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Living in Transit:

Experiences of asylum seekers with the Swedish asylum process

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Summary

Problem and Purpose

Most of the research concerning asylum seekers is focused on asylum policies but little research has been done to the experiences of asylum seekers. To improve the support given to asylum seekers by social workers and volunteers, this study focuses on how asylum seekers in Sweden experience the asylum process and what their main issues of concern are.

Method

I have chosen to do an ethnographic research, using in-depth open ended interviews with visitors of the Red Cross integration program called Träffpunkten. To keep an open mind, I have chosen to apply an inductive research approach and chosen my theory for analysis based on the outcomes of the interviews.

Outcomes

The analyses of the interviews resulted in seven main themes that were important to the participants; 1) seeking safety elsewhere is a difficult decision, 2) negative experiences with the Migration Agency, 3) A long, frustrating and complex asylum process, 4) importance of having a job, 5) importance of family, 6) emotional effects of the asylum process and 7) living in Sweden.

The participants experience the asylum process as long, complex and frustrating and express feelings of hopelessness and having no control over their life. They get little information about what will happen next and have no idea where they are in the process. The uncertainty when a decision will be made and whether they will be allowed to stay or not makes it hard to make any future plans. The participants would like to get to work but the bureaucracy involved in receiving a tax number and opening a bank account makes it almost impossible. Many express having the feeling they are wasting two years of their life while waiting for an answer. The long asylum process makes that some have not been able to see their relatives for more than two years. There main concerns are finding accommodation, finding a job and being reunited with their family.

Discussion and conclusion

Leaving their home country and building a new life in Sweden is experienced as a total event and participants have to rebuild their identity. They had to leave their job, family and social networks behind and everything that is familiar to them. They can no longer fulfill the roles they had in their previous life and have to rebuild their identity. During the asylum interview their identity and their background story is questioned. The uncertainty when a decision will be made and whether they will be allowed to stay or not makes it hard to plan any future action. For social workers and volunteers it is important to make a link between the asylum seekers own cultural and ethnic background and the Swedish culture and society and use symbols that are familiar to the asylum seeker.

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Introduction

In 2015 the EU saw a rapid increase of people seeking asylum. The world was shocked by the images of overcrowded dinghies full with refugees risking their lives crossing the Mediterranean sea, or people walking along the highways in Europe. These images sparked a heated debate amongst citizens, whether their countries had to do more to close the borders, or rather do something about the inhumane conditions of refugee camps such as the ‘jungle of Calais’.

In that year, Sweden received the highest number of asylum applications ever recorded and stood for the great task of hosting all these people. In November of 2015, the Swedish Government came with a statement that the large influx of refugees has overstretched the reception system and could no longer handle the large number of asylum applications. To bring order in the chaos, the government announced a temporary asylum policy with stricter entry requirements.

The large number of asylum applications and the new policy has increased the processing time significantly and people sometimes have to wait for two years for their final decision. How is it like being an asylum seeker and having to live in constant uncertainty whether you are allowed to stay or not? This research focusses on the experiences of asylum seekers with the Swedish asylum system. What struggles do they face and what are the main issues of concerns for them?

In 2013 I came to Sweden to study International Migration and Ethnic Relations at Malmö Högskolan. To gain more experience in working with immigrants I started working as a volunteer for the Swedish Red Cross in 2014. Here I work on an integration project for newly arrived immigrants and helped them practicing Swedish, learning more about the Swedish culture and society and getting to know Malmö. Through this project, I have met people from all over the world who are all very eager to learn. Many of the participants of this project are asylum seekers who shared with me the struggles they face while trying to build up a new life in Sweden. This has inspired me to do this research, so we can improve the support we offer to asylum seekers.

I will start with a background sketch of the subject at hand to get a better understanding of the context of this study. Thereafter I will explain the research aim and present the research questions. This will be followed by the theoretical framework that will guide this research, where I outline the concepts of symbolic interactionism and identity theory.

In the second part of the report I will outline the research method used during the research. To answer the research questions is chosen for an ethnographic research approach. The paradigm that has influenced this research is interactionism. The data generated by this research has been collected through interviews with participants of an integration project in Malmö. To analyse the data, I have used an inductive analysis.

The third part gives a summary of the interview outcomes. The analysis of the interviews has resulted in 7 main themes that are each explained and illustrated with a few phrases from the interviews. After the presentation of the research outcomes I discuss the outcomes in relation to the theory. Thereafter I will present my conclusion and give some recommendations for the future.

Background

A long history of refugees

Refugees themselves have a long history, but international asylum law is relatively new. With the Second World War and the Holocaust in mind, Western diplomats in Geneva agreed in the 1951 UN convention that everyone fleeing a well-founded fear of persecution on the basis of race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a “social group” has a right to asylum (Waters, 2011; Jennissen, 2015). Initially this convention only applied to European refugees who had been a victim of the Second World War, but with the so called New York Protocol from 1967, the mandate of this convention got expanded to include refugees who are, for example, fleeing oppression by a dictatorial regime or the violence of decolonization (Jennissen, 2015, p.13).

The first wave of refugees who made use of these new laws were mainly middle class, skilled people coming from behind the Iron Curtain in the 1950's and 60' and were welcomed quite openly by the western European countries. For the west, these refugees were seen a sign of superiority of democratic states in the West as opposed to communistic regimes in the East. According to Schuster this has resulted in a system. Ultimately, the walls and gun towers of the communist blocs brought a halt to the potential refugee flow from Eastern Europe to the west (Waters, 2011).

In the 1970's, though, Indo-Chinese refugees fleeing the Vietnam war and those fleeing the violence of decolonization in Africa, Asia and South-America posed a different question. As these refugees were mainly poor farmers from the countryside, people started to wonder if they really fled persecution or did they actually flee poverty? And suspicion raised about the legitimacy of their asylum claims. Were these refugees really just victims or were they fleeing justified persecution for war crimes (Waters, 2011)?

Bureaucracy was set up by skeptical governments, to determine who has a legitimate claim for asylum and who has no right to stay. Migration offices now wanted verifiable facts such as government documents and police reports. In return, an industry has been set up to match stories to the available documents and to meet the expectations of the migration offices. As a result, there is a patterned explanation as to how refugees present their story. This created a system

where asylum seekers, who can present their case well and can afford to hire a good lawyer, have a higher chance to get asylum while others with a legitimate asylum claim do not, simply because they do not have the papers that proves their case (Waters, 2011).

After the cold war, the number of refugees seeking asylum in Europe has dropped significantly, which turned the attention of debate towards economic migrants instead (Jennissen, 2015). But with the refugee crisis in 2015, refugees became a hot topic again. The economic crisis and a growing populist movement in Europe has caused European governments to tighten their asylum policies over the last years. Changing modes of war have also made it more complex to determine who has a legitimate claim for asylum.

The current status

The start of the civil war in Syria in 2011 has brought in motion the largest number of displaced people since the Second World War. Most of these refugees are reciting in neighboring countries and only a small portion sought their way to Europe. At the end of 2015, 3,8 million Syrian refugees were living in Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq. The number of Syrian refugees that have applied for asylum in Europe between April 2011 and May 2015 was merely about 250.000 (UNHCR 2015, cited by Jennissen 2015, p.17). In Sweden that was 51338 at the end of 2015 Other large groups of nationalities that sought asylum in Sweden in that year where people from Somalia, Eritrea, Afghanistan and Iraq (Migrationsverket, 2017b).

During the refugee ‘crisis’ in 2015 Sweden has taken in the second highest number of displaced people seeking asylum in Europe with a total of 162 877. In line with an ongoing trend in Europe to tighten asylum policies, the Swedish government came with a proposal on November 2015 for a temporary asylum policy that grants asylum seekers now only temporary residency instead of permanent residency and increased the requirements for family unification to nearly impossible (Migrationsverket, 2016). This, according to the Swedish government, to streamline the application process and to take pressure off the migration board. But also, to stimulate an equal share of the burden of hosting refugees among EU member states. With this new policy, the government was hoping to send the message that Sweden is no longer the best option to go to and an easy way out for other states to take responsibility to host a fair share of asylum seekers (Karageorgiou, 2016).

The reception of asylum seekers in Sweden

Once an asylum seeker has arrived in Sweden, he or she can apply for asylum at one of the Migration Board's asylum application centers. There are three bases on which one can get asylum in Sweden. The first is on the basis of refugee as according to the UN refugee convention mentioned in the first paragraph. The second basis is 'otherwise in need of protection' in accordance with the EU's rules and regulations. Those who fall under this status are either at risk of the death penalty in their home country, at risk of physical punishment, torture or other humiliating or inhuman punishments, or as a civilian have a high risk to get injured due to an armed conflict. Besides these two, Sweden has, as one of the few in the EU, a third status for those who do not fall under the first two. This only applies in very special circumstances where a rejection would go against Swedish international commitments. Such cases could be, people who suffer from a severe health condition or people who have been a victim of trafficking (Migrationsverket, 2017). Only 10 % of the Syrian asylum seekers got the status of refugees. The remainder 90% get the status of otherwise in need of protection.

During the first meeting the applicant has to hand in documents to prove his or her identity. The Swedish law applies a free evaluation of evidence. This means that other legal documents to prove someone's identity, which are presented during the asylum application, should be considered. The applicant's identity can thus also be proven by other means than a valid passport (Sundquist, et al., 2013). After that, a photo and a fingerprint will be taken of the applicant. The photo will be used for the Migration Boards register and for the LMA-card which the applicant can use to show that he or she is an asylum seeker. The fingerprint will be used to check whether the applicant has already applied for asylum or if he or she already has the permission or prohibition to stay in another Schengen country (Migrationsverket, 2017).

After they have taken a photograph and fingerprints and have handed in their identity papers they meet with an investigator who will ask them some questions about their background, the reason why they apply for asylum and how they came to Sweden. They can also expect questions about their family and their wellbeing. Based on this interview and the documents that are handed in, the investigator will check the background of the applicant and decides if more investigation needs to be done. In a later stage, they will get a new appointment for an interview to elaborate more on why they have left their home country, how they came here and what they think will

happen if they return to their country. The applicant might be invited for one or two more interviews before the Migration Board takes a decision. As every case is different, the length of the process can vary from three months to two years (Migrationsverket, 2017a).

After the intake, the applicants receive more information about the asylum process and their rights and obligations as an asylum seeker. When asylum seekers choose to live in an accommodation provided by the Migration Board they are usually relocated to small village anywhere in Sweden. Asylum seekers are initially supposed to take care of their own financial situation. If they cannot find a job or other ways to support themselves, they can get economic support from the Migration Board. This is 24 sek a day for a single adult or 19 sek a day for adults who share a household and 12 sek a day for children up to 17 years, for those who live in an accommodation that serves food (Ibid). Those who choose to find accommodation by themselves do not get any extra financial support from the Migration Board to pay for the rent.

Asylum seekers who applied before the 24th of November 2015 can get a permanent residence permit. All applicants who applied after that date can qualify for a temporary permit of 3 years in the case of those who fall under the refugee status, or 13 months in the case of those who are 'otherwise in need of protection'. After that period they have to apply for an extension of their permit and will the Migration Board reassess if the grounds for the residence permit are still in place or if the situation at home has become safe enough to return (Migrationsverket, 2017a).

Malmö as entry point

Malmö is the third largest city in Sweden with 328 494 citizens (as of February 2017), located in the most southern point of Sweden. With a bridge between Copenhagen and Malmö and ferries going to Germany, Malmö is for most asylum seekers the first entry point to Sweden. This is reflected in the cultural diversity of the city. There are 178 different nationalities represented in Malmö and 38% of the citizens are born outside Sweden. Another 12% of the citizens are born in Sweden but have one or both parents born in another country (Malmö stad, 2017). Therefore, Malmö is by most Swedes known as the immigrant capital of Sweden. These are not all asylum seekers however. Malmö also host a large number of international students studying at Malmö University or Lund University, Danes who enjoy the lower taxes in Sweden and expats who are

working for companies like Volvo or Ikea. The largest groups of foreign born are Danes, former Yugoslavians and Iraqis.

In the last couple of years, the number of citizens grew significantly. In 2016, Malmö received 5290 more people. But the housing market did not grow accordingly, which led to a shortage of housing in Malmö. Therefore, the city is building hard on new houses and has started about 3100 new building projects in 2016. This growing number of citizen has not only an impact on the housing market but also on the labor market. Compared to other cities in Sweden, Malmö has a high number of unemployed citizens. The unemployment rates differ per category but is among others, higher under foreign born citizens than under Swedish born citizens, no matter the level of education (Malmö stad, 2017). Despite the high unemployment rates, most asylum seekers prefer to live in Malmö.

Malmö is the fastest growing city in Sweden and is expecting to receive another 50 000 new citizens before 2027. This growth is mainly due to birth and immigration. Malmö is therefore also a very young city. Almost half of the population is younger than 35 years old (Malmö stad, 2017).

Attitudes towards asylum seekers

Sweden is generally known as a progressive country if it comes to asylum reception and Swedes would describe themselves as liberal, equal and open-minded. According to Sayaka Osanami Törngren (2015) Swedish immigration policies have always been based on the idea of colorblindness and the believe that everyone is equal and has the same rights and opportunity. This colorblindness even goes so far that the Swedish parliament decided in 2001 to eliminate the word race from all official language and deleted race as a basis for discrimination in 2009. In 2014 the Swedish government announced that the word race should be erased from all legislation and replaced with another word. However in reality, discrimination based on race does exist in Sweden but the political correctness of Swedes make it hard to discuss this issue (Törngren, 2015).

The discussion around asylum policies are becoming increasingly polarized. On the one side people are demonstrating for more tolerant refugee politics while on the other side people are

calling for more restrictions. This can also be seen in the rising popularity of the Swedish Democrats, a right wing populist party, that became the third largest party during the last elections in 2014. At the same time, no other party wants to cooperate with the Swedish Democrats.

As said before, in 2015 Sweden experienced a large influx of refugees, mainly coming from Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan, which further increased the polarization of public opinion. At the same time a large number of Swedes engaged in voluntary actions, mainly under the name 'Refugees Welcome', to help the refugees with food, clothing and information. This outburst of voluntary activity was coupled with a popular opinion for Sweden to remain their generous asylum policy. However, despite the steady stream of incoming refugees throughout the rest of the year, the number of volunteers declined. This also reflected a shift in national opinion. In November 2015, the Swedish government announced a major change in the asylum policy, which resonated with most people who seemed to have changed their opinion in just a few months (Gustafsson, 2016).

Träffpunkten a place to meet

To help integrating all these new arrivals to Malmö, the Swedish Red Cross started an integration project in 2014. It started as a pilot project financed by the European Union under the name frivillighet för delaktighet (volunteering for participation). In 2015, when the pilot project ended, the project changed its name to Träffpunkten and it is now financed by the Swedish Red Cross.

Träffpunkten is a place where immigrants and volunteers meet to practice Swedish, meet new people and learn about the Swedish culture and society. Translated to English, the name Träffpunkten means meeting point. The program of Träffpunkten is based on the input of participants and their wishes and needs. The ideology of the project is that the immigrant knows best what he or she needs to integrate in the Swedish society. The main focus of the project lays in language training. Most participants are interested in training to speak Swedish as they do not get a lot of opportunity for that in daily life.

The group exists of approximately 30 regular visitors and 30 active volunteers who meet every Wednesday evening from 18.00 to 20.00. The project is based on voluntary participation and people can come and go whenever they like. Therefore, the composition of the groups changes

every week. Many of the participants also visit other integration projects in Malmö and meet each other on different occasions. Although all newly arrived immigrants are welcome, most of the participants are asylum seekers coming from Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan and Somalia.

Aim and purpose of the research

During the refugee crisis in 2015, Sweden has taken in the second largest number of refugees in the European Union. For Sweden, this has been the highest number of asylum applications ever recorded. This has increased the process time of an asylum application significantly. Now the government has implemented a temporary asylum policy, status holders have to send in a new application to extend their residence permit every thirteen months or three years. What does it mean for people to live in the constant uncertainty if you are allowed to stay or not?

Many asylum seekers visit volunteer organizations such as the Red Cross to help them integrate in the Swedish society as they are not yet entitled to Swedish language classes offered by the state. To understand how to give the best support to asylum seekers it is good to know how they actually experience the asylum process.

A lot has been written about asylum policies in Europe, but little research has been done to the experience of migrants themselves and how it is to be an asylum seeker. Therefore, this research aims to find out how immigrants in Sweden experience the asylum process to get a better understanding of their situation. What struggles do they face and how do they deal with them? This knowledge can be helpful for social workers and volunteers to improve the situation of asylum seekers and support them during the process.

This research is guided by the following research questions: 1) How do asylum seekers in Sweden experience the Swedish asylum process? 2) What are their main issues of concern during the process?

Previous research

The 20th century has by some scholars termed as the age of migration. As a result, migration theory and research is a large and expanding field which covers a wide variety of disciplines such as sociology, political science, psychology and public health. Phenomena such as globalization, climate change and international migration has challenged the meaning of human rights and the boundaries of the nation state and citizenship.

In Sweden, most of the research concerning the situation of asylum seekers focused on legislation and asylum policy. Many scholars have criticized the new restrictive asylum policy in Sweden and the implication it has on the safeguarding of refugees. Research suggests that the Swedish government mainly deals with issues of asylum as a ‘problem’ or a ‘burden’ to the welfare system (Wettergren, 2014).

To curb the number of immigrants coming in, most states take action to make it difficult to enter its territory through visa demands, carrier sanctions and decreasing the likelihood to get a residence permit. On top of that, some states have also tried to curb the asylum seekers and undocumented migrants right to work and to social benefits in the last decades, to make it seem less desirable to come. However, there is little research that shows that these measures actually have an effect. The reasons for people to apply for asylum are too varied and complex for these measures to have an effect on their decisions. The idea that taking away the ‘pull factors’ for migrants to come, is based on the assumption that refugees have the possibility to choose their destination and have enough information to make an informed decision, which is debatable (Andersson & Nilsson, 2011).

Even though Sweden has followed the attempt to decrease the number of asylum applications, it does not seem to follow trend to strip the asylum seekers rights and benefits. In the contrary, unlike other European states, the social rights for asylum seekers and undocumented migrants have expanded since 1990’s. With an exception of the daily allowance, which has been decreased, asylum seekers have received the right to work and asylum children have increased rights to education and healthcare (Andersson & Nilsson, 2011).

The human right to asylum applies both for adults and children. This means that also children have the right to have their asylum application assessed individually, even when they apply together with their parents. However, Lisa Ottosson and Anna Lundberg (2013) show in their study that an adult-centered interpretation of refugee experiences in Sweden has led to an inadequate assessment of children's asylum claims and sometimes their claims are even overlooked entirely. Children are often regarded as 'uncappable' to be heard and to not have valuable information to support their asylum claim. Often their rights are represented through their parents. Nonetheless, the experiences of child refugees might hold grounds for an asylum claim which are now in most cases overlooked.

Ottensen and Lundberg also point out that legal representative who support asylum seekers during the application process, are paid and appointed by the migration agency, which creates a feeling that the representatives have other interests than their clients. The mandate of the migration agency to appoint the representatives has been criticized by various actors.

Another aspect that is pointed out in the study of Ottensen and Lundberg (2013), is a problem with interpreters during the interviews. Since interpreters have to make the applicant's story accessible and understandable for the migration agent that assesses the case, they have an important role in the asylum process. But translation is a complex task and interpreters do not always have the right skills for it. Research shows that interpreters sometimes changed both the wording and format of the applicant's response or the question posed by the caseworker. The most common alteration was a simplification of the applicant's response. There is no independent check whether the interpretation is correct and it is often hard for applicants to prove that mistakes have been made (Ottosson & Lundberg, 2013; Keselman, et al., 2008).

Several studies show that asylum seekers are handled with distrust by staff working at the governmental agencies. They question the identity and the background stories of the Asylum seekers and are guided by prejudice. Even though the government officials say it does not influence the outcome of the decision whether they believe their story or not, for asylum seekers it is often important that they do (Brekke, 2004; Lennartsson, 2007; Liebling, et al., 2014).

The international migration has brought challenges for the Nordic welfare model and their integration ideology of social participation. The study of Gunnar Myrberg (2012) shows that the free choice of asylum seekers to live in the accommodation offered by the migration agency or

find accommodation by themselves has resulted in an unequal spread of asylum seekers over the municipalities. A few municipalities have received a significantly higher number of asylum seekers, where others received nearly none. This has great implications for municipalities to handle issues of housing shortage and segregation.

The study of Rebecka Lennartsson (2007) shows that asylum seekers, on average, have a significantly higher healthcare consumption than Swedish nationals. The loss of the home land, traumatic events during the flight, the long waiting time in Sweden and the process of integration, all have effects on the mental health of asylum seekers. The most common complaints are sore joints, pain in the back, head and shoulders and problems with sleeping.

The health of asylum seekers is another hot topic for researchers concerned with refugees related issues. The Swedish law entitles asylum seekers to a voluntary health assessment upon arrival and to receive health care that cannot be postponed, however in a study by Pacheco, et al., (2016) more than half of the respondents that underwent the assessment reported that their needs were overlooked, especially when it comes to psychological needs. Some of the respondents said that they never even received an invitation and lost their opportunity for a health assessment.

There are a couple of studies where I want to go deeper into. The first is a study of Jan-Paul Brekke (2004). In 'While we are waiting' he presents his results of interviews with asylum seekers in Gothenburg and Uppsala. His research question was how do asylum seekers experience the waiting time and what consequences does this have for future integration or return? The participants experienced the lack of order in handling their cases as negative, which contributed to a sense of randomness. The process seemed unfair and hard to understand. They had little information about the process as a whole and where they were in their individual process. That they did not know when they would receive a decision also contributed to the sense of randomness. Finding a solution and moving on was difficult for the respondents. They felt as if they had no control over their own life.

The Swedish asylum policy aims to fill the asylum process with meaningful activities which qualifies the applicant for both outcomes, be it return or a life in Sweden. This assumes that it is possible for people to prepare for both outcomes. Based on this dual position of the Swedish asylum policy, Brekke describes four types of behavioral outcomes. The first one he calls the perfect applicant, in the eyes of Swedish policy makers. The perfect applicant plans activities

that prepares them for both outcomes. The second is the exile activist, who remains strong ties with his or her home community and is waiting for the time that it is safe enough to return. The exile activist is not interested in integrating in the host society and does not prepare itself for a life in Sweden. The third option is the bridge burner, to whom returning is not an option and are not thinking of either a voluntary or forced return. They fully concentrate on a new life in Sweden and plan activities accordingly. The fourth option is the waiter, who does not take any action that prepares them for any outcome. They do not want to think of a possible return but at the same time the uncertainty of the future makes that they do not fully engage in integration activities either (Brekke, 2004).

Most of the respondents considered returning home as no option but at the same time they were aware that there is a change that their application would be rejected. Even though they presented themselves as being prepared for both of the possibilities, their behavior showed differently. The result was that they prepared for neither of these outcomes. They were very active in taking language courses but the anxiety of the possibility that their application will be denied had a great influence on their day to day life. It made it hard to focus and concentrate on the activities they were undertaking.

Brekke (2004) suggest that building in certain time intervals for the different phases in the asylum process could be just as important than shortening the entire process time. These intervals, preferably with specific dates, would offer predictability and a more comprehensive waiting period. This helps them to make plans and anticipate, which could give asylum seekers back the feeling of having control over their life.

The second research that I would like to highlight is that of Liebeling et. Although this research is conducted with asylum seekers in the UK, their outcomes has largely guide my study. To get a better understanding of the main concerns of asylum seekers in the UK, Helen Liebling, Shani Burke, Simon Goodman and Daniel Zasada interviewed nine migrants about their experiences with the asylum process. A thematic analysis of the interviews resulted in seven key themes: 1. The importance of safety, 2. Negative experiences of the Home Office (Migration Agency), 3. Experiences of support in the UK, 4. Emotional effects of being an asylum seeker, 5. Significance of family, 6. Hopes for the future and, 7. Positive experiences of living in the UK.

All participants came to the UK as they perceived the country to be safe. Returning home is not an option for them. But the participants had not much knowledge of the asylum system or their rights and duties before they came. Also in this study the participants did not know in what stage of their process they were and when they could expect to get a decision. They experienced the treatment of the Home Office as inhumane and as if they did not care or believed the applicants. Those who received a rejection deemed the Home Office as having little knowledge about their home country and incorrectly deeming it as safe. Some of the participants had the feeling that the staff of the Home Office was more concerned with sending them away than providing them with safety.

Furthermore, the participants had a hard time finding accommodation and some of them were even living on the street. They reported friends as a source of support, both practical with providing food or accommodation, and emotional. Being able to talk about their struggles with others that are or have been in the same situation is experienced as helpful. Some participants reported having mental health problems and even spoke about suicidal thoughts. They also reported feelings of loneliness and isolation, especially when they arrived in the UK alone.

Their research highlights that asylum seekers want to make a contribution to the society and want to live a normal life in safety. Greater efforts have to be made to offer asylum seekers safety and support. They recommend that a shift has to be made away from what they call 'a culture of disbelief' among the employees at the Home Office. Furthermore, asylum seekers should be allowed to work during the process, which would result in positive benefits for their mental health and a better social integration.

Theoretical framework

In this chapter I will first give an outline of symbolic interactionism followed by identity theory deriving from symbolic interactionism. This theory could help explain why leaving your home country behind and trying to build a new life in an unfamiliar world has such a great impact on a person's life.

Symbolic interactionism

Symbolic interactionism, is a meta framework of sociological theory and stems from the work of ea. William James, Charles Cooley, W. I. Thomas, George Herbert Mead and S. Stryker (Burke & Stets, 2009, p. 10). Symbolic interactionism is a micro-level approach which looks at interaction between individuals rather than at macro-level concepts such as education or the state. In Blumers view, social institutions only exist trough interaction. Society is not a structure but rather a continuing process where indeterminateness and agency is emphasised (Carter & Fuller, 2016, p. 932). Other than most theories about human behavior, symbolic interactionism believes that people are active participants rather than acted upon (Blumer, 1986). Some of the main points that symbolic interactionism is based on are *the self*, *language* and *interaction* (Burke & Stets, 2009).

The self comes forth from the mind and is that what characterises someone's consciousness on his or her being and identity. The self is able to take itself as an object and reflect on itself, to take account of itself and plan accordingly and manipulate itself as an object to bring about future goals. The self should not be seen as a little person living inside our body that is doing these things, but more as an organized set of processes that is making these outcomes (Burker&Stets, 2009).

However, people can only make sense of their world by learning to speak the *language* of their community. After people gained language, they can obtain knowledge or develop a mind. Only then people can start to distinguish and make sense of the objects that are part of their worlds (Prus, 1996, p. 10). Objects can be; physical things, such as a tree, a chair or a car; other people such as a mother or teacher; spaces such as a classroom or a library; emotions or actions of others (Blumer, 1986). Classical Greek philosophers first had to extend the existing Greek

vocabulary before they could develop their ideas because the existing vocabulary was not sufficient enough to bring their thoughts into words.

Only when people have learned the language of their community and started to make sense of their world, people can start to take themselves in account. According to Mead, the 'self' can only exist when people have obtained language. In order to communicate with one and other and act in ways that takes the point of view of others in mind, they need a shared *set of symbols*. Trough ongoing *interaction*, people are able to develop a better understanding of the world and of the 'self' (Prus, 1996, pp. 10-11).

Furthermore, trough interaction with each other and taking the point of view of the other in mind, people become objects of their own awareness. By taking the view point of the other in mind, people can attach meaning to their own 'being' and develop a line of actions that takes themselves in account. As reflexive beings, people can take action by themselves, as well as resist unwanted influence (Prus, 1996, pp. 15-16).

The meaning that people give to objects are not permanent but can change over time as they interact with different people (Prus, 1996). People constantly create and recreate experiences as they go from one interaction to the next.

Identity theory

In earlier times, when societies were relatively stable, identity was of a less interest for scholars and researchers. Nowadays however, identity has become more important due to a fast changing social context. Identity is a complex concept and we tent to hear about it only when it is connected to problems such as an 'identity crisis'. Identity usually only becomes visible when it is perceived as missing or unstable. There are different concepts and theories about identity which influences the way one looks at identity (Lawler, 2014). On the one hand, we see identity as something personal, something that makes us unique, but at the same time identity is shaped and created through our social and cultural context and through interaction with others.

Identity is generally seen as multi layered that can be divided in different concepts. Mead, for example, makes a distinction between 'me' and the 'I', where 'me' interacts in complex social structures and is a version of ourselves that we present to others. The 'I' is the agent that thinks

and acts and reflects on the perceptions and understanding of the self. But as soon as one becomes aware of the 'I' it becomes an object to the 'me'. The 'me' and 'I' are interrelated and both created through language and communication and through interaction with others (Lawler, 2017, p.5; Scott, 2015 p.12). Erving Goffman distinguishes between three types of identity. First is a personal identity, which is based on the unique characteristics of a person, both in itself and in terms of their relations with others. Second is a social identity, which can also be called a categorical identity and is based on the membership of a social group. Last is the ego or the felt identity, which is based on a subjective sense of who we are or what we think ourselves to be (Lawler, 2017, p.p. 6-7). Likewise, Susie Scott (2015, p.11) argues that we can distinguish identity in two interrelated concepts of selfhood and personhood. The selfhood is a reflection of one's inner feelings and thoughts while personhood is a set of publicly presented or externally ascribed characteristics that others use to identify us.

There are two main theories about identity formation. The first is *Identity theory* and the second is *Social Identity theory*. In 'Identity Theory and Social Identity Theory', Peter Burke and Jan Stets (1998) discuss the differences and the overlapping themes between these two theories. Where Social Identity Theory is more focused on group behavior and intergroup relations, Identity theory focuses more on role performance and role relationships within groups. Both theories, however, agree that the self is reflexive and looks back on itself and categorizes itself in a certain way in contrast with others. Although Burker and Stets, argue that both theories could be combined into one, I have chosen to concentrate on Identity theory, as I think that the role-based identity theory better connects with the experiences of the participants.

Identity theory has been formulated in the context of what is named *structural symbolic interactionism*, a term coined by Stryker in 1980. Structural symbolic interactionism asserts that social structures, like systems of positions and related roles, but also larger principles such as race, gender and class, shapes interaction. It claims that the self is a product of society and organizes social behavior (Stryker, 1991; Crossman, 2017).

According to identity theory, people identify themselves based on a role they fulfil, their membership to a particular group or certain personal characteristics they ascribe themselves. People can have multiple identities in different situations and social settings but the meaning of these identities are shared by the members of society. Identity theory seeks to explain the

meanings people give to their multiple identities, how these relate to each other, how it influences their emotions, thoughts and behavior and how their identities connects them to society at large. It is viewed by several scholars that society is created by actions of individuals, though they accept that individuals behave according to the context they create and are influenced by this context. Therefore, we need to understand the nature of individuals that create society and understand the nature of society in which individuals are acting (Burke & Stets, 2009).

In identity theory, society is seen as a mosaic of relatively durable patterned interactions and relationships which are differentiated but organized and embedded in a variety of groups, communities and organizations. People live in relatively small number of specialized social networks and their participation in such networks are supported by the different roles they take. The likelihood that someone enters a certain social network is influenced by larger social constructs such as age, gender, ethnicity or religion (Stryker & Burke, 2000). Being identified as a woman does not allow you to join a man choir even though you like singing.

People have as many identities as roles they occupy in different relationships. Social roles are expectations attached to positions occupied in networks of relationships and identities are internalized role expectations. People identify themselves stronger with one role than with others. The different identities are organized in a salience hierarchy reflecting the hierarchy of society. Identity salience is based on the possibility to use the same identity in different social networks and interactions and are positioned in status and roles in particular social groups (Stryker & Burke, 2000). This influences for example why a parent chooses to stay home with his kids instead of playing tennis at the club.

Identity salience, in turn, is influenced by the commitment to a given identity. Commitment is based on the number of ties and the strength of ties an identity gives to other members of a social structure. The stronger and the higher the numbers of ties, the stronger is the commitment to an identity. This explains the choice of a certain role behaviour. In the above example the role of being a parent has a stronger commitment and is therefore placed higher in the salience hierarchy (Burke & Stets, 2014).

Ascribed roles and the types of behaviors that are associated with them change over time and across space. Therefore, the representation, definition and perception of identity also changes.

This change becomes more evident during times of migration. Research shows that especially migrants perceive identity as fluid and multiple. Identity is a negotiation of personal given conditions, social context, relationships and institutional frameworks. Especially, ethnicity and religion become important identity markers in a migratory context (Barbera, 2015).

The arrival to a receiving country is by some scholars described as a ‘total’ event, because it requires a complete reconstruction of identity. When migrants leave their home country, they lose their status, family and social networks. He or she enters a world with unfamiliar symbols and meanings and feels lost and alone with no reference points. No matter how much they try to integrate, they always stay strangers and often face distrust and hostility. The migrants feel often disillusioned by the harsh reality of exclusion, which is different from the idealized picture of the receiving country being a place for a better life. This dissolution, together with memories from the past, contributes to a romanticized image of the home country (Barbera, 2015).

In asylum interviews, there is a constant negotiation of identities between the interview officer, the interpreter and the asylum applicant. The objective of the narration of an asylum seekers is to negotiate an institutionally accepted identity. However, it is not expected of asylum seekers that they have a good knowledge of how to present their story best, but it is more likely based on stories told by human traffickers or other asylum seekers and adjusted to their own personal context. In these situations, power plays an important role. The interview officer decides whether to believe the narrated identity or not and has the power to steer the conversation in a certain direction. On the other hand, asylum seekers have to power to decide what to reveal or not and how to present themselves (Kjelsvik, 2015).

There often exist a discrepancy between the image that the host community has of asylum seekers as a group or the image that the individual asylum seekers had of itself. The label of asylum seeker comes with a lot of limitations. In many cases, asylum seekers have no say as to where they are going to live and have no right to work and most adult asylum seekers neither have the right to education (Douglas, 2010). This has an effect on the roles they can take and on the image that the other has about them. On the one hand, the society wants them to work and be able to take care of themselves, but on the other hand the bureaucracy makes it almost impossible for asylum seekers to do just that even though they really want to.

Brekke (2004) argues that for people to recreate a sense of identity, individuals need a sense of a future self. The uncertainty of the asylum process and the limited time-horizon problematizes the process of reorientation. Questions like who am I, who are they and how do they see me are hard to answer in this situation. Some might seek continuity with their former status while others have burned all their bridges to forget the past.

Research method

Research design

To answer the question how asylum seekers in Sweden experience the Swedish asylum process and which are their main issues of concern, I decided on an ethnographic research design. Ethnographic research assumes that you first have to find out what people are doing and what reasons they give for doing so before trying to interpret their actions. It takes the position that human behavior and the way in which people give meaning to their worlds and lives are highly variable and locally specific (LeComte & Schensul, 2010).

Ethnographic research is a particularly good approach if you want to explore experiences, but has also a couple of limitations that have to be taken in account. Unlike a positivist approach, ethnographic research does not happen in a controlled environment such as a laboratory but in the natural environment of the research object. Even though ethnographers are using the same instruments, changing circumstances beyond the researchers control can generate different outcomes, which the researcher has to be able to explain. Furthermore, it can happen that the field has changed so much that it is necessary to use different research tools (LeComte & Schensul, 2010)

A second characteristic of ethnographic research is that the researcher needs to be intimate with the participants. This means that the researcher needs to build a trust relationship with the community, either as a member of the community, an outsider or a partner. Trust is not build over one night and needs time. In the case of this research I have been working as a volunteer leader for an integration project where the participants of this research are frequent visitors. This has as a benefit that I already have a trust relationship build up with them. The participants are happy with the help they receive from the project and therefore happy to volunteer as interview participants (LeComte & Schensul, 2010).

On the other hand, the researcher also needs a certain ignorance to not oversee concepts that are taken for granted for an insider but might be unfamiliar to an outsider. My role as an organizer of the integration project, rather than a participant, makes that I am still unfamiliar with the situation. After all, I have not experienced myself how it must be like to live as an asylum seeker in Sweden.

Research paradigm

An ethnographic research can be inspired by different paradigms, which depends on the researcher's preference and schooling. The most common paradigms are positivism, critical theory, interpretivism, ecological theory or social network theory. In this case the research is guide by an interactionist paradigm, and more specifically symbolic interactionism, which is one of the three most common paradigms in sociology (LeComte & Schensul, 2010).

Crucial for interactionism is the believe of a social construction of reality. What people believe to be true about the world is constructed and reinforced trough interaction with other people, over time and in specific social settings. Ontologically this means that what we know is our interpretation of events and the meanings we create to communicate these events to others. Epistemologically, interactionists believe that the researcher is a part of the reality it tries to understand and that observations and interpretations are influenced by the researchers own cultural background. Unlike positivists, symbolic interactionists see it as impossible, and even undesirable, to totally distance itself from the research object (LeComte & Schensul, 2010).

Researchers who attempt to study the human life-world have to be aware of a 'double hermeneutics', where the researcher tries the interpret entities who in their turn interpret the world they experience. The people at study will try to make sense of the researchers attempt to study their experiences and in turn react to the presence of the researcher. They can choose to cooperate with the researcher and be open about their experiences and help the researcher to understand them, but they can also choose to mislead the researcher or leave important information out (Prus, 1996, p. 18).

Another central point for interactionism is that human life is community life. This means that humans and human behavior cannot be understood apart from the context of the community that they live in. People can only communicate and interact with each other if they have developed a shared set of symbols. Only when someone has learned the language of the community can one start to make sense of the world he is living in and develop an understanding of the 'self' (Prus, 1996, p. 13). Therefore, it is important for the researcher to make itself familiar with the language of the community in order to be able to understand the behavior of the people at study. Ethnographic research fits well within this paradigm because it studies people within the context of their community.

Within the tradition of interactionism it is recognized that people interact in different social groups and therefore develop different understandings of objects. When groups of people, through interaction, develop a mutual understanding of the existence of objects and the meaning attached to it, they tend to see their definition of the situation as real' or 'objective' (Prus, 1996, p. 15). Ethnographic researchers are especially interested in these 'realities' and how they are created.

The theoretic framework will go deeper into the concepts of symbolic interactionism and how these can help to understand human lived experiences.

Data collection

Ethnographic research uses the researcher as the primary tool for data collection. The researcher can choose any kind of research tool but the most common forms of data collection are through interviews, surveys and participant observation. An ethnographic research always uses a qualitative tool for data collection but can be supplemented with a quantitative tool such as statistical analyses (LeCompte & Schensul, 2010). For this research, I have decided to use interviews as my primary tool for data collection as it creates the opportunity for participants to narrate their experiences and concerns.

In ethnographic research, an interview usually takes more the form of a casual conversation. Sometimes participants do not even know that they are being interviewed. New questions are slowly introduced to not make it feel like an interrogation and sometimes the interview goes back to a friendly conversation (Prus, 1996). Open interviews allow the participants to talk freely about what he or she thinks is important and can lead to unexpected outcomes which are free from prejudice and bias (May 2011, p.p 136-140). This has as a result that a lot of data collected is not relevant for the research and the researcher has to make a selection of which data is relevant. According to Thomas (2003), it is common that only one third of the interview contains useful information to answer the research question.

Over the course of one month I have conducted in-depth open ended interviews with 5 of the visitors of the integration project. To make them feel at home and create the informal atmosphere I made sure that I had something to drink and cookies to offer. Interview 1, 2 and 5 have taken place at my house and interview 3 and 4 at the Red Cross. Before inviting them at my home I

made sure that the participants were comfortable with it. I chose to invite some of the participants at my house because it was a quiet place where we could speak in private.

I started the interviews by stating my intention with the interview and what will happen with the information. Furthermore, I asked permission to record the interview and told them that I will use the recordings to make a transcript of the interview. I first asked a couple of standard questions, such as where are you from and why did you come to Sweden, to open the dialogue and get comfortable with the situation before I posed the question to elaborate on their experiences with the asylum process. After the first two interviews, I noticed some recurring themes, which guided the following interviews. Some of these themes were for example, having problems with their interpreters during the interview or the lack of information they got from the Migration Agency. In the following three interviews, I asked the respondent if they had similar experiences. The interviews have been conducted both in English or Swedish, depending in the participant's preference. A transcript of the interviews can be found in the appendix.

Research population

The research population are asylum seekers in Sweden. The UNHCR (2017) defines asylum seekers as people whose asylum claims have yet to be processed. In the past year, there were 71,576 pending asylum applications in Sweden (Joseph, et al., 2016). The average handling time of applications was 328 days. The largest groups of asylum seekers in Sweden in 2016 are coming from the Middle East (Migrationsverket, 2017b).

The sample population exist of 5 frequent visitors of an integration project run by the Red Cross Malmö, 4 man and 1 woman. All participants are coming from the Middle East region just like the main group of asylum seeker in Sweden. Participant 1, 3 and 4 are coming from Iraq, participant 2 comes from Yemen and participant 5 comes from Syria. They all have been living in Sweden for longer than two years. Participant 1 and 2 are still waiting for a final decision, the application of participant 4 has been denied for the first time and is now under assessment at the migration court. Participant 3 and 5 have already gotten a residence permit and participant 3 even has the Swedish nationality.

The family circumstances of the participants are very different. Participant 1, had to leave his wife and children behind in Jordan and hopes he will soon be reunited with his family. Participant 2 came on his own and has no family in Sweden, Participant 3 came at 9 years old together with her mother and brothers and sisters, two years after her father and grandfather applied for asylum in Sweden. Participant 4 came on his own but already had a sister living in Sweden who married a Swedish national. Participant 5 came together with one of his brothers and his wife and 8 year old daughter.

All participants have chosen to take care of their own living arrangements and are living in and around Malmö. Some have lived in an accommodation provided by the migration agency in the beginning, but only until they found something for themselves. Participant 3 lived in Jordan during the process, while her father applied for asylum in Sweden and came to Sweden through family unification. The asylum interviews took place at the Swedish embassy in Jordan.

I selected these participants based on their language skills. All of them could speak either Swedish or English, so I did not have to make use of a translator. The first two interviews have been held in English and the last three interviews were in Swedish. Even though Swedish is not a first language for both the researcher and the participants, I think that it has as a benefit that participants feel free to talk without worrying about making mistakes. Sometimes the interview would switch from Swedish to English or the other way around if the participant or the researcher could not find the right word.

Research approach

As said before, ethnographic research tries to understand why people behave in a certain way and which explanations they give for their behavior before trying to give meaning to it. Therefore, I have chosen for an inductive research approach, which means that research comes before theory. The purpose of an inductive analysis is to:

1. Condense extensive text data in a brief, summary format
2. Establish a link between the research aim and the summary outcomes and to ensure that these links are transparent and defensible; and to
3. Develop a model of theory about the underlying structure of experiences and processes that are evident in the text data.

An inductive approach is common in several types of data analysis and is mainly used in health and social science research (Thomas, 2003). An inductive approach uses a specific way of data analysis which will be described below.

Data analysis

To analyse the outcomes of the interviews I used the steps described by David R. Thomas in his article: '*A General inductive approach for analyzing qualitative evaluation data*' (2003). I started my analysis with a close reading of the interview transcripts and selected text that in my opinion are relevant to the research aim and given them a specific code, such as accommodation, misinformation or frustration. After coding the texts, I have listed all the codes in a different document and grouped all the codes into several main themes. The list of codes can be found in the appendix.

After grouping the codes into main themes, I have collected the corresponding text fragments and categorized them in the different themes. By doing this I realized that some parts of the text have the same code but fall under different categories. This process has also helped me to further narrow down the number of categories and merges some of the themes in one category, such as 'accommodation' and 'orientation' in a new category, 'living in Sweden'. With the text fragments categorized in different themes, I read through the text again to find the key issues to give a summary of the outcomes of the interviews. These summary outcomes are presented in the following chapter. The themes that emerged after analyzing are:

1. Seeking safety elsewhere is a tough decision
2. Negative experiences with the Migration agency
3. Long, complex and frustrating process
4. The emotional effects of the asylum process
5. The importance of having a job
6. The importance of family
7. Living in Sweden

After a thematic analysis of the interviews I found that their main concerns during the asylum process can be explained through 'Identity Theory', stemming from the tradition of symbolic

interactionism (see theoretical framework). In the discussion part I will make the connection between the interview outcomes and the theory.

Ethical considerations

As some of the participants are still in the asylum process, the information they give during the interviews could be held against them. Furthermore, their stories are very personal and intimate, sometimes including details they have not even told their family about. Therefore, it is very important that their privacy is protected. During the interviews, it is made clear what the interviews are for and who will most likely read them. All interviews are anonymous and held at a place where we could not be overheard by others. All participants have received a transcript of the interview and given the opportunity to elaborate more on certain aspects or to let me know if they do not want me to use certain parts of the interview.

During their journey from their home country to Sweden, many asylum seekers are being approached by people who are trying to make money out of their misery. Human traffickers who are asking way too much money and do not deliver what they have promised, scammers who sold fake bus tickets and journalist and photographers who made money out of selling their story and pictures to the media. Therefore, it is important to be transparent about my intentions with this research and let them have control over the outcomes of the interviews.

Research limitations

Given the purpose of this research as an examination of my master I did this research on my own. To assure the liability of the research it would be preferable to work with a second or third researcher who analyses the text and create a list of labels to see if they have the same interpretation of the text. Differences in the outcome can be discussed and if needed merged into one list of labels (Thomas, 2006). This research is solely based on my interpretation of the interview transcripts.

The small sample size has some limitations for the generalizability. Therefore, this research needs to be seen more as orientative research which explores what impact the asylum process has on asylum seekers and can lead to further research. However, the main themes that emerged after analyzing the interviews, overlap largely with the outcomes of Liebling *et all.* (see previous

research). Therefore, I think that, although the small size of the sample group, these five interviews give us a good insight of the experience of asylum seekers in Sweden.

Furthermore, it must be noted that participation in the integration project of the Red Cross is voluntary, which may have caused a natural selection of highly motivated and higher educated asylum seekers who are more proactive in their asylum process and better in presenting their case for the Migration Agency. Therefore, their experience might not be totally representative for the average asylum seeker in Sweden. On the other hand, these participants will also be better in expressing their experience in a foreign language and therefore I think they will be able to give us a valuable insight in their experiences with the asylum process.

Interview outcomes

In this chapter I will outline the summary outcomes of the interviews per theme. The themes will be presented in a logic order and illustrated with selected fragments of the participants interview.

Seeking safety elsewhere is a tough decision

The main reason for the participants to seek asylum in Sweden is for safety. They all fled because of a fear for their safety. The main reasons were; an attempt to or being kidnaped and escaped (p.1 and p,4), imprisonment for avoiding military service (p5), an attempt to kill, (p3) and internal conflict and extreme poverty (p2). When asked why participants 2 came to Sweden he says:

< Because sometimes you are coming from a country who are really facing war and eh katastrof [catastrophic] situation

> Ja

< You are not looking for haven. You are looking for the minimum standard. Sometimes you are looking for eh. Ja, the minimum standard of life that you can really live in peaceful and freedom.

> Ja

< So I think that eh. I thought Sweden also in that way actually. That's really good country and eh. Just like to feel yourself, secure ...

(Int. 2, line 2635-2644)

The participants made the decision to come to Europe because they saw no opportunity to build a future in one of the neighboring countries, due to the limited possibility to go to school or find a job. They feel they had no other option than to leave their country and come to Europe. Participant 5 says that he would have preferred to stay in one of the neighboring countries so he could return as soon as his country becomes safe again, but felt that he was not safe there and all doors had closed. He had no other option than to come to Europe.

Some have done research before they came to Sweden and others made their decision to stay after they arrived. The main reasons to apply for asylum in Sweden are the protection of human rights, the previous generous asylum policy, the possibility to apply for family unification and the possibility to look for work as soon as you arrive and have your degrees validated.

< before I came here I have search the internet

> Hmhm

< And I search for details

> yeah

< And why I have decide to come to Sweden in fact was based on a lot of things. First thing, that time Sweden has inte [not] started in hostile

> Yeah

< A hostile attitude against eh against, you know

> Immigrants

< Arabs eller [or] Muslims. This is fact

> Yeah

< We can see that Sweden is still a good option for people coming from Arab eller [or] Muslim countries

> Ja

< Second thing I discover that Sweden has the easiest system to evaluate the paper, to evaluate the degree. And third thing, that I thought that, in fact I read that Sweden needs doctors

> Hmhm

< And eh doctor maybe have the ability to improve their skills and practise and have self-improvement. I thought. I was wrong. I admit I was absolutely wrong

(Int.1, line 557-576)

Some of the participants express disappointment after being confronted with the harsh reality of the new asylum policy and wonder if they have made the right decision. Participant 1 says that if he could do it all over again he would not choose to come to Sweden again. He considers to go back to Turkey to reunite with his family. Participant 4 says:

< *I read a lot about Sweden. I became very disappointed when I came to Sweden.*
> *Yes?*
< *Because I read one thing but it was a totally different thing when I came to Sweden.*
> *Hmhm*
< *Like, not the same country.*
> *Hehe*
< *Ja*
> *In what way was it a different country?*
< *I don't know eh, rights and opportunities, the way they treated me.*
> *Hmhm*
< *I don't know*

(Int.4, line 4443-4454, auteur's translation)

The participants have also considered other options and have tried to go to other countries before they came to Sweden. Most of them are registered for the IOM resettlement program but also at the IOM it takes a long time for an application to be processed. Participants are also considering their options in case their application in Sweden will be denied. P. 1, for example, considers to go to Turkey or try to apply for asylum in Germany in that case.

Negative experience with the Migration Agency

All Participants describe negative experiences with the Migration Agency. They do not feel taken serious and treated with distrust and skepticism. The participants had to hand in a lot of documents to prove their identity and their story as to why they had to flee their country and seek safety in Sweden. Participant 4 says:

< *They asked me, 'do you have a video?'*
> *Ja*
< *Do you have a film? So, I should stop those who want to kill me,*
> *Hmhm*
< *to take pictures of them,*
> *Ja*

< *and film them,*

> *he*

< *and then jump out and say, 'okay I have videos of you?' That is really stupid. When you just flee, or move away, you do not have the time to do everything they ask for.*

> *Hmhm*

< *It's the most important that I am alive, now.*

> *Yes*

< *I have taken, I think it was strong evidence for them. But if they don't want to believe you, it doesn't matter what you have to prove.*

(Int. 4, Auteur's translation, lines 4699-4713)

The caseworker that handles their case, does not always have enough knowledge of the country and culture they come from to assess the situation. Participant 4 explains how his caseworker asked him many questions about Iran, even though he comes from Iraq and had the feeling that his caseworker was just waiting for him to give a wrong answer to prove that he is lying. He described his interview as unprofessional and unlawful.

< *Just like eh, I come from Iraq and she asked me questions about how it is functioning in Iran.*

> *Yes*

< *Because she is from Iran.*

> *Okay*

< *It felt really, really clear that she was trying to drag me in a discussion about Iran.*

> *Yes*

< *Because she knows about Iran and I don't know anything about Iran. Just so I would answer something wrong. So she could say, aha, that is wrong. You are lying.*

(Int. 4, line 4579-4586, auteur's translation)

Participants often describe their caseworker as being skeptical if their story is true or not. They find it very important that their lawyer or caseworker believes their story and describe the skeptical attitude as very frustrating and make them feel inferior or as if their existence is being

denied. Participant 5 explains how he had to show the scars on his body to make his caseworker believe that he has been tortured in prison and felt it as an intrusion of his privacy.

< *I have never felt like I felt when she said, 'I don't know if it is true or not'.*

> *Hmhm*

< *Because I don't lie. I felt inferior. Maybe because I came for help. I came for help and I want to stay here.*

> *Yes*

< *I felt it is really unpleasant.*

> *Yes*

< *But. I feel useless. I can't do anything''.*

(Int. 5, auteur's translation, line 5530-5537)

> *How does it feel for you that they don't believe you even though you have handed in so much evidence?*

< *It feels like I don't exist*

> *Yes*

< *I don't exist. They deny me.*

> *Deny?*

< *Yeah, they deny my history and my name.*

(Int. 4, line 4714-4720, auteur's translation)

Participants feel like the staff at the Migration Agency just follows the system without listening to their personal stories. Participant 2 says he does not feel treated as a human but as a number in their computer.

Some participants talked about the problems they had with their lawyer. They did not feel like they got much help from their lawyer but it was not always clear to them what exactly the role of the lawyer is. Sometimes they did not show up at the hearing or came a few hours late. With two of the Participants their lawyer changed jobs and they got another lawyer appointed halfway through the process, who did not know what was said during previous interviews. Participants would have wished more support from their lawyers.

All Participants expressed problems with their translators. Even though they learned Swedish during the asylum process or spoke very well English, they had to do the interviews in their mother tongue and make use of a translator. Some concepts are hard to translate but can change the meaning of the message entirely. Some Participants also said that their translators spoke either a different dialect or spoke limited Swedish. One of the Participants even found a paragraph in the transcript that had nothing to do with his interview. According to his lawyer it might be text coming from someone else's interview. Participant 1 says:

< *In the first interview the interpreter was from eh, Tunisia*

> *Ja*

< *So you know their dialect, their accent are not the same*

> *Ja. Ja*

< *And my advokat [lawyer] in the first interview, through this three-quarter hour*

> *Ja*

< *She asked her several times, she asked the translator*

> *Ja*

< *Can you eh. She asked her, can you say what [name interviewee] have said the same way?*

> *Ja*

< *She couldn't*

(Int. 1, line 1919 - 1929)

Children are also interviewed by the migration board and without their parents. Participant 3 tells that it was really hard for her and her siblings to have to relive everything they had been through and to be interviewed all on their own by a stranger. Participant 5 tells how his brother's daughter was scared and cried for her mother during the interview.

Participant 5 says that the interviews with the migration board felt like an interrogation by a police officer and says:

< *It is not a normal room.*

> *No*

< *You sit in a room. Eh, it feels like a police officer is talking to you.*

> *Yes*

< *And the police in Syria is not like the police in Sweden.*

> *Yes*

< *So nice as in Sweden. We were very scared. We thought somebody will come and,. I don't know. I was scared.*

(Int. 5, line 5581-5588, auteur's translation)

To prove their identity, participants have to hand in a lot of papers. The migration board keeps their Identity papers which sometimes causes problems. Participant one tells that his daughter cannot renew her passport because she needs a certified copy of her father's passport, but the migration board does not let him to make a copy. Participant 3 had problems proving that she really is the daughter of her father because she has a different last name in her passport. The migration board wanted to do a DNA-test but in the end, they accepted the application without it.

Long frustrating and complex asylum process

The asylum process is experienced as a complex process and participants feel they are not very well informed about the progress of their asylum application or what will happen next. There does not seem to be a reasonable explanation why some have to wait only a few months and others three years. This adds up to the uncertainty if participants will be granted asylum or not and is highlighted as one of the hardest parts of the asylum process.

The long waiting time, two years on average, and the uncertainty if they are allowed to stay or not is experienced as the worst part about the asylum process. Participants feel as if their life is on hold and have no control over their future. Participants find it hard to think about the future and make plans as long as they do not know whether they will receive a residence permit or not. This long waiting time and uncertainty is felt as very frustrating. When the participants ask their caseworker about the progress of their asylum application the standard answer is 'we don't know. You just have to wait'. After receiving a negative decision participant 4 says:

< *If it wouldn't take so much time, it wouldn't change the feeling but I think it will be better.*

> *Hmhm*

< *Because,*
> *Even if you get a negative decision?*
< *Yes. if it comes earlier, like, after two months,*
> *Yes*
< *or three months, you don't waste so much, you don't waste two years of your life.*

(Int. 4, lines 4831-4838, auteur's translation)

Participant 1 says however, that even if his application will be denied he has at least had the opportunity to live for some years in safety.

Their biggest worry is whether they handed in enough evidence to convince the migration board of their situation and if their asylum application will be accepted. They all have tried to bring as many identity papers and documents to prove their background stories, but they could not always manage to get their hands on all of it before fleeing their country. Seeing other people coming from a similar situation being denied increases the worry that their application might be rejected too.

Some express a frustration about the changes in the asylum policy and how this has affected their asylum application. They chose to apply for asylum in Sweden because of the chance to get a permanent residence permit and be reunited with their family who stayed behind, but now they changed it to a temporary residence permit and sharpened the requirements to apply for family unification.

< *Ja. This is really, really strange. Because, eh, the person used to plan before doing something*
> *yeah*
< *And, and if they don't want the people, they shouldn't open the doors. If they like. If I didn't had a good chance to stay in Sweden. Why should I decide to come to Sweden?*
> *Ja*
< *Why should I spent my life in a country, and than the country change the law that I don't have a chance to stay here*
> *Ja*
< *So this is, this is not eh, this is really not eh*
> *Unfair*

< *Unfair. Ja*

(*Int. 1, lines 1551-1562*)

Participant 2 is worried about the changing attitude towards asylum seekers in Europe and how this might influence asylum policies and his asylum application in the future. As long as he does not have his residence permit he does not feel secure.

The emotional effects of the asylum process

The long waiting time and uncertainty has a negative effect on the emotional wellbeing of the asylum seekers. They feel frustrated and hopeless and worry about the application all the time. Participant 5 says:

< *In the end I said, 'please sent me home. If you sent me home I will die only one time but not every day'.*

Participants are having a hard time having to re-live everything they have been through during the interviews with the migration board. They would rather forget everything that happened but the interviews with the migration board forces them to go through it again. Participant 5 says that he has troubles sleeping and nightmares during the night. Participant 3 describes the process as something she hopes she will never have to go through again and sometimes wonders how she managed to cope as a child. She found it hard to talk about everything she had been through with the staff of the Swedish embassy and felt the pressure that they might not get asylum because they did not believe that she is the daughter of her parents.

Participant 1 expresses the hopelessness of the situation by describing how he wakes up in the morning not knowing what he is going to do or what he did yesterday. One day looks the same as the next. He feels depressed and misses the busyness of his big family around him. To not feel alone he decided to share his flat with another person.

Participant 4 tells how the rejection of his asylum application occupies his mind all the time at the moment. He describes his thoughts as acquaintances that are with him all the time, when he eats, sleeps or during a job interview. He sees the negative decision as a death sentence to him and is worried about what will happen to him if he has to go back. While talking about his worries he is visibly upset.

The importance of having a job

All participants express the importance of having a job. They are trying very hard to find a job but face many bureaucratic obstacles. Participant 2 tells that he could not get payed the first three months when he started working because he had problems opening a bank account. He has been to the labor office multiple times to apply for a temporary tax number. The labor office told him that he had to contact the tax office and the tax office told him that he had to go to the migration board, who in their turn told him that he had to be at the labor office. Eventually he got his tax number after interference of his employer who knew somebody working for the municipality.

The main reason for them to find a job is to be financially independent. The financial support they get from the migration board is not much and all of them prefer to live in their own apartment rather than in the accommodation offered by the migration board. One of the participants says he feels bad having to ask for money from his family, in order to pay the rent. Participant 5 says:

“This is not life. This is,. This is not the life as I want to live. I want to work and help others like they helped me.” (Int. 5, line 5451-5452, auteur’s translation)

Another important reason they give to find a job is having something meaningful to do and to be able to contribute to the society. Most of the participants are active as volunteers for different organizations and go to multiple language cafes to learn Swedish, but they feel it is not enough. They feel as if they are wasting about two years of their life and their competences are not being appreciated.

< ... Every time when I wake up in the morning I just think, what have I done yesterday?

> Ja

< Nothing

> No

< Nothing. And it keep going like this way. It keeps going like nothing to do. I don't want to, I don't know what to do. Today, for example

> hmhm

< I don't have something to do. I don't know tomorrow. I don't have something to do. And after tomorrow I don't have something to do. So don't tell me to go to open Skåne. That is not useful in fact.

> hmhm

< But because we have nothing to do

> You will go

< Yeah, or to go. They will not miss us in fact

(Int. 1, line 1247-1261)

They also see it as part of their culture to take care of themselves. Sitting at home and getting money from the government is seen as a no go. Participant 2 says:

< ... I want to do something, because, actually it is a kind of cultural differences.

> Ja

< In my country I am not supposed to stay to get help from the government

> Ja

< I am always supposed to work to get my eh financing eh, this financing to myself, to fix things for myself

(Int. 2, line 2194-2200)

The importance of family

The long process makes that asylum seekers are not able to see their family sometimes for years. During the process, they are not allowed to leave Sweden and even after receiving a residence permit, traveling is very limited. This makes the process even harder, especially for those who left small children behind.

Participant 2 tells that he is hoping that he will be able to see his mother one more time before she dies. During Christmas time, he realizes how hard it is going to be to one day be together with all his family as the war has spread everybody around the world. Almost every family in his home country has lost somebody in the war.

Participant 1 calls his family almost every day and misses them very much. His youngest son was only a few months old when he left and he is afraid that he will not recognize him as his father when they meet again. He has not seen his wife and children for almost two years now and hopes he will soon be reunited. The idea that he might not be able to be reunited with them soon, makes him wonder if he should give up the process and return to Turkey instead.

< I like Sweden actually, but I like my family.

> Yeah

< If I have to choose between being here or my family, I would choose my family.

(Int. 1, 617-621, auteur's translation)

Also participant 3 describes how her father has not been able to see his children grow up and how he had a hard time not being able to help them and be a father for them. Her youngest brother was only a few months old when her father left and did not understand the relationship with the man on the picture. After they reunited, her father has tried very hard to make up for the time he missed out on and give them everything they need. The main reason for her father to come to Sweden was for them to have a better future and not having to live the life they lived.

Participant 5 came together with his brother, sister in law and their eight year old daughter. He worries a lot about the wellbeing of his brother's daughter as she is the only child they have in Sweden. It is hard to keep in contact with some of his brothers and sisters that are left behind and he does not know how they are doing.

Participants do not always want their family to know what is going on in their lives as they do not want them to worry. Participant 4 says they are not able to do anything about it, so why should he worry them?

< They don't know everything what I have done and everything that has happened with me in my home country.

> Hmhm

< Because I have not told them what has happened to me in my home country. I will just make them distressed or worried.

> Yeah

< Why would I say so? They cannot do anything to help.

> *Hmhm*

< *So, sometimes I don't tell them.*

(Int. 4, line 4422-4431, auteur's translation)

Living in Sweden

The accommodation that is offered by the migration board is experienced as unsafe, poorly maintained and are often located in small cities. Residents often fight with each other and drugs is being sold on the property. Participant 4 says about this that being an asylum seeker does not mean that you have to live like a dirty person together with other dirty people and participant 2 feels his life is too much valued to waste his time in an asylum camp.

< *It was a really shitty and dirty place*

> *Yes*

< *Sometimes with drugs*

> *What?*

< *With drugs and alcohol. Really bad place.*

> *Yeah, have you been there?*

< *Yes. I saw it. Sometimes even asylum seekers fight with each other.*

> *Hmhm*

< *They take, they have a knife and everything you can use to fight. I don't want to live there.*

....

> *That I am an asylum seekers does not mean that I have to live like a dirty and useless person, together with other useless and dirty people.*

> *Yes*

< *I don't want to live like that. So, I fixed my own apartment. One that is reasonable for people.*

(Int. 4, line 4178-4195, auteur's translation)

The accommodation is often located in small cities and offer little activities to stimulate the integration process. Participants prefer to live in bigger cities, which offer better options to find a job and more organizations that offers activities for immigrants to stimulate the integration

process. Participant 2 says that he chose to live in Malmö as it has to offer something for everybody which makes you feel at home.

Therefore, all participants chose to find their own apartment. But finding an accommodation is difficult and expensive. Asylum seekers do not get any extra financial support of the migration board to pay for the rent and have to rely on savings from home or money sent by other family members. Some have been living with friends or family or are sharing an apartment with other people. The accommodation they find is often short term and participants had to move several times during the process.

Participants described difficulties to adapt to a new country. They miss the food from home and are not used to the cold winters in Sweden. Participant 4 tells how he found his way in Malmö, first by food and later by bike, looking for addresses of different charity organizations that helps asylum seekers learn the language or fill in documents. Having to move several times also helped to get to know different parts of the city.

< I. It did not take me a long time to get to know all of Malmö.

> Hmhm

< With everything. The rules, the busses, where can I buy this or that. You know, as an asylum seeker, you are looking for the cheapest places.

> Yeah

< To buy. Because they don't have so much money. Eh, it was also, the struggle to find an apartment has helped me to eh, get to know the area. Because eh, I moved many, many times.

> Hmhm

< Every time I moved I was lost

> What?

< I was lost.

> Lost?

< Yeah

> Okay

< I did not know, where should I take the bus from, which way should I take to the course?

> *Yeah*

< *Yeah, but later, I was forced to get to know all the areas.*

(Int. 4, Line 4356-4372, auteur's translation)

Participants have a positive experience with the local community. They got help with learning the language, writing a cv or finding a job from different organizations and private persons. They are very grateful for the help they get. Those who have received a residence permit are happy with their life in Sweden and the opportunities they get. They feel safe in Sweden and that their human rights are being protected. One of the participants describes the day that she received the Swedish nationality as one of the happiest days of her life.

However, one participant also describes experiences of discrimination and is aware of the opinion among some people that asylum seekers are not trying hard enough to find a job and just come to Sweden to live from social benefits. He says that every time he hears in the news that something happened, he hopes there were no Muslims involved because people will ask him questions about it. He is worried about the growing fear against Muslims and how this might affect asylum policies in the future.

Discussion

If we look at the outcomes of the interviews from a symbolic interactionist perspective we can see the participants using terms of long, unclear and frustrating to describe the asylum process. The actions they took during the process were different. Some of the participants took a proactive approach in their application process and contacted the Migration Agency regularly to ask about the progress in their process, hoping that it would speed things up. Others decided to concentrate more on building a life for themselves while waiting for a decision to be made.

As mentioned in the theoretic framework, people need to have a future perspective to be able to recreate a sense of identity. The uncertainty of how long it is going to take and whether day will be allowed to stay makes it hard to plan future action. Furthermore, as asylum seekers have limited options to learn the language and find a job while they are waiting, they have limited possibilities to interact with the Swedish society. This problematizes the process of making sense of this new reality they are living in.

A family identity

If we look closer at identity theory within the symbolic interactionist approach, we can see how leaving your home country and seeking asylum in a different country has an impact on the sense of identity of people. As described in the theoretic framework, fleeing to another country is experienced as a total event. As an asylum seeker in Sweden, the participants can no longer fulfill all the roles they had in their old life. They had to leave everything behind, their family, house, friends, their jobs and the states they had. Often, they also lost the documents to prove their identity, their educational background or their relationship to the other family members applying for asylum. After a long and often dangerous trip, they arrive in a country where they do not speak the language, do not know the culture and the norms and values of that culture. Everything is unfamiliar and participants have to start all over again to build up a life.

During the application process the passport is symbol of a prove of identity. However, different countries have different costumes when it comes to naming their children which can lead to problems when trying to prove the relation between different family members. Participant 3 describes how it is a custom in her country to give children multiple last names, which refer to their father, grandfather or great grandfather. It is up to the government official to pick which

name is used in their documentation. This way it can happen that siblings have different last names even though they all come from the same father and mother. Unfamiliarity with this custom can lead to incomprehension among government officials in Sweden.

Most of the participants had to leave close family members behind and during the asylum process they are not able to travel outside the country to visit their families. Due to the long process, some have not been able to see their family for two years or longer. They can no longer fulfil the role they had as a family member. They cannot be a father to their children, a son to their parents or a husband to their wives. The father of participant 3 even feels like he has failed as a father or as a partner as he has not been able to take care of his family for two years and could not see his children growing up. They have to find other ways to be involved in the wellbeing of their family and to be able to fulfill their family roles. They often do this by having frequent contact through skype. Both participant 1 and the father of participant 3 called their family every day to see how they are doing and stay involved in their lives.

For all participants, the reason to leave their home country is based on certain aspects of their identity. They got death threats as a consultant of the American embassy or as the daughter of a journalist. During the asylum interviews, these parts of their identity are being questioned and sometimes even denied, simply because they do not have the documents to prove it. They felt as if their existence is being denied. For many asylum seekers, getting the status of refugee is very important, because it acknowledges the danger they have been fleeing from rather than coming for economic benefits. Most of the participants described in the interviews that for them going back to their home country would mean their death sentence.

Professional identity

Participant 2 does not want to be identified as an asylum seeker but rather presents himself as a labor migrant or expat and seems to be proud of it that he has been able to find a job that is connected to his educational background. However, many of the participants had to give up their old profession and with that the status that came with it. Unemployment rates among foreign born in Sweden are higher than among Swedish born and most of the first generation of immigrants have a job below their level of education. The father of participant 3 used to work as a civil engineer, but now feels forced to work as a taxi driver instead, as it is almost impossible

to find work as an engineer. Participant 1 seems to take great pride from being a doctor and being able to provide a good living for his family and regrets that he probably will not be able to pick up this profession again. Participant 4 says that his first and most important word he learned in Swedish was the word for engineer. Now he could present himself to other people and say I am an engineer. For most people their professional identity is every important and scores high in the identity salience hierarchy and has many ties with other members of their social network. It makes them the breadwinner of the family, an employee of a company or a college. Not being able to continue with the same profession or not being able to work at all has therefore a big impact on somebody's sense of identity.

It is not only important to be able to fulfill their old professional roles but the participants also want to change the view that the society has of asylum seekers. A large part of the society thinks that asylum seekers are not trying hard enough to find a job and just sitting at home enjoying the social benefits. By finding a job or being active as a volunteer, the participants are trying to change the expected behavior that comes with the identity of being an asylum seeker.

All participants are highly educated and had a good life before the unrest started. Participant 5 says he loves his country and would like to go back as soon as the war is over and the country becomes safe again. Most participants lost the comfortable lifestyle they had when they had to flee. Now they have to share a flat with others to be able to afford the costs and are dependent on others having to translate documents or finding their way in the city. For many participants, being dependent to social benefits is seen as a no go in their culture. You have to be able to take care of yourself. This new status of second class citizens changes the perspectives they have of themselves and other have of the participant.

Some end remarks

All participants expressed certain expectations of the Swedish bureaucracy of being fair and structured. When you ask a Swede to describe their culture they would use symbols such as equality, socialistic and organized. However, the experiences of participants with the asylum system made them see a different reality. They use terms as unclear, incomprehensible and random to describe the bureaucratic system. Some participants also described expectations of the Swedish society to be less hostile towards Arabs and Muslim more specifically. Although they

had mixed experiences they still perceived the Swedish society as less hostile than in other European countries.

The main reason for asylum seekers to come to Sweden is because they see the possibility to build a future here. To do that, the action they take is to visit several volunteer organizations to learn the language and get to understand the Swedish society. It is often communicated by the society to the asylum seekers that speaking the language is key to integrate in the society and to find a job in Sweden. Learning the language is not only key to finding a job, but as discussed in the theoretic framework, language is also key to interaction and making sense of their new world. As they slowly learn more and more Swedish, they also start to understand certain social structures within the Swedish society, such as greeting each other with a hug or having 'fika' with your friends.

Conclusion

To answer the research question, how do asylum seekers in Sweden experience the Swedish asylum system, they experience the process as long, uncertain, frustrating and by times degrading. The analyses of the interviews resulted in seven main themes that were important to the participants; 1) seeking safety elsewhere is a difficult decision, 2) negative experiences with the Migration Agency, 3) A long, frustrating and complex process, 4) importance of having a job, 5) importance of family, 6) emotional effects of the asylum process and 7) living in Sweden.

The main issues of concern for asylum seekers is to find accommodation, find a job and to be reunited with their family. Finding affordable accommodation is difficult and participants had to move several times during a short period. This was even more problematized by the fact that the participants have a hard time getting to work. With no job, there is little income to be able to pay the rent. Due to the long process time, participants are not able to see their family members sometimes for more than two years.

All these issues can be linked and explained with identity theory. Having to leave their home country behind and seeking for asylum in Sweden is experienced as a total event. The participants had to leave their social network, their house, their job and the status that came with it behind and start a new life in an unknown world. In order to recreate a new sense of identity people need some future perspective. The uncertainty when they will receive a decision and whether they will be allowed to stay or not makes it difficult to plan any future action.

The participants can no longer fulfil the roles they had in their old life and gained new roles that they do not always agree with. They can no longer fulfil the role they had as a family member and most participants had to give up their old profession. For most people their professional identity and their role within a family are very important and score high in the identity salience hierarchy and have many ties with other members of their social network.

Recommendations

For integration projects like Träffpunkten it is important to make the connection between the asylum seekers own cultural and ethnic background and the Swedish culture and society and use symbols that are familiar to the asylum seeker. This will help the asylum seeker to orientate itself in the new context they are living in. Anne Douglas (2010) suggest that social workers and caseworkers could help by communicating with asylum seekers in their own language and send them for example an invitation for an asylum interview in both their own language and in Swedish, together with a map and instruction how to find the address. This way asylum seekers will be able to find their way on their own, without being dependent on someone else to translate for them or show them the way. Right now, all information sent out by the Migration Agency is in Swedish, which makes the asylum seeker, especially in the beginning, highly dependable on others to translate their documents.

The Migration Agency should give more mental support during the asylum process and after a negative decision. Participants found it hard having to re-live everything that had happened to them during the asylum interviews and express problems with sleeping. Right now, asylum seekers only get psychological support if they seek help themselves. However, for most asylum seekers it is culturally not supported to seek help from a psychiatrist or talk about their mental health issues. When psychological problems are not properly addressed it can have a great impact on the integration process and potentially cause great costs for the Swedish healthcare system.

The officials working at the Migration Agency should change their attitude towards asylum seekers. Participants did not feel taken seriously and sometimes found the way they are treated by their caseworker degrading. Some responses underlined the recommendations from previous research that officials need to get more schooling in the facts and current information of the areas the asylum seekers are coming from. Right now, they do not seem to have the right information to make a good assessment about the safety in these areas.

Furthermore, all participants had problems with their translator. The migration board should allow asylum seekers to tell their story in Swedish or English if they can show that their level of Swedish or English is sufficient enough to express themselves. Besides that, they should offer

the translators extra schooling in the job and have a better understanding of different dialects and how this affects the translation.

Swedish governmental agencies should cooperate better and align their services to prevent that asylum seekers end up in a so-called moment 22. Participants faced a lot of bureaucratic obstacles finding a job. If they found an employer who was willing to hire them, they had a hard time getting a temporary tax number or opening a bank account to get their salaries paid. It seems that government officials have too little information on the rights and possibilities for asylum seekers to work to help them in the process.

For further research, it would be interesting to find out which strategies asylum seekers use to cope with their identity crisis and focus the interviews more on identity formation during the asylum process. In this way, we will get more knowledge about how civil organization or social workers could help in the process of re-creating identities.

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Appendix

To save paper I have decided to provide a link which will give online access to research appendix. In the appendix can be found the following:

- A transcript of all interviews
- A list of codes
- The selected text categorized in main themes

https://www.dropbox.com/sh/xm6t5cazlmmn14z/AACsnPJg_VEQuecAchCqg2T3a?dl=0