DISOBEDIENT CIVIL SOLIDARITY

THE CASE OF DUTCH CITIZENS PROVIDING PRIVATE HOUSING ALTERNATIVES FOR REFUGEES

MAJOR THESIS (SDC-80436)

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Für meine Familie, als Dank für ihren unerschütterlichen Glauben an mich.

ABSTRACT

Publicly provided accommodation for refugees has in recent years received much criticism for segregating refugees socially and spatially from wider society, and thereby preventing their inclusion into society. Focusing on the case of the Netherlands, this thesis looks at citizen initiatives that counteract the shortcomings of the public refugee accommodation system by providing alternative (temporary) housing options for refugees in the private homes of Dutch citizens. I argue that studying the participating Dutch citizens with a focus on their personal drives, expectations and interpretations of facilitating such housing alternatives for refugees can provide us with important insights into the means citizens have in contesting the marginalization of this group through bottom-up initiatives. This is specifically important in the light of the increasingly discouraging national housing policies for refugees. Based on narrative research among the facilitators of such private housing arrangements for refugees, this thesis frames these activities as mundane acts of *disobedient civil solidarity* which contest the state-imposed segregation of refugees. Based on theories of radical democracy, this thesis discusses and critically evaluates the potential and obstacles of such mundane endeavours for socio-political changes in the Dutch asylum (accommodation) system.

Key words: civil disobedience; quiet politics; radical democracy; refugee accommodation; socio-political change; solidarity, tactics

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Warum?
Auch um der Ohnmacht – er kenne sie
wohl – ein leises „dennoch" abzutrotzen.

Günter Grass

1| Introduction: citizen engagement for refugees in the Netherlands

In the European Union, the Netherlands have long had the image of being among the most open countries, tolerant of religious difference and supportive of multiculturalism (Bakker, Cheung, & Phillimore, 2016). However, during the last twenty-five years, this openness has significantly changed with regard to immigration, which is also reflected in an increasingly restrictive asylum policy. Nested within the more and more deterrent EU approach to asylum, the Netherlands have been described as the country were the "backlash against 'multiculturalism' has been most dramatic" (Versteegt & Maussen, 2012:19). Negative discourses in society and media increasingly connect asylum seekers with criminals and present them as a threat to the Dutch welfare state, national security and social cohesion. This is also reflected in the developments of national asylum policies from the late 1990s until today, which mostly aimed at reducing the numbers of refugees and their options for accessing social benefits, the labour market and housing (*ibid.*, see also Bakker et al., 2016).

In the past three years, the topic of asylum policies became even more important on the national agenda, as numbers of asylum applications started to rise again after about a decade of relatively low numbers of refugees coming to the Netherlands. This was specifically due to the arrivals of higher numbers of Syrian and Eritrean nationals (Engbersen et al., 2015). These developments resulted in public debates being very much dominated by the so-called 'refugee crisis', and the stance that the Dutch government should take towards these 'flows of refugees'. Earlier fears regarding the financial burden due to growing numbers of asylum applications and the perceived threat to social cohesion were complemented with discourses around the 'fear of Islamic terrorism' ("Angst leidt tot inperking mensenrechten" n.d.; Bakker et al., 2016; Schinkel, 2016). The increasingly negative discourses around asylum of the past decades, coupled with the strongly growing numbers of asylum applications in recent years, let many Dutch voters to support a very restrictive asylum policy (Bakker et al., 2016; Versteegt & Maussen, 2012).

This restrictionist approach is also clearly reflected in the asylum seeker accommodation policies: Bakker et al. (2016) describe how asylum seekers are actively separated from wider society through having to await a decision in their asylum procedure in the often remote asylum seeker centres, which reinforces the stigmatizing discourses of asylum seekers as potentially criminals or 'bogus

refugees' (Darling, 2011; Haas, 2012; Schuster, 2011; Willen, 2007). Within the centres, life is tightly controlled through the obligations to report regularly, and the construction of the facilities often significantly impedes personal privacy (Bakker et al., 2016). For asylum seekers whose application has been denied, government support ends within a few days and they usually lose their right to publicly provided accommodation. This is aimed at discouraging rejected asylum seekers to stay in the Netherlands (Versteegt & Maussen, 2012).

However, the tightening of asylum (accommodation) policies also met some resistance by refugee advocates and organizations, who protest against the increasing criminalization and stigmatization of people seeking refuge in the Netherlands. International, national and local NGOs contest these developments, for example by writing reports criticising breaches of human rights in the treatment of rejected asylum seekers, as Amnesty International has done. Also lobbying on the national level or providing local assistance to specific refugees, such as the widely known cases of Mauro and Sahar who both faced the threat of deportation after living in the Netherlands for a significant time of their lives, are methods used by NGOs and asylum lawyers (Versteegt & Maussen, 2012).

Not only formal NGOs, but also a significant number of individual citizens or citizen initiatives are involved in supporting refugees before, during or after the asylum procedure, motivated by what they see as shortcomings in the current asylum (accommodation) system. Next to the many initiatives and associations that have been long-established (*ibid.*), several new citizen initiatives developed in these past years when the numbers of refugees coming to the Netherlands began to rise. As Engbersen et al. write, "a great many" Dutch citizens (2015: 39) are now involved with refugees with different legal statuses in the Netherlands, of which many (although not all) are critical towards the current asylum (accommodation) system. Hence, also on this 'grassroots level' (Nuijten, 2015) there can be found much contestation against the increasingly deterrent asylum policies.

It is especially such protests against this restrictionist approach to asylum by Dutch citizens, who in most cases do not have own experiences with refugeehood, that are the focus of this thesis. In particular, I focus on the case of what I have termed 'private housing alternatives' for refugees, where Dutch citizens offer to share their household with a refugee who otherwise, dependent on the status of his or her asylum procedure, would have to live in the publicly provided mass accommodation centres for refugees, in one of the refugee emergency shelters or on the street (Versteegt & Maussen, 2012). These housing alternatives enable refugees to move from the often remote asylum seeker centres or from shelters for rejected asylum seekers (Darling, 2011; Van der Leun & Bouter, 2015) into the private homes of Dutch citizens. The arrangements vary in their form and organization: they can be short- or long-term, arranged clandestinely or through official regulations, and they can involve single individuals or whole families sharing a household.

I consider such 'private housing arrangements' as particularly interesting, as they constitute a pro-active approach of citizens providing a practical alternative to what they consider as injustices in the nationally organized refugee accommodation. By bringing together refugees and citizens in everyday interactions within the shared household, such small-scale acts of facilitating private housing arrangements seem to challenge the increasingly negative discourses around refugees mentioned above.

The goal of this research is to gain insights into the potential of such very mundane citizen engagement for refugees for achieving changes in the discourses and regulations around refugees in the Netherlands, especially with regard to their accommodation. Specifically, my aim is to find out

how those Dutch citizens that are involved in facilitating alternative housing options for refugees speak about their actions as a form of everyday political resistance and contestation. The research question that follows from this objective is: How do Dutch citizens who facilitate (i.e. organize or provide) private housing arrangements for refugees in the Netherlands talk about the potential of their activities to inspire such transformations towards non-restrictive (or less restrictive) approaches in the treatment of refugees in the Netherlands?

In a context where academic and media attention is often biased towards more 'dramatic' forms of pro- or anti-refugee protests (Dünnwald, 2006), I consider it as highly relevant to also gain insights into such mundane acts citizens engage in to contest the Dutch asylum (accommodation) policies. Shedding light on these initiatives and understanding how those involved make sense of their actions is important for getting a more balanced image of how members of the Dutch civil society respond to the increasingly exclusionary asylum policies and anti-refugee sentiments. However, it must be noted that it is not the goal of this exploratory research to provide any generalizable statements about the involvement of Dutch citizens in the facilitation or provision of private housing arrangements for refugees. Instead, the goal of this thesis is merely to provide an insight and to sketch the variety there is among those who are engaged in such a way with refugees.

Academically, this thesis contributes to the further development of a theoretical understanding of bottom-up socio-political change through citizen protest (Nuijten, 2015), especially with regard to the everyday forms of contestation exemplified by private housing arrangements. This research will give some insights into the opportunities and limitations of such forms of protest, as well as an understanding as to how involved citizens consider themselves as political actors in the domain of asylum (accommodation) politics (Gill, Conlon, Tyler, & Oeppen, 2014; Millner, 2011; Versteegt & Maussen, 2012). The theoretical findings of this exploratory research might not only provide a starting point for deepening academic scholarship in this field, but can also feed back to those citizens involved in private housing arrangements, who might find inspiration in them for their activities.

Before turning to the next chapters, some words on the terminology I use in this thesis are necessary: In this research, I refer to 'refugees' broadly as people who have fled their country of origin. Although in legal terms the refugee status needs to be granted to the individual, I argue with Schuster "that it is not recognition that makes one a refugee, but the circumstances that caused one to flee" (2011: 1392). In cases where I specifically refer to the different legal situations of refugees, however, I refer to them as 'asylum seekers' when in the procedure, as 'recognized refugees' or 'residence permit holders' (in Dutch *statushouders*[1]) in case of those refugees whose asylum application has been granted, and as 'rejected asylum seekers' or 'undocumented refugees'[2] for those whose application has had a negative outcome.

This category of 'refugees' is contrasted in this thesis by the term 'citizens'. This term is used here to describe not only people who have the Dutch nationality, but also people with other nationalities (often from within the EU) who reside legally and for a substantial duration within the Netherlands, and who, unlike refugees, do not experience strong insecurities around their legal status (Darling,

[1] Dutch terminology is generally italicized in this thesis.

[2] Even though this of course does not literally mean that the Dutch authorities have no information, or documents, about their existence and prior asylum applications. 'Undocumented' refers here mostly to the lack of a residence permit and the fact that their whereabouts are not officially registered.

2011; Szczepanikova, 2013). Although I of course recognize that also refugees might acquire Dutch citizenship at a later stage and that these two terms are therefore not inherently oppositional, the terms are used in this thesis to differentiate between those with a stable residence and legal status in the Netherlands at the moment of the research (the citizens), and those whose situation is currently more insecure and whose knowledge of life in the Netherlands is significantly smaller.

Lastly, the terms 'change' and 'transformation' are used in this thesis mostly used to describe the improvements of the current situation of the asylum (accommodation) system, which those involved in private housing alternatives for refugees want to achieve with their activities. As the Dutch citizens participating in this research have different views on this, the exact shape of such improvements is left intentionally open. Nevertheless, the changes in the underlying societal discourses and practices around refugees might also have the potential to inspire changes in laws, regulations and policies. In this thesis, I refer to 'socio-political change' to describe changes in the dominant discourses that are shaped by, and in turn influence, citizens´ sentiments, media representations as well as the regulative framework around refugee accommodation. This conception of 'socio-political change' relates to the theoretical framework explained in Chapter 3 and will be further explained there.

The remainder of this thesis is structured as follows: In the next chapter, I give a short introduction into the institutions and regulations that shape the alternative housing options for refugees provided by Dutch citizens. This is important background knowledge to understand how Dutch citizens position themselves within, at the border or explicitly outside of this legal framework. In chapter 3, I develop the theoretical framework of everyday civil disobedience based on an approach of radical democracy. In chapter 4, I elaborate on the specific methodological approach chosen for this thesis, and the implications this has for the research. Chapters 5 – 8 contain the empirical findings and are ordered thematically, starting with an emphasis on the variety of approaches, motivations and experiences that the research participants have with regard to alternative housing options for refugees, and continuing with analyses of the responsibilities for socio-political transformations, the potential and the limitations of grassroots acts of protest and civil solidarity. Each of these four empirical chapters is rounded off by a discussion section, in order to give ample room to focus on the different themes emerging from the analysis. The last chapter of this thesis, called 'Conclusions, outlook and final reflections', brings together all the themes developed in this research, and discusses what meaning they can have in practice and future academic research.

2| Background: Refugee accommodation in the Netherlands

The goal of this chapter is to briefly introduce the reader to the Dutch asylum system, with a particular focus on the institutions and regulations involved in refugee accommodation. This is the context necessary in order to understand the approaches to private housing arrangements chosen by the research participants, and to understand their critique to this system. However, I will limit myself to sketching an overview of the aspects relevant in this anthropological research, as diving into the legal details of this topic is not possible within the scope of my thesis. The first part of this chapter gives an overview of the asylum procedure and the housing during this period (including the relevant actors and institutions) under normal (i.e. 'non-crisis') conditions. The second and the third part respectively deal with the consequences of the different possible outcomes, namely approval or rejection of the asylum application, what this means for the refugee, his or her accommodation and which options there are for alternative forms of housing.

Housing during the asylum procedure

Refugees wishing to apply for asylum in the Netherlands have to report in Ter Apel to the Dutch Immigration and Naturalization Service (IND, *Immigratie en Naturalisiatie Dienst*). During the initial identification and registration phase, they are housed in the 'central reception location', where accommodation, meals and basic medical care are provided to the asylum applicants. This central reception location as well as all other accommodation centres of the Dutch asylum system are provided by the Central Agency for Reception of Asylum Seekers (COA, *Centraal Orgaan opvang asielzoekers*), which works under the order of the Dutch Ministry of Security and Justice. The COA and IND were both established in 1996 with the mission to coordinate the asylum reception in the Netherlands centrally (COA, n.d.-d, n.d.-e, 2012; Versteegt & Maussen, 2012).

After a maximum of four days in the central reception location, during which the applicants undergo a tuberculosis screening and an initial hearing of their case, they are transferred to one of the COA-operated 'process reception locations' for a rest and preparation period. Also in these locations, accommodation, meals and basic medical care are provided. Furthermore, in these locations staff of the Dutch Refugee Council (*VluchtelingenWerk*) informs the asylum applicants about their procedure and prepares them for further interviews. While in the process reception location, applicants begin their procedure with their first interview with the IND. The fast standard asylum procedure in the Netherlands lasts eight days, after which there will be a decision whether the application gets accepted, rejected or whether the application needs further investigation in the extended standard procedure (Bakker et al., 2016; COA, n.d.-d, 2012). In 2012, around 60% of the asylum applications were processed within the fast standard asylum procedure (VluchtelingenWerk Nederland, n.d.), but it is unlikely that this is still the case due to the increased numbers of asylum applicants (Engbersen et al., 2015).

After a maximum of twelve days, asylum applicants are moved into the COA-operated 'asylum seeker centres'. In case of an extended procedure, the asylum applicant must await the decision in this location, which can take up to several months or years. In case of a positive decision in the asylum procedure, the recognized refugees (often referred to as *statushouders* in Dutch) receive a temporary residence permit that is valid for five years and have to remain in these centres until they

are assigned own housing and can start their integration programme. In case of a rejection of the asylum application, the refugee is given some days before he or she is evicted from the COA location (COA, n.d.-d, 2012).

It is especially these asylum seeker centres which are the target of much critique regarding the living conditions they offer, as opposed to the central reception location and the process reception locations, refugees often stay here for a significantly longer period. Distributed across the Netherlands and housing on average 400 persons (COA, n.d.-e), these mass accommodation centres are often (although not always) located at a distance to Dutch communities which makes it difficult for the asylum seekers to get in contact with the wider population. In these centres, the asylum seekers receive a weekly allowance and have to prepare their own meals in the kitchen facilities shared with the other inhabitants. Also rooms are mostly shared with several other refugees, often with different backgrounds. Access to the labour market is limited, and also Dutch language programs or other activities are only provided if local volunteers organize these (as only those refugees who have received a residence permit can officially start with their integration programme, which includes Dutch language training). Long periods of such passivation as well as the lack of privacy in such asylum seeker centres has been shown to have potential negative effects on the mental health of refugees (Bakker et al., 2016). Despite these criticisms, however, asylum seekers have to remain in these centres during their procedure.

Housing in case of a positive outcome of the asylum procedure

In case of a positive outcome of the asylum procedure, recognized refugees are in most cases randomly assigned to a municipality in the Netherlands, which is responsible for finding suitable social housing. Until this is made available, the refugee has to remain in the asylum seeker centre. Under normal conditions, this should not take longer than twelve months; however, in 2015, when unexpected numbers of Syrian and Eritrean asylum seekers received temporary residence permits through the fast general procedure, the backlog of recognized refugees waiting for their own housing amounted to 16.000 individuals (Engbersen et al., 2015), and the average waiting time was nine to twelve months (COA, n.d.-d). This caused problems of overcrowding in asylum seeker centres and congestion for the accommodation of new asylum seekers still waiting for an outcome in their procedure. In order to tackle this 'bottleneck of social housing' (Engbersen et al., 2015), a number of temporary policies were developed that allow municipalities for example to accommodate several unrelated residence permit holders together in a shared apartment (COA, n.d.-a).

In this context, where a residence permit holder is waiting in an asylum seeker centre for being assigned social housing, he or she can make use of the so-called *logeerregeling*, a scheme that allows a temporary leave from the asylum seeker centre for short-term lodging with friends or family living in the Netherlands. The *logeerregeling* limits such lodging to a maximum of three months at one address and requires the permission of the local COA office. The weekly allowance of the residence permit holder then complemented with a 'compensation fee' to be used for the living expenses at the lodging address. In October 2014, the scope of the *logeerregeling* was extended to include also host families, which could for example be Dutch citizens without family relations or long-established friendships with the residence permit holder. After it was unexpectedly announced in September 2016 by the State Secretary for Security and Justice that the *logeerregeling* would be abolished (Dijkhoff, 2016), this decision was soon after rescinded and instead the *logeerregeling* was changed

so that it now requires the registration of the changed address of the residence permit holder with the local Municipal Personal Records Database (*Basisregistratie Personen*) (COA, n.d.-c). This can have potential negative effects for the host if he or she receives social welfare.

Apart from the *logeerregeling*, from September 2015 onwards the so-called *zelfzorgarrangement* allowed residence permit holders waiting for own social housing to live outside of the asylum seeker centre, for example with a host family, for a period longer than the three months allowed for by the *logeerregeling*. The aim for this policy was to increase the capacities of asylum seeker centres to house incoming refugees (COA, 2015). However, this policy was abolished in September 2016 simultaneously to the changes made to the *logeerregeling* (Rijksoverheid, n.d.). As for now, there is no regulation that officially allows residence permit holders to live outside of the asylum seeker centre for a period longer than three months at the same address.

Once the municipality offers housing, the residence permit holder has to accept this offer and has to move into the assigned apartment or room as soon as possible, even in case he or she is in that moment making use of the *logeerregeling*. Refusal of the offer leads to an ending of the support by COA and means that the residence permit holder then has to find housing by him- or herself (COA, n.d.-b; Rijksoverheid, n.d.).

Housing in case of a negative outcome of the asylum procedure

There are numerous reasons why the first application for asylum might be rejected. Independent of the reason, however, refugees lose their right to support and accommodation by the COA and are requested to leave the country within four weeks (COA, n.d.-d). Rejected asylum applicants can appeal against this decision, but in general the decision in this appeal must be awaited outside of the Netherlands. If they want to remain in the Netherlands for the time of the appeal, this has to be requested separately, and according to Versteegt and Maussen (2012), even if this request is granted this does necessarily give right to accommodation in COA facilities.

If rejected asylum seekers remain in the Netherlands, their stay becomes illegal and they become what in academic literature is called ‘undocumented refugees’ or ‘undocumented migrants’ (Schuster, 2011). Over the past decades, the Netherlands have developed a “strong exclusionary rhetoric” against such illegalized persons (Van der Leun & Bouter, 2015:150), which is also reflected in the increasingly deterrent legislation. The Linkage Act (*Koppelingswet*) of 1998, which links residence status to a social-fiscal number that is required for work, housing and taxes as well as the New Aliens Act (*Nieuwe Vreemdelingenwet)* of 2000, which ended all government support for rejected asylum seekers and introduced preventive detention of undocumented refugees, are examples of legal measures that reduced the options for rejected asylum seekers to live in the Netherlands without a residence permit (Versteegt & Maussen, 2012). Following these legislative changes, on the local level municipalities long buffered these restrictive national laws by providing support options like shelters, which they justified by their duty of care towards local residents and of preserving the social order by preventing homelessness of rejected asylum seekers (Van der Leun & Bouter, 2015).

In 2007, a general amnesty (*Generaal pardon*) was issued that legalized the residence of 28.000 people who have prior to that resided illegally in the Netherlands. However, an administrative

agreement connected to this general amnesty required the municipalities to end their support for those people who did not receive a residence permit (Versteegt & Maussen, 2012). This strong restrictionist approach left no official options for accommodation of rejected asylum seekers, and meant that even families with minor children became homeless. This caused much international criticism, for example by the European Commission of Social Rights, and prompted several national law suits against the Netherlands. These law suits resulted in the creation of housing options for undocumented families with minor children and official basic support structures for single undocumented persons in five major Dutch cities and Ter Apel (called Bed, Bath and Bread, or *Bed, Bad en Brood*). However, these continue to be a heavily debated topic in the Dutch government (Van der Leun & Bouter, 2015).

In Dutch municipalities, there are different local organizations that provide basic support like shelters which rejected refugees can refer to. Other options are church-based organizations, support centres targeted at specific groups, for example undocumented women, or privately organized stays with friends, family or other supportive Dutch citizens (Van der Leun & Bouter, 2015). As these housing alternatives have to be organized clandestinely and often also involve a financial dependency on the supporting organization or person(s), private housing options for illegalized refugees are significantly more difficult to organize than for recognized refugees.

This brief description of the Dutch asylum system and the options for accommodation available for refugees in various situations served to line out the context in which the Dutch citizens who are involved in facilitating private housing alternatives operate. In the following chapter I will elaborate the theoretical framework that will be used to analyse and interpret this engagement of Dutch citizens.

3| Theoretical framework

Mouffe´s radical democracy

The theoretical starting point for analysing Dutch citizens' engagement for refugees is the insight by Chantal Mouffe that *pluralism implies contestation*. As virtually all societies, including the Dutch, can be considered as pluralist, fundamental oppositions between the different political positions and moral views among different citizens are inevitably present. Indeed, they are a natural characteristic of such societies (Mouffe 2000b, 2005, 2013; Nuijten, 2015). Mouffe terms this element of opposition 'antagonism', a concept she uses to highlight the underlying power relations between the different positions or ideologies, which constantly engage in a struggle for dominance. Based on this understanding of power relations in pluralist societies, Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau have developed a conception of *radical democracy* that considers such antagonistic[3] struggles as a pivotal characteristic of any real democracy (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001; Mouffe, 2005).

Due to the presence of these antagonistic forces, Mouffe emphasizes that political consensus is always only a reflection of a certain constellation of the underlying power relations, with a certain ideology in a dominant, or hegemonic[4], position. Indeed, for Mouffe the idea of consensus is a very critical one, and she repeatedly emphasizes how such agreements can only hide – but not eliminate - the underlying ineradicable antagonistic oppositions. According to her, this implies that any consensus can only ever be a *temporary* arrangement created by hegemonic power relations among different ideologies (Hildebrand & Lluis Martell, 2012; Mouffe, 2013), as hegemonic practices are inherently based on the exclusion of other positions and possibilities. Therefore, any consensus is inherently political.

Mouffe's perspective also highlights that that hegemonic practices are always contingent, i.e. not dependent on any pre-given objective order, but nevertheless constitutive of the established social and political order. Established social practices often conceal the contingency of the hegemonic order, thereby legitimizing and naturalizing it. Nevertheless, this contingency of hegemonic power relations is at the same time the very source of the fragility of all political projects in the long term. The contestability and changeability of any hegemonic order comes from antagonistic counter-hegemonic forces "that will attempt to disarticulate the existing order so as to install other forms of hegemony" (Mouffe, 2005: 18). A brief illustration: according to this approach of radical democracy, restrictionist governmental discourses on how to deal with asylum seekers are not more than an example of hegemonic practices, or a manifestation of a temporary arrangement of power relations.

[3] In fact, in her work Mouffe often refers to *agonistic* (rather than *antagonistic*) struggles, which implies the acceptance of all oppositional perspectives as legitimate positions. Hence, under conditions of radical democracy, the hegemonic struggle should take place between adversaries, not between enemies (Mouffe, 2005, 2013). In this thesis, however, I use the term *antagonism* in order to highlight the oppositional character between positions (not referring to the ideal conditions of radical democracy).

[4] The concept of 'hegemony' as used by Mouffe requires some elaboration here: Rather than referring to classical Marxism, her conception of 'hegemony' is based on the work of Gramsci, who departed from classical Marxist theory by emancipating the concept of 'hegemony' from the concept of 'class' in order emphasize different forms of domination beyond class struggle. Mouffe and the late Ernesto Laclau have developed their conception of 'hegemony' in their seminal work *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001; see also Keucheyan, 2014). For them, hegemony is the key concept to understand 'the political', as hegemonic practices are always based on excluding other possibilities. This gives rise to the "ever present possibility of antagonism" (Mouffe, 2005: 17).

Hence, they can and will be subject to challenges and changes, rather than representing 'the only possible way to act'.

According to Mouffe, this "ineradicable terrain of conflictuality" in pluralist societies (Mouffe, 2013:XII) is lamentably neglected by what she terms 'consensus politics', which have come to dominate national politics in many Western liberal democracies. The approach of 'consensus in the middle' regards political conflicts as solvable through extended discussions by rational actors, as has been theorized by scholars like Giddens and Habermas. It therefore constitutes the opposite of Mouffe´s ideal conception of democracy as radical. Following Mouffe, the danger of such consensus politics lies in their tendency to disregard the underlying power relations, and thereby to naturalize the incontestability of hegemonic discourses and ideologies.

In consensus politics, the disregard of antagonism as the "very condition of a vibrant democracy" has according to her led to a 'crisis of representation', as superficial consensuses neglect the actual variety of political positions within societies (Mouffe, 2013:7). This approach, Mouffe claims, deprives democratic citizens of a political debate where "they can make their voices heard and choose between real alternatives" (2013:119), and where they can discuss about the conditions and boundaries of liberal democracies. For her, consensus politics is therefore an essentially unpolitical approach, as she defines 'the political' as the very competition between antagonistic ideologies for hegemonic power[5], a view that has significantly shaped the approaches to radical democracy in critical theory (Mouffe, 2013; Swyngedouw, 2014).

She claims that as a result, in liberal democracies the traditional formal political channels for citizens´ political participation have become less meaningful, as their largely "rationalist and individualist focus [is] unable to grasp" the power that collective identities and 'passions' have in influencing values and opinions (Mouffe, 2003:3; see also 2000a). According to the radical democracy approach, it is this characteristic of liberal democracy which gave rise to citizens´ increasing *de-politicization*. This phenomenon describes the erasure of the public sphere where antagonistic ideologies and discourses could compete for hegemony. It implies the reduction of politics "to the sphere of governing [and governmental technologies] through allegedly participatory deliberative procedures, with a given distribution of places and functions, one that excludes those who are deemed 'irresponsible'" (Swyngedouw, 2014:125).

The people taking part in such deliberations are thus carefully pre-selected, and citizens´ political participation is largely reduced to voting. "[D]isruption or dissent is reduced to the choreographies of instituted and institutional modalities of governing, the technologies of expert administration and management, to the dispositifs of 'good governance' within spaces appropriate for their enactment, such as parliaments, council chambers, community centres, public-private governance arrangements and so on" (*ibid*:125). This constitutes the end of 'the political' as Mouffe and other theorists of radical democracy understand it (cf. Rancière, 1998, in Mouffe, 2005:29; Swyngedouw, 2014), as it bereaves citizens in liberal democracies of their possibilities for meaningful political participation.

[5] In that sense, the 'socio-political change' that is the topic of this thesis refers to changes in established social practices, but also to the hegemonic practices and discourses shaping the current asylum (accommodation) system.

Citizen insurgencies

As a response to the erasure of the public sphere, the lack of meaningful channels of political participation and the deficits to representation in liberal democracies (Celikates, 2016; Swyngedouw, 2011), scholars highlight that we do see an increasing number of protests that are not necessarily conform to the established (or formal) modes of citizens' political participation. Examples are social movements against the neoliberal order (Hildebrand & Lluis Martell, 2012) or insurgent mobilizations protesting increasingly restrictive refugee regimes (Millner, 2011). Often, these involve acts of civil disobedience.

Although many approaches to civil disobedience have been developed, including those by famous theorists and practitioners like Henry David Thoreau, Mahatma Gandhi, Hannah Arendt and John Rawls (Fiedler, 2009; Heynen, 2010), it is the approach of radical democracy that I will refer to in this thesis. According to this perspective, civil disobedience is

> "an episodic, informal and extra- or even anti-institutional form of political action which allows citizens [...] to protest and participate, when – as is often the case even in more or less functioning, but increasingly dysfunctional, representative democracies – the official and regular institutional channels of action and communication are closed to them or are ineffective in getting their claims and objections across" (Celikates, 2016: 991).

This rather open definition does not specify whether acts of civil disobedience have to be public, using exclusively non-violent means and whether they should be directed solely at state institutions to be classified as civil disobedience.

Despite this openness, however, the radical democracy perspective is very clear in highlighting that civil disobedience can be a channel for citizens´ political participation "where it is blocked rather than enhanced by institutionalized political processes" (*ibid*: 991). Following Celikates, an important element of understanding civil disobedience is that the protesters often act explicitly as *citizens*. While expressing dissensus with state authorities through their actions, they simultaneously acknowledge "some kind of civil bond with their adversaries" (2016: 986), which also determines the format and target of their protests and limits the range of options for action.

Nevertheless, by using acts of civil disobedience to communicate their political message, protesters do not only express a contestation of the issue at stake, but also with the role of citizens in liberal democratic systems as we know it today. Rather than simply a protest of individual right-bearers against a certain case, as non-radical perspectives might interpret acts of civil disobedience, from a radical democracy approach demanding emancipatory social change from below is considered as always also constituting an expression of discontent with the institutionalized channels for citizens´ political participation and a demand for resuming bottom-up political engagement (Piven, 2006 in Heynen, 2010). Acts of civil disobedience are therefore performative, changing the boundaries of what counts as political contestation within the "authority structures and public life of a polity" (Kinvall & Nesbitt-Larking, 2013: 337; Fiedler, 2009).

Civil disobedience can also be a form of resuming citizens´ political engagement in solidarity with less advantaged members of society in a bottom-up manner. This can counteract the tendency of decreasing social solidarity, which Mouffe (2000b) has diagnosed to be one of the fatal consequences of today's liberalism. This corresponds with what Carter wrote already in 1973:

> "[T]he belief in individualism that emerges from the production of liberal forms of democracy, involves seeking the maximum area of free choice, which leads to minimising both governmental restraints on freedom and external intrusions on privacy. What this liberal paradigm translates into is the freedom to let the hungry starve via laws that ensure a buffer from reality for the majority" (in Heynen, 2010: 1234).

In his poignant analysis of the anarchist 'Food not bombs' network in the United States, Heynen describes how this network provides, amongst other things, public soup kitchens for those in need and whoever wants to join. Protesting against a neoliberal system where welfare functions guaranteeing subsistence needs have become the responsibility of charities and volunteers rather than the state, activists from this network have chosen to organize their food distribution at symbolic public spaces. Based on Rancière´s approach of disruption through appearance, Heynen (2010) analyses how something so mundane as public food distribution can be considered as an act of solidarity activism by 'making the invisible visible' (in his case, hunger and poverty), and thus constitutes an act of civil disobedience.

Everyday civil disobedience

Much of the academic literature studying such emancipatory changes from below has focused on the larger, often more spectacular manifestations of civil disobedience (Dünnwald, 2006; Gill et al., 2014). However, a growing body of research also emphasizes the importance of understanding the everyday acts of protest and contestation, as it is precisely within this mundane sphere where people reflect on their political conditions, feel the outcomes of a repressive system, and have personal encounters or form relationships that inform their social actions (Askins, 2015; Gill et al., 2014; Gosden, 2006; Nuijten, 2015; Stephenson & Papadopoulos, 2006). A focus on the small acts of civil disobedience in citizens´ daily lives is important to get a fuller understanding of how they engage in social and political change outside of the formal channels of political participation.

In his dissertation on what he calls 'imperceptible politics', Vassilios Tsianos highlights the importance of everyday acts of emancipatory social change, specifically from the perspective of radical democracy: "These everyday experiences do not refer to a grand narrative of social change, nor are these events identifiable elements of broader, unified social movements. […T]he forces of change today can be traced in, and hinge on, these imperceptible everyday events of social life. But because of their seeming insignificance, they are easily overlooked" (2007: 1). Also Askins (2015) focuses on the political importance of mundane actions in his study of so-called befriending programs, where citizen volunteers become buddies of asylum seekers and recognized refugees in Great Britain. He analysis the personal encounters made through this programme which he considers as acts of 'quiet politics', as they "allow for, and demand, shifts in perceptions of Self and Other, nudging established discourses of alterity, and anticipating new social relations, [through which] people discover each other as multifaceted, complex and interdependent" (*ibid:* 746). Studying such 'quiet', or 'imperceptible' politics is considered by these authors as a crucial step for understanding how citizens engage with and actively contest – on a very mundane level – what they perceive as injustices of a larger system that is beyond their direct influence.

Such focus on the 'grassroots level' (see Nuijten, 2015) is also highly enriching in the study of engagement by citizens for those at the margins of society (or those even barely accepted within society). In her analysis of solidarity activism in Calais, also Naomi Millner (2011) highlights the

importance of studying the day-to-day encounters between refugees and non-refugees, and the often almost imperceptible forms of contestation and delegitimization of the suppressive refugee system they engage in together. Millner quotes an interviewed activist who spoke about her "growing conviction that the key element of solidarity activism is becoming 'receptive', and fostering a broader culture of receptivity. Rather than setting the political agenda, this ethos demands that individuals be moved by their experience, and allow this affectedness to address the norms inflecting shared ordinary reactions" (Millner, 2011: 327). The daily encounters between activists with and without residence permits allow for sharing life stories and experiences of suppression, and 'becoming receptive' (or *political listening*) can become a mundane act of resistance in a system that deems precisely those refugee actors as not worthy to be listened to (*ibid.*, see also Beltrán, 2009).

Gill et al. (2014) refer to De Certeau´s *tactics* as "procedures of everyday creativity" (2014:374) to describe such mundane acts that citizens engage in counterhegemonic solidarity protests. Simple acts such as physical presence, communication of solidarity and witnessing can be considered as such tactics, as forms of everyday civil disobedience and contestation of unjust practices. Also Kinvall & Nesbitt-Larking (2013) and Nuijten (2015) highlight the importance to look beyond elite speech acts and visible, contentious performances, and to study everyday practices of protests that "both rely upon and contest notions of belonging and borders" between social in- and exclusion (Kinnvall & Nesbitt-Larking, 2013:337). Such grassroots engagement with its focus on the everyday has the potential to create a sub-culture of resistance (Nuijten, 2015) that might eventually gain momentum and spread among citizens.

All in all, from the perspective of radical democracy, civil disobedience can thus be considered as constituting an antagonistic channel of political participation for citizens within the politically numbing liberal democratic framework, and as a way to achieve socio-political change, especially when implemented in the realm of everyday 'quiet politics'. In the following section I will specifically look at the case of what I have termed private housing arrangements for refugees, and show how these can be considered as acts of everyday civil disobedience when studied through the lens of radical democracy.

Private housing arrangements for refugees as everyday civil disobedience

To understand the political significance of private housing arrangements for refugees, it is necessary to take a minor detour into the field of refugee studies and look at the category of 'the refugee' and the characteristics ascribed to it: According to Article 1(a)(2) of the 1951 Refugee Convention, a refugee is legally defined as an individual who,

> "[a]s a result of events […] and owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it" (UNHCR, 1951, p. 14).

According to the current European system, the refugee status has to be granted to the individual, i.e. a person needs to be recognized as a refugee by the receiving state or the international body of the

UNHCR (Karatani, 2005). In Europe, the worthiness of such recognition is commonly examined through the national asylum procedures, which can hence be considered as an authentication process for refugee claims. Thus, even though in the common use of the term a 'refugee' is any person fleeing from his or her place of origin (either within or outside of the national borders), in legal terminology the title 'refugee' is only applicable to those who have left their country of origin and who have been granted the refugee status.

Initially, the refugee system was designed with the logic to distinguish between victims of prosecution who deserve humanitarian support, and the undeserving 'migrants' who could have chosen to stay at their place of origin (Karatani, 2005). However, this seemingly obvious distinction between different reasons for mobility has been heavily criticized in the past. The four main critiques are 1) the inadequacy of legal categories to describe the actual motives and often not linear trajectories of people on the move, 2) the homogenizing effect of these categories which renders them ambiguous and often not meaningful to the individual case, 3) the assumed passivity of the individuals classified as refugees which disregards their human agency and abilities of adaptation, as well as 4) the possibility for governments to evade their international humanitarian responsibilities by selectively applying these categorisations, categorizing some people on the move as refugees and others as 'economic' or 'illegal migrants' (Haas, 2012; Malkki, 1995; Schuster, 2011; Szczepanikova, 2013; van Houtum & van Naerssen, 2002).

This clearly shows that the categories used by authorities to regulate who is entering the EU and who is given the permission to stay are not 'naturally given', despite often being treated as such by both the official bodies and the media (Samers, 2004). Instead, these categories of 'deserving refugees' or 'illegal/undocumented migrants', which trigger such a differential treatment by the immigration authorities, are *produced*, are actively created through discursive practices. Categorizations like 'refugee' thus create, shape and condition "particular forms of legality and illegality and subject those positioned within such a system to differential modes of power, authority and control" (Darling, 2011: 265), implying a specific social, political and legal relation between the 'the refugee' and the state (De Genova, 2002). Rather than representing social realities, the legal category therefore *actively creates social realities*.

The legal ordering of 'the refugee' is also reflected in the closely interrelated and mutually reinforcing processes of spatial and socio-political ordering. If, as written above, the asylum procedure can be considered as an authentication process of the refugee claims to separate 'genuine' from 'bogus' refugees, they have to comply with pre-formed expectations of who is a genuine refugee in order to be considered as deserving and eventually getting protection. Discourses of refugees as potentially threatening and undeserving of European protection legitimize the spatial isolation of refugees in (often) remote accommodation facilities and the limitation of their mobility, which combine elements of ordering, disciplining and security concerns. Through being assigned into such sharply defined spatial zones that enable almost total monitoring, the asylum seekers can be made 'legally knowable' (Bancroft, 2001; Borren, 2008; Mountz, Coddington, Catania, & Loyd, 2012). This is a necessary precondition for separating the 'deserving' from the 'undeserving' (Haas, 2012). "The discomforts of [such asylum seeker centres] become, in their own way, a mode of governing this population" (Darling, 2011:269). This prevents any emplacement of refugees by creating feelings of discomfort and non-belonging (Darling, 2011; Kitchin, 1998; Mountz et al., 2012).

The effects of these processes of legal, socio-political and spatial ordering can be understood through the lens of in/visibility: As Haas (2012) writes, the modes of legal and specifically spatial ordering allow for almost complete surveillance of the individual refugee´s life through state organs. This is reflected in surveillance and security measures that enter into the most private aspects of the asylum seekers' lives and render them visible, or even hypervisible, to the state: Examples of an intrusion into the most private sphere of asylum seekers are the collection of biometric data (photos, fingerprints), humiliating methods of determining the age of young refugees (in order to determine whether they are entitled to the special protection for minors or not), but also the state-ordered random allocation into asylum seeker centres and restrictions of mobility. At the same time, however, the individual refugee remains largely invisible vis-à-vis the wider society, hidden behind the abstract category of 'the refugee'. This, according to the dominant theorizations of 'refugees', makes it impossible for him or her to interact with members of the civil society as an equal human being (cf. Borren, 2008; Haas, 2012).

Private housing arrangements for refugees radically challenge the spatial ordering of refugees by enabling refugees to exchange accommodation in the (often remote) public asylum accommodation centres for the private homes of citizens, embedded in neighbourhoods and social networks. The most obvious consequence of private housing arrangements, it might thus be argued, is that they can enable the asylum seeker to become visible vis-à-vis the citizen(s) whom he or she is sharing the household with. By allowing for daily encounters and interactions between the members of the shared household, private housing arrangements can contribute to deconstructing the abstract categories of 'the refugee' as the Other, as the individual behind the abstract categorization becomes visible. Through changing the spatial ordering, also the negative effects of the social ordering of refugees, which render them as an invisible and abstract Other, can potentially be alleviated. Based on theories of radical democracy, especially those by Rancière (2004, 2011; see also Schaap, 2011), private housing arrangements can be conceptualized as performative acts of political disruption, in which civil society actors provide a space of appearance for refugees to appear as humans among humans.

It is specifically the mundaneness of this cooperation between citizens and refugees in sharing a household which defies the legitimacy of segregating of asylum seekers from the receiving society. Looking at the perspective of citizens who invite refugees to share their household (as they are necessarily the ones taking initiative), the radical democracy approach allows to see these as disrupting the naturalized European order of the refugee regime through the quiet and undramatic decisions of opening their house. This form of everyday contestation is almost imperceptible among the larger pro- and anti-refugee mobilizations (Dünnwald, 2006; Tsianos, 2007), and yet such housing arrangements challenge and delegitimize the practices of othering through the naturalness of everyday encounters and interactions between members of a shared household. From the perspective of radical democracy, private housing arrangements can therefore be considered as acts of civil disobedience, i.e. as acts by engaged citizens who criticize and, in cooperation with refugees and within the limited space of a household, attempt to overcome this segregation between citizens and refugees (Askins, 2015; Heynen, 2010).

This theoretical conceptualization of private housing arrangements as a form of everyday contestations of the segregating asylum (accommodation) system will be the basis for the remainder of this thesis. It provides a starting point for an analysis of whether and how citizens facilitating private housing arrangements for refugees consider their actions as having the potential to challenge

the hegemonic discourses that legitimize this system, and thereby to initiate social and political changes. In the following chapter I will describe how this focus on the mundane forms of protest influenced the methodological approach taken in this thesis, and which implications that has for understanding how the participants of this research make sense of their activities in relation to the improvements of the asylum (accommodation) system they would like to achieve.

4| Methodology

In this chapter, broadly called Methodology, I will describe how this theoretical background described in the previous chapters was turned into a research project, and how this research was conducted. Here, I will share my research process with the reader, discussing how I came to the research topic, who the research participants were and how I got to know them, why I chose for a narrative methodological approach and the implications this had for this thesis, how I conducted the research and how I processed the information gained through the interviews for this thesis.

Before the research

This thesis is the second part of a small personal research project in which I wanted to get more insights into the interactions between citizens of Western European countries and refugees coming to that region. Knowing that I would have two theses to dive into the topic, in summer 2015 I decided to focus on an (at that time relatively new) German citizen initiative arranging private housing options for refugees, fascinated by how it enabled refugees to live in households shared with other Germans. This initiative seemed to me as simply reversing all the distance between refugees and Germans that had come to be taken almost for granted. My fascination resulted in a theoretical minor thesis, in which I deconstructed the category of 'the refugee', analysed what effect such private housing arrangements would have on this abstract figure, and developed a theoretical approach to understand the politicalness of such housing alternatives from the perspective of refugees. Some findings form the minor thesis can also be found in the previous theoretical chapter.

At the same time, by working on this topic I also became interested in working locally for and with refugees. Together with several other people I got involved in organizing several lectures on the asylum system, information events for possibilities of local involvement with refugees as well as platforms for local initiatives to connect with each other. Through these activities, I learned much more about the topic, and also established contacts with some people later became involved in this research project as interviewees.

From the theoretical knowledge gained in the minor thesis, and from the experiences made through my practical engagement, I decided to focus this major thesis on getting an insight into how those involved in private housing arrangements make sense of their activities. However, I learned quickly that my first ideas of talking to organizers, participating German citizens and participating refugees would not be possible, as the organization I contacted about my research idea made clear that they could not help with access to these potential study participants due to their obligations for privacy protection. I then decided to focus mostly on the organizers of such private housing arrangements, since as opposed to those citizens and refugees sharing a household, I could contact them directly through their websites. Furthermore, I decided to focus my research on the Netherlands, as here I could rely on some of the connections I had made through my local involvement in order to gain access to the field. After all these developments in my initial research plan, I decided to focus this major thesis on the question: How do Dutch citizens who facilitate private housing arrangements for refugees in the Netherlands talk about the potential of their activities to inspire socio-political transformations?

The research participants and access to them

I consider this research into the politicalness of private housing arrangements to be of a rather exploratory kind[6], since to my knowledge this specific topic has not been covered by academic research. Neither has there been much scholarship on the interactions between refugees and the citizens of their Western European host societies (with some noteworthy exceptions such as Dünnwald, 2006 and Fekete, 2009), and the potential of these interactions as a very local subversion of dominant restrictive discourses. With this research, I endeavoured to get an overview of the different forms of engagement of Dutch citizens in private housing arrangements. Therefore, my sampling strategy was explicitly inclusive to represent the variety of approaches. Regarding factors like forms of involvement (private or as an organization), duration of involvement as well as the legal status of the refugees that the research participants worked with (refugees in the asylum procedure, accepted with a temporary residence permit, rejected with chance for appeal or second procedures or rejected without any options for future legalization of residence), I aimed to be as inclusive as possible, rather than considering these factors as selection criteria.

I started my research by relying first on the connections I had already made through my involvement in organizing some local events, as well as by contacting the foundations and initiatives facilitating private housing arrangements in the Netherlands which I found through online research. From these initial research participants, I continued with snowball sampling and got in contact with people whom my initial research participants recommended me to talk to. With this sampling strategy, I continued until I had talked (sometimes repeatedly) with 20 research participants in interview situations, next to several informal conversations from which I also learned a lot about the perceptions of the research participants. The ages of the interviewees varied from the mid-twenties to the mid-fifties, and the majority of them had gone through higher education. All but one are – as far as I learned from our conversations – Dutch citizens by birth. One research participant is German, but has legally resided in the Netherlands for a substantial number of years for her studies and is involved in facilitating housing alternatives for refugees in the Netherlands. Therefore, she is also included in this study.

It must be noted that during the field work stage I aimed to be as open as possible to the constant evolving focus of this research, as it went through subtle changes in focus that required some fine-tuning with regard to the topics covered. Initially, I focused only on people who were involved in *organizing* private housing arrangements, but soon I learned that strict differentiations could not always be made between the different kinds of involvement in housing arrangements (sharing a house with a refugee or organizing such housing arrangements for others), as several research participants were involved in both aspects. At a later stage of the field work, it was also possible for me to include some people who were only involved in hosting. Furthermore, one alderwoman and one person working at a national organization connecting and coordinating local support structures for undocumented refugees were included as research participants, as I considered their views and opinions as an interesting complementation to the narratives of the research participants who were directly involved with private housing arrangements.

[6] Exploratory research is defined by E. Adler and R. Clark as focusing "on a relatively unstudied topic in a new area, to become familiar with this area, to develop some general ideas about it, and perhaps even to generate some theoretical perspectives on it" (2011: 13).

The narrative methodological approach

Given the focus of this research on understanding how the participating Dutch citizens make sense of their activities, I decided to follow a narrative approach. This meant that I specifically paid attention to how the research participants *talked about* their work as organizing or facilitating alternative housing options for refugees in the Netherlands, and about their perceptions and experiences. This choice was based on the phenomenological epistemological assumption that "meaning is ascribed to phenomena through being experienced and, furthermore, that we can only know something about other people's experiences from the expressions they give them" (Eastmond, 2007: 248). Choosing (repeated) interviews with the research participants as my main methodological approach gave me insights into how they talked about their actions, what aspects of their experiences they considered more worthy to share with me, and which they preferred to avoid. In that sense, focussing on the process of storytelling as a field of knowledge production allowed me to understand how the research participants viewed themselves and their actions in relation to wider society. In the following sections I give a brief introduction into the methodological approach of narratives and storytelling and examine which implications this has for this research.

The theory of narratives and storytelling

Storytelling can be considered as an act of meaning-making (Jackson, 2002:18). From the phenomenological perspective, we cannot access people´s experiences other than by learning about them through the stories people tell about their experiences. As such, stories or narratives do not reflect 'truth', nor do they 'document reality', but constitute not more and not less than a personal representation of the meanings ascribed to experiences (Eastmond, 2007). "Put simply", as Eastmond writes, "narrative is a form in which activities and events are described as having a meaningful and coherent order, imposing on reality a unity which it does not inherently possess" (*ibid*: 250). Thereby, the storyteller makes sense of his or her experiences of certain events, "endow[s] it with meaning and continuity" and a logical order (Davis, 2002: 12). This conveys also the narrator´s normative values, thoughts and feelings (Nuijten, 2015; Ochs & Capps, 1996). Through this process of 'emplotment', storytelling constitutes a creative interpretation of a past, constructed within the specific conditions of the present.

As narratives are born out of experiences and at the same time shape the (memory of the) experiences, the narrative and the self are inseparable. Jackson has stated that "[our] lives are storied" (2002:245). In this view, the 'self' is not considered as some inner essence, "but rather an ongoing story that emerges in and through the selection and 'emplotment' of experience" (Davis, 2002:20). By creating rather than reflecting a continuity between the past, the present and imagined worlds, "multiple, partial selves [are brought] to live" (Ochs & Capps, 1996: 37). This view is based on an understanding of the self as not being necessarily coherent across time and space, but rather as fragmented and situated (Bloom, 1996).

Narratives, or the process of storytelling, are considered as a way of bestowing connection and coherence on these fragmented and situated selves. However, narrators are always also strongly interconnected with social narratives often beyond their influence or understanding. As Hannah Arendt has written, even though narratives often contain the story of the person who experienced certain events, this particular person is never the only author of his or her life story, for it comes into being within an "already existing web of human relationships" (Arendt, 1958, in Jackson, 2002:23).

But not only the wider stories, also the influence the (immediate) listener(s) have on stories is important: "Given that narrative mediates self-understanding and that narratives are interactional achievements, the role of primary recipient can be highly consequential. The primary recipient is positioned to provide feedback on a narrative contribution, for example, to align and embellish; to question, tease, and refute; or to ignore" (Ochs & Capps, 1996:35). This triggers a specific reaction from the narrator and can prompt him or her to change the narration accordingly. Storytelling and 'emplotment' are therefore performative, influenced by the listeners´ verbal and non-verbal communicative contributions and interactions, such as comments, questions, looks and expressions, gestures and other – conscious or unconscious – reactions and behaviour (*ibid*.).

In social research, where the researcher typically guides these kinds of conversation, he or she has therefore a strong influence on the narrative that is produced in the interaction with the research participant(s). Eastmond (2007) refers to Freeman, who has even claimed that researcher's role in the creation of the data is not simply an 'interference', but that indeed it *is* the data – both in the production of this narrative data as well as in the subsequent representation of such narrative data as academic text. Hence, the interviewer can be considered as being simultaneously the co-author of the narrative (Ochs & Capps, 1996). This role requires the researcher to reflect on his or her influence, and to make this as transparent to the reader as possible.

Implications for this research

Choosing this narrative approach as the main methodology has important implications for social research like done for this thesis, as there were many situations of direct one-to-one interviews with the research participants in which they talked about their involvement and experiences with facilitating private housing arrangements for refugees. Firstly, this methodological approach requires me as the researcher to reflect on my positionality, in order to allow the reader to understand my influence in the creation of their narratives. This shall be the topic of the following section. Furthermore, it requires transparency about the actual interview process, in order to understand under which circumstances the narratives were created, as well as transparency about the analysis of these narratives, and how these have been translated into this thesis. These two aspects will be discussed respectively in the last two sections of this chapter.

Positionality of the researcher

There are many aspects to discuss about the positionality of 'me' as the researcher, especially given the approach to the 'self' as fragmented and situated (Bloom, 1996; Ochs & Capps, 1996). This of course does not only apply to the research participants and the construction of their narratives, but also to 'me' as the researcher. As it is impossible to discuss all these aspects in this section, I will focus on three aspects that I consider as having made the biggest impact on the research and which therefore need to be made transparent for the reader.

First of all, the different levels of acquaintance with the various research participants had an influence on the interviews: With some research participants, I could refer back to a longer period of acquaintance, also outside of this research situation, or could bond due to being in the same age group or 'student' situation. I observed that in these situations, the interviews became more personal and conversational, and in this atmosphere sensible topics of personal experiences became

more easily approachable. Other research participants, on the other hand, I met only for interview situations in which I clearly positioned as a student researcher. In my interpretation, this contributed to a more formal atmosphere (especially in the beginning of the interview), which made it more challenging to steer the conversation to personal experiences and expectations.

Another important aspect to emphasize here are my own sympathies for the case of citizens or citizen initiatives providing alternative forms of housing for refugees. As mentioned above, my fascination for such citizen engagement was the main factor that prompted me to do research in this field, in order to gain a deeper understanding of it. This interest and fascination for this topic was something that I honestly communicated to the research participants (especially at the beginning when explaining why I wanted to interview them), and which showed them that on many levels I had similar moral views and political positions as them. This means that our conversations often assumed a 'shared ground' with regards to views on issues around refugees. In this respect, my conversations with the research participants were different from those that a more refugee-critical interviewer would have had. However, this 'shared ground' also meant that during the interviews I had to pay special attention to questioning and following up on statements, positions or critiques by the research participants which I personally agreed with, but which I nevertheless wanted them to explain more in detail in order to gain more insights into their views.

The third important aspect that needs elaboration is that I – unlike all but one of my research participants – have not Dutch, but German citizenship. Although I have lived in the Netherlands for five years and personally do not like to introduce myself with my nationality, this was a topic I nevertheless brought up at the beginning of all interviews that were held in Dutch (which was the vast majority of all interviews) in order to excuse my occasional grammar mistakes and limited vocabulary. In these cases, I observed that several of the research participants made explanatory remarks about 'this is what the Dutch are like' during our conversations. In a very few cases they also made direct comparisons between the Netherlands and Germany or asked me to explain them some aspects from the German context. Hence, this aspect did have an influence on how the research participants related to me and what they considered as important to include in the narratives.

During the research

Based on the theoretical findings of my minor thesis, I developed an interview guide (see Appendix)**.** However, despite the clearly formulated questions mentioned there, I based my interviews only loosely on these questions and rather tried to conduct them in a rather 'conversational' manner, by aiming to let the research participant direct the conversation as much as possible. This, I hoped, would give me a better understanding of which aspects they would find important to talk about with me, and would also allow me to find aspects that I had not considered before. Indeed, my loose list of questions developed significantly over the course of my field work, as I let the prior interviews inform the upcoming ones, not only for the successive interviews with the same research participants, but also across different research participants. In that way, my evolving questions also represent my journey through the topic of this research.

In total, I conducted 25 interviews with 20 different respondents (of which three interviews were group interviews with two or three respondents each), which lasted between one and 4.5 hours. In most cases the interviews were conducted in Dutch, except some of those interviews with research

participants whom I already knew, as with them I had already established English as the language of our communication. The interview with the German research participant was conducted in German. The interviews generally took place at a location of the respondents´ choice. Often I visited them in their homes, but some interviews were also conducted at open spaces like community centres or universities, or at my respondents´ offices. The choice of location for the interviews was an important aspect, as I aimed to make my respondents as comfortable as possible for talking about sometimes sensitive issues regarding their activities.

In order to build rapport, I usually repeated the reason and general idea of my research at the beginning of the interview (i.e. my wish to learn about the perceptions of those Dutch citizens involved in providing alternative housing options for refugees), sometimes referred to shared acquaintances and asked for permission to record. I tried to get the conversation going by first asking the respondents to describe their activities in detail and used this as the basis for more in-depth question to follow-up on their accounts. Only at a later stage, I directed my research more towards specific topics that were important to my research but had not come up during the conversation, or asked more challenging questions.

The success of these methods varied, based also on the personality of the respective interviewee, and while in some cases the interviewees talked freely about their work with refugees, others were rather silent and restrained, which made the interviews more structured. Three interviews were unfortunately conducted by phone, as the research respondents preferred it that way. This also made the building of rapport more difficult, and resulted in shorter conversations that were more on a 'factual' level, concerning the working procedures of organisations or policies, and contained less personal information about experiences and perceptions.

After every interview, I took field notes in which I commented on my impressions from the interview, made methodological recommendations for the coming interviews and noted new ideas or connections with earlier interviews. These fieldnotes were also an important source of data for the analysis of my data. After every six to eight interviews I took a break to reflect on the information I had obtained, and how this data influenced the direction of the research. This helped me to focus during the following interviews and to find a way to accommodate the variety among my interviewees within one coherent research.

At a later stage of the research, when enough trust had been built with the research respondents I had met repeatedly, I was also able to accompany them to a number of meetings and presentations, or to encounter the research participants in situations where my own research was not the priority. These occasions, where I could take a role more akin to the participant observer, provided me with valuable information for my thesis and about the interactions between different research participants; however, I consider this data only as complementary to the narratives directly gathered from the conversations with research participants.

After the research

After the field work stage, I used the summarizing transcripts made after each interview for an initial analysis, which allowed me to identify important recurring themes in the data. These later provided the basis for the three empirical chapters on social and political change (Chapters 6-8). Analysing the

themes emerging from the data allowed me to find theoretical concepts relevant for the analysis of the research participants´ narratives. This step that I had consciously postponed until after the initial analysis to decrease the inclination to see the data only through a fixed theoretical lens, and thereby confirming what I was looking for[7]. Based on these theories, I then developed codes that helped me to analyse the narratives with more detail and to come to the insights which I present in the following chapters.

In order to comply with academic etiquette and to protect the privacy of my research respondents, all persons, organizations and places have been anonymized (even in cases where the respondents gave oral consent or even expressed a wish to be named in this thesis). Also several other personal identifiers as well as statements referring to the in some cases tensed relationship between different research participants have been omitted from the empirical chapters, where I did not consider them as relevant for understanding the research participants narratives. However, the anthropological approach taken in this research made it necessary to describe details of the research respondents' activities, their modes of involvement and connections to other research participants, organizations or institutions active in this country where I considered this as crucial in forming a deeper understanding of the experiences, expectations and views on socio-political change described in their narratives.

In the empirical chapters, I endeavoured to make a clear distinction between the language and framing used by the research participants by indicating clearly where I have used the interviewees' words. Interestingly, however, as several research participants were also educated in social sciences, they sometimes framed their activities in terms not very different from the theoretical terminology I chose for this thesis. Unless specified otherwise, the more analytical language used in the discussion chapters is my own theoretically informed framing, which is of course also based on the analysis of the research participants´ narratives.

All interviews quoted in this thesis are translations, except where these are marked with an ° for 'original', to show that these quotes are the original language used by the research participant. The translations were done in a way to keep the meaning as close as possible to the original, rather than using the same wording, as often their sense and connotation was implied only between the lines. Several concepts, such as '*logeerregeling'*, '*zelfzorgarrangement'* and occasionally also '*statushouders'*[8] are used in this thesis in their original Dutch form, either due to a lack of suitable translations as in the case of the first two terms, or, as in the latter case, because this is a characteristic formulation in Dutch that could lose some of its connotations if translated into English.

After this elaboration of the various aspects of the research process and the methodological approach applied in this thesis research, the following four chapters will focus on the empirical results of this study. Building on each other, the chapters discuss various elements relevant to understanding how the research participants make sense of their engagement in facilitating private housing arrangements for refugees, and where they see the potential for achieving substantial improvements through these activities. Each of the empirical chapters ends with a discussion section,

[7] I recognize of course that it is impossible to approach the data 'purely' and with an unbiased mind, especially considering the theoretical thesis that preceded this research. Nevertheless, I argue that this approach has allowed me to become aware of connecting themes that would have remained invisible to me if I had been analysing my data with the theoretical framework developed in the minor thesis.

[8] See Chapter 2 for explanations of these terms.

in which the various themes brought up in the chapter will be connected to the theoretical framework. These various themes developed in the four discussion chapters will then be summarized and discussed in the last concluding chapter.

5| Against Categorization: an introduction to the research participants

In this first empirical chapter, I will make the reader familiar with the research participants and their approaches to private housing arrangements for refugees. This will provide the basis for the other three empirical chapters, which deal more specifically with how the research participants consider their actions as contributing to an improvement of what they consider as the inadequacies of the Dutch asylum (accommodation) system.

The research participants and my conversations with them described in this chapter show the plethora of entry points, motivations, goals, and approaches to private housing arrangements. This chapter is thematically ordered around research participants´ views on the asylum accommodation system, their experiences and 'radicalisation' as well as the framing of themselves and their work. This chapter numerous ways in which the research participants are involved in facilitating private housing arrangements for refugees in the Netherlands.

Perceptions of the asylum (accommodation) system and forms of engagement

The Dutch asylum accommodation system is "a logistical operation, but not a humane operation". This statement made by Klaas during our interview very well captures the general sentiment of all research participants, namely that the publicly provided accommodation options for refugees do not allow for a dignified human life. This view was underlined by various interviewees through highlighting specific inadequacies, such as the large numbers of refugees that have to live within the very restricted space of asylum accommodation centres and the lack of privacy that resulted from it, which caused a lot of internal tensions (Johanna). Also the separation from wider society, which meant that the only Dutch persons most refugees living in the accommodation centres were in contact with were the staff members of COA or VluchtelingenWerk, was much criticized by various research participants such as Mieke, Roos, Dirk and Mareike.

However, for many of the interviewees the most important critical aspect was how refugees were made passive by the regulations that prevented them from working, voluntary activities, education – basically any form of human development, as Johanna emphasized. For this reason, Lotte described the asylum accommodation system as "sucking out their souls", and several research participants highlighted their surprise that refugees were accepting such treatments without revolting, and that they themselves, in the position of a refugee, would have "gone crazy long ago" (Mieke, Roos). Due to this negative perception of the Dutch asylum accommodation system, private housing arrangements were considered as a positive solution, an improvement of the individual refugee's situation through which he or she could "get a little happier [...]. Or at least less unhappy" (Klaas).

Bram also highlighted the benefits from the perspective of the Dutch society: he considered private housing arrangements as a way to get to know 'a refugee' personally, in order get to know the human being behind that label: "It´s about turning this idea of a person into an actual person"° with their own dreams and ambitions. If more Dutch people provided alternative housing for refugees, he remarked, this would contribute a lot to a better climate in Dutch society (referring to the wide-spread anti-refugee rhetoric). Also Mareike, Anna and Roos emphasized that private housing

arrangements for refugees could contribute to “integration on both sides”, could make the Dutch society more inclusive and could therefore, to some extent, counteract anti-refugee sentiments.

Despite their general agreement on these aspects, however, the research participants differed significantly in the degree of their criticism of the Dutch asylum accommodation system and the conclusions they drew from it for their own activities: For some, the focus of their critical engagement was limited to the refugee accommodation system, and their activities were therefore largely targeted at ameliorating its negative effects on refugees. For others the accommodation of refugees was only one manifestation of the generally “degrading”, “racist” and in some instances even “absurd” Dutch asylum system, which meant that facilitating housing alternatives was only one form of their protest against this system. Other research participants positioned themselves more in the middle of these two opinions, being generally critical about the asylum system at large, but limiting their activities largely to organizing and/or providing alternative housing options (for example Sarah, Sanne, Klaas and Johanna).

These differences in the scope of their criticism were also reflected in the various ways in which the research participants were involved in facilitating private housing arrangements: Four of the research participants were organized in two foundations (*stichtingen*) that focused almost exclusively on match-making, i.e. on bringing together refugees who had already received their five-year residence permit (the recognized refugees, or *statushouders*) with Dutch families, couples or single persons who had a room available. The housing arrangements matched by these foundations used the legal channels of the *logeerregeling* for a period of three months or, until its abolition in September 2016, the z*elfzorgarrangement* for periods longer than three months. Three research participants, Klaas, Johanna and Bram, shared their households with refugees they met through one of these match-making foundations, and who by the time of our interviews had received their residence permits.

Other research participants focused on facilitating alternative housing options for refugees whose asylum application had been rejected, and who therefore lost their right to support by the COA. They were either organized in local support organizations, or worked privately by offering place in their own household and/or using their networks to find housing options for rejected asylum seekers elsewhere. Mieke, Sarah and Manon, for example, have been sharing a household with refugees in this situation for several years, and also Klaas**,** Johanna and Lotte have done this in the past, although they were at the moment of our interview more involved in facilitating housing arrangements for refugees with a residence permit. Given the vulnerable position of undocumented refugees, Sarah explained that she experienced housing them as somewhat more complicated with regard to the organisational aspects, as people without a residence permit cannot rely on any governmental support and indeed need to avoid any contact with official bodies that could endanger their clandestine residence. For their personal interactions, however, she emphasized that the legal status (or lack thereof) did not have any influence.

Hence, there was much diversity with regard to the conclusions the research participants drew from their critical view on the current asylum accommodation system: Some tended to engage more in facilitating private housing options for refugees for whom sharing the household with a Dutch person or family was a *better alternative* to the publicly provided accommodation, and who still received support by the authorities; others tended more towards facilitating housing for refugees for whom living in private households was often the *only option* to avoid homelessness, and who had to live in clandestineness.

I want to argue that the legal status of the refugees is not helpful in understanding and categorizing Dutch citizens' engagement for and with them, as several research participants had been involved with refugees with different legal statuses over time (such as Mieke, Lotte, Klaas and Johanna). Many also remained involved when the legal status changed, for example in the case of rejected refugees whose appeal or second procedure led to a positive outcome. The next section shows how also the mode of engagement of the research participants can evolve over time.

The process of radicalization

A recurring pattern in the narratives of the research participants was the changing forms of their engagement with refugees, and the learning experience this has been for them. Several interviewees explained to me that they had started rather "naïvely" (Mieke) and often unfamiliar with the details of the Dutch asylum system, but had over time become more and more "radicalized" (Manon) through observing the effects this system had on refugees going through it. A detailed example from the narrative of Mieke is described here in order to illustrate what Manon has called the "process of radicalization":

Mieke got involved in working with and for refugees when she took several unaccompanied minor refugees into her home as foster children as part of a governmental foster care program in the early 2000s. One day, one of the minors brought home two young men who had been sleeping on the street. As they later learned, these were rejected asylum seekers who were put on the street by a near-by asylum seeker centre, and whom Mieke then invited to live at her house. Mieke brought journalists to publish about their – in her opinion unjust – procedures, for which she got heavily criticized by the state organization that arranged the foster care programme. Within half a year the foster children were removed from her house.

"And then I understood what the Netherlands were like!", she remarked at that point of her narrative[9]. Angry about this development and about the experiences of injustice she got to know when getting in contact with more rejected asylum seekers, she continued to offer accommodation for them in her own house. As many as nine people used to live at Mieke´s house, in emergency situations for a short time even seventeen. Several times, she arranged media-coverage on the injustices she observed through her encounters at asylum seeker centres and among the rejected asylum seekers she lived with. Unintentionally she also became involved in several (and increasingly growing) tent camps by rejected asylum seekers that protested against being put on the streets by COA, which according to her received a considerable amount of media attention**.**

At the moment of our interview, only one refugee was still living at her house, who also had received a residence permit after being initially rejected. When he refused his assigned social housing in a far-away municipality in order to continue living at Mieke´s house, he got the threatening response from the authorities that "this would have severe financial consequences" for both him and Mieke (despite the fact that living at her house would be more beneficial for his learning about the Dutch language and culture). However, Mieke explains she was rather unimpressed by this, as she has often experienced how official bodies want to punish her for her provision of private housing alternative

[9] Mieke´s angry energy was a strong impression for me in our first interview, where she started talking about all the injustices she witnessed as soon as I had entered the house, which barely left any time for me to ask questions.

for undocumented refugees, for example by reducing allowances, cutting tax refunds and other means. About such means she remarked: **"**They take you wherever they can. It is really disgusting. You´re fighting against the authorities here, [and their response] is sneaky".

Mieke is also strongly involved in the case of a family with one severely ill child, which in her narrative exemplifies all the "inhumane", "absurd", "dangerous", "racist" and sometimes "illegal" actions official bodies (especially from the asylum seeker centre in her town) use to bully refugees. Such treatment continued even after the family has received their residence permits (they still live at a COA location while waiting to be assigned suitable social housing). Through her years of involvement, she has become known in the networks of undocumented refugees, and she explained (and demonstrated during our conversation) that she regularly gets voice messages through social media by refugees in the most desperate situations. Mieke´s continued negative experiences with the asylum (accommodation) system over the past fifteen years have made her very exhausted, and also very cynical about the possibility of any future improvements.

The "process of radicalization" that Mieke went through ranged thus from providing a housing alternative for a minor refugee in a governmental foster care programme, to housing refugees whose presence in the Netherlands has been illegalized, organizing large-scale protest camps, and to currently sharing her house with a refugee with a residence permit who has preferred to stay at her house instead of moving into the social housing in a far-away municipality he was assigned to by the authorities. This is exemplary also for the developments that Roos, Lotte and Sarah went through in their engagement for refugees, as also for them this process was completely unplanned and unintentional, but resulted in a very strong opposition to the current asylum system.

During our conversations, Roos described her increasing disillusionment about the Dutch asylum system as quite "surprising" and "shocking", and as completely shattering her image of the Netherlands as an open and tolerant country. For Roos, her involvement in organizing private housing arrangements for refugees has quickly gone much beyond the organizational formalities. As she described it: "The matching itself is actually quite easy, but everything around it, those problems and obstacles that the refugees encounter, that makes it more difficult" and drains a lot of her energy. Roos´s 'discoveries' and disillusionment along the learning process have led to a feeling of indignation and shame of her own country´s policies and the disinterestedness of her co-citizens, which are now important motivators for her work.

This "process of radicalization", that several of the research participants highlighted in their narratives as part of their involvement with the Dutch asylum system, is another aspect which shows how categorization of the research participants based on their type of engagement is not possible, as this, in many cases, is constantly evolving. Instead, their involvement can be more aptly described as an (often unintentional) 'journey of discoveries', during which some of the Dutch citizens interviewed for this research moved towards more intense involvement with (mostly undocumented) refugees, for whom such private housing options often constituted the only option of accommodation.

Framings of the interviewees and their work

During the interviews with the research participants, another important aspect was the framing of themselves and their engagement. Several research participants talked about their involvement in

facilitating private housing arrangements for refugees (independent of their legal status) mostly in moral terms, as an obligation to help other humans in need, to support them and to open their house for them if necessary (Lisa, Johan, Klaas and Johanna). Their criticism of the Dutch asylum (accommodation) system was rooted in the mismatch of this system with their ideas about human equality, justice and the right to a dignified life for all humans (Roos, Lotte, Klaas, Johanna). For Sanne and Sarah, on the other hand, their religiously-rooted obligations to be there for others in need prompted them to support those refugees who had lost their right to support by the Dutch state organizations.

Dirk framed his engagement for refugees with residence permits as explicitly humanitarian, rooted in his religious values of being there for others in need. Ayla and Manon, on the other hand, referred to their anarchist world view that led them to strongly reject the idea of borders which renders the residence of some people "legal" and that of others "illegal" in a given country. Sanne, for example, also highlighted her own experiences of travelling and working freely in several of the countries where the refugees she is in contact with come from, which is a stark contrast to the vulnerable position faced by these refugees in the Netherlands.

Most research participants framed their work as a pragmatic step to counteract the injustices they observed on the local level, and did not consider their work as explicitly 'political' or 'activist' in nature. When discussing this topic during our conversations, several interviewees said that their actions might be understood as a political message, but that this was not their underlying intention. Bram for example highlighted that his political views were a source of his critical stance towards the current Dutch refugee system, but he did not describe his decision to share his household with a refugee as an explicitly political step, but rather as a pragmatic solution to the shortcomings of the asylum (accommodation) system.

Only Manon and Lotte framed their engagement for refugees as explicitly political and considered it as an "activist deed". For Manon, activism is the "deliberate engage[ment] in social change", which in her opinion she engaged in also in offering her house to those in need. However, their interpretations differed from others whose form of involvement was similar to theirs: Mieke, who similarly to Manon has shared her household for years with rejected refugees, considers herself not as an activist but explained that she rather feels an obligation to act when seeing someone in distress. Also Roos, opposing Lotte with whom she was formerly involved at the same match-making foundation, claimed that their organization was explicitly not involved in activist (which in her interpretation meant illegal) activities, as they wanted to be considered as dialogue partners by the political institutions involved in the asylum accommodation system.

Hence, also with regard to the framing of their engagement, the research participants differed significantly and sometimes even framed their engagement in a contradictory manner. Despite their general agreement that the Dutch asylum (accommodation) system suffered from a number of severe shortcomings and insufficiencies, only few research participants framed their activities as explicitly political. Religious and especially moral values were more commonly used by the research participants to describe their work. In relation to their thoughts on the social and political changes that such engagement for refugees could achieve this shall be further analysed in the following chapters.

Discussion: heterogenous acts of 'civil solidarity'

This chapter has highlighted the heterogeneity among the research participants with regard to their approaches to, experiences with and motivations for private housing arrangements for refugees with or without residence permits in the Netherlands. Some research participants' engagement in private housing alternatives for refugees was more openly contesting the Dutch asylum (accommodation) system, whereas others only implicitly criticized the current system or focused on specific aspects. Also the self-framing of the research participants varied significantly, and whereas some described themselves explicitly as 'activists', others working in a similar manner rejected that label for themselves. Most importantly, the form of their engagement also changed for several of the research participants as they went through a 'process of radicalization', and often concerned refugees with different (and in themselves varying) legal statuses.

One element that was reflected in all research participants' narratives, however, is the confirmation of the theoretical argument that private housing arrangements for refugees can indeed be considered as a critique of the current Dutch asylum (accommodation) system. As written above, the research participants facilitate such housing options driven by the impression that, in the current situation, refugees are often prevented from living a dignified human life, from establishing social connections with wider society and from having possibilities for human development. Through personal encounters with refugees, 'political listening' and 'becoming receptive' (cf. Millner, 2011), many interviewees increased their knowledge about the current situation, which in some cases contributed to their experience of a "process of radicalization". Overall, the criticisms of the research participants relate closely to the themes discussed by critical refugee scholars, such as segregation (Bancroft, 2001; Kitchin, 1998), tight control of everyday life (Malkki, 1995; Mountz et al., 2012) and the production of discomfort (Darling, 2011; Oudejans, 2011) in the asylum accommodation system.

Aiming to alleviate (some of) these shortcomings in the asylum (accommodation) system, the research participants have chosen to organize or provide private housing arrangements. Their actions can be understood as an active step to change the spatial segregation between 'citizens' and 'refugees', which also challenges the social segregation between these two groups at a very local level (Borren, 2008; Darling, 2011; Haas, 2012). Motivated by a wish to overcome the abstract image of 'refugees' that he had received through public debates around this topic, Bram for example found it very important to encounter his refugee-housemate from person to person, to get to know him as a human beyond broad categorizations like 'the refugee' (Nyers, 2006; Oudejans, 2011). To quote Bram: "It´s about turning this idea of a person into an actual person. [...] Not surprising at all, they just turn out to be people who have ambitions and desires".

From the perspective of radical democracy used in this thesis, private housing arrangements constitute a mundane mode of resistance against the Dutch asylum (accommodation) system in solidarity with the refugees, who directly experiences the consequences of spatial and social ordering. Thereby, they can challenge and even reverse – within a limited geographical frame – the harmful invisibility of refugees vis-à-vis wider society (Borren, 2008; Darling, 2011; Haas, 2012). These activities by Dutch citizens can thus be interpreted as challenging the hegemonic practices which renders refugees an abstract and potentially threatening Other (Haas, 2012; Mouffe, 2005; Oudejans, 2011). They are mundane acts of civil disobedience (Celikates, 2016; Heynen, 2010).

However, although several research participants said that their involvement could be understood as political, an important element to consider for analysing the politicalness of their involvement in

private housing arrangements is that the interviewees mostly used moral framings to describe their activities. For them, political contestation was indeed only a side-effect – rather than the goal – of showing solidarity and support for the refugees they were in contact with. Although the research participants spoke critically about the asylum (accommodation) system and the political institutions behind it, only some framed their everyday activities explicitly as forms of political protest. Therefore, I contend that the adequacy and appropriateness of the concept of '(everyday) civil disobedience' to describe their involvement in private housing arrangements needs some critical scrutiny.

One important aspect here is the difference between the commonly-used conception of 'politics' and the Mouffean definition of the word used in the radical democracy approach (Mouffe, 2005). As the interviews have shown, several research participants associated the term 'political' with party-politics or governmental institutions, which is why they did not consider their own actions as 'political'. However, the conceptualization of 'the political' in the radical democracy perspective differs significantly from this view, as it refers to the element of contestation and struggle for hegemonic power relations between different ideologies or positions (Mouffe, 2005, 2013). This takes place even within the realm of the mundane. I consider it to be an advantage of the radical democracy approach to recognize this political capacity of private housing arrangements, even where the research participants did not apply their common understanding of 'political' to describe them.

Despite the recognition of the inherent politicalness of these actions, however, the concept of 'civil disobedience' might not be suitable to fully represent the mundaneness of these antagonistic contestation that characterizes the facilitation of private housing arrangements. With reference to the acts of 'solidarity activism' by citizens for those at the margins (or outside) of society discussed in academic literature (see for example Heynen, 2010; Millner, 2011; Rygiel, 2011), I propose therefore to conceptualize the facilitation of private housing arrangements instead as acts of 'solidarity engagement' or 'civil solidarity'. I consider such more open terminology to be better suited for understanding citizens' mundane forms of contestation and protest, as it is inclusive towards a larger variety of activities and modes of citizen engagement. Furthermore, this is closer to the research participants´ own framing, as it takes into account that for many solidarity and support were more important than contestation. Therefore, in the remainder of this thesis I will use *civil solidarity*[10] as a more suitable conceptualization of such 'undramatic' forms of solidarity protest and resistance, which can nevertheless be characterized as 'quiet' or 'imperceptible' politics (Askins, 2015; Tsianos, 2007).

In the three following chapters, I will focus more on the various acts of everyday civil solidarity in order to get a better understanding of how the research participants engage in social and political changes. In particular, the following chapter will examine what the modes of facilitating private housing arrangements imply for where the research participants see the responsibility for social and political changes, and what this means for their own engagement.

[10] Although 'civil' or 'civic solidarity' have been mentioned in academic literature before (see for example Nikolajsen & Bennett, 2014; Sammut, 2011), in this thesis I refer to them specifically from a radical democracy perspective.

6| Responsibilities for socio-political change

Based on the premise that the research participants engage in private housing arrangements with the aim to achieve changes in the system or in the dominant discourses around refugees in which this system is rooted, this chapter focuses specifically on these changes that the research participants want to achieve. By analysing the various forms of engagement chosen by the research participants, as described in the previous chapter, the specific goal of this chapter is to understand where the research participants locate the responsibility for achieving such changes, and which implications this has for their engagement.

The responsibility of 'the government'

Several of the interviewees, especially those working within the more 'formalized' organizational structures of the match-making foundations, talked about their relationship to 'the government' (*de overheid*) as intrinsic to their understanding of themselves as Dutch citizens. In their narratives, 'the government' was often not further specified and referred to an amalgam of national authorities, the figure of the Prime Minister (or Minister-President of the Netherlands), as well as the Ministry of Security and Justice, whose portfolio of responsibilities includes issues of asylum, and its various affiliated bodies. It is these national institutions that the research participants, who considered themselves as being part of a citizen initiative, addressed when they claimed that 'the government' should pay attention to their activities, take their visions and goals more into account and, most importantly, support them with recognition and cooperation (and preferably also some funding).

This strong focus on the government was rooted in a normative understanding of the distribution of responsibilities between the national government and citizen initiatives with regard to refugees. Roos and Mareike highlighted that citizen initiatives only had a "signalling function" to highlight the concerns of the citizens, and were not designed to take over the responsibilities of the government. Private housing alternatives, as a form of accommodation that according to them contributed to integration, were considered as something that eventually the authorities should take up by themselves. Indeed, Dirk told me that his foundation initially only planned to collect a list of addresses of households that would open their doors to refugees for the period of the *logeerregeling*, in order to then give this list to the local municipality or the organization VluchtelingenWerk, who were expected to take care of the actual matching. Only when these institutions refused this task due to overwork, this foundation began to look into ways they could do the matching on their own. Also Lotte told me that they always intended their match-making actions to be temporary, hoping to make themselves superfluous, either through establishing this option of private housing arrangement so well that no more match-making initiatives would be necessary, or that the government institutions responsible for the housing of refugees would take over this task.

Considering their citizen initiatives to have a signalling function to the government was for these research participants also the reason why they organized themselves in forms of foundations (or, if they were not founding members, joined these after they had been established). Relying on the lobbying power of citizen initiatives to influence the government's position in asylum politics, which was based on an understanding that the government should reflect what the citizens are demanding, they have decided to position themselves as "dialogue partners" to the government, whose opinions

and advice should be taken into account by the responsible authorities, as Roos, Lotte and Mareike described it.

This implied for Lotte and Roos, that particularly in the beginning they would focus only on matching those who fulfilled the legal requirements for moving temporarily out of the publicly provided asylum seeker accommodation by using the *logeerregeling* and the *zelfzorgarrangement*, i.e. those refugees who had been granted asylum but had to remain in the asylum seeker centre while waiting for a suitable social housing in the assigned municipality. Thereby, they excluded the possibility to arranging private housing arrangements for refugees in different legal situations. Lotte described it as a "conscious decision", as they wanted to remain within the realm of the "legal" in order to establish themselves as a "dialogue partner" for the government, hoping to thereby have some influence on future policy design. Even though this was against her own moral views, as she does not agree with policies and laws that sort humans who fled into 'legal' or 'illegal' refugees, for Lotte this was an explicitly "political step" that was necessary in order to achieve their overarching goal of improving the (housing) situation of refugees in the Netherlands.

One of the consequences of locating the responsibility for transformation with the government, and therefore positioning their foundation as a potential "dialogue partner", was that especially the early stages of their foundation (when also the policies allowing for private housing alternatives were still relatively new) were experienced as very difficult by both Roos and Lotte. They explained that it required much perseverance for their foundation to be considered seriously by official bodies like COA, whose cooperation they considered as necessary since their approval is necessary for every single private housing arrangements arranged through these official channels. Roos and Lotte described these early stages as requiring "much determination" and as "being brain-racking", until after some time the national regulations were more widely known and recognized by the local COA offices. In the first half of 2016, numerous matches were made using these regulations until, by mid-September, the Ministry for Security and Justice decided that per September 1 the *logeerregeling* would be stopped. This caused some confusion, especially as a few days later the decision was changed to stop the *zelfzorgarrangement* instead, and to continue with the *logeerregeling* in a changed form that would require immediate registration of the refugee´s new address with the local municipality.

Some of the research respondents were openly critical about this decision, expressing anger, incomprehension, accusations of intransparency and doubts of the democratic legitimacy of the decision (which was according to Roos unknown even to members of the Second Chamber until it was made public) as well as doubts of the competency of the responsible politicians to foresee what effects their decisions would have. Others were more restrained in their reactions, one remarking only that the reason must have been because the regulations were not completely following the Dutch law. However, as the interviews for this research were held in November and December, some time had passed since these changes in the regulation. After some weeks of uncertainty about the future of such match-making citizen initiatives, these organisations were jointly invited for meetings with representatives of the Ministry for Security and Justice and with organizations like COA, to give advice about the design of possible future policies on alternative housing options (although it was not clear to what extent this would eventually influence the new regulations). In that sense, several of them expressed that their goal of being recognized as "dialogue partners" had eventually been accomplished.

However, when asking the research participants to reflect on their achievements with regard to the improvements they wanted to see, opinions varied significantly. Some interviewees, such as Anna, Mareike and Dirk, were very positive about the fact that their relatively recently established citizen initiatives already got invited to talk with bodies like the Ministry or the COA. According to them, living together with refugees became eventually more recognised as a valid housing option, and even considered as an "instrument for integration" (Anna). They felt like they had received the public recognition they had been fighting for in the beginning (also for example through receiving some symbolic awards), and highlighted that their growing societal impact was reflected in the high degree of media attention and numbers of registrations by Dutch households wanting to participate as 'host families'.

Lotte and Roos were more pessimistic about the influence they had achieved in the past two years. Both told me that with positioning themselves strategically as potential "dialogue partners" – and with accepting the limitations as to who could be matched that this positioning implied despite their different personal views – their goal had been to "express a dissent" (Lotte) with the current government of regulations and their underlying discourse that focuses on the necessity to control and manage refugees. These respondents felt that government institutions should have 'picked up' on their dissent much more, and felt like operating "*against"* these unwilling government institutions rather than "*with* them" (Roos), as they had initially envisaged. This situation was in strong contradiction with their views on how the government should react to such citizen initiatives, and they consequently expressed that they felt disappointed and left alone.

However, Lotte also saw some positive aspects to the lack of acknowledgement from official bodies: According to her, this would free them from their self-imposed limitations to match only recognized refugees who were waiting for social housing. Instead, their matching might become more inclusive, and potentially also refugees who had lost their right to housing by the COA could find a host family through their organization. This step would be more true to Lotte´s own moral values. Despite also recognizing this new freedom, however, Roos highlighted repeatedly that in her opinion a real improvement in the housing situation of refugees "could only be initiated by the authorities", as it is "their responsibility". The disappointment about the lack of support and recognition weighed rather heavily on her, and was a repeating theme in our conversations.

Locating the responsibility for changes in the asylum (accommodation) system with the national government thus implied for several research participants to position themselves explicitly as "dialogue partners" representing citizens' opinions, based on the understanding that the government should take these into account in their approach to refugees. However, while some research participants were very positive about the responses they have received and their eventual invitation to speak with representatives of various government bodies about possible legal ways for alternative housing options for recognized refugees, others mainly criticized that the government had long remained too passive in picking up their suggestions and had generally not been responsive enough to citizens' demands.

The responsibility of 'the citizens'

Several other research participants, especially those outside of formally organized citizen initiatives, also emphasized their conception of their own citizen status as implying a responsibility to support

the people in need within their country. Hence, these interviewees talked less about the government or government institutions as having the responsibility for a change in the asylum accommodation system and the underlying discourses. Instead, they rather felt responsible themselves as *citizens* of the Netherlands. This understanding of their citizenship status and their connection to this country therefore implied for them a shared responsibility for the situation in the Netherlands (and especially in their communities), which was a strong motivator for them to get involved in facilitating private housing alternatives for refugees.

This understanding of an intrinsic responsibility of citizenship is very explicit in a remark made to me by Mieke: She told me that sometimes, when feeling very exhausted from her years-long engagement for undocumented refugees in the Netherlands in the face of continuously increasing restrictions, she wished she would live in Germany (the border being only a few kilometres away from her house), as there she would simply feel *less responsible* for all the bad things happening to refugees. Both the Dutch and the German asylum system are nested within the same shared EU approach, and the consequent similarities between the two systems might be argued to be similar in the severity of their effects in individual refugees´ lives; hence this remark was not about one system being better than the other, but only about her feelings of responsibility. The mere fact that she is not a citizen in Germany would take some of the "pressure" that she feels when living in the Netherlands, and which prompts her to engage in protests and to provide shelter and support for those refugees who lose their right to shelter by the official bodies.

This feeling of responsibility intrinsic to a self-understanding as a citizen of the Netherlands was also expressed by other research participants, and involved a feeling of duty to make use of their citizen rights in order to achieve the improvements they considered as necessary. Using their own stable legal position, knowledge of the workings of Dutch society or the bureaucratic system, as well as their rights as citizens to address local politicians and national media are examples of this. These rights and abilities, which are outcomes of the Dutch citizenship that the majority of my research respondents obtained by birth, allowed – or even "required" – them to "play within the system", as Sanne and especially Manon expressed it, and to "search for the borders" of what they can achieve for refugees with this status.

Another recurring theme in the context of citizens' responsibility was the discourse of the 'participatory society' (*participatiesamenleving*), which was for example emphasized by Klaas, Johanna, Mareike and Roos. Established especially in the care sectors, this political discourse and the policies based on it emphasize the importance of citizens taking over responsibilities for caring more for each other (or for example among family members). As the alderwoman interviewed for this research remarked, this is not much more than a "euphemistic description of cuts in the government funding for certain care functions". Despite this criticism, several research respondents reffered explicitly to some of the values of the 'participatory society' discourse in our conversations about their involvement in private housing arrangements for refugees (especially where it concerned residence permit holders). Some said they were willing to take over some "responsibilities for creating a better society" (Mareike); however, they also encountered a number of problems that they considered a strongly limiting in that regard.

In the opinion of the interviewees, one important problem here was the lack of ample support by the authorities which they considered necessary for participatory endeavours. During a meeting between three match-making foundations in Amsterdam I attended at the end of November 2016, a repeating

theme was that in their opinions, such citizen initiatives do much important work, which (by that time) also received some recognition by the government institutions or other official bodies (such as VluchtelingenWerk), but did not receive enough support and assistance. Local municipalities gave many compliments or even agreed to collaborate locally in terms of brainstorming about new ideas for implementation of alternative housing options for refugees with a residence permit, but barely contributed financially to the citizen initiatives. This, the participants agreed, was typical for the 'participatory society': "Being invited to all events, but not getting any funds", as Mareike put it.

Another problem was described by Klaas: that participation in the field of refugees was strongly at odds with the "controlling task" of government bodies like COA, who were thus perceived as "not being open to citizens" wanting to 'participate'. Roos for example, in her disappointment about the abolition of the *zelfzorgarrangement*, described this government decision as "schizophrenic": "They want integration, participation [...]. Many nice citizen initiatives develop, but the most beautiful piece is then abolished by the Minister [for migration]! What is the real agenda? Do they want integration, community (*samenleving*)?"

Also Klaas criticised the refusal of some governmental bodies to give some responsibilities to the citizens, and claims that 'the government' "should also have trust in its citizens", and "should accept that participation also includes some risks". Local citizen engagement, he and his wife Johanna told me, could fulfil many tasks that the "logistical operations by government institutions" could not achieve. According to them, "the question of [refugee] housing is actually not so very different from the question of social cohesion", as refugee housing should ideally also enable personal connections and strong engagement with the social surroundings. For Klaas and Johanna, citizens involved with refugees could make a valuable contribution in "bringing back the humane" to the Dutch asylum system.

However, as Klaas remarked, these interpretations of the 'participation' discourse clashed with the authorities' discourse of control, as they constitute contradictory logics: Whereas for the interviewees, 'participation' included bottom-up engagement with refugees and refugee accommodation, the attitudes they observed in government institutions towards this grassroots engagement (such as the abolition of the *zelfzorgarrangement*, the personal negative experiences with COA staff as well as the general restrictiveness of Dutch government policies with regard to refugee housing[11]) clearly showed that the government in many aspects did not agree with this interpretation of the 'participation' discourse. Consequently, their 'citizen participation' in the field of refugee accommodation was rather undesired, discouraged or even forbidden.

Discussion: the rights and responsibilities of citizenship, or disobedient civil solidarity

This chapter aimed to show the variety of views among the research participants regarding responsibilities for changes in the Dutch asylum (accommodation) system and its underlying discourses: Some locate this responsibility more with the official institutions, whereas other consider the Dutch citizens responsible to take actions. This shows the differences in the interviewees' interpretations of the implications of their citizen status with regard to their engagement for refugees: For some, their citizenship was most important in relation to their rights to make demands

[11] In this respect the Netherlands differ from other Western European countries like Austria and Germany, where, according to Roos, housing outside the asylum seeker centre is possible also during the procedure.

to the government, whereas others considered it as involving a duty and responsibility to help refugees coming to their county (best exemplified with Manon´s remark that she would wish to live in the close-by Germany, as she would feel less responsible there).

With regard to the first aspect, the decision by several research participants to organize themselves in foundations and citizen initiatives can be interpreted as a decision to position themselves as citizen right-bearers in relation to the authorities (Piven, 2006 in Heynen, 2010), making active claims to be heard and considered in their special topic of alternative housing options for refugees. To some extent, they thus relied on more formal channels for citizen participation to achieve some influence (Swyngedouw, 2005, 2011), even though this sometimes meant to compromise their own moral values (such as excluding undocumented refugees from participating in their matching program).

While some interviewees were more positive about their influence, I argue that it is especially the difficulties in achieving recognition and acceptance, as experienced by Lotte and Roos, that are highly interesting here. These two research participants had expected the government to acknowledge and respect their citizen initiative as representing citizens' critique to the current Dutch asylum (accommodation) system, and that their proposed alternative to refugee accommodation would be taken into account more. In one of our interviews, Roos explained somewhat defiantly that they had "played by the rules" in order to be considered as "dialogue partners", but since all their efforts where simply not recognized, there was no reason to adhere to the strict rules as to which legal category of refugees could be matched.

These stories from Roos and Lotte exemplify an experience of a 'lack of representation' (Swyngedouw, 2011). In their self-perception as Dutch citizens, they expected that the government would represent, or at least take into account, their concerns about the current asylum (accommodation) system and their interests in improving it. Their implicit understanding of the relation between 'citizens' and 'the government' was a reason to organize themselves as a foundation, "signalling" (Roos) the concerns of the people. When realizing that the authorities had a different view on their activities, as for a long time they did not respond to their demands and even abolished their main legal channel to organize private housing arrangements for a period longer than three months, they started to consider other ways to engage against segregating refugee housing policies without relying on government recognition.

This lack of representation experienced as highly frustrating by Roos and Lotte links well with the deficits in representation in liberal democracies described by Celikates (2016) and Swyngedouw (2011). Not feeling that their concerns were sufficiently taken into account by their government, they considered searching for other of political participation in order to overcome this 'blockage' by the official institutions (cf. Celikates, 2016: 991), for example by arranging private housing alternatives for refugees also outside of the governmental regulations (i.e. the *logeerregeling*). This is the path which several other research participants have chosen from the beginning, either because they did not consider that going through such more 'official' channels would be very beneficial to achieving their goals, or, as in the case of Sarah, they did not see any possibilities to establish a citizen initiative with lobbying power in their area.

Instead, these research participants focused mostly on the grassroots level (Nuijten, 2015) to achieve improvements in the Dutch asylum (accommodation) system and particularly in the underlying discourses. These research participants felt a responsibility – rooted mostly in moral motivations as well as in their ideas of what constitutes a 'good citizen' – to work for improving the situation of

refugees in the Netherlands and to employ their citizenship privileges (ability to create media attention and to contact for example local politicians and decision makers) as means to achieve that goal. They considered it as their citizen duty to facilitate private housing arrangements as a form of civil solidarity with and support for the refugees in the Netherlands.

Their own perception of what constitutes 'good citizens' led several research participants (such as Klaas, Roos and Mareike) to evoke the 'participatory society' discourse during our conversations. However, as has been shown, their interpretation matched more their own personal willingness to contribute to the accommodation of refugees in a manner they considered as more appropriate than the current asylum accommodation system, rather than the authorities´ view on citizen participation concerning refugee accommodation. In referring to the 'participation' discourse, the research participants made thus use of a governance tool by reinterpreting and re-contextualizing it creatively so as to suit their own views and goals.

Their narratives showed that many of the research participants did not agree to limit their involvement to government regulations on private housing arrangements. They did not wait for top-down policy changes, but rather decided to initiate the improvements they considered necessary by themselves on a local level (although not always framing this in political terms). In that sense, their facilitation of private housing arrangements for refugees is similar to the acts of civil disobedience in solidarity with the poor and hungry in U.S. American cities (Heynen, 2010) or with undocumented refugees in Calais, France (Millner, 2011) described in Chapter 3.

From a radical democracy approach, the research participants' grassroots involvement in facilitating private housing options for refugees can therefore be considered as mundane acts of *disobedient civil solidarity*. I use this conceptualization to describe acts of solidarity with refugees which, although motivated in moral values rather than political protest, nevertheless challenge governmental policies or laws. Disobedient civil solidarity thus highlights the contesting character of private housing arrangements. They are also an expression of discontent with the institutionalized channels for citizens´ political participation. In this perspective, their activities are a demand for resuming bottom-up political engagement of citizens (Piven, 2006 in Heynen, 2010), also in the realm of nationally organized refugee accommodation.

All in all, this chapter has highlighted the differences among the research participants with regard to where they located the responsibility for changes in the Dutch asylum (accommodation) system and the hegemonic discourses it is grounded in. Several research participants focused mostly on the government as the responsible actor for bringing about change in the Dutch asylum (accommodation) system, and therefore positioned themselves as a citizen initiative to address and lobby government (which, for some research participants, proved to be a frustrating experience). Others considered themselves *as citizens* to have a responsibility to bring about improvements for refugees in the Netherlands, and therefore focused more on personal involvements with refugees. Despite discouragements from the official bodies, these research participants considered such grassroots involvement as the most fruitful option for them to achieve social and political transformations with regard to the Dutch asylum (accommodation) system. Therefore, I proposed to conceptualize their activities as mundane acts of *disobedient civil solidarity.* What the research participants consider to be the potential of such bottom-up engagement to achieve these changes, will be the topic of the following chapter.

7| The potential of bottom-up socio-political change

As opposed to the boundedness to regulations and policies experienced by those directly lobbying government institutions to achieve changes in discourses and policies, working on the local level often meant searching for pragmatic and creative solutions within and at the borders of the Dutch asylum (accommodation) system. Despite the research participants´ disagreement with the current situation, for many the national asylum system seemed too rigid and beyond their direct influence. Therefore, they decided to focus their activities on the local level where they felt they could have an influence by utilizing their citizen rights and possibilities. Often, they also felt that local level also offered more possibilities to achieve improvements, if only within a limited geographical area. In this chapter, I will explore what the research respondents considered as the possibilities of such grassroots engagement, and which changes they felt they could achieve with their activities.

Support from the municipality level

In the interviews, many respondents made a clear distinction between the local and the national government levels when talking about their critique of the Dutch asylum (accommodation) system. Whereas they criticized or even blamed the national government for the inadequacies of the asylum regime, the local municipalities were often considered as potential supporters or collaborators for improving the situation of refugees within their geographically limited administrative area. During the interviews, several research participants described how they were in contact with local aldermen or other municipal staff to inform them about the injustices they observed. Klaas and Johanna, for example, showed me a letter they wrote to local alderman about the degrading treatment Akil, the refugee lodging at their house, had received by COA staff. It ended with a description how unnecessary administrative mistakes have led to “a study delay of one year [for Akil], caused a lot of stress and [how the COA staff has] not once given him the feeling of being treated as a human being”. They hoped that by making the local government aware of such incidents, they could prompt local politicians to take steps towards improving the situation in their municipality.

Also several of those research participants organized in foundations initially planned to work together closely with local governments: Roos and Lotte, for example, contacted all municipalities of the Netherlands in the early days of their foundation, with the hope to work collaboratively with them on making private housing arrangements a well-known alternative to housing in asylum seeker centres. As mentioned in the previous chapter, also Dirk’s foundation initially wanted to collect addresses of potential host families in order to forward these to local municipalities, who were expected to match them with locally assigned residence permit holders. However, for both Roos, Lotte and Dirk, this focus on the municipalities did not prove fruitful in the end, and they then chose other ways to facilitate private housing arrangements for refugees without municipal support.

Nevertheless, this choice of first approaching the local government to establish private housing arrangements was confirmed by other research participants who also considered this as the most promising approach: Maria, who worked at a national organization coordinating the work of local initiatives and organizations that provide alternative housing arrangements for undocumented refugees, told me during our conversation that municipalities have several possibilities to support citizens or citizen initiatives that provide alternative housing options for refugees. According to her,

in several municipalities in the Netherlands, there is for example still a strong opposition to the restrictive national policies on shelter for refugees who have lost their right to shelter by the COA, and therefore the local governments might be more willing in supporting alternatives as far as legally possible for them.

According to Maria, local organizations providing life-sustaining support (such as accommodation, access to health care and financial means) as well as legal advice for undocumented refugees indeed receive financial support in some municipalities in the Netherlands. During an interview in such a municipality, an alderwoman told me that the local government has grounded their decision in their general duty of care (*zorgplicht*) towards their citizens, which implied that guaranteeing the human rights of all inhabitants was more important than following the provisions of the national aliens´ law. According to her, this support is an example that shows that municipalities have some possibilities to search for and test the limits of what is legally possible. Or, as Roos described it, "it´s actually civil disobedience, but then by the municipality itself".

Nevertheless, despite the alderwoman´s own political opposition to the government´s stance towards refugees, she emphasized that the Dutch legislation prohibits the municipality from acting beyond the legal boundaries. Therefore, "active citizens" who have more freedoms in 'bending the boundaries' "are needed to locally support refugees" with and without documents where the municipality is unable to do that. For her, the role of the municipality in achieving changes in the asylum regime is thus two-fold: Firstly, through the support of local citizens or citizen initiatives working for that goal, not only through financial support, but also through immaterial resources, symbolic support, networking as well as content collaboration. As citizen initiatives are "necessarily locally grounded" somewhere, the municipalities constitute in her opinion the first and "most approachable level of the government". Therefore, they should be the first "reference point" for citizens or citizen initiatives aiming to influence national politics. Secondly, the municipality has some lobbying power with the national government (either through political affiliations of local politicians or through the Association of Dutch Municipalities), and should know about the concerns of their citizens in order to be able to represent them.

Hence, according to the research participants municipalities constitute an important potential ally in supporting (financially or immaterially) their endeavours to achieve improvements for refugees with and without refugee status. However, as this is strongly dependent on the political orientation of the local government, the research participants could not always rely on such support by their local municipalities. Some research participants described how their local governments were against their citizen engagement for refugees (especially where it concerned undocumented refugees). Other municipalities, as Sarah described it, did not see the need for supporting citizen initiatives, as they denied the presence of any undocumented refugees in their administrative area. In these cases, the research participants engaged in facilitating private housing alternatives for refugees independently and below the level of the local government.

Pragmatism on the grassroots level

Around half of the research participants were not organized in foundations, organizations or other forms of citizen initiatives. They were mostly involved in housing alternatives for refugees individually, although some of them were in informal contact with each other. Others were members

of organizations with a very local focus. All these research participants were active on what might be called the 'grassroots level', and often more engaged with refugees on an everyday basis rather than being involved in explicit forms of protest or political lobbying.

For these research participants, it was important "to do more than just talking", as for example Bram formulated it. Frustrated by seeing 'the refugee crisis' discussed in all kinds of areas (in party politics and by the government, in various media channels ranging from critical to tabloid style, in associations of citizens etc.) with very little concrete and positive decisions being made, many considered it as a matter of course to get involved with refugees if they had not been so already. Pragmatic local involvement was by Sanne and other research participants also considered as way to counter feelings of powerlessness in the face of the rigid asylum (accommodation) system. Then, at least, "one is active in a constructive mode and is not just complaining", as Sanne put it.

In her position as a coordinator at a local organization that provides life-sustaining and legal support to asylum seekers who have lost their right to support by the COA, I asked Sanne about the requirements needed for such a position. She explained to me that a certain critical stance towards the current legislation and political discourses around so-called 'illegal' refugees is necessary, but that it is even more important to be able to pragmatically "work within this system". According to her, this requires much creativity and energy. "One has to have the creativity to make something possible within the system, rather than wanting to create a new world, because that simply doesn´t work!". Creative ways of bending or stretching the rules to make them work for her clients she described as little acts of "civil disobedience".

When reflecting about the influence their actions could have on achieving a situation that would be more suitable for refugees in the Netherlands, many research participants highlighted that their tasks were in raising awareness and spreading knowledge about the situation of refugees in the Netherlands among other citizens, as well as providing active support for the individual situations of those refugees they were in contact with. Considering their options in influencing the asylum (accommodation) system directly to be rather small, these two aspects were mentioned as the main pragmatic possibilities – and therefore responsibilities – that citizens could focus on, independent of the legal status of the refugees that they facilitated the private housing options for.

Private support of individual refugees

Many research respondents felt morally obliged to provide personal support for the refugees they were in contact with. According to them, such support could take the form of help with translations of Dutch documents or websites or to find their way within the Dutch bureaucracy; to make complaints and requests in place of the refugee as experience showed that these would be addressed quicker if expressed by a Dutch citizen; or to accompany the refugee to official appointments where possible, as often the mere presence of the Dutch person made sure the refugee would be treated better and would get his or her rights (which, in a similar situation, triggered a response from an employee that Klaas shared with me: "If everyone brings someone like this along, we´ll never be able to simply arrange things" [12]). Other forms of support were for example career planning, use of networks to find jobs, support in finding housing options, Dutch language

[12] The original expression in Dutch is even more powerful in communicating the attitude of the employee: "Als iedereen so iemand meeneemt, dan kunnen wij nooit meer dingen zo maar even regelen"

practice and, most importantly, “showing them that someone is there for them, caring about them and their situation” (Roos).

This need for personal support by Dutch citizens for refugees was a recurring theme in many of the interviews. It is important to remark that this applied in many cases both to refugees who were denied their application for asylum and lost their right to protection by the COA, as well as those who were granted asylum and had thus the right to live in the Netherlands for the duration of their residence permit. Even though the channels were different in both cases (the latter being more complex due to the more vulnerable situation of refugees without a residence permit), Sarah informed me that for her, helping one group or the other was not essentially different on the personal level.

Knowing her channels of influence as citizens enabled for example Johanna to arrange a meeting with an alderman in her municipality, during which they found a housing solution for an refugee family that for a significant length of time had been waiting in vain for adequate social housing, and which could be arranged quickly after Johanna had become involved in the case and had talked to the local politician. Also Mieke told me about her experience that if only someone with a sufficient network and knowledge of the Dutch asylum system would attend to a rejected asylum seeker, in many cases asylum would be granted in the appeal or a second application. Of the numerous illegalized refugees who had been living at her home for the last 15 years, the vast majority had eventually received a status.

This shows that the involvement of many research participants with refugees went often beyond the mere facilitation of alternative housing options to refugees with and/or without status. Their moral values and political convictions as well as experiences of the positive influence they could have when intervening as a Dutch citizen in a seemingly hopeless situation of a refugee were for many research participants the reason to be active on the grassroots level. Several research participants framed such personal support as a way to ensure that the refugee they were helping would get the rights he or she is entitled to. In that sense, such support was strengthening the (legal) position of the refugee in the Netherlands and could have “a huge influence” for the individual situation (Manon).

Raising awareness, spreading a ‘feeling’

In creating a “more humane” (Klaas) situation for refugees in the Netherlands, many research participants considered it also as very important to share the insights gained through the close contact with refugees with their co-citizens. According to the research respondents, this served to let also others see that refugees were just ‘fellow humans’, and to create awareness about refugees´ situation in the Netherlands. Through that, they hoped to initiate changes in societal discourses which might eventually lead also to political and legislative changes.

In many cases, raising awareness was the consequence of small, everyday actions, particularly when it considered the immediate social surroundings of the research participant. Very mundane conversations with friends, colleagues, parents, neighbours etc. were channels where they could spread knowledge about the lived experiences of sharing their household with refugees, their expectations and views as they changed throughout the process as well as their insights into the Dutch asylum (accommodation) system. Visits by friends and families were possibilities of encounter, through which also those who would not consider opening their own house to ‘a refugee’ could encounter a person who applied for asylum in the Netherlands.

Several research participants referred to stories of such mundane encounters between the refugees they were involved with and their own social environment. Bram for example talked about an encounter between his father, who had been critical about increasing numbers of refugees in the Netherlands, and Jalil, who at the time of the visit had shared the household with Bram. According to him, this encounter was the first time that his father got to know a person with refugee experience. This, Bram told me, might not have changed his general opinion at once, but made him at least aware of the personal stories of individual refugees, and might have encouraged him to question some of his opinions. Dirk mentioned a similar situation to me, where a relative had invited a refugee for a family lunch, rather against the critical doubts of the rest of the family. However, the lunch experience was later described as "generally very positive" by the doubtful Dutch relatives, for whom this was the first experience of meeting an individual who had experienced refugeehood. Also Johanna described a neighbourhood party during summer on the large piece of grass connecting all the houses in their U-formed street, where many of the men from the mostly Dutch neighbourhood, including Akil who lives at her house, happily played soccer together.

Johanna described the power such small encounters can have as follows: "The society (*samenleving*) can only be maintained if there are social forces. And you can make sure that you avoid the development of a parallel society, and that [people with different backgrounds] are not afraid of each other. Economic [issues] you cannot solve by playing soccer together on a lawn. But many other things you can actually do solve by that." Hence, even if unintentionally, sharing a household could initiate a rethinking and questioning of seemingly fixed opinions in the direct social surroundings of the hosting citizens. In Bram's opinion, more of such personal encounters between refugees and Dutch citizens in everyday situations could have a positive influence on anti-refugee discourses in society.

A number of research participants also aimed at spreading more awareness of the situation also beyond their direct surroundings. For this, they chose channels like online blogs (Manon), articles in newspapers or monthly magazines (Johanna), lectures at schools (Roos). Mieke for example had frequently engaged journalists from newspapers and TV (news) channels to report about the situations in asylum seeker centres, so that more Dutch citizens could learn about the conditions in these centres and, as she described it, so that "the bad smell [would] come out". For some research participants, sharing their experiences of providing housing for refugees as 'ordinary citizens', whom other people might identify with, was an important part in how they considered themselves as contributing to improving the situation for refugees in the Netherlands.

But why did they consider it important to raise awareness on such a local level? Manon, a self-described activist, explained to me that for her, raising awareness about the situation of refugees in the Netherlands and mobilizing other citizens to get active themselves constituted a long-term goal that all her other activities and campaigns worked towards. Step by step, she argued, this would "contribute little construction blocks" to larger changes in societal discourses, until at some point public opinion would turn against restrictive policies for refugees. All the criticism would thus eventually lead to a change in the authorities´ position towards them. She mentioned the anti-Black Pete protests in the Netherlands as an example[13], which started as a pet issue of small NGOs, and

[13] The Black Pete discussions in the Netherlands refer to an increasingly debated Dutch Christmas time tradition, when the arrival of Santa Clause (*Sinterklaas*) and his black slaves/helpers, the Black Petes (*Zwarte Pieten*), is re-enacted by (often White) Dutch persons painting their faces black and dress up in a caricaturing manner. As Black Pete is additionally often presented as somewhat clumsy and childish, this tradition has

which over time, if not yet entirely mainstream, have at least become more widely established. To Manon, all the small steps of raising awareness are thus very important in contributing to a bigger goal, even though it might take long before their effects become visible.

Also Klaas and Johanna talked about the potential of raising awareness even in everyday situations: According to them, populist leaders "did not come into power through policy documents, but through *a feeling that spreads*". In this case, the feelings might be fear and anger towards refugees, but Klaas and Johanna considered it also possible that feelings of shared humanness and indignation about inhuman treatments of refugees might work for the benefit of those critical of the Dutch asylum system, and that it was therefore important to contribute to spreading this feeling. "It might start very small, but could then gain mass. [...] But if you find 1500 families who take someone into their house, this makes already 1500 refugees" in better living conditions and less separated from Dutch citizens, as Johanna emphasized.

'Scaling up' grassroots engagement

Apart from mobilizing society through 'a feeling that spreads', a number of research participants also mentioned occasions where their grassroots engagement for refugees had eventually led to an invitation to contribute to decision making in the municipality in cases where this municipal support had earlier been denied, or not even been asked for. Several research participants, whom I got in contact with due to their provisioning of accommodation for an undocumented family, had also been active in a collective of people providing coffee, tea and human-to-human attention to refugees housed in an emergency shelter. Although this was, as they described it, in the first place a purely 'social' initiative without any political intentions, it led to them being recognized as an interest group in this issue by the local government. Consequently, some representatives of this initiative were invited together with other citizen initiatives to advise the municipality about policy developments. Ayla was of the opinion that without such citizens´ involvement, the municipality would have not opened up a platform where citizen representatives as well as refugees from that particular camp could share their views and opinions. Hence, even without having positioned themselves as a 'dialogue partner' in the beginning, they received recognition by the municipality and could, to some extent, 'scale up' the influence of their engagement for refugees.

Another research participant, Sarah, has consciously chosen the path of first starting a grassroots initiative by herself, and then asking support from the (currently rather reluctant) municipality at a later stage, when the initiative has become well-established. Sarah considered this to be the most promising method, as this would allow her to develop a local support network for undocumented refugees without interference by the local government. She considers this as giving her more freedom to act at this sensitive border between legal and illegal options. Only after her initiative has been successfully established, she might consider asking support from the municipality, who at the time of our interview has been denying the presence of undocumented people in their administrative area and thus also did not see any need for funding such a support network.

This method of first establishing such a network and then presenting it as a *fait accompli* to the responsible governmental bodies was also considered by Maria as the best method of achieving

become increasingly criticized as being racist, especially in the light of the Dutch colonial history (see for example Hilhorst & Hermes, 2016).

social and political change. Maria, working for the national organization that facilitates the coordination between various local organizations giving support for undocumented refugees, was also involved in some national political campaigns and lobbying activities. However, during a phone conversation she expressed the thought that instead of directly targeting a policy change, it might be "a more promising approach" to first implement their ideas on the local level with the help of grassroots organisations, so that "these ideas might gain some support by local citizens". With support from local organizations, opportunities for undocumented refugees that are forbidden by the national law, such as possibilities for voluntary work, sale of self-made products and getting education, might be possible. Only after they have become successfully established locally, she argued, one might try to 'scale them up' to the national level. With already established local citizen support, their chances for success might be significantly larger than when addressing the national (policy) level first.

All in all, this third empirical chapter has shown what those research participants active on the grassroots level considered as the potential of their grassroots engagement, and what they felt they could contribute in this way to initiating or achieving bottom-up changes in the Dutch asylum (accommodation) system. Through their various forms of engagement, they hoped to improve the situation for refugees at least on the very local level. Additionally, several of the research participants also expressed their thoughts on possibilities for 'scaling up' their engagement. In the next section, I will discuss these findings in relation to the theoretical framework on everyday acts of disobedient civil solidarity.

Discussion: The tactics of disobedient civil solidarity

The research participants' various forms of engagement described in this chapter illustrate the plethora of acts of everyday disobedient civil solidarity. This underlines the importance of studying the mundane forms of 'quiet' (Askins, 2015) or 'imperceptible' (Tsianos, 2007) politics that citizens engage in, in order to understand how they continuously contest on this very local level what they perceive as the injustices in the Dutch asylum (accommodation) system. However, their engagement goes beyond a mere critique of the asylum regime, and involves also active attempts to achieve changes and improvements by themselves.

These acts of civil solidarity were often described as "pragmatic" by the research participants, as a way to deal with feelings of powerlessness in a "constructive mode" (Sanne). This relates to De Certeau´s *tactics,* which Gill et al. (2014) describe as ways to initiate socio-political change through small acts, creatively 'bending the rules' of the seemingly rigid asylum regime and probing the boundaries of what was legally possible for them to achieve through utilizing their citizen rights. Supporting individual refugees to get a positive outcome in their asylum procedure, empowering those refugees whose procedures have ended (both in case of positive and negative outcomes), as well as spreading awareness about the possibility of sharing a household with a refugee among their social networks and establishing this as "something normal" (Roos) can be considered as examples of such tactics.

Gill et al. (2014) describe how such simple acts can be considered as a form of counter-hegemonic solidarity protests that have the capacity to initiate transformations or, as Manon put it, at least contribute to building up resistance through creating little "construction blocks" of contestation that

could affect “some change in the long term”. In the realm of such mundane actions, the research participants felt that they could actually achieve some improvements, and although not framing their acts of everyday civil solidarity in explicitly political terms, in their narratives many referred to them as the best option for themselves to counteract what they considered as the injustices of the Dutch asylum (accommodation) system and initiating changes at least in their direct environment.

Where possible, research participants like Mieke and Johanna combined these ‘quiet politics’ (Askins, 2015) also with more formal channels to create awareness. Examples were creating media attention about their engagement and spreading awareness beyond their direct social environment, or referring to their local municipality in order to inform them about their experiences. Here, they hoped that local politicians could affects some changes to COA practices where they as citizens felt they could not have any influence. This resonates with the findings of Nuijten (2015), who describes how citizens refer also to their more formal channels of citizens’ political participation where they consider them as a useful complementation to their more informal acts of everyday resistance and the various forms of engagement in disobedient civil solidarity.

Especially their reference to the local municipalities, however, deserves critical examination as to how far this can be considered as simply a formal channel of political participation for citizens. Indeed, as described above, the local government level was perceived by some as a potential ally in their criticism of the national asylum system. This was because it was seen as having some possibilities to ameliorate the effects of the restrictive national asylum (accommodation) system on the local level and as being able, within the boundaries of the legal, to give support to citizens and citizen organizations that criticize these policies. In some cases, approaching the local government could be perceived as a request to engage in “civil disobedience […] by the municipality itself” (Roos) and to act against the line of the national asylum policies. This observation confirms to the findings of van der Leun & Bouter (2015), who highlight the discrepancies between the national and local governments in the Netherlands with regard to rejected asylum seekers. Considering municipalities as potential allies in improving or alleviating the negative effects of the national asylum (accommodation) system ruptures the often assumed dichotomy between state institutions and citizens.

Prompted by the experience of a ‘lack of representation’ (Swyngedouw, 2011) by the national government as described in the previous chapter, as well as the shared perception among many research participants that national level policy makers were often ignorant of the effects their creations had on the local level (Roos, Sanne), many of the research participants showed with their actions that they had more trust in the local government to pay attention to citizens´ complaints about concrete situations of perceived injustice, and to consequently change and improve these situations where possible. Focusing on the local government level and avoiding the national level might thus be considered as a form of contestation of the dominant position the national government has within the asylum regime.

To summarize, this chapter has focused on the research participants were locally involved in initiating socio-political changes, by highlighting where they saw the potentials for achieving transformation through their grassroots engagement. Supporting and empowering individual refugees as well as creating awareness about refugees’ situation in the Netherlands among their fellow citizens were seen as the most important aspects they could get involved in. Some research participants complemented this by utilizing also their formal rights and abilities as citizens where

they considered this as beneficial, or where it allowed them to scale up their engagement. Following the radical democracy approach, these different ways of initiating socio-political changes can be understood as examples of antagonistic contestations (Mouffe, 2005, 2013) of the dominant discourses and regulations around refugees in the Netherlands, and therefore as everyday acts of disobedient civil solidarity.

8| Factors impeding bottom-up socio-political change

In the previous chapter I outlined where the research participants saw the potential of grassroots engagement and what they considered to be achievable through their mundane acts of disobedient civil solidarity. This chapter focuses on the many doubts and difficulties that the research participants expressed with regard to such forms of engagement. These aspects made it difficult for them to keep themselves motivated in their everyday endeavours to contribute to what they considered a better situation for refugees in the Netherlands. Ordered around the recurring themes of localism, invisible effects, co-citizens´ disinterestedness as well as the tricky line between contestation and legitimization, this chapter describes the various problems that the research participants mentioned as preventing bottom-up socio-political change. Thereby, it aims to scrutinize the optimism in academic literature regarding the potential of the mundane and 'imperceptible' forms of grassroots engagement.

The problem of localism and the lack of cooperation

Several research participants referred to the very local focus of citizens' engagement for refugees as a potential problem for achieving more substantial changes in the Dutch asylum (accommodation) system. Maria, the interviewee working at the organization that provides a networking platform for the different local organizations in the Netherlands supporting undocumented refugees, emphasized the problem of localism in our conversation: According to her, all this focus on work within limited geographical areas and on the everyday support of refugees is "very important for making improvements on the local level", and even the most fruitful way to establish progressive ideas and practices. However, her experience has shown her that often such exclusively local focus leads to a neglect of the necessity for scaling up to the national level, if one wants to achieve a more substantial social and political change. She claimed that often, the local initiatives that find "loopholes" in restrictive national laws or that develop novel ideas to support undocumented refugees suffer from a lack of time, staff and other resources to engage in connecting with other organizations that could adopt their successful approach. This, Maria claimed, leads to a waste of energy of re-inventing methods that had already been well-established elsewhere.

Closer cooperation between citizen initiatives and organizations could not only be beneficial to exchange knowledge about new strategies and ideas, it could also serve to strengthen these citizen initiatives, as both Lotte and Mareike highlighted. By presenting themselves as a "cluster" (Mareike) rather than numerous individual organizations and initiatives, they could become a joint power that, if representing a significant number of voices, could make more influential political claims, critiques and recommendations. However, both Roos, Mieke and Maria expressed a rather pessimistic view on collaboration. The "fragmentation" (*versplintering*) of local organizations, specifically among those focusing on rejected asylum seekers, has already been a problem for the more than fifteen years of her involvement with refugees, Mieke claimed, and probably will also not change significantly in the future. According to Roos, initiatives and especially organizations are too often focused on establishing themselves and on acquiring funds. Collaboration is not prioritized, as they do not want "to let each other look into their kitchen". Hence, the fragmentation of the various individuals,

citizen initiatives, foundations and other organizations working with very similar goals can be considered as an important factor impeding larger social and political changes.

The problem of invisible effects and the feeling of powerlessness

Another important aspect repeatedly mentioned was that the results of local actions often remain barely visible or even invisible on a larger level, as Manon explained. Although some effects might be achieved on the personal level, for example improvements the situation for the individual refugee (though even that was not always possible), she also described the difficulties and frustrations of not seeing the larger effects of her activities. This was especially frustrating as she explicitly aimed to achieve changes in larger societal discourses. Manon told me that she could see some effects of one of her latest activist campaign in the way that some journalists had adopted her critical terminology as opposed to what she considered the euphemist terminology used by the official institutions. However, in most cases the outcomes of her endeavours to affect improvements were invisible to her.

Also Mieke, herself already much longer involved than Manon in supporting refugees who lost their right to protection by the COA, described this feeling of frustration in the face of the very negligible effects many of her actions often had in the long run. She told me how she has been involved as an organizer in public tent camp protests by illegalized refugees, which have according to her received "quite some media attention" at the time. During our conversation, she also mentioned various lawsuits against the Dutch state or criticisms by the European Union and other international bodies that have led to changes in the Dutch asylum (accommodation) system.

However, despite the temporary improvements that followed these protests, Mieke found it very difficult to continue with her activities while knowing that the situation of refugees in the Netherlands would probably only continue to worsen over time. Manon expressed a similar feeling when asking: "How do you deal with the... almost security that things are actually going to get worse and that it doesn´t change a thing what you´re doing"? More than fifteen years of observing the political and social developments with regard to the Dutch asylum system have made Mieke very disillusioned about the possibility of positive changes in the future: "I don´t think this country can still be saved. [...] Even if things improve, they always get revoked shortly afterwards. It´s one step forward, two steps back". For Manon and Mieke, the invisibility of their endeavours for socio-political change and the observation of the opposite developments taking place were aspects that both described as emotionally draining and as sometimes hampering their motivation to continue their engagement.

Disinterestedness of wider society

Part of these severe doubts as to whether social and political change can be achieved through quiet politics and bottom-up civil solidarity were rooted in an observation of societal dynamics that several research participants shared: the increasing disinterestedness of citizens with regard to Dutch politics and to the inequalities within the Netherlands. Not only Mieke, but also Manon and Roos brought up the topic when talking about the actual and potential influences their engagement for refugees in the Netherlands. Especially Roos was very vocal about this development, stressing her disappointment

that “the Dutch have stopped discussing politics” and have become “more passive”. She claimed that there was no more belief in “people having the power”, nor in mass demonstrations and public protests as civil means for achieving changes in the Government´s decisions. But also within the government, within party politics, debates had become less passionate, with “less fire” and more comparable to a “tea party” than to what in her opinion political discussions should look like.

Also Mieke thought that people are often not enough interested in what is going on in their country, also and especially with regard to refugees. This, however, is in her opinion partly an outcome of asylum seeker centres being located outside of Dutch neighbourhoods: “In the old days, it was my neighbour that they wanted to deport, that is something completely different” than deporting an unknown ‘refugee’. She and Roos do not think “anymore” that bottom-up social changes which are powerful enough to trigger also shifts in the political course will come any time soon, since these should, in their opinions, “have happened long ago” (Roos). According to them, the situation of refugees in the Netherlands has increasingly deteriorated in the past years, and if none of these developments have triggered a public outcry, both described it as unlikely that future developments will change something about that.

But also another dynamic is at play in the current situation of higher numbers of refugees applying for asylum in the Netherlands, Mieke highlighted: “Nothing [positive] will come from the citizens. A few are active [...], maybe that´s growing a bit, but at the moment the other side is growing much faster, the support of the PVV is getting bigger”. Mieke refers here to the rise of populist anti-refugee polemics in the Netherlands. For her and other research participants, this development is linked to that tendency of political disinterestedness just described, as it is connected to a persisting ignorance about the actual situation of refugees in the Netherlands – despite her many endeavours to make this more publicly known. Although some research participants, such as Dirk and Anna, claimed that with facilitating private housing arrangements their goal was to make a statement against the tendency of rising right-wing populism, others, like Mieke, were doubtful as to whether this would be effective in the end.

All in all, several research participants expressed rather pessimistic views about the influences their actions could potentially have on improving the situation of refugees in the Netherlands. When I asked them why they nevertheless continued with the involvement even though they considered it as futile, both Mieke, Manon and Roos explained that they still considered their activities as ‘the way to go’, since at least this could have positive impacts on the lives of the individual refugees they were involved with, and could hopefully enable them to lead a better live. They concluded somewhat wearily that probably only a “big shock” (Mieke) could affect any changes - although they did not specify how such a ‘shock’ would look like, and how it would differ from the previous ‘shocks’.

The “tricky line” between contestation and legitimization

Another highly interesting aspect which came up already during some of the earlier interviews was the question whether the research participants´ involvement for alternative housing options for refugees could actually be regarded as a contestation of the current system and as a demand for a more appropriate and humane asylum (accommodation) system, or whether they could not also be considered as confirming and legitimizing that very system. This question was something that I tried to bring up in many of the following interviews, when I considered that enough trust and rapport had

been built to address such a challenging topic. Two dimensions were considered as important to this "tricky line", as Manon called it, between contestation and legitimization: playing by the rules of 'the system', and actively taking over responsibilities within 'the system'.

The first dimension concerns what was typical practice for many of the research respondents, as has been described in the previous chapter: accepting that one citizen or even citizen initiative was not able to make significant changes in the national asylum (accommodation) system and to reform it into a design that would according to them be more suitable. The pragmatic solution for many interviewees was then "to play according to the rules" of the system (Manon), but simultaneously to look for "loopholes" in these rules and regulations in order to improve the lives of refugees at least a bit, as Sanne described it. This approach was often considered as the most promising: for example by using arguments and terminology from within asylum (accommodation) regulations in order to criticize them (Maria) and highlighting their paradoxical effects in practice (Sanne), or by writing analytical reports required by the official bodies to prove that individuals from a specific ethnic group might not be safe when deported back to Afghanistan, in order to support their procedures (Manon).

Instead of coining their own critical terminology, instead of refusing to prove dangers when common knowledge should tell one that Afghanistan was not a safe country to deport to, and instead of bringing up own arguments why a specific regulation did not make much sense, the interviewees had (more or less willingly) chosen to work against 'the system' from within it. For many research participants, this way was often chosen simply for pragmatic reasons – they saw it as the most promising way in dealing with the status quo while also aiming to achieve a substantial change in the long term. As Sanne put it (describing a situation from her work with undocumented refugees): "We could also say, everyone should have a right to visit a doctor, but if the doctor is more likely to treat someone who has a paper from us with them, well, just give him this paper". This is also reflected in the work of the foundations that facilitated private housing arrangements by matching refugees and Dutch citizens according to the official regulations: The research participants hoped that by adhering to these policies, they could positions themselves as "dialogue partners" and could thereby achieve some influence for initiating changes in the asylum (accommodation) system from within.

The research participant Manon, however, considered these seemingly pragmatic choices as "dangerous", as in her opinion they legitimize the very structures criticized with such citizens´ engagement for refugees. Although she herself told me of several instances where she did consent to "play according to the rules", such as writing reports showing the danger of deportations to specific countries, or writing letters to parliamentarians asking them to "please, please" bring up a certain issue for discussion, she highlighted that she felt very uncomfortable with it. She has been engaging in such ways of dealing with the rules and regulations for some time, but has at some point become more hesitant about it as for her it was not compatible with her anarchist world view. According to her, at the moment she is writing a report conforming to the "absurd requirements" of the IND (the Dutch Immigration and Naturalization Service), it is them "hold[ing] the leash, you know, *they* walk *me*, they define which path I´m going, what I spend my days doing".

In her view, "playing by the rules" of the system simultaneously legitimizes these very rules, as it confirms them as the proper way to achieve change. She explained that at some points, such practices were necessary in order to support the case of a specific refugee and therefore matched her short-term goals of helping the individual, even though they opposed her long-term goals of working towards significant changes in the asylum government. This "tricky line" between urgent

needs and broader visions is something she considered a very sensitive issue that "needs to be balanced carefully" for every specific situation, and that requires much reflection on the consequences of such pragmatism – which, in her opinion, is often neglected by the advocates of pragmatism.

The second dimension of this "tricky line" was something even more of the interviewees encountered in their activities: Without even aiming for it, they found themselves in a position where they fulfilled tasks that they did not consider as their responsibility, but which they engaged in nevertheless as they considered that the government did not fulfil this task properly – often due to a conscious retreat of the government from its responsibilities of care in times of neoliberal agendas, as Manon described it. However, by 'taking over' these responsibilities they simultaneously saw themselves as supporting and thereby legitimizing such neoliberal policies of retreat: the "gap" (Sanne) left by the government had been filled by their citizen engagement.

Maria pointedly explains this dilemma, or "tricky line", for the context of providing private housing options specifically for refugees who had lost their right to support by the COA, and who were consequently put on the street: "Actually [the provision of shelter by citizen initiatives] goes against the official policies of the government in the line of 'with shelter [the undocumented refugees] will stay, without shelter they will want to go back home; hence, give no shelter'. However, people living on the street might be an even bigger problem for the government, that's why [such] organizations, who get people off the streets and give them shelter and thereby make them invisible, are working in the interest of the government, as this is useful for them".

This observation is supported by what Sanne told me about COA´s "paradoxical" practice of giving day tickets for the Dutch public transport to rejected asylum seekers when they are turned out of the asylum seeker centre. According to her, it is obvious that if a procedure really ended and that person would have to go back to his or her country of citizenship, a day ticket for the Netherlands would not be very effective. Thus, to her it is clear there that there is an intentional "gap" between governmental care and actual needs, which then has to be (and is) in most cases filled by citizen initiatives providing alternative options for housing and subsistence.

In such cases, citizens or organizations take over the responsibilities for care functions which, according to the alderwoman, should be considered as human rights and should thus be provided by states for all humans, independent of their legal status. As the provision of such care functions for undocumented refugees by citizen organizations is not in line with Dutch legislation – despite being in line with the agenda underlying the policies entailing the retreat of the state from this field, as both Maria and Sanne remarked – in many locations the citizen organizations receive barely any structural financial support. They are therefore dependent on private donations by other citizens, who happen to find this work support-worthy (Maria). Despite the necessity of such citizen organizations, they are not structurally supported and are thus in a very insecure and vulnerable position.

However, this "thin line" can be found not only in situations as severe as that of homeless undocumented refugees. As described above, several of the respondents involved in the match-making foundations arranging temporary private housing alternatives for *statushouders* also complained that with their activities they were taking over tasks promoting refugee integration that went well beyond what they had intended and what they considered their own responsibilities. Roos for example told me that she had experienced many situations were volunteers were supporting

refugees in ways that they should not be required to do. Once she received an advice from a refugee lawyer who had told her that she should not be as involved as she was at that time. According to him, her role as a voluntarily involved citizen should be only to give signals about problems and needs in the asylum (accommodation) system, as it is "the task of the government" to take care of these.

The biggest problem with this "tricky line" that Roos, Sanne, Mieke and Manon described was to avoid legitimizing the retreat of the government by filling this gap and taking over responsibilities falling under the government´s duty of care, and thereby encouraging even more retreat by the government. However, as Sanne put it, "traffic lights are only put up at places where once an accident has happened. Maybe one time one has to let this accident happen in order for the traffic lights to be put up. But well, that is very difficult. We cannot simply let people freeze to death on the streets, even though that would probably create much attention for the problem". For these research participants, the moral imperative to act and to support refugees where the government did not was thus stronger than any strategic considerations for achieving social and political change.

Discussion: the role of everyday disobedient civil solidarity for socio-political change

In this chapter, I described several recurring aspects which the research participants considered as obstacles to the social and political changes they want to achieve with their activities. The lack of cooperation between citizens and organizations, the disinterestedness of wider society to what the research participants consider as the shortcomings of the Dutch asylum (accommodation) system, the lack of visible effects despite strong engagement for improvements, as well as doubts as to the usefulness of their activities in actually challenging the Dutch asylum system were mentioned as severe factors that can impede citizens' engagement for socio-political change. In this section I will discuss in how far these experiences by the research participants question, or even contradict, the emphasis on everyday civil disobedience and 'quiet politics' in academic literature as important factors bringing about social and political changes.

As described in the previous chapter, the reasons for choosing these mostly 'quiet' and mundane acts of disobedient civil solidarity mentioned by the research participants were the perceived powerlessness and inability to initiative fundamental changes in the Dutch asylum (accommodation) system and its underlying discourses. The research participants, opposing this system for its inhumaneness and injustices but facing its rigidity, resorted to pragmatic *tactics* (Gill et al., 2014) in order to challenge the system from within and to alleviate its negative effects on the grassroots level as far as possible.

However, as Gill et al. write, such pragmatic actions can be considered only as tactics *within* a larger strategy, such as the dominant discourses around adequate treatment of refugees in the Netherlands. As they explain, tactics can only be "manipulations of imposed spaces, tactics relative to particular situations" (De Certeau 1984: 24, in Gill et al., 2014: 375). They involve "playing by the rules of the game" (Manon) and creatively utilizing loopholes (Sanne, Maria) rather than setting rules themselves. Such pragmatic actions can certainly affect positive changes in the lives of individual refugees, which is why many research participants resorted to such tactics. However, from a more abstract perspective, such pragmatism runs the risk of only reifying the importance and legitimacy of these discourses rather than challenging them at their core.

Such tactics are therefore prone to "being co-opted by states", to being incorporated into the neoliberal system (*ibid:* 379) and to be made to fill the gaps left behind by the retreat of the state from its responsibilities towards refugees. Although support for undocumented refugees is increasingly restricted (Van der Leun & Bouter, 2015) and therefore receives barely any (financial) support from the national government, research participants like Sanne, Mieke and Maria were very much aware about the actual usefulness of their actions for contributing to 'public order' and therefore acting, ultimately, also in the interest of the government.

This co-option and incorporation into the neoliberal system means that the facilitation of private housing arrangements runs the risk of being reduced to a form of 'humanitarian' support, of mere help for those in need. The danger is therefore that the reframing of such 'tactics' in seemingly apolitical humanitarian terms "reduces protest to a contest over 'the possible' which can only ever mean, at a fundamental level, a conservative acceptance of the existing framework for grasping problems and their solutions" (Rigby & Schlembach, 2013: 166; see also Gill et al., 2014; Reinhard, 2016). The long term goals of research participants like Manon, who hopes to initiate substantial socio-political changes in the asylum (accommodation) system and its legitimizing discourses, are seriously impeded by such co-optation, as it denies the need for improvements in the asylum (accommodation) system as its negative effects are ameliorated by citizens' voluntary engagement.

This is for example reflected also in Maria´s criticism of the localist tendency of organizations working with and for undocumented refugees described above: As they do not receive adequate funding, organisations doing the important work of supporting undocumented refugees are often understaffed and their employees consequently overworked and underpaid. This makes it very difficult for members of these various local organizations to engage in work that goes beyond the humanitarian assistance for refugees who have lost their right to support by the COA. Their work remains within the realm of everyday pragmatic tactics (Gill et al., 2014), and cross-organizational connection and cooperation across the Netherlands for a more substantial critique of the Dutch asylum system tend to become unfeasible. Given this often pragmatic confinement of everyday acts of civil solidarity to the tactics of bending the rules of the system (Gill et al., 2014) and their very local focus. the question is whether such 'imperceptible politics' in the "everyday events of social life" are really where "the forces of change […] *hinge on*", as Tsianos (2007: 1) writes.

From the perspective of radical democracy, I argue that such co-optation and reframing of acts of disobedient solidarity as mere 'humanitarian' support by citizens for refugees do not eliminate the intrinsic antagonistic capacity of these forms of engagement (Mouffe, 2005, 2013), although they aim to deny it by making this capacity invisible. In this perspective, such co-optation might indeed rather be seen as an attempt of the hegemonic forces to retain their dominant position, as a defence against contestation. The tactics of showing solidarity with and support for refugees in the Netherlands are repurposed to fit into the broader governmental discourse of neoliberal self-care (Heynen, 2010), and to fill the gap left behind by the state retreating from its responsibility of care.

Turning to Jacques Rancière (as Mouffe herself remains surprisingly silent as to how exactly hegemonic struggles take place), we can see that such partial incorporation and reframing of contesting voices to suit the hegemonic discourses is indeed an inherent part of hegemonic struggles. The hegemonic powers "will try to incorporate these forms of [contestation], categorizing them and assigning them a place within" the hegemonic discourses (van Leerzem, Nuijten, & de Vries, 2016: 869), thereby assimilating counter-hegemonic acts to suit the dominant order. Although co-optation

aims to constrain the antagonistic force of such protests, I argue therefore that this does not imply that this antagonistic capacity disappears – rather, it invokes the question of whether this capacity is used in the right way.

Following Mouffe's argumentation in her book *Agonistics* (2013), more substantial critique is needed to achieve fundamental social and political changes. According to her, "aiming at a profound transformation" (*ibid:* xvi) necessarily involves active engagement *with* these institutions one criticizes, in order to not only challenge the dominant order, but also to *re-articulate* them, i.e. to establish new discourses to replace the old. Creative acts of bending 'the rules of the system' – although certainly contesting the hegemonic order – fall short on this second crucial step. It is the "nodal points of power that need to be targeted and transformed in order to create the conditions for a new hegemony" through "an agonistic engagement with the institutions" (*ibid:* 75). From her perspective, the optimism about "the forces of change […] hing[ing] on" acts of imperceptible politics (Tsianos, 2007: 1) is thus exaggerated, as such acts need to be complemented by more profound engagements attempting to create a new hegemonic order. Only this is true to the "radical politics is envisaged by the hegemonic approach" (Mouffe, 2013: 75).

What do these critiques by Gill et al. (2014), Mouffe (2013) and Rigby & Schlembach (2013) mean for the research participants who want to bring about bottom-up socio-political changes through their involvement in private housing arrangements for refugees? As Gill et al. conclude, mundane and pragmatic tactics can be considered as an "important complement" (2014: 379) to the more radical forms of protest, as these, despite the dangers of co-option, constitute a continuous series of minor contestations. However, for more profound changes, Mouffe's emphasis on *real* engagement with the institutions and dominant discourses *at their core* is important to take into account (Mouffe, 2013). Through a combination of these approaches, the impeding factors of invisible effects, feelings of powerlessness and disinterestedness of the wider society mentioned by the research participants might also be counteracted.

Summing up this discussion, the goal of this chapter was to scrutinize the optimism in academic literature about the mundane forms of everyday protests and contestation, about "imperceptible" (Tsianos, 2007) and "quiet" politics (Askins, 2015). Referring to the approaches of radical democracy by Rancière and especially Mouffe, I conclude that the danger of such mundane acts of disobedient civil solidarity is that they are often limited to pragmatic tactics, which do not constitute a *real* engagement with the contested hegemonic structures (see also Gill et al., 2014; Rigby & Schlembach, 2013). To make use of the antagonistic capacity of disobedient civil solidarity to initiate bottom-up socio-political changes, the tactics should be complemented with forms of protest that go beyond 'playing by the rules' of the system in order to significantly re-articulate the dominant order. However, it remains to yet be seen what form such more profound engagement could take.

9 | Conclusions, outlook and final reflections

This last chapter serves to bring together the various themes and theoretical strands developed in this thesis, and to see which contributions this research has made. In the first section, I will summarize the empirical material presented in this thesis. The second section of this chapter contains the conclusion of the theoretical argument made in this thesis at the case of private housing arrangements. The third section discusses the limitations of this research and their implications for future research, and section four contains a final reflection about my personal learning journey throughout this thesis process.

Summary: Citizens´ engagement in private housing arrangements for refugees

In this thesis, I have aimed to understand how Dutch citizens, who facilitate private housing arrangements for refugees in the Netherlands, make sense of their activities in the face of increasingly restrictive national asylum policies, and how they see their activities as acts of contestation and endeavours for positive changes. I considered it important to shed light on such mundane modes of Dutch citizens showing solidarity and support for refugees, in order to get a more balanced image of how citizens respond to the increasingly exclusionary asylum policies and anti-refugee sentiments in the Netherlands (Bakker et al., 2016; Versteegt & Maussen, 2012).

Through the narrative approach taken in this thesis, I gained insights into the variety of ways that citizens engage in facilitating private housing arrangements, and the heterogeneity in approaches, motivations, experiences and own framings among the research participants which defied any of clear-cut categorization of the interviewees. Nevertheless, only few of the research participants framed their mundane forms of engagement with refugees as political, but rather referred to their activities as a moral obligation.

Following from their heterogeneous approaches and perceptions of the shortcomings in the Dutch asylum (accommodation) system, the research participants also differed in where they saw the responsibility for initiating change in that very system and the underlying discourses. Based on their intrinsic understanding of the governments' responsibility to represent citizens' concerns, some research participants chose more traditional channels of citizens' political participation and focused their activities on lobbying the national government (Piven, 2006 in Heynen, 2010) by positioning themselves as dialogue partners. Whereas some research participants were positive about their achievements, others emphasized their disappointment as they felt for a long time that critiques were not acknowledged and represented by the government bodies they addressed.

Other research participants saw the responsibility for initiating transformation and improvements in Dutch citizens, including themselves, and focused on the small-scale possibilities they felt were open to them. They focused mostly on very local forms of engagement with and for refugees, which this theoretical framework allowed to conceptualize as the tactics of 'quiet politics' (Askins, 2015; Gill et al., 2014). In this context, some research participants also referred to the local government level which they perceived as a potential ally in contesting and changing the consequences of the national asylum regime. This form of engagement was for many the consequence of very pragmatic choices

given the feelings of powerlessness experienced when facing the perceived rigidity of the national asylum (accommodation) system.

The mundane acts of civil solidarity that the research participants engaged in consisted of giving personal support to the refugees they were in contact with, independent of the legal status of the refugee. Furthermore, they focused on spreading awareness, or spreading a "feeling", as interviewee Johanna formulated it, by showing the mundaneness and naturalness of their daily encounters with refugees to other Dutch citizens in their personal social environment or beyond. Several research participants considered these small-scale tactics as being the most promising option to initiate some improvements for refugees by themselves, if only on the local level.

In the last empirical chapter, I focused on the various obstacles to such grassroots engagement for bottom-up socio-political change mentioned by the research participants. These included problems with 'scaling-up' initiatives due to a lack of cooperation, the often invisible effects of bottom-up endeavours to influence the national asylum regime as well as the disinterestedness of wider society. Another important factor impeding the success of their endeavours for bottom-up transformation was that their engagement could also be considered as legitimizing the national asylum (accommodation) system and the retreat of the national government from its responsibilities for care by 'filling the gaps' (especially, but not exclusively, where it concerned rejected asylum seekers). These obstacles to achieve significant socio-political changes made it emotionally difficult for several research participants to continue their activities, and their negative impression as to the potential of such endeavours was sometimes very predominant in the conversations. Many research participants resorted to the hope that with their activities, they could at least help individual refugees by improving their situation also in the short term.

All in all, this exploratory study into private housing arrangements for refugees in the Netherlands has given an insight into the various ways in which Dutch citizens are involved in improving the situation for refugees in the Netherlands with regard to their accommodation. Next to their forms of engagement, motivations and experiences, I specifically studied how they consider their activities as a critique of the Dutch asylum (accommodation) system and how they positioned themselves vis-à-vis this system in providing alternative housing options for refugees in different legal situations. This is a topic which has not previously received much academic attention, which is why this thesis research provides an important basis for further research into the potential of everyday interactions between Dutch citizens and refugees in the Netherlands for achieving changes in the asylum regime. Before turning to the recommendations for further research, however, I will summarize the theoretical argument made in this thesis.

Theoretical conclusions: the politicalness of disobedient civil solidarity

In the discussion sections of Chapters 5-8, I have examined the relevant themes that emerged in each of the empirical chapters in relation to the theoretical framework. In this section, I want to discuss the overall theoretical conclusions that can be drawn from this thesis regarding the political character of disobedient civil solidarity based on the case of private housing arrangements by Dutch citizens.

I argue that this case has shown the usefulness of a combination between the radical democracy approach (Heynen, 2010; Laclau & Mouffe, 2001; Mouffe, 2005) and theories of mundane politics on the grassroots level (Askins, 2015; Nuijten, 2015; Tsianos, 2007). Specifically the emphasis on the workings of antagonistic forces beyond grand narratives of social change allows us to understand the importance of counter-hegemonic acts of solidarity with marginalized refugees within the realm of the everyday. Through this perspective, many of the mundane activities through which the research participants engaged in contesting and challenging the asylum (accommodation) system were highlighted, which otherwise might have remained 'imperceptible' (Tsianos, 2007).

Even though many research participants framed their activities in moral rather than political terms, most of them positioned themselves as citizens providing a critique to the national asylum system. Therefore, I emphasized how their activities can nevertheless be understood as acts of protest and as a manifestation of antagonistic contestation, when studied through the lens of the radical democracy approach that considers confrontations as ineradicable, and indeed pivotal, in pluralist societies. I claim that such contestation, even in the realm of the everyday, is at the very heart of Mouffe's definition of 'the political' (Mouffe, 2013; Swyngedouw, 2014).

Referring to theories of radical democracy, Celikates defines civil disobedience as a "form of political action which allows citizens […] to protest and participate" when other means of political participation "are closed to them or are ineffective in getting their claims and objections across" (2016: 991). Following this definition, the facilitation of private housing arrangements can indeed be considered as everyday acts of civil disobedience, as they allow the research participants to locally implement the improvements they consider necessary in the asylum (accommodation) system, without waiting for top-down changes. Even if not intended as such, the research participants' engagement can be considered as a novel way of communicating their views and positions regarding the improvements in the asylum (accommodation) system they consider necessary. Applying the concept of 'civil disobedience' emphasized the antagonistic character of the research participants' activities, since it allowed us to understand the facilitation of private housing arrangements as a form of citizens' political participation in the nationally organized asylum (accommodation) system.

However, in order to be more inclusive towards the heterogeneity in approaches and experiences among the research participants, I developed the concept of 'disobedient civil solidarity'. This concept is closer to the interviewees' own framing of their activities as grounded in moral values (as many associated the term 'political' with institutionalized politics rather than the Mouffean conceptualization). 'Civil solidarity' emphasizes how for many of the research participants, political contestation was a side-effect rather than the goal of showing solidarity and support for the refugees they were in contact with. Even if not intended, however, these acts often contained elements of contestation and 'disobedience' (Celikates, 2016; Fiedler, 2009). Therefore, I argue that the facilitation of private housing arrangements should best be conceptualized as mundane acts of *disobedient civil solidarity*.

From this perspective, also the various ways in which the research participants were engaged with refugees apart from next to facilitating private housing arrangements appear as everyday contestations in order to achieve socio-political changes in the long term. In face of the obstacles to such endeavours mentioned by the research participants, I argued that one should not ask whether such activities are an antagonistic contestation, but rather whether or not their inherent antagonistic capacity is used effectively. As shown in the discussion of Chapter 8, Mouffe's claim for the need for

real bottom-up engagement with the contested hegemonic order – as a complement to the creative tactics (Gill et al., 2014) already pragmatically employed – and her demand for attempting not only to criticise, but also to *re-articulate* and replace the current hegemonic practices (Mouffe, 2013: 75), seems a good (if mostly theoretical) advice for such endeavours.

Indeed, I argue that even the risk of co-optation (Gill et al., 2014) of citizens' involvement to fill the care functions towards refugees from which the state increasingly retreats does not necessarily diminish this antagonistic capacity. Such incorporation of counter-hegemonic practices, by trying to reduce the contesting character of private housing arrangements to a form of supposedly apolitical (and uncritical) humanitarian support, might rather be considered as a defence of the hegemonic discourses against bottom-up contestation (Mouffe, 2005; van Leerzem et al., 2016). Therefore, such co-optation it should be seen as inherent elements of political contestations, rather than as the end of struggles.

To conclude, the theoretical contribution of this thesis lies thus in developing the theoretical concept of *disobedient civil solidarity*, which allows to understand the workings of the Mouffean 'antagonistic dimension' in the realm of citizens' mundane solidarity acts with refugees in the Netherlands. Based on the case of private housing arrangements, I have shown how citizens' involvement in facilitating these constitutes a form of everyday contestation and protest, which has the capacity to work as a counter-hegemonic force. I argue that these everyday acts of *disobedient civil solidarity*, if involving also some real engagement in the Mouffean sense, have the capacity to contribute to bottom-up change and transformation in the hegemonic practices of the Dutch asylum (accommodation) system. The emphasis on the contestability and fragility of all political projects in Mouffe's approach of radical democracy might be a reassurance of the importance of such bottom-up endeavours for transformation (Mouffe, 2000b, 2005) – even if these transformations do not happen in the pace necessary for those refugees who are in dire situations today.

Limitations of this thesis and recommendations for future research

One limitation of this thesis lies in its exploratory character, which means that it only showed a fraction of the forms that Dutch citizens engage in contesting the Dutch asylum (accommodation) system through facilitating private housing alternatives for refugees. No conclusive statements can be made from this research about the broader landscape of such housing alternatives in the Netherlands, as the representativeness of the very specific cases and situations I have gained insights in is unknown to me. Furthermore, this research touched upon a variety of topics that would be very interesting research foci in themselves, but for which there was not enough room and capacity in this thesis research to dive in more.

This exploratory thesis research can therefore be considered as the basis for deepening social research to get a broader overview of Dutch citizens involved in such everyday contestations through mundane acts of disobedient civil solidarity. Interesting aspects for such future research could be the inclusion of more local initiatives for bottom-up changes and a comparison of the different modes of initiating transformations chosen by them, as well as a scrutinizing study of the attempts of cooperation that already exist between them and how these could be strengthened and broadened. Also the particular relationships with the local government level is an aspect that was only discussed

as a side-line in this thesis and deserves more attention. Lastly, everyday contestations in fields other than private housing arrangements might also be a promising future research topic.

A second important limitation of this research is the one-sidedness in the focus on Dutch citizens. The voices of the participating refugees are not heard, which in some respects confirms the very abstraction, objectification and passivation of this 'group' that I criticized in this thesis (Darling, 2011; Peter Nyers, 2003; Oudejans, 2011; Samers, 2004). Throughout the research, I was aware of this severe limitation, especially when at one point I was able to get in conversation with a few people participating in such private housing arrangements as 'refugees' being allowed to move into the private houses of Dutch citizens.

However, my decision to restrict this thesis mainly to the perspective of the Dutch citizens organizing or providing such housing alternatives was grounded in two reasons: Firstly, in the beginning of the research, when I attempted to have a more inclusive sampling strategies incorporating also refugees as research participants, I was met with the rejection of a facilitating organization to bring me in contact with refugees, which was explained with their obligation to protect their privacy. It was therefore a pragmatic step for me to restrict this research to the participating Dutch citizens (and also only the organizers of private housing arrangements in the beginning, as I described in Chapter 4).

When at a later point of this research I also had the opportunity to get in contact with participating refugees, I had conducted already a large number of interviews and conversations with facilitators of private housing arrangements that focused on their role of Dutch citizens (without experiences of refugeehood) in contesting the Dutch asylum (accommodation) regime. I considered that by including refugees at this late stage into my research as a side-line, I would not be able to do their different life realities, experiences and expectations justice. Therefore, I decided to keep my focus on Dutch citizens in this research.

For this reason, I hope that future research can overcome this one-sidedness in focus and also pay ample attention to the perspective of those participating in such private housing arrangements from the position of refugees in the Netherlands. Also in this case, the tensions between pragmatisms and protest against the restrictive Dutch asylum (accommodation) policies might be an interesting focus. In my above-mentioned theoretical minor thesis that preceded this empirical major thesis, I have developed a theoretical framework based on the Autonomous Mobilities approach (Nyers, 2015; Papadopoulos & Tsianos, 2013), Jacques Rancière's disruptive politics (Mezzadra, 2011; Rancière, 2004, 2011; Schaap, 2011) and Judith Butler's performativity (Butler, 2015; Zylinska, 2004), which could provide an interesting starting point for such research.

A third limitation concerns the theoretical conclusions that could be drawn from this exploratory research: Although highlighting the antagonistic capacity of facilitating private housing arrangements for refugees, which I conceptualized as everyday acts of civil solidarity, the last empirical chapter has shown the manifold obstacles to such mundane endeavours to make use of this potential in order to initiate socio-political changes. Particularly the risk of resorting only to creative tactics to work within the system (Gill et al., 2014), without the means to complement these with what Mouffe calls a *real* engagement with the contested asylum (accommodation) system (Mouffe, 2013), could impede such endeavours for change. However, the shape of such *real* engagement remains unsatisfactorily vague.

I hope that future research can develop a better understanding of such more profound contestation, in order to gain a deeper insight into how hegemonic struggles take place. Particularly the interplay between everyday acts of disobedient civil solidarity with such forms of engagement is an interesting aspect for such research, as it contributes to a better understanding of how radical democracy could work. I argue that this is not only relevant from a theoretical perspective, but could also serve to eventually feed back helpful academic insights to those who are involved in emancipatory protests and grassroots contestations, which, after all, is a normative goal of critical theory (Bohman, 2016).

Some final reflections on my personal learning journey

In the last section of this thesis, I want to reflect on the impact this research had on me as the researcher. All in all, the process of this thesis research has been very fascinating, very challenging sometimes also difficult for me. The process of getting access to the research participants, and in connection to that, the definition of a specific research focus have both been not easy and therefore more protracted than initially expected. Once I could start the field work, I enjoyed the contacts with the research participants very much. However, the chosen topic of this thesis of course also implied that I heard of many difficult situations, hopeless personal circumstances as well as the emotional drainage and frustrations of some research participants, particularly where their work concerned refugees without a residence permit. Although trying to be very involved in our personal conversations, being in my somewhat detached researcher position often made me feel helpless in these situations. Also the task to bring all the complex and detailed personal narratives together into one linear thesis at the end of the field work stage was a difficult step, as it unavoidably implied some generalizations among the research participants and meant that not all nuances of the individual narratives could be included.

Despite, or rather because of these difficulties, I consider this thesis research as one large learning experience for me. Not only methodologically and theoretically, but also regarding the situation of refugees in the Netherlands I gained much knew knowledge. Conducting most of the interviews in Dutch was a step that for a long time I was very shy and insecure about. I am proud that eventually I have been able to do this and that I could improve my Dutch language skills in the research process.

Overall, I am very grateful for the many inspiring and insightful conversations I had with the research participants. They have also influenced my local ‘practical’ involvement, as through the contacts made through this research I recently got the opportunity to contribute to the organization of networking events between various local organizations. This thesis, with its theoretical focus on theories of radical democracy, has ultimately also contributed to giving me a better understanding of such local engagement in my direct environment, and to see its potential to initiate change in a new light.

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11| Appendix

Initial interview guide

As described in the thesis, this interview guide was not designed to be followed strictly, but was rather used to give me inspiration during the interviews which aspects to cover.

Own activity [every-day politics] *Aim: to get some first ideas of how they see their activities, also very personal!*	- What are you doing? How does that make sense? - Why doesn´t everyone do that? - What would happen if more people started doing that? What would change then? - How´s your world different now that you´re doing this? What has changed/would change? - Since when are you active? How long did you contemplate joining before actually signing up? - Any doubts?
Motivation/Goal [Big Politics] *Aim: partly more abstract, partly past reflection → to link their activities to larger issues*	- What is wrong with the world today? - How do you want to change it? - What would be the ideal world (regarding this specific context)? - How do you think your actions contribute to this? - How did you get involved/what prompted you to sign up? - What did you expect then (I know this will prompt answers only about what they want to tell me about what they think they once thought)
Other	- Reflections on media representations/interest by researchers → is that justified, or is it only about some people living together, so why make all that fuss? - What do you think it means for [other people involved in PHAs]? What do you think prompted them to get involved? - Why do people not get involved, what prevents them? -
'Politicalness' (Towards the end, because very guiding) *Aim: ask participants to (indirectly)reflect a bit on the theoretical framework I chose*	- How do you interpret 'politics'? - Is this something 'political' for you? - Is it a mode of political expression? - Do you think PHAs is something 'political' for [other groups]? - Is this initiative part of a bigger movement/contributing to social change? - How much is this an enactment of fundamental human equality? - PHA could also be considered as private actors taking over state responsibility. Opinions about that? (maybe as provocative question?)
DA/MCA-specific *Aim: DA/MCA for getting a better image of what is 'political' for them*	- Who counts as involved/Who counts as politically active/what is 'political' for you/....