

حُرِّيَّتِي: أَن أَكُونَ كَمَا لَا يَرِيدُونَ لِي أَن أَكُونَ
“*My freedom is: to be what they do not want me to be*”
- Mahmoud Darwish

A study of Norway’s Integration Policy Through the
Obligatory Information Program for Asylum Seekers

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MSc Thesis in Human Rights and Multiculturalism

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<p>Title and subtitle:</p> <p>Title: “My freedom is: to be what they do not want me to be” Subtitle: A study of Norway’s Integration Policy Through the Obligatory Information Program for Asylum Seekers.</p>	
<p>Abstract:</p> <p>Like the vast majority of European countries, Norway receives asylum seekers from all over the world. Most of those have origins in the Middle East, Africa and Asia. The vast majority of all asylum seekers in Norway reside in reception centers while waiting for their applications to be assessed by the Norwegian authorities. This study will concentrate on the Obligatory Information Program that asylum seekers receive while residing in reception centers in Norway. My study will investigate the relationship between the objectives of the Information Program from the state’s perspective, and the way that asylum seekers perceive it. I aim to explore the Information Program from the viewpoint both of the recipient, and of the body that delivers it, and to ask whether the two perspectives correspond. The methodology I apply is interpretive analysis of UDI’s policy document on the Information Program, as well as semi-structured interviews with asylum seekers and refugees that have recently attended the program. I connect my empirical data with theories dealing with Multiculturalism, especially in the European/Nordic context. In addition, I refer to research about Norwegian multiculturalism, by, among others, Randi Gressgård, Marianne Gullestad and Anne-Britt Djuve. The main theory upon which this study builds, however, is Edward Said’s <i>Orientalism</i>. This study concludes that the objectives of the Information Program are not fulfilled, at least not according to the perceptions of asylum seekers in reception centers, and that attitudes towards immigrants are characterized by prejudice and not by empirical realities, and therefore need to change. In addition, Norway’s integration policy, in practice, carries elements of assimilation, of a Eurocentric/ethnocentric character, as opposed to inclusion and diversity that are mentioned and proposed in its white papers on integration.</p>	
<p>Key words:</p> <p>Asylum, Asylum Seekers, Refugees, Norway, Obligatory Information Program, Reception Centers, Orientalism, Multiculturalism, Dialogue, Integration, Assimilation</p>	
<p>Number of words: 26 440 words.</p>	

DECLARATION

I certify that this is all my own work. Any material quoted or paraphrased from reference books, journals, www. etc., has been identified as such and duly acknowledged in the text or foot/end notes. Such sources are also listed in the bibliography. I have read the College's policy on plagiarism and am aware of the penalties for plagiarism.

I have retained a copy of my work.

Signed: Name:

*Oh, East is East and West is West, and never the twain shall meet,
Till Earth and Sky stand presently at God's great Judgment Seat;
But there is neither East nor West, Border, nor Breed, nor Birth,
When two strong men stand face to face, though they come from the ends of the Earth!*

- Rudyard Kipling, *The Ballad of East and West* (1889).¹

¹The Kipling Society: http://www.kiplingsociety.co.uk/poems_eastwest.htm

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All translations to English from Norwegian and Arabic appearing in this study are my own, unless stated otherwise.

List of Abbreviations

UDI – The Norwegian Directorate of Immigration

DiFi – Agency for Public Management and eGovernment

EU – European Union

US – United States

EFTA – European Free Trade Association

UNCHR – The United Nations Commission on Human Rights

OECD – Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development

FrP – The Norwegian Progress Party (*Fremskrittspartiet*)

MUD – Moral underclass discourse

ED – Empowerment discourse

PED – Political equality/equal opportunities/women's rights discourse

NOAS – Norwegian Organization for Asylum Seekers

IMDi – The Directorate of Integration and Diversity

IOM – International Organization for Migration

NRK – Norwegian Public Broadcasting Corporation (*Norsk rikskringkasting*)

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1. INTRODUCTION

Migration is a phenomenon as old as the history of mankind, and today's globalized world is characterized by population movements and resettlements, which result in more diversity and less homogeneity. While multiculturalism and diversity seem to have positive effects in various fields, they are issues that remain sensitive and highly debated in contemporary societies throughout the world, as they affect the hosting societies on economic, political and social levels (Castles, de Haas & Miller, 2014: 1).

While education, work and economic motives are three reasons for migration, wars and conflicts are also causative factors. To take an example, the ongoing civil wars and sectarian conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq – and later throughout the rest of the Middle East and North Africa – have resulted in heavy migration to Europe in recent years. Ever since 2010, when the Arab Spring led to bloody civil wars throughout the Arab world, massive migration to the West has taken place. In particular, the revolution in Syria in 2011, that has later developed into a war that is still going on, has led to a substantial increase in Syrian asylum seekers and refugees fleeing to Europe today.² This massive flight has been called *the refugee crisis* throughout Europe – including Norway – by politicians and the media, and has led to dramatic actions by European countries to restrict vast movement across their borders.³

Even though migration trends, as briefly mentioned above, comprise a much wider spectrum and phenomena other than wars and economic crises, the above overview consciously draws a picture of migration trends from *East* (Asia, The Middle East and North Africa) to *West* (Europe), as this will be the focus of my study. In other words, this study intends to discuss the relationship between *East* and *West* in the context of Norwegian society as a Western host of the East (represented by asylum seekers). The intention of this study is to investigate the dynamics between the two, mainly by Edward Said's *Orientalism*, a critical approach to representations of the Orient. Said, a Palestinian-American intellectual, describes the relationship between the West and East as a "relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony" (1995: 5). Moreover, he focuses on the Western attitudes towards the East, and how these influence policies today. My intention is to scrutinize whether Said's portrayal of this relationship between East and West applies to the Norwegian context, narrowing it to the country's integration policies toward asylum

² The UN Refugee Agency: <http://www.unhcr.org/5329b15a9.html> [Accessed 30.01.2017]

³ In a press release by the Norwegian government dating 29.12.2015, the Ministry of Justice and Public Security issued a 150-page document containing proposals to "tighten the immigration rules and make it less attractive for people to seek asylum in Norway": <https://www.regjeringen.no/en/aktuelt/measure-to-address-the-refugee-crisis/id2469066/> [Accessed 30.01.2017]

seekers, through an obligatory information program given to newly arrived asylum seekers. In addition, I intend to examine which assumptions about asylum seekers from the East underlie Norwegian policies towards them.

Said's theory of Orientalism proposes that there is a patronizing Western attitude and rhetoric used towards non-Western, especially near-Eastern, societies. The rhetoric about the Orient portrays the non-Westerners, or the Orientals, as "the other", and as inferior to those imbued with Western values, culture and traditions. I will link this theory to the Obligatory Information Program for asylum seekers, questioning whether Norwegian policies automatically perceives non-Westerners as people with different values and perceptions of what is good or bad, and who consequently need to be taught about the Norwegian and Western civilizations.

Like the vast majority of European countries, Norway receives asylum seekers from all over the world. According to the Directorate of Immigration (hereunder: the UDI), more than 31000 persons applied for asylum in Norway in 2015.⁴ The majority of those have origins in the Middle East (Syria, Iraq, Palestine), Africa (Egypt and Eritrea) and Asia (Afghanistan and Pakistan). The vast majority of all asylum seekers in Norway in 2015 – 30196 to be accurate – resided in reception centers while waiting for their applications to be assessed by the Norwegian authorities.⁵ This study will concentrate on the Obligatory Information Program that asylum seekers receive while residing in reception centers in Norway. I intend this study to focus specifically on a relatively new group of asylum seekers to Norway, the Syrians, for several reasons. First, this is a group of asylum seekers that has rapidly increased in Europe and Norway since the war in Syria erupted in 2011,⁶ and it is now amongst the largest groups of asylum seekers and refugees in Norway. Second, Syrian refugees have received extensive coverage in Western media and politics, partly due to the vicious war that affects the region and the whole world;⁷ and partly because this group has, because of its size, registered on the European consciousness, and has now become part of the European society.

⁴ The Norwegian Directorate of Immigration: <https://www.udi.no/statistikk-og-analyse/statistikk/asylsoknader-etter-statsborgerskap-aldersgruppe-og-kjonn/> [Accessed 30.01.2017]

⁵ The Norwegian Directorate of Immigration: <https://www.udi.no/statistikk-og-analyse/statistikk/mottaksbefolkning-antall-beboere-i-mottak-etter-statsborgerskap-og-alder-2015/> [Accessed 30.01.2017]

⁶ The number of Syrian asylum seekers to Norway has however decreased in 2016 due to a stricter Norwegian immigration policy.

⁷ According to the UN Refugee Agency, over 4 million people have fled Syria since 2011: <http://www.unhcr.org/syria-emergency.html> [Accessed 30.01.2017]

1.1 Purpose of the Study and its Significance

The majority of asylum seekers staying in Norway spend up to several years in Norwegian reception centers while waiting for their applications to be processed by the UDI. Moreover, while some of those living in reception centers have already received refugee status and will eventually be resettled in municipalities, others have been refused asylum, and are expected to leave the country. It is, therefore, a complex group containing people with different legal statuses, facing different challenges.

Furthermore, reception centers are asylum seekers' first encounter with Norwegian society and bureaucracy. Reception centers and the Information Program given to asylum seekers are, consequently, very important to a group that is at the top of Norway's political agenda.

My study will investigate the relationship between the objectives of the Information Program from the state's perspective, and the way that asylum seekers perceive them. I aim to explore the Information program from the viewpoint of the recipient and the body that delivers it, and to ask whether the two perspectives correspond.

To sum up, a study on this topic is important because it touches on the fundamentals of Norway's asylum institutions and framework and its integration policy in a society that is becoming more multicultural and diverse.⁸ In addition, it aims to provide an insight into asylum seekers' perspective and understanding of Norway and its policy.

1.2 Main Research Question and Secondary Questions

The main question that this study will address is: What does the Information Program say about Norway's integration policy, and what are the asylum seekers' own perceptions of this policy? Secondary questions in this study will be:

- What are the underlying assumptions behind the explicit objectives, and how are these perceived by asylum seekers?
- Does the Information Program achieve its goals or are its contents and pedagogical approach counter-productive?

My initial assumption is that there is a contradiction between the explicitly stated aims of the program, and the underlying assumptions. Asylum seekers appreciate the intentions, but criticize the assumptions.

⁸ In 2016, a new White Paper on Integration has been published, and will be discussed further in this study.

1.3 Asylum Seekers and Refugees: Difference in Status

It is important to note the difference between asylum seekers and refugees. Legally, *refugees* are persons who have been granted asylum in a country other than that of their origin. In Norway they are resettled in municipalities and are granted either residency permits or citizenship. Not all refugees in Norway have lived in reception centers.⁹ *Asylum seekers* are persons who seek refugee status, “but whose claim has not yet been evaluated”.¹⁰ In other words, the term *asylum seeker* suggests temporary status. Some asylum seekers may be granted asylum and refugee status, but others may have their applications rejected by the authorities, and will be expected to leave the country.

My aim is to study the group of asylum seekers (and refugees) who still reside or have resided a reception center in Norway, and have attended UDI’s Obligatory Information Program. In other words, they are either:

- Waiting for their applications to be assessed by the authorities;
- Had had their refugee status granted and are waiting to be resettled in municipalities in Norway, or have already moved to a municipality;
- Have been refused asylum in Norway, and are either awaiting deportation or have appealed UDI’s assessment.

It is important to note that the majority of Syrian asylum seekers are granted asylum in Norway. When I conducted the interviews upon which this study is based, some of my interviewees were still asylum seekers, while others had been granted asylum. All of interviewees, except for one, were still living in reception centers when the interviews were conducted.¹¹

All asylum seekers in Norway have the right to live in a reception center while waiting for their application to be processed by the authorities.¹² There are two main types of reception centers in Norway where the majority of asylum seekers reside: *initial/transit reception centers* and *ordinary reception centers*. The first accommodates asylum seekers for a relatively short time, but the latter type houses asylum seekers for longer, perhaps up to several years. All reception centers operate similarly and get their instructions from the UDI.

⁹ Some refugees move to Norway directly from refugee camps in third countries, and others come through family reunification, and are directly resettled in Norwegian municipalities.

¹⁰ The UN Refugee Agency: <http://www.unhcr.org/asylum-seekers.html> [Accessed 30.01.2017]

¹¹ In some cases, Syrian asylum seekers have their applications rejected in Norway, due to several reasons, for example if they had sought asylum in a different European country (See: Dublin III convention), or if they have residence in a safe third country. Some asylum seekers also withdraw their applications: <https://www.udi.no/en/statistics-and-analysis/statistics/asylvedtak-etter-statsborgerskap-og-utfall-2015/> [Accessed 30.01.2017]

¹² Most asylum seekers in Norway choose to live in reception centers while waiting for their applications to be assessed. Though it is voluntary, many of them perceive their time in reception centers as difficult and frustrating: <http://www.dagsavisen.no/innenriks/lang-ventetid-1.473257> [Accessed 30.01.2017]

In this study I have carried out interviews with asylum seekers living in both types of centers. The reason why I chose these specific types of centers for my study, and my choice of interviewees, will be discussed in the methodology chapter.

1.4 The Obligatory Information Program for Asylum Seekers

The Information Program for asylum seekers is one of the common programs that every reception center must provide to its tenants. The program consists of 13 modules informing asylum seekers about Norwegian society, its traditions, social codes, rules and laws, as well as education, health and social-care systems. It also teaches asylum seekers about their rights and obligations in Norway.¹³ Attending the program is obligatory for asylum seekers above 18 years old, and in most reception centers invalid absence from classes can result in a fine.

The Information Program is given to asylum seekers collectively regardless of their legal status, level of education and country of origin. In other words, asylum seekers with positive and negative verdicts, educated and illiterate, all attend the same class, organized according to their language proficiency. A report by the Agency for Public Management and eGovernment (Difi) concludes that there is a gap between what information the asylum seekers are interested in, and what the authorities want them to be informed about. One of the challenges, according to Difi, is that while the Norwegian authorities are concerned with giving information related to, for instance, crime prevention in Norway, asylum seekers are mainly concerned about whether or not they will be granted asylum, and are therefore less receptive to other information.¹⁴ While the focus of Difi's report (that was ordered from the UDI) is on the implementation of the program, this study seeks to investigate the underlying purposes of the program and how these purposes influence the recipient's understanding of the program and Norway's integration policy as a whole.

It is, however, important to mention that the UDI has been working on a newer and – according to the UDI – more improved version of the Information Program for more than two years, and in December 2016 a revised document has become available.¹⁵ The purpose for the revision, according to the UDI, is to create better and more effective topics in the Information Program for asylum seekers, given to differentiated groups.

¹³ The Norwegian Directorate of Immigration: <https://www.udi.no/asylmottak/jobber-i-mottak/informasjonsarbeid-i-mottaket/informasjonsprogram-for-voksne/> [Accessed 30.01.2017]

¹⁴ Agency for Public Management and eGovernment: <https://www.difi.no/sites/difino/files/difirapport-2009-07-mens-de-venter...en-kartlegging-av-informasjon-til-beboere-i-asylmottak.pdf> [Accessed 30.01.2017]

¹⁵ A copy of a yet unpublished draft of the revised circular by UDI is available to the author of this thesis. It is approved by UDI and is planned to be implemented in 2017. I have received permission to use the document in this thesis..

Having said that, this study will not focus on the organization and practical implementation of the program, but rather on the content of the material that is taught, and this seems to remain the same in the newly modified program. I believe the new program is a continuation of the old program, and both reflect a policy that this study will investigate.

Another important point to mention is that the *Obligatory Information Program for Asylum Seekers* differs from the *Introductory Program for Immigrants*. The latter is a program in which refugees participate upon their resettlement in Norwegian municipalities, i.e. after they have been granted asylum and a residency permit in Norway. It is a part of a two-year qualification program/scheme (*introduksjonsordning*) that all municipalities are required to provide to newly resettled refugees, and includes Norwegian language course, social studies and practical measures that aim to prepare refugees for future participation in the Norwegian labor market (Djuve, 2011a: 7). The topics in the social studies modules taught within the Introductory Program are similar to the ones given to asylum seekers in reception centers. And while little academic research has been written on the Information Program for asylum seekers, various scholars have investigated the Introductory Program for immigrants. Consequently, I will in this study refer to research available on this topic, as I argue that the topics taught within the Introductory Program and the Information Program are very similar, if not identical.

1.5 Theory and Key Concepts

In order to answer the questions raised in this study, I have used several theories dealing with Multiculturalism, especially in the European/Nordic context. In addition, I have referred to research about Norwegian Multiculturalism by, among others, Randi Gressgård, Marianne Gullestad and Anne-Britt Djuve. The main theory upon which this study builds, however, is Edward Said's *Orientalism*. In his revolutionary and controversial book that was first published in 1978, Said describes the phenomenon of Orientalism, and analyzes it by different, yet interdependent, ways: First is the Academic designation, in which, he argues, that Orientalism "lives on academically through its doctrines and theses about the Orient and the Oriental". Second, Orientalism as a "style of thought, based upon ontological and epistemological distinction between 'the Orient' and 'the Occident'", a distinction that Said insistently calls "imaginative". And third, a meaning historically and materially defined, or as he puts it: "Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient" (1995: 2-4). By discussing these points, Said demonstrates that

“European culture gained in strength and identity by settling itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self” (*ibid*).

In addition to Said, I have referred to Paulo Freire’s book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, to analyze the content of the Information Program and asylum seekers’ perspectives. Freire talks about liberation as a mutual process between the oppressed and oppressor, and the “banking” of education as a tool of oppression. His main argument is that dialogue is an instrument of liberation, as opposed to the anti-dialogical instrument of oppression (2005).

Multiculturalist societies are a collective characteristic of most European countries, but multicultural policies and approaches differ from one country to another (Triandafyllidou, Modood & Meer, 2012: 1). In the case of Norway, the cultivation of diversity, shared and equal opportunities has been highlighted in the White Paper on integration policy by the Ministry of Children, Equality and Inclusion in 2012, under the title “A Comprehensive Integration Policy”.¹⁶ However, the most recent White Paper on asylum and integration policy was published in the spring of 2016. Stricter asylum and integration policies, based on demands and conditionality, are features that highlight the white paper, reflecting Norway’s integration policy. This will be discussed in the following chapters.

1.6 Outline of the Thesis

This study is divided into seven chapters, including sub-chapters. In this chapter (1), I intended to present the background of my study, with a broad overview over asylum seekers and their legal status in Norway, the main case study, and the theories I aim to use. The first chapter also outlines my research questions and the purpose of my study. Chapter (2) examines the research strategy and reflections on the sampling process. It also presents ethical considerations, and the methodological tools used to answer the research question. Chapter (3) contains relevant literature about migration trends in Europe and Norway, as well as an account of multiculturalism and integration policies in Norway, linking them to my research question. In addition, it draws on research about Norwegian society and its integration tools. In chapter (4) I discuss the theories upon which this study builds, using Said’s *Orientalism* as a main theory. I also refer to theories of multiculturalism and recognition, and liberation. In chapter (5) and (6) my findings will be presented, discussed and analyzed thematically. Finally, chapter (7) encompasses a summary and conclusion of the thesis, as well as policy recommendations.

¹⁶ Government.no: <https://www.regjeringen.no/no/dokumenter/meld-st-6-20122013/id705945/> [Accessed 30.01.2017]

2. METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, I attempt to present my research design and strategy, methods and the process of how this study has been conducted. In addition, I will discuss the methods used to address my research question, and I will present the challenges I have met during my research. I will also give space in this chapter to discuss ethical considerations.

The main research question of this study is: What does the Information Program say about Norway's integration policy, and what are the asylum seekers' own perceptions of this policy? I seek to investigate the relationship between the objective of the Information Program from the State's Perspective, and the way asylum seekers perceive it. In addition, I aim to understand what kind of integration policy this program represents.

In order to answer the research question, I have made an interpretive analysis of UDI's policy papers. In addition I have conducted semi-structured interviews with asylum seekers, and analyzed their narratives regarding their understanding and perception of the Information Program. Below, I will give a detailed overview over my choice of research topic, as well as my choice of interpretive analysis and qualitative method as methodological tools to answer my research question.

2.1 Choice of Research Topic

As mentioned in the introduction, migration, asylum and integration have been tangible and widely disputed issues in Norway's political and social programs in recent years. Prior to formulating a research question and narrowing it to the Information Program for asylum seekers in reception centers, I carried out literature review in order to examine and understand the focus of academic research in this specific field. While extensive literature was to be found on multiculturalism in Norway, refugees and Norway's integration policies, little research on the Information Program for asylum seekers has been conducted. Consequently, I decided to carry out a study on a discourse that represents an important aspect in Norway's integration policy, but one that is little visible and little debated. It has been especially significant for me to give voice to asylum seekers that are mainly talked about and discussed in the media and by politicians, and who are made passive, without the chance to articulate their own opinions about the program that they are obliged to attend.

Another reason for focusing on this topic is the fact that I have been working in reception centers for asylum seekers and have specifically worked with the Information Program. My role and positionality will be accounted for later in this chapter. However, it is important to mention here that the choice of this topic has also to do with my professional

background as an employee at reception centers for asylum seekers. During my professional experience with the Information Program, and through conversations with asylum seekers in the reception centers where I worked, I was encountered with opinions and insights that, in my opinion, ought to be further researched and analyzed, and, not least, heard. I am aware of my position as an “insider” researcher, who has both worked closely with asylum seekers and with the Information Program, and who shares a similar cultural background to my interviewees. In addition, I have a genuine interest in the asylum “institution” and how the dominant Norwegian majority perceives the “other”. There are, in other words, both academic reasons and personal motives that have drawn me to write about this topic. Having said that, it is essential to acknowledge that research cannot be “value free” (Bryman, 2012: 39), and in terms of reflexivity, I have throughout the whole process been constantly self-reflective and have been investigating my own values and biases.

Understanding the Information Program’s goals and intentions is essential to examine Norway’s integration policy. At the same time, asylum seekers’ perception of the program and its content is important, to examine whether UDI’s intentions and asylum seekers’ perceptions correspond. Considering the research objective of this study and the research questions I aim to answer, I find qualitative research an appropriate methodological tool, as it “involves an in-depth understanding of human behavior and the reasons that govern human behavior” (Bryman, 2012: 116), and it does not focus on or investigate information based on numbers (Verhoeven, 2012: 135). Furthermore, this study will be interpretive, as it will focus both on scrutinizing a policy and examining perceptions of the recipients (asylum seekers) of the policy: Interpretivism “is concerned with the empathic understanding of human action” (Bryman, 2012: 28).

The strength of the qualitative research strategy in this study is that it enables us to analyze and understand texts and people, through “collecting information using texts”, and through investigating and interpreting “how people perceive a situation, what their underlying arguments and motives may be for behaving in a certain way” (*ibid*). Within the qualitative research, I have chosen interpretive document analysis and semi-structured interviews to answer my research question. Below I explain in detail my choice of these two methods.

2.2 Document Analysis / Interpretive Analysis

In order to understand the objectives and purposes of UDI's Information Program for asylum seekers, I have carried out interpretive analysis of their policy documents of the program. The main document I have analyzed is UDI's circular on the Information Program. This circular aims to explain the objectives and purposes of the program, as well as responsibilities and organization. In addition, I have looked into some of the modules in the program and analyzed their content.

Bryman points out that it is “tempting to assume that documents reveal something about an underlying social reality”, and that documents are “windows onto social and organizational realities” (2012: 554). This emphasizes the importance of carrying out this study, which aims to question whether or not this document's intention corresponds with reality. Moreover, it is important to note that my choice of interpretive analysis is inspired by Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). CDA is an established discipline that aims to study social phenomena through examining texts (Wodak and Meyer, 2009). It is characterized by “the common interests in de-mystifying ideologies and power through the systematic and retroductable investigation of semiotic data (written, spoken or visual)”, and it is combined with different other methodologies (*ibid*). Similarly to other critical theories, CDA aims to enable human beings – through critical knowledge and self-reflection – to emancipate themselves from power and domination (*ibid*). In this study, I do not carry out any detailed, systematic and linguistic CDA, but I agree with its agenda and find it inspiring in my research. The interpretive analysis I carry out is of the content of the policy documents, referring it to theories of Orientalism and dialogical pedagogy.

To sum up, “interpretive analysis” (Gullestad, 2010; see also Stokke, 2012: 60) of policy documents through “selection of typical arguments that show the dynamics of discursive interaction” aims to put the material in different contexts, by relating them to selected theories (Gullestad, 2010: 46).

It is important to point out, as I mention in the introduction, that a new Information Program for asylum seekers has been under revision by the UDI. Although changes in the content and organization have been made, the modules remain the same, with slight variations, mainly of a structural character. The modules are designed to teach asylum seekers about the Norwegian society in the same way it has been employed so far. There are, however, differences between the “old” and the “new” Information Program that ought to be

mentioned. I will present a quick overview over the main differences in the two sections below.¹⁷

The “old” Information Program: The number of modules in the “old” program, which has been implemented since 2005 and until today, is thirteen, and is divided into four phases: phase of arrival (*ankomstfase*), phase of asylum seeking (*søkefase*), phase of residence (*bosettingsfase*) and phase of return (*returfase*). The nine modules in the phase of seeking asylum are subordinated to a joint national wheel-plan,¹⁸ which means that all reception centers in the country will give information in the same modules at the same time interval. The objective behind the wheel-plan is to ensure continuity in information in case asylum seekers move between reception centers.

The “new” Information Program: Some of the modules have changed their title, but the overall content remains almost identical. However, the difference is that once an asylum seeker has completed his or her participation in the twelve modules,¹⁹ he or she are obliged to attend at least two hours of information meetings every week, as long as they continue living in the reception center. The wheel-plan is thus removed, and the thought behind it is to ensure that asylum seekers participate in multiple and more intensive information meetings.

As we have seen above, the new and old Information Programs have more similarities than differences. The purpose of this study is not to examine the organizational and practical implementation of the Information Program. It seeks to understand first and foremost the intention behind the program from the viewpoint of the state as a tool for integration. Additionally, it aims to scrutinize whether this intention corresponds with the viewpoint of the recipients, i.e. the asylum seekers.

Having carried out the interviews and asked questions relating to the older version of the Information Program (that is still applied at reception centers until today), the study will mostly refer to the old Information Program, its modules, purposes and goals. In addition, the document analysis will refer to policy papers from the same program, unless mentioned otherwise. I do not intend to analyze all modules in the program, but instead, I have chosen

¹⁷ All information and data about the old and new information program are collected through: 1. Experience from working with the information program since 2009, and 2. Written and oral information given by actors from the UDI who have been working with the information program and its revision.

¹⁸ The nine modules in the phase of asylum seeking are: The Asylum Process/ Health, Education and Qualification/ Norwegian Values and Way of Life/ Living Together/ Norwegian Law and Rules/ Conflict Management/ Return Information/ Information Gathering

¹⁹ The twelve modules are, as mentioned in the introduction: Primary and Welcome Information/ Life in a Reception Center/ The Asylum Process/ Ethics, How we See Women, and Sexual morality/ Family Patterns and Marriage Structures/ Parents and Children/ Health/ Social Conditions, Standards and Values/ Crime and Conflict Management/ Rejection of Asylum Application/ Residency Permit/ Limited Residency Permit.

to focus on the pedagogical content of Module 07 (Norwegian Values and Way of Life) and Module 08 (Living Together). The reason is that it is these two modules that asylum seekers have mainly focused on in their answers.

2.3 Semi-Structured Interviews

An interview is “a conversation in which the interviewees’ perceptions are paramount” (Verhoeven, 2012: 141), and is a widely employed method in qualitative research (Bryman, 2012: 469). My choice of semi-structured interviews is due to the need to give voice to asylum seekers, a group that is not given the stage to articulate their opinions and concerns. Choosing semi-structured interviews as a preferred method is because it gives my interviewees a “great deal of leeway in how to reply” (*ibid*: 471). Contrary to structured interviews, which resemble a “survey research, in which all respondents are asked exactly the same questions in the same order” (*ibid*: 716), semi-structured interviews have questions that are “somewhat more general in their frame of reference” (*ibid*), and they enable the interviewer to add questions and open for reflections throughout the interview. This can give the possibility of obtaining new and relevant information. At the same time, this type of interview method enables the interviewees to express their thoughts and feelings without restrictions, and will, consequently, provide the researcher with a deeper understanding of their perceptions of a specific situation. The questions of my interview guide are therefore consciously general in character, which has allowed participants to elaborate and deviate in order to supplement other relevant information.

Using this method has proven to have a positive effect on the quality of the answers I received from asylum seekers. First, they were given the opportunity to voice their opinions and perceptions of the Information Program undisturbed, and, at the same time, using interviews has enabled me - through the voices of asylum seekers – to obtain a deeper understanding of being an asylum seeker in Norway today. They have, in other words, been able to relate to and reflect on issues like integration, diversity and values. Second, semi-structured interviewing has helped me reformulate questions and carry a conversation in case some issues were not well understood.

2.4 Sampling Procedure and Challenges

As mentioned above, in order to carry out interviews with asylum seekers in reception centers with the UDI's assistance, a request has to be sent to UDI.²⁰ After visiting their website and reading their information about research in reception center, I contacted an official in the UDI and asked for approval to meet and interview asylum seekers. In the conversation, I was made aware that any contact with asylum seekers living in reception centers are to be done, first, after the UDI's approval, and second, through direct contact between the UDI and the administration of the reception centers, which would be the link between asylum seekers and me.

Two months after contacting the UDI's Analysis and Development Section (*analyse- og utviklingsavdelingen*), I received a letter where they recommended that I attach a recommendation letter from my boss (in the reception center where I work) when I contact other reception centers, as it would be in my advantage. A letter of recommendation was formulated and sent to the UDI ten days later. A few days later, I got a confirmation to conduct interviews in reception centers. It is important to mention that I experienced the officials at the UDI with whom I spoke as positive and willing to help me with my research.

However, the long process of waiting for a clear answer from the UDI, together with a bureaucracy that I personally experienced as controlling towards asylum seekers and me as a researcher, made me decide to drop interviews in reception centers that would be arranged by and coordinated with the UDI. Another reason for my decision is that I was unsure whether asylum seekers would feel comfortable with being interviewed by a researcher who contacts them through the UDI and their reception center. I assumed they would be skeptical to talk to someone who they might perceive as a representative of the UDI. Therefore, I believed that my position as a researcher would be weakened, since I needed to go through several channels before being able to have a direct contact with asylum seekers. I decided therefore to "find" my interviewees through other channels.

Several months after the decision to postpone the interview process, I came across a documentary on NRK (Norwegian Public Broadcasting Corporation, a TV-channel), which dealt with asylum seekers in Norwegian reception centers.²¹ It was there that I found potential participants for this study, three persons, and I decided to contact them directly. Another interviewee was contacted after I watched an interview with him on NRK in a

²⁰ It is important to note that I did not want to interview asylum seekers living in the reception center where I work. My intention was to meet and speak to asylum seekers with whom I do not have any relations, personal or professional.

²¹ NRK's documentary "The Reception Center" (*Mottaket*), in this link: https://www.nrk.no/emne/mottaket_-1.13034690 [Accessed 30.01.2017]

different program. In addition, it was important for me to interview a female asylum seeker, but it was, unfortunately, uneasy to find one through the channels I had chosen.²² Therefore, it was through a mutual acquaintance that I was able to contact a woman who was willing to participate. Below I present my sampling strategy and give more details about the choice of my interviewees.

2.4.1 Sampling Strategy and Recruitment Process

Asylum seekers comprise a group of people with various backgrounds, whether geographical, religious, educational or professional. Given that this is a qualitative research, I chose to use a purposive sampling which is used “to select samples on the basis of given characteristics” (Verhoeven, 2012: 183). This sampling form suggests that the researcher does not choose participants on a random basis (Bryman, 2012: 418), but is a strategic way to choose relevant participants according to predetermined criteria who serve the goal of the research (*ibid*). In order to narrow my units of analysis, I chose the following criteria of my interviewees:

Asylum Seekers in Transit and Ordinary Reception Centers: As mentioned in the introduction, there are two main types of reception centers in Norway where the majority of asylum seekers reside: *initial/transit reception centers* and *ordinary reception centers*. Whereas the first accommodates asylum seekers for a relatively short time, the latter houses them for a longer period of time that can reach up to several years.²³ The choice of both transit and ordinary reception centers is because information is given to asylum seekers in both types of centers. Most, if not all asylum seekers, who live in ordinary reception centers, had lived in transit centers. In other words, the information they receive in both places is identical (if we relate to information within the Information Program). The same information is, thus, given to asylum seekers in different stages of their stay in Norway. Since the nature of the stay in a transit center differs from the ordinary center (short-term vs. long-term), the conception and perception of the information that is given might vary. In addition, it is interesting to find out whether the information is perceived differently, depending on the legal status and the length of stay in a reception center.

²² The majority of asylum seekers from Syria in reception centers are men. Women usually come through family reunification.

²³ There are other types of reception centers in Norway, such as reception centers or facilities for vulnerable groups or separate reception centers for unaccompanied minors.

Educated Asylum Seekers: Another criterion that I have determined for the sampling of my interviewees is the level of education. An experience from working with asylum seekers shows that those with education from their home-countries (or abroad), prior to arriving to Norway, tend to be more open about their opinions and feelings towards authorities, and are more willing to criticize them. To elaborate, most of the asylum seekers who arrive to Norway come from undemocratic regimes, either totalitarian or dictatorial. In these countries the ability to voice one's opinion about politics or policies is rather limited. Newly arrived asylum seekers are usually reluctant and unwilling to express their opinions, fearing that this would have negative consequences on their asylum applications. However, educated asylum seekers are likely to react more strongly to being treated as inferior, and they can argue through the "universal" values of democracy and freedom of speech/expression, and have a more natural attitude towards criticism and free expression of their standpoints. Therefore, and in order to ensure that my interviewees would provide me with maximal account of their voices and opinions, as well as get both nuanced and various perspectives, I have selected those with higher education. Having said that, I am aware that by doing this selection I also lose other interesting standpoints and reflections. Voices of the less educated are also important. Yet, it is through openness and the belief that the interviewees are willing to share their sincere opinion that, I believe, I would get more accurate answers.

Native Language Considerations: Language is the third parameter that has determined the selection of my interviewees. As a native speaker of Arabic, I chose to speak to asylum seekers with the same native language. I chose this as a criterion to ensure that the communication between the interviewees and me is direct and does not risk misunderstandings by using a foreign language. Narrowing the choice of Arabic speakers to Syrians is, as mentioned in the introduction, because it is a group that is rapidly increasing in Norway, and is amongst the largest group of asylum seekers in Norway. In addition, it is a group that is typically granted asylum in Norway.

As for the recruitment process, I contacted all interviewees through Facebook, where I sent a personal message to each participant with a brief presentation of myself in Arabic, asking if they would be interested in participating in a qualitative interview that is part of a research study about the Information Program for asylum seekers. All responses were positive, and the participants showed interest in the study, and they articulated their willingness to share their perceptions of the program. My experience from this positive response is that asylum seekers have not been given other opportunities to articulate their

opinions about a program that they are obliged to attend. In addition, I believe that the fact that I speak their language and belong to the same (social) background made them comfortable to share critique with me.

After I received positive feedback to participate in the interviews, I sent another message to the participants with an invitation letter, which included detailed information about the objectives and purposes of the study, the estimated length of the interviews, as well as assurance that their identity would be anonymous. Surprisingly (or maybe not), all asylum seekers I have spoken with and interviewed said they did not mind that I use their full name, information about their occupation and asylum status. In their opinion, anything they had said to me was an expression of a need to talk about an issue that affects them personally. In addition, they said that they were not afraid of consequences, as they meant that constructive criticism should be accepted and appreciated. Prior to submitting my thesis, I contacted my participants by telephone again and asked whether or not they wished to be anonymous. All participants said they would like their full names to be used. In addition, I read the quotes I used by every participant for their approval.

Taking into consideration the challenges in finding asylum seekers who fit my criteria, and not through the UDI's approval and assistance, and considering the scope of this thesis and the time limitations, I was unable to interview more than five asylum seekers for this study. Having said that, I believe that it is possible and justifiable to draw conclusions based on the answers from my interviewees. In the below table, I present an overview over my interviewees and their backgrounds:

Table 1: List of Interviewees

Name of Participant	Sex and age	Occupation	Date of interview	Reception center
George Nacoul	Male, 24	Student of economy	02.08.2016	Transit
Waddah Obeid	Male, 23	Student of art; interior design	03.08.2016	Ordinary
Amr Abou Chakra	Male, 24	Artist	05.08.2016	Transit
Samar Al-Suleiman	Female, 38	Manager at a culture center	04.10.2016	Municipality
Bashar Alshiekh	Male, 29	Dentist	10.12.2016	Ordinary

2.4.2 Reflections on Sampling

Recruiting asylum seekers to my qualitative interviews, as mentioned in detail above, has been a challenging process, which also prolonged the period of writing this thesis. However, looking back at the considerations and reflections I have made throughout the project period, I see that the decisions were appropriate. It was highly important for me to recruit asylum seekers without the intervention of the UDI or the reception centers where my interviewees reside, in order to assure them that the research has no connection with the “asylum institution”, and that it is a critical academic study. This is reflected, in my opinion, in their motivation (and even eagerness) to participate, and not least, in their open, reflective and critical feedbacks and responses to my questions, as will be seen in the analysis chapters. Furthermore, semi-structured interviewing has proven to be an effective and applicable method; and with all interviewees, the question-answer approach turned into constructive conversations, where valuable data have been collected.

Having said that, it is important to bear in mind that a “researcher’s worldview affects his or her standpoint and approach to research” (Hesse-Biber, 2010: 30). I have therefore practiced “reflexivity” in order to be more conscious of my choices, values and biases. As an “insider” researcher, i.e. an Arab female student that also works with asylum seekers and the Information Program that I am researching, I have been aware of the various biases and preconceptions with which I could be met. At the same time, I see the combination of my societal and professional background as strength, given that I have a wide understanding of both the asylum seekers and the asylum institution (the UDI).

Considering the scope and volume of this study, I do not claim that the data collected will serve as a case representative of generalizing to all asylum seekers in Norway, but is rather exemplifying in the sense that it represents a broader category of the selected target group and the issue (Bryman, 2012: 67). It will, hopefully, give an insight into one side of Norway’s integration policy.

2.5 Ethical Considerations

Ethical issues in research are crucial and require continuous reflections throughout the whole process of research. According to Bryman (2012: 130), ethics “relate directly to the integrity of a piece of research and of the disciplines that are involved”. Moreover, as the researcher’s responsibility is to seek truth, “scientific integrity is a key aspect of research ethics” (NESH, 2006: 8). According to the Guidelines for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences, Law and the Humanities (NESH), “research is distinguished by researchers’ views

on society and humanity”, which “requires that researchers consider how their own attitudes can color their choice of topics, data sources and the balance between possible interpretations” (*ibid*).

There are several ethical concerns to consider when working with this specific research topic, both when it comes to my role and to the people I have interviewed. I have conducted a critical academic study, and I have followed the ethical principles, which require integrity, honest and verifiable documentation, consistent reasoning, independence and insight into one’s own weaknesses and limitations (*ibid*).

However, in addition to being a student, I have been working as an information manager in a reception center for asylum seekers. One of the responsibilities of my position is to teach the modules of the Information Program for Asylum Seekers, the program that is the main focus of this study. Teaching the Information Program has given me knowledge about and insight into the practice of the Information Program within reception centers. During the seven years of my work with asylum seekers, and through numerous conversations with many of them, evaluations and professional training, I have obtained a wide understanding of different aspects of life in reception centers and the information that is given to asylum seekers.

I am aware of my role when conducting this study. My professional background in working with asylum seekers and teaching the Information Program has not been misused, nor did it compromise the integrity and ethical requirements of an honest academic research. On the contrary, I will argue that my professional experience in this field has given me better knowledge that I have used in this research with integrity and decency, through continuous assessment and scrutiny throughout the research process. In other words, as a critical researcher, I do not claim impartiality or neutrality, but at the same time, I have used reflexivity throughout the whole research process.

In order to avoid having my role as an employee at the reception center mixed with my role as a researcher, I have not interviewed asylum seekers living in the reception center where I work. I have chosen interviewees who reside in other reception centers, and with whom I do not have any personal acquaintance or professional relation. Interviewees in my study have been given adequate information about the research, and prior to conducting any interviews, I carried the responsibility to explain “the limitations, expectations, and requirements that pertain” to my role as a researcher (*ibid*: 20).

2.6 Reliability and Validity of the Study Findings

Research can be controlled and quality-checked in different ways. Both Bryman (2012) and Verhoeven (2012) mention Reliability and Validity as means to assess the quality of research throughout the whole process (i.e. from the stage of determining the research design, through the fieldwork and finally when analyzing the results). Whereas the first “is concerned with the question of whether the results of a study are repeatable” (Bryman, 2012: 46), the latter “is concerned with the integrity of the conclusions that are generated from a piece of research” (*ibid*: 47). My conclusions in this study were linked to theories that I decided to implement. Collecting the data from my respondents and relating it to theory has strengthened the validity of this research.

To elaborate, conclusions did not rely on my own assumptions and understandings of the answers, but rather on theory and discourses, on integration and multiculturalism. In addition, I have given the chance to my interviewees to express their opinions freely, and in their own native language, which has enabled them to give a clear picture of their opinions and perceptions. Through thorough analysis of their answers, I encountered a lot of similarities in their perceptions, which enabled me to draw conclusions and generalizations that I perceive as valid and reliable.

2.7 Data Analysis

One of the main challenges with qualitative research is that it generates a large and unstructured database (Bryman, 2012: 565). The risk of large data is that one might fail to carry out a true and thorough analysis (*ibid*). To be able to conduct data analysis, I carried out thematic interpretive analysis of the policy document and the data collected through qualitative interviews. To do so, I compared the similarities and differences between the responses of my interviewees after transcribing their responses. Their focus areas were made into categories, such as “integration” and “dialogue” and “values”. Later, I compared the perceptions of these themes to UDI’s policy document to investigate whether the objectives of the program regarding these themes corresponded with the perceptions of the participants.

It is important to bear in mind that narrowing my data analysis to specific topics relates to the research question and objective of the study. However, throughout the process, I was open to new perceptions that would add to my own initial assumption. The way the analysis has been conducted allowed me to voice the narratives of my participants and to highlight their own perceptions of the objectives of the Information Program. Consequently, from

being a passive, talked *about* group, asylum seekers' voices and perceptions became equally important to the policy documents, if not more.

2.8 Summary

In this chapter, I attempted to present a detailed methodological process of my research project. In addition, I have given a reflexive reason of the choices I have made in my research design and sampling procedures, in an attempt to justify my choices. I have also discussed my choice of interpretive analysis and semi-structured interviews as methodological tools. Additionally, I have discussed my positionality as an “insider” critical researcher, and reflected over ethical considerations. In the next chapters I will present theoretical framework, theory and the findings of my research.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter attempts to present an overview of migration trends to Europe, and to explore them in relation to the Norwegian context. I will look at past research into integration policy in Norway, referring to previous White Papers. This will show the changes in how politicians have used concepts of multiculturalism and diversity in such policy papers. Later, I will define and discuss integration and assimilation and the European and Norwegian contexts, and I will examine the Norwegian definition of shared values, and the perception of the “other”. Lastly, I will present relevant research referring to a specific integration program in Norwegian municipalities, in an attempt to link it to my thesis question. The literature review aims to link the research question to the next chapter that refers to relevant theories that the study builds on, and to place Norway in a European context.

3.1 Migration Trends to Europe and Norway’s Immigration History

As mentioned in the introduction, migration has been a global phenomenon throughout the history of mankind, and will likely continue to be as long as human society exists. Migration has profound effects on the country of origin of those who migrate, and on the receiving countries. So profound that, according to Castles, de Haas and Miller, “migration and the resulting ethnic and racial diversity are amongst the most emotive subjects in contemporary societies” (2014: 1).

Even though the consequences of migration can and do have positive effects on hosting societies, Western, especially European, policies and public opinion have reacted with skepticism, and even animosity, towards the increasing diversity within their societies, particularly towards Muslim immigrants (Modood, 2013; Murphy, 2012; Stokke, 2012). There is a direct link between this skepticism and Western memories of the 9/11 terrorist attacks in America, killing nearly 3,000 people in New York, Virginia and Pennsylvania, and other attacks throughout Europe in recent years carried out by terrorist Islamist groups. This has led to the term “War on terror” becoming almost synonymous with “War on Islam and non-Western societies”. This link between Islam and terrorism has led to new rounds of “culture talk”, as Mahmood Mamdani (2002: 766) points out, turning religion into a “political category, differentiating ‘good Muslims’ from ‘bad Muslims’” (*ibid*). The result is increasing Islamophobia and orientalist attitudes throughout the West.

However, mass migration existed within Europe before Islam and Muslims entered the modern European consciousness. In 16th century Europe, migration and European expansion resulted in “massive transfer of population from rural to urban areas within and across borders” (Murphy, 2012: 5). Migration to Europe, however, became increasingly popular from the second half of the twentieth century due to the “influence of decolonization, demographic change, rapid economic growth and the creation of the European Union as a free trade and migration zone” (*ibid*: 102). Even though this study will focus on this specific migration trend, i.e. from *East* to *West* (and South to North), one must bear in mind that migration from *West* to *East* – although for different motives and purposes, such as colonialism – has not stopped.

Wars and conflicts throughout Asia, the Middle East and Northern Africa, have resulted in a massive movement of populations to Europe.²⁴ The increasing number of refugees risking their lives to reach Europe seeking safety and protection has led to cries for “new vision in Europe’s approach to refugees” by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Filippo Grandi.²⁵ In Figure 1 below, one can see the number of (non-EU) asylum seekers in the largest European countries in 2014 and 2015.²⁶

Compared to Germany, Hungary and Sweden, Norway has received substantially fewer asylum seekers through its borders; but the flow increased dramatically in 2015. However, in 2016 the number decreased again, not because there is less conflict in the Middle East, but because of stricter asylum politics proposed by the right-wing political parties in Norway.²⁷ Another reason for the dramatic reduction of asylum flow into the country is that transit countries in Europe and Norway’s neighboring countries (Denmark and Sweden) have closed their borders – also as a reaction to the huge influx of migrants to Europe – making it more difficult for asylum seekers to reach to Norway.

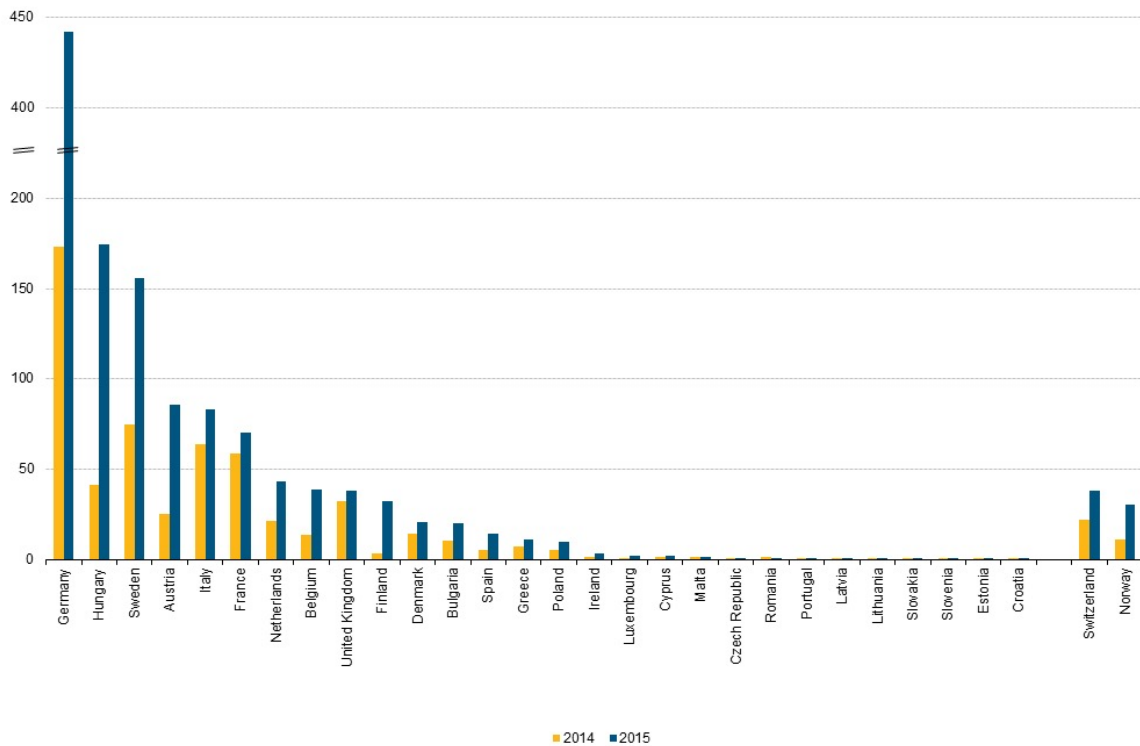
²⁴ It is estimated that over one million people have fled to Europe in 2015, according to UNHCR: <http://www.unhcr.org/europe-emergency.html> [Accessed 30.01.2017]

²⁵ UNHCR calls for new vision in Europe’s approach to refugees: <http://www.unhcr.org/news/latest/2016/12/584594224/unhcr-calls-new-vision-europes-approach-refugees.html> [Accessed 30.01.2017]

²⁶ Number of (non-EU) asylum seekers in the EU and EFTA Member States, 2014 and 2015 (thousands of first time applicants): [http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/File:Number_of_\(non-EU\)_asylum_seekers_in_the_EU_and_EFTA_Member_States,_2014_and_2015_\(thousands_of_first_time_applicants\)_YB16.png](http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/File:Number_of_(non-EU)_asylum_seekers_in_the_EU_and_EFTA_Member_States,_2014_and_2015_(thousands_of_first_time_applicants)_YB16.png) [Accessed 30.01.2017]

²⁷ Compared to 2015, where more than 30000 asylum seekers sought asylum in Norway (<https://www.udi.no/statistikk-og-analyse/statistikk/asylsoknader-etter-statsborgerskap-og-maned-2015/>), fewer than 5000 asylum seekers sought asylum in Norway in 2016: <https://www.udi.no/statistikk-og-analyse/statistikk/asylsoknader-etter-statsborgerskap-aldersgruppe-og-kjonn-2016/> [Accessed 30.01.2017]

Figure 1



Source: Eurostat (online data code: migr_asyappctza)

Norway’s immigration flow from Africa and the Middle East is, however, a relatively new phenomenon. To go back in history, the years between the Second World War and the Cold War there was no significant migration to the country. However, compared to Norway’s immigration history from before the Second World War, the 1940’s have affected Norway – and the rest of Europe – in terms of European immigration (Tjelmeland and Brochmann, 2003: 11).

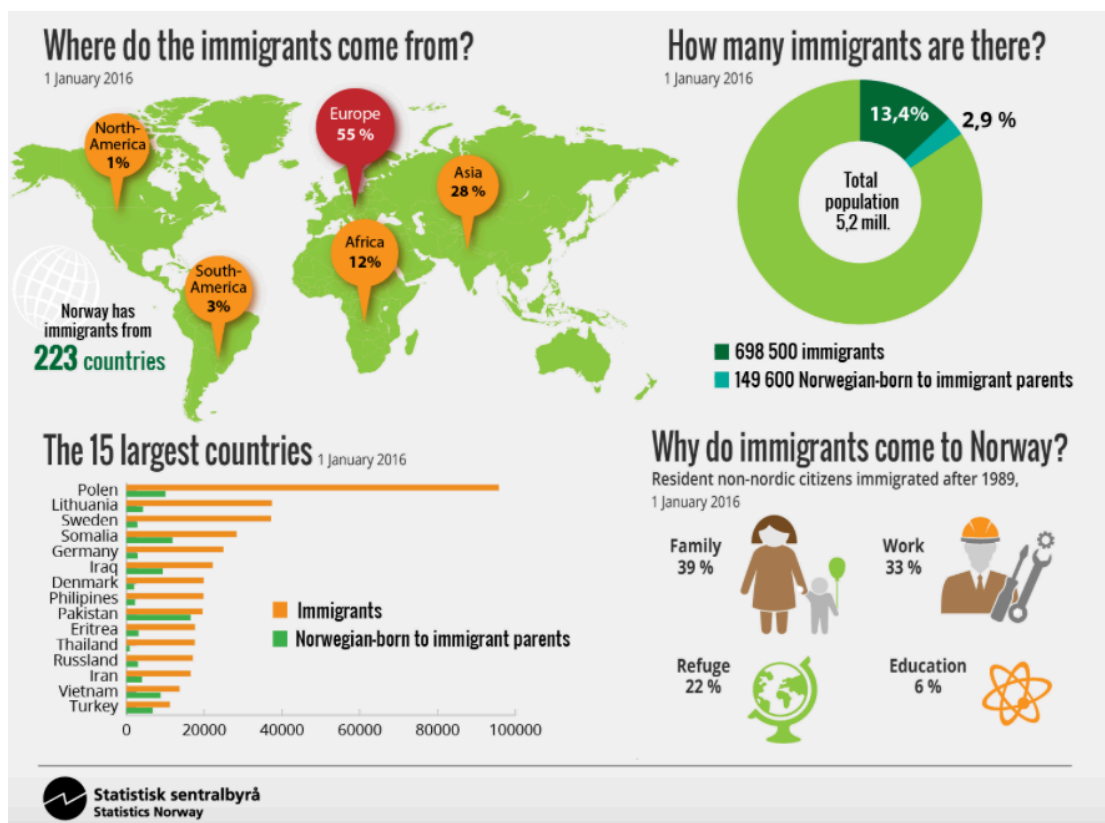
Before the mid 1960s Norway was a country of emigration, but after 1967 it was characterized by immigration (*ibid*: 85). In 1975, after years of migration mainly from Southern Europe, but also from Asia (largely from Pakistan), the Norwegian parliament passed a law of *Innvandringsstopp* – immigration ban, which was meant to limit the relatively large workforce into the country.

However, the mid-1970s marked a transformation of Norway from a homogenous society to an increasingly multicultural one. A study of the attitudes towards immigrants in Norway in the beginning of the 1970s shows that Norwegians were positive toward newcomers. Conversely, towards the end of the 1970s, a rather different attitude was starting

to take shape, and a survey showed that two out of three Norwegians thought that newcomers should adapt to the Norwegian culture (*ibid*: 133-134).

Despite Norway's policy of halting immigration, the flow of migrants continued. Family reunifications, students, foreign workers, asylum seekers and refugees characterized the migration trends to Norway in recent years (Eriksen, 2007: 9; Gullestad, 2010: 26). In recent years, especially after 2000, Norway's immigration flow has been dominated by labor migrants coming mostly from the EU, especially from Poland, Lithuania and Sweden, as shown in figure 2 below.²⁸

Figure 2



As shown in the figure above, 13,4 percent of Norway's population was of immigrant background in 2016. Even though the number is comparatively lower than other European countries, and bearing in mind that the number of immigrants from Asia and Africa in the country is lower than 10 percent,²⁹ the debate about immigrants and immigration (especially

²⁸ Figure from Statistic Norway, ssb.no: <https://www.ssb.no/en/innvandring-og-innvandrerer/nokkeltall/immigration-and-immigrants> [Accessed 30.01.2017]

²⁹ Statistics Norway: <https://ssb.no/befolkning/statistikker/innbef/aar/2016-03-03?fane=tabell&sort=nummer&tabell=258403> [Accessed 30.01.2017]

asylum seekers and refugees) from non-Western countries, is central both in Norwegian politics, the media and public debates (Gullestad, 2010: 29).

To sum up, from being a relatively ethnically homogenous nation, Norway has transformed into a multicultural society due to flow of non-European immigrants (Stokke, 2012: 25; Eriksen, 2007: 9), which has consequently led the “immigration debate” (Gullestad, 2010: 19), “the multicultural society” (Eriksen, 2007: 9) and “integration policy” (Stokke, 2012: 52) to become central topics in the Norwegian public sphere. The question that arises is, thus: How has the development of migration to Norway affected its integration and multicultural policies? This will be discussed thoroughly in the chapters below.

3.2 Integration vs. Assimilation, and the Norwegian Context

It is first important to define some key concepts in order to discuss Norway’s integration policies. Integration and assimilation are widely used in political and social forums in today’s contemporary Europe. They are, however, misunderstood and misused especially by politicians, as Modood emphasizes: “When politicians in Britain and especially continental Europe speak of integration, the meaning they usually have in mind is what I define as assimilation” (2013: 44). It is therefore appropriate to present precise definitions of the terms.

Integration is, according to Modood, a mutual social interaction between the majority and minority population, in which it is expected from both parties to participate so that the burden of integration does not fall merely on the minority. Importantly, those who have to take the lead of integration are the established society, through employment, government and other institutions (2013: 44). Similarly, integration is defined by the European Commission as a “dynamic, two-way process of mutual accommodation by migrants and by the societies that receive them”.³⁰ Both definitions of integration stress the mutuality between minorities and the majority, while Modood stresses the fact that integration is “an overarching concept” (*ibid*: 146) and that “equality of opportunity in an unsegmented society” is fundamental to the integration process (*ibid*).

Contrary to integration, *assimilation* is when the process of interaction and relationship between the minority and majority is a one-way process, and as Modood argues, where the majority expects no interference or disturbance from the newcomers, and rather, it expects them to blend into the new society and become as similar to the majority society as possible (*ibid*). In other words, assimilation marks individuals and groups by ‘difference’, and

³⁰ European Commission: https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/e-library/glossary/i_en [Accessed 30.01.2017]

minorities have to melt into the “dominant cultural pattern” (*ibid*: 149), and have little freedom to choose or cultivate their uniqueness.

European states’ perceptions and practices of integration vary (Triandafyllidou, Modood & Meer, 2012: 3): While one view of integration is that minorities should assimilate in order to participate in the political cultures of the host society, another view says that both individuals and groups should be provided for in formal and informal distribution of powers (*ibid*). Even though integration policies in Europe vary from one country to another, the general European debate argues for “tougher controls of migration” due to increasing international terrorism (*ibid*: 13). And as the fear of Muslim immigration to Europe escalates, skepticism towards multiculturalism is consequently increasing. European policy makers emphasize the importance of “national values” and the “duty of newcomers to integrate and accommodate themselves to their host society’s way of life” (Murphy, 2012: 2). This rhetoric, together with strong signals by policy makers that immigrants are seen as a threat to national communities and identity, has led to more restrictive immigration policies in Europe (Gressgård, 2010: x). Gressgård stresses the fact, however, that “the degree to which immigrants are positively valued is indeed conditioned by the general climate of political debate”, which is influenced by various factors, such as the state situation of the labor market and how negatively ethnic minorities are portrayed in the media (*ibid*: xi).

Directing this to the Norwegian context and questioning Norway’s concept of integration and assimilation, Marianne Gullestad (2010: 19), in line with Modood, distinguishes between *assimilation* and *integration* thus: “As a goal, the word assimilation is connected to an ambition that ‘immigrants’ shall entirely adopt the majority’s culture”, while integration relates to a wish that “they shall participate completely, without necessarily having to renounce all their national and religious distinctiveness”. In practice, these two terms can be the same, she argues: “Attempts to improve immigrants’ Norwegian skills, for example, can be seen as both an attempt to make them Norwegian, or an attempt to help them become able to participate in social and political life” (*ibid*: 20). Integration seen by Norwegians can accordingly, in practice, end up being full assimilation, especially when the definition of how well integrated immigrants are, is exclusively determined by the powerful majority.

Last, Gressgård argues that integration in Norway is a clear sign of “planned pluralism” (2010: 11), in the sense that it is pre-defined, and thus does not promote equality or distinctiveness. When policy documents regarding integration are written, they are designed to promote and cultivate the norms and values of the majority, assuming that they are

universal (*ibid*). Gressgård further argues that by regulating and illegalizing certain practices that are allowed in certain minority cultures, Norway's integration policy leaves no space for cultural relativism, and portrays such practices rather as a threat to liberal values (*ibid*: 9). To take an example, the Norwegian government (through policy documents) deals with issues such as forced marriages, female circumcision and polygamy as illegal practices relating to specific cultures, insinuating that they are a threat to liberal values, and should therefore be forbidden and banished for the sake of successful integration (*ibid*). In other words, this is a way of dissolving separate cultural spheres, forcing them to enlist into the dominant Norwegian values, but at the same time it creates a clear signal that the Norwegian culture is "modern and liberated", whereas non-Norwegian cultures are subject to other threatening cultures and traditions, and consequently need to be integrated into the norms and values of the majority (*ibid*). As a result, a clear distinction between "us" and "them" is created, illustrating the ethnocentric integration policy of the Norwegian state.

Having seen integration and assimilation in the European and the Norwegian context, it is essential to look deeper into Norway's practice of integration through its integration policies. This will be the focus of the following sub-chapters, through a closer look into Norway's white papers on integration.

3.3 Norway's Integration Policy: Diversity or Paternalism?

Integration in Norway became an issue in the 1970s, alongside the first immigration flow from non-Western countries. The first white paper on integration was written in 1974, and the main points related to the rules and regulations relating to immigration (2011a: 11-12). In the same white paper, the terms *assimilation*, *integration* and *adaptation* were discussed. Additionally, it is proposed already in the document that adult immigrants should be offered lessons in Norwegian and social studies, although they should not be obligatory. It is important to bear in mind that the main target group was foreign workers, the main group of immigrants from non-Western societies. Central goal of the ministry was to enable better resettlement and easier enrollment to the labor market (*ibid*).

An integration policy, according to Djuve, can be "more or less ethnocentric" in character, and disputes around the issue of "adaptation" (of minorities and the majority, respectively) are usually apparent both in official formulations of integration policies and in political debates (*ibid*). She further distinguishes between the rhetorical level (in which formulation of goals takes place), the practical level (concrete measures), and the implementation level in the integration policy (*ibid*).

To elaborate, Randi Gressgård (2010) has referred to the problem of ethnocentrism through an analysis of previous white papers, White Paper Nr. 17 (1996-1997), *On Immigration and Multicultural Norway*, and White Paper Nr. 49 (2003-2004), *Diversity Through Inclusion and Participation: Responsibility and Freedom*. Gressgård asserts that neither of the two documents recognizes cultural distinctiveness, and that White Paper Nr. 49 (2003-2004) focuses on “participation and responsibility of immigrants and their descendants in the process of integration” (*ibid*: 6). In addition, cultural distinctiveness is respected only as long as it conforms to the society’s norms and values. An example is that White Paper Nr. 17 (1996-1997) does not acknowledge mother-tongue teaching as a way of cultivating cultural development. Rather, it suggests that mother-tongue teaching will help with learning other subjects, as a tool for integration (Gressgård & Jacobsen, 2003: 75). In other words, integration, according to these white papers, reflects an ethnocentric attitude that serves the dominant majority and its “values”, giving the responsibility merely to the minority, making it in fact more of an assimilation policy.

The various white papers and other official documents regarding integration may differ in rhetoric and formulations, but – as Gressgård (2005a: 20) puts it – they “do not include any multicultural arguments for the recognition of immigrants’ cultural peculiarities”, because Norway is not bound by Norwegian law or international conventions to take into consideration minorities’ culture (*ibid*). In other words, multiculturalism in Norway, is as Gressgård puts it, is less of a “multicultural dialogue” and more of a “Norwegian monologue”, where the Norwegian interests take a bigger place than the individual (2005b: 74).

To move forward, while the focus of the previous white paper (White Paper Nr. 6, 2012-2013), titled *A Comprehensive Integration Policy – Diversity and Community*, emphasizes community cohesion, loyalty to shared values and acceptance of diversity, and at the same time focuses on employment and belonging (Stokke, 2012:49), the latest white paper’s primary focus is how to ensure that asylum seekers and refugees are integrated into the Norwegian labor market and that “knowledge of the Norwegian language and society is necessary for people who remain in Norway for an extended period of time” (White Paper Nr. 30: 2015-2016). It suggests that newcomers to Norway are required to work hard in order to be accepted. It further stresses the fact that immigrants themselves have an obligation towards their new country of residence, and they have to ensure – through active participation and acceptance of Norwegian values – good and successful integration. There are, in other words, clear expectations and conditionality by the authorities from newcomers

to learn how to melt into the new culture quickly and efficiently in order to become active contributors to Norwegian society, and the labor market.

To elaborate, in the most recent policy document (White Paper Nr. 30: 2015-2016), *From reception center to the labor market – an effective integration policy*, Norwegian integration policy is characterized with stricter and tougher demands from refugees. It assumes that immigrants do not wish to integrate into Norwegian society, and instead of working, they prefer to be on welfare. Consequently, immigrants have to be forced to work, to participate and to integrate. Affected by the general European political climate, and the aftermath of mass immigration, especially from Syria and the Middle East, Norway – led by the conservative right and the Progress Party FrP (a party that has gained its popularity through anti-immigrant rhetoric) – announced “a stricter asylum policy”.³¹ Norway’s minister of immigration and integration, Sylvi Listhaug, a member of the FrP, announced that “parallel societies are a result of misplaced kindness”,³² and she has continuously fought for a policy which will lead to less immigration to Norway, and stricter demands on asylum seekers and refugees already residing in Norway.³³

The term “misplaced kindness”, with its variations “excessive generosity” and “foolish generosity”, translated into Norwegian as *snillisme*, was first used by the Progress Party in the late 1980s, and later by other political parties (Stokke, 2012: 52-55). It refers to people who take advantage of the welfare state and do not contribute in return, and as a result, these politicians believe, need to face stricter demands (*ibid*). This is, according to Stokke, linked to a neoliberal attack on social democracy and multiculturalism (*ibid*). The term is still used, mainly against immigrants and marginalized groups in Norway, both in public and political debates.

Demands on asylum seekers, who by definition are not citizens of Norway and cannot even be certain of a future in Norway, are also clearly stated in the last White Paper (White Paper Nr. 30: 2015-2016): “the UDI has been given the task of ensuring that asylum seekers residing in reception centers get information and guidance about Norwegian society, in order to prevent violence and harassment” (*ibid*: 23). Such information, schooling and training programs are organized and implemented within the Obligatory Information Program in reception centers, and within other activities and schooling programs organized in reception

³¹ Government.no: <https://www.regjeringen.no/en/topics/immigration/asylum-regulations-in-norway/insight/stricter-asylum-regulations-in-norway/id2460759/> [Accessed 30.01.2017]

³² Aftenposten.no: <http://www.aftenposten.no/norge/Listhaug-Parallellsamfunn-et-resultat-av-snillisme-60871b.html> [Accessed 30.01.2017]

³³ In a press release from 2016, the Ministry of Justice and Public Security expressed necessity of tightening Norway’s asylum rules <https://www.regjeringen.no/en/aktuelt/nodvendige-innstramninger/id2505028/> and immigration rules: <https://www.regjeringen.no/en/aktuelt/tightening-of-immigration-rules/id2509865/> [Accessed 30.01.2017]

centers. The program can, thus, be seen as a tool to prepare people for integration in Norway, or as preparation for a possible integration into Norwegian society. It is, in other words, possible to see the Information Program not just as information about Norwegian society, but as a tool used by the authorities to teach newcomers what it takes to be able to live and be accepted in Norway. It also insinuates that immigrants from non-Western societies have little knowledge about Norwegian and Western values, and therefore need to be taught for the purpose of successful integration in Norway.

Gressgård (2005a: 19) argues that it is Norwegian culture itself that – paradoxically – limits the society’s cultural diversity. She further asserts that Norway’s integration debate and official policies, like those of other Western and European societies, have been influenced by the terrorist attacks against the U.S. in 2001, and the debate has since focused on “where the limit of tolerance goes” (*ibid*). This is to say, Norway’s integration policy focuses on the differences that immigrants bring with them, and on how these differences can fit into the Norwegian society, and how they can be tolerated. Difference, therefore, is seen as a challenge, not a resource. And even though it is not stated or expressed explicitly in policy papers, the expectation towards successful integration in Norway means, in practice, that newcomers should adopt Norwegian society’s values and way of life in order to be seen as part of it. This reflects an underlying assumption of superior Norwegian culture in terms of democracy and human rights, and at the same time a portrayal of minorities as people belonging to cultures that do not represent the same values.

The above overview about Norway’s integration policy raises the question of whether integration in this context is actually a conscious assimilation policy, in which individuals are expected to melt into society by learning about and adapting to its values and way of life. This will be discussed below, looking into Norway’s distinction of its own culture as opposition to the “other”.

3.4 The Norwegian “We” and the Issue of the “Other”

Having received its full independence in 1905, after years of Danish dominance and a long-lasting union with Sweden, Norway can be seen as a “new” nation still preoccupied with nation building. In addition, its national identity and “cultural distinctiveness” became stronger after the Second World War and the German occupation (Vike, 2007: 134). According to Vike, Norway can be characterized as a *monoculture*, in the sense that its cultural varieties are relatively small (It can, however, be debated whether the cultural varieties are indeed small, or if this is “*imagined sameness*” (Gullestad, 2010), repressing

actual diversity (this will be discussed further below). Culture, in the Norwegian context, is seen as something “the other” has, which instantly distinguishes “them” from the Norwegian majority (Vike, 2007: 138). At the same time, Norwegian society is diverse; both due to the growing number of groups with other traditions and cultures, and also within the majority culture itself (*ibid*).

The question of identity in Norway, as in many other countries, has been ethnicity-related, according to Gullestad (2001: 33). Negative portrayals of the immigrant (*innvandrere*) and contrasting them with the ‘Norwegian’, creates affirmation of difference, leading to what Gullestad calls “invisible fences” (*ibid*: 36). These invisible fences create real barriers when immigrants are associated with, among other things, criminality, unemployment and fundamentalism. As a result, immigrants will be seen as a problematic, and not a resourceful, group (*ibid*: 47).

This portrayal of immigrants, especially those of non-Western origin, and the creation of invisible (or actual) fences, is not unique to Norway. Muslims are especially targeted, and are portrayed by the Western media, politicians and by public opinion, as holders of different values than those considered to be universal Western values. However, a survey by John L. Esposito and Dalia Mogahed (2007) opposes this stereotype, and reveals that, in fact, the vast majority of Muslims perceive Muslim and Western values to be compatible. They also support democracy, equality between genders and human rights. In addition, the survey says, Muslim women – who are constantly portrayed in the Western media as victims of their religion and cultures – believe in gender equality, empowerment and freedom of speech. They do not perceive themselves to be inferior, and do not wish to be “liberated” by the West (*ibid*).

In Norway, rhetoric about Muslim women as victims of their culture is also commonly used (Razack, 2004). Violence against Muslim women is understood to be an act originating from within their culture, without taking into consideration the various factors that lead to violence, as opposed to violence against Western women, which is defined as acts by individuals (*ibid*: 129). Furthermore, the distinction between “honor killing” and “passion killing”, referring to the former as an act inspired by culture/race, and to the latter as an act originating in gender (*ibid*), creates a belief that violence is culturally-related in non-Western societies, whereas it is not cultural, but individual-related in Western cultures. Inevitably, this generates the notion of “us” versus “them”, in which non-Westerners and their cultures are seen as violent and aggressive.

Going back to the Norwegian identity question, Gullestad (2010) asserts that while the Western world is often characterized by egalitarian individualism (*egalitær individualisme*), the tendency in Norway and the Nordic countries is that people need to feel *alike* in order for them to feel that they “fit together” (*ibid*: 82). Referring to how Norwegians look at immigrants, Gullestad says that while the lines dividing class are becoming almost invisible among Norwegians, the dividing lines between Norwegians and immigrants are becoming more obvious (*ibid*: 84). In her opinion, this is a result of Norway being both a bureaucratic welfare state and an increasingly globalized and capitalist economy, which offers an interesting analysis of the concept of being alike (2001: 38). She says that in many situations people in Norway and the Nordic countries need to feel that they are alike – or the same – in order for them to feel that they are equal (*likeverdige*). In this sense, when the similarities are highlighted, the differences are kept at bay, and “in this way equality conceived as sameness is not concrete sameness, but a style of focusing on sameness” (*ibid*). Gullestad calls this phenomenon “imagined sameness” (*ibid*). Paradoxically, when the focus of the sameness is defined, it is according to Gullestad, possible to get a confirmation of one’s individual uniqueness (*ibid*). However, when the concept of similarity (*likhet*) is portrayed as positive, even though differences are accepted, it is a problem when other people are perceived as different: “Difference is seen as a deficiency: Those who are different, lack something essential” (2010: 83).

To conclude, taking into consideration the predetermined difference between “us” and “them”, and the attempt to teach immigrants about Norwegian values as a key to Norwegian society, one can conclude that Norway’s policy of integration has clear elements of assimilation.

3.5 Activation of Refugees in Norway for “Successful Integration”

Norway’s practical work, and efforts towards integration of immigrants, were until the start of the millennium characterized by variations in “content, scope and quality”, but were later standardized by reforms which made all resettled refugees attend the same qualification program (Introductory Program), regardless of which municipality they resided in (Djuve, 2011a: 7). In her research about the Introductory Program for Refugees, Djuve claims that the Introductory Act (*Introduksjonsordningen*), that was created in 2002, presents a divide in Norwegian integration policies. Through a reform in Norway’s integration policy towards refugees, the State has taken control over, and has standardized, the local integration of immigrants (*ibid*).

The main purpose of the Introductory Program, as mentioned in the introduction, is to integrate newly resettled refugees in municipalities into Norwegian society, through *obligatory* participation in Norwegian classes, lessons in social sciences, and activation in the labor market (*ibid*). Like asylum seekers in reception centers who do not attend the Obligatory Information Program, refugees who do not participate in the Introductory Program for valid and authorized reasons, are sanctioned economically and can lose some of their rights. This reform, according to Djuve, can be seen as problematic, as it presents a “violation of the principle of the welfare policy of equal treatment of everyone with legal residence in Norway” (*ibid*).

While Edward Said (1995) claims that the relationship between West and East is built upon power and domination, Djuve investigates whether the conditionality of the Introductory Program as a Norwegian social and political policy “is imposed in order to qualify and enable (empowerment), or is rather motivated by an intention to control and deter (neoliberalism)” (2011b: 113). The empowerment discourse (ED) is evident in the Act’s objective, through individual customization, training in the Norwegian language and social studies, user involvements and introductory benefits through conditional participation in the program (*ibid*: 121). However, critics compare the conditionality and economic sanctions for lack of participation in the program as being equivalent with moral underclass discourse (MUD), as it highlights “the need to discipline social assistance clients” (*ibid*). Containing elements of empowerment discourse (ED), political equality/equal opportunities (PED), and moral underclass discourse (MUD), the Introductory Act has been embraced by political parties on the left and right, in an attempt to create a new activation policy within integration, causing, according to Djuve, an influence on Norway’s integration policy (*ibid*: 121-122). She further asserts that it is “plausible that the mixture of ideological motivations for the act increased its political attractiveness” (*ibid*: 122). Regardless, the result of such activation of refugees through the Introductory Program gives the Norwegian authorities immense power over the members of the program (Djuve, 2010: 406). To conclude, Djuve argues that the nature of this introductory program, characterized by “entry and restricted exit”, is “explicitly paternalistic” (*ibid*: 407), with the ambition to “influence the actions of immigrants” (*ibid*: 419).

Even though Djuve refers in her research to a much broader aspect of Norway’s integration and social policy than merely the social studies that are taught to immigrants, her study can, to an extent, be compared to my investigation of the Obligatory Information Program for asylum seekers. Both refer to how the Norwegian authorities deal with

immigrants and what the tools used say about their integration policies. In other words, I find Djuve's field of research on the Introductory Program not only relevant, but also applicable to my study, as it illustrates Norway's integration policy and Norway's relationship to "the other" within its borders.

When it comes to conditionality and economic sanctions for not participating in, for example, social studies classes, the same can be said about the practical measurements around asylum seekers in reception centers. Participation (and the lack of that) in the Obligatory Information Program affects the amount of money that asylum seekers receive from the UDI.³⁴ Asylum seekers in Norwegian reception centers, in other words, are provided with almost identical services and offers, regardless of where in the country they reside. This includes the Information Program and language classes, that – similarly to the Introductory Program for refugees – are both obligatory for asylum seekers.³⁵

To sum up, Norway's introductory act, through conditional and obligatory participation in the introductory program for refugees, is a reflection of a policy that aims to control and influence immigrants and their choices. It is in other words a paternalistic tool used in the name of successful integration.

3.6 Summary

This chapter sought to present migration trends in Europe and Norway, and Norway's integration policy. Migration to Norway is seen as a new reality, and with the immigration halt and the increase in refugees and asylum seekers to the country in recent years, Norway has seen reforms in its integration policy. Today's integration policy is characterized with a pre-defined conditionality, with an attempt to cultivate the interests of the majority. In addition, this chapter has discussed the issue of identity in Norway, and concludes that it is ethnicity-related, and that *imagined sameness* leads to the notion that difference is seen as a challenge in the Norwegian society.

The next chapter presents the theoretical framework, starting with Edward Said's Orientalism and Paulo Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed, and later presents theories of multiculturalism and integration, to determine how hosting societies of minorities are required to accommodate their new residents.

³⁴ It should be noted that economic sanctions in reception centers are low compared to the introductory act. Having said that, it is the ideology behind such sanctions that is important here

³⁵ The language courses are obligatory merely for those with residency permit, and still live in reception centers.

4. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter discusses the theoretical framework on which this study is based. It draws on Edward Said's theory of Orientalism, as well as Freire's Dialogical Pedagogy. Additionally, this chapter discusses the opposing view presented in Samuel Huntington's contradictory approach in *The Clash of Civilizations*, in which he aims to problematize the notion of cultural diversity and its impact on multicultural societies. I aim to discuss Said and Huntington's approaches to shared values, linking them to empirical reality in the next chapters. In addition, I look deeper into theories of multiculturalism by Tariq Modood and theories of recognition by various scholars. The purpose of my theoretical framework is to link it to my empirical data and analyze both in connection with each other.

4.1 Orientalism and the Pedagogy of the Oppressed

Edward W. Said is one of the main contributors to the field of postcolonial theory and the dynamics between the West and the East. I choose Said's theory of Orientalism as a framework within which to analyze my data for several reasons. First, Said is interested in the dynamics and power relationship between the *West* and *East*. He asserts that Western imperialist powers justify imperialism by portraying Eastern cultures as backward, chauvinistic and inferior. Similarly, this study aims to understand the relationship between a Western state, Norway, its integration policy, and how that policy is seen by asylum seekers from the East. Second, The Information Program aims to teach newly arrived asylum seekers about Norwegian values, law and traditions from the perspective of a Western hosting society. This immediately raises the question of whether Norway automatically perceives non-Westerners as people with different values and perceptions of what is good or bad and who, consequently, need to be taught about Western civilizations.

Said's theory of Orientalism, which he refers to as a "study of imperialism and culture", seeks to demonstrate the patronizing Western attitude and rhetoric commonly used about non-Western, especially near-Eastern, societies. Said argues that the Orientalist mindset limits Westerners' ability to see and understand the merits of other cultures, indeed he writes that "Orientalism is better grasped as a set of constraints upon and limitations of thought than it is simply as a positive doctrine" (1995: 42). Drawing on Foucault's discourse theory and Gramsci's theory of hegemony, Said's argument is that Orientalism is formed by how the West portrays and "knows" the Orient, emphasizing Western dominance, hegemony and superiority. He argues that the phenomenon of Orientalism emerged after Western countries' expansion into Asia and elsewhere left Europeans in control of 85 per cent of the earth's

surface by 1915, from 35 per cent a century earlier (*ibid*: 41). The rhetoric about the Orient portrays the non-Westerners, or the Orientals, as “the other”, and as inferior to Western values, culture and traditions (*ibid*).

According to Said, the British and French pursued their colonial interests in the lands of the Orient, particularly the Middle East, where they agreed to divide large areas of territory between them during and after the First World War. However, it was not only “the land, or profit or rule” that were shared between the British and the French, but also “the kind of intellectual power” that Said calls *Orientalism* (*ibid*):

In a sense Orientalism was a library or archive of information commonly and [...] unanimously held. What bound the archive together was a family of ideas and a unifying set of values proven in various ways to be effective. These ideas explained the behavior of Orientals, they supplied Orientals with a mentality, a genealogy, an atmosphere; most important, they allowed Europeans to deal with and even to see Orientals as a phenomenon possessing regular characteristics.

Asserting that modern Westerners have a superficial view of the religion of Islam as being merely political, lacking in liberal values, and unable to separate politics from culture (*ibid*: 299), Said claims that this is essentially a Western ideology that wants to separate the West from the Other, and it gives the Orientalist the superiority of *knowing* the Orient much more than Orientals do themselves (*ibid*). Said summarizes the four “principal dogmas of Orientalism” which “exist in their purest form today” thus: (1) an absolute and systematic difference between the rational, developed, humane and superior West and the undeveloped, inferior Orient, (2) abstractions about the Orient as “classical” are preferred to empirical reality of the modern Orient, (3) the Orient is eternal, uniform and incapable of defining itself, therefore Western ‘objective’ definition is essential, and (4) the Orient is something to be feared and controlled (*ibid*: 300-301; see also Stokke, 2012: 22-23). Indeed, this portrayal of Islam as politicized and non-Western cultures as a primitive, dangerous “Other” that threatens Western values, is a rhetoric widely and openly used in modern Europe.

The rhetoric around the “ineradicable distinction between Western superiority and Oriental inferiority” (1995: 42) is what creates the notion of “*us*” versus “*them*”, and to the notion of what Huntington refers to as “The Clash of Civilizations” (1993). In his essay, Huntington concludes:

Western civilization is both Western and modern. Non-Western civilizations have attempted to become modern without becoming Western [...]. Non-Western civilizations will continue to attempt to acquire the wealth, technology, skills, machines and weapons that are part of being modern. They

will also attempt to reconcile this modernity with their traditional culture and values [...]. This will require the West to maintain the economic and military power necessary to protect its interests in relation to these civilizations.

For his part, Said suggest that “the clash of civilizations” is a political agenda, and that Huntington’s essay is “misleading” and “is useful as a way of exaggerating and making intractable various political or economic problems” (2000: 571). The timing and populist character of Huntington’s essay, according to Said, is what has made it of interest to “post-Cold War policy-makers” (*ibid*: 573). He suggests that Huntington has been influenced more by popular journalism and less by academic and scholarly facts, and argues that historian and Middle East expert Bernard Lewis – who, according to Said, is the “main spokesman of Orientalism” – is one of Huntington’s main references.

Narrowing the clash of civilizations between the West and East to the Muslim threat towards the West, Lewis (quoted in Huntington, 1993) claims that the West needs to sharpen its policies in order to protect itself from rivals to a “Judeo-Christian heritage” and Western secular values. Politicians and policy-makers in Western democracies use such rhetoric. And it, consequently, creates fear and resentment towards “the other”, and larger (imaginary) differences between civilizations, which is precisely Said’s concern. Furthermore, such division between the modern West and the primitive East/Islam has, as Mamdani points out, “turned religious experience into a political category”, referring to the view of Islam in the aftermath of 9/11, where Muslims have been categorized into westernized “good Muslims” and anti-modern “bad Muslims” (2002: 766).

The increasing presence of Muslims in secular Europe has led to “increased assertions of Enlightenment secularism and of (cultural) Christianity” (Triandafyllidou, Modood & Meer, 2012: 9). Not least, Muslim-Western relations post-9/11, according to Modood (2013: 19), have been characterized by the need of Western societies to demand loyalty from their Muslim minorities. However, Modood argues that moderate secularism and not “radical, ideological secularism” is more successful in accommodating Muslims (*ibid*).

Said’s Orientalism has been appreciated, praised and also criticized by many scholars. In *Orientalism Reconsidered* he attempts to explain his theory saying that his work has been misunderstood and interpreted, and asserts: “The challenge to Orientalism, and the colonial era of which it is so organically a part, was a challenge to the muteness imposed upon the Orient as object [...] Orientalism was a scientific movement whose analogue in the world of politics was the Orient’s colonial accumulation and acquisition by Europe. The Orient was, therefore, not Europe’s interlocutor, but its silent Other” (2000: 202).

While Said's concern is the dynamics and power relationship between West and East, and the superiority the West claims over the East, Paulo Freire (2005) is interested in the dynamics between the oppressor and the oppressed, and how pedagogy can be used as a tool to control and manipulate the oppressed. He asserts that *prescription* is one of the basic elements that highlights the relationship between the oppressor and the oppressed: "Every prescription represents the imposition of one individual's choice upon another, transforming the consciousness of the person prescribed to into one that conforms with the prescriber's consciousness" (2005: 47). It is, thus, a relationship of control, where the oppressor makes the oppressed into a receiving object, and consequently, a notion of dehumanization becomes inevitable. Freire claims that "concern for humanization leads at once to the recognition of dehumanization, not only as an ontological possibility, but as an historical reality" (*ibid*: 43). However, he states that "while both humanization and dehumanization are real alternatives, only the first is the people's vocation" (*ibid*).

Dialogical pedagogy is, according to Freire, the key for liberation. He says that critical dialogue must be "carried on with the oppressed at whatever the stage of their struggle for liberation" (*ibid*: 65), because when the oppressed does not participate in the process of their own liberation, they will be, in other words, treated as objects (*ibid*). Contrary, the process of liberation, through reflective, critical and liberating dialogue with the oppressed, leads to action, and consequently to humanization (*ibid*: 66).

4.2 Theories of Multiculturalism

The end of World War II marks the start of the consciousness over human rights and freedom, solidarity between nations and states, and The Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Multiculturalism, according to Tariq Modood (2013: 2) has a more restricted meaning in the European context than in the United States. Whereas in the latter, Multiculturalism relates to "progressive politics" and "politics of identity" that emerged in the 1960's, where Blacks, women and gays focused on claims of group differences, Multiculturalism in Britain and elsewhere in Europe emerged from a "fundamental movement of peoples", in which immigration from outside of Europe by non-whites has been the main focus.

Even though Europe is receiving a rising number of immigrants creating more diverse and heterogeneous societies, European governments have become critical to the notion of multiculturalism, as they see it as a "failed experiment" (Stokke, 2012:17; Lentin and Titley, 2011: 1). An example is German Chancellor Angela Merkel's declaration in 2011 that

“multiculturalism has failed, really failed” (Triandafyllidou, Modood & Meer, 2012: 1), followed by Prime Minister David Cameron of Britain announcing that “multiculturalism is dead” (Stokke, 2012: 17). Moreover, multiculturalists are accused of being willing to tolerate intolerant cultures, and being obsessed with cultural difference, which, according to the critics, might lead to discrimination, class divisions and socio-economic deprivation (Murphy, 2012: 3).

To move forward, the question of *Multiculturalism* is one of the most hotly debated issues in Europe today. Developed in Canada and Australia as a state policy in the 1970s, Multiculturalism in Europe has been regarded as a failed experiment, even though most European countries have passed multicultural policies (Stokke, 2012: 16-17). Multiculturalism, according to Modood, is not an abstract idea, but a form of integration, since it recognizes groups, not just individuals. He defines it as a “two-way process of integration but, additionally, it is taken to work differently for different groups” (2013: 44-45). Since every group is distinctive, integration has to adapt to differences and diverse identities, and thus cannot consist of a “single template” (*ibid*).

Furthermore, “multicultural accommodation”, according to him, works on two levels: First, it helps create a form of belonging to the country, and second, it helps sustain origins and diaspora (*ibid*). It is, in other words, about recognizing the social reality of groups, and therefore results in the “formation of hyphenated identities, such as Jewish-American or British-Muslim” (*ibid*), without having these identities competing with the sense of nationality or creating disloyalty.

Modood’s extensive theory of Multiculturalism is more pragmatic and empirical than other more normative theories. However, when it comes to the dynamics between Western vs. non-Western (especially Muslim) cultures, multiculturalism and successful integration as Modood (2013) defines it, can be challenged. In his article, Good Muslim, Bad Muslim (2002), Mamdani draws a picture over the view of Muslims today, and asserts that Islam today “whether in Afghanistan, Palestine, or Pakistan, must be quarantined and the devil must be exorcized from it by civil war between Good Muslims and bad Muslims” (*ibid*: 766). Just as the West categorizes Muslims by good and bad, Mamdani suggests that Westerners should also be labeled good Westerners and bad Westerners (*ibid*). However, Westerners are rarely labeled this way, not by themselves or others. The reason lies in the uneven power relations between the West and non-West, a relationship of powerful versus weak. Modood emphasizes that Islamophobia and anti-Islam are attitudes that are being developed into “an ideology in the context of a neo-conservative geopolitical strategy to

dominate Muslims” (2013: 121). This corresponds to Said’s argument about the dynamics of power carried out by the West.

Finally, Modood’s (2013) theory of multiculturalism is about the recognition of groups, not just individuals, on cultural, religious, social and political levels. Multiculturalism is about appreciating and accommodating difference, and perceiving difference as a resource, and not an obstacle, to positive and successful integration. In addition, Multiculturalism is about inclusion, equality dignity and equal respect.

4.3 Theories of Recognition and Accommodation

According to Charles Taylor, minorities’ need for recognition in contemporary multicultural societies has been fundamental in the creation of nationalist movements in politics. He suggests that “our identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence” (1994: 25), and that non-recognition can be harmful to people, and lead to a “reduced mode of being” (*ibid*). Lack of recognition towards colonized people, and the portrayal of them as “inferior” and uncivilized has, according to Taylor, been used as a tool by Europeans imposing their innate feelings of superiority and imposed on the conquered (*ibid*).

The feeling of inferiority by the colonized towards the colonizer is, discussed in Frantz Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952). He describes the psychological impact of colonization on the colonized, and the feelings of exclusion and alienation that the colonized experience. Although this does not directly relate to the core of this study, the power relationship between Colonizer-Colonized and Orient-Occident (which is largely a result of colonization) draws an immense similarity with the focus of this study. It is the relationship between the superior and inferior, the strong and the weak, and not the least the (to a large extent imaginary) difference between civilizations, between “us” and “them”.

Taylor (1994) discusses the discourse of recognition on two levels: the individual identity and the collective identity, and the “tension” between equal dignity (towards individuals) and distinctiveness (towards individuals belonging to a certain culture) in multicultural societies. Gressgård (2010: 2) follows Taylor’s lead and suggests that in the debate on multiculturalism, recognizing cultural distinctiveness is the main issue and is articulated as a question of tolerance. Additionally, Modood (2013: 34) argues that accommodating and recognizing difference and respecting individual identities are essential for multiculturalism, and cannot be disregarded in the name of integration. “Negative difference”, in the form of alienation, stigmatization and discrimination creates a feeling of inferiority and the loss of one’s identity, which creates the notion of “us-them” (*ibid*).

Speaking of difference in the field of race, religion, ethnicity and cultural heritage, Modood (*ibid*: 35) argues that difference relates to “ways of thinking, acting and organizing across many, if not all, social and institutional contexts” (*ibid*). When these differences are accommodated and recognized, through political mobilization and dialogue, negative difference becomes positive difference (*ibid*: 36-37). That is when Multiculturalism functions well in a social constitution.

4.4 Summary

This chapter has defined and summarized the theoretical framework and positioning upon which this thesis builds. It presented Said’s theory of Orientalism, which describes patronizing Western attitudes and rhetoric towards non-Western, especially Oriental, societies. The Western perception of the East is that the latter is inferior, primitive and possibly dangerous to Western values, culture and traditions. Furthermore, this chapter has presented Freire’s theory of liberation through dialogical pedagogy, where the oppressed are active participants in the process of their own liberation. In addition, I have presented Modood’s theory of Multiculturalism, which is defined as a two-way process of integration that adapts to differences and diversity. Lastly, this chapter presented theories of recognition and accommodation by various other scholars. The above outlined overview of theory will be used to analyze my empirical data in the chapters below.

5. DATA ANALYSIS: THE STATE'S PERSPECTIVE

This chapter analyzes UDI's policy papers concerning the Obligatory Information Program for Asylum Seekers, through theory. Similar to the Introductory Program discussed in chapter (3) above, the Obligatory Information Program for asylum seekers aims to prepare refugees for life in Norway, with the purpose of good integration. As mentioned in the introduction, a new version of the Information Program has been under revision by the UDI, which plans to implement it in reception centers in 2017.³⁶ The UDI said it is changing the program for three reasons. First, it wishes to establish a closer link between the asylum process and the kind of information that asylum seekers receive in reception centers. Second, the UDI has established new information principles, in the form of a directive from the Ministry of Immigration and Integration. And third, the UDI now requires reception centers to focus their information on residence and return. This is a shift in priorities, from easing asylum seekers' passage into Norway, to encourage them to leave in case they are denied residency in Norway, and to give those who receive asylum information about how to integrate in Norway.³⁷ In this chapter, I intend to analyze the aims of the program and some of the contents of its modules, linking them to theories that have been discussed above.

5.1 What is the Purpose of the Information Program?

As mentioned in the previous chapters, Norway's policy of immigration ban (*innvandreringstopp*) since the mid-1970's has changed the volume and nature of immigration to the country. Today immigrants from non-European states are allowed to receive a residency permit only if they qualify for refugee status and family reunification (Gressgård: 2005a: 7-8). This limitation suggests that immigrants of non-Western origin represent a threat to "Norwegianess", defined by descent, cultural practice and citizenship. Even though some aspects of immigration can be portrayed as positive in white papers (see White Paper Nr. 49 from 2003-2004), it is stressed that diversity is positive only as long as it unfolds within the frame of shared values (*felles verdier*) (*ibid*). UDI's Information Program, first implemented in 2005, can be seen as a result of such an integration policy, as it aims to teach immigrants about Norwegian values, to ensure that these values are not shaken or threatened by the arrival of immigrants from non-Western societies.

³⁶ It is unclear when the new information program will be enforced. According to officials at the UDI, the program is scheduled to start not before the summer of 2017 (information received orally in a seminar by UDI in December 5th, 2016).

³⁷ This data has been received in a seminar by UDI in December 5th, 2016 by one of the main actors who have had the responsibility for the revision of the information program.

The main goal of the Information Program in reception centers, as the UDI's policy document states it, is as follows: "The overarching goal for all information work in reception centers is to give the residents [asylum seekers] a realistic picture of Norwegian society, and an understanding of the basic values on which the society is based" (UDI, 2005: 5).³⁸

Looking at the words "realistic picture" and "basic values" mentioned in the quote above, raises the following questions: Who defines what are basic values, and whose picture of Norwegian society is deemed to be "realistic? It is valid to claim that such rhetoric is mainly directed towards non-Western "others", as the group of asylum seekers is dominated by people belonging to non-Western – call it even Oriental – societies. Said argues in his critique of the West's perception of the "Other" that abstract generalizations are preferred over empirical reality (1995: 300). His main concern is that the West, through its predefined characterization of non-Westerns, draws an imaginary picture that has no roots in reality, but is, nevertheless, perceived by the West to be scientifically objective (*ibid*). The Orient, Said says, is consequently perceived to be, and characterized as being, inferior and undeveloped (*ibid*). Is it, then, correct to assume that the UDI has predefined assumptions about asylum seekers as people who do not share the same basic values as Norwegians, and therefore sees it necessary to give them a realistic picture of Norwegian values?

In order to acquire knowledge about a new society, one needs to receive information. Asylum seekers in Norwegian reception centers are obliged to attend a program that those in power perceive as important. It is, in other words, information not defined by themselves, but by the authorities. In addition, Norway's policy of integration, which starts in reception centers through carefully selected modules and topics about Norwegian society, laws, values, traditions and codes of conduct – is another example of what creates an opposition between "us" and the "others" (See Gressgård 2005a: 25).

Gressgård's critique is that an integration policy that highlights Norwegian values in opposition to the others' culture can be both culturally relativistic (*kulturrelativistisk*) and ethnocentric (*etnosentrisk*): "While we perceive ourselves as modern and free, the others will be portrayed as traditional and culturally controlled. [...] Immigrants are defined by attributions that can directly repatriate to their cultural background, in contrast to *us*, the representatives of human rights, democratic values and gender equality" (*ibid*: 23). The consequence of this, according to Gressgård, is that immigrants will be excluded from the "dominant moral universe that the integration policy attempts to incorporate them into",

³⁸ UDI's policy document is available in the directorate's website: https://www.udiregelverk.no/no/rettskilder/udi-rundskriv/rs-2009-041/#_Toc335657835 [Accessed 30.01.2017]

which is “why it is necessary to integrate them” (*ibid*). Gressgård argues that the principle of “universal shared values” is defined through what Western culture perceives to be universal, which, inevitably, reveals an ethnocentric attitude that creates the division between “us” and “them” (*ibid*: 18).

To conclude, the program’s aims and intentions are in accordance with Norway’s integration policy, which, according to Gressgård (2005b: 74), is ethnocentric/Eurocentric, or a “Norwegian/European annexation of the Universal Human Rights” (*ibid*), portraying Norwegian perspectives, experiences, values and interests to be universal, objective and neutral, while refugees and asylum seekers are bearers of other particular and traditional values (*ibid*). This claim of copyright over universal human rights and democratic values that ought to be passed on to asylum seekers will be discussed further through a deeper look into UDI’s modules on Norway’s values and way of life below.

5.2 Educating the Oppressed?

As seen above, the intention behind the program is to “educate” asylum seekers about what Norway perceives to be fundamental *new* knowledge (to the asylum seekers) about universal/Norwegian values. Ignoring the difference between the universal and the particular (i.e. the Norwegian) is what also constructs a “colonialist division” between the modern Norwegian and the barbarian “Other” (Gressgård, 2005: 74).

By looking further at the UDI’s aims and intentions behind the Information Program, it is stated that asylum seekers “need to understand why they are enrolled in the Information Program, and why it is essential that they acquire knowledge about Norwegian society [...]. When they understand the aim behind each topic, and can see its importance for them, it will be easier to motivate them” (UDI, 2005: 10). Linking this to Freire’s critical philosophical and educational theory, which claims that liberation of the oppressed happens through critical thinking, and awareness comes from better education and dialogue, UDI’s statement portrays little dialogue and more of an antidialogical action, in which manipulation and control are clear components (Freire, 2005). According to Freire, manipulation is one dimension of the “theory of antidialogical action”, where the dominant elites “try to conform the masses to their objectives” (*ibid*: 147). As a result, the oppressed have merely the “purposes” prescribed for them by the oppressor (*ibid*: 60). Moreover, Freire asserts that it is “necessary for the oppressors to approach the people in order, via subjugation, to keep them passive” (*ibid*: 139). However, this does not require communication with the people: “It is accomplished by the oppressors’ depositing myths indispensable to the preservation of the

status quo” (*ibid*). Examples of such myths are: The myth that the oppressive order is a ‘free society’, or that this order respects and cultivates human rights, the myth of equality of all individuals, and the myth of the heroism of the oppressor classes as defenders of ‘Western Christian Civilization’ against ‘materialist barbarism’ (*ibid*: 139-140). Such usage of myths is, in other words, propaganda wrapped in well-formulated slogans and statements, which gives the oppressed the feeling of being safeguarded, when they are in fact passivized and controlled.

To elaborate, UDI indicates that the topics in the Information Program in the “phase of asylum-seeking” (*søkefasen*) are “fundamental and central to be able to function independently in Norway, and should therefore be given to all asylum seekers in Norwegian reception centers, regardless of their legal asylum status” (UDI, 2005: 7). Topics in the asylum-seeking phase are divided into nine modules, but I am interested (in this chapter and in the following one) in looking deeper into two of the modules. These are Module 07, titled “Norwegian Values and Way of Life” (*Norske verdier og norsk levesett*), and Module 08, titled “Living Together” (*Leve sammen*).³⁹ The modules discuss, among other topics, democratic values in Norway, (gender) equality, freedom of speech and freedom of religion, parenting and children rights. The UDI’s aim with both modules is to assist asylum seekers to form an understanding of Norwegian values and how to live together. Moreover, in their proposal for pedagogical methods, the UDI suggests in both modules to compare these Norwegian values with the values of asylum seekers’ cultural background.⁴⁰

The above outline of the UDI’s intention behind the modules confirms Gressgård’s claim that the Norwegian authorities are characterized by Eurocentric attitudes, and consistently and deliberately make distinctions between Norwegian values and the values of other cultures, claiming ownership over universal human rights, and arguing for the importance of passing them to non-Western societies (Gressgård, 2005b). Teaching about gender equality and rights reflect developed, liberal and universal ideals and insinuate that Norwegian culture is sovereign in a global perspective (Gressgård, 2005a: 29). This attitude supports Said’s theory of Orientalism, asserting that the West perceives its attitude towards Orientals to be “objective” and true, without acknowledging the Oriental as modern; By

³⁹ Full overview over the modules in the Information Program are to be found in UDI’s website:
<https://www.udi.no/asylmottak/jobber-i-mottak/informasjonsarbeid-i-mottaket/informasjonsprogram-for-voksne/#link-1316>
[Accessed 30.01.2017]

⁴⁰ Detailed overview over aims, target groups, selected topics and methods in each module on this link:
<https://www.udi.no/asylmottak/jobber-i-mottak/informasjonsarbeid-i-mottaket/informasjonsprogram-for-voksne/#link-1315>
[Accessed 30.01.2017]

contrast, the Oriental in the eyes of the West is portrayed (and treated) as primitive and inferior, and should therefore be enlightened (Said, 2003).

Furthermore, Sherene Razack asserts that the “policing of Muslim communities in the name of gender equality is now a globally organized phenomenon”, especially after 9/11 and the War on Terror (2004: 129). The rhetoric of Islam’s plot to destruct the West on the one hand, and Islam’s pre-modern perception and treatment of women on the other, is the logical outcome of such organized policing (*ibid*). Muslim women, according to Razack, are seen by the West as being victims of their own culture, and victims of men within their culture. This leads to the West’s compulsion to “discipline” Muslim men and Muslim communities (*ibid*).

Gender equality, and more specifically the rights of Muslim women (against their supposedly oppressive culture and dangerous men), is a hot topic both in Norwegian debates about integration, in government policies, and not least, in the Information Program provided to asylum seekers. Gressgård argues that Norwegian rhetoric contradicts itself when on the one hand it calls for equal opportunities for people from different cultural backgrounds, but on the other hand endorses assimilation policies (Gressgård & Jakobsen, 2003: 73). The approach to gender equality in Norwegian integration policies stresses that women with immigrant backgrounds should be given equal rights and opportunities, but their oppressive cultures and traditions can pose an obstacle to their integration. As a result, “the concept of integration” turns into a “gendered concept” (*ibid*).

Linking this to the modules of the Information Program, gender equality and human rights are central topic and are given considerable weight. In addition, extensive courses about how to treat women are offered merely to non-Western men within the program, in order to help them understand principles of equality and rights.⁴¹ This paternalistic attitude of educating the inferior Oriental about human rights and gender equality corresponds with Said’s first dogma of Orientalism, which is an absolute difference between the modern West and the pre-modern East (1995: 300). Furthermore, the variety of “pedagogical tools” and courses about gender equality is a result of the UDI’s assumption that asylum seekers have “varying experiences and may find it difficult to adapt new knowledge into the perspectives they have from before” (UDI, 2005: 11). Therefore, the UDI sees it necessary to place the information in a “familiar context”, where it is emphasized that the information is framed by

⁴¹ This information course about gender equality and how to treat women has been mentioned and discussed in various Western media: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-36469828> [Accessed 30.01.2017]

both the sender of the information (the UDI) and the recipients (asylum seekers), which will consequently “increase the motivation and the learning effect” (*ibid*).

Even though stated otherwise in the policy document, the formation and development of the Information Program in practice is done solely by the UDI, and the modules are predefined and static. Telling asylum seekers that they are an equal contributor to the content of the information is another example of the authority’s usage of power through manipulation (Freire, 2005). Indeed, Freire argues that attempts to “soften” the power of the oppressor in the eyes of the oppressed are only a reflection of “false generosity” (*ibid*: 44). He asserts that to “substitute monologue, slogans and communiqués for dialogue is to attempt to liberate the oppressed with the instruments of domestication” (*ibid*: 65).

To conclude, the implementation of the UDI’s (positive) intentions for dialogue and successful integration is in practice a “Norwegian monologue” (Gressgård, 2005b: 74) and a policy of control and paternalism.

5.3 Summary

This chapter sought to interpret the UDI’s policy document on the Information Program for asylum seekers. Linking the intentions of the document to Said, Gressgård and Freire, it concludes that the content of the document reflects an Orientalist, Eurocentric policy. Additionally, the objectives of the program mirror an authoritarian pedagogy, where the UDI sets the norms for the content and the implementation, leaving no alternative to asylum seekers to criticize or influence the content. The State’s perspective, in other words, contains a clear contradiction between the explicitly stated aims and intentions, and the underlying assumptions. It states that the purpose of the program is a preparation for integration, but in fact it has elements of control and assimilation.

In the following chapter, I intend to scrutinize whether this analysis of the document corresponds with the experience of asylum seekers that attend or have attended the Information Program. In addition, I intend to investigate how asylum seekers define Norway’s integration policy through their understanding of the program.

6. DATA ANALYSIS: ASYLUM SEEKERS' PERSPECTIVE

While the previous chapter sought to analyze the purpose of the Information Program from the State's perspective, this chapter attempts to draw an analysis of how asylum seekers in Norwegian reception centers experience the Obligatory Information Program. The purpose is to investigate whether the *aim* behind the program (as stated in the papers) and the *understanding* of it correspond.

As mentioned in the methodology chapter, the recruitment process of interviewees has been challenging for various reasons (see section 2.4). I interviewed five asylum seekers, and will use their responses in this chapter. Is this a sufficient number on which to base conclusions? I would argue that the similarity of answers coming from five interviewees living in different parts of the country, residing in different reception centers, and speaking to the author in their native Arabic tongue, unburdened by having to use interpreters they may not know or trust, strengthens the validity of the responses and allows me to draw a tentative conclusion.

The responses of my interviewees are divided into thematic sub-sections, which will highlight the main points of their answers. The answers will be linked to theory previously presented in the thesis, and is a continuation of the previous chapter.

6.1 The Information Program and Alienation of the "Other"

Even though an individual's act of seeking asylum can be seen as an attempt by that person to reestablish him or herself in a new, safer and, perhaps, better environment, it is nevertheless an act that leaves people with a feeling of loss and estrangement. Asylum seekers from warzones had to take a decision to leave their country in order to survive. These are people who have had to take a difficult decision and make a tough journey to the "West".

In his collection of essays *Reflections on Exile*, Edward Said (2000: 173) speaks of the terrible experience of exile, and the feelings of loss and sorrow with which one lives, even though history and literature have to some extent romantically and gloriously portrayed exile and the success resulting from it (*ibid*). Exile and nationalism are, according to Said, interconnected. He claims that nationalism is the feeling of belonging, and that it "affirms the home created by a community of language, culture, and customs; and, by so doing, it fends off exile, fights to prevent its ravages" (*ibid*: 176). Nationalism, accordingly, develops from a feeling of alienation, and is thus an expected reaction to exile, it is one's need to belong and fit into a place. Said suggests that successful nationalisms "consign truth

exclusively to themselves and relegate falsehood and inferiority to outsiders “as in the rhetoric of capitalist versus communist, or the European versus the Asiatic” (*ibid*: 177).

Even though both exiles and refugees can be characterized as people uprooted and unable to return home, Said claims that there is a difference between the two. According to him, while the exile lives a whole life of banishment and misery, and thus is more of a spiritual character, the word refugee suggests “large herds of innocent and bewildered people requiring urgent international assistance” (*ibid*: 181), and is more negatively loaded (at least in today’s Europe). There is indeed a difference between the state of exile and refuge, but the similarities are bigger, as both portray a situation of displacement, alienation and a feeling of being an outsider, as explained by one interviewee:

The phase of seeking asylum is a very delicate stage for asylum seekers and refugees. Refugees do not know where they are and where they will be. We call it a stage of disorientation. Everyone wants to forget it. (Samar)

This is a clear portrayal of crisis and helplessness. Said’s definition of exile, or at least its outcome, applies just as much to asylum seekers and refugees today, as it did in his time, not least because the return to a home country seems to Syrians today like a far-off dream, if not a total impossibility. At the same time, being a refugee brings with it the fear of not fitting in and of not knowing how the future will look, as another interviewee describes:

During the time I have been living here [in a reception center in Norway], I feel I am living in a prison. We do not think of the future, we are just putting our lives on hold. (Waddah)

All respondents in this study share a feeling of (undesirable) segregation from the host society, and at the same time, a strong connection to their homeland and roots. Their experiences bear out Said’s suggestion that alienation in one place leads to a stronger connection to another place (*ibid*). The Information Program contributes to this sentiment among the interviewees, one of whom asserts:

When people leave their country and migrate to another, they carry with them cultures and traditions that they are proud of, and they do not want to change themselves just to fit it. The last thing they want is to get that feeling of alienation in a country that talks about inclusion and rights. They [refugees] are told that it is here [in Norway] they will get their rights and dignity. But in fact people feel that they are treated as less worthy (Amr).

The very state of being in exile or away from one’s home, and finding oneself in the weak position of seeking asylum, is in other words a contributor to insecurity and uncertainty. The UDI acknowledges this in their policy document, and states that “people

living in a situation of exile, which is influenced by uncertainty and waiting, are usually little motivated to acquire information” (UDI, 2005: 10). The feeling of estrangement, exclusion and uncertainty does not correspond with the goals of the program, which are inclusion and integration. However, feelings of alienation and identity/personality crises in the meeting with the Norwegian society are largely related to in the responses of my interviewees. Regardless of their educational and professional achievements or their social, political or personal background, asylum seekers feel they are categorized and labeled as *different* from the Norwegian society (also through the Information Program). It is illustrated by the lack of interest in one’s background, and the fact that asylum seekers are treated according to the West’s stereotypes on them, as one asylum seeker points out:

The Information Program has given me a feeling of alienation. I am always reminded that I do not belong to this place [Norway], and they remind me that I am an outsider and that they always have to teach me in order for me to be like them. They even think that it is not enough with information only once, they need to repeat the same information, without asking us if we have understood it the first time. My problem with the Information Program is that it puts me in a box. I was never asked about my background, where I come from and what I know. I feel that there is a policy of generalization. They imagine the worst person in terms of knowledge and education and abilities, and presuppose that everyone else is the same (Bashar)

Looking at the quote above, it is clear that the Information Program, that intends to give information about the Norwegian society for integration purposes, does not achieve its goal. The imposed feeling of difference and exclusion is clearly a result of a policy that assumes that Orientals indeed are different. This confirms Said’s claim that the West uses abstract generalizations instead of empirical reality (1995: 300), putting asylum seekers in a “box” labeled “different and primitive”.

Furthermore, the repetition of information, without using dialogue with asylum seekers to control the quality of information, is another reason why asylum seekers reject the program, as stated in the above quote. It also contradicts the UDI’s assumption that repetition is an effective pedagogical tool. The result of this anti-dialogical attitude is that asylum seekers resent the program and feel it categorizes them as passive groups without knowledge, where repetition is essential for the authorities to apply their message, reflecting control and authoritarian pedagogy (see Freire 2005). In addition, dialogue as seen above is absent (although stated otherwise in UDI’s policy document, as seen in the previous chapter). Freire defines dialogue as an existentially significant human phenomenon that requires critical thinking, and whose essence is *the word*, and the word comprises of two

elements: “reflection and action”, and therefore must not “serve as a crafty instrument for the domination of one person by another” (2005: 87-91). Contrary to dialogue is the anti-dialogical principle whose educator is the one who “answers his own question, by organizing his own program” (*ibid*: 93). The result of anti-dialogical pedagogy, where content is organized to serve the educator/authority, is counter-productive, leaving the educated (asylum seekers) with a feeling of resentment and exclusion.

The Information Program, in other words, is a major contributor to that feeling of alienation and exclusion. In order to elaborate on this point, I will take an example from modules taught in the Information Program that all interviewees have addressed. The issue of equality between genders and women’s rights is, as mentioned above, one of the most common topics taught in the Obligatory Information Program. In these modules, asylum seekers have to form a basic understanding on – among others – gender roles, democracy, human rights, and children rights. One respondent says the following about the feelings these modules in the Information Program give him:

The most humiliating information I got [during the information meetings] was when they taught us about sex, and told us we are not allowed to have sex with minors or to assault a girl. They also taught us that incest is illegal. I come from an open minded and cultivated environment. This kind of information upset me. (George).

The quote above portrays both a feeling of alienation from the host society (Norway) and a feeling of pride of the society one comes from (Syria), by being put in a position where the recipient of the information and the one who is giving it have different perception of reality. The fact that the UDI chooses to focus on gender equality and women’s rights in teaching asylum seekers about these “unique” Western/Norwegian values, insinuates that non-Western cultures lack the knowledge about such issues and therefore need to be enlightened with these new ideals. Such perceptions about the Orient are an ongoing tendency that has been stretching from antiquity until the present day. As Said (1995) explains it, perceptions of the Orient, and specifically the New Orient, through Europeans’ invasions since ancient times have been characterized by the portrayal of the Oriental as the total opposite of the Occidental (*ibid*: 58), especially through the rhetoric of differences between religions (Christianity vs. Islam).

It is rather striking that such perceptions are still widespread and implemented to this very day, sustaining not only a European imaginative geography, where Europe is portrayed as “powerful and articulate” and Asia as “defeated and distant” (*ibid*: 57), but also an

imaginative culture clash. Ironically, this information about the “Other” is now given not only to Westerners as a means of (knowledge) control, but also to the “Other”, endorsing and strengthening the same gap that has been created throughout history.

Taking Islam, gender equality and Norway’s integration policy as an example, the Norwegian Gender Equality Act, arguing that educating minorities about “what gender equality between men and women means in Norwegian daily life” (quoted in Gressgård & Jakobsen, 2003: 73; see also Stokke, 2012: 158-160), implies that successful integration in Norway means that minorities need to “adopt Norwegian everyday practices” (Stokke, *ibid*). The conclusion is that Norway, in fact, promotes a Eurocentric assimilation policy, and not integration (Gressgård & Jacobsen, *ibid*). To stress the fact that asylum seekers feel resentment towards information about “Norwegian values” such as gender equality, one says the following:

Much of the information I receive is unimportant, like how to treat women, how to raise children, not to have sex with minors. In my opinion this information is irrelevant for me, and I see it as patronizing. I would not assault a girl or hit a child. I grew up on these values back home, and the environment from which I come is not as different from the Norwegian society as Norwegians think. In Syria I used to hang out, together with boys and girls, just like here in Norway, and I was free and open-minded in my choices and relationships (George).

Some respondents also react to the categorization of non-western cultures as Muslim cultures, as one interviewee points out:

The Arab culture is not merely a Muslim culture. It also includes Christian values, cultures of minorities, and even large non-religious groups. I want them [Norwegian authorities] to look at us and treat us as individuals, not as religious groups (Amr)

While Europeans/Norwegians respect and praise the rights of the individual above everything, immigrants are paradoxically perceived and treated as representatives of a “culture”. In Western rhetoric, Arab culture is equated to Muslim culture, and Islam is perceived as a religion that poses a threat to the West. In fact, within the 22 Arab states in the Middle East and North Africa, with a combined population of more than 350 million people, there are more than a dozen of different religions and ethnicities. It is true that the vast majority of the population in the Arab world consists of Muslims. However, Arab minorities like Christians, Druze, Copts, and non-Arab minorities like Jews, Armenians and Kurds, are also represented, composing a variety of cultures and traditions in the Arab

world.⁴² One finds among Muslims the religious, the non-religious and even the atheist. In addition, to speak of the Arabic/Muslim culture in this context is stigmatizing and narrow, as the cultures within “Arab culture” are many and differ from one another.

Not only Arabs, but also Muslims, are victims of stigma and stereotypes in the Western rhetoric, as we have seen. The world’s Muslims have long been a silenced group, while the media, politicians and Western governments have focused on the minority of Muslim terrorists (Esposito & Mogahed, 2007). In their worldwide Gallup poll on Muslim views, Esposito and Mogahed have revealed the nuanced truth about Muslims in the world, and they assert that Muslims represent a diverse population, unlike the accepted rhetoric in the West that Islam is a primitive religion that does not believe in equality and human rights: “Like Christians and Jews, Muslims vary widely in their lifestyle and degree of piety. Sunnis and Shia alike may be observant or non-observant, conservative, fundamentalist, reformist, secular, mainstream, or extremist” (*ibid*: 5). The vast majority of the interviewees in the survey support freedom of speech, gender equality and democracy, and the majority also believe that women should have the same legal rights as men, and hold any job for which they are qualified (*ibid*: 17). This overview is well illustrated in the following quote by one of the interviewees:

I am Syrian, and I am proud of my society. I left home when I started my graduate studies at university. I had friends, and I engaged in many activities. I volunteered in organizations, went out to parties and loved listening to the opera. I have not experienced once in Norway anything I did not experience back home. On the contrary, there are many things I was used to in my home country that I have not found here, like interacting with people for example. I feel that people here do not communicate with each other. In Syria I used to go out on a cafe and meet many new people and make new friends. We would discuss anything together. Here I feel that people do not talk to each other. I have missed talking to people (Bashar).

To move forward and try to break the stereotype about Muslim women as subjugated and oppressed, the survey by Esposito & Mogahed reveals that women constitute a majority at universities in Iran and the United Arab Emirates, they have “headed governments in Turkey, Indonesia, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, and hold positions in parliaments and cabinets in many countries” (2007: 6). Furthermore, countless Muslim women *choose* to cover their heads and bodies, and are not forced to do so, as perceived in the West (*ibid*: 27). For them “the *hijab* is a tool of empowerment that allows them to focus on matters of family, work,

⁴² It is important to note that, oppositely to what commonly is believed, the majority of Muslims in fact live in Asia and Africa, and not in Arab countries (See Esposito & Mogahed, 2007: 5).

and faith rather than material concerns” (*ibid*). Additionally, Muslim women “would like to see Westerners engage in a more detailed understanding of their priorities, rather than impose what they think should be addressed”, and, lastly, Muslim women, according to the survey, “are not eager to be liberated by the West” (*ibid*). Having attended information classes about gender equality and “how to treat women” courses, one of the interviewees reacts thusly:

I have been out in bars, and I wanted to see if [asylum seekers and refugees] really misbehave. Honestly, yes, they do. But so do Norwegians, Germans and French people. It is a group of people dancing, they are usually drunk, everyone is dancing in what you may call ‘dirty dancing’. Some people will call it ‘sexual harassment’ when an Arab guy is doing it, but it is defined as ‘dirty dancing’ when a Westerner is doing it. I do not see that non-Westerners are the only ones who are ‘misbehaving’ in bars. The lights in the disco are shut down, and it is completely dark on the dance floor, but the media turns the spotlight toward those few Arab individuals who are dancing ‘improperly’. To turn the light merely on these individuals is wrong, when they ignore the rest of the dancers (Amr).

Another interviewee says as follows, when asked how she feels she is perceived when she attends information meetings about gender equality:

I come from a city that is as large as Oslo. I have lived a liberal and open minded background, and haven’t noticed that there are big differences between me and the average Norwegian person. On the contrary, I have maybe lived and experienced a richer cultural life than many Norwegians do (Samar).

Various non-Western voices have opposed the West’s systematic negative portrayal of women from non-Western societies. In her book, *I Killed Sheherazade*, the Lebanese poet and women’s rights activist Joumana Haddad questions the perception of the “typical” Arab woman by non-Western societies: “Isn’t it a perception mainly formed in the Western collective consciousness by a multitude of formulas and generalizations, generated either by a skill-persisting Orientalist perspective, or by a post-9/11 hostile view shaped by resentment, fear and condescension?” (2010: 28). Portrayal of Muslim (or Arab, or non-Western) women as victims of their communities is a myth that is widespread in Western political and cultural discourses and is used in order to control and divide. To conclude, this kind of myth places non-Western cultures as traditional and static homogenous units (Ytrehus, 2001: 229-233), in contrast with the Western focus on the free individual. Inevitably, such division creates the false notion of “us” vs. “them”.

6.2 When Dialogue Becomes a Monologue

As seen above, topics in the Information Program are predetermined by stereotypes and predefined ideas about the “other”, and are not a result of a shared understanding by the authorities and asylum seekers of what is important. It is, however, essential to point out that asylum seekers assert that it is not the idea of receiving information and acquiring new knowledge in itself that provokes feelings of revolt and alienation among them. On the contrary, all the respondents spoken to by this author have emphasized that information is important in order to acquire knowledge. In addition, all the respondents articulated their appreciation for (practical) information about topics such as fire instructions, activities in the reception centers and information about different organizations such as NOAS, IMDi, IOM and others, which can help them with issues concerning their legal asylum status,⁴³ as well as providing them with specific information about their legal rights in Norway.

In other words, it is the content of the information, the choice of modules (especially in the “asylum seeking phase” as well as the focus and repetition on such topics that is the problem, as one of the respondents explains:

Personally, I am open and positive toward new knowledge and information. But I have problems with the fact that I am almost 40, with higher education and many years of work experience, and the war has forced me to stop my life. And now I feel I am treated as a student all over again. This causes me psychological problems. I have been forced to flee and consequently start from scratch, and someone else is forcing me to sit down and listen to their information, as if I am back in elementary school, and I feel weakened. I try to work on myself and understand that this is good for me, but it is not easy (Samar).

The above quote reveals resentment toward a paternalistic and ignorant policy. Not taking into consideration that asylum seekers carry with them a cultural, educational and professional background, the authorities turn them into abstract, dominated objects. Drawing on Kogler and his distinction between *power* and *domination*, Gressgård (2005a: 112) explains that in contrast to power relations, which suggest “free subjects” involved in “open and fair struggles” (*ibid*), domination is a set of thinking, acting and perceiving patterns that are “crystallized into fixed positionalities” (Kogler, 1999 quoted in Gressgård, *ibid*). Further, Freire argues that the dynamic between the oppressor and the oppressed is characterized by “changing the consciousness of the oppressed, not the situation which oppresses them” (2005: 74), using paternalistic tools in educating the oppressed. In order to achieve

⁴³ Information about (non-governmental organizations) is given primarily in transit reception centers, and as part of the information program in ordinary reception centers in the phase of arrival (*ankomstfasen*).

“objective transformation” of such paternalistic, dominating dynamics, Freire asserts that it happens when the oppressor shows solidarity with the oppressed and sees that the oppressed has been deprived of their voice, and in addition affirms that “men and women are persons, and as persons should be free” (2005: 50). Similarly, Kogler’s model of dialogue (quoted in Gressgård, 2005: 114) argues for the importance of engaging with and showing interest in others “based on a proximity to their suffering” (Gressgård, *ibid*). This involves both understanding of the situation of the others, and also requires that we “undertake a critically distanced interpretation of their situation” (*ibid*).

When it comes to the conditionality of the program, resentment is obvious in all answers, such as in the following one:

Mentally, people are not ready to receive such information. The fact that it is obligatory makes us feel we are treated unfairly. We have low salaries and do not want to be fined a hundred kroner for not attending. So I can attend the information meeting, put headphones on my ears and listen to music while the information is given, just to avoid losing money (Samar).

In addition to the fact that asylum seekers feel the information is based on abstract generalizations (see Said, 1995), the Information Program is a tool of control and domination, and is designed and implemented according to the premises of the authorities and not the recipients of the information. In other words, there are two problems asylum seekers point out with the program at the stage of seeking asylum. First, the UDI seems to want through the Information Program to implement new information, not taking into consideration the knowledge that asylum seekers already have. Second, as the respondent above points out, information in itself is not negative, and the need for acquiring new knowledge is essential, but it is wrong when it takes the form of a paternalistic manipulation instead of a dialogue.

In the case of the Information Program, information is done through a one-way monologue, strengthening Said’s claim that the West has the “objective truth” (1995: 301). Moreover, Freire’s “humanizing pedagogy” builds on an established relationship of dialogue between the leadership (authorities) and the oppressed (asylum seekers). According to him, by practicing “co-intentional education”, teachers and students (leadership and people) become both Subjects and re-creators, and the oppressed will cease to be pseudo-participants. Instead his passivity will turn into a “committed involvement” (2005: 69). In the case of the Information Program, such dialogue is non-existent. This portrayal of the program as a tool of alienation and exclusion, makes it inevitable to ask the following question: Why do asylum seekers feel they are excluded when the purpose of the Obligatory

Information Program is to prepare asylum seekers to live in Norway? I will attempt to answer this in the section below.

6.3 Real Difference or Imagined Sameness?

In his article, *The Clash of Civilizations* (1993), Huntington divides the world into two, the civilized world on the one hand (which he calls the *West*), and on the other hand the world that wants to fight it (referring to the *Islamic* and *Confucian*). Edward Said rejects the myth of two opposing worlds and asserts that it is rather a result of the relationship between power and knowledge, and a consequence of historical and political influence. It is, as Said claims, impossible to characterize and generalize “a billion Muslims, scattered throughout at least five continents, speaking dozens of differing languages, and possessing various traditions and histories” (2000: 572). Many Arabs, according to Said, would define Islam as their civilization. But at the same time, there are many who would not, just as some Westerners would not want to be labeled as Westerners (*ibid*: 587). Empirical research on Muslim diversity (see Esposito & Mogahed, 2007) supports Said over Huntington whose theory is proven based on populist statements. However, distinctions between “us” and “them”, or the “enlightened West” vs. the “Primitive non-West” are slogans actively used in social and political forums, influencing policies of integration, and turning them in practice into assimilation policies of control and domination of the “other”, also in the case of Norway.

There is a widely used proverb in Norwegian, *Like barn leker best* (translated from the English proverb “Birds of a feather flock together”). It reflects the mentality of similarity (*likhet*) and its importance in Norwegian society. In a society that cherishes this concept and perceives it as safe, diversity can present challenges. Hylland Eriksen (2011) explains that since the mid-1980s, and especially after the fall of communism in Eastern Europe in 1990 when Norway considered accepting refugees from the Balkans, the concept of cultural distance (*kulturell avstand*) has been used as a narrative in Norway. It suggests that some cultures are closer to Norwegian culture than others, implying that it would be easier to accept refugees from the Balkans, coming from culturally close countries (*nærkulturelle land*), than for example refugees from Somalia, who come from culturally distant countries (*fjernkulturelle land*) (*ibid*: 58). The distinction between the culturally close and the culturally distant deriving from physical and apparent distinctions, like geography, language and skin color, immediately generates mental boundaries between cultures that are seemingly different. As a result, stereotypes and ignorance towards the so-called distant

cultures is created. The unfortunate aspect behind this tendency is that such distinctions and barriers are mostly inaccurate and exaggerated, and in some cases even false. Furthermore, Haddad (2010: 19) argues that differences with the Oriental are overstated in the West. She asserts that the difference between Orientals and Occidentals is just as natural as the difference among Occidentals themselves:

We look like you, yet we are different. Not because you're from the West, and we are from the East. Not because you're an Occidental, and we are Oriental. Not because you write from left to right, and we write from right to left. We are different, because all human beings on the face of this Earth are different. We are different, as much as you are different from your next-door neighbor. And this is what makes life interesting. Or else we would all be bored to death

In order to link this to UDI's Obligatory Information Program, one ought to question the purpose behind the modules that are taught in it. When the program, through its modules, aims to enlighten asylum seekers about Western values and cultures, it indirectly stresses the differences between two civilizations that in fact, for many asylum seekers, can be perceived as non-existent or overstated. Moreover, it seems to have an agenda to prepare asylum seekers and refugees for life in Norway by trying to make them similar to Norwegian society, in order for them to fit in. This (both directly and indirectly) focuses on the differences, aiming to erase them and create similarities, as a gateway to Norwegian society. Consequently, the gap between asylum seekers and Norwegian society increases. In fact, it creates a blockage between individuals and the culture. One of the interviewees says the following:

When I attend the information meetings, I wonder sometimes if they really think this information is important for me. They make me feel as if I am coming from a different planet. They portray the information as if it is the first time we will ever hear it, when in fact it is basic and self-evident for us. I feel it is more that it is the Norwegians who do not know anything about us, and not the opposite (Bashar).

Indeed, according to Hylland Eriksen, many Norwegians establish stereotypes about what is similar or distinct from their own cultures, without having sufficient knowledge about some cultures towards whom they have stereotypes: "Few Norwegians know that 250 different languages are spoken only in Nigeria, and that Uruguay is apparently a more culturally similar country to Norwegians than Paraguay" (*ibid*: 59). Accordingly, such classifications can in fact stigmatize cultures as more distant to the Norwegian culture than they really are (*ibid*). However, *imagined sameness*, as Gullestad (2001; 2010) calls it, is a

parameter essential in the Norwegian context to feel that one belongs. By contrast, diversity becomes a contradiction to this central value concept (2001: 38). Additionally, Gullestad asserts that people of the “so-called majority often possess the power to define situations, as well as other people’s identities, without really knowing” (*ibid*: 50). In her opinion, this power is regarded as natural, but in fact it is power. Such power can be misused and, in addition to creating labels, it creates distance. One asylum seeker notes that such categorizations, regardless of how naïve or natural as they may be portrayed, are factors of power that lead to segregation and alienation:

In every civilization there are differences between people, and among [asylum seekers] there are people coming from the desert and others from big cities. As you see within Norwegian society itself, there are differences between people. I have even seen it in Norwegian cartoons: The hero comes from Oslo, the evil guy comes from Bergen, and the simple guy comes from northern Norway. When they stigmatize themselves and each other and feed their children with such “reality” of different classes, I am not surprised that they stigmatize us as less worthy (Amr).

Speaking of sameness in the Norwegian context, Gullestad points out that to label a group as marginalized is derogatory and offensive in Norway, and therefore differences in power and status between people are often “concealed in order to maintain sameness” (2001: 40). However, this is in her opinion counterproductive, as it strengthens the process of marginalization (*ibid*). Furthermore, Norwegians recognize immigrants as “categorically” different, which means that they do not belong to Norway in the same way as (ethnic) Norwegians do (*ibid*: 42). When Norwegians do not see immigrants as people who will ever be “real” Norwegians, what is then the drive behind an information program that aims to integrate newcomers and make them part of Norwegian society? This will be discussed below.

6.4 Integration or Control?

Integration and assimilation are two contested terms in multicultural societies, and according to Modood (2013), the terms are used and misused, especially by politicians in Europe, without understanding the difference between the two. Responses from all interviewees reflect substantial knowledge about the difference between integration and assimilation. For asylum seekers, the Information Program does not mirror an integration policy. Rather, they perceive it as a policy of assimilation, as one of my respondents declares:

I feel that this Information Program tells me: “Do not think that you will come here and implement your traditions on our society, you cannot live the way you used to live in our country”. They do not say it literally, but that’s indirectly what they tell us. They instruct us in how to become like them and live like them. This is absolutely not integration for me; this is assimilation. Integration for me is not when you bring 50-60 refugees, put them in a room and tell them about Norwegian laws, traditions and values. I can go to the Internet and learn about Norwegian laws and traditions. Integration is when I can see how people live, I can interact with Norwegians, learn what they like and what they appreciate, how they eat, dress and behave. But here they keep us within the frame of the reception center and give us one-way information, without us really interacting with Norwegians (Bashar).

From the way the Information Program is perceived and experienced in the above quote, it is clear that the asylum seekers do not perceive the program as a promoter of any integration policy. On the contrary, Norway’s policy of integration is in fact assimilation, where conditionality, Eurocentrism, control and stigmatization of the “other” are rather obvious. In her article, *Imagined Sameness*, Gullestad (2001) asserts that Norwegian society has become much more tolerant to cultural differences compared to the 1950s. However, she notes that in practice, assimilation still exists, and that “today’s ‘integration’ is often just another word for ‘assimilation’” (*ibid*: 54). Furthermore, Gressgård asserts that Norwegian multiculturalism is characterized by a paradox, because, she says, Norway’s integration policy echoes “the asymmetrical structure between the majority and the minority” (2010: 12), which negates the supposed principle of “equality among citizens” (*ibid*).

All respondents, similar to the above respondent, define integration as a two-way, mutual interaction between the minorities and the majority, and assimilation as a one-way policy that gives the responsibility to the minority and demands the minority to fully adjust to the majority’s way of life, and preferably become like them (see Modood, 2013). The above quote in other words shows that asylum seekers challenge the dominant discourse of integration, and that they search for dialogue that enables them to be perceived as subjects and not objects. When it comes to conditionality and control, another interviewee asserts:

Personally, I am happy to know about the traditions and habits of Norwegian society, but this Information program has been imposed on us, in a way that they treated us as a group and not individuals. They did not ask us what kind of information we really needed. I felt I was a different person when I attended this program. This program did not reflect me as a person; it reflected them [The Norwegian policy makers] and their needs (Waddah).

Indeed, Freire compares the “banking concept of education”, that serves the interests of the oppression, to necrophilia (2005: 77), asserting that just as oppression is nourished by love of death, so education serving oppression is based on a “mechanistic, static, naturalistic view of consciousness”, and “transforms students into receiving objects”, and attempts to control their thinking and actions (*ibid*). It is, in other words, an authoritarian dialogue, that is the direct opposite of dialogue, inhibits the power of men and women, and “leads them to adjust to the world” that the oppressor determines for them (*ibid*). Asylum seekers articulate their resentment to the Information Program and its intention to assimilate them into Norwegian society, regarding it as a false tool for integration. Through critical reflection, they do not want to be made into passive objects through an assimilation policy. They search for dialogue where they can be equal subjects, which is the essence of positive education.

To sum up, by placing UDI’s policy documents in the context of my interview data, the findings show that the government’s initiative for dialogue with asylum seekers lacks an understanding of what they define as good information. The Information Program is, as asylum seekers assert, based on stereotypes rather than empirical facts, which supports Said’s theory. Asylum seekers’ definition of good and successful integration is through interaction and dialogue with the dominant Norwegian society, and not through a one-way information program given to them on the terms of the Norwegian authorities. Last, asylum seekers favor information that can be beneficial in their meeting with the Norwegian society, but not a paternalistic education program that portrays them as different, and creating a division between “us” and “them”.

6.5 Summary

This chapter has investigated asylum seekers’ perception of the Information Program that they attend in Norwegian reception centers. First, the findings have shown that the program contributes to feelings of alienation and exclusion among asylum seekers in their meeting with Norwegian society. Second, contrary to the program’s intention to prepare asylum seekers to integration in Norway, the perception is that the program is based on stereotypes that place asylum seekers from non-Western societies in an inferior position, where they are instructed in how to adopt Western/Norwegian values. Third, the anti-dialogical nature of the program transforms asylum seekers into receiving objects, without the possibility to articulate their opinions or actively engage in changing contents in the program that they perceive as unimportant. Consequently, the findings show that there is a contradiction between the program’s intentions and asylum seekers’ perceptions.

7. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The purpose of this research has been to investigate Norway's integration policy through the Obligatory Information Program, and to examine asylum seekers' own perceptions of this policy. The study has, as a result, engaged asylum seekers in defining their own understanding of the Information Program, and in suggesting strategies for better and more effective information in reception centers, which, according to them, will allow for a better integration in Norway.

The study findings support my initial assumption that there is a contradiction between the explicitly stated objectives of the program, and the underlying assumptions behind it, and that asylum seekers appreciate the objectives of the program, but they criticize the assumptions. The results of this study are significant for various reasons: First, they reflect a clash between UDI's and asylum seekers' definition and understanding of good and successful integration. Second, they give asylum seekers the chance to voice their own perceptions of and needs from the Information Program, and consequently, allow them to be active participants in a discussion about Norway's integration policy. Third, the findings emphasize the fact that UDI (and the Norwegian state) should be more focused on what asylum seekers want, rather than on what those in power demands.

7.1 Integration Through Dialogue

Since diversity is an integral part of the Norwegian social landscape, it is important to look into what makes this diversity a resource, and not a burden. It is through understanding of and active dialogue with the "other" that diversity and multiculturalism show their best features. Indeed, asylum seekers in Norway do not want to be seen as a threat to the country's coherence. On the contrary, they wish to be perceived as a resourceful, and not a segregated, group that can have positive impact on Norwegian society.

The state of asylum is, as shown in the responses previously, a difficult condition that results in estrangement and personal crises. It is a situation where an individual is forcefully uprooted from his or her environment and society, and consequently made weak by the circumstances. Asylum seekers' choice to flee their homeland and reestablish themselves in a new country, involves their desire to reconstruct their lives, but without having to give up their own identity. This corresponds with Modood's (2013) definition of multiculturalism, which says that accommodating diversity is accepting difference. Successful integration is highlighted by mutuality and interaction between the minority and the majority, and by recognition and inclusion of the other.

To receive information is important in order to acquire knowledge. But to achieve a successful outcome of information, it is necessary with an active two-way dialogue, where both asylum seekers and the UDI are equally able to define and influence the content of the program. As a result, accommodating asylum seekers' needs and interests through inclusive dialogue will bridge the gaps that are unnecessarily predetermined.

As Freire (2005) asserts, dialogue, through humanizing pedagogy, is a significant human phenomenon that requires critical thinking, and it requires that dialogue be done equally between two subjects. Shared to all interviewees in this study are, first, the need to be heard and, second, the demand to take part in a dialogue on equal terms. The instructional nature of the Information Program provokes rejection among asylum seekers who oppose to be treated as objects without the chance to influence. It is, therefore, essential that the UDI re-evaluates its Information Program and, through interactive dialogue with asylum seekers, designs a program that serves its purpose: successful integration.

7.2 Universal Values are not only Norwegian

This study has shown that universal values are not the ownership of Europe or Norway, although the opposite can be implied in Norway's integration policy that carries elements of Eurocentric attitudes (Gressgård, 2005b). Participants in this study have used a great deal of time during the interviews stressing the fact that they are not as different as it is commonly perceived. Values like democracy, gender equality and human rights are not revolutionary knowledge that they are met with in Norway. This is also confirmed in Esposito & Mogahed's (2007) extensive survey about the world's Muslims. It shows that just as diversity within Western society is large, the same diversity exists within Muslim societies. In addition, the vast majority of Muslims knows about and believes in universal values. One of the respondents says it simply and clearly:

Just like you have the extremist and the radical in any society, you find them in Norway too. I have met intolerant and racist Norwegians. But I do not generalize Norwegians as racists because of some individuals. I expect the same principle to apply to me as well (Bashar).

Asylum seekers in this study have expressed their need to be seen as individuals, and not as groups. They do not wish to be perceived as a threat to Norwegian values, simply because Norwegian values are also their own.

7.3 How to Improve the Quality of Information?

Even though it may sound as a simplistic and banal suggestion, but asking asylum seekers what they *require* of information and knowledge, rather than asking them to *evaluate* an already pre-defined and static information program, can prove to be an effective tool to improve the quality of the information in reception centers. Consequently, it will emancipate asylum seekers from the “box” in which they have been placed, where stereotypes and false presumptions define them. To elaborate on this, I would like to use a quote by one of the respondents, as an example of his perception of effective information. He asserts that learning about Norway’s social and political history, rather than about the abstract values, is more important for gaining a deeper understanding of the country and, consequently, preparing for integration:

I have been here for nine months, and I have not learned anything about the Vikings. Do you know that most residents in reception centers do not know the name of the Norwegian king? Do you know that many do not know that Bergen was once burnt down and rebuilt, and that it was an important point of commerce between Norway and the rest of the world? This is useful information that, in my opinion, can give us a better understanding of Norwegian society, and, consequently, enable for a better integration (Amr).

It is difficult to find one concrete way to create “good-quality” information in reception centers. However, this study shows that today’s Information Program lacks what it takes to be regarded as effective. Authoritarian, one-way information, where the recipients are treated as objects, does not correspond with the definition of good integration.

Improving the quality of the Information Program can, therefore, be done on two levels, the national and the local. On the national level, asylum seekers can be equal participants in evaluating, revising and reforming the content of the Information Program, together with the UDI. Consequently, asylum seekers will have their saying about the overarching national program, and will be able to influence it through active dialogue.

On the local level, i.e. in reception centers, asylum seekers can be given the chance to influence and determine the topics that will be discussed in the classrooms. Here, information can be based on local dialogue between asylum seekers and the reception center. This can be effective, because it opens for dialogue on the grassroots level. Consequently, the bureaucratic grip and national guidelines will be loosened, and the local level will be given more freedom and flexibility. Simultaneously, it requires that the nationally designed Information Program is less rigid.

To sum up, even though reception centers are a temporary domicile, asylum seekers feel isolated from the rest of the Norwegian society. One-way information only adds to this isolation, and it will strengthen the division between “us” and “them”. It is perhaps constructive to minimize the amount of one-way Information sessions, and, instead, increase active interaction between asylum seekers and the local society where they live. Through meetings, seminars and activities between asylum seekers and Norwegians,⁴⁴ one creates a platform for interaction. Not only will this bridge gaps between peoples and cultures; it will also reinforce the foundation for a successful multicultural and diverse Norwegian society, based on equality and mutual respect. Ultimately, this will support the fact that the populist rhetoric about “us” vs. “them” merely reflects what I choose to call *imagined difference*.

⁴⁴ The focus of such meetings can be determined through dialogue between asylum seekers and the administration in the reception center, and dialogue with local organizations.

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Appendices

1.1 Appendix 1: Request for participation in research project (English)

A study of Norway's Integration Policy Through the Obligatory Information Program for Asylum Seekers

My name is Lubna Makhoul, and I am a student at the University of South East Norway (Høgskolen i sørøst-Norge). I am writing my Master thesis on The Obligatory Information Program for Asylum Seekers in Norwegian Reception Centers.

The study aims to explore the objectives of and the perceptions from the Information Program for Asylum Seekers, with the purpose of developing an understanding on Norway's asylum policy both in theory and practice.

A study on this topic will touch the basics of both the asylum institution and the (preparation for) integration policy in Norway. In addition, it aims to mirror asylum seekers' perspective and understanding of the institution and its policy.

I would like to conduct an interview with you, and ask you to answer some questions that will help me understand your perception of The Obligatory Information Program. The interviews will be audio-recorded and used only in this Master thesis. The estimated length of each interview is around half an hour.

The estimated date for project completion is September 2016.

Any information you supply will be treated confidentially, accessed by me and used merely in this thesis project. Your identity will not be recognizable in the publication.

Your participation in this project is voluntary, and you can at any time withdraw your participation without stating any reason. If you decide to withdraw, all your personal data will be made anonymous.

I hope you will consider being interviewed. For more information, please feel free to contact me on my phone (40068664) or e-mail (lumakhoul@gmail.com).

The study has been notified to the Data Protection Official for Research, Norwegian Social Science Data Services.

Best regards,
Lubna Makhoul

1.2 Appendix 2: Request for participation in research project (Arabic)

دعوة للمشاركة في دراسة بحثية

**برنامج المعلومات الإلزامي في مراكز استقبال اللاجئين في النرويج:
ما هي أهداف برنامج المعلومات و ما هو رأي طالبي اللجوء بهذا البرنامج؟**

اسمي لبنى مخول وانا طالبة في درجة الماجستير في جامعة جنوب شرق النرويج. أقوم حاليا بإعداد رسالة الماجستير حول برنامج المعلومات الإلزامي لطالبي اللجوء في مراكز استقبال اللاجئين في النرويج.

تهدف الدراسة الى التعمق في موضوعات وتصورات برنامج المعلومات الإلزامي لطالبي اللجوء بهدف تطوير فهم سياسة اللجوء في النرويج على الصعيدين النظري والعملي. تستهدف هذه الدراسة إلى ملامسة أسس مؤسسات عملية اللجوء من جهة و سياسة الاندماج في النرويج من جهة أخرى. وستقوم بالوقت ذاته على إبراز وجهة نظر طالبي اللجوء ومدى فهمهم واستيعابهم للمؤسسة وسياساتها.

أود أن أقوم بإجراء مقابلة معكم وطرح بعض الأسئلة مما سيساعدني على فهم وجهة نظركم حول برنامج المعلومات الإلزامي. سيتم تسجيل المقابلات صوتيا وسيتم استخدام هذه التسجيلات فقط في هذه الدراسة. المدة المتوقعة لكل مقابلة بما يقارب النصف ساعة.

التاريخ المتوقع لإكمال هذا المشروع هو أيلول 2016.

سيتم التعامل مع المعلومات بكل سرية. انا فقط من سيبستخدم مع هذه المعلومات وبهدف البحث فقط لا غير. لن يتم التطرق إلى هويتكم الشخصية ابدا. اشتهركم بهذه الدراسة هي اختيارية وطوعية. وبإمكانك الانسحاب في أي وقت تشاء دون إعطاء أي تبريرات، وسيتم تجاهل كل معلوماتك الشخصية في حال قررت الانسحاب من البحث. أرجو الموافقة على إجراء المقابلة.

لمزيد من المعلومات، الرجاء الاتصال على [40068664](tel:40068664)
أو عن طريق البريد الإلكتروني: lumakhoul@gmail.com

تم قيد هذا البحث ضمن برنامج حماية المعلومات البحثية، خدمة المعلومات العلمية الاجتماعية النرويجية.

مع كل التقدير،
لبنى مخول

1.3 Appendix 3: Interview Questions

1. What is your name and age?
2. What is your level of education and field of study?
3. What is your work title from home country?
4. How long have you been in Norway, and what is your legal status?
5. What kind of reception center do you reside?
6. How long have you attended The Obligatory Information Program for Asylum Seekers?
7. In your opinion, why does UDI believe it is necessary to attend The Obligatory Information Program for Asylum Seekers?
8. How did the Information Program influence your perception of the Norwegian society?
9. In your opinion, how does The Obligatory Information Program influence your understanding of Norway's integration policy?
10. In your opinion, is attending The Obligatory Information Program necessary? Why?
11. In your opinion, does The Obligatory Information Program give you information that you need?
12. How do you define "integration"?
13. In your opinion, is the Information Program an effective integration tool?