What’s the matter with M

One young asylum seeker’s fall from grace, in Sweden between 2015 - 2022

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Abstract

M arrived in Sweden as a hopeful and aspiring adolescent minor in 2015. By 2022, he instead finds himself living on the streets as a drug addict, homeless, with his residency permit rejected and his asylum application declined. This thesis analyzes his situation through a theory of Performativity and Affect, foremost leaning on Judith Butler, Lauren Berlant, and Sara Ahmed. It scrutinizes the role of the imagined Refugee Figure that M came to represent. It is produced through a set of interviews while following Lee Ann Fujii’s method of Relational Interviewing. While the role for M is being outlawed to the exterior of Global Politics, without the ability to appear, he is consequently never valued as a matter of consideration. May other routes have been possible? The Refugee Figure is here contrasted to alternative figurative identities, such as the builder or even the desperado, that more naturally are associated with an ability to act and to be seen. Ultimately, the thesis reads precarious mobility as an expression of political will, agency, and a voice with one’s feet.

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Introduction

In public discourse, the refugee figure is recognized at first sight, representing either a threat to society or a helpless and nameless victim. We have not least learned to recognize this figure through media, washed up as dead bodies at Mediterranean shores, from pictures of overcrowded boats, or traversing through cold, dark woods, crossing over barbed wire fences, while carrying worn-down mattresses alongside plastic bags filled with belongings. One of the most familiar representations of this figure is the unaccompanied Afghan boy. This thesis focuses on one such individual, M, and his struggle to find agency within the delimited space that his predefined role allowed.

M has always seen himself as a rebel, full of agency and ability. During his first years in Sweden, while still a minor, he lived under the watchful eyes of a temporary care or residence facility (Translated from Swedish: Hem för vård eller boende, commonly referred to as HVB-hem). It meant a high degree of supervision and certain expectations for his behavior, including consistent school attendance. However, things changed when he turned eighteen. As an adult, he was no longer welcomed at the facility and faced either accepting housing arranged by the Swedish Migration Agency about 1,450 km away or finding his own place. He chose the latter, valuing his friendships and existing support network. He and a friend moved between various temporary accommodations to make things work. Gradually, he drifted away from school, navigating Swedish society’s uncertain and shadowy fringes. Then: after having received three rejection letters regarding his asylum application, a streak of hope appeared: he obtained a temporary residency permit under the strict terms of the Temporary Swedish Upper Secondary School Act from 2017 (Translated from Swedish: Gymnasielagen 2017). In 2022 M instead lives irregularly as a heroin addict on the streets of Malmö, Sweden.

This thesis is based on conversations with M about all this. The approach is inductive and interpretative, where M’s own words are the basis for the analysis.

"Hello G, I do not look good, and I do not want you to see me like this."

"When I look good I will call you and tell you that we can meet, let’s see."

(Text messages from M, February 22nd, 2022).
The use of the letter M as a signifier for the respondent is due to confidentiality purposes, but it also acknowledges M’s actual presence and place. M and I frequently call each other by our first letters while texting.

I will not neglect that, as the writer of this thesis, I am the narrator of the story and that the events that will be analyzed will be my interpretation, it is, however, still a narration based on theory to analyze what M tells me about his situation. It is not so much research based on policy decisions or political outcomes but on the affects, or emotional landscape that encapsulate one young asylum seeker’s coming of age. It is, therefore, an attempt to map the shaping of M’s life in Sweden from a theoretical stance, primarily through the lens of the philosopher Judith Butler's theory of performativity. Butler, who is foremost associated with gender theory, does indeed draw the connection between the struggle to appear as the one one self-identifies as and the vulnerable precarious subject’s struggle to appear at all. These are life’s in affect, cruel in their premise.

"In this way, precarity is, perhaps obviously, directly linked with gender norms, since we know that those who do not live their genders in intelligible ways are at heightened risk for harassment, pathologization, and violence" (Butler 2015, 34).

The answer to the research question in this thesis may seem evident from certain perspectives. Some might argue that M never took advantage of the chances that he was given; others might instead point to the impossible situation in which M was placed. Yet, the intent here is not so much to come up with any definite answers as it is an attempt to put his situation into context and, through theory, interpret M’s situation and potential downfall. It is a personal inquiry into M’s reflections on his situation, story, and outlook, with the ambition to figure out what the matter is with M.

**Mapping the research question**

M represents the refugee figure in this thesis due to his circumstance and experience of being in refugee situations. So, even as one cannot fully grasp or represent the person through text, one can perhaps gain knowledge about the sort of trapped situation the subject finds oneself in by looking at the representation of the figure for the construction it is.

This thesis is, therefore, an attempt to research feelings, not to ”…reject reason” but to see M's story ”as one among many ways of being in the world” (Chakrabarty 2000, 249). The perhaps
Irrational search for purpose may put us at great risk. It may also provide us with hope under even the most urgent material circumstances. On an individual level, it is about becoming and being seen, being young, and striving to form one’s own identity. On the political level, M represents a fragmented and multilayered global experience, where, in one part, psychology and, in the other, politics intersect, a situation full of complexity whose heterogeneity only can be read through either experience or imagination.

"To breathe heterogeneity into the word "imagination," I suggest, is to allow for the possibility that the field of the political is constitutively not singular" (Chakrabarty 2000, 149).

It is opposite to what Lauren Berlant writes, not the treasonous dreams of fame and fortune (Berlant 2011, 2) that constrain M’s chances. Instead, such cruel optimism may be the only real asset in the refugee strive. An ongoing exchange thrives among those who find themselves in the “no-places” at the margins of globalization (Bauman 2017, 79), a murmur within the global precariat where dreams are equally nurtured and shattered while in constant movement. Berlant describes a neoliberal condition that demands constant displacement and change, not only of the means of production and our living conditions but also through a spectrum of inner imaginary states that fuel our dreams and expectations (Berlant 2011, 261). It is a mediated quasi-state where everyone wants to be everything at once and can never truly become anything (Bauman 2017, 28-30), held together tightly by equal parts of optimism and disappointment (Berlant 2011, 27). It is a state where frustration is the only constant.

The story of M is also a journey between 2015 - 2022, significant years for anyone interested in how the understanding of refugee situations, motivations, and rights have been constructed within the popular debate throughout Europe and the EU. Not least considering how young adolescent Afghan boys arriving from primarily Iran are rendered in a European context and, in this specific example Sweden.

When M arrived in Sweden in 2015 as a 16-year-old, he was full of hope and capacity. Although an Afghan citizenship, he was born and raised as a refugee to refugeeed parents in Iran. In 2022 he instead awaited extradition from Sweden, an absurd situation as his extradition lacked any recipient party. M found himself in a political and emotional void. As having no, to borrow from Butler, “right to appear” (Butler 2015, 35) within the global state system while his subject position becomes globalized by force (O’Byrne and Hensby 1999, 2). He is recognized as an outsider at first sight through his exclusion from everything else.
The act of departure may, however, represent a rebellion, a protest, and defiance of what is given. In this sense, escape violates the discourse on who is allowed to move. As a critique, escape is a way of not conforming, similar to Foucault’s definition of critique as the ability not to be entirely governed (Neocleous 2008, 7). In this case, the refugee figure instead becomes a heroic model in a frightening world (Berlant 2011, 148). A zone-walker and border crosser, scaling barb-wired fences in Ceuta or who briefly looks up towards the sky while crowded into a jammed rubber boat at sea somewhere between Türkiye and Greece. A rebellion that may end within the “slow death” (Berlant 2011, 38) and straightjacket (Back and Sinha 2018, 77) at the hands of some migration bureaucracy performed by some prosperous welfare state. This sort of rebellion could be seen in contrast to a potential “collective turn” within the Western public discourse (Drozdzewski and P. Matusz 2021, 2). It is by this also an attempt to make M’s life grievable (Berlant 2011, 181: Butler in Halsema et al. 2021, 184-85).

Imagine the heroes in such a rebellion as contemporary desperados, explorers, and wanderers. As they cross the borders, their presence challenges the collective, cultural, and emotional expectations within the societies they enter. What may be considered a threat, as Bonnie Honig writes, in the role of ”...the foreigner as refugee, boundary crosser, terrorist, outlaw, repository of irrationality, erotic excess, madness, anarchy, and so on” (Honig 2001, 8), may in fact entail a promise and a revelation from something that has been seen as stuck.

This thesis investigates one individual’s life in Sweden between 2015 and 2022 in relation to what is understood as a dominant discursive narrative surrounding what and how a refugee should be and act. Ultimately the research question is, although its fundamentally normative stance, why did things go wrong for M in Sweden? Two disclaimers are to be made here. First, from a discursive standpoint, it may be that things did not go ”wrong” for M at all, as M’s case, in many ways, could be seen as fulfilling that performative role provided for the societal position given, and secondary that M during one of our conversations framed his life in Sweden as so far a ”90% success” (Interview 1).

Still, the basis for this thesis, however bourgeois this may be, is that if life-success depends on a certain sense of fundamental material security and attachment to the society where one lives, things have not gone well for M so far. From this perspective, there have been chances, and chances lost, that have vastly affected M’s opportunities for obtaining, if using Berlants words, a ”good life” (Berlant 2011, 2) in Sweden. From a theoretical stance, this thesis sets out to problematize why
these chances were missed as M, as so many of us are, still is attached to the same "good-life fantasies" (Berlant 2011, 2) as any other. While keeping in mind that vulnerability is not to be mistaken or associated with passivity or lack of will (Judith Butler in interview with Sara Ahmed, Ahmed 2016, 485).
Theory

This text seeks to critically investigate aspects of the societal and cultural role of the refugee from a performative perspective. It does so by setting one individual's biographical experience of refugeedom (Riga et al. 2020) in relation to the societal shaping of subjects that performativity as a theory suggests. The aim has been first to listen, then to analyze the affects of being placed in the refugee role. A role that is here understood as positioned within the framework of the constructed stranger figure as described in Sara Ahmed's book Strange Encounters (2000). The interest is therefore not primarily to understand how the refugee figure is framed as an externally projected idea of how refugees, might appear (Ahmed 2000, 56), but how such a projected figure-struct may affect the self-identity of the subjugated (Ahmed 2000, 56), representing a life on the societal outside while subjugated to the strict limits of living a character defined by others. The refugee figure is however not only a figure that represents oppression and subjugation, but could also be seen as a symbol of optimism, as any refugee journey, at its most fundamental level, represents a strive colored by hope for a more "livable life" (Butler 2018, 247). It is however hope followed by consequence, well described in Lauren Berlant's book Cruel Optimism (2011), that elaborates how such situations also can be understood as a sort of life genre. Mirroring the clash between the dreams and potentially optimistic surge that thrives in the decision and effort one takes to seek a more livable life, with the rock-hard delimited space available on arrival as the subject is performatively re-shaped into the subjugated role of the ever-losing refugee figure. Berlants book adds to the perspective of performativity, as it delves into the state of affects of conflicting assumptions with actual situations, between fantasies and realities (Berlant 2011, 14: Butler 2020:15). Finally, in an attempt to find a route out of all this, through in parts disrupt the pre-set narrative I've taken from Bonnie Honig's book Democracy and the Foreigner (2001), to try out if figures, although the use of figures, is always based on a sort of "false ontology” (Butler 1988, 526), still may work as a counter-narrative to enable different readings of such figures abilities and potential. A counter reading that, in M's case, may have provided alternatives to the cruelty of the optimism that M carried before his downfall.

Judith Butler defines performativity as the iterative shaping of the subject, as ”we become through a series of acts that are renewed and repeated continuously” (Butler 1988, 523). This includes the personal affects of circumstance and potential trauma, describing how the body dramatizes and reproduces historical situations (Butler 1988, 521). It is, as Butler points out in the outlying article Performance acts and gender constitutions from 1988, that any experience is dependent on
the stage, the structure, that it is lived within (Butler 1988, 530-31). As a theory, performativity seeks to display what relays behind how we act and the structural limits of that act, where individual roles are framed into pre-defined and normative structs. As we assemble experiences during our life trajectory, these experiences are continuously reshaped and reformed through interaction with others. We internalize what others project upon us, and these experiences affect us. We come to live that felt identity as being a man, woman, or/and refugee, representing "…symbolic social sign[s]" (Butler 1988, 519). Categories that need to remain in their genres to be societally acceptable, any break from these norms will, in one way or another, meet resistance and cause trouble (Butler in interview with Sara Ahmed, Ahmed 2016, 483), as every challenge to such norms ultimately leads to conflict. Violently and openly or through purposeful silent performative rejection taking the form of "radical negation" (Berlant 2011, 199). Although the script is not precisely defined, the roles are anticipated to be enacted within its given genre in our shared "social performance" (Butler 1988, 526). Such normative categories are in real life played out within a mixture of intersectional convening and often oppressing genre sets with highly different social values, as having the lead role in the sort of "situation tragedy" that Lauren Berlant maps out in Cruel Optimism (Berlant 2011, 177), to mention a de-valued genre of life that is highly relevant to the story of M. Accordingly, it is rather easy to judge the social value of the roles that we are given by the manifestations, in form of ceremonies, that surrounds our lives and deaths events, such as the high society wedding versus the funeral of a paperless refugee, as …"some lives are grievable, and others are not (Butler 2004, XIV-XV).

Hence, how we act and identify ourselves in this world depends fundamentally on two factors, our experiences and how others judge us, taken as a very simplified version of what Butler explains as;

"I would suggest that there are two dimensions of [gender] performativity from the start: one is the unchosen or unwilled situation of [gender] assignment, one that we can come to deliberate about and change in time; the other is performative action that takes up the terms by which we have been addressed (and so a retaking, a taking over, or a refusal), the categories through which we have been formed, in order to begin the process of self-formation within and against its terms” (Butler in interview with Sara Ahmed, Ahmed 2016, 485).

The brackets in the quote above are there to stress how Butler's definition of performativity also works beyond strict gender themes, although, the role of the refugee could be seen as a sort of gender of its own. It is worth mentioning here that my interpretation of performativity goes aside
with Butler's connection to gender theory. I see performativity as an opening to read any subject position from a primarily structural stance.

Although the impact of gender- and masculinity norms may not be understated also in M's case, the primary intent is foremost to analyze the performative figure-shaping of the refugee and its affects on the self, based in the assumption that refugeedom, as a life genre, is something one has to learn and be trained into. In one way, performativity could be understood as part of any signifying practice within a normative discourse (Butler 2015, 8), shaping the relationship between identity and body, a process framed by history producing the subject. This is of course a process that can never be fully understood or taken for certain, and were we ultimately are left to our imagination and reason as we try to "read" situations to understand them, it is as Butler writes, "as much as the body is formed in discourse, it eludes any referential act that seeks to capture what it is” (Butler 2018, 245). Nothing is from this perspective, sure.

In an interview with Sara Ahmed from 2016, Butler outlines how when we seek textual evidence for a particular interpretation, nothing is sure, as textual evidence, in some sense, can never be seen as data. It is instead a re-interpretation, taking place through reading (Ahmed 2016, 482). This thesis should be regarded as a sort of reading of M's circumstance and the circumstance of the type of situation that M's case represents, figuratively speaking. Our interpretation and imagination do, to some extent, appropriate and even exploit the lived situation as it tries to read it. As the eye's gaze consumes the object. It is a treacherous venture as any reading reflects the reader's self. Hence it is crucial to separate the reading of the situation from the lived experience while admitting that there is still a bond between the two.

"What I consider doing to the other can be done to me, and that means that my act is never quite my act alone, but potentially any number of acts, and that I can be on either side of the destructive act; as a result, we are already linked through action—or through imagined action—through a bond of reciprocity that I can only deny at the expense of life itself” (Butler 2018, 249).

It is time to sort out the refugee-figures own kind of strangeness. Ahmed makes a distinction between the neighbor, who always in some way is familiar, and the stranger, who seems to come from another world. When does this strangeness occur? What features of difference are necessary to become a stranger? Ahmed makes one distinct and vital point: when strangers, foreigners, refugees, and other aliens are discussed in contexts such as in this thesis, it is always at the basis of producing a critique of such concepts. Concepts such as the figure of the stranger are, although they are utilized to be able to discuss the problem of such constructs, based on a sort of "false
ontology” (Butler 1988, 526). Even if internalized feelings of strangeness are present on the inside, it is always due to the performative process of an outside construct produced in the social realm. By analyzing figures, one makes the construct visible, not the person. That said, it is the figure we seek here, the true M will still hide beyond the reach of this thesis’s reading of his words and situation. It might be a "[…] paradox that cannot be overcome” (Butler 2018, 245). The refugee as a figure is, a stranger that is recognized as such at first sight:

"How do you recognise a stranger? To ask such a question, is to challenge the assumption that the stranger is the one we simply fail to recognise, that the stranger is simply any-body whom we do not know. It is to suggest that the stranger is some-body whom we have already recognised in the very moment in which they are ‘seen’ or ‘faced’ as a stranger. The figure of the stranger is far from simply being strange; it is a figure that is painfully familiar in that very strange(r)ness” (Ahmed 2000, 21).

However, if one is to accept the language of the enemy, one has also to in some way accept the enemy's playfield, which, as Ahmed points out, bears specific risks (Ahmed 2000, 4-5), in that the figures we present might be taken for actual and meant in an essential way. Instead, these figures should be understood as metaphors for certain subject positions that are more subjugated to scrutiny than other. Hence, it is a quest to question the false narratives and applied images that construct the idea of the other in this refugee-figure. M is a representative of the "politics of strangeness” that separates the "freedom, agency, community, and solidarity” for those who belong at home in the polity from those who by their appearance define the one, from the other (Honig 2001, XIV).

If Ahmed describes how the estrangement and figure-making work to separate the ones who belong from the others that do not, either through stranger fetishism or through sheer refusal, Bonnie Honig instead describes how figures of foreignness also work as differential mythological and metaphorical backdrop in the process of civilization telling, as opposites produce one another. Without the other, no one. Such mythology is relevant to this thesis, as although still strange and dispatched, there are clear advantages in becoming a fearless founder, explorer, or desperado in terms of agency compared to the figure of the paperless and the homeless.

"Why do these fears and hopes take shape through the figure of a foreigner? And what can that foreigner, the iconic foreign-founder, teach us about the insufficiencies, challenges, dramas, and dreams of democracy?” (Honig 2001, 14).

M is not a refugee by the definitions used in the Swedish legal context, not least confirmed by the fact that M's status as a refugee has been declined no less than three times while going through the appeal processes. Also, the general discourse concerning who is to be included or not in these
definitions is based on either a view to justify or disqualify the refugee. Due to these established sets of different criterias used in international norms and national legislation, refugeedom may, in the end, become a matter of style;

"This style is never fully self-styled, for living styles have a history, and that history conditions and limits possibilities. Consider gender, for instance, as a corporeal style, an 'act,' as it were, which is both intentional and performative, where 'performative' itself carries the double-meaning of 'dramatic' and 'non-referential'" (Bulter 1988, 521-522).

Although Butler above writes about the performative mechanisms shaping (self) appreciation of gender, the role of the refugee figure could likewise be understood as a historical style that has been seen and enacted many times before, a style that is replicated with only marginal changes, and flowingly is an as predefined role as any, where the room for changes are few.

The refugee is foremost recognized through superficial characteristics that may be changed or withdrawn at any given point due to political circumstances. The refugee figure is in this thesis foremost recognized by such features as traveling over borders in "refugee style.” A risk-full travel on an uncertain trajectory with ones all belongings on a quest to more or less randomly find a place in this world where one can become something different, but where one again is immediately set into a situation one was not seeking. It is for sure, as Butler puts it;

"none of us are captured by the categories by which we gain recognition”, and followingly, "I am that name you give me, but I am also something else that cannot quite be named" (Butler 2018, 245).

In this text, we read certain groups of people that move across borders in certain ways as refugees. In other contexts, we read other people that do not move over borders or in the same style as refugees. Still, it is in relation to the border that M's situation becomes the most acute, not least from a global politics perspective. To say that one recognizes a refugee when one sees one (Ahmed 2000, 21) might be a definition that is far to open to critique. Still, any given definition of the refugee figure will always be based on rather loose grounds as we have to live with uncertainty in a world that is open for interpretation. The problem is that a refugee is not recognized as such if the state where one seeks asylum does not recognize one's right to asylum. M is, by this, not at all a refugee, as his asylum application has been declined. M is currently making his fourth attempt to be recognized as a refugee by the Swedish state. However, M sees himself as a refugee, a recognition of M's own situation as valid as any other definition of the term and, therefore, ultimately the basis for the definition of the refugee in this thesis. M says during the first interviews that he was "born as a refugee and will die as a refugee" (Interview 1).
The refugee’s travel could obviously be understood as a way of giving up one’s own agency and although politicized as a figure, not being political through active engagement. The act of entering into refugeedom could however equally well be regarded as an existential and rebellious act, as clearly saying no to what has been given (Camus 2013, 11-13). Franz Fanon writes (Fanon 2008, 171-172) that freedom cannot be given, that it needs to be taken. The refugee objects to ones given situation by entering on the refugee travel, and expresses thereby a will to break free from ones own given circumstance. The gesture of refugeedom could in this regard be read as a political voice through the movement alone as a vote with one's feet if one will. The refugee rebels against what has been given and conducts a political transformation through movement, as a sort of pilgrimage (Ringmar 2019, 9), meaning that it is a travel into the colonizers world where one also comes to discover oneself as the colonized subject. An act that could be read as a rebellious political manifestation, as "acting in concert can be an embodied form of calling into question the inchoate and powerful dimensions of reigning notions of the political (Butler 2015, 10). When seen from that perspective it is a highly political figure, full of will, centrally positioned in the public mind and therefore consequently exposed to different sorts of risks.

“…each of us is constituted politically in part by virtue of the social vulnerability of our bodies...Loss and vulnerability seem to follow from our being socially constituted bodies, attached to others, at risk of losing those attachments, exposed to others, at risk of violence by virtue of that exposure” (Butler 2004, 20).

Things might be possible to change only through movement. In other words, this text goes against the description of refugees as an anonymous collective who, with Chantal Mouffe's use of Freud’s "eros" lacks any cohesive bond (Mouffe 2018, 73). Those who are among the valueless and not worthy of being sacrificed as no value has been lost by their death (Agamben 1998, 122-123), as their bodies sink into the dark. Instead, the theoretical approach combines the "affects" of reaction and productive emotions that Berlant exercises with Butler's theory of performativity.

An optimistic act can surely be rebellious and cruel at the same time. Lauren Berlant describes a global consumption ideal charging what Berlant labels as Cruel Optimism (Berlant 2011, 99). Through the imagery exchange between what may be considered a fairytale in one part but in another, an accurate description of north-west prosperity and a likewise complex but yet simplified imagination of south-east precariousness, different sorts of cravings bolster (Bauman 2017, 145). It is an intimate liaison created through material dreams (who does not have them?), imaginary richness, and assumed authenticity (Berlant 2011, 223). Both in their role as a politicized figure and
as being excluded from normalcy, the refugee position entails a personal state of exception. This state is sometimes situated within the physical camp that Giorgio Agamben has theorized, but perhaps primarily as a kind of individual condition where the individual carries the camp with them, whether it involves sleeping on a foam mattress on the floor of an underpriced black market car wash or in close proximity to others in an overcrowded apartment rented at an unreasonably high margin. The precarious migrant carries the camp on their backs and gestures by this, their exceptional un-belonging. Agamben quotes Schmitt, who quotes Søren Kierkegaard;

"'The exception explains the general and itself. And when one really wants to study the general, one need only look around for a real exception’" (Agamben 2007, 16).

The state of exception in seeking refuge is exceptional and normative, as it makes life in crisis into an overwhelming state of normality (Berlant 2011, 10). The role of the refugee intersects with many of the criteria commonly associated with other fictitious and real-world subject positions; the part of the desperado and the outlaw, the stray "man,” and the wanderer who, at times, strives towards the sunset for the adventurous occident beyond the horizon (Honig 2001, 8).

The refugee is a performative actor and a shaper of things in this regard. The refugee has nothing to lose and takes command over one’s own agency, striving to create something out of nothing. In a way this is thereby an attempt to take up on Honig’s challenge to read democratic theory as a gothic genre, where we are never sure if the protagonist is a "hero or a villain,” but who on one side diffuses what we tend to take for granted and on the other re defines who ”we” are (Honig 2001, 9).

The refugee society is undoubtedly authentic while both insecure and disembedded O’Byrne and Hensby 1999:138). On M’s part, he is disembedded through his refugeedom and disembedded from the disembedded through his street life and heroin addiction. M is indeed a place of global politics, and politics can indeed be a very lonely place, as being one of the “ineligible” without the right to appear in the public sphere (Butler 2015, 50).

Finally, there is an aspect of strangeness and fetishism executed by the sheer act of examining the other as representing the constructed other. On the other hand, there is the determination among postcolonial theorists to provincialize both the self and the narration process into a fragmented or sandbox-like playfield without a center (Comaroff and Comaroff 2012, 115), not least by making the narrative part of the presentation clearly. It is however not a situation of ”free-play” (Ahmed 2000, 12), but rather an attempt to analyze a gridlocked situation while considering the ”complexity of the relationship” (Ahmed 2000, 14), at full display.
Method

If the previous chapter aims to present some established theoretical perspectives that are lent and interpreted in this thesis to describe and problematize M’s situation analytically, the method discussion is instead orientated towards the conduct or the way that this study has been done. It is perhaps unnecessary to state the obvious, that the position taken in this study may contain both strengths and weaknesses that are open for critique. It is however the ambition to make the study as open for such critique as possible and to not in any defensive way ”guard” any position taken.

The terms for engagement

One crucial departure point for the methodology has been Sara Ahmed’s book Strange Encounters (2000) and primarily the chapter Knowing Strangers (Ahmed 2000, 55-74). In the chapter, Ahmed problematizes the role of the exchange that occurs in the encounter between the one who examines and the one who gets examined. Ahmed exemplifies how complex such encounters may be. Ahmed distinguishes a kind of dichotomy between the researcher and the researched stranger, conceptualized historically as the colonial interception between the normative ”white body” (Ahmed 2000, 52) and the stranger or ”the strange body” (Ahmed 2000, 54). Ahmed makes a rightful warning to the investigative researcher aiming to portrait the different life of subjugated strangers or marginalized subalterns without voices, as someone who risks to define the social life through separating and building the narrative on the cost of the subordinated subject, rather than representing or being able to ”give voice” (Ahmed 2000, 63) to the already subjugated.

"This subject is precisely the subject who determines the formation of home – the space one inhabits as liveable – and whose access to subjectivity is determined through being at home – the centre from which other beings are expelled. The subject who can act and move in the world with ease – the white, masculine, heterosexual, subject – does so through expelling those other beings from this zone of the living (although the expulsion always leaves its trace). One does not then live in abjection: abject bodies are precisely the bodies that are not inhabited, are not liveable as such, or indeed, are not at home” (Ahmed 2000, 52).

It is a sort of construction where the stranger only can become seen or heard (or discovered) through the internalization by a, metaphorically speaking in some cases but also in many cases real, ”white masculine subject” (Ahmed 2000, 52-53). Needless to say, perhaps, is that the immigrant by Ahmed represents the ultimate stranger (Ahmed 2000, 36). By ”smelling” the stranger (Ahmed 2000, 56), the researcher-philosopher cleanses himself as the one who knows and understands the
world. The ambition for this thesis is, therefore, not to know or understand the subject's experience as such, but to without too much of a defense, try to narrow into the exchange with M while both parties are highly aware of their internal differences, in regards to privilege and power, where the end-result is a sort of data presentation and analysis that is as open for scrutiny as possible. It is by this not an attempt to depict M as an individual per se from a biographical stance, but to portrait the type of situation that M is in and the figure that M becomes to represent. The interest in M's situation may be an expression of the sort of stranger fetishism that Ahmed problematizes, but the ambition is not to understand M's being as a stranger and convert that into a sort of stranger-knowledge, but rather to gain knowledge of the situation that M is in and the material and societal factors that brought him there and to thereby question the discourse applied to M as the stranger figure. There is a thin distinction between the two perspectives and they may overlap, but as an objective it is a critical difference between trying to read M as a figure, and to in contrast, interpret M's story to produce knowledge of the specific situation and that situation's place in society. The ambition to know the stranger as a figure is as Ahmed points out a failed and self-contradictory venture (Ahmed 2000, 74), instead the ambition is to problematize the discourse that placed M in the conditions that M is in. The result of this study may, to paraphrase Judith Butler, very well fail to capture its referent, but still be able to show how that failing takes place (Butler 2004, 146). Or, to draw on Lee Anne Fujji's appreciation of mistakes (Fujii 2018, 48); if this thesis from a critical standpoint is a mistake due to the power discrepancies displayed between the author and the subject, it is hopefully a mistake that one can learn from, which in itself then, is to be regarded as knowledge.

The approach in this thesis is to handle Ahmed's warning on a sort of matter of fact basis. M is by at least the perspective of the theoretical approach applied for this thesis subordinated in relation to the Swedish Society in which context M is situated. M had during spring 2022 no permanent place to stay, no ID-number and no legal right to remain or work to make an earning, M had thereby no right to participate in the drug preventive program that M previously went to. M has never carried a passport and consequently, M has no right to vote and to by that gain political representation. The power situation taking place during the study is very obvious for any one involved, including M. There will be no attempt here to artificially lift M's status in relation to the study to become a co-writer, or to, in a real sense give voice to M's story as something fixated. Instead this text is to be regarded as an as open eyed attempt to interpret what M put forward and to use that material as a counter narrative against normative presumptions of how and what the established structure want a
"refugee" to be. A departure point for this study is also that M very well could have been rendered differently, and taken on a different role, if that space had been given.

The role of figures

There are differences between actual situations and the metaphors we use to render the identities we associate with specific situations. Sara Ahmed describes the "stranger" as a metaphorical figure appreciated as representing certain characteristics rendering the stranger as a specific identity (Ahmed 2000, 21), this being a cultural and imaginary concept that carries meaning, that enforces a variety of projected characteristics upon the individual subject. In Georg Simmel’s essay The Stranger from 1908, Simmel sketches the concept of the stranger as someone who arrives from afar and "…who comes today and stays tomorrow” (Simmel 1950, 402). The stranger does not pass through but appears by the border and enters to remain. It is people who exists aside from the normal life living outside and aside from the norm, as "..strangers of a particular type” (Simmel 1950, 407), they are foreign and therefore "obscure” with a "tendency to evil” as Franz Fanon writes while referring to Carl Jung (Fanon 2008, 147), and who thereby are recognized as a challenge to society and associated with crime (Ahmed 2000, 23). Furthermore, to distinguish and place the stranger in the acute present, the stranger is someone who may arrive as the refugee or as the unprivileged migrant and who has to ask "for hospitality, in a language who is not their own” (Khosravi 2010, 125). These figures are the ultimate "others” but who’s conceptual present is created only by the narrator. The one conceptual role possible to be played as the refugee is not to come bearing gifts but to be a burden and a potential threat to society. M is by this understanding not expected to contribute with anything but rather to be reshaped into the norm so that M as a stranger ceases to exist. It is of most concern to society to ensure that M’s conduct fits into what is demanded for the play to carry on also if the reshaping of M fails. Bonnie Honig describes this in the book Democracy and the Foreigner (2001). When the normative dominant majority society encounters the stranger's foreignness, it is appreciated as a problem to be solved and not a contribution that carries potential or anything worthy for the majority. Foreignness is here perceived as a frightening disease that needs to be cured through either rejecting the stranger or converting the individual into the norm (Honig 2001, 4), as a good stranger is no stranger. It is an objective in this thesis however, as mentioned, to explore if there are other conceptual figures that may counter this? Could we use a figure to take away a figure? Are there alternative figures that could be applied to the role of the foreigner that may challenge what tight-knits the discourse surrounding the refugee
as carrying this disease of foreignness? And to do this without entering into humanitarian traps.

Honig expands on one such figure which shows that alternatives are possible; the foreign founder. A figure who’s foreignness infects “…the departure or disruption that is necessary for change” (Honig 2001, 4). It is a figure that appears as a hero and who ultimately leaves when the job is done (Honig 2001, 21), not rarely in the direction of the sunset. Honig’s use of the foreign-founder concept may be a way to challenge the discourse that frames the role of the stranger, or the role of the refugee. And there may be alternative potential figures that are usable to further challenge the discourse, as to render a capable young individual arriving from afar as a role-model who strives to fulfill individual aspirations as a freedom project, or in the lack of material circumstance as a desperado, with the purpose to expose the potential political quest for agency and self determination that the change of place may make possible. The thesis is in this way also a search for the political will behind the move.

Setting the scene, defining the refugee

Any definition of the refugee may fall into the the trap of establishing the false ontology that Sara Ahmed as well as Butler aims to demount, definitions are however the only textual tool we got to specify what we actually try to encapsulate. Sara Ahmed defines migration, as “…the physical movement of bodies within and across spaces” (Ahmed 2000, 80-81), a definition that makes it necessary to relate these bodies as they cross (national) borders to the historical and material circumstances that have led up to the situation, migration could by this be understood both as an experience that affects identity, but also as an historical and physical condition as bodies are transferred over borders into new situations (Ahmed 2000, 80-81). Ahmed describes the historical as producing the given situation beyond experiences and potentially ideas. Violence for example feel the same for the object nevertheless what idea that rely behind the action. It is noticeable that a slightly different viewpoint is presented by Butler, who speaks about historical ideas rather than conditions as the producer of affects (Butler 1988, 522). Migrant bodies are to be considered, when leaning on both Ahmed and Butler, as foremost differentiated by situations, rather than emotions and experiences. Situations which urgency cannot truly be understood or felt by someone who has not themself experienced such. The body that the figure misrepresents are by both writers set in an urgent and vulnerable situation, M is of course a physical ‘I’ (Butler 1988, 521) living in a present situation which carries meaning, but M is also as individual rendered by competing discourses wanting to frame M’s existence into certain sets of contexts as being the most vulnerable, a threat to
society or the illegal alien. But the most crucial role that M represents in this thesis is that of the refugee, with its different predefined characteristics, which this text sets out to problematize. M is from that perspective as discussed in the previous chapter carrying a body that is performatively refugeeed (Halsema et al. 2021, 11). Any established definition of who is and who is not a refugee is therefore set aside in this text. Instead the refugee is here recognized as someone who travels cross borders in refugee style. The rickety rackety style of unprivileged border crossing, "one gesture away from losing all access to sustaining [one’s] fantasies" (Berlant 2011, 6). Where the unpromising optimism may be the subjects only real asset. As a "style of being" for the unprivileged on the global outside (Butler 1988, 521-22). M provides a definition of the refugee figure of his own;

"…a refugee is a person who’s country has been destroyed by powers, and the people who lived in this land, they went, to another land, so refugees are people without land, and who are people who has a rough life and who nobody likes" (Interview 1).

What to do with the questions that are asked

When we present questions to someone, we act performative. When asking questions, we make certain assumptions about the conditions that frame the answer. As seen from this perspective, asking questions is a way of name-calling (Austin 1962, 6), where we place someone into being a certain character belonging to a certain terrain. In the book Migrant City by Les Back and Shamser Sinha (2018), the writers expand on Jaques Derrida’s description of ”trick questions” as a particular way of questioning the migrant subject’s legitimacy and place. Questions such as ”where are you from” may, on the one hand, be an act of curiosity that may seem innocent, but on the other hand, establishes a power discrepancy where one comes to ask and set the field, and the other comes to reply in accordance to that established playfield. There is no way out for the other to escape without, in some way or another, becoming subjugated into the position of not belonging to the place where one remains (Back and Sinha 2018, 91). Asking questions risks, in other words causing damage. As this study is produced through precisely that same practice, to learn things through inquiring M on different aspects of M’s situation, some reflections need to be made. What damage may the study produce? M has lived through a multitude of cross-interrogations since arriving in Sweden in 2015. Caseworkers at the Migration authorities, doctors, therapists, people involved in his drug-addiction program, social workers, employers, and the police have all been inquiring him under various circumstances. M has, however, had no objections to participating in this study,
although certain pre-conditions, such as an already established trust and friendship, may have made it hard for M to decline to participate. On the other hand, the discussions performed during the production of the study have been vivid and apparently thoughtful, with much back and forth with the joint ambition to dig into what specific aspects of this or that question really means. In a way, it might be that our two meetings have presented a sort of pause and breathing space in M’s daily strive as an opportunity to reflect intellectually on life matters and futures possibly seen from a weak position. It has been a continuous ambition not to push difficult or disrespectful questions leaning into the personal experience against M. Instead, when we reached touchy grounds in our exchange, we changed the subject to more safe grounds. One such topic is that M’s situation in Sweden, from a normative standpoint, as mentioned, may be understood as a failure. However, M wants to see it as most opportunities remain, and that he has prevailed reasonably well so far. It has not been the role of this study to question that assumption. Instead, such normative discrepancies have contributed to apprehending the complexity of M’s situation.

The interview situation

Lee Ann Fujii has developed relational interviewing as a method, usable when researching social mechanisms and motivations. In the book Interviewing in Social Science Research (2018), Fujii writes that relational interviewing ..."is particularly well-suited for those that investigate how people construct meaning" (Fujii 2018, 9). Additionally, Fujii describes relational interviewing as an effective method to uncover personal processes of ”change and transformations” on the individual level (Fujii 2018, 9) and a listening exercise, where the discrepancy in subject positions between the interviewee and the interviewer is part of the empiric quality (Fujii 2018, 15). Interestingly, the relational aspect also opens up for identifying and interpreting logical gaps, mishaps, and vulnerabilities that may occur in the interview situation (Fujii 2018, 8-9).
Furthermore, it is a method striving to seek a collaborative partnership between the interviewee and the interviewer (Fujii 2018, 3), where each “voice” is regarded and respected as an expert in one’s own subject position (Fujii 2018, 10). While Fujii is evident on the part of data collection and positional reflexivity where the interview situation, as a situation in itself, is part of the empirical material (Fujii 2018, 16-17), it is less evident what the actual analysis of the gathered data would entail following Fujii, the analysis is however, on a general level structured following Fujii’s advice to look for patterns of what has been shared and to thematize these (Fujii 2018, 75).
This paper is not intended to reveal disguised meaning but to ask questions and analyze patterns (Fujii 2018, 75) that may evolve through the personal conversations. The intent is to interpret these and put them in relation to theory. In other words, this study is a sort of hermeneutical enterprise. However, while investigating somewhat the “archeology of the person” (Josselson 2004, 21), the intent is not to analyze out of suspicion to reveal what is hidden. The ambition is instead to take the words of M seriously and to, based on our conversations, analyze M’s appreciation of the situation M is in with deep trust in M’s actual words as reflecting certain and important perspectives that may be generalizable to others. This is at its core a qualitative study. On a greater level, any precarious refugee-travel into Europe is here understood as a form of speech by members of the subaltern, the subordinates, and the subjugated who embodies the paperless experience.

M and I met during two sessions over lunch in early spring 2022. The first time we had a Mexican type of chili and talked during 1,5 hours, the restaurant was empty, and it was no background sound or other guests. Our discussion took off well, and we came into some crucial aspects of how M describes the conditions that M is living under, both now and before. Unfortunately, we were after an hour interrupted by a waiter, who told us that the place was closing, we then moved over to a neighboring coffee shop, but we lost some of the intimacy in the discussion there. We also became quite exhausted by our efforts to talk about matters on the margin of the capacities of our joint language. The second time was a one hour session over burgers, with some people around and background music. Although the closeness in the conversation never appeared the second time, M still led the conversation and came into territory that gave depth to the previous meet.
Literature Review

The selection of previous research presented in the following chapter represents various perspectives that complement the inquiry into M’s emotions and perceptions of self-fulfillment and failure. This thesis regards the aspirations to move and the affects of precarious mobility as significant, reflecting a form of political determination from below. The desire to go for, as in M’s case, Europe, might be influenced by idealized and romanticized notions of a distant life at a place far away in the occident, but which turns out, upon arrival, to be a disappointment and slasher for dreams and opportunities, reflecting a sort of cruel optimism (Berlant 2011) situated within the performative framework of the refugee figure. The thesis is thereby an attempt to contribute to the understanding of the emotional landscape that the construction of the refugee figure produces through interpreting the type of situation and experiences that M represents.

Terminologies

The terminology within the field is complex, and the amount of research is extensive. Refugee migration (FitzGerald and Arar 2018), refugeedom (Riga et al. 2020), unaccompanied refugee minors shortened to UMs (Vervliet 2015), and undocumentedness (Lønning 2020) are examples of terms that are used within social research to describe different refugee situations from the perspectives of researching vulnerability, subjugation and the social affects of involuntary displacement. There remains underlying friction between distinguishing refugees on one side and migrants on the other. This friction may also be why some of the writers referred to in this text utilize different forms of hybrid concepts when framing the refugee situation, where ”forced migration” is only one of many examples. The term refugee is by several of these writers understood as problematic. What may be labeled as humanitarianism, stress the vulnerability, subjugation, and displacement of the rendered refugee at the cost of agency, not least when it comes to how adolescent youths are understood within the refugee situation, as the use of the term refugee by itself may become an oppressive discursive tool (FitzGerald and Arar 2018, 391), in contrast to the term ”migrant” that is instead understood to bear aim, purpose, and will. The terrain is, in other words, difficult to navigate, as this logic, unfortunately, is reminiscent of the discourse present among actors in the political camp that is against the rights of refugees and who much rather renders any refugee as a migrant and a fortune seeker without regarding a history of vulnerability (Scalettaris et al. 2021, 530).
Afghan refugees and numbers

Afghan refugees are one of the largest groups among the world's refugee population, remaining outside their country of descent. Jussi Jauhiainen et al. provide in the report Afghans in Iran: Migration Patterns and Aspirations (2020) an extensive account of the data points mapping Afghans residing in Iran. Two interesting numbers from this report concerning this paper might be that a majority of Afghan refugees, about 3 million people, reside in Iran (Jauhiainen 2020, 20), by of whom the Iranian government estimates 1.5 - 2 million irregular Afghan migrants in the country (Jauhiainen 2020, 7), where the report leans on estimates from UNHCR on both accounts. Young Afghans have since 2008 constituted the majority of unaccompanied refugee minors seeking asylum in Europe (Lønning 2020, 317). However, The actual number could be considered not very high. 44% of the 42,230 unaccompanied minors that sought asylum in the EU in 2022 were of Afghan descent, representing 18,560 individuals (Eurostat a, 2023). That said, unaccompanied refugee minors still represent a relatively small number of people compared to the EU's total population of about 450 million (Eurostat b, 2023). Hence, the extensive debate and research on this group alone might actually be a mistake as there may be other far more crucial political concerns to investigate.

Navigating legal and illegal realities

As this paper investigates affects and situations, this also inclines that this paper, at its basis, aims to inquire into agency. The perspective is by this reminiscent of how Khadija Abbasi and Alessandro Monsutti, in the working paper To Everyone, Homeland is Kashmir (2017), describe how the adolescent Afghan's refugee experience, although particular in context, also represents a generalizable experience of "displacement and exclusion” independent of specific cultural belongings. Thus, the motives and aspirations fuelling refugeedom represent a sort of "universalism from below” (Abbasi and Monsutti 2017, 9).

In the article Young Afghans at the doorsteps of Europe: the difficult art of being a successful migrant by Giulia Scalettaris, Alessandro Monsutti, and Antonio Donin (2021), the writers summarizes the research on young Afghans as being rich in its empirics, while overall reflecting on the groups status as unaccompanied children, rather than investigating the aspirations among these young individuals as social actors in their own right, which thereby risk neglecting their individual agency and personal aspirations. Scalettaris et al. references one distinct exception from this rule, the doctoral dissertation paper by Moa Nyamwathi Lønning Fragmented Journeys, Social Relations and Age Amongst Afghan Young People on the Move Towards Europe: Positioning, Negotiating
and Redefining, Trondheim (2018). In the summarizing article Layered journeys: Experiences of fragmented journeys among young Afghans in Greece and Norway (2019), Lønning provides an excellent overview of the narration of the illegal subject's complex relations and subjugation to rules stipulated by different states. Lønning describes how the individual slips in and out of different jurisdictions and shifts continuously between legal and illegal statutes, creating both a dichotomous opposite to the citizen and a "constructed and criminalized identity" (Lønning 2020, 319). In this regard, the adolescent refugee represents a specifically complex terrain as the refugee situation is intervened with one's passage into adulthood. This is also what Francesca Meloni describes in the text The limits of freedom: migration as a space of freedom and loneliness among Afghan unaccompanied migrant youth (2020). Meloni draws on how the adolescent refugee experiences on one end a profoundly personal journey of becoming, but on the other, is nestled into legal realities, where one goes from being regarded an unaccompanied child one day to instead being rendered an adult the next, loosing one’s previous protections and shelter (Meloni 2020, 425-426). Over the day, the young refugee risk to transcend from being considered an unaccompanied child into becoming an illegal and paperless adult. It is interesting to note that Lønning primarily focuses on the material and legal realities regarding the young refugees while Meloni instead expands on the internal process of forming one's identity and purpose.

Aspirations and situations

The alternate route that Meloni presents could be described as an interest in the internal factors of refugeedom, including an interest in the aspirations that may be charged by imaginary dreams of “another life” somewhere faraway. A life in a land of opportunities where one can become who one really is, and where the journey is part of an individual freedom project while coming at age (Meloni 2020, 428). Meloni also expresses how the refugee travel may be motivated by a sense of ”doing the right thing” concerning one’s family and belongings. Meloni especially mentions the role of the individual in this context, where freedom is seen as a distant ”horizon” of ”ethical imagination” and a space where one imagines” novel relationships” with both oneself and with others (Meloni 2020, 433). In reality the potential for freedom is, however, restricted into what Meloni describes as a state where the young refugee, on the one hand, side up with ”too much freedom” as in being alone and without accompanying adults, and on the other side, ”too little freedom” as in having no rights and delimited opportunities to education, work, and social stability (Meloni 2020, 429). Meloni provides here an account of freedom as the writer connects Hannah Arendt’s and Michel Foucault's understanding of freedom as something that is exercised in conjunction with and within a societal surrounding and describes freedom as a reflective practice.
driven by personal aspirations in relation to a societal context (Meloni 2020, 429). Freedom is, following Foucault, considered as the state where individuals shape themselves into ”'ethical subjects’” concerning ”moral codes and conduct” (Meloni 2020, 425). The above is highly relevant to this paper, as aspirations on the individual level are assumed to be deeply connected to the will to gain personal freedom. Meloni stresses freedom as representing an... ”'ethical project of self-making” as a scarcely researched social field while providing several threads to previous research (Meloni 2020, 425). The above is furthermore complicated when reflecting on the situation from the perspective of the adolescent refugee child, whose need for protection is obvious but who risks losing one’s agency on the way. The aspirations of Afghan unaccompanied refugee minors before departure and on arrival in the host country (2014) by Marianne Vervliet opens additional inroads to a situation full of contradictions. Vervliet describes the refugee child as in frequent danger and at risk, but also how the child’s subject-position challenges normative ideals of an incapacitated childhood that is sacred, protected, and bound to custody (Vervliet et al. 2014).

The complex view on the refugee as being both an individual who flees and who aspires is further advanced in the article The Sociology of Refugee Migration (2018) by David Scott FitzGerald and Rawan Arar who stresses how previous generations of migrants would be rendered as refugees if applying today's terminology. FitzGerald and Arar problematize the distinction between the refugee and the migrant and shows how mobility between Europe and the ”New World” during the 19th century, commonly described as "labor migration", also was forced by precarious conditions present in the countries of origin (FitzGerald and Arar 2018, 388). The narration surrounding migration to the ”new world” is driven by tales of individual aspirations and agency, as an expression of strive for freedom and liberty. The role of the refugee becomes once again a marginalized figure outside of such traits. The humanitarian narrative risks situating the refugee as a passive bystander to external forces, whose reasons to flee become scrutinized and judged by the appreciated level of threat and exposure to oppression or violence. The understanding of migrants as fortune seekers risk undercutting the vulnerability and precariousness of the subject-position.

Lønning acknowledges the agency of the young afghans that the writer has met and interviewed without giving away the vulnerability in their situation. In the article Challenges and opportunities in researching the lives of young people on the move (2019) Lønning reasons over the researcher's own subject-position in relation to the interviewees. A perspective that is not least relevant for the scope of this paper. In the text, Lønning expands on what it inclines to as a researcher be perceived both as a refugee herself (Lønning 2019, 20) and how the privileged observer is stuck in a theoretical understanding, rather than an empirical, no matter how close you go. Lønning
exemplifies this by quoting a young refugee residing in the camp in Patra, Greece, "You've gathered a lot of information about this situation but you haven't lived it, there's a big difference" (Lønning 2019, 19).

"Mobility as a political act"

Alessandro Monsutti, mentioned above, has in various books, articles, and co-written pieces expanded on the role of the refugee by drawing on the situations concerning adolescent Afghan refugees. In the article Thomas Faist and the Transnationalized Social Question (2021), Monsutti paints inequality as a truly global phenomenon and followingly how the subjugated immigrant might have become our times main "political subject" in the way that the "citizen" was the main political subject of the past (Monsutti 2021, 1367). Refugees are continuously subjugated as researched objects and exploited for political reasons. Monsutti is one among several to point out that this perspective needs to be further challenged. That the voice of individual refugees as independent political actors is to be taken into serious consideration by recognizing those "knocking at the door to Europe" (Monsutti 2018, 454) as politically aware subaltern subjects.

It is here accepted that the young refugee is situated in a uniquely vulnerable condition, but in this paper this understanding does not give away the agency that drives ones individual decision to leave for a faraway country, and that that decision also is charged by individual aspirations of becoming, and furthermore that these decisions by that should be regarded as political acts built from specific political claims. When judging refuge mobility as political action, bearing certain demands, fueled by individual aspirations, it is also understood as in line with the Nietzschean concept of "will to power" which Edward Said defines in Orientalism (2003) as "a will to truth and interpretation, and not [being] an objective condition of history" (Said 2003, 240). On the individual level that is; to be able to enter ones own destiny driven by personal and existential motives and followingly on the political level; to have one's voice listened to.

The potential dichotomy between vulnerability and agency may go back to Hannah Arendt's, although critical stance, still believed here realist-leaning understanding as from how FitzGerald and Arar describe the viewpoint (FitzGerald and Arar 2018, 392) but where rights risk becoming something unenforceable for those "'who lack one's own government'" (Bhabha 2009, 411). On one side stands the humanitarian effort to through legalization "give" rights to the one's that has not yet been given rights as in Jaqueline Bhabhas article Arendt's Children: Do today's migrant children have a right to have rights (2009) which provides a walkthrough of the legislative pathways.
surrounding rights for unaccompanied minors (Bhabha 2009, 411). On the other side stands the structuralist thinking, which surmises "giving rights" as a tool of subjugation to further displace these abjects into a "bare life"-nonstatus as objects. By the latter perspective, agency is undercut by the humanitarian approach. A position reflected in the article Theorizing refugeedom: becoming young political subjects in Beirut (2020) by Liliana Riga, Johannes Langer, and Arek Dakessian, who describes humanitarianism as neglecting agency "as such" and accordingly depoliticizing and thereby silencing the refugeed subject (Riga et al. 2020, 714).

The most subjugated of the subjugated in this discourse is the child. As Riga et al. write, "Children and young refugees, in particular, can become dependent subjects of refugee humanitarianism’s depoliticised constructions of trauma and victimhood" (Riga et al. 2020, 711). The adolescents are rendered the sub-subjugated, the voiceless among the voiceless, and the helpless among the helpless. Another additional example of this enforced structural understanding of power relevant to this paper is Oscar Hemer, Maja Povranović Frykman, and Per-Markku Ristilammi, who, in the book Conviviality at the Crossroads, The Poetics and Politics of Everyday Encounters (2020), understands the distinction between the refugee, the migrant, and the citizen as the product of a… "a biopolitical state machinery" (Hemer 2020, 195), aimed to separate the wanted bodies through "normalization" (Eliassi 2010, 21) from the unwanted and unrecognized, as unseen "abjects", placed and unordered outside the jurisdiction (Hemer 2020, 195).

Alessandro Monsutti writes in the article Mobility as a political act (2018), that there relies… "a working hypothesis that mobility can be seen as a testimony of the immorality of the global polity and as a political act subverting classical forms of state territoriality and contesting the distribution of wealth” (Monsutti 2018, 448). In this context, the role of the paperless or the illegal, the one who remains on the outside, though resides hidden on the inside, becomes highly interesting. Monsutti refers to the philosopher Paolo Virno, who understands this as paradoxically inclining a sort of "cosmopolitanism from bellow” through the force of "'engaged withdrawal'” as a reluctant resistance expressed through… "an exodus defined as defection from the state, an act of resistance towards established power” as Monsutti continues, "All of them fled violence or injustice; all of them aspire to a better life” (Monsutti 2018, 453-454). It is believed here that this mixture of hope and desperation is key for any insight in the refugee situation.

Disclaimer concerning perspective

A necessary addition the perspectives above is found on the website opendemocracy.net that 2020 held a roundtable discussion on aspirations as an aspect of the refugee situation. In one of the texts,
Eda Kiriçcioğlu and Ayşen Üstübici notes that not all refugees aspire for Europe and that the assumption that this would be the case is not only false but in fact, contributes to a “western-centric externalisation” expressing a worldview that “all displaced populations eventually aspire to settle in the developed world” (Kiriçcioğlu and Üstübici, 2020). The writers point to that cultural, social and regulative circumstances in many cases are more beneficial for refugees in countries outside the EU. This thesis may of course from that perspective contribute to the general discourse over refugees “always wanting to Europe” that Kiriçcioğlu and Üstübici find problematic (Kiriçcioğlu and Üstübici 2020). In this context, it is, of course, essential to point out that only a fraction of the world's refugee population seeks asylum in the EU. The majority of the world's refugee population remains in places close to where one once came from.

**Arrival**

So, why leave? The incentives for a better life are often shared between the migrant and the refugee. In reality, what differs them may at times only be the legal framing. As the preamble to Open Democracies roundtable writes, ”Refugees dream about their future in order to give shape and meaning to their journeys, yet this often counts against them in public discourse” (Welfens et al. 2020). As Meloni expresses it, these journeys may also carry dreams of becoming an adult and being seen as someone of capacity in the eyes of others, both back home within the family and as an aspiring young individual on a globalized societal and public stage. A story of wanting to become ”a new self”, in a place where one may find possibilities both for one's own life, distant from the normative circumstances that one has left (Meloni 2020, 428). Meloni refers to Monsutti, who alleges that migration and refugeedom might in some contexts, be understood as the viable rite of passage into adulthood (Monsutti 2007, 167). Hemer quotes a young refugee, "’I started at the wrong end, I wanted to have big changes …’” (Hemer 2020, 122). Indeed, the darker side of investigating aspirations is disappointment, which may already set in that very first morning one has arrived on some Mediterranean shore. Monsutti describes this experience colorfully when meeting some newly arrived young Afghan refugees ”It is not Europe here, it could not be Europe!” (Monsutti 2018, 451). If nothing else, it capsules both the dreams and the vulnerabilities present in the young one's refugeedom.
Conversations

The following chapter contains excerpts from M’s and mine conversations. They are put in relation to theory to interpret and piece together M’s "world" and are, as Fujii suggests, categorized under themes identified from the transcripts. This means that they are not presented in a strict chronological order and that a particular exchange can be referred to from different aspects of their meaning under different sections.

It is important to note that this exploration does not aim to provide any definite answer for M’s downfall. The reasons why things went as they did for M depend on a multitude of factors, not least on the normative view of what should be regarded as a failure or not. Equally important is that value of our conversations lies not in their factual accuracy but in what they reveal about M’s perspective and experiences (Fujii 2018, xv). Our "mode of encounter" (Ahmed 2000, 144) is, therefore, not a meeting where two strangers try to understand each other, but instead an inquiry into the affects of becoming estranged. I believe we both are aware that our terms of engagement are unequal.

Is it possible to make conclusions by leaning on one biographical experience alone? M’s downfall is not unique. By his own account, which is not contested in this thesis, only in Malmö, Sweden, more than a hundred previous adolescent sole coming Afghan asylum seekers are now living on the streets as paperless and homeless, not rarely combined with drug addictions, primarily heroin as, to mention one example, documented in the article "Det är sista vägen och vi är alla fast i skiten" by Jens Mikkelsen in the Swedish paper Sydsvenskan (Mikkelsen, 2020). A situation in part also confirmed by the National Board of Health and Welfare’s report "Slutrapport från Kunskapscentrum för ensamkommande barn”, which states that a significant part of young asylum seekers above 18 lives as homeless, not rarely in combination with drug abuse (Socialstyrelsen 2021, 37).

Fujii suggests that the researcher revise the dilemmas encountered in the field, including paying attention to the power discrepancies between the researcher and the interviewee. Fujii mentions as one example the way the researcher asks for consent. The power relation between me and M is full of discrepancies, but as M, as I understand him, carries an outspoken postcolonial critique, he is also keen on being heard and taken as an active agent concerning his own life choices.
M's and my relationship is built on nestled experiences from when we first met in 2018. It is, however, a relation where M’s self and life choices have always been the receiver of our joint attention and put into scrutiny during our conversations, also outside of this study. My integrity has never been seriously challenged though our relationship, presumably due to the power discrepancy that underlies our relationship, as in legal status, economic circumstances, privilege, and so forth (Fujii 2018, 82). We know each other in some aspects, but in other, we don’t know each other at all. There are many examples during our conversations when M challenges this lack of equality on terms, as when he tells me that I could hear him out better (which is, of course, a good advice to any interviewer), ”you hear me all the time, but it is important that you listen [too]” (Interview 1).

Most of what is referred to below is taken from our joint talks within the interview frame. Still, at some points, I also refer to memories of ”small talks” we have had at other times outside of the thesis work. From a relational interviewing perspective, such traces from ”additional interactions” outside the interview situation are still considered valuable (Fujii 2018, 7). The interviews with M were done during two sessions while having lunch. They were open-ended, although I planned specific themes of inquiry ahead. In reality, though, our exchanges often took other routes than planned (Fuji 2018, 71). They found their shape while we were talking, and many times we left a subject to talk about something else, to at a later point, return to what we had started earlier. My impression was that M enjoyed the talks as much as I did.

Crucial for the reading of the following is, as Fujii writes, that the way and the choices M makes in what he decides to share is the actual object of analysis. Ultimately, the interest of the study centers on the feelings and affects of M's individual experiences rather than analyzing any cause of events from a biographical stance, as it is the type of situation that M represents that is the basis for the analysis. Finally, as our conversations were held in Swedish, all interview quotes are my translations. I have put effort into translating not just the meaning of each statement but also the way and tone of how it was said.

**Broken language**

Speak easy, as, as you do in the street, it is better I believe, it will work better (Interview 1).

A crucial aspect when interpreting these talks is that M and I were communicating at the far limit of our joint language. I do not speak Dari, and M's Swedish is broken, an imbalance as much as any
that could be problematized from different perspectives. Gary Olson writes, referring to Homi Bhaba and Benita Perry, that developing a "broken" language could also be seen as a way to protest power by rejecting to step into the "schooled" language of the colonizer (Olson 1998, 49-50). M's Swedish has developed partly through his time in school but primarily during his life among other asylum-seeking youngsters, in conversation with social services and migration authorities, while taking on "day jobs" and during the last years while living on the streets, as a heroin addict, among others in the same situation. At one point, M asks me directly to speak as you do on the street, something I would neither be able to but foremost rejects as it is out of my habitat. M then snaps, "You have never been on the street, and I have been my whole life on the street" (Interview 1). M is here referring to the street not as a place but as a situation and circumstance, similar to how the term street life is used in popular culture (For example the song Street Life by the Crusaders from 1979, Randy Crawford sang "Street life, it's the only way I know"). Both of us are acknowledging how our different backgrounds have shaped our identities as in the way we speak, I can not imitate a street language, and M, for his part, actually feels that he has a complete language as it works naturally and covers all necessities in the street life that he is living. An exchange that if nothing else reflects what Fujii might call our different "worlds" and how these differ (Fujii 2018, xv).

M and I have become accustomed to each other's speaking styles over several years of interactions. We have developed a joint way of communicating where our sentences often are quite concise, while we, on the other hand, repeatedly re-ask the meaning of what the other has just said. These continuous micro-misunderstandings lead to a methodological search, were we are digging into the core of what the other is saying. When reading the transcripts, I also realize that our limping way of communicating helps to create an atmosphere of trust and will to understand the essence of what the other is attempting to transmit. Our joint language becomes a tool to enable a "working relationship" (Fujii 2018, 3). The examples where this becomes clear are several, as when during the first interview, M tells me about his upbringing and school time in Iran. During the exchange, I reveal my presumption of what subaltern and paperless refugeedom in Iran might entail, and picture myself an image of M as a victim of child labor, working on scaffolding already at the age of seven. This turns out to be a misunderstanding, where M, although still an adolescent, did go to school in Iran for seven years, until he left school for work at the age of thirteen (Interview 1). Fujii describes how such mishaps can be valuable, encouraging not to dismiss these when they occur but rather try to analyze what they might tell about the larger picture (Fujii 2018, 9). Our broken language makes
both M and me proceed with care throughout the conversations and dig into each topic until we reach a point of acceptable understanding of what one another means to say.

_Arriving from the periphery_

I was concerned ahead of the interviews that M would provide replies that may be tailored to a particular presumed refugee story, providing answers he would assume fit my field of inquiry (Khosravi 2010, 72). As the conversations continued, we gradually became more personal to each other, where aside from all the hardship he has gone through also the enjoyment and sense of freedom and adventure he at times felt during his flight shined through in his comments. No questions are ever entirely innocent, and questions are, as everyone knows, a way to seek differentiation and particularity. Therefore it is crucial to state once again that the aim here instead is not to differentiate M as representing the particular other but to map the particularity of the situation that M represents, which is a situation that he shares with many (Ahmed 2000, 42).

Khosravi points out that for refugees, any interview situation is associated with the asylum process (Khosravi 2010, 71). When initiating these conversations with M, I considered the risk that the interview situation unintentionally would reproduce his subjugation as the one that has to give answers. Hospitality, as well as giving oneself the right to ask questions, is a way to leverage oneself as either the one who has something to “give” or likewise the one who has the right to present questions versus then, being the one who has to accept gifts as well coming up with answers (Derrida 2000, 27-31), at one point I ask M directly if I am asking him the same questions as the Migration Agency, he first dismisses this, but then problematize his answer by saying that I am asking about his situation here (in Sweden), while the Migration Agency is asking him about his situation in Iran (or Afghanistan) (Interview 2).

Yes, that is why I like it, if you would follow these three things as he says, all world [would] be perfect (Interview 1).

It may seem a sidetrack, but I have chosen to keep the following showing another side of M’s world. Throughout the years, I have noted that M, in many aspects, holds perspectives parallel to postcolonial theory. M sees himself as part of a subaltern group and is frustrated by the advocates for liberalism’s hypocrisy and Western power’s domination. M may lack the terms, but he is aboard on the discourse. This sometimes leads to that he can exclaim how he ”loves” the former American president Trump or that he suddenly sympathizes with the Russian political narrative regarding the
invasion of Ukraine. His discourse is foremost anti-western and anti-capitalistic in this sense, and he instinctively aligns with powers that aim to challenge the world order. He does, however, also reject Muslim fundamentalism in any shape or form. He despises the Talibans as much as the Mullahs in Iran.

Furthermore, M holds ancient Persian and Afghan history high, not least the Zoroastrian tradition. I pick up on previous discussions during the interview and encourage him to speak about this. He googles for the Zoroastrian commandments to practice "good thoughts, good words and good deeds”, and we speak about these. He says that the Muslim prophet Mohamed did not come for his people and how Zoroastrian tradition demands absolute truth-telling independently of the circumstance. M also says that Zoroaster is buried in Afghanistan (Interview 1). To me, the interest in both ancient history and Zoroastrian thinking is a way for M to center his own background part of a struct to by his own means de-centralize Europe. Telling me that his place of origin has value beyond the Western narrative, both historically but also in the present, as when he compares Mashhad and Teheran to New York and portrays them as "perfect” cities (Interview 1) or when mentioning the natural resources that Afghanistan holds, as certain metals that are needed for battery production or uranium needed for nuclear production (Interview 1).

When I tell M that I have always understood his position as more focused on asserting a “right” rather than that he is seeking any permission to remain in Sweden or Europe, he agrees. "Everyone likes their country Gustaf, nobody wants to become a refugee, without relatives, without family, and such” (Interview 1). M then expresses that Western nation’s involvement has destroyed Afghanistan. His perspective is that he exercises a rightful claim through his displacement to, at least on his behalf, rectify the situation.

For example, if my country has been destroyed. It is only due to, to, for example, USA, Germany, Sweden, it is only due to them that my country has been destroyed (Interview 1)

When M says he is a refugee due to the Western country’s interference in Afghanistan (Interview 1), one could take several analytical stances in the interpretation. The relational perspective could be used to analyze why M is saying this to me during the interview, what M signals by saying this, or as valid, to analyze why I pick out certain statements while others are omitted from the thesis. I believe, however, that the proper route here is not to overanalyze M’s and my conversation on any meta-level, but instead, the aim is to listen to what M says and to regard these statements as
representing his worldview. Following what Fujii describes as seeking an understanding of how one”…act to alter, maintain, or transform those worlds” (Fujii 2018, 88).

…and it is my right to be here, exactly, sometimes, sometimes some tell me, no, you have come to our countries and now you will destroy it here as in Afghanistan and I tell them, so Afghanistan you have destroyed it, we didn’t do this, (Interview 1).

Life far away

"[as] I came out of the house there in Iran, I thought, I am going to Sweden and Malmö, that is my purpose. No, it was not that way, my purpose was primarily to… I can go over the ocean to Greece, and then after Greece any European country, that is it… and which should it be? It is the same, it doesn't matter you know” (Interview 1).

M explains he intended to ”get to Europe” (Interview 1: 00:26:23), but he had no particular destination in mind apart from this. Lønning describes this restless and “onward mobility” as fragmented or layered journeys (Lønning 2020, 330), as the destination is as much a dream outside of time as it is a place outside of geography. The journey to find this place is endless, as no such place exists. It is more of a quest than a travel. He tells me that when he was in the youth shelter as an adolescent, he was never able to transform this purpose into one of becoming something or somebody in his new context. School suddenly felt meaningless. The Swedish welfare state was never the destination for this wayfarer. Instead, it was the place one finds at the end of the road.

Monsutti writes that among young refugees, Europe is both an alluring dream and a concrete destination where the quest to find the end of the rainbow becomes an evading dream (Monsutti 2018, 451), urging the travel to continue until Europe simply ends as the onward movement that Lønning describes (Lønning 2020, 330). Arriving at a place of immediate disappointment and confusion creates the conflictual situation of disbelief regarding the crude reality one experiences while maintaining, nurturing, and chasing the imaginative dreamscape that one has already lost (Monsutti 2018, 451). M describes how he, on his travel to Europe, during a bus traveling through Türkiye, was amazed at the comfort aboard, each seat had a video game console on its back, and he and his fellow travelers said to each other that if it is like this in Türkiye how will it not be in Europe, at another point he instead pictures his first morning in Sweden on the bus ride to the Migration Agency, and how he looks out the window and measures Malmö's grayish outskirts against Tehran's or Mashhad's much grander cityscapes back in Iran. Nowadays, M is not only disappointed in the place where he has ended up, complaining about everything from the people to
the weather, but he is also disappointed in himself, ultimately blaming his failure on himself. However, the word failure always comes with a disclaimer on his part. He sees others that it has gone better for, and he compares their relative success to his own life. However, I also sense that he partly dismisses their gains as having given up their independence to instead ”fit in” and sees their adjustment as subjugation. He regards his failure as his own, which he, in some part, cherishes as his ”own way”. He immediately changes tone when the conversation slips into his difficulties in Sweden. First, telling me that he had had 90% success in what he wanted to achieve by leaving for Europe, and then, later, when we returned to talk about his strife as a homeless that;

"I have forgotten, forgotten myself too, in some way, you know... Yes, that is why I believe, that I couldn't make it in Sweden...Yes...//... Or, or, or not, not that I couldn't make it in Sweden. No, I, I, will make it, I am [only] middle road, not (happier)...at [the] end of the road"... I will make it” (Interview 1).

The grinding down of M’s self and his sense of losing his capacity to rule his own life is similar to how when Khosravi describes how neither lashes on his back nor prolonged time as stateless could take away dignity as the refuge camp Sweden did (Khosravi 2010, 71). Khosravi describes the camp situation as educating the subject into becoming the refugee (figured into), where one goes from being ”full of life, will and courage” to being shaped into the role of the ””victim”” (Khosravi 2010, 71). The performative power of being subjected to this machinery can not be underestimated. The refugee camp can, of course, be an actual site, as Khosravi describes, or as in M’s case, a camp that he carries with him through his exceptional situation. M represents the camp in every interaction with the governing bodies, where he, as an individual self, ”weights nothing”. Becoming a refugee is, from this perspective, not primarily about escaping a circumstance but that of being performatively forced into simultaneous submission and exclusion. Refugeedom means living as a (human) failure. Berlant describes failure as a crucial aspect of liberal optimism. The struggle to survive at the bottom while experiencing normative state violence and its arbitrariness, the shaping of ideals and lost attachment, while gazing at an unachievable utopian horizon. It gives way to a theoretical availability of a good life fantasy that globalization in this context impresses, but it is a scene, or situation, drained by disappointment (Berlant 2011, 174).

”...you need to be in the situation to for example when, sometimes, sometimes, I tell (sighs), No I can’t decide like this you know, I can’t decide over my life...//...You say, I say, that Migration Agency has decided that this… You have to go to school to get residence permit, if you won’t go to school then you get none. Thats how it is, it is them, they decide by this, you know. I have to do it or I can’t do anything else, so they decide over me, it is not me who decides” (Interview 2).
M gives several examples of how the authorities mistreat young refugees foremost by neglect, as their lives mean so little if they have not been able to adopt to the terms given, and how these interactions lead people to give up. Butler notes how in shaping one's sex in relation to the law, the body must tremble in anxiety, either to produce alignment or abjection (Butler 2011, 65); being a refugee works, in this case, as a sex of its own, as performatively shaped into a pre-defined subject position with strictly delimited room for variation. If you do not show that you tremble in anxiety and conform, you have no place here.

"... I know a guy here, he had it well in fact, he, ... I know him since four years back, and for example three and a half, four..., he didn't smoke cigarettes,... But now he smokes...white [M’s term for heroin] for example, man asked why? No, if Migration Agency now has decided so, and I got my application declined, and it started by that. Yes, I know precisely it’s stupid, really stupid. But that situation?.../[and later]/... how should I put it.../...

M then shares with me an experience at the social security office where he was told to "get lost", because he did not have a registered home address in the municipality where he sought assistance. M had then threatened to throw himself in front of a train if they would not help him. M says that they replied that he was welcome to do so,

So I said, ok, I will go and jump in front of a train, and they said, ok, be my guest, we don’t care. Later the police stopped me ...by the train. ...They say it really easy in fact (Interview 2)

M is, as he lacked a residency permit at the time, denied access to any drug prevention program that could have helped him stay away from the street to gain a job in the black market and potential housing, as being on the outside, he is not even given a chance to prevail at the bottom. When approaching the welfare office, he is welcome to throw himself under a train as he does not have value and, therefore, would not be grieved (Butler 2015, 197).

"Forget everything they say, so you believe just in that, hell, my life weights nothing"

(Interview 2).

Knowing everything

"I will not lie, but I felt free, but we said in case that I became mad, or taken by the police and such, and they use bad words, so you feel, pain in your hart, and you say, hell this is not my country, and you now, but apart from that, I felt free there too, but only .../..., sometimes people as example, they say No, you’re from, we don’t like you and such. Who talks shit, a little, so you feel a bit, hell, no, I am like a guest here. It is not my country you know. ... But apart from that I felt really free there” (Interview 2).
I ask M about freedom, and he tells me that he felt free in Iran to a certain extent, although M had to have a special permit to travel in the country and that he was occasionally harassed both by the police and in sporadic incidents while changing insults he still felt free. M then reflects on this, and as I understand him, he is somewhat surprised by his feelings. Although his presence in some sense was more restricted in Iran than in Sweden, at least before he got into trouble with the Swedish police, he still ”feels” as if he was freer there than here. M spontaneously mentions when he got his residency permit in Sweden due to his participation in school and how he, I believe, expected to appreciate this as a great leap forward. Instead, he tells me that he felt his room for agency inflate. He then tells me,”No, you know, when I didn’t have the residency permit, I felt free. When I got the residency permit I didn’t feel free [any longer]” (Interview 2. 00:31:13). He tells me that it felt like he was monitored all the time. M continues, “Ok, it is a bit as I’m free nowadays, but I don’t feel free, you understand? I can go wherever if I like, so, go during the night to France, go to England, for example go to Finland, go to Norway. So, wherever, I can go now… yes but… but I, I don’t feel free. I don’t know what”. He is as if placed at the center of the panopticon, surrounded by the collective gaze from the spectator stands.

M has several times expressed to me that he ”knows everything”. The claim is, of course, partly meant as a joke. However, it still underscores his self-assuredness in his abilities and his perplexity about how he has come to be in his current situation, suggesting a disconnect between his perceived knowledge and his circumstances.

”I know everything …I mean I don’t mean that I know, that it is that I know everything…//…I don’t know everything (laughing), … No, when I say, I know everything, I mean that… for example, about building, I know everything, about…//… bicycles I know everything, about motorcycles, I know everything, … So? Do you find this strange, or what?” (Interview 1).

He puts the above in relation the the demand for schooling that he has experienced in Sweden and adds, when we a moment later are revisiting the subject that.

”They who go to school. They can become something, they …or they get job. They who don’t go to school they don’t get job, and they don’t know anything and so forth, so that is your way [of seeing things]. Sure it, it I have a lot of respect of your way, and it is right too. I don’t mean that…that it is wrong, but, …but it is that. It depends on how you grow up Gustaf” (Interview 1).

On the one hand, I believe that M really would have wanted to create a good life for himself in Sweden and is deeply disappointed in his inability to achieve this, not least because he fails in the
eyes of his family. On the other hand, I believe M regards himself as sort of a “rebel”. During the
time of interviews, M lives an irregular life, and his residency permit has ceased. Instead, he
remains on the streets chasing drugs. His days are filled with despair, and he risks being taken into
custody for potential extradition at any time. He also tries to avoid an imminent jail sentence by
staying in the shadowlands. This identification of himself as part an outlaw, which is right in the
perspective that he has been outlawed and outsided into becoming the paperless alien that, in some
perspective, is free to go everywhere at any time, but on the other hand is strictly delimited due to
lack of money, security, purpose, papers, and prospects. He fits exactly what Meloni describes as an
existence conversely colored by either too much freedom or too little (Meloni 2020, 429).

“So Gustaf, you might be a little like me, you know you too, you think you know everything, yes I
know, we are the same, but we, some things… one, one sees, one one don’t get it, one, one has to be
in the situation” (Interview 2).

I ask M about responsibility and why he thinks things did not go well for him. He reacts by telling
me that he is not seeking to identify problems but wants to look forward and find solutions to his
situation (Interview 2). I understand this as a way to preserve his agency regarding his situation; he
wants his strive to be his own and not the result of some system under which he has been
subjugated.

Life on the streets as an illegal alien is ”unsettled, unpredictable, and erratic” (Khosravi 2010, 69).
M experiences these kinds of out-of-control moments, too, also when residing within the legal
frame.

One example is, as referred to earlier when he is ”kicked” (M’s terminology) out of his HVB-home
(Home for care or residence) as he gets eighteen (Interview 1). During the first months in Sweden at
the youth shelter, he cries himself to sleep he tells me (Interview 1), missing home, circumstance
and family. After some time, it is the institution that becomes his new family. At least in retrospect,
he feels that this was also when he lost his sense of purpose. During our conversations, we return to
speak about his lost sense of purpose several times.

I have heard him mention this phase earlier, when he, from one day to the other, lost the protection
that the HVB-home had granted him as a minor until then, to more or less permanently live as a
homeless from becoming eighteen. Similar to what Meloni describes as the ”paradoxical treatment”
from being seen as a child in care to overnight being handled as an adult from the authority’s side
(Meloni 2019, 426).
M elaborates on a quite complex discussion on his level of agency in relation to his circumstance, "The situation is special… especially when it concerns a refugee or an immigrant… you don't have all your life, all of your life in your hand, half you, you got in your hand, and half your life Migration Agency got in their hand" (Interview 2). And later. "If they decide good, it is well, but if they decide bad, it gets the double bad" (Interview 2).

This is when I ask him how it can be more challenging to get through the Swedish school system than to cross over the mountains while traversing illegally into Türkiye from Iran. M reflects on this and concludes that the lack of advancement is the difference. During the hardships of his travel, something was always happening, but behind the school bench, everything became "boring” (Interview 2) and ultimately lacked meaning and purpose. Berlant describes the ”slow death”, where one gradually loses one's agency over one's destiny. The slow death may be synonym with a sort of sobering mood, M has experienced the ”affects” of being self-sovereign during his flight, and now, behind the school bench, his life opportunities seem increasingly grayer and dull, the ”good life fantasies” he has cherished are reduced to fatigue (Berlant 2011, 117). During the conversation, he makes a comparison between him and me. He says that I, too, make mistakes (Interview 2). One might add that the mistakes that he makes have much more significant consequences for him than the mistakes I might do has for me. Additionally, as an adolescent sole coming asylum seeker, M has no room to make the mistakes that people his age under less vulnerable conditions have.

"Of course it is my fault when things go bad for me” (Interview 2)

 Loving risk

"It was really hard, but…you know, it was fun too, yes it was hard, yes exactly it was hard” (Interview 2).

M tells me that he "loves risk” (Interview 1) something he has repeated many times since I got to know him. He continues by taking up the knife from the table, telling me that risk like the knife has two sides, that may either help or hurt you, and that if you do not take risks, you will never gain. I ask him about the risks he has taken, and we get into the story covering his passing over the border between Iran and Türkiye.

"We were hundred and ten people… it was nine in the evening, the night we went through the mountains, in the mountains, we slept there, due to that Sepāh [Revolutionary Guard], where at the
border, so we couldn’t go… and then… after seven, eight days, everyone got tired. Also one guy… A donkey had kicked his eye out… and another a bear, had cut him (showing with a gesture the place on the body)... and when everybody saw these things... they said, we, we will go back. We don’t want to pass the border, and that, that person, [who would] take us over the border said, ok, [so] who wants to go?… and it was only me (laughing)” (Interview 1).

He then tells me how he replied when somebody said he would risk getting shot, ”it doesn’t matter, either I cross or I go to hell”. He continues to say that he led a small group of eight people over the mountains after that. M's story is almost mythical in its setting. I imagine him and his group traversing these bare rocks under a dark, starry sky. He is laughing and seems happy when he tells me all this, and I comment on his story by saying that it seems to be a good memory. M confirms this by saying,”...it was very dangerous, but it was really good too, as it was completely new experience one can say” (Interview 1). M tells me that he sometimes reconnects with people he crossed the mountains with and how they recall different stories from that time. These are stories that they share and cherish together. Another such story is when M tells me about his boat ride between Türkiye and Greece.

"It was really hard there too, as, first it was only a small boat with room for maybe 20 people. We went 45-40 people… and then the person who would drive the boat… it was his first time, and in midwater he just went round [and round], util the guy on the Turkish side called, he could see us. You know he called, he says that he should come back. If you go like this, you will get into the big sea” (Interview 1).

M tells me how the one driving the boat did not want to go back and be corrected and that M stepped into the situation by instructing how he should take out the direction towards Mitilini on the Greek island Lesvos. He snaps his fingers and tells me it only took half an hour or twenty minutes to get between the two countries after that, he took over the steermanship.

"Went through the border when I was in Türkiye, so I said to myself, yes, now I’m ready with the first, and then it will be easy, the other [part], but you get…you get hope to be able to manage it easy, the second part” (Interview 2).

I ask M how, despite demonstrating such determination, manifested through leaving his home and navigating through uncertainty, he still could not establish a solid footing in Sweden. M continues:

"On this road, I had a purpose, that I had to…/… go to a good country… so I made this… When I was here.. I had no purpose [any longer] from start… due to…Maybe my brain, was not so… that I decide on a purpose…that I need to follow this…” (Interview 1).
M endured the hardship of the precarious travel over borders and through rough terrain under violent and dangerous circumstances. He even cherishes the memories and describes the times as the happiest in his life. In contrast to that, he lost his purpose after arriving in Sweden, "I forgot everything, in some way” (Interview 1). M then utters, "I forgot that.. that I came to become someone” (Interview 1), and continues,”I have forgotten myself also, in some way, you know … yes, that is why I believe I could not make it in Sweden” (Interview 1) He then immediately corrects himself saying that he is only halfway.

M finds himself in a situation where his previous abilities and knowledge have become useless (Berlant 2011, 151). The type of ”migration skills” he developed during his travel that enabled his onward movement (Lønning 2020, 329) has little or no value when attempting to navigate the new premises. While actively trying to establish a new beginning, he ultimately finds himself on the run while having nowhere to go, representing a failed fantasy of ”self-orgination” (Butler 2011, 120), with an increasingly heavier debt to carry, in all its aspects.

”…it is not that can’t make it in Sweden, no, no I will make it, I’m only half way” (Interview 1).

Desperados and other figures

Figures are often used in casual talk to sketch out different life genres, not least when imagining alternatives to one's current life, representing ”scenarios of living on in the ordinary” (Berlant 2011, 21). M sketches the life of his favorite figure, ”the builder”, but also gets aboard with discussing ”the refugee” as well as” the desperado” when I introduce these into our talk.

Early on in the first interview, we talk about M’s background and his upbringing, and I ask him about what dreams he had for himself as a child. M paints an affectionate portrait of his childhood and family. He tells me how he wanted to become an archeologist and how his father described the ancient treasures remaining in Afghanistan, making him dream of both adventure and ways of creating a “good life” as a way to “name” or frame a goal for his own “social struggle” (Butler in interview with Ahmed, Ahmed 2016, 491). As M becomes older, the archeologist figure is exchanged for the builder figure, which he finds a more achievable role, not least shaped by an idealized brother-in-law that M describes as a successful builder in Mashhad. “I knew I couldn't become an archeologist … as I have to … work, and I cannot work and study at the same time, and … it is special as Afghans don’t have right to study as they like” (Interview 1), reflecting the various
material and societal challenges that any higher education in Iran would have meant, potentially both due to regulation and material circumstances.

Later I ask him about how a builder is, and M replies that a builder is someone who has a good business, a good house, and good earnings, good family and a good car ”so that everyone believes in him” (Interview 1). He continues,

"Everybody likes him, and be good to others, end of discussion. I really want that. It means that a good builder does for them, that has no money, refurbishes or something, so, so helps them. These [are] the greatest things I believe…” …/… "I like builders because they build houses, houses are really important, you know…house, are really important. So I like, yes, yes you build houses for those who doesn’t have houses…/…they get glad, so that you too become glad yourself” (Interview 1).

I ask M to describe what he believes characterizes a refugee. He describes the role as someone who lacks his own ”land”, who is in a precarious situation, and whom nobody likes (Interview 1). He says that he has never held a passport and lacked proper papers already as a newborn. I then challenge him on how he identifies himself as a refugee. I suggest that a refugee, from some perspectives, could be seen as a person ”begging” for mercy or asking for rights, as ”…coming before an existing law and ask for recognition within its terms” (Butler 2015, 40), and that I have never seen him beg or ask for anything.

He replies that I am both right and wrong, he continues that he would never ask anyone for anything that he did not know well enough. I enforce the question by gesturing a begging pose, with my hand out, M replies that ”no, no, I would not, never…/… why would I?… do this? No I need to make [it] on my own” (Interview 1). He pauses for a while and continues ”Or, I might be asking in some other way perhaps” (Interview 1). I reply by asking him to think of the refugee not as himself but more as a figure and describe the refugee as someone that asks for protection and suggests that a refugee, as the stranger, is someone that is always in need of someones else favor, ”asking for a generous response” (Ahmed 2000, 149). He laughs while he replies that ”I am a refugee too, I beg, I beg please Migration Agency I get permit…”. I then ask him to expand on the answer and make it more ”difficult”, M replies that I have framed the question in the wrong way, ”sure a refugee begs to be able to stay here…/…but it doesn’t mean that they should [have] to beg….about all things all the time” (Interview 1).

He tells me that school in Sweden hindered him from becoming a ”builder” as it can not teach him anything abut such things, and that he would have learned much more if he had been able to work
instead of being in school (Interview 1). I say that its seems that Sweden and he did not go well together, and he agrees (Interview 1), he replies ”…so…//…yes, I need to change myself” (Interview 1). Indicating that he would have needed to transform himself to have a chance at establishing a sustainable life in Sweden.

I tell him that I believe this stands against each other. On the one hand, his insight that he needs to get into line with a certain ”way of doing things” to be able to prevail, and, on the other, his desire to act on his own without taking advice or subjugating to the terms given by the supervising authorities, implying that he has paid a high price for that refusal to adopt. M then asks me if I think this is wrong or right (Interview 1). I refuse to answer this, as the answer is too dim. On one side, he shares his rejection of authority with many young people. On the other, he could not afford the consequences of his resistance. He was not entitled to rebel without punishment.

Later I ask him if he knows what a desperado is. M replies that he believes it is a singer with a guitar, which one could kill with (Interview 1), clearly referring to Robert Rodriguez’s movie Desperado from 1995. I tell M that I sometimes think of him as a desperado, characterizing a desperado as someone who claims to know everything, harbors fearlessness, embraces risk and has nothing to lose.

M replies, laughing, ”that is me” (Interview 1). And says that he too has nothing to lose. I object to this and say that, in reality, I think this is wrong, meaning that he does have something to lose, meaning his life. He then agrees again,

”No, yes, exactly, my years, I mean and… I’m loosing myself, the most important… //… that I only lay down like that, no, I have nothing to loose. No it is not true, as, now, I’m twenty three years, if I should be here when I’m thirty years, so I’m loosing with, seven years of my life, and that is crucial, it is really crucial” (Interview 1).

Loosing time is as Les Back and Shamser Sinha points out an underlaying aspect of any migrants life, losing time is part of being the migrant refugee (Back and Sinha 2018, 77).

I try to inquire about M's self-perception by prompting him to position himself on a spectrum between the refugee figure and the desperado. M reflects and then refers to himself as a refugee with a desperado's mindset (Interview 1). I ask if he thinks all refugees share this mindset, to which he swiftly responds with a firm ”no” (Interview 1). He proceeds to delve into his admiration for risk-taking, expressing a genuine belief that risk-taking holds significant value and serves as a marker of good character.
It is as Arendt notes a medieval custom to outlaw those who are not wanted and to place “the life of the outlawed person at the mercy of anyone he met” (Arendt 1979, 302, f.n. 54). Swedish authorities have declined M’s right to remain after M fails to live up to the terms given within his temporary residence permit for studies. As he remains, he becomes illegalized and alienated from any protection. His drug addiction does not help, and indeed not his deeds or mindset. M has not proven himself valuable to be granted permission to stay and therefore lacks value. His life is valueless, and as he yet remains, he is outlawed as the enforced figure of the failed, paperless young Afghan and the homeless heroin addict.

While searching for literature, I incidentally came across the book “Desperado” by the German criminologist Hans von Hentig, published in 1956. In the book, Hentig presents a matching definition of the term “desperado”, being the psychological state of becoming outlawed, as the affect of being excluded from the group or the society is desperation, or as Hentig writes translated from German:

"One may have always been an outsider, a black sheep, a rebel. Now, all bonds of collective cohesion are dissolved. The outcast stands alone in a world filled with overpowering natural forces, animals, enemies, and even heartless ghosts. But this isolation mobilizes the bare instinct of self-preservation” (Hentig 1956, 3).

Hentig continues a bit further down that:

"The outlaw becomes evil and, because they are wicked and ruthless, feared. That's how the English word 'wretch,' originally meaning the cast-out, like seaweed washed ashore, has come to imply 'wretched' and 'miserable,' with the added notion of being driven away like a waterweed is by the force of a guiding stream” (Hentig 1956, 3).

Similarly, M and others like him find themselves washed up on the shores of Europe, only to be named evil and unwanted. The desperado, in this context, represents an "outlawed" other, pushed to the "global outside" with no given right to be righteous but who insists in his appearance. The desperado assert their rights independently as a sort of performative act (Butler 2015, 49), living aside the established rules, existing in illegality, and remaining like a stranger, the stranger other who arrived yesterday and who remains tomorrow (Simmel 1950, 402).

Although still desperate, the desperado figure offers agency and opportunities compared to the vulnerable refugee figure. A potential hero, akin to a foreign founder, who occasionally emerges to save the situation. This role, as described by Bonnie Honig, stands in contrast to a, figuratively...
speaking, weak democratic citizen. The fictional heroic stranger rides into town to save it from corrupt forces through the sheer force of their exemplary yet flawed personality (Honig 2001, 22). Nevertheless the outlawed desperado remains wretched, a solitary figure, forever estranged.
Analysis

When an Afghan boy, born a refugee in Iran, ends up as a heroinist on the streets in Malmö, Sweden, politics are in play. Politics runs through his veins and his mind. His life is not only the product but also the place of politics, a living example of the empty projection of global human rights quoted from Costas Douzinas as; a "free-floating signifier" (O'Byrne and Hensby 1999, 207). War, legal constitutes, trade, and crime affect his actions. Through his exclusion, he is politicized as a figure while kept outside of the polity.

M's story is closely linked to the construction of the national-state system, placing him firmly on the anarchic outside of this system. M depends on a global system that has rejected him and stripped him from protection to become a politicized and globalized "'leftover'" (Khosravi 2010, 3). M has never carried a passport and was born as a refugee to refugeeed Afghan parents residing in Iran. M's belonging is globalized by force (O'Byrne and Hensby 1999, 2). Experiencing in real life what Giorgio Agamben states as that ...” In the system of the nation-state, the so-called sacred and inalienable rights of man show themselves to lack every protection and reality at the moment in which they can no longer take the form of rights belonging to citizens of a state” (Agamben 1998, 127), a living proof of western hypocrisy.

Using figures as a conceptual tool gives way to two levels of analysis. First, as mentioned before, M is no refugee from any legal or international relations definition. We must consider him representing the refugee more as an identity and societal role defined by certain characteristics as the "refugee figure." Secondly, using figures makes way to sketch alternative roles that may or may not have been more viable as roles for gaining a less "bad life,” enabling a greater sense of agency.

Berlant writes that we should conceive agency as something that also happens in the invisible, in waiting, and in silent endurance without affect or mournfully accepted dramatic curves (Berlant 2011, 99). The refugee leaves one's private context and steps with what Butler calls "Arendtian" terms (Butler 2015, 51) into the political public realm by exploiting one's potential for freedom. However, it is a step into the public realm without the ability to participate. It is also a step out of the private realm no one has asked for, as it is an act without invitation. The refugee arrives without invitation; the punishment for the rebellion comes later, during the asylum process, which in many cases, can only end in one way, with rejection. During the asylum process, you are alone. You wait. You may start using drugs. You may do everything that you never aspired to. You create your own
story where each small step is a loss of what you already lacked from the beginning and where the everydayness, the monotony, and the gradual erosion of life are the only constants (Berlant 2011, 124).

M steps out of the private realm and becomes a problem of the world. He is part of the global subordinates, unheard, and placed without a place (O’Byrne and Hensby 1999, 131). He is, however, by himself also a place of conflict. His perception of Europe, his aspirations to live up to the expectations of his family, his belief in what, as I interpret it, it is to become a man (Monsutti 2007, 169), or as Khosravi quotes from Liisa Malkki,”’refugeeness is a matter of becoming’” (Khosravi 2010, 71), …where some see a child, M sees a man.

As a man, he judges himself as a rebel, not to say a potential hero, making him not less but more vulnerable. His strive and motivations represent a political will to come out in ”the world” and, from a postcolonial stance,”’take part’” of what he regards as his right, and through his strive and mobility, he is indeed representing a ”universalism from below” (Abbasi and Monsutti 2017, 9) that is, as Butler frames it, ”postnational in character” (Butler 2020, 39).

Ahmed writes that the arrivant can not be ”identifiable as coming from a particular place” (Ahmed 2000, 151). In Swedish public discourse, it has been a semantic practice to name refugeed asylum seekers as ”newly arrivals” (from Swedish ”nyanlända”). This word strips the individual from having a history as if the one has been washed up at the shore as born out of the sea, without recognizing any valid preset for one’s departure. Instead, the person incidentally appears by the border. As the searchlight is turned on, the young body is first placed in custody, then examined to detect its age, then placed under strict monitoring, then schooling, to finally be rejected for extradition without any recipient party to extradite to. It is a rejection and extradition to nowhere. Any self-naming is, in this perspective, to be seen as a way to rebel against what has been given, or as Butler writes:

"It may be that the conceit of autonomy implied by self-naming is the paradigmatically presentist conceit, that is, the belief that there is a one who arrives in the world, in discourse, without a history, that this one makes oneself in and through the magic of the name, that language expresses a “will” or a “choice” rather than a complex and constitutive history of discourse and power which compose the invariably ambivalent resources through which [a queer and queering] agency is forged and reworked” (Butler 2011, 174).
The act of self-naming one's identity in protest against the imposed discourse is just as valid in challenging the refugee role as it is in challenging gendered identities. As outlined by Butler above, this process aligns with M's efforts to find a part on his own terms. M is determined to establish his identity independently. Consequently, he confronts a discourse where success paradoxically emerges from his failure. While he may gain the freedom to flee, the flight enforces his exclusion. He might be free to run away, but only as a cast out, deflecting any rights for protection.

His time in the examination light is over, as he is cast out of having rights. As outlawed, he withdraws to the private realm and draws back into the shadows, becoming one of the paperless, faceless, counted but un-counted. He is a place of politics but is not welcomed as part of politics. He is placed outside any demos, somewhat outside the state structure but nestled to it, situated in a crowd of no-ones. Before his addiction takes hold of him, he is represented by no one, then at the last stage, not by himself to himself. The political voice he has achieved through his mobility is now ultimately silenced.

The idea of self-determination is perhaps objectively a chimera. However, self-determination is still a normative ideal (Berlant 2011, 97) for the most vulnerable and the privileged alike. The difference is that one party perceives themselves as heroic, as the hero in the story. Like a fictional figure from the movie Django Unchained or Unbreakable, who survives against all odds by flexing one's ability. The misconception that the one who has nothing is the one who has the least to lose is present everywhere.

Modernity has allowed us to imagine other worlds and dream big, even if we miss what we left behind and the places that are lost because a place is never the same, even if you return one day. We know that the crucial choices have made us into who we are in the new place we find ourselves. Escape is not just about changing location in an acute situation; it is also about changing belonging to some extent and reimagining who one can be. The act of displacement itself is a political action where the uncertainty of the journey and the marginalization it entails are fetishized and elevated to become idealized, creating a new self-image and belonging based on equal parts martyrdom and heroism. To walk away is to act politically; those who walk alone are vulnerable, while those who walk in concert act politically. If there is anything to learn from all this, it is just that; precarious mobility may be read as a conscious political manifestation, not least through manifesting one's life's expendability.
During this process, the refugee, with or without a work permit, still exists as an asset in the labor market. The refugee is both Milton Friedman’s and Jürgen Habermas’s “man of the market” (Berlant 2011, 33), often as the man of the black market and, more broadly and structurally, the black man of the black market, on the margins of these “colonizers’ domestic economies” (Bauman 2017, 78).

In M’s case, the question of his failure is misguided from this perspective. Instead, his refugee existence perfectly corresponds to the figure of “the unaccompanied Afghan boy,” and in that sense, both the rejections, the dehumanization of a minor, his vulnerability on the streets, and his willingness to take risks all become parts of the performative process that molds him into the role of the refugee figure. Through various means, he reenacts an already-defined role. He drew the short straw, but the figure itself is reproduced to perfection, and all supporting characters can then repeat their roles and occupy them indefinitely. Although M, as he says, was born a refugee, it was not until he tried to break away from his fate that he ultimately fully embodied this figure and became recognized as such at first sight.

So, is there any way out? Perhaps other available roles to inhabit could be established. Honig’s “foreign founder” is one, of course, but it has limitations. Instead, numerous other figures are available, such as Khosravi’s “illegal traveler.” However, more simplistic figures like the desperado or the adventurer, explorers (in some sense), are easier to envision. However, here, I intended to leave it open.

For the unprivileged refugee, it is optimism itself that is the fetish; optimism is also a political action by not being realistic. The refugee feels that dreams are unrealistic, and precisely because these dreams lead to disappointment, they become political. It is through the inability to achieve dreams that they function as political visions. Berlant’s “double bind” (Berlant 2011, 55) is cruel because disappointment is often expected right from the journey’s beginning. It is not about being naive about one’s outlook, everyone involved knows that the starting point is poor.

Regardless of that the potential success associated with the journey is a chimera, M has still done “it”; M has taken the step, and in this aspect, made the imagination possible. The fictional goal has become as valuable as an achieved “good life” due to its proximity to the projected longing (Berlant 2017, 31). Exile can be seen as an acquired and self-chosen fetish that breaks the self out of the given place. The protest is carried out even as everyone is aware of the cost. His journey represents a victory based on the subaltern premise that the ability to take risks is the only asset one has. By
utilizing his almost unlimited capacity to take risks, as M perceives himself as having nothing to lose, he elevates his status compared to those he left behind. It is the opposite of the bourgeois fetishization of security (Neocleous 2008, 153). M fetishizes his only asset, his ability to endure uncertainty, and manifests it through his displacement. The price is loneliness, marginalization, and potentially life.

He sees himself as capable of “anything”. Where some see vulnerability, he sees strength. M sees himself as a fighter for his cause, or rather, as the hero in the story. Paradoxically, this does not make his situation stronger but, depending on the spotlight placed on him, even more vulnerable. The more he acts as a hero, the less he fits the victim role, the very condition for being accepted as a refugee. The most vulnerable sometimes have to save themselves even from their own perceptions. What allowed him to survive the journey is what prevents him from prevailing on the arrival.

Judith Butler phrases it so well that it is hard to reference without quoting directly, but this is an attempt. If you are vulnerable because you walk alone, then that is signifying that your rights are either not in place or not enforced, that although they may be written, these rights lack substance in the real world, it is a fictional writing. If you instead walk safely, it means that others have accepted you as having those rights (to walk freely), but it does not end with that you can walk safely (Butler 2015, 51-52). To walk should, in this regard, be seen as an opportunity to assemble, to walk in concert, and through this walking, express a political will, and thereby, it should be understood as a sort of political speech. It may not be, as Butler writes, on equal terms, but it may still be an opportunity for representation and part of a democratic struggle. I believe that to regard precarious mobility as such a voice, let us call it a protest movement, would lead to a different analysis of who the refugee is and what the refugee figure represents. This is not the place to foresee what such a conversation would end up in, and it takes, of course, will to engage in such a discussion on such premises. M expresses first extensive will to appear through his flight, then radical disappointment due to the constraints that hinder his action when arriving, and finally, due to his radical exclusion: despair.
Conclusion

M strives for his "performative right to appear" (Butler 2015, 10) without accepting the subjugation, it takes to conform to the terms he was given. While some of M’s peers choose to disappear into submission as the only way to be tolerated, as they could only be let in if they ceased to be visible. While no other script was given, M was suddenly alone on the stage, as a flawed protagonist in his own "situation-tragedy" (Berlant 2011, 177). M never wanted to play the figure of the refugee; M would have preferred to be recognized as, to tell it metaphorically, as we sometimes recognize what something is through what it is not, but through what it resembles (Ringmar 2019, 6), the brave desperado, that comes today and leaves tomorrow.

M is firmly positioned within the “bad-life” experience, where the cruel optimism and strive for a “good life” fantasy (Berlant 2011, 1) is bound to end in disappointment. However, although living the “bad life” (Butler 2015, 194), he still considers it a "heroic life" where M regards his capacity for survival as significant for his agency.

It is a life without rights placed at the center of the public realm. His actions are influenced by the effects of war, various forms of regulations, poverty, trade, and corruption. Everything from his upbringing to the money M pays for crossing the border between Iran and Türkiye. The comfortable bus with console games on the back of each seat taking him down the ancient silk road. The rubber boat in-between Türkiye and Greece. That he is not granted refugee status when he accepts a conditioned residence permit to study in Sweden. That he does not know how to go to school. That his life experience is regarded as worthless. That he is unwanted. That M sees it as self-evident and righteous that he, too, should get his share of the wealth he sees in the West, that he has a lived understanding of the postcolonial situation. That he will never feel gratitude. The social loneliness and the short but drastic fall to the bottom, marinated by opioids, possibly produced in his country of heritage. The way he dresses. The way he talks, the direction he takes on his journey. The way, he conducts his life, and by every practical measure through which he is considered worthless. He is not welcome to neither appear or participate in the public realm, although his body is examined, measured, and exposed within it. By all means he is robustly positioned among the subalterns (O’Byrne and Hensby 1999, 132). When M tries to make himself appear as something other than the refugee figure, as the present desperado or more aspirational as the builder, he is instead spitted out and becomes a leftover.
Why did M fail? Ultimately M never failed but fulfilled his performative role as the stranger and the outlawed living a street life, which is the only life he knows. On the other hand, from the normative stance, he did fail as he failed to cease as the stranger. On the individual level, however, paraphrasing Judith Butler, M failed as he never mattered in the new situation he found himself in. Situated among the expendables, his rebellion against circumstance was a trap. As he went up against discourse, the role he ultimately gained through his rebellion had implicit disappointment built in and failure was inclined already at his departure. In the situation where he found himself, M never mattered at all.
Bibliography


