

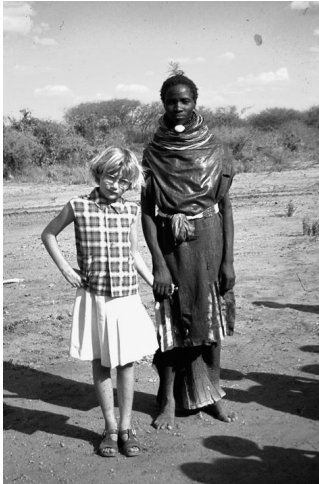
Itinerary of Belonging

An investigation into places of belonging of displaced people in the Netherlands

001 Introduction, fascination

Figure 1. Simone and Roza holding each others hands.

Hans Visser, 1979, photograph, Kenya.



My mother grew up in Kenya with her younger brother and two younger sisters. My granddad was an anthropologist and was researching a group of people in a small village in Turkana, a region in Kenya. In the image (figure 1), my mother is nine years old, and a woman from Turkana, Roza, is standing next to her. Roza helped the family out in the house. Even though her culture and appearance were entirely different from my mother and family, my mother felt safe and comfortable with her. Roza belonged to my mother's place and sense of home. When my mom was around ten years old, they moved back to the Netherlands and stayed here. However, when she came back here, she felt a bit displaced. The Dutch culture and how other children behaved differed from the culture she grew up in, even though my mother and her parents were entirely Dutch.

What does it mean to belong somewhere? The spatial meaning of belonging is the feeling of attachment to a particular place. This place can vary in scale, from as small as the home to a country or continent. When you look at the definition of belonging from the individual's perspective, the focus is often put on the experience of belonging, described as a 'sense of belonging' or 'place attachment' (Gilmartin, 2017). In general, the home is the place that people feel most attached to. The creation of home is one of the most universal and, at the same time, social, cultural and place-specific progresses in human life (Beekmans, Gola & Singh, 2022, p11). A home is something that is not planned to be; it can only become. Before a house becomes a home, it is a foreign place. Georges Perec questions the feeling of belonging in a space in the following text, which is a quote from his book *species and places of other species*:

“What does it mean, to live in a room? Is to live in a place to take possession of it? What does taking possession of a place mean? As from when does somewhere become truly yours? Is it when you've put your three pairs of socks to soak in a pink plastic bowl? Is it when you've heated up your spaghetti over a camping-gaz? Is it when you've used up all the non-matching hangers in the cupboard? Is it when you've drawing-pinned to the wall an old postcard showing Carpaccio's 'Dream of St Ursula'? Is it when you've experienced there the throes of anticipation, or the exaltations of passion, or the torments of a toothache? Is it when you've hung suitable curtains up on the windows, and put up the wallpaper, and sanded the parquet flooring?” (Perec, 1997, p24)

By questioning specific situations and if they ensure that someone feels at home in a place, Perec shows that it is non-self-evident to belong somewhere. I am especially fascinated by situations where there is tension between a place, people and their feeling of belonging. This was the case with my mother after she came back to the Netherlands, but it can also be the case with refugees or asylum seekers who arrive here and are unsure if this is where they will live from now on.

002 problem statement, research questions

At this moment, we are witnessing the highest levels of displacement on record; there are more than 100 million forcibly displaced people worldwide (UNHCR, 2022). A displaced person is someone that is forced to leave their home country due to persecution, conflict, violence, climate problems or human rights violations (Oxford University Press, n.d.). What do home and belonging to a place mean when you are forced to leave

your home country and displaced? Displaced people wander in a liminal phase. A liminal phase is a transitional phase in which a person has been separated from their former context but has not yet been rooted into a new structure or place (Turner, 1967). In this liminal phase, there is an interaction between aspirations and opportunities to move in a set of socio-spatial structures (Kleinmans, Ostaijen & Seibel, 2022). In the case of displaced people, it is uncertain if these aspirations and opportunities become real and, if so, when. The door to the former life has been closed, but the prospect of a new life is still vague and uncertain (figure 2).

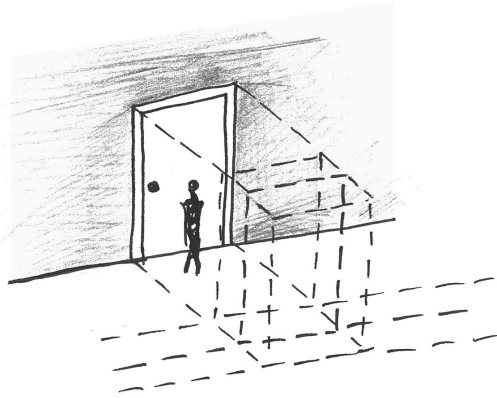


Figure 2. Liminality

Drawing made by the author, 2022.

That we witness this high level of displacement is something that is discernible in the Netherlands as well. Many nights of the past few months, people had to sleep outside in the open air in Ter Apel, because there were not enough shelter spaces inside. Briefly explained, this shortage of shelter spaces results from a shortage of social housing. Because of this shortage, status holders do not move out of asylum seekers centres, and therefore, there is not enough place in those centres for new people. (NOS, 2022).

The Central Organ for Asylum seekers (COA) provides shelter and guidance for people that seek asylum in the Netherlands. The COA is an independent organization covered by the ministry of safety and justice of the Netherlands. The objective from which they work and provide shelter is 'sober doch human (sober but human) (Ghorashi & ten Holder, 2012). When we examine shelters where the COA places displaced people in the Netherlands, it is often in spaces at the margins of cities, thus, of society. Often the buildings are non-specific for the context and target group with which they can be phrased as non-places as described by Marc Augé or Michel Foucault's heterotopias (Beekmans & Vanden Houte, 2019).

This research focuses on a deeper understanding of how spaces can create a feeling of belonging somewhere. It investigates the relationship between displaced people and the spaces they inhabit and use. Those spaces can be spaces provided by the COA, their own homes or more public spaces in which they have a sense of belonging. For this, the central question in the research is, 'How do displaced people in the Netherlands create a sense of belonging in the spaces they inhabit?'

To be able to answer the main question, the following sub-questions will be answered:

- What does it mean to belong to a place?
- What is the current situation relating to housing and places of belonging for asylum seekers in the Netherlands?
- Where do displaced people live while getting Dutch status, and how do people create a sense of belonging in these spaces?
- What elements have hindered or supported people from feeling a sense of belonging somewhere?

003 methodology, methods

The research consists of two parts, the theoretical framework and the ethnographical fieldwork. The first two sub-questions are answered by literature review. The question what does it mean to belong to a place will be answered by different sources; academic literature, podcasts, movies etc. Every person somehow has a relation with the concept of belonging and therefore, a lot has been documented about it. Examples of used books are 'Species and Places of Other Species' by George Perec (1997) and 'Poetics of Space' by Gaston Bachelard (1958). Both works take a poetic approach to living in a space and the concept of home.

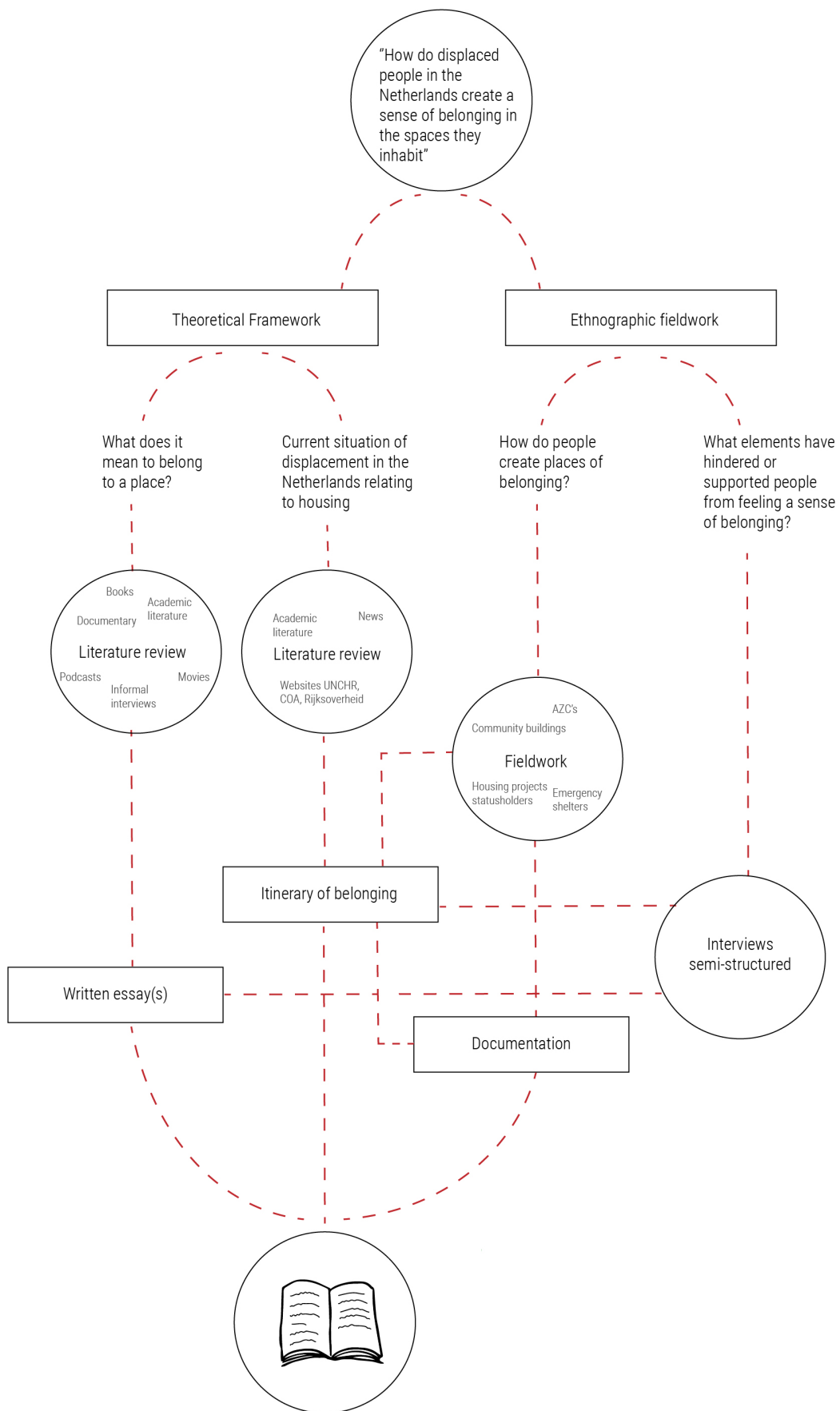
To learn more about the current situation relating to housing for displaced people in the Netherlands, academic literature, newspaper articles and websites from organizations like Vluchtelingenwerk Nederland (Dutch Council for Refugees), the UNCHR, the UN refugee agency, COA, and the Dutch government will be used. Two other primary sources for this question are De Migratiesamenleving, migratie en diversiteit als gordiaanse knoop (the migration society, migration and diversity als Gordian knot) by Reinout Kleinhans, Mark van Ostaijen en Kimberly Seibel, and the book Making home(s) in displacement by Luce Beeckmans, Alessandra Gola, Ashika Sings and Hilde Heynen are used. Both books were published in 2022. The first book provides background information on the refugee situation in the Netherlands. The second book is a collection of essays from different authors on different topics about displacement and gives insight into different perspectives on displacement.

The second part of the research builds from an ethnographical approach. The definition of ethnography is a 'representation of a society and culture of a specific ethnic group based on fieldwork'. Relating this to architecture it is more about physical enclosure that protects and supports human life and activities (Kajima, 2018). Thus architectural ethnographical research is about researching the relationship between a specific group of people and their physical enclosure. In this research, this specific group of people are displaced people in the Netherlands, and the physical enclosure is the spaces they inhabit. Two ethnographical methods that are used are fieldwork and semi-structured interviews.

During the fieldwork, different locations from the itinerary of belonging will be visited. Examples of these places are emergency shelters, asylum centres and housing projects in which status holders live together with people of Dutch nationality. Besides these residential locations, community buildings or places where activities for refugees and status holders are organized, will also be visited. During these site visits, observational research methods are used, for example, creating sketches, taking photographs when allowed, creating mental maps and writing descriptions. These methods are used to document these different locations of belonging. By conducting observational research, the locations are observed from a natural setting.

Besides fieldwork, semi-structured interviews with status holders or people that received the Dutch residence permit will be conducted. Within these interviews, questions about their asylum progress and what things have hindered and supported them in finding their place of belonging will be asked. The interviews are semi-structured to guide the interviewees into the topics of research, but also leave space for the interviewee to bring up topics themselves.

Figure 3. Diagram on methodology and methods. Created by the author.



004 objective, outcome

The research aims to create a 'portrait of belonging' of displaced people in the Netherlands. The outcome of the project will be a collection of different components brought together in the form of a book. The book opens with an essay about what belonging somewhere means. After that the book provides information about the current refugee situation in the Netherlands to establish a common knowledge about displacement. This part is followed by a visual flowchart with the name 'itinerary of belonging' (appendix I). This flowchart gives an overview of different spaces that displaced people inhabit during the process of getting a Dutch residence permit. The Itinerary of Belonging can also be seen as a summary of the ethnographical research that has been done. The next part will be a documentation of the different locations where fieldwork was conducted. This part will contain photos, drawings and descriptions. The final part of the book will be a written text in the form of a manifesto that questions the right to belong somewhere.

The book has two main goals. The first goal is to give a better understanding of what the situation of displaced people in the Netherlands looks like. As said, displaced people are often sheltered at the margins of cities. This results in that most people do not come in contact with these people, their situation and the places they live in. This book hopes to give more insight into the lives of displaced people in the Netherlands, to architects and other people. Secondly, the book wants to start a conversation on what belonging to a place and the feeling of displacement means. The concept of living and belonging somewhere is something that relates to all people. Displacement, however, is a topic that is not often spoken about. This work would like to put light on this topic of and evoke a discussion about belonging and displacement.

The results from the research provide a base from which a design project can be developed. This design project will take part somewhere along this itinerary of belonging for a specific group of displaced people. An example of a possible design outcome could be a shelter in combination with a community building in a city in the Netherlands. In this graduation project, the focus lies on research during the first part of the process. During the second half of the graduation year, the focus will be on the design.

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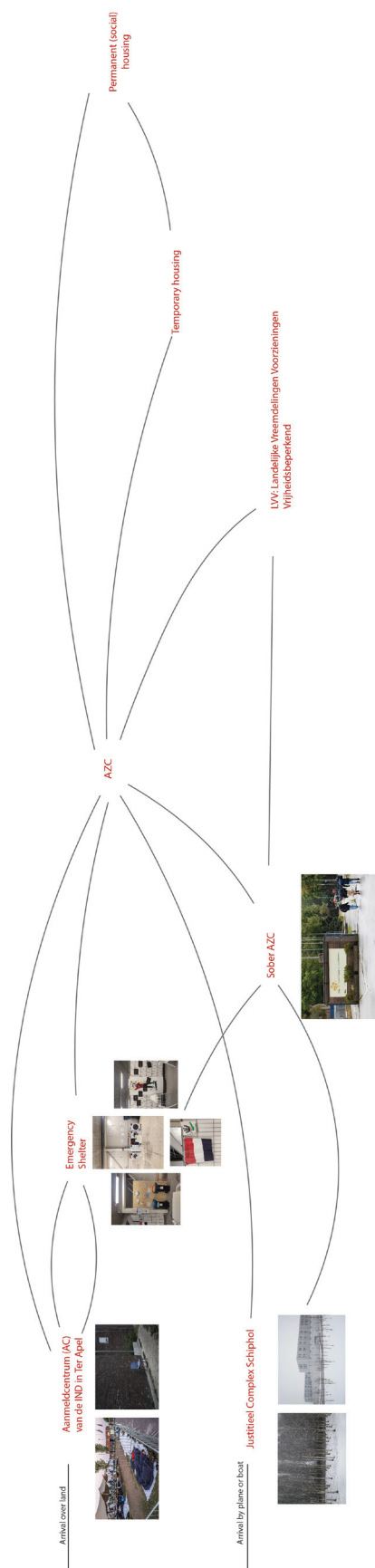
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appendix i. itinerary of belonging



Min. 6 days of rest and preparation time
 Registered as asylum seeker
 Algemene Afdelingsprocedure max 6 days.

Because of the lack of social housing, status holders don't move out of AZC's. There is no place in AZC's for new people, in Ter Apel 28.500 extra places have been created in Emergency shelters

When people come from 'safe' countries, or have secured refuge in another country already (Dublin regulation), they are placed in the emergency shelter.
 The procedure is accelerated.

Rights status holder:
 - Allowed to work
 - Right to housing
 - Right to financial aid
 - Duty to do integration exam

If not from a 'safe' country, refugee seekers have to wait 6 to 15 months (but often longer) for a (Temporary) residence permit, this is called status. Status holders will be housed by the Dutch government.

When asylum seekers don't receive a residence permit, and all the procedures are finished, they are placed in a LWV. This is a shelter with restricted rights. Here they wait for eviction.

Sometimes status holders are placed in emergency shelters for people who they are waiting for family to get through the procedure.

After 5 years the IND looks if the situation has changed. With no change, status holders get a residence permit.

appendix ii. bibliography

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