Master's Thesis in Culture, Communication & Globalisation – International Migration and Ethnic Relations (IMER) and Global Gender Studies (GGS)

"Gender Equality in Danish Asylum Centres? – Women's Experiences Seeking Asylum and the Need for Safe Spaces"

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is focused on the situation of women within the context of the Danish Asylum System, specifically in the Danish asylum centres, and their experiences of vulnerability and oppression that hinder their well-being within said system. In order to investigate these, I turned to look into understandings of gender equality and gender sensitivity within the Danish Asylum System due to the fact that Denmark considers the notion of gender equality as a part of Danish values. In my findings, I consider those experiences of vulnerability to be outcomes of the lack of explicit understandings of gender equality and lack of implementations of gender-sensitive guidelines by the relevant actors within the asylum system: Ministry of Immigration and Integration, Immigration Services and Danish Red Cross. The thesis is based on semi-structured interviews, audio recordings and other relevant documents that together form a corpus of data including experiences and opinions from asylum-seeking and refugee women, NGO representatives and frontline workers from the Red Cross. Through the use of methodology related to content analysis, I found relevant themes that affect women in their daily lives in the asylum centres. These themes respond to discrimination, harassment, spatiality and the power and praxis of street-level bureaucrats. By using an intersectional approach I was able to unveil the different axes of oppression and unbalanced power relations, revealed as domains of power, that lie beneath the experiences of women. Moreover, I looked into gender relations to understand how being in the asylum centre has challenged and changed gender dynamics and constructions of masculinity and femininity, and how these have exposed women to sexual harassment. The role of street-level bureaucrats was also taken into consideration in terms of the power they have regarding decision making, but also the misuse or abuse of that power placing asylum-seeking women in vulnerable situations. The findings of this thesis revealed that women feel unsafe, discriminated against, harassed, victimised and abused in the asylum centres, and that there is an active need for gender-specific spaces for women.

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- Marta

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Introduction

Migration is and has been a very discussed and heated topic in almost every area of the world during the last few decades, from politics to media to education. Within migration, it can be argued forced migration is the most worrying and contested topic for many Western states. In Europe, "the political salience of migration has increased which is reflected in the rise of extreme right-wing, anti-immigrant … and a subsequent move to the right of the entire political spectrum on migration and diversity issues" (Castles, De Haas & Miller, 2014, p.1). This, indeed, poses a problem when it comes to addressing the integration and situation of refugees, asylum-seekers and stateless people arriving in Europe. Moreover, the exacerbated nationalism and anti-migration sentiments have become more established and developed after the so-called 'refugee crisis' in 2015 and it continues up to this day. In this light, the Nordic countries pose an interesting case since forced migration (refugees and asylum seekers) seem to have challenged their strong positions towards their values, culture and homogeneity (Keskinen, Skaptadóttir & Toivanen, 2019). This is indeed reflected in the tightening of immigration laws in recent years and the debates regarding a 'proper' integration of refugees in Nordic societies and outsourcing reception centres for asylum seekers (Collett & Fratzke, 2018; Olsen, 2020). Consequently, many refugees and asylum seekers in the Nordic countries are vulnerable to social discrimination, harassment and uncertainty. Furthermore, in the majority of the cases, women are the ones who suffer more from these vulnerabilities due to the fact that there is a lack of gender-specific guidelines in the process of asylum and the implementation of gender-sensitive praxis is utterly disappointing (DRC, 2020). This thesis departs from this issue.

In this context, this thesis focuses on Denmark, as it is, in comparison to its fellow Nordic countries, the one that has the tightest immigration policies (Stormhøj, 2021), and even though notions of gender equality are celebrated as inherent to Danish culture and society, they are not institutionalised (ibid.). When addressing the process of asylum, this lack of implementation of gender equality measures in the area of asylum indirectly leads to a lack of gender-sensitivity in processing asylum cases and also to the risk for women to be vulnerable to violence, discrimination and harassment in the Danish Asylum System (Canning, 2019; Kohl, 2020; Bendixen & Jensen, 2020). It is true that the UN Refugee Convention from 1951 originally did not include gender or sexuality as motives for being granted asylum, however the UNHCR has, since the 1980s, been developing specific guidelines regarding the protection of women on the basis of gender-related persecution up to this date (Welfens, 2020; UNHCR,

2002). Still, Denmark does not have official guidelines regarding a gender-sensitive reading of the Refugee Convention (Lepola, 2016; DRC, 2020). Adding to this issue, Denmark has also ratified The Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women, also known as Istanbul Convention (2011), which contains specific considerations regarding the protection of refugee and asylum-seeking women: "in order to address the particular issues linked to women asylum seekers, the Istanbul Convention establishes the obligation to introduce gender-sensitive procedures, guidelines and support services in the asylum process (Article 60, paragraph 3)" (Council of Europe, 2019). The problem with these conventions is that they are 'soft law', meaning that the countries signing/ratifying them are not legally obliged to apply the guidelines as they appear in the conventions; they are just seen as recommendations. Therefore, in the Danish case, this lack of implementation of gender-sensitive guidelines can lead to the vulnerability of women to suffer gender inequality, violence and discrimination in the Danish Asylum System (Canning, 2019; Kohl, 2020)

These consequences are indirect, because it does not seem that Danish authorities are seeking this kind of inequality on purpose; however, this does not mean that their ignorance to gendered issues in asylum seeking should not be called out and considered as detrimental for women. In this vein, there have been situations where questionable and misleading gender-sensitivity measures have been implemented. This is the case of the order given by the former Minister of Immigration and Integration, Inger Støjberg, in 2016 to separate 23 married couples which she understood to be 'illegal' marriages where the women were as she called them "child brides"[1] (Information). She painted this picture where girls under 18 were married to old men, and therefore they had to be separated. However, the reality was that most of the couples separated were around the same age, 17-18 years old (Davidsen-Nielsen, 2020; Tone, interview, March 4, 2021). She created a feminist image of herself as saving brown women, when it reality is a ¨white saviourist' behaviour that misused the notion of gender equality as a tool to implement more restrictive asylum policies (Tone, interview, March 4, 2021). This shows how asylum-seeking women are extremely victimised, and also how gender equality as a Danish value applied immigration policies is a mere strategy to further punish asylum seekers.

Since the 'European Refugee Crisis' in 2015, "[a]cademic and non-governmental organization (NGO) advocacy research stresses the need for gender-sensitive asylum and refugee policies to take the different vulnerabilities between and among refugee populations sufficiently into account" (Welfens, 2020, p. 511). Thus, there is a need to implement real

[1] "Barnebrude" in Danish.

gender-sensitive measures and considerations in instances of asylum in Denmark that will improve the well-being of women in the system and will avoid and minimise situations of violence, harassment and other types of discrimination for asylum-seeking women in the Danish Asylum System.

Thus, the focus of this thesis will be on exploring the different ideas and understandings about gender equality and gender-sensitivity, or lack thereof within political debates, legal and administrative documents related to the Danish Asylum System. Furthermore, I investigate how these understandings affect women's well-being in the environment of the asylum centres and the possible detrimental consequences that said understandings might have for them. Hence, I discuss the gendered considerations that the Danish Asylum System has, if any, when it comes to mixed asylum camps, women's protection, and recognition of discrimination towards women. By relying on instances of intersectionality, gender relations and street-bureaucracy, I aim to unveil situations of discrimination, harassment, unsafety experienced by the women in the asylum centres and how they can be linked to unbalanced power relations and to the role of street-level bureaucrats as representatives of authority and decision makers in situations of vulnerability. The analysis is based on primary data collected through semi-structured interviews with refugee women, frontline workers (street-level bureaucrats) and NGO representatives working with asylum seekers.

Aim and Problem formulation

The idea for this thesis comes from concerns of women's discrimination in the Danish Asylum System. This issue came to my attention due to my own involvement with refugee women's groups (see Trampoline House's website[2]) and the discussions made in this forum about the problems they encountered and struggled with in the asylum camps. Asylum camps in Denmark are not divided by gender, that is both sexes share common spaces, sometimes also bathrooms and kitchen facilities (Bendixen, refugeeswelcome.dk).

Women seeking asylum, together with children, and in particular single mothers are in vulnerable positions and can be subject to different kinds of violence, discrimination and stigmatization throughout the whole process of fleeing: from the moment they leave their countries until they reach the asylum centre in Europe (Gerard, 2014). As Michala Bendixen (2017) states, "even before women arrive in Denmark, a large number of [them] fall victim to attack and rape along the way". Furthermore, some women's asylum cases are motivated by

[2] https://www.trampolinehouse.dk/

gender issues such as forced marriage, gender-based violence (GBV), trafficking and rape, to name here only a few (ibid.; UNHCR, 2002). Due to this gendered approach to immigration, women might feel unsafe in asylum camps, in particular, where they share common spaces with men. In this vein, the communication between the camp authorities (street-level bureaucrats) and the residents might play a big part in the issue of mixed camps and introduction of gender-sensitive guidelines. This means that gender sensitivity and gender inequality (see here p. 4-5) are important issues that should be addressed in migration areas and, in this case, in asylum procedures and processes. Moreover, within the Danish context, the rooted notion and understanding of gender equality might play a part in these issues of women's vulnerability.

Taking this into account, the research questions that this project will try to answer are the following:

- What are the considerations and applications of gender sensitivity and gender equality in the Danish Asylum System?
- How are asylum-seeking women affected by these understandings?
- What are the consequences of these understandings?

These questions will be addressed by using a thorough method of content analysis together with a theoretical framework built on intersectionality, gender relations theory and street-level bureaucracy.

With this thesis, I aim to bring forth the importance of women's experiences in the Danish Asylum System, and the problems caused by the vulnerability they face in the Danish asylum centres. Therefore, I strive to fill in the gap within gender and migration research regarding the situation of asylum-seeking women in asylum centres situated in Northern Europe. And more specifically, I would like, with this thesis, to join the conversation regarding the rights and well-being of women in the asylum centres in Denmark, and how to work for a better present and future for them.

Concepts to be understood

In order to have a better grasp of the concepts discussed throughout the extension of this thesis, I will use this section to clarify and define them.

First of all, gender equality is a complex concept that appears in many disciplines and environments (labour, humanitarian practices, gender-based violence…), therefore I will give a combine definition in order to be as accurate as possible in relation to may research.

According to UN Women, gender equality "means that the rights, responsibilities and opportunities of individuals will not depend on whether they are born male or female." Adding to this, this concept also entails "that the interests, needs and priorities of both women and men are taken into consideration, thereby recognising the diversity of different groups of women and men" (ibid.). I find this sentence extremely important for the understanding of gender equality in the field of migration, most importantly in asylum seeking. As Council of Europe adds to the understanding of gender equality, in the field of migration "due consideration should be given to [women's] needs and circumstances and gender-responsive measures should be adopted to prevent discrimination, violence, harassment, trafficking and other forms of exploitation and abuse." This sums up how this term is understood throughout this thesis.

Gender sensitivity is defined by the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) as:

> "[p]olicies and programmes that take into account the particularities pertaining to the lives of both women and men, while aiming to eliminate inequalities and promote gender equality, including an equal distribution of resources, therefore addressing and taking into account the gender dimension."

In regard to migration and asylum, gender sensitivity is related to the understanding of the fact that women and men have different motives of asylum that are outcomes of different experiences due to gender considerations (DRC, 2020), and therefore women need different care services than men, so a "one-size-fits-all approach" (Bendixen & Jensen, 2020) in the asylum system is not appropriate to protect and empower women in situations of vulnerability.

Finally, I understand the concept of 'asylum seeker' as "a person who asks for protection as a refugee, but who still has not had their case assessed" (Bendixen, 2020). However, throughout the thesis, I use asylum seeker as an umbrella term including also rejected asylum seekers[3].

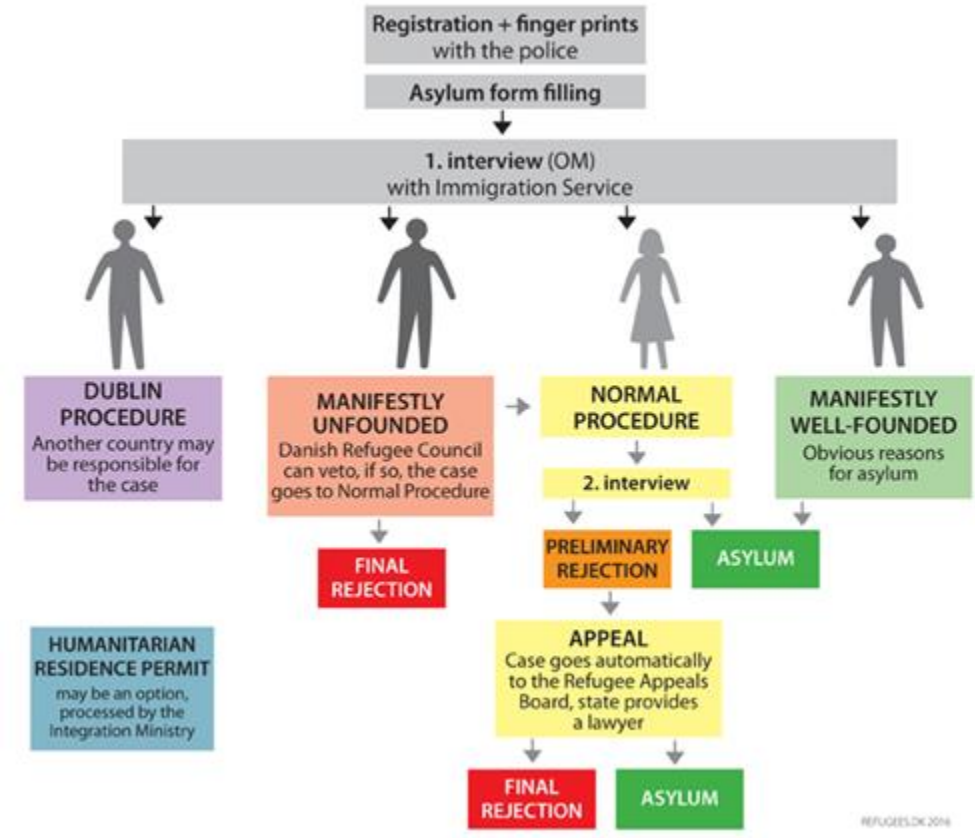
[3] "A rejected or failed asylum seeker has been through the procedure and been given a negative decision, which means that the state has assessed that this person doesn't need protection" (Bendixen, 2020).

Context: Denmark and the Danish Asylum System

In order to better understand the situation for women in the Danish asylum centres, it is extremely necessary to explain and understand the Danish Asylum System and the overall asylum procedure and the 'camp' system in Denmark.

Denmark has a very defined and structured asylum system. Furthermore, information about seeking asylum in Denmark is easily found on the internet through different immigration related websites from the government (Ny i Danmark) and other organisations, such as the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) and Refugees Welcome. And all of them are accessible at least in Danish and English, there are leaflets and booklets in other languages (Arabic, Farsi…).

Asylum Procedure



("The three phases of the asylum procedure", refugeeswelcome.dk)

Throughout the analysis I will be referring to the different stages of the asylum procedure, in order to explain the vulnerability that women face in the centres. The Danish Asylum Procedure consists of four outcomes and three so-called phases. When asylum seekers arrive in Denmark,

they normally do it on their own and in order to apply for asylum they need to contact the Danish immigration authorities. After submitting the application, the asylum seeker will get invited to the first interview with the Danish Immigration Service that will provide an interpreter; these interviews tend to last for 3-6 hours (ibid.). The purpose of this interview is to determine in which of the four procedures does the asylum seeker's case follows: the Dublin procedure[4], the Manifestly Unfounded procedure, the Manifestly Well-founded procedure, or the Normal procedure (ibid.). The situation of the interview is where women feel more vulnerable in the process of seeking asylum. The trauma that leads them to flee and the whole process of fleeing needs to be revisited so the immigration case worker can decide whether or not the asylum case should be processed or not (Bendixen, 2017; 2020) In this extremely vulnerable scenario there are certain issues to take into consideration: the gender of both the case worker and the interpreter can play a detrimental role for the experiential account of the woman. For example, if the interpreter is a man from the same country, the woman migh feel unsafe and might not be able to fully share her story (Tone, interview, March 4, 2021). Some women are not informed about the fact that they can choose the gender of both the interpreter and case worker (Bendixen, 2017).

As mentioned above, the asylum procedure in Denmark is also characterised for having three phases that include different elements and situations for the asylum seeker. Phase 1 is basically the arrival period where the asylum seeker gets assigned a very low cash allowance[5] food is provided by the cafeteria at Center Sandholm, there is no possibility for an internship or education, and the asylum seeker lives at the reception centre (ibid.). In the circumstance that the asylum seeker has registered fingerprints in a country that adheres to the Dublin Regulation, the Dublin procedure will be applied to her/his case, this means that Denmark will demand that this country takes the asylum seekers case (ibid.). If the asylum case does not fall within the Dublin Regulation, the case will be processed in Denmark, and, consequently, the asylum seeker will begin phase 2 (ibid.).

During phase 2, the asylum seeker is moved to an accommodation centre in Jutland (e.g. Center Jelling), she/he will have what is called 'pocket money'[6] and if the centre has cooking premises, the asylum seeker will receive money to buy food. One of the most important features of phase 2 is the access to an internship and language education (Danish or English).

[4] Refers to Dublin Regulation.
[5] "The basic allowance is DKK 54.47 per adult per day.If you live at an asylum centre with your spouse/partner, the amount is DKK 43.12 per adult, per day… During the initial phase, the caregiver allowance for the first two children is DKK 63.54 per child, per day." (New in Denmark).
[6] Basic cash allowance.

This provides a steppingstone for the asylum seeker in order to gain work experience, to get acquainted with the Danish society (if they get internships outside the centres) and of course to learn Danish, which is of extreme relevance if they get residence permit (opholdstilladelse). In this phase, women also face inequality, mostly mothers in a family and single mothers. This is mainly because they are assigned with the traditional role of childcare, thus when it comes to accessing education and *praktik*, they are placed at a disadvantage if the asylum centre does not have a nursery or if they cannot find a babysitter among the residents of the centre that is suitable in the eyes of the Red Cross (Kohl, 2020).

When the case has been processed during this phase 2 there are only two answers: asylum or rejection. If the asylum seeker has been granted asylum in Denmark, she/he will be designated to a municipality (Kommune) that will be responsible for monitoring and observing the next 3 years of the asylum seeker in the integration program (ibid.). On the contrary, if the decision of the Immigration Service is negative, the asylum case is automatically appealed to the Refugee Appeals board (ibid.). This is a cause of stress for many asylum seekers, also women, due to the fact that they have to revisit their case again and, with it, the trauma and pain they went through. It builds up the situation of uncertainty.

Finally, phase 3 refers to the state of rejection of the asylum seeker. During this phase 3, the asylum seeker will be moved to the return Center Avnstrup, or to the departure Center Sjælsmark or Kærshovedgård, which are both run by the Danish Prison and Probation Service (Kriminalforsogen) (ibid.). Nowadays Center Avnstrup houses only asylum-seeking families. A rejected asylum seeker does not receive 'pocket money' and does not have the possibility for an internship (ibid.). This furthers the issue of poverty among asylum-seeking women, leaving them depending on men from outside of the asylum centre and with that, they also have to deal with issues of prostitution (Canning, 2019).

In normal circumstances, a great number of asylum seekers leave Denmark on their own or through deportation after one or two years after being rejected (ibid.). Nevertheless, there are a small group of rejected asylum seekers that end up living in the asylum centres for almost over 20 years, due to different factors, such as, the identity of the asylum seeker and her/his country of origin (ibid.). This is the case for one of the women interviewed, she was in the asylum system for 10 years until she finally got asylum this past December.

Asylum Centres

One of the key elements that also characterises the Danish Asylum System, also of relevance for this thesis, is the centres where asylum seekers live during the whole process of seeking asylum. Asylum seekers have no choice when it comes to where to live, this is decided by the Immigration Services (Bendixen, "Asylum centres and prison"). Furthermore, asylum seekers can be moved to other centres without being informed in advance, it can be that from one day to the next they have to pack up their belongings and move. This means that the majority of asylum seekers in Denmark have lived in many different centres throughout their time in the system.

After the 'paradigm shift' in immigration policies that occurred in 2019 where the immigration strategy changed from the integration of immigrants in the Danish society to their deportation or repatriation (Siim & Meret, 2020), there has been a decrease of asylum centres, from almost 40 to 12, as of May 2021. However, for the purpose of this thesis, I focus on the ones run by the Danish Red Cross or where the Red Cross has a section. This downsizes the number of asylum centres to 5:

- Center Jelling is located in Jutland, and it is categorised as an accommodation centre which is meant to house asylum seekers whose case is being processed in Denmark (Ny i Danmark). Furthermore, Jelling offers separated spaces for asylum seekers with special needs and also has a women's department within its premises (Danish Red Cross). It is the only asylum centre that has this kind of separated space.
- Center Sjælsmark is a deportation centre situated in the region of Zealand and it houses single men and single women in phase 3 that are not collaborating with the police and authorities on their deportation (Bendixen, 2020; Ny i Danmark). The most interesting and also terrible characteristic of this centre is the fact that it is situated next to an active military training field. This means that one can hear shooting practices when being in the centre. I have experienced this myself, and it really is terrifying.
- Center Kæshovedgård is also a deportation centre, but it is situated in the middle of Jutland. It also houses single people whose cases have been rejected.
- Center Sandholm is the reception centre for asylum seekers who have just arrived in Denmark, and it is situated in the region of Zealand. Asylum seekers apply for asylum here and spend a few weeks until they are moved forward in the system to other asylum centres depending on the status of their application.

- Center Avnstrup is also located in the region of Zealand, and it houses families and single mothers who are collaborating with their deportation, but also those who do not collaborate (Refugees Welcome DK). In this centre, the Danish Red Cross has facilitated the service of a nursery (0-3 years), therefore women who are the primary caregivers for their children can participate in *praktik* and also education in the asylum centre.

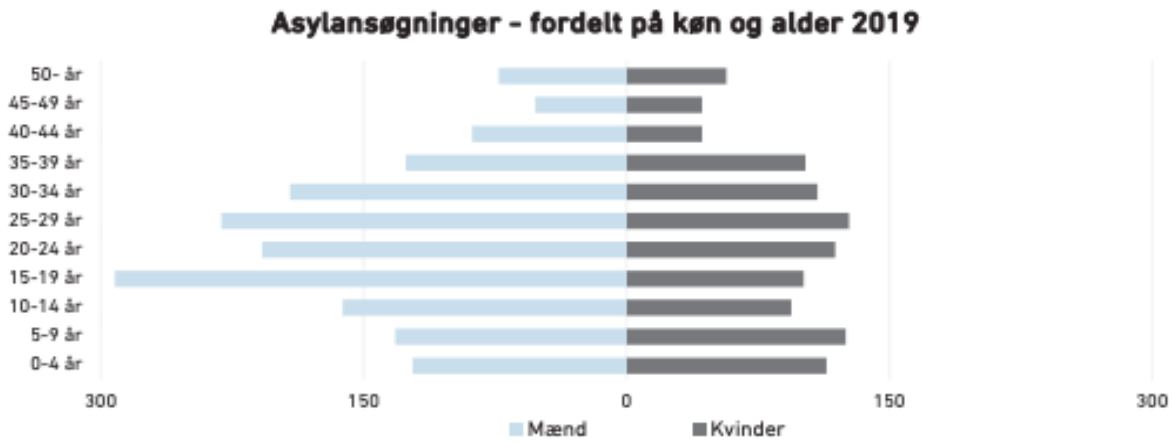
When looking at the issue of asylum centres with separated sections for women, before 2019, there were, to my knowledge, 3 asylum camps that had a specific designated area for women: Center Kongelunden, Center Sandholm and Center Dianalund. All of them were situated in the region of Zealand. However, the capacity of these centres was disappointing. Kongelunden had the biggest women's department with 50 spots, whereas Sandholm had only 8 spots for women in severely vulnerable conditions and Dianalund had a single floor out of 5 in a building shared with families and single people (Bendixen & Jensen, 2020; Tone, interview, March 4, 2021). Regardless of this lack of space, Denmark was still praised for having special gender-specific spaces for women (Lepola, 2016). Nevertheless, nowadays all of these centres are closed and so are the women's centres, even though there is still a need for these women's centres and more availability of space. This will be further discussed and analysed throughout the thesis (see here p. 39-44).

Another situation that affects women in relation to asylum centres is the remote placement of them in thinly populated areas:

> "Women are also confined to the asylum centres to a greater degree while they await a decision in their case. They are often solely responsible for the children, and many are too nervous to venture far from the centres as the public transport options are limited, necessitating long walks along dark country roads" (Bendixen & Jensen, 2020).

Situation of women in the Danish Asylum System

Women seeking asylum are a minority in the Danish Asylum System. As of the last quarter of 2020 and beginning of 2021, 124 women from non-Western countries applied for asylum in Denmark and their case was processed (Danmarks Statistik, 2021). However, Statistics Denmark does not provide with the actual numbers of women currently in the asylum system, these include women in the three phases. In the report "Tal og fakta på udlændingsområder 2019", the Immigration Service includes this graph where the amount of asylum applications divided into gender and age:



(Udlændingstyrelsen, 2020)

This obviously confirms the fact that women are a minority, however, they still make around 40% of the number of asylum seekers (Bendixen & Jensen, 2020), thus, Bendixen (2017) claims that "neither asylum legislation, procedures or accommodation facilities are designed for women, despite" this percentage. This ends up with women feeling unsafe, insecure, discriminated against and harassed in the asylum centres (ibid.; 2020; Canning, 2019; Kohl, 2020). This situation of the women in the asylum system, and most relevantly, in the asylum centres is the central focus of analysis of this thesis, therefore, the issues related to this situation will be further explored throughout the structure of this work.

Literature Review

This section of the thesis provides an overview of relevant academic research devoted to gendered issues of migrant women including asylum seekers, refugees, and documented migrants. Furthermore, it will also include more general theoretical considerations of adding a gender perspective to migration research.

The academic literature focused on women's experiences in the Danish Asylum System is limited but growing. There are two articles that specifically treat the issue of the vulnerability of women in the Danish Asylum System, specifically in the process of waiting for the asylum case to be processed, this is the women living in asylum centres in Denmark. These two articles inspired the topic of this thesis.

In “Degradation by design: women and asylum in northern Europe”, Victoria Canning brings forth the issues of gender blindness and tough asylum policies in Denmark, Sweden and Britain, and how these make women stuck in the asylum system more vulnerable to discrimination, harassment and violence. Canning’s article is based on a two-year research study named *Remaining Refugee Rights: addressing asylum harms in Britain, Denmark and Sweden* published in 2019, where she interviews psychologists, immigration lawyers, sexual violence experts and women seeking asylum in the countries mentioned (Canning, 2019, p. 47). Something from this article that really inspired my problem formulation was the fact that Canning argues that: “Although women seeking asylum are regularly deemed ‘vulnerable’, asylum policies and practice across all three countries actively contribute to or increase the risk of vulnerability to violence” (ibid., p. 48). Throughout her article, she shares the experiences of different women, mostly from the asylum centres in Denmark, where they explain the situations of vulnerability they experienced and the consequences that they had in their lives in the asylum centres, and the trauma left by current refugees. With her article, Canning reports “issues non-adherence to the Istanbul Convention (for Denmark and Sweden, who have ratified it); non-application of gender guidelines; and significant wholesale violations of refugee rights” (ibid., p. 46).

The other article, written by Katrine Syppli Kohl, named “Making a familial care worker: the gendered exclusion of asylum-seeking women in Denmark,” investigates the issue posed by the activation process of women asylum seekers in Denmark. The author explains the difficulties for women in phase 2 to enter that ‘activation’ and the Asylum Course which allows them to have pocket money and to gain experience with internships (*praktik*) both inside and outside of the camps. She continues to state that this is a gendered issue where women are victims of exclusion in their activation due to several rules from the immigration services but also from the Red Cross (Kohl, 2020, p. 10). Moreover, this quote caught my attention: “Telling asylum-seeking women that they need to conform to a norm of gender equality to become citizens while failing to provide the structural support they need to do so, amounts to strategy of abandonment legitimized by individualizing the responsibility for success of failure” (ibid., p. 16). The fact that ‘gender equality’ is so rooted in Danish society but at the same time there is little effort to offer the right tools for women to break from inequality is quite perplexing, in my opinion.

Following this idea of gender equality as a Danish value rooted in society, Christel Stormhøj (2021) brings out the issue of this concept and its usage to discriminate and contribute

to the othering of ethnic minorities in Denmark, especially Muslim women, in her article "'Danishness', Repressive Immigration Policies and Exclusionary Framings of Gender Equality.". Thus, her article involves four topics related to gender equality and immigration:

> "(i) how images of model migrants serve to reshape 'the other', and glorify Denmark; (ii) how the racialization of gender-equality deficiencies serves important strategic functions; (iii) how, despite differences in agendas, neoliberal and right-wing ethno-nationalist parties converge in exploiting gender-equality deficiencies for labour-market, anti-immigration and welfare-chauvinist stances; and (iv) how racialized minority women's organizations both resist and comply with this politics." (ibid., p. 90).

Her article seeks to add knowledge to developing areas of research within the Nordic feminist scholarship that builds on the exploitation of the concept of gender equality by ethno-nationalist parties, and also on the role of organisations targeted to migrant women in these situations (ibid., p. 90-91). Indeed, this article has been helpful in understanding the appropriation of the term of gender equality as a tool to tighten immigration policies in Denmark.

Most of the research dealing with gender in refugee/asylum centres/camps is focused on humanitarian situations, for example the introduction of gender equality notions in refugee camps in the Global South. This is the case of Katarzyna Grabska (2011) who in her article, "Constructing 'modern gendered civilised' women and men: gender mainstreaming in refugee camps", explores the implementation of 'gender equality' and other activities in a refugee camp in Kenia. Her article stems from the gender mainstreaming practices that the UNHCR tries to implement in the camps in order to empower women and recognise their status of vulnerability. Grabska (2011) argues further that "the concepts of 'gender' and 'women' are often over-simplified and essentialised in gender mainstreaming, and this results in programmes which not only exacerbate gender asymmetries, but may also place women at risk" (p. 81). Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh (2010) also explores issues regarding gender mainstreaming and gender equality in the Global South, more specifically in the Sahrawi refugee camps. She investigates the implications of idealising these camps as having succeeded in achieving female empowerment and gender equality, since these programs tend "to marginalize the needs and priorities of 'non-ideal' women and girls with grave effects" (ibid., p. 64). Furthermore, she questions who is the one really benefiting from these 'good' practices.

The process of asking for asylum and the processing of asylum cases is what the majority of the research regarding gendered issues in asylum-seeking is focused on, also, regarding regulations and legal documents about this. The book *Gendering the International*

Asylum and Refugee Debate (2015) by J. Freedman, which seeks to expand the growing research and analyses about the gender-specific issues regarding refugees and asylum seekers, since in the research of forced migration the figure of the female asylum seeker has been non-existent in the last decades. Therefore, this book covers an extensive collection of topics and concepts related to gender and forced migration: defining concepts such as 'refugee women', explaining gendered asylum-motives, revising laws and conventions related to asylum and gender issues, sharing experiences from refugee and asylum-seeking women, to name a few. On a more focused note, Diya Kallivayalil (2013) examines psychological issues such as trauma and PTSD suffered by women seeking asylum in the US. Her work is based on the fact that "these women have a particular vulnerability to authority, face forced telling … of a trauma narrative, have an ambivalent relationship with notions of home and homeland, face numerous gender related challenges, and struggle with significant post-traumatic sequelae" (ibid., p. 319). She also compares these experiences with the ones from voluntary migrants (ibid.).

In terms of research addressing asylum motives based on gender issues and gender-based persecution (GBP), McPherson, et al. (2011) investigate how guidelines regarding gender issues in the asylum-seeking decision are implemented when a woman claims for asylum due to gender based prosecution in Australia. They conclude that barriers have been identified "to both the emergence and consideration of claims and suggest ways [the Department of Immigration and Citizenship] might improve gender sensitivity in the processing of asylum claims "(ibid., p. 323).

Migration research has drawn upon, in recent decades, the introduction of a gender perspective integrating feminism into its research. In her article, Stephanie J. Nawyn (2010) describes and addresses how gender has been integrated into migration research and the theoretical implications of this. She writes about a very influential feminist theory in the gender and migration literature, that is also of interest for this thesis: a gender relations theory (Connell, 1987). Gender relations theory applied to gender and migration research seeks to focus on "how gender relations shift as a consequence of migration and settlement (Nawyn, 2010, p. 751)., this is because this theory gives space to change or unveil gendered structures. According to Nawyn (2010), "because it theorizes gender as socially constructed within the bounds of larger social institutions and structure, it provides feminist migration scholars with a way of understanding the fluidity of gender power relations as they change under the influence of macro-structures" (p. 751). This theory was, indeed, applied by Alice Szczepanikova (2005) in her article "Gender Relations in a Refugee Camp: A Case of Chechens Seeking Asylum in the Czech Republic", in order to understand the constructions of

masculinity and femininity among Chechen asylum seekers. Her findings are quite interesting since the research showed “that the environment of the refugee camp provides, on one hand, some opportunities for the increase of women’s power in the family and men’s involvement in childcare and household duties", but at the same time, “the assistance in the camp is based on [a] … gender-blind perception and construction of refugees as passive objects of aid, and latently sustains gendered violence” (ibid., p. 281).

Methodology

This section of the thesis is devoted to the unpacking of the methodological considerations and criteria behind the content analysis characterizing this study. These considerations include epistemology and ontology issues; methods for collection and analysis of data; ethical considerations; and possible limitations of this study.

For the purpose of the thesis, I use a qualitative research approach since the aim of this study focuses on understanding and exploring issues regarding the situation of women in the Danish Asylum System, which involve looking at experiential accounts. Therefore, using a qualitative approach, as Durrheim (2006) suggests, “allow[s] the researcher to study selected issues in depth, openness, and detail as they identify and attempt to understand the categories of information” (p. 47). Furthermore, it is relevant to acknowledge that this thesis takes a feminist methodological stand, since it “reflects on the ethical and political import and consequences of the research” (Ackerly & True, 2013, p. 2).

The research design in this thesis has been constructed in an iterative manner which involves going back and forth between the data selected and the theory (Bryman, 2016, p. 26). This iterative research design has though been limited by the time constraints set by the project since there has been no additional time available to go through several rounds of research and data sampling to provide the existing pool with an even stronger theory and data evidence. In that way, throughout the research process, the theory has been tailored for the data and vice versa.

Epistemology and Ontology

It is relevant to address the ontological and epistemological positions taken in this thesis, since they disclose the researcher’s understanding of reality, in this case the social reality. When it comes to ontology, I align myself with notions of social constructivism since it “asserts that

social phenomena and their meanings are continually being accomplished by social actors" (Bryman, 2016, p. 29). This means that categories found in social reality are not fixed and pre-established, but they are being influenced and modified by social actors, shaping their own reality. This is that categories such as gender, race, class, ethnicity, etc. are socially constructed.

From an epistemological point of view, I take an interpretivist stand where the purpose of the research is not to explain the possibilities of understanding a social reality, but to understand how social actors interpret their social reality they are immersed in (ibid., p. 26-27). Furthermore, this thesis also follows a feminist epistemological position, since feminist epistemology "examines the relations between gender and knowledge, where gender is understood not as an attribute of individuals but rather as an axis of social relations", it is also focused on "how gendered power structures of society affect the shape of and possibilities for knowledge production and the exercise of epistemic agency" (Grasswick, 2011, p.xiv-xv). Feminist epistemology is inherently based in multi-layered experiences/standpoints. Therefore, I find feminist epistemology fitting since the purpose of this thesis is to explore notions of intersectionality, gendered power relations and how they have an impact on the social reality of the women in the Danish Asylum System.

Data collection method

Due to the current situation regarding the Covid-19 pandemic the data collection methods are necessarily mixed since I have not had the direct access to the women living in the asylum centres and to the social workers and civil servants employed at different organisations (street-level bureaucrats) that play a relevant role in the Danish Asylum System. The main data collection method has been semi-structured interviews with a complementation of some installation audio recordings, official documents, guidelines, reports and other articles and material of relevance for this topic.

Semi-structured interviews

As mentioned above, the main part of the data comes from semi-structured interviews which are based on a loose set of questions related to a specific topic called interview guide (see Data Appendix pp 65-67). Even though there is a set of questions to be answered, "the interviewee has a great deal of leeway in how to reply" (Bryman, 2016, p. 468) and which questions she/he finds more relevant to their experience. The use of semi-structured interviews is key to answer the research questions since two of them are focused on the experiences of women in the

Asylum System and, therefore using these kinds of interviews puts emphasis "on how the interviewee frames and understands issues and events - that is, what the interviewee views as important in explaining and understanding events, patterns, and forms of behaviour" (ibid.).

Even though an interview guide was used for the interviews, I prioritised giving space for the interviewees to 'ramble' and express their opinions and share their experiences in a conversational flow, but I still made sure to ask the questions that I found most relevant for the purpose of the thesis, and also follow-up questions that deepened their opinions and experiences of the different topics addressed in the interview.

Due to the current pandemic and the past lockdown in Denmark, the interviews were conducted online or over the phone through apps like Facebook Messenger and Whatsapp between March and the beginning of April 2021. The interviews/conversations lasted between 40 and 50 minutes. The fact that the interviews were conducted over the phone has made it challenging to get more asylum-seeking/refugee women and other relevant people involved in this thesis. I could not physically visit the centres, and also the woman I had as a contact person in one of the camps is no longer there. Therefore, I had to rely on the contacts I already had and, on their willingness, to refer me to other women (snowball sampling) in the asylum centres and other Red Cross workers. This was not always successful for several reasons: women being stressed with their case, women with refugee status being busy, wrong phone numbers, etc. Regardless, the interviews that I conducted were fruitful and flowed really well. Besides, it was also challenging to figure out if the interviewee understood the question or not, because I could not observe their body language, something that, as Bryman (2016) argues, can be relevant to recognize "discomfort, puzzlement, or confusion" (p. 485). Therefore, I tried my best to be friendly and approachable and to establish a relationship with the interviewees that I did not know that well.

Other sources of data

In order to complement and support the data taken from the semi-structured interviews, other sources of data have been collected. Adding to women's experiences in the Asylum System gathered in the interviews, I also collected audio files from the audio installation 'Captured Outside'[7], where women from Trampoline House's Women's Club talk about their experiences as women in the Danish Asylum System. The audios are divided into the themes of

[7] The installation was made by Bridge Radio and Blake Shaw for the Danish National Museum with the collaboration of Trampoline House's Women's Club.

bureaucracy, borders, education, media and sexual harassment (Bridge Radio, Captured Outside, 2016).

Since one of the purposes of this thesis is to explore the understandings of gender sensitivity and gender equality in the Danish Asylum System, the National Action Plan against honour related conflicts and negative social control 2016-2020[8] (Document Appendix) has been retrieved. Added to this, this thesis also pays attention to gender relevant legal documents such as: the Gender Equality Act (2020) and the Declaration about education and activation of asylum seekers and others[9] (22 August 2020).

In order to further explore and understand the consequences of the gendered understandings mentioned from the point of views of organisations involved with asylum seekers and advocating for the protection of migrant women, I consider two informative articles written by Michala Bendixen (Refugees Welcome) on the well-being of women in the Danish Asylum System[10]; and annotations from the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) concerning Danish asylum practices regarding women (July 2020)[11]. The DRC remarks can be found in the Document Appendix attached.

Sampling of data

The sampling of the subjects for the interviews was done through purposive sampling which entails "the selection of [participants], with reference to the research question being asked" (Bryman, 2016, p. 407-408). Therefore, the participants have been selected in a strategic way also following what is called "criterion sampling" which is based on the sampling of participants that meet a specific criterion (ibid., p. 409). The aim for this thesis was to have representation from 3 different groups related to asylum seeking in Denmark: 1) women that are/have been in the asylum system; 2) street-level bureaucrats working within the asylum system; and 3) NGO representatives working with asylum-seekers. This kind of criterion sampling gives a broader overview on the situation of women in the Danish Asylum System, where different perspectives are analysed and taken into account for the research questions. The sampling can be considered small since I only conducted four interviews.

[8] National handlingsplan - Forebyggelse af æresrelaterede konflikter og negativ social kontrol (Oktober 2016).
[9] Bekendtgørelse om undervisning og aktivering mv. af asylansøgere m.fl.
[10] "Women in an Asylum System for Men" (2017) and "The Danish Asylum and Integration Systems Discriminate against Women from Start to Finish" (2020)
[11] Bemærkninger til dansk asylpraksis vedrørende kvinder

Two women that have been in the asylum system were interviewed: Soraya and Adira (these are fictitious names to protect their identity). Soraya recently got a residence permit as a refugee after spending almost 10 years in the asylum system; and Adira got a residence permit as a refugee in Germany after being rejected up to 4 times in Denmark. I met Soraya during my time as an intern in Trampoline House's Women's Club and I decided to interview her because she was very vocal about issues in the asylum centres and seemed to be willing to speak to me about being a woman in the asylum system. Then during the interview, Soraya suggested that I talk to Adira. She also suggested other women, but I could not reach them through the phone. Both Soraya and Adira spoke English, which was also one of the reasons why I decided to interview them.

Regarding the second group (workers in the asylum system), I had an interview with a temp worker from the Red Cross that has experience working in several asylum centres in the region of Zealand. He decided to remain anonymous, so I will not share his identity. I reached him through my personal network, because it has been practically impossible to get a hold of the asylum section of the Red Cross and the people working in the actual asylum centres; this despite the several attempts to engage them. I contacted Center Jelling, Center Sjælsmark, Center Avnstrup and Center Sandholm and other relevant contact people within the organisation without any luck. Furthermore, I asked the interviewee about other possible contacts within the Red Cross, but he could not think of anyone that would be willing to have an interview with me. This could probably be due to the fact that I am a master's student and sometimes a master's thesis is not considered as important as a Ph.D. or other kinds of funded research. Another possibility could be the fact that the situation of asylum seekers in the asylum centres is a hot topic nowadays, and also controversial.

Finally, I interviewed Tone Olaf Nielsen, former Program Director of the NGO Trampoline House and organiser of the Women's Club, since she has a lot of experience working with refugees and asylum-seekers, especially women. For 10 years, she has helped women with everyday problems in the asylum centres, with cases of harassment and other serious issues involving discrimination. Besides Tone, I also contacted Michala Bendixen, founder of Refugees Welcome, Denmark, who referred me to the articles she has written since they contain her opinions and reflections about the situation of women in the Danish Asylum System and in the Danish society.

Data analysis method

The data analysis method chosen to analyse the data for this thesis is content analysis (Bryman, 2016). It is a method that can be used both in quantitative and qualitative analysis. For the purpose of this thesis, it would be used as a qualitative research method. As its name indicates, it is a methodological tool that focuses on analysing the content of the data produced in communicative language (interviews, documents, field work notes…). From a qualitative point of view the focus is set on understanding and interpreting the data that is categorised in 'codes' which represent words, full texts, concepts, themes, etc. (Luo, 2021). The main purpose of this type of data analysis method is to "quantify and analyze the presence, meanings and relationships of such certain words, themes, or concepts" (*Content Analysis*, 2019). This is done in terms of their frequency of appearance in the interviews and the relevance given to the themes by the interviewees.

I have chosen to use qualitative content analysis because I am working with varied types of data (interviews, documents, articles…) and so content analysis "can be used in all types of written texts no matter where the material comes from" (Bengtsson, 2016, p. 10). Therefore, it gives me freedom in terms of analysing different types of data.

The analysis of the data in this thesis is focused on identifying common categories such as themes and concepts that appear frequently in the selected data. An example of this would be having 'discrimination' as a theme that could also be divided into sub-themes such as 'racism' or 'social control' for a better and deep understanding of the main theme. In terms of concepts an example could be 'gender sensitivity', since I am looking for certain understandings of this concept in the Danish Asylum System. It could be argued that the themes are based on experiences and opinions from the interviews and the articles; and the concepts are based on more fixed interpretations taken from official documents.

Processing of data

The interviews were transcribed using the transcription software 'Konch', which was provided by the AAU IT support. However, the audio recordings from Bridge Radio were transcribed manually. Details, such as names, have been edited in order to protect the identity of the participants in vulnerable situations. In addition, the interviews were conducted in English, therefore, there has been no need to translate them. The entirety of the interviews and the transcriptions for the audio recordings can be found in the attached Data Appendix, together with the interview guide.

In terms of coding, the software Nvivo was used to gather and organise the data into codes that responded to categorisations based on the theoretical framework. Nvivo provides a platform where documents can be uploaded and divided into classifications chosen by the researcher. The main purpose of Nvivo is categorise data from those documents into so-called nodes, which represent units of meaning. In this thesis, I used a mixture of my previous knowledge on the subject and open coding to find out which codes to use in order to organise the collected data. Open coding was, thus, used as a way to have a broader and thorough understanding of the data and to be able to code and categorise as much content of the data as possible. I started with the codes "gender equality" and "gender sensitivity", which do not have sub-nodes. Then I added the nodes "discrimination", "harassment", "gender relations", "spatiality", and "street-level bureaucracy." The node "spatiality" was divided into two sub-nodes: "safety" and "privacy", as it was required when coding the data to distinguish between two notions of spatiality. In addition, "street-level bureaucracy" was subdivided into "praxis" and "abuse of power". Finally, I added the node "coping mechanisms" that was subdivided in "acts of resistance/strength", "self-isolation", "support systems/safe spaces". This last node and sub nodes were added because it was clear that the respondents put emphasis on ways to survive in the Danish Asylum System. The structure that includes the organisation of these nodes can be found in the Data Appendix (p. 1).

Ethical considerations

It is important to recognise different ethical considerations in regard to my position as a researcher investigating issues involving asylum-seeking women and their vulnerability in Denmark. I acknowledge that I stand in a position of privilege as a researcher because I am a white European woman that holds a valid residency permit in Denmark as an international student. I am well aware that the women in the centres are survivors of trauma and are still suffering from the consequences that made them flee, therefore, I am not trying to downplay their struggle by any means. Furthermore, I do not consider the women in the Asylum System as objects of a study, but as subjects that are human beings with agency and a voice that needs to be heard. While conducting the interviews with the two women, I made sure they knew that they could stop the interview if they did not feel comfortable and also that they did not have to answer all the questions or questions related to a vulnerable topic if they did not want to.

Limitations

As in every piece of research, limitations for this thesis need to be addressed. The COVID-19 pandemic has had a huge impact on the development of this piece of work, due to the extended lockdown during the beginning of 2021, when the process of the research started. Thus, this lockdown has affected the data collection process since I could not physically go to the asylum centres to talk to the frontline workers or the women in order to be safe and not put anyone in danger of being infected. For that reason, I also had to take into account women that were approachable through the phone or the internet, and that limited my access to how many women I was able to interview. Furthermore, as mentioned earlier in the methodology, the contact person I had in one of the asylum centres does not reside there any longer.

Another limitation for this thesis has been the closing of Trampoline House. My plan for this research was to collaborate with Trampoline House's Women's Club, in order to have a closer access and relationship to the women, both refugees and asylum seekers, and be able to collect data in a more fluid and constant way. However, this was not possible because Trampoline House closed its doors in January 2021 as a consequence of the pandemic. Again, this affected the data collection of my thesis.

Finally, it is relevant to mention that due to my relationships with some asylum-seeking women, and also to my own opinions and experiences in relation to the topic of women's vulnerability in the asylum centres, the findings of this thesis might be biased, even though I have been actively trying to remain objective.

Theory

To analyse the data and other documents gathered for this thesis and to be able to address the research questions posed in the problem formulation, I will use a theoretical framework that builds on intersectionality, power relations, gender relations and the power of street-level bureaucracy and which can allow me to consider issues related to the vulnerability of women in the Danish Asylum System and asylum centres.

Intersectionality and power relations

The concept of intersectionality was firstly coined by the anti-racist and feminist law scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) in her article "Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A black feminist critique of anti-discrimination doctrine, feminist theory and anti-racist politics".

She used the example of unemployment of black women in the US to demonstrate that they are both discriminated against because of their gender and their race, which intersect creating unbalanced power relations (Crenshaw, 1989). Thus, she argues that using a single-axis analysis (e.g., focusing only on gender, or on race, or on class) when investigating problems of marginalisation and social inequality, is counterproductive since women are not homogeneous and different women have different struggles that meet at the intersection of their identity categories of gender, race, class, sexuality and so on (ibid., Collins & Bilge, 2016). Crenshaw (1991) continued to use intersectionality as a tool to address the problem of violence against women of colour, where she considers "how the experiences of women of color are frequently a product intersecting patterns of racism and sexism, and how these experiences tend not to be represented within the discourses of either feminism or antiracism" (pp. 1243-1244).

Nowadays, intersectionality is a very widespread concept within different areas of investigation within feminist research such as post-colonial feminism, anti-racist feminism and queer feminism among others, and also policy advocates, practitioners and activists (Lykke, 2010; Collins & Bilge, 2016). It has also opened a space in mainstream feminism for an 'intersectional feminism' (UN Women, 2020). Social media also plays a big part in spreading intersectionality where younger generations of activists discuss the significance that this concept has politically and intellectually (Collins & Bilge, 2016, p. 88). This popularity has made intersectionality have a very broad understanding and definitions, due to this, Nina Lykke (2010) suggests a kind of umbrella definition of intersectionality in order to try to accommodate the key element that different feminist disciplines value:

> "Intersectionality can … be considered as a theoretical and methodological tool to analyze how historically specific kinds of power differentials and/or constraining normativities, based on discursively, institutionally and/or structurally constructed sociocultural categorizations such as gender, ethnicity, race, class, sexuality, age/generation, dis/ability, nationality, mother tongue and so on, interact, and in so doing produce different kinds of societal inequalities and unjust social relations" (p. 50).

This attempt of a 'broad' definition gives a good ground to start building an interdisciplinary analysis of certain experiences regarding discrimination and power imbalances. Patricia Hill Collins and Sirma Bilge (2016) also focus their approach to intersectionality as one unveiling power relations and also build up on it "as a way of understanding and analyzing the complexity in the world, in the people, and in human experiences" (p. 2).

For the purpose of this thesis, I align myself with a combination of these understandings of intersectionality, and, in order to use intersectionality as an analytical tool, I will take some core ideas from Collins & Bilge (2016) that "provide guidepost for thinking through intersectionality" (p. 25). These concepts are social inequality, power and relationality. Social inequality could be argued as the aftermath of the intersections of identity categories, moreover, and so, intersectionality "adds additional layers, recognizing that social inequality is rarely caused by a single factor" (ibid., p. 26). Power is tied together with relationality creating 'power relations' which are key to understanding intersectionality, this is, "within intersectional frameworks, there is no pure racism or sexism", rather, "power relations of racism and sexism gain meaning in relation to one another" (ibid.). Collins (2000) in her book *Black Feminist Thought* also suggests that power relations can be both analysed through intersections, but also through 'domains of power' which are structural, disciplinary, cultural and interpersonal. "The matrix of domination refers to how political domination on the macro-level of analysis is organized via intersecting systems of oppression" (Collins, 2017, p. 22).

- The structural domain of power is based on how social institutions are coordinated in order to portray the submission of oppressed women (Collins, 2000, p. 277). The structural power and social institutions are organised and controlled by public policies (Collins, 2017), and these social institutions take several forms: banks, police, government departments, etc. (ibid.).
- The disciplinary domain of power refers to "bureaucratic hierarchies and techniques of surveillance", meaning that this domain of power is the one managing the power relations (Collins, 2000, p. 280). Therefore, bureaucracy plays an important role in power relations, since policies and other regulations are used to uphold control and discipline over oppressed people (Collins, 2000; 2017).
- The cultural domain of power "aims to justify practices in [structural and disciplinary] domains of power" (Collins, 2000, p. 284). In general, this domain has to do with hegemony: "social institutions and practices that produce the hegemonic ideas that justify social inequalities as well as counter-hegemonic ideas criticize unjust social relations" (Collins, 2017, p. 26). This indeed is based on culture, in the case of this thesis, the culture of the host country, Denmark.
- Finally, the interpersonal domain of power is where intersectional experiences of oppression and resistance practices are shared in the every-day life (Collins 2000; 2017).

When it comes to analysing issues that relate to gender and migration, in the case of this thesis, asylum seeking status, intersectionality plays a big role in contextualizing and unveiling power imbalances and instances of discrimination. As Taha (2019) argues, an intersectional approach highlights that "refugees" are a diverse group and refugee experiences are shaped by multiple identities such as gender, race, national origin, class, age, (dis)ability and sexual orientation", and, thus, this intersectionality should be recognised by refugee policies, "instead of applying a singular universal approach for all refugees" (p. 3). Intersectionality is, indeed, a tool to analysis experiences and realities of migrant women, Contreras Hernández & Trujillo Cristoffanini (2017) consider this concept "to address the reality of migrant women in Northern countries, since it gives [them] multidimensional tools to visualize the fusion of social structures in experiences and vital trajectories of this collective"[12] (p. 146). This is, intersectionality and the recognition of power relations are relevant to deconstruct the layered concept of 'women' (Anthias & Yuval-Davis, 1995) as host of other categorising elements such as race, religion, sexuality or class that intersect and interact, thus, revealing different hierarchies and imbalances that might lead to vulnerability to abuse and discrimination.

Gender relations theory

Raewyn Connell develops in her book *Gender & Power* (1987) a gender relations theory that is based on structures and understandings related to relationships based on gender among men and women and the implications that these have in terms of social interaction and power relations. It also has to do with interpretations of femininity and masculinity within society and the interplay these two constructions have when it comes to gendered relations mostly based on patriarchal stereotypes. In order to address gender relations, Connell (1987) argues that there is a need to have an understanding of social structures, for her the concept 'structure' is more than a pattern, "it reflects the experience of being up against something, of limits on freedom" (p. 92). This understanding of a 'structure' is interesting because it indicates the limitations that structures create by fixing people within certain social stereotypes or boxes. She argues that a social structure "expresses the constraints that lie in a given form of social organization" and that these constraints "operate through a more complex interplay of powers and through an

[12] Translated from Spanish. "Por ello, consideramos central el concepto de interseccionalidad y de experiencia multi-situada/localizada para abordar la realidad de las mujeres migrantes en países del norte, pues nos otorga herramientas de carácter multidimensional para visualizar la fusión de las estructuras sociales en las experiencias y trayectorias vitales de este colectivo."

array of social institutions" (ibid.). Therefore, when it comes to issues of gender there are power structures and also power relations to be deconstructed.

In order to reveal and build up on gendered structures, she addresses four dimensions of the structure of gender relations: power, production, emotion and symbolism (Connell, 2014, p. 144). These constitute tools to use analytically. The power and the emotional dimensions are of interest in this thesis.

When it comes to power, Connell (1987) refers to the fact that society finds it "often difficult to see beyond individual acts of force or oppression to a *structure* of power, a set of social relations with some scope and permanence" (p. 107). To clarify this she puts the example of rape, which is "routinely presented in the media as individual deviance", but it "is a form of person-to-person violence deeply embedded in power inequalities and ideologies of male supremacy" (ibid.). In this vein, it is important to focus on social structures of gender where "the power of husbands over wives, and fathers over daughters, is an important aspect of the structure of gender" and the fact that "this is still an accepted idea in much of the world" (Connell, 2014, p. 144). Bureaucracy is also related to power in structures of gender; Connell (2014) refers to this in terms of work promotions and salary, but, in this thesis, power in bureaucracy will be addressed in the practices of street-level bureaucrats in the Danish Asylum System.

The emotional dimension of gender relations, also referred to as cathexis (term coined by Freud), deals with "the importance of emotional attachment in human life" (ibid., p. 167). It is also based on how emotional commitments can be either positive or negative or both and also loving and hostile at the same time; these are described with the concept of 'ambivalence', that is key to understanding complex gender relationships (ibid.). Connell puts two examples of negative emotional dimensions: misogyny and homophobia. In this way, emotional hostility is not only symbolic, but it can develop into physical actions that can lead to violence, including killings (ibid.). When looking at the emotional dimension in gender relations, Connell (2014) asserts the fact that "in the contemporary metropolitan society, households are expected to be formed on the basis of romantic love, that is, a strong individual attachment between two partners" (p. 168). This can also be translated into other non-Western patriarchal societies. Linked to this idea of romantic love is sexuality and the need to be sexual meaning that there is an active pursuit of partnership, running away from loneliness (ibid.)

One of the main purposes of using Connell's (1987; 2014) gender relations theory in the field of migration, and more specifically in situations of forced migration, is to investigate how gender relations between men and women are challenged, change, or stay the same in new

settlements (Nawyn, 2010; Szczepanikova, 2005; Kohl, 2020). For the purpose of this thesis, this theory is applied as an analytical tool to unveil new forms of gender relations and constructions of masculinity and femininity among asylum seekers and how are those manifested in relation to discrimination, harassment and unsafety among women residing in asylum centres.

Street-level bureaucracy

The street-level bureaucracy approach is a theory concerned about the way street-level bureaucrats act when translating policies, guidelines and other procedures into practice by actively or inactively making daily decisions that affect or benefit the so called 'clients' or citizens. They are a representation of authority.

Michael Lipsky (2010) was among the first to develop the idea of street-level bureaucrats and to emphasize their role and importance as individuals in public service and as daily decision makers. What Lipsky argues is that "although [Street-level bureaucrats] are normally regarded as low-level employees, the actions of most public service workers actually constitute the services 'delivered' by government" (Lipsky, 2010, p. 3). In this way, this means that street-level bureaucrats represent government policies, but most importantly, it is through them that citizens (and non-citizens) concretely and directly encounter and interact with the 'government'. Hence, Lipsky (2010) defines street-level bureaucrats as "public service workers who interact directly with citizens in the course of their jobs, and who have substantial discretion in the execution of their work" (ibid.). They have indeed a critical role in the public service area where their decisions can have many different outcomes both beneficial and disadvantageous that might define people's lives and opportunities (ibid., p. 4).

Street-level bureaucrats tend to be included in political controversies relating to public services, and one of the main reasons for that, also relevant for this thesis, is the impact that this level of bureaucrats "at the bottom" have on people's lives and decisions (ibid.). This means that these public workers have, in a way, full power on determining how eligible citizens are for certain governmental benefits and sanctions (ibid.). Following this, it is important to mention that street-bureaucrats "usually make decisions on the spot … and their determinations are focused entirely on the individual" (ibid. p.8). This allows street-bureaucrats to make use of opportunistic and personally biased decisions that can directly affect other people's life chances. Lipsky's (2010) focus is set on the US public services system with examples related to education, welfare and justice, but for the purpose of this thesis, I will extrapolate the role

of street-bureaucrats into the immigration services found in the Danish Asylum System, more specifically the organisations and other bureaucracies places in the asylum centres.

When addressing immigration, street-level bureaucrats might play an even more critical role due to the fact that many actors, organisations and other institutions are incorporated in migration issues, particularly in the asylum system, "thereby exteriorizing the state's control of asylum and immigration (Bhatia, 2020, p. 278). According to Bhatia (2020), this exteriorization of decision making and of policy implementation defines is a "widening net of control" (ibid.), which can result in being detrimental for asylum seekers because it "creates a feeling of omnipresent captivity, a sense of isolation, a (symbolic) distance from the outside world and a lack of ability to envisage a (secure and stable) future" (ibid.). In this way, there is already a growing feeling of mistrust towards authorities. In the case of the asylum centres authority is represented/embodied by the street-level bureaucrats. And often, the decisions that these bureaucrats send (or prevent) send asylum seekers to end in a state of limbo, instability and ambiguity about their present and their future (ibid.). All this together with a situation in which the asylum seekers still cope with the trauma that has led them to seeking asylum in the first place. Street-level bureaucrats, as mentioned above, have to make decisions on the spot, therefore, in the case of asylum seekers, these decisions can heavily affect both their near and their further future (Bhatia, 2020; Kohl, 2020). Simple decisions such as dismissing a babysitting request, refusal to give more hygienic products, or overlooking requests for internships outside the centre, might set the asylum seeker's wellbeing in distress and heavily affect future opportunities, regardless of if they get asylum or not (Kohl, 2020).

Interestingly enough, Bhatia (2020) also argues in his research that "street-level actors are committed fully to the state's hostile policy approaches and/or are unwilling to deviate from formal procedures to alleviate the harms affecting people seeking asylum (p. 279). His claim deviates from Lipsky's (2010) understanding of bureaucrats as negotiators between policy and those affected by the policies. Of course, Bhatia's research is focused in the British immigration setting, but I am interested in analysing the possible role of street-level bureaucrats in the Danish Asylum System as negotiators or as mere enforcers of policies. This means that my aim is to explore how frontline workers/street-level bureaucrats use the power they have as decision makers for asylum seekers, more specifically women, and how this use affects positively or negatively the situation of women in the Danish Asylum System. This will be further discussed in the analysis section (see pp.45-48).

Analysis

This section of the thesis will explore the empirical data gathered through the interviews and the document material (see here pp. 16-19). The pool of data has been divided in specific main themes and concepts in order to investigate and discuss issues regarding gender sensitivity together with gender equality in the Danish Asylum System. This also focused on the experiences of asylum-seeking and refugee women, on the view of the 'experts' or street-level bureaucrats working in asylum centres relating to the vulnerability of women in the Danish Asylum System.

Considerations of gender sensitivity and gender equality

As mentioned in the introduction, gender equality is considered to be a considerable part of Danish values, and consequently of the Danish society (Kohl, 2020; Stormhøj 2021). Therefore, when it comes to understanding women's vulnerability in terms of asylum-seeking, it is relevant to look at what considerations the Danish Asylum System and the actors involved have about these concepts of gender equality and gender sensitivity. During the data collection process, I became aware of the fact that there are no straight-forward definitions or clarifications about what, for example, the Red Cross understands as 'gender equality'. This even though it is by law included in the teaching and 'activation' program of the asylum-seekers (Declaration about education and activation of asylum seekers and others, 2020).

Mis/understanding of gender equality

The declaration states that asylum seekers in phase 1 have to participate in what is called an 'asylum-seekers course' where they teach "in fundamental democratic values, equality between genders in both social life and in the family, women's and sexual minorities' rights as well as gender relations in the Danish society"[13] (ibid.). This is interesting to discuss since the Immigration and Integration Ministry seems to put a strong emphasis on asylum seekers and their plight to learn about gender equality and gender relations in Denmark. Yet the documents I accessed do not refer to nor specify the concrete meaning behind these two thick concepts.

[13] Translated by me from Danish: "undervisning i grundlæggende demokratiske værdier, ligestilling mellem kønnene i både samfundslivet og i familien, kvinders og seksuelle minoriteters rettigheder samt kønsrelationer i det danske samfund."

Given that gender equality is engraved in Danish society (Stormhøj, 2021), it could be assumed that the understanding that the Danish Asylum System is related to the one found in the Gender Equality Act[14] (2020). That is:

> "The purpose of the law is to foster equality between women and men, including equal integration, equal influence and equal possibilities in all the functions of society on the basis of women's and men's equal value"[15] (Gender Equality Act, 2020).

Furthermore, the law continues to state that another purpose is "to counteract direct and indirect differential treatment because of gender, as well as to counteract harassment and sexual harassment" (ibid.). When it comes to evaluate immigrants' (not only refugees and asylum-seekers) understanding of gender equality in Denmark, the Immigration and Integration Ministry links it (in the *Medborgerstatsprøven*) with how the person feels about, for instance, negative social control (Udlæandinge- og Integrationsministeriet, 2018). Indeed, one of the main worries of the Ministry of Immigration and Integration when it comes to gender equality is that of negative social control in relation to honor related conflicts. Negative social control is defined as "actions, regulation, control or sanctions that in a significant degree hinder or limit the individual's unfolding of life, behaviour, choice and rights"[16] (National Action Plan, 2016, p. 9). Furthermore, they clarify on several occasions throughout the document that women are especially vulnerable to suffer negative social control (ibid.). Thus, it can be argued that there is a gender sensitive understanding when it comes to counteracting and addressing this kind of social control. It is important to remark that this national action plan against negative social control is considered in the context of the integration of ethnic minorities in the Danish society. This means that there is no discussion involving the situation of women asylum-seekers in terms of social control in the asylum centres. The only considerations taken regarding asylum seekers in this matter is the implementation of "a new mandatory lesson plan in the asylum centres about equality and gender relations, among other things" (ibid. p. 15).

When the National Action plan against honour related conflicts and negative social control was released in 2016, the government also decided, as mentioned above, to implement a course on gender equality and sexual morality for asylum-seekers. This was right after the

[14] Ligestillingloven.

[15] Translated from Danish: "**§ 1.** Lovens formål er at fremme ligestilling mellem kvinder og mænd, herunder lige integration, lige indflydelse og lige muligheder i alle samfundets funktioner med udgangspunkt i kvinders og mænds lige værd. Lovens formål er desuden at modvirke direkte og indirekte forskelsbehandling på grund af køn samt at modvirke chikane og sexchikane."

[16] Translated from Danish: "Negativ social kontrol i forhold til æresrelaterede konflikter handler om handlinger, styring, kontrol eller sanktioner, der i væsentlig grad hæmmer eller begrænser den enkeltes livsudfoldelse, adfærd, valg og rettigheder."

incidents of the New Year's Eve in Cologne and the rapes occurred in a festival in Stockholm in 2015 (Rømer, 19 Jan. 2016). The initiative to implement this course was taken by the former minister of Immigration and Integration, Inger Støjberg. The grounds on which she bases the reasoning for this course are the following: "It is completely crucial that when one comes to Denmark, then one should understand that here there is equality, and one should treat women well"[17] (ibid.). This eagerness of imposing a Danish understanding of gender equality when teaching asylum seekers about Denmark, is strictly related to what Collins (2000) calls cultural domain of power, where culture, in this case gender equality, is used as a tool to differentiate asylum seekers from Danish citizens, and also related to the disciplinary power domain, since they want to implement gender equality through the use of courses which would be developed and carried out by frontline workers, also known as street-level bureaucrats. However, according to the Red Cross worker interviewed, such courses about gender equality have not been implemented yet (Red Cross worker, personal communication, May 27, 2021)[18]. It is interesting to point out the fact that there was a political agenda that was eager to introduce this kind of course for asylum seekers back in 2016, after the so-called refugee crisis, but it has somehow faded away with time. This, indeed, shows the long road and process between policies/action plans and the actual implementation of them, which is in the hands of street-level bureaucrats.

It could be argued that there is also an understanding of the fact that there are different gender relations outside of Denmark. Yet the way that this is portrayed and how gender equality is discursively used is rather concerning. It seems, in fact, to be used as a tool to differentiate between Danish people, who comply to gender equality, defined as 'Us' and the asylum seekers, who culturally are lagging behind on gender culture and respect, constructed as 'Them' (see Meret, & Siim, 2013; Stormhøj, 2021). Indeed, in political settings gender equality and feminism seems to only come into play when minorities are being othered and called out as being anachronistic, traditional and patriarchal (Strømhøj, 2021). Furthermore, stating that gender equality exists in Denmark as a fixed characteristic of Danish values leaves room for improvement out of the question, and that is problematic. Even so when, according to Stormhøj (2021), "Denmark has the weakest institutionalized gender equality regime" in comparison to Sweden and Norway (p. 91). Gender equality is, then, taken as a given and as if everybody

[17] Translated from Danish: "Det er helt afgørende, at når man kommer til Danmark, så skal man forstå, at her er ligestilling, og man skal behandle kvinder godt."
[18] However, teachers in the asylum centers seem to be 'pushing' for it.

understands what it means. This explains the lack of gender equality guidelines in the area of asylum, apart from the requirement of teaching asylum seekers about equality.

Lack of a gender-sensitive approach to asylum

The interviewee working for the Red Cross confirms the lack of guidelines on gender:

> "I think really there isn't much of [gender equality guidelines], most of it I have from my own … life experiences and from education… I don't think there is much written about special needs in that sense only on gender" (Red Cross social worker, interview, March 26, 2021).

In this vein, it could be argued that there is a lot of effort put into mentioning and somehow enforcing gender equality in terms of learning it as a Danish value as it is, but not much is done in practice and on-the-ground - in terms of guidelines, when it comes to acknowledging and acting on gendered issues that women experience in the asylum centres. It is all left to the individual understandings of civil servants and their good or bad practices. This will be discussed in depth further on in the analysis (see p. 45-48).

Gender sensitivity is inherent to gender equality, and it is also a concept that the Danish Asylum System does not define, furthermore, it is not considered when talking about gender relations or gender equality, however, it is more contextualised when looking at the Danish Refugee Council's (DRC) remarks regarding asylum praxis in women's asylum cases since they ask for a gender sensitive translation of the UN Refugee Convention (1951). With 'gender sensitive translation' the DRC means

> "that the authorities in an asylum case should be aware of that the persecution of women can manifest itself in other ways than persecution of men, and that private-law conflicts in certain cases cover up conflicts that really are about, e.g. political or religious persecution"[19] (DRC, 2020, p. 2).

This consideration gives away the fact that gender sensitivity, when it comes to women's issues, is sometimes not taken into serious consideration in the asylum procedure, and so it could be extrapolated into the situation of vulnerability that women can experience in the asylum centres. This lack of implementation of gender sensitive procedures or methods could be caused by a stricter understanding of gender equality as only based on equal treatment of

[19] Translated from Danish: "En kønssensitiv fortolkning betyder, at myndighederne i asylsager skal være opmærksomme på, at forfølgelse af kvinder kan komme til udtryk på andre måder end forfølgelse af mænd, og at privatretlige konflikter i visse tilfælde dækker over konflikter, som reelt handler om f.eks. politisk eller religiøs forfølgelse"

men and women. This even though women have completely different experiences than men when seeking asylum due to different intersections (race, ethnicity, religion…). It is true that when it comes to specific situations, in the asylum centres, where one woman is vulnerable to for instance physical violence and/or harassment, there are different procedures put into place to protect the woman, for example removing her from the centre (Red Cross social worker, interview). But those procedures seem to only take place when something bad has already happened or it is about to happen. In that way, it could be argued that there are no gender sensitive *pre-emptive measures* to avoid certain things from happening, such as harassment, gender-based violence... One of the measures that is of interest for this thesis is that related to separated spaces[20] for women in the asylum centres. This is among the most important and most noticed issues taken up by the women I had contact with and by the scholarly research on the vulnerability of women in the asylum centres (Canning, 2019), and so it will be further discussed throughout the next parts of the analysis.

Even though there might not be specific guidelines including *pre-emptive measures* and procedures that are gender sensitive from the Red Cross or the Ministry of Immigration and Integration in terms of the protection of women in the asylum centres, it is important to remark that there has been a gender sensitive understanding of women's vulnerability in the system. Tone Olaf Nielsen, former program director of Trampoline House remarks in the interview:

> "I know that the system acknowledges that there are some women and LGBTQ+ individuals who need special protection from hetero normative patriarchal behaviour, and that's why these special care centres and special centres, according to gender or sexual orientation, were established" (interview, 4 Mar 2021).

When she mentions "special centres" she is referring to sections of asylum centres that have been, in the past, devoted to housing only women and people with special needs. Before 2019 there were several asylum centres in the region of Zealand that had a specific and separate section only for women: Center Kongelunden, Center Dianalund and Center Sandholm (Red Cross worker, interview; Tone, interview; Bendixen & Jensen, 2020). However, those sections do not exist anymore. As of today, May 2021, the only asylum centre that has a women's section is Center Jelling, which is situated in the Jutland peninsula. Thus, Tone recognizes that there is a problem in the system, even though there is a recognition of the need for protection that some women have:

[20] This is not willingly allowed as it would contribute to the idea of separated areas that has been so widely criticised in relation to Islamic practices, e.g. swimming pools.

> "I think the main problem with the system is that there is not enough places and enough rooms for women who need protection and that it is very hard to argue for" (Interview, March 4, 2021).

This question of lack of space and the implications of it will be further addressed below together with the possible reasons why there are no women-only asylum centres (see p. 40-45).

Gendered experiences in the Danish Asylum System

This part of the analysis is devoted to exploring experiences and to other considerations that the refugee women have in the asylum system that can be viewed as outcomes of the previous discussion regarding gender equality and gender sensitivity. The subsections are a result of the themes found when the data was coded and which I considered important after an attentive content reading of the interviews and also by secondary literature written on this topic.

Discrimination

"You can find discrimination in different ways. You can find it with the workers who are working, you can find it with the people who are living there." (Soraya, interview, March 22, 2021).

As Soraya says, discrimination is an issue that is multi-layered and affects women in different situations. Furthermore, intersectionality is key to understand the kind of discrimination that women suffer since gender is not the only aspect of their identity that hinders their well-being in the asylum centres. Race, nationality and being a single mother have been brought to my attention as factors that set women in a more vulnerable position to suffer discrimination:

> "You pass through the challenges as a single mom, you still pass the challenges of abuse because of your colour … as a single mom to travel a long journey to ask for asylum, it was not easy. It's very hard. And there are a lot of challenges you meet when you are a single mom in the camps and there are a lot of discrimination and a lot of racism. So it was not really easy for me when I was living in the camp" (ibid.)

Some may see the process of seeking asylum as a mere bureaucratic transaction, but in reality, there is much more to it in terms of discrimination and marginalisation. As Soraya puts it, it is not easy being a woman seeking asylum, since it comes with many challenges, not only in terms of gender but also regarding experiences of racism, coming from the asylum centre's staff as well as from fellow asylum-seekers, and being a single mother. Hence, Soraya talks

about discrimination as a ‘challenge’ which can be understood as something that she is supposed to overcome.

She gives an example of an untasteful episode she lived with a frontline worker when she was asking for toilet paper:

> “When I ask for something, they would say who are you to ask? You still could get just like an abuse. … For example, I'll give an example, if you ask for toilet paper one of these people say, why do you ask for toilet paper when in Africa, are you using grass? You can use the grass, you understand? or a piece of paper to go in the toilet and clean yourself. So, of course, a lot of those challenges. Well, I'm the kind of person that I hate challenges and I love challenges. Yeah, because it makes my brain to wake up. Yeah, yeah. So, when you challenge me then I'll challenge you in another way around” (ibid.)

This is a clear example of racism and from how Soraya talks about it, it seems to be something recurrent. Moreover, this is very concerning and a clear misuse of power from a frontline worker. Soraya refers to episodes of this kind, again, as challenges and as opportunities for her brain to activate and speak up to defend herself. This is linked with the fact that when some women ‘wake up’ in the asylum centres and start being outspoken about their situation and well-being, they start being punished. This will be discussed in more depth in the last part of the analysis (see p. 47-48)

In general, discrimination seems to be something that women face almost daily in the asylum centres and is intertwined with other situations of vulnerability, such as harassment and violence, due to the intersectional oppression they face. That is why the next sections of the analysis are also tinted with this theme of discrimination.

Harassment and gender relations: The asylum camp as a breeder of gender inequality

“To be in the camp as a woman is so very hard and so difficult, because you pass a lot of torture from men” (Soraya, interview, March 22, 2021).

“Men always like testing women, so they test you and they see your reaction, so when you react positively to them, then again tomorrow they will come back, the next day again they will come back” (Woman 2, Bridge Radio, 2016).

One of the most mentioned situations of vulnerability in the data is harassment, most specifically sexual harassment including gender-based violence. So, in order to explore this theme, it is also necessary to understand it together with gender relations in the asylum centres,

since most of the perpetrators of harassment happen to be men (Bendixen, 2017). First and foremost, it should be acknowledged that asylum centres have a society of their own that does not reflect situations of the 'real world' in terms of gender relations. Thus, this micro-society seems to negatively affect the behaviour of men in terms of their relationships to women:

> "People might not feel that is a different country, so some people have been here for many, many years or many months, they might think this is a planet, this is the only planet they have, so that is why some guys, I have heard some guys they think, if they are living here without any girlfriend, it is embarrassing, and it's like they cannot compete with their friends. That is why many women get harassed because guys try to have a girlfriend, to have someone." (Woman 1, Bridge Radio, 2016)

Indeed, this quote reinforces the notion about how the asylum centre becomes a society of its own, where men believe that they need/have the right to a partner, even though the situation they are in is quite uncertain and unstable due to their situation as asylum seekers (rejected or waiting for an answer). Furthermore, as this woman says, some people have been in the asylum system and camp for too long and therefore the only experience of society they have is that of the camp, which does not reflect, as mentioned, the 'real' Danish society outside, where social and romantic/affective interactions and relationships are completely different and built in different circumstances. This understanding is, obviously, dangerous for women, since as this woman says, the main cause of harassment is the need for men to have a constant sexual/romantic companion (cathexis), as if they were in a 'normal' situation outside of the asylum centres. This is very interesting, and it is directly linked with what Connell (1987) suggests: "a heterosexual woman is sexualized as an object in a way that a heterosexual man is not" (p.111); hence, in that way, gender relations are unequal and put women in situations of harassment. The same asylum-seeking woman reflects further on this idea of men wanting a girlfriend or a sexual companion by putting herself as an example:

> "I am a single mom with a child, I am also h*rny sometimes, what do I do? I don't go and ask a man yeah, come here, come to my room. No, I don't do that. I don't have to face HIV; I don't have to face social problems, 'oh she slept with this man, and he has a wife' or the guy starts becoming too committed to me and then starts to get jealous when I talk to another man." (Woman 1, Bridge Radio, 2016).

In this way, asylum-seeking women worry about different things when it comes to sexual relationships, e.g., HIV, rumours and gossip, men's jealousy (ibid.), whereas men seem to only be thinking of women predominantly in terms of satisfying their sexual needs.

Related to this last remark, there is a significant problem in the asylum centres which has to do with sex work. Soraya is the one that reflects more about it, but this issue was also brought to my attention while I was an intern in Trampoline House, and so I think it is relevant to discuss. She explains that the reason why the idea of sex work in the asylum centres is a problem, is because "there are … some women who come into the camp when they are just selling their bodies, so when these women come, [men] think all the single women are the same" (Soraya, interview, March 22, 2021). This further reinforces the idea of women portrayed as sexual objects (Connell, 1987) and the one-dimensional idea of women as a homogeneous collective. Thus, this understanding of gender relations in the asylum centres develops into harassment and conflict between men and women:

> "You pass a lot of 'torture' of men, some men, they think that you're a prostitute, and so you get a lot of abuse from men. And if you refuse, then you'll find you're into conflict with the man in the camp … so they hate you because you refuse to have sex with them or love them" (Soraya, interview, March 22, 2021).

Indeed, refusal leads to hostility and resentment, and this could put women in a vulnerable and dangerous situation where further harassment can occur, or even they could be victims of different forms of violence. The word 'torture' that Soraya uses to describe the kind of situation that women are put in by men says a lot about how women experience harassment and the unwanted attention they get from men as something that equals torture, that could be understood as an intentional infliction of pain. This is indeed concerning. Bendixen & Jensen (2020) explain that "it is not known how many women experience abuse in Danish asylum centres but fear alone can be enough to severely limit a woman's daily life".

The Red Cross worker interviewed also reflects on this lack of boundaries that men have when approaching women in the asylum centres as something quite visible and part of the daily life:

> "The women [in the asylum centres] can kind of like say something back, but still it is of course not okay in any way. But some guys, there, in the system, they will have no barriers. They will go and ask a woman to have sex just because she is sitting with a t-shirt in the sun … some guys just [are] really not understanding when somebody is available or not" (Red Cross worker, interview, March 25, 2021).

Here it can be argued that there is a recognition of the problem caused by men harassing women and so, if this Red Cross worker has been able to identify and acknowledge the fact that this problem exists, it is probable that the asylum section of the Red Cross has noticed it as well. Thus, a question arises: why has the Red Cross or the Ministry of Immigration not considered

the option of, e.g., a women-only asylum centre in order to avoid these kinds of situations? This will be further discussed and unfolded in the next section regarding spatiality in the asylum centers (see p. 40-45).

Harassment and frontline workers

Harassment has been until here discussed as a problem that women experience when it comes to the interaction with fellow asylum-seeking men. However, there have also been cases of sexual harassment and relationships between women seeking asylum and staff in the asylum centres. Tone was, indeed, made aware of this issue:

> "I've heard rumours from some women saying that there have been incidents of Red Cross workers having had sex with some of the female asylum seekers and whether this has been consensual sex or not … I'm not aware of, but definitely that relationships between staff and residents of the camp have occurred" (Tone, interview, March 4, 2021).

It is relevant to mention that Red Cross staff are not supposed to have any kind of non-professional relationship with asylum seekers, and this obviously include sexual and/or romantic relationships; they risk being fired (Red Cross worker, interview; Tone, interview). These kinds of relationships are obviously problematic due to power relations where there is a clear power imbalance or even an abuse of that power that Red Cross staff (street-level bureaucrats) hold over asylum seekers that could lead to favouritism, negative influence in the asylum case, etc.; in general, consequences that could really affect the future of asylum-seeking women. An example of these power relations and abuse of power is a untasteful situation of sexual harassment that one of the asylum-seeking women from the Bridge Radio recordings experience in the hands of a Red Cross worker:

> "What happened to me is that this guy with the position in the job centre said he wanted to be my best friend and he tried to kiss me without my willingness in front of my daughter. … I thought he would take me to the coffee shop and sit down and talk like friends. But what happened is that he asked me to have sex with him in the car. I did not understand what was going on in his brain, in his mind, in his conscience. Then I asked him, 'how many women have you done this to?' He said like, only two or three women, and I thought he was lying. He has done it with many women because I checked with some asylum seekers, who know him, that they saw this man with asylum women outside the camp" (Woman 1, Bridge Radio, 2016).

This case is a clear situation of abuse of power where this worker used his status as a street-level bureaucrat as a tool to lure this woman to trust him as a friend in order to take advantage of her. Fortunately the situation in that case did not escalate physically ending up in a case of rape, but the harm was done anyways. She reported him to both the Chief of Avnstrup and the police, mostly because of her fear of this worker having some kind of negative influence in her asylum case (ibid.). Consequently, he was fired from his position in the job centre, but he kept using her power to somehow manipulate her and make excuses for his actions:

> "Then this guy sent me an SMS saying that because of me, because of my complaint, he was pushed out of the job. And he says that he doesn't think this is wrong, because he has been nice to me, always wished good things for me. Then I said the good part I accept, but the bad part I don't like because I never wanted to flirt with you, have sex with you or anything" (ibid.)

There is no recognition of the fact that he was abusing his power and how he completely took advantage of her friendliness and turned it into an invitation to sexually harass her. Furthermore, he seems to blame her for her dismissal since he was fired because of her complaint. This belittles her experience of harassment because "he has been nice" to her and only "wished good things" for her. Even though she makes clear that she did not want any kind of romantic/sexual relationship with him. It is extremely valuable that this woman spoke up and reported this situation, even more when many women have probably been victims of his abuse of power. If she hadn't reported him, he would probably still be working in the asylum centre taking advantage of his power to harass other women in the centres. This issue can also be discussed in terms of intersectionality since it involves questions of power relations (Collins & Bilge, 2016). As the woman says herself, she sees street-level bureaucrats as good-hearted people and not as abusers of power:

> "and at that time I thought he just wanted to be friends, because I thought, in my opinion, Danish people are professional, and under Red Cross badge, these people are helping other people with their heart and they don't expect anything in return" (Woman 1, Bridge Radio, 2016).

When this kind of oppression takes place, it is not only because the victim is a woman but because this woman is an asylum seeker and comes from Thailand. The perpetrator, therefore, takes advantage of his power knowing he could probably get away with his conduct since this woman is in a vulnerable situation, and of course, there is an understanding of the stereotypes surrounding Thai women (passive, submissive, willing to participate in sexual intercourse...). Furthermore, this intersectional issue and the unbalanced power relations can be also a

consequence of the fact that "poverty ... leave[s] women dependent on men financially, this dependency manifests itself in many forms, including so-called transactional sex for somewhere to stay, or sexual favours in return for goods or money that offer more autonomy than the systems allow" (Canning, 2019, p. 48). This poverty is mostly visible among rejected asylum seekers since they do not have money allowance when they are in phase 3 (Refugees Welcome DK). Soraya, indeed, confirms this idea of dependency on young girls in the system:

> "There are some … young girls, 18, who need makeup, they need some stuff, expensive things. … so these girls, you find that they are doing things which they are not supposed to be doing … then you find out the child has started moving out with men and doing some silly" (interview, March 22, 2021).

Thus, it could be argued that asylum centres, as Szczepanikova (2005) expresses, "[have] been conceptualized as ... gendered space[s] that induce certain constructions of masculinity and femininity, often to the detriment of women's security" (p. 284).

Spatiality - a problem of space

"We want, if possible, if the government could separate the buildings, if they could give us the 'only ladies' … camp and then the men [stay] in another camp, if they cannot do that then the buildings should be separated" (Woman 2, Bridge Radio, 2016)

As it has been mentioned throughout the thesis, the issue of spaces in the asylum centres has been very much discussed and also criticised for several reasons, mostly related to gender sensitivity and women's security in the asylum system (Bendixen, 2017; Bendixen & Jensen, 2020). It can be observed from the quotation above that there is an active need for women to have separate spaces from men. This need probably stems from the situation regarding gender relations in the asylum centres explained in the section above. The main sub-themes that appear when space in the asylum centres is mentioned in the interviews and the articles analysed are those regarding safety and privacy.

First of all, it is relevant to have an overview of how the space is distributed in terms of gender in the asylum centres. For this purpose, Center Sjælsmark is taken as an example of a mixed gender centre. As mentioned in the context section, Center Sjælsmark is a deportation centre where rejected asylum seekers that do not collaborate with their deportation reside (Bendixen, Refugees Welcome DK). The division of the space is interesting since Sjælsmark is quite big. There are no exact numbers available about how many people live in this centre, but it is safe to say that most of its population is men since the majority of asylum seekers are

men (statistics). Furthermore, after the families were moved to Center Avnstrup, the centre is almost empty with very few buildings being occupied (personal account after visiting Center Sjælsmark).

> "There is … in Sjælsmark …, there are two buildings, which are only for women, two big ones. And then there are some of the women, but they are living with as couples, older couples mostly living a little bit mixed. But still not door to door at all …, there's not like a single guy here and there next there is a couple, the single guys are more separated" (Red Cross social worker, interview, March 26, 2021)
>
> "There is one building where there are some men living, but it's more, let's say, quiet types in the building next to one of the women's buildings. And then the more I mean, I think they haven't put all the bad seeds in one place, but there is one house which is more like, let's say people who get drunk a little bit more often and stuff like this… they are a little more separated away from the women's department" (ibid.)

These quotes give an overview of the physical distribution of Sjælsmark, but also of how the thought process for this distribution was. Thus, it could be argued that there is a recognition of women's vulnerability when the building housing 'loud men' is placed far away from the women's buildings. So, it can be observed that a gender sensitive approach has been taken into account when arranging physical spaces for men and women in this way. This indeed acknowledges the fact that there is a type of gender relations in the asylum centre that put women in the spot of situations of harassment, and other types of discrimination. Nevertheless, the women's buildings are still accessible, since there are only locks on the actual room's doors; and there are common areas such as the cafeteria and the laundry room that are shared between men and women. With this remark I am not trying to imply that all men are going to harass women, but, as Bendixen & Jensen (2020) imply, the simple thought of the slight possibility of being harassed can really limit women's daily lives in the asylum centres.

Safety

"I've just seen throughout the years of woman after woman, you know, their testimonies of the fact that women felt unsafe in the mixed gender centres and that most of them preferred to stay in their rooms" (Tone, interview, March 4, 2021).

"In the women's center, I felt safe, because it's a women's center" (Adira, interview, April 9, 2021).

Feeling and being safe is the main objective of seeking asylum, people flee their countries looking for safety. In this case, the Danish Asylum System should strive to provide safety for

asylum seekers, especially women. Throughout the data, the concept of safety has been divided into two understandings, for example, Adira[21], a transwoman with refugee status in Germany, as seen in the quote above, relates safety to being in a women's only space separated from men, whereas Soraya associates safety with the problem of uncertainty that rejected asylum seekers face:

> "You cannot live in a camp where you feel that you're safe … Then you're in the fear of deportation and also even though you are in phase 1 or phase 2, then you are thinking about making your interview. How is it going to be, are they going to reject you? All your mind is in fear, and depression and stress" (interview, March 22, 2021)

Both understandings are, of course, completely valid and uncertainty is a significant issue that should be discussed in depth, but, for the purpose of this thesis, my interest lies on the gendered aspect of un/safety. Moreover, most of the data material refer to this kind of safety related to women's spaces or the lack thereof in the asylum system.

Adira is the only woman I know, up to this date, that has lived in a women's only department, when Center Kongelunden was active and had the women's department. Her insights about the Women's Center (Kvindecenter) have been helpful in order to better understand the need for these separated spaces. She first moved to the women's department in Center Kongelunden after being in Center Allerød (not active anymore) and feeling isolated since there was only one bus with a tight schedule going to the city (Copenhagen). Thus, she requested to be moved to the women's department in Kongelunden. When I asked her, following up on her quote above, why she only felt safe in the women's centre, this was her answer:

> "Because in the women's center, even though we have problems with discrimination, when we go to our place, that is, you know, you feel comfortable, easy to go to bed, how can I say, to walk in the kitchen to toilet, to your room. There are no men, you know. All there are women, so there is no need to, you don't need to think like ah you have to cover everything, because there are men, you know, like it's all women. It's nothing" (Adira, interview, April 9, 2021).

She relates safety with comfortability and freedom to go around in the centre without worrying about what a woman is wearing. The kind of fear of discrimination and/or harassment decreases when the space is not shared with men. For Adira, this comfortability and safety is also very important because she is a trans woman, and sadly that puts her in an extremely vulnerable

[21] Adira was in the Danish Asylum System from 2013 to 2017, before she tried to seek asylum in Germany.

position, as there have been situations of violence and harassment against trans women in some asylum centres in Denmark. As Jazmine recalls in Canning's (2019) report: "Every time boys come and knock my door, I was so much scared at night time that they want to rape me. "(p. 56). That is why separated spaces for women are needed. Even more so there should also be separated spaces for LGBTQ+ people, since they also face discrimination based on their sexuality within the camps[22].

As Adira mentions, there are still problems with discrimination in the women's centre related to intersections of racism, body shaming and transphobia. But regardless she was still comfortable and felt safe, because it seems that she perceives men as more harmful than women. When I asked Soraya about her opinions regarding having mixed-gender asylum centres she also mentioned this issue regarding discrimination among women:

> "So women to live with men. It doesn't show anybody why women live with men in the center, also for the women. If you're not comfortable with men, they could take you in the center for the women, but that's also it doesn't guarantee you that you will not get discriminated against … you still pass through discrimination, you too pass through the challenges as a single mom, you still pass the challenges of abuse of your colour" (Soraya).

An intersectional understanding of this situation leads to the conclusion that regardless of the space, if you are a woman seeking asylum discrimination is unavoidable. This is partly because of the asylum system's lack of understanding of intersectional issues, where culture, gender, sexuality, race, religion etc. intersect and play big roles in the lives and experiences of asylum seekers. Here I am not only referring to women; men also experience situations of discrimination (Canning, 2019, p. 53). What is clear from these testimonies is that there is a need for separated spaces for single women, single mothers, families and LGBTQ+ people.

On another note, the availability of separated spaces for women is questionable, also when women really need to be protected. I have not been able to collect data regarding the capacity of the women's department in Center Jelling, but the one in Center Kongelunden (inactive) had 50 spots for women. This is a very limited space and, according to Adira, "a lot of people are waiting in the list to move to the women's centre, but the women's centre does not have enough place, some women are waiting more than a year to move." It is important to remark here that Adira was in Center Kongelunden the last year it was open, around 2017.

[22] This has been recently discussed by the current Minister of Immigration and Integration, Mathias Tesfaye.

Having said that, I think it is relevant to consider this high demand to be in a women's centre as a confirmation of the need for separated spaces for single women.

Furthermore, this lack of availability can have awful consequences for women that need protection from a vulnerable situation. An example of this is presented by Tone. They had a case in Trampoline House where an asylum-seeking woman was victim of a gang rape in Center Sandholm and was asking Tone for help:

> "This particular woman was for some reason not transferred to the women's centre[23], although we tried. So she basically had to stay in the Sandholm where she would, you know, risk running into the … men who raped her. What was even more ... tragic was that I contacted a number of women's shelters in greater Copenhagen and none of them were able to take her in. And this has to do with the fact that she's under the administration of the Danish Red Cross. And so if she were to be moved to a shelter, yeah, someone would have to pay for her stay. So if she had had a residence permit, the municipality would have paid for her stay. But as an asylum seeker under the responsibility of the Red Cross, there was no money to cover this. Then Danner was one organisation where they actually had a quota of accepting two female asylum seekers at any given time. But that quota was used so they couldn't take it anymore. Well, so if you are raped, you can really only get help within the Red Cross system or in different NGOs. But ... for this woman, there was no possibility of getting her professional treatment" (Tone, interview, March 4, 2021).

This case brings to light how the intersectional struggles of seeking-asylum women are not taken into account when developing strategies, spaces and support mechanisms to help women that have been victims of violence. This results in a power imbalance where women have to depend on the system to get help, and so the access to professional help becomes limited due to their status as asylum seekers (Canning, 2021; 2019), which can be understood as an issue of intersections between gender, race and class.

Privacy

"We need a private life, and it is good if you can separate one is for man asylum seekers and one is for women and one is for family" (Women 1, Bridge Radio, 2016)

[23] At that time the Women's Center in Center Kongelunden was still active.

The issue of privacy is also discussed in terms of separated spaces for single women but also for single mothers. Adira focuses her reasoning for having a women's centre around privacy, which she considers to be crucial for comfortability:

> "I think more, how to say it, more privacy. That is better with the women centre because the women's problem you cannot share with men. Not everything you can share with men" (Adira, interview, April 9, 2021).

And so when the main area of Center Kongelunden, which was mixed (families, single men …), was closed and they had to move the asylum seekers living there to the women's department, she lost that feeling of privacy:

"And then when they said no more women center said that, like mix with the people is no more feeling of privacy. You know, that is with the men" (ibid.)

Adira had, during our interview, reiterated on many occasions how privacy is extremely important for her and one of the reasons for this is the fact that she is a transwoman.

Street-level Bureaucrats: power and praxis

Throughout the analysis situations and issues regarding the power of street-level bureaucrats have been addressed. This section focuses on unpacking the role of civil servants as street-level bureaucrats in the context of the asylum centres looking at the use of their power (disciplinary domain of power) in relation to women's vulnerability and the relationships they have towards women. Therefore, I investigate procedures, reactions and practices of civil servants from the Red Cross, since I have only had access to staff from this organisation through an interview and secondary data.

One of the issues that I noticed from the data regarding praxis and handling situations of women's vulnerability is that it really depends on the understanding of gender-sensitivity or background of the specific street-level bureaucrat who has to handle certain situations. As mentioned in the beginning of the analysis (see here p. 32-34), there are no guidelines related to gender sensitivity or gender equality when it comes to train frontline workers for asylum centers in the Red Cross, therefore it is somehow left to personal understandings of it. This can possibly affect reactions to situations or implementations of procedures in certain cases, however, I have not found evidence for this. However, the Red Cross social worker interviewed reflects on issues about the personal opinions of street-level bureaucrats:

> "There has been a few in between that were hired a little bit quickly. And when you could sense that they had a. They have maybe a little bit more square, square and

> conservative ideas about some things with women in general, even the ones that I know who are quite traditionally minded I never heard them say their personal opinion at work" (interview, March 26, 2021)

When it comes to appeasing conflicts, the Red Cross worker explains that there are procedures that they learn where in "specific situations, you have to isolate the women from this problem with the husband … you just react to how the situation is like" (Red Cross worker, April 9, 2021). He continues to add there are no specific guidelines that reflect on in which situations the staff should react to protect the woman, but he thinks that "it's like common sense that you try to separate and try to protect the woman, because, I mean she is the one" (ibid.), meaning that she is the one to be protected in, for example, domestic disputes. As he mentions, common sense seems to play a big part in how street-level bureaucrats react to conflicts, which can be problematic sometimes mostly when there is no physical violence involved or the conflict is not as visible. Therefore, it could be argued that maybe frontline workers with more traditional understandings of gender relations would react differently.

In terms of reactions in situations where women are vulnerable, the Red Cross worker interviewed recalls a situation where an asylum-seeking woman wanted a divorce from her husband:

> "I have tried some in the past in another center, … like when a woman comes to the reception and says, I want to divorce my husband. I tried this one time and I was like, okay, sit down, let's talk about it. But before you know it, there's like a lot of other people around and they're talking. In this case, it was Arabic. And then you kind of get the sense that they are trying to fix in between them … And this can be a little bit of a problem, I think …, not in a place like Sjælsmark for example, but in the living center or places with many families, that there can be a tendency from people from the same countries to try to sort it in between themselves because of a distrust of authorities. And that can be that has been an issue a few times, for sure. But in that kind of case, if the woman comes at the end of the next day and says, I don't want to, what I said yesterday ... I didn't mean it, I still want to be with my husband. I will still say it through the nearest boss, I will say listen I think this is not this is not really her own choice. I think it's some other person. From there I can do so much more, but I will have an eye out for it a time after" (Red Cross worker, April 9, 2021).

There are a few things to highlight from this quote. First of all, it is relevant to clarify that his area of work falls into reception/administration (social netværk) and also sometimes he takes care of some people with special needs. Having said that, it can be observed that he has an

understanding of the gender relations and cultural dynamics in the asylum centre, therefore he is able to take *pre-emptive measures* such as communicating his suspicions to a boss and keeping an extra eye on the women in question, in order to avoid possible situations of coercion where the woman is forced to stay in the marriage. It is also relevant to point out his recognition of the fact that there is a mistrust of authority due to their status as stree-level bureacurats who represent authority (Lipsky, 2010). So sometimes asylum seekers would try to fix conflicts among them, however, it is valuable that he still tries to follow up on the issue, even though he cannot do more than observe how the situation unfolds.

The procedures that are put into practice when there is a conflict like the one explained or related to gendered issues are handled the same way as any other conflict (interview). As the Red Cross worker explains, there are no specific training regarding specific situations of gendered violence; the main procedure is "to separate first and then another kind of authority takes over and listens to each part, in the end, it's not ever going to be my role to determine who is mostly right or wrong." This last sentence is important because he recognises the limits of his 'power' and understands his role as just a mediator that is supposed to stop a conflict.

As mentioned before in the issue of harassment, abuse of power does occur in certain situations between women in the centres and the male frontline workers as discussed in relation to the episode of sexual harassment experienced by an asylum-seeking woman in the hands of a Red Cross worker. However, it has been brought to my attention that this abuse of power by frontline workers has been used to 'punish' outspoken women by moving them to other centres and other kinds of threats. Soraya experienced something similar to this:

> "When you complain that you're being discriminated, then will put it on you … they put charges on you that you are disrespecting the workers or you're disrespecting the Red Cross or you're discriminating other people in the camp because of the color (interview, March 22, 2021)

Besides, Tone reinforces this idea were speaking up could lead to discrimination of the women in the centres:

> "But there has been a tendency [where] very vocal, very critical women, to find ways to punish them, to kind of calm them down, to kind of get them back into place. And the way that the system has done that is in the camp system ... you know, punishing the women for being outspoken by transferring them to another camp"
>
> "Then there is the discrimination and disrespect from staff when you are vocal, outspoken. … All the women have kind of experienced that, that the system has said you are not a fit mother. And we will check, we will look into your child and see what

> is wrong. And the problem with this is that it always comes at a time when the woman has made a complaint, when the woman begins to realize that she is discriminated, she's criminalized, she's victimized, she's isolated." (interview, March, 2021).

This is very much related to fixed understandings of what an asylum-seeking woman is: "undereducated, underprivileged and probably abused and harassed before you even came" (ibid.). Thus, the intersections (class, race, religion, culture…) and assumptions of being an asylum-seeking woman influence situations of unbalanced power relations that follow what Collins (2003) calls the disciplinary domain of power, which, translated into this issue, involves the use of power through bureaucracy to control minorities, that is stripping women seeking asylum from any kind of agency or self-determination (Tone, interview, March 4, 2021). They are just seen as powerless victims.

Another issue brought up by Tone is that of the miscommunication between Red Cross staff and the women in the asylum centres, and the fact that it has led to misunderstandings and conflicts:

> "[When women complain] is due to miscommunication and also a very non-transparent system of regulations. In the camps one thing that really has upset women in the past is that they haven't been able to understand why a Syrian family would get two bedrooms in the camp after having arrived only a couple of months earlier and then maybe this woman of African descent. and having been in the camp for four years and ask for the exact same and wasn't granted it" (interview, March 4, 2021)
>
> "There's a lot of misunderstandings. So, what this communication, this miscommunication builds up and you at the same time experience that when you go to ask questions and get clarifications and you're met with silence or 'we can't help you with that' or 'calm down', then the women I know lose patience and get very angry." (ibid.)

In short, it could be argued that the role of a street-level bureaucrat working in asylum centres is both to ensure that policies, guidelines and procedures are being followed (Lipsky, 2010), and also to understand the environment, the different dynamics in the centres and act according to the situation. With this I imply that street-level bureaucrats need to recognise that their decision making can either help or negatively affect the situation and well-being of women in the asylum centres. Obviously, they cannot act against every situation of harassment, violence or discrimination that occurs because there is a mistrust of authority among asylum seekers in general, and so many of these situations might go unreported. But they can, at least, be able to

have better communication to try to fix situations of misunderstandings that lead to complaints and anger, and to dampen this generalised mistrust of authority.

Discussion

After having gathered the analysis of the different issues that women face in the asylum centres in Denmark, it is necessary to further discuss the theoretical implications, described in the theoretical framework (pp. 22-28) of the findings and also to address the research questions posed in the problem formulation, in order to have a better understanding of the situation of women in the context of the Danish Asylum System, more specifically in the asylum centres. The questions were:

- What are the understandings of gender equality and gender sensitivity by civil servants and volunteers in the Danish Asylum System?
- How are asylum-seeking women affected by these understandings?
- What are the consequences of these understandings?

The aim of this discussion is also to reflect further on the consequences and also address coping mechanisms developed by the women in the asylum system that help them survive in the system "designed for men" (Bendixen, 2017).

As developed in the first section of the analysis, the understanding of gender equality as an inherently Danish trait is problematic and hostile when applied to the discourse regarding asylum seekers. First of all, the notion of gender equality is used as a power move to differentiate and exclude asylum-seekers from Danes and Danish society (Stromhøj, 2019), reflecting on the cultural domain of power (Collins, 2000; 2017). Secondly, politicians or, more precisely, the former (Inger Støjberg) and the present (Mathias Tesfaye) ministers of Immigration and Integration seem to be worried about teaching gender equality to ethnic minorities and migrants in the Danish Integration System, but they are, at the same time, reinforcing gender inequality in the asylum system, and this can be observed in the asylum centres as well (Bendixen & Jensen, 2020; Canning, 2019; Kohl, 2019). This happens because there is not an understanding of gender equality or gender sensitivity in an intersectional way. The discrimination, harassment and unsafety that women experience in the asylum centres is not due to one single factor (e.g., being a woman or being African). These horrible situations take place due to the fact that power relations of sexism, racism, classism, transphobia and others become meaningful when they intersect with one another (Collins & Bilge, 2016; Crenshaw, 1991). Asylum-seeking women are not homogeneous, and that should be

understood by the authorities, not only by policymakers and politicians, but, more importantly, also by frontline workers that interact with them on a daily basis.

Gender sensitivity and acknowledging gender relations in different cultures, but also in the environments of the asylum centres, are key because the constructions of femininity and masculinity vary from culture to culture (Connell, 1987; 2014). Furthermore, gender relations in migratory situations can change or stay the same, it really depends on the context that migrants are in (Kohl, 2020; Nawyn, 2010). Therefore, as I have explained in the analysis, gender relations in the Danish asylum centres are completely different to the ones in Danish society and also in the societies that asylum seekers come from: men's masculinity is built around satisfying sexual needs and needing a partner; and women's femininity is constructed as learning to stay strong when facing these 'challenges', as Soraya calls them, of discrimination, harassment, etc. The construction of masculinity explained in the gender relations of the asylum centre is part of the dimension of cathexis, where there is a need to be in a couple, but also may lead to situations of hostile cathexis, this is harassment and violence (Connell, 1987; 2014).

In terms of women's safety, street-level bureaucrats (Red Cross, Kriminalforsogen…) have a big role in detecting situations of power imbalances where women are being forced to agree on certain situations, this could be staying married even if the women do not want to, go back to their home country or engage in sexual intercourse. Furthermore, they should be aware of the fact that with their daily decision making, they can also perpetuate these uncomfortable situations (Bhatia, 2020). It is truly important that street-level bureaucrats use the power they have in the Danish Asylum System, and also in the Integration program to avoid gender-based violence, sexual harassment and other discriminatory situations from happening through their willingness to make decision that would help others (Lipsky, 2010).

In order to complete the discussion, I find it necessary to address the coping mechanisms developed by women in the asylum centres as consequences of their experiences of discrimination, harassment, spatial unsafety and also in relation to their relationships to frontline workers. These coping mechanisms are understood as the interpersonal domain of power (Collins 2000; 2017), where women try to navigate the asylum system in the most bearable way possible trying to fight unbalanced power relations. In the same way as Black women in the U.S. are depicted "solely as passive, unfortunate recipients of abuse" (ibid., 2000), asylum-seeking women are also victimised by the intersecting oppression they face, and that street-level bureaucracy perpetuates. However, this does not mean that they cannot actively

work to improve their situation in the asylum system. One of the positive coping mechanisms is the building of strength and outspokenness in situations of stress, pain and harassment:

> "We women are sometimes afraid to speak, but the more you speak and the more you talk to them the more they will understand our pain, the more we keep quiet, the more they [will] put us down in the camps. It is on us to pull up our voices so they can listen to our pains, the more we keep quiet the more we go down" (Soraya, Bridge Radio, 2016).

There is a call for women to 'wake up' and speak up on situations of inequality and injustice, thus this translates into acts of resistance where women build strategies to unveil racist and sexist practices by frontline workers/street-level bureaucrats. According to Soraya, they created a group of single women to unveil misuses of power when they were denied to receive something by frontline workers:

> "we want to find out, is it because of my color or it's because they didn't want to give me, you understand? and then we could make a deal. And when I get there and they refuse to give it to me, then I will send one of my friends, 'go and ask for the same stuff'. She could go and she got it immediately, without a doubt." (Soraya, interview, March 22, 2021).

This shows that women are indeed aware of their intersectional oppression and "although [female] asylum seekers find themselves in situations of serious repression, there are still sparks of agency in the form of everyday tactics with which they seek survival and possibly also resistance" (Robleda, 2020, p. 82). These acts of resistance are ways to identify and fight oppression, but also, they lead and assist in the process of resilience (ibid. p. 84).

On the other hand, self-isolation becomes an issue in women's daily lives in the asylum centres that is detrimental to their psychological well-being (Canning, 2019). Self-isolation is a direct response to the fear of discrimination, harassment and social control in the Danish asylum centres, that are created by unsustainable gender relations. Therefore a lot of women decide to remain in their rooms as much as possible to avoid conflicts and confrontations with men (Tone, interview, March 22, 2021; Bendixen & Jensen, 2020). This is reflected by what one of the women from the Bridge Radio recordings mentions: "we keep ourselves in our room, when you feel hungry of course you risk it and cook, but otherwise you stay in your room, because of the rumors which we have had. So we have had fear." This issue of self-isolation limits women in their everyday tasks and adds on to the already existing isolation of the asylum centres in remote areas of Denmark.

Throughout this thesis, I have argued for more and better gender-specific spaces and centres for women in the Danish Asylum System. Indeed, one of the coping mechanisms has been the creation of support groups in the form of safe spaces only for women. Soraya created a women's club while she was living in Center Sjælsmark, since women were coming to her to solve their problems, not only issues with men, but also with other women.

> "We talk about [sexual abuse] and about the challenges. When I was living in Sjælsmark, I had made like a women's club every 14 days. We, with the women, sit together and talk. And some women who they have like difficult they fight each other. I would sit with them. I make counselling with them, then I give them advice and which now in the camp since I left the camp and I got my papers. So these people, they don't have somebody like they are facing those challenges. Again, they don't have that anymore." (Soraya, interview, March 22, 2021).

The Red Cross recognised this as a good practice that was making women happy (ibid.). They even supported Soraya's initiative, providing her with a room in the centre and with money for snacks. Nevertheless, after Soraya got asylum and the families were moved to Avnstrup, the women's club stopped. One can ask: why did it not continue, if it was helpful for women and the Red Cross supported it? A possible answer to this could be the fact that it was organised by an asylum-seeking woman herself with enough agency and determination to gather women. Relationships between street-level bureaucrats and asylum seekers are based on "the feeling of omnipresent captivity" (Bhatia, 2020, p. 278) and unequal power relations, therefore it could be argued that a women's club organised by the Red Cross in the asylum centres might not be well received. However, they could still encourage women into having these fruitful and empowering gatherings by offering the possibility to have a fixed safe space.

Finally, it is necessary to discuss recommendations and suggestions for change that would improve the situation of women in the asylum centres. In this context Bendixen & Jensen (2020) assert that in order to "get the women involved one must, to an even greater degree than with men, consider their individual preconditions and not resort to a one-size-fits-all approach.", this is, "refugee women need care services for their children, networks and mentors, teaching and courses based on their situation". There is a need for an intersectional approach to the Danish Asylum System because women have different experiences of asylum/fleeing than men. It needs to be recognised in the policies and guidelines.

Furthermore, Refugees Welcome (Bendixen, 2017) recommends, the Danish Asylum system to have more women's centres, since "there is no economic or rational justification for not creating asylum centres exclusively for women – something that would make refugee

women more secure and give them more empowerment." This rational justification seems to be that Denmark has policies regarding gender equality (ibid., 2020), therefore the Immigration Services (Udlændingstyrelsen) dismiss the suggestion of having women-only asylum centres. However, this does not add up since, currently, there is a women's department in Center Jelling and there has been other women's sections in previous asylum centres. It seems to be a vague excuse since "a prerequisite for equality is to treat people based on their situation and set goals that an individual has a real opportunity to live up to" (Bendixen & Jensen, 2020); thus, by ignoring issues of unsafety, discrimination and harassment, the Danish Asylum System perpetuates indirectly situations of gender and social inequality. As Tone puts it, "the kind of protection that the system offers is really much more victimization and more disempowerment right now, not allowing you to have self-determination" (interview, March 4, 2021).

Conclusion

This thesis has sought to bring forward the problematisation and impact that very fixed understandings of gender equality and lack of implementation of gender sensitive guidelines have on asylum-seeking women in the Danish Asylum System, more specifically in the asylum centres. As outcomes from the semi-structured interviews and audio recordings, I have presented, throughout the analysis, issues of discrimination, harassment, spatiality and street-bureaucracy that hinder the general well-being of women in the asylum centres and that have unpleasing consequences such as self-isolation. Thus, the theoretical frameworks of intersectionality, gender relations and street-level bureaucracy have led this thesis to address and explore unequal power relations; and to unveil the social inequality and the social structures of oppression that women face in the Danish asylum centres.

By addressing women's vulnerability and unsafety in the centres, I have not intended to imply that all asylum-seeking men are dangerous and violent. That would be a very orientalist and 'othering' perspective to take. What I have tried to convey with this thesis is that the unsafety that women feel is caused by several factors other than only by the behaviour of men. Their daily life is conditioned by the intersectional struggles of social control, unequal gender relations and the hostile relationships with street-level bureaucrats, in addition to the already existing worry about their asylum case. Something that we, as outsiders from the life in the asylum centres do not see, is the social structures, harassment and social control that women are exposed to. That is why more research of this kind needs to be done to keep the conversation going regarding the ill/well-being of women in the centres. From the beginning

of this thesis, I have argued for more and more accessible gender-specific spaces for women, in order to decrease the situations of unsafety they experience in the centres. Ultimately, the Danish Asylum System needs to have a revision and clarification of its understanding of gender equality and how to better implement gender-sensitive guidelines in order to be able to provide the protection that women need. Striving for gender equality should never be the reason to ignore structural inequality and the intersections that lay beneath the gendered experiences of asylum.

In conclusion. even though there is a recognition of women as vulnerable in the asylum centres, women still face violence, harassment and discrimination, almost on a daily basis, leading to gender inequality and psychological trauma (Canning, 2019; Kohl, 2020). As Szczepanikova (2005) states, "the very fact that women are recognized as more vulnerable … does not necessarily lead to the increase of their safety and to the improvement of their position in relation to the male inhabitants of the camp" (p. 284). There is still much work to be done in terms of implementation of gender-sensitive procedures and guidelines that ensure the safety and protection of women seeking asylum within the walls of the asylum centres. From here onwards, we can only hope that the fight for women's safety and their proper protection keeps on going for the women currently in the asylum system and for those to come.

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