Resilient Women:

An Investigation of Refugee Women's Journeys

Bachelor's Project in Language and International Studies, English

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Abstract

The literature concerning refugee women presently seems to neglect the decision-making power and agency practiced by these women. Additionally, the mass media and the academic literature alike seem to couple refugee women with notions of docility and victimhood. We will demonstrate this tendency through a literature review in which we engage with and challenge this trend. In this paper, we set out to pay attention to the agency of refugee women using the theoretical approach of autonomy of migration. In order to engage with refugee women in a manner that recognises the wide range of real and concrete experiences that they encounter, we take an intersectional perspective. Here, we examine how the oppression faced at the intersections of a variety of social categories constitute specific obstacles on refugee women's journeys. We combine these two theories in order to answer the research question: *Which obstacles do refugee women face on their journeys, and how do they relate to them?* In our investigation of this question, we pay particular attention to gender-blind laws, the resistive practices of refugees, and the sexual and gender-based violence that refugee women may face on their journeys. Furthermore, we discuss the obstacles that refugee women face qua the two social categories 'refugee' and 'woman', as well as the obstacles they face at the intersections of these.

In this paper, we utilise already collected data concerning refugee women. We rely on interviews, surveys, and peer-reviewed academic literature from a variety of fields to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the obstacles that refugee women face on their journeys. We reframe refugee women as the protagonists of their own migratory journeys by using already collected data in a new way. Additionally, we use an interdisciplinary approach, as this allows for refugee women's journeys to be investigated from several different vantage points, thereby prompting a more nuanced exploration.

Overall, we argue that refugee women should be decoupled with notions of vulnerability and need, and that narratives concerning refugee women should not engage with these women purely as victims. Instead, we propose that refuge women should be reframed as an inherently resilient group, since they navigate extremely precarious situations, relate to a multitude of diverse obstacles, and fight for a better future for themselves and their families.

Introduction

"Wilders visits town in western Netherlands, hands out sprays to women as protection against [male] refugees"

- Yagci, 2016 – in Anadolu Agency

"Nato: [refugee] women are being drawn into terrorism in return for food and water"

- Dudman, 2018 – in The Guardian

The above quotes are largely representative of the discourse in the mass media regarding refugees. The quote from the Anadolu Agency reflects an overall narrative in which refugee men are seen as posing a threat to European women. Interestingly, this narrative is by far the most dominant one – thereby revealing not only xenophobic attitudes towards refugee men, but also suggesting an underlying lack of attention to refugee women. There are some articles that concern refugee women, but these are few and far between. Furthermore, when the subject of mass media articles actually is refugee women, it seems that they are portrayed in a manner where they are merely seen as pawns in a larger game. This can be seen, for example, in The Guardian quote above, where refugee women are painted as victims without agency, because their involvement with terrorism is depicted as a pure act of desperation rather than involving any element of choice.

Like the mass media, the academic literature also, to an extent, reflects this trend. We find this recurrence of the trend within academia thought-provoking, and so we find it useful to explore it further through a literature review, which we now turn to. Piper (2006) exemplifies this trend in their seminal article concerning gender and migration, in which they refer to the term "convenient pawns" when discussing migrating women in geo-political affairs (p. 137). Here, women are, much like in the mass media, seen as without agency. Piper's focus is not explicitly refugee oriented, but this way of thinking about women can also be seen in refugee scholarship, as illustrated below.

For example, Fiddian-Qasmiyeh (2010) investigates gender equality in Sahrawi refugee camps, a pertinent case study because Sahrawi women are perceived as more emancipated than many refugee women in other camps (pp. 65-66). The women in Fiddian-Qasmiyeh's (2010) case study highlight their own contributions and activities in the camp (see e.g., p. 69), and are described as "proud" of their accomplishments in both administrative and organisational work (p. 68). Despite these women's self-perception, Fiddian-Qasmiyeh

(2010) consistently discusses them in terms of "exclusion and marginalization" (e.g., p. 64, 65, 75) and sees them as victims of "inequality and exclusion within the camps" (p. 75) who have many "unfulfilled needs" (p. 75). In this way, Fiddian-Qasmiyeh couples these refugee women with notions of victimhood and inequality, despite the fact that this does not fit with the Sahrawi women's own self-perceptions. In addition, Fiddian-Qasmiyeh (2010) approaches refugee women as intrinsically restricted women – they are restricted by their lack of education (p. 81), they are restricted by their care responsibilities for children and the elderly (p. 78), and they are restricted by controlling men (p. 81). Overall, Fiddian-Qasmiyeh's (2010) article ignores not only the autonomy that Sahrawi women practice, but it also discounts and diverges from these women's own judgements of their activities in the camp.

Similar to the manner in which Fiddian-Qasmiyeh (2010) views refugee women as restricted by their lack of education, Charles and Denman (2013) present education as a prerequisite to agency (p. 102), and they consider "uneducated or poorly educated women" (p. 101) as inherently lacking decision-making power. While education is well established as an emancipatory resource for women (see e.g., UN Women, n.d. or Yousafzai, 2014), we argue that a lack of education does not de facto deprive women of their autonomy. In addition, Charles and Denman (2013) state that refugee women and children experience violence in the private sphere as well as "experiencing physical violence, sexual harassment, verbal abuse and robbery outside the home" (p. 107). In this way, Charles and Denman (2013) depict women in a one-dimensional manner where they are purely seen as people at risk of violence, without a discussion of the agency and resistance that they also practice. In relation to violence in the private sphere, Charles and Denman (2013) also explore the reasons that refugee men may be especially prone to committing intimate partner violence (IPV) on the journey. For example, the authors point to "gender hierarchy" and a variety of socio-economic "stressors" as explanatory factors (Charles & Denman, 2013, p. 104). Here, violence is explained from the perspective of the aggressor, and can be argued to lack attention to refugee women's experiences and their ways of dealing with this issue, thereby depicting women merely as objects of violence who have no thoughts on the matter.

Freedman (2016) also explores the violence that refugee women experience on their journeys. Freedman's specific focus is on the threats of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). Although Freedman's critically acclaimed article clearly has many merits, and addresses refugee women in a manner where the structural constraints imposed on refugees is often balanced with considerations of agency, even their work includes elements in which

refugee women are depicted as controlled beings with little decision-making power. This can be seen, for example, when they discuss IPV on the journey, where refugee women are presented as controlled by and "stuck" with their violent partners, without a consideration of the ways in which these women relate to this obstacle (Freedman, 2016, p. 22). Therefore, it can be argued that refugee women are here presented as objects of violence who do not relate to the obstacles that they face. Freedman (2016) also uses a case study of a Syrian woman living in emergency accommodation, where she is scared of the men residing there – and the woman "wanders the streets to pass the time" (pp. 22-23). However, before being placed in this emergency accommodation, this woman had been imprisoned "for opposing the [French] government" (Freedman, 2016, p. 23), but Freedman does not put much weight on this fact. In this way, the Syrian woman is presented as fearful and powerless, yet she could also be reframed as a woman who defies norms and laws to protect herself.

This literature review is indicative of a trend where the agency of women is neglected in favour of depicting women as mere objects of violence who do not practice resistance. Our literature review uncovers a need for the academic literature to take seriously the real and concrete experiences of refugee women in a manner where their autonomy and decision-making power is recognised. We not only suggest that the academic literature should take these considerations into account, but that governments and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) should alter their policies in such a manner that a perspective with a greater gendered awareness is incorporated. However, the latter must be the focus of another paper. Nonetheless, our paper should be understood as a project of policy relevance, since we show the need for refugee women to be engaged with in a new manner.

In this paper, we aim to investigate refugee women, not only because there seems to be a lack of attention to the diverse and heterogenous experiences of refugee women, but also because when refugee women are explored, they are characterised in a manner where they are seen purely as objects of violence. To challenge this characterisation, we aim to exemplify that refugee women can also be analysed in a manner where their decision-making power and autonomy is recognised. We particularly intend to examine refugee women as autonomous beings when fleeing, as this seems to be an area in which women's agency is particularly neglected.

With these considerations in mind, we pose the overall research question (RQ): *Which obstacles do refugee women face on their journeys, and how do they relate to them?*

We choose to focus on the European refugee 'crisis', which, from a European perspective, started in approximately 2015. Therefore, we focus approximately on this time period. When we employ the term refugee 'crisis', we use inverted commas to underscore that we do not see refugees as the cause of the 'crisis', but rather see the political response to the situation as constituting this perceived crisis. We take this approach in line with Freedman (2016; 2019). In 2015, "a record 1.3 million individuals applied for asylum in the European Union, Norway, and Switzerland", and over half of these applicants were from Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq (Pew Research Center, 2016, p. 1) – three countries from which asylum applications to the EU more than "quadrupled between 2013 and 2015" (Pew Research Center, 2016, p. 2). Many of the refugees from Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq initially fled to neighbouring/transit countries in North Africa or other Middle Eastern countries (IOM, n.d.; Baklacıoğlu, 2017, p. 77), after this some of the refugees travelled to the USA or Asia, but the majority of those who left the transit countries came to Europe (Eurostat, 2016). With these considerations in mind, we limit our geographical focus to the journeys of refugees coming from the Middle East to Europe. We have hereby established both a temporal and geographical focus.

Furthermore, a clarification of the concept 'journey' is necessary, as this can have several meanings. This is partly due to the ever-changing coercive laws and policies which are "bouncing them [(refugees)] back from one place to another" (De Genova, Garelli, & Tazzioli, 2018, p. 246). Also, refugees may flee to neighbouring countries, and remain there for several years before continuing their journeys. For example, when the Syrian civil war broke out many fled to Lebanon, but in 2015 many of these Syrians continued their journeys to Europe, since many of their basic needs were not met in Lebanon (Asaf, 2017, p. 2). In this way the stay in Lebanon became a transit period for many Syrians. A transit period may be forced or voluntary, depending on whether the stay is intended or not. However, a distinction between these is not always clear, as determining whether a stay is an active choice, or a choice of necessity, is seldom obvious or straightforward and may be a combination of both. Considering this, we employ the term journey to refer both to the concrete physical movement as well as voluntary and forced transit periods.

We take the term 'obstacle' to mean any historical, social, economic, legal, or political factor that inhibits or makes fleeing more difficult. We aim to take seriously the obstacles that refugees themselves identify as inhibitors on their journeys, and as such purposely approach the concept of an obstacle in a broad manner where a large variety of types of obstacles can be considered. We do this because a narrower understanding might

exclude some of the hinderances that refugees themselves identify from being understood as obstacles. However, we acknowledge that this broad understanding is so far-reaching that it can be considered non-specific, but we argue that the benefits of our broad understanding outweigh this, because many more obstacles can be considered.

After the initial review of the literature concerning refugee women, we found a significant pattern. We found that there is shockingly little data available on refugee women – an issue that Baklacıoğlu (2017) and Freedman (2016) also point to. One reason for this is that many Syrian women are not individually registered, "but included in the record of their husbands, brothers, or fathers" (Baklacıoğlu, 2017, p. 83). This is a significant reflection considering our focus on the European refugee 'crisis', as Syrian refugees constituted the largest group of first-time asylum-seekers in the European Union (EU) in this time period (Eurostat, 2016, p. 3). Another reason for the lack of gendered data could be explained by "some cultural prejudices and fears, [that make] the Syrian women avoid talking about the border passages" (Baklacıoğlu, 2017, p. 77). Freedman (2016) points to the EU statistic that about 20% of those arriving in Europe in this time period were women, but they also highlight how unreliable this statistic is, not only because the EU lacks gender-disaggregated data, but also because many refugees travel along clandestine routes, thus avoiding registration (pp. 18-20).

Although both Baklacıoğlu (2017) and Freedman (2016) discuss the hinderances caused by this lack of gendered data, and both scholars discuss why there is such little data available on gender, neither further explore where this lack of gendered data historically stems from. Here, we refer to Piper (2006), who suggests that "the historical subordination of women to men […] resulted in gender-neutral policies which ignored women's specific experiences and needs" (p. 139). In order for these gender-neutral policies to be enforceable, no gendered data is necessary, which therefore contributes to explaining why institutions like the EU and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) infrequently collect data based on gender.

This lack of gendered data has significant implications for our paper. As previously stated, we focus on refugee women, but we will at times look into phenomena on which no gender-disaggregated data is available. We do this as we make the assumption that it is not only refugee men who are affected by these phenomena, although it is typical to assume that when no gender is specified, a male perspective is interpreted. This is established in the work of De Beauvoir (1989), who states that the "absolute human type" is defined as masculine, while women constitute "peculiarities" and are thus understood as inherent others (p. xxi). De

Beauvoir (1989) thereby shows that "the neutral" is often understood as male (p. xxi). Yet, works that do not specify gender may still pertain to women, and so we argue that non-gendered data can be used to investigate not only the journeys of refugee men, but also the journeys of refugee women. Thus, we are inspired by the approach of Baklacıoğlu (2017), who uses non-gendered data to investigate Syrian movements predominantly in the Middle East, in which they assume that women constitute almost 50% of these movements (p. 78). We find this 50% divide somewhat arbitrary and so we do not employ this in our own paper. Yet, we find merit in the idea that a significant proportion of women are still be affected by the phenomena described by non-gendered data, and so although we do not work with a strict 50% divide, we consider a substantial number of women to be affected.

As mentioned above, our overall RQ remains rather broad even after the temporal and geographical limitations we imposed. Therefore, after reviewing the literature in the field, we identified three core focus areas which we see as essential to understanding our topic. To operationalise our overall RQ, we have therefore formed three sub-RQs based on the three core focus areas we identified.

The first core area that we identified is that gender-blind laws seem to create obstacles for refugee women when fleeing. Therefore, our first sub-RQ (sub-RQ.1) is: *How does the gender-blind 'Refugee Convention, 1951' (co)constitute an obstacle on refugee women's journeys?* We chose to examine specifically this convention, as it has laid the foundations for how refugees are conceptualised in the modern socio-political and legal landscape. Thus, our first sub-RQ acts as a tool to frame the following two questions by discussing the systemic factors that contribute to creating obstacles on refugee women's journeys.

Our overall RQ necessitates a specific focus on how refugee women relate to the obstacles they face. We created this dual focus in our overall RQ, because we found the resistance which refugees practice to be a core area when discussing their journeys. Therefore, our second sub-RQ (sub-RQ.2) asks: *Which obstacles do refugees practice resistance towards on their journeys?* Here, we found very little gendered-data, and as such, we, like Baklacıoğlu (2017), work under the assumption that a large proportion of those investigated must be women.

The final core area that we identified is the omnipresence of SGBV on refugee women's journeys. We aim to explore this area through the third sub-RQ (sub-RQ.3): *Which obstacles do refugee women face in relation to sexual and gender-based violence on their journeys?* This is one of the only areas where there is data predominantly concerning women.

This is notable, as women are then seen primarily as objects of violence, since they are not explored in particular in relation to other phenomena such as resistive practices.

All of our sub-RQs help to answer the overall RQ. Sub-RQ.1 introduces the overarching issues concerning refugee women's definitional status considering the laws that govern them. This question additionally acts as a framing tool for the following sub-RQs, as it introduces an obstacle that underlies the very experience of being a refugee woman. In this way, this question contributes to an answer of the overall RQ as it concerns the obstacles that refugee women face because the laws governing them are gender-blind. Our overall RQ also concerns how refugees relate to the obstacles that they face on their journeys. Thereby, sub-RQ.2 further contributes to answering the overall RQ by looking specifically into how resistance is practiced. Finally, the purpose of sub-RQ.3 is to investigate SGBV on refugee women's journeys. This contributes to answering the overall RQ, as it investigates several dimensions of SGBV that constitute obstacles for refugee women, and this sub-RQ also examines how refugee women relate to these. Overall, it can therefore be said that these three sub-RQs allow a three-pronged approach to our overall research question. Yet, we do not claim that these three sub-questions uncover all of the obstacles that refugee women face, nor all the ways they may relate to them. For example, health related issues are also of great importance on refugee women's journeys – while we briefly reflect on this in the project, we limit our study to the three sub-RQs, in order to allow for a more in-depth exploration.

The three sub-RQs shed light on three distinct, yet interconnected, areas concerning the obstacles that refugee women face on their journeys. These interconnections may be linked through the experience of simultaneously being both a refugee and a woman, a consideration that will be developed further in a discussion following the analyses of the three core areas.

Having explained our focus area as well as the sub-RQs that operationalise our overall RQ, we now turn to an outline of our paper. First, we will outline our theory, after which we will present our method section. Once our theory and method have been accounted for, we will be equipped to proceed to the analysis of our three sub-RQs. After this, we will, in a discussion, reflect on a core commonality found in the sub-RQs. Finally, we will present a conclusion in which we summarise our findings.

Theory

As stated in our introduction, our focus is on women, but we have yet to define the group we are referring to when invoking this term. Therefore, this will be addressed in the first segment of our theory section. Also in our introduction, we set forth the aim to unpack a wide range of real and concrete experiences of refugee women, but we do not elaborate on how we plan to achieve this – this too will be clarified in the first segment of our theory, when we explain the concept of intersectionality, and how we utilise it in our project.

Furthermore, we have shown that refugees will be a core group of interest in our analyses, but we have not clarified how we intend to use this term in our exploration. Accordingly, this will be addressed in the second segment of our theory section. Due to our focus on refugees and autonomy, we see the need for a theoretical approach that allows for the agency of refugee women to be analysed, hence we employ autonomy of migration (AoM) – this too, will be outlined in the second segment of our theory section.

We suggest that intersectionality and AoM are two theories which complement each other greatly, and for our project specifically, a combination of these approaches will be especially useful. Therefore, the final part of the theory section will outline the manner in which these theories work together to underpin an effective analysis.

Women & Intersectionality

The focus of this paper is refugee women, and we are interested in how their experiences on their journeys are shaped by simultaneously belonging to both categories. As such, we are interested in how these categories of identity play a role on their journeys. Thus, we find it necessary to actively engage with these categories of identity in order to understand refugee women's journeys, the obstacles that they face, and how they relate to these obstacles. Furthermore, we also consider other overlapping categories, such as nationality, marital status, age, and class, as these may also have a significant impact on their journeys. In this way, we seek to employ an intersectional approach in our analyses. Collins (2015) explains that intersectionality "references the critical insight that race, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nation, ability, and age operate not as unitary exclusive entities, but as reciprocally constructing phenomena that in turn shape complex social inequalities" (p. 2). We refer to these entities and phenomena as social categories.

Before examining intersectionality more in-depth, we first find it necessary to explain what we mean by 'women', as this is significant for the way we engage with this category.

We base our understanding and usage of 'women' on Judith Butler's conceptualisation of gender. According to Butler, gender is performative, meaning that gender is "manufactured through a sustained set of acts, posited through the gendered stylization of the body" (as cited in Shams, 2020, p. 16). Hence, Butler understands gender as being performative, and in this way also rejects the notion that gender is an expression of "essence" (Butler, 2014, p. xii). In other words, rather than 'having' a gender, one is always 'doing' gender. Furthermore, Acker (2004) suggests that "gender is a basic organizing principle in social life [and] a principle for allocate[ing] duties", however, there is a gender-bias here, where women bear a disproportionate burden compared to men (p. 20). Marx and Engels (1939) even suggest that women become "the slave of the husband" (p. 76). Based on these considerations, we suggest that the subordination of women is dialectically linked to the more powerful position of men. Therefore, we argue that 'woman' cannot be understood without an understanding of 'man', and especially not without a recognition of gender relations – so we will engage with 'woman' as a performed gender enacted within unequal power relations. We here also find it useful to consider Carling's (2005) distinction between sex and gender. Carling (2005) notes that the "term 'gender' was introduced to social science in order to underline the difference between socially and biologically determined sex. Gender encompasses both men's and women's active roles in society and their ideas about 'maleness' and 'femaleness'" (p. 2). In this way, Carling (2005) builds on Butler's understanding of gender as being (socially) constructed. Importantly, Carling (2005) suggests that "the most common weakness in gender research [within migration studies] is the focus on women rather than on gender" (p. 3). To avoid this, we aim to engage with women as a performed gender, where we pay specific attention to women as gendered beings who manoeuvre dynamic gender roles and are situated in intricate power dynamics.

According to Collins (2015) "[p]revailing stories of the emergence of intersectionality routinely grant naming rights to Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991)" (p. 10). However, Collins (2015) points out that Crenshaw "*develops* [emphasis added] important connections among the core ideas of community organizing, identity politics, coalitional politics, interlocking oppressions, and social justice" (p. 10). In this way, Collins (2015) indicates that intersectionality already existed before Crenshaw coined the term.

Collins (2015) argues that there are three overarching conceptualisations of intersectionality – namely, as a field of study, as an analytical strategy, and as critical praxis (pp. 6-17). When discussing intersectionality as a field of study, Collins (2015) notes that, in recent years, intersectionality has become more widely accepted within academia (p. 6).

However, the popularity of the term "triggers use, misuse, and critique in ways that reinscribe the very political relations intersectionality scholarship critiques and seeks to transform" (Hancock, 2016, p. 3). Both Collins (2015) and Hancock (2016) seem to indicate that the misuse of intersectionality partly comes from the 'users' being ignorant of its origins – a mistake we seek to avoid by thoroughly discussing the concept in this section.

Regarding intersectionality as an analytical strategy, Collins (2015) states that the way in which authors understand and engage with intersectionality provides a form of "analytical sensibility" which shapes the way the authors engage with their research (p. 11). We use this 'analytical sensibility' in the sense that we employ an "intersectional way of thinking" about the problem, and by incorporating reflections on power relations (Collins, 2015, p. 11). For example, in the discussion, we will reflect on 'refugee' and 'woman' both as social categories where specific systems of oppression occur at the intersections of these, but also as labels imposed by a more powerful group.

Collins (2015) explains intersectionality as a critical praxis as referring to when actors "critique social injustices that characterize complex social inequalities, imagine alternatives, and/or propose viable action strategies for change" (p. 17). Collins (2015) here particularly highlights "[l]ocal grassrotts, small-scale, and/or temporary groups" as drawing "upon intersectionality to guide their critical praxis" (p. 16).

Thus, Collins (2015) illustrates the different ways in which intersectionality can be, and indeed has been, conceptualised and engaged with. In this project, we employ the term mainly as an analytical strategy in the sense that we use intersectionality as a theoretical background which underpins the ways in which we engage with the literature. We also employ intersectionality as an analytical strategy as we find it imperative to examine the overlapping categories of identity, such as gender, nationality, and class, when exploring refugee women's journeys.

Indeed, an intersectional focus is beneficial, and even imperative, when examining refugee's journeys because social categories "shape complex social inequalities" (Collins, 2015, p. 2). For example, Silvey (2006) summarises Hyndman's 'geopolitics of mobility' framework, which posits that "[t]here is […] a variable porosity of borders, and the unequal geographies of spatial control reflected and created through these borders are intertwined with social hierarchies of gender, race, nation, and class" (p. 72). In other words, social hierarchies affect the ways in which refugees engage and negotiate with borders, while at the same time these hierarchies also affect the ways in which refugees are engaged with at the borders. Similarly, Herrera (2013) notes that within migration studies "[i]ntersectionality

looks at interlocking systems of oppression as constitutive of migration systems. Such an approach examines how gender intersects with other categories of social inequality, attending to the centrality of power and social hierarchy within migration processes" (p. 472).

The above illustrates that intersectionality has a focus on inequality and how the experience of inequality may differ depending on intersecting social categories, in this way, intersectionality is concerned with power relations. This understanding of inequality as related to one's social categories is also something that Pittaway and Pittaway (2004) support as they state that "[t]he nature of identities as sites of struggles, and the tendency to draw boundaries between us and others in the process, makes identity the cause of much conflict" (para. 21). Furthermore, Pittaway and Pittaway (2004) stress that the "experiences endured by refugee women are not caused by discrimination against one, or some, or even all" social categories "but by the irreducible oppression caused by the compounded effects of discrimination against them all" (para. 24).

Based on these considerations, we argue that to examine refugee women's journeys, the obstacles they face, and their resistive practices in a meaningful manner, it is critical to employ intersectionality as an analytical strategy. Thus, in the analyses of our sub-RQs, we seek to actively engage with and consider the social categories of 'refugee' and 'woman', as well as other categories as they become relevant to the analyses.

Refugees & Autonomy of Migration

Although the term 'refugee' currently refers to 26 million people worldwide (UNHCR, 2020), it is wielded in vastly different ways and for a wide variety of political purposes, depending on the person or organisation using the term. Of course, to be a refugee is a legal status, but it is rarely used exclusively in this way. For example, the Hungarian right-winged anti-refugee Prime Minister Orbán, often uses the term "economic migrants" when referring to people who are in fact refugees (as seen for example in Staudenmaier, 2018). On the other hand, NGOs like Refugees Welcome almost exclusively use the term 'refugee' to refer to all people fleeing from war (Refugees Welcome, n.d.). Here, the political purpose of the label is significant, as the former example suggests an attempt to delegitimise the asylum claims of refugees, whereas the opposite seems true for the latter example.

Crawley and Skleparis (2018) criticise this "categorical fetishism" when it comes to labelling those on the move (p. 49). They note that 90% of those arriving in Greece in 2015 at the time of the refugee 'crisis' were from Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq – all of which are

countries “in which there is known to be widespread, and escalating, conflict and political unrest”, in other words, these should be considered dangerous war zones (Crawley & Skleparis, 2018, pp. 48-49). This suggests that the vast majority of the arrivals would be accepted as refugees. However, as the scholars point out, this was not the case, as many had their asylum claims rejected. This strongly indicates that using the term ‘refugee’ only for people who have been granted the legal status is inadequate.

Considering these issues with defining refugees, we take the approach of De Genova et al. (2018), because they “mobilize the term refugees […] as a strategic essentialism” irrespective of legal status (p. 245). As a strategic essentialism, it should be understood that the term ‘refugee’ is used to take its point of departure from the real and concrete experiences of those actually affected by the label – that is, those who take the label upon them. In this way, we are also able to include those refugee women who might otherwise be excluded from the label by the political elite. We find this especially important when we investigate the journeys of refugee women, as women seem to constitute a category that is particularly at risk of being excluded from the refugee label (Nilsson, 2013), a phenomenon that will be explored in greater depth in the analysis of sub-RQ.1. An elaboration on the meanings and implications of the refugee label will be presented in the discussion, yet it should be mentioned here that whether a person is labelled as a migrant or as a refugee must have severe consequences for that person’s experiences when fleeing.

Utilising the term refugee as a strategic essentialism, is considered to be a “necessary methodological reorientation” within the AoM approach, and it allows for a broader spectrum of people to be considered (De Genova et al., 2018, p. 258). We now turn to an exploration of the core aspects of AoM, specifically, we focus on the dichotomies that AoM authors navigate, balance, and reject as we use these considerations for the key theoretical underpinnings throughout our analysis.

Firstly, AoM authors reject the manner in which refugees are seen only as people who are forced to move, who do not actively decide to flee by enacting their own agency. This is particularly important when investigating the journeys of refugee women, because there seems to be a tendency to view these women merely as following their husbands, rather than choosing to flee of their own accord (as seen for example in the work of Gray, 2019). Erden (2016) points out that “the West perceives women of the third world and developing countries as innocent and defenceless”, and that “the West does not perceive the refugee women as active and able individuals” (p. 254), a bias that we not only bear in mind, but also aim to challenge in our analysis. Also, the tendency to address refugees through “the

objectivism of economic models" has been criticised by AoM authors, because migrants are treated as "effectively inert objects at the mercy of 'push' and 'pull' factors of structural forces" (De Genova et al., 2018, p. 241). This tendency to view migrants as inert objects is particularly noticeable in the literature concerning women. For example, Nawyn (2010) discusses the "push and pull dynamics" that they see as controlling the labour-migration of women in developing countries (p. 753). This shows that AoM authors reject the notion of refugees as people who are merely 'bounced around' (to use the terminology of De Genova et al., 2018) by states and their policies.

However, it is important to note that this perspective is not "a romanticization of the migrant exercise of freedom of movement as a purely subversive or emancipatory act" (De Genova et al., 2018, p. 241). In other words, while refugee movements should not be understood purely through push and pull factors, neither should these movements be understood without a recognition of the structural constraints imposed on refugees. Zagor (2015) explicates this by stating that "the choice that is central to true autonomy […] must exist under conditions which are not overly deterministic" (p. 16). Therefore, AoM asks "how migrants challenge, defy, and subvert border controls" (Sheel, 2019, p. 46), while acknowledging the "coercive emplacement and immobilization" imposed on refugees (De Genova et al., 2018, p. 248). In this manner, borders can be seen as sites of struggle (Sheel, 2019, p. 46), as the agency practiced by refugees is in constant interplay with the structural forces of, for example, the European refugee regime.

Another notion that AoM rejects is the view of refugees as "pure victims" (De Genova et al., 2018, p. 241). De Genova et al. (2018) point to the "need to decouple the image of the refugee […] with nonchoice" (p. 248). Sheel (2019) builds on this by stressing the need to challenge "the imagination of the migrant as a weak subject marked by hunger and misery and in need of care and assistance" (p. 43). Zagor also raises a significant reflection in this regard. They mention that "it is common to start with the coerced nature of refugee flight", that is, the point of departure that sees refugees as victims without agency (Zagor, 2015, p. 378). But they suggest that "another way of characterising the refugee – especially the refugee who arrives 'irregularly', without authorisation or documentation […] and employed people smugglers to bring themselves […] to safety – is that they are, perhaps counter-intuitively, the quintessentially autonomous human being" (Zagor, 2015, p. 378). Here, Zagor shows not only that refugees practice agency when fleeing, but also that especially those travelling along clandestine routes who are often seen as particularly coerced, are actually practicing autonomy in an extraordinary manner. In other words,

through the resilience shown in extremely precarious situations, autonomy becomes explicitly apparent.

Furthermore, in the literature review we found the presentation of refugee women as victims to be prevalent not only in the academic literature, but also in the mass media concerning refugee women. Carling (2005) refers to this as "the 'sacrifice and suffering' approach" – that is, this manner of addressing refugee women consistently associates female migration with exploitation and victimisation (p. 8). Erden (2016) suggests that refugee studies scholars enforce these representations of helplessness and victimhood (p. 253), so in order to avoid this, we aim to address refugee women as enacting a significant measure of autonomy and decision-making power in our analysis.

From the above, it can be understood that AoM navigates between two dichotomous poles. On one hand, AoM rejects the objectivism of economic models that consider only push and pull factors and thereby forget the agency practiced by refugees. On the other hand, AoM also rejects the romanticisation of refugee movements as purely emancipatory, as this neglects the structural forces that play an important role in refugee movements. In other words, AoM balances considerations of structure and agency when dealing with refugee movements. At the same time, it is especially important to mention that AoM also rejects the view of refugees as pure victims, and thus refugees should be reframed as the protagonists of their own migratory journeys (to use the terminology of Sheel, 2019).

Combining Intersectionality & Autonomy of Migration

We use intersectionality and AoM in a combined approach in order to provide an effective analysis framework. AoM scholars "propose to take seriously the dire lived circumstances of millions" of refugees (De Genova et al., 2018, p. 241), yet not one journey is the same. Therefore, we argue that an intersectional perspective is of particular importance here. This can be seen when Silvey (2006) suggests that migratory systems are "intertwined with social hierarchies of gender, race, nation, and class" (p. 72). Considering this, we aim to use intersectional perspectives in such a manner that the circumstances that millions of refugees encounter may be contextualised, understood, and further developed by a wide range of social categories. For example, in order to take seriously the 'dire lived circumstances' of refugee women, we argue that it is imperative to consider the influence that categories such as class or nationality may have.

This manner of combining theories may be termed theory triangulation. Bennett (1997) argues that this "can enlarge the framing of questions" (p. 97), which we can also see in our paper, as the way refugee women are framed becomes significantly less one-dimensional when both their autonomy and their wide ranges of social categories can be explored together – thereby allowing our explorations more depth.

We find it of particular importance to triangulate these approaches because AoM "has been charged with not sufficiently acknowledging the variety of conditions under which migration occurs and the multiplicity of experiences it involves" – this critique is also referred to as "limited situatedness" (Sheel, 2019, p. 42). When AoM is combined with an intersectional approach, we argue that such limited situatedness is diminished, because an intersectional perspective allows us to consider a wide range of experiences. That is, intersectionality calls for a reflection upon a 'multiplicity of experiences' which means that many different conditions of migration can be investigated in a nuanced manner.

Furthermore, Herrera (2013) states that "intersectionality looks at interlocking systems of oppression as constitutive of migration systems" (p. 472). This is very similar to the approach of AoM because this too places great weight on the importance of global power relations when exploring migration (see for example De Genova et al., 2018, p. 241). We engage with the importance of power relations in our paper by using perspectives from both intersectionality and AoM in such a manner that the best of both worlds can be considered. This can for example be seen when we, in sub-RQ.1, critically examine the Refugee Convention of 1951, as we argue that it does not acknowledge the specific conditions and experiences that refugee women face which cause them to seek asylum. In this way, we employ an intersectional perspective to uncover the specific obstacles that refugee women face at the intersections of the social categories 'woman' and 'refugee'. In sub-RQ.2 we then explore the resistive practices of refugees to highlight that they are not voiceless victims, but rather the protagonists of their own migratory journeys. In this way, we employ intersectionality as an analytical strategy when exploring sub-RQ.1 which frames the analysis of sub-RQ.2. Thus, by combining the two approaches, we seek to avoid contributing to the limited situatedness that AoM has been criticised for. Another way we use theory triangulation to achieve the best of both worlds from the theories can be seen in our exploration of SGBV, where we balance considerations of agency and the oppressions faced at the intersections of social categories, in order to achieve a more in-depth analysis.

In addition to this, we use intersectionality and AoM both as theories and methodological re-orientations. In other words, we use both approaches as a type of critical

vantage point to frame our investigation. We choose to include intersectionality and AoM in the theory section of our paper because we, in the analysis, often rely on the theoretical aspects of the approaches to inform our interpretations and presentations of our data. In this way, the theoretical backgrounds provided by these approaches in combination can be said to constitute the architectural backbone of our project. This is not to say that we do not employ the approaches methodologically as well, since both intersectionality and AoM have significant impacts on our methodological reflections. For example, Collins (2015) stresses that intersectionality is not a "fixed body of knowledge", thus the method is in constant flux (p. 2) – a phenomenon that we contribute to when combining intersectionality with another approach. Also, De Genova et al. (2018) call for the need "to decouple the image of the refugee […] with nonchoice" (p. 248) – we argue that this is made possible by a methodological reorientation that recognises the agency of refugees as well as by investigating the existing literature on refugees with this in mind.

For our investigation, it can even be said that combining these two theories is necessary if an effective exploration is to be possible. For example, when looking into how resistance can be practiced on refugee journeys, an understanding of the gendered differences here is aided by an intersectional perspective, while AoM allows us to engage with this resistance in a way where women are not just seen as voiceless and without any autonomous power. Similarly, when we investigate SGBV on refugee women's journeys, the manner in which autonomy is practiced can be seen to be heavily impacted by the type of SGBV related obstacles that women face, and the social categories that these different women belong to. Overall, we argue that we cannot effectively engage in a discussion of agency without considering the wide range of different experiences that impact how this agency can be practiced – in other words, autonomy manifests differently depending on the circumstances that different refugee women have to navigate and negotiate on their journeys.

Method

In this section, we will outline the core methods that we use in our analysis. Firstly, we describe our use of the interdisciplinary approach. This approach is particularly useful when aiming to explore a wide range of real and concrete experiences of refugee women, because these experiences can be examined using tools from several different disciplines. Next, we discuss our data with a specific focus on the types of data we use to underpin our analysis, and we will also reflect on where our data lies on the interpretivist – empiricist divide. Finally, we will describe the limitations of our project with a focus on the impact these have on the process and outcome.

Interdisciplinary Approach

In this project, we seek to employ an interdisciplinary approach. Yetiv and James (2017) acknowledge that "interdisciplinarity can assume many different forms", yet they define it as "*cross-fertilizing empirics, concepts, and approaches from two or more disciplines, or of sub-fields that overlap disciplines, to enhance explanation*" (p. 2). Thus, Yetiv and James (2017) indicate that interdisciplinarity is beneficial as it aids in attaining a deeper understanding, which then leads to 'enhanced explanations'.

Importantly, Yetiv and James distinguish between multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary approaches. They explain that interdisciplinary approaches seek to explain a given topic in a more nuanced manner by combining various disciplines, whereas multidisciplinary approaches examine "phenomena from disciplinary perspectives [… meaning that] they investigate each issue area through one particular disciplinary lens" (Yetiv & James, 2017, p. 3). Hence, in this project, we are taking an interdisciplinary approach, as we seek to combine methods and concepts from various fields to reach one more encompassing understanding, rather than use various disciplines to reach several separate understandings. Some of the fields we combine in our project include history, sociology, gender studies, social anthropology, and not least international relations (IR).

Particularly in relation to IR, the need for interdisciplinarity has been well established. For example, Bayliss, Smith, and Owens (2012) note that IR is itself interdisciplinary (p. 3). Lamont (2015) also states that IR is "a field of study that welcomes methodological plurality" (p. 13). Furthermore, Lamont (2015) argues that

> IR's diverse methodological traditions have resulted in researchers, in both scholarship and practice, making use of a diverse array of research

> methods […] from a number of fields [such as]: anthropology, economics, law, political science, and sociology. Thus, an understanding of a broad spectrum of social science methods is a necessary prerequisite for academic or policy literacy. (p. 14)

Linked to this, Yetiv and James (2017) indicate that there is a need for an interdisciplinary approach when one's data is varied (p. 58). In this sense, Yetiv and James seem to support Lamont's (2015) argument regarding interdisciplinarity as a "prerequisite for academic literacy" (p. 13). As we use knowledge produced from a variety of academic fields, we argue that it is necessary to undertake an interdisciplinary approach in the analyses. In sum, this interdisciplinary approach has the added benefit of aiding us in attaining a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding.

Data

The purpose of this paper is not to discover new concrete findings based on specific data collected for such an objective. Rather, we aim to make broad theoretical reflections based on three significant overall areas related to the obstacles refugee women face on their journeys, thereby allowing us to use already collected data in a new way. For example, we point to a need for refugee women to be reframed as people with agency and decision-making power. Therefore, informed by perspectives from intersectionality and AoM, we aim to use already published data in a manner where refugee women's heterogenous and autonomous nature is considered.

One advantage of using data that is already available in the field is that it is possible to investigate a wide range of experiences from many different viewpoints, as we are not bound to a singular object of study. In other words, this allows us to gather information about many more refugee women than would have been possible if we had carried out our own interviews. This also allows for refugee women from many different countries to be considered, which is especially important as nationality is a key factor in the migratory experiences of refugees. Yet, a disadvantage of using already collected data is that this data does not always consider the autonomy of refugee women in the manner that we aspire to do ourselves, thereby necessarily limiting the interpretations we can draw from this. However, using data that has already been collected allows for a much broader scope in our project, in part because there is a vast literature in this field already. This broad scope is useful when

aiming for an intersectional perspective, as this allows for an exploration of many more intersections of social categories.

We could have collected our own data – this would have allowed us to gather data specifically tailored to our project. Collecting our own data, for example through interviews, would also have allowed us to pose questions during the interviews that we found relevant but that may not otherwise have been asked. For example, we identify that there is a lack of gender-disaggregated data concerning refugees unless the subject concerns SGBV. By conducting our own interviews with both refugee men and women we could thus have gained an understanding of how both groups relate to various other obstacles, e.g., being prevented from working legally when living in a state without having been registered, and how their experiences and forms of resistance differ towards these.

However, collecting our own data would not only have been too time consuming considering our scope, but might also have contributed to a limited situatedness in our project because fewer experiences could be considered – a critique of AoM as discussed above. We avoid this limited situatedness by drawing on data describing a variety of conditions during migration, where we see already collected data as allowing for a considerable breadth of conditions to be explored. Another reason we chose to work with already published, peer-reviewed data is that we criticise the tendency in the academic literature to view refugee women as docile, passive victims, and by using these works we are able to show that refugee women can be reframed as the strong protagonists of their own journeys, even within the literature that does not fully engage with them in this manner.

Furthermore, we aspire to take a bottom-up approach. Another way of saying this is that we aim to consider the real and concrete experiences of refugee women and use these experiences as the basis of our analysis. A top-down approach would focus more on how policy and political elites approach refugee women's experiences, for example through a policy analysis or discourse analysis. Although we do incorporate considerations of policy, we do this in a manner where the way in which women relate to, or even resist, this policy is of particular importance, and so we overarchingly aspire to take a bottom-up approach.

We achieve this bottom-up approach by using case studies and interview data, as will be discussed. Neaga (2014) states that "to grasp the thinking and experiences of regular women" is "the first dimension of […] bottom-up analysis" (p. 62), and so we analyse our data with this consideration in mind, thereby paying special attention to those who do not constitute the elite.

We argue that this bottom-up approach works well in combination with AoM and intersectionality. AoM scholars "propose to take seriously the dire lived circumstances of [those affected by] our global socio-political [refugee] regime" (De Genova et al., 2018, p. 241), and they aim to "prioritize the subjective practices, the desires, the expectations and the behaviours of migrants themselves" (Sheel, 2019, p. 48). In a complementary manner, intersectionality seeks to recognise and identify how experiences may differ depending on the oppression faced at the intersections of the social categories to which the subject belongs. In this way, both the goals of AoM and intersectionality are made possible by a bottom-up approach because the approach takes it's point of departure in the experiences of refugees.

Our approach to our data can be understood using Lamont's reflections on empiricist and interpretivist epistemologies. Empiricists often rely on numerical data and operate using the "broad assumption that knowledge can be accumulated through experiences and observation" (Lamont, 2015, p. 18). Furthermore, empiricism works with causal mechanisms and explanations of developments, in order to, in many instances, be "of policy-relevance and to inform action by decision makers" (Lamont, 2015, p. 19). On the other hand, interpretivists do not necessarily aim to explain events or trends, but rather focus on "understanding social meanings embedded within international politics", that is, "interpretivist research agendas seek to understand identities, ideas, norms, and culture in international politics" (Lamont, 2015, p. 19).

Our data constitutes aspects of both epistemological traditions, which seems to support Lamont's (2015) assertion that the empirical-interpretive divide can be thought of as a fluid continuum (p. 17). From the interpretivist tradition, we draw on, for example, qualitative interviews where we analyse, explore, and discuss the meanings that the findings from these interviews can have. From the empiricist tradition, we draw on, for example, statistics collected by Eurostat, where knowledge is collected, sorted, and utilised often with descriptive goals in mind –that is, to indicate a certain state of being, rather than to interpret the consequences and implications of this data. Along this fluid continuum, our data most often leans towards the interpretivist tradition, as we try to understand the obstacles that refugee women face, more than we try to explain how these came to be. Yet, like empiricists, we aspire to produce a paper that will be of policy relevance, as can be seen in our introduction where we call for a shift in policy towards a perspective with greater gendered awareness.

Our data is largely qualitative. Lamont (2015) suggests that qualitative data is particularly useful within the interpretivist tradition (p. 19), and this can be seen in our

analysis, where we use excerpts and quotes from refugee women who are actually dealing with the issues we address. We argue that these add both context and nuance, which allows for a more in-depth exploration and analysis. We also make use of qualitative data, for example through interview data and case studies, such as the interviews seen in the work of Freedman (2016; 2019). This type of interview data takes its point of departure in the real and concrete experiences of refugee women, which aids our bottom-up approach significantly. Furthermore, Lamont (2015) adds that qualitative methods are used to "better understand how we make sense of the world around us" (p. 78). This is particularly useful considering that the purpose our overall research question is to understand the obstacles faced by refugee women, and how they relate to them. Significantly, Lamont (2015) reflects on their own work with interview data and suggests that (method) triangulation is a particularly effective strategy (p. 79). By this, they mean that comparing interview data sets with one another allows for inconsistencies to emerge that otherwise may not have been visible. We also do this in our paper, where interview-sets come from a variety of sources, so we compared the inconsistencies found here to determine how to progress, resulting in several reflections being disregarded or considered outliers. For example, in an interview of a UNHCR official (as collected by Freedman, 2016), the interviewee suggests that women flee without their husbands because EU member states will see them as more vulnerable and thereby grant them protection. Yet, interviews with Syrian women show that they flee alone out of necessity, perhaps because their male relatives have gone missing, or because they see no other choice (Baklacıoğlu, 2017; Freedman, 2019). In this way, the interviews with Syrian women help to discount or contextualise the data from the UNHCR interview.

In addition to our extensive use of qualitative data, we also make use of some quantitative data. For example, we use data from statistics and surveys published by international institutions as well as academic researchers, such as data from Eurostat (2016) or Sulekova et al. (2021). When dealing with this type of data, we keep in mind the limitations of statistics and surveys in relation to the phenomena we are working with; the lack of gender-separated data as we discuss above, as well as women's resistance to report some of the obstacles they face (see e.g., Freedman 2016; Baklacıoğlu 2017), which results in considerable uncertainty. This can already be seen in our introduction, where the statistics on refugee women vary considerably depending on the source. Additionally, as many refugees travel along clandestine routes, many of the institutions that collect statistics will not be able to include them in their statistics, a draw-back we must keep in mind. However, we still use

this qualitative data, because we argue that it is indicative of the scope of the problems we investigate, although we acknowledge that some people may not be considered.

Limitations

There are several limitations to our project, we first wish to address the limitation imposed by our own role as authors. Lamont (2015) points out that "the distinction between the researcher and the social world […] should be rejected" (p. 20). In this way, Lamont (2015) indicates that the researcher cannot be separated from the subject they are researching, meaning that the researcher cannot prevent themselves from bringing in their own worldview when examining an issue. This necessarily affects the way in which the author understands and engages with their research. Thus, we find it necessary to briefly discuss our own bias, as these have necessarily shaped how we have conducted our research.

We must acknowledge that our approach to our data was critical from the beginning. For example, our initial exploration of the data was done with an underlying assumption that the agency of refugees, particularly refugee women, is often neglected. This early focus has likely had an impact on the way in which we have engaged with our data and may also have affected the conclusions drawn from it. This is a pertinent consideration when taking into account that we draw heavily on the interpretivist tradition, because our initial bias must have some impact on our interpretations of our data.

We must also address the limitations associated with our data. Firstly, as we mention in the introduction, we were surprised by the lack of gendered data in the field. Most of the data, albeit not concerning SGBV, lacks a gendered perspective, which, according to De Beauvoir (1989), assumes a male interpretation because this is seen as the "neutral" (p. xxi). In this project, we work under the assumption that a significant proportion of women are also affected by these phenomena although these are typically engaged with in a gender-neutral manner. This assumption, while allowing us to operationalise the overall RQ, carries with it an uncertainty in terms of scope – in other words, when drawing on gender-neutral data to investigate the journeys of refugee women, it is difficult to know how many women the issues we discuss pertain to. One way we ameliorate this issue, is by discussing gender relations rather than just women (as Carling, 2005, calls for), and we also actively consider how the experiences of refugee women may differ from refugee men.

We acknowledge that the scope of this project is both too broad and too narrow at the same time. We investigate refugee women and their experiences while including

considerations of their autonomy and agency, as we find this focus to be somewhat lacking in current literature. Although our paper seeks to alleviate this issue, we recognise that we also sometimes could have framed women as the protagonists of their own journeys to a greater extent. That is, there are many instances where our paper could have further analysed the autonomy that these refugee women practice. This is in part caused by the available data. Often, we employ the very same data that we criticise for lacking attention to the autonomy and agency of refugee women, because of this we may not identify all instances in which refugee women enact their autonomy on their journeys.

We further seek to address and acknowledge that the experiences of refugee women differ depending on their social categories, and while we do make use of case studies to highlight individual experiences, we still also draw overall conclusions and suggest that some experiences are shared. In this way, we may involuntarily be essentialising the experiences of refugee women, and thus misusing intersectionality in the very manner that Collins (2015) and Hancock (2016) criticise. However, we argue that by being aware of this pitfall, and continuously reflecting on this point, we become better equipped to identify instances where we may essentialise refugee women and their experiences, which is likely to alleviate at least some aspects of this limitation.

Analysis

Having accounted for our theoretical and methodological backgrounds and stances, we now turn to the analysis. Firstly, we discuss the effects of gender-blind laws in relation to sub-RQ.1. Next, we consider the resistive practices of refugees, in accordance with sub-RQ.2. Finally, we investigate SGBV on refugee women's journeys, as sub-RQ.3 calls for.

The Effects of Gender-Blind Laws

In this paper, we seek to highlight refugee women's experiences and their resilience on their journeys, to do so we find it necessary to highlight the systemic obstacles that they face. We identify gender-blind laws to be one of the main challenges to refugee women as it affects not only their legitimacy as refugees, but also the ways in which they relate to non-gendered obstacles. As such, we argue that it is integral to examine the effects of gender-blind laws to understand the obstacles that refugee women face on their journeys. Specifically, we will investigate the 1951 Refugee Convention as this has laid the foundation for how refugees are conceptualised and has laid the foundation for subsequent gender-blind laws and initiatives. With these considerations in mind, we pose the question (sub-RQ.1): *How does the gender-blind 'Refugee Convention' (co)constitute an obstacle on refugee women's journeys?* To exemplify the obstacles that are created when gender is not taken into consideration, we will critically explore the Dublin Regulation and a European border securitisation initiative, namely Frontex.

Investigating the Refugee Convention of 1951

In the introduction, we discussed the lack of a nuanced focus on refugee women and their experiences. As stated above, the fact that there is a vast amount of literature on refugees but that so little of it is gendered is notable, as it indicates that gender has not historically been considered a relevant aspect in relation to the migratory experiences of refugees. In other words, there seems to be an underlying assumption that the experiences of refugees are not dependent on gender, unless the experiences relate to SGBV. However, this history of assumed equal experiences is incredibly problematic as it stems from a definition of refugees that has historically been interpreted "within a framework of male experiences" (Nilsson, 2013, p. 123). In other words, what 'makes' a person a refugee has been defined in a manner that favours men, in this way, many of the reasons that women may have for fleeing become

naturalised, thus these women are not viewed as legitimate refugees. Valji (2001) suggests that this favouring stems from the Refugee Convention reflecting "the concerns of Europeans at the time [of its conception], and, more important[ly], the specific concerns of its writers – white, educated, Western males" (p. 26).

Currently, the way in which refugees are conceptualised and governed is based on the Refugee Convention of 1951 and the later "1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees" (Nilsson, 2013, p. 124). These two legal documents are frameworks that lay the basis for the way in which the United Nations (UN) considers refugees and "are legally binding on those states which have ratified or acceded to them" (Nilsson, 2013, p. 124). Nilsson (2013) explains that before the creation of the Convention, refugees were 'dealt with' in an ad hoc manner. However, after the Second World War there were vast numbers of people who were displaced, which made it apparent that there was a need for a broader legal framework that could provide "a general definition of who was to be considered a refugee" (p. 124).

In essence, the Convention seeks to define who can be granted the status of refugee, and thus who is entitled to the aid and protection that is, in theory, provided to such. It would be outside the scope of the paper to account for the entirety of the Convention, as such we will here discuss the first article (A2), as this is where the status of a refugee is most clearly defined as being constituted by five grounds for persecution. According to the Convention (as seen in UN General Assembly, 1951, p.6), the status of 'refugee' applies to a person who:

> As a result of events occurring before 1 January 1951 and owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.

Importantly, the 1967 Protocol eliminates the limitation of "as a result of events occurring before 1 January 1951", thus after 1967 the status of refugee could be granted based on results of events happening outside of this temporal restriction. Nilsson (2013) notes that this definition "covers only those persons who are outside the country of their nationality or, if the person is stateless, outside their usual country of residence. Accordingly, internally displaced people are not covered" (p. 126).

It is notable that the Convention asserts that refugee status should be granted to persons who have a "well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of […] membership

of a particular social group" (UN General Assembly, 1951). This recognition of persons from particular social groups is very vague and arguably all-encompassing, as such, women could theoretically make use of this 'particular social group' definition in order to make their refugee claims accord with the Convention.

The UNHCR has further explained this concept, and the way in which it has been explicated complicates the manner in which it can be used. It is worth noting that "[t]he Commissioner's statements are not legally binding, but they provide legal interpretative guidance for interpretation of the Convention" (Nilsson, 2013, p. 124). Nilsson (2013) notes that a "particular social group" can according to the UNHCR be defined as "a group of persons who share a common characteristic other than their risk of being persecuted, or who are perceived as a group by society" (p. 126). Based on this, one may again think that women could make use of their belonging to the social group of 'women', to make their refugee claims legitimate. However, this definition, and the way it is enacted, does not take into account whether it is possible for refugee women to establish that there is a causal link between their belonging to the social group of 'women' and to the discrimination or persecution they face. This illustrates that, although the convention theoretically recognises women, in reality, the persecution that women face cannot be as neatly demonstrated to be because of their gender, and thus refugee women stand at a disadvantage when it comes to proving the legitimacy of their refugee status. This constitutes an obstacle on refugee women's journeys because from the onset of the migratory experience, the real and concrete persecution that they face due to their gender is neglected and thus delegitimised.

Additionally, Valji (2001) points out that the five grounds on which refugee status can be granted construct only political asylum as being legitimate, i.e., economic migration becomes illegitimate (p. 27). Valji (2001) further notes that this distinction "is patently false when one observes, in the context of its relevance for women, the manner in which the political is filtered through economic persecution – such as the disproportional effects structural adjustment policies have on women" (p. 27). In this way, economic migration is not legitimate when it comes to refugee status. However, one might argue that this is not an obstacle unique to refugee women, meaning that refugee men may also face this challenge. Yet, this obstacle is particularly pertinent to women, as "[w]omen's enforced economic vulnerability […] makes them vulnerable in other locations", for example "in the job market, more women are coerced into the growing sex trade, or find exploitative jobs […]; in relationships, abuse is tolerated for lack of means to survive on one's own" (Valji, 2001, p.

27). In this way, it can be argued that refugee women are more limited by this obstacle as they have fewer options available to them than refugee men.

Another important point that Valji (2001) makes is that "[i]n enumerating political opinion as a nexus of persecution, Western interpretation has imposed its paradigm of the public/private split, in defining what constitutes the "political" realm" (p. 27). Here, Valji (2001) points out that the Convention constructs an understanding of political persecution as happening outside of the private sphere, that is, in the public sphere, which is dominated by men. In this way, the private sphere, in which women are most visibly present, is excluded, "[t]his interpretation has further implications in that it denies women validity for the political views and actions that they express in the private sphere" (Valji, 2001, p. 27). In other words, political acts are not viewed as being political unless they are performed in a visible manner, meaning in the public sphere. In this way, the agency and self-determination of women is not viewed as being political, and thus not valid, when it is performed in private. Linked to this, Valji (2001) also points out that the Convention "has been interpreted as an instrument that protects its citizens from abuse by their state", this however once again ignores "the location of women's persecutory experiences, which take place overwhelmingly at the hands of non-state actors" (p. 27).

However, as stated above, the UNHCR's explanation is not legally binding, and so the way in which the Convention is interpreted and enforced also depends on the state in question. For example, Nilsson (2013) states that "Sweden is one of the countries that recognize gender-related persecution" (p. 127). Even though Sweden recognises gender-related persecution, its legislation still contains a "'gender biased' perspective" (p. 127). Here, Nilsson (2013) points out that in a discussion "about wife-battering" it was deemed that this type of IPV (as will be discussed in sub-RQ.3) is not something that happens because the wife is a woman, but because of other causes such as infidelity – "the primary or driving force [thus] normally being jealousy" (p. 127). Nilsson (2013) points out that this reflects a gender-blind understanding since the legislation then does not consider that an underlying factor in causing IPV is the woman's "'membership of a particular (subordinate) social group'" (p. 127). Thus, even in states where gender-based persecution is recognised, there are still structural problems when it comes to recognising persecution that, although not enacted because of gender, is 'allowed' to continue because of embedded gender relations. From this we can see that women must be more selective of the countries to which they flee, as there are few countries that recognise gender-related persecution as a ground for asylum. This

complicates their journeys significantly, and thus ought to be considered an obstacle on refugee women's journeys.

Gender-Blindness & Migration Controlling Measures

The EU has had various institutions and migration/refugee control initiatives even before the "[e]scalation of migratory pressures in the early 2010s" (Selanec, 2016, p. 75). Thus, there are many different measures which could be examined, yet we here focus on the Dublin Regulation and Frontex operations.

Frontex is an EU agency which has since 2006 been used to patrol the Mediterranean (Selanec, 2016, p. 75). The agency and its operations have since increased in size and in scope. Selanec (2016) points to the "the media outburst following the 19 April 2015 tragedy, when a migrant boat sank just off Libya resulting in more than 800 dead men, women and children" as a potential reason why Frontex became a more important agency during the refugee 'crisis' (p. 75). However, Frontex operations are not solely focused on saving lives, but also include surveilling criminal activity, monitoring trafficking, tracking illegal networks, and registering refugees (Selanec, 2016; Freedman, 2016). Frontex also carries out search and rescue (SAR) operations (such as Triton and Sophia), these, while being presented as saving lives in the Mediterranean, can also be understood as enforcing coercive mobilisation (in line with De Genova et al., 2018). Furthermore, SAR operations have also been criticised for endangering the lives of refugees, since the patrolling of European borders has resulted in refugees seeking longer and more dangerous routes (SeaWatch, 2021; Baklacıoğlu, 2017, p. 89).

The registration of refugees relates to the Dublin Regulation, "which states that asylum seekers should have their cases processed in the European country in which they are first registered" (Brekke & Brochmann, 2014, p. 146). Importantly, this first country of arrival is "responsible for the collection and examination of [the asylum-seeker's] asylum claims" (Denaro, 2016, p. 77). It is also important to note that "in the EU there is no 'positive mutual recognition' of approved asylum decisions, meaning that persons who were granted asylum do not have the right to move or reside in the territories of any other Member State" (Selanec, 2016, p. 86). Thus, EU countries surrounding Mediterranean waters, e.g., Italy, faced a greater burden during the refugee 'crisis' than other EU countries. Furthermore, Brekke and Brochmann (2014) also point out that there are "[n]ational differences in reception conditions, access to integration measures and social rights" for asylum-seekers

depending on their country of arrival, these "differences encourage secondary movement" (p. 146). In other words, because of the vast differences in how refugees are treated and the opportunities available to them in different countries, refugees avoid registration until they reach a country that they deem as giving them opportunities for a better life (this will be examined in much more detail when answering sub-RQ.2). However, this attempt to resist the Dublin Regulation also has significant effects for refugee women on their journeys.

Firstly, the resistance means that the refugees will be in transit for a longer period of time. This places refugees in precarious positions as "refugees of both sexes experience[…] a heightened level of violence in transit" (Gerard and Pickering, 2014, p. 341). In addition, when refugees seek to resist registration in undesirable countries, this often means that they also seek to pass through these countries as quickly as possible, which often leads to them making use of unsafe transportation, or them being exploited (Denaro, 2016; Gerard & Pickering, 2014; Freedman, 2016). These are clearly obstacles to refugee men as well, yet refugee women become particularly vulnerable to SGVB during transit periods, as will be elaborated on in the analysis of sub-RQ.3.

Freedman (2016) for example notes that refugee women may experience SGBV and can be coerced into "transactional sex during which women were promised priority treatment of their cases and faster release if they agreed to sexual relations with male guards" (p. 20). This shows that women face specific gendered obstacles on their journeys, which makes it clear that a gendered perspective is necessary when it comes to legislation and initiatives regarding refugees. Freedman (2016) notes that various EU institutions and agencies, such as Frontex, have "integrated gender guidelines", yet "despite these […], in practice no […] attention is paid to issues of gender" (pp. 20-21). Notably, Pittaway and Pittaway (2004) show that some authorities may even take advantage of these refugee women's precarious situations and thereby perpetrate further sexual violence (para. 11).

Furthermore, undocumented transit periods also compound the scrutiny that refugee women face, since they, based on the Convention, cannot even be deemed as legitimate refugees. By this we mean that by not being registered, refugee women live in an undocumented state which is fraught with additional scrutiny and suspicion by authorities and the European media. This additional suspicion in combination with their already illegitimate claims to the status of refugee creates a further obstacle for refugee women as it limits the opportunities available to them in EU countries and thus also creates an obstacle for these women to retain their personhood and dignity.

Summary of Sub-RQ.1

In this section we sought to examine how the gender-blind 'Refugee Convention, 1951' (co)constitutes an obstacle on refugee women's journeys. We here found that the gender-blind manner in which the Convention defines refugees has a disproportionately negative effect on refugee women. We found that this gender-blind perspective makes it difficult for women to make their status as refugees seem legitimate because the persecution that they face cannot easily be demonstrated as being caused by their gender. Also, this persecution must according to the Convention be political in nature – thus, economic reasons are excluded. Finally, only persecution in the public sphere is viewed as being legitimate. From this, it is clear that refugee women from the very beginning of their journeys face many obstacles regarding their legitimacy as refugees.

We investigated some of these obstacles by analysing the effects of the lack of a gendered perspective in the Dublin Regulation, as well as in Frontex operations. Here, we found that, although the obstacles faced by refugee men and women in many cases are the same, the manner in which they are experienced, and the proportion of their effects may differ. This illustrates that there is a need to examine refugees and refugee legislation in a way that pays greater attention to how gender relations affect refugee journeys.

Resistive Practices of Refugees

In the section above, we examined some of the obstacles that refugee women face on their journeys. However, we are not only interested in the obstacles that they face, but also in how they relate to them. As such, we pose the question (sub-RQ.2): *Which obstacles do refugees practice resistance towards on their journeys?*

It is here important to note that we are not looking solely at the obstacles and resistive practices of refugee women, but at both refugee men and women. We do this because we acknowledge that, although the way in which refugee men and women relate to obstacles on their journeys may differ, there must be similarities in their resistive practices. Furthermore, the data available on resistive practices is not gendered, which means that both genders are included in the data.

In this section, we will pay attention to resistive practices in relation to the Dublin Regulation, and resistive practices facilitated and performed through applications (apps) and social media. We find it interesting to examine these practices as they demonstrate the inequalities and even inhumane treatment that refugees face on their journeys. Furthermore, we, as stated in the introduction, aim to pay particular attention to the self-determination and autonomy of refugees.

Resistive Practices to the Dublin Regulation

As stated above in the analysis of sub-RQ.1, the Dublin Regulation creates a number of obstacles for refugees. We briefly explored some of these obstacles above, we now turn to a more in-depth exploration in which we pay particular attention to how refugees practice resistance towards these obstacles.

As explained above, the Dublin Regulation was enforced to regulate and control the influx of refugees in Europe. One of the reasons for implementing the 'country of arrival' law was to harmonise policies across the EU (Brekke & Brochmann, 2014, p. 146). However, because of the geography of Europe and the routes of fleeing, some EU countries received a significantly higher number of refugees than others. Brekke and Brochmann (2014) further identify that the Dublin system was, and still is, further "challenged across Europe by gaps in reception policies and living standards: significant national differences prevail as to liberality in granting asylum status, access to welfare goods and the labour market" (p. 146). For example, as was discussed above, some states recognise gender-related persecution as grounds for asylum, e.g., Sweden (Nilsson, 2013, p. 127). Meanwhile other states, like France

and Italy, still do not recognise these as grounds for asylum, unless the persecution is perpetrated by state actors (Valji, 2001, p. 28).

Because of these differences in standards, many refugees resist getting registered in their country of arrival in favour of living without documents until they can be registered in a country where they believe their opportunities will be better. It is important to note that "asylum-seekers […] only have one chance to claim asylum. Therefore, if authorities find an asylum-seeker's fingerprints in the database and can confirm that they have been in another EU member state, then […] the asylum-seeker can be deported to the first country" (Bhimji, 2016, p. 52). Thus, if a refugee woman seeks asylum on the grounds of gender-related persecution by a non-state actor, it is integral that she is not registered in a country like Italy where such persecution is not recognised, but that she avoids registration until she reaches a country like Sweden. In this way, we can identify one instance where refugee women's experience of an obstacle is much more severe and consequential than that of refugee men. From this we can see that selectivity when it comes to country of official arrival, or country of registration, is a powerful way in which refugee women resist the restrictions imposed on them by the EU.

Furthermore, Bhimji (2016) also takes note of how refugees can resist deportation, for example the scholar states that:

> [f]ollowing a period of six months, from the time of their deportation proceedings or the expiration of their visa, an asylum-seeker with fingerprints in another EU member state could not be deported from Germany and could become eligible to apply for permanent asylum if they managed to stay in the second country. (p. 62)

Because of this, many refugees resist deportation attempts, for example by refusing to board planes, or by leaving their refugee centres after receiving their deportation notices (Bhimji, 2016, pp. 62-63). Bhimji (2016) argues that this form of deportation resistance is a form of "enacted moral agency since […] refugees] refused to experience the moral consequences of deportation and elected to survive in extremely difficult circumstances" (p. 63).

Notably, some refugees are not successful when attempting to resist registration, yet they may persevere and attempt other forms of resistive practices. For example, Bhimji (2016) recounts the story of some refugees who despite having been registered in Italy decided to continue on to Germany and seek asylum there. Bhimji (2016) notes that "these refugees understood that they would not be eligible to claim asylum in Germany" because they had already been registered elsewhere. Thus, these refugees knew that they would

experience “a shift in their legal status” and lose “their rights to work” if they did not return to their registration country (p. 56). Despite these limitations and loss of civic rights, many of these refugees chose to remain in Germany. Bhimji (2016) recounts that these refugees explained “that they were unable to survive the economic situation and live a life of dignity in countries such as Italy or Spain or Hungary since they were unable to find employment” (p. 56). In this way, their choice to remain in Germany and work illegally can be seen as a form of resistive practice, as they resisted EU regulations and instead prioritised their dignity and a humane standard of living.

Bhimji (2016) pays particular attention to the ways in which refugees perform resistance to protect and retain their dignity. For example, Bhimji (2016) notes that many “refugees and migrants without asylum encounter[…] housing problems” (p. 57). Freedman (2016) also raises this point, albeit with a gendered perspective – for example, they mention that refugee accommodation in Greece is not gender separated, and that women because of this may create barricades at the entrances of their rooms to protect themselves (pp. 22-23). Furthermore, Bhimji (2016) recounts many experiences reported by refugees such as charity housing not being suitable because “many of the people who lived in charity housing suffered from substance dependencies and mental health problems” (p. 57), or conditions in homeless shelters being unacceptable because of inefficient administration and/or “racism from the authorities managing these shelters” (p. 58). These refugees instead sought other forms of accommodation, such as short-term stays in private homes of activists, or long-term shared housing (Bhimji, 2016, pp. 57-58). Bhimji (2016) points out that in this way “refugees resisted living in inappropriate conditions and sought to find appropriate and respectable living spaces, [thus] they arguably resisted denigration, through their negotiations and strategies” (p. 58). Furthermore, Bhimji (2016) points out that by living with citizens in private homes, refugees were better able to “integrate into the wider society since the people whom they lived with provided them with a sense of inclusion” (p. 58). We see this as a form of resistive practice, since the refugees in this way are able to resist the racism, exclusion, and isolation that comes with residing in public or state appointed accommodations. In this way, refugees resist the obstacles of coerced mobility and loss of dignity.

Bhimji (2016) identifies the above examples as instances of individual resistance, yet refugees may also practice collective resistance. For example, Brekke and Brochmann (2014) recount that in an interview with a group of Eritrean refugees, the refugees described how they (the refugees) “[w]hile at sea […] had agreed to collectively resist having their fingerprints taken once they arrived” (p. 155). However, Brekke and Brochmann (2014)

report that “in the end, they were all fingerprinted and registered” (p. 155). Even though this attempt at resistance was not successful, it still illustrates how refugees can unite and perform collective resistance.

Another example can be found in Bhimji’s (2016) recount of the experiences of one refugee, Yasir, who “refused to stay in Manchester even though he had a steady source of income there” because his personhood was threatened there as the community was less accepting of refugees (p. 59). Bhimji (2016) notes that many refugees, like Yasir, prioritise their personhood and participate in demonstrations and activism as a way to claim a “presence within social space” (p. 59). We interpret this as refugees resisting the limits imposed on them by the refugee status, and instead reclaiming their “right to have rights”. Arendt (1973) introduced this concept of a right to have rights in an effort to illustrate how “[t]he fundamental deprivation of human rights is manifested first and above all in the deprivation of a place in the world which makes opinions significant and actions effective” (p. 295). Thus, Arendt (1973) argues that in order to maintain one’s inalienable human rights, one must first belong to or be recognised by a community. In this sense, by demonstrating and claiming a “presence within social space”, refugees assert that they have a right to have rights, just as citizens. Overall, demonstration and activism can be seen as a powerful and symbolic form of resistive practice.

However, Bhimji (2016) also mentions other challenges that refugees face in which the opportunity to resist is very limited. The most obvious example of this is the lack of health care for asylum-seekers in EU member states. Bhimji (2016) notes that, although EU countries do not “specifically prohibit[…] health care access, publicly subsidised care [… is] not guaranteed across the region” (p. 59). Refugees are thus in a very precarious situation because they depend “on pharmacists or NGO clinics to provide them with the correct treatment” (Bhimji, 2016, p.60).

Resistive Practices Through Social Media & Apps

In the section above, we discussed some of the ways refugees practice resistance towards the obstacles that they face on their journeys. The above shows that there are a range of resistive practices on the individual level, but also collective practices. We here find it interesting to examine some of the factors that make such forms of resistance possible. Both Denaro (2016) and Brekke and Brochmann (2014) highlight the importance of apps as platforms through which information can be disseminated, and as tools for mobilisation.

Brekke and Brochmann (2014) found that "[s]preading information about other opportunities in Europe was an important part of the temporary-migrant culture in transit" (p. 155). We here understand "other opportunities" to mean other ways to reach Europe, new information regarding the opportunities and/or ease of gaining asylum in specific EU member states, information about housing etc. (see Brekke & Brochmann, 2014, p. 155). From this, it can be seen that refugees make use of different communication channels, namely in-person conversation as well as online communication via social media, to individually stay up-to-date on new information, and to collectively help other refugees in similar situations. We view this as a form of resistive practice, since refugees share their "first-hand experience of the migration regimes in other countries, of opportunities and hindrances" (Brekke & Brochmann, 2014, p. 155), and in this way help themselves and others navigate and avoid a wide range hindrances. However, it is worth noting that not all are "well informed about the details of migration regimes in other European countries" (Brekke & Brochmann, 2014, p. 155).

We suggest that this dissemination of information online can be viewed as a form of community building. Denaro (2016) also seems to support this, as they particularly take note of how messaging apps such as WhatsApp and Viber play an integral role in online community and network building as these apps "permit users to share videos and pictures" as well as texts (p. 85), thereby aiding in communication across borders. We argue that these online platforms provide a way for refugees to connect to allies and to other refugees who may be at different points of their journeys. In this way, refugees create an online space for themselves in which they can enact their personhood without the same interference and restrictions as they face in their physical lives.

Furthermore, we argue that this online information sharing also plays an incredibly important role when it comes to physical mobilisation. Online platforms not only provide an avenue through which information can be shared, but also allow for social networks to be assembled more easily, which we argue is translated into physical mobilisation as well. Notably, we view this online form of community building to be another type of resistive practice, as it functions in the same way as physical community building and 'space claiming' as "real life" community building, as was discussed earlier using Bhimji (2016).

We here also find it necessary to reflect on how refugees can, and do, use apps and social media as a way to gain the attention of the rest of the world. Notably, La Rosa (2014) points out that social media is increasingly used as an online arena in which various social actors can interact (p. 35), in this way, the usage of social media by refugees can be seen as

them (refugees) entering this arena and interacting with other actors. For example, Denaro (2016) recounts how some Syrian protests, for example "cases of hunger strikes", "have been filmed and photographed by them [(the protestors)], allowing the large-scale diffusion of witnesses on social networks such as YouTube and Facebook" (p. 85). By sharing their protests with the rest of the world, refugees can attract public attention and, thus, challenge the dominant narratives surrounding refugees. As has been discussed earlier in this paper, the dominant narratives regarding refugees either present them as illegal migrants coming to Europe for self-serving economic goals, or as suffering victims with no autonomy who need a 'saviour' to help them. We argue that by sharing their protests, refugees challenge these narratives. In the videos, refugees can be seen to retain and enact their own agency and power – they thus challenge the narrative of them being voiceless victims. In this way, these videos can be seen as refugees asking for recognition and solidarity, rather than asking for a 'saviour'. We further see this as another form of resistive practice that refugees employ to reclaim their personhoods and dignity.

On the other hand, using social media to spread awareness of the injustices and inhumane treatments that refugees face can also enforce the narratives of agency-less victims. Denaro (2016) for example notes that a video was shared by a Syrian asylum-seeker which shows "a practice used in the Lampedusa reception centre, which consisted of making migrants undress in open spaces and washing them with a pump, as an anti-scabies treatment" (p. 86). Thus, the sharing of videos can result in indignation and public support for better treatment of refugees. However, these videos may also reinforce damaging narratives.

Summary of Sub-RQ.2

In the section above, we explored how refugees relate to the obstacles they face, specifically we examined which obstacles refugees practice resistance towards on their journeys. We here found that refugees practice resistance towards obstacles created by the Dublin Regulation, namely registration and deportation. We also found that the reasons for practicing resistance towards these obstacles can vary, and that there are also several forms of resistive practices that refugees perform.

We found that refugees practice resistance on an individual level as well as a collective level, and additionally found that some forms of resistance can be performed in both manners (e.g., fingerprint resistance). Relying heavily on Bhimji's (2016) work, we

explored how resistive practices are a way for refugees to reassert their personhood and protect their dignity.

We further chose to examine how refugees make use of social media and apps as platforms or tools that aid their resistive practices. We here found that social media and apps are used by refugees to disseminate information, to aid in mobilisation, and to create online as well as physical communities. We further found that the sharing of experiences online can be understood as another form of resistive practice, as refugees in this way can challenge dominant narratives.

Sexual and Gender-Based Violence on Refugee Women's Journeys

Pittaway and Pittaway (2004) assert that "it is widely acknowledged that the majority of refugee women experience rape and sexual and gender based violence as part of the refugee experience" (para. 1). Similarly, academics with a specific focus on women in the 2015 refugee crisis certainly also seem to establish the omnipresence of SGBV (see for example Alsaba & Kapilashrami, 2016, or Asaf, 2017). Due to the magnitude of this phenomenon, it follows that an exploration of SGBV on refugee women's journeys cannot, and should not, be ignored when exploring the obstacles that refugee women face. Therefore, in this section, we unfold the question (sub-RQ.3): *Which obstacles do refugee women face in relation to sexual and gender-based violence on the journey?* In the exploration of this question, we aim to examine SGBV as an obstacle that refugee women face, but we also aim to reflect on the ways in which refugee women relate to this obstacle, thereby incorporating considerations of agency into the analysis.

Before analysing sub-RQ.3 we will discuss the nature of the data available in relation to SGBV. After this, we examine three different facets of SGBV that refugee women may face on their journeys: SGBV in relation to fellow refugees, SGBV practiced by smugglers, and finally SGBV practiced or exacerbated by authorities. After this, we will present a brief summary of sub-RQ.3.

Data on Sexual and Gender-Based Violence

We have established that there is significantly more data available concerning SGBV than other phenomena concerning refugee women's journeys, there is, for example, very little gendered data available on resistance. This supports what Asaf (2017) calls the "prominent perception of women" in conflict, namely that they are seen merely as "victims of war" who do not challenge or even relate to the obstacles they face (p. 1). The fact that women are examined as objects of violence in a much more extensive manner than they are explored as people practicing resistance or resilience can be argued to play into a prevailing narrative of women as an inherently fragile or vulnerable group. This patriarchal narrative can be argued to (re)enforce the subordinate position of women globally (Sultana, 2011, pp. 13-15). This is not to say that the experiences of SGBV that refugee women undergo during their journeys should be neglected, rather, that we must situate the available data within our current global socio-political context.

Additionally, when discussing the data for this section, a few uncertainties must be mentioned. Firstly, as shown in the introduction, there are significant discrepancies in statistics for women arriving in Europe in this time period. Also, Baklacıoğlu (2017) suggests that Syrian refugee "women avoid talking about […] gender-based violence" (Baklacıoğlu, 2017, p. 77), and Byrskog, Olsson, Essén, and Allvin's (2014) interview data confirms the sentiment that it is "shameful to tell" (p. 6). In addition, for women who are fleeing, there might not be a suitable authority to report the crime to (Pittaway & Pittaway, 2004, para. 38), which suggests many instances might be concealed or unreported. These reflections suggest that the magnitude of the problem is likely to be larger than the academic literature is able to grasp – a significant reflection to remember in the analysis of this section.

Sexual and Gender-Based Violence in Relation to Fellow Refugees

We will firstly explore how refugee women's experiences with SGBV manifest in relation to fellow refugees. To do this, we consider the SGBV that takes place in refugee camps, before exploring the difference between travelling alone versus with a man, and then we will reflect on the impact of IPV.

Camps

The impact of SGBV on refugee women's journeys is particularly evident when exploring the experiences of women in refugee camps. For example, one of Freedman's (2016) case studies concerns an Iraqi woman who was "scared of the other refugees within the [Greek refugee] camp" and therefore predominantly stayed in her tent because, as she stated, "it is too dangerous for me to go outside" (p. 22). This insecurity is likely to be exacerbated by the lack of "sex-separated latrines or shower facilities", as seen in many refugee camps (Asaf, 2017, p. 9). To minimise the risk here, some women may eat and drink very little, as to reduce the need to use these facilities (Amnesty, 2016, para. 7). Also, Human Rights Watch (2019) shows that women may form groups that use the facilities at the same time, so that they can protect each other (para. 39), hereby showing both the benefit of and need for strong female communities. Both tactics show that refugee women do relate to these obstacles in an active manner, but they also both show the limited extent to which it is possible to create change when the organisation of refugee camps does not seem to consider gendered obstacles.

Another case study of Freedman's (2016) shows that families with daughters in pre-teen and teenage years may sleep outside in more open or remote areas, in order to avoid the

risk of SGBV that other refugees pose (p. 23), a tactic one of Asaf's (2017) case studies show that single women may also utilise (p. 6). Both Asaf (2017) and Freedman (2016) thereby seem to corroborate Baklacıoğlu's (2017) assertion that refugee camps are "dangerous […] places of sexual abuse and harassment" (p. 85). However, sleeping outside is not without risk. This can be seen, for example, when Gray (2019) reflects on the danger presented by "armed actors" from for example "'enemy' groupings" (p. 189) who may stay close to refugee camps to deter new arrivals (Lischer, 2015, p. 157). Here, 'enemy groupings' may, for example, be militias from the countries that these refugee women are fleeing from – e.g., because these militias want to punish 'deserters' of the regime. This shows the importance of nationality when fleeing. Importantly, it seems that the women who chose to stay outside the camp are aware of the risk these groups pose (considering Gerard & Pickering, 2014). Thereby, it can be said that these refugee women calculate and deliberate the risks posed by different groups to make a conscious choice of where to sleep.

Alone or with a Man

We now turn to look at the difference between travelling alone compared to travelling with a man. Freedman (2016) shows that there is "another layer of insecurity as a woman travelling alone" or as a woman traveling with just her children (p. 21). This sentiment is also seen in the explorations of refugee journeys by Byrskog et al. (2014) and Fiddian-Qasmiyeh (2010), although these do not focus specifically on journeys during the refugee 'crisis'. Baklacıoğlu (2017) has a particularly significant case study where they interview a Syrian mother who communicates a hope for her daughter "not to undergo her menstruation soon, because we will have to marry her in order to protect her [from SGBV]" (p. 95). Notably, the daughter was also travelling with her father, yet she had to get married to be protected. This shows that in addition to the physical presence of a man, the status of marriage is also protective. It is believed that many girls and women get married as a tool to reduce the risk of SGBV on the journey (Baklacıoğlu, 2017, pp. 93-95), thereby attempting to safeguard their sexual and reproductive health. Charles and Denman (2013) raise a significant point about the refugee girls who get married at a young age – namely that they are much more likely to experience IPV (pp. 102-105), which we consider to be a form of SGBV, as will be explained later.

Importantly, we assume that refugee women are, before choosing to flee, largely aware of the risks of SGBV on the journey, and that this risk is increased when travelling without a man. We make this assumption based on Byrskog et al.'s (2014) extensive study, although this has a focus on Somali women coming to Sweden, yet Asaf (2017) and

Baklacıoğlu (2017) who focus on the Middle East, draw similar conclusions. Despite this awareness, Freedman (2016) suggests that a "greater proportion of women are now [2016] travelling alone, or with just their children" (pp. 18-19). Some institutions believe that this is "a specific strategy on the part of men who believe that sending women and children ahead will be a more successful means of gaining entry to the EU member states, as they will be perceived as more 'vulnerable'" (as seen in UNHCR interview by Freedman, 2016, p. 19). Yet, we criticise this view not only because it neglects the agency of women, but also because if these women do indeed know of the risks, as we propose, then this 'strategy' seems to put them in unnecessary danger. Rather, we are inclined to agree with Freedman (2016) who proposes that "women do not migrate until they have absolutely no other choice […] these women are taking the choice of last resort", compared to men who often leave earlier (p. 20).

With the above considerations in mind, we propose that travelling with a man, and especially a husband, offers more protection against SGBV, yet more women are now travelling alone and are therefore in even more precarious situations. These women seem to be aware of the risks of travelling alone in relation to SGBV, but they may be seen as choosing to risk their current bodily autonomy in order to protect their, and their possible children's, future safety.

Intimate Partner Violence

It must be acknowledged that travelling with a man does not always minimise the risk of SGBV. This is particularly the case when considering IPV, which is shown to increase on refugee women's journeys (Charles & Denman, 2013, p. 103). Tastsoglou and Nourpanah (2019) show that IPV is often regarded as a 'private issue' (p. 41). Yet, we take IPV to be a type of SGBV, since it often manifests and unfolds within unequal gender relations and should therefore be regarded as a type of gender-based violence (in line with Gray, 2019). Byrskog et al.'s (2014) interviewees suggest that IPV may be thought of as an issue that should be "solved within the marriage and within the larger family (p. 7), which Freedman's (2016) work seems to support (p. 23). Yet, this is indubitably a 'solution' that is harder to implement during refugee journeys where families are often split up, broken into smaller units, or completely dispersed (Dubow & Kuschminder, 2021, pp. 1-2). Furthermore, Charles and Denman (2013) note that "women feared that if the [intimate partner] violence were reported, their husbands would send them back to Syria" (p. 104). Also, Freedman (2016) proposes that when fleeing, refugee women "find it impossible to leave their abusive husbands" either because of the risks of SGBV posed by other refugees (p. 20), or for the fear

of being delayed on their journeys to Europe (p. 22). Freedman (2016) therefore suggests that they "find themselves stuck in a violent relationship with no hope of escaping" (p. 22). Yet, we argue that these refugee women can also be reframed as weighing the violence faced by their husbands against the risk of violence posed by other refugees, and against the violence in the countries from which they are fleeing. As such, rather than simply being victims of violence, these refugee women are making an autonomous choice to endure IPV for the sake of their future safety.

Sexual and Gender-Based Violence by Smugglers

The literature concerning refugee women's experiences with SGBV is saturated with examples, case studies, and reflections about SGBV committed by smugglers. For example, Freedman's (2016) interview data includes information about a refugee woman "who had been raped by smugglers and badly injured" – injured to the extent that it hindered her onward journey (p. 21). Here, health is also shown to be an obstacle on the journey of refugee women, as both the sexual and mental health of this woman can be seen to be endangered. Furthermore, Hynes (2017) suggests that refugee women's use of "smugglers increase[s] the chances of being [sexually] exploited", because the women are in such a dire situation that they have no-one else to trust (pp. 221-223). Here, the SGBV risks posed by smugglers are shown to be a severe obstacle that refugee women face on their journeys, yet the way in which women relate to this obstacle is not clear, perhaps because it can be viewed as almost unavoidable in these situations.

A key trend when looking into smuggling is refugee women's "exchange [of] sexual relations in return for the price of their passage when they did not have enough cash to pay for this journey" (Freedman, 2016, p. 21). This 'exchange' is so coerced that few gender and migration scholars use the term prostitution when discussing it. Freedman (2016) oscillates between calling it "rape" and "transactional sex" (pp. 21-22), while Charles and Denman (2013) call it "survival sex" (p. 106). We use the term of Charles and Denman, as 'survival sex' makes it clear that it is a last resort rather than an exchange – importantly, 'survival sex' should be understood as a specific type of rape, considering the underlying coerced nature. This type of rape can also be seen as a risk in relation to sexual and reproductive health, considering the lack of availability of contraception on refugee journeys (as shown by Nabulsi et al. 2021). Furthermore, Charles and Denman (2013) suggest that utilising this 'option' of 'survival sex' may be considered on the "family level" (p. 106), that is, families

may determine that it is necessary for wives/mothers to have 'survival sex' with a smuggler in order to achieve safe passage for their families. Yet, critical feminist scholar Herrera (2013) criticises the view of the family as a "homogenous unit" especially during migration (p. 481), a reflection that suggests that the level of choice in this circumstance must be seen as immensely limited.

When discussing 'survival sex', the importance of an intersectional perspective becomes particularly useful, since class can be seen to play a momentous role. For example, a refugee woman with better economic resources may be able to pay in financial rather than bodily terms, thereby decreasing the risk she faces of SGBV. Additionally, class plays a significant role in where, when, and how refugees flee. For example, in the case of the Syrian civil war, many in the upper class were able to flee early on in the war (approximately 2010-2011), leaving by plane for countries like Egypt where they could establish businesses and continue their lives with little change (Ayoub, 2017, pp. 82-86). Contrarily, those of the lower/middle class mostly left in the years where the war was thought to draw out, have a devastating impact, and severely endanger human lives (approximately. 2013-2015). These people had to leave using boats and smugglers to reach safety in the EU (Ayoub, 2017, pp. 97-99), thereby increasing the risk of SGBV. Notably, those of the lowest classes may not be able to flee at all – here, it is notable that SGBV is often used as a weapon in war against civilians (Asaf, 2017, p. 6), but other risks are seen to overshadow this, like the risk of death. We can therefore establish that a low socio-economic status constitutes an obstacle for refugee women's journeys.

Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Practiced and Exacerbated by Authorities

Much like smugglers may force refugee women in dire situations to have 'survival sex', many authorities like police and border guards are reported to do this too. This can be seen, for example, in one of Baklacıoğlu's (2017) case studies, in which "Syrian women told stories about […] border guards […] soldiers and militias" who demanded either money or sex in exchange for 'privileges' like safer travel or even resources like food and water (pp. 86-90). Also, Pittaway and Pittaway (2004) point to "documented reports of refugee women who have been [raped] by UN peace-keepers and members of security forces" (para. 12) – hereby showing that SGBV by authorities is a clear obstacle on refugee women's journeys. Pittaway and Pittaway (2004) suggest that very few refugee women report this, firstly because there is no appropriate authority to report it to when the perpetrator is the authority

(para. 38). Secondly, because of the fear that reporting the crime will prolong their journeys (Freedman, 2016, p. 23), hereby showing that refugee women may silence their experiences in order to achieve faster or safer travel for themselves and their families. Notably, nationality plays a significant role in determining who takes the role of the authority and who takes the role of the refugee in these situations, and as such, the importance of these social categories cannot be ignored.

But authorities do not just practice SGBV against refugee women, they also exacerbate the risk of SGBV that they face by others. This can be seen, for example, when looking into the SAR operations carried out by Frontex. As explained in sub-RQ.1, SAR operations make refugee journeys more difficult by deliberately and forcefully emplacing refugees in countries that they were not heading for (De Genova et al., 2018, p. 249). SAR operations have also separated refugee families "with some refugees being brought to Greece and others taken to Turkey" (Freedman, 2016, p. 19). Considering the increased risk of SGBV when travelling without a man, as established above, this must be seen as exacerbating the risk of SGBV that refugee women face on the journey.

Additionally, in an attempt to reduce the number of refugees coming to Europe, the "EU [increased] borderisation policies at the Libya-Italy route" in 2015 (Baklacıoğlu, 2017, p. 91), for example through the Triton operation, which increased Frontex presence in this time period (Tazzioli, 2016, pp. 1-4). The Libya-Italy route was known to be the most used by middle-class Syrian women in 2014 (Baklacıoğlu, 2017, p. 89) but with increased Frontex patrolling in the area, they had to find alternative pathways (Baklacıoğlu, 2017, p. 97). Notably, this "constant shift" in travel pathways increases the need for smugglers and makes the use of smugglers more expensive (Baklacıoğlu, 2017, p. 97) which may increase the use of 'survival sex' and other forms of SGBV practiced by smugglers as discussed above. We suggest that this constant shifting and negotiating of changing circumstances is an example of the resilience and agency of refugee women, because it shows the dynamic and innovative pathways that refugee women forge. Here, the importance of nationality as a social category can also be seen as significant, since one's nationality helps to determine the route a person uses to flee.

But this is not the only way that increased EU borderisation exacerbates the risk of SGBV, because the constant shift means that refugee women in camps near a specific EU border may have to leave the camp to reach new smugglers hubs, sometimes having to "walk hundreds of kilometres through dangerous conflict zones and deserts" (Baklacıoğlu, 2017, pp. 85-87). Here it can be assumed that there is no proper shelter, which Freedman (2016) shows

exacerbates the precarious situation of refugee women, because this is a significant factor in increasing the risk of SGBV (p. 23). Also, the use of SGBV as a weapon in war may increase in these conflict zones (Asaf, 2017, p. 6). With these considerations in mind, we argue that this forced "zigzag towards their aspired destination" (De Genova et al., 2018, p. 251) must be seen as exacerbating the precarious situation of refugee women. When SGBV is used as a weapon in war, the importance of nationality as a social category becomes clear, as refugee women may become targets of violence due to their national identity.

Summary of Sub-RQ.3

Overall, this section of the analysis aimed to shed light on the question (sub-RQ.3): *Which obstacles do refugee women face in relation to sexual and gender-based violence on the journey?* We first investigated the impact of other refugees, specifically by looking at the SGBV that takes place in refugee camps, as well as the importance of who you travel with, and the impact of IPV. We found that smugglers pose a great risk of SGBV, and when looking into the concept of 'survival sex', we found an intersectional perspective to be particularly useful, since the intersection of class with the categories 'refugee' and 'woman' was shown to be of great importance. Finally, we explored how authorities both practice and exacerbate the SGBV that refugee women experience on their journeys. In the analysis of this question, we found that refugee women constantly navigate difficult and dangerous pathways (co)created and maintained by fellow refugees, smugglers, and authorities practicing and exacerbating SGBV. While the ability to challenge many of these obstacles related to SGBV was found to be severely limited, we found many instances where refugee women actively engaged with, related to, and avoided the obstacles by invoking their agency. Therefore, we argue that these women should not be viewed as passive, docile victims, who cannot but accept the conditions they face.

Discussion

In the above analyses, we explored several obstacles that refugee women face on their journeys, and we reflected on how refugee women relate to these. However, we have yet to discuss a major trend in the analysis sections. A trend that we identify as running throughout the analysis is that the obstacles refugee women face are shaped exactly by the two central social categories 'refugee' and 'woman'. In other words, the experiences of refugee women when fleeing seem to be framed by these two social identity markers. In this section we aim to unpack a discussion of this trend. To do this, we firstly examine the obstacles that refugee women face qua the social category' refugee', before exploring the obstacles that refugee women face qua the social category 'woman'. Finally, we dive into the obstacles faced at the intersections of these, that is, the obstacles faced as a refugee woman. Here, we will discuss the power of labelling, and provide more theoretical reflections compared to the analysis sections which were more concrete.

In our discussion of labelling, the reader may notice a discrepancy in our deliberations concerning refugees. In the theory section, we state that we employ the term refugee as a strategic essentialism, thereby constituting a bottom-up approach, yet, in this discussion of labelling we treat the refugee label as imposed by a dominant group. A clarification is necessary. While we above analytically aim to address refugees as a social category rather than as a rarefied legal status, we here in the discussion acknowledge that the use of the label 'refugee woman' is not merely an identity that refugee women take upon them, but that it is also a tool used by the European refugee regime to position refugee women as objects of policy in a specific way.

Obstacles Faced as a Refugee

As refugees, refugee women experience a "lack of adequate legal-political protection", where the "subliminal association between 'refugee' and 'non-citizen' creates almost absolute legal impunity for those who exploit or assault refugees" (Pittaway & Pittaway, 2004, para. 44). This can be seen in our analysis, for example in sub-RQ.2, where we discuss how refugees practice resistance towards the manner in which they are prevented from enacting their rights in the same way as citizens, here the importance of nationality as a social category is underscored. This lack of protection can also be seen in relation to the SGBV that smugglers and authorities are able to commit against refugee women who cannot/will not report the crime, as explored in sub-RQ.3. Furthermore, Pittaway and Pittaway (2004) show that in

some refugee camps, "justice is delegated to 'bench courts', which are […] run by the refugees themselves" (para. 40). However, they also suggest that these are very patriarchal in nature, and so "women are not likely to achieve justice" especially in cases where SGBV is involved (para. 41). This shows that even when the lack of legal-political protection is attempted to be alleviated, this may have a gendered skew.

In an extension of this, Pittaway and Pittaway (2004) suggest that "when refugees are forced to flee their countries, although their citizenship remains officially intact, all of the factors which give it […] meaning are undermined" (para. 42). Hereby, "refugees are unable to participate in the citizenship practices of any country" (Pittaway & Pittaway, 2004, para. 43), which not only constitutes an obstacle, but also indicates that some ways of opposing a government are not possible i.e., voting. However, as we show in sub-RQ.2, refugees may still participate in demonstrations and other forms of activism. De Genova et al. (2018) show the importance of the "queer politics of asylum" in instances like this (pp. 250-254). By this, it is meant that unusual and innovative pathways are taken to show dissatisfaction with asylum regimes. For example, as discussed in sub-RQ.2, refugees engage in individual and collective resistive practices when subverting registration, i.e., by refusing to have their fingerprints taken, or examples of resisting deportation.

Another obstacle that refugees face on their journeys is lack of resources associated with health. This is an obstacle that we briefly mention in the analyses, but we do not engage with it on a deeper level. Also, the literature regarding refugee journeys often concerns health. Considering these points, we suggest that it is an important factor to incorporate into the discussion. Daynes (2016) asserts that "for the hundreds of thousands of people who are travelling through [and to] Europe, access to even basic healthcare is often extremely limited" (p. 437). This must be seen as an additional obstacle faced in transit periods and in refugee camps, both of which we discuss without a reflection on health in the analyses. Further, Daynes (2016) shows that Doctors of the World report a range of problems "from skin and breathing problems to chronic conditions such as diabetes, pregnant women unable to access any kind of antenatal care, and people who have been victims of police brutality" (p. 438). All of these must be seen as obstacles refugees face on their journeys, and they should be understood as factors which exacerbate the precarious situation of refugee women, and the factors also make it more difficult to practice resistance. It should be noted that when discussing police brutality, the SGBV risks refugee women face by authorities (as shown in sub-RQ.3) should also be considered. Similarly, the police brutality that has taken place during pro-refugee activism should be considered in this context (see e.g. The Guardian,

2021). Also, when discussing sickness in families, it must be considered that women often take on the care giving role, which may hinder them from participating in the running of camps for example, as explained by Asaf (2017). This suggests that refugees face significant health obstacles, and that gender cannot be extracted from a discussion of these.

This section has shown that as refugees, refugee women face obstacles concerning a lack of legal-political protection, lack of citizenship, and health issues.

Obstacles Faced as a Woman

In addition to the obstacles refugee women face as refugees, there are also considerable obstacles that they face as women on their journeys. As was discussed in sub-RQ.1, refugee women face issues concerning the legitimacy of their refugee status because the 1951 Refugee Convention has an ungendered nature which only recognises political persecution as happening in the public rather than the private sphere, which thereby favours the asylum claims of men. Furthermore, Valji (2001) notes that issues of gender-blindness are not only limited to the 1951 Convention, but are pervasive throughout the justice system, its laws, and interpretations of these (p. 27).

Furthermore, as we mention above, "pregnant women are frequently unable to access antenatal care" (Daynes, 2016, p. 437), which clearly creates an obstacle on the journey. This must also be viewed in light of the SGBV we explore in sub-RQ.3, as many of the pregnancies on these refugee journeys may be a result of rape. For example, Sulekova et al. (2021) have a case study concerning refugee women arriving in Italy during the refugee 'crisis' – here, 11% of the women were pregnant, where 30% of these became pregnant as a result of SGBV (p. 233). This obstacle may be exacerbated considering that services like abortion are frequently not possible on the journey, due to both stigma and lack of safe facilities (Lehmann, 2002, p. 151; McGinn & Casey, 2016, p. 5). Other causes of pregnancy may be linked to the lack of contraception available on the journey, as explored by Nabulsi et al. (2021). This creates a further obstacle for refugee women as it becomes more difficult to provide for their expanding families (Asaf, 2017, p. 8), not to mention the physical and psychological strains of childbearing, birth, and care of a new-born in such precarious situations (as explored by Byrskog et al., 2014).

Furthermore, as women, refugee women are often responsible for the caregiving role. Fiddian-Qasmiyeh (2010) draws on a case study of a refugee camp, where the "women […] are responsible not only for their own children, but also for those of their relatives" and so are

not able to participate in the political, social, and educational life in the camps (p. 78), which can be argued to effectively make them stay in the tents and live isolated lives – an obstacle which not only has the potential to increase IPV, but also contributes to poor mental health (Silove, Ventevogel, & Rees, 2017, p. 132).

In addition, many refugee women in families are thought to prioritise their family's well-being over their own, and so "when food and other necessities are in short supply, women do not get a fair share of what is available" (Asaf, 2017, p. 8), thereby leaving them lacking important resources. This finding can be considered using Ruddick's (1980) concept of "maternal thought" in which a mothers' needs are not prioritised compared to those of her family (and especially her children) (pp. 348-349). Here we suggest that a woman's 'choice' to give up on her own needs for the benefit of her family's is a type of conditioned choice enforced by patriarchal narratives that diminish or undervalue the needs of women.

Yet, the social category 'woman' is not always a hindrance for refugee women. In line with Ruddick (1980), Pittaway and Pittaway (2004) underscore that "as a woman, her gender identity may give her status and a sense of self-esteem as the mother of children, or as a wife" (para. 17), and they state that "within the family or community it may entitle her to certain respect or protection" (para. 18). This is important to bear in mind when discussing the role gender plays in refugee women's journeys. Nonetheless, a woman's gender may simultaneously "deny [her] access to education and decision making" (Pittaway & Pittaway, year, para. 19). Here, Pittaway and Pittaway show the dual role that the social category 'woman' has when considering refugee women's journeys.

Overall, this section has shown that as women, refugee women face obstacles concerned with pregnancy, motherhood, and the caregiving role – yet the dual role that a woman's gender carries with it must also be remembered.

Obstacles Faced at Intersections & Labelling

Above, we have highlighted some of the obstacles that refugee women face as refugees and as women respectively. Yet, these sections have clear links, overlaps, or intersections, and our independent discussions of the two categories have uncovered that for refugee women, the two identity markers 'refugee' and 'woman' cannot be separated. Taking an intersectional perspective, we therefore argue that these two categories are dialectically intertwined, and that refugee women have to constantly navigate and manage both categories simultaneously. This can be seen for example, in the arguments presented by Pittaway and Pittaway (2004),

who suggest that "women are the socially constructed 'holders of virtue' and men attack other communities by 'dishonouring' their women (para. 29)" – an argument that Asaf (2017) backs up in their analysis of rape as a weapon of war. Thus, "when men rape […] women from other groups, they are not only targeting the women's identity as members of the other group, but also their identity as women", hereby showing that "this discrimination cannot be separated out into its two constitutive parts" (Pittaway & Pittaway, 2004, paras. 29-32). This intersectional perspective can be summed up by the question and subsequent answer that Pittaway and Pittaway (2004) present: "Why is a refugee woman so much more vulnerable than a refugee man, or another woman? […] because she is wearing the label of 'refugee woman'. The answer lies in the label, with which she is consistently branded" (para. 37).

By mentioning 'branding', Pittaway and Pittaway (2004), pave the way for a discussion of labelling. Eyben and Moncrieffe (2007) define labels as "the way in which people, conceived as the objects of policy are defined in convenient images – their purpose is therefore to simplify the complexities to which they refer" (pp. 65-66). In this way, labelling should be understood as a type of political manipulation, as well as a "fundamental activity of exercising power" because a dominant group is able to control the (simplified) images coupled with a less powerful group (Eyben & Moncrieffe, 2007, p. 19; p. 40). In connection with this, Vigil and Abidi (2018) suggest that "refugee is a socially constructed label with complex legal, ethical, and political connotations" and that "within the refugee regime, power is expressed in multiple ways, such as through policy and law, and these expressions of power influence how categories and labels are constructed" (pp. 53-54). This shows the importance of power relations when discussing the refugee label, but we suggest that this logic is equally applicable to the process of labelling someone as a woman, because this also "positions people as objects of policy in a particular way" (Crawley & Skleparis, 2018, p. 52). This thereby allows for policy agendas to be established based on the intersections of both of these labels.

These power relations become particularly significant when considering Eyben and Moncrieffe's (2007) assertion that "there is a disjuncture between how [refugees] view themselves, and how current policy frameworks view them" (p. 65). This shows that these unequal power relations cause a separation between the real and concrete experiences of refugees versus the way these are perceived by states and their policies. In this way, the "act of being labelled a 'refugee' by others can be seen as denying refugees their own agency and making them into objects" (Ludwig, 2016, p. 7). We argue that this is especially pertinent when discussing refugee women because they are often viewed as passive, docile, victims

who do not practice autonomy, as we show in the introduction and literature review. When refugee women are labelled as 'refugee women', they are branded as "in need of assistance, training and a host of other resettlement services, though never to speak and act of their own accord" (McKinnon, 2008, p. 398). Not only does this concur with our literature review, but it also shows a "desire to keep issues simple" (Eyben & Moncrieffe, 2007, p. 37) because these labels allow for a refugee woman to be understood only through this label. That is, the label prompts a connection to vulnerability and non-choice, although we, in the analyses, show the resistance, resilience, and multiplicity of ways in which refugee women deal with the obstacles they face on their journeys. In this way, "a large part of the stigmatization around forced migrants [(in our case refugee women)] comes hand-in-glove with the processes of categorization which impose labels upon them" (Eyben and Moncrieffe, 2007, p. 64).

When discussing the labels associated with refugee women, it is particularly pertinent to remember Eyben and Moncrieffe's (2007) statements that the power of labelling (co)constitutes "the process of classifying needs and entitlements" (p. 20). In other words, labels are a tool to prioritise claims to welfare, yet may also be used as an exclusionary tool to prevent groups from accessing specific resources. This can be seen in the needs-based approach to assistance, where labels allow for the "worthy and unworthy, deserving and underserving" to be easily (and one-dimensionally) identified (Eyben & Moncrieffe, 2007, p. 27). In this needs-based approach, those perceived as most vulnerable may be seen as most worthy or deserving, which may be understood as an opportunity for refugee women to gain greater protection. Yet as Freedman (2019) states, the "impacts on those who are classified as vulnerable can be felt as forms of symbolic violence which reduce agency and autonomy" (p. 1). This indicates that the consistent political branding of refugee women as an inherently vulnerable group perpetuates the obstacles that refugee women face.

Overall, being classified simultaneously as a refugee and a woman can be said to contribute to a form of symbolic violence, since refugee women are, as a result of this label, considered to be an intrinsically vulnerable or agency-less group. In our analyses, we have found that refugee women face extraordinary obstacles on their journeys qua these social categories, but we have also found that refugee women relate to, resist, and challenge these obstacles in resourceful and courageous ways. Based on our analyses and discussion, we therefore argue that refugee women, instead of being coupled with vulnerability, need to be reframed as inherently resilient women.

Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to uncover some of the obstacles that refugee women face on their journeys in a manner that recognises not only the oppression that they face at the intersections of different social categories, but also in a manner where their autonomy and decision-making power is discussed and reflected upon. Based on our investigation, we suggest that migration policies should henceforth incorporate such considerations of agency when engaging with refugee women.

In order to approach our topic, we posed the overall RQ: *Which obstacles do refugee women face on their journeys, and how do they relate to them?* To operationalise this rather broad question, we selected three core areas which are essential to understanding the obstacles that refugee women face on their journeys. We formed three sub-RQs based on these areas.

Firstly, we identified gender-blind laws as an obstacle for refugee women when fleeing. We found the 1951 Refugee Convention to be particularly pertinent in this regard. Therefore, we wanted to investigate the question: *How does the gender-blind Refugee Convention, 1951, (co)constitute an obstacle on refugee women's journeys?* Firstly, we outlined the gender-blind nature of the convention, specifically the first article (A2), in which the grounds for granting asylum are defined. Here we found that the definition of a refugee creates several obstacles for refugee women from the very beginning of their journeys – in part because the persecution that they face is not recognised unless it occurs in the public sphere. That is, the persecution that many women face is often not seen as political, and thus is not seen as a legitimate ground for asylum. Some states interpret the grounds for asylum differently, for example Sweden recognises gendered obstacles to a greater extent than many other states. We argue that these differences of interpretation create and maintain obstacles that constitute extremely precarious situations especially for refugee women, considering the impact of the Dublin Regulation where one can only claim asylum once, and only in the first state of registration, so refugee women must be selective of where they are registered.

Next, we looked into the manner in which refugees may practice resistance on their migratory journeys. To do this, we posed the question: *Which obstacles do refugees practice resistance towards on their journeys?* In the investigation of this question, we assumed that both refugee men and women must practice resistance, and since there is no gender-disaggregated data on this topic, we made the assumption that women must constitute a significant proportion of those refugees practicing resistance. We explored this question by

looking into the obstacles that the Dublin Regulation carries with it, and the ways in which refugees can practice resistance to these, for example by refusing to give fingerprints in the first country of arrival. We also investigated resistance in relation to social media and apps, where we found that these are used to create social awareness, for information dissemination, and for community building. We further found that refugees perform individual and collective resistance, in this way it can be seen how autonomy and resistance play out during the journeys. These forms of resistance constitute a way for refugees to reassert their personhood and protect their dignity.

Finally, we explored how SGBV constitutes an obstacle on refugee women's journeys. To unfold this area, we asked: *Which obstacles do refugee women face in relation to sexual and gender-based violence on the journey?* This area is one of the few on which a gendered perspective is present in the literature. This plays into a narrative in which refugee women are portrayed as objects of violence, rather than, for example, as people actively practicing resistance. This may give the impression that refugee women do not relate to the obstacles that they face because their thoughts about the violence they endure is neglected. Yet, we found this narrative to be unequivocally false in our analysis of the obstacles related to SGBV that refugee women face on their journeys. For example, when looking into how SGBV manifests in relation to other refugees, we found that refugee women actively relate to the obstacles they face, for example by forming groups to use facilities in refugee camps, thereby minimising the risks of SGBV by other refugees. We found that refugee women actively relate to the obstacles they face in relation to SGBV on their journeys, and that they are very much aware of the risks, but that they choose to continue in spite of these since they are fighting for their and their possible children's future safety. We found that refugee women have to constantly navigate the precarious paths created and maintained by fellow refugees, smugglers, and authorities practicing and exacerbating SGBV.

A key trend that we identify as running throughout the analysis sections is that the obstacles that refugee women face on their journeys seem to be shaped exactly by the two social categories 'refugee' and 'woman'. We looked into the obstacles that refugee women face because they are refugees, and the obstacles that refugee women face because they are women. However, we found that these cannot be separated from each other – that is, the obstacles that refugee women face manifest at the intersections of the categories that define them. It should be noted that the categories 'refugee' and 'women' also act as labels imposed in order to position them as objects of policy in a particular way. Here, the power of labelling becomes significant, and we discuss for example how resources are allocated based on

‘vulnerability’. This vulnerability indicates an inherent lack of agency and may therefore be seen as a sort of symbolic violence. We suggest that rather than seeing refugee women as an inherently vulnerable group, they should be reframed as people who, although facing great obstacles, fight through extreme hardships in innovative and courageous ways, and as such should be seen as inherently resilient women.

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