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Mobility dynamics within the settlement phase of Syrian refugees in Norway and The Netherlands

Ilse van Liempt^a and Susanne Bygnes^b

^aDepartment of Human Geography, Utrecht University, Utrecht, TC Netherlands; ^bDepartment of Sociology, University of Bergen, Bergen, Norway

ABSTRACT

This paper sets out to investigate the forced and voluntary (im)mobility of Syrians who recently moved to Europe and are in the transition from asylum to settlement. We conceptualise 'settlement' for this group as a dynamic process and trace different forms of mobility in this phase, which is more commonly defined as static and associated with 'having arrived'. We take a broad perspective on mobility, including social, mental and physical aspects of moving and being stuck and include refugees' own experiences and everyday coping strategies in order to understand how the interaction with mobility regimes takes place and is experienced after settlement. We do this by analysing qualitative interviews conducted in two similar but nevertheless different reception and settlement contexts. The Netherlands and Norway are both highly regulated welfare states providing support to newcomers although, importantly, also restricting their agency and mobility, resulting in spatial and social exclusion. By zooming in on research participants' acts of everyday coping mechanisms and different domains of integration in the two contexts, we identify similarities and differences in strategies for challenging official and everyday definitions of where and what to be after fleeing to Europe.

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Introduction

For asylum-seekers and refugees, important phases within the migration process are the escape, asylum and settlement phases which all come with different forms of (im)mobility. In this article we focus on the transition from the asylum to the settlement phase of Syrian refugees' trajectories and differentiate between forced and voluntary (im)mobility within that phase. Settlement is often seen as the end phase of migration and as such not associated with mobility, let alone forced types of mobility. Drawing on the new mobilities paradigm (Sheller and Urry 2006), we conceptualise the settlement phase as dynamic and acknowledge different domains, change and ruptures within it. We show that within this part of the migration process, too, people must readjust in relation to the new context and concepts of self (see also Scannell and Gifford 2010). The new mobility paradigm enables a *subject-based approach* that prioritises how people characterise their *own* mobility (and fixity) by focusing on experiences and practices. But it also allows us to study the politics around mobility.

CONTACT Ilse van Liempt  i.c.vanliempt@uu.nl  Department of Human Geography, Utrecht University, Utrecht, TC Netherlands

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We draw on qualitative interviews with 75 Syrians who are recently arrived in the Netherlands (49) and Norway (26) and take refugees' perspectives and feelings of movement and being stuck as a starting point for analysis by approaching their mobility as a *trajectory*. Once refugees have arrived and entered the reception and settlement phase they are supposed to be free but, in that phase, we noticed that there are still forms of forced (im)mobility. Forced relocations, for example, include moving between asylum seeker center (ASC) locations and settlement according to a dispersal scheme. Being directed to a particular location within the dispersal regime while having other preferences with regard to the location of settlement takes away the freedom that is usually associated with settlement. On the other hand we show how leisure based, everyday mobilities help refugees to cope with these forced immobilities.

We show context specific differences in the strategies drawn on to regain control of everyday mobility, specifically leisure related mobilities. Although the Dutch and Norwegian contexts are both highly organised welfare states and strongly regulate the mobility of asylum-seekers and refugees after arrival, the countries also differ greatly in other respects. Important differences that affect how people adapt includes population size and density, distances, topography, and the availability of different kinds of leisure venues. In this article we identify important similarities between the policy structures restricting and enabling mobility after arrival in the Netherlands and Norway. Following migrants' mobility trajectories and everyday coping mechanisms in the settlement phase enables us to discern fragments of their trajectory of belonging, linking past and present while reinventing identities in relation to new environments.

We approach settling down as a *process* that shifts and takes shape, a trajectory which includes memories and experiences of the past, including the hardships as well as the present and a projected future. We show that, in addition to formal domains such as the economic and the legal, housing and leisure are important domains, too, that come with important narratives of forced and voluntary mobility and immobility and are crucial to understand if we want to grasp the dynamics involved in the 'settlement' of refugees.

Bridging displacement and mobility studies

Refugees and asylum seekers are hardly ever framed as mobile subjects after having arrived somewhere. They are mostly contained and perceived as wanting to stay put, denying people's plural geographic, social and migration movements (Kleinman 2019). Very little work has addressed the fertile middle ground between forced migration and mobility studies (Gill, Caletrio, and Mason 2011, Della Puppa and Sanò 2021). Forced migration studies tend to focus on the precarity forced migrants face in the migration process and as such run the risk of overlooking migrant's agency (Malkki 1996). The mobility paradigm helps to see that mobility is also a source of empowerment. It allows people to escape from situations of conflict and danger, but also after settlement it can be seen as a source of empowerment when people try to find their way in a new society.

The new mobilities paradigm is useful when wanting to make the bridge between forced migration, displacement and mobility studies as it allows for a broader approach to mobility. It, first of all, moves beyond a single focus on the *spatial movement* of human beings and include the (embodied) experiences, practices and politics around mobility (e.g. Adey et al. 2014; Cresswell 2010; Kwan and Schwanen 2016; Sheller and Urry 2006). As such it allows to include the mental and social aspects of moving (as well as being stuck), which is crucial for understanding the personal dynamics involved and the everyday experiences in the settlement phase of refugees. Secondly, it is open for acknowledging social changes that are reshaping migration scenarios and, in case of forced migration, mobility that takes place outside the reception system (Della Puppa and Sanò 2021).

Moreover, it is important to acknowledge that mobility is not the same for everyone and is practiced in different ways. People's past moves towards a nation state may have greater significance to them than their moves into it. Cresswell (2010), for this reason, argues for including past mobilities and experiences with mobility since we cannot understand new mobilities without understanding old ones. Mobility is a dynamic process and someone who moves at one point can also be stuck, reluctantly immobile, at another point. Gill, Caletrio, and Mason (2011) argue in a similar vein that the process of human displacement cannot be fully understood in all its complexities without looking at the dynamic and systematic nature of interlocking mobilities and immobilities.

The new mobilities paradigm is also of great help as it explicitly calls analytical attention to regimes and politics of mobility and allows for a much better understanding of the contextual dynamics and interdependencies between mobility and immobility. It has however largely put the more positive and romantic experiences of mobility upfront (Creswell 2006). Bridging displacement and mobility studies allows us to better understand the contexts of power that are relevant for forced migration and investigate which social spaces and spheres are available to individuals whose mobility is controlled and restricted in particular ways. In this paper we explicitly focus on the settlement phase within forced migration.

Settlement in The Netherlands and Norway

The general philosophy behind both the Norwegian and the Dutch dispersal policy for refugees is to 'spread the burden', which refers to sharing the responsibility for and the financial costs of housing refugees between municipalities. The concern with 'fair burden-sharing' has historically also been driven by a fear that the concentration of refugees in bigger cities would result in segregation and deprivation (Darling 2022, Van Liempt and Miellet 2021). Although there is no formal obligation to accept this housing offer in the Netherlands and refugees can voluntarily take up residence anywhere and find housing independently, in practice this is difficult due to tight housing markets and refugees' lack of social networks. As a result, Syrians live dispersed all over the Netherlands and the concentrations in cities such as Amsterdam (3,000), Rotterdam (2,800) and The Hague (1,900) are relatively small for a group that consists of 103,000 people (Central Bureau for Statistics 2019) – which indicates that part of this settling down is not entirely free as people have very limited control over the location of settlement.

Like many other European countries, including the Netherlands, Norway also practices the dispersed settlement of refugees (Borevi and Bengtsson 2015). The dispersal policy, applying to refugees attending the state-financed introduction programme with a guaranteed monthly allowance for a period of two years, provides a limited choice in where to go. Most refugees in Norway are assigned to a municipality in Norway according to a distribution key. As a result, the residence pattern of Syrians there is very dispersed, with only 42 per cent living in Norway's most populated areas around the capital and 7 per cent (compared to 3 per cent in the general population) living in Norway's less-central municipalities (Tønnessen, Dzamarija, and Drahus 2020). Bearing in mind that the country's size – population ratio in Norway is 5.4 million people living in a 385,203 km² territory – in stark contrast to the Netherlands' 17.2 million and 41,543 km² area – domestic travel in Norway is costly and time-consuming.

In addition to the policy framework regulating housing and settlement in the Netherlands and Norway, both countries offer exemptions or alternatives, which are in practice primarily available to the most resourceful. The Norwegian ministry, for example, made *Agreed Self-Settlement* for refugees an explicit policy in the wake of the increased arrivals in 2015. The term 'agreed' was included in the wording of the Norwegian policy in order to separate it from the Swedish model of practicing free settlement (Henningsen et al. 2016). The aim of this policy was to make further use of available housing in the private renting market and also to control

settlement by making the agreement with the municipality a prerequisite. Another reasoning behind the policy is its likelihood of creating a sense of choice and control among its users – expected to increase their chances of successful integration.

About one third of Norway's widely spread municipalities opted for agreed self-settlement. The arrangement was used more frequently by single male adult refugees with networks, good language skills and a higher educational level and, while municipalities varied in size and location, they were slightly more centrally located and densely inhabited than the average Norwegian municipality (Henningsen et al. 2016). Despite the positive experiences, studies show that only a very small proportion of refugees made use of self-settlement. Henningsen and Søholt (2018) explain that, due to a lack of information about the policy, it is mostly refugees with resources like language skills and contacts who are able to maneuver the agreed self-settlement policy.

Something similar is the case for the Dutch private initiative called *TakeCareBnB*, which offers asylum-seekers who are granted refugee status but are still residing in an ASC because they are waiting for a housing offer, the possibility to temporarily stay with a Dutch person/family. As in Norway, it is a small number of refugees who participate in these programmes – a very selective group who still question the lack of choice in where refugees can settle down. The programs are however foregrounded by research participants in both contexts as examples of policies that offer some leeway in regaining control of their mobility in the settlement phase.

Interviews on Syrians' everyday experiences with settlement

In the Netherlands, qualitative research that involved 49 in-depth interviews was conducted with Syrian refugees who had recently arrived and who had obtained refugee status after January 2014. The aim of the interviews was to capture Syrians' everyday experiences with settlement in various locations in the Netherlands. The research team consisted of a mix of male and female researchers with Dutch and Syrian backgrounds. Two female Syrian students conducted the interviews as part of a research internship through the InClUusion programme of Utrecht University and helped with the translations. One male Syrian researcher was hired as a junior researcher for this project. Most interviews were undertaken in Arabic so that people could more easily express their feelings. These interviews were later translated by Syrian research assistants into English. Twelve interviews were completed in Dutch. Questions around work, education and civic integration were ones that most respondents had been asked before. The questions on social contacts, the neighbourhood, leisure time and concrete public spaces were more surprising for them and triggered more-revealing conversations.

Access to respondents was provided through the personal networks of the Syrian research assistants, through organisations which help Syrian refugees, by participating in language cafés and by entering Syrian cafés, hairdressers' and shops. Some respondents referred us to other Syrians. Most interviews were done at people's homes but some were also conducted in cafés, community centres and a hair salon. We interviewed 31 male and 18 female Syrians which roughly represents the gender division within the Syrian community in the Netherlands where 65 per cent are male (Dagevos et al. 2018). In terms of education, around one third of the Syrians in the Netherlands has finished higher education, one third middle education and one third lower education (Dagevos et al. 2018). Our respondents varied in gender, educational background, age and residential location (see Annex 1). We conducted 11 interviews in larger cities (Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague, Utrecht), 21 in 'middle-sized' cities (according to the measurement of the national government) and 17 in small towns. Our interviews are all recorded and, if need be, translated, transcribed and anonymised. The transcripts are coded and analysed with the support from Atlas.ti.

In Norway during 2016 and 2017, open-ended, interviews lasting between one and 2 hours were conducted with 26 individuals – 22 men and four women – between 18 and 35 years of age, mostly originating from Syria's largest cities as part of a larger project called [reference omitted]. Eight of the interviewees were interviewed again in 2019. All but one of the 26 interviewees were either planning to or were already attending university or had already completed university-level education in fields ranging from law and philology to engineering and medical sciences before going to Norway. Of the total 27,000 Syrians presently living in Norway, 90 per cent arrived after 2014. The group is young and male-dominated (61 per cent) and about 25 per cent arrived following a college or university education (Dzamarija 2018). An Arabic-speaking male research assistant with a Syrian background recruited interviewees by approaching potential participants in public places and asylum reception facilities. Author B recruited interviewees through social media networks such as *Refugees Welcome* and in public meetings.

Each interviewee recruited lived in or on the outskirts of two of Norway's largest cities which, for the purposes of this study, are nicknamed *Fjord City* and *River City*. Three interviewees later voluntarily relocated to Norway's capital, Oslo. Many interviewees had made leisure trips to Oslo and other locations in and beyond Norway after settlement. The interview guides featured open questions about their lives in Syria, about the flight and, after, their present lives and future prospects. Some of the early interviews were conducted by the research assistant in Arabic and translated into English. Other interviews were conducted with the research assistant present as an interpreter and translated into English. The majority of the interviews in the first round were conducted in English by the researcher originating from Norway. In the follow-up phase, all interviewees were interviewed by the researcher – one in English and the rest in Norwegian. All interviews have been fully transcribed and manually analysed following the thematic thread of this paper (Braun and Clarke 2006). Pseudonyms are used rather than real names when we refer to respondents.

Trajectories of forced and voluntary (im)mobility around settlement

Research on irregular migration and the asylum phase has generated a rich account on waiting and being stuck (see for example, Griffiths 2017; Jacobsen, Karlsen, and Khosravi 2020) foregrounding the immobility produced by different migration regimes. Less attention has been devoted to forced mobilities of refugees after arrival. Forced mobility as an aspect of the settlement phase was however prevalent in our material. Research participants both in the Netherlands and in Norway, depict a sense of repeated up-rootedness throughout the first years after arrival. In the Netherlands, it was shown that the recent group of Syrian arrivals on average remained nine months in a reception centre – on average in four different locations (Dagevos et al. 2018). This number is much higher than other refugee groups from the past because, when Syrians arrived around 2014/2015, there were large shortages in locations. A Syrian man who moved six times in eighteen months from reception centre to reception centre had just been allocated to a house in a small town when we interviewed him (Interviewee 2). He reflects on the impact of such repeated involuntary mobility after arriving in the Netherlands:

When we came here they treated us really badly. They just kicked us from one centre to another. I had to move six times in 1.5 years. Now we have got our own place. Me and my mother. And it feels like finally we can breathe again.

A similar reflection on the unfreedom in mobility after arrival and how involuntary mobility is experienced in Norway is provided by Marwan (Interviewee 19). He described the constant moving as an impediment to maintaining the ties which he had created with friends and potential employers in different locations:

I'm trying to get the old plans back, to organise myself, but there's a lot of moving. I was in [ASC in a rural community], then [ASC in a rural community close to a big town], then in [ASC in a town] and now I've

been in Fjord City, all in one and a half years. That does not give you a lot of ... impression, you know the first step to stand on. Ok, I'm going to live here, ok I'm going to start. So every time I do that, they destroyed it and I had to move [...]. Actually it is a really negative thing. Because, as I told you, you have to put down the base for the building, so whenever you start to build the base or to put in a plant, to put a seed in your, in the soil... they will tell you 'Ok, go away'. So it will die, I cannot take it with me. So I have to plant another seed.

Our material corroborates previous research positing that trajectories of mobility are not a linear processes but goes up and down and sometimes even backwards (Schapendonk et al. 2020). Our data also importantly show that forced *mobility* is not only about physical mobility but can also be experienced in a broader sense as hampering life chances and a sense of moving forward in life (Bygnes 2021).

In the next section, we foreground migrants' strategies to take back control over mobility and exert agency both during and after the asylum-seeking process. Such efforts to regain control over one's life in a situation where mobility is severely constrained, even in the phase of settlement, entails everyday coping strategies. Such tactics can easily be overlooked but are important for understanding how newcomers are able to challenge a system which is often experienced as restricting mobility and agency.

Strategies to take back control over mobility

The interviews offer several examples of how Syrian refugees negotiate the mobility regimes in both Norway and the Netherlands in the settlement phase in order to take back control over their mobility. The *Temporary Stay Regulation* and *TakeCareBnB* in the Netherlands and the *Agreed Self-Settlement Scheme* in Norway are examples of how people use the potential for voluntary mobility built into each system as part of their everyday strategy to cope with difficult situations and to resist restrictions on their mobility.

For individuals who have received their residence permit but are still waiting in asylum accommodation, the planned self-settlement policy offers a possibility to take back control of their mobility and exert agency. Mahdi, for example, energetically recalls that he was informed about the policy by the Norwegian Directorate of Integration and Diversity (IMDI) and, in order to get away from the ASC as soon as possible, bought himself a computer and proceeded to write e-mails to all Norwegian municipalities. His efforts, however, were allegedly against the will of the ASC staff. Mahdi and several others tell stories about defying the ASC staff, going on undeclared trips to find apartments in municipalities that were willing to settle them.

When I received my permission to stay, the management at the ASC did not let me know about it. [...] The woman at the directorate [IMDI] helped me [...] so I came here without the ASC knowing about it. I went to River City and rented a house, came back to the ASC and presented the acceptance letter from River City and she [ASC representative] said 'What? When did you go there?' [...] She was surprised and angry that I had called the municipality and fixed it myself. When those who work there do not know the law, they do as they like, outside the law.

Several of our interviewees recounted their experiences of self-settlement being sabotaged rather than facilitated by ASC staff. They describe how they sneaked off on unsolicited visits to cities across the country to find a place to live and stay in direct contact with the central authorities rather than going through the ASC staff when sorting out the practicalities. An interesting feature of our interviewees' descriptions of these situations is the energy and enthusiasm with which the stories are told in all three cases, indicating that taking back control and agency over their mobility brought a sense of joy and fulfillment.

Experiences like these suggest that the self-settlement policy facilitated an opportunity to exert agency and create what Häkli et al. describe as a sense of 'distance between one's sense of self and the refugee identity proposed in encounters with institutional discourses and practices' (2017, 190). Indeed, Søholdt, Henningsen, and Dyb (2017) found that taking back control over

mobility by moving out of the ASC and choosing a municipality with better possibilities for employment, education and social networks was a central reason cited by those using the scheme. The possibility to exert this particular type of agency over mobility is, however, likely to be more readily at hand for individuals with access to certain resources (Henningsen et al. 2016). Both the cases of everyday strategies to regain control presented here are likely to be dependent on established resources, suggesting that advantage is accumulated and that more possibilities are offered to individuals who already hold resources which are important for further and physical mobility as well as social mobility. The Dutch and Norwegian policy contexts thus, provide similar constraints on refugees' mobility by practicing dispersed settlement, while the self-settlement schemes offered in both countries provide exemptions to the main policy regime that in some cases create space for individuals to increase control of their physical whereabouts and life plans. Our interviews' responses to these policy frameworks are relatively similar in both contexts. With respect to every-day attempts to regain control of physical and mental mobility and establish a sense of moving forward in life, we find more diverging strategies across the two contexts.

Mobility in everyday life and leisure based integration

Housing is not the only way in which our research participants work to take back control of their mobility trajectories. Mobility in leisure and everyday life also forms part of their coping mechanisms and redefinitions of selves, but the coping mechanisms mirror different possibilities and limitations in leisure and everyday life across the two contexts. Ahmed, for example, who lives in Amsterdam, likes to visit the city centre at the weekend.

When we go out, we go to Rembrandtplein. I like it, Leidseplein as well. I like to drink a coffee there on the terrace. I like to sit and watch people. It is simple but I like it. I like places when there are people. I don't like empty places. I like it when you feel movement. I don't like silence.

This quote shows that mobility is practiced, experienced and embodied. It is also a way of being in the world (Cresswell 2006). For Ahmed, mobility here is also a form of everyday resistance to a 'refugee life', a life stuck away in a silent neighbourhood with very few social interactions. Going to the city centre is an important part of the process of aiming to gain control over his mobility. Here we refer not only to physical but also to mental mobility in terms of migrants trying to reconnect with themselves and questioning the labels attached to them as refugees (Häkli Pascucci, and Kallio et al. 2017; Suerbaum 2018). The mobility paradigm thus also helps to understand how refugees fight against stereotypes of them as a category. By focusing on everyday mobilities we get more insights in the conditions they themselves seek to achieve within their lives and surroundings.

Younes (Interviewee 7) similarly explains that visiting the centre of the city is important to him. He adds a mental perspective to it by illustrating how these visits often feel 'light' and make him forget his worries, at least temporarily.

Yeah, visiting the centre, checking out the shops, having fun, that is so important for forgetting the heavy things. Even though, when I arrive at home at night, it all comes back to my mind, of course. But I am trying to move out of that mental state now and then.

These moments of rest and letting go of issues such as traumatic experiences are important for people's state of mind and as such also impact on their sense of belonging.

Rima (Interviewee 10, a 23-year-old Syrian girl) explains how going to Starbucks helps her to feel good again.

I always go and have a coffee at Starbucks. It is so special. When I am sad or lonely, I treat myself to a good coffee and then I sit there and think or just try to keep calm. They are very friendly to me and when you feel down you just go there and they wish me a good day and it really helps to stay positive.

For this young Syrian woman, it is a difficult but also exciting journey into Dutch society, where she not only tries to advance in terms of work but also learns how to make her own decisions (and not listen to her father and brother so much). These examples of individual everyday coping mechanisms with regimes of mobility often refer to ‘leisure based integration’ which is, to a great extent, overlooked in the literature on forced migration, whereas it seems to be important for refugees’ daily lives and processes of settling down.

In a similar vein as in the examples from Amsterdam, Faisal (Interviewee 21) who had decided to move from Fjord City to Norway’s capital, Oslo to secure work in the medical profession looks back at his time in Fjord City. He recalls how he used his leisure time to visit a particular café, an open space where he met with his friends and had many ‘fleeting encounters’ (Valentine 2008) with locals who were not familiar to him. This mix of sitting comfortably among both friends and strangers reminds Faisal of cafés in other regions of the world and this plays a part in providing him with a sense of belonging.

In Fjord City we went to [a particular restaurant] We belonged to that restaurant. My friends call and we meet there. It is open. We meet other people, we see Norwegians, they say ‘Hi’ but here I have not found such a place. There I could never be bored because there would always be someone who knew me there. It is similar to the middle-eastern cafés – it is outside, you can smoke, it’s social. I do not belong to Norway, I belong to Fjord City. But life is so, I feel like I belong to no place – nor to Syria.

Contrasting the sense of everyday mobility found in such urban café life, many of the interviewees in Norway, however, faced challenges while accessing public places in order to feel part of the social fabric. Amira (Interviewee 25), for example, felt disappointment when encountering little social life in the streets:

I am going to the public square in Norway and there are so few people. In Syria ... there are a lot of people. In the street you find hundreds of people but, in Norway, just one or two people. [...]

Rather, the interviewees in Norway describe other kinds of everyday mobilities to regain a sense of normality through mental and physical mobility. While the pleasures of urban life were seldom foregrounded in the Norwegian context, the ability to walk in or use nature was often mentioned as important. Walid (Interviewee 2), for example, had chosen to combine work in Fjord City to earn money, with tending to a plot of land in a rural area where he feels a sense of belonging though working with the soil:

[I feel belonging] when I am at the farm. Because I know that I am in the city to earn money, to earn money to survive and live, nothing else. But when you are working with the soil.... You get a... you feel like a different person. [...] the big city is not my city, I did not grow up here, I feel no belonging to Fjord City.

Walid refers to the plot of land he is renting in a rural area as ‘the farm’. Growing up on a large farm in Syria, his sense of belonging is connected to growing things and to agricultural land. This illustrates how people’s past experiences and histories have great significance to understand current mobility experiences. While nuancing the image of the city as being the most desirable place for all newcomers, he also draws on ‘leisure based mobilities that are important for his everyday integration. Whereas other interviewees go to cafés or to Southern Europe, Walid spends money to be able to be a farmer during his free time.

Another important aspect of the everyday leisure based mobility of our interlocutors in Norway was socializing at home. In addition to spending time in nature, this is another key aspect of social life for many people living in Norway. Partly because of the climate, the Nordic region tends to place much emphasis on the home and often invite people in rather than going out. For our interviewees who felt the possibilities to be social in public are quite restricted in the Norwegian context suggest that the possibility to create social contacts which can be sustained in the private sphere more productive.

Nasim, for example, who had lived five years in Norway when we met for the follow-up interview in 2019, said that, while he met a lot of fellow students at university, he had not formed

any real friendships with them. He does however enjoy many spontaneous gatherings with compatriots and time spent cooking, talking and smoking the water pipe at his place. This is what Antonsich (2010) refers to as the cultural factor which can contribute to generating a feeling of being at home by facilitating individual and collective identity. Smoking shisha can be felt as an element of intimacy which resonates with one's autobiographical sphere and, as such, contributes to feeling at home.

Most of the time we are at my house, they all come to me. We ... smoke the water pipe (shisha) and talk all the time. And of course, we can just call to ask 'Are you busy? No? Ok, just come'. Or we eat together, it is a great thing to cook. I am the chef but I hate to do the washing up, so I cook and they do the dishes.

A final way in which leisure mobility was tied to everyday ways of integration is the travel documents allowing individuals with a permission to stay, to get out of Norway. This mobility venue was used to get a sense of freedom, to visit family and friends settled in other European countries or to experience warmer social and meteorological climates like many Norwegians do. Living in River City, Diana (Interviewee 23) for example lists two reasons why she and her husband have used their possibility for European mobility after settlement to travel to Spain on holiday. The first reason has to do with the Nordic climate. Like many residents in the Nordic countries, she takes the opportunity to enjoy a warmer climate during the holidays. The other reason is about getting away from their conservative compatriots residing in River City. European mobility provides the opportunity to dance and drink freely without having to worry about the gaze of more-conservative Syrians. 'Leisure based ways of integration', like having a coffee at Starbucks or travelling to Spain to dance in a club, illustrate the importance of voluntary mobility as an everyday coping mechanism, to carve out new identities in the space between Syrian warmth and conservative attitudes on the one hand and the difficulties and possibilities encountered in the Netherlands and Norway on the other.

We need the sun. And we are used to it. There is sun here but it is cold. Where I come from, I am used to summer, that it is sunny and it is good for the body. That is my only small problem [...] There are many things we cannot do here, like going on a Saturday to just dance and so on. We did that in Spain but not here. Because people talk and they do not like it. They say bad words and we do not want to hear that so we just ... we try to do that in other places.

Compared to some of our other narratives indicating how everyday- and leisure mobilities feature in refugees' coping strategies, traveling from Norway to other countries in Europe is dependent on more financial resources. Even travel from Europe's periphery has however become relatively affordable with the appearance of several low-cost airlines. The leisure mobility of refugees with travel documents therefore share similarities with the freedom of mobility enjoyed by European citizens. Although refugees' freedom of mobility within the continent cannot be used to relocate to other countries in Europe until they get Norwegian or Dutch passports (van Liempt 2011), but the possibility to travel for leisure purposes should be acknowledged as a venue through which a sense of freedom can be created for some refugees despite the many restrictions otherwise limiting their mobility after settlement.

Conclusion

Our analysis shows that, while the Dutch and Norwegian contexts share many similarities – like being highly organised welfare states – they also differ in how they limit and facilitate forced migrants' attempts to take back control over their own mobility. Both countries strongly regulate the mobility of asylum-seekers and refugees after arrival. The first phase of housing for asylum-seekers is proven to have an extremely negative impact on asylum-seekers' wellbeing. Both countries, however, do feature alternative schemes for settlement, with the government-induced option of self-settlement in Norway being more radical than the Dutch temporary-stay regulation or the private initiative *TakeCareBnB*. In both countries we identified micro forms of resistance to

the restrictive mobility regime – for example, escaping reception centres and/or sleeping/eating at friends/relatives' places when supposed to be confined to reception centres. This shows that mobility regimes are not determining structures and that refugees find (temporary) ways to escape, circumvent or invert the logics of a system to their own needs. At the same time, it was obvious that some refugees were more capable of doing this than others.

In general, the transition from an asylum-seeker centre to moving to one's own house has been identified as an important transition towards security and freedom within the settlement phase. Nevertheless, this process still comes with little agency, making the transition not necessarily always one leading to more freedom in terms of mobility (some respondents referred to feeling re-uprooted again). Settlement as such is thus not a static phase; there is still a lot of moving going on after people have arrived (and are no longer on the run). This confirms the need to go beyond sedentarist social sciences.

Outside the realm of housing, we found a range of other strategies employed to search for mobility and freedom in new contexts. In the Netherlands, leisure-based mobility from suburbs or small towns into the heart of the city to enjoy a coffee and participate in city life were employed as a strategy to give them a sense of freedom and establish a sense of belonging. While embracing life in lively cafés to reinvent identities in a new setting was mentioned by some interviewees residing in Norway, most drew on other strategies of leisure based everyday mobility to regain their foothold in the country. Interviewees describe practices like hiking in the mountains, renting a plot of land to grow vegetables, social gatherings in private homes and travelling to popular holiday destinations in Southern Europe to enjoy a sense of freedom and belonging. Many of the practices that our interviewees described latch on to familiar practices and collectives such as family or co-ethnics in order to gain a sense of belonging but many references were also made to more-individualised practices that explore a sense of newfound freedom and inventing a new identity in relation to a new environment. And it is through these experiences that also new forms of everyday integration evolve. In line with Antonsich (2010) we argue that belonging is produced through structures as well as through personal, intimate, feelings of being 'at home' in a place. The risk of focusing only on one of these two dimensions is to fall into the trap of either a socially de-contextualised individualism or an all-encompassing social(ising) discourse.

The added value of differentiating between the various phases of migration and the different domains and degrees of forced/voluntariness within these phases is that we show the conceptual limitations of dividing the process up in static events. By not freezing refugees in space and time and acknowledging that mobility cannot be linked in linear ways to different phases of the refugee migration process, we offer space for understanding instances where refugees move at one point in one domain but can be stuck in another.

Moreover, a broader take on mobility allows us to see that a lack of freedom in mobility in the settlement phase can be compensated for in leisure time when, for example, cafés are visited. This reminds people of their social life back home or produces a certain atmosphere that puts them at ease. Holidays are also booked where they feel that they can be more themselves. A focus on the everyday shows that forced migrants can have strategies to overcome physical constraints on mobility but also mental barriers that are important to cope with the situation and challenges the larger representation in society of who they are. In order to belong, people should feel that they can express their own identity (Valentine, Sporton, and Nielsen 2009), which means that the role of political and, in our case, also housing institutions, is not sufficient if the rest of society fails to grant this recognition.

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Appendix

Table A1. Overview of respondents, Dutch case study.

Respondent	Gender	Age	Education
1	Male	40	University (not finished)
2	Male	35	University (not finished)
3	Male	35	University (not finished)
4	Female	27	University
5	Male	40	University
6	Female	23	High school
7	Male	32	Higher vocational education
8	Male	40	University
9	Male	35	University
10	Female	23	High school
11	Male	27	High school
12	Male	28	High school
13	Male	28	University
14	Male	31	High school
15	Male	25	High school
16	Male	22	High school
17	Male	29	University
18	Female	45	Higher vocational education
19	Male	58	Primary school
20	Male	33	High school
21	Male	33	University
22	Male	34	University
23	Female	31	University
24	Female	35	University
25	Male	38	University
26	Female	38	Higher vocational education
27	Female	19	Primary school
28	Male	40	Higher vocational education
29	Male	38	Primary school
30	Female	35	High school
31	Male	45	High school
32	Female	38	Primary school
33	Female	22	Primary school
34	Male	23	Primary school
35	Male	37	University
36	Female	33	High school
37	Male	48	High school
38	Female	42	High school
39	Male	20	University (not finished)
40	Male	64	High school
41	Female	39	Primary school
42	Male	34	Primary school
43	Female	33	Higher vocational education
44	Male	45	High school
45	Male	42	Primary school
46	Female	41	Vocational education
47	Female	33	University
48	Male	34	High school
49	Male	34	Lower vocational education

Table A2. Overview of respondents, Norwegian case study.

1	Munir	Mid-twenties	University (not finished)
2	Walid	Early twenties	University (finished)
3	Tariq	Mid-thirties	University (finished)
4	Hussein	Late teens	High School (not finished)
5	Omran	Late twenties	University (finished)
6	Nasim	Mid-twenties	University (not finished)
7	Yaser	Mid-twenties	University (finished)
8	Nour	Late twenties	University (finished)
9	Bashir	Late twenties	High school/professional athlete
10	Jamal	Early twenties	High-school (finished)
11	Farid	Mid-twenties	University (not finished)
12	Karam	Early twenties	University (not finished)
13	Nabil	Late twenties	University (finished)
14	Adnan	Early twenties	University (not finished)
15	Ahmet	Early twenties	University (not finished)
16	Ali	Early twenties	University (not finished)
17	Badr	Mid-twenties	University (not finished)
18	Farouk	Mid-twenties	University (not finished)
19	Marwan	Mid-thirties	University (finished)
20	Sali	Early twenties	University (not finished)
21	Faisal	Late twenties	University (finished)
22	Victor	Late twenties	University (finished)
23	Diana	Late twenties	University (finished)
24	Mohammad	mid-thirties	University (finished)
25	Amira	Mid-twenties	University (finished)
26	Mahdi	Mid-twenties	University (finished)