The Gendered Implications of Securitized Migration:

A qualitative look at how the securitization of migration affects women’s experiences of seeking asylum in one of the world’s most gender equal countries

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ABSTRACT

The interrelation between gender and the asylum-seeking process has received increasing attention within academic as well as political discussions in the past decade. Looking specifically at the case of Sweden, this paper hopes to add to existing knowledge through the consideration of how tensions and contradictions regarding migrants and asylum-seekers affect women’s experiences of the asylum-seeking process. The analysis builds on the idea that the European Union Member States, Sweden included, have cultivated a “securitized” migration discourse which considers refugees and asylum-seekers as a threat to national security and stability. This has resulted in reinvigorated internal and external controls on migration and asylum, with particular structural and gendered implications for those seeking asylum in the EU. The aim of the study is to explore how these implications affect women’s experiences of seeking asylum in Sweden. It finds that women, and especially women belonging to ethnic minority groups in their home-countries, are particularly vulnerable to the effects of securitization due to lack of social and economic resources, increased exposure to gender based violence (GBV) during the migratory journey, insecurities related to male-dominated and overcrowded asylum accommodation centers, and insecurities related to family fragmentation.

Keywords: gender, asylum-seekers, securitization of migration, Sweden

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1. INTRODUCTION

From the great Migration Period of the first Millennium AD until today one thing has remained constant; people migrate. The scale of migration has however tended to fluctuate over time due to ever-changing push and pull factors. There are now more than 244 million migrants in the world, compared to 153 million in 1990. 57% of these 244 million international migrants are living the Global North, with more than half, 61%, originating from a developing country (UNDESA, 2016:1). Yet, just as the scale of migration has varied throughout history, so has attitudes towards it. South-to-North migration has alternately been regarded as a burden, a resource, or a threat for migrant-receiving countries. Many voices, including Amnesty International, the Red Cross, and the UN have been raised in favor of more generous migration and asylum laws in the EU in order to facilitate transit for those fleeing persecution and adversity in their homelands. However, the general trend in Europe seems to contradict these wishes. Many scholars are instead pointing towards the emergence of a “securitized” European migration discourse which considers immigration from the Global South as a threat to the sovereignty and wellbeing of the European nation-state (Ceyhan & Tsoukala, 2002; Huysmans, 2000). The recent civil war in the Syria, along with conflicts in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Somalia, made this all the more apparent as many European nations decided to close their borders to the thousands of refugees fleeing intense conflict in their home-countries.

In 2015 the EU received a total of 1.26 million first time asylum applications\(^1\), comprised mainly of applicants from Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq (Eurostat, 2016a). EU Member State Sweden, a prominent refugee receiving country which up until 20 July 2016 was considered to have the most generous asylum regulations in Europe, stood out among other EU Member States as the world’s largest recipient of new individual asylum applications per capita in 2015 (UNHCR, 2016a:3). About 162 900 people sought asylum in the country, almost doubling the previous high of 84 000 persons in 1992 during the war in former Yugoslavia.

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\(^1\) First time asylum applicants for international protection (as defined in Article 2(h) of Qualification Directive 2011/95/EU) are persons who lodged an application for asylum for the first time in a given Member State during the reference period. Repeat applicants are accordingly excluded (Eurostat, 2016a).
Yet, only 48,100 applicants in 2015 were women, representing merely 30% of the total number of people who sought asylum in Sweden that year (Migrationsverket, 2016a). This preponderance of male asylum claimants is however not unique to the Swedish case as men were reported as the main lodgers of asylum throughout the EU in 2015 (Bonewit & Shreeves, 2016). What is noteworthy is that the overrepresentation of male claimants does not correspond to the overall gender balance among global refugee populations as roughly half (47%) are female (UNHCR, 2016a:3).

The discrepancy in the number of male and female as asylum applicants indicate that gender needs to be taken into account when studying policy and practice vis-à-vis migration and asylum. Looking specifically at the case of Sweden, the present study accordingly considers how gender affects women’s experiences of seeking asylum in an EU member state. The analysis is anchored in the idea that the securitization of migration in the EU has resulted in reinvigorated internal and external controls on migration and asylum. The sex discrepancy indicates that these controls, structural in their nature, have had diverging impacts on men and women –thus highlighting the need to study men and women’s experiences separately. Moreover, the securitization of European migration tends to play into colonialist perceptions and attitudes about the foreign “Other” (this will be developed further in theory section of the paper) thus highlighting the need to embed the study in a post-colonial framework.

The paper accordingly hopes to contribute both theoretically and empirically to the understanding of how gender and postcolonial perceptions play into an increasingly securitized migration discourse and how this, in turn, affects women’s experiences of seeking asylum in Sweden. The paper is structured as follows: the first section introduces the aim and research question, a clarification of concepts, the theoretical framework, as well as an overview of some of the previous literature which has been produced within the field of gendered migration studies. The second section makes evident the methodological approach of the study and provides a critical discussion of material and sources. Before proceeding to the qualitative data analysis, the third section provides an introduction to Swedish asylum policy and practice during the studied time period. This is then followed by an exploration of how the securitization of migration affects women’s experiences of seeking asylum in
Sweden. The fourth and final section provides a summary and discussion of the empirical and theoretical findings of the study.

1.1. AIM AND RESEARCH QUESTION

The present study is, as mentioned, grounded in the notion that Sweden, along with other EU Member States, has cultivated a “securitized” migration discourse which plays into post-colonialist perceptions of migrants and asylum-seekers as ontologically and epistemologically different from Europeans. As such, the securitization of migration works to depict refugees and asylum-seekers as a threat to national security and stability. This has resulted in reinvigorated internal and external controls on migration and asylum, with severe structural implications for those seeking asylum in the EU. The discrepancy between male and female asylum-seekers to Sweden, with men being overrepresented as lodgers of asylum claims in the country, indicate that these structural implications have gendered dimensions with diverging effects on women and men’s opportunities and experiences of seeking asylum. The aim of the paper is accordingly to provide an analytical account of how this securitized migration discourse (and its inherent gendered and racialized dimensions) affects women’s experiences of seeking asylum in Sweden.

To limit the scope, the study focuses on asylum-seekers who have arrived to Sweden after 2013. The year 2013 was selected because it was the first time, since the end of World War II, the number of refugees, asylum-seekers and internally displaced persons worldwide exceeded 50 million (Edwards & Dobbs, 2014). The EU has since 2013 responded to the continuous increase in the number of refugees and asylum-seekers by increasing border controls and enforcing stricter rules and regulations guiding the asylum-seeking process. Studying the time period from 2013 onwards thus allows for a closer exploration of how the securitization of European immigration affects the experiences of women seeking asylum in Sweden.

To fulfil the above described objective the following research question has been formulated:

*In what ways has the securitization of migration affected women’s experiences of seeking asylum in Sweden during the period 2013-2016?*
1.2. Definition of Concepts

The aim and research question should be accurately understood before embarking on the analysis and the concepts of “gender”, “postcolonial perceptions”, “securitization of migration” and “seeking asylum” need therefore be properly clarified. By “gender” this study refers to the social and cultural representations and constructions which distinguish between that which is considered “feminine” and that which is considered “masculine”. The study thus differentiates between gender and sex; where sex is used to refer to biological differences between men and women, and gender to the contextually bound, socially constructed notions of what it means to be a man or a woman, a boy or a girl. The advantage of using gender as an analytical category rather than sex is explicated by Jane Freedman who argues that gender allows for the exposure of how relations between men and women also are relations of power (Freedman, 2015:19). Moreover, gender, compared to sex, understands the relationship between men/masculinity and women/femininity as relational i.e. that the meaning of one is dependent on the meaning of the other. Donato et.al have highlighted how this relational understanding of gender is particularly beneficial for the study of migration as “migrants often become particularly aware of the relational and contextual nature of gender as they attempt to fulfil expectations of identity and behavior that may differ sharply in the several places they live” (Donato et.al., 2006:6). Likewise, the postcolonial perspective underscores how the understanding of the “Third-World foreigner”, the “asylum-seeker” or the “migrant” is relationally, socially and culturally constructed. By “postcolonial perceptions” this study thus means to refer to socially constructed ideas and perceptions about “Third-World people” which tends to perpetuate the European understanding of asylum-seekers and migrants from the Global South.

By “securitization of migration” the study refers to the process whereby migration is constructed as a threat to regional or national stability and security. Moreover, the present study understands “seeking asylum” as a process-based concept which does not only encompass the distinct act of lodging a claim for asylum, but rather includes the range of actions or steps taken by an individual with the end-goal of receiving asylum, where asylum can be defined as a “residence permit granted to an alien because he or she is a refugee” (Utlänningslag (2005:716), Ch. 4, 1§). The study accordingly considers the act of
leaving one’s place of origin with the intent of seeking asylum elsewhere as the first stage of the asylum-seeking process. The process is understood as ending once asylum is granted.

1.3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The research question has been informed by literature pertaining to the theoretical concept of securitized migration. The following section is, as such, devoted to the discussion and exploration of this literature. The aim is to provide a theoretical account able to conceptualize the reinvigoration of controls on migration and asylum in the EU (and Sweden). As the present study seeks to explore the gendered implications of these controls I also discuss theoretical literature which expands on the traditional notion of security through the incorporation of a gender perceptive. Feminist- and postcolonial theories, which can be used as empirical tools to analyze the experiences of women asylum-seekers, are also presented and discussed.

1.3.1. THE SECURITIZATION OF MIGRATION AND THE DISJUNCTION BETWEEN THE “XENOS” AND THE “XENIA”

The concept of “securitization” developed in the mid-1990s out of constructivism’s focus on perception and interpretation. The concept, associated with authors such as Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver from the constructivist Copenhagen School of International Relations, focuses specifically on “how” and “why” certain subjects are constructed as security issues. Securitization can be described as a process during which actors (usually states but it can also involve other constituents such as the media or interest groups) transform particular subjects into matters of security in order to legitimize extreme measures to protect a given object, entity or idea. Moreover, the process of securitization can be used to motivate the introduction of a certain issue or subject on the political agenda, into what Buzan describes as the “realm of panic politics” (Buzan, 1997:14). Buzan argues that this “realm of panic politics” enables a departure from the rules of normal politics where “secrecy, additional executive powers, and activities that would otherwise be illegal” become justified (Buzan, 1997:14). Buzan and Wæver posit that, for a subject to become securitized, it must first be constructed as a threat or security issue through what the authors refer to as a “speech act” i.e. “an utterance, which represents and recognizes phenomena as ‘security’, thus giving it special status and
legitimizing extraordinary measures” (Buzan & Wæver, 1998:26). The speech act in itself is however not enough; the process of securitization also requires that the idea of a perceived threat or security issue is internalized by the general public (Buzan & Wæver, 1998:23-26). The process of securitization can, as such, be understood in terms of the Foucauldian notion of governmentality which contends that the state, through the construction of knowledge and discourse, has the ability to identify and regulate populations and their subjectivities (Foucault, 2007:108; Morrissey, 2013:779).

The idea that security issues do not always entail the threat of military aggression is integral to the Copenhagen School. Buzan and Wæver’s concept of securitization can, as such, also be employed to understand how questions relating to migration become constructed as security issues. Authors such as Jef Huysmans, Ayse Ceyhan and Anastassia Tsoukala have, for example, drawn upon the ideas of the Copenhagen School to illustrate how migration to the EU has increasingly been constructed as a security issue (Huysmans, 2000; Ceyhan & Tsoukala, 2002). Ceyhan and Tsoukula argue that the end of the Cold War, and the subsequent demise of the bipolar power structure, prompted drastic changes to the international system. These changes, in turn, have resulted in an altering of social arrangements, a modification of domestic order, the transformation of the forces of integration and fragmentation, and the acceleration of the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion (Ceyhan & Tsoukala, 2002:21). The authors argue that Western societies are as a result witnessing “the emergence of many existential and conceptual anxieties and fears about their identity, security, and well-being” (Ceyhan & Tsoukala, 2002:12). Ceyhan and Tsoukula consider this “identity-crisis” the principal reason for the construction of a discourse of fear and proliferation of dangers; a discourse which tends to manifest itself in the perceived threat of the “foreign other” i.e. the undocumented migrant, the refugee, the Muslim, the “non-European” etc. (Ceyhan & Tsoukala, 2002:22).

Huysmans, on the other hand, argues that the discursive framing of migrants, asylum-seekers and refugees as security threats is primarily a result of the “Europeanization of migration policy” – a process rooted in questions concerning internal security, cultural identity and the welfare state (Huysmans, 2000:778). This process is, in turn, enabled by three central “techniques of governmentality” pertaining to: (1) the seeping of securitization into policy development and implementation; (2) the mobilization of a political discourse which
exaggerates the risks of migration and asylum; and (3) the construction of migration as a security problem requiring security-based solutions (Huysmans, 2006, in Gerard, 2014). Huysmans posits that the abolishment of internal border controls in the Schengen Area, and the subsequent loss of control over transnational flows of goods, capital, services and people, has been construed as a challenge to public order and the rule of law (Huysmans, 2000:758). This has in turn resulted in the idea that the external borders of this free movement area need to be strengthened to guarantee a sufficient level of control of “what” and “who” can legitimately enter the realm of the European Community. However, in order to make the issue of border control a security question, the internal market has had to be framed within a discourse of internal security (Huysmans, 2000:760). Huysmans contends that migration has become a “nodal point” within this discourse and that politically powerful labels such as “migrant”, “foreigner”, and “asylum-seeker” have the capacity to “connect internal security logic to the big political questions of cultural and racial identity challenges to the welfare state and legitimacy of the postwar political order” (Huysmans, 2000:762). Huysmans suggests that the image of the migrant as a threat to internal security has accordingly been used, and to some extent exacerbated, to legitimize various measures to protect the internal security of the European Community (Huysmans, 2000:758-762).

The cultural identity aspect of the Europeanization of migration policy is, according to Huysmans, rooted in the assumption that immigrants, asylum-seekers and refugees present a challenge to the belief in national and cultural homogeneity and its importance for the social and political stability of the state. This assumption feeds into the idea that migrants are inherently different from European nationals and that they therefore do not have a natural place in the EU; that they are a burden to European societies, and that they need to be kept at a distance (Huysmans, 2000:766). The welfare aspect of the Europeanization of migration policy can also be understood in terms of this process of “othering” where immigrants, asylum-seekers and refugees, unlike national citizens, are “increasingly seen as having no legitimate right […] to social assistance and welfare provisions” (Huysmans, 2000:767). Huysmans argues that an increased competitiveness for social goods (e.g. housing, healthcare, unemployment benefits, jobs etc.) since the 1970’s has resulted in an augmentation of welfare chauvinism i.e. “the privileging of national citizens in the distribution of social goods” (Huysmans, 2000:767). Welfare chauvinism can accordingly be viewed as both a result and a contribution factor to the process of securitization of migration in Europe.
The securitization of migration described by the above-mentioned authors can, according to Didier Bigo, be understood in terms of a pervasive perception of the nation as a “body” or “container” for the state. He argues that the process of securitization, and the consequential portrayal of the immigrant or foreigner as a “threat”, is anchored in the fear of ruling politicians about losing the symbolic control they have over territorial boundaries. Bigo goes on to argue that the process of securitization also resonates with feelings of "unease" among members of the public. He posits that these feelings are associated with an inability to cope with the “uncertainty of everyday life” (Bigo, 2002:65). This reasoning, I shall argue, finds traction with Jaques Derrida’s concept of hospitality and the impossibility of achieving what he calls “absolute hospitality” (Derrida, 2000:25).

Derrida’s discussion of hospitality is rooted in the ancient Greek notion of “xenia” -a concept of hospitality based on a reciprocal relationship (a pact if you will) between the guest, the “xenos”, and the host. This relationship is expressed through the exchange of gifts as well as through an implicit interchange of non-material services such as shelter, protection and the gratification of certain normative rights. Hospitality in the xenian sense accordingly rests on a principle of conditionality. However, Derrida argues that this idea of conditional hospitality is conceptually paradoxical (Derrida, 2000:23). He contends that the reciprocal relationship inscribed in the notion of hospitality commands, to some extent, a familial or genealogical bond between the host and xenos. This bond, according to Derrida, is contentious as it is at once what makes hospitality possible; and yet the very thing that limits and prohibits it. This means that hospitality can never be offered to “an anonymous new arrival” who lacks patronym or social status (Derrida, 2000:25). An “absolute” form of hospitality which does not demand the existence of this social bond would thus require the host to open up his or her home to an “absolute, unknown, anonymous other” (Derrida, 2000:25). It would require him or her to “give place” to this unknown stranger; to let them arrive, and take place in the space offered to them, “without asking them of either reciprocity (entering into a pact) or even their names” (Derrida, 2000:25). An unconditional and altruistic form of hospitality accordingly demands that the host give up control over her own home. This loss of control, Derrida argues, encroaches on the host’s role as “the master of the house” and accordingly her ability to receive whomever she likes; to determine whether the individual making claims to her hospitality is a “guest or a parasite” (Derrida, 2000:53,61). The inability of the host to
determine the intentions of the guest will inherently lead to the assumption that the guest is indeed “wrong, illegitimate, clandestine, liable to expulsion or arrest” (Derrida, 2000:61)

These assumptions resonate with Bigo’s description of “unease” and people’s inability to cope with that of which they have no control. The unease generated from the state of not being able to control or determine whether the guest is a “parasite” or “guest” forces the host (i.e. the state) to restrict its hospitality in order to maintain control over its sovereign body by, for example, increasing border controls and restricting rights to asylum; Derrida’s conceptualization of hospitality is, as such, useful for understanding the underpinnings of securitization. The securitization of migration can also be used to help explain the limits of hospitality. The process of securitization is, as described by Huysman et al, also a process of “othering” – a process of constructing the migrant as inherently different. One could accordingly argue that the securitization of the migrant has increased the ontological distance between the “host” and the “xenos”; further complicating the already complex notion of hospitality.

1.3.2. THE FEMINIST INPUT: BROADENING THE ONTOLOGICAL SPAN OF SECURITY STUDIES

Feminist thinkers have emphasized how the ontological span of security studies can be broadened by the inclusion of women's experiences and the introduction of gender as an analytical category of security. By exposing global structures of inequality and by including women's experiences in the analysis of safety feminist thinkers believe that a more comprehensive definition of security can be achieved (Tickner, 1995:190).

Security, according to feminist theorization, can be understood in terms of emancipation and empowerment. Ann Tickner has for example defined security as the “diminution of all forms of violence, including physical, structural and ecological” (Tickner, 1997:625). Principal to the feminist conceptualization of security is the rejection of the state-centrism of traditional security studies in favor of a more individual or community based focus which takes women’s security as its principal concern (Roe, 2014:17). Security is also understood as a process rather than an ideal; this process involves exposing different social and structural hierarchies and attempting to understand how these hierarchies construct, and are constructed by, the international system (Tickner, 1997:624). Feminists contend that these structural and social
hierarchies produce gendered inequalities which permeate both the private and the public spheres of society and contribute to the insecurity of individuals, and women in particular. The state-centric analysis of security thus fails to take into consideration the “interrelation of insecurity across all levels of analysis” (Tickner, 1997:625).

Moreover, Peterson and Runyan argue that the conventional way of studying security has “disadvantage and marginalized calls for and analyses of how to bring about peace, not only as the absence of war and other forms of direct violence but also as the end of structural violence” (Peterson & Runyan, 2010:145). Structural violence can here be understood as indirect, invisible and insidious violence, occurring at a structural level where it is not possible to identify a clear perpetrator (Galtung, 1969). Akhil Gupta has added to the understanding of the concept by emphasizing that structural violence encompasses “not only the exclusion from entitlements such as food and water, but also the exclusion of certain groups from particular forms of recognition (citizenship rights, equal rights before the law, rights to education, representation, and so on)” (Gupta, 2012:20). Social injustices produced by gendered relations of domination and subjugation can, as such, be described as a form of structural violence. Peterson and Runyan describes the particular form of violence resulting from structural and social inequalities between men and women as the “gendered division of violence”. They argue that the gendered division of violence is reproduced and reinforced through “hierarchical dichotomies of self-other, us-them, aggressive-passive, soldier-victim, and protector-protected that divide the world into masculinized offenders and defenders and feminized populations over which they fight and seek to conquer and defend” (Peterson & Runyan, 2010:143-144).

1.3.3. Feminist standpoint theory and the postcolonial critique

Insecurities resulting from gendered divisions of violence are arguably best understood through analysis and research conducted from the “standpoint” of women. Feminist standpoint theory, which emphasis that women and men generally have different social positions and experiences and “that women are, by and large, underprivileged relative to men and experience reality through work in ways men often do not”, can thus be useful for understanding the experiences of women within a broadened security framework (Philips, 2014:331). The fundamental claim of this theoretical perspective is, as Paul Roe explains it, that the female perspective has its own epistemic value. The theory holds that, by conducting
research from the standpoint of women, a more objective form knowledge can be generated though the reveling of new and more complete truths (Roe, 2014:127). Feminist standpoint theory has however been problematized from a postcolonial perspective for its essentialized and monolithic understanding of “woman” and the subsequent ignorance of epistemic differences between different groups of women. Heidi Hudson argues for example that “the security needs of Western women and women in the developing world are different to the extent that no global sisterhood can be assumed” (Hudson, 2005:157). Instead, she argues in favor of a more intersectional understanding of gender as intertwined with other identities such as race, class and nationality (Hudson, 2005:158). An intersectional approach is also favored by Chandra Talapade Mohanty, who is critical of the tendency within (Western) feminists writing to portray the “third-world-woman” as a uniform and monolithic subject. She posits that this tendency “exerts a discursive colonization of the materialistic and historical differences in the lives of the women who live in the Third World” (Mohanty, 2003:35). This process of discursive colonization, she argues, results in homogenate and reductionist representations of the “Third-World-woman” as leading an “essentially truncated life based on her feminine gender (read: sexually constrained) and her being “Third World” (read: ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, domestic, family-oriented, victimized, etc.)” (Mohanty, 2003:38). She argues that this discursive representation stands in contrast to “the (implicit) self-representation of Western women as educated, as modern, as having control over their bodies and sexualities and freedom to make their own decisions” (Mohanty, 2003:38). Mohanty identifies six different ways in which the monolithic understanding of the Third-World-woman is manifested and reproduced within western feminist research; it is expressed through the portrayal of Third-World women as victims of male violence, as universally dependent, as victims of colonial processes, as victims of economic development processes, and finally, as victims of the Arabic family system and the Islamic rule system (Mohanty, 2003:40). She argues, for example, that western feminist who study women in the Arabic world have a tendency to conduct their research from the viewpoint that all Arabic and Islamic societies share the same conception of women and womanhood; without paying attention to the various historic, materialistic and ideological power systems that shape this conception (Mohanty, 2003:43). She is also critical of the tendency to portray Islam as a uniform and consistent religion which affects and restrains all Muslim women in a similar manner (Mohanty, 2003:45). I here feel obliged to mention Edward Said’s conceptualization of Orientalism as it bears a clear connection to Mohanty’s criticism of reductionist
representations of Islam within Western feminist research. Said’s Orientalism can be described as a discursive practice which works to distort and exaggerate ontological and epistemological differences between “the Orient” (i.e. the Arab and Muslim world) and “the Occident” (i.e. the Western world). The practice of Orientalism generally involves a stereotyping portrayal of Arab and Islamic culture as backward, lacking democracy, and abrogating women’s rights (Said, 2003:xiv).

I believe feminist standpoint theory might be progressed through increased attentiveness to practices of Orientalism and discursive colonialism as described by Said and Mohanty. Christine Sylvester, and her notion of empathetic cooperation, may here be useful for the construction of a theoretical framework within which feminist research can be conducted in a less reductionist and generalizing manner. Sylvester argues that empathy can be practiced as an epistemological method within feminist research to overcome the reductionist tendencies of feminist standpoint theory. She describes this method of “empathetic cooperation” as a “process of positional slippage that occurs when one listens seriously to the concerns, fears, and agendas of those one is unaccustomed to hearing when building social theory, taking on board rather than dismissing, finding in the concerns of others borderlands of one’s own concerns and fears” (Sylvester, 2001:247). Empathetic cooperation, through the adaption of an empathetic understanding of the diverse needs and concerns of women, accordingly has the potential to counter the (involuntary) practices of discursive colonialism within feminist research. The notion of empathetic cooperation can, in turn, be connected to Heidi Hudson’s idea of fractured holism which “recognizes difference as a tool within a bigger process of emancipation” (Hudson, 2005:168). The fractured holism approach thus considers individual, context bound experiences as connected to universal structures and processes of domination and subjugation. What this essentially means is that, although marginalization and vulnerability can look different for different women in different places, feelings of inclusion and exclusion are similar for all people. Fractured holism, “by not absolutizing difference, but rather treating it as part of an emancipatory process”, thus makes it possible to expose how institutions and other actors employ discursive processes of difference to justify certain forms of inclusion and exclusion (Hudson, 2005:169). The concepts of empathetic cooperation and fractured holism can both be connected to Sylvester’s notion of “relational autonomy” which takes root in the idea that human autonomy is both constrained and enabled by the voluntary and, for marginalized groups (such as women) often involuntary relationships we have with
other people (Sylvester, 200:119). The notion of relational autonomy is also tied to the idea that social or historical conditions resulting from oppressive systems of domination and subjugation (e.g. repressive gender or racial socialization) can both promote or obstruct individuals’ capacity for autonomy. This, according to Sylvester, makes possible the realization that a lot of what we find to be different in others in fact “echoes within one’s own experience and identity” (Sylvester, 200:120). An empathetic approach, to quote Sylvester, thus “enables respectful negotiations with contentious others because we can recognize involuntary similarities across difference as well as difference that mark independent identity” (Sylvester, 2001:120). This means, in other words, that empathetically cooperative research requires recognition of the relational ties we have with those defined as distinctly “different” from ourselves.

1.3.4. Summary of Theoretical Discussion and Relevance for the Present Study

Buzan and Weaver’s securitization theory, along with Huysman, Ceyhan and Tsoukala particular focus on the securitization of migration within Europe, is relevant for the present study through the conceptualization of reinvigorated controls on migration and asylum implemented in the EU and EU Member States such as Sweden. Securitization connects regulated migration to national interests and does, as such, help make sense of the disjunction between humanitarian commitments and strict migration and asylum laws that may, in some regard, be considered to infringe on such humanitarian commitments. Derrida’s hospitality theory can be applied to further explain this apparent disjunction. If we, to humor Derrida, treat the humanitarian commitments of states as the implicit commitment of the host to provide refuge and shelter to the foreigner, then we can understand states’ unwillingness to offer unconditional and unregulated opportunities for asylum in terms of the impossibility of absolute hospitality as described by Derrida.

While securitization and hospitality theory is useful for providing a theoretical understanding why and how states act the way they do vis-à-vis migration, the theories do little for the understanding of how institutional practices of inclusion/exclusion and security/insecurity influence and affect the lives of the people who migrate. Incorporating a feminist perspective into the conventional study of security is thus beneficial as it expands the ontological range of the field through its normative commitment to the individual and/or the community as the
ultimate referent of security. Feminist theory accordingly exposes how the nation-state’s pursuit for national security and stability, manifested through the securitization of migration, can in itself be constitutive of insecurity and violence, both physical and structural in its form.

Moreover, the feminist perspective is important as it illustrates how gender molds the experiences of those seeking asylum in Sweden. I also believe a gender-sensitive approach to be crucial, not only for understanding the plight of women as migrants and asylum claimants, but also for the understanding of how perceptions about gender shape state-decisions regarding migration and asylum. Embedding the analysis in a postcolonial framework is important for similar reasons; as the present study focuses on South-to-North (or Orient-to-Occident) migration where a predominate majority of the studied asylum-seekers are Muslim it becomes of particular importance to be aware of how tendencies of orientalism and discursive colonialism shape policy and practice in regard to migration and asylum and, subsequently, the experiences of asylum-seekers from the Orient. Moreover, maintaining a postcolonial awareness throughout the analysis is arguably of particular importance for me as a white, Western woman conducting research on the plight of female migrants seeking asylum and refuge in a country of which I am myself a citizen (placing me in a comparatively privileged position). An empathetically cooperative and holistically fractured approach is therefore preferred as it reduces the risks of reproducing homogenate and reductionist representations of the “victimized” and “repressed” Third-World Muslim woman.

1.4. PREVIOUS RESEARCH

In 1984 the International Migration Review published a special issue titled “Women in Migration”. This issue, according to Donato et.al, marked an important turning point within scholarly research on migration by including women as analytical category (Donato, et.al., 2006:4). Since then a growing body of literature has emerged within the field of feminist migration research -some of which is introduced in this following section. Particular emphasis is placed on research which focuses on “gender” rather than “women” as this, in the words of Donato et.al, allows for a more “sophisticated” theoretical and analytical understanding of migration as a power laden and “gendered phenomenon” (Donato, et.al., 2006:4). The scope of this section is further limited by the evident choice to focus mainly on research with a pronounced focus on the lived experiences of female asylum-seekers and migrants. Of particular interest is the work of feminist scholars such Alison Gerard and Jane Freedman
who both have written extensively on the subject of female migration within an increasingly securitized migration framework.

1.4.1. The Journey to “Fort Europa” and the Forgotten Voices of Female Migrants

Writing from a criminological perspective Alison Gerard, in her book “The Securitization of Migration and Refugee Women” (2014), argues that there consists a “considerable gap in the existing […] literature in the use of empirical research to capture the lived experiences of those seeking refugee protection and the impact of securitization on them” (Gerard, 2014:1). To remedy this problem Gerard has conducted a qualitative study which explores the experiences of a small sample of refugee Somali women residing in Malta. Gerard’s research, similar to the present study, aims to reveal the “humanized impact of the securitization of migration” (Gerard, 2014:xiii). She accordingly builds on arguments from authors such as Bigo and Huysman in order to illustrate how European borders have undergone a transformation “with securitization now the dominant paradigm defining border control” (Gerard, 2014:1). She argues that the act of crossing borders has racial, gendered and classist dimensions which, within a securitized migration framework, are becoming increasingly prominent. Gerard accordingly expounds the gendered dimensions of securitization by bringing to the fore the often-forgotten voices of women migrants. Her principal focus is on exploring women’s experience of the “four key stages” of their migratory journey: exit, transit, arrival and onward migration (Gerard, 2014:1). The first stage, exit, is explored though a conflict analysis of Somalia, followed by an examination of how gender-based violence affects women’s decisions to emigrate. She finds that women’s decision to leave often is prompted by a number of factors such as; individual or family interest, expectations of safety in Europe, experiences of trauma and violence in one’s country of origin, economic insecurity (just to name a few) (Gerard, 2014:92, 105).

The second stage, transit, explores the impact of the EU’s migration policy on the migratory routes of women. Gerard finds that the experience of traveling from Somalia to Malta is for many women characterized by “direct and structural continuing insecurity and a lack of access to socio-legal or refugee protection” (Gerard, 2014:4). She argues that this violence has unequivocal gendered dimensions as women generally are exposed to adversities such as sexual violence, assault and incarceration (Gerard, 2014:130). These transit-associated
difficulties are also identified in Freedman’s research on the experiences of Syrian women arriving to Kos, Greece, in which she finds that women are at particular risk of being subject to rape, sexual assault and harassment (Freedman, 2016:9). The women interviewed by Freedman also reported insecurities associated to having to place their trust and money in the hands of smugglers (Freedman, 2016:9). Both Gerard and Freedman contend that this reliance on smugglers is result of the EU’s increasingly securitized approach to migration. Gerard argues further that the reinvigoration of European borders is constitutive of structural violence which, in turn, is reinforced by gendered and racialized inequalities as women and minorities’ often limited access to financial resources encumber their possibilities for a secure and safe transit. In light of this women are often forced to use their own bodies as a form of “currency in border crossing” where “rape can be used as a toll or a price for crossing borders, sexual services may provide or guarantee passage, and in some instances money can be paid to avoid being raped” (Gerard, 2014:130). The practice of having to “pay” for transit by providing sexual services is also reported in a study conducted by Freedman on female migrants traveling via Morocco from Sub-Saharan Africa to Europe. One Nigerian women interviewed explained for example that she, despite already having paid $300 to travel to Morocco, had been forced to have sex with her “guide” to avoid being abandoned in desert (Freedman, 2012:46).

The third stage identified by Gerard documents and analyses women’s experiences of arrival in Malta. Gerard’s findings indicate that, upon arriving in Malta, female migrants are subject to legal, administrative, social and economic “punishment” owing to their “crime” of arriving to Malta without a relevant visa (Gerard, 2014:133). The legal and administrative punishments are manifested both explicitly, in the form of an 18 month long mandatory detention for all irregular migrants, and implicitly, in the form of diluted refugee protection such as the granting of subsidiary protection\(^2\) or temporary humanitarian protection\(^3\). Gerard’s research suggests that this form of diluted refugee status works to “keep transnational migrant subjects in a constant state of uncertainty and under surveillance into the future” something

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\(^2\) Subsidiary protection is “the protection given to a non-EU national or a stateless person who does not qualify as a refugee, but in respect of whom substantial grounds have been shown two believe that the person concerned, if returned to his or her country or former habitual residence, would face a real risk of suffering serious harm and who is unable or, owing to such risk, unwilling to avail himself or herself of the protection of that country” (Council Directive 2004/83/EC).

\(^3\) Temporary humanitarian protection (THP) is a non-EU harmonized form of protection granted in Malta.
she considers to be “a hallmark of new penology techniques” (Gerard, 2014:144). Gerard also identified the unavailability of family reunification under these diluted forms of protection as a major stress for the women she interviewed.

Insecurities and hardships associated with diluted refugee protection and poor reception conditions are evident also in Freedman’s research. Access to basic facilities and services in Kos were limited with over 700 migrants living together at an abandoned hotel designed to support a maximum of 100 people. The hotel, at the time of Freedman’s visit, had no electricity or running water, there were only two functioning bathrooms and a few temporary shower cubicles had been installed outside the hotel by Médecins Sans Frontières (Freedman, 2016:10). Freedman’s study indicates that poor reception conditions in transited countries are especially detrimental to women who, due to lack of private sanitation and sleeping facilities, are at particular risk of being subjected to rape and sexual assault.

The fourth stage described by Gerard, onward migration, considers how the securitization of migration, and subsequent increased efforts to expedite asylum claims and prevent onward migration within the EU, contradicts the notion of non-refoulement (i.e. the prohibition of forced expulsion of refugees or asylum-seekers to an area or territory where their life or wellbeing may be at risk) as stipulated in Article 33 of the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees. Gerard finds that the possibilities and experiences of onward migration for female refugees is characterized by: a) containment through involuntary residence in Malta, forced returns to their country of origin, or the need to resort to illicit methods to exit Malta, and b) control derived from the “process of protracted selection whereby individuals may be selected to leave Malta through sanctioned legal pathways” (Gerard, 2014:166). Moreover, from her interviews Gerard reaches the conclusion that onward migration, to a large extent, is driven by an “unavailability of protection in the countries transited” (Gerard, 2014:130). This conclusion is also supported in Freedman’s research on Syrian migrants in Kos as none of migrants interviewed intended to stay in Greece, citing “lack of facilities and welcome for migrants, as well as very limited opportunities for integration and employment” as the principal reasons (Freedman, 2016:12). Instead, a majority of the women reported that they intended to travel to Germany, Sweden or, in some instances, France or the UK. Freedman describes the choice of destination as governed by a range of factors such as family connections, better reception conditions, faster and fairer asylum procedures, favorable
economic conditions and healthy job markets (Freedman, 2016:12-13). One woman in Gerard’s study, who had been in Sweden but sent back to Malta due to the Dublin II regulation, reported for example that conditions in Sweden were much better and that she therefore lamented having been forced to go back to Malta (Gerard, 2014:147).

1.4.2. REACHING THE FINAL DESTINATION: THE GENDERED EFFECTS OF SECURITIZED DOMESTIC MIGRATION AND ASYLUM PRACTICES

Gerard and Freedman’s research illustrate that Malta and Greece, both located at the external border of the EU, are, for many migrants only temporary stops on their journey towards other European countries such Germany, Sweden, France and the United Kingdom. But what happens once migrants arrive at their desired location in northern or central Europe? Literature which explores the lived experiences of arrival and resettlement in these “final destination” countries is rather limited. The research which does exist indicate however that the legal, administrative, social and economic “punishments” which Gerard described as constitutive of the experience of arriving to Malta are, to a large extent, present also in other EU countries. Insecurities associated to diluted refugee protection are, for example, highlighted in a study by Lisa Hunt in which she explores and analyses the experiences of women asylum-seekers and refugees living in West Yorkshire, UK. Many of the women interviewed felt that their status as asylum-seekers prevented them from being able to move on with their lives while, at the same time, robbing them of their identity. A Sudanese woman quoted in Hunt’s study demonstrate these sentiments, saying:

It’s like you are nobody, that identity is gone and you are just a refugee, you are just a figure . . . it’s the hardest time because you don’t know what to do, you don’t know whether you’re going to get refugee status or not, you can’t decide, you can’t plan.

(Margaret, Sudanese woman quoted in Hunt, 2008:285)

This account is echoed in research conducted by Freedman on female asylum-seekers in France as several women interviewed by Freedman reported feeling as if their personal identity had been reduced to nothing beyond their status as asylum-seekers. One woman described for example how she, when arriving to the police prefecture in France to register for asylum, had been met with “scorn and disbelief” which she felt had accompanied her throughout the asylum-seeking process (Freedman, 2015:180).
Moreover, the women interviewed in Hunt’s study reported feelings of frustration from not being able to work and provide for themselves and their families. Many women also described a loss of status associated to not being able to apply their skills and qualifications in the form of employment (Hunt, 2008:285). Similar descriptions can also be found in Freedman’s research as several women described the inability to work, in combination with low levels of financial government support, as a major stress which prevented them from providing basic necessities such as clothes, food and nappies for their children (Freedman, 2015:183). Some of the women in Hunt’s study had however been able to counteract the loss of status associated to being unable to work by instead engaging in volunteer work.

Both Hunt and Freedman’s research indicate that lack of control and information is as a source of major insecurity for female asylum-seekers. Hunt finds, for example, that the lack of self-determination in regard to where to live is a cause of insecurity and frustration for many migrants, with one woman describing her move to West Yorkshire as “a second migration” (Hunt, 2008:286).

1.4.3. STANDING ON THE SHOULDERS OF GIANTS: LESSONS FROM THE PREVIOUS RESEARCH

The previous literature indicates that the securitization of migration has resulted in both explicit and implicit barriers which work to restrict and complicate the process of seeking asylum in the EU. Although different individuals experience the effects of these barriers differently it is, in Gerard, Freedman and Hunt’s research possible to identify certain shared characteristics, or themes, in the way the securitization of migration affects women’s experiences of the asylum-seeking process. These shared themes, made evident by the previous literature, are illustrated in Figure 1. Though not elucidated in the previous literature, it is however important to note that the themes illustrated in Figure 1 do not exclusively describe the experiences of women. Male asylum-seekers are indeed also likely to experience lack of socio-legal protection, family fragmentation, insecurities associated to diluted refugee protection etc. Theory and previous research indicate nonetheless that socially constructed gender-roles, which produce and perpetuate power inequalities between men and women, may exacerbate the impact of the identified themes by placing women in a relatively disprivileged position. Moreover, though the paper does not seek to create a weighted analysis
of the relative “genderness” of the identified themes, it should be highlighted that the significance of the “gender-factor” may vary somewhat across the themes. Low socio-economic status may, for example, be more important than gender in terms of exacerbating the negative side-effects of having to rely on expensive and illicit methods of transportation; whereas gender is likely to be the principal factor in terms of increased risks of being exposed to gender-based violence (GBV).

**Figure 1: Themes identified in the previous literature, pertaining to the impacts and effects of securitized migration on women-refugees**
2. METHODS

To fulfill the aim of the study the research entailed a focused qualitative exploration of the experiences of a small sample of women who were currently undergoing, or had recently, undergone, the process of seeking asylum in Sweden. In this section the methodological approach of the study is introduced. It also describes the process of data collection and analysis as well as ethical considerations and discussion of material.

2.1. FEMINIST ETHNOGRAPHY

In “Why Gender Matters”, Mahler and Pessar use the term “feminist ethnography” to describe a methodological approach in social science research which focuses on “the perspectives and understandings of subjects’ actions and beliefs, thus facilitating the definition of potential interventions that reflect and respect local knowledge” (Mahler & Pessar, 2006:30). Mahler and Pessar argue that this open-ended qualitative approach is suitable for scholars who “irrespective of discipline, share certain epistemological assumptions and research strategies associated with the traditions of feminist scholarship and anthropological fieldwork” (Mahler & Pessar, 2006:30). One such shared epistemological assumption is the idea that strictly quantitative or positivist research cannot provide accurately contextualized or gender-sensitive analysis (Mahler & Pessar, 2006:30). This assumption is shared by the present author as I believe that a solely quantitative methodological approach would fail to accurately capture the agency and subjectivity of female asylum-seekers to Sweden. The study accordingly embraces the “feminist ethnographic” approach proposed by Mahler and Pessar in its attempt to answer the question of how securitization of migration shapes the experiences of women seeking asylum in Sweden. The strength of this methodological approach is that it has the ability “to not only build upon previous observations and generate hypothesis from them, but also to produce new research materials, questions, and hypothesis from within ongoing observations” (Mahler & Pessar, 2006:31). The ethnographic approach accordingly allows for the deductive research guided by theory and previous research while, at the same time, allowing for inductive insights and findings which can be used to generate new questions and theories. Moreover, the reflexive and flexible nature of the ethnographic methodology provides opportunity to approach the data in an empathetically cooperative or holistically fractured manner (as described in the theory section) which takes seriously the intersubjective nature of human relations.
2.2. DATA COLLECTION

Ethnographic research includes a wide range of data collection methods, from participant observations to in-depth interviews. The present study has relied on both observations and in-depth interviews, although primary focus remained on the latter. In-depth interviews were chosen as the principal method for data collection as it is generally considered to be one of the most effective methods for the study of opinions, attitudes and experiences (Tjora, 2012). The aim of the in-depth interview is to establish an understanding of how the respondent has experienced a specific situation or phenomenon. The method can, as such, be understood as grounded in the phenomenological school of thought which studies “consciences experiences as experienced from the subjective or first person point of view” (Woodrow Smith, 2003). Particular emphasis should here be placed on the word “subjective” as it illustrates that the method of in-depth interviews can only be used to generate “subjective” or “situated” truths and knowledge. The inability to create objective knowledge was however deemed as irrelevant for the present study as the aim is indeed to explore the subjective and personal experiences of seeking asylum in the context of securitized migration.

The in-depth interview method was also deemed suitable because it allows for the creation of an environment within which the researcher and the respondents can have a relatively unrestricted conversation around specific themes determined in advance. A relaxed and conversational atmosphere opens up the possibility to discuss topics that may be difficult, sensitive, or very personal. The previous literature, as well as pre-study consultations with informants from organizations and groups working closely with asylum-seekers in Sweden, helped highlight the particular importance of establishing an open and relaxed environment when conducting interviews with female asylum-seekers as many are likely to have experienced trauma or adversities that may be hard or uncomfortable to talk about. One NGO informant warned against asking questions that would force the respondents to re-visit memories of a distressful and difficult journey, saying:

“I would recommend that you avoid asking questions that are too specific. Many of these women that come to Sweden have had to compromise their own ethical or moral principals in order to get themselves or their families here. Many just want to forget what they’ve had to do, what they’ve had to go through… Asking about it may
bring it all up again, adding to the trauma so to speak. I’d ask the kind of questions where they themselves can choose how much they want to share…”

To adhere to this advice, I decided to only ask respondents open-ended or “reflection question” which allow the respondent to stay in charge of the conversation by inviting them to share their own subjective knowledge or feelings (Tjora, 2012:86). The interviews were structured around two principal reflection questions:

- Can you describe your journey from your country of origin to Sweden?
- Can you describe the experience of arriving to, and seeking asylum in Sweden?

The questions were chosen as they correspond to the two major stages of the asylum-seeking process affected by the securitization of migration: the journey to and within Europe, and arrival in the country of destination (in this case Sweden). By asking the women these two questions I hoped to gain a somewhat holistic picture of how regulations and restrictions on migration shape women’s experiences of the asylum-seeking process. Before the interviews a number of follow-up questions had been prepared to help guide the respondent if needed. The follow-up questions were formulated to correspond to the study’s analytical and thematic framework (see the Appendix for an outline of the interview structure). By, for example, asking the respondents whether or not they had travelled with a male companion and how they thought that had affected their journey to, and reception in Sweden I hoped to get respondents to reflect over how gender play into the asylum-seeking process.

The empirical data was collected over a period of two months during which I visited a number of different language-cafés, study-groups and social events for newly arrived immigrants in the greater Stockholm area. Although the choice to carry out the collection of empirical data in the Stockholm region was mainly taken out of personal convenience it proved fruitful as Stockholm receives more asylum-seekers than any other Swedish county, thus providing greater opportunity to get in in contact with asylum-seekers (Migrationsverket, 2016b). The respondents were selected according non-probability, convenient sampling method which involves selecting those who are “most readily available [...] regardless of characteristics” (Tansey, 2007:769). Although some form of probability sampling might have been preferred in order to enhance the study’s ability to draw generalizable conclusions about how women migrants experience the asylum-seeking process, it was not a viable option in light of
difficulties associated to accessing female refugee populations who are willing and able to speak about their experiences of the asylum-seeking process.

The only criteria that respondents had to fit were accordingly that they had to self-identify as women and be currently going through, or recently (i.e. after 2013) have undergone, the asylum-seeking process in Sweden. Gaining access to respondents that fitted these criteria did however prove problematic in itself. The langue-cafés, which provide newly-arrived immigrants and established swedes with the opportunity to meet and learn Swedish through casual conversation, proved to be predominately frequented by male refugees and asylum-seekers. The few women that did fit the criteria were generally not interested in being interviewed, often citing the fact that they did not feel comfortable speaking about the asylum-seeking process before receiving their decision from the Swedish Migration Agency as the principal reason for declining. The relatively unsuccessful attempt to find respondents at the language cafés is likely related to the fact that the women did not visit the cafés as regularly as the men, thus impeding my ability to build up a trusting relationship with potential interviewees. The majority of the women interviewed for this study were instead found at a women’s knitting-club organized by volunteers at one of the Swedish Migration Agency’s asylum accommodation centers located in southern Stockholm. The club met once every week and was attended by women living at the center whilst either waiting to receive a decision on their asylum-application or waiting to be moved to a different location. The club was generally visited by the same women every week thus allowing me continuous access to the population over the data collection period. Meeting the same women several times allowed for the establishment of a more trusting and familiar relationship which I believe contributed to making the women more sympathetic to the idea of sharing their experiences with me. Getting to know the women at the knitting-club also helped generate additional respondents by way of snowballing.

All together six in-depth interviews were carried out. Five of these interviews were conducted with women who were either living, or had previously lived, at the asylum accommodation center in southern Stockholm, and one interview was conducted with an attendee at a language-café hosted in central Stockholm. The respondents generally differed from one another in terms of demographic variables such as nationality, ethnicity, age and level of education. The choice to not only interview women of a particular migrant group was a
conscious one as one goal of the study is to understand how perceptions about different ethnicities and cultures interact with gender to shape the experience of seeking asylum in Sweden. Interviewing women of various backgrounds has thus allowed me to explore how variables such as ethnicity affect the experience of seeking asylum.

The semi-structured, in-depth, interviews were complemented with what Alison Gerard refers to as “unstructured documented conversations” with women that attended the knitting-club or language cafés. Gerard argues that this method is useful as it helps foster “flexible engagement” with the subject matter in cases where the participants and researcher do not share first language (Gerard, 2014:13). This approach, characterized by “interpersonal and informal encounters” (Gerard, 2014:13), did indeed prove to be effective for the collection of additional empirical data as it enabled dialogue with women who did not necessarily speak Swedish or English well enough to allow for conductive one-on-one interviews. The interactions were instead enabled by the help of other women who could translate or through the help of web-based tools such as Google translate. The nature of the knitting activity facilitated these interactions by creating a relaxed environment where the women, supported by the other members of the group, would speak rather freely about their experiences as asylum-seekers. One woman, Laila, who did not speak English or Swedish well enough to enable a constructive interview, asked for a written transcript of my questions. She returned the week after, having answered almost all the questions in writing. The text, translated from Dari to Swedish by a certified translator, is also used as material.

Information conveyed during the unstructured conversations was recorded in a field diary which I kept with me during my visits to the asylum center and language cafés. The women who I spoke to were all made aware that I was there as a researcher and knew that their conversations could be recorded, sometimes they would even request that I note down things that they felt were of particular importance for my research topic. Moreover, spending time at asylum accommodation center allowed me to engage in, what I would like to describe as “informal observational methods”, which entailed paying close attention to how the men and women living at the asylum center interacted with each other and their environment. These observations were also recorded as field notes which, in turn, are used in the analysis to expound on experiences recounted in the interviews and unstructured conversations.
2.3. Ethical Considerations and Empirical Limitations

Female refugees and asylum-seekers are at risk of being especially vulnerable due to a number of factors as exemplified by the previous literature. Specific ethical considerations were therefore considered necessary when carrying out research on this group. Asking respondents open-ended question was, as already mentioned, one way to safeguard against contributing to potential trauma or adversity. Another was assert participants that they were in no way obligated to share difficult or traumatic experiences if they did not feel comfortable to do so. When conducting the interviews, I also tried to stay attentive to bodily and linguistic cues such prosody, facial gestures, and tone voice, that could indicate discomfort related to talking about a particular topic or memory. If respondents showed signs of emotional distress (for example by crying, through prolonged silences or by only providing short or laconic answers) when speaking about a certain topic I generally avoided pursuing the topic by refraining from asking follow-up questions.

All respondents were asked before the interviews if they were comfortable with being tape-recorded. In the four cases where the respondents asked not to be recorded I resorted to taking notes after the interviews. Tape recording all interviews would of course have been preferable as the study’s reliability may be negatively affected due to important details or information being forgotten or distorted during the transcription process. However, in light of the respondent’s potential vulnerability it was considered more important to respect their wishes than to insist on taping the interviews. In order to decrease the risk of impeding the reliability of the study I made sure to transcribe immediately ensuing the interviews to reduce loss or distortion of data due to memory loss. I also remained in contact with the respondents after the interviews, allowing me to ask follow-up questions in case specific details or information needed clarification.

The respondents spoke English and/or Swedish at varying capacity. The six women with whom I conducted one-on-one interviews could however all speak either language at, at least, a conversational level. The fact that I had to rely on respondents speaking Swedish or English presented an obvious limitation for the collection of un-biased empirical data. By only conducting in-depth interviews with women who possessed some knowledge of either language I am likely to have limited my sample to those who were well educated or who had experience working in Sweden, thus potentially impeding the internal validity of the study. To
avoid the risk of selection bias due to language constraints it would have been preferable to hire a translator, though lack of financial resources prevented this. The unstructured conversations I had with the women at the knitting-club did help to broaden the sample somewhat by allowing me to interact with women who did not necessarily speak Swedish or English. These interactions were however dependent on other women, and sometimes the women’s children, translating -thus potentially diminishing the reliability of the data as it may have been in the interest of the respondents to depict events in a certain way or leave out personal or intimate details. One NGO informant brought attention to this problem by explaining that there often exists a discrepancy between the “group-narrative” and the “personal-narrative” when asylum-seekers tell their stories. She described how refugees, and female refugees especially, often tell different stories in public and in private as they are afraid of being judged or criticized for things that they might have done or been subjected to during the asylum-seeking process. An awareness of this potential discrepancy therefore had to be incorporated into the analysis of the data collected at the unstructured group conversations conducted at the knitting-club and language cafés.

2.3. DATA ANALYSIS

In order to analyze the collected data, the study employed thematic analysis –an analytical method used to identify, analyze and report patterns or themes within qualitative data. The method’s advantage is that it provides the possibility for both inductive and deductive engagement with data by allowing for theoretically bounded explorations of new patterns and themes. As such, thematic analysis becomes especially appropriate for the conduction of feminist ethnographic research. Another advantage of thematic analysis is described by Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke who, in their article “Using thematic analysis in psychology” argue that the method makes apparent the researcher’s active role in identifying themes and patterns (Braun & Clarke, 2008:80). Thematic analysis accordingly makes the analytical process more transparent by clearly illustrating how the researcher’s epistemological and theoretical commitments guide the coding process. The present study has primarily relied on a deductive approach to thematic analysis, meaning that “coding and theme development are directed by existing concepts or ideas” (Braun & Clarke, 2015) These existing concepts or ideas have been derived from the themes identified in the previous literature i.e. lack of socio-legal protection; increased risk of being subjected to gender-based
violence (GBV); insecurities associated to diluted refugee protection; family fragmentation; reinforcing gendered and racialized inequalities; lack of self-determination and personal agency; and a need to rely on illicit methods of transportation.

Thematic analysis is performed through six different steps to identify and explore themes within the data. The six steps are: familiarization with data, generating initial codes, searching for themes among codes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing a final report. Table 1, copied from Braun and Clarke’s article, provides an outline of the six stages of thematic analysis:

### Table 1: The Six Stages of Thematic Analysis, (Braun & Clarke, 2008:87)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Description of the process</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Familiarizing yourself with the data</td>
<td>Transcribing data (if necessary), reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Generating initial codes</td>
<td>Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Searching for themes</td>
<td>Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Reviewing themes</td>
<td>Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2), generating a thematic ‘map’ of the analysis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Defining and naming themes</td>
<td>Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Producing the report</td>
<td>The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Step one, as Table 1 illustrates, involves familiarization with the qualitative data. In the case of the present study, this involved transcription of information collected during the in-depth interviews, the unstructured conversations at the knitting-club, and observations carried out at the asylum accommodation center in southern Stockholm. Step 2 involved the generation of codes. A code should refer to “the most basic segment, or element, of the raw data or information that can be assessed in a meaningful way regarding the phenomenon” (Boyatzis, 1998:63 in Braun & Clarke, 2008:88). The coding process was performed by systematically
working through the entire data set, identifying and extracting different aspects of the data that either pertained to themes identified in the previous literature or were considered to have the potential to form the basis of new themes or patterns pertaining to the research question. See Table 2 for an example of codes applied to two data extracts.

**Table 2: Example of Coding in Thematic Analysis**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data extract</th>
<th>Coded for</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Type of source: in-depth interview</strong></td>
<td>1. Fear of being punished for expressing criticism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“They punish you! You say something bad about your handläggare [Swedish:</td>
<td>2. Not wanting to be moved to “the middle of nowhere”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>administrative officer] or Migrationsverket [Swedish: The Swedish Migration</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agency] and they send you away—they move you to the middle of nowhere. I</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>have a friend who was a little critical and two days later they moved her</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to Kiruna” (Soraya)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>**Type of source: Field notes from unstructured conversation at the knitting-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>club**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laila tells me that she has four children. Her two oldest boys are in</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden, close to Stockholm. When asked if she goes to visit them a lot she</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shakes her head: “No, only once, very expensive”. She shows me pictures of</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>her youngest son and her daughter who are still in Afghanistan. “My</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>daughter -I miss [she makes a gesture which indicates a hug]”. Laila starts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>crying. I ask her if she hopes to bring them to Sweden in the future: “Yes,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>inshalla, but I have waited [she indicates the number 13 with her fingers]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>months, still no decision from Migrationsverket… so I don’t know when”.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The three next steps involved establishing and naming themes. There are no exacting rules to prescribe what constitutes as a theme within thematic analysis. Braun and Clarke do however provide a general definition by describing a theme as something that “captures something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set” (Braun & Clarke, 2008:82). The level of patterned response is by the present study measured according to the prevalence of a particular data feature. For something to be considered a pattern/theme it had to occur at least twice across the data set.
3. ANALYSIS

In the previous research section, we looked at literature which, like the present study, deals with the practical and gendered implications of the various internal and external controls brought about by the securitization of migration. In this section I seek to add to this knowledge by examining the experiences of women refugees and asylum-seekers in Sweden, using data collated from qualitative interviews and conversations with female refugees at different stages in their asylum-seeking process. Sweden is, as described in the introduction of this paper, one of the top destinations for migrants seeking refuge in Europe, having received more asylum applicants per capita in 2015 than any other European country. The material presented in the following text provides a direct insight into the experiences of women who arrive in Sweden to lodge claims of asylum. Analyzing the experiences of women asylum-seekers in Sweden is also particularly interesting as Sweden is considered to one of the world’s most gender equal countries. To provide the analysis with “contextual thickness” I begin by providing an overview of the Swedish asylum and migration system as it has developed throughout the studied time period —giving insight into how the securitization of European migration has played into the various legal and institutional factors that currently control and regulate the process of seeking asylum in Sweden. The analysis hopes to bring to the fore how gender molds women’s experiences of seeking asylum within an increasingly securitized migration regime.

3.1. SWEDISH ASYLUM POLICY AND PRACTICE, 2013-2016

Asylum policy in Sweden is governed by the Swedish Aliens Act (Utlänningslagen), the Aliens Ordinance (Utlänningsförordningen), and the Reception of Asylum Seekers and Others Act (Lag om mottagande av asylsökande m.fl.). Policy making on asylum and refugees does however not simply take place on a national level as legislation is informed, integrated, and constrained by international- and EU conventions such as the 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (henceforth the 1951 Refugee Convention), as well as the legislative framework of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS). The institution responsible for adjudicating all asylum claims in Sweden is the Swedish Migration Agency (Migrationsverket). The institution, created in 1969, is today responsible for: 1) the assessment of applications from people who wish to “take up permanent residence in Sweden, visit, seek protection from persecution or get Swedish citizenship”; and 2) the provision of
housing, money and food to asylum-seekers waiting to receive a decision on their application (Migrationsverket, 2016c). All asylum-seekers in Sweden are entitled to have their applications considered by the Migration Agency. The Aliens Act stipulates that the Migration Agency may not deport, expel, or refuse to a provide an asylum-seeker with a deceleration of protection status, without any kind of oral processing (Utlänningslag (2005:716), ch.13, 2§). An asylum-claimant may appeal a decision from the Migration Agency if he or she does not agree with the outcome. Appeals can be made at two instances: at the Migration Court and, in rare occasions, the Migration Court of Appeals.

The number of asylum claimants to Sweden has gradually increased since the establishment of the Swedish Migration board in 1969. This, in turn, has resulted in a number of changes to the Swedish asylum system over the years -changes which have generally pertained to increasing control over who gets to enter and remain in the country. Recent implementations of stricter controls to regulate the influx of refugees and asylum-seekers can be connected to the growing size of worldwide refugee populations which, in 2015, resulted in the so called “European Migration Crisis” brought on by rapidly increasing numbers of migrants and refugees making their way to the EU. In Sweden, the “crisis” resulted in a significant increase in the number of asylum-claims being lodged in the country (see Figure 2).
Figure 2: Aggregated annual data from the Swedish Migration Agency (no aggregated data available for 2016)

Efforts to limit this development prompted, on 21 June 2016, the adoption of several legislative changes which affect asylum-seekers by restricting their ability to obtain residence permits and the possibility of being reunited with their families. The law, which was implemented on 20 July 2016 and will apply until 19 July 2019, also stipulates that applicants are no-longer entitled to assistance if they receive a decision of explosion or the deadline for voluntary return has expired. The temporary law also increased maintenance requirements in case of family reunification by removing an exception from the requirement to be able to support and provide housing for family members applying for residence permits, which had previously been provided to people who had been permanent residents for more than four years. However, the requirement is still not applicable if the sponsor (i.e. the person requesting to bring their family member to Sweden) is a refugee or have been granted subsidiary protection and the relative applies for the residence permit within the first three months after the sponsor has been granted residency.
Swedish prime minister, Stefan Löfven, stated in a press conference in November 2015 that new legislation was needed to “provide a breathing space for Swedish refugee reception”, something he argued required a significant decrease in the number of persons seeking asylum and being granted residence permits in Sweden (Löfven & Romson, 2015). Vice-prime minister, Åsa Romson, stated in the same press conference that “tough decisions regrettably had to be made” as the government had to “prioritize safeguarding the operational activities of the welfare system” (Löfven & Romson, 2015). The reinvigoration of internal border controls was one such “tough decision” as the government decided to extend and expand on a decision taken on 12 November 2015 to implement temporary border controls and subsequent identity checks of individuals traveling by bus, train or ferry to Sweden from abroad. This decision was taken despite the fact that free movement of peoples within the EU is one of the cornerstones of the Union. Article 23 of the Schengen Borders Code stipulates, for example, that Member States may only introduce temporary border controls “where there is a serious threat to public policy or internal security” (Regulation (EC) No 562/2006). The Swedish government could however proceed with the changes as The European Commission does not have mandate to veto a decision taken by a Member State to introduce internal border controls. The Schengen Borders Code nonetheless proclaims that internal controls should not be applied for a period exceeding 30 days, unless a serious threat to the security and stability of the state remains eminent beyond the specified time period. Sweden’s use of internal border controls has, since its original implementation in November 2015, been extended several times and are now expected to last until 11 February 2017 (Regeringskansliet, 2016).

The collective legislative changes implemented by the government in 2015 and 2016 can be said to represent a U-turn in Swedish migration and asylum legislation as the country used to be considered to have one of the most generous asylum systems in Europe. In 2013 the Swedish Migration Agency assessed the prevailing security situation in Syria to be marked by indiscriminate violence to an extent where it, in any foreseeable future, would be impossible to return people to the country without subjecting them to severe danger and harm (Migrationsverket, 2015a:2). Sweden accordingly became the first EU country to grant all Syrian refugees in Sweden permanent residency as well as the possibility of family reunification. This decision was however revoked upon the implementation of the new asylum legislation despite the fact that the Swedish Migration Agency in November 2015 considered the security situation in Syria to have deteriorated further (Migrationsverket, 2015a:5). All
Refugees granted international protection in Sweden are, after the implementation of the new law, instead only able to receive temporary residency.

The new law consequently mean that those considered to be “refugees” under the rules of the 1951 Refugee Convention, the EU Qualification Directive, and Swedish law receive residence permits valid for three years, and individuals granted protection on grounds of being “in need of subsidiary protection” receive permits valid for 13 months. Refugee status is in Sweden granted to an individual outside his or her country of origin because “he or she feels a well-founded fear of persecution on grounds of race, nationality, religious or political beliefs, or on the grounds of gender, sexual orientation or other membership of a particular social group” (Utlänningslag (2005:716) Ch. 4, 1§). Gender-related persecution was included within the remit of this definition after a reform of the Aliens Act in 2005 –making Sweden and the UK the only two EU Member States to have to adopted any kind of guidelines or directives on gender into their asylum procedures (Freedman, 2015:94). Subsidiary protection status is granted to people who do not qualify for refugee status according to the above definition but who, upon return to their country of origin or former habitual residence, “would face a real risk of suffering serious harm” (Directive 2011/95/EU). Directive 2011/95/EU, in which the minimum standards to qualify for subsidiary protection are stated, defines serious harm as consistent of:

“(a) The death penalty or execution; or (b) torture or inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment of an applicant in the country of origin; or (c) serious and individual threat to a civilian’s life or person by reason of indiscriminate violence in situations of international or internal armed conflict. (Directive 2011/95/EU, 2006, Ch. 1, 2 f §)

Moreover, Sweden used to stand out among other EU Member States by providing a third category of beneficiaries of protection under the Swedish Aliens Act to those deemed to be “otherwise in need of protection”⁴. However, since the changes on 20 July 2016, this third

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⁴ The Swedish Aliens Act defines a “person otherwise in need of protection” as an alien who, in cases other than those stipulated by the Geneva Convention or in Directive 2011/95/EU of the European and of the Council, is outside their country of nationality because: “he or she feels a well-founded fear of suffering the death penalty or being subjected to corporal punishment, torture or other inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment; needs protection because of external or internal armed conflict or, because of other severe conflicts in the country of origin, feels a well-founded fear of being subjected
type of protection status is no longer granted (although expectations are made for children and families who sought asylum before 24 November 2015, provided the child is under 18 when the decision is taken).

In March 2016, before the implementation of the new law, The United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) issued a warning in regard to the legislative changes proposed by the Swedish government, stating that the measures “could reduce asylum-seekers’ access to territory and produces in Europe, resulting in persons in need of international protection being forced to undertake life-threatening journeys in order to exercise their right to seek asylum” (UNHCR, 2016b:4). The organization also criticized Sweden’s decision to limit the right to permanent residency, considering it to be in contradiction with UNHCR Executive Committee Conclusion No. 104 on Local Integration, in which it is stated that “the ultimate goal of international protection is to achieve durable solutions for refugees” (UNHCR, 2016b:7). The UNHCR also expressed concern in regard to the differentiation of rights depending on the type of protection status granted, arguing that “there is no reason to expect the protection need of subsidiary protection beneficiaries to be of shorter duration than those of refugees” (UNHCR, 2016b:8). Moreover, the UNCHR argued that this is especially problematic in light of evidence which suggests that individuals in Sweden who should be granted refugee status are often instead provided with subsidiary protection (UNHCR, 2016b:8). The UNHCR’s criticism is supported by the fact that only 13 510 people (39%) out of the 34 470 individuals who received positive decisions on their asylum applications in Sweden 2015 were granted refugee status, compared to an EU average of 74%. Subsidiary protection status was however awarded to 54% of all those who received a positive decision on the application in Sweden, comparing to an EU-average of 18% (Eurostat, 2016b).

Taken together the legislative changes adopted and implemented in 2015 and 2016 drastically limit the possibility of seeking and receiving permanent refuge in Sweden. The securitization of migration has accordingly resulted in asylum laws and policies in Sweden to serious abuse or; is unable to return to the country of origin because of environmental disaster.” (Utlänningslag (2005:716) Ch. 4, 2 a §)
now pertaining to the lowest common standards permissible by the Common European Asylum System (CEAS). The aim of the present study is not to provide a full-fledged analytical account of how the securitization of migration in Sweden and the EU has occurred (this has already been done in a number of other studies, see for example Serge & Burgess, 2011; Jakesevic, 2016; and Hettne & Abiri, 1998), and I have therefore not dwelled into analysis of details pertaining to discursive constructions of the migrant threat. I do however believe that the general trajectory of Swedish asylum and refugee policy make it evident that a process of securitizing migration has, and is indeed still, taking place. The fact that the Swedish government chose to implement internal border controls, which should only be applied “where there is a serious threat to public policy or internal security”, is arguably the best evidence to support this claim. The trajectory of Swedish refugee policy accordingly coincides with that of the rest of Europe in that migration has been constructed as a threat to internal security and stability. The process of seeking asylum in Sweden has, as such, been made increasingly difficulty due to the reinvigoration of both external (EU) and internal (domestic) controls and regulations on migration and asylum. The gendered implications of these controls are revealed in the following analytical account of women’s experiences of the asylum-seeking process; beginning by an examination of the effects of securitization on the first stage of the asylum-seeking process, i.e. the journey to and within Europe; moving on to an exploration of how securitization affects women’s experiences of arrival and reception in Sweden.

3.2. EXPERIENCES OF TRANSIT: THE FIRST STAGE OF THE ASYLUM-SEEKING PROCESS

Sweden’s migration and asylum policy is, as already mentioned, by and large a product of international and EU-conventions. The Common European Asylum System (CEAS) establishes, for example, the various laws and regulations to which all EU Member States must adhere in regard to asylum-seekers and refugees. The Dublin II Regulation is an example of such a regulatory measure that have been of particular importance to prominent refugee-receiving countries such as Sweden. The Dublin Regulation establishes the criteria and mechanisms for determining the Member State responsible for examining an application for international protection lodged in one of the Member States by a third-country national or a stateless person. The Dublin II Regulation basically stipulates that asylum-seekers entering Europe have the right to have their applications considered –but only in one country. This
means in principle that asylum-seekers should not be able to seek asylum in a Member State if they already have their application examined in another EU country. The Dublin Regulation also states that if the claimant does not have family residing in a EU country and if no documents allowing the claimant to reside in the EU have been issued, then it is the first country that the asylum-seeker entered that is responsible for examining the application (Council Regulation (EC) No 343/2003, 2003). The Dublin II Regulation accordingly undermines the possibilities for onward migration within the EU by tying the asylum-seekers to their country of entry. Sweden, a primary destination country for many refugees and asylum-seekers, frequently applies the Dublin II Regulation to expedite asylum claims by sending claimants back to the country where they were first registered. During the first 11 months of 2016 Sweden decided to transfer 17 392 asylum applications to other EU States under the framework of the Dublin II Regulation (Migrationsverket, 2016d).

While the Dublin II Regulation restricts migration of within the EU, Council Directive 2001/51/EC (which supplements Article 26 of the Schengen Agreement) limits refugees’ and asylum-seekers chances to enter the EU in the first place. The directive is intended to combat illegal immigration to the EU by obliging transport companies, such as air- or shipping carriers, to ensure that “non-EU nationals who intend to enter the territories of the EU countries possess the necessary travel documents and, where appropriate, visas” (EUR-Lex, 2010). The directive also stipulates that carries must return non-EU nationals to their place of departure if these provisions have not been followed. If the transportation cannot be carried out immediately then the carrier is obliged to “assume responsibility for the costs of the stay and return of the non-EU national” (EUR-Lex, 2010). Council Directive 2001/51/EC accordingly makes it near impossible for travelers without legal documents to enter to EU in safe and regular ways. This, in turn, forces many refugees and asylum-seekers to use illegitimate, expensive, and often dangerous, methods to enter the EU.

3.2.1. PAYING FOR TRANSIT THROUGH DOMESTIC LABOR

The restrictions of the Dublin II Regulation and Directive 2001/51/EC naturally apply to both men and women. The previous literature suggests however that the implications of these restrictions may be especially detrimental to women who, due to lack of financial resources and risk of being subjected to sexual violence, are particularly vulnerable to the effects of securitized migration during transit. The results of the present study resonate with these
findings as almost all the interviewed women reported having either witnessed or personally experienced, gender-related exploitation or harassment during their journey to Sweden. Restrictive measures, such as Directive 2001/51/EC, aimed at reducing the number of asylum-seekers who arrive in the EU have increased the demand for facilitation services provided by smugglers and human traffickers. The results show that need to rely on smugglers can be particularly problematic for women as they often lack the economic means necessary to pay for such services. This can sometimes force women to undertake work where their access to social and legal protection is limited. Three of the interviewed women had accordingly been forced to engage in clandestine and exploitive domestic labor in order to afford the services of migrant smugglers. Amira⁵, a school teacher from Syria who had not been able to save enough of her low salary to pay for the whole journey to Europe, had for example been compelled to stay and work as a domestic helper in Libya for six months before being able to continue her journey to Europe. She described this as a very difficult period for herself and her two daughters, explaining:

“I was kind of like a slave. Working many, many hours every day and getting very little money. It was especially hard for my daughters… they are small children. But I had no choice… I had no money so what could I do?”

The experience of having to undertake different types of illegitimate domestic work in order to afford to pay for transit was shared by Laila, a Hazara woman from Afghanistan. Laila recounted having to work several months as cleaner and seamstress for an Afghani family in Iran before being able to continue her journey to Sweden. She described the work as hard but was still happy to have been given the opportunity to earn money as she otherwise would not have been able to afford to pay the smugglers who eventually helped her cross EU’s external border between Bulgaria and Turkey. Mona, another Hazara woman who I spoke to several times during my visits to the asylum accommodation center, recounted having engaged in similar work to that of Laila, though she had not been compelled to pause her journey as she had been able to find “work on the way”. Amira, Laila and Mona were the only women, out of all the study participants, who described having to engage in black market labor in order

⁵ All respondents cited in this study have been provided with pseudonyms in order to protect their identities. Other forms of identifying details (such as date of birth or place of residence) have also been anonymized.
pay for their migratory journey. Noteworthy is that these three women were also the only ones to have travelled to Sweden without male companionship in the form of a husband, father, uncle, brother, brother in law, or adult son. This may suggest that single women are more exposed to the financial penalties of securitized migration (i.e. being forced to pay large amounts of money to human traffickers) due to gender disparities which limit women’s access to the economic sector in their home countries.

3.2.2. **Risking their lives on the Mediterranean Sea**

All the women interviewed, except one Mongolian woman named Sara who had been able to travel directly to Sweden on a false visa, had been forced to use irregular and dangerous routes to cross EU’s external border. All the women who I spoke to (except Sara and Laila who had entered the EU via the Eastern Borders Route) had, at some point in the journey, either crossed, or attempted to cross the Mediterranean Sea in boats provided by smugglers. The dangers of attempting to enter the EU using such unconventional methods can again be exemplified by the experiences of Amira, who originally had planned to enter the EU via the so called “Central Mediterranean entry route” which involves having to travel by boat from Libya to southern Italy. She had chosen Libya as her point of departure as she wanted to avoid having to travel via the Balkan route where she would potentially risk “getting stuck” in eastern Europe. She had also chosen to travel from Libya after hearing that it offered the cheapest cost of travel by boat. Media reports from 2011 support this account by suggesting that the unfolding of the Libyan Civil War in 2011 resulted in a drastic decrease in the cost of travelling from Libya to southern EU by boat (Chulov & Tisdall, 2011).

Despite cheaper prices Amira still had to use most of the money she had earned from working as domestic helper to pay a smuggler who promised to bring her and two daughters, who at the time were 5 and 7 years old, safely across the Mediterranean. During the early spring of 2014 Amira and her daughters made three attempts to cross the short stretch of water—all turned out to be unsuccessful. The first time the boat had to turn around after it began taking in water from being too heavily loaded with people. Before turning the boat around the smugglers had thrown the belongings of the migrants overboard, leaving Amira and her daughters with nothing “but the clothes on their bodies”. The second time the boat got stopped by the Libyan coast guard and all of the passengers had been returned to Libya. The third time the small fishing boat had capsized just a few hundred meters from the Libyan
coast due to being overcrowded. Amira recounted being in the water for about ten or fifteen minutes before being picked up by the coast guard and returned to Libya\(^6\). She described not being able to think about anything but trying to hold on to the boat and keep her daughters’ heads over the water.

All the interviewed women who had entered the EU irregularly by crossing the Mediterranean Sea described the boat ride as the worst part of their journey. The thematic analysis of the data did however make apparent that material and social resources tend to determine the conditions of the journey. One Iraqi woman, traveling with her well-off husband and extended family, had for example crossed the sea on a fairly large fishing boat which they had shared with just one other family. Although the boat ride had been long and tiresome she still recalled feeling relatively safe throughout the journey. The results accordingly suggest that traveling in close-knit family networks alongside male relatives can works to lessen the effects of securitized migration on female refugees.

### 3.2.3. Insecurities en Route in Europe

After the third unsuccessful attempt to cross the Mediterranean Amira decided that she could not risk her daughters’ lives by putting them on a boat again. Amira accordingly decided to use the little money she had left to buy flight tickets to Istanbul, entering the EU via the “Eastern Mediterranean Route”. This route, which she had originally hoped to avoid, involved entering the EU at the Turkey-Bulgarian border. Amira, aware of the stipulations of the Dublin II Regulation, recounted feeling very anxious when they arrived in Bulgaria as she did not want to have her fingerprints registered by the Bulgarian authorities. Amira’s 17-year-old son, who had left Syria six months before his mother and sisters, had been sent back from Germany to Bulgaria due to Dublin II and she was scared that that the same faith would be bestowed upon her and daughters if they got “caught” at the border. Her fears were close to being materialized as they did indeed get stopped by the Bulgarian authorities as they attempted to cross the Serbian border. Amira and her daughters were brought to what was described as a “migrant transit center” which, according to Amira, more resembled a prison.

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\(^6\) Bilateral agreements have been struck between Libya and Italy which allow for refugees to be sent back to Libya without receiving access to a refugee determination process (Monzini, 2007)
“It was surrounded by a very high fence… and we weren’t allowed to leave. I think we were there for a week, or maybe two… I don’t remember. We didn’t get any information and people were starting to get angry. Then one day they started putting people on buses, they didn’t tell us where they were going to take us. People were very angry and it became like panic almost. Two boys I had gotten to know in the camp helped me and my daughters leave. I don’t know really how... But we managed to get on a bus from Bulgaria to, I think, Serbia.”

Many of the women recounted how fear of being stopped by police or placed in “migrant transit centers” (like the one described by Amira) had prompted them to travel by foot using inaccessible and physically demanding trails. This experience was particular common among the women who had traveled to Sweden on the Balkan Route which takes refugees through Bulgaria, Serbia, Croatia, Hungary and Slovenia. Many ascribed fear of having to seek asylum in any of these countries and/or not being provided with a fair assessment of their refugee status, as the main reason why they had chosen to travel on trails rather than roads. Laila, for example, described the fear of being arrested as one of her greatest tribulations during her journey to Sweden:

“I starved and got many wounds on my feet and my body when I walked in the mountains. It was painful but the worst was the fear of being arrested by the police and sent back to hell in Afghanistan and the oppressive existence that thousands of Afghan women are forced to endure.”

Others stated that they simply had lacked the financial means necessary to pay smugglers for transportation on buses or in lorries. One pregnant Hazara woman, who had been unable to pay for transportation though the Balkans, ascribed her eventual miscarriage to the harsh conditions she had suffered during her peregrination through the forests and mountains of eastern Europe. All the Hazara women who I spoke to had similar experiences of making the migratory journey principally on foot due to being unable to pay smugglers for transportation. The Hazaras are one of Afghanistan’s largest ethnic minority groups with a long history of ethnic discrimination, and although their political situation has improved since the overthrown of the Taliban in 2001 they still remain among the worst off economically (Minorities At Risk Project, 2016). The findings accordingly support the results of the previous research by suggesting that structural violence, characterized by gendered and ethnic relations of
domination and subjugation, is reinforced within the framework of securitized migration by making safe and efficient transit reliant on access to financial resources.

3.2.4. THE GENDERED IMPLICATIONS OF SECURITIZED MIGRATION DURING TRANSIT

The risks of traveling as an unaccompanied woman was made apparent during the interviews. Amira had, for example, changed her route in order to remain as long as possible with two 18- and 19-year-old boys who had helped her and her daughters exit the Bulgarian transit center. When asked why she explained that she would not have dared to make the journey from Bulgaria to Austria alone after having heard several stories about “bad stuff happening to women who travel alone”. The concept of “bad stuff happening” to unaccompanied women was reflected in the stories told by the other women who had used irregular routes to enter the EU. Although none of the women recounted having themselves been subjected to sexual violence or harassment during their journey, almost all described having either witnessed or heard about such things happening. The theme of being exposed to an increased risk of GBV as a result of securitized migration was accordingly made apparent during the analysis, along with the theme of having to undertake expensive and illicit methods of transportation. The fact that some of the women had engaged in clandestine labor also confirms the notion that the securitization of migration affects women by putting them in situations where they lack socio-legal protection or where gendered and racialized inequalities are reinforced.

The analysis of the qualitative data accordingly makes evident the fact that securitization of migration is, by and large, constitutive of both structural and direct violence –with particular gendered and racialized dimensions. The structural violence is, as mentioned, made evident by the fact access to economic and social resources affects the ability of migrants to secure safe transit to and within Europe. The reinvigoration of European borders has made the migratory journey very expensive which is particularly problematic for women and minorities who often have limited access to material and social resources. The results show that lack of financial resources may force women into exploitative domestic labor and/or encourage them to use cheaper, alas more dangerous, routes to travel to and within Europe. Structural and social inequalities reinforced by securitized migration can, as such, be considered a result of what Peterson and Runyan refer to as “gendered divisions of violence” (Peterson & Runyan, 2010:143-144).
3.3. EXPERIENCES OF ARRIVAL AND RECEPTION IN SWEDEN: THE FINAL STEPS OF THE ASYLUM-SEEKING PROCESS

All study participants had arrived to Sweden before the implementation of border the controls and could accordingly enter Sweden rather unhindered once they had passed the more rigorously controlled areas of eastern and southern Europe. Most were aware of the fact that border controls had been implemented after their arrival and considered themselves “lucky” to have been able to enter Sweden before November 2015. These sentiments were voiced by Sara, a Mongolian woman who had arrived pregnant to Sweden together with her three children in March of 2014:

“Just after we arrived all this asylum crisis started, just two or three months after we got here they started getting tough with the borders and everything. So, I was so thankful that we got in here in good time!”

In order to avoid the risk of family fragmentation Sara waited five months before lodging her claim for asylum after having arrived in Sweden, wanting to wait for her husband who was still in Mongolia working off the debt the family owed to the smuggler who had provided them with the false documents. During the five months long wait, Sara and her children were able to live with another Mongolian family in a Stockholm – illustrating the importance of having a social network in the destination country. When Sara’s husband arrived, they went together to the Swedish Migration Agency to lodge a joint claim of asylum.

When an application for asylum is handed in, the Migration Agency makes a decision on whether or not the applicant will be in need of a public counsel during the asylum-seeking process. A public counsel is generally provided unless the Migration Agency considers it obvious that the applicant will be granted residency or considers the application to be manifestly unfounded, for example in a Dublin case. All the respondents who participated in the present study had been granted with a public counsel. Some women felt however that the counsel had been of little help and, despite being provided with a translator, recalled difficulties in communicating with their assigned public counsel. These difficulties were, by and large, considered a result of the applicant and translator not speaking the same dialect, or of the translator not being able to properly translate medical or legal jargon. One woman described it in the following way:
“It’s like, you give one hundred percent of your story, and then the translator gets maybe eighty-five percent, and then it reaches the handläggare [administrative officer] and it’s seventy-five, maybe eighty percent. And then, of course, there will be misunderstandings.”

Many women shared this experience of feeling like their story had not fully come across to the administrative officer handling their case. Moreover, two of the women who had travelled to Sweden with their husbands, described feeling like the administrative officer had been more interested in their husband’s story than theirs. One of these women, Esnad, had been scheduled to have her first asylum enquiry interview on the same day as her husband. Her husband’s interview had however dragged on, resulting in there not being enough time for Esnad. Her interview subsequently had to be rescheduled three months later.

The women had varying experiences from the interviews. Most did however recall feeling stressed about not being able to recall particular details such as the exact date they had left their homes or the exact route they had taken to Sweden. For a majority of the women the interviews also entailed having to remember difficult or traumatic memories that they would rather just forget. One woman recalled, for example, having to pause the interview because she was crying so hard after being asked to provide a detailed account of the death of two of her children. Another thing that became apparent was that fact that many of the women felt that their motives for seeking asylum were not taken seriously during the interview. One woman recounted being told during her interview that Afghanistan was not dangerous, a comment she felt was both ignorant and unjustifiable, stating: “They don’t know, for woman, Afghanistan is hell”. Esnad also recalled having the severity of the situation in her home country questioned by the administrative officer:

“Three hours: ask, ask, ask! A lot of questions and a lot of stress. Sometimes she told me that maybe we would move back to Libya because Libya is no problem… but Libya is big problem! A lot of stress and when I answered the questions I remembered the worst things… I was crying all the time during the interview.”

The feeling of not having one’s motives for seeking asylum taken seriously appeared to sometimes manifest itself in the creation of resentment between members of different migrant groups. Some of the non-Syrian refugee women did, for example, express disapproval of the
Swedish Government’s decision to grant all Syrian refugees permanent or, since the changes in July 2016, temporary residency in Sweden, without giving the same privilege to refugees fleeing from other countries. A Palestinian woman, who like Esnad had fled from conflict and persecution of Palestinian refugees in Libya, stated for example how:

“Yes, the situation in Syria is bad – but Libya is also very, very bad! But the Syrians get all the privileges, all the attention. The media is always writing about the Syrian war, the Syrian refugees. No one cares about other refugees. It is not fair!”

Esnad also described feeling frustrated with the amount of attention the Syrian refugees were getting in comparison to other migrant groups. She recalled an encounter with a Swedish journalist who, when learning that Esnad and her family were not Syrian, had abruptly ended the interview after explaining that she wanted to speak to “real refugees”. These types of experiences make evident the need for a more subtle understanding of the motives and trajectories of women asylum-seekers. Homogenate and reductionist ideas of what constitutes as a “real” asylum-claim can be detrimental to those who do not fit the narrow framework.

3.3.1. Living in Uncertainty

Asylum-seekers who are unable to find housing on their own are provided with temporary accommodation whilst they are waiting for a decision. As a result of the sampling method, the women who participated in the present study were all living in asylum accommodation centers provided and payed for by the Migration Agency. Those who are unable to find housing on their own are generally not given the opportunity to choose where to live but are moved where there is space available. The Migration Agency may also choose to move applicants from one accommodation center to another in order to make place for new asylum-seekers. All the women interviewed for the present study had been forced to move at least once. The data collection and analysis made evident that asylum-seekers are generally given very short notice from the Migration Agency, often finding out about the move only one or two days before having to leave. The interviews suggest that the short notice may be especially detrimental to women who are often in charge of packing. One woman recounted finding her family’s name on a list of people who were going to be moved only 11 hours
before the bus was coming to pick them up. She remembered the experience as extremely stressful, explaining:

“After 1 year and two months living in the same room I had a lot of stuff. I had clothes for my kids, for me… It was difficult. After that I was sick for three or four days because I was so tired.”

Some of the women recalled the move being especially difficult due to having to put their kids in a new school. One woman described how it “had broken her heart” to move her 11-year-old daughter from the security of her old school. The women who had been moved to the asylum accommodation center in southern Stockholm were however generally pleased with their new living situation. Many described having lived in “the middle of nowhere” previous to moving Stockholm. Sara and her family had, for example, lived for 8 months in an accommodation center located 40 kilometers outside the city of Uppsala, a period which she described as “extremely difficult” due to being unable to leave the center. A majority of the women also described feeling safer in their new accommodation than they had done in their previous one. Accommodation centers with less than 200 inhabitants are not required to be manned around the clock (Migrationsverket, 2015b), something that, according to the accounts of the interviewed women, can cause problems. One respondent described being scared of leaving her room at her previous accommodation as “the men would get violent and invite strangers to the hotel” once the staff left for the day. The accommodation center in southern Stockholm was however big enough to demand 24-hour supervision, something the women considered very positive. There were nonetheless accounts of sexual harassment and rape having occurred at the center. Sara, for example, recalled helping another Mongolian family in communicating with the police after the attempted rape of their 16-year-old daughter. Another woman described not feeling comfortable leaving her room without her husband after being subjected to sexual harassment related to her choice of not wearing a veil. Many of the women also reported feeling uncomfortable leaving their rooms due to all the public spaces in the center being occupied by men, an account confirmed by my observational field notes. One woman stated that she would have preferred if it was just other families and women at the center: “I don’t know why they put everyone together… it would be better if it was just women and families here. It would be better for everyone”.

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3.3.2. THE LONG WAIT

All study participants described waiting for a decision on their application as the most frustrating part of the asylum-seeking process. Sara, who was granted permanent residency after two years of waiting, described the day when she got her decision as the “best day of her life”. She described the feeling of not having control as the worst part of the waiting process – sentiments that were shared by a majority of the women who I spoke to. For some women, the wait was made all the more difficult by being separated from their families. One woman, who had travelled to Sweden with her two sons and respective families, recalled living alone at the asylum accommodation center for six months after both her sons had been granted residency. She had herself not yet received a decision on her application and described feeling extremely frustrated and angry over her situation. Others, such as Laila and Amira, were desperately waiting to receive a decision that would enable them to be reunited with their children. Both accordingly described feeling alarmed by the legislative changes and subsequent restrictions in the possibilities for family reunification. The frustration of waiting was for many of the women exacerbated by not having anything to fill their days with. Activities such as the knitting-club were therefore described as important by providing a sense of purpose. Some of the women had also chosen to engage in internship work. Laila, for example, worked three days a week as a seamstress -something that provided her with a sense of accomplishment. The internships were also important by providing the women with an opportunity to leave the asylum-accommodation center for a couple of hours every week. Esnad described for example how: “without the internship at the Red Cross I would have gone crazy! It was so good leaving the hotel… otherwise I was just sitting all day, waiting for my children to come home”.

While the women were generally happy about their internships many also lamented not being able to earn money from their work. Asylum-seekers in Sweden are allowed engage in wage work provided that they can prove their identity -finding payed employment was however considered to be near impossible by the interviewed women. As one woman put it: “nobody wants to hire an asylum-seekers, we don’t speak Swedish and we never know how long we will be staying in the same place”. Unemployed asylum-seekers living in accommodation centers where food is included receive 24 SEK ($2.60) a day if they are single and 19 SEK ($2.10) a day if they share household expenses with another adult. The money is expected to
cover expenses such as clothes, footwear, leisure activities, non-acute health and dental care, baby essentials and other consumer goods (Migrationsverket, 2016e). Providing their children with clothes and toys was generally not something the women had to worry about as such things were regularly donated to the asylum accommodation center. Many of the pregnant women, or women with very young children, were however stressed about being unable to afford to buy nappies, prenatal vitamins, or culturally-appropriate baby food. Food was in general something that was of great concern to many of the women, as one respondent explained:

“For the ladies the biggest worry is not being able to cook for their family, especially for the children. When they ask for their own favorite food we just say sorry, we cannot, we are unable to […] Everyone is saying ‘oh, I wish I could cook for my child’”.

Being unable to cook appeared to entail loss of identity for many of the interviewed women. The women would, for example, show me photographs of meals they had cooked before embarking on their migratory journey – illustrating an evident pride in their work. I was also provided with personal recipes that I was encouraged to try at home (with a varying degree of success!). Expressing a longing to cook for their families did in fact turn out to be one of few consistent themes throughout the data analysis. This longing turned out to be partially related to the fact that the food served in the cafeteria was not adapted to the various religious, cultural, or nutritious needs of the asylum-seekers – arguably illustrating a lack of sensitivity on behalf of the Swedish Migration Agency to the often-heterogeneous nutritional needs of individuals of different cultures, ethnicities and genders.

3.2.3. The gendered implications of securitized migration upon arrival in Sweden

The testimonies of the interviewed women made it possible to identify certain shared themes in the way the securitization of migration affects women asylum-seekers experiences of arrival and reception in Sweden. The themes generally coincided with those identified in the previous literature. The results indicate, for example, that the securitization of migration affects women by increasing insecurities related to diluted refugee protection (through the provision of subsidiary and temporary protection), family fragmentation (as a result of the
Dublin II Regulation in combination with recent infringements in the possibilities of family reunification), and lack of self-determination and personal agency (especially in relation to not being able to choose their accommodation or cook for their families). Moreover, the gendered implications of securitized migration during transit has resulted in there being more men than women inhabiting the asylum accommodation centers, something which evidently brings with it an increased risk of GBV and sexual harassment. The analysis also conveyed how attitudes, which consider certain asylum-seekers as more “legitimate”, can create tensions between individuals of different genders or ethnicities. The securitization of migration may also lead to insecurities related to fear of not having your asylum claim taken seriously.

4. CONCLUSION AND SUMMARY OF THEORETICAL AND EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

The present study hoped to contribute both theoretically and empirically to the understanding of how gender affects women’s experiences of seeking asylum within the context of securitized migration. It did this through a focused qualitative study of a small sample of women asylum-seekers currently residing Sweden—a country whose recent policy changes in regard to asylum and migration can be considered constitutive of an increasingly securitized approach to migration within the EU. The study accordingly sought to answer the following research question: “In what ways has the securitization of migration affected women’s experiences of seeking asylum in Sweden during the period 2013-2016?”.

The first part of the paper made clear the theoretical framework of the study by describing the theoretical underpinning of securitizations theory. It also sought to provide a theoretically-bounded answer to the research question by exploring the interrelation between the securitization of migration and gender. Incorporating a gender perspective into the conventional way of studying security makes evident the fact that the state’s quest for security (through, for example, securitizing migration) can, in itself, be constitutive of violence. The state, in order to legitimize and secure the symbolic control it has over territorial boundaries, plays into hierarchal dichotomies of self-other, us-them, aggressive-passive, etc. This process, in turn, leads to what Peterson and Runyan refer to as “gendered divisions of violence” by
exacerbating the impact of structural and social inequalities between men and women (Peterson & Runyan, 2010:143-144).

The second part of the paper provided an empirical account of how these “gendered divisions of violence” are expressed within the framework of securitized migration. This empirical account was acquired though the conduction of holistically fragmented research from the standpoint of women. Although theory and previous research has made evident the problematic aspects of generalizing about the experiences of female asylum-seekers the study was still able to identify certain shared themes in the way securitization affects the way women experience the asylum-seeking process. It has illustrated how the securitization of European migration exacerbates gender and racial inequalities by making safe and secure transit dependent on access to social and material resources. The securitization of migration, and the Swedish state’s unwillingness to offer “absolute hospitality” (Derrida, 2000), results in women asylum-seekers having to wait very long periods of time before receiving a decision on their application. The experiences of the women who participated in this study exposes how waiting can be especially detrimental to women by keeping them in a constant state of insecurity related to being separated from their families and having to live in male-dominated and overcrowded asylum accommodation centers. The findings accordingly indicate that Sweden, if it wants to honor its reputation as one of the world’s most gender equal countries, need to do more to secure the interests of women asylum-seekers and refugees.
5. REFERENCES


Directive 2011/95/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 December 2011 on standards for the qualification of third-country nationals or stateless persons as beneficiaries of international protection, for a uniform status for refugees or for persons eligible for subsidiary protection, and for the content of the protection granted. *Official Journal L 337, pp. 9-26.*


6. APPENDIX

In-depth interview structure

1. Introduction: Inform the respondent about the purpose and objectives of the interview, make clear that the respondent has the right to remain anonymous and that she is no way required to answer any given questions if she, for whatever reason, does not feel comfortable to do so. Ask if you may tape the interview or, if the respondent does not want to be taped, take notes during (or after) the interview. Confirm consent.
   a. Purpose: collect data for my master thesis in Political Science in which I want to explore how women experience the process of asylum-seeking, looking both at the journey to get here to Sweden and the experience of arriving to Sweden and seeking asylum.

2. Warm-up questions (5 min): Simple and straightforward questions (for example about demographic variables)
   a. Could you tell me a little about yourself to begin with?
      i. Where are you from?
      ii. Family?
      iii. What did you do before you came to Sweden? Employment?
      iv. How long have you been in Sweden?
      v. Did you come before or after 24 Nov 2015?
      vi. What is your current asylum status? Permanent residence permit, Residence permit as refugee (3 years), Otherwise in need of protection (13 months) or still waiting for decision.

3. Reflection questions (20-45min): Invite respondent to share stories and experiences through “grand tour questions”
   a. The Journey
      i. Why Sweden? Conscious choice?
      ii. Can you tell me about your journey to Sweden? How did you get here and how did you experience your journey?
      iii. Where there any specific obstacles on the way?
      iv. How was it to travel through Europe? (For example, did you know to avoid getting your fingerprints recorded?)
v. Did you travel with a husband or male companion? How do you think that affected your journey?
vi. Looking back, would you have dared to make the journey without a male companion? Why/why not?

b. Arrival and reception in Sweden
   i. So, what happened when you arrived to Sweden?
   ii. Did you know what to do, who to turn to?
   iii. What is your experience of your meetings with Migrationsverket? How did it feel to be interviewed during the asylum enquiry?
   iv. What was your accommodation like during the asylum-seeking process? Did you feel safe?
   v. How was it to share accommodation with people with whom you could not necessarily communicate with? Cultural clashes?
   vi. Were you able to work or in some other way keep yourself busy whilst you were waiting for a decision? How did that affect the waiting period?
   vii. To summarize, what would you say was the most difficult thing to cope with throughout the whole asylum-seeking process?
   viii. Is there anything positive you can say about your experience?

4. Concluding questions (1-5min): Ask questions that can help divert attention from the reflection questions to normalize the situation.
   a. May I contact you in case if come up with any additional questions?
   b. Do you want to look at the paper before I send it in?
   c. Thank you for letting me interview you!