



Manifest of Agnes

‘The world mainly is a dreadful place for women to live in, that’s why we must treat women refugees as victims of war’

The issue of refugees and related problems is prominently present in the media today. However, this attention seems to lack focus on gender related aspects for migration motives. With this *Manifest of Agnes*¹ the Dutch organizations ‘Wij zijn hier’, Sax consultancy, Vluchtelingenwerk Utrecht and Huize Agnes would like to request your attention to our experience that, within the current asylum legislation, female refugees are drawing the short straw in requiring a residence permit.

Like men, women run away from war, violence and starvation, but women often have other reasons to leave their homes such as systematic sexual violence, forced marriage, honor killings and trafficking. Some of them leave their homes because authorities of their country consider them accessories to dissident actions of relatives. Gender specific motives can be divided into three categories:

- Indirect political involvement
Apart from being in danger because of political activities themselves (which is considered a reason for asylum), women get endangered by the actions of their relatives (which is not considered a ground for asylum). In their country of origin, women are in danger because the authorities believe that their husbands, fathers or brothers are involved in acts of rebellion and / or are members of dissident factions. To put pressure to these men, their female relatives are arrested, tortured and/or raped. Also when women hide and / or take care of opponents of the regime, or when they disperse pamphlets, they run the risk of being punished in a similar way. Often they do not act out of political conviction, but to protect their children and other relatives.
- Gender discrimination and gender specific violence
Persecution of women can stem from active or passive resistance against cultural standards, values and laws of their homeland, which are women repressive. This resistance can e.g. consist of refusing to obey certain instructions as to clothing, social of

¹ In the manifest we find the conclusions of the symposium Women, Refugee, Story, Difference about the gender aspects of the Dutch migration policy on 2nd of March 2015 organized by the Foundation Agnes van Leeuwenberch, better known as Huize Agnes.

family law rules (forced marriages) or female genital mutilation. Not just the authorities but also their family or local community can persecute them for those reasons.

- Sexual violence

Here we are dealing with all kinds of violations occurring outside the house, like rape or forced prostitution. Sexual violence is used as punishment, torture method, or revenge on for instance the husband, family, or social group to which the woman belongs.

For women with these gender specific motives to migrate it is often difficult and even impossible to ask successfully for asylum in our current asylum procedure and asylum legislation. Thus it is hard to prove (indirect) political involvement during an asylum procedure because women are often kept politically ignorant because of their subordinate position in their country of origin. In the case of gender discrimination, gender specific and sexual violence it is for them embarrassing to speak in all openness about traumatic experiences. This is considered difficult for all women, but it is even harder for refugees because often they stem from cultures with a huge sense of shame. As a consequence, they are afraid of extreme repercussions when it is known that a woman is the victim of sexual offence. Nevertheless, we expect them to give an extensive and specific account of their traumatic experiences without being prepared and without experience with the Dutch cultural values and (obliged) openness in these issues.

Organizations such as Vrouwen Tegen Uitzetting, Huize Agnes, Wij Zijn Hier, Vluchtelingenwerk Utrecht and experience experts ask your attention for their experience that the current Dutch asylum policy and the asylum procedure often leave too little room for gender specific motives to run away. Therefore, the policy and the procedure need to be altered to get into agreement with the Universal Declaration of the Rights of Men. The said instances are not the only ones to draw attention to this issue. The United Nations already did likewise in November 2014.

The subscribers of The Manifest of Agnes propose to arrange the asylum policy and its execution in such a way that the gender specific motives of female refugees are not only respected but also recognized:

Changes in legislation and policy

1. Recognition of gender specific motives such as indirect political involvement, gender discrimination and gender specific violence and sexual violence.
2. To consider the gender specific motives as mentioned under 1. as being legitimate and to adapt the asylum legislation and the asylum policy in this respect.
3. To have the Onderzoeksbureau Overheid (Government Investigation Bureau) carry out a (continuing) investigation into the question how and how much gender is important in the process and the results of an asylum procedure.²

² The latest inquiry into this subject took place 25 years ago. Besides, critical observations can be added to this inquiry. The investigators have only inquired IND-employees after their opinion on possible gender discrepancy in the asylum procedure and they have not examined how

Changes in procedure

1. IND-employees have to be trained adequately regarding gender specific aspects in the regions of origin.
2. To improve the Medisch Advies (Medical Advice) to a more elaborate and careful procedure.
3. To employ IND-specialists who are able to signalize whether there is a question of dealing with sexual violence at an early stage.
4. If at the start of the medical check there is suspicion of women having had dealings with sexual violence the procedure must immediately be prolonged, and medical and psychological guidance must be provided with a view to the women being better equipped to tell their stories.
5. Testing the executive activities of the IND among other things by taping and archiving the first and second hearings.

Changes in expertise and providing information

1. Foundation of a national center of expertise which collects information and expertise and carries out research on migration issues, gender related aspects included.
2. More attention being paid to improve informing refugees properly about what will be expected from them. At the moment women do often not realize the importance of the first and second hearing whereas their statements during these hearings are predominantly determining the outcome of the procedure.

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female -and male- asylum seekers have experienced the procedure themselves. Moreover, we think that we are not so much dealing with gender inequality as with the fact that reasons for women to migrate are not considered reasons for granting asylum.