

Power and Resistance: Exploring strategies of self-empowerment among Syrian asylum seekers in Sweden

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This article explores the experiences of Syrian asylum seekers, who are waiting for their decision or have recently received it, in Sweden. The empirical data were collected through semi-structured interviews with ten women and men during a month-long period of fieldwork conducted in the autumn of 2016 in an asylum center located in the south of Sweden. The research queries the regimes of power that shape the everyday realities of respondents, mainly the Swedish state, the camp administration, and the wider Swedish society. Simultaneously, the study illustrates how individuals are active agents, navigating their interactions and resisting and negotiating the established power relations.

Keywords:

Power relations; resistance; asylum; waiting; Syria; Sweden

INTRODUCTION

It was a warm and sunny autumn day. Samir and I were on the bus on our way to the camp. It was my first visit to the center and Samir, a 22-year old Syrian refugee, agreed to introduce me to his friends who live there. Throughout the journey to the camp, Samir was enthusiastically talking about his school life in Sweden, his plans after graduation, and how he would like to become an engineer. He paused after a while, dwelling upon his thoughts, and then shared with me the other side of the story. This side he was reluctant to reveal at the beginning of our conversation. Samir told me how lonely he feels at school, as his classmates refuse to befriend him and look down on him as they have found out the “truth” about him, and how he misses life in Syria, his family, friends and most of all the call to prayer, the adhan, which to him is the most beautiful sound in the world.

Upon arrival at the camp, I found myself contemplating a plethora of unanswered questions. *How was Samir so eager to finish his studies and become an engineer despite the apparent discrimination and racism he was facing? How did these challenges affect his feelings about being in Sweden and his wishes for building a new life? What were Samir’s accounts of discrimination a reflection of?*

After jumping off the bus, we found ourselves in a remote village about an hour away from the nearest town of Linhälla,¹ where communal and social life revolves around the small local church. The camp itself is in an abandoned hotel with old-fashioned and worn-out furniture with grey and unwelcoming walls. The people living here ironically refer to it as the “five-star hotel” while talking to their friends in other countries.

The day I arrived coincided with a celebration that was organized by members of the local church and volunteers from neighboring houses. For my respondents, it was a rarity in their otherwise monotonous lives. Swedish songs and dances filled the room, where adults and children from both nationalities were dancing in roundelays and exchanging gifts. However, after a while in the most Swedish of environments, the tunes of the traditional Levantine dabke were heard. All the Syrian men began to dance, inviting their Swedish guests to join, and for a moment one could feel the presence of a “little Syria” in a remote village in Sweden.

That day had a profound impact on generating my views. I realized the common thread of my queries and the relationship between this final episode and Samir’s experiences. Both episodes were marked by power relations and shifting power dynamics. In the case of Samir, societal pressure was excluding and

banishing him for being a refugee, while, in the case of the camp, the Swedish community was willing to embrace asylum seekers but with the prerequisite of cultural hegemony. By introducing local social customs, the members of the community were imposing the accepted cultural norms and reaffirming the superiority of the Swedish culture.

Nevertheless, in both cases, people expressed their agency and resisted in their own way. In the case of Samir, by refusing the label “refugee” and striving for his aspirations, and in the case of the people in the camp, by reviving their native traditions to preserve their identity.

Hence, to explore the various strategies of self-empowerment among Syrian asylum seekers and their interactions with different regimes of power in Swedish society, I pose the research questions:

1. What are the main structural constraints relating to everyday life of Syrian asylum seekers in Sweden?
2. How do asylum seekers navigate their daily interactions within these constraints and how do they resist them?

CONTEXT

The Syrian civil war has caused a mass migration of people, many of whom have sought asylum in different parts of the world, including Europe. According to the estimates provided by UNHCR, around 884,461 asylum applications were submitted in more than 37 European countries between 2011 and 2016 (UNHCR 2016). Most Syrian asylum seekers (64 percent) applied for asylum in Germany and Sweden (Ibid.). Thus, Sweden became one of the EU member-states with the highest number of asylum seekers per capita (Ibid., 27). Syrian asylum seekers constituted the majority of asylum applicants in Sweden (Ibid., 28). Subsequently, with asylum applications on the rise, the Swedish asylum system and reception centers faced significant challenges. A sense of crisis began to crystalize in parts of the Swedish government, political parties, media, and the wider society. As a result, historically liberal and open asylum policies began to shift with the introduction of more restrictive measures to limit the numbers of arriving asylum seekers (ENAR 2016). On 11 February 2015, the Swedish government introduced new temporary legislation and made temporary residence permits (either a three-year under the Geneva Convention or 13-month under subsidiary protection) the standard permits granted to refugees (Swedish government 2015). The changes in the new temporary legislation decreased the level of protection to refugees to the lowest possible without violating international and EU law.

At the same time, public debates have shifted towards more nationalistic and anti-immigrant sentiments. A recent study conducted by a leading British think-

¹ The name of the city is fictional and is applied to ensure the confidentiality of the research.

tank Demos observes how the dramatic changes in asylum policies were accompanied by an increased focus on questions pertaining to national identity and civic integration (Demos 2017). The study reveals how discourses around Swedish values and immigrants who need to assimilate into Swedish culture have become prominent among both elite and non-elite members of the society (Demos 2017, 375). Some of these discourses also portrayed immigration as a potential threat to the stability of the welfare state (Ibid., 388).

To summarize, the unprecedented large numbers of asylum applications in Sweden were followed by the introduction of more restrictive asylum policies and the rise of nationalistic and anti-immigration sentiments in political and public discourses. Nevertheless, the impact of these changes on the individual experiences of migrants has largely been neglected by researchers as well as the relevant authorities. The new temporary legislation granting residence permits one year at a time can substantially complicate the situation for housing, employment, and education for many Syrian asylum seekers and refugees. Additionally, the securitizing language of the media alongside the nationalistic and anti-immigrant rhetoric of politicians can fuel the discriminatory public attitudes and discourses. As a result, the integration of asylum seekers and refugees can be significantly constrained.

STRUCTURE AND AGENCY

The question of the interrelationship between agency and structure has been one of the oldest and most widely debated topics within the sociological tradition. Anthony Giddens' theory of structuration offers an analysis that explains the interplay between the two. He defines structure as both the "medium and the outcome of the social practices they recursively organize" (Giddens 1984, 25). Thus, even though structure shapes much of social practice, it is also reproduced and possibly transformed by that practice. Giddens describes structure in terms of what he refers to as modalities or a set of rules and resources engaging human action (Ibid. 34). Modalities can refer to cultural constraints such as established norms, customs, traditions, and ideologies that influence the behavior of individuals by introducing specific rules and laws to regulate human conduct. In the case of Syrian asylum seekers, such structures can present themselves in the forms of constraints associated with the inability to work and study due to restrictive asylum policies, non-recognition of qualifications, lack of references, and discrimination by employers and recruitment agencies (Wright 1995). Additionally, the enforced long-term waiting period can be a major structural constraint for many asylum seekers. Researchers have scrutinized the notion of *uncertainty* during the waiting period as

a significant variable that affects the well-being of asylum seekers and can result in psychological as well as drug- and alcohol-related problems (Dupont et al. 2005). In the same way, waiting for the change of status has been identified as one of the most painful periods of the claimant process, putting individuals *on hold* and impeding their progress towards settling and integration (Lacroix 2004). Waiting has been characterized by *anxiety*, *existential boredom* and a *feeling of exclusion* among asylum seekers as they find themselves in a state of "inbetweenness" or a liminal condition (Stewart 2005). In addition to this, labels such as "asylum seeker" and "refugee" can become structural constraints themselves due to their negative associations in terms of public perceptions, preventing individuals from moving forward with their lives in exile (Hunt 2008). The prejudiced media coverage of asylum seekers and their portrayals as "bogus", "welfare scroungers", "criminals", and "terrorists" (Hunt 2008, 1) can have a grave impact on refugees' chances of socio-economic integration and force them into vulnerable and exploitative situations, as well as adverse effects on their mental health (Ibid. 119).

These constraints can condemn them to the status of strangers, outsiders, and aliens, stripping away their right to become political beings (Isin and Rygiel 2007). Hence, being in legal limbo limits the capacity of asylum seekers to express and assert their agency. Nevertheless, Giddens argues that while being restrained by established structures, human actions are also enabled by them. For example, human agency can be performed by not paying attention to traditional social norms, or substituting or reproducing them in a different way. Accordingly, people's agency ensures that they always have some degree of freedom and some room to maneuver. Ultimately, Giddens affirms that human actors have the potential to modify and alter social structures, thus leading to social change.

In the past, refugees and asylum seekers were represented in terms of helplessness and loss, with a tendency towards homogenization and victimization, denying them any form of agency. This was explicit in UNHCR literature, which depicted the lives of refugees as: "...desperately simple, and empty. No home, no work, *no decisions to take* today. And none to take tomorrow. Or the next day. Refugees are the *victims* of persecution and violence. Most hope that, one day, they may be able to rebuild their lives in a sympathetic environment. To exist again in more than name" (UNHCR 1993, 48). As refugees and asylum seekers were so often victims of violence and forced migration, many assumed that they also had no agency (Ghorashi 2005). Nonetheless, homogenizing and victimizing portrayals of refugees and asylum seekers have been criticized by recent studies challenging the discourses of pity and exclusion. These scholars have shown the existence of agency

and resistance at different stages of the lives of refugees. From the time of decision-making to flee their homes, acting as “purposive actors” (Turton 2003), to the time of being in camps and detention centers and demanding basic human rights and dignity, performing as “social actors and agents” (Puggioni 2014). Rather than accepting the passivity that is imposed on them, individuals self-mobilize in unions and religious networks and strive to maintain their identity in their collective claim for citizenship rights and inclusion (Bailey 2010; Bhimji 2016; Lowry and Nyers 2006; Moulin and Nyers 2007; Piacentini 2014). Thus, despite their vulnerable and liminal position, refugees consciously and strategically challenge, modify and alter the social structures they are confined in.

Thus, Giddens’s theory of structuration can be of great assistance for understanding the interplay between established structural constraints and the capacity of asylum seekers to act and modify their own social reality. However, the structuration theory lacks an analysis of the modes of power and how they operate on multiple societal levels to ensure the functioning of established structures. Therefore, to better understand the sources of power and its various modes of operation, it is appropriate to consider the ideas of Michel Foucault and, specifically, his concept of “governmentality”. Disciplinary power stemming from the logic of governmentality, defined by Foucault, is a power exercised through administrative systems and social services, such as prisons, schools, and mental hospitals (Foucault 1979). According to Foucault, established systems of surveillance and assessment ensure that people behave in expected ways by disciplining themselves: “the success of disciplinary power derives from the use of simple instruments: hierarchical observation, normalizing judgement and their combination in a procedure that is specific to it, the examination” (Ibid, 98).

To portray the workings of disciplinary power, Foucault (1977) describes the image of a panopticon prison with an observation tower placed in the middle, surrounded by a circle of cells.

All that is needed, then, is to place a supervisor in a central tower and to shut up in each cell a madman, a patient, a condemned man, a worker or a schoolboy. By the effect of backlighting, one can observe from the tower, standing out precisely against the light the small captive shadows in the cells of the periphery. They are like so many cages, so many small theaters, in which each actor is alone, perfectly individualized and constantly visible (Foucault 1977, 200).

Thus, prisoners can never be certain if they are being watched or not. In other words, disciplinary power is derived from constant surveillance, examination, the functional organization of space, and the introduction of time tables and daily routines. Without having to resort to the use of violence, disciplinary mechanisms ensure the control of populations and the promotion of norms about expected human conduct. Refugee camps and asylum centers can become spaces where authorities establish control through the means of governmentality, having refugees under constant surveillance and examination. According to Agamben (1998), the refugee camp is a space that produces and dominates individual subjects by introducing the logic of governmentality (Ibid., 95). Thus, refugees are regulated and governed within the boundaries of the camp (Ibid., 110). Agamben also refers to the notion of potentiality. He claims that it is not only the bodies of refugees that are excluded but also their potential is contained, regulated and objectified, before it results in bodily inclusion or exclusion. Therefore, to consider the status of the potential of asylum seekers, in the next section I look into the micro dimensions of individual action and resistance in the face of sovereign panopticism.

EVERYDAY TACTICS OF RESISTANCE

To understand the strategies and tactics applied by asylum seekers in navigating their interactions with various modes of power, here I highlight some theoretical concepts relating to the agency and resistance of the subaltern groups. Individuals belonging to these groups are, as a rule, socially and politically outside of hegemonic power structures. Being excluded from society’s established institutions, they are denied the means by which people have a voice in their society (Hylton 2007).

It is worth mentioning that Agamben’s and others’ discussions of refugees, while acknowledging the political exclusion and exposure of refugees to sovereign power, reproduce discourses that foreclose refugee agency and the possibilities of systemic change (Bousfield 2010). Therefore, in the search for suitable analytical concepts, I bring in other theories more relevant to analyzing different acts of agency and resistance performed by asylum seekers.

The concept of resistance has had varying connotations, referring to various forms of human actions and behaviors on the individual, collective and institutional levels of social life (Hynes 2013). The term can be defined as, for example, “acting autonomously, in one’s own interests” (Gregg 1993, p. 172), “active efforts to oppose, fight, and refuse to cooperate with or submit to . . . abusive behavior and control”, (Profitt 1996, p. 25), or simply “questioning and objecting” (Modigliani and Rochat 1995, p. 112). Traditionally, resistance has been regarded as something visible and sizeable, such as large-scale

protest movements (Hollander et al. 2004). As noted earlier, refugees and asylum seekers engage in mass demonstrations protesting discriminatory legislation and difficult living conditions within camps and asylum centers (Askland 2007; Puggioni 2014; Rygiel 2011; Tyler 2013; Kleist, 2009). Isin (2008) refers to these agentic acts of disempowered people as *acts of citizenship*, acts undertaken by people to perform as political subjects, making a claim on the *right to have rights* (Arendt 1943).

Nevertheless, Hynes (2013) argues that resistance is not only a form of reaction through which mass movements challenge existing structures of power, but also a strategic response of individuals to the workings of systemic structures in everyday contexts. Everyday acts of resistance performed by relatively disempowered groups of people are elaborated in the works of Comaroff (1985), Ong (1987), Scott (1985), and Willis (1977). As Butler (2014) emphasizes, these non-violent forms of resistance are crucial for the purposes of asserting existence, claiming the right to public space, equality, and challenging oppressive power relations. In Scott's (1985) definition, resistance can manifest itself not only in open and direct confrontation but also in acts of hidden and disguised resistance, such as "foot-dragging, escape, sarcasm, passivity, misunderstandings, disloyalty, slander, avoidance or theft" which amount to acts of desperation (see also Scott 1989; 1990). To Scott, these subtle acts of resistance, which he identifies as "weapons of the weak", are more accessible to disempowered people as they rarely have access to the resources or opportunities to resist openly and publicly. Additionally, non-conformity implies correction and penalty, institutionalized by the disciplinary power. As Scott (1990) asserts, everyday acts of resistance expressed in "hidden transcripts", even though they might seem insignificant and invisible, have the capacity to challenge the power relations between the subaltern and the sovereign. Contrary to organized political actions, these acts of dissent are oriented towards short-term, rather than systemic, change, and pose an indirect, rather than a direct, challenge to the sovereign power. Among asylum seekers and refugees, such individual acts of resistance can range from hunger strikes, suicide attempts, and lip-sewing, to escape and concealing of identity (Bhimji 2016; Ellermann 2009; Kjærre 2011). The research illustrates the body politics that takes shape, helping people to gain visibility in contesting their rights.

Complementing Scott's ideas of subtle acts of resistance with Michel de Certeau's "theory of tactics" is a useful strategy to analyze the struggles of individuals against the panopticism of the sovereign. De Certeau (1998) explores the tactics of ordinary people's attempts to regain their own independence and to undermine the political and cultural rituals and representations imposed upon them. As de Certeau claims: "tactic is an art of the weak, by which they

make use of the cracks that particular conjunctions open in the surveillance of the proprietary powers. It poaches in them. It creates surprises in them. It can be where it is least expected" (Ibid. 30). Consequently, the weak "use, manipulate and divert" the spaces imposed upon them to create "unexpected results." Through such techniques and tactics individuals gain a sense of self-empowerment. While empowerment is based on the idea of the powerful giving power to the weak (Bhavnani 1990), self-empowerment is understood as the ability of an individual to regain the sense of autonomy and self-determination, thus bringing a sense of control in one's own life (Rappaport 2010). Thus, by learning to cope with cultural and structural constraints, individuals develop a sense of worthiness, build self-esteem, and develop the ability to change the personal and structural conditions that are barriers to developing individual potential.

To summarize, the self-empowering tactics of refugees and asylum seekers are mainly observed in political collective terms in the literature, which pays less attention to the specificities of their individual realities. At the same time, within the individual dimension, resistance strategies tend to amount to acts of desperation rather than self-empowerment and agency (Scott 1989, 1990). Most studies fail to thoroughly explore the interrelationship between the acts of agency and resistance and the difficulties associated with the asylum process and camp life. It is conceivable that such challenges can be appropriated by individuals and applied as a source of motivation to act, thus enabling them to demonstrate agency and overcome the barriers of the asylum process and camp life.

Meanwhile, the theoretical basis provides a framework for an analysis of the experiences of Syrian asylum seekers within the boundaries of Swedish sovereignty. By engaging with Foucault, I question the extent of such individuals' exposure to disciplinary power exercised by the sovereign. In line with Giddens' ideas, I aim to understand the interplay between structure and agency within the context of the everyday lives of asylum seekers. In dialogue with Scott, de Certeau, and others, I query the ways asylum seekers navigate their interactions with various modes of oppression and the ways they tactically challenge the existing power structures by both subtle and open acts of resistance. Moving between the multiple levels of society, I posit how subjective experiences and actions contest and inform practices of human exclusion through institutions such as the Swedish state, the camp administration, and the local community.

METHODOLOGY

The study is based on the narratives of ten Syrian asylum seekers, derived from a month-long fieldwork in an asylum center located in the south of Sweden.

The participants were either waiting for their asylum decision or had recently received it. Initially, I established contacts with respondents through informal networks followed by a snowball sampling method (Hennink et al. 2012). The study combines narrative research and phenomenology to conduct interviews and collect necessary data for the research.

Narrative research implies “construction of the self via reconstruction of the past” (Fischer-Rosenthal & Rosenthal 1997) allowing a thorough analysis of respondents’ lives and experiences (Chamberlayne et al., 2000, Wengraf 2006).

Furthermore, phenomenology facilitates the analysis of subjectivity as it is more concerned with personalized, inner worlds of meaning and how the external world is received and processed (Schutz 1967). In comparison to the narrative approach, phenomenology is more concerned with addressing commonalities. As such, it is a useful tool in understanding how Syrian asylum seekers experience different modes of oppression and how they strategically resist and challenge them.

I used a semi-structured interview guide to conduct in-depth ethnographic interviews, allowing the participants to dwell upon their experiences and facilitating the building up of a rapport between us. Ultimately, this generated a wide range of responses, thoughts, and reflections without imposing my own framework of ideas and restricting the possible range of answers (Creswell 2012).

STRUCTURAL CONSTRAINTS

During the participant observation, it became apparent that the waiting period was one of the most challenging aspects for asylum seekers and one of the state-imposed structural constraints that individuals strive to overcome. All my respondents found the difficulties associated with the waiting period overwhelmingly distressing. I have underlined several responses to give a general idea about their concerns. The disturbing effects of prolonged waiting-times were addressed by Hakim (29 years old), who had escaped Raqqa, one of the strongholds of ISIS, after being targeted and accused of “espionage and treason” for cooperating with international humanitarian organizations. He aimed to reach, as he defined it, “the furthest place possible” from the reach of ISIS. As he was denied access to Norway, he applied for asylum in Sweden. Referring to the time spent in the camp, Hakim noted:

The long waiting time is killing us. Me and my friend live in the same room and we have been here before anyone else. We have been living together in this same room and having the same life for so long that now we are having even the same dreams. We wake up and

tell each other our dreams (laughing). We have been waiting for so long. It’s enough already. We should go out. I don’t want to spend all my life here.

Fears and doubts relating to the asylum process and the subsequent implications for their lives were prevalent in the discussions about the future. Karima (32 years old), who also fled the Syrian civil war with her husband (Nadim, 40 years old) hoping to find a safer place for her family, similarly identified the waiting period as the most excruciating part of asylum process due to its uncertainty. “We are anxious and worried all the time because we don’t know if they will give us a positive or negative decision. What will happen to us, if they refuse to give us a permit?” (Karima).

In addition to that, the introduction of temporary permits that can be extended only if the person has an income, posed another constraint to individuals.

I need to find a job, but it is so difficult [...] We have been living in this place for more than a year, far away from the city, with so few opportunities [...] And now, after I received my permit they expect me to find a job and a house in just thirteen months. How am I supposed to do that? (Hakim)

Thus, the daily realities of the respondents reveal various structural constraints with which they interact on a daily basis. State power manifests itself by both legally and politically excluding the refugees and asylum seekers from the boundaries of its sovereignty. In line with Agamben’s discussion of sovereign power and the relationship between the state and non-citizens, the modes of power established by the Swedish state can be observed in the legal predicaments present in my informants’ lives. The introduction of temporary permits and long waiting periods for asylum decisions were considered to be major obstacles for the integration efforts of my informants. Six of the ten respondents received temporary permits. Those who had to apply for an extension of a permit expressed their profound fears and doubts, as in order to receive an extension they need to be financially self-sufficient or employed and be able to afford their own housing. There were several reasons for their doubts and fears. The enforced long-term waiting period for adult asylum seekers, marked by uncertainty and no rights to employment or studies, significantly affects their employment chances after receiving the permit. Only after the residence permit is received are the refugees entitled to attend lessons in Swedish organized by local municipalities. Given the fact that the access to the labor market relies heavily on the acquisition of linguistic skills, this can cause a major delay in their economic integra-

tion. Subsequently, these legal impediments stall the efforts of individuals to find means of self-empowerment. Thus, the paradoxical logic of twofold state oppression both obstructs the people's chances of integration and at the same time demands it.

The asylum center's location in a remote area also posed a major structural constraint to the respondents. With very little financial means to commute to the larger urban areas and create social networks and find more opportunities, most had little or no access to the labor market or to wider Swedish society. Hence, the sovereign power excludes the "body of the refugee" not only through political and legal, but also physical expulsion. As Agamben notes, through this banishment the very human potential is maintained and regulated before it results in bodily exclusion or inclusion (Agamben 1998). Accordingly, the lives of refugees are regulated and governed within the boundaries of the state sovereignty.

Furthermore, other structural constraints that respondents' accounts revealed related to the management of the camp life. Nadir, the eldest respondent (61 years old), a joyful person with a warm-hearted personality, escaped Saudi Arabia because he was accused of supporting oppositional forces in Syria. The allegations were made based on the fact that he was sending donations and food supplies to his family and to the people affected by the war. Nadir shared with me his experience of living in the camp before my arrival. His words revealed the disturbing reality of the camp resembling a "panopticon prison." He recalled times being under constant control by the camp administration, describing how it affected all the aspects of their lives: "She was watching everybody: no smoking, no noise, no entrance to the restaurant after the mealtime."

This statement clearly indicates the imposition of disciplinary mechanisms through which the administration of the camp aims to regulate the organization of space, time, and people's activities and behaviors (Foucault 1975). Furthermore, to make his point clearer, Nadir compared the nature of the camp management with one of the most infamous surveillance systems in Arab countries saying: "That woman was like mukhābarāt², we escaped from that kind of people from our countries now we find them even here." The strict imposition of rules and regulations permeated all the aspects of camp life, creating a sense of imprisonment among the respondents. Amin (28-years old) fled the war in Syria hoping to find a haven for his unborn child and wife in Sweden. Referring to the restrictive and despotic environment of the camp, he noted:

For example, if the time for eating was over but you have not finished your

meal yet, she would say: "stop, go out", and if you would like to take the leftovers with you to eat in your room, she would not let you do that either.

The camp administration, as the embodiment of state power, has been identified as one of the most influential actors feeding into the processes of oppression. Unlike formal state-refugee relations, which are marked by the workings of the sovereign power, the lives of the respondents living in the camp are restrained by the mechanisms of disciplinary power. As Foucault highlights, the disciplinary power is exercised by those who represent the sovereign authority in everyday transactions by their own or the sovereign's rules. Multiple aspects of respondents' lives indicated the dominance of disciplinary mechanisms in their daily practices. The constant surveillance established by the camp administration aimed to control people's behavior and daily activities, such as eating, resting, and socializing. Additionally, "a prison-like" rigid organization of spatial configurations in the camp explicitly demonstrated the workings of disciplinary mechanisms.

The societal dimension presents the final layer of the regimes of power shaping the realities of my respondents. Here, Agamben's emphasis on state panopticism as a monopolized act of banning the refugees falls short of providing a theoretical explanation of the acts of expulsions at multiple and differentiated societal levels. Samir's accounts of how he has been discriminated against by his fellow schoolmates for being a refugee, which resulted in his social exclusion and marginalization, is illustrative of how various modes of oppression intersect on the level of state and society.

INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE FORMS OF AGENCY AND RESISTANCE

The narratives of my respondents reveal not only the regimes of power that they are subjected to, but also illustrate the individual acts of resistance and self-empowerment that challenge the established power relations. These acts of transgression can be broadly classified as those performed outside and within the confines of the camp.

As the findings suggested, the respondents found themselves exposed to disciplinary power that permeated all layers of the camp life through overarching surveillance techniques established to control the behavior and daily activities of the informants. Nevertheless, the respondents mobilized collectively to draw the attention of relevant authorities, the media, and the local community to the alarming situation in the camp. Nadir, with his compelling charisma and leadership skills, was at the front line of organizing the dissent.

² Mukhābarāt is the Arabic term for intelligence, as in intelligence agency.

We were around seventy-five people. We gathered everyone's signatures and complaints about different things and discussed all these with the representatives of the migration agency and municipality.

After five months of numerous meetings with journalists and representatives of the Swedish migration agency, Nadir and the majority of the people living in the camp succeeded in replacing the manager of the camp with a more compassionate and understanding person. Thus, the respondents were able to challenge and transform the disciplinary mechanisms operating in the camp by restoring their threatened sense of ontological security and dignity. And in the words of Nadir, life has completely changed in the camp since then.

According to Foucault, in comparison to sovereign powers, disciplinary mechanisms evoke little resistance due to their discretion, low exteriorization, and relative invisibility. Nevertheless, the narratives of the respondents illustrate the most vigilant form of resistance that aims to stall the functioning of these mechanisms. The respondents, who were deprived of the political power of citizenry, broke the pattern of their political and social invisibility in their collective claim for citizenship rights and inclusion through these acts of resistance.

Additionally, the narratives demonstrate the plethora of resistance strategies and techniques applied by respondents in their everyday life transgressing and defying the confines of camp life. Such acts of transgressions could be traced to "hidden transcripts" of the subtle acts of resistance (Scott 1990). Faiz (40 years old) with his daring and goal-oriented personality was determined to pursue his career aspirations. After escaping the war, Faiz and his family were striving to create a better future for themselves in Sweden.

As soon as, my family and I arrived at the camp we began to plan our life outside of the camp, and not inside, because life in the camp is very difficult [...].

To achieve his goals, Faiz sought to build a social network and increase the chances of gaining access to the Swedish labor market.

As I speak English, I make so many friends in the village. I attend various social events and meetings, talk to people and ask about any jobs they might suggest [...]. People here are sitting, smoking and playing on their phones. I wasn't planning to do that, I was more worried for my life outside of the camp,

because life is not inside the camp, life is outside of it.

In line with de Certeau's (1998) ideas, people had to look for the existing cracks within the established system of powers to tactically challenge their social and economic marginalization. Faiz's strategic use of spatial relationships and the establishment of social networks, within a limited area, constitutes a creative way of challenging his social exclusion. Thus, he tactically diverts and manipulates the spatial relations within a highly-restricted configuration of space and produces unexpected results by advancing both his social and economic status. In agreement with Giddens (1984), it can be argued that the very structures that limited the freedom of actions, such as the lack of access to Swedish social life, in turn enabled his resistance strategies and opened the potential for creativity.

In a similar manner, Hakim, despite being unable to attend Swedish classes, was determined to reach a good level of Swedish on his own, which to him had the capacity to alter the established power relations in the society:

When I go to the Migration Agency or talk to people in public places, I can speak Swedish and if something happens, I can defend myself. I think it is a form of power to be able to speak Swedish.

Sumaya (38 years old) aimed to master Swedish on her own as well. Fleeing the clutches of ISIS in Syria, she came to Sweden with her family. Even though, as a mother of three small children, she could not afford to study on her own for long hours, especially in a small room where the whole family was placed to live, she was still using all the spare time she had to study Swedish. "We have been here almost a year and a half. Many people feel bored while waiting, but I don't, because I study all the time." Despite having lived in the country for such a short time and not having any opportunity to attend language courses, Sumaya managed to become fluent in Swedish by studying on her own. When I asked her if it was difficult to do that, she answered: "Yes, it was very hard, but I always thought that the language is the key that will open the doors to Swedish society, so I did my best to learn it."

Most studies on asylum seekers' experiences focus on the paralyzing effects of long-term waiting, due to anxieties and fears for the future. However, what studies have not observed is how these challenges can be appropriated by individuals and applied as a source of motivation to act in order to circumvent the disabling effects of waiting. Even though my respondents acknowledged the hardships associated with the waiting process, their actions showed that

they did not accept the enforced societal alienation and exclusion, and instead utilized waiting as a way to exercise their own power and build social, cultural, and other forms of capital, to prepare themselves for the life after the camp.

Similar to social and cultural integration, economic independence was one of the main priorities of the respondents, many of whom proved themselves to be very resourceful in this field. Sumaya, who used to be a school director in Syria, was resolute in pursuing her goals and aspirations in Sweden as well.

From the moment we arrived, I was trying to find a job. I contacted my Swedish friends and one of them, who was a teacher at a local school, helped me find an internship there.

Similarly, Hakim sought after any opportunity to work:

I asked a Swedish man who was working at the church about an internship, a job or anything, I could do. Even an unpaid job would have been good. I told him that I just want to go out. I want to meet people and do something good for myself. Then he spoke to someone he knew who needed help in the restaurant and I went there to work.

Being engaged in any work activity had a crucial meaning for Nadir as well:

I can't stay without work. I need to work. I think there was someone who said: "I am working, I am alive." Anyway, I forgot, but the point is that, I can't stay without work, any work, even unpaid, because as I said, **when I work, I am alive.**

Being a professional fine art designer helped Nadir to secure an internship position at the local art boutique where he spent most of his time. However, Nadir was not fully content with it and was planning to have an international exhibition and continue his studies in the field of decorative arts.

I know it will be hard, especially in here (village surrounding the camp), maybe in bigger cities like Malmö or Stockholm it will be easier, but in any case, **I will start from Linhälla. It will be the first step.**

In line with Scott's ideas of subtle and disguised acts of resistance, respondents utilized their social networks, be it family members residing in Sweden

or friends and acquaintances from the Swedish community, to facilitate their access to the labor market and contribute to their economic integration. Nevertheless, both Scott and de Certeau define the power relations within the paradigm of "weak" versus "strong." Scott emphasizes the state of desperation at the heart of resistance while de Certeau highlights the manipulation and deception that individuals resort to in order to challenge the established power relations. Thus, they fall short in offering insights for my respondents' abilities to gain empowerment by building a tactical ground and having a strategic advantage. Sumaya, Hakim, and others' utilization of their limited social networks to secure any form of employment demonstrates how individuals tactically approach their social constraints and transform them into means of social and economic empowerment, thus allowing them to have a strategic advantage in their daily interactions with the Swedish society.

CONCLUSION

The aim and purpose of this article is to query the regimes of power that shape the everyday realities of respondents and illustrate how individuals are active agents, navigating their interactions and resisting and negotiating established power relations.

Observing the interrelationship of asylum seekers and the Swedish state, the camp administration, and the local Swedish population, the article explores the modes of oppression and resistance operating on multiple societal levels. Particularly, it underlines the numerous legal and social structural constraints that the respondents are subjected to, which in turn contain and limit their potential resulting in systems of oppression. Simultaneously, the study illustrates how these established power relations are negotiated by individual actors who perform as active agents, navigating their interactions and resisting their socio-political, cultural, and economic marginalization. Thus, by leading to self-empowerment, the strategies and tactics of resistance affect the lives of individuals both on a macro level, asserting their rights to be political beings, and a micro level, claiming their place within the community.

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