

## **Pain, Faith and Yoga: An intersectional-phenomenological exploration of Syrian Muslim refugee women's experiences of resettlement in Sweden**

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This chapter contributes to critical perspectives that address the intersection of leisure, gender and religion in contexts of forced migration. It does so by addressing the experiences of a group of Syrian Muslim refugee women attending women-only yoga courses in their country of resettlement, Sweden. These courses were part of a Civic Orientation programme that combined the prescription of therapeutic yoga and educational activities, aimed at transforming them into integrated, employable Swedish citizens. The participants' embodied experiences of yoga represent an entry point for capturing the diversity and complexity of navigating forced migration and re-settlement. The research that underpins the chapter integrates phenomenological and intersectional approaches. It involves 22 months of ethnographic research and seeks to centre participants' lived experiences of both trauma-sensitive yoga and, more broadly, forced migration and resettlement. The chapter aims to complicate existing assumptions and discourses about the female Muslim body—in contexts of forced migration—as docile, oppressed and a vulnerable object of moral compassion. Through a focus on pain, (im)mobility, yoga and Islamic faith, the chapter offers insights of how participants re-appropriated the secular and self-development-oriented space of trauma-sensitive yoga. It shows how the participants' engagements and re-appropriations of Yoga complicates rigid dichotomous understandings of East/West, here/there, and secular/religious.

### **Introduction**

This chapter aims to contribute to critical perspectives addressing the intersection of leisure, gender and religion in contexts of forced migration. It will do so by addressing the experiences of a group of Syrian Muslim refugee women attending women-only yoga courses in their country of resettlement, Sweden. These courses were part of a Civic Orientation programme that combined the prescription of therapeutic yoga and educational activities, with the aim of transforming refugees into integrated, employable Swedish citizens (Severinsson and Sandahl, 2018). The embodied experience of yoga will represent an entry point for capturing the diversity and complexity of the participants' navigation of forced migration and re-settlement.

This analytical perspective will thus complicate existing assumptions and discourses about the female Muslim body in contexts of (forced) migration. While these issues and domains have been highlighted in forced migration literature, most of the time they remain invisible (Harrell-Bond and Voutira, 2007) or are essentialised in public and policy narratives (Doná, 2007). Refugee women often represent the epitome of the docile object of moral compassion, the ultimate vulnerable refugees (Malkki, 1996 ; Nyer, 2006 ; Freedman, 2016) who, when Muslim, is are further oppressed by religion and culture (Abu-Lughod, 2002; Farooq Samie, 2018). Refugee women's framing as lacking and passive can be implicit and normalized, both in therapeutic and civic interventions targeting newcomers, and also within wider policy that fails to give attention to gender issues related to forced migration (Schultz, 2017; Canning, 2019).

By discussing issues of pain and (im)mobility, yoga and Islamic faith, the chapter will interrogate and destabilise essentialising representations of Muslim refugee women, which often inform (uninformed) public narratives and policy. In doing this, the chapter will also complicate the nexus of body, citizenship and religion through which Muslim women are portrayed as oppressed by, and as the embodiment of, discriminatory “backward” traditions (see Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2016; Rana, 2017 ; Farooq Samie, 2018). The chapter will first address the wider historical and political contexts relevant to the participants’ experiences, and will then present the theoretical framework and methodological approach before discussing the research findings.

### **Seeking sanctuary and resettlement in Sweden**

Since the “long summer of migration” of 2015 the European media has consistently offered sensationalist images of a perceived refugee crisis and its accompanying vocabulary. Political discourses and subsequent immigration policies in Europe have been presenting skewed pictures of the sheer overwhelming numbers of people seeking sanctuary on the continent (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2016; Szczepanik, 2018). In 2015, Sweden was one of the few European nations that maintained open borders for people seeking asylum, receiving almost 163,000 asylum applications, the largest per capita inflow of asylum seekers ever recorded in a country of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (Eurostat, 2016). Since then, the Swedish government has adopted a number of asylum policy changes, including increased requirements for refugees’ family reunification processes, increased detention and deportation powers (and efforts), enhanced border controls aiming to deter asylum applicants, and the introduction of short-term residence permits for refugees (Emilsson, 2018). These restrictive policy shifts have been discussed by migration and legal scholars as a deliberate attempt by the national government to discourage people from seeking asylum in Sweden, while, at the same time, trying to maintain at the same time the country’s “self-image of decency and humanity” towards people seeking sanctuary (Schoultz, 2017, p. 29).

State provision for people granted asylum and humanitarian protection in Sweden include an essentially mandatory, two-year Civic Orientation programme. As mentioned in the handbook provided to all newly-arrived migrants, the programme’s primary aim is to enable participants to “find a job as quickly as possible so that you are able to support yourself” (Severinsson and Sandahl, 2018 , p. 14). This focus, underpinned by an emphasis on “the psychosocial element” of refugees’ integration, has been criticised as relying on refugees’ responsabilisation, to shift societal problems (like unemployment or poverty) onto newcomers (see Uheling, 2015, p. 1006). As Uheling argued, the “psycho-social element” underpinning civic orientation programmes “shifts the focus away from legal protection and human rights toward [refugees’] work on the self, feelings and internal states” (2015, p. 1008) as preconditions to achieve the self-reliance and autonomy deemed necessary for a successful integration.

Echoing these considerations, the Civic Orientation programme primed newcomers about how to function in Sweden, with an explicit focus on self-sufficiency and psychological preparedness for resettlement. In this sense, the programme’s handbook stressed physical and mental wellbeing as fundamental components to achieve these aims:

One sign of stress is that you are sleeping badly and feel sad. You may also have difficulty concentrating, a poor memory and problems with your stomach, headaches or pain in other parts of your body. If you are active, eat good food and sleep enough, this helps your body to cope with stress.

Severinsson and Sandahl (2018 , p. 192)

Equivalent to a 40-hour working week, and linked to the provision of financial support, the programme's portfolio of activities often included yoga courses for women. More specifically, a particular yoga practice known as trauma-sensitive yoga, which had been deployed since October 2016 in the fieldwork location. Trauma-sensitive yoga has been described as facilitating individualised movement and expression (Emerson and Hopper, 2011), unlike the more prescribed trajectory towards the perceived perfect yoga pose, which is often the aim of other modern postural yoga practices. There has been increasing use of trauma-sensitive yoga methodologies and emphasis on individual choice in movement and "nonjudgmental self-study and safety" (Mitchell et al., 2014, p. 123) in integration initiatives. These aim to foster refugees' "self-paced development" and "mindful awareness" as tools to manage and recover from trauma (Hamburger et al., 2018).

Interestingly, while the trauma-sensitive yoga practice was included in the programme due to the benefits associated with "self-paced development" and freely chosen movement, attendance was mandatory for refugee women that were referred to these courses, predominantly by health professionals or their employment/mentor advisors (handläggare). Failing to attend would mean a reduction of the economic support received. The reason for referral to the trauma-sensitive yoga course was often a suspicion of psychological trauma, which frequently arose as a result of the failure to find organic origins of the women's physical and health complaints. The trauma-sensitive yoga courses thus reflected the Civic Orientation programme's aims in relation to newcomers: to responsabilise (in this case for their health), enable self-development and educate. Yet, while the core of this activity aimed to support refugee women's health and well-being, it also implicitly relied on specific, gendered assumptions regarding the vulnerability and trauma of refugee women (e.g. no trauma-sensitive yoga courses were provided to male refugees). The trauma-sensitive yoga courses represented a unique entry point to contextualise and contrast the participants' embodied experiences of forced migration and resettlement in relation to the wider assumptions and expectations surrounding Muslim refugee women in Sweden.

### **Theoretical framework**

In order to bring to the fore the participants' lived experiences, both of trauma-sensitive yoga courses and forced migration and resettlement more widely, this research integrated phenomenological and intersectional lenses. According to a phenomenological approach, the body is the essential medium through which actors capture and engage with their everyday social domains (Merleau-Ponty, 1968). The body (and its flesh) is not simply "matter" shaped by individual will or social forces but represents constitutive elements of subjectivity and being-in-the-world (Merleau-Ponty, 1968). Employing a phenomenological perspective can enrich existing analyses of forced migration that have addressed bodies as inert matter on which representations of refugees' passivity, vulnerability or deceitfulness are inscribed by state and humanitarian actors (Fassin and D'Halluin, 2005). In focusing on bodies and bodily practices, it is possible to access and contextualise refugees' navigation

and negotiation of asylum regimes from a variety of analytical perspectives (for example, Khan, 2013; Suzuki, 2016; De Martini Ugolotti, 2020).

Anderzen-Carlsson et al. (2014) employed a phenomenological approach to explore the meaning participants attached to a medical yoga practice in Sweden. They observed how the participants (5 women and 1 man) did not engage with yoga as a linear, prescriptive journey towards healing and recovery. Instead, the authors highlighted how the participants lived experience of yoga contributed to an increased sense of wholeness, an integration of past and present experience and as another way of being in the world. Anderzen-Carlsson and colleagues (2014) provide an initial, more nuanced, understanding of embodied experiences of yoga, departing from understandings of the practice as an endpoint to recovery for specific medical(ised) issues (see Mitchell et al., 2014). Drawing on and expanding Anderzen-Carlsson et al.'s insights (2014), this research aims to contextualise the participant's lived experiences of yoga. It addresses and contrasts media and political narratives that frame refugee women as victims of socio-political forces and as inherently outside the national, healthy, Swedish body politic (see also Zylinska, 2004, and Agergaard et al. Chapter 7, in this volume about the Danish context). This research employed an intersectional lens to illuminate how the participants' lived experiences of trauma-sensitive yoga courses reflected and responded to the overlapping domains, such as media and public narratives and resettlement policies. It is through these domains that Muslim refugee women in Sweden are othered as traumatised refugees, oppressed Muslim women, and hypervisible others (Pittaway and Bartolomei, 2001; Pittaway and Pittaway, 2004; Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2016; Farooq Samie, 2017 ; Dağtaş, 2018). Considered together, these intersecting representations compound the participants' positions, opportunities, and possible future trajectories of resettlement in Sweden. The research combined a phenomenological and intersectional approach in order to engage with the participants' lived experiences, the complexities of their stories and their navigation of the forced migration/resettlement continuum.

## **Methodology**

This chapter draws on 22 months of ethnographic research, conducted between February 2018 and November 2019. The bulk of the research was carried out between February 2018 and July 2018 when the first author lived in Sweden. As part of the research, the first author participated in the four-weekly trauma-sensitive yoga courses, as well as in the wider activities of the Civic Orientation programme: courses on women's rights in Sweden, courses on housing and rental costs, and on activities such as opening a bank account, walking tours of the city, sewing classes, conversational Swedish classes, and trips to the shopping mall. After an eight-month process to obtain the higher level ethical clearance from the first author's research institution, consent to conduct the research was negotiated, first and foremost, with the women attending the trauma-sensitive yoga courses and with both directors of various organisations, some of whom received funding to run and/or manage aspects of the Civic Orientation programme.

With this aim, the first author invited all sixty 60 women attending the trauma-sensitive yoga courses to a number of meetings in local cafés and libraries. The invitation to meet was outside the programme schedule. Eleven women attended and expressed an interest in being involved in the research. In these meetings, the women discussed with the first author the aims and practical aspects of the research. They asked the author to omit terms such as

“refugee”, “health and safety”, “risk” and “observed” from the research consent forms and information sheets, and to maintain a specific position (beyond their gaze) during the trauma-sensitive yoga courses.

The first author’s professional experience in the UK as a yoga teacher for women, including refugees, proved very useful in negotiating access to the group of research participants. Acknowledging the first author’s expertise, the participants asked her to devise and deliver a three-hour workshop on setting up their focusing on shoulder pain and tummy aches, which the participants related to fasting during Ramadan. The first author also supported a number of women who were interested in teaching yoga, organising opportunities for them to lead yoga classes (both as part of and outside of the programme) and feeding back to them on their teaching. Throughout the research, the first author kept a diary which documented her own physical and affective responses to participating in the programme, alongside the many informal exchanges and conversations held with trauma-sensitive yoga course participants.

In keeping an ethnographic diary, she methodologically considered how her own position as an English woman, an academic and a yoga teacher influenced her emotional and physical experiences and engagement, both with yoga and with the participants, during the research. These corporeal and affective experiences and responses provided opportunities to discuss the lived experiences of the yoga sessions with the participants during informal conversations and interviews. Alongside the use of ethnographic writing, drawing and photography, the first author conducted 11 eleven semi-structured interviews with the participants.

To avoid an approach that could remind the participants of asylum interviews (see also Haile et al., 2020), the first author discussed the interview structure with a Syrian cultural advisor and six women with refugee backgrounds. The first author has taught yoga to these women in the UK. Most interviews were conducted in Arabic, through an interpreter. Although the role of interpreters in migration research carries an array of complexities related to trust and power (Edwards, 2013), the collaboration with an interpreter was fundamental within the research process. The presence of an interpreter who was trusted by the participants helped to capture and translate both bodily and verbal language, as well as the nuances of cultural and faith components of the women’s experiences. The interviews were conducted in a variety of locations chosen by the participants, including libraries, cafés, parks and their homes. Most interviews lasted between one and to two hours. During the research process the participants asked to co-create with the first author a photographic exhibition portraying them in their chosen yoga āsana (see Dima’s chosen photograph, Figure 8.1). The photographic exhibition was displayed in the café area gallery space where the participants spent their breaks. The exhibition aimed to provide a different image of the participants for the Swedish citizens who also frequented the café and gallery. As Nour put it, the exhibition aimed to show that “we are not just lazy and sitting around all day” (informal conversation, 03.04.2018).

<Figure 8.1 here>

Figure 8.1 Dima in her chosen yoga āsana (posture) and location, overlooking the Swedish sea.

Photo credit: Haya

This unplanned, co-created research activity helped build further trust with the participants. Furthermore, instead of being a researcher who would “fly in and fly out” of participants’ lives (Pittaway et al., 2010, p. 236), the first author remained in contact with them after concluding the research fieldwork. Following an understanding of research consent as iterative (Hugman et al., 2010 ; Lewis, 2010), the first author has continued to check the participants’ willingness to have their data used for publication purposes, such as this chapter.

The analysis process included a comparison and integration of emerging codes across the interviews, field-notes and co-created visual material (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The two authors then discussed selected excerpts and themes as they wrote up the chapter. Participants’ names and some minor details from their accounts have been modified to protect their privacy and anonymity.

Pain and faith: leisure, religion, (im)mobility and yoga

The participants’ engagement with the courses reflected diverse personal trajectories as well as complex and ambivalent thoughts and experiences about their resettlement process, which often coalesced and emerged in the embodied experience of trauma-sensitive yoga. With their complexities and ambivalences, the participants’ experiences revealed multi-faceted (hi)stories, complicating the linear narratives of trauma and healing, the dominant portrayals of Muslim refugee women, and the problematic distinctions between the secular and religious that are often used to analyse forced migrants’ practices (Zaman, 2019). These dimensions emerged particularly in relation to the women’s relationship with pain and Islamic faith while participating in the trauma-sensitive yoga courses.

### **Yoga, pain and (im)mobility**

Sometimes we feel as our bodies are very fragile, like cheap plastic toys, that are breaking easy.

(Haya, interview: 24.05.2018)

I couldn’t move for 2–3 days, I am going to quit.

(Nour, interview: 09.05.2018)

Bodily aches were commonly mentioned, expressed or chatted about during and after the trauma-sensitive yoga courses . In several cases, the participants directly linked somatic issues with war experiences (Morina et al., 2018). As Haya observed, ““War had a very negative impact on our bodies””, (interview: 24.05.2018), and several other participants conveyed a sense of heaviness that burrowed between the shoulder blades, making them feel that their bodies were, at the same time, fragile and rigid (as per Haya and Nour’s statements at the start of the section). Nour recalled how before leaving Syria she was ““gasping for air”” and held a ““heavy weight in my shoulders””, often in response to lingering glances by armed guards at check points (informal conversation: 17.04.2018). Yet, the participants’ bodies did not emerge during the research as only carrying the evidence of war-related displacement and suffering (Fassin and D’Halluin, 2005). Rather, they held together a variety of domains (Ahmed, 2004) and represented sites where individual (hi)stories and

trajectories articulated with current issues of resettlement, as well as with future ambitions and desires (De Martini Ugolotti, 2020).

For Nour, pain was a reminder of her reluctant attendance at the trauma-sensitive yoga courses. As she would convey in other moments of the research, being prescribed the (painful) yoga courses reminded her of the limiting perceptions surrounding Syrian Muslim refugee women: as traumatised but also as “lazy and sitting around all day” (quoted in the methodology section). In Nour’s embodied experience, what had been designed as a healing and liberating practice represented one more instance of forced movement. A double bind seemed to constrain her resettlement trajectory—, one that in recognising her right to sanctuary and to be supported in starting a new life in Sweden, there nevertheless followed essentialised and essentialising assessments of what she needed to do. For other participants, like Reem, the heaviness felt in her shoulders and her aching, creaking back related to heavy domestic work, especially when “cooking the Syrian breakfast, taking me hours” (interview: 26.04.2018). For Sa’adia pain was related to childbirth (interview: 23.04.2018), while Lina referred to “a very serious car crash, not related to war but being silly youth” (informal conversation: 25.05.2018). Several of these experiences also intersected with the cold, harsh Swedish winters, combined with the sub-standard, often poorly heated accommodation allocated to refugees (Harding, 2000). Dima, for example, lived on the ground floor of a former office block in a large converted stationary storage room.

The bodily experiences and accounts of pain that emerged during the yoga sessions shed light on the complexities of the participants’ personal trajectories and the realities of their everyday lives in resettlement. Yet, in the programme’s aims, and in the prescription to attend the courses, the only issue that mattered was a supposedly linear journey from trauma to recovery and healing, as a key step towards making refugee women healthy, independent and self-reliant. The wider socio-political dynamics that often created or reinforced the participants’ precarious predicaments, particularly as women on their journeys to sanctuary and in Sweden (see Freedman, 2016; Canning, 2019), were left behind by the therapeutic focus of the courses. Nevertheless, while not freely chosen, the yoga setting became reappropriated by some of the participants as a meaningful space of self-care. Recalling the first painful trauma-sensitive yoga course, Aya discussed how she decided “not to ignore my body and give my body some rights” (interview: 14.05.2020). Yoga, pain and forced (im)mobility became embodied domains through which the participants addressed, in their own terms, other contingencies in their lives. These domains acquired further layers of meaning and relevance in relation to their Islamic faith.

### **‘Sports for the soul’: yoga, Islam and resettlement**

We— – at first, we refused to do it [the trauma-sensitive yoga courses]. Because we consider it as, um, a kind of religion which is haram, you say haram which is forbidden [and] not in our religion [...] It’s a kind of prayers or something that is not related to [our] religion.

(Nour, interview: 09.05.2018)

The prescribed nature of the trauma-sensitive yoga courses was not the only issue that the participants had, at least initially, about their engagement with yoga. Although non-attendance in the courses placed the women at risk of having their financial support reduced

or even stopped, several participants were nevertheless concerned about the compatibility between the prescribed yoga practice and religion (as illustrated in the quotation from Nour above). The perception of yoga as haram (forbidden) and yet somehow unavoidable, given the repercussions of non-attendance, was demonstrated by Mariam who shared that she, at the start of each yoga class, she whispered to herself, “God, forgive me, InshaaAllah” (interview: 04.06.2018).

The disparity between the programme’s aims with trauma-sensitive yoga and the participants’ experiences could be seen as illuminating the fault lines between, on the one hand, resettlement initiatives aiming to change newcomers’ “whole concept of the world” (Uheling, 2015, p. 998) and, on the other, refugees’ own cultural and religious practices. However, expanding existing discussions on the topic, the participants’ responses and reappropriations of the trauma-sensitive yoga courses offered a much more nuanced perspective of their experiences: —one that highlighted a further example of refugees’ mundane practices of hybridity in forced migration domains (Malkki, 1995; Lewis, 2010; De Martini Ugolotti, 2020). In fact, it did not take long for several participants to reappropriate the non-negotiable attendance at the trauma-sensitive yoga course(s) as part of their personal relationship with faith, by drawing unanticipated connections between the yoga and Islam.

Aya observed how “After I practice yoga, I am more consistent in the prayer” (interview: 14.05.2018). Several other participants explained that particular yoga āsanas and sequences physically, mentally and spiritually reconnected them to their Islamic faith, as recorded in observational drawings from the first author’s ethnographic diaries (see Figures 8.2–8.4). As such, Balāsana (Figure 8.3) was compared to touching the forehead to the ground in salah (prayer), while in Virasāsana (Figure 8.4) the head was often moved from left to right as in prayer.

It’s like you say [while in Virasāsana], like Assalamu alaikum [while praying], because I think they say that there are angels on your shoulders, on God’s hands, there are, so we have to forget all these things [whether yoga is haram or not] and just focus to pray and to say something from the Koran. This is good for mental and for body at the same time. Because I think when you say, Assalamu alaikum. We finish this there. When you say that, it’s the end of the prayer.

(interview: 27.04.2018)

<Figure 8.2 here>

Figure 8.2 Qiyam and Samedthti.

Claire Collison’s ethnographic drawings.

<Figure 8.3 here>

Figure 8.3 Sujud and Balāsana.

Claire Collison’s ethnographic drawings.

<Figure 8.4 here>



## Figure 8.4 Julus and Virasāsana.

Claire Collison's ethnographic drawings.

The ethnographic presence in the trauma-sensitive yoga courses enabled an appreciation of how the participants appropriated yoga movements in order to create (and subsequently break) a sacred and meaningful space for them. Hana went on to explain that this āsana was very important in helping to distance herself from everyday concerns and focus on her salah, something that Banah also further elaborates on:

[yoga] is like sports for the soul. It just take all of the negative energy out and throw it away as if, I put it in a way like when you take a shower, but you take it for your soul. It's from the inside. The breath, everything, all the toxics in the body just get rid of ... when you pray it's because God asks you to, and then my soul ask me to do yoga. [...]. They just complete each other.

(interview: 23.04.2018)

During the research, several participants started to perform wudu, (the Islamic ritual of washing before prayer) prior to each yoga class, demonstrating a new-found perception that there was a sacred compatibility between yoga and their Islamic faith. While adhering to the requirement of essentially mandatory attendance at the Civic Orientation programme and trauma-sensitive yoga course, the participants carved out a meaningful sacred space that complicated the secular dimensions and therapeutic aims of trauma-sensitive yoga (Hamburger et al., 2018). At the same time, the participants' re-appropriations echoed recent suggestions of a centuries-old connection between yoga and some manifestations of Islam (see Parikh, 2015), , a connection that Banah elaborated in these terms:

The mind that believes in God. Okay. God created us and He's the reason why we breath and why we think and everything. And then we have the soul that was created also by God. To take care of our bodies and to be always healthy and good from inside, we need to also do exercise for the soul. In that we are taking care of this body that was created by God. I don't believe in yoga as a religion, it's not God or whoever. It's just a way to be more flexible because I used to pray on a chair and I always feel this [points to her legs and back]. And even when I am sleeping, I used to have cramps in my legs or in my body, but now I feel more flexible and more relaxed with my body.

(interview: 23.04.2018)

Both the participants' accounts and the ethnographic fieldnotes showed that participants strove towards physical, mental and spiritual wholeness. This highlighted the complex nature of their emerging needs and experiences, as opposed to any predetermined conditions of trauma inherent in their refugee status. Their adaptation of both the yoga practice and their intimate relationship with Islam destabilised images of the passive, traumatized refugee. Furthermore, it destabilized the image of Muslim women as oppressed by constraining and rigid religious and cultural proscriptions. The next section will discuss the relevance of capturing the complexities of such experiences, by in contrast with the othering processes implied in dominant accounts of Muslim refugee women.

## Conclusions

This chapter addressed the perspectives and experiences of a group of Syrian Muslim refugee women prescribed trauma-sensitive yoga courses as part of their full-time resettlement programme in Sweden. Taking cues from the participants' embodied experiences of the trauma-sensitive yoga courses, the chapter aimed both to capture the diversity and complexity of their navigation of forced migration and resettlement, and to complicate existing assumptions and discourses on the female Muslim body in contexts of (forced) migration. The participants' embodied experiences provided a unique perspective on how they navigated and negotiated the overlapping domains through which Muslim refugee women are represented as victims of socio-political forces and inherently outside the national, healthy, body politic. In response to recent calls for intersectional approaches in studies of leisure and forced migration (Spaaij et al., 2019), this chapter combined phenomenological and intersectional lenses. This has revealed the (in)visible stakes and negotiations emerging from the participants' prescribed attendance of trauma-sensitive yoga courses.

Engaging with the participants' responses to yoga through these lenses did reveal instances in which their physical pain was rooted to their exposure to gender-based violence and abuse on their journeys to sanctuary. However, far from being defined only by psychological trauma, the participants' bodies carried traces of, and responded to, intersecting experiences and dimensions: heavy domestic workloads in Syria, difficult childbirth, car crashes and war-related loss and displacement, as well as stigma, stereotypes and sub-standard housing in Sweden.

Missing the diversity and complexities of refugee women's experiences and needs does not simply overlook their capacities and contributions, as women and as newcomers, in countries of re-settlement. The employment of narrowly-focused policy interventions can make invisible, and maintain, wider political domains that perpetuate harmful practices for women on their journey to sanctuary and in contexts of resettlement. There are, for example, unsafe routes to sanctuary, limited and problematic provisions, increasingly restrictive reception and resettlement policies, and enhanced deportation practices (Freedman, 2016; Canning, 2019). The participants' complex and ambivalent relationship with yoga, and their creative capacity to carve out a meaningful space of both faith and self-care from the trauma-sensitive yoga courses, should not be seen as indicative only of their "coping mechanisms" or individual "resilience". Through giving us access to their creative, intimate, diverse and rich embodied experiences of yoga, the participants enabled us to see what is overlooked by a narrow focus on the "psycho-social element" (e.g. trauma, acculturation-stress, self-reliance) of refugees' resettlement.

The discussion in this chapter aimed to highlight two initial dimensions of the participants' embodied experiences and appropriations of the trauma-sensitive yoga courses. Firstly, the employment of an integrated phenomenological and intersectional perspective illuminated the overlapping forms of oppression that participants navigated and negotiated on their journey to sanctuary and during resettlement. The same analytical lens highlighted how the participants' intimate, barely visible, yet relevant negotiations and appropriations of life in resettlement de-stabilised framings of refugee women as passive recipients of wider power dynamics, from war and displacement, to "oppressive cultural practices" and the politics of resettlement. In fact, the participants' reappropriations of the trauma-sensitive yoga courses exceeded rigid dichotomous understandings of East/West, here/there, and secular/religious,

as they hybridised their involvement with yoga as a secular therapeutic and self-development practice with intimate religious meanings.

Secondly, the chapter highlighted how a critical, in-depth analysis of leisure practices and settings can contribute to problematising not only the inadequacies of protection but also the categories underpinning practices of refugees' assistance that increasingly involve leisure practices as part of their vocabulary of interventions. These perspectives can represent a meaningful starting point for the proposition and co-creation of leisure practices and domains that are more closely attending, highlighting and engaging with refugee women's needs in contemporary regimes of asylum and re-settlement contexts.

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