

Kezman clearly shows that the term safe is one of the main reasons why he belongs to Sweden, which makes him feel at home in the host country. This can be associated with how Brah (1996, p.192) defines the notion of home in the migration context by stating that home is not a physical place, contrarily, an imaginary place where refugees have the emotional attachments, and sense of security. As in the case of Kezman, Sweden is much more than a location and thus, becomes a homeland as he feels a social bond towards Sweden. Furthermore, he said that a number of demonstrations towards populist right-party and racism that were taken place in Malmö showed how the high number of people got together to help the refugees. Therefore, he appreciates that Malmö has a significant feature of being a secure city. This is also how Cohen (1982, p.2-3) states the importance of the relationship between a sense of belonging and community, saying that each community aims at constructing a sense of unity with the other people.

"I feel I belong to Malmö much more than Syria and the other cities of Sweden because you can see many people from all over the world in Malmö. Everyone respects each other due to the diverse culture of Malmö, and also administrators in the municipality of Malmö are working very transparently. Therefore, here there are no much political and social issues as compared to my country." (Lisa)

Lisa is comparing both two countries by stating the main political and social differences, which directly determines her sense of belonging. By mentioning these differences, it seems like she has been influenced by the cosmopolitan atmosphere and of the transparent administration of Malmö. These kinds of feelings are formed and changed in the economic, political and social processes over time, which reflect some of the significant components of the sense of belonging explained by Yuval-Davis (2006, p.199).

It should be worth noting that several interviewees express that they would go back to Syria in the future if conditions are suitable, but now they have the negative thoughts due to the ongoing civil war, the economic crisis, the anti-democratic system in Syria. Furthermore, they intend to live in Sweden to have better living conditions and opportunities for their careers.

In conclusion, I received a wide range of explanations from the interviewees related where they felt belonging as they had a different understanding of belonging, and several factors affected their feelings. In the case of Davud, he belongs to be somewhere in between Sweden and Syrian societies. This shows us one of the main issues faced by him in Sweden because it provides him with a sense of confusion. Contrarily, Farjad does not feel belonging to anywhere. It seems that his sense of belonging has been influenced by the prejudiced and exclusionary behaviours that he has directly experienced in both Sweden and Syria. Kezman, Mazhar, and Lisa express much more belonging to Sweden than Syria because feeling 'safe' and having the 'friends' and in the 'democratic system' in Sweden are the significant factors, which positively affects their sense of belonging to Sweden. All of the interviewees' statements about whether they belong to Syria or Sweden support Davis's, Anthias's, Cohen's and Barh's conceptual approaches explained in the theoretical framework section.

6.4. The role of language in ethnic identity

Language has an important effect on the development of both personal and ethnic identity (Mead 1934, p.142). Language and ethnic identity are interrelated with each other. Some interviewees stated the significance of speaking the Arabic language to maintain ties both in the host society and homeland. Therefore, only Arabic is spoken by some interviewees at home, or when they are spending time with members of the Syrian community and some of the friends in the host country. Mazhar's and Kezman's explanations demonstrated this.

"My siblings and I always speak Arabic at home due to our mother tongue. It is very important to talk about our ethnic language, because I have very close friends here from other Arabic countries, for instance, from Lebanon and Jordan. When I meet up with them, we are speaking Arabic with each other, which makes me happy. Although all of us know Swedish at a sufficient level, we prefer talking to our mother tongue because it makes us feel much more comfortable and confident." (Mazhar)

"I take care of speaking Arabic at home. We do not use any other languages apart from Arabic at home, because I know my kids are ultimately learning Swedish at school. Therefore, I do not want them to forget their own ethnic identity in speaking Arabic at home." (Kezman)

Davud, on the other hand, said that knowing and speaking Arabic not only provided him to be in contact with his family in Syria but also helped him to find a job in Sweden. Thus, language is seen from his perspective as a part of an investment tool in describing the significance of the Arabic language.

"I have benefited from the Arabic language to maintain my family bonds in Syria because I speak with my family in Arabic. I do not use it outside too much, because I have much more Swedish and international friends than Arab ones. However, it does not mean that my language is not important. On the contrary, knowing Arabic in Sweden is very significant for my business life because you can see lots of people from Syria as well as other Arab countries; therefore, Arabic is one of the most significant languages in Sweden, and I have been very grateful that I already knew it." (Davud)

Lisa emphasises that language is one of the crucial tools to separate the Syrian community from the majority.

"I feel proud of my mother tongue because it is a part of my ethnic identity. More clearly, it reminds of me 'who I am' even if I am trying to integrate into Swedish life in both the society and the school."(Lisa)

According to Jenkins, ethnicity and the classification between 'us' and 'them' are linked with the above Lisa's answer because she refers to ethnicity as the first identification. As in the case of Lisa, ethnicity shows a significant aspect of self-identification when it comes to collective identity."Ethnicity, when it matters to people, really matters. The circumstances under which it matters are relevant, however. Ethnicity depends on similarity and difference rubbing up against each other collectively: us and them." (Jenkins2008a, p.87)

Collective identification has two significant forms. "In the first, the members of a collectivity can identify themselves as such: they know who (and what) they are. In the second, members may be ignorant of their membership or even of the collectivity's existence" (Jenkins 2008a, p.104). Farjad's answer reflects this last statement.

"The Arabic language is not essential to me because I am here in Sweden. I have been still learning Swedish for a better job and life for a while. Therefore, I do not like to contact those who speak Arabic here. The other reason behind it is that I do not feel like much comfortable whenever I talk to Arabic with my foreign friends. I cannot explain why I feel like this."(Farjad)

Farjad emphasizes the reasons why Arabic is not an important part of his life. The first reason is associated with his career-wise in Sweden. The other reason directly refers to the ethnic identity membership that he intends to ignore in the context of collectivity identity. These explanations of the interviewee are associated with how Giddens (1991, p.106-107) explains the meaning of the identity in the postmodern order by stating that an individual can deliberately choose his own identification depending on social changes, which shows us that ethnicity is changeable.

Jenkins (2008b, p.14) states that "ethnicity is centrally a matter of shared meanings – what we conventionally call culture." Therefore, a common language occupies an important place in the definition of ethnicity. As can be seen from the interviews, most of the interviewees, apart from Farjad, highlight the significance of the Arabic language because of several reasons. For Davud, the Arabic has been quite significant for him as he has benefited from it for both job skills and family connections. When it comes to Lisa, Mazhar, and Kezman, all of these three interviewees consider the language as an important part of their identities. I would say that Lisa and Kezman reflect a stronger commitment to their own identity. They directly refer to the Arabic language as a part of their ethnic identity. The language, especially for Lisa, is an essential tool to not only define her self-identification but also determines how she is perceived by the mainstream society. This remark is in line with Mead's (1934, p.135) explanation that individuals take the attitudes of others as a shared language develops their self-identity feelings through definitions. For Kezman, his mother tongue is quite significant; therefore, he wants to influence his children for the construction of ethnic identity by speaking with his children in Arabic. It appears that Lisa's and Kezman's statements are so similar to Mazhar's understanding of his self-definition. Farjad has the weakest sense of his ethnic identity among the interviewees. He does not feel more comfortable in speaking with those who do not know Arabic due to the ongoing problems in his country. Although he identifies himself as Syrian, he has a great tendency to use Swedish rather than Arabic. This experience of Farjad's weak feeling towards his own identity is related to Mead's view that self-identity has a development, and is being shaped and changed through social interactions (ibid, p.135). Therefore, Farjad's own identity is affected based on response to the society and others about himself, which means that the 'I' reflects the self as a subject of experience (ibid, p.203).

7. Conclusion

The aim of the study is to illuminate the feelings of identity and belonging of the Syrian refugees in the Scania region in Sweden. The research questions are leading me regarding how the Syrian refugees identify themselves in Sweden and where they really feel belonging to. Furthermore, I am wondering what kind of factors have a significant influence on their identity and sense of belonging in the interviewees' perspective, and how they consider they are defined by others who do not comprise of the Syrian society because the way refugees define themselves might be related other people's perceptions. One of the main reasons why I chose these questions was that I aimed to discover how to live in with different identities and which factors affected their identity construction as well as their sense of belonging in Sweden.

In order to accomplish more reliable results and the purpose of the thesis study, I employed the themes of identity that were three main aspects such as the individual, collective and ethnic identity, respectively, along with sense of belonging and stereotyping, which were very helpful to provide a wider understanding of the interviewees' experiences and thoughts related to their identity and sense of belonging. As the term identity was so broad, I focused on only these three identities in the theoretical part, which constitutes the most significant part of this study.

To answer the first question related self-identification, the chosen interviewees appear to have a weak sense of being Syrian. Some of the interviewees define themselves as Syrians; others emphasize that their Syrian identity has become more vulnerable after coming to Sweden. After asking a question regarding how they defined their identity in the host country, it was an easy answer for them to tell me who they were. Kezman had the strongest sense of being Syrian in comparison with the other interviewees, and he was the only person who had been longer in Sweden than the other interviewees. Teaching Arabic to his children and getting in remain in touch with other Syrians in the host country was quite important for him. Therefore, he is more explicit when it comes to his self-identification. Farjad had a clear primordialism perspective related to his self-identification. He believes that he cannot change his identity. Furthermore, he does not proudly say that he has had the Syrian identity as Sweden has provided him with a sense of security as well as a high level of human rights. Davud feels like much cosmopolitan in multicultural Sweden, even though he identifies himself as Syrian due to physical appearance and the accent, which causes some confusion about his self-identification. Mazhar identifies himself both as Arab and Middle-Eastern rather than Syrian as he makes friendships with other Middle Eastern countries. Therefore, it is apparent that the environment has an important effect

on shaping his identity. As for Lisa, she seems to be influenced by both the collective identity of the Syrian and Swedish communities. However, she stresses that she does not feel a Swedish because she is aware that she has different values and cultures with a distinct identity. Therefore, it is not difficult for her to identify who she is.

To answer the second research question: what is their sense of belonging, the findings of the study were complicated because they were very similar to the answers regarding the identity. The interviewees provided a large number of different explanations that have affected their sense of belonging in various ways. Farjad is confused about his knowledge of belonging, as he has the experience of exclusion from the Swedish community, being seen as his individual and ethnic identity differently. Despite having the experience of exclusion in the host country, he does not feel belonging to Syria as well, which makes it complicated to get a more realistic picture of his sense of belonging. Davud has the same feelings as Farjad, finding themselves in the sense of categorization in Sweden. Unlike Farjad, Davud seems that he tries to be adapting to Swedish life via the social interaction outside of his own community. These kinds of feelings of belonging are involved with several reasons, such as their experience of exclusion and sense of categorization due to personal and ethnic differences. On the other hand, Mazhar, Kezman, and Lisa are confident in themselves belonging to Sweden, and it is so easy to see their answers and which factors lead to them love to Sweden. For Mazhar, studying and having friends in Sweden are some strong factors in determining his sense of belonging. His sense of belonging is based on emotional attachments, which makes him feel a strong connection and belonging to Sweden. When it comes to Kezman, the feeling safe and secure are some of the prominent factors why he loves Sweden a lot. However, he has been so worried about the rising of the right-wing party in Sweden, which might affect his sense of belonging in the future. Lisa has been influenced by the political and social structure of Sweden.

In conclusion, all of the interviewees are aware of having a different identity as compared with the Swedes. Some of the interviewees tend to integrate into Swedish society, and others do not care to adapt to the society because of some reasons. When I asked a question of how they felt in Sweden, they started to highlight some important differences between Swedish and Syrians, and they tried to show me some of the main values, ideas and thoughts that led to the differences between ‘them’ and ‘us.’ Although some of the interviewees have some significant features of both cultures, they do not feel like they belong to either the Swedish or Syrian culture and values. Their answer seems to be somewhere between both cultures, not being able to identify where they really belong. For instance, as one of the interviewees said, he feels that he belongs

somewhere in the air. One of the other interviewees does not believe that he belongs to either the Swedish or Syrian culture and values. When it comes to self-identification, I would say that some interviewees' answers are clear that they identify themselves with the Syrian identity. The others have confusion related to their self-identification, making them not define their identity.

The interviewees also express that they are defined as different in the host country. This is why they identify themselves as Syrians as they are discerned from Swedish, and they have some important characteristics that have a significant impact on this ethnic distinction, which leads to the distinction between 'them' and 'us.' They assume that they are being identified as 'others' due to their Syrian background and identity. Therefore, they share similar experiences related to the perception in the host country.

7.1. Suggestions for further research

Firstly, I was not able to focus on some essential themes during the thesis study. After starting to analyze the data collected, I recognized that the theme of religion would be necessary for the interviewees. In this way, the religious identity, together with the individual, collective, and ethnic identity that have been analyzed in this study, might have provided a broader perspective for the readers. Also, it would be great to analyze the first generation with the descendants of the Syrian refugees in Sweden and look at whether there are any significant differences in the self-identity, stereotyping and sense of belonging. Another important theme that I could not involve in my study was cultural identity. It would have been better if this study had investigated the cultural identity of the interviewees. Lastly, the future study could explore some significant differences by providing the same number of gender perspective among the interviewees, even if the study has been involved in only one female interviewee.

8.References

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9. Appendix

Interview Questions

1. Could you describe a little bit about yourself? Education, age, employment?

2. When did you arrive in Sweden?

2. How did you come to Sweden?

3. Do you think that you belong to Syrian or Sweden?

4. Do you think that you are integrated into the Swedish community and lifestyle?

5. What identity do you define yourself with?

6. To which identity/values do you belong?

7. Is your mother tongue important to you? If so, why?

8. Have you ever been in trouble just because of your Syrian identity?

9. Do you follow Swedish or Syrian values? How?

10. Do you think that the Swedish values are different from the Syrian values? Why?

11. What are your thoughts on how the Swedes perceive your community?

12. What are the good and bad aspects of living in Sweden and Syria?

13. Where is your home for you and which reasons?

14. How often do you come together with Syrian people?

15. Do you want to say anything extra?