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Agents vs. Bodies: Contextualizing Refugee Women's Empowerment in British and French and Structures

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AGENTS VS BODIES: CONTEXTUALIZING REFUGEE WOMEN'S

EMPOWERMENT IN BRITISH AND FRENCH AID STRUCTURES

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By

Zeynep Kilicoglu

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To: Dean John F. Stack, Jr.
        Steven J. Green School of International & Public Affairs

This dissertation, written by Zeynep Kilicoglu, and entitled Agents vs. Bodies: Contextualizing Refugee Women's Empowerment in British and French Aid Structures, having been approved in respect to style and intellectual content, is referred to you for your judgment.

We have read this dissertation and recommend that it be approved.

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Florida International University 2022

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to all of the brave women around the world who are not afraid

to fight against patriarchy.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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The current refugee system and aid structures often reproduce gender hierarchies by representing women refugees as vulnerable and helpless victims. This imagining serves a political purpose. Representing women as silenced visual bodies is an act of power, in which a white Western masculine subjectivity could reinforce its political limits and communicate its identity (Rajaram, 2002). This dissertation project aims to answer the following questions: How do the aid actors in Western Europe construct women refugees and attach meanings to "women's empowerment" as an end goal? How are these constructions related to global hierarchies (between the West and the rest) or collective identities of superior and inferior? The UK and French are chosen as the areas of focus in this project. I conducted semi-structured interviews with aid workers and engaged in participant observation to analyze the distinct discourses and strategies for addressing refugee women's empowerment. The project analyzes that aid organizations in the UK address refugee women's empowerment in the following general themes; (1) creating and regulating space, (2) service, aid delivery, and protection, (3) collaboration and inclusion, and lastly, (4) public visibility and authorship, whereas French aid organizations focus on

the following general themes; (1) legal protection and identification of vulnerabilities, (2) service delivery and professionalism, (3) advocacy and awareness-raising and lastly, (4) integration to France and sensibilization to French values. The research concludes that British aid structures are more participatory as refugee women are given opportunities for enhancing their authentic representation and authorship. Empowerment is defined as providing necessary tools for women to be autonomous in the long term and break away from dependencies on aid structures. As for French organizations, empowerment predominantly means assisting refugee women to acquire legal status and access constitutional rights. Women refugees in French aid structures are more likely to be dependent on aid professionals, which might harm their autonomy and agency in the long run.

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CHAPTER 1:INTRODUCTION

For my whole life, as a Turkish national, I had to and still have to apply for visas. When I was younger, I never found it strange but as something that is given. I thought everybody had to do so. Being born into a modern and secular family, I see myself and my family as a part of the Western world because of our lifestyle, and values and ideals that I was brought up with. Apparently, it was irrelevant, and the color of our passports were much more important. I remember that it was important to dress up nicely and look presentable during the visa appointments to ensure that they believe we are just a regular family, not criminals or destitute people, who will never leave once step onto Europe. I remember how my parents got stressed before every appointment to collect the relevant documents and paperwork. Yet, it was quite normalized. Only when I grew up, I realized that something was off. When I got accepted to the London School of Economics for my Master's degree, I paid much more for my tuition fees compared to my European classmates. Also, I had to register myself with the British police regularly (for an additional fee of course). Apparently, just because of my nationality, I did not have the right to a cheaper education, and I looked like a potential criminal. After I graduated from LSE, I sought Ph.D. opportunities in the UK. Although I was a top student, there were no fellowships or grants for "international" students in social sciences but only for EU citizens. In today's globalized world, I came to realize that the only context where the word "international" gets a negative connotation is migration. It is a diplomatic word to describe people coming from the non-Western world. As an international student studying International Relations, none of the textbooks that I have read said anything about that.

Once I realized my "international status", I started to see how it limited my choices or my capabilities in different fields of my life.

When I started my Ph.D. at FIU in 2016, the refugee crisis was at its peak in Europe. The crisis in addition to the Eurozone financial crisis translated into more hostile attitudes towards migration as the government has securitized the topic and heightened border controls. This period coincided with the rising Islamization of politics in my home country. Many young people similar to my age wanted to leave the country because their lifestyles were under threat and they did not see their future in Turkey. At the time, I was in the USA. My friends were calling me lucky. However, I only had until my student visa expired and my future was uncertain. Ph.D. students all around the world are anxious about their future but my anxiety was doubled due to the political climate in my home country.

While migration politics were quite salient everywhere with Trump and his wall in the USA and Brexit in Europe, things were extremely harsher in Turkey. At least they were more visible. On a daily basis, you saw Syrian refugees everywhere. They were living on the streets in horrible conditions. The government was reluctant to do anything. President Erdogan was using them (and still does) to secure his leadership against the European Union. European countries could not intervene in his oppressive politics because he was gatekeeping Syrians (and now Afghan refugees as well). Witnessing the daily life of Syrian refugees in Turkey made me realize how one can lose everything after losing their country. It made me truly comprehend why Arendt (2009) said one loses all of their human rights when one loses their national rights. We are taught that human rights have a universal character. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which was adopted in 1948, portrays human rights as being beyond ideologies, nations or politics. Yet, this is not the

reality. In the current nation-state system, it is the national sovereign state, which guarantees or selects the type of rights that one can enjoy. Therefore, human rights are not a universal phenomenon but are strictly related to one's nationality.

As a feminist scholar, I was curious about the distinct ways that women are affected by the loss of their nationality and thus their human rights. Women experience the refugee system differently than men. Moreover, they face different sources of discrimination. Both in Europe and Turkey, while non-Western refugee men are usually portrayed as sexual predators or terrorists that threaten the normative orders in reception countries, women refugees are seen as vulnerable victims, who do not have any agency. Yet, they are seen as the symbols of anti-Europeanness or anti-Westernism. They are seen as the cultural other. These common perceptions justify and perpetuate the myths about Third World Women being incapacitated and apolitical individuals. Therefore, women become a category just like Towns (2010) argues to rationalize and sustain the hierarchies among nations and states. Just because Syrian women came from a Muslim developing country, their vulnerability was seen normal and thus the governments can justify their reluctance to do anything about their situation.

In Turkey, aid organizations and state agencies are mainly focused on providing material assistance to Syrian refugees since Syrians are allowed to stay and live in Turkey with a distinct status under the Temporary Protection Regulation. This means that they are provided with protection in Turkey and enjoy certain rights until they find a more permanent solution. On the contrary, I have realized that the aid organizations in Europe advertise a different objective as they mainly advertise that they work towards the empowerment of refugees (not solely providing them material assistance). Empowerment

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has become a quite popular policy goal in recent years. However, it is quite vague in character, and everybody might define it differently. From a feminist perspective, I wonder how it can be possible to empower someone who is seen or constructed as incapacitated and inferior both due to her gender (as a women victim) and loss of nationality (as someone who lost her country) by default. Moreover, I realized that empowerment has an intersubjective character. The way you define and work towards empowerment hints at the way you construct yourself and others. In other words, if aid organizations construct women refugees as victims by default, the empowerment activities that they design for women cannot be comprehensive in nature. This is because they would not recognize their agency and potential from the start and therefore cannot really believe that they might have something to contribute to society. At the same time, this false perception, namely constructing women refugees solely as victims, might serve their self-interest and sustain hierarchies between refugee women and aid workers, Western women and non-Western women, and Western and non-Western societies.

With these questions in mind, this dissertation project was created. My dissertation aims to answer the two following research questions: How do the aid actors in Western Europe (The UK and France) construct women refugees and attach meanings to "women's empowerment" as an end goal? How are these constructions related to global hierarchies (between the West and the rest) or collective identities of superior and inferior? I chose the UK and France as my areas of focus. This is because they attract many refugees and migrants due to their imperial past. Moreover, they advertise themselves to be the guardians of human rights and democratic values including gender equality and women's rights, compared to other European states. Yet, the rise of anti-immigration politics and far-right

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political parties in both countries are quite salient in recent years. All organizations that are selected and interviewed in this study advertise themselves to be feminist organizations or women specific organizations or claim to have a gender lens in their service delivery. These organizations can be either women-only platforms or mixed (both men, women, and children) organizations that offer women-specific activities and assistance and design programs to achieve women's empowerment. Therefore, my research does not represent the general features of all aid organizations in the asylum sector in each country. Rather, it focuses on the different strategies and structures for addressing women's empowerment embraced by different organizations in the sector, who advertise themselves to pay attention to the gender dimensions of refugeehood and asylum-seeking.

At this point, I think the reader may benefit from a brief summary of the general situation of women refugees, diverse immigration policies and how women refugees are affected from these particularly in the UK and France. The following sections portray the needs and concerns of women refugees in these countries including how issues got intensified during Covid-19. These issues experienced by women refugees create the base in which aid organizations operate and design related activities and services to address refugee women's empowerment, which is aimed to be analyzed in this dissertation.

1.1. Women Refugees in the UK

Like many other European states, the UK's national asylum system is designed to limit its refugee intake, especially after the Bosnian war in the 1990s. The introduction of the Immigration and Asylum Act in 1993 aimed to lessen the number of people coming to the UK by reducing asylum- seekers access to welfare and social security systems significantly. Over time, the government set up policies that denounced the asylum-seekers

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right to work and derived harsher detention procedures. These attempts fit into the securitization rhetoric around migration in Western Europe, which was quite salient even before the Syrian Refugee Crisis. In 2012, Theresa May as the Home Secretary introduced the Hostile Environment Policy, which further deteriorated the conditions for asylum seekers. The policy targets migrants without papers and eases the deportation process. Moreover, it further limits refugees' access to basic services such as housing and healthcare. As Dudhia (2020) argues "the Hostile Environment Policy displays a signature departure from the previous policies to the immigration control because for the first time, the government creates a system of citizen-on-citizen checks. Under this new system of civil and criminal offenses, public service providers, such as the National Health System alongside a wide range of private individuals such as landlords, charities and banks, have been requested to carry out immigration checks" (p. 14). In 2018, the Windrush Scandal revealed many people were wrongly detained, deported and denied citizenship rights by the Home Office. This shows that the hostile attitudes against migrants were systematically integrated into the system since the 1970s. In the aftermath of the scandal, the policy making language has changed to The Hostile Environment Policy has been replaced by the "Compliant Environment Policy", which was a relabeling project since the discriminative conditions against immigrants did not change.

According to the Home Office (2021) "There were 29,456 asylum applications (relating to 36,041 people) in the UK in 2020, an 18% decrease from the previous year but similar to levels in 2018. The latest figure will have been impacted by the measures taken in response to COVID-19 which have impacted migrants' movements globally" (p.5). "The UK offered protection, in the form of asylum, humanitarian protection, alternative forms

of leave and resettlement, to 9,936 people (including dependents) in 2020. This figure is around half (48%) of the number in 2019, and the lowest level since 2014. The lower numbers of people given protection in the latest year is due to fewer initial decisions being made on asylum applications (14,365 decisions in 2020 compared with 20,766 in 2019), as well as the pause to resettlement activity after March 2020, both a result of the COVID-19 pandemic" (Home Office, 2021, p.3). At the time of writing, I could not find any gender disaggregated data on the Home Office's website. Nevertheless, a report by the Refugee Council (2020) demonstrated that in 2019 26% of asylum applications were made by women. This was close to the average for recent years, which was 27% in 2018 and 28% in 2017 and 25% in 2016" (p.9). "Until 2014 women asylum seekers were generally slightly more likely than men to be granted asylum, and slightly more likely to be granted humanitarian protection or discretionary leave. Until 2014 the refusal rates for women tended to be lower than for men, however in 2015 the percentage of women granted asylum was significantly lower than for men and the refusal rate was higher. In 2018 and 2019 the refusal rate for women was lower than for men" (Refugee Council, 2020, p.11).

Dudhia (2020) discusses that women asylum seekers who make asylum applications can apply for social support under the Section 95 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 while waiting for the Home Office's decision about their asylum case. Under this policy, they are given £37.75 per week, which is equal to £5.39 a day, which should cover women's daily needs such as food, medicine, phone credit, travel passes and hygiene products. Section 95 can also provide public housing to women. Accommodation is assigned by the government and women are not asked about their preferences. Hence, many women usually end up in poor segregated areas of the UK irrespective of social

connections and their special needs. Some women are unaware that they can apply for support while others do not want to apply as they are afraid that it might affect their cases, in which the Home Office would conclude that they come to the UK for economic reasons not because of fear of persecution. If women are successful in getting refugee status, their support is cut after 28 days, which means that they have literally 28 days to secure employment and find housing. If they get refused, the support is cut after 21 and they are expected to leave the UK. If not, they will be removed forcibly by the Home Office. The ones who are refused can apply for additional support (which is £35.39 per week) under Section 4 (Ibid.). The support is given to destitute women, who have met the following criteria: "She is taking all reasonable steps to leave the UK or place her/himself in a position in which s/he is able to leave the UK. She is unable to leave the UK because of a physical impediment to travel or for some other medical reason. She is unable to leave the UK because in the opinion of the Secretary of State there is no viable route of return. She has applied for judicial review of the decision on her/his asylum claim and s/he has been granted permission to proceed" (Taal, 2018, p.13). The support is cashless and provided via a payment card that can be only used in specific shops (Dudhia, 2020). This posed additional challenges to women especially during the Covid-19 lockdowns as women were not able to travel or these shops were closed.

Considering the significantly small amount of support provided by the government, women asylum-seekers and refugees struggle with many issues in different spheres of their daily lives. According to Reehal, Taal and Maestri (2019), women refugees cannot access reliable and qualified legal representation. Solicitors as well as the interpretations might not have the required expertise to address gender related issues sufficiently. Additionally,

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women suffer from the disbelief culture in the asylum system, long waiting periods for their case to be finalized and fear of deportation. They lack information about the system that they are in and don't really understand the complex ever-changing asylum system (Ibid). Furthermore, they are not allowed to work and thus become destitute and homeless. This often make them dependent on transactional sex to survive, which makes them further exposed to sexual abuse. Hence, violence is perpetuated by the system; "perpetrators reinforce their power by using women's insecure immigration status and lack of access to housing and financial means to threaten them" (Reehal, Taal and Maestri, 2019, p.5). Some women work in informal markets, which lack social and physical security. Dudhia (2020) argues that 24% of women refugees are exploited for work. Survival strategies (namely activities focused on providing material aid to women) employed by charities usually aim to pass the day, which perpetuates a dependency system which is initiated by the hostile policies of the Home Office (Taal, 2018). Women feel disempowered. Destitution makes them dependent on aid organizations and community networks for accessing basic resources for survival (Reehal, Taal and Maestri, 2019; Taal, 2018). A further issue is women's physical and mental health problems. They don't usually have access to medicine and hygiene products. In some cases, they are too afraid to go to the General Practitioners because they think it might affect their asylum cases. Their negative mental conditions get intensified as a result of being dependent on others, social isolation and low self-esteem. Women suffer from anxiety and trauma resulting from family separation, PTSD, social isolation and racism (Reehal, Taal and Maestri, 2019; Taal, 2018). In her research conducted among 103 women refugees, Dudhia (2020) indicates that 95% of women felt

depressed, 24% self-harmed and 32% tried to kill themselves. Destitution makes such conditions worse as they are trapped in circles of exploitation and abuse.

The Covid-19 pandemic intensified the problems of refugee women. A report by the Sisters Not Strangers Coalition (2020) in the UK, "Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) women are almost three times more likely to die from COVID-19, compared to white women. The intersection of gender, race and immigration status, coupled with the trauma of their past experiences, means that asylum-seeking women are among those BAME women most affected by the consequences of the outbreak" (p.4). The refused asylum-seeking women are identified as the most vulnerable, going hungry, sharing rooms with strangers, and working illegally in exchange for shelter (Sisters not Strangers Coalition, 2020, p.4). The lockdowns made the asylum processes even longer than it is, which made women trapped in cycles of destitution due to their uncertain immigration status. Asylum-seeking and refugee women identified the following issues resulting from the lockdowns according to McKnight and Coles (2020) and Pertek, Phillimore and McKnight (2020): The violence against women has increased as familial pressure has increased during the lockdown and women's access to public safety and assistance mechanisms have decreased simultaneously. Secondly, women couldn't access healthcare, maternity and family planning services due to the closure of face to face services. Especially women who cannot speak English were not able to talk to their doctors on the phone. Likewise, their access to services related to mental health is weakened while their anxiety levels have increased since the confinement and segregation triggered underlying traumas in the past. What is more, women's childcare responsibilities have increased, especially the ones who suffered from 'digital poverty' as their kids were not able to engage

with remote learning. Last but not least, women couldn't access food and hygiene products. Some women expressed that they were dependent on charities for food, and they went hungry when they were all shut down during the lockdowns. Moreover, they were only getting paid weekly, which limited them to shop in bulks as many people did. They were not able to travel to the specific shops, which are cheaper and accept their support cards.

1.2. Women Refugees in France

According to a report by Delbos and Tripier (2020), which is edited by the European Council on Refugees and Exiles and published by the Asylum Information Database, there have been 62,067 applications for asylum made by foreign adults in 2020 in France and 80.2% of them were rejected. A gender/age breakdown of the total number of applicants was not available at the time of writing (Ibid). The lack of gender-disaggregated data creates problems in terms of understanding the realities, needs and concerns of women refugees. A report by the Council of Europe (2020) demonstrates that women's needs and exposure to abuse "cannot be quantified due to the ban on producing ethnic and racial statistics in France (Article 8-I of the French Data Protection Act of 6 January 1978)"(p.4).

Once arrived in France, asylum seekers are required to register themselves to the system for initiating an application. Registration is dealt by local platforms that are governed by the related state agencies OFII (*l'Office Français de l'Immigration et de l'Intégration-French Office for Immigration and Integration*) with the help of their partner organizations. Asylum-seekers are given a temporary certification allowing them to stay in France during the application process. After getting registered they are oriented to reception centers to get assigned for public housing and a monthly allowance. As the

number of people fleeing to France has grown steadily over the years and there is limited capacity in public housing, not all asylum seekers will get public accommodation. At this point, if a foreign woman is identified as a vulnerable person during the registration process, namely a victim of sexual and gender-based violence, she will be oriented to the reception centers much more quickly, which they can get prioritized access to housing and allowance. At the time of writing, the allowance for an adult asylum-seeker is roughly 6,80 Euros per day, which is paid in debit card not cash (this seems to create problems for women because they might have kids and family members in their country of origin, and they cannot wire money to them).

The French asylum policy is much affected from the securitization policies around migration in the European Union such as enhanced border policies in the Schengen Area and the lack of willingness to review the Dublin Regulation. Like many other European countries, The Bosnian war in the nineties led France to introduce policies signifying a hostile attitude towards immigration for preventing a high influx of people coming to the country. The European Refugee Crisis in the 2010s has further intensified such policies. The public has associated terrorism with asylum-seekers as there have been a few tragic terrorist attacks that happened in France by radical Islamists. The presidency of Emanuel Macron has led to even harsher policies that limit the asylum-seekers' access to public services such as health care and shorting the waiting process for asylum requests and thus preventing appeals and easing deportation. He also introduced preventative measures such as setting up facilities in non-EU countries such as Libya to make it difficult for asylum-seekers to reach France. He justified his anti-immigration stance by making a firm

distinction between "deserving" and "undeserving" asylum-seekers and arguing that France should prioritize the "deserving" ones only.

This hostile atmosphere has intensified the problems that women refugees experience in their daily lives. One major issue is the lack of shelter. According to a report by the Council of Europe (2020) given the national housing crisis in France, not all asylum seekers can be placed in public housing. Women are less likely to afford accommodation because women are less likely to find employment compared to men. If they do, it is in informal sectors, where they work for less money in insecure conditions. Hence, women are dependent on their family or cultural networks for shelter. This results in dependency, which limits foreign women's capacity to leave abusive relationships or communities. They are reluctant to report violence not only because they will lose their access to resources but also they fear the police due to their uncertain legal status. They think that reporting might work against their asylum applications. Even if they decide to go to the police, they have difficulties proving violence and abuse, which might work against them. At this point, weak human rights awareness and low language proficiency can represent additional obstacles. Sometimes, women use transactional sex, in exchange for shelter or food, which leads to further abuse and have a severe impact on their physical and mental health. Foreign women are more likely to get STDs and HIV among the migrant population in France, which demonstrates the impacts of gender-based violence on women's health (Ibid.).

The outbreak of Covid-19 has intensified refugee women's exposure to violence. According to a report by the European Commission (2021), domestic violence in France increased by 32% during the first week of the lockdown, which translated into higher rates

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of violence against asylum-seeking women. Moreover, according to a report by RAJFIRE (2020) pandemic has restrained women's access to basic resources, in which they become highly dependent on local feminist organizations for food parcels, credit, and phone refills. Since foreign women mainly work in informal sectors, they are among the ones who lost their jobs first during the lockdown. Women, who self-isolated themselves in hostels or temporary public shelters reported that they didn't have the necessary hygiene conditions alongside access to hygiene products such as soap or disinfectants. Lastly, the pandemic created delays in the decision-making regarding foreign women's asylum claims. Asylum hearings were postponed, which left women in uncertain legal situations. Additionally, refugee women reported that it was difficult to get appointments from the online system since the system was overscheduled and busy. Some refugee women didn't have the necessary computer skills to book an appointment online, which was an additional obstacle (Ibid).

1.3. The Purpose and Plan of the Dissertation

I believe this research is significant because it tackles real-life problems or real people. By putting women refugees at the center of my project, I also want to contribute to the "peopling" of International Relations as a discipline that aims to shift the attention from nation-states to marginalized individuals. Being one of the worst humanitarian crises in recent years, the refugee crisis in Europe still lacks attention (especially the gendered aspects of it) and waits for effective responses to end all kinds of human rights violations. We need a better understanding of the needs and concerns of the refugees and design effective policies that do not perpetuate racial and cultural stereotypes about non-Western individuals, especially women. Only in this way, we can find solutions to the gendered and

racial insecurities of refugees. This project aims to shed light on these insecurities. It has a feminist goal of unrevealing the actual concerns and needs of women refugees, identifying issues about representation, voicing their authentic critiques, and helping them to have a better life in reception societies via exposing the power dynamics in French and British assistance programs.

Moreover, the relevant academic literature on aid actors, which develop policies about refugees and gender, is heavily focused on the camps, transit countries, and the legal asylum procedures. However, my research specifically focuses on the integration and resettlement policies in Western Europe, which will be my main contribution to the academic debate. Additionally, there aren't many studies that compare and contrast the activities of the aid organizations located in Europe and do work about women refugees and women's empowerment either. For these reasons, in the long run, this research will contribute to the design of better and more egalitarian integration policies for refugees and achieving societal peace in the region.

As the global neoliberal system continues to widen the gap between poor and rich, migration is going to be a continuing phenomenon in the future. As the recent war in Ukraine showed us, the world order created after the end of the Cold War has come to an end. This will result in more refugee crises in the upcoming years. As the rise of radical right parties and Brexit demonstrated migration is going to remain a key challenge for world peace and human rights. In this regard, this dissertation aims to give insight about the complex and ever-changing needs and concerns of women refugees and the distinct strategies and tactics employed by aid organizations to address these. Reception societies

will benefit from realizing the potential and agency of women refugees and allowing them to contribute to the political and economical life in the long run.

My research shows that aid organizations in the UK do not support mere professional and clientelist approaches that define women refugees as simply receivers of aid because they make women dependent on aid structures in the long run. This harms women refugees agency, self-resilience and autonomy. For this reason, aid workers prioritize community-building approaches that encourage women refugees to take active roles and ownership of their communities. Relatedly, women refugees are seen as friends, partners and full members of the communities, which eradicates the hierarchies between aid workers and refugee women. Collaborating with refugee women, aid organizations intended to increase the authentic representation and authorship of women. In this way, they highlight their agency as opposed to the common portrayal of them as vulnerable and incapacitated individuals. Women refugees are given opportunities to represent themselves and talk to the general public directly via using different mediums such as public speaking, poetry, drama, photography and music in political campaigns. There is a sisterhood emphasis in the communities, which resonates with a feminist and politicized logic of aid since organizations value collaborating and working with women to create a long-term permanent change. The aid work is never separated from the greater agenda and struggle for social justice. Therefore, advocacy is seen to be integral to aid work. Moreover, organizations are not concerned with responding gender-differentiate needs but rather use a women's rights approach to address empowerment. Such strategies and perception of refugee women by the British aid organizations work against the stereotypical representation of Third World Women as passive and backwards individuals, which

enables women to stay in solidarity while disrupting global hierarchies and neocolonial perspectives.

Contrarily, aid organizations in France claim that refugee women's empowerment can be achieved through carrying out professional aid work to address the gender-differentiated needs of refugee women. Hence, their perception of aid is limited and demarcated from a greater political context and the local feminist movement. Aid workers define the central pillar as their work is to assist women refugees to access legal protection, namely citizenship status. Legal emphasis on citizenship is a direct result of the Republican political tradition as the citizenship status is the major source for empowerment of every citizen. Helping women to get citizenship status, aid workers draw greater attention to identifying women refugees' vulnerabilities properly. In this way, representing women as vulnerable victims might benefit women in the short run by accelerating the process for them to acquire international protection but in the long run it might create problems since it damages their agency and autonomy. Aid organizations value professionalism and expertise, which makes them reluctant to offer leadership roles to women refugees in the communities and collaborate with them. Women refugees become dependent on aid workers to communicate their needs and concerns. Therefore, there is a hierarchical setting between aid workers and women refugees in the aid structures as women are seen only as receivers of aid. Aid workers define their work to be objective and value-free, which should be carried out with the partnership of formal actors such as the state or the EU agencies. For this reason, advocacy is not seen as integral to work they do. Advocacy is carried out by the professionals from separate departments, who are responsible to represent the best interest of refugee women since refugee women are seen to not have any capacity to act

due to their lack of legal status. Consequently, women refugees are seen as vulnerable victims, who are in need of protection, supports and legitimizes the myths about Third World Women as women who do not have any agency and resilience.

Chapter 2 reviews the relevant literature on the international refugee system and its perspective on gender, fixed identities of vulnerability ascribed to women refugees, cultural relativist attitudes in assistance schemes, aid work and how it addresses gender equality and women's empowerment, and, lastly, refugee politics and the general situation of women refugees in Europe. The literature review aims to lay out the analytical framework and distinct practices, strategies and perceptions in aid structures that serve women refugees.

Chapter 3 explains the methodological approaches of the project. I use mixed qualitative methods in my research and employed semi-structured interviews and participant observation in my data collection in the UK and France. Embracing a feminist interpretative epistemology, this section reflects about my researcher positionality and reviews the strategies I used to minimize the potential hierarchies in the research settings. It also gives information about the challenges and limitations that the pandemic created during my data collection.

Chapter 4 reviews how aid organizations in the UK construct women refugees and attach meanings to refugee and asylum-seeking women's empowerment in their operations mainly in four categories; (1) creating and regulating space, (2) service, aid delivery and protection, (3) collaboration and inclusion and lastly, (4) public visibility and authorship. It also discusses the barriers and challenges identified by the organizations, which limit the efficiency or initiation of programs that address empowerment such as practical barriers,

barriers related to the asylum and aid sector, and barriers related to diverse perceptions of feminism among women in the community resulting from different backgrounds and life experiences. These categories and the discussion come from the data I collected during my fieldwork.

Chapter 5 analyzes how aid organizations in France address refugee and asylum-seeking women's empowerment in four categories; namely (1) legal protection and identification of vulnerabilities, (2) service delivery and professionalism, (3) advocacy and awareness-raising and lastly, (4) integration to France and sensibilization to French values. Then it will review the barriers and challenges identified by the organizations regarding the efficiency of the programs that target women's empowerment such as geographical location, cultural differences, practical issues that limit women's willingness to report violence and dependence on public funding. This chapter also argues how Northern France is viewed as a merging point between British and French aid cultures, political traditions and feminist understandings and approaches. These categories and the discussion come from the data I collected during my fieldwork. Therefore, they are different from the categories that I reviewed in Chapter 4.

Chapter 6 compares and contrasts how organizations address asylum-seeking and refugee women's empowerment in the UK and France. It first discusses the similar experiences and perceptions of British and French organizations such as the crucial role of providing basic material support in encouraging asylum-seeking women to report violence, the necessity of creating gender-segregated places, the significance of having a formal feedback system, and, most importantly, the ways how asylum-seeking empowers women in some cases. After, it analyzes the disparities in the perceptions and practices about

empowerment. The discussion is centered around the diverse political cultures in these countries, namely British Multiculturalism and French Republicanism/Universalism and how they affect charity cultures, funding schemes, the role of the state in the charity sector and historical evaluation of national feminist movements in the UK and France.

CHAPTER 2:LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter reviews the relevant literature to this research project. I categorized the relevant literature into five groups; (1) the 1951 Refugee Convention and it's perspective on gender; (2) the construction of fixed identities, like vulnerability, for refugee women in the refugee system;(3) the implications of cultural relativism in assistance programs; (4) aid work, humanitarianism and how it influence assistance schemes and practices about gender equality and women's empowerment; and lastly (5) the securitization discourse on migration and the general situation of women refugees in Europe.

2.1.The 1951 Refugee Convention

The literature covered in this section lays out the legal issues regarding women accessing international protection. Organizations in my research assist women refugees to acquire a legal status on a daily basis, which shapes their priorities and type of actions when addressing women refugees' empowerment. For this reason, it is essential to comprehend how international refugee law discriminates against women.

History of refugee protection is related to the history of distinct organization of politics in different times and contexts (Kleist, 2017). Therefore, the refugee system resonates with the foundational principles of the existing international system. Since the current International Relations system is state-centric, it is not a coincidence that the 1951 Geneva Convention (The UN Convention Regarding the Status of Refugees) identifies states as the key actors for making decisions about giving refugee status to fleeing individuals. This powerful position enables states to maximize their national interests at the expense of entitled rights of refugees. The Convention reflects the ideological features

of the Cold War, in which Western industrialized countries had strategic and political interests in receiving refugees in the past (Zimmerman, 2011).

The Convention defines a refugee as a person "...owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence is unable or, owing to such fear, unwilling to return to it" (UN, 1951). As it can be seen from this definition, gender is not identified as a persecution ground. This is because; at the time of drafting, issues related to gender did not fit into the political realities of the Cold War. The ideal refugee was imagined as a political man, who is persecuted by the oppressive regimes in the Eastern side of the iron curtain. Moreover, the drafters of the Convention believed that gender equality was a matter of national legislation, not international law (Freedman, 2007). As a result, the Convention is not capable of recognizing the different reasons that make women flee.

The legal structure of the Convention reflects a male perspective, and it universalizes the experiences of men when defining the legal personality of an ideal refugee. According to Freedman (2007), it does this in mainly two ways: Firstly, the Convention demarcates the public and private spheres. It doesn't consider persecutions happening in the private sphere pertinent to the international refugee law. Accordingly, it doesn't recognize the persecution committed by the private agents (like male relatives) but only the state. Persecutions in the private sphere are not seen as political matters or violation of human rights that might pose danger to the wellbeing of individuals but rather

as cultural practices. Secondly, the Convention narrowly associates political activities with activities that are associated with men. In other words, political activities are defined in terms of public sphere activities, which are dominated by men historically. Such imagining ignores the political agency of women. Due to patriarchy, women might engage with different types of activities than men. For example, disobeying religious and cultural rules, such as refusing to wear revealing clothing, can also be considered as political acts. Yet, these activities are not considered "political enough" and not recognized by the international refugee law (Ibid.). These accounts problematically reproduce oppressive gender roles ascribed to women as passive and dependent individuals, who do not exist in political or economic life. Moreover, they fix women refugees' identity to certain categories and prevent them from accessing international protection.

Some claim that the lack of representation of women in the refugee system can be overcome by treating women as a special group, under the ground of "membership of a particular social group or political opinion" in the Convention's refugee definition. Yet, identifying women as a separate group is highly problematic as it ignores the relational character of gender while enhancing biological binarism between men and women. Most importantly, it justifies treating women differently, as their different needs are reduced to "special" needs. This understanding supposes that women face persecution because they are women and unprotected thus the vulnerability of women becomes a permanent and constant reality (Macklin, 1995). To get recognition in this system, refugee women have to fit into stereotypes of helpless victims (Foster, 1999). They have to meet certain expectations and perform as "real" women to gain representation or access to assistance mechanisms. Another problem regarding treating women as a separate group is that it

neglects characteristics (like class, race, ethnicity, religion and sexual orientation) that affects women's position in society since being a woman is not a universalizing and essentializing category (Calavita, 2006).

2.2. Fixed Categories of Vulnerability

The literature on vulnerability benefits my research question as women refugees are usually portrayed as vulnerable within and such contractions are the basis for the ways how aid organizations address women's empowerment. Distinct understandings on vulnerability not only determine the type of programs and assist schemes but also refers to the positioning between refugees and aid workers, citizens and refugees, or men and women.

The dominant representation of refugees is shaped in relation to power dynamics in the international system. This is why, over the years, the perception of refugeehood has transformed in line with the political interest of the West. Refugees have been victimized and depoliticized. This is a strategic attempt to associate refugees with feminine characteristics based on the public-private distinction that Feminist IR theory problematize. Relatedly, refugees are imagined feminized objects, who don't have any political agency. This was not the case 50 years ago. Johnson (2011) argues that in the Cold War, the refugee was a white male individual from the Eastern world, who had a story to tell that was related to the ideological war between two great powers. However, this has changed after decolonization movements and the end of the Cold War since people from the Third World had started to flee from civil war and poverty. These people were seen as mass movements (not individuals) which threaten the wellbeing of the Western states. Therefore, states didn't want to integrate them but instead "voluntarily" helped them as paternalistic saviors

in external sites (Ibid.). Gender plays an important role in these imaginations since the ideal refugee image becomes a woman, who is helpless and passive thus willing to stay in the camps and resettlement areas in the South whereas male refugees on the move, who want to reach to Western countries, are constructed as deviant and hypersexualized enemies to the security of host populations (Hyndman and Giles, 2011). Although things have changed slightly after the Syrian Refugee Crisis and there are more women traveling alone today, the general imagination of refugeehood remains to be feminized, in which deserving refugees are individuals that are trapped in vulnerable situations and seek help from the powerful actors.

Refugee women are generally represented as vulnerable victims and they become identical to their gendered bodies. Vulnerability becomes a fixed category that is imposed upon women to gain representation or access to assistance in the system. These categories homogenize and universalize refugee women's experiences or identities as there is no room for intersectionality. Their existence is reduced to the private sphere as mothers, wives or family members. These identities are all above politics and assert that they do not have any potential to change the situations that they are in. They are powerless and thus sometimes they fall into the same categories with the children. The focus on vulnerability shifts attention away from the structural causes of a woman's victimization and her personal character becomes the main source of her insecurity (Foster, 1999). Furthermore, these categorizations serve a political purpose. Within the Western domestic debates and humanitarian campaigns, women become the exotic and helpless others, who need protection from their brutal cultures or countries of origin (Baines, 2004). Oppression is

constructed as an ordinary thing or a way of life for Third World Women, which reproduce racist and sexist stereotypes.

At this point, refugee women become an object of knowledge that can be known, produced, organized and regulated by powerful actors, who can provoke attention without contextualizing the cause of women refugees' victimization. Women cannot go beyond gendered and bodily representations. The female body's consignment to visuality is a type of fetishization and an act of power since the Western masculine subjectivity can reinforce its epistemological, ontological and political boundaries (Rajaram, 2002). These representations also form and justify the character and shape of the assistance and aid mechanisms that are seen most appropriate. Since women refugees are constructed as depoliticized actors, responses of the helpers are technocratic and humanitarian in nature and do not contain any political contextualization. Assistance gets a hierarchical character since "helpers" get to make decisions on behalf of refugees. The actual refugees are treated as unreliable informants: they are dishonest, untrustworthy, and prone to exaggeration because political activism and refugee status are constructed as mutually exclusive (Mallki, 1996). Therefore, the narratives of the actual victims are taken as irrelevant to the assistance mechanisms since they disrupt the positional superiority of the Western helpers.

In this way, the imposed categories of vulnerability help reproducing global hierarchies. Gender and ethnicity interplay in this process. Women refugees are targeted to be rescued from their culture as their culture is identified as the one and only reason for their oppression. Spijkerboer (2000) argues that the idea of protecting defenseless women from the oriental male is a standard part of the colonial discourse, which legitimizes Western domination in the Third World. The discourse on refugee women portrays white

males as the universal, who are rational, modern, progressive and in control whereas women and non-whites as not so universal, who are submissive, passive and backward (Ibid). Refugee women have to meet these false expectations if they want to achieve safety for themselves (Freedman, 2017). For example, Razack (1996) claims that when female asylum applicants present themselves as particularly vulnerable and helpless in refugee hearings, they are more likely to be given asylum status. Similarly, Aberman (2014) argues that women applicants in Canada need to synchronize their stories to the stereotypical cultural representations about the Third world women to receive assistance. If they are seen to be strong and independent, their applications would be rejected on the ground that they are able to "protect herself" (Ibid). Within this context, vulnerability becomes a performance and not determined by the actual needs and concerns of women refugees. Instead, it is based on the racist assumptions of the powerful actors in the system. This performative dimension of vulnerability constructs the women refugees and helpers in a certain way and legitimizes their distinct positionality in the refugee system in line with the Foucauldian power exercises.

In recent years, the EU has started to design programs and schemes that prioritize giving assistance to the most vulnerable populations among refugees. This might be considered as a positive development at first sight. However, the way that these mechanisms define vulnerability is highly problematic as they replicate racist and sexist categories. Freedman (2019) argues that refugee women are identified as vulnerable in these schemes without really giving attention to the structural or contextual origins of this vulnerability. For example, refugee women's vulnerability to violence during the fleeing process is not inherent to the fact that they are women but instead it is a result of the

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securitization of the migration policies in Europe. Yet, these accounts reproduce racial and gendered stereotypes as they support the typical narrative of Third World Women as weak, vulnerable, indecisive and passive. Therefore, they increase structural or symbolic violence against women and make it harder for them to integrate into the social life in reception societies. As they are portrayed as vulnerable without context, they are not respected by the political actors, aid workers or the members of the society that they resettle. Another problem is that identifying vulnerability is considered an objective and easy process, which can be detected by observing the physical appearance of refugees (like disability or pregnancy). Therefore, vulnerability gets a visual and intrinsic character. However, there are also invisible sources of vulnerability (like sexual violence), which are not given attention as they are more difficult to recognize (Ibid.). Similarly, another study points out that policies developed for Syrian refugees in transit countries define pregnant women or mothers without husbands as more vulnerable, therefore are given more assistance and visibility compared to unconventional categories of women refugees like single women, victims of torture or women with mental health problems (Koffman, 2018). All these issues indicate that defining vulnerability is a complicated process, which refers to the positionality between actors. In the case of women refugees, if they are recognized as vulnerable, they would access protection more easily at the expense of their autonomy since they will be exposed to structural violence and discrimination in the long run.

Lastly, studying refugee women in relation to the fixed categories of vulnerability might be dangerous in terms of reproducing the same representations about them and thus solidifying their limited agency. Refugees are of course vulnerable in many ways, but the assumption of vulnerability might have a disempowering effect as well and one must be

careful not to present an overarching and fixed view of what enacts disempowerment. Then maybe, in the case of refugees, one should consider the ways how this typical form of vulnerability, namely statelessness, can lead to politics of change or resistance. For example, in regards to women refugees, Krause (2014) focuses on the empowering effect that refugeehood can have on women and assert that in some situations forced displacement can challenge oppressive patriarchal codes as refugees can renegotiate gender relations in camps and resettlement areas, which ultimately contributes to the empowerment of women refugees. This is possible through women's participation in new settings of camp life like camp management, education, economic life, return and reintegration processes (Ibid.). Therefore, it is essential to avoid making oversimplifying connections between vulnerability and the social settings that create it as it will have implications for the agency of women.

2.3. Cultural Relativism

The literature covered in this section helps my research question to be more attentive to the perceptions of culture and how it shapes the aid structures that address women's empowerment. Studies on cultural relativism and the refugee sector demonstrates how hierarchies are produced and demolished as well as how organizations construct women refugees and create related programs.

The depoliticization and victimization of refugee women go hand in hand with the promotion of cultural relativism. The asylum agencies can easily reject giving assistance via shifting the blame to the non-Western cultures. Within this context, gendered insecurities are not given significance as they identify gender equality as a value that only exists in the West. Within this context, human rights are constructed as cultural, not

universal (Freedman,2008). This works against women's empowerment because it supports gender hierarchies that exist in the traditional family life and justifies the subjugation of women. Moreover, gender-based persecutions like female genital mutilation and forced marriage are constructed as ordinary and cultural, not discriminative practices, which are not considered "political" but private and outside of the dictate of the international refugee law. Sexism is problematically located in the non-Western refugee-producing societies only and it is normalized.

Another major issue is that cultural relativism ignores the commonality of gender oppression across cultures and overlook the gender inequalities in Western societies (Macklin, 1995). The liberal paradigm assumes that issues of the "self" are irrelevant to the issues of the "other" (Foster, 1999). Instead, the emphasis is on the cultural status of the individual. Therefore, cultural relativism problematically reproduces the typical representation of the Third World women as uneducated, cultural, poor and backward (Mohanty, 1988; Parpart,1993) and legitimizes the categories that are imposed upon them regarding being vulnerable, helpless and timeless. These categories are embedded in the national asylum systems that prevent women from enjoying their rights. Women need to play their role as victims to access the system, but it doesn't necessarily mean that they are given assistance; because their insecurities are framed as cultural matters and juxtaposed with general non-recognition as refugees.

The cultural relativist attitudes are compatible with the securitization discourse that has developed around the migration in Europe and allow Western states to avoid responsibility for closing their borders. For example, European states use cultural relativism in their national asylum systems to justify their discriminatory and indifferent

policies regarding refugees. According to Spijkerboer (2017), the EU member states need to localize and culturalize the universal character of human rights if they want to prevent a flood of applicants wanting asylum in Europe. Human rights are represented as local exercises and some human rights are treated to be more fundamental than others. Obviously, gender equality is not identified as one of the fundamental ones for non-Western individuals. These constructions define gender-based persecutions as local and ordinary practices in non-Western societies. Therefore, most of the European states advise refugee women to adapt to these circumstances rather than fleeing as a main coping strategy. For example, applicants, who fled from domestic violence and sexual harassment are not given very much attention in the national asylum systems since these practices are constructed as ordinary in non-Western countries. In some cases, authorities turn down the applications of women, who have male relatives in their home country since male relatives are assumed to be enough to protect the applicant women from other men. For the same reason, sometimes women are advised to get married. Hence, the women's dependence on men is justified and women are expected to adapt to gender hierarchies rather than breaking free from them (Ibid.). Security gets a patriarchal character that can be achieved through being protected by men, not as something that a woman can achieve on her own. This is also the case for LGBT refugees/asylum applicants in Europe. In many cases, authorities advise them to adapt to their societies via hiding their identity to avoid potential persecutions (Spijkerboer and Jansen, 2011).

Furthermore, cultural relativist attitudes that are embedded in the assistance programs reproduce power dynamics among the refugees in camps/resettlement areas. Sometimes humanitarian actors prefer relying on traditional protection mechanisms (like

families) to achieve safety for women. For example, women, who travel with their partners, are assumed to be in a safer position compared to the women traveling alone; but what if their partners are violent? In these cases, women cannot express their needs since they don't have direct contact with the authorities and might be stuck in violent relationships (Freedman, 2017). Moreover, in some camps or temporary resettlement areas, humanitarian actors encourage traditional methods or customs to solve issues or deliver justice (Pittaway, 2004) in the name of showing their respect to multiculturalism. Although this might be seen as a democratic practice at first glance, customary practices can reinforce power asymmetries already existing in the community. In regards to gender equality, elder men as the dominant actors in communities can heighten gender hierarchies through their judgments (Freedman, 2007). This can be also the case for integration policies as national authorities, which aim to promote multiculturalism, do not fully recognize or address issues that may result from internal power conflicts within ethnic and religious communities. Hence, when government agents make contact with cultural communities, they usually listen to the authoritarian male voices in the community while women are stuck in essential cultural categories, and their needs and concerns remain unrepresented even in Western communities that attach importance to multiculturalism (Yuval- Davis et al., 2005).

Lastly, cultural relativist attitudes might shape the attitude of aid workers or volunteers and the ways they define the efficiency of their programs. For example, Mc Cluskey (2019) argues that volunteers in a small Swedish village got frustrated and blamed the oppressive non-Western cultures when women refugees stopped showing up to the cooking classes. These classes were organized to enable women refugees to enjoy some self-time or a pause from childcare. However, Syrian women were criticized for not making

the effort to adapt to their new (gender-equal) life in Sweden (Ibid.). In this example, women are again identified as cultural individuals, who don't have any capacity to change. They are constructed as the ones who are responsible for the short life and inefficiency of the programs that are created by the aid workers and volunteers. However, the reality is more complex than that: aid workers and volunteers should have considered the structural or practical reasons that prevent refugee women from showing up to the cooking classes. These accounts instead feed the hierarchical positioning between givers and the receivers of aid through the construction of empowerment in line with cultural relativist attitudes.

2.4. Aid and Humanitarian Work

The relevant literature covered in this section benefits my research in terms of analyzing the different perspectives and tactics that aid and humanitarian actors embrace when addressing gender equality and women's empowerment. It lays out the theoretical framework for the concepts that I investigate in my research.

Constructing refugees as depoliticized, vulnerable and helpless is compatible with the nature of humanitarian work as it is not concerned with addressing issues politically. Instead, humanitarianism works with emotions and universal values like compassion, care, and mercy, which are all above politics. Therefore, it has a timeless and unchangeable character, which is embedded in the histories of charity, diplomacy, international law, peacekeeping and colonial rule (Mallki, 1996). In regards to refugees, forced displacement is framed as a development issue, in which humanitarian actors are responsible for taking care of and addressing the material needs of anonymous bodies, biological or corporal objects, who don't have any specific histories.

Humanitarianism simultaneously demarcates individuals, the ones being saved and the ones who save and therefore justifies and perpetuates the hierarchies between actors. For this reason, humanitarian assistance is not a value-natural field but an act of power, which is used for governing and regulating certain populations (Pallister-Wilkins, 2015). For example, it can be used by the West to deal with the "cultural other" and to reconstruct their position as superior and fix their borders (Cetinoglu, 2019). Harrel-Bond (2002) discusses that the exchange of goods is not a merely mechanical but a moral transaction, which underscores the power relations between the giver and receiver. In the case of refugees, the aid is distributed by foreign actors, which are capable of deciding who deserves what (Ibid.). Refugees need to embrace their inferior position against the paternalistic authorities if they want to receive any type of assistance. For example, Mc Cluskey's (2019) recent study on refugee integration programs in a small Swedish village focuses on how regular citizens construct themselves and their country as morally exceptional among others via their interactions with refugees. Refugees again become a category that could be regulated by the "decent" Swedish citizens, volunteers and aid workers. Refugees who actually do not fit into the rigid categories of vulnerability were taken as ungrateful towards the generous Swedish people (Ibid). Similarly, Freedman (2017) argues that when women refugees raise questions about the assistance they get in European reception countries, aid workers tend to ignore them and sometimes behave disrespectfully, especially if they can be easily identified as Muslim.

Relatedly, narratives of actual refugees are usually found "too political" and thus irrelevant to the type of work that humanitarian or aid workers do (Malkki, 1996). It is the job of the professionals to come up with effective programs based on their "expertise"

about forced displacement and diplomacy. As opposed to refugees, humanitarian and aid workers are assumed to be engaged in rationalized and calculated activities that can fit refugees into their institutional culture, namely structures of impartiality, neutrality, and independence (Ilcan and Rygiel, 2015). A good example for this is Rajaram's (2002) study, which discusses how humanitarian agencies represent refugees as faceless physical masses, who are denied the right to present their own political narratives. In this way, they become a site where Western ways of knowing are produced and justified. She analyzes Oxfam's "Listening to the Displaced Project", which is created to integrate the authentic voice of refugees into the aid systems and discusses how the study failed to improve the communication between the workers and refugees. In this project, the identity of refugees is again reduced to fit and support the institutional frameworks and goals of Oxfam. The project implicitly prioritizes the material needs over historical and political contexts because of the very nature of the type of work that Oxfam does. The narratives of refugees are used for making aid more efficient and relevant. In other words, they are used to reassure the identity of Oxfam as a development and humanitarian organization. Hence, Oxfam's goal of allowing refugees to speak for themselves has a predefined humanitarian context. Consequently, in this context, speaking only means outlining the material needs of refugees to increase the efficiency of aid delivery. This approach fixes the identities of refugees as victims. Subsequently, refugees become a subject for aid delivery and fundraising only (Ibid). At this point, the typical homogenized representations of Third World women become comforting to the humanitarian personnel since they do not need to investigate the effect of race and class on refugee situations (Parpart, 1993).

Additionally, the nature of humanitarianism or aid work shape the meaning and character of gender equality goals in the assistance programs. Gender equality becomes a type of governmentality in the Foucauldian sense and operates as a governing tool. It becomes a technical matter, in which aid workers attach appropriate meanings to it based on their position and then "teach" it to refugees in a top-down fashion. In her study on a refugee camp in Bangladesh, Olivius (2016) discusses how the discourse on gender equality explicitly constructs humanitarian subjects and refugee others. Gender equality was an instrument to increase aid effectiveness by enhancing the participation of women refugees based on the idea that women are different from men, therefore, have different special needs. It did not have a political character as it is synonymous with women's participation only (not about empowerment explicitly). Moreover, Olivius argues that humanitarian actors framed gender equality as a development project, which aims to transform religious and cultural societies as these societies are constructed as the fundamental sources of sexism. Relatedly, refugees became "windows of opportunity" in the eyes of humanitarian actors, who should be thought about modernity and Western values for managing refugee populations more effectively. Third World Women again portrayed as traditional, exotic, passive and vulnerable, who are in need of guidance and protection. Teaching gender equality in its most appropriate form is identified as the sole responsibility of the aid workers. If actual women refugees want to pursue their own goals about gender equality, they are no longer useful to the humanitarian actors and thus not supported by them. There is no room for authentic activism. Moreover, since gender inequality is particularly constructed as a symptom of underdevelopment or uncivilized masculinity, humanitarian workers become liberal reformers, who aim to transform

traditional societies into modern societies with liberal values. At this point, gender equality adopts a colonial mission. Yet, humanitarian workers see their work as neutral and non-interventionist, which is divorced from all greater political and economic structures (Ibid). In this way, the particular perception of gender equality by the workers contributes to the reproduction of global hierarchies through the positioning between the helper and the receiver. Humanitarian actors use cultural arguments to regulate and transform the non-Western "others" via the meanings they attach to gender equality.

Another study by Olivius (2013) analyzes how community-based approaches and participatory mechanisms in the promotion of gender equality can be problematic for the humanitarian actors as it might disrupt their agency and authority in camp settlements. Because of positionality between humanitarian actors and refugees, refugee activism is not always appreciated. As Olivius discusses, the refugee government in Thailand was seen problematic in relation to the promotion of gender equality in the eyes of humanitarian actors even though women actively took part in the system. This is because refugee culture was seen as traditional and backward and thus believed to be limited to challenge patriarchy in the absence of humanitarian control over the camp. Hence, in this example, Olivius again claims that gender equality is used as a tool to justify and legitimize humanitarian control over refugees (Ibid.). Similarly, Turner (2019) also draws attention to how humanitarian workers perceive refugeehood as a feminized subject, therefore, identify their work as helping and empowering women through implementing programs that are technocratic in nature. The meaning of empowerment is shaped only by the humanitarian actors and it is not clear whether actual women refugees share the same concerns or needs. Since humanitarian work is strictly associated with helping women, men do not exist in these

programs and are not identified as the beneficiaries of the aid. This reproduces patriarchal patterns as even in the case of forced displacement, men are imagined as independent and autonomous, who do not really need assistance (Ibid.). Both these case studies indicate the gendered character of humanitarian work and its interrelated nature with the power hierarchies between actors in humanitarian systems.

Similarly, Neikirk (2017) studies the humanitarian work and how it uses polygamy, marriage practices, and gender equality to justify transforming refugees in line with Western values. According to this study, humanitarian actors defined polygamy as a morally corrupt and oppressive practice that marginalize Bhutanese women refugees and tried to change the marriage practices before resettling them in Australia. In this case, gender equality was strictly identified in relation to monogamy and abolishing polygamy was viewed as an essential element for helping women refugees. Yet, humanitarian actors didn't really pay attention to the practical reasons for polygamy in agricultural societies and thus the ways that monogamy might actually marginalize women (as increasing the domestic housework or childcare). Instead, they have prioritized teaching them about morality (which indicates that they see themselves morally superior to refugees) and transforming them in order to prepare them for their new life in the West (Ibid.). In this example, again, humanitarian actors have a certain vision about gender equality and women empowerment in line with Western values and practices and they are not interested in seeing if their activities reflect the realities of refugees or not. Gender equality becomes a development project that justifies humanitarian dominance and conversion among refugees.

Constructing gender equality in particular ways can also enable dominant actors within refugee populations to strengthen their control among others. Fiddian-Qasmiyeh (2010; 2014) examines the idealization of Sahrawi women living in camps in Northern Africa by the humanitarian actors and their implications on gender equality programs of the humanitarian organizations. The UNHCR and other NGOs respond to the demands of and collaborate with the National Union of Sahrawi Women (women's wing of the nationalist political party called Polisario Front) since it frames issues related to gender in a very way similar to the Western actors. The author argues that this is a rational strategy that the NUSW adopts to access funds and justify the general cause of the Polisario Front in the eyes of the international community. When the international actors hear the things that they want to hear from the NUSW, they tend to ignore the other women who live in the camps but don't really have any connections with the political party. The members of the NUSW (namely the party elites) become the ideal women refugees at the expense of others and are given more visibility in the assistance programs. Large proportions of funding go to the party itself without being used in programs that might reduce the issues ordinary women face in their daily lives as there are still unmet material needs. Thus, the aid reinforces the same power relations among women without transforming them (Ibid). I believe this case study is very different from the other studies that are explained above, which address problems that come with the depoliticization of women refugees. In this study, some Sahrawi women are political actors, pursue political goals like the recognition of the Polarisio Front and thus could escape from the fixed categories of vulnerability. However, the problem here is that a powerful actor, namely the NUSW is in the position to define gender issues in line with its own interest at the expense of other members of the

society. Gender equality becomes a tool that manage population and perpetuates internal power dynamics instead of delivering justice.

Lastly, it is important to note that although humanitarian or aid work might have a fixed character that involves compassion and care, the way that they are used by different groups and organizations can have different implications on women's empowerment. Erden (2017) studies how a small local women's organization in Turkey challenged the dominant discursive schemes that refer to refugees as victims and helpers as liberators and created less hierarchical assistance schemes that approach women refugees as equals. This organization is a female-only community network that aims to integrate women refugees from Syria, who treat them as family members. Erden notes that unlike the dominant narratives, the organization wanted to frame Syrian women as strong individuals who survived a civil war and made it to Turkey and to remind them that they are capable of building a new life for themselves. Moreover, local women expressed that they were very surprised when they actually met with refugee women as they were very different from how the media portrays them. This engagement not only helped refugee women in terms of creating a better integration mechanism but also enhanced the agency of local women as they felt more independent after achieving something outside the household and did something else than being a mother or a wife. This was possible since interacting with refugee women and talking to them about gender roles made local women realize that there are many similarities regarding being a woman. Local women expressed that they have realized that in some cases they were even more "vulnerable" than Syrian women in terms of not recognizing patriarchal codes in their local communities until they met Syrian women and heard their experiences. Accordingly, the relationship between local and

refugee women goes against the typical image of Third World Women, who tend to be excluded from support systems as they are seen helpless themselves. However, this case study shows us how encountering refugees or women from different settings transform housewives into social agents (Ibid). This type of assistance or integration approaches display vast differences compared to the studies above. It works against the idea of associating care with hierarchy and power. Gender equality is not a technocratic project that justifies one's self or superiority in relation to others but a collaborative goal constructed with meaningful and democratic two-way communication.

2.5. Women Refugees in Europe

This section reviews the relevant literature on refugee politics and the general situation of women refugees in Europe. It benefits the research project via demonstrating the contemporary political structures and asylum practices in Europe, which eventually shapes the environment and guidelines that refugee organizations operate in. It also lays out some common issues that women refugees' experiences at different stages of the asylum process.

In recent years, the EU has securitized the discourse on refugees. Member states define migration as a security problem that seriously threatens the public order and stability in the region via promoting terrorism and crime. Hence, there is a security focus in the solutions proposed by the member states that legitimizes the technocratic and political surveillance of European societies and contributes to the militarization of migration (Yuval-Davis et al., 2005). Due to this narrow focus, the member states can avoid responsibilities for the tragedies of fleeing individuals.

Accordingly, the EU has failed to develop comprehensive legislation to tackle the issue in all its dimensions. The existing legal documents, like the Dublin Convention and the European Common Asylum System, were not successful in terms of harmonizing asylum practices among member states despite their binding nature. This is because the legal language of documents is vague and open for national interpretations and manipulations (Schittenhelm, 2019). Therefore, European legal frameworks do not discourage states to look after their own interests via minimizing refugee intakes. Yet, they are compatible with the securitization discourse around migration in the region.

European responses to the Syrian refugee crisis can be listed as the following; " the measures responding to the arrival of asylum seekers at the EU's external borders (through the introduction of hotspots), measures on responsibility-sharing (through relocation and resettlement), policies of externalization (the EU-Turkey Statement), the redefinition of who is in need and has a right to asylum (through the introduction of new safe countries of origin), the prevention of irregular migration (through border control and measures against trafficking and smuggling), and stopping the departure of refugees from their home and transit countries (through the introduction of trust funds)"(Nienmann and Zaun, 2018, p.5). All these policies prioritize state interests at the expense of fleeing individuals and their entitled rights under international refugee law. Looking after domestic self-interest creates asymmetries and leads to moral issues. Some member states take larger shares and take responsibility while others benefit from free-riding. Moreover, some legal arrangements like the Dublin Convention limit the possibility of equally sharing the burden of asylum processing as it decreases the mobility of refugees, who are only allowed to apply to asylum in the country that they arrive (Doomernik and Glorius, 2016). In this way countries at the

borders of the EU that refugees can reach more easily need to pay a higher price for the crisis. These issues have the potential of damaging the overall EU integration. Brexit is a good example of this as the UK wants to leave the EU due to limiting its refugee and migrant intake.

Refugees pay for the power asymmetry between the member states in the field of migration. Calais camp is a good example for this. Freedman (2018) explains that Calais was composed of refugees, who want to cross the sea to apply for asylum in the UK as the British system was seen as less assimilationist compared to the French system and refugees think that they have a higher chance of acceptance. However, both countries were concerned with refugees taking these illegal sea routes. Therefore, the French government suddenly dismantled the camp in 2016, which caused major food, water, and health problems, and increased violence among refugees. It denied responsibility for the events and didn't offer any type of assistance to refugees due to its principle of non-interventionism (Ibid.).

The role of humanitarian organizations or more professional NGO's were ambivalent in Calais. In general, the NGOs have been traditionally weak in the areas of asylum and immigration policy because of the narrow security focus of national governments on the issues (Freedman, 2007). As they are competing with other players in the sector to gain more influence, NGOs have to meet the expectations of governments. In other words, the size and scope of the humanitarian players also affect the efficiency or determine the type of assistance given to the refugees. In Calais, the more institutional and professional NGOs failed to address the needs of refugees after the closure of the camp since there was no formal political support to the issue. However, their role was taken by

the smaller players and less formal grassroots organizations. Sandri (2018) defines this type of assistance in Calais as volunteer humanitarianism, which can be seen as a symbol of civil obedience against the securitization of migration in Europe. Volunteer humanism criticizes the neoliberal governance of humanitarianism, which prioritizes pragmatism and rationalism while ignoring empathy and building social relations with the recipients of aid. As I discuss in the previous section, aid delivery can be used to validate an organization's identity. Sandri argues that volunteer humanitarianism in Calais was divorced from these organizational concerns. The humanitarian work was done without any formal permission by everyone as no one asked for expertise. The volunteers spent time with the actual refugees, heard their stories and became friends with them. No Border and Lotus are examples of the grassroots organizations in Calais, who are also self-claimed activists. According to them, the formal humanitarian aid is an extension of the domination of the state. Since they are active political agents, they have continued to put pressure on the governments about the situation of refugees after Calais. For them, this type of activism should be seen as a continuation of the work that they engaged in the camp (Ibid.). This case study shows that civil mobilizations are sometimes far more effective than government-supported formal programs both in terms of material and emotional support.

As discussed in the previous sections, in recent years, refugeehood is significantly feminized in the world and Europe. Accordingly, European states do not pay attention to the political reasons that make people flee but instead basic humanitarian needs and concerns (mainly about physical health) as paternalistic authorities. Therefore, asylum lost its political character. Fassin (2005) argues that to qualify for asylum, refugees need to show a humanitarian reason and communicate themselves as victims that deserve empathy.

In this way, asylum is replaced by charity approaches as European countries "humanitarianize" their immigration policies (Ibid). This trend work against the universal rights of refugees that are identified in the Refugee Convention. Refugeehood becomes a physical and bodily condition that should be dealt with compassion and care by the morally superior member states. Vulnerability becomes a relation between actors and demarcates boundaries of culture and power while not taken as the result of closed-door immigration policies (Armbruster, 2019). For example, Alan Kurdi, a little Syrian boy found dead at the Aegean coast of Turkey in 2015, had created a wave of interest regarding the issue of refugee among the European societies but it didn't go beyond evoking emotions or pity in public or translated into more fair immigration and assistance mechanisms.

European attitudes on refugees and migration are compatible with Foucault's bio-political governmentality. This concept refers to a particular form of security that aims to protect the physical body and physical life of the population, in which protection of one's life is associated with the death of the "other" (Holmes and Castaneda, 2016). Therefore, security intrinsically means to eliminate difference or otherness to maximize the wellbeing and coherence of the living population. This definition of security feeds racism via justifying discriminatory practices against refugees in Europe.

Ticktin (2011) explains that humanitarianism (or humanitarianization of migration politics) produces a biological mechanism that vulnerable and disables subjects become valuable as they can legitimize the morally superior position of the states dealing with them (namely the cultural other) and support politics of compassion. Simultaneously, the actual causes of victimization or suffering are depoliticized. Sick and feminized refugees are useful from a biopolitical perspective as they are necessary for the emotional wellbeing of

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the reception society in Foucauldian sense (Mavelli, 2017) even though they are feared to disrupt social and physical coherence of European societies. This is why, the European attitude towards migrants is uncertain and subject to change from time to time as they are both produced as groups "to be pitied, rescued and saved but also feared, despised and left to die (Bilgic, 2018, p.542). Vulnerability constitutes the bridge between these ambivalent emotions as it has a political function. In this way, countries can both legitimize their strict migration policies and their moral exceptionalism through selectively dealing with a limited number of them.

Relatedly, vulnerability plays an important role in Europe when it comes to deciding who is an authentic refugee and who is not, namely just an economic migrant. In regards to this, Crawley and Skleparis (2017) argue that there is a "categorical fetishism" in the region, in which strict categories do not only homogenize the refugee experiences and oversimplify the migration itself but also justify politics of exclusion. Economic migrants are seen as deviant figures, who flee to Europe without any reliable reason but to exploit the welfare mechanisms. Although forced migration and economic migration are linked in many ways, these categories enable member states to avoid responsibilities. This is a strategic categorization. Labels are important as being labeled as a refugee brings along numerous political and legal accountability for the reception states. As Cole (2017) notes labels do not only identify the objects but also the subjects dealing with them and encourage a certain type of response. Therefore, relabeling some groups with new words is a political project for escaping from the obligations that states agreed via signing the Refugee Convention (Ibid.). Labeling refugees as illegal or economic immigrants enables European states to securitize the issue and justify their closed-door immigration policies. Moreover,

it is the states, who get to decide who is a real refugee or not, which again highlights the power asymmetry between states and fleeing individuals.

The exact number of women refugees in Europe is not known due to the lack of gender-disaggregated data. The gender balance among Syrian applicants is more equal compared to applicants from other nationalities in Europe since many Syrians travel with their families (Freedman, 2016b). That said, since 2015, the number of women fleeing to the region alone has increased (Koffman, 2018). This is mainly because of strategic reasons since lonely women are perceived as more vulnerable and thus more likely to be offered protection by the European states (Freedman, 2017; 2016b). Once they are given asylum status, they apply for family reunification to bring their family members along. Gender has been addressed in some legal texts like the Qualification Directive, the European Parliament 2016 Resolution on the Situation of Women Refugees and Asylum Seekers and Refugees and the 2017 Istanbul Convention (The Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence). However, the implementation is slow due to the indifferent attitude of the European states towards the issue.

There aren't any clear common EU standards about gender in the field of refugees. States have different practices regarding the rights of women and girls, which exacerbates the gendered insecurities. Malta, Romania, Sweden, and the UK are examples for the member states that have adopted some kind of gender guidelines in their asylum law. Freedman (2010b) argues that adaptation of gender into national asylum legislations relies on the history and character of local gender activism. Gendered aspects of migration should be communicated in relation to the national context or local women's rights mobilizations.

In this way, political entrepreneurs can benefit from the existing discursive structures when convincing governments to adopt gender guidelines. As Freedman continues, for example, the UK has a more multiculturalist interpretation of gender equality along with unified structures of activism, which work for the benefit of women refugees. However, the NGO system in France is more fragmented and defines gender equality from a universalist (Republican) perspective, which creates problems for women refugees (Ibid.). For these reasons, harmonization among state practices is crucial regarding protecting the rights of women refugees.

Women suffer from different issues than men through the fleeing process. State-centric approach to migration, namely enhanced border security practices, exacerbates sexual and gender-based violence, especially for women traveling alone (Freedman, 2016b). Women are more likely to be exposed to smugglers and traffickers when states close or criminalize secure routes of travel. Class is an important indicator. Women, who don't have any financial resources for the trip, use transactional sex in order to reach Europe (Gerard and Pickering, 2013). The European political leaders define smugglers as the key responsible for the crisis and even suggested bombing their boats to reduce the number of refugees attempting to reach Europe (Freedman, 2016) However, European police and military officials also pose dangers. Women usually don't report these cases of violence at the camps and are afraid to go to the police because they feel threatened by them even more (Freedman, 2017). Similarly, because of the dangers of traveling alone, women, who travel with their families and are exposed to violence from their relatives, are also reluctant to leave their abusive partners. So, they are usually stuck in violent relationships. Even when they reach Europe, they don't always get help to escape from

domestic violence. Freedman (2016) explains that a woman refugee in Germany tried to file a complaint but neither the police nor the social workers listened to her. A German NGO said that this is because in an event like this there is no clear policy and nobody knows what to do (Ibid). Lastly, the different timeframes of refugees and organizations discourage women to report sexual violence. For example, Frontex trains its personnel about approaching the victims of gender-based violence but in reality, there is no time to use this training as refugees want to move as quickly as possible (Freedman, 2016). Even given enough time, it should be noted that talking about sexual trauma is not easy. Yet, states and border authorities expect women to describe what happened clearly with even the smallest details. If women fail to meet these expectations, they are not believed and therefore not given assistance (Singer, 2014).

Lastly, integration procedures are also problematic in terms of limiting refugees' agency. Humanitarianization of refugee politics is a key reason for that. Identifying refugees as damaged and vulnerable people works against their full participation in their new life at the reception societies (Marlowe, 2017). EU states do not follow a common rule regarding refugee integration as the focus is more on reception policies and externalization policies instead.

Gender plays an important role in integration. In general, women refugees take longer than men to adapt to the social life in new countries. (Cheung and Philimore, 2017). Due to cross cultural gender hierarchies, they are given fewer opportunities in public life. For example, women suffer from issues related to employment. Although they are more likely to attend training and education programs, they are less likely to match with employment (Peace and Meer, 2019). Moreover, adult women may receive less support

from their family members to pursue a career as they are assigned childcare responsibilities in the household (Pietka-Nykaza,2015). Relatedly, women suffer more from public hostility and isolation even if they become citizens (Nasser-Eddin, 2017). The male breadwinner bias, attitudes on different cultural and marriage practices and racial categorizations make migrant or asylum women symbols of non-Westerness and non-Europeanness (Allwood and Wadia, 2014). They are treated as if they don't have any benefits or potential contributions to the reception societies. They are only family members of the "real" migrants, who don't really contribute to their political or economic life. This limits women's agency and their adaptation to reception societies as integration policies do not really address issues about gender equality. For example, family reunification policies are seen as the first step of successful integration of refugees in the EU but women's issues and gender hierarchies within the family remain as secondary issues (Morris, 2015). Accordingly, women migrants only have instrumental value in these programs that can enhance the wellbeing of family and are not identified as autonomous individuals or agents, who have individual needs and concerns and want to join the public life.

Instead, gender equality becomes a tool in integration debates to regulate moral and political hierarchies among migrant and refugee populations. Korteweg (2017) argues that it is used as a postcolonial project that marks stark differences between the modern West and the backward Rest and justifies oppressive laws upon Muslim women and men regarding their religious practices. It evokes marginalization of immigrant communities and consolidates their perceived inferiority against the western actors. Some other approaches are more participatory in their nature as they include migrant organizations and communities into the programs to address gender equality issues like honor-related or

forced marriage (Yurdakul and Korteweg, 2013). Yet, these approaches do not really take a rights-based approach to multiculturalism but more like a problem-solving approach since European governments acknowledge and work with ethnic and religious groups but the processes remain top-down in nature (Korteweg and Triadafilopoulos, 2015).

It can be said that in recent years, the attitude on women refugees has shifted and women got a more advantageous position in comparison to men, who have started to be perceived more negatively by European societies. This is because, male refugees are taken as violent sexual predators, who threaten the social order in European societies (Allsopp, 2017). Within this context, refugee women are seen as less dangerous as they are seen as subjects without agency or power. Yet, again, this emphasis on weakness and vulnerability makes it more difficult for women to integrate into public life. To overcome these difficulties many refugee and migrant women establish their own associations. Allwood and Wadia (2014) discuss that in these associations women draw attention to the problems that they experience both in their home countries and the host countries. They activate their citizenship by enhancing their political and social visibility and engaging in activism. The activities of these organizations range from conventional strategies (like lobbying governments) to militant demonstrations and occupations (like Sans Papiers/Without Papers Movement in France by RAJFIRE). These associations also offer programs for refugee women to develop language and professional skills, to give legal advice regarding their rights and to help them with their mental problems through therapy groups (Ibid). The organizational character of these organizations is very different from typical humanitarian or charity organizations as the refugee women can be involved in the political activities regarding their own life.

2.6. Conclusion

This chapter reviews the relevant literature to the research project in five categories: (1) the 1951 Refugee Convention and its relation to gender; (2) the fixed identities ascribed to women refugees such as vulnerability, (3) the implications of cultural relativism in assistance programs; (4) aid work, humanitarianism and how it influence NGOs capability to address about gender equality and women's empowerment; and lastly (5) the securitization discourse on migration and the general situation of women refugees in Europe. The literature review benefits the research via covering the academic studies about the concepts that are central to the project such as women's empowerment, aid work, vulnerability, and cultural relativism. It also demonstrates how aid work about women refugees and empowerment can perpetuate and demolish hierarchies in organizational structures. The last part aimed to shed light to the refugee politics in Europe and how women are affected from them differently than men.

CHAPTER 3:METHODOLOGY

This dissertation project aims to answer the following two-fold research question: a) How do the aid actors in Western Europe construct women refugees and attach meanings to "women's empowerment" as an end goal? b) How are these constructions related to global hierarchies (between the West and the rest) or collective identities of superior and inferior?

By women refugees, I mean women who are forced to leave their homes and seeking protection in Western European states, particularly in the UK and France. My research is not focused only on women, who received international protection and status as "refugees" but also asylum-seekers. Therefore, "refugee" has been used as an umbrella concept in my research for women who have left their home countries due to the fear of persecution and sought protection in the UK and France whether they are given international refugee status or not.

By the construction of women refugees, I refer to the particular ways that aid actors identify women refugees' social, political, and cultural identities and potential, and determine their needs and concerns accordingly. Such constructions lead aid organizations to formulate, contextualize and attach meanings to "women's empowerment" as an end goal in diverse ways via the type of programs and operations they design. The current literature points out that organizational programs and institutional goals related to gender equality, women's rights, and women's empowerment can be utilized for objectifying refugee women and making them a category of knowledge in the hands of Western humanitarian and aid actors (Olivius, 2016). This is because perspectives on women's empowerment might be used to demarcate boundaries and create a hierarchical separation

between Western and non-Western individuals (women) and thus reinforce global power structures and neocolonialist perspectives. During my research, I was curious to see if this is applicable to the British and French aid sector, especially to the refugee organizations, which define themselves as "feminists" or organizations which have a specific focus on women and gender. Investigating the ways such organizations characterize women's empowerment in their programs and daily operations, I wanted to examine if such operations are participatory and bottom-up programs or embody hierarchical features that build upon, and deepen the victimization and vulnerability of refugee women. The later intervention reinforces the idea that refugee women as Third World Women are dealt with as the cultural "other", which problematically makes women refugees a "governable" category controlled by the Western actors. The existence of such categories may be justified via the contextualization of women's empowerment, feminism, and women's rights and how they are treated differently in Western or non-Western societies.

Empowerment as a feminist term has its roots in the 1980s. It has originally started as a radical grassroots concept that aims to recognize structural inequalities, transform consciousness and bring about structural change in favor of greater equality (Cornwall, 2016). It was focused on how the power structures impede empowerment of women from the Global South and how women can transform these structures collectively. Towards the end of the 1900's, it has become a popular development concept adopted by international organizations such as the World Bank and the UN. It has become one of the Millennium Development Goals. This process made women's empowerment an instrumental value (Kabeer, 1999) for policy makers to achieve bigger goals such as development or elimination of poverty and thus lost its radical grassroots character. It has become

individualized and neoliberalism via moving away from structural inequalities and becoming concerned with enhancing the individual capacity of women. In other words, empowerment is identified to be dependent on individual choices of women and therefore the focus was on enhancing individual capacity to make a choice via providing and enhancing resources (Ibid). In other words, if women have access to resources they make changes in other areas of their lives (Cornwall, 2016). Yet, as Kabeer (1999) reveals in her study, structures rather than resources are more effective in terms of making a choice and therefore enhancing agency. In addition to this, Kabeer (2005) warns about dangers of treating empowerment as a global development goal since "gender inequalities are multi-dimensional and cannot be reduced to some single and universally agreed set of priorities"(p. 23).

In this study "women's empowerment" refers to all organizational efforts that target to make refugee women independent and autonomous actors, who have the power and liberty to shape their own lives and make their own decisions in the reception societies. Therefore, organizations perceive women's empowerment in a neoliberalized character, which focus on enhancing the individual capacity of women. "Empowerment" has become a quite popular policy goal in the refugee sector in recent years. Starting from the early 2000s, the aid organizations have started to step away from approaches that solely focus on giving assistance or providing material or social aid to refugees since it has been observed that such approaches create dependence in the long run, which disrupts refugees' capacity to become independent citizens and fully integrate to the reception societies. Aiming to avoid such dependencies, the aid sector adopted "empowerment" as a central institutional and operational goal, which means that their work is now not only providing

aid but assisting refugees to achieve empowerment. There are two issues arising from this transition. Firstly, empowerment is a vague concept. It can be used as an umbrella concept lacking context in the sector since it doesn't really entail any specific goals and objectives. It is up to the organizations and their institutional dynamics, agendas, and goals to define what is empowerment and design programs accordingly. Secondly, ontologically, empowerment as an operational goal can be problematic since it might deepen hierarchical settings in the aid structures via assigning even more decision-making power to the aid workers and thus highlight their superiority against the inferior position of refugees. Empowerment is something that one should achieve individually or collectively. It is not something done for others. If it is described by the organizations as a goal to be done and planned by the professional aid workers, empowerment will again create dependencies in the long run and limit refugees' capacity to make their own decisions and become independent. Moreover, if empowerment is something to be done with the help of the aid workers, it reinforces the power relations and hierarchies between givers and receivers or Westerners and non-Westerners. Especially, "women's empowerment" might operate in the same way. It might demarcate the boundaries between Western and Third World countries via constructing women's rights as a Western value, therefore creating a hierarchy between white-Western women and non-white non-Western women as well as non-Western inferior and Western superior social and political systems.

By aid actors, I mainly refer to the aid organizations and NGOs in the UK and France, which assist women refugees or work towards refugee women's empowerment. All organizations that are interviewed in this study advertise themselves to be feminist organizations or have a gender lens in their service delivery. These organizations can be

either women-only platforms or mixed (both men, women, and children) organizations that offer women-specific activities and assistance and design programs to achieve women's empowerment. Therefore, my research does not represent the general features of all aid organizations in the asylum sector in each country. Rather, it focuses on the different strategies and structures for addressing women's empowerment embraced by different organizations in the sector, who advertise themselves to pay attention to the gender dimensions of refugeehood and asylum-seeking. The programs of such organizations range from conventional charity work such as legal casework and (material and social) service delivery to more progressive approaches that have more political character focusing on advocacy and grassroots community organizing.

Lastly, by global hierarchies, I refer to the ways that different framings of women's empowerment can exclusively reinforce, justify and perpetuate Western subjects and non-Western objects in aid structures and in host societies. Do aid organizations engage in bottom-up approaches via giving voice to actual women to achieve empowerment? Or do they instrumentalize fixed categories about Third World women and limit refugee women's agency when addressing women's empowerment? How are these fixed categories about women in the aid structures fit into the British and French national discourses on colonialism, humanitarianism, migration aid, feminism, advocacy, security, etc. ?

At this point, I want to note that I am aware of the dangers of essentializing various identities in my research. I do not want to essentialize differences between men and women via focusing on women solely in my research question as it might lead to constructing them as biological categories without giving attention to the relational social aspects of gender. I also want to avoid essentializing individuals or communities as Western/non-Western or

Northern/Southern and reproduce the current hierarchies among them. Instead, I want to reveal the power dynamics between them and see how they produce collective identities through the particular meanings attached to women's empowerment in refugee and aid sectors, and communities in the UK and France. I seek to reveal their discourses on women's empowerment that might produce certain categories for the identities of women refugees and asylum seekers. Relatedly, I am aware of the dangers that Stern discusses (2006) about doing post-colonial feminist research and doing research with Third World Women. She argues that in research that targets " 'giving voice' to marginalized groups or even exploring marginalized discourses, the benefits of providing a space for people who are not able to 'speak for themselves' has often been mistaken for paying sufficient attention to power differences" (p. 190). Then she asks "whether doing ethical research is possible at all when northern academics research "Third World Women," questioning who gets to do research on whom, and critically discussing the implications of the very existence of privilege that allows the research to be undertaken. Yet perhaps, in paying attention to power relations, we (researchers) overestimate our power. The people with whom we converse also wield power over what, whether, and how they choose to narrate. They are not only victims, but also agents in the forming of their own subjectivity" (p. 190). Therefore, I respect that some of my research subjects, who are women refugees, are not just victims or objects. Their responses and participation in my research are based on full political and social agency, and autonomy.

3.1.Country Selection:

The UK and France are the areas of focus in this project. There are both practical and intellectual reasons for focusing on these countries. The practical reasons are the

following: I choose these two countries because of their languages. Since I have mainly used qualitative research methods, the command of language plays a significant role. I am trained in English so I am conformable in conducting research in the UK. As for France, I can also speak the language a little bit. Moreover, many French NGOs produce content in English as they work with the EU, which makes it easier to collect data.

As for intellectual reasons, I am interested in these countries since they are powerful actors in the region. Due to this powerful status, they can reflect the Western European discourse on women's empowerment and its relation to refugees better than the other small European states, especially the ones in Eastern Europe that do not really address gender-related issues. Both of these countries used to be empires and thus they are popular destinations for migrants and refugees in general in comparison to the other countries in the region. Therefore, refugees and migration have been controversial hot topics in the national political discourse.

Migration has always been a forefront issue for both societies. Even before the Syrian Refugee Crisis, in early 2000, both the British and the French governments introduced "managed" and "selective" migration policies for increasing barriers to migration (Allwood and Wadia, 2014). Both of the states identified "good" and "bad" or "genuine" and "bogus" refugees and immigrants for justifying their oppressive policies. Unsurprisingly, the asylum application rejection rates are high in Britain and France, and "relatively small numbers of women (whether primary asylum applicants or dependents) are accorded refugee status or humanitarian protection (Allwood and Wadia, 2014, p.3). In both countries, women struggle with many issues regarding their integration to society. Particularly, the ones who cannot speak the language since they are highly dependent on

humanitarian professionals and NGOs (Ibid). During my fieldwork, I was curious to learn about the potential power relations between the aid workers and women refugees, and how institutional approaches to women's empowerment are justified based on these relations.

Another important reason for choosing French and the UK as areas of focus in my project is the way they see themselves as the guardians of European civilization and values like democracy, freedom, justice, and equality. This is also applicable to gender equality and feminist values since these countries are more gender-friendly than the Eastern European states. They are identified as safe havens for those who are denied rights based on these principles; however, they are also the leading architects of "Fortress of Europe" in which refugees and migrants are not welcomed since they threaten the normative order in European societies (Allwood and Waida, 2014). Because of their colonial past, both countries have major migrant communities from different ethnic backgrounds. In recent years, we see how these communities were marginalized and discriminated against in national politics via the rise of populist far-right parties. Migrants become associated with terrorisim and also seen as threats to the normative orders of European societies that perpetuates global hierarchies between Western and non-Western systems.

Especially after Brexit, I was curious to analyze the construction of different national identity discourses in the UK, France and in Europe against the opposite image of refugees and how these relations affect the way aid actors design programs to address women's empowerment. Although they are both Western European states, close to each other geographically and have long established societal ties with each other, the UK and France display various asymmetries in their asylum and integration policies historically. As Freedman (2010) argues available opportunity structures in local and national activism

determine to have more comprehensive policies on gender and asylum. In other words, the women's rights groups in these countries, their historical development, contemporary agenda and the size and scope of gender activism all play an important role in designing gender-related policies for refugees. Refugee organizations in the UK are more responsive to gendered issues because they can benefit from the availability of such inclusive gender structures. Such opportunity structures in the civil society networks and gender activism along with the multicultural organization of British society are translated into a more comprehensive asylum legislation, which is more likely to address diverse needs and concerns of different refugee identities, including women (Ibid.). As Freedman continues, "In contrast, in France, there has been very little substantial activism or mobilization on the issue of asylum and gender-specific persecution, and what mobilization there has been has had little or no impact on policies or legislation. On several occasions the issue of women asylum seekers and gender related forms of persecution has been discussed both by feminist groups and amongst associations and NGOs working with asylum seekers and refugees, but this discussion has never led to any real agreement on the goals of a mobilization, or to a widened participation in the mobilization beyond a few activists. The ''major'' associations and NGOs dealing with asylum have neglected this issue, or dismissed it as unimportant or even ''divisive''(2010, p.188). This is a direct result of French political traditions, namely French Republicanism, secularism or universalism since all individuals are seen as equal in front of the law and their membership to a particular group is considered to be irrelevant (Raissiguer, 2013). Such perspectives ultimately create problems for women refugees as gendered aspects of issues are not given attention. Furthermore, French Republicanism promotes assimilationist policies since

cultural unity is taken as a prerequisite for political inclusion, in which women are affected by this in numerous ways. For example, Muslim refugees are not allowed to wear Islamic headscarfs (*foulard*) in public spaces since secularism is central in French Republicanism and the government sees religion as a barrier to refugee women's integration (Freedman, 2004).

3.2.Methods:

In this project, I employ a post-positivist epistemology. Given the complexity of the research question, I use mixed qualitative methods. I completed my data collection in early 2021. Firstly, I used semi-structured expert interviews conducted with aid workers, who work for aid or refugee organizations in the UK and France, to analyze the particular meanings attached to refugee women's empowerment. By experts, I do not always strictly mean professionals but rather all participants to an organizational structure, and members of an organization or community regardless of their position or role. I do not consider expert knowledge as an end product of a top-level professional but rather an analytical tool to investigate the social production of reality since the first would have meant only people who have a certain degree of power would be called as experts (Littig, 2009). I do not want to create such a hierarchical setting in my research. Hence, I adopt Meuser and Nagel's (2009, p.24) more inclusive "expert" definition. As they argue experts can be understood as individuals who are active members of a community regardless of their social status or position in the system. They are active participants in the community, who acquire a special knowledge through their activity and have access to information. This is not because they are "trained". Instead, "their expertise is too socially institutionalized and linked to a specific context and its functional requirements even though in a different way from the

expertise grounded on the professional role"(Meuser and Nagel, 2009, p. 24). The research benefits from such ontology because a narrow definition of "experts" poses a risk of professionalization of a solution for a problem due to the limited professionalized definition of the very same problem (Meuser and Nogel, 2009). For this reason, my research is not only limited to interviewing aid workers and conducting interviews with all the participants or members of the organizational structures. Although a great deal of the interviewees were, in fact, aid professionals and workers, I have also conducted interviews with volunteers, advocates, activists, community members, and also women refugees and asylum seekers. These research subjects might not have professional knowledge on the issues but their input is valuable regarding the ways they experience the system and structures based on their position. I respect that each one of them is an expert of their own life (Ibid). Adopting a broad definition of expert knowledge, I aim to dismantle potential hierarchies and avoid representation issues. According to Meuser and Nogel (2009), expert and expert knowledge refer to and are associated with modernization, which imposes certain norms to the one who produces knowledge, which is compatible with the power-knowledge construction in a Foucauldian sense. Accordingly, knowledge is produced by the already powerful actors because they are the ones who already hold privileged positions to decide what can be constituted as true or knowledge. What is called knowledge is based on their narrow privilege experiences yet it is imposed on others and constructed as universal. In my research, I want to avoid such power settings during data collection and aim for plurality among the knowledge-producing actors. I recognize that knowledge can be produced by different actors. Hence, during my data collection, I tried to achieve heterogeneity in knowledge production via including research subjects from different

positions in the community and organizational structures, namely advocates, refugees, aid workers and volunteers.

During my data collection, I was interested to see how different organizations identify the general needs and concerns of women refugees and how they attach meanings to women's empowerment accordingly. These constructions are not divorced from the national asylum debates, the public discourses around feminism as well as the institutional characters, cultures, and agendas of organizations. Additionally, the subjects' position in the community or the organizational structure interplay and affect the type of work that aid workers and professionals do. Therefore, during interviews, I benefited greatly from the semi-structured settings. I used open-ended questions to avoid informative and descriptive answers about organizational operations. Instead, open-ended questions enabled me to understand how interviewees contextualize their work, identity, goals, operations in relation to women refugees as well as to broader concepts such as gender equality, feminism, representation, women's empowerment, or empowerment. Using post-positivist epistemologies and qualitative methodologies, I was not interested in predicting the interviewees' behavior but instead examining their values and attitudes in the aid structures and the aid sector. Within this context, the use of open-ended questions allowed the interviewees to organize their answers in their own frameworks and increased the validity of responses as well as their tolerance and reciprocity (Aberbach and Rockman, 2002). This setting helped me to get a better understanding of the epistemic cultures of the aid sector and how they associate their work with gender and empowerment of women refugees.

Subsequently, I analyzed the text that I provided from the interviews along with some secondary sources. These sources can be listed as handbooks, guidelines, brochures, action plans and programs, recommendations, and websites created by the organizations that specifically address gender related issues, women refugees and women's empowerment.

The deconstructed interview texts and organizational documents reflect the nature of charity culture and aid work in the UK and France. Additionally, they indicate the historical development of asylum politics in line with the national political traditions, and, most importantly, contextualization of feminist movements. All together these structures might lead to the reproduction of hierarchical collective identities and organize the nature of interactions between the West and the non-West. In this vein, during my research, I was curious to see how meanings attached to refugee women's empowerment reveal or are being used to justify post-colonial mechanisms that perpetuate global hierarchies among societies as well as the hierarchies between white Western and non-white non-Western women. To do so, such mechanisms might fix women refugees' identity (based on the myths of the Third World women in general) to their gendered bodies that are vulnerable and victimized, which doesn't have any agency, and therefore they may become an object of knowledge categorized and governed by the aid structures to highlight Western political and social superiority.

Lastly, I employed participant observation to get a better grasp of the position and work of the aid workers in daily activities and operations and how they position themselves in relation to women refugees. I was also curious to see how they intervene in women refugees' lives in the field as "professionals" through aid or assistance programs and

operations. I volunteered in a few British refugee organizations to do participant observation. (This was only possible in the UK as because of the pandemic I could not physically travel to France and take roles in French organizations.See below for more information). I attended daily meetings, worked in office jobs such as making phone calls to government offices, shadowing advocates, organizing paperwork, helping advocates with language translation as well as more basic practical work such as tidying up, playing with kids, washing up dishes, and serving food. Moreover, I have also attended the projects and activities such as art projects, speech groups, mental health awareness activities, and information sessions. Joining all these activities enabled me to experience the everyday positional dynamics in aid structures. Moreover, it helped me tremendously to see how daily activities, agendas, and programs play a role and contribute to the refugee women's empowerment as an end goal in organizational agendas.

My research has benefitted from the use of ethnographic methods since it brought me closer to the refugee communities and aid sector and thus allowed me to grasp a more nuanced understanding of appropriate behaviors or operational activities in their closed epistemic circles. and thus "humanize" the research setting. I did not treat the subjects as sources of data or numbers. Ethnographic methods helped me to serve the feminist ethics of research via creating a dynamic and two-way and more egalitarian relationship with the me and the partcipants In this way, I was more aware of potential hierarchical settings and therefore engage in ways to minimize the power relations in knowledge production. Moreover, as Schwartz-Shea and Majic (2017) argues ethnographic methods helped to understand the "intentional immersion in the life-worlds of those studied (as opposed, e.g., to the artificiality of an experimental lab) in order to access individual and community

meanings" and enabled me to "getting close to research participants and events that produce the evidence that is distinctive from interviews alone" (p.98). In this regard, participant observation has supported the expert interviews in examining the interactive and spontaneous meaning production about operations and positioning in organizations.

3.3.The UK

I conducted a field study in the UK, which started in February 2020 and ended in July 2020. I interviewed around twenty one women from eleven different aid organizations. The character, size, and scope of these organizations vary. Some of these organizations exclusively define themselves as women-specific and women-only organizations (established by women, employ women and give assistance to women only) whereas others are mixed organizations that offer services to men, women, and children but have a separate women group or somehow advertise to adopt a gendered approach in their service delivery. Some of the organizations offer women refugees employment or provide them opportunities to volunteer inside the organization while some of them only offer employment to professional aid workers and experts. Moreover, some organizations provide more conventional services in the sector such as legal casework or material aid provision while some others engage with more progressive approaches such as grassroots community organizing and advocacy. The main reason for selecting these organizations is that among the other actors in the aid or asylum sector, these are the ones which exclusively advertise that they give attention to gender or issues of women refugees. The organizations that I interviewed are located in different parts of the UK such as London, Birmingham, Coventry, Cardiff, and Manchester. It is important to note that the organizations I studied are mainly located in the Midlands area (Birmingham and Coventry) and London, which

is highly populated with migrants, refugees, or culturally and ethnically different minorities compared to the other parts of the UK.

As a feminist researcher, who aimed to pursue feminist research ethics I tried to minimize the hierarchical settings in the data collection process. I used semi-structured interviews and avoided asking strictly formed questions, which enabled me to get more genuine responses from the research subjects. I let the participants guide me through the interview questions and provided them opportunities to control the flow of conversation. Moreover, many women refugees that I interviewed were not comfortable with me taking their pictures of them and or recording their answers via using a voice recorder. I respected their preferences and therefore took notes instead. I understand that no matter how good my notes can be, I cannot quote them exactly. I realize that as the researcher I am responsible for writing and conveying their messages accurately but in the end, it was me who decided to reflect what or decided which part of our conversation was more significant. Although I tried to minimize the hierarchical settings during my data collection, I recognize my privilege and position as the researcher. I had a particular academic agenda during my fieldwork. Yet, I avoided making universal assumptions and I embraced feminist methodological reflexivity and authorship. As Ackerly (2008) stated, "analyzing data is an ethical practice: an exercise of power, of delimiting boundaries, of appreciating relations, and an opportunity for self-reflection. The interview subject is the author of her ideas so could I do anything other than report them? I decided not to take each interview as its own individualistic isolated 'text' but rather treat it as a part of an ongoing dialogue with others" (p.36). I employed the same perspective during my research and never treated any conversation as isolated material but as a part of a broader discussion or discourse.

This was possible because the participants were all members of the same community or epistemic circle.

The last tactic that I employed during my data collection to minimize hierarchical settings was the use of consent forms. For me, the use of consent forms was not just a bureaucratic academic process but rather a tool for maximizing the well-being and rights of research subjects. From the beginning, I was very open about my intentions with the interviews. Moreover, I was always open about my identity as a Ph.D. student. In many cases, I used the public information of organizations and aid workers to reach out to them. Therefore, I respected their privacy. After they accepted the interview request I sent them a copy of the consent form. Then, I provided them with a hard copy during the interviews. I was fully aware of the fact that working with women refugees in some cases might work against the well being of the refugees as it might bring back traumatic memories and experiences. To protect the well-being of refugee women, I never asked them questions about violence or their personal life. I provided them with a copy of the questions before the interviews so that they could take a look. I never forced them to answer any questions if they did not feel like it. Also, as it was stated in the consent forms, I assured them that the interviews were completely anonymous and I will never share their personal information with anyone. This was essential for their well-being as they are very sensitive about sharing their personal data since they think it might affect their asylum cases.

Apart from using public information to contact organizations and aid workers, I have also used the so-called snowballing technique. I engaged with this tactic especially after the National Refugee Women Conference that I attended in Birmingham on the 14th of February, 2020. This was my first point of interaction with the aid workers, namely gate

keepers in the refugee sector. I was able to do networking since I was introduced to different members of the epistemic community via participating in workshops and panels throughout the day. Later, I realized it was easier for me to convince organizations and aid workers to participate in the research if I was introduced by a member of the same community, namely another aid worker. Gusterson (2008) states that the snowballing technique might pose dangers since the researcher might get trapped inside the same networks' echo chamber. I tried to avoid this trap by reaching a wider sample of aid workers and organizations in different cities interviewing individuals that have different roles and positions in communities such as professionals, volunteers, advocates, and women refugees themselves.

During the interviews, I was curious about getting a grasp of the meanings attached to refugee women's empowerment in organizational operations and how organizations address it as an end goal. I wanted to examine how aid actors situate feminism into their daily work and programs. The distinct understandings or perceptions of feminism might shape to the underlying power structures in the sector and also the interactive everyday processes between the givers and receivers of aid. I always analyzed the content on the organizations' websites, reports, and blog entries before the interviews to get familiar with the institutional context, in which aid workers operate and work towards achieving women's empowerment. After almost every interview, I changed the questions accordingly to the data I grasped from the research subjects. I was interested in hearing the individualistic accounts of the participants but also how they contribute to a discourse community regarding women refugees, gender equality, aid, feminism, and women's empowerment. As Gunterson (2008) expresses, I see interviews "as dynamic and

intersubjective processes or events in which the identity of the subject was performed and even co-constructed by the interviewer (…). I was changed by each interview too: no two interviews were done by the same interviewer." (p.105). This demonstrates that "feminist IR fieldwork is not a linear process of confirming hypotheses but rather a set of positionings through which researcher and researcher negotiate with each other and, in so doing, establish their subjectivities" (Jacoby, 2006, p.173). The same applies to participant observation as well. As Pader (2006) analyzes "each participant-observer goes in with his or her own experiential background, theoretical preferences, research questions, and ideas about how to obtain the appropriate data to answer the initial research questions. As learning develops, these questions are, ideally, continually revisited and revised" (Pader, 2006, p.163). I experienced this in my research. For instance, at the beginning of the research, I was originally going to investigate how gender equality is perceived as an operational goal by aid organizations. Yet, after observing the community and becoming familiar with the discourse of the epistemic culture, I realized they address "gender equality" and narrow it down to a more specific goal of "women's empowerment". Therefore, I decided "women's empowerment" will be a more useful analytical category to examine. If I hadn't been a member of the community, there would be fewer opportunities to become aware of this and accordingly change my research question. Another benefit that participant observation and ethnographic methods provided me was that I got to know the community more than a superficial level, which helped me to avoid cultural relativism and patronizing approaches (Pader, 2006).

Another ethical consideration that I employed was related to the participants' time and resources (Ackerly, 2008). Especially at the beginning, it was very difficult to reach

out to aid workers and organizations, and convince them to take part in my project. This was partly because we did not have any acquaintances in common and they did not have any interest in responding to a PhD student's email from the other side of the world. Yet, I think the major reason was that as devoted professionals working in the charity sector, they are extremely busy all the time. In addition to this, most of them work on very limited budgets and tight schedules, which makes it difficult to arrange space and time for the interviews. It was usually me, who went to see them in their houses, in a coffee shop near their workplaces, or in their offices as they do not really want to pay for travel expenses and devote extra time for the interviews. Therefore, I always offered to cover their travel expenses if they needed to use transport.

Another major difficulty was related to my privileged position as the researcher or being an outside member of the refugee sector or the community. Especially in grassroots refugee community organizations, many advocates did not like researchers, academics or external observers. They think researchers see them as data sources, in which they can exploit and then never show up again. Once I was told by a woman refugee advocate in Coventry that "You don't really care about us but do about your research. It is for your benefit to come here, not for us". At first, I felt very confused and upset by this comment. I thought yes maybe I am here for my research project but I choose to do this research because I care about the issue and somehow want to be a part of their cause for structural change. Then, I came to think that she was right as I hold a privileged position in my interactions with the participants, which made me more aware of my role and identity inside the community. I employed a few strategies to minimize my privileges. Firstly, I tried to establish persistent friendly relations with the community members or aid workers

based on trust and sincerity. Although they were less friendly at the beginning, I turned up to the daily meetings, volunteered in some of their programs, donated money, played with kids, and served them food. I did my best to give back to the community. And only later, they were more welcoming and helpful. This was an important mile step for my fieldwork, which made me aware of the academia/activism divide.

As Gusterson (2008) argues ethnographers in the field are marked by their race, class, gender and education level, nationality, and other characteristics. During my fieldwork, there were times where my identity crippled my research capabilities, especially at the beginning. As a Turkish national, I am not culturally white. Yet, I am a white woman, I look Western and I study from the Western part of the world, which in some cases highlighted my position as an outsider, especially in grassroots community organizations. In some other cases, my Turkish nationality came handy, as Middle Eastern Muslim women were sincerer and more open with me as they were more familiar with the Turkish culture. Many of them expressed that they adore Turkish soap operas, which worked as an ice-breaker in most of our conversations. Furthermore, sometimes I felt women easily connected with me because of the fact that I was also a woman from a Third World country. Yet, when I was discussing asylum politics or Middle Eastern politics with them, I felt the power and privilege of holding a nationality and passport. All in all, I think it is important to note that being in a female-only environment is quite helpful to overcome such issues that might result from differences. Being surrounded by women is very empowering and forgiving. It is much easier to leave out differences and unite, although it is not always a straightforward process.

In the first two months, before the Covid-19 outbreak, I conducted face-to-face interviews with the aid workers and volunteers from different organizations in various places such as their offices, their homes or public areas where they hold their drop-in sessions like churches and community buildings. However, as the lockdown measures were introduced during mid-March 2020 in the UK, I had to switch to online meetings. I used different platforms for this such as Zoom, Skype, or FaceTime. Conducting online interviews provided both some benefits and some drawbacks. As for benefits, being at home made aid workers and advocates more available time-wise to participate in my research. Yet, as for women refugees, not all of them had access to the internet or to a computer to take part in the interviews during the lockdown. Therefore, I realize that the most vulnerable women in the community were not able to join the research.

Before the lockdown, I had the chance to volunteer in two different organizations in Birmingham. I both volunteered in office jobs such as making phone calls to government offices, shadowing advocates, organizing paperwork, helping advocates with language translation as well as more basic practical work such as tidying up, cleaning the dishes and serving food. I also joined daily activities and programs that are offered by the organizations such as knitting, pampering, yoga, arts, mental health programs. Moreover, once I was given an opportunity to hold a session on gender equality and empowerment with women refugees and asylum seekers as there was an empty slot that aid workers couldn't fill in for the day. It was not my request, but instead I was asked to do it by the aid workers. The women who offered to hold the session expressed that they do not really talk about gender equality and empowerment as concepts on their own but instead they always implicitly address them in relation to activities and goals. Hence, they thought it

would be a nice change to have a more philosophical conversation on these topics in the community. Being a volunteer and joining these activities helped me to establish personal connections with both the aid workers and the refugee women, in which I was able to experience in-group dynamics firsthand. After the outbreak of the Covid-19 and the introduction of the lockdown measures, I was able to stay in connection with the community as a result of the friendly relations that I have established. Therefore, I was able to take part in some online activities. I joined some online arts-crafts sessions and weekly catch-up meetings on Zoom. In June 2020, I also participated in an online photo exhibition, where destitute refugee women are given cameras to capture their lives on the streets.

3.4. France

In September 2020, I started my data collection in France. It ended in January 2021. I was able to interview around 20 aid workers from 11 different organizations. Although my initial plan was to travel to France and spend a couple of months doing fieldwork there, it was not possible due to the peak of the Covid-19 pandemic as the borders were closed and flights were canceled. When reaching out to organizations, I again used the public information on the websites or their social media accounts. It was again very difficult to reach out to organizations, especially due to the fact that I was not there physically. I couldn't just visit the offices or join events to meet aid workers. I was introduced to gatekeepers of the French sector by the aid workers that I interviewed in the UK as some organizations had joint projects. Just like in the UK, I benefited from the snowballing technique as it was easier to reach aid workers and organizations after I met with a few aid workers, who introduced me to others in the sector.

The organizations that I interviewed vary in their character, size, and scope. Some of these organizations are women-only organizations as they only provide aid to women whereas others are mixed organizations, which have separate departments for women refugees or claim to integrate a gender lens in their service delivery structures and operations. All of these organizations advertise to adopt a gendered approach or offer specialized assistance to women refugees. They also take part in nation-wide collective arrangements that address the double violence that women refugees experience. Some of these organizations are bigger, more institutionalized players in the aid sector that operate under government contracts whereas some of them are smaller women-specific neighborhood organizations or more activist organizations. Again, the main reason for selecting them is that among the other players in the aid and asylum sector, these are the ones which exclusively advertise that they give attention to gender or issues of women refugees. None of these organizations offer employment to women refugees. Some of them, especially urban grassroots organizations, might offer small volunteering opportunities to women but many of these opportunities require expertise on the domestic law. All of the organizations mainly focus on conventional services such as legal casework and integration, even the ones who define themselves as militant or activist exclusively.

The aid workers that I interviewed were from various organizations located in Paris, Lyon, Dunkirk, and Calais. It was particularly difficult to reach those in Northern France, which is a transit area for refugees to cross to the UK. This is because they were more busy as they are occupied with working on the field, and in emergency camp-like situations. The ones located in urban centers such as Lyon and Paris are more likely to accommodate the bigger players in the sector, which are established after World War II and operate under

government contracts. That said, urban areas also accommodate smaller women-only organizations either provide services in a specific field related to asylum such as legal aid or integration or define themselves as militant and activist platforms established by women refugees themselves. During my data collection, I have observed that bigger professional organizations outnumber smaller grassroots community or militant organizations in France. I came to realize that this is a direct implication of the culture of the non-profit sector in France, which will be discussed in the later chapters. There are fewer opportunities for the direct participation of women refugees in organizational structures. The aid work is carried out by the French professionals and volunteering citizens only usually in more institutionalized and formal platforms that are supported by the state.

There were a few drawbacks resulting from collecting data online only due to the pandemic. Firstly, I never had a face-to-face interaction with any of the participants. Therefore, I was not able to establish friendly relations before asking them to take part in my research. Although a majority of the aid workers that I spoke to were very passionate about their work and their participation in my research, I think it is important to note that I never had a pre-existing relation with them before the interviews. I used different online platforms such as Skype and Zoom to conduct the interviews. There were two times that I conducted phone interviews. When I sent an invitation email to the research subjects, I always included the list of questions that I wanted to ask to give them a general idea about the research and their contribution as well as an online copy of the consent form. The meetings were completely anonymous and I assured them that their personal information will be protected. At the beginning of the interviews, I always asked their permission to use a voice recorder to record the interview. All of them agreed. Just like in the UK, I

benefited tremendously from the semi-structured setting of the interviews and the use of open-ended questions. Moreover, I never forced them to answer a question that they are not comfortable with. I never asked them a personal question or a question that might trigger traumatic memories such as violence and sexual assault for the sake of maximizing the well-being of the participants. My identity as a researcher did not really pose a challenge as most of my interviewees were professional aid workers and thus they are used to working with researchers.

Secondly, I was not able to do participant observation and embrace ethnographic methods. I wanted to join online activities that organizations might hold during the lockdown as they did in England. However, most of the organizations only held private meetings and appointments online, which are not open to external actors such as researchers as myself. The reluctance for shifting activities online (other than private meetings) resonates with the narrow perspective on asylum aid in France, in which assisting refugees to acquire legal status is the main focus of organizations and they do not think other services are their responsibility. In other words, they do not have a holistic perspective on aid and do not really systematically offer a diverse range of activities and programs for refugees. In the absence of chances for joining organizations' activities, my only option to give back to the communities was to make donations for the organizations, which I did.

Thirdly, conducting research remotely limited my opportunities to meet and interview directly with refugee women and include them to my research. As I explained above, I either use publicly available information to reach out to aid workers or I was introduced to them via other aid workers in the sector. Moreover, I was not able to establish

relations with the communities since I was not physically there to gain their trust although the aid workers that I interviewed were passionate about their jobs and extremely helpful, kind and friendly, it was not very possible to be introduced to the women refugees by them. This is because women refugees are very sensitive about their privacy and reluctant to talk to external actors since they think it might affect their asylum cases and aid workers assert that it is their responsibility to protect them. Hence, out of 20 women that I interviewed in France, only two of them were refugees. This is of course because I was not there physically to meet them but I believe there is another reason. Women refugees are not given opportunities to directly participate in the aid structures and they are seen as clients not as partners, thus they are not very visible in the community or daily operations of the aid workers. In other words, the aid work is carried out by the aid professionals and organizations solely. For this reason, although I think the small number of refugee participants was a major disadvantage to my research in France, I don't think I would have been able to meet and interview more women refugees even if I was in France physically due to the lack of participatory and inclusive approaches in the asylum sector.

Another major drawback is related to language. Although I can speak some French, my capabilities were limited in terms of conducting the interviews in French. Therefore, all the interviews were conducted in English. Since the aid and asylum sector is very professionalized and institutionalized and many organizations take part in joint projects with the EU, I never experienced any problems regarding English since all of the participants were quite fluent. Yet, I am aware that the data I collected is limited to English speaking sources. The women refugees that I interviewed had written their answers to my questions in French and I used translation services to decode their answers. Similarly, when

analyzing organizational documents, reports, brochures, or any written or visual materials, I used Google Translate and didn't experience any serious issues. Some of the organizations that I focused on produced English content as well. The only difficulty related to the language was again related to the professional culture in the asylum sector. Since organizations usually focus on the legal matters and policy making mechanisms in their services, the aid workers use a very technical jargon, which refers to national and European policies and other specific documents, guidelines or action plans. In other words, they used an explicit expert language. For this reason, at the beginning, it was very difficult to follow the conversations because they were talking about specific policies most of the time when I asked them to describe their work. I got used to it eventually as I became more familiar with the context.

3.5. Conclusion

This chapter reviews the methodological perspectives and approaches of this research. I employed feminist and interpretivist epistemological stances and used qualitative method. Paying attention to my privileged position as a researcher, I tried to eliminate potential hierarchies and maximize the participant's welfare via giving them voices, letting them control the flow of information and preserving their anonymity. I avoided treating them solely as sources of data via establishing friendly relations and most importantly always finding a way to give back to the community. The outbreak of Covid-19 has changed the initial research plan and prevented me from conducting field research in France since I could not be there physically and therefore could not engage with communities and employ participant observation. This undoubtedly affected the type of data that I collected in France. That said, I think this limitation was marginal as the aid

culture in France is very institutionalized and professionalized. Therefore, even if I were able to go to France, I would not think I could become a member of the refugee communities as I was in the UK because French organizations do not use community-building approaches and they do not give active roles to women refugees within organizational structures. The daily operations and activities are carried out by the aid workers only and I do not need to be physically in France to interview them.

CHAPTER 4:JUST PASS US THE MIC: ADDRESSING REFUGEE WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT BY AID ORGANIZATIONS IN THE UK

4.1.Introduction

This chapter reveals how aid organizations in the UK construct women refugees and attach meanings to refugee and asylum seeking women's empowerment in their operations. Not surprisingly, many of them identified sustaining basic survival needs as the first step of women's empowerment. Yet, they also give serious attention to advocacy for creating a systemic and permanent change in the long run. Advocacy is identified as an integral part to their work and "reason for their existence" as aid organizations rather than being a secondary objective. Because of this they call themselves "advocates" not aid workers or professionals. Such emphasis on advocacy has continued during the Covid-19 pandemic too. The advocacy activities continued and were shifted to digital platforms.

Another important characteristic is that women refugee organizations actively work to come up with creative mechanisms and programs for supporting authentic representation and visibility of women refugees. They define empowerment predominantly as providing necessary tools to refugee women for voicing their critiques and telling their stories without being dependent on others, namely the local aid professionals or advocates. Challenging the dominant media representations, which construct women as vulnerable and victimized individuals who are not capable of influencing change in their own lives, organizations provide leadership roles to women and create related programs for encouraging them to take ownership in the communities. In this way, it is possible to move away from narrow charity or survival to more comprehensive social justice approaches in their work. Such approaches challenge the anonymity of refugee women and enable them to communicate

their real identities and personal stories. Agency of refugee and asylum-seeking women is highlighted via giving support to grassroots community-building and activism by the organizations.

All these perceptions about aid work show that British organizations adopt a holistic perception of aid. It refers to politicization of aid rather than being operated under neutral, universal and objective, which promotes humanitarianism. Advocacy is always treated as an integral part of daily service delivery. Aid is not identified as a momentary transaction between the aid workers (local) and refugee women (foreigners) for sustaining everyday material needs but instead as a tool that facilitates long term independence and well-being of refugee women. Thus, such perceptions disrupt the long-established hierarchies in conventional aid structures and resonates with a more feminist understanding of aid, which supports integration of refugee women to aid structures as equal members of the community. They encourage altruistic perspectives of aid via lessening the potential dependencies of refugee women on aid structures and facilitating organic bottom-up community organizing approaches within the communities. Organizations do not address women's empowerment as sustaining gender differentiated needs but they situate their work in line with the broader movement for womens' rights. Lastly, they make room for intersectionality in their structures, as culture, sexual orientation or ethnicity are always discussed in relation to the other factors, which ultimately challenges the stereotypes of non-white or non-Western women from developing countries.

In the following sections; I will investigate the ways how women refugee organizations in the UK identify refugee and asylum seeking women's empowerment in

four categories; (1) creating and regulating space, (2) service, aid delivery and protection, (3) collaboration and inclusion and lastly, (4) public visibility and authorship. In the last part, I will discuss the barriers and challenges identified by the organizations, which limit the efficiency or initiation of programs that address empowerment. Then I will analyze some issues and challenges which are identified by organizations to limit their abilities to address empowerment. Such barriers can be scrutinized under three main groups; practical barriers, barriers related to the asylum and aid sector, and barriers related to diverse perceptions of feminism among women in the community resulting from different backgrounds and life experiences.

4.2. Creating and Regulating Space for Women

According to the women refugee organizations in the UK creating and regulating space is essential for addressing women's empowerment. In this section. I will analyze the purposes of this tactic; namely as sustaining everyday needs of women more effectively, encouraging women to take ownership of communities, achieving equality inside the communities, eliminating patriarchal norms about masculine leadership, reconfiguring patriarchal power structures, supporting physical and mental healing of women from traumatic experiences, facilitating community-building and networking, and lastly, achieving social and physical safety of women.

All of the organizations highlight the importance of either mobilizing and operating as women-only platforms or forming gender segregated, women-only groups within mixed communities. These attempts are identified as the first step for women's empowerment for various reasons. First and foremost, creating a women-only space is necessary to acknowledge and sustain some of the practical everyday needs of refugee and asylum-

seeking women. Food is one of these needs. In general, women tend to eat less in their households when there is a crisis situation. Within this context, asylum seeking and destitution intensify women's lack of access for food. Even if they have access to a certain, they tend to prioritize their kids and cut their ratios to feed them or eat less than their male partners. Refugee women's lack of access to food is a systemic issue, which is enforced by the national asylum system, which doesn't allow women to acquire employment. Research shows that 95% of refugee and asylum seeking women responded that they were hungry, 27% answered that they were hungry all the time, and 87% responded that they relied on charities for food (Dudhia, 2020). By creating women-only spaces, organizations aim to avert potential gendered power structures within their households disrupting their access to food and feed women. They want women to enjoy the food just for themselves without any "quilt, fear or disturbances" from the men in their families or communities.

Organizations also want to address refugee women's issues related to health and childcare via creating women only spaces. Even during asylum-seeking, women remain as the chief responsible for childcare. Organizations ensure that women can get meaningful assistance and support about childcare via creating women only spaces. Offering daycare services, they want to ease women's burden since they are stuck with their kids 24/7 in most situations. They aim to enable women to take a break via taking their kids to a place for a few hours everyday so that they can meet other women and eventually become familiar to a community. An advocate expressed that "If you are a single mom, you don't get any time for yourself. We created daycare and afterschool programs for children, which is not enough but we've seen it has enhanced women's participation in organizational activities and programs". Such services are also beneficial for boosting women's self-

confidence and overcoming isolation. That said, there are some organizations that use just the opposite tactic in this regard. An organization in Birmingham does not allow any kids to their weekly community meetings because it wants women to enjoy personal time for a change without worrying about childcare. The founder of the group stated that "We only allow children once in a month for food. They are not allowed because then the community meeting becomes a daycare. It stops being about women. We will have children screaming and running so the speakers and the facilitators cannot really speak. Also, single women stop coming to the meetings".

Relatedly, maternal health is a significant issue since pregnant refugee women are usually afraid to go to the General Practitioners (GPs) because they think they might affect their asylum cases. In this regard, creating an informal women-only space attracts women to ask for help and get information about their health concerns. The same applies to mental health issues. Refugee women feel safer in a closed women-only community, in which they are more likely to discuss psychological problems despite the cross-cultural stigma around discussing mental health issues. Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, since refugee and asylum seeking women are likely to suffer from sexual and gender based violence at all stages of asylum-seeking, organizations assert that it is not possible to discuss such issues when men are present. As one refugee woman told me "Issues about men cannot be discussed when they are there staring at us and ready to list their excuses". Hence, according to the organzanizations creating women-only spaces is crucial for enabling women to communicate and ask for help about exploitative or abuse relations.

Secondly, organizations frame creating and regulating space in line with women's empowerment since such tactics encourage refugee and asylum seeking women to take

ownership of the communities. There is a strategic relationship between organizing space in a particular way and urging refugee women to pursue ownership. A refugee women's center in Birmingham is a good example for understanding this relationship. The center is a large building designated only for refugee and asylum seeking women and children, which offers a large communal space that refugee women can just come and do activities alongside getting help for casework or sustaining basic needs. There is a playground, which they can leave their kids to, and also a kitchen area and a tea bar, which allow them to just hang out and chat. Moreover, there are individual rooms assigned for different organizations. Some of these organizations carry out more conventional aid work like giving legal assistance and providing basic support, some are engaged with advocacy activities and community-mobilization and some others mainly focus on organizing social and cultural activities. Many volunteers, who used to work at the center (unfortunately, it was closed permanently at the time of writing), point out that there was a "certain vibe" of the building. They were honestly impressed by the space, which both benefits refugee women as a community space and aid workers as a progressive working environment. The building is filled with furniture. There are Asian rugs on the floor, colorful posters on the walls and flower vazes in many spots. Overall, it was very contrasting to conventional spaces that refugee organizations operate within since many of them experience lack of funding and thus don't have the required financial resources for decoration. Usually, refugee organizations use shared offices, which have a more professional atmosphere and do not feel like a community space. In most cases, organizations also use free public places like community centers or churches, which women from other religions might not feel very comfortable with.

The founder of the center explained that decoration was a central tactic they used to urge refugee women to take ownership, overcome alienation and isolation resulting from the hostile asylum processes and racism, and encourage them to develop bonds with others and belongingness to their new life. She reveals that "Many women who come to the center lost their dignity, they forgot that they are human. So we really focused on decoration, environment-setting and accessorizing. We wanted them to think 'What a lovely place it is!' once they stepped into the center. In other organizations, they wait in the corridors or office-like places, which constantly trigger their anxieties. Environment-setting is a way to show how much you value people around you. It's an effective way to say I care about you. It encourages women to take ownership of the space. They are more eager to take roles. They are not like guests or recipients of aid simply. They truly feel that this is their space. Thus, they eventually start to build resilience because they are not under pressure. They actually enjoy being here". Within this context, creating and regulating space for women is treated as the first step of community-building, which will support self-resilience and autonomy. I was told that refugee women are usually shy and quiet when they first come to the center but then they open up, come together with other women and are more prone to take roles inside the community.

Relatedly, the aid workers express that refugee women truly benefited from the physical proximity of organizations within the center. This is because women might first come to the center to ask for help about their casework but after they might end up joining in a wide range of social activities. Moreover, they might find opportunities to engage with political action via joining advocacy efforts. One of the advocates expressed "The center is a space for meeting, getting together and ultimately build towards a collective feminist

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action". Hence, organizing and regulating space in a particular way enables organizations to adopt more collaborative approaches, in which refugee women are seen as friends and partners that can take active roles within the community or engage in political action.

Organizations put vital effort into regulating space in a particular way to achieve and maintain equality (including gender equality) inside the communities. Sometimes certain organizations can be dominated by women from certain cultural or ethnic groups (namely; African or Middle Eastern women) and women from different backgrounds might feel reluctant to join. For overcoming such situations and avoiding discrimination, many refugee-led women's organizations advertize that they speak many languages, practice many religions and some of they have kids while some others are single. They declare that everyone who wants to come can equally participate in the community as there are no leaders and they sit in circles during the meetings. In the case of an intentional or unintentional discriminative behavior, they immediately intervene verbally. They actively speak up against patronizing behavior and warn the other members, reminding that they are a "sisterhood" and any type of action that potentially harms this collective spirit is not allowed. In some organizations, especially in refugee-led grassroots organizations, anti-discrimination and equality principles are addressed via creating "bill of rights" or "code of conduct" documents. Such documents demonstrate the role, place and responsibility of each community member indicating that everyone is equal. They also regulate the relationship between members. In this regard, written documents have an additional function in mixed organizations. Women in mixed organizations usually create their own segregated groups as they fear gender based violence from the male members inside the community. In such cases, code of conduct documents function for regulating the

relationship between men and women in the community and to protect women from abuse and exploitation from the other community members. An asylum-seeker advocate from Coventry expressed that "Coventry is a very mobile city. People come and go frequently. Sometimes refugee or asylum-seeking men take advantage of newly arrived women. They might present themselves as solicitors that might help them with their asylum cases or as people who have respectable status inside the community. They simply lie. Women fall for their paternalistic behavior because it seems like these men have some sort of control and knowledge, which might help them with their cases. They fear from the asylum system so much that fall into these traps and get raped or abused by these men. We have a code of conduct to overcome such behavior. When a new woman joins us we clearly state at the beginning that we are all equal, everyone is either a refugee or an asylum seeker and there are no solicitors among us. Nobody is more powerful than the other". Creating basic written rules and regulations inside the community and organizational spaces therefore serve to protect women from abuse by other community members and to signify that men and women are equal members of the community.

Furthermore, organizations identify creating and regulating space is a vital tactic for eliminating patriarchal norms about masculine leadership. Many mixed refugee communities or organizations are usually dominated by men. Hence, many refugee and asylum seeking women express they prefer women-only spaces because they are intimidated to talk when men are present or afraid to be accused by men when they raise an issue. They are usually told that how they feel or what they want is simply wrong. They want to talk to other women because they can empathize with and understand each other better. A refugee woman advocate told me that "In mixed groups men want to be the leaders

but here we are the bosses of our own group. It is us who are leading the discussions". Women express their discontent about men's domination of speaking spaces resulting from gendered hierarchies implying that men are natural leaders and thus they should control discussions. Due to the very same hierarchies, men are given more respect and thus more opportunities to speak during collective meetings. Another refugee women advocate stated that "We try to eliminate these types of power dynamics via creating a segregated space for women. Men usually boss around and ignore us. Sometimes we receive complaints from women". She also added maybe it is not the right strategy and they should focus more on educating men rather than organizing separately but this is what they can do at the moment.

Creating a gendered space is also seen as an instrument for reconfiguring patriarchal power structures via enhancing women's self-confidence and independence. Gendered spaces enable women to get together based on a common identity of being a woman, speak about shared issues and experiences, and develop a collective feminist spirit. Women boost their self-confidence via expressing themselves. Furthermore, it is a good excuse to do something for themselves or to go somewhere on their own without their family and cultural community members. Accordingly, many organizations forbid the entry of men to weekly meetings and activities. This is identified as a feminist tactic by the organizations for claiming power; an attempt to leave the men out like they do it to women in many other spaces of daily life. Being a woman becomes an identity that entails privilege and power via acquiring a new meaning that is associated with exclusiveness and belongingness. An advocate explained to me that "We don't want any men to be here. Sometimes men don't give permission to their partners to come here alone. If he

accompanies her to the center, we directly ask if he supports women. We show him that we are the ones that are in charge here. If he leaves her home and comes alone to ask for help about something, we don't help him. We tell him that he has to bring her if there is an issue. We don't let him speak for her situation". These attitudes value women just because they are women independently from their families and imply that being a woman entails agency. Signifying women don't have to be represented by someone else just because they are women, organizations aim to support self-resilience of women as a long term goal. A volunteer noted that: "The type of empowerment message that we want to give in our spaces is that it's okay to be separated from men. It is okay to end abusive relationships. It is okay to create a community and have a life without men". In this manner, creating segregated spaces is seen as essential for building an independent (hierarchical) community that refuses to include men and to discriminate against men unlike many other fields of public life for supporting the autonomy and independence of women inside the communities.

Moreover, organizations claim that they support women's empowerment via creating and regulating a comfortable, warm and friendly space. Many of the refugee women are traumatized by their experiences with men across countries, both in their home countries and the UK. They lack trust to men not only in their families but also in public spheres such as men working for the state agencies and aid organizations, who generally operate under masculine norms and characteristics highlighting an hierarchical white Western masculine subjectivity. Research (Reehal, Taal and Maestri, 2019) shows that refugee women suffer from lack of qualified legal representation and advisors addressing gender issues. One of the reasons for this is that they don't feel comfortable. Many refugee

women that I interviewed expressed that they feel anxious to go to bigger and more professional aid organizations even though they might have greater capabilities and thus might offer more opportunities. This is because; they feel intimidated, patronized and misunderstood. They don't like one-on-one meetings in these organizations especially because they don't feel safe; they cannot be really open with me as they are afraid to ask them questions. An asylum-seeker revealed that "I constantly feel anxious when I go to other bigger organizations. It is like a clinic-like environment. I have to wait in the corridor. But here *(she is referring to smaller women-only organizations)* is more friendly and warm". Similarly, women suggest they are respected more in smaller women's organizations. "I stopped going to the big names in the sector because I feel like I am not representing myself. I am not valued. I am exposed to patronizing behavior constantly. It is better to go to smaller women organizations. At least they ask for my opinion on matters". Relatedly, such bigger and more professionalized organizations require to book an appointment beforehand, which limits refugee womens' access to the services. This is because they cannot spontaneously go to the organizations and ask for help about an issue that might have come up that day or week. For enhancing women's access to services, women's organizations hold weekly drop-ins, in which they don't need appointments to come.

Furthermore, getting an appointment beforehand is also problematic because refugee and asylum-seeking women hesitate to share their personal information fearing that it might affect their asylum cases. Additionally, they might be fleeing from dangerous community members and thus they might think sharing personal information might compromise their safety. For these reasons, privacy is taken very seriously in women-only

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spaces. A volunteer stated that "We don't really ask each other about our cases. We respect privacy. Women who come here are self-defined. They come just because they want to". Many women organizations advertise that women who want to come to the weekly meetings do not need to register unless they want to get legal help. A women-led refugee organization based in Manchester clearly explains in its website that the organization takes personal information to help women only; they keep the information in a locked drawer and not share with anyone unless they give consent. If they leave the organization, they will destroy all of the records and files about them. They assert that confidentiality is guaranteed in the organization for enabling women to feel more comfortable and safe.

As opposed to the hierarchical relationships and environment in bigger organizations, many refugee organizations intend to create a friendly and warm environment for enhancing the agency and ownership of women inside the communities. As I was told by one advocate from Birmingham that women who come to the center are considered "friends not simply recipients". Such approaches serve to build a community and mobilize together much more easily. Another advocate from London stated that "Women feel like they are home here. They breastfeed in front of each other. They take out their hijabs once they enter the room. All prove they feel secure here. They feel they are surrounded by friends not random strangers". Such emphasis on friendship and networking is identified to be crucial for empowerment because in the highly complex and hostile procedures of asylum seeking in the UK, women tend to rely on informal support systems such as friendships and solidarity with other refugee and asylum-seeking women, they get strength from each other and call each other family (Taal, 2018).

Finally, organizations aim to achieve social and physical safety of women via creating women-only spaces. Refugee and asylum-seeking women usually feel safer in gender segregated spaces due to their past traumas. Many women are exposed to sexual abuse at all stages of the migration process; country of origin, during the journey to the UK and after they arrive to the UK (Dudhia, 2020). They might experience various traumas across all cultures and communities, males from their families/communities or state agencies that operate under white western masculine characteristics. An advocate from London told me: "We believe in universal equality but from a migration perspective, gender, race, ethnicity, marital status and sexual orientation affects the character of safe spaces. If you are a woman migrating, you are more likely to experience sexual and gender based violence. Thus, women don't feel comfortable when men are around". Advocates claim that creating a persistent and consistent women-owned space is a substantial tactic to recover from trauma.

According to the organizations, safety is also related to patriarchal norms and biases embedded in different social contexts. Men and women among refugee populations come from diverse cultural and educational backgrounds, which might prevent women's equal participation in community meetings and collective discussions. A single asylum-seeking woman expressed: "In our own groups we can talk, laugh, joke and dance without the risk of being gossiped about inside the community. If you become assertive during the meetings then men might think you are flirting. As a result women look down and don't comment in mixed groups especially in the presence of their husbands or other family members". Another advocate added "Women come from different cultural backgrounds where it is not appropriate to mix with men or they just don't feel comfortable. It is not our place to judge.

We organize women-only spaces so that they can come here and use the services just like anybody else". In this regard, organizations create women-only spaces not to treat them as cultural others, who cannot mix with men, but instead to ensure their access to the help and activities just like the other members of the community. In other words, it is a tactic to eliminate male privileges that allows only men to join public spaces in some cultures.

4.3. Aid Delivery, Services and Protection

This section reviews the ways organizations construct aid and service delivery, and protection as a vital part of the empowerment of refugee and asylum seeking women. Within this context, aid refers to all the services provided and all types of activities designed for/with women by the organizations. These can be identified under three main categories; firstly, providing services for sustaining basic everyday needs, secondly, creating support groups and social activities, and thirdly, generating advocacy related actions and programs. The organizations have a holistic and politicized understanding of aid, in which they are not only concerned with providing basic resources and services but changing the unjust system. Therefore, they situate their work into the broader agenda of social justice or feminist cause.

To start with, almost all organizations interviewed point out the crucial role of providing services to meet women's everyday basic needs. Advocates noted that providing assistance related to survival needs of refugee women is a very important part of the aid work that is carried out by the women organizations because it is the first step for achieving empowerment. Refugee women usually get assistance about these basic needs during weekly drop-ins of the organizations. As I discuss in the previous section, women do not require to get an appointment beforehand to come to the drop-ins and to ask for help about

their issues, which surely enhances their access to services. It also enables them to get help very quickly about an urgent issue that might have just come up that day or week (like a time sensitive document sent from the Home Office or a delayed bill) without needing to wait for the date of their appointments. Moreover, women are provided with bus passes when coming to drop-ins so they do not have to pay for transportation. This is another tactic by organizations to enhance women's access to services.

The drop-ins usually occur as in the following schedule: When refugee women come to the organization in the morning, they are asked to write their name on a sign-in sheet and get a number if they want to get help or ask a question about a certain issue. While waiting for their turn, they participate in social group activities, eat lunch or just hang out with others. When it is time they are called for an individual meeting with one of the advocates in the organization. These meetings are confidential and take place in private rooms. At the beginning of the meeting the advocate makes sure that she can ask for help about anything. The assistance provided during the meetings can be about legal matters such as the Home Office problems, chasing appointments, solicitor and interpreter problems, lack of adequate legal representation, deportation, detention, gathering evidence for the court, appealing to the court decisions, and applying for Section 4 to stay in the UK after getting rejected. Moreover, it can be about providing basic needs and resources such as finding appropriate and reliable accommodation, accessing welfare money, food, clothes, medicine and other resources, booking appointments for General Practitioners, gynecologist, family-planning or mental counselor, and paying or postponing bills. According to the advocates the priority is usually given to issues related to homelessness, detention, deportation and destitution.

During the pandemic, the services offered in drop-ins were partly stalled as the face-to-face meetings were not possible. Preserving women's access to services, organizations created an online network of refugee women and used platforms Zoom and Whatsapp to continue to individual advice sessions. Yet, a minority of women, who don't have access to digital technology, smartphones or laptops and Wi-Fi had difficulties in accessing services. During the lockdowns, in addition to the previously discussed basic survival needs and legal issues, refugee women asked for help about issues like not having access to internet and smartphones or laptops, homeschooling their kids, and difficulties regarding remote learning in the absence of related technologies. Emergency parcels that include food, cleaning products (masks, soap and hand disinfectors) and childcare products (like pampers) were effectively delivered to the refugee women by the organizations in smaller towns and cities. Yet, in bigger cities like London and Birmingham, women were more likely to experience delays in getting the parcels.

Secondly, organizations coordinate social activities and support groups, which is identified as another aid effort for supporting refugee and asylum-seeking empowerment. Such efforts aim to enhance women's integration and quality of life, cater emotional support and promote socialization to overcome isolation and discrimination. Additionally, these programs are designed to help women for healing from past traumas of violence and abuse by encouraging them to develop membership ties to a community. Organizations plan a wide range of social activities such as music or choir groups, English lessons, self-care sessions(like pampering sessions), arts and crafts-making, sports activities, daily trips to galleries, museums and concerts, and wellbeing activities (like acupuncture and yoga). Just like drop-ins, organizations provide bus passes so refugee women do not need to pay

for transportation for participating social activities. Many of these activities continued on digital platforms during the lockdowns. Some of these activities take place in women-only groups whereas some others in mixed groups. Advocates discuss that sometimes they have to come up with activities that are traditionally associated with women like knitting and sewing groups or pampering sessions. This is a tactic for attracting more women to come by implying that there will be no men around. According to the organizations, it is crucial to serve either lunch or snacks during these activities. Food is an important medium. It not only attracts more women to come but also brings them together, enables them to make friendships and eventually feel attached to a community. Offering such a wide range of diverse activities reflects that organizations employ a holistic lens on aid and service delivery. An advocate stated: "We do casework but also yoga, we believe in a holistic way of supporting people. I don't think it is wise to demarcate legal help from social and well-being activities. They all come together and complement each other. We treat women as full individuals, not only refugees or migrants".

The third category is advocacy. Organizations frame advocacy as an integral part of the aid work they carry out. It is identified as another fundamental aspect of aid just like sustaining basic material needs. They assert that aid cannot be meaningful and effective if it lacks advocacy. It cannot be demarcated from political action. Therefore, they define themselves as politicized actors, not neutral and objective humanitarian organizations that are mostly concerned with providing basic material needs, which is usually the traditional perception of aid in the immigration sector. The politicized and holistic understanding of aid also challenges the problematic imagination of refugee women as passive and vulnerable individuals. Women are constructed as vulnerable and passive because they are

non-White and non-Western refugee women. Such constructions do not recognize the root causes for vulnerabilities and assert that women are victims by default. However, women organizations' politicized and holistic conceptualization of aid problematize the unjust national asylum system for women's vulnerabilities. For this reason, they integrate a systemic critique and an advocacy funcion into the aid work for eventually bringing permanent political and social change and at the same time enhancing the agency of refugee women. Adopting a critical approach, organizations refuse to operate based on traditional power relations embedded in aid structures, which underscore hierarchies between "the receivers" and "the givers". Refugee women are treated as partners and friends, not simply as receivers of aid. Such perceptions also demonstrates that aid workers integrate feminist goals and values into their work via disrupting hierarchies in communities.

Moreover, the way they perceive aid shows that they always situate their work within a broader social justice cause. An advocate based in Birmingham expressed: "We deal with so many problems at the same time, sometimes we do not frame it explicitly as gender equality or race equality explicitly but our work is always tied into such causes. We prevent deportation so women don't suffer from more destitution or violence. If they are victims of abuse, we arrange them for mental counseling sessions. We write blogs, reports, destitution, rape and violence with using an exclusive feminist or activist language for influencing policy-making". As it can be seen, women's everyday needs are attempted to be addressed in line with wider political objectives. Accordingly, aid is not seen as a spontaneous transaction made between foreign and local women. Aid workers construct their operations in the broader context of women's emancipation and changing the asylum system rather than mitigating individual issues resulting from the corrupted system. An

advocate from London asserts "Bigger organizations which get government contacts for providing asylum services are more likely to do what the Home Office says rather than criticizing the system or truly helping people because they cut out advocacy and try to work out with the system. What is the point if we don't change the system? The system is broken". As they are mainly critical about the system, they are also concerned with the bigger players in the sector for implicitly preserving the status quo via neglecting advocacy or without engaging with political action.

Placing greater emphasis on advocacy, some women organizations expressed that they changed their work scheme from traditional approaches that are centered around providing assistance to more progressive programs to engage in advocacy more effectively. They formalized these new approaches via rebranding the organizations, opening-up new departments and changing the agenda systemically. An advocate based in Manchester explains this process as "Before thinking and addressing about advocacy within the organization structurally, we didn't have a capacity for it because we were overly focused on providing day to day services. Now that we define it as one of our chief objectives and devote funding to it, the capacity of the staff and the organization has enhanced dramatically''. Such organizations engage with a wide range of advocacy activities such as reporting, researching, campaigning and fundraising. They also actively use their social media platforms to support their advocacy efforts.

Adopting a holistic and political perception on aid leads organizations to design related operations and activities to address feminist objectives. As an advocate explains: "Unlike other bigger organizations we adopt a holistic approach on aid. Yes, we help women with their needs but our fundamental goal is not only to provide for them. Instead

we address the issues in accordance with systemic issues such as women's oppression. In other bigger or mixed organizations, gender equality is only mentioned on paper for addressing gender differentiated needs but here we contextualize in within a feminist or women's rights agenda". Hence, organizations aim to influence a systemic change from a feminist perspective as well. They are concerned with raising awareness about human rights issues rather than solely focusing on meeting basic needs. Political issues are discussed in support groups and community meetings too. A volunteer who organizes weekly community meetings in Birmingham stated that "We don't only talk about our asylum problems. We sometimes talk about politics since our whole situation is merely political. It depends on the conversation. For example, when we talk about violence and rape, politics come up. Or just last week we talked about Brexit and how it will affect our situation".

Another implication of adopting a holistic perspective on aid is that organizations communicate the disregarded and overlooked needs and concerns of women refugees by the conventional aid structures or bigger players in the immigration sector. One of these needs is refugee women's lack of access to menstrual products. Having an undisrupted access to menstrual products is vital for the well-being of refugee and asylum seeking women just like any ordinary woman. This is an important example to see how gender affects asylum-seeking, which translates into an extra burden on women since they don't have enough financial resources to access related products such as tampons or sanitary towels. A report by Taal (2018) demonstrates that refugee women struggle to access underwear and sanitary pads; it is difficult to explain it to charities or government offices because they are intimate and personal. This is not unconvincing since there is a cross-

cultural stigma about menstruation. Yet, what is striking is that instead of merely providing women menstrual products, organizations rather address it structurally. They communicate it as "period poverty" and engage with appropriate systemic action via campaigning. Again, we see that they integrate advocacy actions to their aid and service delivery schemes. An advocate responded "There is nothing to be ashamed of menstruation. The message we try to convey is that refugee and asylum seeking women are just ordinary women who menstruate. We humanize them in this way. They are not different from us British women ". Such notions that target reducing the hierarchies between local and foreign women also apply to the workshops on sexuality designed for LGBTI women support groups. The same advocate continued "Last month we had a workshop on sex toys. Some of my friends who work in other organizations asked me if this is really our priority? It is not about priorities. Refugees are just ordinary women, who have the right to get information about sexuality. Just because they flee from their countries it doesn't mean that they are asexual or different than Western women. The way I see our work is not only getting them legal status to stay in the UK or prove them food. I see it as a whole agenda that includes literally everything about being a women and women are sexual".

Similarly, some community groups assert that the message they convey is mainly that refugee women are ordinary women. An advocate based in Coventry stated "We buy birthday cards to each woman in the community. Sometimes I bring toiletries to women such as sanitary towels, deodorants and moisturizers. Sometimes I pick-up some jewelry for them from the local church group. I want them to feel like a normal person that has a normal routine. Sometimes it is nice to have a break from politics. They have the right to feel feminine or beautiful in a difficult situation, and accessorize themselves like any other

women if they want to". All these examples are tactics for humanizing refugee women as opposed to the negative connotations given to them in mainstream media. Organizations assert that refugee women are ordinary women and they are not much different from local women. Therefore, they point out that they should be given the same rights and opportunities to live dignified lives.

Furthermore, organizations point out that giving priority to women during aid and service delivery has also an empowering effect especially in some mixed communities that men outnumber women. Hence, prioritizing women secure women's access to resources. An advocate from Coventry revealed that "We prioritize women especially if they are sick or pregnant during service delivery. Men don't really think about it on their own and want to stand first in the queues". She adds that it is also vital to give out products or money directly to women because men tend to take and control it all for their families due to male breadwinner bias.

Similarly, many organizations describe service and aid delivery as integral to enhancing refugee and asylum seeking women's power and agency. Within this context, aid delivery is described not as a momentarily act happening between the superior and inferior actors for sustaining momentarily material needs. Instead it is seen as an instrument that serves a long-term mission for challenging gender hierarchies in refugee women's private or public life. Thus, aid situates itself into a feminist agenda. It has a political objective rather than embracing neutrality. An advocate from Birmingham describe their perception of aid as the following: "Our work is mainly built on the famous feminist phrase 'What is personal is political'. Yes, it might seem that we are mainly concerned with everyday needs of women. However, the way we perceive our daily reality shapes is related

to the power dynamics in private and public spheres. It may look like we help women with little things like postponing a bill but it makes women feel empowered especially in their household. They become able to challenge traditional gender roles, gendered division of labor or authority and hegemony of their husbands. They become able to say 'As a family we had X issue. You as the husband couldn't solve it but I did' ". For this reason, advocates express that getting help on basic issues helps refugee women to challenge the patriarchal structures at the household, which translates into enhanced agency of women and eventually supports empowerment. In this regard, an advocate explained the contradictory effect of asylum-seeking on women's agency as the following: "I think being a refugee both empowers and disempowers women at the same time. On the one hand, it disempowers women because they struggle with many systemic issues related to their legal status, racism or destitution. They are given less employment opportunities compared to men. They still carry the burden of childcare and cannot really leave their homes and spend time outside their community. On the other hand, refugeehood empowers women. As being traditionally responsible for the wellbeing of their households and families, women are more adaptable to change compared to men. They can block out the past much more easily compared to their husbands because of their care responsibilities. Focusing on practical issues to take care of their families like access to resources, women become the most powerful actors at home. So they acquire some sort of power even in such a powerless situation such as asylum-seeking. Husbands lose their previous role as the leader of the family and in fact we come across many divorce situations as a result of this".

Based on my personal observation, the effect of enhanced autonomy was quite visible in refugee women communities. I have once participated in a group meeting about

self-care, which included a discussion about refugee women's happiness and content about their life. It was quite interesting to see that many women identify self-care or happiness as being selfish, which underlines gender hierarchies as women devote themselves to others around them. Yet, once we got more into the discussion, all women started to point out oppressive gender structures, which limit their well-being and position in life. One woman stated that "Our work *(domestic work)* is not appreciated at all. Men say to us 'Why are you tired? You did nothing all day' but we work constantly. We do housework all day. I didn't recognize this before coming to the UK. I can't believe the person I was. Now, I go to college, take care of my kids, and join support groups. I am living my life". Such notions are compatible with the organizations' understanding of aid as an instrument, which aims to equip women with required tools and resources to build self-resilience and autonomy in the long run. Moreover, it implies that despite all the vulnerabilities it may create, asylum-seeking can have an empowering effect on women too via improving their access to resources such as education and employment, which they lack in their countries of origin.

Organizations define aid and service delivery as an empowering tool not only for women refugees but also for themselves. Many advocates expressed that the immigration sector is predominantly a Western white male sector. Accordingly, it reflects a white male savior rhetoric, which does not only oppress foreign women but also British women working in this sector. In this regard, advocates highlight the significance of "women to women aid" in challenging the male domination in the sector. Many of them asserted that women should be the ones who campaign about women's rights and gender related issues and women refugee organizations are useful platforms for that. One advocate explained how women to women aid affected her work as the following "The other organizations that

I worked in the past had very masculine environments and I had only a few women coworkers. Having a segregated work space for only women and working only with women definitely brings a whole different perspective to aid work. I feel a part of a community, not as a professional". Similarly, another advocate who shares the same feeling about being part of a community explains how they overcome differences "We tend to focus on what brings us together. As women we have shared experiences, we don't believe in artificial separation like nationality or culture. The major challenge is the asylum system. Working with women is delightful because we are united as women. We build understanding and friendship with each other". Moreover, in mixed organizations advocates were 'proud' to tell me that they have more female employees or even female directors in many cases, which helps to go against the white savior rhetoric in the sector. Lastly, women organizations support the "women to women aid" approach via creating nation-wide alliances with women refugee organizations in different parts of the UK. They design campaigns together, write joint reports (for instance; they've written a joint report together about the needs of women during the Covid-19 pandemic) or organize rallies and conferences. Such alliances and networks are essential for transforming the dominant masculine values into progressive and non-hierarchical structures in the aid sector, which does not portray refugee women as victims who need to be saved by Western subjects but equal community members.

The "women to women aid" approach influences less hierarchical understandings of aiding and helping. It resonates with feminist notions of equality. This is because aid moves beyond being a spontaneous transaction between givers and receivers and leads to forming bonds between actors or developing friendships and partnerships. This ultimately

eases refugee women to feel attached to and feel a sense of belonging to the communities. Non-hierarchical understandings of aid puzzles the refugee men that come to organizations. An advocate based in Birmingham stated "We had a couple, which consulted us last week. The woman was a regular but she brought her husband for the first time because he had a problem. He felt challenged and suspicious about our friend-like and non-patronizing approach. He asked us multiple times if we knew what we were doing. He wanted more authority because authority assured him that he was getting help. This clearly shows gendered differences in the perception of authority and problem-solving". Similar to this, many advocates that work in mixed organizations revealed that they sometimes receive sarcastic comments from men about doing their jobs. The authority of women is questioned due to the cross-cultural patriarchal understandings of authority and power and for the very same reason the efficiency of women to women aid approach is also questioned by men.

Lastly, organizations frame providing protection as a crucial part of aid and service delivery, which supports women's empowerment. Protection refers to giving assistance regarding acquiring legal status, which has traditionally been a central mission to the organizations in the asylum sector. In this regard, women organizations specifically work for identifying gender-related persecutions and help women to get legal protection under the "belonging to a particular social group" article of the Refugee Convention. However, women organizations don't define protection narrowly as legal protection. Getting legal status is undoubtedly a crucial step for empowerment but organizations also problematize refugee women's dependence on charities, which limit their long term autonomy. Taal (2018) demonstrates in her research that "women feel disempowered by the system and they need more information and opportunities to live, not just charity to exist. Advocates

need to think of new strategies to avoid dependency, challenging government policy more effectively to end destitution"(p.42). Therefore, organizations try to come-up with creative strategies to break women's long term dependency on the aid structures. Moreover, women also suffer from dependency on men as well. A refugee women advocate expresses: "Us women are highly dependent on men. If you apply as a family you are dependent on your husband. He might take away your passport. Sometimes you might need to get into relationships with British men just to have a roof on top of you. Then you get raped. One time, I was living with a British family and I had to be their maid and take care of their kids to not go homeless. We are also dependent on solicitors or the interpreters that we are afraid to ask questions to. We cannot represent ourselves. We are not treated like humans". These concerns are very common among refugee women as they report to receive "bad legal advice, not feeling supported, and feeling intimidated" when working with solicitors (Reehal, Taal and Maestri, 2019). They have a hard time understanding the ever-changing complex national asylum system, which results in dependency.

The most common strategy by the organizations for overcoming dependency is to provide information to women about their options and their rights as asylum seekers. Information is seen as the main source for achieving empowerment and autonomy. Therefore, organizations organize information sessions for women about the national system. I attended one of these information sessions in Birmingham, which was mainly about potential solicitor problems. The facilitator, who was an immigration solicitor, gave advice on the points that women have to consider when picking a good solicitor for their case. The most important thing about the session was that it was not like a typical lecture full of legal details but instead the focus was on highlighting that women refugees have

power over their solicitors or the way they get legal representation. The facilitator often reminded women "Don't forget that the solicitor is working for you, not the other way around. You are the ones who should be instructing them. You have the power. You have the right to ask questions if you don't understand something. You have the right to ask for a female judge or a female interpreter. If you don't feel comfortable just ask". As women refugees usually feel uncomfortable and intimidated in their relation with the Home Office and their solicitors, this session aims to equip women with knowledge about their entitled rights. An advocate told me: "Many women have no idea about the system that they are in, which makes them dependent on the solicitors. The information sessions aim to give them reliable information so that they can make informed decisions about their cases. We shouldn't make decisions for them". I was told by many advocates that letting women know about their rights makes a huge difference in service delivery. Women can use the services offered by the organizations more efficiently because they have an idea on what's going on and therefore ask for meaningful assistance about their situation.

Organizations also provide information to women about employment and their rights as job applicants. An advocate in Coventry, who held a session about employment, said that due to the male breadwinner bias, they detected that women don't know their rights when applying to a job. Providing them reliable information enhances their confidence, uncover their skills and enables them to present themselves to the employers.

Organizations also offer English lessons for women to lessen their dependence on others. Women are less likely to speak English due to structural reasons. Advocates stated that some women are dependent on their kids or their husbands to speak, which limits their

self-autonomy and independence. Many volunteers expressed that speaking English enables women to solve their problems on their own.

Some organizations address the relationship between information and empowerment via more structural and formalized efforts. In Manchester, one organization set up the "Early Action Program " for teaching women about the asylum system, their rights and what to do in the case of rejection or any other potential issues that they might end up destitute. No one gets personal advice in this program but instead women are provided generic info about the national asylum process. The advocate behind this program disclosed: "Knowledge is power. We teach them related asylum information when they are at the beginning of the process. We talk about potential issues that they might experience. This helps overcoming crisis situations like homelessness and destitution. So that they can take action before the crisis situation and know which way to go". The program targets allow women to feel control over their cases to represent their best interest. They can make informed decisions about their situation since they are less dependent on the solicitors because they can logically evaluate the advice that they get. Moreover, advocates expressed that the program ultimately pushes women to engage in advocacy actions later. When women are equipped with knowledge, they are more likely to get into political action for helping others in similar situations.

4.4.Collaboration and Inclusion

This section analyzes how organizations frame collaborating with women refugees and integrating them into aid structures as an important strategy for addressing empowerment. Especially the organizations, which are established and governed by both local and refugee women, underscore how providing positions for refugee women inside

the organizations support their efforts for promoting non-hierarchical understandings on aid as discussed in the previous section. Relatedly, collaborative approaches also resonate with organizations' view on advocacy as a vital part of their aid delivery in the asylum sector. The organizations target collaboration and inclusiveness via the following tactics; giving active roles to women inside the organization and aid structures, giving opportunities for women who experience the system firsthand without being dependent on aid workers to communicate about issues, facilitating collective decision making, giving women leadership roles within the organizations via appointing or holding elections, getting feedback, offering volunteering and employment opportunities and lastly, adopting programs to achieve "two-way integration".

First and foremost, organizations seek ways to encourage women to take active roles within the organizations and communities for working together about issues that affect their daily lives. At the same time, they provide roles to facilitate grassroots mobilization for enhancing the authentic representation of refugee women. An advocate from Birmingham explained "We support grassroots refugee and migrant organizations here because they are the ones who are experiencing the system firsthand. The sector should be led by women who have experience. In the last few years there has been a trend towards employing actual refugees to organizations in the UK, which is truly a positive development. I am inspired by women who want to create permanent systemic change. Change comes from the bottom-up not top-down". Accordingly, promoting bottom-up approaches intend to provide opportunities for women with experience to voice their critiques and needs on their own without being dependent on professional aid workers or advocates. Refugee women's opinions and ideas are valued. They are given support for

taking roles for creating a more democratic and inclusive aid and community structures. In this vein, women's empowerment is framed as to bring women's perspective to the organizational settings and procedures as well as to influence public policy and general public opinion. Advocates argue that refugee women deserve a voice. The public can only learn about the injustices faced by women by hearing the same women sharing experiences and stories. By including refugee women in aid and advocacy schemes and enhancing their authentic representation, organizations claim that they can educate wider society more effectively and create comprehensive plans for overcoming issues. This again refers to politicization of aid, in which organizations assert that aid and the general political cause for social justice are not mutually exclusive. Aid work is portrayed as a tool that enhances refugee women's capacity to influence their own lives instead of treating them as agentless individuals who need to be saved. A women refugee volunteer based Coventry stated "Representation is important. I stopped going to other organizations because I was not treated right; not as a human. I realized that I was not representing who I am. I am treated as a sick inadequate person who doesn't have the ability to make her own decisions. Getting help is good but I want to get informed or asked. Otherwise it's just patronizing. We are not beggars. Let's work together. Let's work in dignified ways". Collaborating with women demonstrates that organizations recognize women's agency and their potential for contributing to the communities.

Relatedly, organizations attach greater importance to collective decision making, which goes against the stereotypical portrayal of women refugees and asylum-seekers as passive and apolitical individuals in traditional aid structures. Advocates assert that refugee women's ideas are given equal weight when making decisions about daily and weekly

activities. Advocates also adopt bottom-up and participatory approaches in administrative matters of the organization. This is possible mainly in two ways. Firstly, organizations appoint women refugees in high-ranked positions in the organizations such as the board members or roles in other important administrative bodies. An advocate from London expressed "We cannot demand women's empowerment and claim to represent them at the same time. This would be hypocrisy. Women refugees are independent individuals. Other organizations like the Red Cross only give lip service to women's empowerment but we mean it and address it comprehensively. The organization is the materialized entity of our missions and ideals. Hence, we include refugee women to our board for supporting a more democratic and egalitarian institutional culture. We are proud to give them leadership roles in the organization".

Representation and intersectionality goes hand in hand. When I was doing research in London, one of the women's organizations was searching for a new director. The job posting indicated that they seek to find someone with firsthand experience, preferably with a refugee background. This proves their dedication for authentic representation. Another example is from an organization based in Birmingham. Their website states that two out of five founding members of the organization are women refugees. They also proudly advertise that their board and administration is racially and ethnically diverse; there are white, brown and black women serving in the administration and they come from different regions, namely Europe, Asia, Middle East and Africa. One of the members of the organization told me equal representation is important because it is the only way to make sure that the organization is governed by the ones who are using it. Also, it enables the organization to target the ever-evolving needs and concerns of the women in the

community. Such efforts help to overcome hierarchical settings within the communities too. Accordingly, advocates and aid workers constantly come up with new strategies to enhance collaboration and include more women to their organizational structures.

Another tactic for integrating refugee women in organizational structures is to hold elections. This is mainly applicable to organizations that are established by women refugees, in which they proudly advertise that they are women-led and refugee-led. A women refugee organization based in Manchester indicates in its website that "It is us who are in charge in our organization. All the members can vote during our annual meeting for electing the ones who they want to manage and represent the community. At the moment we have eight asylum seeking women on the board. Also, once you get your papers we ask you to become a trustee". Similarly, another grassroots refugee-led organization in Coventry states that they have elections for the administration board because they believe people affected by a problem are the best placed to find the solutions; they adopt a bottom-up approach for demanding systemic change and empower their community members via giving them leadership roles (CARAG website). As for mixed community organizations, I was told that women are also represented at the board and appointed to other higher positions to preserve their representation. I was also assured the number of women and men in the administration board is always balanced. Women and men are given an equal number of positions to serve. Additionally, when invited to an external activity (like a media briefing, official meeting or a joint meeting with other organizations), they always pay attention to sending an equal number of men and women for supporting equal representation and visibility. They aim to promote gender equality with all these tactics.

Women are treated as independent individuals, friends, partners or members of the community, who have the agency to contribute to their communities rather than simple recipients of aid. How they contribute is left to their choice. An advocate from Coventry said "We believe everybody has a different skill set. They can contribute to the community in any way they want. This can be either cooking or campaigning. It doesn't really matter". In this regard, another important point is that none of the women are being pushed or forced to be engaged with political action, even in more activist groups. One advocate from Birmingham said that "It depends on what they really prefer. Women do not necessarily want to do campaigning. Some sister organizations from London think that all women should do campaigning if they are refugees. However, you have to respect their choices. You should never force them into something. They've been forced their whole lives. We respect them if they want to take a break from politics". That said, I observed that many refugee women choose to engage in political action, which will be discussed further below.

Secondly, organizations argue they support collaboration and inclusion via getting refugee women's feedback about services. This is a very simple yet effective strategy and all organizations I interviewed put significant effort into this. They claim that getting feedback is generally neglected in bigger and more professional actors in the sector. Hearing about women's critique is identified to be the first step of creating a more egalitarian aid scheme by the organizations. They are eager to find out how women feel to be in the spaces that organizations offer. Getting feedback helps advocates to decide priorities and thus design related solution mechanisms. which enhances the quality and efficiency of aid delivery. It also provides opportunities for women to give their opinions on the services: An advocate explained "It is just like another transaction really. They have

the right to express if they feel uncomfortable about something. We are led by what they said and we are happy about it". As the statement demonstrates, feedback is treated as another strategy for integrating refugee women into the aid structures, enhancing their representation and overcoming patronizing approaches.

Sometimes women give feedback individually whereas sometimes as a group. The feedback system is always anonymous since refugee women are highly concerned about their privacy. In many women refugee organizations, individual feedback systems are usually structural and formalized policies. At the end of one-to-one meetings (mostly take place during weekly drop-ins), women refugees are given a form and asked to give their written feedback regarding the quality of assistance that they get on that day. They are asked to answer a few default questions via putting numbers (like 10 being the highest and 0 being the lowest score). There is also an additional blank section, where they can write additional comments. Undoubtedly, one can raise issues about this practice. First and foremost, the advocate who they are asked to evaluate is sitting right across women when they fill out the form. Secondly, women might not feel secure enough to express their critiques due to their uncertain legal status. They might fear that they might be refused to be offered help next time by that organization. Lastly, they might not speak English, which limits their capacity to express themselves or to understand the questions clearly. In that case, they have the right to ask for help from the advocate but again it might prevent women from evaluating the meeting honestly and independently. Nevertheless, I believe it is important that organizations have a structural and established feedback system for giving opportunities for women refugees to influence the organizational agenda and services. Interestingly, some advocates claim they usually get positive feedback probably due to

cross-cultural gender roles since women are expected to be less critical and more grateful. They never complain.

In addition to getting feedback from women refugees, many organizations also get feedback from volunteers, facilitators or any participants who attend the organizational activities. When I attended the National Women Refugee Conference in Birmingham in February 2020, which accommodated more than 200 people, all the participants were asked to give feedback about the conference at the end of the panels and activities. We were given forms to evaluate the content, activities and organization of the conference.

Giving feedback as a group is more informal and verbal and thus it is a less structural strategy. Organizations create group discussions or meetings for asking women's opinion about the future activities they intend to plan. Women usually prioritize sessions related to immigration issues but it depends. They sometimes ask for political debates. On time they wanted to have a proper community discussion on Brexit. Brexit. There is not really a limit for bringing suggestions; there is a wide range of activities and topics. I have attended a group discussion in Birmingham, in which a sister organization from London was present too. The organization from London, which has greater capacities due to their funding for creating bigger activities, gave a short briefing about what they can organize together and listed the options based on what they did in the past. They listened to women carefully about their experiences about the past activities and also their opinions on future agenda. Based on this feedback, the organization created an action plan that includes collaborative workshops for the upcoming months right at that moment with the help of refugee women.

During Covid-19 lockdowns, some organizations created separate groups on WhatsApp for refugee women to provide feedback about remote services. Again, this might be seen as problematic since women cannot provide anonymous feedback, which might prevent them from giving their real opinions. Yet, I think it is still a positive development that organizations at least put effort into getting feedback even during extraordinary circumstances and seeing women's opinion about this new online service structure.

Furthermore, organizations promote collaboration and inclusion of women to aid structures via giving them volunteering and employment opportunities. Volunteering supports women's autonomy and self-worth as well as boost their confidence. It recognizes their agency and helps them to become full members of the society that they newly settled in. Women realize their worthiness and potential as opposed to the victimized and vulnerable identity, which is imposed on them. Additionally, they might enhance their political agency via volunteering in advocacy programs and use their past experiences to help other community members, who experience similar issues. A women refugee told me "I volunteer here as an advocate because of the degrading behavior that I've been exposed to in this hostile system. We are not treated as humans. I have great sympathy for women who come here because I've been in the same spot". Another women asylum seeker expresses a similar stance: "I decided to volunteer as an advocate because I can relate to the women I work with everyday. I sought asylum for nine years in the UK, moved from city to city, dragged from agency to agency, and got different advice from different people. I felt lost. Nothing was certain. I don't want anyone to go through the same thing. I realized that on my own I cannot change anything so I've decided to connect with organizations

and mobilize". Therefore, it can be argued that asylum-seeking politicizes women, in which they seek opportunities within organizations to engage in political action for helping others.

For this reason, many women's organizations offer training programs for refugee women to become advocates. These are also called Leadership Programs, which aim women to take leadership roles in the organizations in various fields. An advocate based in London explained "Migrants are not voiceless. They are individuals who have the ability to act. We want them to participate in social and political life as equals in the UK. We actively encourage them to take leadership roles to represent their communities". After completing their training, women refugees can assist organizations in daily operations and activities and also serve as advocates or trustees. For example, they can help in weekly drop-ins and do minor things like making phone calls or chasing appointments. They can also engage in advocacy and plan campaigns. It depends on what they want, what the organization expects from them and the type of training they complete. In advocacy training, women learn about the legal and bureaucratic matters related to the British asylum system alongside other related policies and guidelines such as gender and trauma informed approaches, safeguarding, emergency situations, and homelessness. They are also taught tactics for community and grassroots organizing such as how to represent your community, building alliances with other groups, planning action and mobilizing. All of these aim to equip women with new skills and information for engaging in meaningful activism for contributing to their communities. On their websites, some organizations proudly state that newly qualified advocates are working together with highly experienced ones. Relatedly, on the websites and written documents such as brochures and reports, when organizations talk about the advocacy actions they never use patronizing vocabulary that undermines the

agency of refugee women. For example; they don't use "for" but "with". They say X person is designing programs "with" women refugees or X person is working "with" women refugees, not "for" women refugees. The wording choice signifies how organizations value collective decision-making and adopt non-hierarchical settings inside the communities.

Providing advocacy training to women refugees has a practical benefit too. Taal (2018) states that volunteering with charities not only has a positive well-being effect on refugee women but also practical issues since it lessens the pressure on overworked advocates in charities. This is very plausible considering that many advocates and aid professionals work in very tight time schedules and on low budgets. Therefore, encouraging refugee women to assist them is a common strategy. Such approaches also help break the dependencies of refugee women on charities and other external actors and support self-resilience and independence (Taal, 2018).

That said, offering advocacy training is not very easy. It needs additional funding. Trainees have to be dedicated and determined as training programs usually take at least between six months to a year. Once they complete the training, refugee women are qualified to volunteer or work in the organizations but they need a little time to get experienced and become fully independent advocates, who do not need to shadow the older advocates. Getting advocacy training supports refugee women to develop a sense of belongingness and take ownership of their communities. I've personally observed this attachment in the attitudes and language of the refugee women advocates that I interviewed when they were talking about their communities. Once a woman explained to me that the organization that she volunteers at doesn't really advertise anywhere and women come here by word of mouth. She stated that this means they are doing their job right and she

was extremely proud of herself and advocates in the organization. I noticed how she constantly said "we" when she talked about the organization, which underlines that she truly feels like an active member of the community. Besides, it was clear that she was satisfied and pleased about her role and the type of work she is engaged with within the community. She had a sense of self-worth and agency since. She felt like an equal to the other members. She took her role very seriously and was not afraid to take responsibilities. She claimed that the organization is like a family to her because she feels valuable. Relatedly, you can see how organizations proudly advertise newly qualified advocates on their websites and put information about the modules that they have completed, and their role in the projects and campaigns. They are eager to celebrate their work and achievements, which is a strategy for supporting refugee women's empowerment.

Furthermore, organizations also offer refugee women volunteering positions and employment (for the ones who acquire legal status) that are not related to advocacy. These roles are usually related to daily operations of the organization like working in the kitchen, reception or as an interpreter. These roles benefit refugee women in multiple ways. First of all, getting active roles in the community enhances trauma recovery and healing. This is because; women are treated as an equal member of staff or an equal contributor to the community. Many women refugees express that they face discrimination in their daily life because the common view in the society is that women flee to the UK because they want free social and economic benefits. An African refugee woman advocate told me once "This is not true. In fact, in our culture there is a saying that goes there is nothing such as a dirty job. Women can take care of themselves if they are given appropriate opportunities. We are not beggars". This woman was an accountant in the government before fleeing her

country. She could not find any related employment in the Uk before getting a legal state. Therefore, she engaged with advocacy and now she works as a full time "professional" advocate. Before refugees could work while waiting for the decision on their asylum case but this has changed with the National Immigration and Asylum Act in 2002. This law new has not only disempowered women as thye were not able to use their skills and energy, which results in severe mental health issues but also led to criminalization of those who work and promoting modern slavery, which increases the risk of getting abused further (Reehal, Taal and Maestri, 2019). Refugee women report that they feel unworthy and depressed by doing nothing, not talking or not thinking. A women asylum seeker expressed "Getting your papers is a long-process. You feel depressed, desperate and suicidal. I come to think that your rights as a refugee is not about your survival or well-being, instead what is expected from you. You have to fit into certain categories. You say you are sick or you are a victim to get protection. After a while it becomes your reality. You start to believe it after talking about it for 7 years. I wish they could accept us the way we are. I volunteer here at the kitchen. I work for myself firstly and then for helping others. It allows me to get used to my life here". As it can be seen, although asylum seekers cannot get employment during their lack of legal status, they still want to engage in volunteering to enhance their integration to public life, overcome social isolation, and preserve their agency.

Moreover, creating volunteering and employment positions is framed by the organizations as a tactic for supporting gender equality among refugee populations, more specifically to overcome male breadwinner bias within households. Compared to men, women refugees are less likely to spend time outside home. Gender hierarchies might still prevail alongside other broader political structures such as racism and capitalism and limit

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women's participation to public life. For example, one advocate expressed that surveys show that women lack confidence in seeking for employment because they don't feel suitable for working. They feel like "junk" after spending years doing nothing while waiting for their asylum claim to be finalized. Relatedly, a refugee woman argued that "Men are given more opportunities related to labor but we are not. We want equality. Men should give us more respect and let us serve in high ranked positions. Here at the organization we address gender equality via creating jobs or volunteering positions to women with experience". Some women also stated that they prefer such positions within the women's organizations due to their concerns related to safety. A woman asylum-seeker explained "Safety concerns are higher for women. Men can do night shifts but women cannot. In my case, there are also cultural barriers. For example, British women can work in a carwash place but I cannot. Men in my community will say 'Women, why don't you wash your house but wash people's cars?' I am not saying that they are right. I am trying to say there are certain types of jobs that are more suitable for women in my cultural community and I am glad to be working in a community kitchen". She felt more comfortable working in jobs that are traditionally associated with women and expressed that she is extremely lucky for this opportunity.

Collaborative and participatory approaches are compatible with how organizations define and support "two-way integration". Two-way integration refers to a process in which integration is not understood as the sole responsibility of refugees and asylum-seekers. Yet, locals should also put effort to learn about their cultural context and make room for their contribution as equal members of the society. An advocate stated "You don't see refugee women's contribution to UK society on the news. They are humans with skills,

education and capacity. Why don't we just humanize them? Media tells that integration is something that immigrants should do but it is extremely hard if you think about the obstacles in the asylum system. How can they integrate without given education and employment opportunities? This is not realistic!".

Two-way integration intrinsically challenges the hierarchies embedded in traditional aid delivery perspectives because it recognizes refugees' potential and agency. They are treated as equal members of the community, which goes against us vs them conceptualizations in the asylum sector. One British advocate based in Birmingham analyzed this problematic hierarchical setting as "Aid is self-reflective. It compliments the party that provides the help for others. This type of aid cannot be feminist or egalitarian. It should be about them, not us. Some people get mad when refugees are not grateful or too demanding. They are not "pet refugees". As any other human-being, they too have the right to criticize things. This shows the power relations in the sector". Within this context, two-way integration approaches are internalized by the organizations to minimize such power dynamics. Therefore, women are not only simply participants to organizations but instead they are given opportunities to become facilitators.

There are two important projects that I came across that encourage facilitation of women refugees. The first one is a project by a mixed Welsh refugee organization. Refugee women are provided with a community kitchen and a street food vendor, in which they can cook to fundraise for the organization. There is also a supper club, in which the locals can hire their service for special days. This might seem as a very simple idea but the main idea behind the project is to give a "speaker" role to women and enable them to teach the locals about their own culture. This targets to give them a sense of agency since they are ones

who are talking via food. The advocate behind the project asserted: "They communicate through food to tell us about their heritage. Food makes people happy. It is a very powerful medium. Our organization's chief goal is to achieve integration but we are keen to learn about and be inspired by different cultures of our community members". Food enables women a chance to interact with the locals; their work is appreciated and celebrated. They embrace their culture for acquiring an equal position in and contributing to the reception society.

The other project that attempts to achieve two-way integration is by a befriender women's organization in London. This organization brings together local and refugee women for improving refugees' English skills and more importantly for overcoming social isolation by creating bonds between local and foreign women, who come from different backgrounds. This aims to stimulate social integration as like most of other befriender organizations. What is different about this project is that the organization underlines that they include British women to the integration process as "learners" too, not only "teachers". They allow refugee women to become the "speaker" during a conversation with British women. All members are seen as equals as they don't categorize participants as simply "givers" and "receivers" of aid. In this way, they tend to disrupt traditional power hierarchies in the sector via adopting a more collaborative and participatory perspective to service delivery.

Finally, funding opportunities allow organizations to enhance collaborative and inclusive approaches for addressing empowerment. Finding appropriate funding opportunities is vital for designing creative and non-hierarchical approaches to aid. Many advocates assert that without finding related funding, the organizations' capacity to

prioritize collaboration with women is limited. An advocate from Manchester explained the situation as the following: "Before the recent years, funders only supported traditional approaches for aid delivery. However, after they realized that conventional schemes create dependency, which is highly problematic in the long run. Now that funders are more interested in progressive approaches, we are encouraged to design more creative and out-of-the-box ideas and programs for finding sustainable ways to achieve empowerment. We are stepping back so that the women can come forward". The same understanding applies for the advocacy programs too. As discussed in the previous section, funders encourage organizations to integrate advocacy efforts into traditional service delivery, which results in more inclusion of women into the everyday activities as contributors.

In this regard, some funders provide resources for organizations to hold smaller community-meetings to stimulate grassroots organizing. For example, a women-only organization in Birmingham organizes small bi-weekly community-meetings about gender based violence based on a small amount of funding that they get from an independent women's organization. They aim to hear women's opinion on the issues and create a long-term social change. During the meetings, they draw mind maps together for investigating the root causes of gender based violence as well as to come up with potential action plans. Sometimes they share their thoughts with and collaborate with other organizations (not refugee or migrant but related organizations on violence, peace or women's rights etc). These meetings facilitate bottom-up knowledge and allow women to become a part of the advocacy efforts of the organizations. Women who participate in the community meetings reported that they feel like they can make a difference since women have the power to change the broken system together. As seen from this program, funding can strengthen

organizations' capacity to adopt more collaborative and inclusive programs, which supports women's empowerment.

4.5. Authorship and Public Visibility

Organizations address refugee and asylum-seeking women's empowerment via providing them opportunities to claim authorship and increase their public visibility. Such activities are compatible with the organizations' holistic and politicized perception of aid, which supports identifying advocacy integral to service delivery and collaborating with women for overcoming their potential dependence on aid structures. The use of different art mediums is highly encouraged in these advocacy programs. Organizations promote women's authorship and visibility via the following tactics; story-telling and public speaking classes, photography projects, drama, music and poetry performances, art groups, intersectional feminism courses, effective use of socil media and special days such as the International Women's Day. Organizations even continued to hold these programs during the Covid-19 lockdowns.

Enhancing women's authorship and visibility, organizations attempt to denounce the long established imaginary of refugee women as victimized and passive individuals, who are not capable of doing anything about their situation. A Taal (2018) demonstrates in her research that destitute refugee women feel powerless and voiceless; they acknowledge that the system should be changed but do not know how to make this happen. They feel like they don't have any agency over their situation as they are not referred to as a person or by their names but seen as an anonymous asylum seeker by the public (Ibid). This is undoubtedly highly problematic because it makes women dependent on others alongside placing them in an inferior social and political position compared to locals just because of

their lack of legal status. Due to this imposed inferiority and vulnerability, the conventional aid schemes explicitly operate under universal charity values that prioritizes their survival rather than adopting a social justice approach. As Taal (2018) puts it churches and charities are well received by women as they provide emotional support, yet, social change is slow if aid is solely focused on humanitarian understandings, which ultimately stimulates survival over activism. For accelerating social justice and activism, organizations create related programs for women, which they can directly communicate with the public and restore their agency and self-resilience, which will be discussed later in this section

Many organizations point out that the common perception of refugee women as vulnerable and apolitical victims go hand in hand with gender roles, which order women to be not too demanding or critical. One advocate based in London explained: "Women are conditioned to think it's their fault or something is wrong with them. For this reason, it is very dangerous to objectify women as victims. Here at the organization we are writing the values of vulnerability narrative and replacing it with equality and mutual respect". Organizations problematize the common perception of women's vulnerability since they argue that it is not a value in real life but only in the corrupted asylum system. Instead of focusing on their vulnerabilities, they choose to talk about women's strength and honor the victims. Moving away from traditional aid structures and targeting social justice, they provide women with various tools for speaking out and representing themselves. These opportunities refer to feminist objectives too. An advocate based in London noted "Gender equality is not about talking but meaning. In this regard, we empower via providing appropriate tools, encourage them to join campaigns and express themselves. We give them platforms for directly talking to the government or other public authorities. These formal

spaces are traditionally assigned to white men, the ones who usually do the talking. The greater political structures like colonialism and patriarchy make us believe that non-Western women are dependent on others for speaking but they are perfectly capable of speaking on their own".

During the community meetings, which are organized by refugee-led women organizations that I participated in, many women expressed that they are glad to find a speaking space for confronting issues as they are usually expected to shadow men in their ethnic communities. Some state that the process of asylum-seeking politicizes them and they want to work with others for the well-being of women who experience the issues that they have experienced in the past. This is a common pattern that I've witnessed during my field research. Advocates asserted that this is a direct result of the cross cultural gender norms, which makes women more likely to talk about traumas or abuse compared to men. For this reason, they are more likely to discuss political issues during community meetings because gender-based violence such as domestic violence and rape are all a type of political violence. Consequently, they are more likely to develop a systemic critique to asylum-seeking and eventually engage in political action. In this vein, organizations generate tools for women to express their political stances about the issues that affect their daily lives.

Many women advocates and aid workers report that they are more attracted to the progressive organizations, which set up creative programs for enhancing women's authorship and visibility. This is because the traditional understanding of refugee assistance is built on white male savior rhetoric that promotes masculine and hierarchical values in the sector. Yet, women prefer to work in progressive organizations that embrace egalitarian approaches and treat refugee women as equal partners. An advocate based in London

expressed "I learn a lot from the women that I work with. We develop stable partnerships and friendships. We work together at every stage of my work. They join public meetings and walk in front of the marches. They believe they can make change and become leaders". This refers to an altruistic perspective on aid and how there is two-way empowerment between the local and foreign women.

Organizations vigorously encourage women refugees to become proactive partners in advocacy campaigns. Accordingly, refugee women create or join campaigns and rallies, run public events, walk in the marches in various cities, collaborate with other organizations, write letters and statements and talk to the media, government officials and members of parliament. Such advocacy actions cover a wide range of diverse topics. These can be listed as shutting up detention centers, ending gender-based violence, demanding a voting right for immigrants, ending destitution, asking right to employment, opposing the cuts in ESOL (a language course called English for Speakers of Other Languages) funding and calling for family reunification. Contributing to these campaigns, women refugees do not only raise awareness about issues but also communicate them as actors that experienced those firsthand. They have different levels of experience in advocacy; some are new to activism some are not, some acquire more active roles than the others. Nevertheless, they come together and engage in collective political action. Telling their stories to the public, they aim to create permanent social change.

Boosting refugee women's authorship, many organizations arrange public speaking and storytelling classes and hire a communication expert for facilitating sessions. Organizations put a structural effort into this. Hence, they continued to hold public speaking lessons on Zoom even during the Covid-19 lockdowns, which shows their

commitment and dedication for supporting authentic self-representation of women refugees even during a time of crisis. Another tactic for facilitating speaking mechanisms is podcast shows. An organization based in Cardiff posted these podcast shows by refugees on their website, in which the public can hear about their life stories from their voice.

There was a story-telling workshop during the conference that I participated in, which aimed to teach refugee women how to tell their stories to the media. Similarly to that sesion, organizations argue that public speaking programs target teaching women about how to approach the media, address the public, talk to government authorities and speak during mass political events like conferences, marches and rallies. The sessions provide them information about the cultural features of public speaking in the UK. For example, women learn about how to keep eye contact with crowds and appropriately use the tone of their voice for increasing their believability and facilitating attention. They also teach different tactics for story-telling with a purpose and ways for highlighting authorship and ownership when telling your story. Additionally, women learn about conveying statements about their personal stories for the media and press releases for facilitating long term change.

Public speaking programs are viewed as central to advocacy activities by many women organizations. According to the advocates, the main reason behind creating such programs is because women are usually not understood by the government or the public. Due to the long established imposed voiceless imaginary, it is especially difficult to speak about your situation as a refugee woman. This is highly problematic and disempowering because women become dependent on others for speaking about the issues that they experience firsthand. Advocates assert that when women refugees directly speak to the

public they foster more empathy from the public and challenge the voiceless representation of them in the British media. Moreover, they heal much more quickly from their past traumas since they perform as powerful and independent actors. They are no longer victims but visible agents who can make a difference. They speak from firsthand experience from a powerful position(namely, the speaker) to address the audience and give an effective message that facilitates long term change. Organizations also aim to humanize women refugees via making them more visible. They are constructed as just anyone in the society, who can speak up about oppression and marginalization. Advocates add that they always present during the press releases and conferences to support refugee women against the hostile attitude of the media. An advocate from London advocates explained "It is disgusting how hostile the media can be. From time to time, refugee women need to be reminded that they are right. So we never leave them alone. The community is always present to support them when they are giving out speeches". As the statement reflects, organizations assure that women refugees never feel left alone when addressing the public.

Furthermore, many refugee and asylum-seeker women assert that public speaking has an empowering effect among the communities. An African refugee woman explained how public speaking enhanced her accurate representation as the following: "My activism is about speaking out. If you don't tell your story, nobody is going to listen, understand or pay attention. We should talk about issues because basically it is us who are experiencing them. Having the locals talking about our situation is frustrating because they don't have a clue what we are going through". Another refugee woman made a similar comment at the National Refugee Women's Conference that I attended: "You don't have to represent us. Just hand us the mic. Give voice to the voiceless. Why privileged women like Melinda

Gates are talking or sharing about my experiences? My 'lived' experiences". Within this context, speaking enables women to claim authorship over their stories and represent themselves without being dependent on others. As both examples demonstrate, women refugees don't like when the locals address issues related to their lives. They want to be the speakers for communicating issues and thus facilitate long term change. One time I asked a refugee woman advocate if she feels her activism is effective regarding creating a systemic change. She responded as: "We are hidden in everyday politics. British people don't really have an idea about our issues and experiences. Actually, I come to think that it is up to them. It is their responsibility to learn about us or learn the truth. I am tired of proving myself to them. I am not responsible for their ignorance. If they want to learn about the injustices we are here. It is their problem". I believe this is a very powerful statement that signifies how refugee communities can develop a sense of autonomy against the hostile attitudes of the general public. Such autonomy highlights their agency for the sake of their own communities, rather than solely aiming for influencing the British people. As she put it, it is not their problem that ordinary citizens are not aware of human rights violations. It is the responsibility of the citizens to learn about these. Refugee activism is not something done for the locals but for building autonomy and self-resilience for their communities.

Another mechanism for supporting the authorship of refugee women is photography projects. Organizations identify photography as an effective creative medium for women refugees to express themselves and communicate their issues with the public. Women refugees tell their stories via taking photos. Photography programs are almost as common as the public speaking classes offered by women organizations. The photos taken

by women refugees are widely used on the organizations' websites and other visual or written documents like posters, reports and brochures.

I had the chance to personally attend two related events about these photography projects. The National Women Refugee Conference that I attended offered a workshop called "Using Photography to Tell Your Story". Additionally, in June 2020, I participated in a digital exhibition on Zoom held by a women refugee organization based in London. The exhibition is constituted by the photos taken by a few destitute and homeless refugee women in London. They were given cameras for a whole day and assisted by a professional photographer for documenting their daily lives and telling their own stories. The main idea behind the project is to challenge the domination of male experiences and images in media portrayals of refugees, and enhance women's authentic representation. Women are usually portrayed as victims and they have no control over these images and the ways how they are represented. Hence, the project offers alternative representations of women, which highlights their agency and strength.

The photos in the exhibition are accompanied with short testimonies or poems by women who took them. The photos consist of images of various objects that signify the everyday lives of refugee women such as food, tents, streets, buses and trains, charities, government buildings, community kitchens and homeless people. Such images are reported to reflect how women feel invisible in their daily lives in a fast paced city like London. People do not really pay attention to them; they feel like they are not seen. Most of the time they feel exhausted and powerless due to the uncertainties about their future. Not being able to work due to their legal status drains their energy. They feel trapped. They spend their days lonely on the streets in the cold. Sometimes they spend all day on the bus to keep

warm. They sometimes have to walk long distances if they have no bus passes for going to charities. They reveal how lacking access to food, accommodation and menstrual products harms their well-being and prevents them from living in dignity. That said, women's testimonies reflect messages on hope, strength and resilience at the same time. All women indicate that they still have dreams, they haven't given up and they are still hopeful about the future. They believe change is possible. They find strength and support in other refugee women in their communities. Similarly, the general tone of the exhibition underlined solidarity, unity and resilience messages. Women refugees who participated in the exhibition stated that they are passionate despite the difficult situations they are in and keen for celebrating their work. The photos gave out the message that women refugees are not victims because they are women instead they are victimized by the asylum system. They are creative, artistic and proactive individuals, who are not afraid to speak out about their issues. Relatedly, one of the British advocates, who spoke during the exhibition reminded the audience that everyday is a struggle for refugee women due to the hostile asylum system and xenophobia. However, women are incredibly strong since they manage to survive somehow and the UK is missing so much by not giving them opportunities to contribute to public and economic life. In this manner, the exhibition was a moment of celebration, which recognized refugee women's potential, resilience and agency. (please visit https://ourlives.myportfolio.com/about for the photos)

Furthermore, organizations facilitate drama, poetry, and choir groups for promoting self-expression of women refugees and asylum-seekers. Similar to public speaking and photography, ushc programs use art as a medium for strengthening authorship and supporting autonomy of refugee women. These are central to advocacy actions by

organizations as refugee women give performances in public events or on special days like the International Women's Day. The organizations assert that art is an effective and powerful tool for communicating issues since it is much easier to attract the attention of the general public. Giving them a 'speaker' role, such programs boost self-confidence of refugee women via using the emotional power of art and drama. They also help them to feel more attached to their communities and develop stronger bounds with other women, who have similar asylum experiences.

Organizations usually hire a theater professional to facilitate drama groups. During the weekly meetings refugee women learn about the ways to "dramatize" a message and deliver it on the stage effectively to make the audience think how it would feel to be a woman refugee. Public drama performances are well-received by refugee women and reported to have positive effects on their well-being. A refugee woman from Coventry reveals "Not everyone is comfortable with talking plainly about rape, trauma or issues like violence, destitution, homelessness. Art makes it easier. Also, when we talk about issues on the stage, we talk about them in relation to peace, love and hope. Music and poetry enable us to show that we are strong and still hopeful despite difficulties". Similarly, a women-led organization based in Manchester, which has a choir, expresses that music helps women express themselves and tell the locals that they are just ordinary women like them. Members of the choir write songs together, which usually aim for spreading messages about hope and strength. The same group also has a stage show for fundraising. It addresses issues related to destitution, homelessness, violence and racism. At the same time, it gives messages of solidarity via revealing how fighting together makes them feel stronger.

There are also other groups, which use music augmenting their activism. For instance, a LGBTI group based in London created their own song collectively. They use this song to mark their powerful presence during the community meetings and also to support their activism in external political events like the Pride Marches. Their song gives messages about accepting each other as the way they are, uniting, and affirming the righteousness of their cause. Additionally, it helps them to feel a part of a community and implies self-control over their lives despite the human rights violations they experience in the asylum system.

I personally witnessed three different drama performances during the National Refugee Women Conference that I attended in Birmingham. Indeed, all of the performances were very powerful, touching and sometimes provocative, which challenged common imaginary women refugees as victimized individuals. All women wore the same t-shirts on the stage and performed both individually and as a group. When one woman was performing the others usually kept quiet but sometimes they sang a beat together to make the performance more dramatic. While performing, women read poems out loud, which were written by them. They effectively used eye contact and tone of their voices, which signaled authorship and self-resilience. They knew what they were talking about. And they looked confident and determined. The poems covered wide range issues such as lacking access to pampers and menstruation products and legal barriers to family unification. One poem was about the instrumentalization of women during wars, which was very moving. In the power, the women expressed how she got raped by both the sides during the war in her home country. Then she decided to risk the Mediterranean journey but the states closed their borders so she got raped again by the smugglers. She felt free

once she stepped onto the 'Queen's Land'. Nevertheless, people were unkind and hostile. Nobody believed her story and asked for proof. She was left to live on the streets and got raped again. She stated that nobody really cared what happened to her. Intimate and personal stories similar to this one along the dramatic ways of using their body language and voice made it easier for them to connect with the audience as people could feel their pain and admire their strength. They are no longer anonymous victims but survivors or fighters with real individuals with real identities and experiences.

Drama, music and dance play a significant role in advocacy campaigns by the organizations because they advance the bodily autonomy of women refugees. Such performative mediums enable women to reconnect with their body and reclaim back power and control over their bodies for giving messages or telling their stories. It also accelerates the healing from past traumas, which harmed their bodily integrity and unity. Once I participated in a collective performance called the "Circles of Sisterhood" during the International Women's Day in London. This performance was organized jointly by the national network of women refugee organizations and took place at the same time in different cities all over the UK. Refugee and asylum seeking women created big circles and sang a song about their unity while dancing. This song was first introduced during the National Refugee Women Conference that I attended in February. The audience was asked to memorize this song so that they can participate in the Circles of Sisterhood on International Women's Day. This performance was centered around women's bodies for enabling them to attach new meanings to their physical existence. The bodies become purposeful tools for expressing themselves instead of being a passive entity, which is open for the control interventions from others, mainly men. It is a tactic for reclaiming power.

Additionally, another objective of the protests might be improving women's belongingness to their communities since they might feel connected to other bodies and develop a sense of unity or solidarity with others. As a participant, I felt like I am part of this unified body and also more powerful with the presence of other women around me.

Furthermore, many organizations arrange art classes for fostering refugee women's self-expression. A mixed refugee organization in Cardiff conducts women-only art classes regularly to allow women communicate their needs and issues. The paintings created during the classes are later shared with the rest of the community, which is dominated by men. An advocate from the organization stated "This year, we shared what we have done in the art classes with our community on the International Women's Day. The exhibition facilitated a discussion of women's issues and created a platform for women to share their stories. The idea behind it was to educate the men in the community and allow women to express themselves".

I attended an art session in Birmingham, in which refugee women were asked to make art collages for creating postcards that should give the message "You Are a Star". The postcards created during the session were later sold in a private event to fundraise for the organization. The facilitator was a professional artist, who identified herself as a queer feminist during our private conversation. She gave a little speech at the beginning of the session and asked women to reflect on their dreams and stories. Relatedly, the postcards that women made highlighted their strength and hope, and indicated that they have not given up, they will rise again, and keep moving forward no matter what. Some women came up with some slogans such as "Women should stop hiding", "When women support each other amazing things happen" and "We are women, we seek equality". I observed that

women had fun while making the postcards. Women enjoyed doing something creative with the other community members. They were checking out each other's postcards. Mothers were helping their daughters. Also, I felt like it restored hope. One woman identified the session as a great way to remind herself that she is right and strong.

Another strategy that targets enhancing authorship and visibility of women refugees is arranging regular intersectional feminism courses. These are usually offered to the women who are already engaged with advocacy and seek ways to move forward with their activism. This program is only carried out by two organizations at the time of my fieldwork; one in London and the other one in Manchester. Each weekly class usually consists of ten to twenty women and is facilitated by a professional from the sector, who might be an activist, a scholar or a lawyer. The discussions are centered around being an asylum seeker in the UK and how it is related to womanhood and feminism. Moreover, the classes also aim to help women to improve their English skills. The group setting is not hierarchical. It is a safe space where women feel comfortable and confident to truly express themselves. During a private conversation, one of the facilitators told me that even though she was the "teacher", she learned a lot from and was inspired by the participants. This shows how the classes value two-way dialogues and processes and open for contributions from the women refugees. Women refugees talk about gender in relation to the other identity markers such as class, race, ethnicity, religion and sexual orientation, and how they intersect in shaping their lives as well as the ways they perceive feminism. An advocate in London explained "Feminism can mean a different thing based on your country, class, culture, and life experience. We talk about feminism in the context of our individual life stories". This shows that feminist teachings are not imposed on the audience by the local facilitators

rather the discussions have bottom-up character that values plurality and firsthand experiences. The classes also focus on greater political structures such as colonialism, racism, sexism, misogyny and capitalism and how these forces affect women's asylum experiences, both in their home countries and the UK. An advocate from Manchester stated "During the intersectional feminism classes we talk about layers of privilege. The implications of being a member or an outsider to various communities and identities. Different labels about being a "woman" and a "refugee" and how they affect us in distinct contexts. And also different sources of discrimination. Last week, we discussed about whiteness in relation to the women of color and how white feminism can be discriminative".

Sometimes the classes introduce feminist theories to refugee women to give a more comprehensive picture about oppression mechanisms in various settings. Moreover, women also cover contemporary topics in world politics (mainly international movements) and British politics (the elections, Brexit and the future of the National Health System). These discusiions are later turned into blog posts, which can be reached on the websites of the organizations. during one of the classes in London refuge women held a discussion on the #MeToo movement. The blog post indicated that refugee women were surprised to hear that American movies stars, who experience sexual harassments, were not believed by the authorities either. Refugee women experience the same due to the established culture of disbelief in the UK asylum system, which prevents them from acquiring legal protection by the Home Office. As this example suggests intersectional feminism classes assist women to develop a systemic feminist critique about common issues and experinces among women not only in their communities but all around the world. Relatedly, recognizing such

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similarities strengthen the communities and encourage building solidarity despite the differences. An advocate from Manchester pointed out "Sometimes we confront issues related to cultural differences, age gap or diverse immigration experiences. During the intersectional feminism classes we learn about how to deal with these differences and focus on what brings us together. Obviously, we don't expect an immediate magical change in one day but step by step we put effort into learning to be supportive of differences".

Another tactic by the organizations for addressing authorship and visibility of refugee women is their strategic use of social media. Organizations use their social media accounts to articulate real images and testimonies of women refugees for not only enhancing their authentic representation and avoiding anonymity but also constructing them as resilient and autonomous individuals. Offering an alternative to the conventional media image of refugee women as victimized and passive individuals, organizations share photos and videos from group activities, advocacy training, community meetings and day trips, in which all women look happy, healthy and well-dressed. They also post photos of refugee women from political campaigns while they are giving out public speeches or performances during rallies and marches. It is important to note that since privacy is important among refugee women, organizations always ask for permission before taking their photos or sharing them on digital platforms. In all these photos refugee women are "acting" and contributing to the communities. They are not passive or apolitical bodies. Moreover, they are with other women community members not with their kids, male relatives or partners, which represents their autonomy and self-sufficiency. They are actors capable of representing themselves on their own.

Relatedly, organizations utilize social media platforms actively for celebrating achievements of women in their communities. They create posts on Twitter, Instagram or Facebook to notify the community and the general public about success stories of refugee women such as getting employed, setting up their own businesses and obtaining citizenship. Likewise, organizations write blog posts on their websites about women who take proactive roles for representing their communities like talking to a government official or discussing LGBTI rights on media platforms. Such promotions on social media enhance the visibility and authentic representation. In fact some refugee-led women organizations take university courses for learning about using social media effectively for supporting the activism and authorship of women refugees. Hence, the effective use of social media is taken seriously and seen as a powerful tool by the organizations as many of them put structural effort into this.

Furthermore, many women's organizations support the authorship and visibility of refugee women via using direct quotes from them in their written or visual documents. Instead of adopting a strict academic, expert or policy-making language in these documents, organizations assure giving space to women's life stories and examples from real-life firsthand experiences. I've noticed that bigger and more professional organizations use a third person singular while narrating refugees' stories while women organizations adopt a first person singular usage for enabling women refugees to speak directly to the readers. This highlights the non hierarchical settings in the women organizations since it demonstrates refugee women are seen as equal members of communities, who are capable of speaking directly to the public without being dependent on the local advocates. An advocate indicates this perspective as "We don't treat women as numbers or statistical

figures. They are real persons with individual stories, who should be heard". As it can be seen such approaches aim to humanize and personalize the existence of refugee women in aid structures.

Another striking example for tactics aiming to enhance refugee women's visibility is an annual award-ceremony called "Women on the Move Awards", which is created by a migrant-led organization based in London with the support of the UN Refugee Agency. Refugee women, who make a difference in their communities are recognized for their agency and given a prize. The prize includes financial resources and professional advice for improving women's work in their communities. The ceremony, which was first held in 2012, has a feminist character as it is a part of an broader annual feminist meeting in London. The advocate behind this project explained how she came up with the idea as the following: "I was invited to New York by the UN to be given an award for my work. When I came back to London, I realized that we are always so busy and buried in casework that we never celebrate and recognize the achievements of refugee women within the community". Hence, the ceremony is intended to be a moment of celebration via honoring women for their strength and resilience since they have been working in isolated settings and struggling with various obstacles throughout the years. The women who were given awards in the past are from different parts of the UK. Their work ranges from establishing charities and community groups, publishing local newspapers to making movies for confronting issues such as violence, Female Genital Mutiliation, labor rights, child marriage, honor killing and migrant's lack of access to education. The award ceremony also celebrates diversity and intersectionality as awardees are all able to make a difference even though they come from diverse class, ethnic, religious, and cultural backgrounds.

Once again the award ceremony challenges the dominant media representations about women refugees as victims and constructs them as autonomous actors, who can influence social change.

Lastly, organizations utilize special days and months for enhancing women's visibility and authorship. Many organizations encourage their members to join the marches or give speeches and performances on the International Women's Day. Some mixed-organizations use the International Women's Day to hold sessions for raising awareness of men about gender-related issues in the communities. The same applies to the women LGBTI groups, which take part in the Pride marches all over the UK. Due to Covid-19 lockdown in 2020, LGBTI women couldn't join the marches but they wrote blog posts about their experiences in the asylum system and published them on the websites of their organizations. Accordingly, organizations use their social media platforms to celebrate various special days such as Trans Visibility Day, Lesbian Visibility Day, Women's Rights Day and Domestic Violence Day to enhance the visiblity of women and raise awareness about related matters in the communities. Likewise, organizations actively supported the Black Lives Matter protests initiated in the United States in late May, 2020 and provided spaces for refugee women to communicate their firsthand experiences and write blog posts about racial discrimination in the UK. Moreover, they joined a hashtag campaign, created slogans and shared their photos to celebrate the Black History Month. Some of the art groups shared their activist work online. All these demonstrate that women use the internet actively to engage with political action. The international events inspire them to act and create collaborations with actors and movements all around the world.

Similarly, the Covid-19 pandemic has created opportunities for refugee women to enhance their political agency and authorship. Some organizations asked refugee women in their communities to create short blog posts about their lockdown realities and document their experiences. These posts included both short statements and poems written by the women. An advocate from Manchester who assisted such projects expressed "We have been organizing public speaking classes and advocacy training for a while now. The crisis situation gave opportunities to women to use what they have learned from these programs and supported their self-expression during the pandemic". In these blog posts, women expressed the various difficulties they experience such as the increased burden of childcare. They cannot leave their little kids alone at home to go shopping. They also experience hardship in homeschooling as some of them do not have smartphones, laptops or access toWI-FI, which are required for remote learning. They worry about family members who are in their home countries. Some women problematize their lack of access to food and cleaning products. Some others revealed how self-isolation triggered their past traumas and harmed their mental health.

Similarly, during the lockdowns, organizations encouraged women refugee advocates to use art for maintaining their activism and started to hold online art meetings for them to express their thoughts at different stages of the pandemic. These pictures by women gave messages about hope, indicated the importance of self-cleaning and hygiene, and revealed the ways they spend time with their kids at home. According to women refugees, all these images signified unity, resilience, love, hope, safety and health. An advocate who helped to facilitate the online advocacy art group stated "Sisterhood is now

shifted to online platforms. It is not the same but it is going. We keep continuing our activism".

Most importantly, many organizations use the videos and pictures of refugee women in their communities to spread messages during the lockdowns. In these visuals, women advise the public to stay home and think positive. Organizations also shared voice recordings and Zoom videos of women who described their experiences to the government officials and the Members of Parliament. One refugee woman in Manchester prepared and gave a presentation to the Home Office about issues related to the pandemic and a potential action plan for mitigating problems. All these efforts show that organizations continue to embrace strategies that strengthen visibility and representation of women even in a crisis situation. They maintain to see them as partners and thus provide opportunities for them to share their firsthand experiences with the authorities for influencing change.

4.6. Challenges and Barriers

Organizations identify some barriers, which disrupt their abilities to address refugee women's empowerment in their operations. These barriers prevent women refugees to be integrated in aid structures and take proactive roles in their communities. Such challenges and issues can be categorized under three main groups; practical barriers, barriers related to the asylum and aid sector, and barriers related to diverse perceptions of feminism among women in the community resulting from different backgrounds and life experiences.

4.6.1. Practical Barriers

The first one of the practical barriers identified by the advocates and aid workers is the traumatic experiences of women refugees in the past, which disrupt their ability and

willingness to join and take active roles inside the community. Experiences of cross-cultural violence and abuse deteriorates women's physical and mental health, which might make them reluctant to take ownership of their communities. The same applies for engaging in political actions. If women are not ready, taking advocacy roles might increase the pressure on them and work against their well-being. Many advocates asserted that although they actively encourage women for grassroots organizing, they make sure that women are not pushed to take political action. They are not pressured to be activists or advocates. It can be very extremely damaging to talk about traumas, thus they are not asked to be open about their abusive experiences unless they want to. "It is crucial to encourage women to take part in campaigning when it is appropriate and meaningful. We cannot damage women via jumping to conclusions, labeling them as radical activists and forcing them to talk about their traumas. Sometimes we don't really realize this but starting to talk about violence is actually a huge development itself". Hence, the timing plays a vital role in facilitating ownership, authorship and visibility of refugee women.

Accordingly, some advocates express that women might be less likely to share their stories with others, especially at the beginning. This might limit organizations' capacity to address issues related to sexual violence and abuse as well as promote advocacy campaigns. Advocates state that they are mainly led by what refugee women say they need in aid and service delivery schemes and refugee women usually give priority to practical asylum issues not structural issues such as gender-based violence. It is not surprising since destitution and housing present more emergency. Refugee women sometimes talk about their personal experiences of violence during sessions about sexual health. Apart from this advocates face resistance to opening up and tackling related issues such issues in a group

setting. Instead, women are more likely to talk about it in one-to-one private meetings. Advocates assert that such tendencies are understandable considering the cross-cultural stigma around discussing trauma resulting from sexual violence or mental health in general. Rape is still stigmatized in many societies and refugee women are afraid of to be labelled as a "bad woman" by the fellow members of their communities. Therefore, they are reluctant to open up about their experiences in group settings. Advocates do not blame the non-Western cultures for this reluctance due to the non hierarchical setting embedded in the organization and community. Some of the advocates express that age is a crucial indicator in determining the willingness to talk about trauma. Younger women are more likely to speak up compared to the women from older generations. Nevertheless, they assert that trauma might affect the overall well-being and thus capabilities of refugee women, which limit their full participation in and contribution to the community.

Additionally, many advocates argue that women's traumatic experience with the national asylum system might also make them unwilling to take ownership in their communities. This is because, once they are granted status after seven to ten years of surviving in the system, they might never want to talk and even think about their traumas ever again. Therefore, they might resist taking part in refugee communities, which might result in social isolation and thus work against their empowerment.

Although advocates actively work to encourage refugee women to engage in advocacy actions, they assert that local professionals are also needed in the sector for assisting communities and campaigns. This is because the UK asylum system is reported to be bureaucratic and the paperwork is hard. Hence, advocates think local professionals should be present to give assistance about rules and laws both in the asylum and charity

sectors. Another issue is related to refugee women's reluctance to take responsibility. An advocate in Birmingham told me "Teaching advocacy is hard. I've been trying to make some refugee women trustees for the organization but they don't take it seriously. Women are keen to give ideas but when it comes to putting these ideas in practice and finding money to do it, no one takes responsibility. For example, once they come up with an idea of writing a book about their experiences and sell it to raise money for destitute women. But then they actually have to write the book, organize sessions, choose pictures and find funding. Never happened. You cannot do advocacy half-heartedly because you are responsible for other people's lives. You should be there for 24/7. I want them to take it seriously". As this example indicates, sometimes it is hard to make refugee women take leadership because they are not professionals. Hence, local professionals are also needed in advocacy and aid structures. They do not explain this need to patronize or undermine the agency of women refugees but rather highlight collaboration and working together.

Another practical barrier identified by organizations is childcare. As many women depend on transactional sex to survive in the UK, they might experience multiple number of pregnancies. Women remain as the chief responsible for child care even during asylum-seeking and destitution. This increases their burden and thus limits their ability to join organizational activities or take active roles within communities. The Covid-19 pandemic has also intensified women's childcare responsibilities. An advocate based in Manchester explained "Men are not single fathers but women are single mothers. During the lockdown, many women reached us regarding their kids. They constantly asked 'What happens to my kid if I get sick?'".

Although additional burden of childcare is a common problem among women refugees, according to advocates it still remains as one of the biggest challenges since it is still devalued and there is no funding for it. It is not taken seriously by the authorities. This creates obstacles regarding integrating refugee women into aid structures and creating opportunities for self-expression. An advocate from Birmingham stated "We arranged a meeting once with an NGO to come and listen to women refugees problems. The NGO had a certain expectation on women and kids in the meeting as well as the structure of the meeting. Typically in meetings people speak once at a time. However, there were kids screaming and running around all the time because women didn't have anywhere to leave them. The NGO didn't like this chaotic environment. It is not women's fault that they do not fit these expectations. Considering women's childcare responsibilities, we should enable women to join in the conversation in their own way. We should be listening, not demanding". This example demonstrates how the additional burden of childcare is generally overlooked in the asylum sector, which is a valid example for the relation between gender and asylum seeking. Childcare responsibilities might hinder women's participation communities and place them in a disadvantaged position against men among refugee populations regarding the use of their agency and potential.

4.6.2. *Barriers Related to the Asylum and Aid Sector*

The second group of barriers identified by the advocates is related to characteristics of the asylum and aid sectors. The first issue is related to reaching out to refugee and asylum-seeking women. Some organizations disclose that although there is diversity, the majority of women coming to the organizations are single moms or single women. Especially in mixed organizations, not a lot of people come together as traditional families.

This is because maybe they already have some sort of a support system as belonging to a family. Hence, many organizations seek to find ways for attracting married women to join their communities and activities. According to advocates, initial contact and engagement are crucial issues since women stay at home and are too scared to access support in some cases. Additionally, due to past traumas with government agencies, it is also difficult to make women trust in charities and other support systems. Hence, organizations of refugee women should be educated about the purpose of aid organizations and their options. Moreover, organizations underline lack of gender segregated data limits their ability for reaching out to women. There isn't a comprehensive database, which gives information about the new arrivals in the UK, cities or communities so organizations rely on word of mouth, initial accommodation centers and hostels and bigger organizations such as the Refugee Council and Migrant Help.

Another barrier related to the asylum and aid sector is about balancing between everyday service delivery and advocacy activities. Advocates report that during most of their day they focus on everyday survival issues, which is very difficult to convey a political message. They desire to connect their work with greater political structures for creating permanent change. Everyday service delivery and casework are obviously important for refugee women's survival and addressing empowerment. However, they think the target should be on the system rather than mitigating the symptoms because it is the system in the first place, which captures women in oppressive structures and prevents them from living dignified lives. For this reason, finding a balance between everyday casework and advocacy in the daily operations is crucial for advocates.

The same issue applies for feminist values and advocates intend to feed feminist accounts into their everyday aid and service delivery. An advocate from London explained "Sometimes when you are on the field, you might feel a mismatch between providing aid and conveying a feminist message. You might not be able to see how your work is connected to feminism. The issues we address on the field or hile doing casework are definitive feminist issues such as gender-based violence, female genital mutilation, sex trafficking, sexual abuse. Yet, that very moment is not the time to frame the issues via using explicitly feminist or a political language. We work with women to make sure that they get the type of support they need, which is a feminist mission". As this statement reflects, there might be different priorities between the advocates and refugee women or they might use different languages but everything comes together under nonconflicting values and principles. Advocates assert that they always situate their work within a feminist agenda, which is beneficial for all women in the aid structures. Some organizations argue that facilitating grassroots community organizing is the right way to overcome this mismatch. An NGO founder, who is a refugee herself, expressed "Most of the time there is tension between service delivery (you are buried in casework) and advocacy (no or less immediate connection with the refugees' realities). Community-organizing is a technique for overcoming this asymmetry via assembling service delivery and advocacy in a bottom-up characteristic. It makes sense in this way. You cannot have permanent change without integrating actual people or women into the organizational structures". Therefore, again timing is important. Advocates pay attention to daily realities or immediate needs of women refugees and acknowledge that giving assistance regarding those is the first step for women to take more active roles in the community.

According to advocates, finding appropriate funding is vital for supporting bottom-up community-organizing tactics with regard to balancing casework and advocacy. In some cases organizations might be dependent on their funders and thus are expected to frame issues in line with the funders' social principles and stance. According to advocates, this might limit their creativity during designing new programs, which signifies the power dynamics in the sector between the organizations and funders. In some cases, organizations are expected to be politically neutral to acquire funding, which might their harm ability to convey feminist messages or adopting feminist narratives explicitly. An advocate from Manchester gave the following example: "Feminism might be seen as something "way too political" or "way too related to politics" by some of our funders. We are expected to be politically neutral to get the money. Yet, focusing solely on aid delivery doesn't really create permanent change on its own. So we seek ways to find ways to address issues politically, feed politics into our work and still compete for different sources of funding at the same time. It can be difficult but it is part of our work". Just to be clear, there are many different sources of private funding available to the UK for charities, which support political framings and messages as well as grassroots organizing. Therefore, this is not a very common issue but can still happen with some of the actors in the sector.

Lastly, competition for funding in the sector might prevent organizations to do self-criticism and eventually harm the effectiveness of aid and service delivery. An advocate from London disclosed "Currently in the sector, you always have to say something good about yourself to attract funders. It is a cycle of bullshit. Instead, we should get feedback from women and let our egos dissolve to improve our work and give meaningful service to refugees". The competition for funding might lead organizations to overestimate their

quality of services and make them silent to the problems that women experience in aid structures, which ultimately harms their well-being and empowerment.

4.6.3. *Barriers Related to Distinct Perceptions of Feminism*

The last group of barriers are related to distinct perceptions of feminism between local advocates and women refugees. Women inside the communities come from different backgrounds. Some are more conservative while some are more progressive. Some are more politically active whereas others are less. These all affect what they understand from the word feminism.

During my interviews, the topic of culture came up from time to time. What I found very interesting was that despite the highly diverse characteristics of the communities, which makes it very difficult to establish a sense of unity, none of the advocates adopt cultural relativist attitudes for differences. In other words, none of them blame the non-Western cultures for women's vulnerability. I noticed that bigger and more professional organizations in the sector, culture is treated as a topic that should be avoided. Cultural issues are not discussed and even not mentioned. Volunteers in such organizations are told not to address or talk about any cultural issues with refugee populations during their training. On the contrary, women's organizations are not afraid to talk about culture. It is discussed in relation to other indicators such as class, ethnicity, sexual orientation and religion. Advocates express that it is crucial to not to make overarching and deterministic assumptions about culture. An advocate based in Birmingham explained "I believe in personality differences not cultural differences. Sometimes women have different opinions even though they are from the same country. Other factors, for example age definitely creates a bigger gap in ideas among women". This expression indicates that advocates

adopt an intersectional approach for analyzing issues inside the communities instead of blaming it on the non-Western cultures. In this way, they avoid creating hierarchical settings between locals and refugee women and sustain equality in the communities. Focusing on what brings them together, organizations claim that they do not allow differences in backgrounds and life experiences to create an artificial separation among women within the communities.

That said, community building is not a straightforward process. It might not be easy to overcome differences just like that effortlessly. This might increase discrimination against some women inside the communities. For example, one advocate who works for a London-based organization revealed that at the beginning of the outbreak of the Covid-19 discrimination against Asian women was heightened during the community meetings. In response, the organization held a session on the causes of the virus and strategies for protecting one's self. Similarly, advocates indicate that they sometimes witness a clash between religious, cultural and sexual rights among communities. It rarely happens but from time to time, we see some women supporting religious arguments over sexuality. Or they might can challenge each other on issues like marriage, sexual orientation and sex work. For instance, once a women refugee advocate told me that she would never campaign for homosexuality and lesbians but she never spoke out loud about this in the group meetings.

Organizations disclose that value freedom of expression but discrimination is not allowed. Organizations intervene if these conflicting views serve as a source for oppressing and discriminating other women within the community. They also intervene spontaneously if there is any use of politically incorrect language during the meetings and activities. They

verbally warn women and explain why she should not use a narrative that might offend the others. Intersectional feminism classes are another strategy for eliminating discrimination. The classes enable women to talk about differences in accordance with greater political structures and thus help them to focus on the similarities between them and other women who come from different backgrounds. They learn to respect and accept each other as they are and create a 'sisterhood'. One advocate, who facilitates these classes said "We don't aim to change people but to learn accepting differences. The most important thing is to maintain the community. We are a sisterhood". The sisterhood emphasis was very common in the women refugee organizations that I interviewed, which shows their dedication to form a unified community.

To overcome differences, organizations provide sessions about legal and illegal practices in the UK, which might clash with their cultural traditions. The sessions cover the law and how violence, FGM and forced marriage are illegal in the UK. Some women come from very conservative backgrounds. Organizations report that they do not judge them or expect them to change. Yet, to give information about their rights in the UK ultimately leads to a change in attitudes and practices of women, which helps to eliminate discrimination in communities.

Likewise, differences in immigration status of women among the communities sometimes drive tensions between perpetuating cultural practices and enjoying basic freedoms. Organizations should ideally intervene in cultural practices when it is against the basic freedoms because it is the law. However, it depends on the willingness of women to move forward with issues. Advocates cannot really take an action if women do not make an official complaint about the situation. The same applies to domestic violence. I was told

that some young refugee women might prefer the status-quo and refuse to challenge their families. In this regard, for instance, arranged marriages are very problematic. It is normally against the law but women give consent, therefore organizations cannot do anything about it. At this point advocates assert that they have to acknowledge the choice of women because she will know what is best for her. An advocate from Birmingham explained "I think it is more likely for the first generation women to not go up against their families because they have seen their parents struggle a lot in the past. So for them it is more important to stay as a family. They don't know if they should start adapting to British society and reject the practices they grew up with. Empowerment is about their peace of mind. I wouldn't act like them if I was in the same in this situation but because of their realities and experiences going with the status quo is much more convenient for them. I cannot make the decision for her. It is not always what we believe is right. There is no point in insisting from the outside to push for change". Hence, refugee women are not judged and their choices are respected, even though there is a mismatch between principles of feminist organizations and actions of refugee women. Agency of refugee women is valued as they are treated as strategic and rational individuals, who do cost-benefit analysis for serving her best interest.

Furthermore, different perceptions of feminism among the local (aid workers) and foreign (refugees) women might also create an asymmetry in the narratives and practices. As discussed in the previous sections, organizations employ collaborative approaches. Yet, coming from different backgrounds might harm the harmony in the rhetoric or operations. For example, a British advocate said "Women that I work with sometimes say things like "Oh my God or God helped me" I tell them it is not God, it was you". Sometimes British

advocates can be more eager and comfortable to address issues politically compared to women refugees, which creates issues. Refugee women might resist engaging in politics but British advocates think that their cases are already politicized. An advocate based in London explained "Some women say that they do not want to get engaged in politics but I tell them politics is everywhere". That said, advocates underlined that they do not force women to get into advocacy necessarily. Women who come to the organizations are self-defined; they are allowed to come just because they want to come.

A further asymmetry created by different perceptions of feminism is concerning the necessity of having women-segregated spaces. Cultural differences sometimes can be very frustrating according to an advocate from Cardiff: "One time they hired a Spanish yoga teacher for a women's only yoga group. The teacher was a white Western man, who was half-naked during the class. Some women didn't feel comfortable about it. It shouldn't be a problem". She added that refugee women should also join or prefer doing activities in mixed groups. She argued that she personally recognizes the importance of having segregated groups but feels that women should also be comfortable with men. Organizations suggest that they need to be culturally responsive, and respect religious rules, however, they also need to tactfully inform people of their rights or equality in the UK and how these may differ from rights in their country of origin. They should support them to challenge their existing mindset whilst not forgetting or refusing their cultural identities and values. They should encourage women to adapt in values to have a more positive impact on their individual life in the UK via convincing them to access employment and education. Often many women leave their countries for these reasons anyway, but for those who do not, they should openly inform them about options while

maintaining respect. Bringing mixed group opportunities into conversation, they can gradually engage people through an equality based model of support when out in the community, namely normalizing behavior to open people's mindsets to the endless opportunities that could be available to them in the UK as powerful women. In this regard, some organizations organize activities like sports for women or sewing for men to challenge binary understandings, which is viewed to be a 'great breaking point' but it is not enough.

Additionally, advocates report that distinct understandings of feminism among local and refugee women might create mismatches in the purpose and character of feminist agenda and principles. I witnessed a few incidents concerning this. The first of them is related to the perception of the necessity of organizing only as women. Once during a community meeting, women were asked to give feedback about the National Refugee Women Conference. One refugee woman asked why there were no men during the conference. She added they should let men speak about their problems as they are more effective in communicating issues compared to women. I was curious to see the reaction of the British advocates as this feedback truly contradicts their organization's principles and view on feminism. None of them said anything at first. It was actually the other refugee women, who objected. They raised their hands and assured her that they don't really need men. In this case, reaction was more organic as the fellow community members are the ones who gave a feminist reaction right away, which is remarkable.

The mismatch between feminist understanding also affect the perception of necessity of certain organizational activities. I spoke to an advocate from Cardiff, who identified herself as a feminist and she had a highly urban look with dreadlocks and

piercings. She shared her displeasure about a few programs they offer for women in the organization: "We offer a pampering session to women, in which we invite a beauty expert and a hairdresser to the center. Women can get hair cuts, get their nails done etc. For me, personally I don't really care about these sessions. And they are not really necessary from a feminist perspective. Of course, women feel good about themselves. It boosts their self-confidence in return and thus might have an empowerment effect. Yet, it is a stereotypically feminine activity and is not really compatible with the type of political message that we want to give".

Another example is related to priorities given to the feminist agenda within communities. During one community group meeting in Birmingham, women were asked if they wanted to attend the Women's March in London on International Women's Day. They had to make a decision because they needed to ask for funding from the sister organizations in London for covering travel expenses. It was 2020 and the International Women's Day was on Sunday. The majority of women said that they don't want to attend the March because they go to church on Sunday. I sensed a sort of disappointment among the British advocates. This is because for them going to the march was way more important than going to church. It was the right thing to do in terms of their individual and organization's feminist principles and ideologies. Attending the march is a political action, which supports refugee women's autonomy and agency, which is compatible with the priorities of the organization. However, going to church is more important for refugee women. Advocates didn't judge them and force them to go to London but I could feel their displeasure.

A further example is from the collage postcard workshop in Birmingham, which was mentioned in the previous sections. Women were asked to make art collages to create postcards, which will be later sold during a private event for fundraising for the organization. The facilitator was a professional artist, who identified herself as a queer feminist during a private conversation. She asked women about their dreams and to use those in their collages for honoring the statement that "You Are a Star". While some women come up with genuine feminist slogans about unity, hope and self-confidence, some others created postcards that did not challenge gender hierarchies rather embraced them. These postcards demonstrated images of having kids, getting married, or owning a large kitchen to cook a fine meal. These images mismatched with the overall purpose of the session, because it aimed to give opportunities for refugee women to convey messages about their autonomy such as getting a job and acquiring an independent life without men and kids. There was no way to address this asymmetry and obviously nobody told those women they should change their dreams. Yet, I again sensed the disappointment. During our private conversation the facilitator told me that "Some women should definitely have to find their voice".

All in all, despite the potential asymmetries in priorities and principles resulting from the distinct perception of feminism between the organizational framings of empowerment, it is very important to note that advocates do not make patronizing comments. Although they do not really know how to approach situations like this, they know that they should never discriminate against women and always respect their choices. It is a challenge but the most important thing is to maintain the community and solidarity no matter what.

4.7. Conclusion

This chapter analyzes the ways how women organizations address women's empowerment. These tactics can be grouped in four main categories namely, creating and regulating space, service, aid delivery and protection, collaboration and inclusion, and lastly, public visibility and authorship. Moreover, they acknowledged that there are certain challenges and issues that limit their capabilities for addressing empowerment. These barriers can be listed as practical barriers, barriers related to the asylum and aid sector, and barriers related to diverse perceptions of feminism among women in the community resulting from different backgrounds and life experiences.

Such tactics and narratives demonstrate that women refugees are constructed as partners not as clients. There is a strong "sisterhood" emphasis in a feminist sense, in which organizations claim that they do not focus on artificial separation resulting from different backgrounds or life experiences but what brings them together to create permanent change. Advocacy is seen as an integral part of the aid work since advocates believe aid cannot be demarcated from politics and the broader cause of social justice. There is a holistic and politicized understanding of aid, which disrupts hierarchies. Women refugees are humanized and treated as ordinary women, not different from local British advocates. They do not categorize themselves as locals and refugees or givers of aid and receivers of aid. Accordingly, organizations work towards two-way integration and two-way empowerment, which highlight the agency, equality and full contribution of refugee women in communities. Collaborating with refugee women and providing them opportunities to express themselves, organizations aim to enhance authentic representation of women in the media as opposed to the conventional images that portray them as

victimized and vulnerable individuals. Organizations support women's autonomy and authorship for breaking their dependence on aid schemes and external actors. All these narratives challenge the stereotypical representation of Third World Women, which enables women to stay in solidarity and work together while disrupting global hierarchies and neocolonial accounts.

CHAPTER 5:WE ARE PROFESSIONALS: ADDRESSING REFUGEE WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT BY FRENCH AID ORGANIZATIONS

5.1.Introduction

This chapter analyzes how aid organizations in France identify refugee and asylum-seeking empowerment and address it in their daily operations. Most of the organizations that I interviewed define empowerment in accordance with carrying out professional aid work to address gender-differentiated needs of women. Focusing on gender differentiated needs lead to the interchangeable use of women, gender, and empowerment in aid schemes, which creates vagueness and superficial approaches that lack systemic analysis. Adopting a legal and bureaucratic approach in their work, organizations' essential objective is to assist women to acquire legal protection since citizenship is seen as the chief source of security. Accelerating the process for getting citizenship status, aid workers assign greater importance for identifying women's vulnerabilities properly.

Placing greater emphasis on professionalism and expertise to better assist women, organizations are reluctant to collaborate with women refugees. Women refugees are required to fit into organizational goals, categories and structures to access assistance. For instance, they might be constructed as victimized and vulnerable women refugees, which might help them to acquire international protection much more easily in the short run but ultimately harm their agency and autonomy in the long run. Aid is identified as an objective, technical and value-free instrument, which results in the prioritization of administrative projects and policy-making schemes both at the national and European level at the expense of local grassroots activism. Relatedly, advocacy activities too have a formal and neutral character. It is carried out by the aid workers and experts exclusively, which

limits the authentic representation and authorship of refugee women and takes away their decision-making power about policies targeting their lives directly. As a result, empowerment is constructed as an objective policy or organizational goal related to professional service delivery, which is demarcated from political activism. Similarly, integration activities also have a technical character narrowly focusing on to enable women to access appropriate accommodation or job market rather than designing tools targeting to enhance women's political agency. Lastly, French aid organizations, problematically, treat women's empowerment as a Western concept via promoting Western or white feminist values during their operations. Therefore, they actively work to "teach" and "educate" women about French values and support cultural assimilation to address empowerment and prepare them for their new life in France.

In the following sections I will investigate the ways that women organizations identify refugee and asylum-seeking women's empowerment in four main categories, namely (1) legal protection and identification of vulnerabilities, (2) service delivery and professionalism, (3) advocacy and awareness-raising and lastly, (4) integration to France and sensibilization to French values. In the last part, I will discuss the barriers and challenges identified by the organizations regarding the efficiency of the programs that target women's empowerment such as geographical location, cultural differences, practical issues that limit women's willingness to report violence and dependence on public funding. The section also analyzes how Northern France is viewed as a merging point between British and French aid cultures, political traditions and feminist understandings and approaches.

5.2. Legal Protection and Identification of Vulnerabilities

This section reviews how organizations reported assisting women refugees for acquiring legal protection is one of the main activities that they address empowerment. The tactics and strategies adopted by the aid workers can be listed as, providing legal assistance to women, proper identification of women's vulnerabilities, protecting and offering tailored assistance mechanisms to victims of gender based violence, training frontline workers for responding to the needs of victims, and engaging in policy-making at both national and European level. The aid work is identified to be value-free and thus demarcated from politics. It has a technocratic character, which underscores the need for professional expertise. The aid work is carried out by the professionals only, which limits the space for collaboration with refugee women. The policies are usually targeted at the formal actors, such as the state, public agencies or European agencies.

Organizations that I interviewed associate refugee and asylum-seeking women's empowerment explicitly with assisting women to acquire legal protection. It is strictly about promoting the use of legal tools that are available for them. Moreover, the focus is mainly on the protection and assisting women for accessing their entitled rights alongside identifying vulnerable women, who are the victims of violence at all different stages of asylum-seeking. Aid workers discuss that assisting victims to acquire a refugee status is a crucial step for women's security and welfare since it is the only way to secure their access to constitutional rights and social benefits. Hence, many of the aid workers prioritize actions that are related to legal assistance such as giving legal advice, filling out forms for women, making applications on behalf of the victims, responding to administrative letters and screen women's correspondence with the state agencies, attempt mediations or appeal

to court decisions and follow up the appointments and interviews with OFPRA (French Office for the Protection of Refugees and Stateless Persons), etc. All these programs are technical in nature. They are institutionally structured and target the national asylum and political system, and public authorities. For this reason, they refer to a need for a certain degree of "expertise" or "professionalism" to be an actor with decision-making power in the aid delivery process. This means that women refugees require to be represented by professional experts in the asylum sector.

Within this context, an aid worker, who is a founder of a women refugee organization in Paris, asserted that they are not activists but lawyers: "Our work is mainly legal work related to acquiring residence permits and refugee status for women. When we do lobbying it is again specifically about the legal rights of women, which are carried out with social workers from other organizations specifically. For refugee women, we only offer legal advice and assistance programs. The way we define empowerment is about how the law works in France to protect vulnerable women. It is about making sure that the prosecutor applies the law". Focusing on the interpretation of the law in favor of foreign women, the organization is concerned with domestic and international law and how to use it to best represent the interests of refugee women. Therefore, refugee women, who lack the necessary expertise, do not really have a say on the procedure. Most of the time they are not aware of their options and they are dependent on the aid workers for representing their best interest, which overlooks their agency.

Additionally, adopting a narrow focus on legal matters prevents organizations from offering proactive roles to women in the aid schemes. The same social worker told me "We are not a refugee-led organization. They might get some roles but it is problematic. When

they are still in the system, we don't prefer them to collaborate with us, once they get protection they can if they want. But it almost never happens. Because we mainly offer legal support meaning that you need specific training and knowledge about international law and national law asylum law. So collaboration is not likely to happen as our team is composed of lawyers mainly".

The curious thing about this is that emphasis on legal protection is applicable both to the bigger and more professional aid organizations in the sector, which operate under government contracts and to smaller refugee-led and women-led organizations which identified themselves as activists. A women refugee activist from a militant organization in Paris disclosed that providing legal assistance is the main role of the organization: "We are a collective of solidarity with foreign women who want to access their rights. We support women in their asylum applications, discuss violence or persecutions they experienced in their country of origin, and prepare them for the asylum interviews. The main role that we give ourselves is to help women in asylum applications and legal procedures. We have acquired the legal and other skills for that, we help to prepare application files and it is among the other things why women come to us". Different from the bigger players in the sector, this organization provides information sheets about the legal rights of women so that they understand the system and their options. This might give them some sort of power because they can have an idea of the procedures and their options, which makes them not completely dependent on the aid workers. Nevertheless, I think it is very interesting that despite the disparities in size and scope of the actors in the sector, they all associate aid explicitly with providing legal assistance. This shows us something about the perception of citizenship in France.

A similar example is from an organization based in Paris. The aid worker I interviewed has also said that their work is centered around providing legal protection to refugee women. What is striking was that although she was constantly talking about technical and bureaucratic legal procedures, she still defined the organization as an militant organization explicitly: "Our work aims to help foreign women in France and in colony island territories (D'outre Mer) to access their entitled rights. Most of the women and children who come to us are victims of violence. We help them to apply for asylum. We are not lawyers, but activists who give judicial advice. We work with lawyers. We have the ability to be an observer in the asylum system. To see what is happening, what questions are asked during the interview, are they related to the women's case, how is the attitude of the officer or the interpreter". This statement refers to the blurred line between activism and providing legal expertise in the sector.

Likewise, when the aid professionals asked about the feminist motives in their work, many of them identified feminism narrowly as the legal equality of women, women having equal rights with men, and women's ability to equally participate to the public life free from violence and discrimination. It is not a coincidence that the emphasis is again on legal rights since many organizations in the asylum sector are concerned with giving assistance to the ones who are not protected by the law, including refugee women. Women refugees are constructed as apolitical and passive individuals, who are not capable of "acting" because they don't have the necessary citizenship status. Therefore, they are dependent on the ones who already have that status, namely; the aid professionals. Refugee women are silenced. One aid professional based in Paris expressed "We contribute to women's empowerment because we fight for their rights. We fight for foreign people and

women's rights. This is a part of the greater cause of feminism". I found her choice of wording very strange. She spoke as if she is the one who is doing all the fighting on behalf of the foreign women since refugee women could not fight for themselves. Holding expertise, related knowledge and citizenship, she has the power of 'acting', which underscores her agency.

Organizations justify their emphasis on legal protection via the ignorance of the French society about gender-related persecutions and the international refugee law, namely the Geneva Convention. Aid workers assured me that the public does not know so much about women refugees. When French people think of refugees they mostly think of men, who are in danger due to their political ideologies but there are many other reasons for being recognized as a refugee. An aid professional stated "Historically in France, foreign women are thought to migrate only to reunify with their families but this is not true anymore. Single women migrate too. Sometimes they flee from violence. There is a diverse profile of refugee women coming to France both single and married with children or childless. We witness many cases of marital violence, especially women from the Balkans. We see issues related to forced marriage from women coming from West Africa. They can also be victims of trafficking, labor abuse, and sexual exploitation". Due to these different gender related persecutions that the French society is unaware of, organizations claim that it is important to assist victims appropriately for gaining legal protection. Therefore, they actively work to help women to fit into the "belonging to a social group" article of the Geneva Convention as they identify themselves to be legal experts on gender-based violence. Many of them noted that this is also a central topic in their advocacy campaigns, in which they target the enlargement of the article so that it can be applied to more cases

and thus protect more women. This will be discussed furtherly in the upcoming sections in detail but what I want to draw attention to is that even their advocacy actions are centralized around the legal protection and status of refugee women.

Undoubtedly, protecting victims of violence is crucial and the language of the Convention, which is a gender-blind document, should be improved for the benefit of refugee women. However, the legal protection emphasis implies that women refugees are victims by default. They are vulnerable because they are women, which overlooks their agency as self-resilient and autonomous actors. An aid worker based in Paris told me "Women are clearly vulnerable because they are women. Gender, unfortunately, puts them in dangerous situations. This is really sad to say but it is true". When the emphasis is on legal protection, the words gender, women, victim and empowerment are more likely to be used interchangeably. Gender becomes a variable in the aid structures rather than embracing a comprehensive and systemic view on the issues experienced by women. Empowerment then becomes a technical and objective policy goal by the organizations. In other words, integrating a gender perspective becomes identical to the empowerment of women, which perpetuates "add and stir" approaches. Gender is treated as a variable to enhance the aid delivery rather than emancipation of women. Therefore, it serves the interest and objectives of the organizations mainly, not the actual women.

At this point, it is not surprising that organizations define their chief mission narrowly as giving legal assistance to women refugees, who are victims of violence. An aid worker from Paris expressed "We work on how we help women to identify problems due to gender and identify them so that they can get protection as they are entitled to. We give special attention to the question of vulnerability". This statement implies that they

perceive gender related issues only as to be gender-based violence. For getting assistance, women need to fit into categories of vulnerability, which are defined unilaterally by the organizations. The needs and insecurities of women refugees who are not victims of violence are neglected substantially. When I asked an aid worker what does it mean to integrate a gender lens into their operational activities as advertised on their website, she answered "Put effort to come up with organizational guidelines and tools to better identify vulnerabilities and victimized situation of women resulting from violence and gender-related persecutions such as sex trafficking, FGM, child marriage and mental health resulting from the experiences and impacts of the asylum procedures and reception conditions and eventually integration mechanisms. Each has different vulnerabilities and structures that need special attention and complex characteristics". This again shows how gender differentiated needs are viewed to be identical to needs of victims. It also demonstrates that the related actions are highly technical and objective in nature.

The proper identification of vulnerabilities of women for the organizations since it is the first step of enhancing their access to legal status. It has an instrumental value for taking down criminal networks too. An aid worker from Paris explained "What is more dangerous is that international criminal networks might exploit women's vulnerability. Sometimes human traffickers use asylum for getting legal status for their victims so that they can continue exploiting them in the reception territories without any disruptions. So asylum can be used to further abuse women. We should provide protection to women so that they can report these networks. If not, they are trapped and criminal networks become stronger everyday". Likewise, another aid professional based in Lyon asserted "The protection of women victims is important because once they first arrive to France, their

only networks might become the ones from their countries of origin, who may be are engaged with illegal activities like forced prostitution. This puts pressure on them because they don't know anyone else. They might know that they are a part of a criminal network but are reluctant to report since they feel that they don't have any other option. As a result, they keep going through what they have been doing. Because they don't know if they are going to get protection or not. If not, then why risk your only source of security and connection?". Similarly, another aid worker stated "Women don't know if they are going to get protection for sure, so they don't report illegal activities. Therefore, it is our job to do our job right so that they can act freely and apply for asylum". All these statements underscore the vital role of providing legal protection to victims in reporting illegal activities. If women victims get protection, they become more likely to report criminal networks and illegal activities since they can access social security networks and break their dependency on criminal networks.

Furthermore, proper identification of vulnerabilities is claimed to be empowering for women refugees by the organizations because they can provide specialized assistance to the victims. They offer distinct help schemes for women, who are victimized due to different issues. There are different programs offered for trafficked women, stateless women, or women who are exposed to marital violence as they all have different needs and priorities. According to aid workers, the proper identification of vulnerabilities is the first step of providing them appropriate assistance in the later stages of the process. For example, it is a huge advantage if women refugee's vulnerabilities can be identified during the registration process, which is the initial process at the beginning for entering into the French asylum system. An aid worker based in Lyon explained "Asylum-seekers are

usually registered as one unit if they come as a family. If the social worker is capable of identifying that a woman is suffering from marital violence at the registration stage, it will make a huge impact on her asylum case as she can file an independent application and she will most likely get legal status. She will enhance her personal safety both physically and legally". Relatedly, I was told that married women exist in the asylum system as family units. The husbands are more visible in the process. They are the ones who are on top of everything. Women usually cannot book individual appointments because the husbands want to be there all the time. Sometimes the husband speaks a little bit of French and the wife cannot so she is dependent on her husband for communicating with the organizations. This is a serious problem from the perspective of the victim because she cannot speak with the workers freely to report violence. She cannot take decisions without her husband especially about her health like having abortions or taking mental counseling. At the same time, women might be reluctant to report domestic violence because they might think that it might complicate their asylum case as a family and they want to get their papers as soon as possible. She might not know that she might apply separately. For all these reasons, organizations assert that identification of vulnerabilities is crucial protection of victims-the earlier, the better.

Once identified as victims, women can access public resources and protection more easily. An aid worker based in Paris expressed "Due to the high influx of asylum-seeking individuals coming to France in the last decade, the organizational and professional capacity is very limited in the initial registration platforms (Structure of the First Reception of Asylum Seekers (SPADA)), where you get 20-30 aid workers for thousands of people. They do their best but there might be delays in the system. Their work is essential because

they are the ones to first identify if the person is in greater vulnerability like an LGBT individual, a women victim of violence, a victim of trafficking, or a victim suffering from trauma. This will accelerate the process and allow them to get to the next step faster, in which they are provided with accommodation and other benefits". Identification is the first step of providing individually curtailed and tailored assistance to the victims of violence, which aims to respond to their diverse needs more effectively. The organizations are very proud of these services because they do not use cookie-cut approaches. Yet, again, I think it is problematic that refugee women's identities or needs are downgraded to a victimized status. Refugee women become identical to victims, who need special assistance because they are women. Hence, the issues they might have not related to being a victim of violence, might be overlooked. Does that mean women refugees who have not experienced any violence during asylum-seeking (which is not likely) are safe? Also, it constructs violence as if it only happens before entering France since the identification of vulnerabilities is expected to be done during the first arrival to France. What about the violence that women experience from the guards, front line workers or French men or citizens in general?

Nevertheless, coming back to the specialized assistance mechanisms, organizations define assigning a special accommodation for the victims of violence as crucial for the refugee women's empowerment. Aid workers can make recommendations to the public officials for prioritizing women victims to access specialized accommodation and other social benefits (such as allowances) in a fastly manner. This is reported to be particularly significant to protect women from further abuse in potential cases of destitution and homelessness. Not only is there a lack of public housing and not all asylum seekers are assigned to accommodation centers but also the government systematically dismantles

informal camp situations that women might be dependent on to survive. At the time of writing, the government dismantled a refugee camp in the outer zones of Paris, leaving many refugees living on the streets. Women can avoid going homeless if they are identified as vulnerable by the workers. An aid worker based in Paris explained "The state gives priority to women if they are victims. The problem is the state doesn't have enough asylum accommodation. We have approximately 90.000 spots in public accommodation centers nationwide but roughly 130.000 asylum seekers in the system. This means that not all of them are going to get accommodation. In this regard, the first step of identification is very essential because the state will give priority to the most vulnerable ones". Victims might be given separate spaces to respond to their specific needs. One aid worker based in Lyon stated "This year they have started designing a special accommodation and support systems for the victims of violence in private realms or victims of trafficking, who are usually engaged in forced prostitution. Prostitution is seen as a major problem by social workers. Women do it to survive as they don't have any other resources to live. We have noticed that the perpetrators, namely the smugglers, can be from the very same networks they share their journeys and their countries of origin. We have realized that these actors might accompany them or live with them in our accommodation centers. Therefore, we decided to organize a separate place for women victims of violence". A similar example was given by an advocate from Paris: "If there is an identified victim of trafficking and violence, we accommodate them in specific places dedicated to them. This is a safe place with a security guard so they wouldn't be in danger. We adopt a holistic approach when thinking about violence and deal with it as a cross-cutting issue. For instance, women might not think it will be safe to escape from forced prostitution networks, which are usually composed of

their ethnic community members. We assign security guards to the victims so that they can feel much safer. It is also easier to keep them in a segregated place where the community members cannot reach them or trick them to abuse them further. Lastly, women are provided with mental support in these accommodation centers, which helps them to recover from trauma". As these examples demonstrate, creating separate accommodation centers for women victims of violence is seen as a tactic for responding to their distinct needs and concerns. The focus is highly on protection and empowerment is addressed as offering relevant and tailored assistance to the women victims.

Similar practices (namely prioritization of vulnerable women in service delivery) are also carried out by smaller and more informal women organizations (that do not coordinate their actions with the state) in transit areas. Such organizations are located in Northern France, which identify empowerment as responding to the emergency needs of women refugees in camp situations in Dunkirk and Calais. One example might be an organization based in Calais, which aims to provide shelter for women refugees. The founder assured me that they prioritize vulnerable women, who can be young, single, pregnant women, or single mothers since the camps are usually male-dominated and women might feel uncomfortable in shared spaces. So again being identified as vulnerable becomes a source of protection for women refugees.

Another example is from an organization in Lyon that mainly focuses on befriending and social integration. They additionally offer accommodation to asylum seekers. It is a mixed organization but they prioritize vulnerable women and single parents (who are usually women) in their housing program. A worker from the organization stated "Housing program is the only positive discrimination that we institutionalized or take

affirmative action about women specifically. We don't have gender segregation in the buddying programs, we don't take into consideration gender preferences. Usually, people get along but we understand that lots of people that we work with are in vulnerable situations. So we have a very strict protection policy, a charter of values and an established crisis management process. These are a set of policies to overcome abusive behavior along with disagreements and misunderstandings. It is an established system so we usually see what is coming so we are able to do early interventions in the case of harassment and protect vulnerable women". This strategy implies that empowerment is seen as identical to addressing gender differentiated needs and the protection of victims. There aren't any other interventions identified by the organization for systemically combating the issues women might experience rather than protecting the victims.

Since the identification of vulnerability is identified to be crucial for empowerment of refugee women, organizations relatedly emphasize training social workers working in the field (such as in registration or reception platforms) for assisting victims. In this manner, they create partnerships with other organizations, and coordinate their actions to enhance the quality of assistance that vulnerable women get from social professionals. Training and educating public and private sector workers is also considered to be a part of the advocacy actions of the organizations, which will be discussed in later sections. For example, one of the organizations that I interviewed stated that it actively participates in a project called "Safe Women in Migration". This project aims to provide toolkits and a series of modules for fighting against gender-based violence in migration and build the capacity of social workers to detect the victims and respond to their needs. Many aid workers reflected that violence should be dealt as a cross-cutting issue. Therefore, the

frontline workers should be trained for getting familiar with the context of the country of origin of the victim women to assess their vulnerability properly. An aid worker based in Paris explained "We should adopt a global approach for assessing women's vulnerability. In some cases, victims might not be aware that they are victims because abusive practices might be normalized in their communities (like child marriage or female genital mutilation). If we don't see this, we will isolate the victim even more. So we train our workers to address cultural sensibilities in vulnerable situations. We adopt a more proactive position meaning that we identify abuses in accordance with the cultural practices. If she is coming from X country, the worker should be familiar with the cultural practices in that country. Even if the woman victim is not talking about it we should keep in mind that she might have experienced it or been exposed to it". As this statement indicates, protection of refugee women is again a goal to be achieved or assigned to the professionals. It is about their expertise, which is multilayered and comprehensive. Also, women refugees are constructed as cultural individuals, who are captured in timeless apolitical categories of vulnerability without paying attention to intersectionality.

Furthermore, according to the organizations training aid workers is an important strategy for protecting women from marital violence as well. Domestic violence is very tricky to identify as it depends on many complicated factors. If the social worker is careful enough to identify domestic violence, women will be provided with better protection mechanisms. An aid worker from Paris explained "Sometimes violence occurs within the couple after they are assigned to public housing. And most of the time the officers don't do separate registration for women and women don't know that they can make a separate asylum application. She might get trapped in a violent cycle because of the neglect of the

frontline worker. If the officer doesn't suspect anything, then she will never talk about her situation". In many cases, reporting violence is dependent on the willingness of women to go forward with the issue. In this regard, organizations assert that frontline workers should be informed and experienced enough to think about violence from many angles including gender roles in households, and should offer women related options and tools for their protection. An aid worker asserted "Due to gender roles, it is very difficult for women to make decisions about leaving their husbands during the asylum procedure. She feels guilty about the kids, fears being alone or afraid of what the community would say. They might be in a bad physical and mental state to get a job and provide for their kids. Therefore, we believe it is very important to educate and give formations to our workers about the gendered aspects of violence. Yet, it is a complicated issue because many workers ask 'What if we report the violence and she doesn't get a status, what will happen to her?". As it can be seen from these examples, organizations attach significance to addressing violence comprehensively and therefore provide related training programs to the workers. They are also aware that if women leave their abusive relationships they are dependent on acquiring legal status in France. Otherwise, they will have no safety networks. Therefore, workers take their jobs very seriously since doing their jobs have a direct effect on the well-being of women victims of violence.

According to the organizations, another important theme in refugee women's empowerment is supporting related policies at both the national and international levels. In other words, they intend to integrate a gendered approach to the policies at different levels for better protecting and helping the women victims of violence. These interventions are again bureaucratic in nature and refer to professional expertise in identifying the ideal

conditions on how the state should deal with the victims of violence. The problem here is that again vulnerability is imposed on women since having a gendered approach becomes identical to protecting victims, which neglects the needs and concerns of women who do not fall under these categories. Moreover, these interventions are not participatory and do not offer any space for the inclusion of firsthand experiences of actual refugee women. Women do not have decision making power over the creation of these actions since it is displaced to the aid professionals who hold expertise. It is a top-down intervention, in which the ideas about vulnerability and protection flow from the hierarchical administrative authority mainly and it is not clear whether it reflects the daily realities of the women victims. I do not intend to say the aid workers are doing wrong by this. I believe all of them are very generous and dedicated individuals that work all day to assist refugees. Yet, it is important to comprehend that refugee women are invisible or silent in these structures. It is not a collective effort rather dependent on the local expertise, which might be demarcated from the authentic experiences of women refugees. There is no reciprocity because women refugees are not seen as contributors or actors before getting their legal status. This is a direct implication of French political culture, namely Republicanism, which will be discussed further in the next chapter.

Aid workers support policy-making about women's vulnerability in two levels, national and European. Firstly, organizations work with the French government for implementing laws and guidelines about vulnerability and protection of victims. They write bills and make recommendations to the state agencies. For example, an aid professional based in Paris explained "At the moment we are working on a legal framework in France with other NGOs to protect the most vulnerable women, who will get qualified

accommodation and enhanced financial help, and also to give better training to social workers regarding asking proper questions about gendered violence". Likewise, another aid professional from Paris claimed "We mainly work on legal frameworks about vulnerability and implementation of those in national settings. Our efforts include policy-making recommendations and assistance. The national government initiated a guideline about vulnerability this year, specifically for women victims of violence. We contributed to the bill and it will be later introduced to the general public this year". These examples demonstrate how organizations prioritize working with more formal and institutionalized actors and target policy-making mechanisms.

Focusing on taking actions related to protection of vulnerable women at the national level is not a coincidence. This is an intentional choice since it is one of the priorities of the state and almost all of the organizations that I interviewed are fully or mostly dependent on public funding. In general, not only the asylum sector but also the charity sector is dependent on the state(or other public entities such as the administration of different provinces) and thus the state is quite influential and dominant in determining the organizational agendas. For example, as many aid workers indicated, the government offers specific funding for supporting the victims of violence, which might explain why organizations prioritize providing curtailed assistance to victims. Being dependent on public funding, organizations might operate as an extension of the state and be expected to meet the expectations or objectives of the state. Most interestingly, none of the aid workers that I interviewed thought being dependent on state funding limited their independence or creativity. An aid worker working for a Paris-based organization, which advertises itself as a militant organization, discussed: "It doesn't affect our work or advocacy message at all

because we are not a public institution. We are a private and an independent organization. To be honest, we actually prefer national funds because they are easier to adapt sinc we are experienced in France". This proves that they construct aid work as a value-free tool in a technocratic sense. Hence, the protection assistance they offer is treated as an implementation of a public strategy rather than being a deconstructive and participatory practice. They acquire funding for adopting such legal, professional, and bureaucratic instructions into their operation. Since they do not acknowledge these reflecting any ideological values, they are not aware of the power dynamics hidden in the aid structures, which eventually determines priorities, actions, and decides who gets protection and who doesn't. This unawareness is a direct result of the French political tradition, namely republicanism and universalism, which constructs the state as the neutral and legal guarantor of the rights and equality among citizens. Therefore, the state's domination in the charity sector is justified. I was curious to learn if organizations recognize the effect of republican and universalist values on their work. One aid worker answered: "No we don't cover values but rights. Maybe the most affiliated value with our work is equality in France. That means no matter whether you are a refugee or local you are entitled to your rights". This proves that they perceive their work to be free from any type of values although they are quite embedded in the system.

I was sure that there must be more specific and visible state agencies that they work with, which define criteria for their operations via providing funding. Maybe, this would allow them to see my point about their dependence on the state's ideology.   So I asked them about the public agency that provides funds for the protection of women refugee victims. An aid worker based in Lyon explained the structure as follows: "The management

of the state resources for women and gender equality is decentralized in what we called in France, Départements, which is a local administration level. The person in charge is the Delegate Departement for Women's Rights and Equality Between Men and Women. (Délégué-e départemental-e aux droits des femmes et à égalité entre les femmes et les homes in French). He/she acts under the authority of the Minister for Equality Between Men and Women but also the Home Office. The values defended includes secularism, republicanism, feminism, and fighting against gender-based violence etc. We work with this agency to make sure we follow their guidelines to support better and empower more women victims. They decide specific issue areas, in which our organization gets money and we follow their values and integrate their frameworks into our work". The state agencies and ideologies are quite salient in the process but organizations do not realize it. Therefore, they see aid above from politics, if not unrelated.

Secondly, organizations carry out actions targeting policy-making at the European level to protect women victims or violence. They work with agencies of the European Union (such as the EU Commission), exchange practices, and coordinate actions to improve vulnerability guidelines and the EU legal framework and how to implement them in France. In this regard, the EU guidelines serve as the chief principles for guiding organizations regarding protecting women victims and responding to their needs. In other words, they utilize an international approach for integrating gender differentiated needs in their aid and service delivery schemes. An aid worker from Paris explained "The EU legal framework (The Common European Asylum System, the Qualification, Procedure and Reception Directives) is our chief guide. These all are crucially important because we import those into the national setting. The national asylum law is based on the EU

framework. Additionally, the guidelines for defining and assisting vulnerabilities come from the EU too". The way she described the processes again refer to a certain degree of expertise of the aid workers since the nature of the work is related to bureaucratic and legal procedures. For the very same reason it implies a technocratic way of dealing with women refugees, which highlights a top-down approach or attitude.

Organizations assert that they carry out many projects carried out at the European level with formal actors for enhancing the protection of women refugees. One of these projects mentioned is called the TRIPS (Trafficked International Protection Beneficiaries' Special Needs), which targets identifying and responding to the victims of trafficking (mainly used to asssit and protect women in forced prostitution networks). Another example is the "Safe Women in Migration", which intends to train social workers about gendered violence, which is mentioned above. Moreover, some organizations that I interviewed are members of the "Survivor Project", which aims for the successful integration and resettlement of survivors of gender-based violence, who are mainly women. In this project, partners, which are the European states, pledge to exchange practices, experiences, and issues for facilitating collaboration and enhancing opportunities to integrate survivors into the host societies. What is interesting about these projects is that, firstly, they are all carried out with formal actors or public entities. Secondly, although there is room for the participation of civil society actors in these projects none of them are refugee-led organizations. This means that the authentic representation of actual victims is not present and women refugees are dependent on external actors for communicating their concerns. This underscores a hierarchical setting, in which women refugees are portrayed as victims lacking agency.

Additionally, organizations indicate that they join various EU networks that focus on protecting refugee victims of gender based violence. These can be listed as the European Asylum Support Office Vulnerability Network and its the Consultative Forum (composed of all the civil organizations but again no refugee-led organizations), which works on common guidelines and tools to better identify vulnerabilities and respond to the specific needs of the victims experienced different types of gender-based violence), The Platform on Human Trafficking by the EU Commission, which aims for policymaking, implementation, exchange of practices and raise awarenss to better address vulnerabilities of persons in trafficking, the End Female Genital Mutilation European Network, which combats FGM, and the EU Statelessness Network, which analyzes how statelessness might increase the vulnerabilities of women and children. All these projects mentioned by the aid workers are again created by and about the actions of formal professional actors. The actual women refugees are not represented in these projects. The projects are technocratic in nature, which are created by experts, professional or policymakers. They are applied in a top-down manner from the European level, which implies a hierarchical setting that refugees cannot contribute to. The EU provides funding for the organizations if they participate in the related projects about gender but since they are internationally managed the criterias are more rigid. Therefore, organizations report that they prefer state funding since they are easier to access. Nevertheless, it is seen that again being dependent on EU funding limits organizations' capacity to produce progressive projects on their own as they have to follow certain guidelines and coordinate their work with the EU agencies.

5.3.Service Delivery and Professionalism

Organizations construct service and aid delivery as central to address empowerment

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of women refugees. There are three main axes in their service delivery; namely casework, basic material support, and integration activities (accommodation and access to social security systems along with designing some social and cultural activities). Social and cultural activities are usually arranged with external partners. Organizations are also engaged with "long-term impact" activities, such as advocacy, yet, it is not treated as an integral part of aid work. This is because it is not "delivered" to or carried out on the field or with women refugees. Instead, aid professionals, who have the necessary expertise and work in the external departments do it for the sake of refugee women. Refugee women are not involved in these spaces, which will be discussed further in the next section. Organizations mainly perceive empowerment as responding to gender-differentiated needs. The way that they engage with aid work underscores professionalism and expertise, which limits the participation and contribution of women refugees into the organizational structures.

The casework, social support, and integration activities are intertwined due to the legal rights based approach that organizations operate under. Hence, aid workers mainly identify helping women to access their constitutional rights or international protection under the Geneva Convention, as their primary goal in service delivery. The focus is on supporting them in reception, preparing them for interviews, assisting them about the asylum procedures, and protecting them from detention. Some organizations carry out activities outside France (in overseas territories) to assist refugees and immigrants (including women) such as screening detention centers and ensuring that they have access to basic rights. Yet, it is still unclear on the websites if they have specific programs designed for women. These efforts that take place in overseas territories can be seen as an

extension of EU policies that aim to create safe havens for refugees to prevent them from coming to Europe.

Service delivery is conducted via holding weekly drop-ins by some organizations. Drop-ins are mostly preferred by the smaller women-only associations while bigger organizations, which have government contracts, require to book individual meetings beforehand. During the drop-ins, women get help about their asylum-cases. Smaller, women-only organizations sometimes provide information about the asylum system to women but these are not structural or systemic efforts for educating women to logically evaluate the advice they are getting. Instead, they are spontaneous answers to specific issues identified by the women.

Apart from protection, organizations indicate that providing social support is a vital part of their service delivery. Examples for social support can be listed as securing access to basic resources for survival like food, clothing, phone credit, shelter alongside entering women into the social security system. Joining the social security system enables women to access public resources such as health insurance, retirement schemes, unemployment salary, public housing, family allowance, and credit line to start their lives in France. These are framed to be significant for achieving empowerment of women refugees since many aid workers claimed that the bigger discussions about abuse and violence only come after covering those needs. This makes women feel secure enough to open up about their traumatic experiences and ask for help eventually. Especially in camp situations in Northern France, many aid workers noted that there is really no opportunity to share personal stories in emergency situations, in which women do not have access to basic needs.

The outbreak of Covid-19 limited the ability of organizations to continue their service delivery. Organizations had to stop their weekly drop-ins and cancel appointments. Due to the decreased capabilities of organizations, aid workers reported that they had to define priorities and thus mainly addressed emergency needs about asylum applications of women who are already in the system. Additionally, they created Whatsapp groups and hotlines for maintaining the social support mechanisms and protecting women from gender based violence. The lockdowns created major setbacks in mental counseling programs since therapies for the victims of violence were claimed to be difficult to maintain. Women refugees were afraid of the virus and they didn't want to go out. Aid workers expressed that they tried video therapy but it didn't quite work because many women live in studio apartments and they are usually others in the room during the online sessions, which harmed the privacy and confidentiality of the meetings. Moreover, some organizations claimed that digitalization of the services has created additional challenges during service delivery as they "caught off guard" and had to make changes in the aid structures very quickly to continue assisting women.

Organizations have clearly divided services for asylum-seeking and refugee women. For asylum-seekers the priority is on the registration, providing accommodation, and social support whereas for women refugees the focus is on integration services such as accessing employment, training, accommodation, or other social benefits such as an unemployment salary. This distinction is plausible as they might have different needs. Yet, what caught my attention is that the service population is again divided and categorized based on their legal status and dealt with by experts in the relevant field. Another significant theme that I noticed, which highlights professionalism, is that the state is again

quite salient in the asylum sector. The operations in the asylum system are shared by the public agencies and private aid organizations, which secure government contracts to do what the state intends to do. More specifically, these aid organizations govern and regulate registration and accommodation centers in the name of the government and they direct vulnerable women to the state agencies for accelerating their asylum procedure. Even the smaller women-only organizations, who identified themselves to be militant, get at least 90% of their funding from the state. Resulting from this dependence, aid and service structures are centralized and professionalized. Aid is seen to be a neutral and bureaucratic tool by the aid workers, it is divorced from political and cultural connotations. Organizations therefore, do not think their work is affected by being dependent on state funding. One advocate expressed "We do basic service delivery, like meeting daily needs and providing aid, money, apartment, and jobs. We do not speak about values or politics. So I do not know how politics might affect our work". As this testimony indicates, aid workers define their in line with professionalism, which is unrelated to political dynamics. Within this context, women's empowerment as an organizational goal also gets a technical character, which is not concerned with justice but survival of women. At the same time, it is silent on the power relations in aid schemes that perpetuates "givers" and "receivers" or "us vs. them" rhetoric. Aid workers do not realize that they replace the decision making power of actual women refugees and make them dependent on aid schemes.

Furthermore, under the category of integration and social support services, organizations provide specific health services to women refugees. These can be listed as gynecology, midwife, psychotherapy and osteopathy (for the victims of violence) services. In general, according to the aid workers, the most controversial types of services given to

women is the ones about sexual health and family planning. These are framed to be empowering for women so that they can understand their rights in France. These services are provided both at the individual and group levels. An aid worker based in Paris stated "We give information about the public health system and their rights since they might not know the system in France. We also give information about sexual health, STDs and access to contraception, family planning and abortion. We identify their needs and discuss their options in private meetings. We sometimes arrange collective workshops with men, which are not about personal issues but about the system in general". I think this is the only salient theme that organizations define their service delivery in accordance with women's rights rather than gender differentiated needs. This is because not only women are given information about their rights but also organizations include men into these sessions for raising awareness of such rights. This refers to individual autonomy of women. In all other fields, aid delivery is not about autonomy but more like a technical transaction happening between the experts and receivers.

Organizations design social and cultural activities for women specifically as an extension of their integration services. However, these are arranged in partnership with external organizations. An aid worker from Paris explained "With other organizations, we sometimes arrange activities to see theater, go to local festivals, participate in gym, French and writing classes. We have a gardening class in one of our centers. It depends on the center really. Women are very happy doing these activities because they are lonely during the day since they are less likely to have jobs compared to men. Having these types of activities are very helpful to overcome isolation". Participation in such activities is completely voluntary. As reflected in this statement, they are not structured efforts and

availability is contingent on the centers. These activities do not have any political character, which aim to enable women to socialize. Moreover, they are arranged by external actors which demonstrates a narrow (contrary to a holistic) perception of aid by the organizations. They do not think that it is their responsibility to organize such activities.

The only exception might be a women-only activist organization in Paris. On their website, they indicate that they hold solidarity lunches for women to come together and also a workshop for women to create banners and slogans for the demonstrations. Although many of these stopped during the lockdowns, these efforts indicate that they adopt a holistic perception of aid work since they view social activities as an integral part of their work. Moreover, these activities have a political character. They hold a weekly meeting to provide a speaking space for exiled women, which is led by a female doctor, which is both a support group and an information session. Also, when I contacted an activist from this organization, she said that they have recently held a session to discuss the election of Kamala Harris as the first women-of-color vice president. Yet, she was not really open about such activities so I am not sure if these are more like political debates or community announcements. I sensed that she was reluctant to give me more information because I was not a community member.

What is more, organizations perceive creating women-only spaces as a significant part of their service delivery. Many of the aid workers expressed that creating a segregated space for women has an empowering effect on women because they are more likely to discuss violence, share their experiences and ask for help. The founder of a women-only organization in Paris argued "When we were at the stage of establishing the organization, we didn't want to include any men but create a space for women only, where they can

speak freely about violence. Actually, this request has come directly from the women, who wanted to discuss their problems outside family obligations. It is easier to talk about violence and their experiences when men are not around. It is very important to have a special place dedicated for women to address violence because they are intimate and traumatic experiences. It is easier to overcome shame this way. And once they decide to disclose their experiences they are much closer to getting help". Likewise, a volunteer from a women-only militant organization in Paris stated "It is easier for women to express themselves in a women-only space because most of them suffer violence by men. They become more autonomous and able to take action in a women-only environment. We think single-sex places are important for women but we are not separatists, we want a truly mixed society". In both examples, creating a single-sex space is identified as a factor for women to express and confront with violence and go forward with reporting, which is seen to be an empowering proces by the organizations. Moreover, the latter testimony about having a mixed society hints to the legal status based approaches promoted by the aid sector, which is compatible with the political culture in France. The emphasis is on legal equality between men and women and empowerment is narrowly identified within the limits of republicanism and universalism.

Organizations operating in emergency camp situations in Northern France also draw attention to the importance of creating women-only spaces. Accordingly, assigning segregated space for women is particularly required for enhancing the physical and mental safety of women since camps are usually dominated by men. Women refugees report that not only they feel insecure due to the risk of sexual violence and harassment but also they are less likely to access basic resources. Some single mothers express that they cannot

breastfeed in the camp areas. Recognizing these issues, organizations actively work to establish a confidential space for only women. The husbands, male relatives or partners are not allowed in these spaces. Organizations target listening to and providing basic needs of women in these spaces alongside designing social activities for them to feel comfortable and safe, which might encourage them to report violence. Such activities don't necessarily have a political character. An aid worker from a women-only organization in Dunkirk stated "Sometimes we design jewelry-making or knitting activities, which are stereotypically feminine because women feel the most safest and relaxed while doing these activities. They are assured that they are in a confidential space, which is closed to men. They are not judged for not having certain (political) opinions. This is a safe space, where they come together and talk about what they want to or not talk about. They create relations with the service providers because they need to trust us if they want to go forward with a complicated issue. Bigger conversations about being an asylum-seeking woman only come after we create a reliable relationship". As the testimony demonstrates, sustaining women's specific needs and creating a gender segregated environment is seen as the initial step of providing further protection and thus contributing empowerment of refugee women. Additionally, in transit locations like Northern France, organizations arrange social activities that are typically associated with women as well as gender segregated places to make sure that women can rest. An aid worker explained "There are usually no women-specific activities in the camps or women do not have a confidential space, where they can come together with other women. They don't have a place where they can rest and enjoy space. Our organization offers relaxed ordinary space for them so that they can rest before their journey to the UK and to a certain degree to feel that they are getting back to their

normal life after a dangerous journey from their home countries to France". Therefore, such arrangements also target trauma recovery and energy boosting.

Another mixed organization in Calais, which offers accommodation to asylum-seekers, expresses that it particularly pays attention to advocate space for women. The founder of the organization expressed "We make sure that single women stay with single women. We never put unaccompanied children in the same room with adult women. We advocate space for them in this manner, we make sure that women enjoy private space, independently from gender hierarchies that regulate and organize space everyday in favor of men". In this manner, organizations located in urban France report that they advocate space for women via creating women-only activities and space. Women are welcome to bring their kids to these arrangements, which enhances their participation in these activities. Again, organizations arrange activities that are typically associated with women such as knitting, tea time and flower arrangement. This is a tactic to make sure that women can come without their partners or male relatives and do something on their own.

Many of the aid workers that I spoke with identify addressing gender-differentiated needs as a contributing factor to women refugees' empowerment. The way they associate gender-differentiated needs and empowerment doesn't entail agency to women refugees or recognize their potential. It is rather concerned with the organizational goal of increasing the accessibility and effectiveness of their service schemes via integrating gender as a variable in the service structure. Therefore, it lacks a feminist character while emracing a technocratic one. It is not a long-term goal about enhancing the autonomy of women and authentic representation of women but about adding more women to the aid structures and increasing their access to services. This is, of course, crucial for the well-being of women

in the short run but without a mechanism working towards enhancing their self-resilience and agency in the long run, it will make women dependent on the aid structures and external actors. Moreover, focusing solely on gender-differentiated needs define gender as a biological binary construct almost, which is silent to gender structures that systemically oppresses women.

Here are some examples for the ways organizations employ a gender approach (not a feminist) in their service delivery for better serving women, evaluating how gender affects asylum-seeking and arrange related organizational procedures and activities. An aid worker based in Lyon explained "We implement policies and guidelines in France and refugee-producing countries for meeting the specific needs of women. We try to integrate gender dimensions into all our recommendations, operational support, and integration to better represent their needs. We give them support, which takes gender into account". Similarly, another aid worker stated "We adopt a gender lens to see what is out there specific to women. We also produce gender-disaggregated data. Getting trained about their options and rights is itself something". Lastly, an aid worker based in Paris "We want to make sure that our services are equally accessible to women or that services given to women are equal to men. We realize that the first question we ask women refugees is if they have any children. If it is a man we ask him about his occupation in your country. So the way we welcome foreigners, how we represent them, and how to identify problems due to gender is important. We pay attendance to have an awareness about how gender affects migration impacts our activities and services. Like should we create separate kitchens for women to make them more secure or can they use mixed ones?". These statements demonstrate that refugee women's empowerment is downgraded to responding to gender-

differentiated needs. Most importantly, it is treated as a goal to be achieved by the aid workers, not women themselves. It is about adopting a gender lens in the service structures or producing gender-disaggregated data, which are demarcated from social justice or politics.

Accessibility to services is narrowly defined as having an equal number of men and women in the service delivery and integration services, which again highlights how organizations perceive women's empowerment as a technocratic goal. An aid worker from Lyon, who specifically works in the area of social and economic integration of refugees expressed "Our objective is to have 50% women in all our projects. There are still more men due to male breadwinner bias although there is an upward trend in the women coming to France. We think that inclusivity is better achieved if we give attention to gender. We use an inclusive methodology to support women. We made our programs more accessible to women via helping them directly". Hence, adopting a gender lens has an instrumental character for increasing aid efficiency and ensuring the participation of women in the aid structures, which serves to the organizational objectives, namely gender-mainstreaming. Yet, the character of women's participation is rather passive and spontaneous, which does not recognize their agency and potential contribution to the aid structures or the host society in the long run. There are many diverse factors that limit women's accessibility of services. For example, an aid worker noted women could not come to the office-hours when it gets dark. In this regard, some aid workers said that the digitalization of services due to Covid-19 actually increased participation of women in activities since the ones who live in the outer zones of cities and cannot afford to travel can join the online programs this way.

Emphasizing gender-differentiated needs to address women's empowerment might justify the imposing victimized and vulnerable categories on women refugees. As discussed in the previous section, organizations often identify refugee women as victims of gender based violence by default for accelerating the process for them to access citizenship and social benefits. Therefore, being a refugee becomes identical to being a victim. In this manner, organizations discuss that integrating a gender lens into aid delivery means offering tailored support to the women victims of violence. An aid worker revealed "We pay particular attention to vulnerability in all of our programs. We don't have a specific program designed for women but we adopt a global approach to the significance of gender in all of our activities. This usually means offering specialized assistance to victims of violence, who are mainly women. How they experience the asylum system and what they might need once they arrive in France. Victims of violence might prefer to work with female aid workers or interpreters so we provide them. We work with the government to accelerate the process or make sure that they get priority support". The commonly established association between women refugees and victims of violence creates a tension from a feminist perspective since implies women are victims because they are women. It does not assign any identity for women refugees beyond being victims. Moreover, the needs of women are downgraded to the needs of victims. In other words, holding a victimized status is the only area that the gender differentiated needs are recognized as if it is the only source for refugee women's marginalization. At this point, I believe gender, women and empowerment are used interchangeably; it has a superficial understanding of the realities of women refugees as well as the asylum-seeking and how it intersects with greater political structures and identity makers. Such narrow understandings perpetuates

post-colonial imaginings of non-White and non-Western refugee women, who are portrayed as vulnerable and victimized because of their culture. It also perpetuates a hierarchical setting in the aid structures between cultural women and local experts. Hence, it becomes justified to use professional expertise to deal with refugee women and avoid participatory approaches in organizational structures.

Although not preferring to collaborate with them, organizations attach great significance to get feedback from women refugees. This is the only salient, systematic and structured effort by the organizations to directly include women's thoughts and concerns in aid and service delivery. Aid workers assert that getting feedback is a tactic for including women into the organizational schemes and give them a voice. An aid worker explained "We are not a refugee-led organization but we work with women for data and also for understanding their situation. The feedback eventually shapes our actions, priorities and programs. We mainly represent them, and their interests and rights in external platforms and based on their feedback and our conversations with them". As this testimony indicates, women do not have the power to represent themselves since they are dependent on aid workers for communicating their issues. Women get a secondary role in the process; the final decision is still made by the aid workers about priorities based on their expertise and knowledge. This highlights that the aid structures are not participatory, which harms agency and autonomy of women. Likewise, another aid worker from Paris stated "We always work with women and ask them to give feedback. It is important to hear what they think about addressing issues properly". As it is indicated, Feedback plays an instrumental role for aid workers to understand the realities of refugee women. Women's opinions are seen as valuable as long as they serve the organizational goals of increasing aid efficiency

and identifying gender differentiated needs more effectively. The feedback systems are not concerned with democratizing the decision-making processes or opening spaces for direct interventions from women refugees.

Furthermore, organizations located in Northern France disclose that their feedback structures are less formal and structured compared to the organizations in urban France. Operating in camp situations, their capacity is limited to have more established feedback systems. This is because they are usually understaffed and thus prioritize responding to emergency (survival) needs of women. Nevertheless, they try to coordinate actions with bigger women organizations such as working in the field for improving their feedback systems and ensuring that they address women's needs. An aid worker, who works for a small organization that aims to provide shelter for vulnerable refugees expressed "We do regular check-ins and individual chats with women to make sure that everything is fine. We work with bigger organizations for addressing their needs, if they are uncomfortable or disturbed they can file reports or talk to them who are more trained in women-specific needs". Yet, even these bigger women organizations might have limited resources for facilitating feedback mechanisms because of emergency camp situations. An aid worker from one of those bigger women organizations stated "Our feedback system is quite informal as well. We ask and talk with women on an individual basis. We want to improve it but transparency is an issue. As of today, we don't have a physical permanent space. We are just a mobile van service going around going to certain spaces. We cannot offer a safe space to women". As this example demonstrates, offering a physical and structured safe space for women refugees is the first step of getting meaningful feedback from women. In these spaces, women can be more honest about their needs and likely to report violence

and abuse. Moreover, a few aid workers mentioned that language is an important barrier for getting feedback. Since they work in a transit area women don't have time to learn French and providing interpreters is difficult.

Apart from getting feedback, organizations do not have any mechanisms for including refugee women into the aid structures and organizational processes. The ways how organizations define their central mission as assisting refugee women to receive legal protection and status justifies the reluctance for adopting participatory and collaborative approaches. There are none or fewer opportunities for women to take proactive roles in the organizations because they are not lawyers. It will take a long time to study law and be qualified enough to enter the organizational structures. This is an important barrier for their participation. A women-only organization in Paris, which is refugee-led and identifies itself as a militant organization, underlines the importance of having legal expertise as it follows: "It is possible to be a volunteer in the association. There is no employee in the association, we are actually all volunteers. But it takes a lot of time and availability to acquire the necessary administrative and legal knowledge, and know how to mail, organize files etc., and therefore become activists". Although some organizations might offer volunteering roles, women's participation is not straightforward since they require to build a certain expertise even to become activists. This might work against community building. Women who do not have any expertise on legal matters and have other skills should be given opportunities too.

Some organizations do not prefer to collaborate with women until they get papers while some of them do not let them volunteer at all. This is because they think it might jeopardize their safety. An aid worker from Paris stated "Sometimes, asylum-seeking

women might get small volunteering positions in our accommodation centers but this is not really preferred because it might expose her to many things. Such as assisting a workshop about sexual health, which is prone to have many disagreements might jeopardize her position in the community". The same worker added that they sometimes orient women to specialized partner organizations if they really want to take active roles. She continues "We divert women to external organizations if they want to get further advice or engage in cultural and social activities or political issues like about the situation of women and LGBT migrants. However, in general, they don't want to take part in politics before getting their papers. They are more likely to volunteer in humanitarian organizations like giving out food, helping children or homeless". In this regard, it can be argued that the agency of refugee women is limited to humanitarian activities since they do not really require expertise or employ a political identity. This might impose the silenced political agency of women refugees based on the nation state system since losing citizenship practically means your political capacity. Refugee women might prefer to take active roles in humanitarian organizations not because they are apolitical but because they might fear to carry out political activities due to their insecure immigration status. I think this is overlooked by the organizations. Another important point in this statement is that aid workers mainly see collaborative and inclusionary approaches irrelevant to their work. Thus, they divert refugees who want to act to external organizations, which are identified to be experts and specialized in certain fields. This highlights how they see their work to be value-free and divorced from politics alongside constructing aid work in line with professionalism and expertise.

The theme of professionalism is quite salient in the ways that organizations identify their work, which is also framed to be supporting refugee women's empowerment. In other words, aid workers believe refugee women are more likely to be empowered if they do their jobs right. This means that they carry out professionalism in their relationships with the clients; they shouldn't discriminate and harm and should use their knowledge and expertise for the best interest of women; they should also show respect to fellow workers in the aid structures. This narrative resonates with the idea that empowerment is something related to the work of professionals and "provided" to the receivers, which disrupts the agency of women refugees. The advocacy and awareness-raising activities reflect professionalism too. Organizations do not allow refugee women to enter these structures and carry it out with experts only. This will be discussed in depth in the next section.

During the data collection, I came across a few exceptional projects that make space for the direct involvement of women refugees in aid structures, which work against the hierarchical settings between the aid workers and women recipients. A major example for this is a dance workshop specifically for the most vulnerable refugee women such as homeless, paperless and victims of sexual gender-based violence. It is designed by an organization based in Paris, which focuses on giving free medical service to women refugees and asylum seekers. The medical doctor behind this project revealed they aim to create a safe space for women for re-experiencing, making peace with and reappropriating their bodies through peer support to create social bonds. Another objective is to improve their mental health and make them able to express themselves. The refugee women decide what to perform each week under the theme "togetherness". There aren't any facilitators; they don't take guidance from anyone and women are free to do what they want. In this

way, the doctor asserted, they target the traditional power dynamics between the caretaker (doctor) and the client (patient). She argued that "We normally adopt a strict medical approach when dealing with refugee women. People come to us because they suffer from violence and they want to talk about what happened to them. We are very focused on medical symptoms as doctors. So we wanted to create another space where the body can meet the mind not only in a medical sense. Rather it can be about pleasure, joy, collectivity and sharing it with other women". What I think is important is that although this program is created by a medical organization, which is an even more difficult field to acquire expertise in compared to law, it still puts effort into establishing participatory and collaborative activities. It adopts a holistic attitude on aid or service delivery, which comes up with creative programs for women refugees to express themselves and enhance their agency . The same medical organization is planning to open up a women's center in Paris so that refugee women can spend all their day without feeling alone. One of the doctors stated "If we can give them a fixed space where they can rest, talk, socialize and find other women and discuss their experiences, it will accelerate the healing processes". They were unable to open this center at the time of writing due to lack of funding. Yet, this is a good example for reflecting how their perception on aid is holistic, which aims to achieve community-building and develop belongingness for the long term well-being of women rather than promoting clientelism and professionalism.

Another example for participatory projects is by an organization in Paris. The aid workers expressed they normally don't collaborate with women refugees. However, in both of the examples below, refugee women took the initiative and started the programs via pressuring the aid workers and sharing their ideas with them. This means that there isn't a

systematic effort to encourage women to establish their own programs but it depends on individual initiatives. The first of these projects is a sightseeing program that aims to bring refugee and local women together. An aid worker from the organization explained "Some refugee women proposed to us to visit Paris with French women. The idea is to experience Paris together via exchanging experiences and feelings. We liked this idea because the French public doesn't know a lot about asylum seekers. Also, none of ordinary citizens have probably been around in Paris with a refugee woman". The second project was initiated by a woman living in one of the accommodation centers of the organization in Southern France. This woman proposed to organize a gym program, which is open for both refugees and local French women. She wore a hijab while exercising during the classes. French women who joined the programs were very surprised to see that one can work out with a hijab, which helped them to overcome their prejudices. Both of the projects have innovative and progressive characteristics since they bring refugee and local women together and enable them to learn from each other. They entail agency to refugee women as they can become 'educators' too.

Finally, an example for participatory projects might be a one-time French language project that involved art and testimonies from refugees. The project was open to participation to both men and women. The number of women was significantly lesser than men. The main objective of the project is to improve refugees' French skills. The organization presented the project by claiming that everyone should have access to learning French as it is the first step of successful integration. Although the project might provide chances to express themselves, it embraces a humanitarian character focusing on women's basic needs. The participation of women in the project was more about displaying their

vulnerabilities to draw public attention. The stories of women did not give any messages about power or resilience of women but more about their tragedies. They showcased how women survive based on the aid they receive from such organizations and thus to convince the public to donate money. Therefore, the project does not support empowerment but instrumentalizes women for the benefit of the organization.

5.4. Advocacy and Awareness-Raising

This section reviews how organizations carry out advocacy activities for supporting refugee women's empowerment. Emphasizing legal protection in work, the way that aid workers view advocacy has a technical and professional character too. Advocacy actions are mainly concerned with policy-making and carried out with aid professionals, state officials or EU authorities rather than facilitating grassroots activism or community organizing. (Many aid workers claimed that Covid-19 caused delays in their advocacy activities as their meetings with the state agencies were canceled or postponed). This points out to the hierarchical setting in aid structures. Advocacy too is identified to require expertise to a certain degree. The bigger organizations have clearly divided advocacy teams and departments, whose work is different from service delivery. In smaller women-only organizations, advocacy is usually carried out by the lawyers, who hold expertise in the legal and political system. This section portrays the advocacy tactics identified by the organizations as enlarging the articles of Geneva Convention, publishing research and data, carrying out advocacy with other professionals and organizations, creating alliances between organizations for combating double violence, and training social workers.

Aid workers outline advocacy activities such as giving recommendations to the officials, monitoring and analysis of new developments in the national and European

system, developing networks and partnerships, joining policy debates, and collaborating on projects on both national and EU levels. Advocacy is defined by aid workers as operational activities, projects, and partnerships on topics such as ending detention, providing free legal aid, running free health centers for refugees and providing special assistance to victims of violence. The primary advocacy theme related to women refugees is to offer protection to the victims of gender-based violence. Therefore, organizations pressure the state for implementing the EU frameworks about the identification, registration and reception conditions for victims. Accordingly, advocacy is essentially constructed as developing national and international projects, creating partnerships with external organizations and agencies and getting consultation, policy-making, and exchange between practitioners to better identify the vulnerable women. The focus is again on the vulnerability of women rather than their resilience or agency.

Another advocacy activity, according to the aid workers, is lobbying, which mainly targets law reform to enhance the conditions that vulnerable women can access to legal protection or citizenship status in France. In this regard, organizations work to enlarge the ground of the "belonging to a social group" article of the Geneva Convention for making more women fit into it. For instance, an aid worker from Paris expressed "This year we changed the social group article for Nigerian sex trafficking victims. Before, only one part of Nigeria and practices in that area were considered to source gender-related persecution (specifically sex trafficking) but then we worked on a document to show the government that people who live in other parts are also exposed to gender-related persecution. So basically, our aim is to enlarge the "social group" article to help more women. And to trigger policy-making for addressing the needs of women victims of violence and to make

the French law more responsive. We do similar activities about forced marriage, female genital mutilation and domestic violence too". As this example indicates, advocacy campaigns mainly target the state and its policies for ensuring they are accountable to women's issues and gender-based violence, which being a refugee woman becomes identical to being a victim again. The focus is again the victimized status as if they do not have any other aspects in their identity.

Advocacy activities are funded by the state or the EU Commission just like any other operation of organizations. Yet, as discussed in the previous section, aid workers do not think being dependent on public funding affects their work. Instead they identify their organizations to be independent and private. This is because advocacy work is seen as a professional activity and divorced from grassroots activism. It is almost seen to be a value-free process, which cannot be affected by political structures, values or power relations. It has a humanitarian character, which offers legal protection to women victims of violence.

Furthermore, aid workers also identify publishing research and data as one their major advocacy activities. The production of written documents is also seen as an advocacy action that serves to feminism since they provide information about gendered dimensions of the national asylum system as well as gender disaggregated data. The bigger mixed organizations offer monthly bulletins about the contemporary legal and political developments on asylum in France and the EU, fact-checking, stating their positions about polices, and drawing attention of the authorities to certain issues, which might sometimes include remarks on gender or women refugees. They also publish press releases and blog entries to give general information about the situation of refugees in France, practical information about their service delivery and the future of the asylum in Europe. The parts

about women refugees and gender are written by the women departments of the organizations. What all these documents have in common is that language used is very bureaucratic and professional. Moreover, it is not argumentative; rather informative. They are composed of statistics and technical information about the legal obstacles in the asylum system. This is not a surprise considering that they are written by professionals in the asylum sector exclusively. In these reports, there are never quotes, statements or testimonies from refugee women. This means that they are not given any opportunities for speaking the public directly, They are dependent on the ways how aid workers choose to express their realities, which underlines that advocacy does not have a participatory character. It is carried out by professionals on behalf of women refugees.

Similarly, the language used on the websites of organizations is also quite bureaucratic and professional. Even the design of the websites are very professional and organized. There is usually one color design, which makes them look like a website of a government agency or a clinic. There are no pictures of refugees, which underlines that they adopt a client and professional relationship rather than community building approaches. There is an explicit use of policy-making language. I've come across some cases where you can find testimonies but all of them are from asylum-seeking men and don't give autonomy messages at all. Instead, they refer to a humanitarian goal for attracting the reader to understand how vulnerable and victimized the refugees are. The same applies to the social media accounts of the organizations. Unlike the organizations in the UK, social media platforms are not actively used by the organizations. When they use such outlets, their posts are usually about developments in the legal system, academic research and policy-making. The most active platform used by organizations is Facebook,

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which is also quite popular among smaller women-only organizations. Aid workers from these organizations assert that this is because their websites are not up to date and they prefer to use Facebook for conveying messages. The authentic representation and visibility of women is very limited as organizations usually post pictures of or by employees. When they post photos of refugees either men or heterosexual families dominates these photos. The use of social media platforms is not concerned with giving messages regarding agency or resilience of women at all. Instead, it is about spreading information about rights to the public and related authorities. These characteristics imply that the framing of advocacy is related to providing information which showcases that advocacy doesn't have an activist but expert sense.

Relatedly, organizations do not really view advocacy as something to be done with women refugees. Instead, it is something to be done for them. Therefore, they don't really collaborate with women or integrate them into the advocacy schemes. In other words, women are not given active roles in the community because the way they define advocacy doesn't have a political but a professional character. In some cases, organizations might offer small voluntary roles to women for assisting aid workers in their accommodation centers. The type of roles they are allowed to take are usually in the area of service delivery not advocacy, which harms their women's political agency and authorship. As one aid worker expressed "We don't really offer any positions or places to politically active women. This is political engagement but our aim is to assist refugees. So it is not the forefront of our organization". As this testimony indicates, the organizations do not see aid in a holistic way. advocacy work is a clearly defined area, which is external to service delivery. It is also demarcated from politics and operates under humanitarian and objective

values. Promoting clientelism in the aid structures, organizations do not think providing opportunities for women to express themselves or engage in politics is not related to their work.

The same understanding applies to smaller women-only organizations too. The founder of a small women-only organization in Paris stated "We are legal experts on violence, we engage in some lobbying activities but women do not participate in these. With actual women asylum-seekers we only engage in service delivery. We don't do political campaigning with them but with our partners, namely other organizations that focus on women and gender". Advocacy is constructed as a professional activity, which should be carried out with other professionals who have the required expertise. An aid worker, who works in the women's department of a bigger mixed organization in Paris, argued that their advocacy actions are based on their daily work with women "Our advocacy activities are based on working with women but women don't participate in the campaigns. Yet, our recommendations are based on our daily work with women, so for me, advocacy means understanding what's happening on the field and to represent their best interest and rights". Although she acknowledges that advocacy actions should serve to address the real life problems that women refugees experience everyday, the agency of refugee women is overlooked in these structures. Refugee women's experiences only have an instrumental value to aid workers, who get to decide about priorities and issues when shaping advocacy messages. This perpetuates a dependency of women on aid structures for self-expression. It also reinforces a hierarchy between local and foreign women, in which local women are assigned more decision power because of their expertise. The same aid worker mentioned that they are members of a European network (ECRE) that are

composed of civil society organizations. Some of these actors are refugee-led organizations and the ECRE intends to increase their participation in the debate. I believe this again underscores professionalism. The civil actors which can participate in the discussion should be formal actors that exist in an organizational logic. In other words, women should be a part of an organization or be represented through organizations to join the conversation. There is no defined space for their individual agency or representation but they have to fit into professional and structured bodies.

Moreover, as organizations don't adopt participatory approaches, they don't encourage women and refugees to act or take active roles in the organization. If women want more, they are directed to external organizations that are specialized in different fields such as women's or LGBTI rights. Yet, many aid workers argued that it almost never happens because women refugees usually don't want to engage in political action before getting their papers. It is more likely for them to get roles in charity and humanitarian organizations. I believe the aid workers fail to see that this is not because refugee women are apolitical. Instead, it is a strategic calculation for their benefit resulting from their insecure legal status. If they are given more opportunities, they would want to act collectively to influence long-term change. Moreover, this example shows that there is a clear distinction between the operations and responsibilities of distinct organizations in the sector. Some are for political activism, in which women can act, while some others are only for offering assistance and aid. This highlights that they do not employ a holistic lens when thinking about aid. They do not believe in fluidity among roles, objectives or operational in services but in clearly divided roles and structures in the sectors and within organizations.

The two organizations that I interviewed expressed that women refugees can get active roles inside. Both of these organizations are community-based and women-only activist organizations. Yet, as discussed in the previous section, both of them highlighted it is not a straightforward process since taking roles are difficult for women if they don't have the necessary expertise: "There is no employee in the association, we are actually all volunteers. But it takes a lot of time and availability to acquire the necessary administrative and legal knowledge, and know how to mail, organize files etc., and therefore become activists". This indicates that collaboration is tricky even in smaller, women-only and more activist organizations, which is a direct result of prioritizing legal protection approaches in the sector as well as viewing advocacy narrowly as a professional activity.

Organizations don't collaborate with women refugees but they attach great significance to creating partnerships with other organizations. Partnerships are limited to other professional and formal organizations that carry our work about women refugees, which have a certain degree of expertise on gender, asylum, and law. As discussed in the first section, they engage in formal projects at the EU level, such as TRIPS (to design tools for the needs and concerns of women working with the EU Commission). They are also members of various networks such as the European Asylum Support Office Vulnerability Network and its Consultative Forum, Platform on Human Trafficking by the EU Commission, the End Female Genital Mutilation European Network and the EU Statelessness Network, which all mainly combat with different type of gender-related persecutions that victimize women refugees.

Organizations define working with partners as an important part of their advocacy both in France and in countries of origin, journey and transit countries to realize women's

specific needs. Therefore, some of their work is not limited to France. Congo, Niger, Lebanon, Albania, and Armenia are few examples for the countries that organizations operate outside France. A few bigger mixed organizations work in these countries for supporting the rights of refugees and engaging in preventative actions such as assisting victims of violence to reach justice in the country, improving the conditions in detention centers, observing elections, providing advice, assisting reception centers, and carrying out exploratory missions. These activities are again highly professional and require expertise as they mainly target policy-making at the state and international level. Even in local level partnerships in these countries, organizations do not prefer to collaborate with grassroots community organizations but professional and specialized agencies who have expertise on gender-based persecutions.

Similarly, smaller women-only activist organizations also place greater importance on expertise and professionalism in their advocacy actions. According to the aid workers in these organizations, this is because without the required expertise their power is limited to attract policy-making and without policy-making the implementation is slow and not coherent. A volunteer from an activist feminist organization located in Paris expressed "With our partners, we carry out advocacy actions on mainly two subjects: firstly, the right of asylum (for a better recognition of persecution linked to gender) and violence against foreign women. Last year, we met the director of OFPRA(*Office Français de Protection des Réfugiés et Apatrides- French Office for the Protection of Refugees and Stateless Persons*) and members of his team. We were once received by the Ministry of the Interior to discuss about violence against women. When there is a new bill, we contact deputies to support amendments. In these dialogues, there are only professional activists, because these

are technical discussions and also you cannot go there as a crowded group. However, with our contacts with the officials from the Paris Police Headquarters about the rights of undocumented women we formed a delegation composed of many undocumented women. It was at a time when there was a lot of mobilization of undocumented people. But then there was no more time to organize that, and then the requests had become so diverse that it was difficult to make an intervention that remained coherent". This shows that even in smaller women-only organizations advocacy activities are not participatory and women refugees' contribution is limited. Advocacy is not viewed to be about refugee women expressing themselves but pushing for policy-making and formal interventions to pressure the government to introduce related laws.

Furthermore, organizations frame that training frontline workers working to better assist women victims of violence as a part of their advocacy activities that support women refugees' empowerment. Many employees draw attention to the significance of thinking violence from a cross-cultural angle since domestic violence is more difficult to detect than political violence. Therefore, educating social workers operate without discrimination is crucial for the well-being of women. In this regard, many organizations advocate for the training of both public and private sector workers. They arrange information sessions for making more responsive to the gender-based violence and insecurities of refugees for better assisting women and addressing their needs. These sessions give information about the rights of women, gender-related persecution, the foreigners law, and mechanisms that can be used for preventing violence. Refugee women do not join these sessions as they are only open to professionals, activists or sometimes students, which underscores again that

advocacy is seen as something to be carried out with professionals only, according to the organizations.

Organizations that have a special focus on gender and women express that they carry out advocacy actions in partnership with other organizations under their coalition ADFEM (*Action et Droits des Femmes Migrantes et Exilées- Action and Rights of Migrant and Exiled Women*). The ADFEM is the most visible and organized network that focuses on women refugees and their rights in France. I've interviewed all members of the ADFEM collective. There is a great diversity among members as some of them are bigger organizations that have government contracts while some others are smaller refugee-led, women-led and more militant organizations. Smaller organizations reported that ADFEM is quite useful for them because they don't have the capacity to engage in campaigning on their own and ADFEM enables them to do so. Despite the diversity among actors, the emphasis is again mainly on the protection of women and the actions target the state and policy making. Advocacy is therefore carried out by the professionals and actual refugee women are not present in the organizations. For this reason, advocacy activities do not have a grassroots but formal and professional character.

ADFEM specifically targets double violence in the context of women refugees and pushes for legal reform to recognize victims of violence in France and the European Union. Advocacy is defined as participating in social debates and engaging in legal action to improve the entitled rights of refugee women. The coalition meets once in a month normally but they stopped meeting during the Covid-19 lockdowns. The founder of a women-only organization based in Paris, which is also a member of ADFAM, discussed their work as the following: "We support the rights of foreign women. The main objective

is fighting against double violence. Double violence refers to the fact that women can be victims both in the domestic and the public spheres. They can be victims because they are women and because they are foreign. For example, undocumented women victims of domestic violence cannot go to the police because they don't have a legal status and they fear it might affect their application". As can be seen in this statement, the focus is again on protecting women from violence. The members of the collective think that ADFEM and fighting with double violence serve to a feminist agenda. As one aid worker from Lyon expressed, "We fight against double violence because we want to ensure that foreign women have the same rights as French women and should be protected like them. We should shape the public opinion about equality, which is a feminist goal. Everyone has the right to be safe from violence and discrimination. No distinction should be made between foreign women and French citizens". This implies that ADFEM's main advocacy message has a legal character, which pushes for equality in front of the law. The way they define empowerment or feminism resonates with the idea of legal equality. Thus, the type of advocacy ADFEM engages in is about achieving legal protection and equality rather than enhancing the authentic representation and authorship of women refugees.

Apart from lobbying activities that shape policy-making about double violence, ADFEM also arranges awareness-raising events, in which social workers and professionals from the sector are invited. I was told that there are sometimes refugee women too in the audience but the events mainly target the participation of aid workers such as frontline workers, lawyers, advocates or politicians. They are also the ones who speak in these events. In other words, it is again the aid professionals who talk on behalf of women refugees. When I asked why they don't allow actual women to speak, many aid workers

responded that it is very difficult to find someone who is willing to talk about their situation. I believe this is not true. They are not aware of the fact that they create professional structures precisely, which are closed to the participation of women refugees from the beginning. If women were given more opportunities, they would have been more eager to share their experiences and reclaim their power back via expressing themselves.

Furthermore, the organizations express that they engage in awareness-raising activities, which contribute to the empowerment of refugee women. These activities mainly either target aid workers from the sector or the general public. Women refugees are again not present in these activities. Training is the main awareness-raising activity that targets aid as discussed previously. These sessions are informative and technocratic in nature. The awareness-raising tools targeting the general public can be listed as fact-checking brochures, games and animations for kids and adults, quizzes about migrant journeys, educational materials, and short films about the stories of refugees. Such activities aim to educate French citizens about refugeehood and eventually fight against discrimination. They aim to challenge the association between terrorism and refugees in the mainstream media, which exacerbates the insecurities of refugee women. Moreover, as many aid workers argued, many people in France do not know one can apply for asylum based on gender-related persecution. An asylum seeker is imagined to be a man traveling alone. With the help of awareness-raising activities, organizations aim to educate the general public that women also flee from violence and thus they have the right to apply for asylum in France too.

As part of awareness-raising activities, one of the organizations based in Lyon arange an annual festival called the "Migrant Scene". The main objective of the festival is

to deconstruct prejudices and restore the hospitality of French society. The festival is composed of social activities such as movie screening, public discussions or art exhibitions. Some migrant groups and cultural communities participate in these events as choirs or dance groups but they do not really give any messages about their resilience or political agency since they are mainly cultural activities.

Another organization that I interviewed organized a series of art and cultural events during the refugee week. What captivated my attention was in the art projects they collaborated with famous photographers or artists but not refugees. In other words, refugees did not express themselves but it was the famous artists that raised awareness about the problems of refugees. I found this bizarre. Why not at least facilitate cooperation between the artists and refugees?

The same organization organizes a march called the Umbrella Walk in Lyon every year. The participants, which are both refugees and citizens, carry white umbrellas in the march, which symbolizes the responsibility of host countries for protecting refugees. Not surprisingly, the main message is again about protection, which portrays them as vulnerable people who don't have any agency or capacity.

Although many organizations define advocacy and awareness-raising operations as professional activities that target policy-making and highlight expertise, there are also a few exceptions. One bigger mixed organization based in Paris addresses advocacy as participating in local, national or international political movements and campaigns. At the local and national level, they joined the Me Too movement in France. Another refugee-led organization in Paris stated that they participate in events on special days related to women such as Saint Catherine's Day and International Women's Day. Also, they once joined a

rally for undocumented women which was supported by the local feminist associations too. They are also active members of the Abolition Movement in France, which is a national collective to end prostitution. Lastly, sometimes they join events such as academic conferences, public meetings, and exhibitions about topics such as the history of women in France, gender-related violence, prostitution and the foreigners' rights, which have more political framings explicitly. As for international political movements, some smaller refugee-led organizations engage in campaigning about gender-related issues in their home countries of their members. For instance, an organization based in Paris once organized a campaign to protest the femicides in Algeria in front of the Algerian Consulate in Paris. Another migrant-led organization, which has a separate women's group publishes brochures and other written documents occasionally for providing information about gender-based violence in refugee-generating countries. In these documents, the organization adopts a border social justice approach to address issues. More specifically, it talks about migration and refugeehood in the context of North-South relations, racisim and capitalism, and it showcases how their cause for free movement cannot be demarcated from the fight against patriarchal power structures and denouncing prostitution.

5.5.Integration and Sensibilization to French Values

This section analyzes how organizations define refugee women's empowerment as integration and sensibilization to French values. Integration has a narrow and technical understanding that prioritizes refugee women's access to their entitled rights as citizens such as accessing employment or public housing. They are not concerned with offering opportunities for refugee women to engage in political action. Most of the time, organizations offer the same programs to women and men. When they arrange women-

specific integration activities, they are usually about sexual health and family planning. As for sensibilization to French values, I focus on the ways how organizations support assimilation of refugee women for their own sake, namely empowerment. These interventions mainly focus on teaching women about gender equality, secularism or republicanism, which implies that they are not capable of understanding those on their own.

Organizations associate women's empowerment with their successful integration into France. They have a narrow understanding of integration, which specifically refers to their access to the labor sector, the social security system and appropriate housing. Such services have a technical character and are divorced from any political connotations. In other words, they do not target the political agency of refugees as full citizens, rather providing them public resources "to become a productive part of the host society, a one aid worker told me". Therefore, the type of integration services they offer can be listed as providing public housing, facilitating professional integration (training, formation or helping refugees to find jobs), language classes, family unification, accessing social security benefits such as the unemployment wage, assistance about voluntary returns, and vulnerability assistance. Organizations express that they provide personalized and individualized integration support based on the identification of refugees' diverse needs. Since their work in general is centralized around assisting women to acquire legal protection, the main objective of integration programs is to ensure that women can access rights and public services as any other French citizen. Therefore, the focus on integration activities is again on related matters to citizenship status. Citizenship is seen as a legal matter rather than political participation. I believe this is a direct result of the French political tradition, namely French Republicanism and Universalism, since the state is

portrayed as the main if not only guarantor of welfare. This will be discussed further in the next chapter.

Organizations usually do not have separate integration programs for women. They offer the same services to both men and women. This might cause problems in addressing the gender-related barriers that slow down women's integration. An aid worker specializing in integration services from Paris expressed "We usually create mixed programs for labor integration. We do realize that statistically women experience different issues compared to men such as childcare. We are trying to think about these additional challenges. Yet, it is not really a planned effort and we do not know how to address those exactly". When organizations arrange women-specific labor integration programs, they are usually stereotypically feminine activities or occupations. For example, I have come across a flower arrangement program in Paris, in which refugee women receive training about creating bouquets professionally, which are later sold to local partner restaurants. The program intends to teach a whole new occupation to women and to fundraise for the organization.

Some organizations, which explicitly focus on professional integration, seek ways to add more women into their entrepreneurial programs for the sake of promoting inclusivity and diversity in their aid structures. The reason for this is that they realized that although there are more women coming to France in recent years, there are more men in their entrepreneurial programs. Within this context, the professional integration of women becomes an organizational objective, which implies that inclusivity can be better achieved if they add more women to the programs and take gender into account when designing their programs. Accordingly, women's empowerment plays an instrumental role. An aid worker

from the organization explained "It would be easier to exclude women from our entrepreneurial schemes because there are always more male entrepreneurs. So we can just get feedback from men statically but this will make women invisible and we want the processes to be as diverse as they can be. We want to include more women for achieving inclusivity". She added that they use word-of-mouth to attract more women and advertise women leaders so that women wouldn't feel intimidated to come and ask for support for their projects. Nevertheless, inclusion of women into service structures aims to balance gender demographics in the programs. This is undoubtedly an important first step but it treats women as numbers. They acknowledge the imbalance in representation and want to change it but do not work systemically toward achieving that goal. Thus, without the comprehensive mechanisms that address why women are less likely to become entrepreneurs and how gender hierarchies affect such processes, such approaches cannot go beyond superficial gender-mainstreaming efforts.

One of the reasons for reluctance to address gender hierarchies according to the aid workers is that they claim their entrepreneurial projects to be impact driven. This means that the feasibility of the projected business plan is central when deciding giving support or not to a certain project. There is no positive discrimination based on their gender identity. Their conversations with women refugee entrepreneurs are always project-based as they prioritize the projects not individuals. One aid worker told me that one reason for this is that they want to avoid labeling for the sake of creating an equal society that is beyond the labels of men and women. The organizations mainly aim to provide social capital for both men and women to start their own businesses. If women come to them with reliable projects, they can get support. Not surprisingly, it is usually men who get support for their

projects because of the male breadwinner bias. I was told that the most successful and ambitious projects still come from men even in the sectors that are traditionally associated with women such as cooking, education, culture and fashion. That said, women are almost invisible in the sectors that are associated with men such as industry and technology. When I asked about the potential reasons behind this trend one aid worker highlighted the role of patriarchy above anything else such as cultural differences: "The patriarchal culture both in France and elsewhere cultivates a certain image about success and successful persons. Leaders are characterized as white males and there are additional barriers if you are not one. It is not about migrant women's reluctance or their culture. Gender-related cultural differences are not really relevant apart from the fact that we live in a patriarchal society". Although she clearly identifies patriarchy as a greater political force behind women's limited participation in professional integration schemes, her organization doesn't really have a systematic plan for addressing those because it doesn't serve the institutional goals and priority is different. In other words, although they acknowledge the gendered power dynamics, which disrupt integration services via limiting women's participation, they are reluctant to address these because the way that they define their work is demarcated from politics. They don't take any responsibility as the service provider for gender hierarchies although they are aware of them. Women's projects are evaluated based on their feasibility from a strict business perspective. This implies that the empowerment and integration of women are not evaluated from a point that takes additional barriers into account.

Apart from professional integration, some organizations plan social and cultural activities for women, which are also identified as integration activities. These activities are carried out with the help of local partners and can be listed as gardening, gym classes, art

classes, movie screening, and knitting. Knitting is quite popular among organizations because it stimulates the participation of women as a stereotypically feminine activity. The main objective of these activities according to an aid worker is "for them to feel empowered, to be more independent and feel more integrated. These activities help them realize that they are free". She adds that they feel lonely during the day as men leave for work and they might feel isolated. This attitude not only underscores male breadwinner bias but also implies a hierarchical setting in integration mechanism. This is because women refugees are not seen as "free" as they are because they come from non-Western cultures and countries. It resonates with a neocolonial discourse that sustains myths about non-Western women being passive, uneducated and backward without any agency. As if they don't work because they are non-Western women, not because of discrimination or other additional barriers. They are dependent on organizations and the social activities they arrange to realize that they are actually "free".

Furthermore, I have come across a small women-only NGO based in Paris, which advertises its focus to be explicitly on empowerment and assisting refugees to find their voices (especially women as indicated on their website). Yet, there are not any "empowerment" activities beyond job formations and integration lectures, which are not really clear in terms of content. They have a separate group for women knitting, which is advertised to be empowering for women but they don't explain how.

One of the central integration activities targeting women refugees specifically is identified to be the information sessions about sexual health and family planning. During these sessions, organizations provide information about the public health system in France, and their access contraception, family planning, the STD treatment and abortion services.

Associating women's integration to France with a narrow sexual health perspective points out that organizations do not assign any other roles to women than being mothers, caretakers and homemakers. Getting information about sexual health is surely empowering as women can learn about their rights and options. However, viewing integration identical to family planning limits refugee women's identity to the private sphere. They are constructed as cultural and apolitical individuals, who can only be wives or mothers. What about the needs of women who exist outside family structures or politically active women? Are there any specific programs for their concerns during integration? Women are treated as partners, who can control the size of their families. Therefore, their integration plays an instrumental value in achieving the instrumental goal of assimilating non-Western families into French society.

Most interestingly, although organizations have a technical understanding about integration which is demarcated from politics and focused on providing access to public resources, they use integration interchangeably with the words "autonomy" and "inclusion". In other words, instead of calling such services "integration services", they list them under the categories "autonomy and inclusion activities" on their websites. Although autonomy is a word associated with agency and independence, aid workers use it in the context of acquiring the legal rights that one is entitled to. Thus, they treat integration as a value-free process such as getting employment or public housing. Yet, aid workers are not aware that they are the ones who have the power to decide what autonomy or integration means and impose it on refugee women. An aid worker told me that they do not really offer services to politically active women because it is not aid but political engagement and since she works in an aid organization, it is not their responsibility. This is a direct result of the

narrow legal understanding of citizenship (as opposed to active citizenship) in France. Organizations are not concerned with offering opportunities for refugees to use their rights to influence political change in the long run.

What is more, organizations report to work actively for the sensibilization of refugee women to French values, which is identified to be a crucial process for the sake of their empowerment. This is because it is seen for their best interest to understand basic rights including gender equality. The issue is that such rights are constructed as French values explicitly. Aid workers organize workshops for women to give information about their rights, options, and services available to them in France so that they can be empowered and acquire an independent life. However, such workshops are again dominated by topics related to sexual health and family planning. I was told that men too sometimes participate in these voluntary workshops in accommodation centers. The sessions cover topics such as right to abortion, free access to contraception, family planning and safe sex, which sometimes eventually lead to discussions of equality of men and women in France, women's role and participation in public life. Aid workers define these conversations as vital for both men and women refugees to be better integrated into France. An aid worker, who is specialized in integration services, from Paris disclosed "We form speech groups, sometimes only with women and sometimes with both men and women, to talk about gender equality in France. These conversations aim to fight against gender stereotypes so that refugee women can get integrated into the social and political life in France. We talk about problems that might prevent women from finding jobs. These conversations are not about the private realm. We don't teach them how to talk to their husbands or relatives but to the employers. We tell them they can get a job just like men.

If they are stuck with childcare, we can get them nannies. There are many services that they can benefit from and we let them know about their options". Therefore, the main objective of these conversations is to sensibilize refugee men and women to understand equality in France, which implies that gender equality is a French value.

Moreover, it superficially locates the gender related barriers that limit women's participation into the public life in non-Western family structures but what about discrimination against foreign women in the job market or in French society in general. Moreover, such interventions are again about professional integration solely and do not aim to support or promote the political agency of women. Therefore, integration or gender equality gets a technical character, which is mainly about women's ignorance about their rights in France. It lacks a systemic evaluation about the invisible political oppression mechanisms that gender hierarchies cross-culturally impose on women. When I asked the same aid worker if there is anything that they discuss related to leadership of women she answered "Nothing related to leadership or political campaigning is covered in these groups. Politics is not the goal here. Our goal is to integrate them into France. If they want a job, they can get one. We explain to them that they are free in France. So it is not about politics but more about helping them to overcome their cultural life and participate in public life". As it can be seen from this quote, gender inequality is problematically located only in the non-Western cultures. Women are again constructed as cultural and apolitical individuals, who need to leave their culture to be a productive member of the host society and eventually to become free. Lastly, it deals with gender inequality superficially, which tries to address it without referring to politics. How can women "feel free" without being offered leadership roles or opportunities to use their political agency?

The same aid worker mentioned a related project created by her organization. This program exclusively approaches gender equality as a tool for promoting better and more successful social integration of refugee populations to France. It is supported by CIDFF (*Information Centers on the Rights of Women and Families - Centre d'Information sur les Droits des Femmes et des Familles*). The project constructs women as essential actors in integration, who can facilitate integration starting from their family and then move to their ethnic communities. This is possible via educating their children, passing on tradition, and then eventually advertising such traditions in their communities. The project aims to challenge sexist stereotypes that limit the individual capacity of refugees to fully participate in public life. Therefore, it desires "to raise awareness around the concept of empowerment of women and stimulate equality in all spheres of society, including participation in decision-making processes". It discusses inequalities between men and women, for example, by assigning a gender to a certain occupation or skill.

Getting information about the rights and opportunities might have an empowering effect on women refugees. The most important point is that their partners are also addressed, which might paint a picture of joint responsibility in the household. Yet, the project might be problematic from a few angles. To start with, it might instrumentalize women's role in the traditional family structures for achieving integration (which is a policy goal of the organization) rather than explicitly and systemically challenging patriarchal structures for the true emancipation of women. There aren't any direct conversations about the root causes of gender hierarchies. Instead, the emphasis is on the technical barriers that prevent women to integrate into the host society and make sure that men understand those. Women are seen as partners in the aid structures as long as they fit

into their roles in line with organizational objectives. The role which is offered to them in this project is to conform into gender roles not challenging them, in which as women and as homemakers, they should be responsible for the assimilation of their families. Why not create a project to address women empowerment that does not limit women's role to the private realm? Relatedly, the project overlooks intersectionality as there is no attention to the potential of single women or politically active women in influencing social change in the long term. Why not address their political agency? This is because the most essential goal is to achieve integration, which is an institutional goal and women's empowerment is limited to that specific goal.

I was told by many aid workers that being single and childless is more empowering compared to being married as a refugee woman. They explained that single mothers and married women experience additional barriers from an integration perspective. They are less likely to get a job, training or education due to the male breadwinner bias if they are married. Married women stay at home to take care of the children whereas single women feel free to get an education or search for a job based on their interests and preferences". An aid worker underlined that being alone helps women to become more independent and develop autonomy: "Traveling alone makes her stronger. She must be ready to take everything into her own hands like managing resources and money for her best interest. This might be very different from her previous situation in her country of origin, in which her decision-making power might never have been recognized by the relatives or partners before. Other people have always been there to take credit for opinions and controlling her decisions. After coming to France, she must end most of her social relations to hide from the persecutors. She has to make her own decisions about her future. From a psychological

perspective, I think it is important that you feel alone to make a decision because you can be the only decision-maker and you know it. Compared to childless women, single mothers are less likely to attend workshops and appointments because they have other obligations. We do our best to provide them opportunities for training or education but they are very busy. Yet again they are forced to make effective decisions to take care of the child and herself. So, they get a job. When there are husbands it is not possible". Accordingly, having a partner is identified as a barrier for refugee women's integration into France, and their empowerment and independence.

Locating gender equality only in France and treating it as a French value lead the organizations to identify integration as something to be done by the refugees only. In other words, integration is seen to be the responsibility of refugees. It is not a two-way process. This not only underscores a hierarchical relationship between aid workers and refugee women but also justify their assimilation for their sake. Refugee women's empowerment or gender equality become things to be taught or given to women by the aid workers. In this regard, many organizations stated that they use accommodation centers as platforms to teach both men and women. An advocate revealed "We care about having these discussions about women's rights and equality in France. Men also need to learn about this stuff. So they should be included. They need to know that in France women can have abortions, it is their right and they do not need to get the permission of their partners. It is important that they hear it. Some are progressive, some not. At the end, we also ask them about their opinions". According to organizations these conversations serve to the general cause of feminism alongside integration and assimilation. This is probably true and it should have an empowering effect on women since both partners are addressed. However,

I think it is limited in terms of highlighting the agency of women and providing opportunities to voice their first-hand experiences. The focus is on giving information. Hence, such sessions do not have a participatory but an informative character. There is no two-way learning from the real-life experiences of refugee women. Instead, the meaning of empowerment becomes identical to their assimilation into the feminist or French values, which are imposed by the aid workers. Refugee women are constructed as cultural objects who should be saved by their culture or background as it prevents them from realizing their rights and integrating into France. An aid worker from a women-only organization based in Paris argued "Culture is more like a barrier for us when it comes to gender equality. We know that equality is not seen as it is seen in France in their home countries. So it is our job to tell women who are not aware of it that they are equal to men. Thus, they shouldn't suffer from violence. The majority of women who come to us usually come alone even if they are married. If they come with their husbands, they want us to help the husbands too. Men sometimes take too much space during these meetings. If this happens we warn them and remind them that women can talk freely for themselves. They probably know what happened to them better". As this statement indicates, aid workers impose a hierarchy between them and refugee women that is centered around gender equality via assuming that there must be more gender hierarchy in wherever they come from compared to France. This assumption is silent to intersectionality, and perpetuates racism and neocolonial understandings of non-Western women. Resulting from this hierarchy, aid workers assert that they are the ones who are responsible for making them realize that they are free in France as if women are not capable of understanding it on their own. If they understand gender equality, which is treated as a French value explicitly and assimilate, refugee

women can be integrated into France better, which helps the organizations to achieve one of their operational goals.

Just like gender equality or feminism, organizations frame secularism as another essential French value to achieve assimilation, integration and empowerment of women. At this point, secularism is identified almost as if it is a neutral character, which is divorced from any political connotations. It is seen as common sense and the way things are and should be. This is because secularism is a long established tradition and it is normalized in French political culture. It is a value, in which the civil republican citizenship is built on. Therefore, aid workers do not perceive that it is an ideology that they impose on refugee women. One aid worker expressed "In sensibilization activities, we talk about freedom of religion and secularism too. We explain to women that freedom of religion is different in France. The system is secular to protect you. Secularism doesn't mean that you cannot perform your religion. On the contrary, the state want to guarantee this freedom to everyone so in the public sphere nobody can perform their religion to avoid discrimination". The same perception applies to the smaller women-led organizations that define themselves as activists too. For example, one of such organizations based in Paris explicitly associates secularity in relation to women's rights and citizenship in its constitution. When I asked about the reason for this, a women refugee volunteer from the organization responded "We affirm that we are secular and support the principles of secularism by explaining that freedom of conscience *(religion)* must be respected and that the state must be neutral. We denounce the fact that political movements instrumentalize religion and do not impose a fundamentalist vision of religion. We say that the principle of the republic is equality in front of the law, regardless of origins or cultures, and that everyone must act accordingly

to ensure that this is respected. However, obviously in reality, there are inequalities, discriminations. We must fight them through mobilization, action, and defending our rights. Secularism seems to be understood in our organization. We work with women who have various religions, including very religious women, or atheists, who both seem to agree that religion should not interfere with laws or with politics and that it is a personal choice, and that violence and oppression in the name of religion is totally unacceptable, as in the case of terrorist attacks. If the conversation comes on this subject we recall that obviously there are many more Islamist terrorist assassinations in Africa or the Middle East, and that the victims are overwhelmingly Muslims!". As can be seen, the discussion of secularism is closely related to republican and universalist political culture in France, in which the state does not have an identity and should be equally distant to every citizen, who might come from a distinct background. The salience of the effect of political culture in integration services resonates with the ways organizations define aid work strictly related to legal protection and citizenship status. I understand the way it comes from but organizations are not aware that they actually impose these values that they internalize to refugee communities. Therefore, the problem is that it is not a two-way discussion but refugee women are expected to accept these ideologies just like that and they do not have any right to explain their realities. Does secularism really mean that refugee women are not discriminated against in the society even if they are not religious or even if they do not wear a hijab in public? Does it mean that secularism prevented the development of extremist right-wing parties in French politics in recent years? Does that mean refugee women are matched with decent jobs and salaries in the job market if they are not religious? A woman refugee still can be a productive member of the French society and be religious.

Organizations cannot grasp that and they treat dicrimination and imposition as if they are a human right.

Relatedly, the goal of sensibilization to French values for promoting women's empowerment is dangerous because it can easily justify assimilation. In fact, I realize that most aid workers think assimilation is a good thing and beneficial for women. Of course, the type of assimilation they refer to is one-way integration as it is the sole responsibility of foreign women to integrate into France, which clearly implies a hierarchy between locals and migrants. I've asked aid workers what they think assimilation means to the refugee women they worked with. Many of them answered that refugee women don't regard it as an imposed idea, and realize the necessity and logic of assimilation based on their daily life experiences. An aid worker based in Paris said "Of course there is always racism and discrimination in state agencies but it is not related to the system but the personality of the employees. Refugees realize that no matter what their ethnicity is, they have the same rights in front of the law, police and social security system. They understand that the problem is rooted in the way that they express themselves in public, not assimilation. France law says it doesn't recognize any minorities. This value is indivisible and this is the main reason for the need for assimilation. There cannot be a private law for only Asians or Muslims. Maybe we need special policies for some communities but it is against the constitution because it will stigmatize otherness". This is a perfect example for how organizations justify assimilation. They overlook the systemic problems and assert refugees should agree to assimilate if they want to be integrated in France as if religion is the only source of discrimination against migrants in society. They are the ones that impose certain values and ideologies on refugee women but they are not aware of their decision making power

since such values are internalized in French political tradition and therefore are presented as common sense.

Lastly, organizations refer to the Republican Integration Contract as another way for teaching women and men about French values which stimulates their integration and assimilation into the society. In 2018, The Prime Minister of France Edouard Philippe addressed the importance of the Contact for providing information about gender equality in relation to the successful integration of refugees into France "Integration begins with sharing values of the Republic, secularism and equality between men and women"(https://cis.org/Rush/France-Integration-Migrants-Begins-Shared-Values). The integration agreement was created by the OFII (*l'Office Français de l'Immigration et de l'Intégration - Office of Immigration and Integration*) and it should be signed by every migrant after completing a language course (for 600 hours) and a day-long civil rights course. During the civil rights course, there is a mediator talking about various subjects such as republican values, constitutional rights of French citizens, and structures of the state agencies. The contract doesn't explicitly have a gender lens but reflects a republican understanding of equality, which includes equality of men and women. Women refugees learn about their rights such as they can sue the persecutors of gender-based violence. They also learn that some cultural oppressive cultural FGM and child marriages are against the law in France. Once again I believe these courses should have an empowering effect on women since they get information about their rights and they are addressed with men. Yet, I think it is problematic to treat gender equality as a French value explicitly and assume that assimilation is the only way to ensure women are empowered since it places refugees in an inferior position against aid workers and locals by default. This enhances discrimination

against refugee women and harm their agency in the long run as it implies that they are not equals.

5.6.Challenges and Issues

Organizations list a couple barriers that affect their capacity to address asylum-seeking and refugee women's empowerment. These barriers can be listed as geographical location of the organizations, cultural differences, practical issues that limit women's willingness to report violence and dependence on public funding. The section also analyzes how Northern France is viewed as a merging point between British and French aid cultures, political traditions and feminist understandings and approaches. Hence, the characteristics of aid work in Northern France regarding empowerment will not apply to the approaches of the organizations in the rest of France.

The first of the challenges is related to the geographical location of organizations. The organizations located in transit areas in Northern France such as Dunkirk and Calais state that it is much more difficult to address long-term goals like women's empowerment and grassroots advocacy because they work with unsettled communities. For the same reason, they are less likely to collaborate with refugee women in aid structures. It is almost impossible to encourage refugee women to take active roles or engage in advocacy actions because they do not want to stay in France and want to go to the UK as soon as possible. One of the employees who works at a women refugee center in Dunkirk disclosed "We would love to collaborate with women but they don't stay in France for long so don't want to get in long term commitments. They are here to leave as soon as possible. This is one of the downsides of being an organization in a transit area". One advocate drew attention to the significance of offering a physical permanent space for women refugees: "People live

in tents and they lack basic needs. Thus, we cannot offer diverse programs such as social and political activities. Most of the time we respond to basic needs or report violence to the police. We respond to a population that is constantly on the move. Maybe with a more settled refugee population and with a permanent physical permanent space, you can be more creative. However, we do not have an office at the moment, and we are just a mobile van service, which focuses on meeting primary material needs". Another aid worker from Calais made a similar argument "Northern France is a transit area, which limits our ability to address broader topics such as true representation of women refugees. The circulation rate is around 1-2 months. This means that women that we work with focus on resting, deciding where to go next or accessing their basic needs instead of advocating or making their voices heard. I think they need to settle down before taking an active role in the community. They have to feel that they are home to do something like that". Having a settled population alongside having a physical permanent space is identified to be vital for adopting more participatory or activist approaches in aid structures. Consequently, organizations in Northern France report that their advocacy activities are not structured institutionally but rather carried out on a less formal and individual basis.

The second barrier according to aid workers is cultural differences, which signifies a cultural relativist perspective. Women are constructed as cultural individuals merely without giving attention to the complex migration situations that they are. Avoiding an intersectional analysis, aid workers identify culture as the chief and only source for the oppression of women. Hence, as discussed in the previous sections, they seek ways to assimilate them to French values so that they can overcome their cultural life and realize that they are free.

One example for the argument on culture is related to sexual health. One employee told me that as opposed to divorce or reporting violence, sexual health is a much easier topic to reach out to refugee women because it doesn't directly threaten the family structure or the cultural and community life. Consequently, women are more eager to use services that gives information about contraceptives, maternal health or genealogical advice compared to services that enable them to report sexual abuse and violence.

Contrarily, one aid worker based in Paris stated the opposite and assert it is very difficult to address topics related to sexual health because of cultural differences. She continued that when they organize information sessions about sexual health in the accommodation centers, they have to approach things differently to ensure participation. For instance, they cannot write "Sexual Health" on the posters; if they do, nobody will come. This is even more applicable to women because if a member from their cultural community sees them attending such an event, they will be labeled as a "bad woman" inside the community. Although organizations never cover personal issues in these meetings and just focus on basic rights, they are afraid of being marked in their community and getting a bad reputation. Most interestingly, the same aid worker claimed that the situation is completely different in individual meetings, in which women are more open and free because they do not fear being recognized by a community member. She stated "The presence of another person usually creates resistance for women. During the individual meetings they can talk freely and express themselves freely. This is different with men because they are less likely to admit that they are victims of sexual violence due to gender roles'. This indicates that it is not that women do not want to talk because they are cultural individuals. Rather, they do a strategic calculation to protect their best interest

while holding an uncertain legal status and do not want to lose their only source of social security, which is their communities. In this regard, interpreters can be problematic too. The same aid worker explained "We have to be careful with interpreters because we are bringing a third person into the conversation when talking about traumatic experiences such as rape. Women can feel ashamed especially if the third person is from her community. Sometimes it is easier for us to find someone from their community and among our clients rather than finding an interpreter who is a French national. It is complicated. We solve this issue by proposing to do it on the phone even though physical presence is better for having a more direct translation. The phone makes it more confidential so women are more likely to speak openly".

Similarly, organizations claim that women's ties with their cultural communities can be barriers for their empowerment and well-being. Women might be reluctant to report criminal networks from their own cultural communities, which actually trafficked them into France from their home countries. The reason for this is that they might feel alone and fear losing their only source of security. An aid worker based in Lyon explained "When women arrive, they tend to join the networks from their own ethnic and cultural backgrounds. These networks can be criminal networks and women might be reluctant to report violence because they might feel like they don't have any other option. So they keep doing what they have been doing and get captured in cycles of abuse and violence. For example, we know that the Nigerian networks in France are more or less involved in sex trafficking and forced prostitution. If women in these networks go to the police, their families or loved ones who stayed in Nigeria might be in danger. It is a multilayered issue and it is very difficult to extract women from their cultural communities". The same aid

worker mentioned that women might not be aware of the fact that they are a part of a criminal network because such abusive practices might be normalized in their cultural communities: "Culture might duplicate the power of the abuser on women as women might not consider themselves as victims. Maybe they have always been under oppression or experienced sexual violence, they think of it is normal. They might be very dependent on community networks or their families who exploit them. In these cases, the main challenge is to explain to them that they are victims and should take action. Acquiring citizenship status has a huge impact in this process. If they don't know if they are going to get protection for sure then they will not report. When they are too stressed about their legal status, they do not respond to our mental health programs". I believe she makes a very important point about the relationship between reporting and asylum-seeking. All examples above indicate that having an uncertain asylum status works against reporting. It is not the cultural differences. Women might be reluctant to report abuse in their cultural communities because at the end of the process they don't know if they will get asylum or not. Therefore, it might be more beneficial for them to keep the status quo even though this means they are exposed to violence. They can break ties with their communities only if they are provided with a legal status. This is again a strategic decision, which highlights their agency and demonstrates that they are not cultural individuals.

Another interesting point is that although organizations often identify cultural differences as a barrier to their activities, they don't think that culture affects their professional work at all. A women activist from a women-only organization in Paris emphasized that they are cultural universalists and their cause is universal: "Gender-based violence exists across all cultures. Refugee women who have experienced this, who have

fled this, who do not want their daughters to suffer from it, strongly denounce all these practices. They do not justify them in the name of culture. We are universalists, human rights only make sense if they have a universal aim for all mankind, what would it mean to condemn slavery or the death penalty in one place, and to find it legitimate elsewhere?". Similarly, another employee from a women-only organization mentioned: "Culture doesn't really affect our work because cultural differences don't have an impact on being a victim of violence. Women who come to us already know or understand that culture is not a barrier for violence". Undeniably, culture cannot justify oppression of women and it is important that organizations frame it that way. However, these testimonies illustrate that they overlook gender hierarchies in Western culture as if they do not exist in France. When they hear the word culture, they immediately think about non-Western cultures that refugee women come from and its harmful practices against them. This is because they believe their work is value-free and thus cannot be affected by the values of the French society they live in. Adopting a narrow legal protection approach, organizations construct aid work something beyond or unrelated to culture. If women come to them it means that they have already moved beyond their culture. One aid worker from Lyon disclosed "Culture doesn't affect our work because most of the time women are already emancipated in their country of origin and it is the reason why they wanted to come to France in the first place. Especially if they are traveling alone. So we don't have to address such issues". They do not think addressing oppressive practices against refugee women in French society is relevant to their work.

Aid workers do not think culture affects their work because they operate under the French political traditions such as republican and universalism. These values suggest that

one's personal background or identity markers do not determine their relationship with the state. They think avoiding addressing culture is common sense because it does not affect or change anything in the process. An aid worker who works in integration expressed "We don't deal with culture in our programs. We just help refugees to find housing, get a job and to be fully integrated into society. We never talk about culture. It is not an issue for receiving support. We know that statistically, women are less likely to get jobs due to cultural differences so we try to sensibilize them to the French society but we don't really talk about it". She thinks that culture only refers to practices in non-Western societies, and disregards culture in France and how it might make refugee women feel discriminated against or oppressed. This is because of the very culture of France, in which republicanism and universalism are quite internalized in the society and also in aid work. Therefore, aid workers view their work to be technical and value free in fact they operate on ideologies and values that they already embodied, which are invisible to them.

Such understandings about neutrality and objectivity are also connected to the French charity charity culture in France. Some aid workers that I interviewed, who work in Northern France, claimed that (surprisingly most of them have worked in the UK too at some point in their career) the British charity sector is more dynamic and composed of young people whereas the French sector tends to depend on old people, who are retired volunteers. Hence, there is a generational and demographic gap, which limits adopting or creating more progressive ideas and values in service structures. Moreover, the French sector is reported to be more separationist in service delivery as different organizations are specialized in different service areas but the British organizations offer more holistic support and a wide range of diverse activities and programs. Lastly, they argued that France

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is less supportive of grassroots organizations compared to the UK since the bigger names which can access government support and funding are much more visible in the sector.

It is not a coincidence that the ones who make these comments are working in Northern France. This is because as they put it Northern France is a merging point between British and French aid cultures. For this reason, there is more flexibility in aid structures and more space for progressive compared to the urban organizations in Paris and Lyon since each one of them has a different specialty and expertise in different service areas. For this reason, it can be said that the regions, in which the organizations operate in, matter when making an argument about the aid culture. As an aid worker described: "Our work in Northern France will not apply to the rest of France. The notion of refugee integration is much related to the French Republican values. These do not apply to us because we are in a transit area and we are not concerned with integration activities".

Northern France is seen as a merging point in terms of defining feminism and its relation to aid work. An aid worker from Northern France explained that "French feminism has a less forgiving approach and a more clear trajectory of women's rights movement in France has led to where in the current context. There is a strong pride and feeling that women no matter from what background should live with that if not adhere. There is more animosity towards ethnically and culturally different women such as Muslim women, who cover themselves. In the UK this is slightly different because there is no certain 'Britishness' to feminism; there is less pride and more respect to diversity". For this reason, being located in a transit area leads organizations in Northern France to adopt a more forgiving and flexible approach when situating their work in the broader agenda of feminism and designing activities for addressing refugee women's empowerment.

Relatedly, when I asked an aid worker working in one of these organizations how they act to achieve empowerment, she responded that empowerment is actually a patronizing term and continued: "Who are we to empower someone? Yet, the way we define empowerment comes from recognizing that a lot of women we work with cannot access their rights partly because they are undocumented or they are women or because they are stuck in countries that have anti-immigration policies like France. So we find ways to help them to exercise their rights both individually and collectively. Also, we make sure that all of our advocacy efforts resonate with the long-term experiences of actual women and how they improved their situation". This statement hints that there is a less hierarchical setting in aid structures in Northern France as way as the perception of empowerment compared to the organizations in urban France, which assert that it is their responsibility to teach refugees about feminist values. Feminism is not defined as a French value rather a two-way conversation, exchange and learning process, which makes room for the contributions and experiences of refugee women too. Some organizations noted that they do not advertise their organization to be a feminist organization to attract as many women as possible. This is because they work with a great diversity of women from different ages, family structures and socio-economic backgrounds and feminism can be seen different by different people based on life experiences. Thus, organizations argue that it would be wrong to have one fixed definition and try to impose it on women. It shows that that aid workers in Northern France do not blame the culture for differences between feminist understandings but life experiences. This is itself a genuine feminist approach as it makes room for diversity compared to the approaches of urban organizations, which dictates French perception of feminism on non-French women in a patronizing way.

Relatedly, as opposed to the cultural relativist attitudes of organizations in urban France, aid workers in Northern France acknowledge that refugee women's willingness to report violence can be determined by many different factors. In other words, they employ a more holistic approach compared to the organizations in the rest of urban France. They don't blame the cultural differences for reluctance to report violence but locate the problem in the legal status of women and her own risk assessment. An aid worker from Dunkirk expressed "Our notion of feminism can be influenced from our background. Culture might matter but so do different life experiences. In our organization, employers are unmarried childless women whilst our clients are usually married women with children. This sometimes creates a gap in understanding of needs as it affects one's reaction to violence. If one of our team members experiences partner violence, her response will be very straightforward. She will immediately go with a standard Western European response such as going to the police, using public services and filing for divorce. For refugee women, it is much more complicated. She has to do a risk assessment. She must evaluate the potential hostility of her family and community members since there are dangers of traveling alone. She might be exposed to more risk and abused further. So it is a different type of cost-benefit assessment. It is not about culture. What you might see as a standard feminist response might not be the safest option for asylum-seeking women. For this reason, we operate based on the individual willingness of women. We don't have a set of fixed policies imposed on women about partner violence and reproductive health. It is dependent on the woman's own understanding of her safety and if it is beneficial for her to leave her husband". I particularly wanted to include this long quote because it shows how organizations recognize the agency of women and treat them as capable individuals who

can make decisions to preserve their best interest in her reality. They do not establish a hierarchy in aid structures that is justified by French perspective of feminism. Instead, they respect the choices of women even if these choices differ from their perspectives.

A similar statement is made by another aid worker based in Calais, which analyzes the relationship between reluctance to report violence and being located in a transit area: "Biggest issue is that we are located in a transit area. Women do not easily open up about these issues. It is very common for women to experience domestic violence in camp situations but they are unlikely to speak about it. Even if they do, they are reluctant to do anything about it because they want to get to the UK as soon as possible and don't want to lose their husbands, who serve as a source of security in the context of border crossing. It would be more dangerous for them to be alone. The services that we offer cannot really work without their willingness to report issues unless she stays in France. In that case, reporting would be in her interest during her asylum claim". Accordingly, it can be argued that the willingness of women to report violence is also determined by the asylum stage that they are in. If they are not in the final destination, they are less likely to report violence since they do not want to travel alone due to dangers of gender-based violence.

Adopting a more forgiving feminist approach, which respects diversity and two-way exchange, unsurprisingly, aid workers in Northern France report that their work have changed their perception of feminism and made it more inclusive. The conversations with refugee women they work on the field made them reassess their foxed ideas on Western or white feminism. One aid worker expressed that how she learned from women about different non-Western feminist movements such as the Kurdish female freedom fighters or socialist feminism in the context of USSR from the women she works with.

Moreover, another aid worker explained to me that refugee women (especially the ones from younger generations), even the ones who seem quite domestic from the outside, are constantly trying to change power dynamics in their family unit. Asylum-seeking helps this process because there is little opportunity for men to work and there is no home for women to take care of and clean. People are staying in very informal living spaces and tents, so there is an obvious shift in gendered division of labor, roles and responsibilities. She adds that she realized that how she previously saw feminism as a movement to completely break away from those gendered dynamics, by becoming conscious of them and questioning them: "Having gone to university in Brighton and London, the expressions of feminism that I witnessed tended to be very visual and seemed to attempt to go as far as possible from the stereotypes. This would be seen for example through physical appearance (clothes, tatoos, hair style...) in being deliberately not womanly; in a stereotypical way, also through work, having independence in a relationship, basically breaking free from all attributes that would I've been considered traditionally female in a way that I would consider old fashioned. It's all reliant on stereotypes in a way, which I completely realize. For me was a deliberate desire to not conform to a norm that I might otherwise be pressured into (which I haven't really been, ironically). Speaking with Kurdish women, I realized that many, if not all, had a deep consciousness about this – I'd say more than people around me in Europe who didn't study social sciences or had an interest in gender studies. I failed to have a countless number of times with friends in France, who don't really seem to have analyzed their gendered dynamics that much, or who don't question them that much. Of course once there is a realization, there are a myriad of ways in which that has had an impact on the lives of women I've encountered. For one of them, it meant that having

children and raising them wasn't a given, but an active conversation with her husband. They had regularly discussed whether they wanted children, how many, and now that they had children, they were very conscious about their roles in education. In the context of Kurdish families that I have met, that is a rather unusual situation. For one woman, it meant creating a space for herself, alongside the responsibilities in the household, to do some dance and gym in her own time. Wearing leggings to dance in her bedroom in the accommodation center and playing loud club music was also something she did consciously, to take care of her own needs. That women discussed gender roles and their desires amongst themselves, and also to European volunteers like myself, that is also taking some form of liberty. The usual divide between the private and the public gets blurred, because the women felt like there was a need to express themselves and to share ideas. Traditionally, Kurdish couples feel like anything that is between them and within the family must stay in that small unit - that nothing personal can be shared. That pressure tends to be more felt by women because they hold more responsibilities and have less socializing opportunities, as they don't work. But all that changes, I think it's both due to generation (everyone seems to agree that also in Kurdistan for women there things have changed a lot) and to displacement, which creates a lot of socializing opportunities. That women have told me about domestic violence or about the desire to separate from their partners is to be a feminist action. I think there are some areas that women I've met seem to have thought about and didn't want change. A lot of women I've talked to would prefer child care to be more shared, but generally wouldn't want to not be cooking. It seems that most enjoyed having a privileged moment either alone or with other women in the kitchen, that preparing dishes is a source of pride and also provides a responsibility that many see

as having a defined role (and most didn't seem to want to eat the food their husbands might cook). And yet, that being said, I've met several families in which both parents cook together, or in which the husband would cook. Also, in conversations with couples or families, women have often had a stronger voice or openly made fun of their husbands (in a nice way). This could be because I am a female too, and the interactions probably look different if the majority of people talking are male. Yet I found that the Kurdish women I spoke with, even in the presence of their husbands, had greater ease in speaking up and defending their perspectives than I would have in a similar context, or female friends of mine, who equally tend to be very discreet in group conversations when there are men'. This long testimony signifies many things. First and foremost, it highlights how refugeehood can challenge gender roles and create opportunities for women to acquire different roles outside the household. Secondly, it demonstrates how feminist understandings of the organizations in France are more inclusionary. Thirdly, it shows that aid workers might experience change too due to their work, rather than treating change as the sole responsibility of women refugees if they want to integrate in France. And lastly, there are no hierarchical settings in the aid structures, in which refugee women are seen as equals, who can teach new perspectives to aid workers.

Such dynamic and more progressive views on feminism do not exist in urban organizations. Even refugee-led and women-led organizations, which define themselves as militants, do not think that Western or French feminism is discriminatory. A member from one these organizations expressed "Feminism is a global movement that obviously manifests itself in diverse ways depending on historical and geographic contexts. I do not see how it would be discriminatory in its principles. But feminism in a country is not

immune to the existence and reproduction of social or other inequalities that exist in any society". I believe this lack of recognition is the direct result of French universalism and republicanism, in which identity markers of one don't interfere with constitutional rights including women's rights. The French context is universalized and imposed on women. Accordingly, feminist principles do not take race, ethnicity or religion into account and not concerned with how coming from different backgrounds might create issues such as discrimination against refugee women based on the assumption on sameness.

Lastly, another barrier related to the organizations' capacity to design creative programs for addressing women's empowerment might be related to funding. The aid sector is highly dependent on public funding and there are almost none or significantly fewer opportunities for private sourcing. Surprisingly, this is quite normalized and organizations do not think that being dependent on state funding influences the type of programs they create. An aid worker from a women-led activist organization based in Paris expressed that "Public funding does not affect our work at all, we do exactly what we want to do and we do not hide our activities at all. The institutions, which we ask for funding (in fact it is only the City of Paris) support exactly what we do, and which is also legal (we have the right to help undocumented people in France when it is not to make profit off their backs)". Similarly, the bigger organizations, which operate under government contracts, state that getting funding from the government does not affect their advocacy messages and assert that they are fully independent and private organizations. They mentioned that they actually prefer national funds because they are easier to access since they are experienced in France. In fact, accessing EU funding is more challenging because it limits their capacity to be creative as they have to manage them internationally and there is more

bureaucratic work as a result of working with external partners. I find it very interesting that they do not realize that getting state funding might make them operate as an extension of the state. Yet, according to the republican political tradition, in which the state is the sole guarantor of the well-being of all citizens. they might think that this is the way to do things.

The only exception is that one of the aid workers, who works for the women's department of a big player in the sector, which holds a government contract, expressed that state funding favors local women organizations rather than refugee organizations that support refugee women. She argues that foreign women should also be included in the conversation: "The Secretariat of Equality between Women and Men matches funds but they don't really give money to the NGOs working with foreigners, namely refugee women. They don't think about them. Last year, they were working on this bill fighting against gender-based violence with women's organizations in France but our organization was not invited. So foreign women were not part of it. This is discrimination and it is against the law because there shouldn't be any discrimination between French and foreign women under the constitution in an event of violence". Relatedly, she adds that the local French movement is disconnected from the work they do and they are not really a part of the local feminist cause "Last year, I contacted the Me Too Movement in France and asked them if we could join the action. They were very happy. I was surprised that they included us because usually the focus is on the problems of French women. We should be a part of more projects like this to bridge our experiences. On the local level we should try to work more with local feminist organizations and be a part of the worldwide action for equality and empowerment. Bottom-up approaches should be promoted. We should start at the local

level with partnerships and then grow into the networks at both the national and the EU level". As this testimony indicates, there is a detachment between the refugee organizations and local women organizations. Maybe, this is the reason or result of how organizations value professionalism in their work and not define advocacy integral to their work. Nevertheless, creating local partnerships will both benefit organizations and refugee women and lead to the design of more effective policies for the well-being of refugee women.

5.7.Conclusion

This chapter analyzes the ways how organizations interviewed in France address refugee women's empowerment in their activities. These can be categorized mainly in four general themes; which are (1) legal protection and identification of vulnerabilities, (2) service delivery and professionalism, (3) advocacy and awareness-raising and lastly, (4) integration to France and sensibilization to French values. It also discusses the challenges and issues identified by the organizations that disrupt their abilities to address refugee women's empowerment which can be listed as geographical location, cultural differences, practical issues that limit women's willingness to report violence and dependence on public funding. Additionally, it explains how Northern France is viewed as a merging point between British and French aid cultures, political traditions and feminist understandings and approaches.

As the chapter reveals, due to the highly professional and technocratic perception of their work, aid workers view women refugees as recipients of aid solely, who are not given opportunities to take active roles in the aid structures, and thus overlook their potential and agency. Women are dependent on professional aid workers for representation

as well as communication of everyday issues they have. Working with the state agencies and other formal actors, aid workers use their expertise on the legal system for creating solutions and representing the best interest of refugees. This implies a hierarchical setting in the aid structures, in which decision-making power, visibility and authorship are explicitly assigned to aid workers, and perpetuates myths about non-Western women as passive individuals.

The main axis of aid work is focused on assisting refugees to acquire legal protection. For this reason, aid workers usually carry out related activities. The emphasis on legal protection is related to the legal citizenship perspective that is internalized in France (at the expense of active citizenship) due to republican tradition. To accelerate the process for women to get citizenship status, organizations assign greater significance to identification of vulnerabilities of victims of gender-based violence. This might be a strategic choice in the short run. Yet it is very dangerous in the sense that it portrays women as victims because they are women and leaves out planning protection mechanisms for women, who are not victims of gender based violence(even though it is unlikely). Empowerment becomes identical to addressing gender-differentiated needs of foreign women, which are constructed as needs of victims of violence.

Aid workers do not see advocacy integral to service delivery. Instead, there are external departments that deal with advocacy based on their expertise. Hence, the advocacy activities are focused on formal policy-making mechanisms and not inclusive or supportive of bottom-up grassroots activism. This demonstrates that they do not have a holistic understanding of aid. Moreover, organizations define integration from a very technocratic perspective based on their understandings of legal citizenship. Integration activities are

limited to ensure refugees access their constitutional rights such as housing, social security and employment. There are usually no separate programs designed for women to enhance their integration with the exception of information sessions on sexual health. Organizations frame assimilation into French values as an important part of their integration. Values such as equality or empowerment are problematically defined to be explicit French values, and therefore, foreign women should be taught about them and move away from their culture to realize that they are free. Integration or empowerment are not seen as a two-way process rather it is seen as the sole responsibility of refugee women, which again points out hierarchies between French and non-French women.

CHAPTER 6:HISTORY MATTERS: COMPARISON BETWEEN BRITISH AND FRENCH AID STRUCTURES

This chapter compares and contrasts how organizations address asylum-seeking and refugee women's empowerment in the UK and France. It analyzes the potential reasons for the stark differences in conceptualizing "empowerment" via giving attention to various structures in each country such as political culture, migration politics, charity culture, funding schemes, the role of the state in the charity sector and historical evolution of national feminist movements. Additionally, the chapter demonstrates the similarities between the two cases regarding the organizations' experiences and tactics for addressing empowerment. The most noteworthy similarity between these two countries, which differ from each other drastically regarding their political and charity culture, is that asylum-seeking and refugeehood are not necessarily a disempowering situation for women. Via changing gender roles, reducing the dependence on traditional patriarchal security mechanisms (such as the family or ethnic community) and providing opportunities for women to contribute to public life during integration programs (like getting education or employment), asylum-seeking can enhance the agency and self-resilience of women. Therefore, it is not plausible to make overarching assumptions about the relationship between vulnerability, asylum-seeking and women.

The chapter first discusses the similar experiences and perceptions of British and French organizations. These can be listed as the crucial role of providing basic material support in encouraging asylum-seeking women to report violence, the necessity of creating gender-segregated places, the significance of having a formal feedback system and, most importantly, the ways how asylum-seeking empower women in some cases. Then, the

chapter analyzes the disparities in the perceptions and practices about empowerment. The discussion is centered around the diverse political cultures in these countries, namely British Multiculturalism and French Republicanism/Universalism and how they affect charity cultures, funding schemes, the role of the state in the charity sector and historical evaluation of national feminist movements in the UK and France.

6.1. Similarities

First and foremost, organizations in both countries noted that providing basic material support and services are not only crucial for refugee and asylum-seeking women's survival but also making them feel safer, which will eventually encourage them to engage in "bigger conversations" on physical, emotional, or sexual violence. For this reason, according to the organizations, it is vital to always keep the services accessible, even in crisis situations such as the pandemic. Therefore, organizations in both countries put effort into shifting their drop-ins to online platforms or creating new hotlines during the Covid-19 lockdowns to preserve asylum-seeking women's accessibility to their services. That said, the implications of shifting services structures to digital platforms are contradictory from an accessibility perspective. Some women, who do not have access to the internet or possess any electronic devices such as laptops or smartphones, lost their access to services. Nevertheless, it really worked for some other women, especially the ones who are living far away from the urban centers, in which organizations are located. Before the pandemic, these women had no or little access to services since it was very difficult to travel from the suburbs to city centers a few days a week as I would require time and money. Also, from a safety perspective, they were afraid to use public transportation or wander around the streets in urban areas when it got darker, thus they could not attend night classes or

activities. Consequently, these women have benefited from online programs and activities as they do not need to leave their houses to access services available for them.

Another similarity related to service delivery is that organizations highlight the significance of creating gender-segregated places for women, which can again serve as the first step for encouraging women to talk about violence and abuse. Many aid workers stressed that due to traumatic experiences in the past, women feel much more comfortable around other women and open up much more easily compared to mixed groups or communities. That said, organizations in both countries emphasised that women are even more comfortable during one-to-one meetings. They pointed out that women talk very eagerly and actively about what happened to them during the private meetings, contrary to the general idea that they are way too conservative and religious to talk about sexual violence. Instead, the main reason that might make them reluctant to talk is that they are afraid of their community members and relatives and to be labelled as 'bad women' as it might threaten their position in the community. That position might be the only security net that they have in such an uncertain process as asylum-seeking. In other words, it is not that women don't talk to authorities because they are women or vulnerable. Instead, they maximize their own security and thus strategically preserve their family and community ties for their best interest, at least until getting legal status. This intentional cost-benefit calculation highlights the agency of women rather than thinking of them as vulnerable victims.

Another implication of this is that it shows that acquiring legal status is crucial for women to report violence and abuse or criminal networks. Organizations in both countries describe reporting as a multilayered and cross-cultural issue rather than a straightforward

process. As discussed above, women might be reluctant to report violence because, in the absence of legal protection, their community and family can be the only source of security for them. The same applies to their ties with the criminal networks. Accordingly, sometimes preserving the status quo is more favorable to women even though it means the continuum of abuse and violence for them as they get safety in return. For this reason, organizations in both countries asserted that they always respect women's choice, never patronize them on this matter and avoid making cultural relativist assumptions. As one aid worker told me, as a white European citizen her reaction would be totally different to violence, but there are many other dynamics that one has to consider as an asylum-seeking woman. Therefore, aid workers highlight that it is very important to not impose any decisions on women and just acknowledge that they will make the best decision for themselves. In addition to this, from a legal perspective, they cannot intervene in the matter if the woman is unwilling to report the issue. The same applies to the integration stage with cultural practices such as forced marriages. Organizations express that they do not have the right to intervene. They only inform women about their rights in the host country. At the end of the day, it is up to them to go forward or not. Again, preserving the status quo can be much more beneficial for women who have spent their lives on the run with their families. Especially younger generations do not want to disappoint their families after experiencing many traumatic experiences together for so many years and they do not challenge the status quo via asking for help. As a result of these similar experiences and examples, aid workers in both countries agree that the way how they define safety can be very different from the ways how women define safety for themselves. Therefore, they

respect their agency and choice and avoid imposing decisions on them. (This is especially applicable to organizations located in Northern France).

Another major similarity between the case of the UK and France is that organizations in both countries point out the instrumental value of creating activities that are typically associated with women, such as knitting, beading, or cooking. Such activities work as ice breakers for organizations in many ways. Firstly, they give excuses to women for spending time outside the house without their male relatives or partners. Secondly, it works as a first step for women to become familiar with the wide range of services of the organizations. She might become more willing to join other activities. Eventually, she might create stronger ties and become attached to the community, which helps her to overcome alienation and isolation, and therefore have better mental and physical health. Thirdly, once she becomes attached to the community, she might feel comfortable enough to ask for help about her traumatic experiences or report violence. Lastly, from an organizational perspective, typical activities associated with women might increase women's access to services and enhance the number of women receiving support in aid structures. Aid workers report that for some cultures, it is not okay for women to mix with men, and thus women cannot access services as men do. In this manner, setting up a women-only space is crucial to set equality among men and women regarding their access to services. At this point, interestingly, aid workers from both the UK and France highlight that creating gender-segregated places is not ideal, and women should eventually attend mixed events and communities as well as they get integrated into the host societies. They draw attention to the significance of mixing with men as an important step for their integration into their new life. Within this context, they stress that they are not separatists, and they support

mixed groups rather than women-only spaces ultimately. Yet, they acknowledge that traumatic experiences that women have with men, such as sexual abuse and the patronizing or abusive behavior from police or government officials both in the past and present, make it necessary for organizations to set up women-only spaces for enhancing their access services and support.

Organizations in both countries highlight the importance of getting feedback from refugee and asylum-seeking women. Although adopting distinct systems and approaches for getting feedback, all organizations put a structural effort into this matter. Moreover, they all perceive getting feedback as an attempt to add refugee and asylum women to the aid structures and thus making it more participatory. In some cases, especially in France, getting feedback, therefore, is claimed to be the starting point of advocacy activities that organizations engage with. There are various elements that support or undermine the efficiency of feedback systems in organizations. As learned from the Calais example, providing a confined permanent physical space is crucial for women to feel safe and comfortable enough to give their real opinions on matters. Another important factor is anonymity. Women should be informed that their personal information will never be shared publicly. Also, they should understand that their feedback will never affect their asylum case or prevent them from getting support from the organization in the future if they state a negative comment.

Lastly and most importantly, both British and French organizations agree that asylum-seeking and refugeehood do not necessarily victimize women. On the contrary to the general opinion, they can have an empowering effect on foreign women in some cases. Undoubtedly, asylum-seeking can marginalize women in so many ways as gender-related

persecutions are not recognized under international law, and women might get trapped in abusive relations since they do not have legal status. Even if they get a legal status they might experience destitution, racism, and sexual violence in reception countries. Yet, asylum-seeking and refugee women are not vulnerable victims by default. During asylum-seeking and refugeehood, the stereotypical gender relations become eroded as there is no confined private or public space that gender roles can be applied clearly as in the home country. In other words, the social and political structures that gender roles operate within change. It is much more difficult to see a clear division of labor for different gender roles within the household. For example, there is little opportunity for men to work, and there is no home for women to take care of or clean, which disrupts the male breadwinner bias. There is an obvious shift in responsibilities and roles, which might assign more power to women.

As one advocate told me, as women are more adaptable to change (because they are the primary responsibles for the well-being of the family unit in traditional gender systems), they focus on more practical survival issues to take care of their families in the reception societies. In this way, eventually, women might become the most powerful actors within the household as husbands lose their previous role as the leader of the family. The same advocate noted that for the very same reason, they come across many divorce situations because of this. So, it is evident that asylum-seeking might challenge the dominance and leadership of men. Additionally, women might become more likely to get opportunities in reception societies like access to education, healthcare, employment, and free child care unlike in their home countries, which may make them less dependent on their families and partners. All these opportunities might lead them to start thinking about

their former gender roles as domestic workers and how their work is never being appreciated. Moreover, they might notice that they did not have any decision-making power despite the hard work that they put into the family structures. Such opportunities might make them take control in their hands about their lives. They might become a part of a community away from male relatives for the first time. Thus, they might reclaim some sort of autonomy and power even in a powerless situation such as asylum-seeking or refugeehood.

At this point, it is crucial not to make overarching assumptions about refugee and asylum-seeking women and their victimized status. Of course, they might be victimized in many ways due to the current international refugee regime, however, they are not victims by default. Asylum-seeking might have an empowering effect on women too, as organizations from both countries confirmed.

6.2. Disparities

6.2.1. Political Traditions and Charity Cultures: Multiculturalism vs Republicanism

The diverse charity cultures in the UK and France, which affect the organizations' perceptions, operations, and methods for achieving refugee and asylum-seeking women's empowerment, are built upon distinct political traditions. In other words, such disparities in political traditions, namely British multiculturalism and French Republicanism/Universalism, ultimately shape how organizations address and attach meanings to empowerment.

British multiculturalism has many effects on the charity culture and sector in the country. Ashcroft and Bevir (2018) argue that since the Second World war, Britain has started to receive many non-white migrants. This was an intentional and purposeful policy

adopted by the Attlee government in the name of remaking the British nation and state as more multicultural. The decolonization movements all around the world posed a direct threat to not only Britain's self-perception but also its place in the world. Aiming to mitigate the negative implications of decolonization to the British Empire and securing the power and influence of Britain in Commonwealth countries, Britain established a new form of British multicultural citizenship that created the modern multicultural Britain today. This new policy granted individuals living in colonial territories new citizenship rights and the right to immigrate to the UK for the purpose of reasserting Britain's status as the 'mother country' (Ashcroft and Bevir, 2018). This strategy can be traced back to the settler colonialism tradition in British political history as the Empire always sought new ways to create political and cultural affinity with the colonies in order to secure its place and power in the world (Bell, 2016). The creation of the Commonwealth is a good example to demonstrate the intention behind establishing a political, cultural, and economical unity under the leadership of the British Empire. Although there have been much more hostile attitudes towards migrants and multiculturalism, which started the Cameron government and consolidated during Brexit, multiculturalism still lives and is embedded in the British society and political system.

Multiculturalism in the UK makes the charity sector more progressive, interactive, and less hierarchical. There is more room for collaborative and participatory approaches. This is because the state does not have a determining role in social communities, unlike in France. There are opportunities for minorities to embrace their identities and organize around those identities. Such communities or movements are not really perceived as direct threats to the capacity and rule of the state necessarily. As a result, the charity sector is

more progressive because they can add the 'receivers' of aid to the aid structures and take effective roles within communities. They are more likely to be given a voice and represent themselves without being dependent on the locals. At this point, the stark difference in status imposed by citizenship status gets blurred between the aid workers and clients. Asylum-seeking women are seen as friends, partners, and fellow community members. They are not seen as asylum-seekers or refugees but humans.

Moreover, because of multiculturalism and multicultural citizenship in the UK, there is a holistic idea of aid, which refers to the idea that aid cannot be demarcated from everyday politics thus, topics such as migration politics, minority rights, cultural freedom, anti-racism and women's rights. Therefore, the charity sector (especially the women-specific organizations) does not only operate under humanitarian agendas but adopt a broader social justice approach. The needs and concerns of women refugees and asylum-seekers are therefore addressed in line with the fight for a greater political change rather than being perceived as an organizational goal. In other words, they situate their work within the women's rights movement rather than focusing on gender-differentiated needs during asylum-seeking. The role of charity organizations is not just to help individual women but change the unjust system. Accordingly, they identify advocacy as an important part of what they do. It is not a separate operation but integral to their work as aid workers. This is why advocacy activities continued even during the Covid-19 lockdowns. Another implication of this holistic perception of aid is that a diverse range of operations and activities are organized within the same organization. The same organization does legal casework, advocacy, arrangement of social activities as they are all seen as intrinsic to how they understand aid.

Furthermore, because of multiculturalism, it is much easier to adopt participatory approaches in aid delivery and support grassroots community organizing. Asylum-seeking women are given opportunities to influence policy-making decisions via communicating with the public directly about their firsthand experiences. They are quite visible in social media accounts to give messages. Unlike the understanding of citizenship in France, in the UK, legal status is not the condition for acting and talking. In other words, asylum-seeking and refugee women are not seen as vulnerable by default just because they don't have legal status. Rather there are opportunities for women to become autonomous and resilient actors through the organizational services. Many advocates asserted that there have been structural changes in the aid sector in recent years that consolidate this more altruistic perception of aid as the charity sector is moving from traditional approaches such as just helping women to "they are helping women to help themselves". Aid is seen as a tool for creating long-term independence for foreign women rather than being a momentous transaction between the receivers and givers. There is available funding to adjust to this new agenda in the charity sector. Asylum-seeking women are represented on the administrative level of organizations, which highlights the significance of collective decision power. They can also get roles in service delivery, which is identified as a major benefit for local advocates since it decreases their workload. Accordingly, there is less emphasis on professional expertise, unlike in France. Instead, both local and foreign women are part of the same community and share responsibilities and roles based on their unique skills and experiences.

All these conceptualizations about the relationship between aid and women's empowerment by women refugee organizations in the UK are somehow compatible with

British multiculturalism as there are much more physical and discursive opportunity structures for plurality and representation in the charity sector. The historical tradition for respecting different religions, cultures, and languages in public spaces in British politics, therefore, is translated into a more progressive charity sector. There is less hierarchy, and more room for participatory and collaborative approaches in organizational structures and agendas as legal status or citizenship are not narrowly identified as having legal status.

Contrarily, the characterization of citizenship is the exact opposite in France. French political culture is built upon republicanism, universalism and French Revolution ideas that are embedded in the narrow conceptualization of aid and less progressive character of the French charity sector. According to Beland (2003), political universalism is directly connected to the republican model of integration. During the French Revolution, a strong model of national sovereignty was established, which aimed to create a nation of equal citizens, replacing the king as the source of political power and legitimacy. This new political vision is centered on an individualistic and homogenous vision of the nation, namely an egalitarian community of citizens. This vision has translated into the Republican integration model as integration is grounded in secularism, universalistic civic identity, and a strict separation between the private and the public spheres. This means that expressions of specific ethnic or religious identities in the public sphere are not perceived as legitimate as it might harm the general interest of the color-blind Republic, which is a political community of equal citizens. The general interest must always triumph over parochialism and private interests. Thus, there is an active construction of the collective identity grounded in a common language, universalistic values, and the recognition of the public sphere's separation from particular and private identities (Ibid). As a result, according to

Bertossi (2012), the republican and universalist political culture in France translates into the refusal of recognizing diverse cultural and religious identities or in the public arena and therefore refers to a different integration and citizenship model that deals with immigrants, ethnicity, racial and religious diversity contrasting with British multiculturalism.

In this Republican political model, the state is the sole guarantor of the well-being of its citizens and the provider of the services. Therefore, citizenship is exclusively associated with acquiring legal status as it is the only way of becoming an equal member of this political community. This perception also shapes the charity culture, especially the organizations working in the asylum area. It is not a coincidence that organizations identify the central pillar of their work as helping asylum-seeking women to acquire legal status. For the very same reason, aid work is explicitly about legal work. Similarly, providing legal assistance to foreign women is identified in line with achieving empowerment due to the clearly defined relationship between the state and individuals in French republican culture. To achieve empowerment, organizations should help foreign women to get legal status because it is the only way for them to access state protection, equality and public services. Even the advocacy campaigns are explicitly about helping women to acquire legal status and enlarging the legal definitions in the Convention for the benefit of women. This understanding might be the reason that there is less room for participatory and collaborative approaches in the charity sector because having legal status or citizenship is the first condition for acting, and when foreign women do not have legal status, they cannot act. They are dependent on citizens, namely aid professionals, for representing their interests or communicating their messages. This explains why there is a reluctance to add women refugees into the aid structures and give them active roles. Also, it explains why the aid

workers collaborate with formal actors such as state agencies or EU institutions rather than foreign women and engage in bureaucratic work targeting the state and policy-making mechanisms.

Moreover, republican culture leads to a narrow conception of aid, referring to the idea that advocacy is not integral to aid. Operating under humanitarian values, aid is seen to be neutral and objective and value-free and thus it is demarcated from politics. When I asked the aid workers if they provide any opportunities for foreign women to campaign, I was told that it is not what they do; aid or service delivery are different from political engagement. If they want to act on matters, they can be diverted to external activist organizations since advocacy is not integral to asylum aid. Additionally, there is fragmentation in the sector as each organization is specialized in a certain topic and a limited range of services and activities that each organization offers. What aid workers in the asylum sector do is to help foreign women to acquire legal status, which needs expertise on domestic law and state policies, not political activism. This is because being entitled to constitutional rights and becoming a citizen is identified to be the main objective to achieve asylum-seeking women's empowerment. Therefore, asylum-seeking women's empowerment is identified to be demarcated from everyday politics or a greater political agenda targeting patriarchy or racism. Similarly, grassroots organizing or community-building are not major tactics that aid workers employ as women that they work with do not have citizenship. Even if they do, the republican political culture works against accommodating or encouraging minority movements. There are no opportunities for organizing around diverse identity markers such as ethnicity, race, or religion since they might disrupt the equality among and collective identity of French society. Without

collaboration with foreign women, empowerment becomes an organizational goal, not political. As Olivius (2016) argues gender dimension is integrated into the aid structures for increasing the efficiency in service delivery. It becomes a tactic for gender-mainstreaming via making services and aid equally accessible to women, which is compatible with the perception of equality in French political culture and citizenship rhetoric.

Within this context, aid workers claim that aid, namely their work, is not affected by political ideas and values. Moreover, they assert that culture is not related to their work. It is not true. There are many values affecting their work such as republicanism and universalism, but they are not visible to the aid workers because these values are long-standing traditions in French political culture, and thus, they are normalized. It is exactly what French universalism means. Relatedly, aid workers discuss that what they do is not about political values but rights. So, there is this false assumption that acquiring legal status would solve everything for women, but what about mechanisms of discrimination and racism that might work against women's full integration to the society? Is a narrow perspective on citizenship centered on the legal status enough for being equal to the others in the society? What about assimilation, which is central to the republican integration system in France? Aid workers support the assimilation of foreign women for achieving empowerment. The reason why assimilation is described as a good thing is a direct result of the republican and universalist political culture in France. Then how can we say that aid work is neutral, objective, and free from political values and ideals?

In this regard, Northern France represents a unique case. The charity culture in the location cannot be applied to the organization in the rest of France due to the peculiarities

of the region. The notion of migrant and refugee integration is much related to the French Republican values, but this does not apply to the organizations in Northern France because they are located in a transit area. Therefore, the aid is not situated in a French citizenship rhetoric. And maybe, that is why it is less representative of French universalism and republicanism. Once an aid worker from Northern France told me that the British charity sector is more dynamic and composed of young people, whereas in France, the sector tends to depend on retired volunteers so there is a generational and demographic gap when it comes to the ideas and values. As a transit area that has more crisis situations, it is less likely for old people to volunteer and thus teams are composed of young people, which might work against the generational gap she was talking about. With more young people involved, maybe there is less conservatism regarding identity politics and more room for plurality. Moreover, as a transit area, it accommodates lots of volunteers and workers from the UK. Even some of the French aid workers worked in the UK at some point in their careers. For all these reasons, Northern France can represent a merging point between the two diverse charity cultures of the UK and France. There is flexibility and diversity in service delivery as a more holistic understanding of aid, just like in the UK. The French charity sector is quite separationist in service delivery, and there is a clear division and labor between different departments and organizations, which hints at the significance given to professional expertise. Yet, in Northern France, there are less formal and professional structures that open space for creativeness or progressiveness in aid structures. The fact that the aid workers from Northern France were the only ones that made comments about French political culture in my fieldwork demonstrates that they can see the relations

between political and charity culture in France and move away from such traditions with the help of opportunities created by operating in a transit region.

6.2.2. Sources of Funding for Charities

Funding has a crucial effect on the diverse charity cultures in the UK and France. Relatedly, it also has implications on how aid workers and organizations perceive their work and its relevance to advocacy, as well as how they decide upon specific agendas and services to address asylum-seeking and refugee women's empowerment. The diverse funding structures in charity sectors in the UK and France are closely related to their political culture traditions, as discussed in the previous section.

The State of France is the main funder of the nonprofit sector, namely the third sector. Therefore, we see that French organizations are dependent on the state, which works against adopting more progressive and creative approaches and moving away from the republican agenda or the state ideology. Their activities should meet the expectations of the State. Most interestingly, none of the aid workers that I interviewed think that getting all their funding from the state affects their work at all. They identify their organizations as private and independent associations. In addition to this, they prefer state funding since it is easier to access as they are familiar with the national system. This goes back to the idea that aid is free from any political values, which is supported and justified by the republican and universalist culture in France. Aid that targets asylum-seekers is only about providing them technical, neutral, and professional assistance for acquiring citizenship. In other words, for establishing an individual link with the state so that they can be equals to the others in the political community. Representing one collective identity and being equally distant to every member, the state becomes the ultimate protector, guarantor of

rights and provider of public services. Therefore, state protection or provision is an objective process not about political values or ideologies because it guards the general interest. The state funding works in the same way. It guards the general interest, and for this reason, it cannot refer to any political and ideological values that might influence the agenda of the actors in the nonprofit sector. The dominance of the state in the charity sector is neutral. As a result, organizations see themselves as independent actors and do not acknowledge that their work is an extension of the responsibilities of the state.

The historical development of the non-profit sector in France explains why state and public funding is very dominant and how it is related to French political culture. According to Archambault et al. (1999), after the French Revolution, private associations and other charity organizations were made illegal in France until 1864. Due to French Republicanism and Universalism, they were seen as undemocratic organizations, which might disturb the "general will" represented by the "democratic state" (Ibid). The origin of the nonprofit sector in France goes back to the Roman Catholic Church, just like in many other European countries. The revolution feared that the Church might try and reconsolidate its power through charity activities, namely via providing goods and services (Borzaga and Galera , 2014). "For this reason, these charities were secularized and suppressed as the government declared its social responsibility and highlighted its monopoly over common-wealth. In accordance with the Rousseauist principle, the state resisted the presence of any intermediary agent seeking to serve as a bridge between the state and its citizens. This statist tradition contrasted with the Anglo-Saxon predominance of individual responsibility and with the subsidiarity principle. As it would be in direct confrontation to the governmental mandate that the state and its citizens maintain a direct relationship, any kind

of intermediary interest group was deemed illegal if not authorized by the state"(Archambault et al;1999, p.82).

The nonprofit sector became legal again in 1901 in France, which indicates the relatively late development of the sector. The state acted as the only funder of the nonprofit sector. This increased the associations' dependence on the state not only regarding financial resources but deciding activities and roles of organizations (Borzaga and Galera, 2014). As a result of the economic crises in the 70s that crumbled the welfare state system in Europe, a few new decentralization acts in the 80s revisited the dominance of the state and resulted in relatively relaxed legal schemes for the nonprofit sector. Local authorities have integrated into the system (Archambault et al.;1999). Moreover, to decrease the burden of the state, the nonprofit sector was given new opportunities to act on their own boards, create employment, engage in commercial activities and provide public services for the benefit of the "general interest", which broke the state monopoly to some degree (Borzaga and Galera, 2014).

Although decentralization laws are still alive today, the state is still quite dominant in the nonprofit sector as being the main source of funding for the sector. The data available about funding schemes of the French nonprofit sector is very limited. Yet, GHK a report by the GHK for the European Union in 2006 shows that public funding consists 51% of the total financial resources of the charity organizations. The sources can be listed as Communes (14%), Central Government (12%), Departments (10%), Social Organism (7%), Regions(3.5%) and European Union (1%). Private funding constitutes the rest, which accounts for 49% of the total funding. These sources can be listed as Income Generated Activities (32%), Membership Fees (12%) and Donations and Sponsors (5%). As it can be

seen from these statistics, there is one or fewer opportunities for funding sourced by the private sector actors such as business corporations, which might be engaged in corporate social responsibility or private foundations or sponsors, unlike the UK. This is not a surprise for me. When I checked out the websites of French organizations that I interviewed for the names of their donors, I noticed that there was almost never a name of a private funder. Instead, there were always the logos of ministries, departments, or municipalities, which shows that most of their funding comes from the state itself.

All in all, the dominance of the state in the nonprofit sector is rooted in the political culture as the state can be the only service provider for guarding the general interest and equality among citizens, which indicates a liberal understanding of citizenship as the nation is composed of equal individuals, not separate groups, clubs or corporations. Accordingly, the prevalent role of the state is justified and normalized in the nonprofit sector. For the very same reason, French organizations do not think being dependent on the state affects their funding. Yet, they might have been working as an extension of the state via meeting the guidelines and expectations of the state. It might limit their capabilities to adopt more creative or progressive approaches in service delivery to aid. As Craig (2009) argues, the dependence on public funding might work against nonprofit organizations' social justice mission since they might prioritize the legal and bureaucratic approaches, which is the case in the French nonprofit sector.

There are way more private funding sources available to the organizations in the British nonprofit sector. Therefore, the state does not really influence the activities, agendas, and objectives of the organizations in the sector. Consequently, organizations are freer and do not have to act as the extension of the state. they are more likely to come up

with creative tactics and strategies in aid schemes. There is no static perception of aid and service delivery. Instead, there is room for constant change since there is constant competition between organizations to access funds, and they have to follow the most recent trends. For example, currently, funders want organizations to move away from traditional service delivery and to integrate refugee women into aid structures to break down dependencies and hierarchies. Thus, organizations come up with programs to enhance collaboration with women to access funding. These demands might lead organizations to create systemic and permanent advocacy structures within organizations, in which they can always balance casework and the agenda for a greater political change. Organizations can integrate a social justice approach to their work rather than solely focusing on legal casework and the provision of services. They do not act as the extension of the state.

The availability of private funding is a direct result of British political culture and its relation to the historical development of the nonprofit sector in the UK. In contrast to France, British charities have always been viewed as the partners of the state, not as confronting actors to the public authority (Borzaga and Galera, 2014). In fact, until the 1970s, charities played an advocacy role predominantly and were less concerned about the direct provision of services (Ibid). The 1970s marked a new era in corporate social responsibility, which eventually led to the fragmentation in funding schemes of the nonprofit sector. Brammer and Millington (2003) discuss that during the 70s, the market share of manufacturing began to decline and was replaced by the service sector. Simultaneously, there has been a significant increase in stakeholder pressure for socially responsible behavior by companies, in which much of this pressure has fallen on the traditional manufacturing industry. The British government encouraged socially

responsible behavior at first through environmental regulation and closer controls over the activities of some industries with socially damaging externalities, such as the tobacco industry. Companies have also come under pressure from the ethical investment movement. (Ibid.) Such developments are key to the evolution and persistent presence of corporate social responsibility and corporate philanthropy (see Brammer et al., 2006) in the UK, which eventually created the structure for the availability of private funding in the British nonprofit sector.

According to The National Council for Voluntary Organizations (2022), the government is the largest donor in the non-profit sector, but three-quarters of all voluntary organizations do not receive any income from the state. Half of all voluntary sector organizations receive most of their funding from individuals. For almost one in ten voluntary organizations, statutory bodies are the majority provider of their income. (The National Council for Voluntary Organisations, 2022)". Other sources (private) of charitable income are large institutional funders, trusts and members of the public responding to fundraising campaigns or gifting legacies (Connoly et al., 2013). These numbers demonstrate that British organizations are less dependent on the state for funding. Undoubtedly, it plays an important role in the sector as being the largest donor. Yet, it does not have dominance as only one-quarter of the organizations are funded by the state. There are many other sources of funding in the sector. Most importantly, this fragmentation in funding schemes encourages organizations to adopt more progressive approaches in service delivery.

6.2.3. Identifying Protection

Another major implication of diverse charity and political cultures in the UK and France is related to the ways organizations define protection and its relation to empowerment of the refugee and asylum-seeking women. In the case of the UK, protection is not defined narrowly. It does not only refer to assisting women to legal status in the UK but also decreasing the dependency of women on aid. This vision translates into the organizational activities and agenda. Organizations work actively to provide tools to asylum-seeking and refugee women so that they become independent agents who have control of their own lives even though they are in powerless situations. The focus is not on their vulnerabilities but on resilience. They are not treated as anonymous gendered bodies but individuals who are independent agents that can communicate with the public directly without being dependent on an external actor to speak for them. Within this context, organizations draw attention to the important role of programs and activities that provide asylum-speaking women opportunities to speak. Traditionally, speaking is a verb associated with masculine qualities. By letting asylum-seeking women speak and represent themselves, organizations situate independence in line with the greater cause of the feminist movement. Another intervention by the organizations aiming to decrease the dependency on aid structures is that they offer courses to teach women about the asylum system. Getting familiar with the legal frameworks, guidelines and procedures, women logically evaluate the information that they get from their caseworkers, lawyers, public officials, partners etc., which eventually decreases their dependence on aid organizations and also on men. Moreover, such courses are viewed as a first step for becoming advocates by the organizations. When they have enough knowledge about the system, women

eventually want to become advocates for helping women who experience the same difficulties that they experienced before. (In France, sometimes women are also informed about the asylum system, but it is a spontaneous interaction to answer their questions about a certain matter in their casework. Thus, it is not a systemic or a structural effort that aims to teach about the whole system so women can evaluate the advice they get and decrease their dependence on others).

Encouraging women to take leadership roles within the communities is another tactic employed by British organizations to decrease asylum-seeking women's dependence on others. They are both offered voluntary and paid roles. Disrupting male breadwinner bias at the same time, such tactics prompt asylum-seeking women to take ownership of the communities too. They are not guests or clients but fellows and partners. The refugee women advocates that I interviewed were very proud of their work. When they were talking about their organizations, they always used the word "we", which clearly portrays that they do feel belonging to their communities and develop a sense of self-worth about their roles. Otherwise, women feel like 'junk' while they wait for too many years for their asylum case to be finalized and finally get a job.

All these examples demonstrate that protection is defined broadly and not limited to legal status by the organizations in the UK. They define protection also as coming up with mechanisms to decrease the dependency of refugee women on aid structures. Accordingly, they do not only focus on survival but long-term goals such as independence, self-sufficiency, and resilience.

Contrarily, in France, protection is narrowly defined as helping women to acquire legal status by the organizations. This is because lacking legal status is the ultimate source

of insecurity and vulnerability. This is a direct outcome of the French republican political culture, which acknowledges the state as the absolute guarantor of the rights and services as discussed above. Therefore, the lack of legal status makes asylum-seeking women agentless by default. Accordingly, it becomes the responsibility of professional aid workers to protect women. I think this implicitly implies a division between the local women (the aid workers who already hold citizenship) and the foreign women (asylum-seeking women who do not have legal status). At the same time, it replaces the decision-making power in the hands of the local women only and justifies it as they have the required legal status to act as agents. Within this context, it also justifies not working or collaborating with asylum-seeking women. For that very same reason, it is not surprising that aid workers work with policy-making entities, state institutions and other professional aid actors, not with foreign women. Activities such as training programs, advocacy campaigns and agenda-setting are always carried out with the locals or formal platforms both at the national and the EU level. Such programs are dominated by the topics on legal matters to better protect asylum-seeking and refugee women. Therefore, protection becomes a neutral and value-free policy goal, which should be achieved by the locals for the benefit of the foreigners. Since foreigners do not have legal status, they are dependent on locals to represent and communicate their needs and concerns.

Identifying vulnerabilities of asylum-seeking women eases the process for them to get protection, namely get legal status. They might be represented by the organizations as people who do not have agency. Besides, they might be infantilized via being dealt with under the category of "women and children" by the programs. This can be seen as a strategic choice since it will lead to positive discrimination against foreign women, which

will ultimately enhance their protection via accelerating the process for them to acquire legal status. Still, the emphasis on vulnerability is dangerous. It implies that women are victims because they are women. Similarly, gendered differentiated needs and concerns become identical to the needs and concerns of victims as if women can only be victims. Yet, due to the instrumental value of imposed categories of vulnerability to asylum-seeking and refugee women, protection rhetoric also dominates the advocacy activities of the organizations (more specifically about double violence and how to protect the women victims of violence). Protection is undoubtedly very important, but it is not the only reality or issue that asylum-seeking women have. Moreover, it again creates a hierarchy between the local and foreign women as if foreign women are victims because they are culturally others. Thus, they are dependent on Western women to protect themselves or represent their best interests. Such discourses, therefore, perpetuate myths about Third World Women. Why can foreign women not speak for themselves? During my research, I came across some creative projects by French organizations in which their clients use art and paintings to communicate their issues. Such projects were usually dominated by men, and there was low participation of women. I noticed that both men and women express their tragedies and victimized status via art. It is never about resilience or agency. This is not a coincidence rather an explicit outcome of the ways how protection is narrowly identified as acquiring citizenship as an extension of the French political and charity culture.

6.2.4. Two-way or One-Way Empowerment and Integration

Not surprisingly, the diverse charity and feminism cultures in the UK and France are reflected in the views on empowerment and integration. Originating from multiculturalism embedded in British political and charity culture, aid workers do not characterize

empowerment narrowly as something to be achieved by the refugee women only via their interactions with the aid structures. Instead, they identify a two-way empowerment process, which does not only benefit foreign women but also themselves as local professional women working in the asylum sector. The asylum and charity sector are dominated by a white male savior rhetoric, which makes it a White Western male sector, according to the women aid workers. Many of them express how they feel intimidated and discriminated against by their male colleagues when they were working in other bigger professional organizations in the sector. However, working in women-only organizations and embracing a women-to-women aid approach provide them opportunities to challenge the white male savior rhetoric in the sector. The masculine mentality in the sector underscores and reproduces the hierarchy between receivers and givers, or the binary understanding of masculinized subjects helping feminized objects disrupts the agency of both local and foreign women. Yet, women-to-women aid creates opportunities for aid workers to break from these patterns and adopt more progressive and innovative methods in service delivery. They can draw attention to the rooted hierarchies in the aid structures and move to approaches that are centralized around collaboration, community-building, equal representation, and authorship of foreign women. Many advocates that interviewed express that they do not feel like professionals but more like a member of a community. They are quite happy about establishing friendships with women they work with. They also create nationwide alliances to promote women-to-women aid via writing joint reports, organizing rallies and conferences, and conducting research projects together. They call this alliance 'sisterhood' and assert that the 'sisterhood' empowers them since they believe that women should be the ones campaigning for women not men.

Similarly, aid workers also conceptualize integration as a two-way process, which implies that foreign women are seen as equal members of society. Especially, women-specific organizations' integration approaches are in line with their broader objective to achieve more egalitarian and feminist aid structures. Consequently, they create programs for asylum-seeking and refugee women, enabling them to contribute to the organizational or social structure even though they do not have a legal status yet. These programs are not necessarily political. They offer various opportunities. Cooking programs are a very widely used tactic by organizations, which not only allow foreign women to fundraise for the organization but also teach or talk about their culture to the locals. The main idea behind such projects is that it is not only the responsibility of refugees to learn about British culture. Locals should also learn about the newcomers' culture too. Another strategy for two-way integration is reflected in the structure of the befriending women organizations. These organizations bring local and foreign women together, but the roles are interchangeable; foreign women are not learners but also teachers. These programs do not categorize asylum-seeking women as clients and local women as volunteers but instead establish an equal structure for both women to teach and learn at the same time.

On the other hand, empowerment and integration are defined very narrowly in France. They are both recognized as objectives to be achieved by asylum-seeking and refugee women exclusively with the help they get from aid professionals. Mirroring republican political culture in France, integration means that refugee women should have equal access to the public services and social welfare system. Therefore, integration is narrowly defined as having access to appropriate accommodation and the job market rather than political engagement or identity politics. The word integration is used interchangeably

with inclusion and autonomy. This interesting choice of words reflects the republican culture and how acquiring legal status is the main source for independence and self-autonomy.

Relatedly, organizations claim that they utilized customized and tailored assistance to refugees for better responding to their diverse needs during integration. Yet, they generally use the exact same programs for both men and women. Aid workers acknowledge that patriarchal structures or gender relations might create additional barriers for women during integration, but they do not know how to address these challenges in their work. Thus, the integration assistance that women get might not be meaningful since it does not address invisible social structures that pull back women during integration other than helping them to use their constitutional rights. This asymmetry in integration services for men and women might be an outcome of the republican understanding of equality as the state does not recognize any identity makers such as gender and universalize male experiences in the provision of public services.

Furthermore, unlike the British case, aid workers do not embrace collaborative or community-building approaches to enhance the integration or empowerment of asylum-seeking and refugee women. Instead, the relationship between the workers and clients are clearly defined. It is the responsibility of aid professionals to teach about French values, which will make foreign women move beyond their culture and become productive members of the society. This problematic one-way understanding of integration reflects a neocolonial lens, which perpetuates stereotypical representation of culturally, ethnically, and racially different women via portraying them as backwards, uneducated, and conservative. It also locates freedom strictly as a concept that can only exist in Western or

French society. Such perspectives affect the type of integration activities designed for women. The only women-specific integration programs are related to sexual health and family planning as if culturally other women are mothers, wives, or homemakers by default. In line with this vision, an organization in Lyon created a program that centered around gender roles. This program is open for the participation of both men and women. The programs aim to explain how women have the exact same rights as men in France. They have equal access to accommodation and the job market. It deals with gender in a technical sense. Emphasizing mainly on the practical barriers in the job market and social security system, the program does not discuss the root causes of patriarchy or its relationship with discrimination or racism. Neither it is about political campaigning nor leadership. The main intention behind the program is to utilize the instrumental value of women, who as mothers educate their kids about French values and therefore enhance the integration of each household into the society. Thus, integration is strictly about assimilation to French values, which consolidates the idea that integration is a one-way process that should be achieved by the foreigners. Simultaneously, it places French culture and values above the others and reproduces collective identities of superior and inferior. This hierarchical setting proves that aid work is not value-free, contrary to what aid workers think.

Lastly, because of the one-way conceptualization of empowerment, there is no reference to the empowering effect of women-to-women aid, unlike the British case. Although there are nationwide collaborations between women-specific refugee organizations, there is no explicit remark for the role of such collaborations in the male

savior rhetoric or masculine characterization of the asylum sector. This is again related to republican political culture as aid work is seen as neutral and value-free.

6.2.5. British vs French Feminism

The historical development, character, and agenda of the feminist movements in the UK and France account for the diverse understandings of asylum-seeking and refugee women's empowerment by the organizations. Stemming from the multicultural political tradition, British feminism has been more inclusionary historically in terms of accommodating the concerns of ethnically, racially, and religiously different women. This is not to suggest that British feminism is problem-free. Yet, in relation to the French feminist movement, British feminism did a better job in terms of integrating the ideals of women-of-color into the general cause of the movement. Jonsson (2015) argues, similar to the US, Black British Feminism was established as an autonomous movement in the late 70s, which has thrived both within and outside the academy. The first national Black Women Organization, OWAAD, (Organization of Women of African and Asian Descent) was established in 1978. 'Black' was used as a political term inclusive of all people targeted by racism, such as Asians and Middle Eastern women as well. Focusing on racist policing, restrictive immigration laws, discrimination within the education system etc., the movement challenged the white hegemony in the British feminist movement and made room for racial critique and thus plurality in the broader national feminist discourse, which is still applicable today (Jonnson, 2015).

Stemming from the historical evolution and characteristics of British feminism, refugee women organizations are more likely to situate aid in the greater political agenda of the feminist movement. They are not interested in meeting gender-differentiated needs

but deal with issues from a women's rights perspective systematically. They differ from bigger organizations in this respect because they create participatory and emancipatory activities rather than just gender mainstreaming. Since there has been historically more room for plurality within the British feminist movement, refugee women organizations claim that they do not believe in artificial separation between foreign and local women. Adopting a sisterhood rhetoric, women are seen as friends and equal members of the community. When they discuss culture, they always address it in relation to other factors such as age, race, ethnicity and sexual orientation and how it affects the human right in question. In that way, they avoid essentializing arguments about differences. They acknowledge that the women they work with are not victims because they are women but because of the international asylum or the nation-state system. Unlike France, organizations view foreign women not only as asylum-seeking and refugee women but as ordinary women. Therefore, in addition to gendered issues related to asylum-seeking, they also address contemporary issues in the British feminist movement, such as period poverty or sexual freedom.

Most importantly, organizations recognize the political potential and agency of women. Aid workers claim that asylum-seeking makes women more political compared to men because they are more likely to talk about traumatic experiences. These conversations eventually turn into discussions about feminist politics and women's rights. For this reason, some of the organizations hold intersectional feminism classes to strategically use this opportunity to teach them about feminist theories. During these classes, refugee women also discuss contemporary topics such as Brexit and how contemporary politics affects the asylum system in Britain. They also examine international movements such as the #Metoo

Movement or the Black Lives Matter and how they have shared experiences with women all around the world. These talks and programs are voluntary, and women are never pushed to learn about theories or become advocates. Yet, they have the option which highlights the inclusionary and progressive character of British feminism and its effect on the ways how organizations address women's empowerment.

Within this context, Freedman (2010) argues how the available opportunity structures that local and national activism can be translated into more comprehensive policies on gender and asylum. International norms on gender and asylum can be integrated into the national policy "through an active appropriation and mobilization at national level, a mobilization which was possible both through the availability of political opportunities for cooperation with government bodies and through discursive opportunities for talking about gender in the NGO sector''(2010, p.187). In other words, the character and size and scope of gender activism in the UK have provided opportunities for refugee organizations and as well as other women organizations to work together to be more responsive to the needs and concerns of women refugees. As Freedman continues, "In contrast, in France, there has been very little substantial activism or mobilization on the issue of asylum and gender-specific persecution, and what mobilization there has been has had little or no impact on policies or legislation. On several occasions the issue of women asylum seekers and gender related forms of persecution has been discussed both by feminist groups and amongst associations and NGOs working with asylum seekers and refugees, but this discussion has never led to any real agreement on the goals of a mobilization, or to a widened participation in the mobilization beyond a few activists. The ''major'' associations and NGOs dealing with asylum have neglected this issue, or dismissed it as unimportant or even

''divisive''(2010, p.188). This is a direct result of French political culture and how gender equality is narrowly defined as having the same right as men or having equal access to public services. Relatedly, Freedman discusses that some "believed that any measures to provide specific procedures or support for female asylum seekers would inevitably deprive male asylum seekers of some of their rights and support. This type of argument against gender specific policies or procedures is often framed in terms of the necessity of maintaining ''universalism'', which is strongly anchored in the French tradition.(...) Thus, it can be argued that a key element in the failure of France to adopt at national level any of the international norms on gender specific persecution, has been a discursive opportunity structure within which gender is either absent, or else has negative connotations' (2010, p.189). Freedman's argument mirrors how French political traditions of republicanism and universalism creates fragmentation in the charity sector as well as the French feminist movement or national gender activism. Consequently, organizations fail to promote progressive and inclusion programs to address women's empowerment. The focus is mainly on assisting women to acquire legal citizenship.

The historical evaluation of French feminism has been more conservative and static compared to British feminism, which affects how French organizations define empowerment and situate their work its relation to feminism. Although centered on the idea of equality, the French Revolution failed to provide equal political rights to women and women continued to be seen as passive or second-class citizens. Only in 1944, women were granted voting rights, which made France one of the last countries to do so in Europe. With the peak of the second-wave feminist movement in the 1970's, women solidified their presence in the public sphere and gained equal treatment and rights with men in the

economic and political life. Although second wave feminism has layed the ground for the British feminism to go to a more multicultural direction with the inclusion or critique from non-white women, it has been the opposite in France. Feminism in France become institutionalized for the sake of protecting the gains and achievements of second wave feminism. According to Allwood and Wadia (2002a) by the 1980s, gender equality gained legitimacy in France and thus, French feminists felt obligated to "enter into dialogue with the state as a means of protecting gains made in the 1970s, was the institutionalization of feminism. In France this institutionalization consisted of, on the one hand, the establishment of the Ministry of Women's Rights (MWR), under the aegis of the Socialist government of 1981–1986 and, on the other hand, the entry of feminism into the academy. The second process was the demobilization of the feminist movement and the decision of individuals or groups of feminists to remain autonomous and to continue defending women's rights and challenging male-dominated power relations and structures. The unfolding of these twin processes led to repeated media discussion over the future of feminism in the 1980s. It became fashionable to talk of the demise of feminism and of its replacement by a postfeminist culture in which women had achieved equal status with men and therefore no longer had reason to engage in the kind of militant feminist activism that had marked the 1970s" (p. 212). This process again hints the republican culture as acquiring the same legal rights with men seem to be the ultimate end of the feminist movement in France as if there are not any other sources for women's oppression. Moreover, institutionalization of French feminism was also a reaction to the globalization of economy, Europeanization of decision-making and Americanization of culture in Europe for the sake of persevering French national identity via eliminating differences

among citizens and supporting French exceptionalism or universalism (Allywood and Wadia, 2002b). For these reasons, the French feminist movement has historically become less responsive to differences and intervention from non-White and non-French women. Eventually, during the progressive climate of world politics in the 1990s, the French feminist movement mobilized again and started to make coalitions with anti-racist and anti-capitalist global movements. Yet, the evolution is very slow compared to the UK and there has been late or less historical engagement with non-white and non-universalist movements, which fails to provide any room to foreign women (for instance, as the burqa bans demonstrates) and therefore affect the ways how French organizations address empowerment and refuse to adopt collaborative approaches during aid delivery. Even today, gender differences have to be universalized and presented as a universal difference, in which being a woman becomes a universal category that transcends other social categories of class, race, age and ethnicity to become a valid public claim (Gole and Billaud, 2012). This explains, for instance, why French organizations define protection or integration very narrowly as acquiring citizenship rights.

Deriving from the legal equality emphasis in French feminism, it is not a coincidence that organizations prioritize responding to gendered differentiated needs rather than situate their work in a broader cause of French feminism. Therefore, women's empowerment becomes an institutional policy goal, which can be achieved only via working with professional actors, not with foreign women, since they do not have the required legal capacity to act or work. Interpreting feminism narrowly as responding to gender-differentiated needs of foreign women leads to the problematic conceptualization of assuming women, gender and feminism are identical to each other and being used

interchangeably in aid structures. Gender differentiated needs become symmetric to the needs of victims of violence, in which the most appropriate empowerment tactic becomes protection. It also implies that women are victims because they are women and as if there cannot be any other gender-differentiated needs apart from offering protection to the victims. Such perspectives are similar to Olivius's (2016) study on humanitarian organizations and how integrating a gender dimension to service delivery was not about women's emancipation; rather, it was an institutional tactic to enhance aid delivery via adding more women to the structures, which was the main institutional objective.

The more conservative and universalist character of French feminism also influences the integration services or programs that organizations design specifically for women. Such programs are mostly sexual health and family planning only. Unlike the UK, they are not given any opportunities for political engagement. When I asked about this to the aid workers, they responded that foreign women usually do not want to get more active roles as they do not have their papers. If this is true, it is not because women are apolitical but the asylum system. Yet, in integration programs, women are either victims in need of protection or wives, homemakers and mothers who are responsible for educating the household for their new life in France. These perspectives perpetuate a neocolonial lens about non-white and non-European women as they are portrayed as agentless and backwards who only exist in the private sphere. According to the aid workers, foreign women need to be taught about French values to move away from their culture and acknowledge that they are free in France as a woman, or they have the same rights as men. Accordingly, accumulation and sensibilization to French values is argued to be crucial for women's empowerment. Such perspectives entail gender equality or feminism is a Western

concept, which is also compatible with French values such as secularism, republicanism, and universalism. As a result, there is little or almost no engagement with local feminist activism since there is a sharp distinction between foreign and local women. should be partnerships to break this artificial separation and move away from less forgiving and less diverse trajectory of French feminism. Just like the UK, sometimes organizations use special days such as International Women's Day and St. Catherine's Day to communicate gender issues to the public and organize joint activities with local movements. Yet, these should not be limited to special days and fit into the broader of the feminist movement in France. The only exception will be the Abolition Movement, as some smaller organizations advertise that they actively support the movement. Apart from this, there are no explicit partnerships about the contemporary campaigns of the local and national feminist movement and women refugee organizations.

As discussed in the previous section, Northern France can be seen as a merging point between the charity and political cultures of Britain and France. The same applies to feminism and its relation to service delivery, which is not focused on assimilation but enables more space for interaction between aid workers and refugee women and lead to change in diverse understandings of feminism. An aid worker from Calais explained to me how working in a transit area helped her to break the stereotypes embedded in French or White Western Feminism. Before she had a very rigid idea of how a feminist must look like namely, urban, professional, or radical with tattoos etc. Yet, once she hears the stories from the women she worked with, she came across with different feminist histories or movements such as the Kurdish female freedom fighters or socialist feminism in post-Soviet Union countries. Moreover, she expressed that in camp situations, there is no typical

clear division of labor within the households. Husbands cook and clean too. Consequently, she came to understand that there are many similarities between European women and foreign women, which comes together under the umbrella of feminism. Therefore, unlike the organizations in urban France, there is two-way learning about feminism rather than teaching foreigners about feminist values, which implies a less hierarchical structure. When I interviewed the organization in urban France about such dynamics, even the smaller grassroots women organizations responded that they did not really understand how could (White or French) feminism be discriminatory. This is a straightforward outcome of the universalist aspects in political tradition and its influence on the French feminist movement.

6.3. Conclusion

This chapter analyzes similarities and disparities in the ways how organizations address empowerment in the UK and France. The most meaningful similarity is that organizations in both countries acknowledge that asylum-seeking is not necessarily a disempowering situation for women. Asylum-seeking women undoubtably victimized by multiple structures but they are not victims by default. Asylum-seeking can change gender roles, which might enhance the agency of women and lessen their dependence on men. Moreover, they might get education and employment opportunities in reception countries that they may not get in their home countries. For these reasons, asylum-seeking can be an empowering process for women.

The diverse political cultures in the UK and France is the main source for the disparities in organizational perceptions of and tactics for addressing asylum-seeking and refugee women's empowerment. Multicultural political tradition in the UK along with the

more cosmopolitan perception translates into a more progressive charity culture. The relatively silent role of the state in the charity sector and availability of private sources for funding enable organizations to come up with more creative programs. Empowerment is seen as a long-term goal, which does not only refer to getting international protection but also lessen their dependence on aid structures. The multiculturalist tradition also makes British Feminism much more inclusive, which eventually makes room for asylum-seeking women and their concerns in the broader agenda of the national movement. Therefore, organizations situate their work within the cause of feminism. They work actively to create mechanisms and programs for asylum-seeking and refugee women to represent themselves and tell their stories.

Contrarily, in France the republican political culture, which makes the state the only provider and guarantor of services, lead organizations to define empowerment narrowly as acquiring legal status. Being the main donor, the state is quite dominant in the charity sector, which limits organizations' ability to be creative. They act as the extension of the state, which means that they emphasize on providing legal help to women. The universalist characteristic of French feminism does not make room for asylum-seeking women. Organizations therefore do not see advocacy integral to aid work. They do not situate their work in a broader social justice frame. Instead, they view themselves as professionals and also citizens, who have the capacity to act based on their legal capacity and rights, working for the protection of non-citizen women. Empowerment is defined narrowly as assisting women to acquire citizenship.

CHAPTER 7:CONCLUSION

This dissertation aims to answer the following twofold research question: How do aid organizations in the UK and France construct women refugees and attach meanings to "refugee women's empowerment" as an end goal? How are these constructions related to global hierarchies (between the West and the rest) or collective identities of superior and inferior? The research concludes that British aid structures are more participatory and inclusive as refugee women are given opportunities for enhancing their authentic representation and authorship. Women refugees in French aid structures are more likely to be dependent on aid professionals, which might harm their autonomy and agency in the long run.

I have conducted semi-structured interviews with aid organizations and women refugees to answer the research question. All organizations that are selected and interviewed in this study advertise themselves to be feminist organizations or women specific organizations or claim to have a gender lens in their service delivery. These organizations can be either women-only platforms or mixed (both men, women, and children) organizations that offer women-specific activities and assistance, and design programs to achieve women's empowerment. Therefore, my research does not represent the general features of all aid organizations in the asylum sector in each country. Rather, it focuses on the different strategies and structures for addressing women's empowerment embraced by different organizations in the sector, who advertise themselves to pay attention to the gender dimensions of refugeehood and asylum-seeking. The outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic has affected the methodological process as I was not able to conduct field work in France but in the UK only. I was able to employ participant

observation in the communities of British aid organizations to get a better grasp of the meanings and objectives, in which the daily activities and operations build on.

The ways aid organizations define and address "refugee women empowerment" are remarkably diverse in the UK and France. Based on my fieldwork, I come up with four main categories to analyze the ways how British aid organizations construct empowerment, which are (1) creating and regulating space, (2) service, aid delivery and protection, (3) collaboration and inclusion and (4) public visibility and authorship. Organizations assert that providing basic material aid that covers refugee women's everyday survival needs is one of their major activities to achieve "empowerment". Yet, they are skeptical about mere professional or clientelist approaches that construct women refugees as receivers since they create dependency in the long run and limit women's agency and their full participation in public life. Therefore, they actively work towards programs to enhance community-building strategies and provide opportunities for women to take leadership roles in and ownership of their communities. In this way, refugee women are seen as friends, partners and full members of the communities which eliminates the hierarchy between aid workers and refugees as well as local women and refugee women. Such structures resonate with a more feminist logic of aid, in which aid organizations do not focus on gender-differentiated needs but rather on women's rights approaches for facilitating women's empowerment. In this regard, intersectionality is respected in aid structures as culture, sexual orientation or ethnicity are always discussed in relation to the other factors, which ultimately challenges the stereotypes of non-white or non-Western women from developing countries. There is a sisterhood emphasis inside the communities highlighting the need for working together for a better future. Collaborating with refugee women, aid organizations aim to enhance

the authentic representation of women and highlight their equal status as opposed to the common portrayal of them as vulnerable and incapacitated individuals. Women refugees are given opportunities to represent themselves and talk to the general public directly via using different mediums such as public speaking, poetry, drama, photography and music in political campaigns. In this way, British aid organizations adopt a politicized and holistic perception of aid, in which aid is seen as a tool for creating long-term permanent change and full autonomy and independence of women. Advocacy is seen as integral to aid work and thus aid workers describe themselves as advocates. Aid workers embrace two-way integration and two-way empowerment. This means that they recognize that working with women refugees empowers themselves as aid workers as well. Moreover, they refuse to construct integration as solely the responsibility of refugee women, namely newcomers. All these attitudes challenge the stereotypical representation of Third World Women, which enables women to stay in solidarity while disrupting global hierarchies and neocolonial perspectives.

British aid organizations interviewed in this research reveal certain challenges and obstacles that limit their capabilities to address women refugees' empowerment. I analyzed these in three main categories. The first set of barriers is practical barriers, which refers to the physical and mental conditions that limit women refugee's participation in aid structures. The second group is barriers related to the asylum and aid sector. These refer to the issues in the British aid sector such as balancing the everyday casework and political work for creating long term political change, finding appropriate funding and lack of data. The last group of barriers is related to diverse perceptions of feminism among women in the community resulting from different backgrounds and life experiences, which analyzes

the issues resulting from addressing empowerment in a diverse group of refugee women and the strategies for eliminating discrimination inside the communities.

In France, based on my data collection, I have analyzed the ways aid organizations address refugee women's empowerment in four main categories such as namely (1) legal protection and identification of vulnerabilities, (2) service delivery and professionalism, (3) advocacy and awareness-raising and lastly, (4) integration to France and sensibilization to French values. Moreover, the data demonstrates that transit areas in Northern France (such as Calais and Dunkirk) is viewed as a merging point between British and French aid cultures, political traditions and feminist understandings and approaches. Hence, the characteristics of aid work in Northern France regarding empowerment will not apply to the approaches of the organizations in the rest of France.

Aid organizations assert empowerment can be achieved through carrying out professional aid work to address the gender-differentiated needs of refugee women. Therefore, their activities are demarcated from the local feminist movement. Thinking the gender differentiated needs identical to women's empowerment creates vagueness and leads to superficial approaches that lack systemic analysis. Aid organizations assert that their work is and should be mainly focused on assisting refugee women to access legal protection and citizenship. Therefore, they adopt a strict legal and bureaucratic approach. The emphasis on legal protection is related to the legal citizenship perspective that is internalized in France (at the expense of active citizenship) due to republican tradition. As part of their work for helping women to get citizenship status, they assign greater importance for identifying women refugees' vulnerabilities properly. Representing women as vulnerable victims might benefit women in the short run by accelerating the process for

them to acquire international protection but in the long run it might create problems since it damages their agency and autonomy.

As a result of the emphasis on legal aspects of women's empowerment, aid organizations value expertise and professionalism, which makes them reluctant to collaborate with or offer leadership roles to women refugees. Women are seen as the receivers of aid not partners in organizational structures. Therefore, there is a salient hierarchical setting between the aid workers and women refugees. Aid work is seen as an objective, technical and value-free instrument, which results in the prioritization of administrative projects and policy-making schemes both at the national and European levels at the expense of local grassroots activism. The same applies to advocacy activities since advocacy is not seen as an integral part of aid. Aid has a neutral and formal character, which is done by the aid workers exclusively and women refugees do not participate in advocacy structures and have decision-making power. Hence, empowerment too becomes a formal and value-free policy goal, which is demarcated from political activism. Advocacy is done by the professional activities of experts, who are responsible to represent the best interest of refugee women since refugee women are seen to not have any capacity to act due to their lack of legal status. It is carried out in separate departments with external actors (who are also experts) and is demarcated from daily aid operations or casework, which is not open for any contributions from refugee women. The advocacy activities about the needs and concerns of women refugees do not have any reliable connection with the local women's or feminist movement in France.

Lastly, French organizations define integration in a technocratic sense as a result of their legal perception of citizenship. Integration is limited to assisting women refugees to

access their constitutional rights just like any other citizen in France such as public housing, social security and employment. There are usually no separate programs designed only for women to enhance their integration except for information sessions on sexual health. Relatedly, organizations frame assimilation into French values as an important part of women refugees' integration into France. Values such as gender equality or women's empowerment are problematically defined to be explicit French values, and therefore, foreign women should be taught about them to move away from their culture and realize that they are free. Integration or empowerment is not seen as a two-way process by the French organizations. Rather, they are seen as the sole responsibility of refugee women, which again points out hierarchies between French and non-French women.

French organizations identify some barriers and challenges that affect their capacity to address asylum-seeking and refugee women's empowerment. One of these barriers can be listed as the geographical location of the organizations. The ones in transit locations such as Northern France are less likely to address long-term goals like women's empowerment and grassroots advocacy because they work with unsettled communities. Another barrier is related to women's ties with their cultural communities for achieving safety for themselves in uncertain situations such as asylum-seeking. Women are less likely to join organizational networks and open up about their violent experiences since it is not guaranteed that they will get legal protection and they might lose their online source of security if they report their partners or families. The last group of barriers is due to French organizations' dependence on public funding as they work as the extension of the state and their capacity and independence are limited for creating progressive strategies and programs.

The diverse perception and practice of refugee women's empowerment in French and British organizations are related to many factors. First of all, the diverse political traditions in these countries, namely British Multiculturalism and French Republicanism/Universalism lead to differing charity cultures in both countries. Such cultures lead organizations to perceive and address empowerment differently from each other via affecting funding schemes, the role of the state in the charity sector and historical evaluation of national feminist movements in both countries. British society is way more multicultural due to the historical development and support of cosmopolitan citizenship in order to save the British Empire's place and status in the world against the decolonization movements. This resulted in a more inclusionary attitude towards migrants and refugees as well as their cultural and ethnic characteristics. Contrarily, in France, French Republicanism and Universalism dictate the state to actively eliminate differences and to have equal distance to all of its citizens. Multiculturalism in the UK makes the charity sector less hierarchical and provides more room for collaborative and participatory approaches since the state does not regulate the social or ethnic communities. In this way, there are more opportunities for aid organizations and workers to come up with progressive and creative aid structures that embrace the identities of refugee women and enable them to organize around such identities. This is why refugee women are given opportunities to speak directly to the public or formal actors and enhance their authentic representation and authorship. In other words, multiculturalism in the UK supports participatory approaches that recognize and highlight the agency, resilience and autonomy of women refugees. The French Republican Model narrowly associates citizenship with acquiring legal status. The state as the sole guarantor of the well-being and freedom of its citizens is equally distant

from every member of the political community. This perception of a homogenized French nation and legal citizenship works against aid organizations' capacity to enhance participatory and inclusionary approaches in the asylum sector because having legal status or citizenship is the first condition for acting, and when foreign women do not have legal status, they cannot act. Women refugees are seen as individuals that lack agency because they are dependent on citizens, namely aid workers, for representing their best interest.

The disparities in political traditions in France and the UK apply to the funding structures of the aid organizations and their way of addressing women's empowerment. The aid organizations in France are heavily dependent on state funding whereas in the UK organizations have access to private sources of funding. Thus, the aid organizations in France act like the extension of the state and work towards objectives and priorities of the state such as giving assistance to women refugees to access legal protection. Relatedly, aid is identified to be objective and neutral and demarcated from any political agenda or frame. In the UK, organizations enjoy relative independence from the state and therefore they can create out-of-the-box programs for women refugees and integrate them into the organizational structures for representing themselves no matter what their legal status are. They pay attention to situate their work in a larger frame of a social justice movement. For this reason, their perception of aid is holistic and politicized. The disparities in political traditions in both countries are also related to the historical development of feminist movements in both countries. The size, scope and the agenda of national or local feminist movements also influence the ways how aid organizations address women's empowerment. Multiculturalism in the UK has historically benefited the ethnically and religiously different women and their integration into the British feminist movement. This

translates into more opportunity structures for refugee women to get active roles in aid structures. Similarly, organizations encourage refugee women to take leadership roles instead of constructing them as sole recipients of aid. Rather than addressing the gender-differentiated needs of women, organizations situate their work in line with the greater political agenda of the local feminist and women's rights movement. Contrarily in France, the feminist movement has been historically less open to interventions from non-White and non-French women. Due to the Republican and Universalist traditions, it has been less responsive to the differences and more focused on the legal equality of women. For this reason, aid organizations narrowly define women's empowerment as women refugees' access to citizenship rights as it is the main source of equality with others in society. Hence, women's empowerment becomes an institutional policy goal that is free from any political connotations. Empowerment becomes identical to responding to the gender-differentiated needs of refugee women by the experts. Foreign women become dependent on French women because they do not have the legal capacity to act on their own. In this way, their dependency and lack of agency are justified. Due to this clearly defined hierarchy among foreign and French women, the way how aid workers define aid work is demarcated from politics and the local feminist movement since the needs and concerns of local women and foreign women are defined be opposite to each other.

The research shows that aid work regarding asylum is not universal and it does not operate under universal values but rather it is contextual and shaped by the social, political and economical ideologies and histories of the reception population. Moreover, it is not only about the needs and concerns of the newcomers but also about the receiving population. Treating and identifying the needs of asylum seekers and refugees serve to the

construction of the "self" of the receiving population. Therefore, the way one defines one's self shapes the practices and strategies that are seen as necessary to assist others. Such constructions are never irrelevant to political traditions and agendas. For instance, constructing women refugees as victims and vulnerable individuals will help to reestablish and justify its hegemony and superiority by highlighting the hierarchy among different cultures, societies and nations. Women and their gendered bodies might be used to legitimize and sustain the oppressive orders between Western and non-Western societies.

Another major conclusion of this research is that asylum-seeking and refugeehood are not disempowering status for women by default. Undeniably, refugee women are victimized in many ways. Most women cannot access international protection because gender-related persecutions are not recognized under international law. In the absence of legal protection, they are dependent on social and family networks, in which they might get trapped in vicious cycles of abuse and violence. They might be still exposed to destitution, racism, and sexual violence in reception countries even if they get citizenship status in reception countries. That said, asylum-seeking and refugeehood can also empower women via transforming traditional gender roles and reducing dependence on family networks that harm women's autonomy since men might lose their previous role as the leader of the family as there is no "home" space that underlines the gendered responsibilities ascribed to men and women. Moreover, women are more likely to have access to education, healthcare, employment, and free childcare compared to their countries of origin. Such opportunities might make them take control in their hands about their lives. Joining public life, they might become less dependent on their families and partners and allow them to break away from their former gender roles. They might reclaim

some sort of autonomy and self-resilience even in a powerless situation such as asylum-seeking or refugeehood. Therefore, it is not plausible to make overarching assumptions about the relationship between vulnerability, asylum-seeking and women.

Relatedly, it is important to distinguish what to protect refugee women from. Women refugees are not victims because they are non-Western women. They are victimized by the international refugee system and the nation-state system, in which countries can avert responsibilities to protect them. At this point, the ways how aid organizations define protection are essential. As the research shows, French organizations define protection narrowly as legal protection, namely acquiring a citizenship status whereas British organizations also frame it as decreasing the dependency of women on aid structures. Therefore, the focus is on providing tools to refugee women so that they become independent agents who have control of their own lives in the long run. Therefore, aid is not a spontaneous transactional activity but rather a tool for achieving social justice and autonomy. Moreover, the focus is not on women's vulnerabilities but their resilience and agency because they are treated as independent agents, who can contribute to the social and political life as full members of the society. Realizing refugee women's potential will benefit the reception societies tremendously and work against racist and populist politics, which have become quite prominent in Europe. Moreover, it will also benefit the local feminist movements in reception countries. Aid work and advocacy activities that are carried out for or by women refugees should never be demarcated from the cause and practice of the local feminist movements to ensure meaningful assistance and long-term change. It should be noted that empowerment is not something that should be achieved by or the responsibility of the refugee women but also local women. Working together and

staying in solidarity against the cross-cultural patriarchal power structures, all women can be empowered.

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