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The securitization of asylum-seeking in Sweden after 2015 in light of experiences of asylum-seeking adolescent girls with roots in Afghanistan¹

Ildikó Asztalos Morell and Mehrdad Darvishpour

Introduction

A gender perspective contributes to the critical studies of “securitization”². The migration vogue of 2015 was constructed as a crisis, since it challenged the established systems of border control and surveillance over refugees. The vogue provoked tightening regimes throughout Europe, including those most liberal regimes. Securitized passage through borders and asylum regulation severed the conditions for reaching the most desired countries of the European “North”, which was seen as having contributed to the gendering of migration through the higher proportion of men from seven years of age to pensioners among those seeking asylum.³ Boys between the ages of 13-17 years dominated among UACS. The proportion of girls has declined from 17% 2013 to 13% in 2015⁴, a phenomenon that is related to girls gendered vulnerabilities in sending countries, as well as through transit and the asylum process.⁵ Feminist research has called attention to the under-researched issue of the adverse impact of securitization on the migration on female asylum seekers.⁶ Nonetheless, still more among the under-researched are asylum-seeking adolescent girls.

As a response to the great refugee vogue, also referred to as a “refugee crisis”, even countries with relatively generous refugee policies, such Sweden, which granted the largest proportion of residency to asylum-seekers in relation to its population,⁷ have reversed their regulations to the “European minimum standard”. This meant even increased surveillance of applications by UASC.

There is solid trans-European research evidence indicating that women and girls experience specific forms of vulnerabilities throughout the asylum process, including reasons of flight, transit, claim-making and detention and resources for reception.⁸ Even Scandinavian research highlights gender-specific vulnerabilities for UASC girls as motivating their flight.⁹ Less explored are gender-specific conditions of reception.¹⁰ These indications support the interest

¹ The research overview on Swedish research on gender and asylum-seeking children relies on an article written by Mehrdad Darvishpour and Elinor Brunnberg (2016). See, E. Brunnberg & M. Darvishpour, 'Etnicitet, kultur och genus: Om ensamkommande barn och mötet med den svenska skolan' in P. Lahdenperä & E. Sundgren (Ed.) *Skolans möte med nyanlända*, Liber, 2016, pp.111-132. The empirical material is based on the research project “New-comer children’s and youth’s inclusion and gender equality development” led by associate professor Mehrdad Darvishpour and has been financed by ”Samhällskontraktet” (Societal contract) driven by Mälardalen University. Other members of the group are Ildikó Asztalos Morell, Magnus Hoppe, Niclas Månsson and Mohammadrafi Mahmoodian.

² A. Gerard, *The Securitisation of Migration and Refugee Women*, Routledge, Abingdon, 2014; J. Freedman, *Gendering the International Asylum and Refugee Debate*, Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2007.

³ Eurostat, 2017.

⁴ Migrationsverket 2016

⁵ Freedman 2007.

⁶ Gerard & Pickering 2012

⁷ M. Darvishpour, Welfare State “stepchild”: An intersectional and structural perspective on ethnic relations and discrimination Sweden in E. Brunnberg & E. Cederström (Ed.). *New Tools in Welfare research*, NSU Press, Århus, 2013.

⁸ A. Gerard, *The Securitisation of Migration and Refugee Women*, Routledge, Abingdon, 2014.

⁹ L. Stretemo & C. Melander, *Får jag vara med? erfarenheter från ensamkommande barn och ungdomar i Göteborgsregionen och arbetet med denna grupp*, FoU i Väst, Göteborg, 2013.

¹⁰ A. Celikaksoy & E. Wadensjö *De ensamkommande flyktingbarnen och den svenska arbetsmarknaden*. SULCIS Rapport 2015:2, Stockholm. 2015; I. Luthman, *The Gendered Implications of Securitized Migration: A qualitative look at how the securitization of migration affects women’s experiences of seeking asylum in one of*

in exploring in what ways have the migration crises of 2015 and its aftermath implicated the gender-specific vulnerabilities of UASC girls? Therefore, this paper is to explore:

- In what gender specific ways has the increase in securitization impacted on the opportunities of new asylum-seeking girls reception in Sweden?
- In what ways have their life trajectories, with a specific focus on their reasons for flight, corroborated with the experiences of reception?
- In what ways have these profound changes impacted their psychological and social conditions?

This is to be explored by the life story analyses of two girls originating from an Afghan background, both brought up in Iran and both having arrived to Sweden in 2015.

The securitization of the Swedish asylum system after 2015

Sweden has been recognized as one of the most generous countries in terms of the governance of migration.¹¹ Borevi¹² identifies as the most significant feature of Swedish exceptionalism the universal access to social rights for all citizens incorporating immigrants. The governance was described as lacking liberal pressures put on migrants for self-reliance and a maintained focus on multiculturalism, rather than assimilation as a form of inclusion of migrant groups in relation to the majority society.

Swedish people's attitudes toward the reception of refugees for a long time has been most positive, and characterized by a tension between openness and generosity on the one hand, and control and restrictions on the other.¹³

Nonetheless, this liberal framework has been undermined by rising communitarian sentiments, "a terrain shared with ill-famed radical anti-immigration nationalist-populist movements and parties across Europe".¹⁴ After Sweden joined the EU migration policies have become gradually more restrictive.¹⁵ Swedish policy has been in agreement with Schengen and the Dublin Convention. The purpose of the Schengen agreement is to promote the EU being a common market for goods, capital and labour. Meanwhile, EU is securitizing entrance of third nationals. The goal of the Dublin Convention is to prevent an asylum applicant from seeking asylum in multiple countries. The Dublin Convention, sending back asylum seekers to the country of their first entry within the EU, applied even to UASC. As long as Sweden is seen as a desirable target for asylum seekers, the Dublin Convention implies that many venture onto challenging and dangerous routes to avoid being registered prior to entering.¹⁶

In Sweden, the portion of both foreign-born individuals and those born in Sweden to foreign-born parents has been 22% in 2016. After gradual increases from 29,648 people per year in 2011, the number of asylum-seekers doubled between 2014 to 2105, reaching more than 163,000 in 2015. By this Sweden had the highest proportion of refugees filing for asylum in relation to the population within the EU.¹⁷ Of these, approximately 70,000 were young people under the age of 18 years. During 2015, UASC increased the number of all those seeking

the world's most gender equal countries Uppsala University, Department of Government, Master thesis in Political Science, Uppsala, 2017.

¹¹ M. Darvishpour, & C. Westin, *Maktperspektiv på etniska relationer*, in M. Darvishpour & C. Westin (Ed.) *Migration och etnicitet: perspektiv på ett mångkulturell Sverige*, Studentlitteratur. Lund, 2015.

¹² Borevi, K. 'Sweden: The Flagship of Multiculturalism', in G. Brochmann & A. Hagelund (Ed.), *Immigration Policy and the Scandinavian Welfare State 1945–2010*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, pp. 25–96.

¹³ Darvishpour, 2013.

¹⁴ C-U. Schierup & A. Ålund, 'From Paradoxes of Multiculturalism to Paradoxes of Liberalism. Sweden and the European Neo-Liberal Hegemony', *Journal for Critical Education Policy Studies* Vol. 9, No. 2, 2011.

¹⁵ Darvishpour, Westin, 2015.

¹⁶ Wernesjö, 2014.

¹⁷ Migrationsverket, 2016.

asylum – from one-tenth to one-fifth, with 66% of UASC coming from Afghanistan (23 480). In the autumn of 2015, there was a breakdown of the previous rule system. Many refugees came to Sweden without registering themselves in another European country or at the Swedish border.¹⁸

The 2015 refugee stream, or so-called “refugee crisis”, placed both service provision for asylum seekers and the Migration Board handling the applications into a “crisis situation,” mobilizing resources and civil society for the accommodation of refugees. Despite the pressure, to start, Sweden retained a positive attitude to refugees as reflected in the 6 September 2015 statement by Prime Minister Stefan Löfven: “My Europe does not build any walls.”

However, at the same time, a counter-mobilization and the increasing popularity of the right-wing xenophobic Swedish Democrat Party put pressure on breaking the political consensus on the welcoming of refugees. An anti-refugee discourse permeated other parties, opinions and media.¹⁹ The media image of refugees, especially the young group of men, presented an unbalanced and unfairly negative view of the group.²⁰

Thus, facing political pressure, on November 24 the government, based on a national consultation with all parties, though excluding the populist Swedish Democrats, declared a turnaround from the EU’s most generous migration policy to one comparable with the EU’s minimum standard.²¹ The Temporary Asylum Law implied an increase in the “securitization” of the terms given for residency permits and an alliance with EU directives demanding the redistribution quotas for refugees. Combined with an increased securitization of borders, which ruled out the open internal borders under Schengen, the changes resulted in the “normalization” of migration flows. The number refugees coming to Sweden declined to 29000 in 2016 and 22000 by 2017.²²

This new law had a specifically adverse impact on the opportunities for UASC. One important change was the increased securitization of age certification of UASC, a highly-criticized method by the medical profession.²³ The age of the children is often discussed during the asylum process, and the child’s own information can be questioned. The “writing up” of the age of minors implies that they lose special rights and protections in place for those who are being classified as UASC, both in terms of accessing services and resources while waiting, and as special protection when deciding about rejecting the application. Those, whose age has been written up most commonly, soon received a rejection of their application. Furthermore, the temporary stop in giving permits for family affiliation also makes the prospects for UASC to reunite with their families improbable. The length of the period asylum seekers have to wait for their trial has increased, thus exacerbating the period of uncertainty for applicants. The proportion of those receiving a permanent residence permit (PUT) declined drastically, since most applicants after 2016 obtained a temporary resident permit (TUT). In total the proportion of children examined who received residence permit

¹⁸ Migrationsverket, 2016.

¹⁹ Ahmadi, F. O.Mella, I.Palm & M.Darvishpour, *Mångfaldsbarometern Tio år av attitydmätningar i Sverige*, Gävle University press, Gävle 2015.

²⁰ J. Strömbäck, F. Andersson & E. Nedlund, *Invandring i medierna – Hur rapporterade svenska tidningar åren 2010-2015*, Delmi Rapport: 2017:6, Stockholm, 2017.

²¹ Löfven, S., & Romson, Å. (2015, November 24). Regeringskansliet . Retrieved from Regeringen föreslår åtgärder för att skapa andrum för svenskt flyktingmottagande.

²² Migrationsverket, (2017). *Antal asylsökande – aktuell statistik*. Accessed at: <https://www.migrationsverket.se/Om-Migrationsverket/Statistik.html>

²³ A. Hjern, M. Brendler-Lindqvist & M. Norredan, Age assessment of young asylum seekers. *Foundation Acta Paediatrica*, No. 101, 2012, pp. 4–7; B. Rai, J. Kaur, J & H, Jafarzadeh, ‘Dental age estimation from the developmental stage of the third molars in Iranian population’ *Journal Forensic Leg Med.* Vol. 17, No. 6, 2010, pp. 309-11.

remained at a similar level (87% in 2014 and 86% in 2016). However, the proportion of children with permits from Afghanistan declined from 92% to 78%).²⁴ With the Temporary Law in place, the proportion of cases with granted permits has drastically declined, especially the proportion of permanent permits.

For those already in Sweden, the prospective chances of obtaining permanent residency declined, thus contributing to increased feelings of insecurity for the children still waiting on a decision by the Migration Board. This uncertainty is related to problems with the psychological health of the asylum seekers, which has been associated with the increasing numbers of suicides, particularly among UASC.²⁵

Gender-specific vulnerabilities of girls and women in the securitized asylum process

Fear of global migration, from the global South to the North in particular, has provoked the mobilization of security responses within the EU, thus reinforcing images such as the European fortress in need of protection.²⁶ Especially after 9/11, the surveillance and control of the EU's external borders increased.²⁷ Migration and asylum became framed instead of human rights in terms of what Nyers²⁸ calls a "ban-opticom", a profiling of surveillance for asylum seekers, non-status migrants and undocumented workers, constructing them as "others" through abjection. Securitization has been legitimated by new waves of communitarian discourses. Instead of a liberal Europe, today migration is presented as a threat, especially from the global South. The term "securitization" describes the discourse that interprets global migration as destabilizing for cohesion in a country, and as a danger to public order.²⁹ In recent decades, the term has been used to an unprecedented extent.

A developing discourse in political debates is who can best "protect" the country. More and more, parties are conspicuous about who wants more police officers to ensure safety. In this way, securitization is becoming increasingly posited as a necessity to combat increased international instability and perceived threats related to increased crime in the country, especially in segregated areas, from Islamic terrorism.

Feminist theorizing contributes to the critical studies on securitization by challenging the meaning of security. Ann Tickner, from a feminist perspective, associated security with emancipation and empowerment: a "diminution of all forms of violence, including physical, structural and ecological"³⁰ and explores the "interrelation of insecurity across all levels of analysis".³¹ Hence, the feminist perspective on security is revising the traditional state-centrism of security studies, and instead favouring*** a focus on individual or community relations and taking women's security as a central issue.³² Furthermore, feminist approaches

²⁴ Migrationsverket, (2017). *Antal asylsökande – aktuell statistik*. Accessed at: <https://www.migrationsverket.se/Om-Migrationsverket/Statistik.html>

²⁵ <http://www.dt.se/inrikes/vag-av-sjalvmord-hos-ensamkommande-barn-fran-afghanistan-de-far-ingen-karlek>.

²⁶ J. Huysmans, 'The European Union and the Securitization of Migration', *Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol. 38, No. 5. 2000, pp. 751–777.

²⁷ Bigo D. & J.Julien, 'Border Security, Technology and the Stockholm Programme', *Centre for European Policy Studies: INEX Policy Brief* No. 3, November 2009; C. Cantat, *Contesting Europeanism: Discourses and Practices of Pro-migrant Organisations in the European Union*. PhD Thesis at the School of Law & Social Sciences, University of East London, London, 2015.

²⁸ P. Nyers, 'Abject Cosmopolitanism: The Politics of Protection in the Anti-Deportation Movement', in N. De Genova & N. Peutz (Eds.), *The Deportation Regime: Sovereignty, Space, and the Freedom of Movement*, Duke University Press, Duke, 2010.

²⁹ Cantat 2015.

³⁰ A. Tickner, 'You Just Don't Understand: Troubled Engagements Between Feminists Stokes and IR Theorists' *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 41, No. 4, 1997, pp. 611–632, p.625;

³¹ Tickner, 1997, p. 625

³² P. Roe, P. 'Gender and 'positive' security' *International Relations*, Vol. 26, 2014, pp. 116-138, p. 17)

explore from a process-oriented perspective how social and structural hierarchies interact with the international systems regulating migration³³ and how these produce gendered inequalities in the intersections of the private and public spheres contributing to the insecurities of women in particular.

The increase in the proportion of women during the past decades among labour migrants has prompted Castles and Miller³⁴ to talk about the feminization of migration. In contrast, men dominate among asylum seekers³⁵. The increased securitization of migration, and the growth of border controls and surveillance, has increased both the costs of border crossings as refugees and made the crossing riskier. While the deterioration of the rights of asylum seekers impacted all, research exposed specific vulnerabilities and insecurities that women experience throughout the entire asylum process.³⁶ Concerning the gender-specific causes of flight, women's gender-specific vulnerabilities are emphasized, such as the occurrence of the GBV (gender-based violence) issues of forced marriage and genital mutilation. Meanwhile, women's weaker socio-economic status and access to resources have been named as a hindrance to cover the expenses of flight. Women are exposed to GBV on their way in transit,³⁷ and experience special hindrances while in detention upon arrival to first countries waiting for decisions.³⁸ Women asylum seekers find themselves in vulnerable positions in the asylum-seeking process, since they are placed into joint asylum-seeking accommodations with men. Due to the high proportion of men, informants experienced a fear of sexual harassment and violence.³⁹ Women may experience special conditions in the process of asylum determination, as well as through provisions for reception and while processing their applications.⁴⁰ Lastly, gender differences prevail in the process of the establishment in countries of final destination.

In Sweden, asylum seekers may be granted refugee status if “he or she feels a well-founded fear of persecution on grounds of race, nationality, religious or political beliefs, or on the grounds of gender, sexual orientation or other membership of a particular social group.”⁴¹ The gender notion was first included after the reform of the Aliens Act in 2005. In the EU, Sweden and UK are the only two EU member states adopting such guidelines.⁴² Permits are also granted on the so-called subsidiary protection⁴³ and on humanitarian grounds.

Sweden is renowned for its gender equality policies. Despite of the special status Swedish asylum law offers to gendered-based vulnerabilities, in praxis, however, women who had

³³ Freedman 2007.

³⁴ S. Castles, M.J. Miller, M. J & G. Ammendola, in P. Marfleet (E.) *The Age of Migration: International Population. Refugees in a global era*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2005, pp. 57-140.

³⁵ (EU 2016).

³⁶ Gerard 2014.

³⁷ M. Nagai, U.Karunakara, E. Rowley, E. & G. Burnham, ‘Violence against Refugees, Non-refugees and Host Populations in Southern Sudan and Northern Uganda’. *Global Public Health*, Vol. 3, No. 3, 2008, 249–270.

³⁸ Freedman 2007; Bhabha, J. ‘Demography and Rights: Women, Children and Access to Asylum’ *International Journal of Refugee Law*, Vol 16, No. 2, 2004, pp. 227–243; S. Pickering, *Women, Violence and Borders*, Springer, London, 2011; A. Gerard & S. Pickering, Sharon, ‘The Crime and Punishment of Somali Women’s Extra-Legal Arrival in Malta’ *The British Journal of Criminology*, Vol. 52, No. 3, 2012, Pp 514–533.

³⁹ Luthman, 2017.

⁴⁰ J. Freedman, ‘Engendering Security at the Borders of Europe: Women Migrants and the Mediterranean ‘Crisis’’, *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 2016, pp. 1-15; Gerard, 2014; L. Hunt, ‘Women Asylum Seekers and Refugees: Opportunities, Constraints and the Role of Agency’, *Social Policy & Society*, 2008, Vol. 7, No. 3, pp. 281-292.

⁴¹ SFS (Svensk författningssamling). *Utlänningslag*, 2005:716) Ch. 4, 1§, 2005

⁴² Freedman, 2016.

⁴³ EU, 2011

been objected to GBV experience difficulties to realise these claims.⁴⁴ Therefore, it is of interest to explore in what ways does the Swedish system of reception of asylum-seeking adolescent girls take account of the gender-specific vulnerabilities of girls.

Need for a gender perspective on the reasons of UASC flight from their home countries

In a historical and international perspective, children are a part of the global migration. Children may flee together with their parents or alone. A person under 18 years who comes to Sweden and seeks asylum without their parents, or another grown-up who could take the parents' place, are defined as "UASC."⁴⁵ The reasons for UASC flight, whether legally or illegally, with a passport or paperless, can be different from children arriving with their parents. A Swedish mapping of the situation for 138 UASC who came to the Gothenburg area in 2008 shows that the majority of the children had many hard experiences with them.⁴⁶ The children may have been living alone or in an orphanage (13%), and one-fourth had periodically grown up with a relative other than a parent. The children themselves may have been exposed to violence or witnessed that another person became exposed to violence or was killed, and are more often exposed to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) than others.⁴⁷

There is a limited research about migrating children, and especially about UASC, that also has a gender perspective. Many of the reasons presented about boys for their flight may also have affected girls. Both boys and girls flee from violence inflicted by adults, as well as honouring oppression as a reason for the flight.⁴⁸ Meanwhile, there seems to be strong gender-related reasons due to children being sent away to another country for protection. The differences can be that boys in particular are sent away to be rescued for fear of kidnapping, while girls have reported forced marriage as the reason (11%), which boys have not. Girls more (6%) often than boys (1%) reported having been sexually assaulted. This data reflects upon women's vulnerable social position and lack of gender equality in Afghanistan, characterized by high infant mortality, a high incidence of women dying in childbirth,⁴⁹ the occurrence of a child and an arranged marriage and a lower level of personal autonomy of girls than boys.⁵⁰

Other intersectional aspects of challenges for asylum-seeking children from Afghanistan are that many asylum seekers belong to different minority groups, such as Tadjik, Hazarian, Uzbekian, Aimakian and Turkmenian, forming 45% of the population,⁵¹ and that there is a low degree of literacy (10% in most areas in Afghanistan).⁵²

Need for a gender perspective for the analysis of establishment in Sweden

Migration is seen as a special challenge for many young, migrating boys when it comes to integration and equality questions. Young girls and women of the same age, with the same socio-economic background can win more on integration.⁵³ The immigrated boys and men can confront a more negative view in society than immigrated girls and women do.⁵⁴ Immigrated boys and men can themselves express a more negative attitude towards equality

⁴⁴ WRC (Women's Refugee Commission), *Falling Through the Cracks: Refugee Women and Girl's in Germany and Sweden*. New York: Women's Refugee Commission, 2016.

⁴⁵ MIG, 2008; Migrationsverket 2016.

⁴⁶ Stretemo & Melander, 2013.

⁴⁷ K. Eide & A. Hjerm, 'Unaccompanied Refugee Children: Vulnerability and Agency', *Acta paediatrica*, Vol 12. 2013, pp. 666–668.

⁴⁸ Stretemo & Melander, 2013.

⁴⁹ Hildebrandt 2009.

⁵⁰ J. Nordberg, *De förklädda flickorna i Kabul*, Bonniers, Stockholm, 2015.

⁵¹ Globalis, Afghanistan, (Accessed at): <http://www.globalis.se/Laender/Afghanistan> [2016-01-07]

⁵² Norberg, 2015.

⁵³ Darvishpour & Westin, 2015.

⁵⁴ Ahmadi, Mella & Darvishpour, 2015.

than girls. Also, honour culture may be stronger among immigrated men than among immigrated girls, which has been interpreted as an impact of these men's loss of power in an unfamiliar environment.⁵⁵ Afghan boys associated with girls in school consider that they needed to change their behaviour and view on gender roles, even if they found it strange. For many girls, the situation is different. When they meet people from their own ethnic origin, these girls have to treat them in a traditional way, which is something else than when they meet people outside their ethnic origin.⁵⁶

Wadensjö and Celikaksoy,⁵⁷ who have followed UASC in Sweden between 2003 and 2012, show that most of the UASC come to be educated, and that some continue to university studies. The UASC have the same pattern as youngsters with a Swedish background, which means girls study slightly more than boys. Very few teenagers are employed, as most of them are studying. Conspicuously, UASC were more successful in establishing themselves in the labour market than for those who came with their parents. UASC can receive more support to be able to come inside Swedish society. Another explanation could be that those who do not have their parents in Sweden are under greater economic pressure, and are forced to work to support themselves to possibly also be able to contribute to the support of their family in their native country. Significantly, the difference is most distinct for the girls. Beyond the general explanations, the gender difference might be related to higher expectations on girls coming with their families to help at home with small siblings.

What is unknown is whether UASC encounter other attitudes than children who have come with their parents, or whether newly arrived children from different countries are treated in different ways. If UASC and children who have come with their parents to a different degree are offered resilience in making efforts from valuable persons with knowledge about the Swedish society, this may have a big impact.⁵⁸

Research approach and data

The interviews upon which this chapter are based originate from our research project: "Refugee children's inclusion and gender equality development within society", which involves interviews conducted with 50 asylum-seeking children between the ages of 15 and 18 living in Sörmland and Västmanland in small- and medium-sized towns in two provinces in Sweden. The research has been part of a collaborative project between Mälardalen University and the surrounding provinces and municipalities financed by Samhällskontraktet. We also conducted 12 focus group interviews and research circles with mixed professional groups, as well as individual interviews with welfare professionals in six different settings. The paper highlights the experiences of two girls interviewed by Mehrdad Darvishpour and Mohammadrafi Mahmoodian. The research team also included Ildikó Asztalos Morell, Niclas Månsson and Magnus Hoppe.

⁵⁵ M. Darvishpour & P. Lahdenperä, *Honour-related problems in school contexts in Sweden – theoretical perspective and prevention*. Mälardalen University Studies, Västerås, 2014.

⁵⁶ J.H. Larsson & M. McNell, 'Identitet och invandring: En kvalitativ studie med ensamkommande flyktingbarn' in F. Ahmadi, & M.Lilja (Eds.) *Ensamkommande flyktingbarn: utifrån perspektivet socialt arbete*. Gävle University press, Gävle, 2013.

⁵⁷ A. Celikaksoy & E.Wadensjö *De ensamkommande flyktingbarnen och den svenska arbetsmarknaden*. SULCIS Rapport 2015, 2, Stockholm. 2015.

⁵⁸ E. Brunnberg, 'En magisk box för resiliensskapande insatser' *Socialmedicinsk tidskrift*, Vol 2016, No. 1, 2016, pp. 82-96.

We used in-depth biographical interview as a method with focus on personal narratives. As S. Kvale and S. Brinkmann⁵⁹ note, the narratives that appear during the interviews are “one of the natural cognitive and linguistic forms through which individuals attempt to organize and express meaning and knowledge”. Using the life story method focusing on certain life paths allows us to reflect on which values, attitudes, expectations and ambitions formed their life trajectories, and what type of understandings they formed over these processes. According to Bertaux,⁶⁰ the method’s specific advantage is that it sets the focus on individual agency through the life course. Additionally, it enhances the possibilities to problematize the limitations and freedoms of the actions of individuals in mobilizing their capabilities, which are conditioned by the opportunity structures characterizing their positions within society.⁶¹ Life story interviews provide the opportunity to give voice to the disempowered, who otherwise lack channels to let their voices be heard.⁶²

Securitization versus Empowerment: Conflict between the institutional goals of the Migration Board and municipal social welfare institutions

While asylum-seeking children are a vulnerable group, they have rights regulated in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). This charter of rights includes protection for health, care and social security, as well as education and leisure (Articles 24, 25, 26, 28, 29). The accommodation of asylum-seeking children differs depending on whether they arrive with their families or as UASC. Those arriving with their parents are accommodated in the housing units of the Migration Board. In contrast, municipalities are in charge of the reception, accommodation, school and social needs of UASC. The number of UASC increased 10 times from 2011 to 2015; with the rapid expansion during the vogue, the capacities of the accommodating system have been pushed beyond their limits.

Our research explored municipal strategies of coordinating resources for the establishment of asylum-seeking youth. Our interviews with staff members in six different settings, and focus groups interviews with social workers, give the impression of an engaged professional core who feel sympathetic with the youth. Social workers’ professional ethics encourage them to work in the children’s best interests, and to provide safety and improve their resilience. During 2015, many places were filled by staff without former training. For some, working with the youth required finding a balance between disciplinary and caring attitudes. Similar to social workers, teachers place great efforts in engaging the youth with studies and stimulating their resilience in diverse ways. Such resilience strengthening interventions are crucial for the youth’s recovery from the traumatic experiences they have.⁶³

In contrast, children who arrive with their parents and are accommodated in the institutions of the Migration Board, where, according to the accounts of municipal welfare workers, do not receive concentrated support for establishment similar to UASC. Social workers legitimate greater resources to UASC due to them lacking the support from parents or safety from primary caretakers. This renders them vulnerable for eventual insufficient placements, which can then lead to traumatizing experiences.⁶⁴

⁵⁹ S. Kvale, & S. Brinkmann, *InterViews: learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing*: Sage, Los Angeles, 2009, p.155.

⁶⁰ Bertaux, D., *Biography and Society: The Life History Approach to the social Sciences*. Sage, Beverly Hill, 1981.

⁶¹ A. Krishna, *One illness away: Why people become poor and how they escape poverty?* Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2011.

⁶² Asztalos Morell, 2015.

⁶³ E. Brunnberg, R-M, Borg, & C. Fridström, *Ensamkommande barn: en forskningsgenomgång*, Studentlitteratur, Lund, 2011.

⁶⁴ Brunnberg & Darvishpour, 2016.

The results of our research indicate the presence of conflict between the professional engagement of welfare workers with the uncertainties caused by the Migration Board's surveillance of permits given to the youth. Most severe concerns were expressed in bad coordination and communication with the Migration Board, which were critical of youth having to live in anxiety before decisions. Those denied permits were moved out of their habitual environment on short notice. Thus, while one set of social services lays down large resources on the establishment of youth, the other, i.e. the Migration Board, act in negation of their efforts. Therefore, the two social systems find themselves in an implicit conflict that manifests itself from time to time in confrontations between municipal and state institutions as the municipal authorities in our interviews indicated. This conflict has even led to the organization of professional welfare provider groups against the "securitization" of- and surveillance over the asylum process of UASC manifested in Facebook groups (Stop the expulsion of UASC from Afghanistan), petition writing and demonstrations.

Seen from the perspective of the youth, our research found that most youth advances with their learning of Swedish and engagement with school. However, we also observed a great anxiety experienced among those still waiting for their trial. In opposition to the media image of young refugee men, many of the young men give an account of being passivized in school environments, which is also a consequence of segregated school environments for refugee children. Most of the youth showed satisfaction with social services, especially in HVB homes. One of the few critiques came from a UASC girl who felt boys were challenging staff who could not handle it.

Experiences from home countries in the light of life stories

The families of the two girls in the focus of this analysis are of Hazar origin from Afghanistan, and had left Afghanistan due to persecution by the Taliban and became refugees in Iran. They have no personal recollections about Afghanistan: "*No I would never return to Afghanistan. Never. We have not been there.*" Both of their families experienced hardships due to difficulties in accessing residence permits in Iran. One of the girl's parents lacked such permits, and as a result she could only go to a school for refugees. The other girl's parents could afford the cost of the permit for only shorter periods of time. She could attend Iranian schools during these periods. Anahita lost both of her parents in Afghanistan, and arrived to Iran together with her siblings and her uncle. Yasmin lived with her parents, yet the father could only get very low-paid construction work. Both of the girls witnessed discrimination as belonging to the Hazar minority in Iran by the authorities. They felt they were the object of a racist gaze in their everyday life: "When we go out, they see us, they look at our appearance, that we are Afghan, it can be seen. And then only: "*You are Afghan. What are you doing here? Why do you not go home?*" (Yasmin). They also experienced restrictions as girls. This concerned limitations by their families on their free movement: "*We were controlled more than boys, who had more rights to go out and do as they will.*" These restrictions had their roots not only in patriarchal views on the restricted movement of girls. Yasmin's father feared what could happen to her being outdoors on her own, which made her give up learning violin. While in Iran, "*My father was very anxious for me, how I should make my way to the violin lessons and come back. He was very much afraid for me.*" Life had been especially harsh for Anahita, who had no parents in life and lived with her uncle while in Iran, and who had highly traumatizing experiences that she "*does not want to remember*" and did not want to discuss in terms of how she made a living while in Iran. She does not have permanent residency in Sweden and fears being sent back to Afghanistan as a lonely girl, which would put her life in serious danger.

Meeting the refugee experience in Sweden

The two girls' experiences of being a newly arrived refugee in Sweden differ. Yasmin arrived with her family through affiliation immigration. Her brother arrived to Sweden at the age of

13 as an unaccompanied minor, and received permanent residency (PUT) prior to the securitization of the asylum policy after the vogue of 2015. Four years after his departure, he could reunite with his family (parents and two siblings). Hence, Yasmin did not have to go through the dangerous migrant passage, nor was she deprived of the support of her family. In contrast Anahita, who lacked parental support in Iran, was pushed to start the dangerous passage on her own thanks to her desperate situation in Iran, a situation that is corroborated by interviews with several other unaccompanied girls in our study.

In contrast to Yasmin, Anahita came without the safety of a residence permit. She had waited for two years at the time of the interview for a decision, and had no family to rely on for support. While Yasmin could settle with her family in an independent flat, Anahita was accommodated in a HVB home.

Anahita was experiencing multiple stressors. First of all, the long wait for the decision on her asylum application accentuated her feelings of vulnerability. *“One feels isolated since one does not have a permanent residence permit. One feels isolated, lonely, depressed, and even aggressive.”* She has applied for help from a psychologist, since her ongoing *“fears for the rejection of others”*. She feared that *“something was wrong with her”*. In her fears and anxiety, she has no confidential, trustful relationship with adults. She felt she could not trust social workers at the home: *“I have no one to trust, they are against me.”* She experienced negative attitudes from both ethnic and non-ethnic Swedish employees. On one occasion, she asked for financial support to buy a bus pass. She felt that the monthly allowance was not enough to be able to buy it. The employee she asked shamed her by saying: *“You had no money in Afghanistan, why do you complain here than?”* She also feels that they received more attention when she arrived, such as cultural programmes arranged by social care workers. In contrast, recently they had to find activities on their own. Anahita’s feelings of degradation were enhanced by her experiences with the Migration Board, where she felt *“having been interrogated as if she was a murderer”*. She finds that the authorities are *“not listening to our voices”*. She finds that authorities are discriminative against refugees from an Afghan background compared to those coming from Syria or Eritrea, since unaccompanied youth from these countries receive a much higher percentage of PUT. She feels mistrust, since she feels being unjustly discriminated against: *“We have not done anything wrong.”*

Anahita has a vulnerable emotional and existential situation, and a lack of trusting and supportive relationships with adults. Her vulnerability is aggravated by the institutional “criminalization” of the asylum-seeking process. The asylum policies were introduced after Anahita’s arrival are restrictive and imply surveillance.

In contrast, Yasmin has the supportive nest of her family, the advice and rules of which she follows even if she thinks differently on some matters. Her father’s views are the ones she follows:

This thing with the veil. ... I do not believe in it This is for my family and this is for my father. I respect him and his wish... Otherwise, if it was for me, there would be no veil. I should not have a veil on me.

Her father’s views also count in regard to her social contacts. She can meet up with friends, even boys, but only as friends. She is not expected to have a boyfriend, a rule that she has internalized:

It is OK with friends, but not so close.

No sexual relationship?

No, absolutely no such, none.

Especially when they were new in Sweden, her father had been very anxious about the interface with Swedish society: *“We should not be as them. ... We should always have some kind of distance between us and Swedes.”* However, over time this strong fear has softened. Yasmin can fraternize with girls, and even with boys and Swedish girls. Although they had

conflicts occasionally, Yasmin is not revolting against her father's control. She also sees how her father is making her wishes come true, such as allowing her to take violin lessons. She accepts that her father is being protective due to divergent cultural codes compared to the Swedish ones. Nevertheless, she also sees that such a protective attitude is originating from her father's fears for her safety.

Yasmin's parents have not been successful yet with establishing themselves. They are unemployed, working on a practice job for the municipality. This situation seemingly contributes to shifting gender roles for the parents; her mother's practice job is cleaning, while her father takes care of children. At home, her father does much of the cleaning and washing of the dishes. In the meantime, Yasmin is the one who had a summer job, as well as a babysitting job aside from school. Through these jobs, Yasmin experienced an increased freedom of movement. Consequently, she is an economic provider for the family. The normalization of life in Sweden led to an adjustment to the norms in Sweden. Even if her father's fears became milder, and Yasmin experienced greater freedom, her father's control of her movement and association with friends would not fully disappear.

Hence, Yasmin's situation is balanced between two concerns: she has her parents who provide her emotional support, and a caring context of trust. Her space of action is restricted by the controlling practices of her father, which has dual roots. On the one hand, it originates from the religious and cultural beliefs rooted in patriarchal traditions, in which a girl's body and movements are more controlled than boys. On the other hand, it originates from the fears of being a minority within a majority society, whose rules threaten the rules of their own culture.

Social contacts with fellow countrymen

Being an UASC, Anahita is accommodated in a mixed gender HVB home. As a girl, Anahita finds herself being monitored by the gaze of boys in similar situation. She accounts for having been commented on about her clothing. The boys criticize her for wearing tight trousers and an improper veil, arguing that *"If you are not wearing a proper hijab, you could just as well not wear anything."* These comments led to many disputes, yet no *"physical fight"* and no direct assault against her. Conflicts like this lead to falling outs, when they close the doors, and not letting in others. She feels more comfortable with the company of girls than boys, due to cursing. She thinks that *"Each individual should decide herself if one wants to wear a veil or not, one should respect each other."* Yet, she considers herself a believer, and wearing the *"half-veil"* is her own choice. Ongoing comments on which kind of veil and clothes she wears makes her uncomfortable in the company of her Afghan countrymen: *"I feel myself much more comfortable in expressing myself outside of the Afghan group."* Unfortunately, in the HVB home where Anahita lives, there are only two girls and 10 boys: *"I may have a friend."* This contributes further to her feeling of isolation.

Wearing a proper veil is also a concern for Yasmin. She is sceptical about the veil, but puts up with it due to respect for her father. Nonetheless, she, just like Anahita, is wearing a so-called *"half-veil"*. Her parents accept it, even if they never considered it to be a proper one, such as the one her mother is wearing. She also receives critical comments from Afghan youth at school, yet not all boys have a comment.

Thus, religious/ethnic symbols of chastity and virtuousness as a girl, such as the veil, are experienced as controversial for both girls. For Anahita, being an UASC girl, the veil posits insecurities concerning her own ethnic identity, even if she wears it out of her own religious conviction. Yet, concerns by fellow Afghans on her appearance make her feel detached from and question the association with her own ethnic group. In contrast, in the case of Yasmin, she accepts wearing the veil as a kind of proof of alliance and identification with her father, and in extension with her own ethnic group, even if she does this against her own judgement.

So for Anahita, the veil strengthens her individual choice and conviction, while for Yasmin it reinforces her group identification.

Contact with Swedish society

The two girls share the experience of not having contact with ethnic Swedish youth in or outside of school: *"We do not know each other. They do not come and talk to us and we do not do it either"* (Anahita).

Yasmin goes to high school. At first, before having passed the classes for immigrants, Yasmin only had a couple of Afghan friends. It was difficult with a lack of language skills. But over time she qualified to start in the mainstream Swedish educational system, where she obtained more friends. She describes it as an *"immigrant high school"*, due to the high proportion of youth with an immigrant background. There is only one class with ethnically Swedish pupils, but there is no interaction among pupils. Those in her class are youth with an immigrant background. For this reason, Yasmin's friends are teenagers with immigrant backgrounds. She describes a segregated educational system, where the *"Swedes are afraid of us and we are afraid of them. That is why we never come close to each other."* As discussed earlier, Yasmin experienced racial discrimination in Iran. She embodied racial difference in the eye of Iranians. In Sweden, she finds herself associated with youth who embody a non-Swedish status in her eyes. Therefore, she is careful to bring forward that her interest in making friends with ethnic Swedes has nothing to do with having concerns about her non-ethnic Swedish friends' deviant bodies. Hence, Yasmin is critical about this system, not that she would never like her friends who were not ethnic Swedes:

They [her friends] are not born in Sweden. I have no problem with that they are not Swedes, or that they should look like Swedes. No. Not so. But it is good to mix a little.

Sharing and mastering the Swedish language is the key to identification and the acknowledgement of belonging to the community of Swedes:

I have friends from other countries who are born in Sweden, and they can perfect Swedish. Therefore, for my part there is no difference between those who are born in Sweden [but have immigrant parents] and those who are [ethnic] Swedes. It is the same language.

Even so, Yasmin also has Afghan friends with whom she communicates in Persian: *"I feel very good among Afghan girls."*

Encountering the equality ideal in Sweden

Intriguingly, both girls wish to become health professionals, a doctor or nurse for Anahita or a midwife for Yasmin, which implies ambitions and further studies.

Yasmin is very decisive on prioritizing education and a career before establishing a family: *"first a career and the building a family!"* This is a priority that her parents do not challenge. She feels her parents would not like her to leave the family, which would be a consequence of marriage: *"No, my father is not such a one. Not my mother either. They want me to stay home."* Thus, after initial fears from encounters with Swedish society, her parents seem to have become supportive of the opportunities that opened for their daughter due to immigration to Sweden.

Both girls are very positive about Swedish policy for gender equality. They see it first of all as a policy which allows individual freedoms and a right to decide:

I believe it is very good that there is gender equality and that one respects women, and that they can decide on their own. (Anahita)

Meanwhile, in different ways, they express a critique of being received as immigrants: Anahita, due to the long process of securitized asylum process, and Yasmin, due to the segregated school system. In their everyday life, they feel safe, and do not experience direct racism. However, both girls have experiences of elderly women being unfriendly with them on public transport, and questioning why they are in Sweden at all.

Discussion and conclusions

These two life stories reflect the very different experiences of two girls of Afghan origin. The two girls, Yasmin and Anahita, share some joint experiences of intersectional discrimination from Iran, where their families resided prior to their departure for Sweden. This included stigmatization as refugees from a racially identified minority of poor social status, where gendered aspects of fear for being subjected to GBV were apparent. Anahita's situation was particularly vulnerable due to a lack of parents.

Yasmin entered Sweden prior to the securitization of the asylum process after the 2015 refugee vogue through a family reunion. Having the support and emotional safety of her family has been decisive for her establishment. However, even if the readiness of her parents to accept the freedoms of Swedish society increased over time, they still put pressure on her to accommodate cultural and religious expectations that were not her own choice. Having acquired permanent residency opened the path for Yasmin for an integration into a segment of multicultural Swedish society with youth from an immigrant background.

By contrast, Anahita arrived with the vogue in 2015, with an increased surveillance and securitization of the asylum process. While prior to the restrictive regulations, those under 18 could count on favourable decisions on PUT, and that one had the right for a family reunion; following 2016 restrictions, the percentage of denials increased and the asylum process became longer, especially in the case of youth from Afghanistan. As Anahita's case illustrates, the extended asylum process increases the vulnerability of youth, and psychological and social adjustment problems arise, as the establishment process is halted. The situation of girls is particularly vulnerable, since they find themselves not only without emotional support, experiences of questioning the truth of their asylum claims and the righteousness of being in Sweden, but are also challenged by fellow countrymen at their residence and at school about their clothing, behaviour, exercising gendered surveillance over them. Anahita, and many other UASC girls face conditions of accommodation, in which they are in a clear minority compared to boys, and through this having fewer opportunities to establish viable social bonding with girls in a similar situation to them.

The account of the two girls here does not corroborate the results of previous research by Celikaksoy and Wadensjö⁶⁵ which indicated that UASC do better in terms of establishment compared to those who arrived with their families when they were children. In this study Anahita, who arrived as an UASC is the one who gives the largest indication of distress and difficulties in engagement with her studies. Since Celikaksoy and Wadansjö's research was conducted with youth who arrived prior to the securitization, we can consider that the difference can reflect the consequences of the increased insecurity for UASC after the 2016 laws. Anahita's case indicates that these UASC encounter difficult psychological challenges, especially due the uncertain result of the asylum application, while at the same time they lack the emotional support of their families.

⁶⁵ A. Celikaksoy & E.Wadensjö, *De ensamkommande flyktningbarnen och den svenska arbetsmarknaden*. SULCIS Rapport 2015:2, Stockholm. 2015.

This has consequences for Anahita of poor psychological health. Would she obtain the permit, she has a strong motivation to move on and accomplish her studies. She is highly motivated to strive for independence, and has shown a strong will to act according to her own values. However, the securitization has disempowered her and challenged her ability to move on with her life.

Previous research has indicated that girls with their families are often hindered from engaging with Swedish society, both since they have to participate in family scores, taking care of younger siblings and being more restricted in their movements by their fathers and brothers.⁶⁶ Yasmin's case partially corroborates with these results. She is accommodating her behaviour to her father's traditional views on clothing, as well as his monitoring of her social contacts. In the meantime, she also deviates in several aspects. She has been freed from doing family chores, since she has been successful in obtaining an extra job after school as a babysitter, while her parents are still only employed through activities for the unemployed. Also, her parents seem to be very supportive for enabling her to study. It appears that her father did not have the opportunity to provide this for her in Iran, and is now ready to open the opportunity for her studies. Moreover, she is succeeding better than her parents at finding work.

The cultural meeting with Swedish culture can be a particular challenge for children who come from a "collectivist" oriented society to an individualistic society like Sweden.⁶⁷ Cultural differences, not least gender related, can cause conflicts and misunderstandings in daily social interactions.

In many cases, the cultural baggage of asylum-seeking children indicates hard patriarchal views on women and young girls, which may collide with basic thinking from an equality perspective. They may have been exposed to discriminating acts in their family home. The UASC may have traumatizing experience from their native country or their travel to Sweden, but also become exposed in Sweden to intimidation or offensive treatment.⁶⁸ Both Yasmin and Anahita's case indicate they have to put up a double standard: one towards those of a similar origin displacing traditional behaviour and one among Sweden-born friends accommodating liberalized gender patterns.

Anahita's life chances, similarly to the lives of those young girls and boys who arrived in- and after 2015 to Sweden, became insecure due to the securitization of her asylum status. Their opportunities for establishment is hindered, and for many of them closed. As Anahita expressed, her life situation is fully unreliable:

Without the residence permit, one feels a very large insecurity, anxiety. One is between heaven and earth. One does not belong anywhere; one does not know what one should do.

Studies conducted prior to 2014 indicate the difficulties UASC experienced in gaining access to the community with contemporary friends born in Sweden, and to establish long-term relationships with grown-up support persons.⁶⁹ They may face discriminatory attitudes by teachers who can negatively affect the development of the children.⁷⁰ Anahita's case corroborates both of these aspects, as she has difficulty with access to Swedish friends, and also experienced negative attitudes by social workers.

⁶⁶ Celikaksoy & Vadensjö, 2015.

⁶⁷ Brunnberg & Darvishpour, 2016.

⁶⁸ Brunnberg, Borg & Fridström, 2011.

⁶⁹ U. Wernesjö, *Conditional Belonging Listening to Unaccompanied Young Refugees' Voices.*, Uppsala: Uppsala Dissertations from the Faculty of Social Sciences 93. 2014.

⁷⁰ Stretemo & Melander, 2013.

As the report of the WRC⁷¹ indicates, GBV victims lack awareness of their rights for protection and experience difficulties in reporting and making their claims recognized by officers. The report is critical on the group placement of girls among men and the lack of access to adequate medical support. Yasmin's account gives clear indications on all these issues, indicating that her gender-specific vulnerabilities were not recognised within the extended (2 years) asylum trial, leaving her in insecurity increasing her vulnerability. They must balance the insecurities of the application with pressures related to gendered hierarchies from their home cultures, with experiences of occasional homophobic accidents without any trusting supportive relationships. This leads to feelings of alienation and a disembedding of identities, a state of not belonging. They experience being criminalized in the asylum process and not listened to. Thus, as the life story of Anahita indicates, the increased securitization of the asylum-seeking process has contributed to increased pressures for UASC adolescent girls. These special sensibilities would need to be taken on board, both in the process of asylum trials and in forming reception.

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⁷¹ WRC 2016.

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