Cultural Integration: The Case of Afghan Refugees in Sweden

Peace and Development Studies

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Abstract

With increasing number of refugees coming to Europe in recent years, the discussion on how to integrate them in a better way into their host societies has gained new strength. One of the important issues concerning this debate is cultural adaptation. Afghans are one of the largest refugee communities in Sweden. Using a semi-structured approach, twenty-seven Afghan refugees were interviewed in three cities; Växjö, Malmö, and Ljungby, concerning their experiences with cultural integration in Sweden and the obstacles they face in order to integrate culturally into the Swedish society. In answering the research questions, the findings were examined through a theoretical framework derived from four theories, acculturation attitudes, acculturation moderators (Berry 1997), cultural maintenance and contact-participation (Berry, 1980) and cultural group relations in plural societies (Sam and Berry, 2006).

The findings of this study indicate that although Afghan refugees have encountered some difficulties such as language barriers, they have a positive attitude toward cultural adaptation to Sweden. Afghan refugees do not wish to abandon their own culture which means that they do not prefer another culture over their own culture. Their aims are to adjust to the Swedish culture because they want to live in Sweden permanently. In order to achieve more effective cultural integration in Sweden, possible adjustment will be needed to be taken to Swedish integration policies in order to facilitate cultural integration for refugees. Therefore, this study could be very valuable for a better understanding of the processes of cultural integration in the world and specially in Sweden.

Key Words: Cultural integration, Integration, Refugees, Afghanistan
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Chapter One: Introduction

1.1. Introduction, research problem and relevance

Nowadays, the integration of refugees into society raises many concerns for the countries and their governments in the world. In 2015 alone, approximately 244 million people migrated around the world (United Nations, 2016). Refugees\(^1\) are facing a lot of problems in the host country such as learning a new language, finding employment and housing, adapting the host country’s cultural norms, new laws (Boundless. 2016) and suffering from social exclusion (Bask, 2008). Especially in the urban areas, migrants suffer from strong segregation. Furthermore, a host nation’s attitude has big influence on integration, as a negative view on immigrants\(^2\) leads to discrimination, which makes it very difficult for a quick integration to take place (Entzinger and Biezeveld, 2003, pp.28-29). Assimilating refugees into society and providing the necessary support for them is a challenge for the host country.

Receiving countries have high expectations for immigrants to get integrated into society. These expectations come from the government and the host nation’s citizens (Entzinger and Biezeveld, 2002, pp.28-29). Integration can be considered a big achievement for host countries when it comes to human’s capital and economy. Penninx (2003) mentioned that the process of integration depends on two parties: firstly, migrants themselves and the effort they put in; secondly, the host countries and how they have been treating and receiving the newcomers into their organizations (p.1).

The important part of the process of the integration is cultural integration. The main issue regarding cultural integration is whether a person needs to give up his/her own cultural identity in order to completely assimilate or go along with the host country traditions. In other words, cultural integration requires the creation of mutual norms and basic rules for mutual understanding in the society while having core rules and regulations that should not be violated (Entzinger and Biezeveld, 2002, pp.23-25). Cultural integration is related not only to the quality of interaction between newcomers and their children with the receiving society, but also to the level of adaptation and rejection of cultural norms of the host society by newcomers and

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1 “Refugees” and “migrant” are often used interchangeably not only in media but also in public discourse. There is though difference between them, migrants do not move because of a direct threat but mainly to improve their lives by finding work, but refugees are people who flee persecution or armed conflict and cross national borders to seek safety and are defined and protected in international law (UNHCR, 2015).

2 According to international organization for migration (IOM,2011, p.1), immigration is a process by which non-nationals move into a country for the purpose of settlement.
cultural norms of the newcomers by the host society. Moreover, it can be measured by several factors such as: an individual’s sense of belonging into the host society, cultural contact between groups, and inter-group marriages. In addition, cultural integration is measured by the degree to which groups remain separate; for example, separation of religion from host institutions or schools, or an individual’s intention to return to the home country in the future (Brian, 2002).

One of those countries receiving many refugees is Sweden. Sweden’s population increased to approximately 103,662 people in 2015, and the major factor in that increase was refugees and immigrants. In 2015, around 134,240 people migrated into Sweden, about 60,641 females and 73,599 males. In 2016, around 11,232 people applied for asylum in Sweden, a lot of whom come from Afghanistan (Migrationsverket, 2016). Even though Sweden has become a host country to many, there are issues with integration and discrimination against refugees (Rosen and Olsson, 2015 cited in Solling, 2015, p.5).

A lack of jobs has a negative impact on the living standards of refugees for example studies show that people, who were born outside of Europe, live in smaller living quarters. Another aspect was mentioned by Bask (2008) who claimed that refugees arriving in Sweden suffered from high levels of social exclusion compared to Swedes (p.1). Many refugees in Sweden come from Afghanistan. Due to the war on terror tactics by the US and its allies, Afghanistan found itself at a state of chaos at the beginning of the century (World Fact book-CIA, 2016). Smith underlines that “longstanding animosity between ethnicities, forced marriages, insecurity, land disputes and the forced conscription of minors into the Taliban, the Afghan military, as well as forces fighting in Syria are the common reasons for asylum” (Smith, 2016, p.2).

This resulted in a large number of refugees. Around 178,000 Afghans entered Europe in 2015 and approximately around 42,000 entered Sweden (Smith,2016, p.2). A great number of Afghan refugees, approximately 14, 400, came into Sweden during November alone which makes them one of the largest group of refugees over the year. That number was increased to 51, 000 by the end of 2015 (Migrationsverket, 2016). Most Afghan refugees who are settled in Sweden, were previously refugees in countries like Pakistan, Iran and India but left as they could not regularize their status there (Smith, 2016). According to Shakibaie (2008, p.10), the first group of Afghan refugees who entered Sweden in 1999 came through Iran. Moreover, in Sweden, around 70% of Afghan refugees are men (SCB,2013 cited in UNCHR, 2013, p.10).
Cultural integration is harder for refugees from societies that have profoundly different cultural values from the host countries and Afghan refugees in Sweden are one of those groups. In addition to their tolerance of hardships on their way to Sweden, many authors maintain that it is essential that refugees adapt to the Swedish culture (Wilkens, 2016). Integration is not only a reciprocal process but also it involves complex practices: economic, social and cultural. Integration happens in different sectors of society; but it can be failed (Rudiger and Spencer, 2003, p.5).

However, there is not much written on cultural integration of Afghans into Western societies. For instance, a qualitative research done on Afghans in Canada gives us a good idea of how Afghans settled in Canada. Shiva Nourpanah (2010) applied Anthony Gidden’s structuration theory as the theoretical framework. In Anthony Gidden’s structuration theory, structure and agency are articulated and this is a main concept of his theory. Shiva interviewed Afghans about how they revealed their agency in the structural limitations of refugee life in Canada. The interviews results showed how the respondents use culture as a goal to express and explore their agency. Nourpanah found that Afghans have a strong sense of belonging. They have a sense of belonging towards Canada, their host country. And they wish to establish themselves and get rooted in the society. In the study, Shiva pointed out that the interviewees tend to socialize with people from their own country. The research in some cases harbored stereotypical (mis)conceptions about Canada but “this should not be read as marginalization. Studies have shown that immigrants across different ethnicities develop a strong sense of Canadian belonging and identity, despite their ethnic networks and backgrounds” (Nourpanah, 2010, p.98).

Another study done by Nourpanah (2014) is about the experience of integration and settlement of Afghans. Nourpanah found that Afghans suffered from a lack of political and legal voice (p.1). Moreover, Afghans pointed out that they felt much for their Afghan culture despite living in Canada but they did not take it as an obstacle for integration (2014).

Another qualitative study on Afghans by Stack and Iwasaki (2009) is on the pursuit of leisure activities among Afghan refugees in their adaptation to their migration process in Canada. Based on Afghan’s narrations, the real story of their lives, scholars found out that Afghans’ immigrants and refugees were considered marginalized and a minority group encountering difficulties and trauma during the process of adaptation in the host society (Stack and Iwasaki in Nourpanah 2010, p.21).
A qualitative study was conducted by Shakibaie (2008) on integration of Afghan women, coming as quota refugees to Sweden. Shakibaie (2008) used the framework of Ager and Strange (2004) for the integration of refugees, which is a model that examines refugees’ achievements in the society, according to specific domains. The results of her study showed that integration in Swedish community has been challenging for Afghan women. Those Afghan women have shown resilience in coping with new situations in the host country, while finding a job and learning a new language, which is difficult for them (p.45).

A quantitative study has been conducted by Fouraschen (2011) on Afghan language use and acculturation processes in the Netherlands. To find out how Afghans explored the cultural and linguistic maintenance, Fouraschen has applied the social identity theory of Tajfel and Turner (1979). The results of the study show that Afghans preserve their own cultural and linguistic heritage and they also show respect to the Dutch culture, norms and values. Thus, there is further need to deepen the knowledge on cultural integration.

Most of the studies done on Afghan refugees’ integration into their host countries rely on a socioeconomic perspective on integration (Shakibaie, 2008). Therefore, there is a research gap and a necessity to perform research focusing on cultural integration, since refugees cannot live in isolation from society. The different societies have different ideologies; Afghans are from a collectivist society while Swedish society tends to be more individualistic, and so Afghans have challenges in their resettlement and integration in Sweden (Wilkens, 2016).

It is crucial for them to interact with the society and understand its norms and values in order to achieve comprehensive integration. It is also vital to have the process supported by a detailed and rough research.

Through interviewing Afghan refugees regarding cultural adaptation, this research helps to provide information concerning the ways they adapt to be members of Swedish society and what they see as obstacles and hurdles. It will be a very constructive and helpful information for the possible adjustment to Swedish integration policies in order to facilitate cultural integration for refugees in Sweden. Because of the significant number of refugees living in Sweden and those that are arriving in the years to come. As it is mentioned above there are differences between Afghan and Swedish cultures. It is important to listen to Afghan refugees to understand how they consider those differences and variations in cultures that affect the process of their integration into society. Also, it is important to figure out what obstacles they
have when it comes to the cultural adaptation and how they tackle those obstacles, in order to pave the way for future refugees in Sweden.

The research aims to investigate what the needs are and the expectations of Afghan refugees for Swedish society, government and institutions. To make an effective integration of refugees in Sweden, particularly Afghan refugees and to help them adapt norms, there is a need to ensure that institutions have information on cultural adaptation. Moreover, the outcomes of this study could be very valuable for the future research in the context of cultural adaptation in Sweden and it would help to understand the processes of cultural adaptation and how countries can help refugees to go through these processes.

1.2. Objective

The objective of the study is to investigate what attitudes Afghan refugees have toward cultural adaptation, what obstacles they face in the process of integration into the new Swedish culture and society and what they need to do to overcome these obstacles to achieve a better integration.

1.3. Research questions

1. How do Afghan refugees perceive Swedish culture in comparison to their own?

2. Do Afghan refugees think that they need to adapt to the Swedish culture in order to fully integrate into Swedish society? Why, or why not?

3. What do they observe as obstacles regarding cultural integration?

4. What do Afghan refugees consider would facilitate their cultural integration into Swedish society?

1.4. Methodological and analytical considerations

This research is a qualitative field study with an abductive approach. Interviews were the main method of data collection for the research. 27 Afghan refugees were interviewed to grasp relevant information on the cultural adaptation. For my analytical framework for this study I am leaning on John Berry’s extensive work on acculturation strategies, acculturation moderators, cultural group relations in plural societies, and cultural maintenance and contact-participation (Berry 1997; Sam and Berry 2006; Berry 1980).
1.5. Disposition

This study includes six sections. After the introductory chapter, the second chapter applies the analytical framework. The third chapter is the methodological considerations which presents the method utilized for this study and explains how the interviews will be conducted, how many will be interviewed, the ethical considerations of the study and also the limitations and delimitations of the study. The next chapter includes the findings concerning the research questions, and the fifth chapter concludes the discussion and analysis of the research findings. After that, chapter six contains the conclusion and some recommendations in line with the findings of the research for further study.
Chapter Two: Analytical Framework

2.1. Conceptual framework

Integration

Integration according to United Nation’s definition, is considered a process that consists of two interrelated components, to include “… the process and the result of the process, the results of the adaptation of persons of foreign origin into their new home society and acceptance by that society of the foreigner” (UNHCR, 2012 cited in UNHCR, 2013, p.9). At the same time, refugees do not need to abandon their cultural identity (UNHCR, 2012 cited in UNHCR, 2013, p.9).

Based on research in Canada, Lori Wilkinson defined integration as a mutual process where newcomers are merged into a new society (Wilkinson, 2013). As a result of this process, interaction between newcomers and the receiving country might differ from one to another. For instance, if immigrants and refugees alter their behaviors, the receiving countries also change the policy due to integrate newcomers. Gradually, both newcomers and their children start to adapt the host cultural norms. The process requires a lot of work so as to make sure that the receiving society is prepared to accept new people in the community (ibid. p.1).

Ager and Strang define integration as:

An individual or group is integrated within a society when they achieve public outcomes within employment, housing, education, health etc. Which are equivalent to those achieved within the wider host communities; are socially connected with members of a(national, ethnic, cultural, religious or other) community with which they identify, with members of other communities and with relevant services and functions of the state; and have sufficient linguistic competence and cultural knowledge, and a sufficient sense of security and stability, to confidently engage in that society in a manner consistent with shared notions of nationhood and citizenship. (Ager and Strang, 2004, pp.5-9).

There is another definition provided by the European Commission which states that integration is a dynamic, two-way process of mutual accommodation by all refugees and immigrants and residents of all the member states. Integration refers to the dynamic and bilateral process of accommodating both immigrants and residents of member states (2016). In order to have a
successful integration mechanism, it is significantly important to establish a frequent interaction between immigrants and state citizens, which can be achieved more conveniently by utilizing shared forums, inter-cultural dialogue, education about immigrants and immigrants’ culture (Bijl and Verweij, 2012, p.35). Thus, in Sweden, integration policy relies not only on an individual’s rights irrespective their ethnic and cultural backgrounds but also it relies on human rights, the issue of equality of gender and democratic governance. Moreover, Sweden has adopted multi-cultural attitudes toward integration. From their perspective, integration is a two-way process, meaning no group has to give up their cultural identity, providing that both add a shared dimension to that identity (Bijl and Verweij, 2012, p.35).

According to Entzinger & Biezeveld (2002) integration is often used as a concept, for instance, in most academic studies related to sociology. Integration in a society will definitely lead to a firm relationship among the constituent parties, groups and individuals. Social cohesion is usually known as an equivalent for integration in the society (ibid, p.6). They introduced an indicator which is known as a benchmark and it has four parts of the integration process. These parts include socio-economic, legal and political, the attitudes of receiving societies towards immigrants and cultural integration (ibid, p.19).

1) Socioeconomic Integration characterizing as an indicator for successful integration associates with the migrant’s contribution in the labor market, it has some factors that stimulate or hamper the process of integration, for example language competence, education and training (Entzinger and Biezeveld ,2002, pp.19-20). Income level, as an indicator it is connected to migrants’ participation in their jobs, for instance to see whether they are over-represented in a low-skilled job or in a job that requires their education. Another indicator that measures social and economic integration of a migrant is social security and welfare. For instance, obtaining a house, a job, health care and education while the quality of the living standard is recognized as a further indicator (ibid, p.21).

2) Legal and Political Integration refers to grant equal rights and full citizen rights to immigrants who have become the citizens of the country whether they were born or not in the host country (ibid, p.25). In addition, naturalization rules are different in one country from another. Some states expect immigrants to abandon their pervious citizenship to prevent conflict loyalties after naturalization (ibid). Legal and political integration can be categorized in four parts

a) How many immigrants get citizenship?
b) How many immigrants have two nationalities?

c) Immigrants’ participation in voting.

d) Immigrants’ activeness in the civil society of the host country (ibid, p.35).

3) **Attitude of Recipient Countries**: Integration is not only one process of which immigrants bear all the responsibilities. The recipient society has some responsibilities, too (p.38). In accordance with the statement mentioned above, institutions of the recipient societies should be available for the immigrants and aid them with education, health care and so on (ibid, 29).

4) **Cultural Integration**: the main issue concerning cultural integration is that whether a migrant needs to give up his/her own cultural identity so as to completely assimilate or keeps it in the host country. In other words, cultural integration means approval of both norms and basic rules of the host country by immigrants or by their attitudes toward basic rules and norms within the host country (Entzinger and Biezeveld, 2002, p.23). Moreover, Sardinha (2009) points out that cultural integration means embracing different religions, beliefs, sexual orientations, cultural affiliations and ensuring equal rights for all people who live within a society (p.6). A person who maintains close ties with his or her country of origin is not well integrated into the host society. Many individuals marry someone the country of the origin which is often interpreted as a sign of lacking cultural integration (Entzinger and Biezeveld, 2002, p.23). Besides, language proficiency of migrants is a vital factor, which enables them to communicate with the members of the host society. The level of immigrants’ language capabilities in the host country where immigrants live, may also predict the degree of acculturation. For instance, in a segregated society the need to learn the language is not only deeply felt by newly immigrants, but also those who have been residents for a longer time (ibid, p.24).

A weak integration in the country results in a high crime rate among migrant’s societies (Entzinger and Biezeveld, 2002). On the one hand, high crime rates can be seen as a sign that offenders do not accept basic rules and norms of society. On the other, it can also be seen as an indicator that offenders are not fully accepted as members of the society. Moreover, a high rate of crime performed by immigrants, has a very negative impact on the perception of all immigrants in a society and thus it harms their opportunities for integration (ibid, p.24).
2.2. Theoretical framework

2.2.1. The process of cultural adaptation

In this section, the author applies four theories of John Berry who is one of the main establishers of the field of acculturation psychology. His work is very influential in the field of cultural adaptation and he is described as a person that was at the frontier on defining contemporary approaches to acculturation (Ward, 2008). Similarly, psychological acculturation is one of the most prominent theories cited in social work regarding immigrants and refugees (Sakamoto, 2008).

Adaptation refers to the change taking place in individuals or groups in response to environmental demands. These adjustments can happen sooner or later (Berry, 1997, p.13). According to Berry (2005), acculturation is the process of cultural and psychological changes taking place as a result of contact between two or more cultural groups and their individual members (ibid, p.2). Usually, the process occurs at two levels. At the first level, it consists of changes in social structures, community institutions and in cultural practices, while at an individual level, it is a process of cultural and psychological changes involving various forms of mutual accommodation, which leads to some longer-term psychological and sociocultural adaptations between both groups. Often, contact and changes happen for plenty of reasons such as colonization, migration, military invasions and sojourning due to tourism, international study and overseas (ibid, p. 3). “It continues long after initial contact in culturally plural societies, where ethno cultural communities maintain feature of their heritage cultures” (Berry, 2005, p.3). Acculturation is a process, which takes place when different cultures are in contact with each other. For instance, long-term adaptation and living in cultural-contact will result in a long-term accommodation among the groups in contact. This happens because groups in contact with each other are sharing food preference, adjusting forms of dressings, social relations and acquiring languages (Berry, 2005, p.4). Cultural adaptation theory is related to the process and time it takes a person to assimilate to a new (host) culture. For instance, a person who lives in a new culture can experience difficulties in the process of cultural adaptation if the society is drastically different from his or her home country (Teasley, 2015). While these mutual adaptation sometimes take place through two processes of culture shedding and learning which means individuals adjust themselves into the society of settlement (Berry, 1992). It sometimes leads to culture conflict and acculturative stress during intercultural interactions. This implies some degree of cultural conflict happens when a person has to gives
up his or her culture. But conflict can be prevented when two groups in contact will share some mutual accommodations (Berry, 2005, p. 6).

Acculturation is defined as a linear process of letting go of one’s culture of origin while migrants’ assets to obtain the traits of the receiving culture: uni-dimensional acculturation or assimilation. On the other hand, it is defined as an orthogonal process of people holding or shedding go of the culture of origin, while they acquiring or rejecting the host culture independently (Ryder et al., 2000; Zea et al., 2003, cited in Sakamoto, 2007, p.519).

Berry perspective was that individuals tend to keep the original culture at the same time while adapting to the host culture (1990).

2.2.2. Four types of acculturation strategies by Berry (1997):

Berry (1997) points out that there are four different types of acculturation strategies among persons confronted with a different culture in their new homeland. This model is generated from Berry’s theory of cultural maintenance and contact-participation in 1980.

*Integration* occurs when individuals wish to maintain their original culture while accepting the host culture and having interaction with other groups.

*Assimilation* happens when individuals reject their original culture and cultural identity while accepting the receiving country’s culture and having interaction with the other groups.

*Separation* happens when individuals are interested in their original culture and avoid the host culture by avoiding interaction with others.

*Marginalization* occurs while individuals have no interest or there is a little possibility in cultural maintenance (the old culture and the host culture) due to the reasons of enforced cultural loss and no interest in having interaction with other groups because of the suffering from discrimination and social exclusion (Berry, 1997, p.5).

According to Berry (1997), there are two perspectives on acculturation: one is a linear process of assimilation, which means assimilation has been reached when starting with one culture and transforms gradually into the other. Second perspective is cultural plurality, which means a person adapts two different cultural backgrounds without giving up the original cultural identity or original ethnic.

A number of authors have emphasized that acculturation has several domains: first one of those major domains is people identity while second is choice of friendship, third one is people
behaviours or people attitudes generation and fourth one is geographic history as well. Therefore, these self-report measures focused on behavioural and cultural values of individuals (Chung at al., 2004; Suinn et al., 1987, 1955, cited in Sakamoto, 2007, p.520).

2.2.3. Berry’s models of cultural group relations in plural societies

Acculturation theory explains intercultural relations and plural societies (Berry 1997, p.5). For instance, acculturation occurs when people from different culture come and live together and these people share cultural diversity with the host nation (Sam & Berry, 2006). According to Allen and Skelton (1999 cited in Berry 2005, p.27), different cultural and ethnic groups simultaneously live together in a plural society. Sam and Burry (2006) emphasize that there is no society that is made up of people having one culture, one language and one identity (p.2). Instead, they point out two models of cultural group relations in plural societies.

1. The melting pot model is about a dominant society and minority groups that are on the margins. The minority groups in this model are rejected, they are accepted in the society by being absorbed into the dominant culture and basically they disappear as a group. In other words, it consists of the dominant society, minority society and groups with restrictions where the minority groups are immersed in the main cultures and cannot be seen as single culture (Sam and Berry, 2006, p.28).

2. The multicultural model is about individuals and groups, which keep their cultural identity. At the same time, they participate in the social structure of the larger society. All different cultures and groups are accepted, but they should have to create shared norms about how to live together. Individuals and groups maintain their cultural identity as part of the larger social structure society and develop shared norms of living with diversity (Sam and Berry, 2006, p.28).

“Assimilation when sought by the non-dominant acculturating group it termed the Melting Pot. When separation is forced by the dominant group, it is Segregation. Marginalization, when imposed by the dominant group it is Exclusion. Integration when cultural diversity is a feature of the society as a whole, including all various ethno cultural groups, it is called Multiculturalism.” (Berry, 2011, p.7).
2.2.4. Berry’s cultural maintenance and contact-participation (1980)

The amount of contact a person has with the receiving country and the people of his or her own cultural background has an effect on his/her integration or assimilation in society (Shadid, 2007, cited in Sakamato, 2007, p. 527). Berry’s (1980) theory of acculturation has two concepts: cultural maintenance and contact-participation, which are based on the amount of contact a person has established with the host country and his/her own cultural background.

Cultural maintenance: “to what extent are cultural identity and characteristics considered to be important, and their maintenance strived for” (Berry, 1997, p.9). It is considered a vital factor to maintain one’s own identity and characterises (Berry, 1997, p.10).

Contact and Participation: “to what extent should they become involved in other cultural groups or remain primarily among themselves” (Berry, 1997, p.9). Is relationship/contact with the new society appreciated and preserved (Berry, 1997, p.10).

Berry noted that after asking questions the answers will be transformed into four different categories. In this model, it can be seen different degrees of adaptation which is expected from the minority group by the majority group (1997, p.9). Usually, a diverse society includes a dominant group from the receiving country and one or more minority groups.

![Acculturation Model as Constructed by the author from Berry (1997)](image-url)
The models mentioned above can be compared to Berry’s (liner and bipolar) model. According to Phinney (1990, cited in Berry 1997, p.21) linear models emphasizes ethnic identity in an acculturation process as a line that moves from one ethnic identity to another identity. Acculturation compared to ethnic identity is seen as a two dimensional process, one dimension with both the traditional ethnicity relation and the other with the new dominant ethnicity relation. In this regard, a person can have a strong or weak tie with both ethnic identities, therefore it is not a simple transition from one ethnic identity to the other (ibid, pp.21-22).

2.2.5. Acculturation moderators

Berry underlines that some factors, which he calls acculturation moderators, have a significant impact on a person’s acculturation process which include: age, level of education, distance to receiving society, gender and migration factors, (Berry 1997, p.15).

A) Age influences how a person acculturates and speeds the process, for instance, youth acculturate faster because they are much eager to adjust to the host society compared to the older people. According to Berry (1997) the reason for this it might be related to increased personal adaptability.

B) People with high levels of education tend to adapt to a new society much faster comparatively to people who have low levels of education. Therefore, they earn more money and have more contact with the people of the host society.

C) Gender also plays a significant role in the adaptation of the receiving country’s norms. According to Berry (1997), it might be difficult for females to acculturate in a new society and to adapt to the host society because of a vast different between their new roles in the new society compared to their home country.

D) Migration can be divided into two factors: one is the pull factor resulting in a voluntary migration (immigrants), second is the push factor resulting in an involuntary migration (refugees) (Berry, 2005.p.5). According to Kim (1988), for migrants moved by the push factor, their migration is not a result of the positive perspective that they have toward the majority group and their opportunities (cited in Berry, 1997, p.23). According to Ager (1990) “among involuntary migrants, refugees and asylum seekers called forced migrants, they have the greatest hurdles to face: they frequently do not want to leave their homelands, and, if they do,
it is not always possible for them to be granted the right to stay and settle into the new society” (Berry, 2005, p. 30).

E) The extent of difference between two cultures has an effect on the speed in adaptation. For instance, if there are similarities between the two cultures, adaptation will be easier for migrants (Berry, 1997, p. 23).

For Berry, acculturating persons from non-dominant ethno-cultural groups encounter two questions that arise from intercultural contact. For instance, is it important to maintain one’s original cultural heritage? Or is it important to engage in intercultural contact with other groups? If the answers to these questions are dichotomized as yes–no responses, four acculturation orientations such as attitudes, strategies, preferences, and modes can be identified. Ward (2008) argued in contrast that the emergence of acculturation strategies takes place as a process and is set in a broader sociocultural context. This emergence has been examined both as a static outcome in itself or as a predictor of broader adaptation. Ward says that important elements of the process have been largely overlooked: What does integration mean, and how is it achieved? Another question is whether people integrate by changing their orientation to home and host cultures? Ward considers that although Berry’s model presents an orderly framework, it is not dynamic. For Berry, acculturating individuals orient themselves to their traditional culture, the wider society, to both or to neither, but it is not clear how people arrive at these orientations, and if they change over time. He also states, that while we know empirically that the two dimensions of acculturation are orthogonal, we do not know if acculturating individuals always experience them in that particular way. It has been argued in the personality, clinical and counselling literature that migrants often experience conflict between the demands of home and host cultures and that this is likely to have negative psychological and social consequences (2008, pp. 2-3).
Chapter Three: Methodology

3.1. Qualitative field study

This research is a qualitative field study. One advantage of the qualitative study is that the researcher can obtain data from the individual’s perspective (NSF, cited in Ali, 2016, p.21). Therefore, the researcher conducts interviews with Afghan refugees to provide answers to the research questions. The focus of this study is on Afghan refugees. Therefore, 27 Afghan men and women were interviewed. The interviews were conducted individually. Interviews lasted between 60 to 90 minutes per interviewee. This research was conducted according to snowball sampling (Bryman, 2016). After interviewing an Afghan friend in Växjö, she introduced me to the Afghans’ community in the city, which opened the doors for more research and interviews.

Qualitative methods are used for “exploring and understanding the meaning of individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem; the process of research involves emerging questions and procedures, data typically collected in the participant’s setting” (Creswell, 2014, p.4). Those who want to do qualitative research, are looking for either grasping the context or setting of participants via visiting this context and gathering information individually from the participants (ibid, p.8). For Bryman (2016, p.374) qualitative research methods rely on words for doing analysis. One of the advantages of the qualitative method is that when a person shares his or her own experiences or events for the researcher, these feelings can be understood by directly observing interviewees (ibid, p.8).

3.2. Abduction method

In this research an abduction method is used. Abduction according to Danemark et al (2008)’s definition is kind of scientific inference or mode of inference concerning re-descriptions or re-contextualization (Danemark, 2008, cited in, Ali, 2016, p.21). Besides, both qualitative and abductive approach provide wider explanation for research problem. Step one is understanding the interviewees’ experiences toward cultural adaptation, followed by applying this information to compare with other four theories. Meso-level is also theories of social movement, communication and organization (Creswell, 2014, p.52). The lack of knowledge about the cultural adaptation of Afghan refugees in Swedish society, and the ready availability of a suitable analytical framework suggests an abductive approach to the research. Therefore, the researcher uses an abductive method applying four theoretical perspectives of John Berry: his acculturation attitude, acculturation moderators (Berry,1997), Berry’s (1980) theory of the
cultural maintenance and contact-participation in their own society, and Sam and Berry (2005) cultural group relations in plural societies to analyze the findings. The researcher applies four theories of Berry in order to compare these definitions with Afghan refugees’ experiences toward the adaptation of Swedish cultural, for instance, is it easy or difficult for them to culturally integrate and what are the basic cultural barriers which hamper them to culturally adapt to Swedish society

3.3. Interview process

The author has conducted the interviews in Växjö, Malmö, and Ljungby in order to do the research on Afghan refugees. The author has chosen these cities because a lot of Afghan refugees are living there. Moreover, there is one Afghan’s community organization in Växjö which helps them culturally to integrate into Swedish culture such as offering language training and leisure activities. Many Afghan refugees participate in the community for above mentioned reason. The reason of choosing Växjö, Malmö, and Ljungby is to capture the enriching experiences of Afghan refugees’ during the way of cultural adaptation into Swedish society.

Through snowball sampling, interviews were conducted during November and December face-to-face, on the phone and through Skype. All interviewees who have done the interviews living in those cities are first generation Afghan refugees between the age of 26 and 65. The implementation of an interview was performed so as to get firsthand information, in other words, primary information from Afghan refugees’ interviewees. At the time of the interview, all women who were interviewed were employed except two who were doing Swedish for immigrants (SFI) courses. All men who were interviewed were working except three who were relying on social welfare and one was a student. Four of the men were illiterate, nine of them had an elementary degree, and the rest had done the secondary school in Afghanistan. Two of the women had been illiterate in Afghanistan, but the rest got a diploma degree in Iran and Pakistan, and one received a Bachelor degree in Iran.

All interviews were done individually to get a better result, in order not to make them distracted by the environment: four interviews were done in the researcher’s apartment, the researcher invited them one by one in order to get their different perspectives. All interviews were done in the study. Four of the female interviewees agreed to do the interviews in their houses in a quiet room. The rest of the interviews were done through Skype and phone; the process of the interviews was the same for the rest of them. They were sitting individually in a quiet room to conduct interviews. At first some interviewees were a little hesitate to speak, but by convincing
them, encouraging them and starting to ask some general information, gradually they overcame the difficulties.

3.4. The interviewees

All interviewees were Afghan refugees who got Swedish permanent residence permits. The sample was divided in two groups of men and women, employed and unemployed. The interviews were done in Persian language; moreover, all participants chosen among those Afghans’ refugees could speak Dari.

Some interviewees were living in Ljungby and in Malmö. Due to the difficulty for the researcher to travel, interviews were conducted over the phone and 2 interviews were done through the Skype. Not all the interviews were recorded, in fact, 17 out of 27 interviewees declined to be recorded. In these cases, notes were taken instead of recording for those who declined, and during all interviews, notes were taken to record body language, facial expressions and gestures as well. The notes proved to be a useful supplement.

The interviews were semi-structured, using a topic guide. During the interviews, interviewees were allowed to feel free to mention additional topics that they wished to discuss so as to do interviews in a more friendly environment. The researcher set up some questions to ask the interviewees with the hope of gathering some useful and sufficient data from them.

Semi-structured, in-depth interviewing methods were used in order to get a better understanding the perceptions of Afghan refugees on Swedish cultural adaptation. The reason for preparing semi-structured and open-ended questions for research is the fact that semi-structure questions are not only a two-way communication but are also fairly open for answers (Keller and Conradin, n.d). Semi-structured interviews provide the same questions to each interviewee while there always exists some kind of flexibility in order to ask them questions, it is mainly applicable when the interviewer exploring the interviewees’ outlook toward the research questions (Teijlingen, 2014, p.20).

3.5. Ethical considerations

In order to perform an interview and observe, the ethical concern is an important factor for this research. Some information about the interviewees of this research is anonymous, such as the names. The record file will be accessible only to the researcher. The researcher received the interviewees’ consent.
Those who participated in this research were made aware of the aim of the research and their participation was voluntary. Also, the privacy of the interviewees was not invaded at all. Interviewees were made aware that they could terminate the interview at any time or they could choose not to answer any questions about which they were not at ease with. In order to protect the identity of the interviewees, anonymity was ensured. Moreover, the researcher presents their views using a code to preserve their identities.

3.6. Limitations and delimitations of study

One limitation is that the interviewees were solely Afghans refugees speaking (Dari). The researcher excluded Afghan Pashtun speakers due to the problem of language barriers. Therefore, the scope of the study mainly focuses on the Dari speaking refugees. The other limitation is that the number of the interviews is constrained because of the time restriction. As most of the interviewees were employed, it was difficult to conduct interviews during the week. Interviews were either conducted during evenings or weekends. Also, the Dari-speaking Afghan refugees belong to the Hazara ethnic group which is prosecuted by the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. Some prefer to stay low-key and thus not very interested in being interviewed and sharing their experience. The research was conducted on a rather small sample size of 27 refugees. The interviewees do not represent all Afghan refugees living in Sweden. Thus, it is not possible to make generalization based on this study and it would also be interesting to have a bigger sample size to expand the study much further.

One of the delimitations of this research is the lack of interviewees in the study, although there are a lot of Afghan refugees in Sweden, it was not possible for the author to do interviews with all of them. The second delimitation is that the interview is conducted only in Växjö, Malmö, and Ljungby. However, no interviews were conducted in other cities due to the limited traveling funding.
Chapter Four: Findings

Twenty-seven Afghan refugees were interviewed for this research: this includes eleven females and sixteen males (see appendix 2). The age of the interviewees range from 26 to 65 years old. Out of the 27 refugees that were interviewed, there were 11 women and 16 men. Four women were at the age of 35 and three of them were 26. The rest of the women refugees has an age of 27, 31, 44 and 46. Regarding age in the male group, the youngest man was 28 years old and the oldest one was 65 years old. Five of them were 38 years of age, four were 31, two of them were 42 and the remaining three were 36, 44 and 45 years old at that time.

In regard to educational background of the refugees, four of the men had no education, the rest of the men had secondary education in their home country. When it comes to the women’s background only two did not have an education, and the rest of the women had a diploma degree. Four of them had a diploma in the field of literature, two of them had a diploma in sociology. Regarding the remaining three women, one had a diploma in empirical science, other one in cooking and the last one had done a bachelor in an Arabic language.

The total number of years the refugees have been living in Sweden ranges between six to sixteen at the time of the interviews. Three of the women have been living in Sweden for six years, one of the women is living for eight years, two of them for ten years. The other three have been living in Sweden for sixteen years. Among the men interviewed, five have been living in Sweden for twelve years and the rest of them have been living for sixteen years.

The major reason to come to Sweden for all the interviewees is that due to the insecurity and wars in Afghanistan except one of the interviews. She came here to rejoin with her husband.

With respect to the employment status of the refugees, three of the men and two of the women were unemployed and totally depend on incomes from social welfare. One of the men is working as a mechanic and the rest 12 men are working in restaurants as cooks, dish washers and kitchen staff. Concerning the women’s current status of employment, two of them are working as social workers regarding refugees for their Swedish language, one is an elementary school teacher and the remaining six women are working as interpreters.

Most of the Afghan refugees in the study have one to three children, except one of the men who has six children. Most of the interviewees have mentioned that their close families are living in Afghanistan. Some refugees have relatives in Iran and Pakistan as well. They have three to five cousins or nephews living in Sweden.
4.1. Interviewees’ reflections on Swedish and Afghan cultures

When asked to define culture, most of the interviewees regardless of their gender defined culture as the way of life and how they live, except four of the female interviewees, (interviews. f1, 3, 4, 9, 2016, see appendix 2). One of the interviewee said that culture was, “going to school is the sign of culture” (Interview, f 1, 2016, see appendix 2). Another one’s reflection defined culture as “the way people speak” (Interview, f 3, 2016, see appendix 2). Yet another interviewee viewed culture as “development and identity of the country” (Interview, f 4, 2016, see appendix 2). The other one revealed that culture was “respect to others’ religion” (Interview, f 9, 2016, see appendix 2). Four male interviewees (Interviews, m3; 10; 12; 15, 2016, see appendix 2) pointed out culture as how children communicate with their parents, their way of dressing, understanding of each other and respect for others’ rights irrespectively.

When asked how they would describe Afghan culture, at the beginning most interviewees were silent but when I prompted them out, all Afghan men and women mentioned that they are very social; Afghans care a lot for their guests. When they invite someone to their home, they host in such a way that guests feel comfortable in their house. They cook several dishes for their guests. They respect their neighbours and take care of them. Most of them pointed out that family and family roots are very important for them.

When asked to define the Swedish culture, the interviewees pointed out, Swedes wear what they like, they are very frank and straightforward and express their feelings very directly. Besides, when Swedes want to go out to drink and eat, each person pays their own bills. Some Swedes are very kind, help refugees without any expectations. On the whole, they are hardworking (Interviews, m2; 14; f 7, 2016, see appendix 2).

When asked about the difference between the culture of Afghanistan and Swedish culture, some referred to their celebrations: one of the biggest festival in Afghanistan is Nowruz. They celebrate it on the first day of the spring and it is a new year. On the day (Nowruz) people wear new clothes and give each other gifts, the families kiss each other and after that the young people visit the elders and congratulate on the new year and wish them luck in the new year. Another famous festival is killing of four goats which are placed on the ground. There are two groups competing each other, some prevent others from picking the goats by the followers, but the other group should stop them from grabbing. During this festival, each ethnic group wear its own traditional clothes and eats different food. Afghans preserve their own ethnic rules and
customs and never adopt the norms of the other ethnic groups (interviews, m6,9,10,15; f5,7,8, 2016, see appendix 2).

Some interviewees pointed out that there are quite some differences between the Swedish celebrations. The interviewees pointed out that in Sweden, on the other hand, one of the most important, delighted and favourite holidays is Christmas. People provide Christmas trees and decorate them with bright lamps. Red colour is a sign of that day. People give each other gifts and eat various kinds of food. Swedes hang up lamps representing the star of Jesus before Christmas in their houses. During the spring some people wear two colours pairs of socks and their celebrations are root in their Christianity. Like Easter, people celebrate it in the spring and eat eggs and the yellow colour is the symbol of that day (Interviews, m 6;9;10;15; f5;7;8 ,2016, see appendix 2). Another Swedish celebration is Lucia, where children put some candles on top of their heads, which is held before Christmas. In summer, they have ‘mid-summer’, pick up some bunches of the flowers and hang on the piece of wood, while dancing around the wood and singing.

Another big difference is about their law, Afghan refugees pointed out: they can see the equality of men and women and regardless of religion all people have equal rights in Sweden. It is a secular country which means religion is separated from politics; for example, people can follow any religions or even being an atheist.

All interviewees mentioned that another factor which distinguishes Sweden form Afghanistan is democracy. One women said: “democracy is one of the characteristics of Swedish culture, their rules and regulations do not prevent them from doing any activities which they want to attend” (Interview, f7, 2016, see appendix 2).

Democracy is one of the outstanding features of the Swedish culture. There are no restrictions for people in their lives, whatever school of thought they belong to, does not matter. The majority of the refugees underlined that Swedes obey the law and they respect it, for example police treat people with respect and also police provide assistance if they need help of any type.

Some interviewees mentioned that: their legislative rules were taken from Islam in Afghanistan. Most of the Afghans are Muslims and they pray to Allah. Therefore, with respect to the Islam, it is very important in their life. Moreover, culture combines with the Islamic rules. Afghans avoid drinking alcohol, consuming pork, dancing with the opposite sex and they do not have relationships with the opposite sex. They pray to their Allah five times in a day and fast in the holy month of Ramadan. Due to the strict rules and regulations which are rooted
in Islam, people are very conservative and they are not free to do the kinds of activities they would like to do. Based on Islamic culture women avoid shaking hands with men. Women have to put on scarf and hijab. In some rural areas women wear a full covered dress called Burgha, so that no one can see their faces. (Interviews, F3, f 5; m 5, 2016, see appendix 2). One man said: “if someone does something against Islamic rules, he or she, according to their culture and norms of the country will be seriously punished. In some areas, people do not like foreign people and languages due to the Islamic rules” (Interview, m14,2016). Two men mentioned that “according to the strict Islamic law, women have no right to get education, especially in villages” (Interviews, m14; 15,2016, see appendix 2).

Afghan men and women refugees said, they do not like about Swedes that Swedes are reserved and do not like to hang out a lot. They do not make friends with others easily. It takes time and sometimes very hard to get close and have a relationship with them. They would like to have their own privacy and personal space. For instance, children can get independent at the age of 18 and live by themselves. They do not visit their parents everyday but only sometimes. They are free to have boyfriends and girlfriends and have a relationship with each other. There are no boundaries in their relationships. They make their own decisions regarding their lives (Interviews, f 6;7;9 and m,12, 2016, see appendix 2).

Concerning Swedish relationships, the interviewees had observed that couples live together for years without legal marriage. One of the men pointed out, “if they do not like to live together, they can quit from the relationship” (interview, m 13, 2016, see appendix 2). Some women mentioned that one of the main Swedish characteristic is that they hug each other, most of them drink alcohol and not all of them eat pork. (Interviews, f 4; 5;7, 2016, see appendix 2).

However, Afghan refugees also appreciated very much the Swedish culture for example, the equality of men and women’s rights in Sweden is what they have never observed in Afghanistan. For instance, women have rights to get education and work. Second interesting Swedish norm is people’s respect for freedom of speech and religion (Interview, f6;8;9;10;11, 2016, see appendix 2). One of the men mentioned that “both men and women work and make money in Sweden, while in Afghanistan we do not have this” (Interview, m,13, 2016, see appendix 2).

What are the positive and negative aspects of the Afghan culture? Positive aspects: all Afghan men and women mentioned, family is very important for them and children respect and obey their parents. About the negative aspects: when their children got married, they have to live
with their wives in their parent’s house. One of the men described about this tradition. He said: “it is not acceptable in our culture if their children want to live alone (Interview, 3 m, 2016, see appendix 2) while their daughters after marriage, she has to leave her father’s house but she and her husband live with their father-in-law”.

All interviewees mentioned that it is not customary for children to live alone after the age of puberty. When it comes to marriage, it is parents’ responsibility to choose a girl for them, it is not accepted in their culture that the son chooses his future wife. Most of the marriages in Afghanistan are arranged. First of all, the son’s parents select a future daughter-in-law, afterwards with their son, they go to her father’s house to propose to her family. The girl’s parents take some days to investigate their potential son-in-law. One man mentioned that “when the girl’s parents accept them, the future groom has to pay $10,000 which is seventy percent in cash to the parent of the bride and the rest to buy jewellery for the future wife (some ethnicity group call it Ghailin others Ghale)” (Interview, m 5, 2016, see appendix 2).

Four women who were interviewed, mentioned some negative aspects of the Afghan culture. They said that couples should live together forever and divorce is not accepted in their culture. They further added that it is shameful for the family to get divorced (Interview, f 7; f 8; f 9; f 10, 2016, see appendix 2). One man mentioned that “another negative, custom in Afghanistan is that the groom has to pay a lot of money for his marriage. He further mentioned that for this reason “I was not able to get married in Afghanistan” (Interview, m11, 2016).

Some of both genders pointed out that a negative aspect of Afghans’ culture, it is the duty of men to earn money therefore women should stay at home and doing chores. Another negative aspect of Afghan culture is that a religious man never calls his wife by her first name in front of the other men and he always tries to avoid calling her. Next negative aspect is that some families force their daughter at the age of nine to marry someone who is very old and rich, but this custom exists in rural areas (Interviews, M 9; 10, 2016, see appendix 2). Some women complained about strict Islamic rules against women. They mentioned that some parents apply violence on women and some young girls are forced to marry someone who they do not like and would like to spend a life with for the rest of their lives (Interviews, f 8, f 7; f 10, 2016, see appendix 2). Furthermore, interviewees mentioned that the way men treat a woman is very different. One woman mentioned that “some Afghan men are dictating their family, they force their opinions on their wives and their children” (Interview, f11, 2016, see appendix 2).
Two men mentioned that other negative aspects of their culture is the ethnicity problem. There are four Afghan ethnicities: Hazara, Tajik, Pashtun, Uzbek. Only the Hazara ethnicity is Shi’a Muslim, the rest ethnicities are Sunni. None of these ethnicities are allowed to marry a person from another ethnicity (marriage occurs within their own ethnic groups). But if marriage happens between Shi’a and Sunni, the couple have to run away from their families, or even have to leave Afghanistan to save their lives (Interviews, m 7; m 9, 2016, see appendix 2). One of the interviewees underlined that “Afghan men are usually very fanatic. It is shameful for them if their wives work outside their houses or go to school and study, especially in the rural areas. Another reason behind this tradition is that most of the people who are living in rural areas only care about their own ethnicities and respect” (Interview, m 10, 2016, see appendix 2).

4.2. Afghan refugees’ reflections on cultural integration

All Afghan refugees interviewed felt that it is important to integrate into the Swedish culture while they are living in Sweden. It is necessary for them to adapt those customs of Swedish culture which are not against Islamic rules and share it with their own culture. For instance, one woman mentioned “we can cook all Swedish dishes and eat except those dishes which can contain pork” (Interview, F 1,2016, see appendix 2).

Some believe that if they are living in Sweden “they have to get familiar with Swedish norms and customs in order to live properly and not to encounter difficulties” (Interview, m 15, 2016, see appendix 2). He mentioned “when he was in Afghanistan he never helped his wife, he thought it was her job to cook and raise children but in Sweden due to observing some Swedes, he learnt to help his wife” (Interview, m 15, 2016, see appendix 2). One man mentioned that in order not to bother themselves “it is better to adjust into Swedish society to make our life comfortable” (interview, m 9, 2016, see appendix 2). Another woman stated that “by adjusting to Swedish culture we can reduce the cultural differences, too” (interview, f 8,2016, see appendix 2).

On the importance of adapting to the Swedish culture, one woman mentioned “I am Muslim but every year I have a Christmas tree inside my house even though my religion is different but due to my children’s desire, I put it there just the same as Swedes. I will give them gifts” (interview, f 7, 2016, see appendix 2).
Concerning the significance of their cultural integration, another reason is that they say “they have left Afghanistan due to the war and insecurity and they do not want to come back there. They are refugees who enter Sweden. It is their duty to adjust themselves to the host society” (Interview, m 1, 2016, see appendix 2).

But they believe that they will preserve their own positive culture while they are living here in Sweden and they will prefer to transfer these positive aspects to their children. For instance, they wish to teach them to interact with their families, friends and even after marriages to visit their parents (Interviews, f 7; f 8; f10; f11; m 9, 2016, see appendix 2).

However, the interviewees visualised a lot of obstacles when it comes to cultural integration for example, they do not have an access to make Swedish friends. Having a Swedish friend is one of the biggest obstacle, because Swedish people do not mingle quickly. But the majority of interviewees mentioned, they have other friends of different nationalities such as Somalian, Bosnian, Albanian, Arab and Iranian living here in Sweden. Furthermore, they mentioned the special taste of the Afghan food is also one of the challenging thing for them. Swedish dishes are not as delicious as Afghan’s (Interviews, m3, m5, m7; f3, 2016, see appendix 2). Others said that the additional effect is that they do not drink alcohol or consuming pork which does not make them socialize (interviews, m 7; m8; m12, 2016, see appendix 2).

One woman mentioned “sometimes she was invited by her friends to attend parties but due to mentioned above, she refused” (Interview, f 5,2016, see appendix 2) she further mentioned that her friend got mad at her and could not understand her”.

One additional problem for them, which is also mentioned by almost all Afghans, is that they do not like too much freedom for their children’s life and the way they will treat their opposite sex. Some mentioned, they dislike to leave children alone (Interviews, m 7; m9; m11; f 5, f8, 2016, see appendix 2). Moreover, religion is another big issue for Afghans. Almost all Afghans mentioned, due to their religion, they cannot mingle easily with Swedish. In addition to that, two women mentioned, Swedes hug each other a lot, it is difficult for us to tackle this (Interviews, f 5; f8, 2016, see appendix 2). One man mentioned, “in my culture a woman should not shake hands and also should not be alone with a man.” He further mentioned that “it is a big problem to allow my wife to indulge in such practice” (Interview, m 4, 2016, see appendix 2). Afghan women cannot go inside disco and dance, this action is forbidden in their culture. One man mentioned that “some Afghan families would not let their girls marry non-Muslims” (Interview, m 11, 2016, see appendix 2).
When asked about obstacles in Sweden, all Afghan refugees brought up with language barriers, except for two women (Interview, f 9; f 10, 2016, see appendix 2), the rest of Afghans men and women revealed the difficulty of the Swedish language for them. Six Afghan men and women mentioned that they cannot learn it because they were illiterates in their own country so they cannot learn it easily. One man noted that “over 14 years living in Sweden he still has a problem with Swedish language” (Interview, m 11, 2016, see appendix 2).

Some men pointed out that some Swedes speak so fast, it is hard for them to understand, when they do not understand the language, they cannot talk to someone or even impossible to make friends. Therefore, they are not able to learn about their culture and their norms. In such manner they remain kept-away from the society (interviews, m 1; m2; m3; m4, 2016, see appendix 2).

Some people pointed out that they have contacts with Swedes through phone. Their relationship is limited except for greeting not more than that (Interviews, m 6;7, 2016, see appendix 2). One man said “there are two kinds of Swedish language: one is easy (lätt) and the other is very difficult (svårt). Some Swedes use difficult languages, we cannot understand” (Interview, m 8, 2016, see appendix 2).

One man brought up with some religious view “I as Muslim cannot accept Swedish culture but I am working in Sweden and paying my tax” (interview, m 13, 2016, see appendix 2).

In regard to socializing with Swedes, they mentioned that Swedes are shy, reserved and not social. It is very hard to make friends and maintain relationship with them. Almost all Afghan refugees have the same views in this regard. Some mentioned that they made efforts several times to have an interaction with their neighbours but they do not like to have contacts with them. One man pointed out that “when my wife cooked some delicious typically Afghan food, we gave it to some of our neighbours to start getting closer in this way, then for a short time they could keep their relationship. But after some weeks again their neighbour behaved in such a way as if we have not known for each other before. Swedes do not trust us because we are refugees” (Interviews, m 15,2016, see appendix 2).

All Afghan refugees’ pointed out that they would like to have a Swedish friend, in this way not only they can improve their Swedish language, but also they can get information about their rules and regulations about finding a job. The more contacts they have with Swedes; the more integration possibilities they will get. One man mentioned that “in order to make friends with Swedish people, we have to be recommended by a Swede, in this way they trust them, otherwise it is so difficult to be friends with them. You cannot make it only by yourself”
One man spoke about advantages of a Swedish friend he mentioned that “once with my ex-girlfriend we went for a walk in the forest, I threw away my chewing gum in the nature, but my girlfriend complained about it. This made me understand the importance to preserve nature” (Interview, m 8, 2016, see appendix 2).

Some mentioned that they have some colleagues at work and have communicated with them but this relationship is limited to their work; they do not want to expand it to family relationships. Three of them were very sad as it was seen by their face expression (Interviews, m, 10, 11, 14, 2016, see appendix 2).

Another issue for Afghan refugees is that they come from a collective society which means they like to have relationship and share their feelings with someone. Almost all agreed to the above mentioned points. They continue their friendships with someone from their own countries, where they spend much time together and talking in their own language (Interviews, m 12; 4; f 1, 2016, see appendix 2).

With regard to discrimination, all mentioned that they were discriminated several times by Swedes at their jobs or at a shopping centre, except three students who study Swedish for immigrants (SFI) courses. Three women and one man mentioned that they could not tolerate these situations at their jobs; therefore, they quit their jobs. They mentioned that they had the same position like Swedes, they worked same but some of them always backbite them, (Interviews f 9; f 6; f 5; m 6, 2016, see appendix 2). They express their feelings in a sad way, one of them was really annoyed about discrimination. Another man mentioned that “some Swedish have negative point of view regarding refugees due to the lack of information about refugees and media always write and say negative issue and it plays an important role on their lives. They do not like refugees, they call us ‘svartskalle’ or they think all Muslim are terrorist. He revealed that Swedes have never invited them in their parties, they always ‘svartskalle’ for them” (Interview, m 11, 2016, see appendix 2).

Some criticized on the role of information and geography and lack of knowledge on refugees’ background, they mentioned that because Sweden is a multicultural society, they should improve their knowledge in order to reduce and end discrimination (Interviews, f 5, f 7, m 6, 2016, see appendix 2). One man stated that “when you want to interact with them, the first question that comes into Swedes’ mind is that where you are from, when they learn from where you belong then they stay some steps back, they change their accent, behaviour and they give me the cold shoulder” (Interview, m 11, 2016, see appendix 2). He continued, “this is not fair
asking for nationalities and treat us like that because we are now Swedish citizens” (Interview, m 11, 2016, see appendix 2)

Another big problem is that some noted that because they come from a war stricken country, they have lost their families at war, they still have horrible memories of their life. It takes time for them to forget the psychological trauma of this issue, they say; most of their families still live in Afghanistan, they think about them. These issues have a bad effect on them. It leads to call them and spend a large amount of time talking with them, and not focusing on learning Swedish and integration in the Swedish society. (Interviews, m 2; m 3; m 4, 2016, see appendix 2).

Afghan refugees cited that some of them are living in Arabygatan and Dalbo in Växjö. They mentioned that few Swedish people like to live in these areas. Only refugees live in these areas, because the rent is cheap and others like them already live there. They thought it is not good for cultural integration, if Swedes do not mix with them. Swedes prefer to live in a community where mostly Swedish people live (Interviews, f 8; f10; f11; m 5; m 4, 2016, see appendix 2).

When asked about their views on the Swedish rules, all of them revealed, they like the Swedish traditions and some other positive customs that are not similar to their religion. The reason why refugees come to Sweden, according to themselves is because Sweden is a safe, democratic and multicultural country. The equality of rights is important for Swedes. Some women mentioned, we Afghan women love these factors and these have a lot of influence on our life. Hence, we have learnt to defend our rights. We got this knowledge by interaction with Swedish people. We could not get this knowledge if we had no interactions with the Swedes (Interviews, f5; f6; f7; f 8; f 9; f 10; f11, 2016, see appendix 2).

When I asked them if they are looking for a place to chat with Swedes, the majority of them agreed on this. They mentioned that they can meet them and spend couples of hours with them and they can share their culture and customs with them; for instance, what Swedes like and dislike. One man mentioned that “he learnt that Swedes took of their hats when they go to church” (Interview, m 16, 2016, see appendix 2).

The role of participation in Swedish festivals is very important, some Afghan refugees have taken part in there and mentioned, they have found some friends and have learned about the history of these traditions. For instance, how to dance traditionally and what kinds of dresses they wear in their festivals (Interview, m 10; m11; m 13; f 8, 2016, see appendix 2).
The role of doing social and cultural activities in Sweden is significant. It can help them to comprehend Swedish society better. For instance, by finding a job, they can improve their knowledge and language skills with interacting with new people. They can learn how Swedes respect to law and rules (Interview, m 1; m4; m5; m6, 2016, see appendix 2).

By spending time with Swedish people, refugees can develop their language skills and get familiar with the Swedish rules. Some mentioned the role of reading books and googling on the net about the Swedish culture was proven to be important. By practicing a lot, they can learn Swedish and also can improve listening to the Swedish news and participating in their celebrations. When they learn Swedish, they can also learn about culture (Interviews. f 9; f10; f11; m 15, 2016, see appendix 2).
Chapter Five: Analysis

In this section the researcher provides the four analytical frameworks to analyses the findings: The analyses were based on the theories of Berry’s (1997) acculturation strategies, acculturation moderators, Sam and Berry (2006) cultural group relations in plural societies, and Berry’s (1980) theory of acculturation: cultural maintenance and contact-participation. These four analytical frameworks were applied in order to present an analysis of the Afghan refugees’ experiences toward the Swedish cultural adaptation. All four theories of cultural adaptation are discussed below:

5.1. Acculturation strategies in Afghan refugees’ case

Berry (1997) maintains that there are four different types of acculturation strategies: integration, assimilation, separation and marginalization.

This research found that Afghan refugees definitely display integration attitudes when it comes to acculturation. Afghan refugees who have been interviewed and living in Sweden, they wished to preserve their own culture at the same time they want to learn all about the Swedish culture.

On the other hand, assimilation attitudes were not found in the case of Afghan refugees because they do not want to reject their own culture and their cultural identity but rather would like to preserve parts of it for instance. They are interested in the family relationship, children homage their parents, their food, and their language. They insisted on rejecting arranged marriage and couples living with their in-laws, violence on women, forced marriages on the behalf of their parents.

It is not separation either because Afghan refugees do not want to avoid the Swedish culture or avoiding interaction with Swedes.

And finally, it is not marginalization because they do have interest in their own culture and they want to integrate into the Swedish culture.
5.2. The role of cultural group relations in plural societies in the case of Afghan refugees

Building on their previous research, in a more recent study (2006) Sam and Berry claimed that there are two different types of societies: melting pot and multicultural society.

The melting pot model is a dominant model in society; it means that everything is a kind of mixture in which the culture will disappear, therefore it is rejected by this research. Due to the theory definition, the minority group feels that they have to give up their own culture in order to fully absorb in the Swedish culture. According to this part of the theory, Afghans as a minority group should give up their own culture and assimilate into the host society (Sweden). My research shows that it is not the model Afghan refugees prefer.

The multicultural model which means each person or groups with different cultures can add parts of their own culture to the host culture. This part of theory is supported by the research. Afghan refugees want to have a multicultural society where they can keep and preserve their identity and on the same time want to participate in Swedish society. Simply, Afghan refugees want to share their own culture with Swedish society.

5.3. The role of cultural maintenance and contact and participation of Afghan refugees in Sweden and in Afghanistan

In this section I will lift another theory of Berry, along with other acculturation theories. Berry pointed out cultural maintenance and contact-participation.

The acculturation perspective is defined by the difference between cultural maintenance and contact-participation. The theory focuses on the amount of contact with people from the host country and their original culture. Two terms are mentioned in the theory: *Cultural maintenance*, which means preserving your own identity and *contact-participation* which you get included in other cultural groups or mainly staying among their own minority groups.

The findings of this study underline that all Afghan refugees kept contact with their own families and relatives in Afghanistan. Therefore, there is indeed cultural maintenance for Afghan refugees. Based on this theory, they are integrating because they fit in cultural maintenance and contact.
5.4. Berry’s acculturation factors and their application on the case of Afghan refugees in Sweden

The other part of John Berry’s work about acculturation factors which I have used in my research are age, level of education, distance from receiving society, gender and migration factors.

A) The role of age: Afghan refugees who were younger than others were much more enthusiastic on acculturating to Swedish culture and learning the language faster. Age factor is just like a catalyst for speeding up the process. Afghans in older age, which have lived for longer period of time in Afghanistan will need more time to adapt their living habits (norms and values in their homeland) in Sweden.

B) The level of education: those Afghan refugees, who have a high level of education also have a higher tendency to adjust in the Swedish society quicker than those Afghan refugees with lower levels of education. The better the level of the education, the better the chances they have to make contact with Swedes and even find a better job.

C) Distance from receiving society: There are a lot of differences between Afghan and Swedish cultures. Therefore, it is slower in cultural adaptation for Afghan refugees. But by improving their Swedish language and making more contact with Swedes, they will reduce these differences and distances between their norm and practices.

D) Gender: The findings revealed that Afghan women are more open to the Swedish culture than men. They believed that Swedish culture has a positive effect on their life. For instance, in Sweden they can study, get a job and become independent, which was impossible in their home country. They are aware of their own rights in Swedish culture.

E) Migration factors: In this research, all of the Afghan refugees, except one Afghan woman who got the Swedish residence permit through marriage, left Afghanistan and moved to Sweden due to the fact that Afghanistan is not a safe country. This migration can be considered as a push factor involuntary migration. Other Afghan refugees, left their own country because of the life threaten situation in Afghanistan. Most of the men considered it as working process for the culture adaptation in the new country. They have believed that Sweden is now their own country. They can accept some parts of the Swedish culture which are similar to their own ideology. Therefore, Afghan refugees in Sweden moved due to both the push and pull factors.
Using these analytical frames which were above mentioned helps to identify cultural differences and challenges of Afghan refugees in Swedish society. Afterwards, these four analytical frameworks were applied to analyze experiences of Afghan refugees toward these differences and challenges to integrate them with Swedish culture and society.

### 5.5. Answering the research questions

*How do Afghan refugees perceive Swedish culture in comparison to their own?*

Afghan refugees are quite open to the Swedish culture. They like certain things about the Swedish culture but in comparison to Afghan culture, they dislike some of the Swedish culture. They still do not like something about their own culture.

They do not prefer one culture to another. It is obvious that they like some parts of their own culture, therefore they do not want to abandon their culture. They like Afghan food and they like equality of both men and women’s right in Sweden.

In terms of multicultural theory, Afghan refugees wish to have a multicultural society where they keep and preserve their identity and they want to contribute in Swedish society. Afghan refugees want to share their own culture with Swedish society.

The acculturation perspective focuses on the amount of contact with people from the host country and their original culture. *Cultural maintenance*, which means preserving individuals own identity and contact-participation which individuals get included in other cultural groups. According to contact-participation and cultural maintenance theory, afghan refugees are integrating through cultural maintenance and contact.

Younger Afghan refugees were much more enthusiastic about acculturating to Swedish culture and learning the language faster. Educated Afghan refugees, have a higher tendency to adjust in the Swedish society quicker than uneducated ones. In general though, the speed of cultural adaptation for Afghan refugees is very slow because of the many differences between Afghan and Swedish cultures. By improving their Swedish language and making more contact with Swedes, they will reduce these differences (norm and practices). The results show that Afghan women are more exposed to the Swedish culture than men, and they assume that Swedish culture plays a big role their life.
Do Afghan refugees think that they need to adapt to Swedish culture in order to fully integrate into Swedish society? Why or why not?

Yes, they do. They want to be part of this society and they do not want to go back to Afghanistan. They want to live here permanently, therefore they need to integrate. Most of them have belief, it is essential to adjust in the Swedish culture due to the fact they are living in the host country. Some pointed out, they have not any places in Afghanistan, so they feel Sweden as their home country. Afghan women are very open to Swedish culture. They believe that Swedish culture has a positive effect on their life, such as their enhanced rights in Swedish culture. Afghan refugees who were younger than others were much more enthusiastic to acculturating to Swedish culture and learn the language faster. Afghan refugees, who have a high level of education also have a higher tendency to assimilate into Swedish society.

What do they observe as obstacles regarding cultural integration?

Many obstacles are related to language barriers but also they had no social relations to Swedes. Other cultural barriers for Afghan refugees during their integration are religious issues, Swedes’ lack of knowledge on Afghan refugees’ background which causes a factor called discrimination and so on. One of the biggest problems for them is segregated area which is not integrated into the Swedish culture. Older Afghans, need more time to adapt their living habits (norms and values in their homeland) in Sweden. Uneducated Afghan refugees find it harder to adjust to Swedish society. Differences between Afghan and Swedish cultures results in slow cultural adaptation for Afghan refugees.

Afghan refugees’ migration can be considered as a push factor involuntary migration. They accept some mutual norms of the Swedish culture which are similar to their own ideology. Thus, Afghan refugees in Sweden moved due to both the push and pull factors.

What do Afghan refugees consider would facilitate their cultural integration into Swedish society?

Learning Swedish language is really important for them in this way. They can bring up different subjects to talk about when they want to talk to Swedish people instead of limiting their communication to greeting a person in Swedish.

Additionally, learning norms and culture through participation in Swedish celebrations is also vital for them. The multicultural model refers to the coexistence of multiple cultures. Afghan
refugees wish to have a multicultural society where they keep and preserve their identity while taking part in Swedish society.
Chapter Six: Conclusion

This research has indicated factors and obstacles which have effects on the process of cultural integration of Afghan refugees into Swedish society. The conclusion of this research points out that Berry’s different theories of cultural adaptations do apply in the case of Afghan refugees.

The first part of my conclusion regarding acculturation strategies is integration, which takes place when Afghan refugees hold their own culture and simultaneously embrace the Swedish culture.

Following the integration theory, cultural group relations in plural societies mean that Afghan refugees preserve their cultural identity while they reside in Sweden. Thus all various cultures and individuals are embarked in the whole society. Afghan refugees should create their shared norms like how to live together in the new society. At the same time, Afghan refugees preserve their cultural identity and contribute their own culture norms with Swedish society to live like a one community.

Moreover, the theory of cultural maintenance and contact-participation which identifies and emphasized on how many times Afghan refugees have contact with the Swedish society, how much they get involved with them and also their contacts with their original country.

The last part of the results, acculturation moderators, divides into five sections. First one is the role of age which showed that younger Afghan refugees are more eager to acculturate faster and make adjustment with the Swedish society rather than old Afghan refugees.

Second one is the role of education which indicates that Afghan refugees who got higher education are more active to adapt to Swedish society and faster than those who are uneducated. Educated Afghans can adopt a better life style, have more opportunities to get better jobs and ways to mix with Swedes than others.

The third one is regarding the distance to the host society which means that it will take much more time for Afghan refugees to adjust to the Swedish culture because of a lot of differences between these two societies but it can be overcome by improving their language capabilities and enhancing their interactions with swedes.

Gender is the fourth factor; it has an effect on Afghan refugees. In this case, woman Afghan refugees have high tendency to adapt Swedish culture compared to man Afghan refugees because they feel freedom and protection in Swedish society.
The last factor is migration. It can be seen that the majority of Afghan refugees left Afghanistan because of wars and threats of life. These are considered as push factors because their migration is not voluntary and they are also affected by pull factors as they migrated to Sweden.

In my point of view, cultural integration is the most significant part for Afghan refugees to survive in Sweden. There are many ways to get integrated into Swedish society, just like group meetings, attending parties and celebrations, adapting their cultural values, creating shared norms and the last but not the least thing is to learn the Swedish language properly to be a part of a culture and society of the receiving country at the same level of citizenship. While on the other hand I also believe that the integration cannot be possible without the whole heartedly participation of the Swedish community towards Afghans refugees. Swedes also have to come forward by giving them opportunities to overcome all the above mentioned problems and obstacles, like giving them space in their society. Swedes should welcome them, respect their own identity, inviting them for celebrations as well as providing them facilities to learn the Swedish language and Swedish norms. I have a firm belief that with the contribution of both groups, they will be able to maintain attached to their home culture while at the same time being able to adjust to the host culture in ways that make integration possible.

This research adds some useful information for the discussion in integration. By investigating the needs and the obstacles of Afghan refugees regarding the cultural integration, a significant side of integration will be their quick adjustment in the society. According to Rudiger & Spencer (2003), integration is a reciprocal process that involves complex economical, social and cultural practices. By listening to the refugees themselves, we can help Afghan refugees and alleviate their difficulties when attempting to integrate into their new home society. By doing what mentioned above, Afghan refugees will be increasingly encouraged to culturally integrate and will get the feeling that they are a part of the society; hence, they will be a more effective part of the Swedish society rather than a dark part of Swedish society.

The results of this research could be applied to other refugee groups to some extent. Different refugee groups. Despite the difference of nationalities, they share some needs and obstacles, as all of them are newcomers in Sweden. I believe that many of them want to maintain a part of their own culture because they cannot abandon it totally. At the same time, they need to integrate into the new society to create a stabilize life.
There is a need for more future research about refugees on how to reduce discrimination against them. Also more research about the negative effects of the segregated areas on the cultural integration.
References


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Appendix 1: Interview Questions

General information:

1. How old are you?

2. What is the highest degree you have?

3. Are you married?

4. How long have you been in Sweden?

5. Why did you come to Sweden? Why do you leave Afghanistan?

6. Are you employed or not?

7. How many children do you have?

8. How many members of your closer family are here (with you) in Sweden and how many are still living in Afghanistan (or other parts of the world)?

Part one

1. How do you define the concept of culture?

2. How do you characterize Afghan culture?

3. How do you characterize the Swedish culture?

4. What do you think are the differences between Swedish and Afghan culture?

5. What do you like/dislike Swedish culture?

6. What are the positive and negative aspects of the Afghan culture?

Part two

1. Do you feel if it is important to integrate into the Swedish culture or not?

2. Would you like to preserve the Afghan culture while you are living in Sweden?

3. What do you think about your children? Should they preserve the Afghan culture or should they adapt to the Swedish one?

4. Do you have Swedish friends?
5. Do you have friends from other countries here in Sweden? (from which?)

6. Do your children play with other children with Swedish background?

**Part three**

1. What in your culture prevent you from cultural integration into Sweden’s culture?

2. What in Swedish culture would be an obstacle to your integration?

3. How easy is it for you to speak Swedish? And: Do you speak Swedish? Have you made efforts to learn Swedish? What do you think makes learning Swedish difficult?

4. How do Swedes react to you? Do you think that is a positive or negative reaction?

5. Would you like to have Swedish friends? Why or why not? What keeps you from being friends with Swedes?

6. Have you made efforts to mingle with Swedes? What do you think makes mingling with Swedes difficult/easy?

7. Have you ever felt down by Swedes?

8. What is hard for you regarding cultural integration in Sweden?

9. How often do you call to your own country?

10. How often do you have contacts with Swedes?

11. Do you like to have contacts with them?

12. How many of your friends are from your own Country?

13. How do you feel about Swedish rules and customs?

**Part four**

1. What did attract you to come to Sweden?

2. Have you found your expectations comply with the reality? From your perspective what make it easier for you to integrate into the society?

3. What do you suggest to improve in Sweden in order to culturally integrate?

4. What would make it easier to mingle with Swedes?
5. what would make it easier to learn the language?

6. What would make it easier for you to find Swedish friends?

7. Have you participated in a mid-summer celebration? Would you like to? What keeps you from doing that? What would have to happen for you to participate?

8. What in Swedish culture do they perceive as helpful

9. How do you see your future in Sweden?

10. What are your future plans in Sweden?

11. How many Swedish friends do you have?

12. Are you looking for a place to chat with them?

13. What kind of social and cultural Swedish activities do you do here
## Appendix 2: Table of Interviewees

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