To Menstruate in Peace.

– Embodied experiences of menstruation during migration.

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I know no woman – virgin, mother, lesbian, married, celibate – whether she earns her keep as a housewife, a cocktail waitress, or a scanner of brain waves – for whom her body is not a fundamental problem: its clouded meaning, its fertility, its desire, its so-called frigidity, its bloody speech, its silences, its changes and mutilations, its rapes and ripenings. There is for the first time today a possibility of converting our physicality into both knowledge and power.

Adrienne Rich, Of Woman Born.¹

Abstract

Female specific experiences of migration are lacking in mainstream migration studies, even though women make up almost half of the demographic of migrating people. Based on qualitative narrative interviews with six women the primary aim of this thesis is to show how the women negotiated their migrations from a primarily embodied theoretical approach which focuses on feelings in and of the body in relation to menstruation within the context of migration. The importance of viewing context or rather situation as constitutive for how women can ‘be’ or ‘not be’ women is decisive for the embodiment approach and provides an understanding for the prescriptive nature of norms in general and gender norms in particular. Overall, the situation of migration positioned the female gender norm and the innate bodily function of menstruation as a counterforce of agency for the women, severely limiting their scopes of agency leading to fear, hyper vigilance and self-policing in a manner that the women did not experience was present for men surrounding them. The additional mental strain that menstruation placed on the women severely aggravated their experiences of migration, a mental strain that was solely connected to fear in relation to their bodies.

Key Words – Menstruation, Agency, Fear, Migration, Shame, Women.

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Imagine being forced to leave your beloved home, dear family, friends, community and society that you have come to know since childhood years. Imagine setting out on a journey that will take you across tens of countries and that will require you to risk your life on an ocean that already has taken numerous lives and perhaps maybe takes yours too, but you take the risk because on the other side resides a chance of peace, calm and life. Imagine embarking on that journey in societies that only grants unquestionable agency for men, but you are a woman, and you will not be granted even one moment in which your body will not pose a potential risk to your personal safety or to the modesty prescribed by your gender role. Imagine then, being surrounded by strangers, alone or if you are luckier, with your family. The decision to set out on perilous journeys to Europe was not made simply. Dalila and Habi are two of the six women that participated in this study, Dalila and her family waited in several neighbouring countries for the conflict to calm down, ever hoping they would be able to return home, but in the end, they decided to travel to Sweden and apply for asylum. For Habi, the toughest moment of the entire journey was when the boat suddenly stopped in the middle of the ocean; the boat had been taking in water for a while and the water was coming up to her knees. There was no land in sight,

Habi: In Somalia, somebody told me that if a boat stops they throw the heaviest person overboard to make it go again. At the time I was overweight, so I thought this is it, they’ll throw me overboard, my time has come. But luckily a ship saw us and rescued us.

Women make up close to half the amount of people migrating according to figures from 2016, however, mainstream migration research has had a mainly male dominated approach thereby rendering migration as a generally male phenomenon. Even though migration is a gendered experience, women’s experiences of migration are lacking in the scholarly body and as Morokvasic and Catarino argue that women are often stereotyped as the ‘passive victim’ within

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3 Krystyna Slany, Maria Kontos, and Maria Liapi, Women in New Migrations: Current Debates in European Societies (Kraków, POLAND: Jagiellonian University Press, 2010). 10.
4 O’Neil, Fleury, and Foresti. 4.
migration studies and therefore the focus on women’s agency can act to counteract those notions of both migration being a male phenomenon and of women being passive victims within migration. Donato emphasises that the lack of gender perspectives in migration studies has historical roots within academics which for a long period of time positioned female researchers and women’s studies as appendixes to the mainstream.6

Menstruation was initially chosen as the main theme for its inherent connection to the experience of womanhood. However, talking with the women about menstruation in relation to migration acted as a gateway to several embodied experiences, such as Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and the fear of rape and fear of losing one’s modesty meanwhile navigating a situation constructed for the male gender role. It became evident that the participants felt trapped in the situation of migration due to the narrow scope of agency allowed within the frames of womanhood. I have kept menstruation, as the main theme for the thesis, but incorporated the other embodied experiences women expressed because they are part of the same normative structure that govern the female body. Taking menstruation as a starting point and the understanding of menstrual taboos, menstrual etiquette and attitudes towards it also gave ground for understanding other experiences as well. There are parallels to be drawn between societal attitudes towards menstruation mainly the norm of menstrual silence and women as passive victims of menstrual cramps etc. ensuing menstruation, and, the female role of the passive victim in mainstream migration studies. Women as passive in general infiltrates several aspects of society and notions about the female body stems from patriarchal gender norms which render the not-in-need-of-management body, namely the male body, as norm.7 Similarly, in migration studies the male body/experiences have become norm.

Menstruation is heavily burdened with societal norms, values and strict do’s and Don’ts, it should neither be seen nor noticed. Menstrual silence is a key part in normative understandings of how menstruation should be managed; it can also serve as an explanation to why academic books such as Refugee Women8, without taking away the importance of the book, does not make even a single mention of menstruation or the effects of it for refugee women. Another

5 Mirjana Morokvasic, Christine Catarino, ‘Women, Gender, Transnational Migrations and Mobility in France’, ed. Slany, Kontos, and Liapi, in Women in New Migrations. 51 f.
explanation for menstrual silence is the notion of the non-menstruating body as the norm, which furthers the invisible-making of menstruation as it basically does or at least should not exist in the eye of society/the public. Or as Adrienne Fahs put it “bodies that leak and shift and leave stains” are not welcome in the public eye.\(^9\)

**Aim and Purpose**

By applying an embodied theoretical approach this study aims to highlight the experiences of migration specific to women by positioning feelings and experiences of menstruation at the centre of the process of migration. Thus, showing both contestation and internalization of menstrual norms and how it plays out in the situation of migration, a situation from which the governing power must be taken into consideration for how it affected the women’s migration narratives. This study can also be seen as a contribution to the complex and diverse field of gender studies by exploring the female specific experiences of migration.

The purpose of this thesis is to contribute to the representation of women in migration by focusing on female specific embodied experiences and to problematize prescribing gender norms in relation to agentic behaviour and perceived female modesty in order to contest prevailing trends of women in migration as passive victims of their circumstances. The aim is to broaden the scope of understanding migration by applying an embodied theoretical approach to empirically based experiences of menstruation during migration, in other words placing emotions of and in the body at the centre of comprehending women’s experiences of migration as a way of representing female specific perspectives of migration.

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\(^9\) Fahs. 95.

\(^{10}\) Fahs. 61.
Research Questions

- Which were the main considerations concerning menstruation for the informant’s during forced migration?
- In what way can womanhood in relation to menstruation and migration be understood based on the narratives?
- What kind of emotions/feelings/thoughts did menstruation cause during their migrations?
- Did taboos and norms manifest during migration?
  - If so, how were taboos and norms negotiated?

Background

2015 is in the Swedish public debate generally seen as the year of menstruation. The year that taboo surrounding menstruation would be brought into the light. A ‘new wave’ of menstrual activism had emerged with several public women speaking out about menstruation, and later with the release of the comic book anthology, *Kvinnor ritar bara serier om mens* (Women only draw comics about periods). However, the event that sparked the idea for this study happened during the 2016 Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro, where Chinese swimmer Fu Yuanhui’s answers in an interview after a race in which she felt she did not perform well. Stating “It’s because my period came yesterday, so I felt particularly tired – but this isn’t an excuse, I still didn’t swim well enough.” She has been credited as a taboo breaker within the world of sports. The comment caused a ripple effect and Swedish football player Lotta Schelin spoke out about menstruation being a non-issue in sports, “They map us elite players, they know everything and do everything from examining the heart to blood tests. But, they have never mapped my menstruation and how it affects me.” (own translation). In her opinion, she believes that if men had periods menstruation and its effects on the body would have been mapped out thoroughly by now. Sports and the field of migration studies may not have much in common, but what they do have in common is a generalized male dominance of understanding, rendering

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women to conform to an understanding of performance and menstruation as separate and non-relevant. Similarly, female refugees are dismissed to strict frames of perception of women as being passive followers of men, in “the protective masculine and vulnerable feminine model”\textsuperscript{14} in war, men are positioned as the main agent.

The debate on menstruations’ effect on performance was welcomed by many, however, the debate was and is still permeated with a normative understanding of women being subjected to menstruation, as something negative that happens to the body that cannot be stopped but needs to be endured during which emotions such as anger and depresses can occur, until it passes thus women can go back to a normal state. Nevertheless, it is a state that is established on a patriarchal understanding of the female body, which is based on the understanding of women as compliant, submissive and unselfish. Accordingly, menstruation is constructed as deviant and is used as a scapegoat excuse for upholding women’s inferiority.\textsuperscript{15} Further, it constructs menstruation, as a “messy inconvenience without inherent value”\textsuperscript{16} Additionally, Breanne Fahs writes in the introduction to \textit{Out for Blood} as an answer to why menstruation matters, “menstruation represents a way for women (and menstruating men) to possibly have a shared language, bodily connection, and perhaps even some solidarity with each other - all of which are in remarkably short supply today”\textsuperscript{17} promoting the importance of representation of menstruation within academics, a point of view to which I subscribe to.

\textsuperscript{16} Bobel. 39.
\textsuperscript{17} Fahs. 6.
Outline

Following is a presentation of the theoretical views that underlie the analysis starting with a discussion of and motivation for the use of ‘women’ contrary to ‘menstruators’. Further, theories of stigma and the generalised other, internalisation and self-policing, embodiment and embodied emotions, menstrual norms and taboos, shame in relation to menstruation and menstrual silence and the backlash effect for agentic women. In conclusion of the theoretical views chapter is a short empirical account of how practical menstrual etiquette is performed in everyday life by Swedish women, followed by a review of previous research done in the field of refugee women and menstruation and women in migration. In the method chapter the ‘how’s of the study are presented and discussed and comes to an end with a discussion on ethical considerations and how those were managed according to research ethics. The analysis that follows begins with a short setting of the scene for the narratives, subsequently the results are presented in four themes summed up in a conclusion and the thesis as a whole is concluded in a final discussion.
Theoretical Views

Menstruators or Women?

When I was searching for participants for the study I generally asked for newly arrived women with migration experience willing to talk about menstruation. I used the term ‘women’ to ease the process of acquiring informants as the term ‘menstruators’ seemed a too academic word to use with non-academic people which could also have risked exacerbating the already uneven power relationship between interviewer and interviewee. It could have been damaging for a trusting relationship between my participants and myself. Although there is a benefit to this brief discussion below, about which term to use or not, it serves as a recognition of positives and negatives of both sides and should be understood as a reasoning as to why I have chosen to use the term women and not menstruators for this thesis. Chris Bobel writes;

How can we talk about body-based discrimination, for example, without talking about women as women- even with all the differences within and among women? At the same time, how can we not afford to incorporate a questioning of fundamental categories like gender as we develop feminist agendas for the twenty-first century?¹⁸

In this quote from New blood, Bobel points to the multifaceted problem of the ‘to-categorize or to-not-categorize’ question, even though how one tackles the question is dependent on one’s purpose the acknowledgement of both side’s strengths and weaknesses are of significant importance and value.

This is an interesting and important debate for the purpose of this study because it is important to recognize the diversity of menstruating bodies and the problematics of gender binarism. Not all women menstruate and not all menstruators are women.¹⁹ Therefore, it is also somewhat problematic and complicated to connect menstruation to womanhood as it risks constructing the dichotomy of non-menstruating bodies as non-women. However, Hasson argues that menstruation is a “central marker of difference,” a marker that is both literal and symbolic “of sex and sexuality, fertility, age and health.”²⁰ It is my informants’ experiences, thoughts and voices I want to be heard in this study. Therefore, I have chosen to focus on the socially constructed norms and taboos concerning and surrounding menstruation and migration and less

¹⁹ Bobel. 11.
on the naming and framing of gender in association with menstruation. Although I have made
the choice to connect menstruation to womanhood, understanding the risks this brings, but the
choice was made based on current societal bearings, taking my starting point from within the
frames of normative understandings of menstruation and gender identity to then move to
problematic and deconstructing notions of not only menstruation but also migration. There are
no straight answers in this debate, it is conflicted and complex and it must remain that way,
because only in this way can it also uphold and further its inclusiveness. 21

However, as the latter discussion above shows, all concepts are situated in contexts of societies
with normative frames of understanding and within those frames there is a range of taboos,
perceptions, rules of behaviour for each concept. As this study concerns female menstruating
refugees and their experiences during migration to Sweden, an intersectional approach is of
importance as the concepts are inseparable and form a vital context of understanding,
notwithstanding the importance of the contexts to the intersectional approach.

Therefore, the theory of embodiment, as described by Kay Inckle, Iris Marion Young and Anne
Fausto-Sterling, which takes its starting point in the situatedness of the body, offers an
important framework for the study. But also, for understanding the driving force of gender and
societal norms, Erving Goffman, George H. Mead and Michel Foucault will be used for the
sake of understanding the relational process between, in their words, the stigmatized, the
‘normal’/ generalized other and the internalisation process of that relation. Even though
Goffman, Mead and Foucauldian theory derive from different theoretical traditions they all
engage with processes of normalisation and the relational aspects between those with normative
power and those without albeit on different social/societal levels and therefore a combinatio
of these theoretical views bear significant value in showing the complexity of the participant
women’s experiences of migration despite differences in theoretical traditions.

Stigma and the Generalised Other

Stigma is, according to Goffman, an attribute that in relation to stereotypical societal norms are
discrediting to the individual that possesses the attribute. Norms are according to Mead a
universal hegemonic consensus of gestures and symbols which is then understood as societal
norms that in turn is internalized by individuals. 22 Goffman identifies three types of stigma:

21 Bobel. 19.
22 George Herbert Mead, Medvetandet, Jaget Och Samhället : Från Socialbehavioristisk Ståndpunkt (Lund:
physical deformities, flaws in personal characteristics and ‘tribal’ stigmas like ethnicity, nation, and religion. Although in the case of the stigmatization of menstruation the categories are not as simply divided. Nevertheless, the consequences of stigmatization are according to Goffman discrediting, dehumanizing and discriminating, leading to a curtailment of possibilities in life, in other words, a reduction in agency for the stigmatized individual.\(^{23}\)

Stigma functions within a relational process between the stigmatized and non-stigmatized, which Goffman refers to as the normal people and Mead as the generalized other which represents the general society’s attitudes.\(^{24}\) The relational aspect of stigmatization in short entails a reciprocal respect between stigmatized and ‘normal’. The stigmatized individual will maintain a strategic control over the information about her identity that is shared in social situations by means of implementing ‘correct’ normative behaviour through not calling more attention to the stigma than necessary, because only then can ‘normal’ people reciprocate the favour by keeping the stigma a ‘secret’ and allowing a degree of leeway if the stigma would become openly known.\(^{25}\) Mead explains the value of the relation as effective making the individual’s participation in society.\(^{26}\)

The function of this reciprocal relation is that the stigmatized will avoid negative social consequences of her stigma among others, shaming. Even though shame, which results from stigmatization, will constantly be present due to the individual’s knowledge of her stigmatized attribute and the presence of ‘normal’ people will always serve to remind her of the stigma. Consequently, the stigmatized will correct her behaviour in accordance with normative expectations to ease the shame.\(^{27}\) For example, women will adopt menstrual silence to not be seen as dirty, incompetent and ‘bad’ women. In other words, a stigma is an omnipresent societal process in which every individual plays a role, whether they be ‘normal’ or stigmatized.\(^{28}\) Because every single individual functions within society and social normative structures the individual will both be constituted by and constitutive of society,\(^{29}\) thus, society and social groups have an influence on the experiences of life for individuals and how individuals behave, but at the same time individuals influence others behaviours and experiences, making each and every one of us in to social products.\(^{30}\) In other words, individuals will through their behaviour

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\(^{24}\) Mead. 120 ff.

\(^{25}\) Goffman. 140 f.

\(^{26}\) Mead. 136.

\(^{27}\) Goffman. 15 ff.

\(^{28}\) Goffman. 149.

\(^{29}\) Mead. 20.

\(^{30}\) Mead. 23.
and attitudes incite a response by society/generalized others towards one’s behaviour and attitudes and thus react to the reaction towards oneself.\textsuperscript{31} Rationally, if the reaction from the generalized other is negative, then the outcome of the exchange would be conformity by the individual. Again, taking the example of menstrual silence, if a girl is told repeatedly that menstruation is not to be talked about because it is not appropriate for her to do so, she will, most commonly, not do so.

In patriarchal societies the woman is regarded as \textit{the Other} in relation to the default male norm.\textsuperscript{32} However, in relation to the narratives, ‘others’ will be understood as the generalised other/ ‘normal’ people to which the women put their menstruation in relation to in terms of for example dirtiness and from which shame and behaviours to avoid being shamed by others derives.

\textbf{Self-policing the Symptom of Internalized Oppression}

The internalization of power as described by Foucault and his use of Bentham’s \textit{Panopticon}\textsuperscript{33} lends itself useful to the theorizing concerning self-policing practices of menstruation. Inmates will be seen but not see, therein lies the strength of the Panopticon. Therefore, the power exerted will become automatic, thus the internalization. In other words, consciousness of surveillance will lead to good conduct as the inmate does not know when she is monitored.\textsuperscript{34} Bobel writes that “[t]he process of each inmate’s internalizing the perspective of the jailer is replicated in women’s internalization of the misogynist gaze.”\textsuperscript{35} Hasson continues “[…] women became responsible for an increasing range of self-monitoring and body-management tasks. Stigma and secrecy meant that for many women menarche and menstruation were characterized by shame and embarrassment.”\textsuperscript{36} Shaming processes, such as the construction of menstruation as dirty, can be understood as the surveying power and as a result good conduct in the form of silence and concealment of menarche and menstruation ensues due to the fear of being bad women.

\textsuperscript{31} Mead, 136.
\textsuperscript{32} Iris Marion Young, \textit{On Female Body Experience: “Throwing Like a Girl” and Other Essays} (Cary, UNITED STATES: Oxford University Press, 2014). 31.
\textsuperscript{34} Foucault, 203.
\textsuperscript{35} Bobel. 34.
\textsuperscript{36} Hasson. 964.
Embodiment

Kay Inckle writes,

Embodiment is not [...] solely a theoretical reference point, but it is also a position from which to engage with human experience in lived, and therefore less objectifying, terms. An embodied perspective considers the location and ethics of theorisation; it is a position that both comes from, and is of, the embodied self. 37

Inckle uses the word location, Young stresses the understanding of the situation as constitutive of embodied experience. Young writes that “every human existence is defined by its situation”. 38 Meaning that societal structures, norms and settings effect how women can be women 39 as well as how they perceive womanhood and how they feel about their bodies, for example, as “a thing that exists as looked at and acted upon.” 40 Fausto-Sterling states that “culture shapes bones” 41 in the most practical and scientifically measurable sense, showing how constitutive ones situation also is for the physical biological body. She exemplifies this statement by looking at skeletal bone density and how it is affected by different societal and cultural locations; such as geographical situatedness; such as gender and context. 42 Although in patriarchal societies which posits the male as the default norm and the woman as the Other, Young writes, “Woman is thereby both culturally and socially denied the subjectivity, autonomy, and creativity that are definitive of being human and that in patriarchal society are accorded the man.” 43 Further, Young argues that women as humans in the world are part of societal evolution and change, but as human-women they are denied the very same, therefore women, in Young’s opinion, are living a contradiction. 44 In other words, embodiment “incorporates the complexity of lived, human experience and the means by which we represent and reflect upon it.” 45 Embodiment as a theoretical standpoint entails awareness of the body as both having agency on and being malleable by cultural and societal norms; it is also the understanding that the body and its situatedness/ location plays an integral part of the individual subjectivity; how we understand ourselves and how we can be ourselves in society. It is to

38 Young. 29.
39 Young. 31.
40 Young. 39.
42 Fausto-Sterling. 1495.
43 Young. 31.
44 Young. 31 f.
45 Inckle. 4.
recognize “the body as simultaneously composed of genes, hormones, cells and organs – all of which influence health and behaviour – and of culture and history.” Martin writes, “But women – whose bodily experience is denigrated and demolished by models of implying failed production, waste, decay, and breakdown – have it literally within them to confront the story science tells with another story, based on their own experience.”

The experience of the body in its situation, or more likely situations.

Embodied Emotions

The perhaps strongest appointing emotion, in general regards, towards the body and more specifically to the female body is shame. Shame has a strong policing effect on ‘failed’ femininity, which upholds normative gender roles by inducing feelings of shame towards specific bodily functions. Inckle gives the example of facial hair, which is desired for men but shamed for women. In other words, “shame, [is] crucial to the social regulation of the body and gender.” Feelings of shame can be understood as society’s road signs that steer, with various levels of force, bodies within acceptable directions based on binary gender roles both individually and in relation to each other, ranging from how bodies from each category should look, act and behave to how they should react and act towards each other. The feeling of shame has a strong connection with menstruation and how it should be done (menstrual shame and menstrual etiquette are discussed further below). An interesting example of how menstrual shame can be met is with what Fahs describes as Menarchy; actions against menstrual shame. Art lends itself, especially because “menstrual art […] teeters on the edge of inducing outright panic and introducing chaos into […] social hierarchies.” By making menstruation visible, menstrual art counteracts the shaming processes and challenge the road signs appointing directions to how to behave as women and how to menstruate.

Emotions and embodiment are strongly interrelated and form a sense of “body memory” that connect lived embodied experiences to feelings and behaviours. As Inckle writes, “emotions
are not just experienced *in* the body, but are also *of* the body.”^54 Body memory links experience and knowledge and “offers an opportunity to rearticulate our understandings of both being and knowing”.^55

The theory suits the study for its acknowledgement of the simultaneous complexities of the intersectional experiences of menstruating bodies during migration as well as how and what feelings have been connected to the experience and how this exceptional and time-limited experience has had an effect on women’s subjectivity and how migration has been experienced through an embodied perspective.

**Menstruation as Cultural Norms and Taboos**

Menstruation in its simplest form is described as the process the uterus goes through as it prepares to receive an egg released by the ovaries by filling the uterine lining with blood. Consequently, if the egg is not inseminated the uterine lining is discharged and thus menstrual bleeding occurs which generally lasts between 3 to 5 days. To discharge the lining, the uterus contracts which generally causes menstrual cramps that vary greatly in amount of pain felt. Hormonal changes in the body can also cause soreness of the breasts, mood swings and in its severest form depression.\(^{56}\) That is, a process which effects the body more often than not in terms of physical and mental discomfort. Highly connected to how women can menstruate is the practice of Female Genital Mutilation and below follows a short description of the practice because three of the participants in this study are victims of the practice.

Female Genital Mutilation is the practice of cutting off all or parts of the external female genitalia and sewing the labia majora together only leaving a small hole for urine, menstrual blood and vaginal discharge. There are several different types of cutting performed but the variation my informants disclosed entails the removal of clitoris and labia minora following with the sewing shut of the labia majora leaving a small hole for discharge. Female genital mutilation has no health benefits whatsoever and is a violation of human rights. It causes severe pain, infections and often death, in the long-term menstruation becomes excessively painful as for example menstrual clots become hard to pass through the narrow opening. Reasons for

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^54 Inckle. 85.

^55 Inckle. 86 f.

cutting also varies greatly among practicing communities, one consistent theme however is the maintaining of girl’s modesty and virginity before marriage.57

Described above are the biological and physical aspects of menstruation, although, menstruation is also created outside the body, culturally. Bobel argues, “menstruation has been used to prove women’s inferiority and unsuitability”58. Menstruation has been constructed as the site of women’s deficiency, inherently dirty and disgusting menses should neither be seen nor noticed.59 It is also an interesting site to examine the workings of gender ideologies and how these “shape bodies and subjectivities.”60 Menstruation has come to be seen as a “central marker of difference”61 in a binary gender role system in differences that posits “women’s bodies as ‘dirty’ and men’s bodies as ‘clean’.62 Further, Fahs argues that menstruation as subject reveals “our culture’s relationship to women and their bodies, disgust, abjection, ideas about power and control, and gendered double standards.”63 In addition to the culturally negative view of menstruation is the implication of a “production gone awry”64 defining menstrual blood and bleeding as a sort of ‘waste’ from said faulty production.65 Cultural understandings of menstruation affects how women menstruate in the practical; ‘menstrual etiquette’ (further discussed below) and how women feel and experience their bodies. In other words, women’s embodied experiences of menstruation are shaped by cultural expectations66. Martin argues that in response to such cultural expectations there has been a fragmentation of body and self,67 and therefore not only menstruation but also birth and menopause are thought of something that the body afflicts upon the self and something that would rather not be felt.68 In other words positioning the male as the default towards which other bodies are measured and judged, generally posed as deviations of the male.

Thus, cultural understandings of menstruation, whether they be Western or other, posit menstruation as a downcast phenomenon that acts in the disfavour of women. It locates women in an inferior position to men based on gender biased perceptions of the male body and its


58 Bobel. 35.

59 Hasson. 964.

60 Hasson. 963.

61 Hasson. 959.

62 Fahs. 241.

63 Fahs. 4.

64 Martin. 46.

65 Martin. 46.

66 Hasson. 964.

67 Martin. 89.

68 Martin. 78.
functions as normative and the reproductive hormonal cycle of the female body as an inflictive out-of-control process.

Therefore, shaming menstruation can be seen as an answer to cultural beliefs and menstrual silence can be understood as the reaction to it.

Dirty Shame and Silence

Gender norms derive from gender stereotypes which governs what set of gender norms are prescriptive for which gender. A simple example would be; women should be warm and caring and men should be strong and agentic. In relation to opposing gender norms, Prentice and Carranza writes that “Violations of gender stereotypes are met with various forms of punishment and devaluation, many which seem to stem from their prescriptive quality.”

Devaluation being a keyword which can be understood as being shamed or seen as a ‘bad woman’. Rudman and Glick describes it as a backlash effect for agentic women in the business world, women who adopt male characteristic traits such as agentic behaviour; “those related to social dominance (e.g., competitiveness, aggressiveness)” will on the one hand be rewarded career wise, but on the other hand they will be punished by not being liked due to them straying too far from the prescribed female gender stereotypes. Rudman and Glick writes that “because women are held to a higher standard of niceness than men, agentic women may be viewed as competent but insufficiently feminine.”

The higher standards of niceness they say stems from the stereotypical female gender norm of women being seen as communal “i.e., kind, thoughtful, and sensitive to others’ feelings” which “[...] are linked to maintaining female subordination [...]” the punishment for not sufficiently exhibiting communal traits as a women is dislike and not being seen as a nice person. In relation to menstruation, not following the prescribed ‘rules’ the backlash effect, devaluation would entail shaming thus prescriptive gender norms will be discussed in terms of taboos, menstrual etiquette and as being/not being a ‘good woman’.

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69 Deborah A. Prentice and Erica Carranza, “What Women and Men Should Be, Shouldn’t Be, Are Allowed to Be, and Don’t Have to Be: The Contents of Prescriptive Gender Stereotypes,” Psychology of Women Quarterly 26, no. 4 (2002). 269.

70 Prentice and Carranza. 269.


72 Rudman and Glick. 744.

73 Rudman and Glick. 744.

74 Rudman and Glick. 747.

75 Rudman and Glick. 744.
Acceptable and desirable normative female traits and attributes can be summarised under the umbrella term of modesty which functions to uphold respectability and is intensely connected to womanhood. Guano argues that, for women, acting out modesty can perform as a facilitating agent for empowered and agentic behaviour with lower risk of the backlash effect. Therefore, upholding modesty can be understood as a tactic to avoid being shamed for actions that risk falling outside normative female gender norms.

Menstruation as dirty comes in a package deal of women’s bodies being regarded as dirty in general, ranging from dangerous body hair that needs to be shaved, plucked, and cut, hiding natural body odours and controlling weight gain/loss to concealing breast feeding. Women’s bodies are in need of management and menstruation is no exemption. These notions about the female body stems from patriarchal gender norms which render the not-in-need-of-management body, namely the male body, as norm. The disdain towards menstruation, Martin argues, in part stems from the view of it, as mentioned above, as a failed production, a failed attempt to reproduce and therefore menstruation can be understood as nothing but unwanted and should therefore be concealed as it can impossibly be something to be proud of. Metaphors about menopause make the view of the female body as a site of production even clearer; as the female body has malfunctioned after all the years of menstruation therefore production has been shut down.

Menstrual shame and silence is also reproduced in more general settings such as in grocery stores and in the world of art both which are highly visible elements of society. Feminine hygiene products or the FemCare industry, play a significant role in how menstruation is perceived culturally, mainly for their visibility through marketing of products which are made through culturally acceptable ways of speaking about hygiene affiliated to women. Fahs argues that even the placement of menstrual products in stores, which often are located near diapers and incontinence pads “implicitly links the feminine [another bizarre word that is rarely attached commercially to anything besides menstrual products] with women needing to clean their own and others’ messy bodies” (Fahs’s own comment in quote) furthering the notion of menstruation as dirty and shameful. Thus, the marketing of menstrual products re-produces

77 Fahs. 94 f.
78 Martin. 92.
79 Martin. 42.
80 Fahs. 48.
notions of menstruation as needing to be managed and as something that is supposed to be hidden and concealed.\textsuperscript{81}

Another telling example is the blue ‘blood’ used in TV commercials to demonstrate pads absorbability. October 2017, a well-known menstrual product company posted, what has come to be known as the first menstrual pad advert with red ‘blood’\textsuperscript{82}, accompanied by the hashtag \#bloodnormal. It was widely welcomed and celebrated in social media and the blogosphere.\textsuperscript{83}

The campaign is also an example of companies “capitalizing on trends in consumer attitudes”\textsuperscript{84} by appearing to be progressive and modern to stand out by gaining a competitive edge in the vast market of menstruation products. Menstruation and products associated to it has thus been banished to the realm of dirtiness in the sphere of commercialism. It sends a strong message to consumers of menstrual products, both those who menstruate and those who do not namely that; menstruation should not be seen nor noticed. When companies choose to sport red ‘blood’ instead of blue it also shows how highly politicized the visible making of menstruation is, and the reactions to the choice speak volumes about how strong the norm of menstrual silence is.

About societal menstrual silence and shaming Fahs argues that the censorship of menstruation from museums and art exhibitions furthers the notions of menstruation as an invisible experience, that “bodies that leak and shift and leave stains”\textsuperscript{85} are not welcome in the public eye for it is a too stark a contradiction to the norm of silence and invisibility. Which only serves to “further alienate them (leaky, shifting bodies) from the power and cultural significance of menstruation.”\textsuperscript{86} Also stating that “the normally edgy, provocative, and forward-thinking art world has yet to fully recognize menstruation as a valid subject of interest.”\textsuperscript{87} In other words, the experience of menstruation is curtailed in the public eye which only serves to advance the understanding of visible menstruation as shameful thus also performing a silencing act to those who observe. Leading to an inevitable internalization of societal attitudes towards menstruation and by far from only those who menstruate. An internalization that exercises a certain amount of power over attitudes towards and behaviours of regarding menstruation.

\textsuperscript{81} Hasson. 964.
\textsuperscript{84} Bobel. 107.
\textsuperscript{85} Fahs. 61.
\textsuperscript{86} Fahs. 62.
\textsuperscript{87} Fahs. 61.
Menstrual Etiquette

The notion of menstrual etiquette refers to the acceptable, normative ways in which women can menstruate, consider the, by now, mantra that ‘menstruation should not be seen nor noticed’. As you might understand at this stage, the normative way of menstruating is done in utmost silence and secrecy and practical behaviours ensue to ensure that absolutely nobody can know, see or even suspect that one is menstruating.

The literature consulted for the writing of this thesis gives excellent theoretical accounts of internalized menstrual shame and silence and the vast counteractions to it, such as articles and books presented in Previous studies and Theoretical views. However, examples of women’s practical, lived-in, daily lives’ solutions of hiding their menses are scarce in academic writings. Therefore, I saw it necessary to take a non-traditional rout in acquiring knowledge on this topic that goes beyond my own experiences. Thus, I asked five female friends to give some examples of their solutions to ensure the required secrecy of menstruation thereby being able to present empirical examples which is as follows.

The most commonly given example was when in public spaces or at work to bring the handbag into the bathroom to change menstrual products such as tampons or pads to avoid them being seen by others as it was not felt as appropriate to ‘flaunt’ the products by having them out in the open. The products are even kept in small bags within handbags to ensure that they are not noticed by others if the handbags were opened for other reasons. Disposable products would be avoided to discard if unisex bathrooms did not have designated wastebaskets for menstrual products, which is a common concept in Sweden. Some of my friends expressed feelings of anxiety if the designated wastebasket was not available, some would wrap the used tampon or pad in paper and try to hide it in the regular wastebasket anxious that somebody would see it, others would wrap up used menstrual products and put them in their handbags to ‘safely’ discard them later. One friend, whom for a few days of her period has a heavy flow expressed feelings of stress and anxiety when she had to work during those days of heavy bleeding as she was worried that people would become suspicious about her needing to use the bathroom ‘too often’ as she was in need to change her pad more regularly than she perceived would be acceptable to use the bathroom for more ‘natural’ reasons. All five of my friends reported that they hide their menstrual products in their own homes, regardless if they shared their homes.

88 Bobel. 30.
with others or not. If they did not hide them on a regular basis they did so when they had guests. They all gave the same reason, that it simply is not a ‘nice’ thing to have others look at when they are using the bathroom. Friends that mainly used pads conveyed uneasiness towards wearing tighter fitting pants, especially if they were in need of thicker pads, as they feared that the shape of the pads could be noticed through the fabric and thus they would be ‘found out’ and ‘everybody would know’. None of them felt the need to disclose their menstruating status to friends or co-workers even if they had pains or nausea. They would rather say that they felt ill or had a headache, asking ‘who would even want to know, it’s not a nice thing’. When asked what the worst-case scenario is during menstruation they said that having an unknowing visible stain on their pants was a horrible thought, but the absolute worse-case scenario would be to leave a stain on somebody’s furniture which would be sheer horror as they would feel awfully ashamed. One disclosed an event where she had spent the night at a recent male acquaintance’s house and when she woke up the next morning noticed that she had gotten her period and had bled on the sheets. She then, in utmost horror and shame, fled the scene before he woke up and could see the stain and she never contacted him again.

These are some random examples of how Swedish women navigate menstrual shame, silence and secrecy.
Previous Research

Health and Hygiene

Previous research concerning gendered migration and menstruation largely focus on health and hygiene issues in questions of accessibility of pads, gender segregated washrooms for safe management of menstrual hygiene and maternity care, as it is equally acknowledged that the ability to menstruate in peace without concerns for one’s personal safety, anxiety for access to materials etc. has positive influences on mental health as it reduces stress. 89 Safe Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) 90 is important for its connection to gender-based violence in refugee camps, as sexual violence is a widespread problem that women face as they are made vulnerable when accommodations lack running water and enough bathrooms for the number of occupants. 91

The overarching purposes of these studies are to ensure practical and viable solutions for safe access to facilities and Sexual and Reproductive health (SRH) services for refugees during migration in respect of aid given in refugee camps, 92 and at the point of arrival in host countries, then often linking refugee women’s attitude towards menstruation to other behaviours in the broader field of sexual and reproductive health issues. 93

It is widely acknowledged in these studies that cultural understandings of menstruation, such as norms, taboos and cultural differences in gender roles are important to take into consideration to assure that refugee women can more easily approach aid givers and host country health

93 Hawkey et al. 2, 14 f.
services. Intersections of difference play significant roles in how menarche and menstruation is constructed and perceived by women, but it is also maintained that cultural sensitive education concerning menstrual and reproductive health is vital as women originating from cultures with a high level of menstrual silence can risk not seeking help for gynaecological issues in time. Much attention is given discussing the refugee women’s attitudes towards menstruation and health services, i.e. their ‘cultural baggage’. However, there is a general lack of problematising host country’s own menstrual culture, namely Western culture, almost explicitly pinning menstrual discourses of shame and silence on non-Western societies.

Most of the previous research referred to above have applied qualitative methods to obtain data by conducting single and focus group interviews, mostly with refugee and migrant women but also with staff from NGOs and local organizations.

Women and Migration

Further, the construction of the vulnerable ‘women-and-children’ category is prevalent in migration studies because of its, as Freedman argues, perception of women as particularly vulnerable and in need of more urgent protection in part based on their connection to children. Carpenter et al. furthers the argument by also stating that women are positioned as “indispensable to children’s protection, and receive respect and rights on the basis of their reproductive and child-rearing roles” locking women in a gender normative role of children and family and locking men out of “fathering [and] from the care and protection of children.”

The reproduction of women as biologically vulnerable, despite lack of evidence, furthers the understanding of women as biologically weaker than men and thus women are showed into the category of innocent bystander, non-combatant, civilian. In other words, women are victims and followers lacking agency. Freedman also addresses the issue of inadequate facilities in

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95 Hawkey et al. 1.
96 Hawkey et al. 11.
97 Metusela et al. 837, Ussher et al. 1915.
98 Ussher et al. 1904, Metusela et al. 837, H. Parker et al. 441, Hawkey et al. 3.
99 Schmitt et al. 2.
100 Freedman. 19.
102 Carpenter et al. 32.
103 Carpenter et al. 33, Stephan. 302.
refugee accommodations in her paper ‘Sexual and Gender based violence against refugee women’, specifically placing women’s feelings of fear and insecurity in relation to limited access to facilities, which she found were often shared with many, for the women, unfamiliar men. She writes; “These inadequate conditions increased women’s vulnerability to Gender Based Violence, and many of the women interviewed for my research expressed fears about sharing space with unknown men, particularly single men, who were perceived as a specific threat.”

Further, Freedman conveys that women and families would rather sleep outside in fields from the fear of violence in particular fear of sexual violence in inadequate facilities as the one described in the article on the island of Kos, Greece. She concludes that the EU has not served women well in managing the refugee ‘crisis’, by closing borders women were forced to a larger extent turn to smugglers which put them at greater risk of rape, but it also prolonged their need of having to reside in various refugee accommodations as their journeys were significantly slowed down by the border closings as a result of being further exposed to the risk of gender-based violence due to the inadequacy of accommodation along migratory routes.

Mainstream migration studies have constructed the experience of migration as a male experience, rendering women’s experience formally invisible. To highlight female migration, gendered migration and women’s experiences in migration have become an overarching purpose of feminist migration studies. The overview of previous studies concerning women, migration and menstruation have shown, the main theme falls under Menstrual Health Management and the practical issues concerning safe menstruation while migrating. Important arguments are made in support of the considerations and changes that need to be made to ensure safety and proper aid which is of utmost importance. However, I argue that receiving country’s cultural norms and taboos on menstruation remain unproblematised and that much of the argument is underdeveloped. Also, refugee women’s embodied experiences of migration demand consideration and hold high value for the ‘mainstream’ Migration Studies field for its further growth, maturity and inclusiveness.

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104 Freedman. 22.
105 Freedman. 23 f.
106 Slany, Kontos, and Liapi. 10.
Method

Field of Study and the Interviews

Due to the difficulty of gaining access to informants, the only demarcation was an age limit. Informants had to be over the age of 18 to participate in the study as to ease the process and avoid further important ethical considerations with gaining approval from legal guardians in order to conduct interviews with minors. Because it was a tough process to find informants, I did not feel able to pick and choose the country of origin or specific routes taken by the informants, nor did I feel able to put a time limit on duration of stay in Sweden. As it turned out, my informants were mainly from Syria and Somalia with a few individuals from other countries. The women came to Sweden between the years of 2011 and 2016 and their journeys took between 17 days and 9 months and they are between the ages of 24-35.

Access to informants was gained through a collaboration with the Red Cross, by regularly attending functions for newly arrived and speaking to the women directly. Gaining the women’s trust was a process which was hampered by a misunderstanding as some of the women first thought I was a doctor asking them about their menstruation. However, as I attended more and more functions and the misunderstanding about me being a doctor cleared up and we became more known to each other it also became easier to ask them to participate in the study. We kept the interviews at the Red Cross’s facilities in relation to the functions that the women would attend regularly and thus the interviews were made in a place well-known to them and did not interfere with their daily lives which made participation and attendance easier for them to manage. The three interviews with the Somali women were conducted with a Somali translator, one interview with the help of an Arabic translator, one with the Arabic translator present but was not needed as the informant felt comfortable speaking Swedish, and one interview was done in Swedish without any translator present. Having the interviews translated aided me in gaining access to women that spoke languages that I did not know, in this case Arabic and Somali. My language skills became less of a barrier to collecting empirical material needed for the study.

The participants might have also felt more at ease to speak and be confident in that they would be fully understood and that another woman from their culture with their language was present. My translators thus also became gate keepers as they have sound knowledge of both the culture and customs the women came from and the culture and context we all are situated in, namely
the Swedish. My translators also aided me in understanding cultural specific mind-sets, traditions and customs. For example, my Somali translator helped me a great deal with understanding meanings and processes concerning female genital mutilation, which was invaluable knowledge to have going into the interviews with the Somali women.

**Method of Data Collection**

A total of six interviews were conducted that ranged from 25 to 70 minutes in duration. The main reason for not pursuing more interviews was, after discussions with my supervisor, that further interviews would not generate ‘new’ data as the participants expressed so similar attitudes, feelings and experiences which gave a keen sense that the gathered material was sufficiently saturated. As Kvale and Brinkmann also argue, the necessary amount of participants in qualitative interviews depends on the purpose of the study; too many interviews can serve to water down the material, thus the material gathered should serve as an indicator for the decision based on if one thinks that further interviews would generate ‘new’ knowledge or not.¹⁰⁷ Time was another key factor in the decision as it had taken longer than I expected to gain access to the informants. An important lesson learned. My initial thought was to hold narrative interviews as the method could generate an interesting form of storytelling material, although, I quickly noticed that it was hard to manage a narrative technique with the involvement of a translator because the act of translation would cause an interruption for the informant. As a result, I had to fill out my questionnaire and the interviews took on a semi-structured form with occasional anecdotal elements in which the women would tell stories that originated from their home countries that had affected them during the journey to Sweden.

Narrative interviewing was, initially, chosen for its inherent attention to the informants’ storytelling. As the focus of this study lies on experiences, feelings and thoughts about the transition period of migration, a transit with a beginning, middle and an end, the storytelling approach is appropriate. Kvale and Brinkmann notes that the interviewer’s role, after asking a few introductory questions is mainly to be quiet, listen and let the interviewee tell the story and, if needed, now and then asking questions to aid the storytelling along. However, the strength in narrative interviewing lies in the giving of space and time to the interviewee to tell her own story.¹⁰⁸ On the downside, these interviews are hard to control and therefore the material from

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¹⁰⁸ Kvale and Brinkmann. 169-171.
each interview can vary greatly. It is, for that reason, of importance to be explicit about the
topic and to ‘catch’ and re-direct trains of thought that are of less relevance to the study.
Although, it must be done with utter sensitivity to the informant. However, as mentioned above,
most interviews became semi-structured interviews.

One-on-One interviews, rather than focus groups, were chosen for the sake of ensuring as high
a confidentiality level as possible as information given can be sensitive and cause stigmatization
of the informant.\textsuperscript{109} further discussed in Ethical Considerations. Additionally, Jacobsen and
Landau convey the strengths of interviewing as a method when studying migration, as having
the potential to give a “rich store of descriptive and anecdotal data” and how such data can
“reveal much about how forced migrants live, the problems they encounter, their coping or
survival strategies, and the shaping of their identities and attitudes.”\textsuperscript{110}

Methodologically Jacobsen and Landau argue, it is an advantage for narrow fields of study as
“such narrow studies can provide rich and issue specific accounts”\textsuperscript{111} In other words, in this
case, how informants situate themselves and their experiences of menstruation during migration
within cultural norms and taboos of both menstruation and migration.

However, as mentioned above, the translation hampered the narrative flow for the women and
I had to ask several more questions than planned. Important to note though, is that the interviews
were very rewarding, and I am satisfied and confident in the material.

\textbf{Method of Analysis}

The choice of Narrative Analysis came naturally as the attention of the interviews lies in the
women’s stories about their experiences during migration. It is, however, also a choice made
from my wish of paying respect to the women and the stories they shared with me by avoiding
de-construction of their stories and letting their narratives take the front seat in both ways of
analysis and presentation of it.

Narrative analysis as method does not have one simple definition as the exact entailments of it
are contested and varied. However, Phoenix et al argue that there are two distinguishable

\textsuperscript{109} Karen Jacobsen and Loren B. Landau, “The Dual Imperative in Refugee Research: Some Methodological and
Ethical Considerations in Social Science Research on Forced Migration,” \textit{Disasters} 27, no. 3 (September 2003): 193.
\textsuperscript{110} Jacobsen and Landau. 190.
\textsuperscript{111} Jacobsen and Landau. 190.
approaches, as they call them; the approach of the Story Analysts and the Storytellers.\textsuperscript{112} Story Analysts “conduct an analysis of stories”\textsuperscript{113} as opposed to Storytellers for which “analysis is the story”\textsuperscript{114} I have adopted the approach of the Story Analysts which in short calls for a more structured and theoretical relation to the data collected which “creates spaces for people’s voices to be heard in a coherent context”\textsuperscript{115} and enables both the positioning of narratives within theoretical frameworks, viewing subjects in relation to context and theory and also taking into account the participants own positioning of self through expressed attitudes,\textsuperscript{116} towards in this case menstruation during migration. The combination of consideration for the narratives and the ability to practice a more practical, systematic application of theories on the material was the main reason for choosing the approach of the Story Analyst.

Generally in narrative analysis stories remain intact for the purpose of “respect[ing] respondents’ ways of constructing meaning […]”.\textsuperscript{117} Crucial to keep in mind, as Riessman stresses, it is not about giving voice rather, \textit{hearing voices}.\textsuperscript{118} Therefore, the method suits itself especially well as it is foremost the women’s voices, one should hear in this study, my voice will provide descriptions of wider contexts, theories and tentative analysis to discern how cultural norms and taboos can be understood to have had an effect for the women and their experiences. As I will attempt to explain these contexts from cultural, gender and embodied theories, the method’s other key feature is that it is “inherently interdisciplinary.”\textsuperscript{119} Giving the opportunity to view constructions of self in subjective experiences,\textsuperscript{120} narratives can also contain self-positioning in relation to others through expressing certain “values and actions, which relate dynamically in culturally heterogeneous societies.”\textsuperscript{121} In the narrative analysis process it could also be discerned “not just how stories are structured and the ways in which they work, but also who produces them and by what means; the mechanisms by which they are consumed; and how narratives are silenced, contested or accepted.”\textsuperscript{122} In other words, posed as

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{113} Phoenix, Smith, and Sparkes. 7.
\item \textsuperscript{114} Phoenix, Smith, and Sparkes. 7.
\item \textsuperscript{115} Phoenix, Smith, and Sparkes. 4.
\item \textsuperscript{116} Phoenix, Smith, and Sparkes. 4.
\item \textsuperscript{118} Riessman. 8.
\item \textsuperscript{119} Riessman. 1.
\item \textsuperscript{120} Riessman. 2.
\end{itemize}
questions. In what ways do the women talk about their experiences of menstruation? How can it be understood in relation to theoretical context? Where do they position themselves in relation to their experiences and by what narrative means? How can the attitudes expressed towards menstruation be understood in the context of societal norms and in the context of migration? Such were the questions I used to analyse the material. However, narratives contain numerous types of narratives simultaneously, and therefore the structured theoretical approach risk reductionism as, in this case, only a handful of theories are used to analyse the narratives. Clearly, not covering all aspects of importance in the migration process revealed in the women’s narratives, taking the risk of reductionism knowingly as I chose to narrow the topic of the thesis to menstruation. A broader topic could also mean risking an overall superficial thesis, therefore, a positive aspect of a narrow topic is the possibility to exhaust the subject satisfactorily.

Important to note is that the stories will be analysed by myself, I am in the same process, creating a self that will be visible in the study. As a result, an active awareness throughout the entire process for the co-participation in forming the material, both as an interviewer and as an analyst of the material, is imperative. For this purpose, the method is helpful as it aids in staying true to the narratives, as mentioned above, by not de-constructing the stories rather viewing them in their entirety and their contexts.

Four main themes were selected as headers for the analysis chapter, the themes were selected through listening to the recordings and carefully reading and re-reading the transcribed interviews and identifying common denominators and the context in which they were expressed which was similar throughout the narratives for each theme. The main context for the narratives will in this case be the women’s ‘supplement’ stories about the flight that does not directly connect to menstruation, but are vital for the understanding of their experiences such as intermissions about camps along the way, the boat ride across the ocean, life in the home country before departure etc. Thus, it will function as the narrative framework for the analysis chapter from a stylistic point of view in favour of the narrative method style. Further, the narratives quoted in the analysis have been ‘cleaned up’ solely for stylistic reasons, but the stories have not been altered. In cases where there was a need for shorter explanations within quotes I have added them within brackets […] for example to make it clearer for the reader what a certain ‘it’ refers to. Figurative names have been added to give a more personal tone to the quotations.

123 Phoenix, Smith, and Sparkes. 6.
124 Riessman.11.
The narratives are in themselves positioned spatially and temporally within the migration to Sweden, however not in a specific timeline, and the theoretical framework functions as a shell of understanding that envelops the narratives.

Ethical Considerations

Information about the study was given, before and at the time of the interview, in the form of a Letter of Information which was made available in Swedish, English and Arabic. Informed consent was given and received verbally to maintain a high level of confidentiality. The interviews were recorded on a mobile device, audio files and transcriptions of the interviews were transferred to Linköping University’s cloud storage for safekeeping. Further, in the way of confidentiality, quotations and references to the empirical material will be done in such manner that identification of person will be as difficult as possible. In conformity with the requirement of anonymity details about the women’s routes to Sweden will not be given, neither can I see any negative aspects of this requirement for the analysis as specifics of the routes did not play a significant role for the informant’s narratives in the specific subject of this thesis. Two countries, Turkey and Greece are mentioned in the quotes, but those have been changed from the original countries mentioned in the narratives; I chose Turkey and Greece since they are particularly common migrant routes to Europe. I have also chosen three common Syrian and three common Somali names to give a more personal feel to the narratives, Mona, Habi, Ara, Dalila, Fadel and Lely, for stylistic purposes in line with the narrative analysis method.

However, other ethical considerations are less straight forward as long-term risk analysis is complicated. Jacobsen and Landau argue that the consequences for informants, in a migration/refugee situation, are hard to assess as they might only become visible over a longer period of time. For example, after the thesis has been published or, if informants they talk about their participation. If their participation is known or comes to be known, they can become targets for malignant pressure from family and society. Disclosed sensitive information can also function to stigmatize and ostracize informants.

Further on the refugee and migrant’s vulnerable situation Jacobsen and Landau write

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126 Jacobsen and Landau, 193 f.
Refugees [...] might be reluctant or afraid to tell researchers their true views [...]. Refugees are unlikely to tell researchers anything that might jeopardize their (the refugees’) position in the community. After all, why should a refugee tell a researcher anything that is not in the refugees’ interest? 127

In other words, due to the precarious situation that informants might be in, trust could be curtailed. In general, perhaps because the interview theme did not feel threatening to talk about and maybe because the women had received asylum in Sweden, I did not feel that the women withheld much in their narratives regarding their experiences of menstruation along the way. However, in line with Jacobsen and Landau’s cautionary appeal, some women were careful in their descriptions of details regarding their travels, especially concerning contacts with smugglers and border crossings. And, as mentioned earlier, some of the women thought I was a doctor because of the subject of inquiry, menstruation. This lead me to put more effort into information about the study and I spent more time explaining the purpose of the interviews stressing my role as a student from an Ethnic and Migration Studies programme, to feel confident that the women were confidently giving informed consent to participate. I did not need to, but I was ready to cancel the interview if I did not feel confident in this matter.

127 Jacobsen and Landau. 192.
The analysis chapter is structured as follows:

The first segment, *Fleeing as a Woman* deals with the women’s thoughts about female specific experiences on the road to Sweden, here we discuss the fear of sudden menstruation as most women had irregular bleedings during their migration, fear of rape, contestation of the ‘women-and-children’ category and navigating the woman’s ‘space’ of agency within the precarious situation of forced migration. In *Chocolate and Painkillers*, the women talk about the things that they lacked most during their menstruation on the road; the capacity for emotional selfcare such as giving into cravings and relaxing, and availability to reduce menstrual pain. *Hide It!* reveals the stress brought on from hiding menstruation from Others and can be seen as an extension of the previous segment as it is partly connected to the absence of the possibility to relax in the situation. In the last segment, *The Weak Woman and the Strong Man* women compare their experiences to men, revealing that they often felt trapped in situations and felt weaker than their husbands or brothers through a common example of where or where not one could pee.

Before we get into the main analysis I would like to set a sort of scene for the narratives by introducing a short ‘start of the journey narratives’ by Dalila and Lely and a brief comment on an interesting observation because of the paradoxical statement at the beginning of the interviews in relation to the narratives about the journeys.

**Setting the Scene**

Six women shared their narratives about their experiences, thoughts and feelings during their migrations to Sweden. They are between the ages of 24 and 35 and they all undertook similar routes on their precarious journeys to Sweden. Three of the women, Lely, Dalila and Fadel, are from Syria, and three, Ara, Habi, and Mona, are from Somalia. At the time of writing they are living, working, studying and raising families in Sweden. Getting to this point in time was hard-earned and in the following pages they share their narratives about womanhood, menstruation in the situation of migration.

Lely, as Dalila, stayed a long period of time with family in Turkey with the same hopes of returning home but as those hopes died out she began listening to the radio for reports on boat
rides across the ocean to Greece, but she had to convince her father that there were other routes to Sweden than through Hungary where he feared they would be imprisoned. She did not dare to tell him about the war wound on her stomach from a shelling of her home town, that still to this day causes her pains, she was sure he would never let her set out if he knew. Eventually she succeeded in convincing him and he lent her money and she contacted smugglers to cross the ocean.

Lely: I took a rubber boat with my two children across the ocean to Greece. First time we went to the beach, it was very dirty, to go on the rubber boat but the police came, and the smugglers hid us, and we had to go home, we tried again the next night. The smugglers have guns and they say that if you don’t get on the boat they will shoot you, kill you. You never get your money back, you go to the beach you have to go on the boat and into the ocean. I never told my parents or brothers about this, when they called me I told them ‘yes, yes, everything is fine’.

The women had one objective and that was to make it to their destination, to finish their journeys and have peace of mind. As the women began connecting their narratives to their embodied experiences by talking about their menstruation, large parts of their migration narratives became intertwined with feelings in and of the body, for example, recalling memories of tougher parts of their journeys through the memory of pain in the body but also associating feelings of the body such as menstrual shame, which for the women interviewed seemed to lie in the eye of the beholder and not in their own feelings about menstruation.

Interestingly, even though I am conflicted about the meaning of the statements, nearly all women stated at the beginning of the interviews that their journeys to Sweden were not as hard as others might have experienced.

Ara: I had an easy trip, there are those who had it much worse, I had an easy trip here.

Mona: If you compare with others I had an easy trip, but personally it was very hard.

Dalila: A lot of people went through a very hard journey but I’m fortunate, I didn’t.

Could it, perhaps, be them preparing me for their narratives to not let me down thinking I was searching for gruesome stories of migration to Sweden? Or did they truly feel that they did not have as bad a journey as most others? What the analysis chapter will reveal though is that these women had tough journeys through Europe, paved with exceptionally multifaceted fear, even though the thesis holds menstruation as its main subject the interconnectedness to questions
about power, agency and silencing’s super powers on women’s migration experiences are all connected, which I hope the following pages will make clear.

**Fleeing as a Woman**

As Young argues, *situation* plays a vital part in understanding embodied experiences, in this case migration is the *situation*, a time limited event out of the ordinary but extraordinary as it spans over continents and through numerous countries. Although, as will become evident there were *situations* within *situations* where the women’s bodies came to be a hindrance and a source of anxiety, bodies where limitations of norms acted upon them to limit their scope of agency. Principally the avoidance of being shamed by upholding modesty governed their experiences, leading them to navigate an almost impossible dichotomy, due to the matter of agency not being a highly desirable female trait, as shown with the backlash effect, it is a dichotomy of female modesty in a situation that demands steep levels of agency from everybody that sets out on such a journey.

For Mona, the memories of the journey through the desert are recalled through the pain in her body, she did not have access to food or painkillers during that leg of the journey, but the feeling of powerlessness was also constitutive of her memory.

Mona: When I was in the desert, we were driving, and I got a really bad period, a very painful one. The guy driving said, “it doesn’t matter how much you’re in pain, I won’t stop the car, we keep driving.” We were forty people in the bus. I shout my mouth, so they wouldn’t hear me even though I wanted people to be awake with me and help me because it was so painful. I can laugh about it now, but it was very difficult in that moment. After the car had stopped we had to walk for a long while, it was very cold, and I couldn’t sleep that night because of the pain. I remember that menstruation because of the pain. I remember that journey because of the pain. I felt cornered. Menstruation is troublesome for me. It’s easier to menstruate for women who haven’t been FGM. I still have a hard time with my period even after I became a mother. I have pain and the blood is sluggish and it keeps coming even after it’s supposed to have ended.

Mona tried asking for the car to stop for a while to give her some breathing space, but she did not have the power to do so, the importance of pressing on overpowered her needs. Later in the

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128 Young. 29.
129 Rudman and Glick. 758.
interview I asked her if she thought that she could have been open about where her pain derived from and she answered with a firm ‘No’.

For Mona, Habi and Ara pain is an essential part of their embodied emotions due to the harmful effects female genital mutilation had on their bodies. Thus, their migration narratives contain stronger memories of physical pain. The situation, being women in their original communities in which the women were exposed to female genital mutilation spills over into the situation of migration, thus Mona, Ara and Habi’s embodied emotions can be understood as a continuation of their previous situation which is telling of how harmful and inflictive female genital mutilation is on all aspects of their lives. It is also a representative indicator of, as Inckle writes, “the complexity of lived, human experiences”.130

Although, all the women expressed feelings of their pain being downplayed, menstruation did not fit into their situations of migration, in terms of it not being given space to ‘be’ or time to be felt. They did not feel able to give into menstrual pains and discomfort, even though the suppression of their feelings also made the situation harder to handle, Mona was actively hindered from doing so. In Dalila’s opinion;

    Dalila: Women have made it so well [having painful menstruations] that men think that it’s no big deal to have your period, but actually it’s like being sick, imagine being sick for three or more days every month.

Women are simply too good at hiding their menses from men. Which can be understood as women holding up their end of the relational aspect of the social contract between, in Goffman131 and Meads words, stigmatized and the general other. If women do not make their menstruation and the consequences of it visible they reduce the risk of being shamed and devalued by others, which in turn can be viewed as an internalization of normative expectations on menstruating women. That, in the situation of migration, can be seen as a facilitating response for the sake of others, as Mead described the function of norms; an individual will incorporate the experiences of social processes in order to streamline occurring events.132

There also exists a paradox regarding the feelings towards being powerless in the situation of migration as a woman. The opinion about women’s vulnerability and if it poses a negative or positive outcome differed between the narratives and foremost between the women that

130 Inckle. 4.
131 Goffman. 140 f.
132 Mead. 136.
travelled alone and those who were in company of family, especially with male family members.

Habi is, as mentioned earlier, a victim of female genital mutilation and during the interview she described not only how she was cut but she also demonstrated with the tip of an ink pen how small an opening is left for vaginal discharge;

Habi: that’s where menstruation is supposed to come out. Peeing is bad enough. They only leave a small hole. The blood doesn’t come out, the clots get stuck. It’s very hard.

She also described how her menstruation was irregular and sometimes very small but painful due to the long hours sitting on a train which also caused her feet to swell, causing her further discomfort. She attributed the irregularity of her period to stress and anxiety from the pressures of the journey but also due to the physical pain. Habi was the only woman who travelled completely alone and in the following quote we hear her thoughts about her fear of rape.

Habi: When I crossed the border from my country I went into a foreign country with foreign people and strange men. I didn’t know if I was going to survive or if something would happen to me. I was constantly worrying because as a woman you have thoughts like ‘will it be safe?’ ‘Will I be raped?’ It’s much more unsafe than when you travel with your family. Rape is something one fears. To come in contact with rape, nobody was with me, not my husband, brother or relative, so it was constantly in my thoughts. So, you are careful, very, very careful. You keep away if there are several men, you are careful all the time, you don’t walk in the streets alone, you keep away, so nobody grabs you by the hijab.

Habi clearly relates fear of rape to her as a woman and she especially fears it as she was alone, meaning that she had no protection by men from men, leading to her having to stay vigilant and stay away from strange men for the sake of protecting herself from rape. In other words, she took it upon herself to protect her body from others, which is crucial as the consequences would be devastating. However, it is a common response by the could-be victim of rape, as it generally is the woman’s responsibility to avoid rape rather the man’s responsibility to not rape. A tightrope balancing act as ‘protecting’ generally is an agentic, male attribute, therefore, her tactic of avoiding men as far as she could, lends her the possibility to behave more passively and more in line with female gender norms thus avoiding facing the consequences of the backlash effect.\textsuperscript{133}

\textsuperscript{133} Rudman and Glick. 747.
Ara: When a woman travels she has to think about protecting herself as a woman and then it can happen that she loses her belongings as she’s fleeing, losing her pads she has nothing to protect her period with. In this case, men and women are not in the same place. It’s harder for women. Having your period being FGM is very hard. The blood doesn’t come out properly. Sometimes I can’t pray because you’re not supposed to pray when you’re on your period. It’s like my body reacts with pain when my menstruation is late, I get headaches, pain in my legs and body. It’s the best feeling when you get married and you’re opened, the body is relieved and it’s like it should be. You can’t understand what it’s like if you haven’t been cut. I was in a car for many hours in the desert in Somalia to the border, it was very tough the road was very bad. I had bleedings several times during that journey even though it wasn’t time for it, it was the same for other women in the car too.

Ara also puts an emphasis on protecting oneself as a woman, especially physically. From how she describes her periods affecting her post-female genital mutilation, it is understandable that protecting the period as she puts it, becomes crucial to her and that she positions protection of and body in relation to each other.

Protecting oneself as a woman, therefore is a multifaceted concern for the women, in one part stemming from being able to menstruate in a modest way, and in part of protecting the body from being exposed to gender-based violence. As mentioned, Habi was the only participant who travelled completely alone to Sweden, Lely travelled with her daughter and son who were twelve and fifteen at the time, and the fear of rape was only present in their narratives. Although Lely feared much more for her daughter than for herself, she feared that her daughter would be abducted which she expressed would be a fate worse than death. She mentioned several times that she hardly slept during the journey because she felt a strong need to keep an eye on them during the nights in fear of strange men. Lely and her children had to sleep at the road side several nights in between reaching various refugee camps in Europe coming to Sweden.

Lely: It was so tough, I was very anxious, in three days I slept maybe two or three hours. When I came to Sweden I could exhale, I slept a lot. When men sleep they could wake up refreshed. Women can’t sleep in the road, she can’t leave everything and just sleep in the road, I was very afraid for my children, there were a lot of refugees, men, some had knives and I feared them. I have a daughter, I was very afraid for her.

Lely’s statement above can be understood as women not being able to let their guards down in company of strangers. Even though she does not plainly state the explicit details of what could
happen if a woman does so, it is clear that she fears the consequences of what it might have entailed, especially as she felt she needed to clarify that there were a lot of male refugees nearby, a concern that she shared with Habi. The situation demanded Lely and Habi to be considerably vigilant for their own safety which also made them act in accordance to ensure they protected themselves.

In the narratives presented above one can see a coherent negative position towards feelings of powerlessness in relation to the physical body, the women had no other choice than to conform to the prevalent circumstances. It seems that the only tactic they could apply was a state of hyper vigilance and avoidance in way of protecting their bodies and modesty from harm. A fear that can be understood as solely being connected to their bodies as women. Important to note is that their fear was not in any way misplaced as there exist a general norm which calls for women to watch out for rapists and not the other way around, namely that men should watch themselves from raping. An understanding that derives from the male as the default norm in patriarchal societies, meaning that woman as the Other are anticipated to revise their behaviour after the default and not the other way around.134

In contrast to negative feelings of powerlessness Dalila expressed feelings of alleviation from belonging to the ‘women-and-children’ category as they would not be targeted rather assumed protection as the weak and the victims. Dalila travelled with a large family group.

Dalila: You’re treated a little better as a woman, by guards, in security checks and police because they have respect for women because they are weak, they’re not in the discussion kind of, they don’t have any responsibility. They are weak, and you’re not supposed to talk to them, you don’t speak directly to women out of respect for the man, so they won’t be angry. For me it was a relief, I didn’t have to talk to them. But women have a harder time than men during the journey. When you’re in pain there’s no painkillers, you’re supposed to be covered even if it’s very hot, to not attract attention. Travelling alone as a woman is almost impossible, she would be harassed, treated badly or raped. I was lucky I had my family.

The ‘women-and-children’ category encompasses normative gender norms in war and conflict135, meaning what Dalila expresses, a view of women as weak and in need of protection by men. But, Dalila felt relieved. She was able to take a step back and let others lead the way for her. Even though Dalila’s statement covers large parts of the paradox of fleeing as a woman,

134 Young. 31.
135 Freedman.19.
she felt relieved of not having to deal with guards and police but on the other hand she realised the implications of what it could mean to travel alone as a woman, namely being subjected to gender-based violence. Protecting oneself as a woman in the situation of migration could therefore be understood as having to conform to norms even though it results in discomfort and in part fitting into authorities’ category of the weak and protected. From this point of view, women as a group can be understood to be needing starker protection during migration, and perhaps there might be a function to the ‘women-and-children’ category, but, not from the perspective that women are weak rather from the societal and cultural structures such as normative gender roles that keep women in a disadvantaged position, especially during migration.

All women expressed fear and angst over sudden onset of menstruation during the journey as most of them experienced irregularity in their cycles, which they all attributed to emotional stress and anxiety caused by moving from country to country. Which can be understood as a fear of breaking the normative silence of menstruation and thus appearing as menstruating women, a status that others might hold against them. Lely waited for her menstruation to end and set out on the journey the next day, the fear of sudden onset of menstruation was prevalent in the narratives and was only enhanced by the strains and constraints of the situation.

Fadel: My period was painful, and I got it twice in Turkey and twice in Greece. I didn’t feel comfortable especially as I was in a country I didn’t know, and everything was happening around me. I was scared to get my period while traveling. I was worried I would make something dirty and that it [the period] would be seen by others. When I’m late I will have a very strong period, the first two days I have a heavy flow and then it becomes milder.

A double-sided problematic can be discerned in the narratives, on the one hand the fear of having one’s menstruation noticed by others and on the other a feeling of powerlessness in the situation and angst for their bodies to behave in a way that is not manageable in the situation. An uncontrollable aspect of the body in an uncontrollable situation. In other words, embodied fear both in and of the body which can be understood as menstruation as an inflictive threat to their selves within the situation, that by itself is limiting, as menstruation might threaten their scopes of agency; sitting in a car for a long time without the ability to ‘protect’ it or fearing others might notice a stain. Seeing the importance of situation for embodied emotions; the situation; migration, in relation to menstruation caused embodied fear for the women. A fear that, for some of the women, led to meticulous preparations before leaving their homes. It was
important for the women to have proper equipment to feel safe if they suddenly started menstruating. However, the lack of safe places to change pads along the way was an understated inconvenient concern.

Lely: She [Lely’s daughter] could only change her pads in the porta-potty, she would go directly there [when arriving at a camp] to change. She complained about her clothes being dirty, but I had to tell her that she couldn’t change her clothes here, she had to wait. I gave her lots of pads and a diaper for bigger children, I told her to put it in a way she won’t make her clothes dirty because we couldn’t change clothes, there were no bathrooms only those porta-potty toilets, they were very dirty.

Inadequate facilities for washing, changing pads and relieving oneself in relation to gender-based violence specifically rape is a well-documented fact. The women were prepared but the availability of proper facilities on the road for them to change pads and clean themselves was highly limited and this caused further stress and anxiety. The women had to make concessions merely for the limited possibilities for them to uphold regular menstrual hygiene practises; Lely’s daughter wore a diaper, Dalila wore her pad for several hours longer,

Dalila: We brought stuff with us, but instead of changing every three hours you would change maybe every sixth hour, you keep it for longer. It doesn’t feel good of course but you have to adjust.

Ara: It’s just like planning for a school trip, everything can happen, so I put everything in my bag, so I’ll be ready. Nothing more to think about. I was always prepared, even if it wasn’t that week I was supposed to get my period, I was always prepared.

Even though Ara said ‘nothing more to think about’ with a shrug of the shoulders nevertheless she was always prepared.

Fear in relation to the body summarizes this first section. A fear that, from the narratives can be understood as stemming both from within; in terms of the positioning of menstruation as a threat to bodily modesty, and fear from the outside; in terms of strangers and fearing rape. From those fears the women took discrete measures to ensure that they would be safe from harm. Discrete being the keyword in how they navigated the situation as it kept them safe from the backlash effect that would have caused their modesty harm.

136 Freedman. 22.
Chocolate and Painkillers

Mona: When you’re at home and have your period you can take it easy, take care of yourself, you can take painkillers for the pain, and the cravings for sweets for like chocolate you can get it and it’s ok, but when you’re travelling it’s tough with the pain and you can’t get what you need, you’re not comfortable in the situation.

Painkillers in relation to being able to give into cravings and taking it easier encompasses a regime of common menstrual care which can be seen as a way of soothing the body and mind, allowing more sympathy for oneself during menstruation. It is common for women to experience bloating of the stomach and menstrual cramps i.e. general discomfort in the body during menstruation. It is also common to feel down and sad either shortly before and/or during menstruation. Therefore, relieving pain with regular off-the-shelf medication, and giving into cravings is a way of softening, soothing and being gentler with oneself during the period, a regime that I have chosen to call *emotional menstrual care*. To then lack the ability of allowing oneself such emotional care, especially given that the painkillers and cravings of choice are easy to come by, yet not available to the women in the situation of migration in a sense makes the lack of emotional care harder to bear giving a feeling of even greater unnecessary suffering.

Dalila: It was hard mentally, you know, for a period during our journey we had limited access to certain things, you know when you get cravings you want to eat certain things or want certain medications, it was all limited. It was tough, but you get used to it, you adjust. Stress is a factor, I suffer a lot while on my period and the journey made it worse.

Adding an embodied element to the experience which cannot be described as anything else than further discomfort solely based on their bodies as women, which needs to be understood as a mix of biological body and societally constructed gender norms at work simultaneously.\(^{137}\) Considering the alternative for the women would be to ‘take’ the space and time to engage in proper emotional menstrual care it would also entail an open and visible recognition of their menstruating statuses which would put them in harm’s way of shame and since the recognition would be coming from themselves they would also stray too far into the realm of agency and menstrual loudness.

In relation to the constant need of vigilance on the body and surrounding could-be-rapists the lack of opportunity of emotional menstrual care additionally limits the women’s breathing

\(^{137}\) Fausto-Sterling. 1495.
space, i.e. the constitutive nature of the situation for the women, furthering the feeling of what Habi conveys below as feeling trapped in the situation.

Habi: I didn’t take my shoes off for 15 days, it hurt and affected me a lot during the journey to Sweden. When you’re on your period you’re supposed to take it easy, take care of yourself, but I didn’t get the chance because of the stress, I couldn’t breathe out and take my shoes off for the entire journey. At home I usually have a heavy flow, the period was very hard, I suffered even though I had a small period during this time. I had bad cramps, with pain in my stomach and lower back I had constant worry. I didn’t sleep during the journey, I was sitting, my feet swelling with my shoes on, I couldn’t shower, usually when I’m on my period I want to shower and feel clean, I was trapped in the situation, I couldn’t breathe. A lot of different thoughts. Menstruation was one of those worries.

The perpetual mental strain of the journey only worsened by the lack of ability to ease pain, shower and take it easy. Habi’s feelings of not being able to either breathe or breath out can be understood as to be under immense pressure which derives from the narrow or completely lacking elbow-room and agency for women. Exclusively contributing to the mental strain for the women, again, because the alternative of ‘taking’ the space to properly see to their emotional menstrual care would be giving away their menstruating statuses therefore risking being stigmatized and devalued as to not being fit for the situation because of menstruation.

A recurring common denominator from a theoretical point of view is the persistent sense of menstruation not fitting into the situation of migration. The situation of migration can be understood to be ordered for and after the male gender role in part because of the considerable amount of agency required, which women are socially punished for and in part due to the lack of possibilities in the situation for women to tend to basic needs such as hygiene and protection.

The male gender role with norms that not only allow but demand agency and with bodies that do not, in the words of Fahs, leak nor shift, therefore the issues that have described so far do not pose as issues for normative men.

If the practical feature of menstruation was hard enough to manage then the emotional care seems to have been completely unavailable for the women. The stress, worry, and anxiety of the situation took over the ability of giving into the need of resting and taking it easier during menstruation. In a sense making the embodied experience into one of wanting space of ‘being’

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138 Young. 31.
139 Rudman and Glick. 758.
140 Bobel. 35.
and letting ‘be’ for women and their emotional menstrual care needs, whether they be practical or emotional.

Dalila: Sometimes it feels like, why are we the only ones getting so much pain? Maybe your husband says something stupid, you know, they don’t know what they’re talking about ‘it can’t hurt that much’ how do you know it doesn’t it hurt that much? It’s frustrating at times, values regarding menses, it shouldn’t be like this, not at all, people should have more understanding. Perhaps women missed the rubber boat because they were ‘sick’ [menstruating]. But you disregard the ‘small stuff’ like, what about menstruation? You think about life at that point, it’s not a question about having pain or not, it’s about surviving. But nothing is normal at the same time as your fleeing, you wear the same clothes for several days and you’re fleeing, menstruation is not your biggest problem.

Dalila’s frustration over what can be understood as menstruation being downplayed and disregarded is telling in several ways. She starts out with how others/men view menstrual pain as something that just cannot be *that* bad and asking for understanding and compassion for what women experience during menstruation. However, when she then positions menstruation in the context of migration, seemingly abruptly, menstruation does not fit into the situation and it becomes ‘small stuff’. Menstruation becomes a non-issue in the situation of migration, it could be understood as the balancing act between being nice and agentic and therefore seeing to emotional menstrual care would be too visible in the situation, as they perhaps were already leaning to far on the agentic side of the rope and needed to compensate with hiding their pains and cravings to be ‘nice’ to others as not to pose a hindrance to the urgency of the situation, meaning perhaps slowing the party down or as in Dalila’s example miss the rubber boat because they were menstruating. To alter menstruation into ‘small stuff’ could therefore be seen as a social lubricant in a harsh situation by being a ‘nice’ woman that does not call attention to her needs that others would be required to be considerate of. However, as Rudman and Glick concludes, in their article, the tight rope balancing act puts an immense strain on the mental resources as it creates a perpetual anxiety from self-surveillance wondering when one is going to make a mistake and thus be subjected to the backlash effect. However, it can also be understood in terms of women being denied subjectivity in the situation and pushed toward being caring and considerate of other’s feelings.

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141 Mead, 136.
142 Rudman and Glick. 759.
143 Young, 31 f.
144 Prentice and Carranza. 269.
**Hide It!**

For the women menstruation is something that goes without saying as part of being a woman. They connected it to good health, youth and womanhood.

Dalila: Getting my period each month means I’m healthy.

Habi: It’s normal, it’s something women get.

Mona: It’s a sign of health, it’s a part of being a woman and a sign that you’re still young.

Sharing a given, self-evident and positive attitude towards it in other words, and noting foremost the strong positive association between menstruation and womanhood. Ara even expressed a solidarity between women she met during her journey.

Ara: We would help each other out, women, when it comes to a situation like that, even if it’s any woman at all you help each other out. It’s something we women do, because it’s something we all share, menstruation.

However, as Martin also points out, the coin always has two sides, even though the women felt positively towards their menstruation in terms of it being a marker of womanhood the gender normative negative assumptions about menstruation will be a determinant in shaping women’s attitudes about menstruation. One can thus make the deduction that since the women took a personal positive stance toward their own menstruations the negativity towards menstruation and the menstrual silence they expressed as being important are deriving from societal normative gender norms and thus something that is being acted upon them.

The overpowering awareness of menstruation being something that should be hidden from fathers, brothers and the generalized other was a highly governing factor for the women, both in terms of practically hiding pads and emotionally with shame being the main feeling prescribed as the foremost agent in explaining the ‘why’ of hiding it. As shown above, the women did not subscribe to the notion of menstruation as something inherently bad, although they were acutely aware that others most probably viewed it as such and therefore they acted accordingly, in a sense incorporating feelings of the body as their own and as a vital part of

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145 Martin. 101- 112.
146 Young. 39.
embodied feelings connected to womanhood. Theoretically demonstrative of the double standards imposed on women as humans and as women.\textsuperscript{147}

Fadel: I was shy, and because I was shy from my brother I had to hide it [menstruation]. I was worried I would make something dirty and that others will see that I’m on my period. It’s not beautiful. It’s not beautiful to walk and there’s something on your ass [pad] from behind. I was scared others might see it. If I want to throw away my pad it would be okay in front of my mother but not in front of my brother or father, then I would hide it and throw it away later. It was difficult during the journey, at home in Syria we had a big house but, on the way, usually had one or maybe two rooms, it made it much harder to hide it.

Fadel’s worry that men in her vicinity would see her pads either on her or when she discarded them extended both to her male family members and others, conveying an awareness of the body in direct relation to other’s negative attitudes towards her body and menstruation. She repeats that ‘it’s not beautiful’ and the fear that she might make something dirty with her menstruation can be understood as breaking menstrual silence because a visible stain could not be disregarded by Goffman’s ‘normal’ people;\textsuperscript{148} thus she would be shamed and stigmatized. Fadel also clearly conveys how the situation made discarding her pads much harder than in her home in Syria as they had to live in close quarters, thus menstrual etiquette also became harder for her to maintain. Dalila explains further about her views on menstrual silence.

Dalila: Nobody should know that you are menstruating, except when you’re in a lot of pain of course. You feel ashamed from your family, from your own father and brother, but you’re not supposed to show that you’re in pain, even though my father is open minded, it’s supposed to be a secret. You’re not supposed to speak loudly about having your period. We don’t talk about it, my sisters used to give me advice ‘take this’, ‘keep warm’, ‘do like this or like that’, I didn’t know much then.

It, menstruation, is something that you are not supposed to speak about as a woman. Dalila’s sisters taught her how to do it correctly, and hence her feelings of the body had come to be expressed in silence. Fadel’s opinions of menstruation as not ‘beautiful’ and Dalila’s opinion of menstruation as something in need of concealment fall in line with normative understandings of menstruation as something that should be hidden from view, especially men’s view. It can also be understood as keeping one of the foremost distinguishable features between normative societal binary gender perceptions hidden, due to the male body being regarded as the

\textsuperscript{147} Young. 31 f.
\textsuperscript{148} Goffman. 140 f.
normative\textsuperscript{149} that does not menstruate and thus the menstruating body falls outside the general bodily and societal norms.\textsuperscript{150} Thus, a practical way to evade shaming due to menstruation is to simply hide it from those that would make use of a known menstruating status to women’s disadvantage. However, regarding the generalized other, their fears of having their menses noticed could also be understood as fearing the unseen seer as in Foucault’s usage of \textit{panopticon}.\textsuperscript{151} Not knowing who’s watching and when, therefore made it imperative to enact proper menstrual etiquette at all times. Even though irregular bleedings and inadequate facilities worsened worry and anxiety for if they could ‘protect’ their menstruation properly if/when it came. In doing so they would never ‘drop the ball’ so to say and thereby lowering the risk of exposing themselves as menstruating women thus also evading being shamed. The contradictory nature\textsuperscript{152} of their situation did not aid them in their pursuit to uphold perceived modesty as they would have liked. As Young argues, the \textit{situation} poses a series of requirements on the bodies that reside within the situation and if the body does not meet those requirements then access will not be fully granted.\textsuperscript{153} Lely describes her daughters’ situation within the situation, her daughter feared that her dirty clothes would serve as an indicator for her menstruating status, but they had very limited chances to clean themselves and change pads along the way.

Lely: She [Lely’s daughter] felt like everybody could see that she had it [period]; she felt ashamed, she thought that everyone is looking at her and thinking that she has her period because of her dirty clothes and you can’t change [pads, clothes] anywhere because a woman is shy, you feel embarrassed if somebody would see you, it’s very embarrassing for us.

Needless to say, the shame of menstruation connects to a perception of it also being dirty and therefore the fear of being shamed due to ‘dirtiness’ governs the urgency of cleaning oneself and hiding it from others. In line with the normative assumption that the female body is in need of management\textsuperscript{154} worrying and stress arose when it became hard to maintain desired cleanliness. Correspondingly the women were worried that their menstruation would become visible due to them not being able to sufficiently uphold cleanliness. But, the situation did not

\textsuperscript{149} Young. \textit{On Female Body Experience}. 31.
\textsuperscript{150} Fahs. 59 ff.
\textsuperscript{151} Foucault and Bjurström. 196 ff.
\textsuperscript{152} Young. 31.
\textsuperscript{153} Young. 157.
\textsuperscript{154} Fahs. 94 f.
allow it and subsequently worry and stress of being seen ensues. Concealing their menstruation therefore became particularly difficult and troublesome because of the *situation*.

Ara’s narrative below exemplifies a tactic of concealing menstruation by relating her hardships to other aspects of the body that are not enclosed with normative silence.

Ara: At one point, it felt like I was going through hell. We were driving towards the border and the road was especially bad. It was humid and raining and my period was so bad during that journey that I was throwing up, they had to stop the car because it was so tough. I had pains on one side of my body and I kept throwing up a lot. We had to walk a few times and that made the pain worse, the road was terrible. I couldn’t be open about that the pains were caused by menstruation, menstruation is taboo. I didn’t say anything to the people driving, I talked to another woman I was traveling with and she told them that I was feeling sick because I hadn’t eaten properly, we explained it like that instead. It’s shameful to tell a man that you’re on your period, you feel embarrassed. It’s embarrassing, you should be modest about these things.

Ara’s story also encompasses the multifaceted elements of migrating as a woman with menstruation and the urgent need of keeping one’s menstruating status unknown as a woman, even though as she describes it, she is going through hell, with pains and nausea and having to explain it in other terms that are disconnected from her innate bodily functions for the sake of complying with menstrual norms, albeit on her own expense. It was easier, not only for her to put her discomfort in relation to something else than menstruation, but by not bringing attention to it she also facilitated the social arrangement between others and herself as it is expected by the others that she complies with the norms. Her narrative also contains the sum of the functions of normative gender norms in the situation of migration, namely, powerlessness, the lack of agency due to upholding modesty thus also distinctively associated with womanhood.

Lely’s embodied experiences of menstruation during migration did not end as she arrived in Sweden,

Lely: When I arrived in Sweden I slept a lot and I don’t know why but I got my period and it didn’t stop for forty days. My mother said, ‘maybe it’s because you moved to the cold’, the old they say so much stuff. I wanted to make an appointment with the doctor, but I couldn’t speak Swedish and the translator that was there to help us was a man, but I was shy to tell him my problems it’s our traditions to not tell a

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155 Mead. 136.
man of such issues, so I bled for forty days. Because my husband didn’t want me to
tell the male translator and then I got pregnant and the midwives said it’s okay even
though I have a wound on my stomach from the war, the pregnancy was very painful.

That refugee women avoid seeking medical treatment in countries of destination is a well-
documented phenomenon, several of the papers presented in Previous Research aim to
understand this problem in order to facilitate easier contact with health institutions and to lower
the threshold for refugee women and minimize the risk of them seeking medical attention too
late. Lely evaded seeking medical help solely on the basis of keeping her modesty by not
using the male translator that was available to her. She has later confided that she does not trust
doctors in Sweden which was enhanced following the midwife’s lack of understanding her
concern of pregnancy with the wound on her stomach, which as it turned out caused her pain
during her whole pregnancy and keeps causing her pain and stress. The women were
consistently anxious about their modesty throughout their journeys, making it imperative that
their menstruations went unnoticed even though they suffered pain, stress and anxiety because
of it. It is evident how prescriptive and forceful gender norms and normative assumptions
govern behaviour and feelings of the body, even though the assumptions were not inherently
the women’s own but rather a reaction to them based on evasion of devaluation, shame and
stigmatization related to their menstruation. By now, the situation of migration can be
understood as counter force which posed a strong and essential resistance for the women
because of lack of space and freedom to see to their needs to be calm and comfortable in their
bodies during their migrations.

Space to menstruate in peace without anxiety of having it noticed is constrained, narrow and
causes an excess of stress, fear and unnecessary pain exclusively based on them being women
in a situation constructed for the normative male.

156 Metusela et al., Ussher et al., Hawkey et al.
157 Inckle. 80.
158 Fausto-Sterling. 1495.
The Weak Woman and the Strong Man

In contrast to their feelings of being hard-pressed during their journeys of migration, the women talked about men as having more elbow-room and being able to take more space in the situation for their needs. Therefore, it is not a coincidence that when the women compared their journeys to the men around them a view of men as being stronger prevailed in their narratives, the first word they used in describing men in the situation of migration was ‘strong’.

Habi: It all comes down to strength, when you’re running for a train a man for example would make it better than a woman. When I was in Greece and we were going on the boat, the men got on the boat but I as a woman struggled to get on the boat, in differences it all comes down to strength and stamina, the stamina to carry out the journey. It was very hard to get in the boat, I needed help to do it.

It was easier for men to climb on to the boat and run for the train, but, Mona’s last comment about men not having to think about their periods tap into the main reason why men are perceived as stronger.

Mona: A man can do things quicker, if it’s catching a bus or a taxi, it’s quick, they don’t need to think about their period.

When I inquired further into the way they perceived men as stronger it became clear that the women did not see the men’s bodies as posing a hindrance to them, normatively, as for the women. As it might have become clear by now, the importance of keeping up bodily modesty was significant for the women during their migrations and it posed great restraints on how they could act in the situation, but, not for the men. The situations constitutive nature and its effects are, as both Young and Fausto-Sterling argues,\textsuperscript{159} vital to understand from an intersectional gender and sociocultural perspective. Because by doing so the differences that stem from the situation become clear and therefore one can understand why men were perceived as having more mobility and agency in the situation, because their bodies did not pose a restriction to their agency in the same way as the women experienced that it did for them. Therefore, men were perceived as both physically stronger and more able in the situation. Many of them used the example of where one can pee or not pee as a woman and a man, to demonstrate the differences in agency granted in the situation. The example is a good one as it both points to the freedom of space and the agency of being able to use it without question and limitations, both which the women lacked.

\textsuperscript{159} Young. 29, Fausto-Sterling. 1495.
Mona: Even the simple things like going out and pee, he can go anywhere and stand and pee and that’s it. But I have to look for a good spot, it’s a lot of work around it, there’s a big difference between being a man and woman along the way. As a woman you have to find the right position and squat down [to pee]. As a woman I’m shy, modest. It’s shameful, when you’re covered like in Islam you can’t go anywhere because you need to find a place where you’re covered, and we have more clothes. Men can just do it, open [the fly on the pants] and done. They have an easier time to find places to pee compared to women in those situations.

In Mona’s words, men ‘can open and done’, for her, modesty i.e. normatively acceptable/required behaviour for women, is positioned before her comfort and needs.

Lely: There’s a big difference [between fleeing as man and as a woman] because he can, if he wants, he can pee in public places, it doesn’t matter, he can even sleep outside in the road. It’s not the same for women. She can’t pee whenever she wants to, it’s not normal, she just can’t.

From Lely’s narrative it can be understood as the public spaces undoubtedly belong to men they can freely urinate and sleep where they want but different rules apply for women, and again, modesty comes before personal comfort and needs.

Dalila: At one instance, we had to stop in the desert to pee, and it was completely empty, only desert. There was only one small building and we had to go behind it to pee, but it was impossible, I just couldn’t do it. I had to hold it.

Several women expressed choosing to hold it in even if they really had to go, instead of peeing in public places where they felt exposed to others. Which is another well-documented problematic also presented in the articles in Previous Research, which clearly shows the dangerous relation between inadequate facilities and rape because women are in such an exposed position,160 as for example Mona expressed above, having more clothes as a Muslim woman made it more of a precarious situation for the women to relieve themselves, therefore they refrained from it until they felt safe enough to do it in peace and without fear. It all comes back to how women can or cannot act in the company of others. The example of where one can pee or not serves to demonstrate the situations governing factors on the body.161 If one cannot, for example as a woman, open the fly and ‘just do it’ without risking modesty or personal safety, then the possibility to pee in public places is clearly not available for women. Therefore they

160 Freedman, Schmitt et al.
161 Young. 31.
had to comply with the restrictions and hold it until they reached a place where it was possible to relieve themselves without risking the danger of rape or loss of modesty.

Additionally, men were perceived as possessing more mental calm in the situation especially in the company of others because they did not have to consider their bodies as a factor in how they could move or act among others.

Lely: It’s tough for women, more than men. We have special clothes [hijab] they don’t. Men are stronger than women, they can lie down in the road but for a woman it’s not normal that she lies down on the road. When I slept on the road I always slept with one eye open, but all the men they were sleeping and snoring. She’s weak, not as strong as men are, when you have to walk for long distances her body will be more tired than his.

Lely had no other choice than to sleep by the road side with her children for several nights during her journey to Sweden, even though as she expresses it is not ‘normal’ for women to do so, she counteracted it with constant vigilance over the situation. Since the situation of migration is more suitable for the male gender norm it is not surprising that men found it easier to sleep by the road side, in part because men do not fear for their bodies in the company of others.

Ara: A man can sit with other men and nothing happens, he doesn’t have to think about menstruation.

Fadel: Men are not worried about their bodies like women, they are stronger. My brother was stronger than me, he was able to ask where the smugglers were, and he could help us cross from the beach to the boat.

Apart from physical strength, it can be concluded that the mental calmness, that can be understood as coming from the ability of having agency in the situation is a direct result of having fewer normative restrictions, less fear, worry and anxiety connected to the body and a whole lot more agency from which they did not fear a backlash of in a situation that poses requirements that the male body meets in lager parts. Therefore, men are perceived as stronger and women as weaker, solely based on societal norms and a situation constructed for the benefit of the male gender norm, a situation that therefore does not take female specific needs into account thus it does not either allow for any leeway in normative gender prescriptive behaviour. For the women, their bodies were in their centre of attention, always aware of the in i.e. menstruation and menstrual pain, and of the body emotions i.e. upholding modesty,
expectations and perspectives on the body, and at the same time navigating the tricky,
dangerous, stressful and long migration journey to Sweden.

Habi: He would not have to worry about his period during the journey. Men have
more strength, they have more energy and stamina than women, more patience. As
a woman one gets other thoughts a man wouldn’t get, like will it be safe, will I be
raped? While a man doesn’t need to think in those lines, it’s not that common. You
are more unsafe when you travel alone, it causes a lot of worry.

The embodied emotions of worry and fear in and of the body that Habi expresses she did not
feel men had to even think about, they had more piece of mind concerning the body. As
mentioned earlier, women perceived men as being stronger in terms of being able to walk longer
distances, catch trains and getting on the boat. However, it also became clear that the male
gender norms give men more agency in society in general and particularly during migration. A
situation such as migration poses a strenuous pressure on anyone who embarks on such a
journey and therefore it can be understood that female gender norms pose an even more urgent
restraint on women in migration. Evidently the women did not feel as they possessed the same
agency as the men and therefore perceived themselves as weak due to them having to take their
bodies into account through every step of the way, whether it be their menstruation, their
physical safety or having the possibility to relax and feel more comfortable in an already
emotionally demanding situation paved with fear and anxiety. Thus, it can be understood as
menstruation and womanhood is acting as a disfavour for women, and due to the setup of the
context, it locates women in an even more inferior position than would have been necessary
would it not be for inadequate facilities and lack of female specific interventions and protection
along the way.
Conclusion

To conclude the analysis, here follows a summery of the analysis sections and the theories in relation to the results.

In *Fleeing as a Woman*, it became clear that the women’s bodies were a source of pain and fear. In the situation of migration, the possession of a female body acted as a hindrance for agency and therefore the women experienced a dichotomy of agency in a situation that demands agentic individuals and their prescriptive gender norms allowed no concessions resulting in a state of hyper vigilance and avoidance of strangers to ensure that they protected their bodies from harm. As Inckle argues, “embodiment offers an opportunity to rearticulate our understandings of both being and knowing […]”\(^\text{162}\) by engaging “with human experience in lived, and therefore less objectifying, terms.”\(^\text{163}\) Within the scope of this thesis it has meant that the women’s narratives could be analysed both in terms of *in* body feelings and *of* body feelings in relation to the crucial understanding of both prescriptive gender norms and *situation*. From which the dichotomy of agency emerged.

They navigated the agentic dichotomy of the situation through the perpetuation of modesty which operated as protection from shaming and devaluation. Their navigation of the situation also entailed a level of denial of their needs as women, therefore the feeling of not having ‘space’ within the situation to ‘be’ women, nonetheless menstruating women was consistent throughout the narratives. This led to feelings of powerlessness in the situation although it was contested in the narratives, and as for the women that could, the category of ‘women-and-children’ offered a place of rest with less responsibility in the demanding situation, which was one of the discrete strategies the women utilized to navigate the situation but also for example using avoidance as a tactic of protection to lessen the fear of potential harmful others. Women who display male gender traits are socially punished through what Rudman and Glick calls the *backlash* effect.\(^\text{164}\) However, as Guano notes, the utilisation of *modesty* acts in the favour of women and lends some leeway in agentic behaviour.\(^\text{165}\) Thus, the women’s urgency to uphold their modesty during migration can be understood as a tool available for them for the purpose of navigating the situation. Another strategy that can be understood as a tool in navigating the situation, is the denial of their needs as women. It serves not only to keep them safe from

\(^{162}\) Inckle. 87.
\(^{163}\) Inckle. 87.
\(^{164}\) Rudman and Glick. 744.
\(^{165}\) Guano. 50.
devaluation and shaming, but it also facilitates the situation for others.\textsuperscript{166} However, denial being the keyword in the strategy, it thus entails an internalisation of norms of menstrual silence which in return is self-policing to ensure it goes unnoticed.\textsuperscript{167} Because only then can ‘normal’ people disregard their shortcomings and the backlash effect is avoided.\textsuperscript{168}

Pain was a dominant in the body feeling in the women’s experiences of migration, significantly more for the women suffering from the aftermaths of female genital mutilation. Menstruation came to be not only feelings in the body but also acted as an embodied fear of the body due to the irregularity of their menstruations and thus menstruation was positioned as a threat to their modesty in part because of the worry of not knowing if they would be given space and time to menstruate in peace without risking being betrayed by their own bodies. Fear of the body also came from the outside in terms of others being a threat to physical safety. Avoiding rape is the responsibility of the one that is at risk of being raped, in this case women. The responsibility to avoid rape falls on the potential victim, in this case the women, stemming from the perception of the male as default in patriarchal societies.\textsuperscript{169} The women that feared rape made strategic choices of avoidance and hyper vigilance on others around them to protect themselves from harm, as the situation did not offer other kinds of protection but rather made it worse with for example inadequate facilities aggravating the fear of harm, worry and anxiety for their modesty. Fear of the body, we can conclude, was an integral part of womanhood and a was constitutive for the women during migration.

Emotional menstrual care is a way of soothing oneself when menstruation puts a strain on body and mind by giving into cravings of for example chocolate and easing the pain with painkillers. Understandable from Chocolate and Painkillers, the lack of emotional menstrual care put an extra mental strain on the experience of migration for the women. The situation and lack of agency limited their breathing space which solely acted to further limit their chances of fully ‘being’ in the situation as menstruating women, which led them to feel trapped in the situation and feel that their pain and needs were downplayed and disregarded. Therefore, menstruation and the emotional care of it did not fit into the situation of migration and being denied the opportunity of emotional care enhanced feelings of weakness, powerlessness and helplessness which led to an increase in mental strain from the situation for the women.

\textsuperscript{166} Mead. 136.
\textsuperscript{167} Foucault. 203.
\textsuperscript{168} Goffman. 140 f.
\textsuperscript{169} Young. 31.
Viewing the denial of emotional menstrual care in relation to the situation gives a perspective that points to how the biological body is under the influence of its surroundings. A distinct strategy to deal with the situations downplaying of menstruation is to turn menstruation into 'small stuff' for the sake of facilitating the situation both internally for personally coping in the situation and externally as a social lubricant for the people around them. Therefore, the strategic choice of viewing menstruation as 'small stuff' is logical as it aided the women to easier disregard their needs in favour of others. The mental cost in this regard is higher for the women than for those that did not have the need of considering their bodies to such a high degree as the women, namely men. The women felt utterly trapped in the situation, furthering the conclusion that the situation of migration is much more favourable for the male gender role as it consistently have become evident in the women's narratives that they had to make concessions with their bodily and emotional needs solely based on the restraints of the situation, which was not catering for their specific needs in any way. Migration can thus be understood as being socially constructed for the normative male gender role as it is agentic and not in need of bodily considerations that could lead to shaming would they become known.

Hide It! puts the finger on the importance of upholding modesty for the sake of avoiding shaming and devaluation on the basis of menstruation. Modesty is understood as an umbrella term for female gender normative behaviours, in this case foremost connected to upholding menstrual silence and thus safeguarding bodily modesty. The main consequence of failed modesty is to be shamed by others, which for the purpose of avoidance, the women went to great lengths to conceal their menstruating statuses but constantly fearing it would be noticed by others anyway. Shame can thus be understood as constitutive for the way the women felt like they were able to behave in the situation but also as a dual punishment. As the sole anticipation of being shamed caused them stress and anxiety in the body which lead them to internalise and comply with the opinion that menstruation was ugly and dirty. Therefore, the choice remained to conceal it, even though none of the women shared any experience of a moment during the journey where somebody had actually noticed their menstruation. The fear of it being noticed stood out as an important part of their embodied experience. Constant

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170 Fausto-Sterling. 1495.
171 Mead. 136.
172 Rudman and Glick. 759.
173 Guano. 50.
174 Inkle. 80.
175 Foucault. 203.
176 Inkle. 93.
vigilance on their modesty and strangers around them can thus be understood as strategies for protecting the body from various types of harm. Even though the women expressed self-evident personal in body positivity towards the meaning of their own menstruation they were acutely aware of the societal normative negative of body attitudes which positions visibility of menstruation as a sign of failed modesty and thus exposes women to shaming and devaluation. The awareness and conformity with norms was maintained through rigorous self-policing\textsuperscript{177} for the sake of keeping menstrual silence and invisibility for the benefit of proper modesty. However, due to the lack of adequate facilities and opportunities to change pads and maintain desired level of cleanliness an additional level of mental strain in the way of stress, anxiety and worry for their modesty was placed on the women, hence the relational aspect of shame to womanhood has emerged as a force to be reckoned with.

Contrary to the women's lack of space, power and agency, the women experienced men as having more strength in the situation, in \textit{The Weak Woman and the Strong man}, men's strength was first expressed in terms of the physical but it soon became evident as strength in agency afforded by the combination of a situation that demands agency and a gender role that affords agency without risking any social backlashes\textsuperscript{178}, as far more constitutive to their perception of men as stronger. The women demonstrated this difference in agency through the example of where one could pee as respective genders emphasizing the ‘un-normality’ of peeing in public spaces as a woman and men could go with ease anywhere not restricted by modesty’s rules and regulations on their bodies. Peeing in public spaces was not only seen as a threat to modesty as they feared being seen by others but also because of the exceeding risk of sexual assault due to inadequate facilities. Peeing freely as men, the women would risk much more than their modesty. Men not having to worry about their bodily modesty lent them the ability to have more mental calmness in the situation which the women did not feel they could afford themselves as the threats towards their bodies and modesty were too great. In relation to men’s perceived ability and agency in the situation caused the women to perceive themselves as weak and the men strong. The administrative force of the \textit{situation} defines women’s abilities of how they can ‘be’ women,\textsuperscript{179} and normative societal structures thus keep women in a disadvantaged position where their innate bodily functions are positioned against them.

\textsuperscript{177} Hasson. 964.
\textsuperscript{178} Prentice and Carranza. 269.
\textsuperscript{179} Young. 31.
Menstruation is an intrinsic part of womanhood for the women, but upholding modesty is too, and said modesty strictly implies menstrual silence and secrecy which served as a disfavour for the women during their migrations as the situation was in no way constructed for their needs thus severely aggravating their journeys. However, modesty and its entailments are placed on their bodies by patriarchal gender norms which are highly prescriptive, therefore the division of feelings in and of the body serve to highlight where feelings stemmed from. Thus, shame of the body is made clear to be connected to womanhood. Incorporated additionally in the women’s personal feelings of their bodies for the sake of meeting the requirement of invisibility of innate bodily functions, emotions and needs which inescapably surged feelings in the body of shame, stress and anxiety. It cannot be stressed enough that female gender norms during migration did nothing else than serve as a disfavour for the women.

From an overall perspective, women’s inferiority stemmed from the sum of their restrictions as women in the situation uphold modesty, worry about their physical safety, they lack agency to take care of themselves emotionally and hygienically, whereas the men’s strength came from the ability of actively engage in the situation which is being facilitated by how the situation is built up around the migrants, namely being more suitable for the male gender role.
Discussion

What has clearly become evident throughout this thesis is the importance of viewing the migration process as a socially constructed structure that privileges the male gender norm, in a high regard from a practically and lived-in, grassroots perspective but in just as high respect academically. Mainstream migration studies have advanced the invisible making of women’s migration experiences by altogether disregarding the embodied perspective which has come to show unprecedented accounts of mental strain, fear and anxiety in women’s migration narratives solely connected to their bodies and disregarded of their status as refugees. The women’s narratives vividly contravene the mainstream perception of women as the ‘passive victim’. I argue that the women are decidedly active in navigating the situation with the tools they have at their disposal and thus ‘passive’ in the context of this thesis gains a profoundly deeper level of diminishing bias towards women. Therefore, I also argue that the construction of the ‘weak woman’ in need of protection is solely constructed within the social relation between gender norms that locks women in disadvantaged positions with little to none agency to see to their own needs and protection, hence the situation; society, aid-givers, governments and people in power, let women down as they do not recognise female specific needs as vital for women’s safety and well-being. It cannot be stressed enough that patriarchal gender norms within the situation of migration are the main agents for the re-production of women as weak and in need of protection.

As mentioned in Previous Research, several studies focus on the migrant women’s menstrual and cultural normative baggage from their original societies and how those can be understood in a Western context thus leaving the Western context unproblematised. However, the migration situation in Europe is under the severest criticism, taking one example of many but that is in line with the thesis; the very real threat of rape that inadequate facilities pose. Which for women is almost impossible to avoid during migration, more often than not having to choose the lesser of two evils. Their personal safety will always be at stake, and it is mind boggling for me how reports about this problem keep coming because despite common belief, refugees

are still being exposed to life threatening journeys to and through Europe. Even though it is such a well-documented problem by researchers that also give clear and practical solutions to the problem, which would help to save women from yet another horrific and life-long inflictive experience of rape. And still too little is done to change the situation for women during migration.

I cannot help but wonder how women’s narratives would sound if they would have the possibility to menstruate in peace during migration. To eat a piece of chocolate and relax might sound like trivialities but it does encompass a more human and empathic reception from aid givers and host countries that would entail a more respectful and acknowledging stance towards the situations far more restrictive and demanding nature for women. Since emotional care is such a vital part of menstruation, it can be understood that refugee women are being mistreated/neglected to a higher degree than previous research on the area have shown. Therefore, in the long run, the need of changing prevailing gender norms are vital, for one, the academics need to stop the ‘and women’ chapters in migration research and host countries and aid givers need to disregard female specific needs as taboos.

Additionally, I would like to reconnect to how menstruation acted as a gateway to several embodied experiences for the women during migration. Making clear that menstruation influences women’s experiences in the highest regard and is so much more complex than monthly bleedings. Although, talking about menstruation also reviled how fear and shame of the body is extended to several more aspects of the body than ‘just’ menstruation. Thus, taking menstruation as a starting point to view migration through a female specific perspective turned out to be a valuable and fruitful endeavour.

Even though all individuals on such a journey would benefit from a mental break in such a demanding situation, women whom carry a larger emotional burden would benefit more and it would lessen the effect of the situations restrictive nature for women. Refugee receiveal by European countries are under the harshest critique. Therefore, changes like these might feel like superficial, because refugee receiveals need to change from the core with for example ensuring routes to Europe which do not entail risking one’s life, safer and humane refugee camps, safe border crossings and the list could go on and on. However, changes in aid given along the way could make the perilous journey a bit easier emotionally for women, which at least would be a step in the right direction giving women a chance to menstruate in peace.

Outro

The thesis began with a quote from Adrienne Rich’s *Of Woman Born*, and I would like to end the thesis in the same manner as I started it, namely, with a few chosen lines from *The Period Poem* written and performed by Dominique Christina. She wrote the poem in response to a derogatory Twitter post but also to her thirteen-year-old daughter who had just started menstruating.

*See, it’s possible that we know the world better because of the blood that visits some of us. It interrupts our favourite white skirts, and shows up at dinner parties unannounced, blood will do that, period. It will come when you are not prepared for it; blood does that, period. Blood is the biggest siren, and we understand that blood misbehaves, it does not wait for a hand signal, or a welcome sign above the door. And when you deal in blood over and over again like we do, when it keeps returning to you, well, that makes you a warrior.*

*So, to my daughter: Should any fool mishandle that wild geography of your body, how it rides a red running current like any good wolf or witch, well then just bleed, boo. Get that blood a biblical name, something of stone and mortar. Name it after Eve’s first rebellion in that garden, name it after the last little girl to have her genitals mutilated in Kinshasa, that was this morning. Give it as many syllables as there are unreported rape cases.*

*Name the blood something holy, something mighty, something unlanguageable, something in hieroglyphs, something that sounds like the end of the world. Name it for the war between your legs, and for the women who will not be nameless here. Just bleed anyhow, spill your impossible scripture all over the good furniture. Bleed, and bleed, and bleed on everything he loves, period.*

Dominique Christina, *The Period Poem.*

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Bibliography


