

“Helping Others and Helping Myself Too”

A Study of Irregular Migrants’ Experiences of Doing Volunteer Work

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Master Thesis of International Social Welfare and Health Policy

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Abstract

The aim of this master thesis is to explore and learn from irregular migrants' experiences of doing volunteer work in Norway. It asks what role volunteer work play in their everyday lives and how it influences as well as being influenced by their health, well-being and ontological security. The theme springs out from a mental health project at the Health Centre for undocumented migrants where we encounter migrants who are territorially inside but legally outside. Facing extremely limited entitlements and commonly portrayed as illegal, irregular migrants are positioned at the very margins in the Norwegian society. Despite everyday vulnerability, exclusion and uncertainty, some engage in volunteer work. This thesis builds on qualitative in-depth interviews with six irregular migrants who engage or have been engaged in volunteer work. They represent a diverse group of individuals and situations. Participant observation is, in addition to literature review, also utilized thus the thesis is influenced by my position as project coordinator at the Health Centre and as an activist.

Inspired by Laing's and Giddens' concepts of ontological (in)security and Goffman's understanding of stigma I actively listened to and analyzed the participants' expressions. They reported of regularly helping people in the communities, in religious- and migration networks and other irregular migrants by providing a range of different services and supports. Their motives to help others and simultaneously help themselves by escaping isolation and worries were shown to be difficult to fully realize. The material indicates that volunteer work could be what Giddens calls a *protective cocoon* (1991:40) to which the participants could escape and experience a sense of certainty and stability. The routinely interaction with others, recognition and utilizing of skills and recourses could increase participants' experiences of worthiness and ontological security. On the other hand engagement in volunteer work could also challenge experienced ontological security when facing commonly asked questions which causes fear and anxiety related to both deportation and self-identity. Combating stereotypes and stigma attached to the label of "others" where commonly expressed both as a drive and a constant problem by informants in the study. Their strategies involved among others: avoiding; hiding; using small lies; explaining their lack of residency status; or emphasizing other qualities such as *being a volunteer*.

The findings illustrate that even though *it may hurt*; doing volunteer work in a situation where extremely few arenas for social recognition, belonging and agency are accessible, have

significant impacts on health and well-being and ontological security. Participants gave a range of explanations of how them, by helping others helped themselves.

This thesis theme is particularly notable for social workers and health personnel who by their professionals' codes of ethics and are obliged to care and provide services for people according to their needs and advocate for justice and equity. In a time where spheres of migration and criminal control, and social and health policies are increasingly interlinked we have to search for, learn about and approach alternative ways to facilitate possibilities for individuals to be recognized and visible as who he or she is.

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The work with this thesis has allowed me to learn more from experiences of individuals living and acting next to us but who are partly invisible in the Norwegian society and it has made possible to make muted voices heard. I feel privileged for having had the opportunity to facilitate some of these voices to be heard. Therefore goes my major gratitude to participants of this study who have shared their experiences, thoughts and feelings with me; I admire you for the strengths and openness you have shared with me and for the work that you do. I hope and believe that all of you one day will bloom.

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1. Introducing the Thesis

Irregular migrants are living in a country without legal residency or permission; as such they are territorially insiders but legally outsiders (Johansen, Uglevik and Aas 2013). In Norway they are excluded from enjoying full citizens' rights; and face very limited rights to health care, social services and legal work. In this peculiar situation, some irregular migrants in Oslo recently have joined and actively participated in carrying out volunteer work. They contribute by continuously providing care and assistance to people in the community as well as networks of other migrants and other irregular migrants in Norway. It is this recent development which this thesis wishes to explore. More precisely, the aim of the thesis is to examine how participation in volunteer work is experienced and perceived by former asylum seekers who are today living as irregular migrants in Norwegian society. The theme of this thesis springs out from my current employment as coordinator for a Mental Health Project at the Health Centre for undocumented migrants. It is inspired by the continuously experienced this project entails, and by the analyses and discussions which take place in forums of patient-participants, colleagues, researcher, volunteers and other project-participants.

1.1. Background and Research Questions

We are currently living in a world where people cross borders more than ever before. There is an increased number of people who are forced to migrate due to conflict, persecution and some seek protection and better living conditions. By the end of 2013, 51.2 million people in the world were forcibly displaced, which is the highest number recorded since comprehensive statistics about displacement were first collected in 1989 (UNHCR 2014). The media provides pictures and stories of victims and survivors from the war in Syria, tragedies such as the drowning victims at Italy's Lampedusa Island and of legions of refugees taking huge risks in trying to escape and enter into Europe where few legal routes are available. Even if they are successful entering fortress Europe, there is no guarantee of staying there.

By 2012, some 32 million foreign citizens resided in the European Union, of whom some 1.9 to 3.8 million were estimated to be irregular migrants (Biffl and Altenburg 2012). Irregular migration has increasingly emerged as an important topic in European regional and national public and political discourses focused on migration, human rights and crime. The phenomenon has been discussed and debated by scores of policymakers, academics, the media and the general public. This attention has highlighted many dilemmas and challenges

on how best to respond to irregular migration – especially the extent to which national policies should be inclusive or exclusive.

Within a European welfare state such as Norway, the matter of inclusion or exclusion of irregular migrants is concerned not only about the increased globally migrations flows but also about the economic crises and expansion of the European Union (Stocker 2010). Irregular migrants' entitlements to health care, social service and work are restricted and very limited in Norway. In comparison with other European countries, Norway has a strict regulated welfare system and labor market which moreover limits irregular migrants' access to informal employment and to earn a living (Lysaker, Fangen and Sarin 2011). It is recognized that employment promotes health, well-being and inclusion and that policies which prohibit employment and enforces "leisure time" for asylum seekers and irregular migrants are harmful to their health and forces them into exclusion, passivity and loss of confidence and low self-esteem (Burchett and Matheson 2010; Evans 2013). This leaves irregular migrants vulnerable to exploitation, dependency, poverty and a range of physical and mental health problems.

The exclusive policies in Norway clearly limit irregular migrants' access to participate in society as well as expose them to social exclusion and marginalization (Fangen and Andreassen Kjørre 2013). The exclusion are furthermore reinforced by current public discourses in Norway and elsewhere in the world, where irregular migrants increasingly are portrayed as criminals, illegal aliens, return-deniers¹, frauds, unwanted and a range of other dehumanizing terms. These discourses of irregular migrants as the "othering" serve to justify discrimination, increase exclusion and generate xenophobia (Hilden and Stålsett 2012).

Migration policies and legislation today regulate and control who is entering and staying within the territory of the state, and who to keep out. Lacking legal permission, irregular migrants are at risk of being deported and have to live in hiding which implies several dimensions of fear and insecurity. The context and circumstances, in which irregular migrants

¹ My translation of the Norwegian term "retur-nektene". The term replaced the previous used term "ureturnerbar" (translated to "un-returnable"), because the foreigner agencies denied the existence of un-returnable persons. The previous term was used by the Norwegian authorities to describe migrants without legal permissions who couldn't be deported, either because they had concealed their documents, did not have or couldn't access them, because their home countries did not accept them, or because the Norwegian police did not let them leave. By stating the migrants are "return-deniers", implies denying the fact that the decision of rejection may be wrong, and further makes it possible to hide the real difficulties of realizing the deportation (Johansen, Uglevik and Franko 2013).

are positioned, includes unpredictability, uncertainty and instability and has been explained by some researchers as a situation of *limbo* (Øien and Sønsterudbråten 2011). This situation impacts heavily on the mental, physical and social health of irregular migrants as well as their well-being, and the experience of self in this world.

With restricted access to participate, contribute and belong to the society: some irregular migrants seek for engagement in volunteer work, which this thesis aims to explore. All persons residing in Norway are entitled to do volunteer work. Volunteer work is a wide and vague concept and understanding of what it entails are influenced by several cultural factors. This thesis approaches the field from the perspective of ILO's definition of volunteer work (see chapter 1.4.), but I aim in addition to open up for explorations of the informants' subjective understanding of volunteer work; how they define it and what activities they consider being volunteer work.

The key questions addressed by this thesis ask: (1) how is participation in volunteer work experienced and perceived by individual irregular migrants, (2) what role does volunteer work play in their everyday lives, and (3) how does it influences as well as be influenced by their health, well-being and ontological security.

Drawing on the concept of ontological security I will explore the relationship between participation in volunteer work and the subjective feelings of health and well-being. The origin and content of ontological security and the related term ontological insecurity are especially linked to Ronald David Laing (2001) and Anthony Giddens (1984). The concepts that concern the sense of order, routine and certainty in life and have been used in relation to a number of social phenomena, including research on for instance uncertainty and empowerment among asylum-seekers in Sweden (Brekke 2004); security and well-being among unaccompanied young people seeking asylum in the UK (Chase 2013); the significance of housing, home and home ownership (Dupuis and Thorns 1997) (Hiscock, Kearns, et al. 2001); loss of home and community following the hurricane Katrina in New Orleans (Hawkins and Maurer 2011); international relations, globalization, religious nationalism and identity (Kinnvall 2004; Mitzen 2006); the issue of modernity and the relation between globalizing influences and personal dispositions (Giddens 1991); and on mental illness and schizophrenia (Laing 2001). A relevant master thesis influenced by the

concept is Løland (2013) who did a study on irregular migrant's everyday life, drawn upon Giddens's concept of agency, involving elements such as security, overview and continuity.

I believe furthermore that awareness of Goffman's (1963) concept of stigma can provide a supplemental knowledge base relevant for this study. It can improve the understanding of how ontological security may be created and maintained and how the context influences the experience of my participants. The participants' experiences are highly related to their imposed category and "label" as irregular in Norway which are influenced and shaped by structural forces, perspectives and norms. Irregular migrants are due to structural restrictions unable to conform to standards that the society calls normal and are disqualified to full social recognition and acceptance. Once the label "irregular" is attached the associated attributes, terms and expectations will consequently follow. This results in an "othering" between "us" and "them" and affects self-identity and the relation to "others" which will be explained and illustrated by my participants in several different ways throughout the thesis.

Health and well-being are key concepts of the thesis. The phenomenon which the thesis aims to explore includes several dimensions of health. I apply broad understandings of health and well-being and rely on WHO's definition of health as *a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity* (World Health Organization 2013).

The choice of research questions and concepts are developed in relation to hypothesis; what are likely to be found. The thesis aims to explore these hypotheses and to underpin or disprove the assumed findings (Johannessen, Tufte and Christoffersen 2010). Utilizing ontological security as concept for the thesis enables exploring if, as can be assumed, participation in volunteer work can be a strategy to cope with the different dimensions of insecurity experienced in day-to-day life. Does volunteer work, as assumed, have a positive impact on health and well-being? It further allows examining if working as a volunteer may reduce the experience of insecurity at an existential level; if it can contribute to a sense of positive self, belonging and social recognition in a position of limbo. These are some of the hypothesis this thesis aims to explore through empiric data.

1.2 Methods

Using qualitative in-depth interviews with irregular migrants who are doing, or have been doing volunteer work, in addition to participant observation, I will try as best possible to learn from them their subjective experiences, thoughts and feelings attached to it. I aim to provide space where irregular migrants can use their own voice and words, voices which are commonly denied, muted or silenced by structural circumstances (Kjærre 2011).

1.3 Relevance of the Study and Research Objective

The choice of this particular research focus is taken both from an academic viewpoint and from my professional interests. There is limited research on irregular migrants in Norway, and particularly on irregular migrants' scope, possibilities and experiences of doing volunteer work in Norway (Brunovskis 2010). There are some research projects in progress that has been relevant for this thesis. One of these is the "Provision of Welfare to Irregular Migrants" (PROVIR) at IMER Bergen, Uni Rokkansenteret, which is a research project on living conditions and access to social welfare of irregular migrants which investigates the complex relationship between law, institutional practice, and irregular migrants' lived experience (Uni Rokkansenteret IMER Bergen). Moses Kuvoame works with the PhD project "In Search of Care: How Street-involved Black and Minority Ethnic Youths in Oslo tackle the Psychoaffective Injuries of Prolonged and Multiple Marginality" (UiO, Faculty of Law, Department of Criminology and Sociology of Law 2010), and Christina Brux Mburu is carrying out an ethnographic exploration of mental health among undocumented migrants in Norway in her PhD project "Irregular Migration and Mental Health" (UiO, Faculty of Medicine, Institute of Health and Society 2014). This thesis is influenced by dialogues with these researchers and is inspired by their progress, experiences and continuing findings.

Globally, the notion and attention of both opportunities and experiences of the phenomenon seems scarce. However it is possible to note some relevant studies such as Positive Action for Refugees and Asylum Seekers' (PAFRAS)² case-study of five refused asylum seekers who engage in different types of volunteer work in Leeds (Evans 2013). The study also points out the need of more research on the phenomenon. Burchett and Matheson's (2010) study on

² PAFRAS (Positive Action for Refugees and Asylum Seekers) is an independent organization based in Leeds who works with refugees, asylum seekers and the wider community to counter the effect of enforced destitution on vulnerable migrants. For more information, visit their website: <http://www.pafRAS.org.uk/>

impacts of prohibition of employment and occupational injustice among asylum seekers in UK, and their search for belonging and re-establishment of identity through alternative activities is another notable research. This study is the first of its kind in Norway. It is in addition a contribution and a response to the call for more research on irregular migration, on irregular migrant's situations and living conditions, and on factors that influence their lives.

My personal motivation for the study is linked to experiences in my current work as a coordinator for an ongoing Mental Health Project at the Health Center for Undocumented Migrants, which is an interdisciplinary health service provider, located in Oslo and run by the Oslo Red Cross and Church City Mission Oslo (Kirkens Bymisjon Oslo og Oslo Røde Kors 2013; Näsholm 2014). At the Health Center, I daily meet individuals who experience exclusion and marginalization as well as face stressors and fear day and night, without knowing for how long it will last. I encounter in my work people who seem on the one hand to have internalized some of society's dehumanizing definitions of irregular migrants, but who on the other hand have also utilized their strengths to combat these stereotypes. I see individuals who experience limited abilities to control and influence their own situations and who search for possible tools and strategies for empowering themselves. My decision to undertake this particular research focus is thus also inspired by my ethical, moral and political interest and commitment to confront oppression and negative stereotypes experienced by irregular migrants, to create space where irregular migrants can utilize their recourses and make use of available services, and contribute to social action and social change by increased knowledge and understanding.

The Mental Health Project is a three years initiative that aims to increase awareness of mental health realities experienced by irregular migrants, to explore approaches to respond to the experienced needs and to utilize irregular migrants' recourses to prevent, cope and relieve mental health difficulties. The project has three components: to improve the individual consultations provided by psychologists and psychiatrists during the Health Center's opening hours; to explore group based treatment and approaches; and to focus on psychosocial health, empowerment and self-help through for instance peer-based activities. The project is funded by Extrastiftelsen Helse og Rehabilitering³ and one coordinator is employed. The developed

³ ExtraStiftelsen is a foundation that consists of 28 volunteer organizations which own and distribute profits from the TV- game called "Extra-spillet". The profits go to different health-projects, implemented by volunteer organizations.

and progress of the project is in cooperation with Brux Mburu's PhD study of Irregular Migration and Mental Health (Näsholm 2014; Näsholm et. al. 2014).

As the Project proceeds, the Health Center encounters individual irregular migrants who have heard of possibilities to do volunteer work and to participate in volunteer activities. And the Health Center has in response started to facilitate contacts with arenas where this can happen. Even though the Health Center receives some spontaneous feedback from partners and participants, no structured evaluation of this has been made. It is therefore of interest for the Health Center, the partners and for me personally to find out more about the individuals' subjective experience of participating in volunteer work. I am aware of the advantages my engagement may have during the study, though also the challenges it brings. It has therefore been important for me to critically reflect upon ethical questions, show openness and honestly throughout the thesis.

Research has shown that many providers of health and social services in Norway lack knowledge and ability to assist irregular migrants (Ottesen 2008; Hjelde 2010; Biffi and Altenburg 2012; Bregård and Hjelde 2013; Oslo Church City Mission 2013; Näsholm2014). The reasons for that may according to these studies be lack of knowledge and awareness of irregular migrants; the groups' lack of rights; fear of doing something illegal; cultural or language barriers; or challenges to get in touch with persons due to their status as irregular. Mental health care providers at the Health Center for undocumented migrants have expressed the frustration and powerlessness when providing consultations with patients, since there are very limited what they can do with the major problems the patients present (Whist 2013). I also encounter these challenges in my work as project coordinator. Health- and social work-professionals are by their professional ethical guidelines obligated to promote human rights and dignity for all, and to carry out their work on principle of equity. Hopefully, this thesis may make a contribution to providers of health and social services and contribute to greater awareness on their part of problems to be dealt with as well as possible actions.

The study is also a contribution to the volunteer sector. Research on volunteer work in Norway has commonly focused on measuring the economical values of the sector, and its contribution to the welfare system. The subjective experiences of being a volunteer are less explored and examined. As a person who has cooperated with the volunteer sector through my professional career, but who has also personally been working voluntary in a variety of ways

through different organizations and institutions, I believe and hope that the study can be of interest for both volunteers', employers and colleagues.

To choose a research topic also means not choosing other topics. There are several phenomena, conditions and circumstances about the everyday life of the informants that should be relevant to include in this thesis since they are interlinked, and I believe that participation in volunteer work cannot be studied in isolation to these other factors. These are factors on micro, meso and macro levels, on local, national, regional and supranational levels, that affect the subjective experiences of the life of an individual, living an irregular life in Norway. This thesis aims not to exclude these factors, neither to study them directly, but to let them become a part of the total matrix of different elements that altogether shape the manifest of the informants' experiences of doing volunteer work. As a researcher, I am responsible not to simplify the complex and multifaceted issue, but to provide an analysis that is balanced and of quality of the phenomenon.

1.4 Irregular Migrants

Irregular migrants; often referred to as “undocumented”, “paperless”, “unauthorized”, “clandestine”, “illegal” or a variety of other terms, are persons living in a country without legal residency or permission. These can for instance have received a final rejection on their asylum applications; rejection on application for family-reunion; received residency permission on false grounds; overstayed their visas; or entered the country and stayed without registering with the authorities (Morehouse and Blomfield 2011). Some may also with time move “in and out” of the status as irregular, for instance persons who had received final rejection of their asylum application and later apply for commutation and postponement of the duty to leave the country. If this is approved, the person will obtain the same legal status as before the rejection, while the application is processed. If the new decision is to maintain the former rejection then the applicant consequently become irregular again; without legal permission in Norway (Vollebæk 2014).

The choice of terminology is extremely important since it shapes the perceptions, discourses, policies and actions. Using the term “illegal” for instance, creates negative stereotypes, legitimates the criminalization of migrants and justifies restriction of human rights, detention and deportation. The dehumanizing term “illegal” discriminates and marginalizes irregular migrants and may even encourage violence against them (PICUM 2013). By using the term

“illegal” their everyday life becomes illegalized. The illegalization of migrants sets the regulations for their experiences of inclusion and exclusion at arenas such as work, education, housing, health and relationships (De Genova 2002; Fangen Andreassen Kjærre 2013).

I have chosen the term irregular migrant for this thesis, since I believe it reflects the context and the conditions under which many of them live their lives. This is often experienced as a situation of limbo, or of being “betwixt and between” consisting of exclusion and marginalization in many aspects of everyday life. It is also the term which is frequently used by activists, advocating for migrants’ rights (Elliott 2014). It is important to note that not all irregular migrants define or experience themselves as “irregular”, for instance children who are born irregular and are unknown with their legal status. Many irregular migrants represent a tremendous diversity in so many aspects including both pre – mid- and post- migration experiences (Oslo Church City Mission 2013).

It is difficult to estimate the numbers of irregular migrants since there are problems about defining their legal status. In 2004 ILO estimated on a global level that irregular migrants represented 10-20 % of all migrants, and in 2007 the Council of Europe reported an estimate of 4.5 million irregular migrants residing in the European Union (Koser 2010). There are no new statistics about the number of irregular migrants in Norway and the most recent acknowledged estimation made by Statistics Norway (SSB) in 2006 found that there were 18,196 irregular migrants in Norway at that time (between 10,460 and 31,917), of whom 12,325 were understood to be former asylum seekers (Zhang 2008). It is assumed that the number of irregular migrants in Norway is smaller than in central or south European countries, due to the Norway’s geographical position and its strict legal regulations which make it difficult for irregular migrants to stay (Lysaker, Fangen and Sarin 2011).

1.5 Linking Volunteer Work

Irregular migrants in Norway have no right to legal work and therefore no legal opportunities to earn an income. According to the immigration regulation (Utlendningsforskriften 15.okt 2009 nr.1286.), all persons residing in Norway, including irregular migrants are entitled to do volunteer work. Volunteer work can be carried out through a range of different arenas; for instance religious and humanitarian organizations and networks, community volunteer centers, sport clubs and cultural institutions (Wollebæk and Sivesind 2010).

Volunteer work is a global phenomenon and the volunteer sector has in several countries increasingly been recognized as an important contribution and a significant form of work seen from economic, democratic and humanitarian perspectives. Participation in volunteer work is said to be of particular importance for promoting human agency, dignity, and self-respect. However, the way volunteer work is defined and made meaning to seems to differ around the world (ILO 2011). Depending on the physical and environmental context in where the volunteer work is carried out, understandings of voluntarism vary. Volunteer work by an individual or group will indeed vary depending on factors such as background, social class, gender, and living conditions. Experiences from former participation will also influence, in addition to one's physical, mental and social health and circumstances (Dekker and Halman 2003).

The difficulties of agreeing upon a common definition of volunteer work globally challenges the way it can be measured. The International Labor Organization (ILO) has developed a manual as part of its commitment of promoting “decent work” (ILO 2011). In this publication, volunteer work is defined as *activities or work that some people willingly do without pay to promote a cause or help someone outside of their household or immediate family* (ILO 2011:16).

The Center for Research on Civil Society and Voluntary Sector in Norway is one of the leading research centers on volunteer work in Norway and several of their researchers have adopted the ILO definition (Senter for forskning på sivilsamfunn og frivillig sektor 2013).

1.6 Outline of the Thesis

The following chapter will provide a brief overview of research on irregular migrants, focusing on contextualizing their position in the Norwegian society, their living conditions and coping strategies. In chapter three I aim to review some of the research on volunteer work that is relevant for the study. Chapter four outlines the theoretical framework that will be utilized when analyzing the findings, hereunder the concept of ontological security. I proceed by discussing my methodological choices and considerations in chapter five, before drawing on and discussing the findings in the following four chapters. I then provide information about the informants before the findings are discussed and linked to relevant themes. In the last chapter I provide some concluding remarks and present suggestions for further research and action.

2. Contextualizing Irregular Migrants

2.1 Migration

Irregular migrants represent an extremely diverse group of people, and their pre- mid- and post migration experiences can be many, as well the reasons of migration and choice to stay without legal residency in a country. The migration can be voluntary or involuntary, forced and against one's will. Push factors and motives for involuntary emigration can be related to experiences of for instance war, conflict, persecution, human rights abuse and human trafficking. Other push factors for emigration can be natural disaster, deprivation and other factors related to poverty. The pull-factors for immigration are commonly related to better living conditions, for instance human rights' protection and welfare goods (Lysaker, Fangen and Sarin 2011). All humans have according to the United Nations declaration of Human Rights (Article 13), the right to emigrate; to leave any country including his/her own (United Nations 1948). A paradox though, particularly in the case of irregular migrants, is that there is no corresponding human right to immigrate (Lysaker, Fangen and Sarin, Inside and outside simultaneously. Recognising the vulnerability of irregular migrants in Europe 2011), despite the fact that *everyone has the right to seek and enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution* (Article 14 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights).

It is estimated that the majority of the irregular migrants in Norway are refused asylum-seekers (Zhang 2008). It is therefore a high probability that many of them have left their country of origin involuntarily, and have experienced war or other forms of physical and mental instability and trauma, including many dimensions of loss. According to the immigration authorities, they do not have legitimate reasons for asylum, which in some cases may indicate that they are not believed.

Independent on migration's cause, there is always a huge drama that characterizes the process; from the first move toward a commitment of leaving, to the act of migration and transition and to the arriving, orientation and reshaping a new reality in a new country. Carlos Sluzki (1979) describes the migration process and its stages as (1) preparatory stage; (2) act of migration; (3) period of overcompensation; (4) period of de-compensation; and (5) trans-generational phenomena. The individuals' experiences and coping strategies of these stages will vary depending on a huge spectrum of factors, including the feeling of push and pull

factors. The lack of legal residency permission will indeed have vast impact on how an individual experience and cope with the last stages of migration.

Irregular migrants due to their legal status are partly an invisible group and they have a general silence that is surrounding them. They are not registered and the death rate among them, including causes of irregular migrants' death is not registered by the authorities (Heinesen 2012). Even though irregular migration and rejected asylum-seekers has gained more attention in the public during recent years, it still tends to be a partial visibility, focusing on few individual cases and stories. These are commonly frames by individuals' support networks, or instance support groups for the children Neda (Larsen 2013), Yalda and Yafet (Mikalsen and Moe 2014), or by extreme cases such as the bus accident where a man killed three persons in 2013 (Dagbladet 2014). Another illustration of irregular migrants in public is as "victims", reinforced by for instance pictures of migrants escaping war or dying at the European border. Irregular migrants may also be defined as "vulnerable" due to their limited access to welfare entitlements (Whyte 2014). It is however articles that portrait irregular migrants as criminals that are most common (Mollen 2014).

2.2 Patterns of illegalizing irregular migrants: the Norwegian Context

Irregular migrants are positioned on the margins of the nation and citizenship, a position shaped and produced by a range of interconnected fields of policies. It is important to acknowledge and understand the larger socio-political context, in addition to the local, within which the irregular migrants live their lives, when analyzing what the informants tell of their experiences. The way the Norwegian welfare state defines, understands and interpret irregular migrants, in other words how it constructs the phenomenon, result in a range of various laws, policies and practices. The national policies are influenced by economical, social and political forces on both regional and supranational levels. These forces, policies and conventions have impact on the state's responsibilities and decisions to include or exclude the group in the society and services provisions.

During the last decades, migration and particularly irregular migration has occurred to be viewed as a social problem and a threat toward the European welfare states, and something that needs to be combated jointly. The European Union project entails mechanisms of both inclusion and exclusion which are contradictory measures. The movement towards increased inclusion and integration across borders in Europe is also marked by the simultaneous closing

of external borders for non-European citizens. Norway is not a member of the European Union but takes part in both the international and transnational collaborations that proceeds towards an increased harmonizing of restrictive migration policies in the European Union, including legislations and means to limit migration (Sager 2011; Brochmann and Hagelund 2012; Oslo Church City Mission 2013). The European surveillance system EUROSUR (European External Border Surveillance System) is one example of regional external border cooperation which Norway contributes to; where the use of new high-technology increases the ability to spot and stop refugees before even reaching fortress Europe (Broswell and Geddes 2011). Another one is the introduction of a database and so-called “smart borders”, to gain total control over all cross-border movements of all non-EU citizens leaving or entering the Union with the aim of identifying persons who have overstayed their permission to stay (Hayes and Vermeulen 2012). Norway has signed the Dublin II Regulation, a common European asylum system which is a cooperation to identify as quickly as possible the Member State responsible for examining an asylum application, and to prevent abuse of asylum procedures (The Council of the European Union 2003).

The corporations of migrant regulations in Europe and Schengen area include systems for receiving, evaluating, classifying, integrating, rejecting and deportation of migrants. The increased border control and regulations have made it harder to enter Europe legally and seek for asylum. The pattern of interlinking the spheres of migration control and criminal control is a phenomenon that can produce an illegalization of migrants. Irregular migrants are particularly vulnerable of being criminalized. It is an increased tendency that coercive measures and penalties are more often used as tools to streamline the foreign control. Migrants in Norway can be detained for not having evident identification; if suspicion of false identification; refused cooperating to obtain travel documents; or before an involuntary return in order to hinder that somebody avoids his or her duty to leave the country. Norway’s only detention center for foreigners is located at Trandum and is run by the police. It seems like the use of detention is a more administrative concern than a civil penal one, and that it is legitimized by aims of prevention, influencing general attitudes and by achieving a more efficient migration control (Bø 2013).

To limit, and control migration is also an interest and mean of sustaining the functioning of the welfare state. One way of illustrating the phenomenon is by understanding it as “space of exception” which can be created through a categorization and treating of irregular migrants

that deprive individuals of their legal identity, in order to sustain the power of the state and its institutions. These mechanisms can as a consequence make irregular migrants stuck in an asylum-trap; a situation characterized of no-way-in no-way-out, with feelings of no possibilities to neither integrate nor return (Kjærre 2011).

The choices of exclusion and inclusion of irregular migrants are indeed influenced by national political forces with opinions how the migrants should be categorized and treated. The transition from a socio-democratic government ruled by the Labor Party in coalition with the Socialist Left Party and Center Party, to the present right-wing coalition consisting of the Conservative Party and Progress Party has brought additional attention on how to approach people residing within the states' borders without a legal residence. After 100 days in power they had suggested several policies with aims of decreasing the number of migrants by exaggerating the focus on "return", such as increased resources for involuntary deportation of irregular migrants, establish so called "return-centers" and seek to enter more agreements with countries regarding involuntary return (Det konglige Justis- og beredskapsdepartement 2014). Moreover they suggested in a press-release (2014) to change the terminology in the immigration law and practice by removing the word "voluntary" return, as for signaling the duty to leave the territory.

Definitions and words are thus political means and they are not neutral. This has implications on the space in which service providers make decisions to either include or exclude. Since definitions are constructed and loaded with underlying perceptions they may also cause stereotypes with stigmatizing attributes (Sager 2011; Jørgensen 2012; Fangen and Andreassen Kjærre 2013). Results from a national survey about attitudes toward immigrants in Norway indicate that 35 % of the population believes that immigrants commonly are a source of insecurity in the society. Approximately half of the population state that immigrants in Norway should attempt to become as similar to Norwegians as possible and about 1/3 of the population think that most immigrants abuse the social welfare system. 89 % want it to remain the same or be more difficult for refugees to obtain residency permission in Norway (Blom 2013). Attitudes among the public are produced and shaped by descriptions of the phenomenon in the discourses, academia and the media, but also through interaction; Blom's survey indicates that people who have contact with foreigners are more positive towards them.

Definitions do not only affect the way we think about the phenomenon, they also affect the way the irregular migrants experience, think and feel about their own situation, and about themselves (Fangen and Andreassen Kjærre 2013). Structural and social-political conditions can be manifested as both opportunities and limitations in irregular migrants' lives (Gasana 2012; Rutledal 2012).

2.3 The Rights of Irregular Migrants

As territorially inside but legally outside irregular migrants are entitled to exercise very few rights in Norway and are as Brochmann and Hagelund express “the bottom group in the hierarchy” (2012, 206). The Norwegian welfare state is characterized by a system where it is the responsibility of the state to support individuals in need of assistance. Family and ethical network are less significant and the help provided to individuals is highly formalized. This makes it more difficult for irregular migrants to access help since they have very limited rights and opportunities to enjoy goods in the welfare system (Fangen and Kjærre 2012). Irregular migrants are not entitled rights to work or housing beyond the asylum reception centers (which they cannot choose, and where their whereabouts will be revealed to the authorities) and adults have no right to any education. The rights to social and financial services are restricted to merely include information and counseling. Their health care rights are restricted to emergency health care and “essential health care that cannot wait”, yet some groups have extended rights, such as pregnant women, persons with contagious diseases and children. Children under the age of 16 have the right and are obligated to attend school (Vollebæk 2014). Without legal residency irregular migrants have no right to formal marriage (§ 5 a.) (The Marriage Act 1993), and if an undocumented woman gives birth, her child will be undocumented too (Kommunal- og moderniseringsdepartementet 2004-2005).

Norway has signed and ratified several international conventions to secure the human rights of all persons resident within their state borders, regardless of their legal or migratory status. Human right treaties such as the 1966 United Nations Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the 1950 European Convention on Human Rights are both ratified and given precedence over Norwegian law (Øien and Sønsterudbråten 2011). Still it is a dispute if these rights are applicable for the period of seeking asylum (Brekke, Sveaass and Vevstad 2010) and whether and to which extent they apply to persons without legal residence in Norway (Hjelde 2010). Such migrants without legal residency also represent a challenge to conservative territorial understanding of rights, and limitation of

irregular migrants' rights can be viewed as symbolic act for sustaining the order of the Norwegian state (Fangen and Kjærre 2012). Such desire of sustenance discourage Norwegian state to not to ratify the United Nations Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families. The entitlements on the national level are thus at odds with international conventions, and in addition in conflict with social and health professionals' codes of ethics (Kjellevold 2006; Den norske legeforening 2013; JussBuss 2013). Irregular migrants in other Scandinavian countries face similar restrictions (Biswas, et al. 2012).

The national legislations and international conventions that Norway has ratified do not automatically mean that irregular migrants' entitled rights and services are accessible and available; instead it is often complicated by vagueness of laws and other conditions that generates a gap between the legislations and the real practice. The responsibility to cover the costs of services provision; children's' lack of rights to a general practitioner (GP); certain conditions that need to be fulfilled; administrative limitations; and uncertainty and lack of knowledge among service provisions, in addition to the migrant's fear for deportation are some of the barriers in order to exercise the rights Hjelde 2010; Øien and Sønsterudbråten 2011; Fangen and Kjærre 2012. In addition, the tasks of providing services and ensure the realization of the minimum of rights is further complicated by the frequently shifted responsibilities between different global and national governance systems (Oslo Church City Mission 2013).

To limit irregular migrants' rights and entitlements is also a political tool to gather them in a situation where they can be controlled and forced to voluntarily leave the country. By excluding irregular migrants from the majority of arenas in society, and refusing their access to earn a living and other basic needs, the state aims not only to produce suffering but also send out signals that can prevent asylum-seekers to both enter and stay in Norway (Brochmann and Hagelund 2012; Johansen 2013). The state delegates these mechanisms of immigration control also to the local level by penalizing and sanctioning helpers; for instance to employers, landlords, and social and health workers (Gasana 2012). The current government has come up with suggestion to repeal confidentiality and implement duty of disclosure to the immigration authorities for both people working in the Child Welfare System (Det konglige justis- og beredskapsdepartement 2014) and among health workers (Dagbladet 2014).

As we will see in the findings; the context in which the irregular migrants live their lives, their rights, and how they are defined and understood by others and themselves, are highly significant in their experiences of volunteer work in their everyday life in Norway.

2.4 Irregular Migrants' Living Conditions –What do we know?

Several researchers have been concerned with living conditions of irregular migrants in Norway. The studies indicate that there is no doubt that the lack of legal permission or residency affects and challenges the everyday life of migrants in multiple ways. Facing limited rights and opportunities for supporting one-self, forces irregular migrants to commonly rely on others for day-to-day survival; for meeting their basic needs (Øien and Sønsterudbråten 2011). Social networks are crucial for accessing work in the informal market, finding accommodation and food, and for information about available services (Løland 2013). Hjelde (2010) found in her study that few irregular migrants had a personal relationship with any Norwegian, instead the ethnic network remains the main support both practically and emotionally (Øien and Sønsterudbråten 2011). Lack of rights to work and earn a living forces irregular migrants to seek for employment in the relatively small informal labor market, in which they are vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. The poor working conditions for sporadic jobs in the informal market are often characterized by a lack of contract, hard work and long hours with low salary (Gasana 2012). Prohibitions of employment for irregular migrants position them in a process of “de-skilling”, where skills, talents and aspirations are being stagnated (Burnett and Chebe 2009). Denying opportunities to utilize knowledge and skills has severe impacts on mental health and well-being as found in Burnett and Chebe’s study of refused asylum-seekers in UK (ibid).

Asylum-seekers receiving final rejection can get a place to stay in a reception center if they meet certain criteria (Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion 2009). However many choose to move out from the reception center around the time when receiving the final rejection on their asylum-application. It may be because of not wanting their whereabouts known by the authorities or in search for better living conditions, work and strengths to have a sense of control, be active and remain healthy. Many have expressed concerns of the conditions and circumstances in which asylum-seekers experience staying in reception centers and the severe impact on their mental health (Johansen and Lysvold 2012). From January 2008 to December 2011 approximately 9.000 asylum seekers (constituting 20% of all applicants) went

unaccounted for, or missing, from the reception center (Brekke 2012). To find housing is challenging and irregular migrants are exposed to exploitation in the informal housing market, since they cannot sign tenancy agreement due to lack of identification or personal-number. Many may have to move from place to place or stay together with others in an overcrowded accommodation (Øien 2012).

With few options to support oneself, irregular migrants do not only suffer deprivation of basic needs and dependency, but are left with few opportunities to contribute to persons they rely on, show appreciation and provide something in return. The lack of financial recourses, and travel tickets for instance, does also exclude irregular migrants from attending alternative arenas for social interaction and activities (Rutledal 2012). Nevertheless the social life is governed by the experience of a life on hold, with restraints of prospects for what will happen tomorrow. Abilities to build and maintain relationships with friends and family; enclose in intimate relationships; having children and raising children are challenging, and for some not even a thinkable alternative (Weiss 2013). To maintain a good relationship with family and friends in the country of origin is for many important though challenging. Lack of economic resources limits access to phone calls and makes it impossible to support the family by sending money home, and the fear to make the family worried and disappointed makes many want to hide and not reveal their situation. Rutledal's (2012) study of irregular migrants' everyday life in Norway indicates that the loss of family may reinforce feelings of loneliness and exclusion.

The complexity of a variety of limitations experienced by irregular migrants in their everyday life means that there are few recognized ways for irregular migrants to engage in the society and to participate in common and meaningful daily activities. This may cause mis-recognition of irregular migrants (Lysaker, Fangen and Sarin 2011). Instead irregular migrants may seek other ways of recognition and establishment of relations in order to meet their needs of "having", "being" and "loving" (Løland 2013), something I will come back to in the coming section.

Poverty, limited recourses, lack of network and social recognition, fear of deportation and worries about family-life and so on causes a lot of distress. The links between irregularity and health problems are hence notable; with many different factors contributing to a complex, chaotic, unstable and unpredictable situation that is affecting health in numerous ways. The

dimensions of health problems are related to both pre, mid- and post migration experiences. Research indicates that mental health problems are more evident among refugees than others in the population, and that many have had experience of torture, imprisonment, persecution, assaults and other inhuman and life threatening situations (Brekke, Sveaass and Vevstad 2010). In a review of studies on the mental health of immigrants in Norway it is partially indicated that immigrants have a higher burden and greater risk of mental health problems than Norwegians and the general population. This is associated with social and economic deprivation, poor social support, multiple negative life events including traumatic pre-migration experiences and experiences of discrimination (Abebe 2010).

The experiences of mental health problems and concerns due to previous experiences and a marginalized life situation among irregular migrants are noticed by both researchers and practitioners; a diverse range of problems stretching from posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety, depression and suicide attempt, to sleep disturbance, stress, frustration, hopelessness, fear and loneliness. The expressed somatic health problems such as headache, back pain, stomach ache and digestive problems can also at various levels be related to the difficult situation as irregular (Hjelde 2010; Myhrvold 2010; Øien and Sønsterudbråten 2011; Kirkens Bymisjon Oslo og Oslo Røde Kors 2013; Løland 2013); Whist 2013; Näsholm 2014). A Swedish research indicates that irregular migrants have a significant higher probability of committing suicide (Anna Wahlberg, et al. 2014). In Hjelde (2010) the informants not only report their health as bad or very bad, but also as worse than before they traveled to Norway. Other studies also point out the relation between pre-flight conditions and post-flight conditions and the additional strain of living in exile and its negative impacts on mental health and well-being. Living in exile can be a kind of traumatic experience, characterized by for instance feelings of guiltiness, grief and anger, in addition to feelings of powerlessness and lack of control. (Brekke, Sveaass and Vevstad 2010). Having applied for asylum, highlighted and emphasized oneself as a “victim” in need of protection, then received final rejection on the application, many report about feelings of injustice and distrust (Rutledal 2012). The lack of prospects for the future and not knowing about tomorrow; integration or return, place irregular migrants in a double mode of orientation, passively waiting in uncertainty and stuck in a situation of limbo (Brekke 2004).

The period of open-endlessness “waiting” experienced by migrants waiting for changes by the immigration authorities, increases the lack of control of elements in the surroundings that

influences their life and their identity with time. The level of stress is expected to rise by increased waiting, and the limitation of perceiving the time horizon makes the (re)formation of identity difficult (Brekke 2004). The formation of identity is further influenced by structural forces, as mentioned earlier, and the fear of being understood as “criminal” and “illegal” is expressed by irregular migrants in several studies. They report a need to always do everything they can to act and stand out as lawful persons in order to combat these categories and stereotypes (Øien and Sønsterudbråten 2011; Gasana 2012). The complexity of these experiences of social exclusion, enforced inactivity but also discrimination and racism, contributes to feelings of not being accepted, acknowledged and valued as a human being and some experience themselves as being a “non-human” (Bækkelund Ellingsen 2010; Burnett and Chebe 2009).

To sum up; irregular migrants consists a diverse group of individuals, placed in a technical category created by the authorities for administrative purpose, all of them representing a unique person. The manners in which they live their lives vary due to a range of different factors where one’s history and background integrated in one’s current situation as irregular are further complimented by several dimensions of gender and health. Some may have lived irregular in Norway for 15 years, while others recently became irregular. Though diverse, they all experience irregularity, which means instability and unpredictability; that can be explained as a situation of limbo. Irregularity means not being a full citizen; it means limited rights and opportunities to work, establish relationship, live and be recognized, and to contribute and participate in the society. Difficulties in accessing medical services, employment and shelter have significant affect on overall living conditions. The situation as irregular, in addition to pre- and mid- migration experiences affects in various ways several dimensions of health and identity. The structural and social-political mechanisms create a context of marginalization and “illegalization” of irregular migrants, and conditions of abuse, vulnerability and dependency are everyday challenges.

2.5 How do Irregular Migrants Cope?

In spite of the migrants’ restricted situation in Norway, they still take part as agents in their own lives. Previous studies suggest some strategies irregular migrant may make use of to cope with the challenges they face in everyday life. Social networks, as mentioned above, are crucial for day-to-day survival; to access necessities such as food, clothes, shelter, medical services and emotional support. It also provides a sense of social capital and agency. Irregular

migrants may seek and create relations at reception centers, at organizations providing services available for them, in migration networks, in religious communities or in informal jobs. Many do also keep contact with, and get support from their families and friends in their home countries or elsewhere, through phone-calls and the Internet. The networks may provide different kinds of support, many do for instance keep contact with others who are also irregular, with whom they share some of the similar challenges (Løland 2013).

To deal with the difficulties irregular migrants resorting to short-term strategies; for instance working in the informal sector to earn a living, staying together with others but frequently moving to avoid being a burden, and self-medication if they are sick (Gasana 2012). Hiding one's situation by giving small lies, or even avoiding contact are other strategies found in Kjærre Andreassen's (2011) and Rutledal's (2012) studies. The aim to join activities in order to avoid thinking and maintain mental well-being, and the wish to contribute and be involved in activities that were morally and legally accepted to uphold a sense of dignity and self-respect was found in the same studies. Also Bækkelund Ellingsen's study (2010) points at the importance of social support from networks and doing things that make one forget the problems and fill the day with something meaningful while waiting, such as engagement in political activities and networks. To join activities such as football, playing games or watching TV are not only strategies to keep time moving, but it also creates a sense of structure and routine while waiting. Dreams and prayers for the future can provide inner hope and strength to hold on to (Rutledal 2012).

In a study of emotional work among female asylum-seekers in Ireland, who also experiences similar stigmatization, marginalization and exclusion, the women engaged in physical and cognitive activities as strategies to cope with the difficult life-situation. This was for instance done by singing and playing with their children; daydreaming on a future home; window shopping; having walks; sanctioned themselves and each other to control upset; did each other's hair; cleaned; sewed; and volunteered. It indicates how the women used emotional techniques in order to distract and overcome feelings of hopelessness, fear and anger (Carey 2013). Chase (2013) found in her study of unaccompanied asylum-seekers in UK that engagement in education, learning and other routine activities such as attending worships and community groups, were strategies among the youths to avoid anxiety and get feeling related to well-being.

Some of the researchers mentioned above have come across the phenomenon that their informants are engaged in a variety of volunteer works, though they have not paid much attention to it due to the scope of their studies. The knowledge of their experiences of doing volunteer work and what it implies in their everyday lives are therefore limited, as its relation to health and well-being. Before examining this topic further I will provide a brief overview of volunteer work in the Norwegian context; how it is organized and what we know about experiences of doing volunteer work in relation to health and well-being, for so making the foundation to examine accessibilities, experiences, meanings and feelings amongst irregular migrants doing volunteer work.

3. Contextualizing Volunteer Work

Volunteer work or volunteering as topics in research are not new phenomena, though it seems like the attention and recognition of it in political, academic and public discourses and debates has increased due to the United Nations Year of Volunteers in 2001. It is as mentioned in chapter 1 not a clearly defined phenomenon with a fixed scope as it is used to involve and describe a huge spectrum of different social phenomena. This will be kept in mind when reviewing previous research and even more important when presenting and discussing the findings.

Volunteer work and volunteering have for long attracted several traditions and researchers who have carried out studies in diverse fields. Much research tends to focus on practical issues such as recruitment and management (Dekker and Halman 2003). These perspectives are not of primary interest in my study, as I focus on subjective experiences of doing volunteer work, the role of volunteer work in everyday life and its relation to health. To view volunteer work as culturally constructed and as a possible medium for binding together a modern society, across individual background, gender, ethnicity, social class etc., and for people to enter into relationships, socialize and cooperate for common interests and aims are instead what this thesis focuses on. More precisely, it deals with the participants' experienced effects on health, well-being and ontological security when doing volunteer work. I will however review some relevant research that can help us to understand the culture of volunteer work in which irregular migrants engage. Since the perspectives and appearance of the phenomenon are highly influenced by the local context including policies, values, social-, political- and cultural- settings, the role of the civil society etc.: this chapter will begin by providing a brief introduction to the Norwegian volunteer sector and volunteer work in the Norwegian context. It is in addition important to keep in mind both the individual factors that influence the understandings, motives, drives and experiences of doing volunteer work in this particular context, and the socio-political position experienced by the individual or group, in this case irregular migrants, in the Norwegian context, as have been outlined in the previous chapter.

3.1 Volunteer Work in a Norwegian Context

The majority of the research about volunteer work in Norway has been carried out through Center for Research on Civil Society and Voluntary Sector and several studies have been

linked to the multinational “Johns Hopkins Comparative Nonprofit Sector Project”. The volunteer sector’s members; organizations; activities; volunteer work contribution; and economical incomes and outcomes are some of the elements that have been studied, in addition to attitudes associated to the volunteer organizations and social capital (Wollebæk and Sivesind 2010). There is little knowledge of the effects on engagement in volunteer organizations and few qualitative studies on the subjective experiences of participating in volunteer work (Enjolras, Steen-Johnsen and Ødegård 2012).

Volunteer work has a long history in the Norwegian society, and it has played an important role in the development of the society. Norway has proudly been acknowledged as world champion on volunteer work; with approximately 55 % of the population participating in volunteer work in 1997, and an individual contribution of averaging about 10 hours per months. Volunteer work is commonly formalized, as characterizing the Norwegian welfare state and approximately 80% of the volunteer work is carried out through volunteer organizations (Wollebæk and Sivesind 2010). It is understood that the type of volunteer work has changed through the last decades; from a broad kind of folk movement with projects of collectivistic character to a more philanthropic approach where money-donations take over time-donations and individualism and high status components become more increasingly important. Some research reports that volunteering in sport-, culture- and environmental-organizations has increased while participation has decreased in broader solidarity and value based social and welfare organizations. According to these research it seems like the participation in volunteer work becomes more sporadic and informal, often oriented towards specific purposes, a tendency that is most significant among youths (ibid; Wollebæk and Sell 2003).

3.2 Effects of Volunteer Work on an Individual and Societal Level

The volunteer sector in Scandinavia is known for being a major arena for teaching and training of values and skills attached to democracy. The sector is commonly recognized by politicians and the academia as a positive arena for integration and social inclusion. It has been claimed that volunteer organizations can be a meeting point for promoting democratic values and shared trust and understanding among persons, and are a joint of fostering belonging, identity and friendship (Eimhjellen and Segard 2010; Enjolras and Wollennæk 2010)

The volunteer organizations are understood to be important stakeholders in democratic processes and influential in the development of the society (Eimhjellen and Seggaard 2010). Enjolras and Wollebæk (2010) claim in their study that these organizations can be important for developing capabilities that are attached to welfare, quality of life, well-being and happiness. Some volunteer organizations provide training and courses through cooperation with other projects or stakeholders, for instance in the educational system. This is done in order to improve the participants' knowledge and skills that are relevant for undertaken the tasks, and for participation and interaction in the society (Seggaard 2010).

Volunteer work is further understood as an activity that may have a significant impact on physical, mental and social health and dignity, and it is further believed to create a foundation for networking and collective action. Hence it is by some researchers argued that by doing volunteer work; social capital⁴ is likely to increase (Enjolras and Wollebæk 2010). Notable though is that the tendency may change when the engagement becomes too much; the volunteer work added to daily tasks may be a burden of commitment that has negative impacts on health and well-being (Enjolras, Steen-Johnsen and Ødegård 2012).

However, there has been some criticism regarding the volunteer sectors' aim to reduce social inequalities in the society. Researchers such as Enjolras and Wollebæk (2010) report a tendency for persons with high-level professions and incomes to be more involved in volunteer work, particularly in the growing sectors such as sports and culture, than other groups in the society. The engagement among elderly increases also according to the same study, while participation among young women stays the same, and the young men, particularly men with low level of education, decreases. Enjolras and Wollebæk argue that these social inequalities in volunteer work are more significant in Norway than in other European countries. The social structures within the organizations are as well believed to contribute to increased social inequalities as people with high education or social status to a

⁴There are several definitions and approaches of the concept of social capital. Social capital here refers to the relations and cooperation between individuals and groups and the interaction in these social networks, that create common norms and trust which can result in a sense of agency and higher productivity. It involves the three types of social capital; *bonding* when individuals bond to each other through common identities and can build solidarity, *bridging* when individuals are connected across identities and groups and are able to participate in different platforms in society, and *linking* when individuals are connected across social and institutional hierarchies which gives the individuals social and political influences (Enjolras and Wollebæk 2010).

greater extent take administrative or management tasks. The researchers discussed moreover that recruiting of volunteers seems to be somehow selective in some organization, which may exclude particular social groups. In a study of Wollebæk, Selle and Lorentzen (2000) it is argued that strong and close fellowship and relations between some volunteers can exclude others and consequently already existing social inequalities in the society can be reinforced. Hence they argue, even though participation in volunteer work seems to bring social integration, it is doubtful if it brings social equalizing.

A study utilizing “happiness research” emphasizes the meaning of the context in which the volunteer work is carried out (Loga 2010). To live in a “happy society” that is characterized as democratic, sustainable, inclusive, trustful and with decentralized authority is known to be essential for an individual’s experience of quality of life. The study indicates that trust and social inclusion and interaction are significant factors for both obtaining the individual’s quality of life and a sustainable society, and that volunteer work and cultural activities can be meaningful ways of obtaining these factors. It has been challenging though to demonstrate causal relationships between participation in volunteer work and quality of life since it is hard to control for all the variables that influence the coherence.

3.3 Engagements in Volunteer Work

In national and international surveys it is commonly stated that “being asked” is the main reason why people get involved in volunteer work, which indicates that social networks are relevant in order to get in touch with places where one can do volunteer work. Hence it is likely that persons who are already involved in active social networks have a higher probability to engage in volunteer work (Dekker and Halman 2003). However, there may be different motives for doing volunteer work. Wollebæk and Sivesind (2010) found in their study that the motives seemed to vary depending on membership. For members of a volunteer organization, the case-oriented motivation is higher thus it is the case itself that is of importance for the volunteer; to do something concrete for a particular thing that the person finds meaningful. Others have reported the expressive motivations as important, which are linked to the case-oriented ones and involves for instance investing in emotional well-being such as self-esteem, friends and fellowship. The instrumental motivations are more important for non-members, such as wishes to invest in skills and experiences in order to achieve other aims, often recourses that can be transformed into material goods, and to improve one’s human and social capital. Müller-Nilssen (2012) did a qualitative study of motives among

volunteers in an activity house run by the Church City Mission Oslo, and found that relationships, fellowship, recognition and appreciation were important motives among the informants who did volunteer work. Many also expressed their satisfaction of being able to contribute, utilize their resources and do something they experience as meaningful. The study further linked some of these factors to motivations of realizing a change in mood; doing something for others contributed to positive feelings and a sense of self-reliance. Some of Müller-Nilssen's informants also expressed that their volunteer work was a particularly important part of their everyday life and that their participation lead to experiences of increased well-being. Her study can thus be seen as one of few in Norway that applied qualitative research and explored subjective experiences of doing volunteer work in relation to well-being and conditions that influence the motives of starting and continuing.

It is often stated that non-western minorities are less engaged in volunteer work, than ethnic Norwegian, particularly regarding memberships, and that their level of trust is lower, but this statement needs to be more nuanced. According to Eimhjellen and Segard (2010) there are determinants other than national and migration- background which are more fundamental in relation to participation in volunteer work, such as socio-economical factors and experiences of subjective health. In their study they identify language as one of the most significant factors determining participation in volunteer organizations, with other words speaking Norwegian increases the probability to do volunteer work through an organization. Another determinant identified is timeframe; longer residence in Norway has a significant impact on engagement in volunteer organizations. Income is according to Enjolras and Wollebæk (2010) also an important factor, persons who are unemployed or recipients of disability pension or retired are less likely to do volunteer work, in contrast to persons with a higher income.

There are several opportunities for engagement in organized volunteer work in Norway; through organizations, religious network, sport and cultural clubs, migrant's groups, volunteer centers etc. Available arenas and type of volunteer work that is accessible will influence a person's probability of entering the volunteer sector. Some of the arenas and organizations may have experience of having irregular migrants as volunteers and participants while others may not, or may be uncertain about it since they may not always register the participants using their services.

I have provided a brief overview of the Norwegian volunteer sector in which irregular migrants do engage and contribute to, and outlined some of the existing, though scarce qualitative research of volunteers' experiences of engagement in the sector. There is a lack of knowledge whether the motivations of doing volunteer work, and the positive capabilities and factors linked to volunteer work are likely to be equally and equity accessible and experienced by irregular migrants. The thesis will examine if and how some of these feature in addition to others, are experienced by the irregular migrants that participate in this study. Before doing so I will introduce the theoretical framework that aims to be applied for exploring, explaining and analyzing the findings.

4. Theoretical Framework

In this session I will concentrate on the main concept that I will use as a lens when approaching and analyzing the data I collected. A theoretical framework is important both for the understanding of the situation which the irregular migrants experience when participating in volunteer work, but also in order to understand the context of where they are positioned and their relationship to the society. Ontological insecurity and security, which are the main concepts of this thesis, will be explained and drawn upon here in their relation to the irregular migrants and their experiences and circumstances when participating in volunteer work in Norway. My motivation of choosing these particular concepts is influenced by my experiences during the over two years' employment as a social worker and project coordinator at the Health Center for undocumented migrants, where I get insights in patients' life situations. I believe that some of the themes of their everyday experiences, including engagement in volunteer work may be suitable to explain by applying the concepts of ontological insecurity and security. Applying the concepts will also make it possible to explore the coherence of how the participants' experiences may be produced.

Even though the thesis utilizes both concepts, it has to be highlighted that they are not identical. The concepts' main developers, Laing and Giddens, have applied them from different standpoints, which will be moreover explained in the coming chapter. Although Laing and Giddens never specifically use the term ontological insecurity, it is implicit in their writings that when this kind of insecurity is present when ontological security is absent from the lives of individuals. As a broader understanding of the concepts I will also define the term “(in)security” and include some of Goffman's perspectives of Stigma.

4.1 Ontological (in)security

Several fields and researchers have been occupied with the concept of ontological (in)security, and it is a concept that has been applied to study phenomena within mental health, sociology and international relations. I mentioned some of these studies in chapter 1.

Ontological security refers to the need to experience oneself as a real, alive, whole and continuous person in time, space and context, and to experience others and the world as real and alive, in order to realize a sense of agency (Giddens 1984, 375; Laing 2001, 39).

The concept has been viewed from some different approaches. It was initially developed by Ronald David Laing, a psychologist and psychiatrist from England, in his “Divided Self” in 1960. He applied ontological insecurity within the field of psychology and at an individual level, and particularly focused on schizophrenia in this work. He distinguished ontological security and ontological insecurity where anxiety, danger and fear are associated to the latest (Laing 2001, 39). In 1991, the British sociologist Anthony Giddens, build upon the concept in his work “Modernity and self-identity: Self and society in the late modern age”. He had introduced the concept of ontological security in relation to the rapid changes in the society due to modernism, and argued that consequently new forms of day-to-day social life is transformed which shape self-identity and trust mechanisms that may challenge the individuals’ ontological security (Giddens 1991, 2,3). Jennifer Mitzen, a professor in political science from the USA, has made use of the concept up on state level, to illustrate ontological security in international relations theory; how states search not only for physical security but also ontological security, in its relations to significant others. This perspective has been used to study world politics, such as north-south relationship, nationalism and conflicts as in her work that aims to describe how states need to avoid uncertainty and dilemmas, and could be involved in conflict and dangerous routines in its search for ontological insecurity (Mitzen 2006).

I aim in this thesis to approach the concept mainly at an individual level, from the stands and interpretations of a combination of Laing’s and Giddens’ theories, and apply it when trying to explain and understand the experience expressed by the irregular migrants that participate in my study.

The concept includes existential questions that concern one’s existence, being and self-identity such as who I am and what I am. These are questions which intend to be linked to the empirical data explored in this thesis. Such questions are according to Giddens (1991:54)

parameters of human life and are shaped by social activities. They involve ontological elements such as relations between the external world (finitude) and human life; the existence and interpretations of others; and continuity of self-identity. The self-identity is a core concerned in the concept of ontological (in)security. The self-identity is not something permanent; instead it is routinely shaped and sustained in the reflexive activities that we do in everyday life. Thus self-identity is found in the capacity to keep a continuously process of narratives, were we create an ongoing story about the self, and as expressed by Charles Taylor in Giddens (1991:54) *in order to have a sense of who we are, we have to have a notion of who we have become, and of where we are going*. It is thus important to be able to relate the past, present and future. The confidence in a continuity of self identity is also about having confidence in the social order, in one's place in society and in the right to be oneself (Chase 2013). The self-identity is thus also influenced by our relations and interaction with others, and the society and environment that we are surrounded by.

An ontological secure person feels secure in who he or she is, and has a fundamental and independent sense of an autonomic self and identity. He or she will under normal circumstances never doubt his or her identity as continuous in time, and with an internal consistency that are embedding in harmony within the body (Laing 2001). Irregular migrants' life conditions in Norway may, as outlined above, not be understood and recognized as "normal" in the Norwegian society, which adds a question-mark whether totally ontological security can be achieved. Laing continues to state that if a person does not experience and feel safe and secure in his or her identity and own world, he or she will suffer danger and anxiety. According to Laing (2001:44), such anxieties can affect an ontological insecure person in different ways and can be associated with elements of engulfment, implosion and petrification. Disruption of the biographical continuity and the continuities narratives can threaten the ontological security. Such phenomenon can for instance cause anxiety about being engulfed, crushed or overwhelmed by externally impinging events. An example is if the external environment is full of changes and uncertainties, the person may be oppressively preoccupied with risks to his or her existence and self-identity, and thus paralyzed in terms of practical action (Giddens 1991, 53). If an individual for instance starts to doubt his or hers reality, life, independency and identity, such feelings related to anxiety may cause isolation since an interaction with any other person can threaten the individual's autonomic self-identity (Laing 2001). Feelings of being powerless and doubt about worthiness of self are other examples of what can cause ontological insecurity and existential anxiety (Giddens 1991).

Thus ontological security implies that to fulfill basic needs is not enough to live an adequate and satisfied life. Human beings need something more as a safe and secure base to which they may return to in times of difficulties, fateful moments, crises and fatigue; for protection against threats, risks and dangers in order to sustain hope and courage. Such a “secure base” involves fundamental elements of trust and faith. Giddens describe this base as a *protective cocoon* (1991:40) and Mitzen (2006 ,7) a *basic trust system*. A secure base can be developed and sustained through relations and routinely interactions with significant others and membership in a community (Hawkins and Maurer 2011) or through attachment and belonging to a home (Dupuis and Thorns 1997; (Hiscock, Ade, et al. 2001).

Development and sustainment of ontological security, including elements of basic trust and trust, are produced and reproduced through routines in everyday life, such as daily rituals and routines of social interaction (Giddens 1984). A person’s identity and ontological security is thus formed, influenced and sustained through social relationships. To experience a fundamental sense of safety and security in the world one must be able to relate to significant others without feelings of threat for losing our identity, and these relationships must include routines, certainty, trust and basic trust of other (Laing 2001). A creative involvement with others as a routine is fundamental for a sense of personal worth and is so an essential component of one’s psychological health (Giddens 1991) Due to the structural, legal and socio-political position that I have discussed in chapter 2, regulations may limit irregular migrants’ ability to seek for and to establish routine relationships. Obtaining of trust in relationships is necessary for maintaining a sense of well-being and to avoid ontological insecurity and anxiety (Chase 2013).

The feeling and experience of belonging to someone or to somewhere; to a state, a community, a family, an ethical or cultural identity, a job, a “home” etc., is another essential element in order to sustain ontological security (Kinnvall 2004). Irregular migrants are by the state defined as non-citizens and non-members; they do not belong to Norway’s territory since they are supposed to leave the country. That entails limited rights and exclusion from legal work, housing, health and social services, education etc. which leaves them excluded from commonly arenas where day-to-day routines and interactions are taking place (Fangen and Andreassen Kjærre 2013). It is argued that asylum seekers lose relative stability due to forced migration and movement to another country. Their place within their worldview and thus their

agency become disturbed, and they have to re-establish a level of ontological security in the new society (Healey 2006).

Since the concept of ontological insecurity aims to describe the individual and the set of all of his or her experiences and agencies in the context of his or her total being-in-the-world; understanding of the context becomes crucial (Laing 2001). The feelings of having constancy and continuity of one's social and material environments, and a reliability and trust of persons and things one is surrounded by are essential elements in ontological security (Giddens 1991).

4.1.1 Security as Thick Signifier

Kinnvall embraces contextual aspects to the concept by approaching the term security as a *thick signifier* (2004,4), inspired by Huysmans, in her study of globalization and religious nationalism. This understanding of security articulates both the ontological security problem and the daily security problem as security mediates the relation between life and death. The interpretation of the "security" is thus embedded in larger institutional and structural relations, relations that reflect the inequality of power between those involved and affected by the discourse. Those who produce the discourse have the power to make it true, by using the language as a tool to make definitions and categories. Approaching security as a *thick signifier* makes us able to explore the structural causes of why some individuals or groups experiences different senses of security, and how they become positioned in different categories in the society (Kinnvall 2004). This approach is useful when analyzing irregular migrants' position in society; how they are defined and categorized and as a result; how they sense their situation of security. The Norwegian context and discourse, its policies and legislations and structural underpinnings and relations, needs to be unpacked to understand irregular migrants subjective sense of ontological security at the individual level. For instance how the distinguishing between "we" and "others" at the structural level and the psychological level are framed. With the power of language, institutions or individuals that influence the discourse may define some as false, stranger, illegal or enemy. This can lead to a pattern to increasingly view some individuals or groups as deserved and some as guilty, or even some as non-existing or non-humans. These definitions are some examples of how irregular migrants have been viewed and defined (Sager 2011) (Johansen, Uglevik and Franko Aas, *Krimmigrasjon? Den nye kontrollen av de fremmende* 2013).

4.1.2 Stigma

This thesis will use perspectives from Erving Goffman's social theory of stigma to supplement the knowledgebase for explaining and understanding the findings. His book *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identities* (1963) shed lights on social-identity and the need of categorizing and labeling a person by identifying particular characteristics of her or him. The society and social settings contribute in creating social-identities by making categories and complemented them with attributes that seems natural or expectable. Goffman distinguished between how the individual experience his or her identity and how the society possess an individual his or her identity. Once a label is attached, attributes will follow and generate a gap between the expected identity and the experienced identity. It is this gap that stigma creates. Goffman examined in his book strategies to protect and maintain identity when being experienced differ or deviate from approved standards in society. One of them was concealment such as withholding particular information due to fear of judgments (ibid.).

To view the participants' experience of doing volunteer work in a situation as irregular in Norway through the lens of ontological security, including the approach of security as a "thick signifier", will provide a tool to improve understanding of their experiences and of the context which affects their experiences. Together with perspectives of stigma, it provides a tool to explain their situations of irregularity; a life where the sense of routine, order and stability are uncertain and unpredictable, where the creation of a link between past, present and the future may be associated with fear, as well as creating relationships and relate to others and self-identity. The concepts can thus contribute to a broader understanding of the participants' subjective experience of well-being in relation to their participation in volunteer work in Norway.

5. Methodology

The purpose of this research was to improve understandings on how irregular migrants experience their participations in volunteer work in the Norwegian context, what role volunteer work plays in their everyday lives and its relation to their health and well-being. To be able to answer these questions I had to get in touch with persons living as irregular in Norway and doing volunteer work, and talk and listen to them. This chapter will outline this research's procedure and the methodological choices and considerations I have had in the process of developing the research questions, approaching the field and collecting, analyzing and interpreting the empirical data. In the final part of the chapter I will reflect upon the several methodological challenges and ethical dilemmas I have faced related to this particular research.

5.1 Capture the Subjective Experience

When meeting the participants it was crucial for me to create a safe and secure arena where they were able to express their experiences and what is important for him or her when doing volunteer work in his or hers particular situation in Norway. I aimed to let them represent themselves. As irregular migrant who are partially invisible and socially misrecognized (Lysaker, Fangen and Sarin 2011), it is possible to assume that they are commonly represented by someone else, if they ever are.

I have chosen to use a qualitative approach since the aim is to capture irregular migrants' subjective experience of doing volunteer work, its role and meaning in their everyday life and the relation to their health (Silverman 2011). I have used interview as a primary method, developed a set of open questions about the scope of volunteer work the participants do; their experience of it; the circumstances and context in which they work voluntarily; the positive and challenging aspects of it; and the possible risks they may face (see II in Appendix). The interview schedule helped me to keep the project in mind and a sense of path while I was actively listening and allowing the participants to talk and ascribe their experiences (Tjora 2012). The interviews were in-depth interviews and open ended since I aimed to achieve rich data and rich descriptions. It can however be questioned whether rich data can be full achieved, since it means revealing participants' views, perspectives, feelings, intentions, and actions in addition to the context and structures of their lives (Charmaz 2014)

I aimed also apply methods that are sensitive to, and open for a consideration of, contextual dimensions of my participants' experiences and narrations. Therefore I have reviewed literature and previous research on irregular migrants, looked into laws and regulations on national, regional and supranational level and tried to follow the discourse in the different media sources and channels, and in social media. Sources such as reports and guidelines from nongovernmental organizations, volunteer centers etc. have also been fruitful resources for me.

I have for a longer period of time attended public seminars, meetings and demonstrations regarding the rights and situations for irregular migrants, which have been useful ways of approaching the field and improving my own knowledge and awareness. It may also have contributed to the building of trust and sympathy between me and the participants who have seen me during these events. My activism and position as project coordinator at the Health Centre has made it possible for me to spend much time with irregular migrants and learn from them which has inspired me and motivated the process of developing the approaches for this research. I have joined some during meetings with arenas for volunteer work and activities, and thus actively witness the phenomena I study. I have so made use of participant observation as a supplementary method, and I will highlight some of this experience and awareness of related themes and patterns when relevant. I agree however that participatory observation are an integrated technique and a fundamental base of all research methods as it rests on the researcher's own direct knowledge and judgment (Adler and Adler 1998).

5.2 Participants -Approaching the field

I wanted to do interviews with adult men and women who are living in Norway as irregular, without a legal residency and who are doing volunteer work. I aimed to carry out between 5-7 interviews with people who presently were engaged in volunteer work, or who had recently been engaged in volunteer work, regularly and preferably minimum once a week. The volunteer work could have been carried out through religious organizations, humanitarian organizations or other networks. It resulted in a sample of in total 6 interviews with 4 women and 2 men, ranging in age from 20 to 45 who were engaged in volunteer work regularly and at least once a week. Among them were two who have been doing volunteer work but stopped because of different reasons. The interviews were conducted in the period from late April to late May 2014.

I got in touch with the participants through organizations that provide services for immigrants and irregular migrants, such as the Health Center for undocumented migrants in Oslo. I also made use of the snowball method; where some key-persons in networks of immigrants and the volunteer sector brought me in touch with more participants. The method can be an advantage when studying populations that are positioned in the margins of society since it may be challenging to approach individuals that are hidden, marginalized and excluded (Tjora 2012). The method may also implicate some dimensions of disadvantages, for instance to which degree the sample of participants is representative and ensuring the anonymity of the participants, something that I will come back to when reflecting upon ethical dilemmas. When starting the thesis I already knew a number of irregular migrants who did volunteer work, they had informed me about it or asked me and I had helped them to get in touch with arenas where they could do volunteer work. Since we already were in dialogue it felt natural to talk with them about the study and to ask them if they wanted to contribute by talking more with me about their experiences. The already established relations may have advantages and disadvantages regarding participation, collecting and interpretation of data and the final product, something that I will reflect upon in chapter 5.4.

5.3 Conductions of Data and Interview Setting

To be able to secure the anonymity and confidentiality of the participants is one of the most crucial tasks I have when I present the data. Irregular migrants are highly vulnerable due to several reasons, including the fact that they face a real risk of insecurity and deportation.

I experience that the interview setting does not only imply the actual interview, but also the first contact and the process of getting to know and build trust between me and the participants. To show my care, support, tolerance and empathy for the participants as a fellow human being and not only as someone gathering data is essential for me. These are also virtual factors when doing qualitative research in social science (Tjora 2012). The relation between me and some of the participants started years back through immigrant organizations, while I got to know some of them recently.

The interview setting had to provide a physically safe and secure place for the participants, but also a place that feels informal, relaxed and tolerant, in which it is allowed to talk openly about personal experiences and think out loud. I suggested that we could carry out the interviews at the University College in Oslo, but also informed the participants that he or she could suggest another place if it was preferable to do it somewhere else. All interviews except

one were carried out at the university college; the other interview was conducted at my place of residence as it was with a person I was much familiar with. Some of the participants have approached me after the interview and supplemented the interview with additional information and reflections.

The interview setting needed moreover to make the participants *feel* safe and secure; I had to be sure that they got the information they needed before they agreed for the interview in order to understand and know what the study was about and how their anonymity would be secured. I needed them to understand and feel that they could trust me. The voluntary perspective, autonomy and confidentiality are all important considerations that shall be respected in research (Johannessen, Tufte and Christoffersen 2010). Everyone involved in my research got to know that I would contact them during the process of writing to offer them an opportunity to look at the material regarding his or her anonymity, and that they were free to contact me whenever they had any questions or thoughts related to the study. I spent time on emphasizing that the participation in the study was totally voluntarily, and that it should not affect the relationship between us if they decide not to. I also informed about their right to withdraw at any time, without having to give a reason for that. I took time to go through the request for interview and statement of consent (see I in Appendix) only began interviewing after receiving their verbal approval for informed consent since a signature could threaten their anonymity. When telling them about the study I made it clear that the participation couldn't indeed make their circumstances better; it would not influence on their legal status, housing and living conditions etc. But that I wanted to provide a place and sphere for them to tell about their experience, and that the thesis perhaps will be fruitful for arenas advocating and facilitating access for irregular migrants.

Since my participants were from different cultural backgrounds than myself, and represented a range of diverse individual and contextual factors, it was essential to be sensitive and alerts to capture the subjective experiences, perceptions and understandings. Hence we spent time on finding common understandings on essential concept both when introducing the study, and during the interviews.

I asked the participants if they wanted to do the interview in Norwegian or in English, since these are the languages I know and could use for an interview, or if they wanted to speak in their own language. It is important that the participants were able to express themselves in a language they felt comfortable with. Two preferred to do the interview in another language

than English and Norwegian. One had a friend she trusted who translated, and the other one preferred a professional interpreter which we chose together. I received financial support from the Church City Mission Oslo to cover the costs for the professional interpreter. I found it challenging of several reasons and I believe having an interpreter present during the interviews influenced the atmosphere and the outcome of the interviews and the translation meant I never got firsthand quotations. During the interview where the friend of my participant translated I could feel that the setting involved a sense of safety. However, I recognized that the friend sometimes simplified the participant's explanations, or used fewer words to explain which may have been because of her language barriers or her interpretation of the participants' explanations due to their friendship. When finishing the interview with the professional interpreter present, the participant explained that she was not totally satisfied with the translation. The girl who translated was much younger than her, they had not met before and I observed that the atmosphere changed to something more insecure when she was present. I also experienced that the interpreters were not fluent in both of the languages they translated between. I am still happy with the interviews, and quotations from both interviews will be included in the findings, but I am aware of the impacts the interpreters may have had on the data. The interviews took from 1.5 hour to 2.5 hours.

I used a tape-recorder to ensure that I did not miss anything, and could instead stayed focus and be present during the interviews. All except one of my participants agreed to record it. To carry out an interview without a tape-recorded was challenging. I found it hard to take notes while paying attention to the talk we had and feared that it could be understood as disrespect, and consequently I did not manage to write down complete quotations. However, when finishing the interview, I tried my best to supplement the notes with what I remembered which made it possible to include the material in the findings. The tapes of the interviews have since been destroyed owing to the sensitivity and situation of the irregular migrants interviewed.

5.4 Ethical Considerations and Challenges

There have been several ethical dilemmas in the study that needed to be considered continuously. Ethical issues about values, rules and guidelines for evaluating what is right or wrong are particularly important when research affects persons directly, especially when collecting the data (Johannessen, Tufte and Christoffersen 2010). By doing qualitative research and interviews I, as a researcher, have to carry a complex range of different

responsibilities. This involves facing not only my own values but also the ones of my participants', and the relationship we enter when involving them in my study (Silverman 2011). Mutual trust, consent and respect are some of the important goals I as a researcher aim to achieve in contact with the participants (Tjora 2012)

As a coordinator for a three year Mental Health Project at the Health Center for undocumented migrants in Oslo, and as an activist, I have met with some of my participants before, during and after the collection of data. We might have met at the Health Center, at volunteer organizations, at public meeting or at demonstrations. With some I have met at social gatherings, having dinner together with or been invited to visit. Some have shared thoughts and ideas when developing the study and some have given me sporadically feedback on their experiences of the volunteer work before. It is impossible for those participants to totally distinguish Linnea "researcher" from Linnea "Health Center" or Linnea "activist". I experienced that the relationship and trust between some of the participant and the organization or institution, was transferred and became trust, solidarity and fellowship between the participant and me, which I experience was an advantage in several ways. Mutual trust is a fundamental component in research (Silverman 2011, 97). The trust between me and the participants appeared in different ways; they knew of my engagement and interests in questions related to their irregularities; they felt emotional sympathy and they have experienced that I, or the arena they associated me with, supported them. It is though important to be aware of the complexity these roles can implicate and possible consequences of the difficulties to distinguish between Linnea as student and as employed at the Health Centre. The participation in the study may for instance have been influenced by feelings of dependency or gratitude in the relationship between me and the participants and that may further have implications on the participants' voluntary consent and ability to decline from the study.

It is further important to be aware of the vulnerability of my participants due to their lives as irregular. My participants live precarious lives and experience oppression, fear and unrest. Some are at risk to be deported anytime. Their security and anonymity is therefore crucial. Before I began with interviews I applied the Norwegian Social Science Data Services (NSD) for research license and got approval. When interviewing people in such vulnerable situations, in poverty and deprivation of basic needs, I experienced it hard to hear about problems of assistance needs when the participants face extremely limited available resources and

assistance. Due to restricted entitlements and barriers to exercise the right, there are few options other than listening when participants reported of problems and stress related to finding and covering the costs of accommodation, food, clothes or other basic needs. Due to my awareness of a few nongovernmental organizations and projects that have made their services available for irregular migrants, I could after the interview refer and facilitate contacts if needed and wanted, which I did with some of the participants who expressed needs and interests for particular services.

During the interviews I sometimes experienced it hard to ask things that reminded them of their problems and their vulnerable situation. In some interviews I could observe that the person felt it difficult, was ambivalent or did not want to talk about the problems he or she faced, experienced and felt in the daily life. I did not push or continued to dig deeper when I observed that the talk was too difficult for the participant. The reasons for that was both the awareness of risks for re-traumatisation among persons who have experienced traumatic events and may presently experience themselves as being in a traumatic situation. Some participants reported symptoms of for instance PTSD, anxiety and depression. In some of the interviews I experienced that the participants reported about serious mental health problems and concerns, such as attempted suicide or previous traumatic events. It was so highly crucial for me to be careful and sensitive for such problems that the participants brought up, since I, by profession, am not competent and shall hence not dig deeper into these topics. And I also feared of inducing negative feelings that may appear after the interview. It might have been only my own interpretation of the situations and perhaps the participants experienced it differently. It is in research important to protect the people involved in the study from all kinds of harm (Johannessen, Tufte and Christoffersen 2010) (Silverman 2011). I aimed to secure the well-being of my participants and show them respect. Hence it is important to reflect upon these ethical issues that may have influenced the interaction during the interview and so also the outcome.

Another challenge that can be linked to the previous one was my experience of asking questions which could remind the participants about the “category” that they experience themselves as a part of. I tried to balance my acknowledgement of the difficulties which is tied to their irregularity, but at the same time be aware of all of the participants’ individual uniqueness; to see behind the category of “irregular migrant” and recognize the commonality he or she has with other random people in the society. This is further tied to my preconceptions which are shaped by earlier experiences from my professional work, activism

along other contributing factors. A challenge tied to this issue had to do with the previous informal dialogues that me and some of the participants had have before I started the study. I assume that both of us felt it weird and unnatural to repeat and talk in a more formal setting, about some of the same things we have touched upon earlier. I tried to address this topic by explaining that the study will be based upon the interview and I asked some participants to repeat the interesting topics we had been through before, and in a few cases I asked the participant if I could use some particular statements or sentences I remember he or she had addresses before. By emphasizing the focus on the findings from the interviews, I also explained that matters addressed by the person at an earlier stage will not be involved in the study. But I provided possibilities to contact me after the interviews if the participants wanted to add, change or reflect upon the topic or the interview, which some of the participants did.

Even though I did not ask directly about the participants' motivations for participating in my study, or what their expectations were, it is important to reflect upon it since it affects the sample of participants. Was it a motivation to speak out and make their situations visible and a hope for socio-political changes? Was it to be able to tell, be listened to and thus be recognized as a human being? Was it an expectation or wish to receive something in return? Was it a motivation to be able to contribute, or to give something in return to me or the organization or platform they associated me with? Was it because of possibilities to build or maintain a relation or friendship? My participants' motives and expectations might be some of these or others that are not mentioned, although I believe that for the majority of my participants it was a complex combination of all these factors that inspired their decisions to take part. It is particularly important to consider such ethical issues when involving persons in a vulnerable situation such as irregular migrants, who are on the edge of the law and who may have limited abilities to protect themselves (Brunovskis 2010) (Silverman 2011).

Some researchers use incentives to motivate participation in their studies (Brunovskis 2010). I decided not to. The reasons for that are the possible impacts on the voluntary consent to participation, the power dynamics between me and the participant, and the complexity of retaining dignity and worthiness among the participants who wanted to contribute. I provided travel tickets since I found it was necessary in order to participate in the study, but none of the participants accepted the offer.

When doing interviews with persons who are defined as to belong to a particular category that has stereotypes attached it is important to be aware and sensitive to the participants'

expectations, an issue that is particularly relevant with contact with (former) asylum-seekers. Asylum-seekers have been interviewed by the Norwegian Immigration Authorities and their answers have had an enormous impact whether their life story is considered trustworthy or not, and consequently on their destiny. Their earlier experiences and their possible emphasizing of themselves as victims may have implications on both the expectations and the conducted interview. They may for instance experience research fatigue and a fear that their answers can affect any new application for refugee status (Carey 2013). As a researcher I aim not to make decisions on whether or not to believe the facts but rather concentrate on how the participants explain their situations, experiences, feelings and behaviors (Brunovskis 2010). I am further responsible to analyze and present fair descriptions of the participants' explanation which does not exploit them for being positioned in fixed categories with harmful stereotypes attached (Silverman 2011).

The process of doing this study has been an emotionally difficult period for me. It has affected me in several ways and I have had feelings of hopelessness, unfairness, anger and sadness. I have for instance felt a need to defend or convince the worthiness of the participant when he or she has expressed disempowerment and non-worthiness during the interview. I have met with persons who shared their experiences of loneliness, and I have sometimes tried to meet it with telling about possible activities or arenas I know of where fellowship may be attained. I have listened to experienced limitations in order to be a "man" in a situation as irregular, and strategies to avoid and not allowing oneself to imagine being together with someone of the opposite sex, having children, build a family, having physical closeness etc. How such feelings and thoughts are repressed. My emotional involvement in the study has at some moments even resulted in a sense of shame over the society in which I live that produces such trajectories of suffering.

5.5 Representing

The purpose for this research is not to achieve generalized findings, rather highlight the different experiences of the 6 unique individuals that participated in my research. Hence it is important to be aware of the fact that my participants represent themselves first and foremost. However, they may also in the thesis stand as representatives for a view or a position. The limited numbers of participants, as consequences of both accessing participants in what seems like an unexplored and partial invisible field, and due to available time to carry through the research, complicates a more generable representativity of the participants.

My goal to let the participants represent themselves is an ambiguous goal due to several factors. The scope of the thesis limits my ability to include all aspects of the participants' lives that may affect their experiences of doing volunteer work. The concept which I have chosen sets the framework of what I focus on, and my presentation, interpretation and analysis of the data is influenced by my knowledge, experiences and values. In addition I was careful to present all elements of a case in order to secure the anonymity of the participants. The way they expressed themselves varied and so did the language used. Therefore I have chosen to translate the quotations I point out for illustrating the findings into simple English, to ensure that the participants are not identifiable. I have also chosen to make small correction of grammar for the same reason. I use [...] when removing one or a few words in a sentence and (...) when taking away one or more whole sentences. Sometimes I replace a word to secure anonymity or to explain my interpretation of a word or sentence. I do that by writing it in quotation marks.

5.6 Quality of the Research

When evaluating the quality of the research I have to consider its reliability, validity and objectivity. The concept of reliability has to do with the data; what type of data I have used, how it has been conducted and how it had been analyzed (Johannessen, Tufte and Christoffersen 2010). Reliability can be challenging to achieve in qualitative research and when conducting interviews; interviews are commonly not structured methods to conduct data, they are depended on the context and the researcher uses him or herself as a tool, which makes the research hard to reproduce. By reviewing relevant and related research on the phenomenon, outlining the contexts in which it takes place, and being open and transparent in my methodological choices throughout the research process I have approached improved reliability. Validity is commonly understood as the question of measuring or exploring what is supposed to be measured or explored. Validity is the ability of the research to conduct accurate experiences of the participants and draw upon it that reflexes the purpose of the research and the reality (ibid.). In order to progress validity I have invested time before and during the research to become familiar with the field and its context and to build relations and mutual trust between me and the participants. I have combined interviews with participatory observation and literature review to explore a variety of different perspectives on issues related to my research questions. It is challenging to determine generalizability in qualitative research; to produce findings that can be utilized for understanding of other related

phenomenon, yet it should according to Mason be a goal for all researchers (Silverman 2011, 385). It is in my research difficult to state that the findings, involving 6 participants, are representative for all irregular migrants who are doing volunteer work, as discussed in the above section. Despite my prime aim being to generate rich descriptions of the phenomena, I intend also to seek and to produce explanations that are of wider resonance and may be generalizable in some ways. I believe that some of the themes possible can be transferred to related research field both within the volunteer sector and health and well-being among irregular migrants. I moreover believe the findings can be relevant when exploring involvement in volunteer work or activities but also other forms of contribution and membership, among other groups or individuals that are marginalized and positioned at the edge of the society. The generality needs however to be considered and related to each particular case and context (Johannessen, Tufte and Christoffersen 2010).

5.7 Process of Analyzing

Guided by the research questions, inspired by previous research and experiences, and anchored in the concept of ontological (in)security, I found my point of departure to approach the field. The process of conducting data was a combination of searching data for understanding and describing the context and background of the phenomenon, and of gathering semi-structured interviews. When transcribing all the interviews I searched for patterns and words that appeared in the data, and the patterns and words were further coded and categorized in themes and concepts and attached to the concept. The themes are interlinked and overlapping and are the result of my abstraction, interpretation and sorting of the material. The empirical findings are however much more interconnected. My research was inspired by ontological (in)security at an early stage and my data was thus constantly interacting with the concept by moving back and forth in the process.

6. Findings and Discussion

As we have seen, irregular migrants are positioned inside the Norwegian territory but are at the same time excluded due to their lack or limitations of rights and opportunities to enjoy participation and contribution to the society. They are positioned differently than the citizens and on the margin of what can or cannot be defended according to universal human rights conventions. Denying of work permission restricts their ability not only to earn an income by legal work, but also to belong, join and contribute in daily interactions with people in the society. We have also encountered and recognized that immigration control and current political and public discourses contribute to portraits of irregular migrants as a category of “illegal”, “criminals” “return-deniers” etc. At an individual level, the irregular migrants’ that sought asylum have experienced a process of unpredictable waiting, which resulted in the authorities’ decision of denied protection and having to leave the country. They have not been believed, or haven’t had a good enough reason to gain protection. Hence the Norwegian context creates conditions of marginalization, fear and exclusion of irregular migrants. It also implies a state of limbo, which impacts on how the past, present and future is perceived by the individual.

There is no doubt that these factors, including others, influence ones’ self-identity; how one experience oneself in time, space and context. It also influences how others and the world are viewed, and the feelings when meeting with people. The concept of ontological security allows us to explore the subjective realities of how some irregular migrants are affected by their position in society, but also how they actively work and realize a sense of agency in order to reduce the burden of their situation.

I will in the following chapters explore the irregular migrants’ subjective experiences of volunteer work, positioned in this precarious situation. I want to explore which role volunteer work play in their everyday life, and how it influences and are influenced by their health, well-being and ontological security. The results have been analyzed in interaction with the concept of ontological (in)security and with awareness of Goffman’s concept of stigma as base, and will in these chapter be described, discussed and linked to the following topics: “The Others”, “The Helper”, “A Base to Escape” and “Volunteer Work and Health”. I will begin by providing a small introduction of the 6 persons that have shared their experiences, thoughts and feelings with me.

6.1 Participants

I have chosen to present my participants jointly and not separately, in order to secure their anonymity. My participants represent a great variety of individuals, all with their own unique qualities, skills and sense of humor. Four are single, two are married, and one has children. They have been in Norway between four to 14 years and several have lived on average more than 5 years as irregular. They originally come from east Africa, from Middle East and from Central Asia and some have spent time in other countries before reaching Norway.

My focus was on the informants' experience of participating in voluntary work therefore I did not dwell on their background, asylum case or previous incidents. However the participants are meeting me with the whole him- or herself and these are aspects that cannot be excluded since they certainly affect the persons' present situation. These themes have therefore been led by the participants themselves in the interviews, and some have paid more attention to previous experiences and their asylum cases than others.

All the participants noted that they came to Norway as asylum seekers. They all have received their final rejection of their asylum application, though at least three of them have after several years reapplied. Following the new application, one of the participants recently got a positive answer and is now starting a new life after more than 8 years in Norway. Even though living as irregular, their asylum cases and present situations are different. One participant is what UDI calls "non-returnable" and cannot return to the country of origin since the embassy does not provide travel documents. The only options it seems, is to either return the illegal way; the same dangerous route, or to live as irregular. Two of the participants have "Dublin" cases and have been in another European country before arriving to Norway where their fingerprints are registered. One was under 18 years old when arriving to Norway, but that was before Norway changed the policy to exempt children in the Dublin II regulations (Vollebæk 2014). After years of waiting, their cases were reviewed again in Norway but were also rejected.

The participants have reported about their situation in their home-countries, about political engagements and risks associated to this, about being victims of suspicions, of war and of violations of human rights. One participant mentioned about being imprisoned and managing to escape. They told me about the long and dangerous routes when crossing borders by foot; crossing mountains and deserts, and using small boats when crossing the Mediterranean Sea. Three told they came directly to Norway by flight. One was pregnant and experienced

massive additional distress. One shared with me the experience of being forced to work in another country before coming to Norway, and explained it as being a “slave”; harsh working-conditions and without the right to free movement. All have taken risks and escaped severe situations with courage and hope to make a better future for themselves, their families and their children.

The time they have spent in Norway have consisted of mainly waiting. None of the participants stayed at an asylum reception center at the time I did the interviews, but all had experiences from it. Two explained that they moved out when they still waited for the answer of their asylum applications since they got formal employment and an income to live alone, another one moved out to stay with her husband who had legal residency, and two moved out when they received the final rejection in fear for being captured and sent back. One was forced to leave after having stayed in the reception center for about 7 years, including several years as irregular and they told her that she had no right to stay there anymore due to her status as irregular. Everyone reported of difficulties due to staying in the reception centers; that the conditions and waiting there made them and others sick. Psychological problems, depression, sleep problems, lack of hope, lack of control and without any meaningful activities to do in their daily life was just some of the difficulties they had experienced during the time they waited at the reception centers.

At the time I conducted the interviews three stayed with family, friends or networks, one rented an own apartment and two were in constant stress of finding a place to sleep. The one who got a positive answer was still waiting for settlement by the municipality.

When I conducted the interviews only one of my participants had an additional income generating employment. Two mentioned that they could get some small jobs but that it was rarely and highly unpredictable. Only one had a job to go to every week, which was a job where the conditions were tough and the pay was low. The withdrawal of tax-cards in 2011 (Øien 2012, 23) is something several mentioned that had huge impacts on their everyday life and living conditions. Before it happened many received annual tax-card, had formal jobs and a regular income, which made it possible to live a more “normal life”. Their livelihoods are now much dependent on others.

Two of the participants told they have contact with their families who stay in their home country or in another country. They mentioned the support that the family members provided but also about the huge will to support them by sending money home. The feeling of not

being able to do enough for the family and the wish to protect them from the problems that they faced here in Norway was something particularly one of the participants experienced huge concerns about. One of the participants had stayed with their partner here in Norway for several years. They really want to get married but cannot marry due to lack of legal residency and identification.

The educational backgrounds of the participant also vary. Two of the informants have barely attained primary education due to war in their home countries. One informant has attained high school education and the other has graduated from university. The work skills and career choices of the informants also seem to vary though I did not ask for much clarification on type of skills. Two participants explained that they used to own companies in their home countries and in a neighboring country, three told of working in the regular labor market in Norway before withdrawal of tax-card.

6.2 Engagement in Volunteer Work

Since volunteer work is a quite vague concept I asked my participants how they would define volunteer work. The most common answer was to work for free, without getting paid, and by own will. Several linked it to humanitarian work and said that it was also supporting and helping people who cannot take care of themselves. When I asked them about their previous understandings and experiences of volunteer work, several explained that they did not know much about volunteer work or have never thought about doing volunteer work before they came to Norway. Some informed me that they have done jobs for free in their home countries which they at that time did not consider as volunteer work; for instance helping friends, neighbors or religious communities. When they think about it today they may define it as volunteer work, though it was not organized and formalized in the same way as the volunteer work they are involved in now. In Norway, several said, they had to apply to do volunteer work, needed to be accepted and registered, and then got a kind of title. But not everyone defined all the organized contribution they did here as volunteer work; some of the participants contributed continuously to immigrants' support groups but did not define this as volunteer work with the argument that this was not something they meant was "work". Another participant revealed of perceptions and experiences of what "work" entails when volunteering at an elderly center:

(...) what I do not like, you go there and then you just stand and waiting for work. That does not make me happy. When I go, I just that time, I want to be active, working with some work, but if you are only sitting and talking with them... you feel you do not do any.

Several explained that they became familiar with the concept at the reception centers. They explained how they contributed to the reception center by for instance being responsible for the common phone, were contact-person for their asylum seekers from their countries, organizing events and activities, babysitting for the people who got asylum and attended classes, and assisting when people got legal residency and settled in the municipality.

At the time I did the interviews, two participants reported doing volunteer work up to 5 days per week. Two of them did it twice a week, where one of them wishes to do it more often and waited to be contacted by places where they registered. Two of the participants have done volunteer work before but have stopped due to different reasons. Both of them who stopped told me that they want to start again when their conditions are more stable and secure.

They did volunteer work through different organizations and arenas and carried it out at for instance elderly homes, meeting-centers for people in the community or for a particular target groups, in immigrants' support groups and in religious networks. The type of volunteer work they did was for instance assisting elderly during training and exercises, followed and helped elderly to dentist, doctor, shopping etc., by cooking or baking, preparing for specific events such as Christmas or Easter, cleaning, practical help such as moving and repairing, cutting hair, and by lobbying and organizing activities for others. When I asked about the motivation of doing the type of volunteer work they were doing the answers differed. Some had offered a service themselves in which they had skilled training, while for other was more of a coincidence. Almost all said that they had expressed when registering that they could do anything; that the type of volunteer work did not matter so much as long as they contributed with something. The concepts of "work" and "help" though, were shown to have different meanings and implications, something which will be more specified in the following parts.

I have named my participants Sofia, Lisa, Ola, Peter, Maria and Tina.

7. The Others

This part of the chapter will view and analyze how the participants tell of their experienced position in society and when participation in volunteer work, and its impact on their subjective well-being, seen from the perspective of ontological security. The contexts in which they are positioned are a crucial element to understand their experiences of self-identity, their environment and of others. As we will see, their position is characterized by exclusion and fragmentations at several levels, but it may also be one of collectivity and inclusion on other levels. Drawn upon the interviews, the findings will be outlined and discussed under the following topics: “The black face”, “The gap between us and them is too much”, and “What we will tell about you?” This will provide the foundation to the following parts of the thesis, in which the roles of volunteer work in the participants’ everyday life and relation to health, well-being and thus ontological (in)security will be further analyzed.

7.1 The Black Face

We, asylum-seekers, are the black face. We are dinosaurs, dangerous crocodiles...

The participant who said this reported about constantly feeling that people were suspicious of him due to his foreign background and his status as irregular. The effect the migration policies, regulations and limitations have on the participants’ living conditions and the way they view and define themselves is evident throughout the interviews. Limited rights and opportunities, together with the public discourse that tends to lead into an increased criminalizing and dehumanizing of irregular migrants is manifested in the participants’ experiences of daily life. The illustration of irregular migrants in public discourses contributes to a construction of a category of “others” in contrast to “us”. They are categorized as non-citizens; they do not belong here. That entails they cannot enjoy the same rights to work, live and access social benefits, neither enjoy equal possibilities to belong and participate in society. The construction of the category of “others” and depicting of “others” makes it easier for the state to refuse responsibility for protection of their human rights. It also makes it easier for the state to treat them differently by for instance limit their health rights, only provide shelter at reception center and deny work permission. The tendencies to portray irregular migrants in this category of “others” include adding of characteristics such as “illegal”, “return-denier” and “criminal” does not only enables the state to use strategies and tools to deal with them, but also implies a call for action. The handle of the “others” is hence accepted in the sense that the “others” are people we need to control and protect the society

from. This construction has impact on how the society and folk in society views and threat the “others”, and may lead to false suspicions and to an increased fear among people. The findings indicate that the belonging of the category “the others” has severe implications on my participants’ everyday life and living conditions, including identity. Here explained by Tina:

We are... our life is in danger so we do not dare to travel back. Therefore we just have to live as irregular migrants here in Norway. Yes, with some very few rights. Yes, you do not get any help from the public agencies, for instance from the social security or NAV or something like that, even if you have a family. In any case you do not get any help. And in addition you have no permit to work, or to live on your own. And I think it is totally de-humanizing.

Tina has stayed in Norway as irregular for many years and she has spent a lot of time and efforts to find out about entitlements and possible solutions for coping with the stressors she experiences in her everyday life. She knows of the benefits and help available for individuals and families in Norway, and she knows that she, as an irregular migrant, does not have equal rights and access to help compared to persons with legal residency. The inequalities lead to the feeling of not only being the category of “others” but also feelings of being not worthy and a non-human. In the same statement she touches upon the need to explain and defend why she lives in Norway and does not travel back to her home country, which indicates that she also feel the characteristics and stigma attached to the category of “others” as return-deniers and do not want to identify herself with that. It can be understood that the migration authorities, by denying its accountability for these people, intends to make the irregular migrants themselves responsible for the situation they are in which has been discussed in chapter two. Tina’s expressions illustrates that the space in which control, choices and agency can take place is extremely narrow for irregular migrants.

Tina also talked about the positive picture of Norway as a country in an international perspective, as a country which stands up for the less privileged and fighting for human rights, but how it does not include all people residing within own borders. She told about the politics that influence and has negative impacts on her living conditions, health and well-being, and of ideas how changes may be possible:

And Norway, that gives out the Nobel Peace Prize and work for human rights and for world-peace, and maybe have no clue about the irregular migrants. Therefore I say (...) it is good to invite politicians so they get to know face to face. And maybe they will think a little bit about us. How we are doing...

Another participant explained for me the following:

In the government they tell us we are illegal living here. So when maybe if they (people she meets) know we are illegal maybe they feel something wrong with us. We feel that. Maybe they feel something wrong about us. Maybe they do not feel of course, but you, you feel maybe they feel. You know you worry.

She further explained: *Before what I feel like I am not completed... human-being, like something miss. Something miss and these things...*

The manifestation of structural vulnerability as drawn upon by Gasana (2012) can thus be found in my material on both a collectivistic level as explained by Tina, and an individual level as explained above. Maria said: *Everywhere when I go, like people read from [...] my face, I am undocumented people. You feel like that.* I understood it as she felt the label of being irregular migrant could make her feel luminous. The label was in that sense superior and made all other identities invisible. One participant informed me about her experiences from the time she stayed at the reception center where she felt that the people working in the office treated her differently when she received her final rejection of the asylum application: *(...) once who have final rejection, they do not appreciate you like the one they have accept by UDI. When we go to office you are, even you come together, and then they ignore you. (...).* Another of my participants expressed the wish to be “normal”, to live a normal life, to get married and to have children, but how that is not a possibility for him in his situation. He feels sad since his life passing by him and that it is soon too late. He said he believed that no woman would marry him since he has no legal residency permission and are what he calls the *black face*.

These last quotations bring us to the next topic which aims to enlighten further of how it may be experienced to be labeled as irregular migrant and the position it may entails in relation to other people in the society.

7.2 “The Gap between Us and Them is too much”

When Maria mentioned the phrase *the gap between us and them is too much* I asked her in which way and she continued by saying:

Ok for example we are two friends, (they) accept her asylum and me they do not accept my asylum so her life [...] will be: she can study, she can be free to do everything [...] maybe for future better life, but me like [...] not living things but like material I cannot do anything. I just sit watching them and then when I watch them I feel too much bad feeling. I am happy for them this things, but [...] compare with them your life is too much worse. [...] the gap between us is too much different [...] here it is a lot of things closed.

The “we and them” theme has been expressed in several ways in the interviews. Marias’ explanation of the huge differences between a person who gets asylum and herself who did not get, points out feelings of being excluded and marginalized at several levels. She tells of everything that she cannot do and attend due to her status as irregular and how that disempowers her. The comparison involves also the aspect of prospect and ability to imagine the future, in which she sees many closed doors. Her feeling of lacking agent, power and control, and the sadness attached to it are some of the factors that may threaten the ontological security.

One participant tells of the experienced differences between volunteers who are irregular and the several other people volunteering at the elderly center who have a legal residency:

(...) very nice to work voluntarily but when you can compare, there are a lot of volunteers, but they have their own work. (...) but we do not have even to survive our lives but even though... we want to help. It is... half-half. Like the one who have work and then everything ok for him and then he work voluntary one day to make him happy and [...] to help the people, and when you help the others you become happy right? So, but you... you want to help, you want to be happy because by helping some people, but (on) the other side [...] you need help also. And then your happiness is half. Not full.

The differences between we and them were also explained in living conditions. Some of my participants expressed how they moved from place to place, staying in small basements, sharing overcrowded apartments and that their conditions are not “normal” like expressed by Peter: *Food? Sometimes I do not have much. I do not need much. Just a little. I buy cheap stuff.*

To position oneself as belonging to a category of “outsider”, may also entail opportunities for inclusion and collectivity on other levels, which also previous studies on irregular migrants indicate (Chase 2013) (Kjærre 2011). Alternative strategies for some of my participants were to be involved in activities or to do volunteer work for people who are in the same situation as irregular. Such an option could build a sense of belonging, inclusion and solidarity. One of the participants explains why she thinks a particular course could be offered only for irregular migrants and illustrates some of these elements:

That is why for this course for example, we need alone and [...] more time (...) if this activity is good for us and then if we go further [...] and then we want to focus on that. [...] we want to learn even more instead of we are sitting and [...] we do not have any other chance to educate of this things so that is why we are asking for alone, the same (course). So if we [...] are all undocumented, we have the same interest and then the same situation I think we more understand each other. And then there is no difference

between us, with any means. Maybe there is different with interest but there are not too much differences with other things.

She touches upon both shared conditions of exclusion such as lack of rights to education which position her and other irregular migrant in a different category consisting of restricted possibilities to be active and join intellectual activities, but simultaneously elements of inclusion. Even though she is aware of the individuals' different interests she gets feeling of fellowship and belonging by defining her as one of "them", and by attaching characteristics in which they have in common.

Positive effects of being involved in migrant networks and participating in groups with people in similar situation as oneself are also recognized in Burchett and Matheson's research (2010). Their study indicates that such involvement can put one's own situation into perspective and shape common identities without being judged. One of my participants volunteered for people in the same situation as her and told of the shared solidarity she felt and how her problem can be seen in relation to others'. (...) *at the same time we are almost, you know we share... our problem always. It is good to me, it is happening with me. You can learn also from others there, from their experiences and [...] in the group (...)*

We had earlier been talking about the wish to "escape" and avoid being reminded of one's problems, so at this time I asked her if it is different to be reminded in this setting than other and she continues:

It comes from YOU [...] you want to tell, not someone asking you. Sometimes we are telling our experience: this is happening to me like that (...) (you are) happy to tell because to share but (it) reminds you of your problems and then you feel bad. So, sometimes as I tell you I may cry and sometimes someone cry. So also when you see all of us in the same situation and then the same problem. Sometimes maybe (you) minimize your problem when you see even more problem for example children and [...] they do not have any income and [...] this things. (...)

The ambivalence regarding doing volunteer work and activities with other irregular migrants or others in the society were noticeable in several interviews. I understand the ambivalence to be much related to the wish to experience one-self as included and as what is perceived "normal", but also the desire to be at a place where the problems can be forgotten. The material indicates that invitations to take part in activities or volunteer work together with other irregular migrants could on one hand bring feelings of appreciation and worthiness, but

on the other hand it could bring feelings of being different or a victim in need of help. It could also remind them of the exclusionary practice they were a part of; the category of others. Maria illustrated this mixed of feeling of inclusion and exclusion; of solidarity and sadness, and complicated the elements of exclusion by saying: *So we get this one because we are... we are not... we do not have... we are undocumented so we get this for free. Sometimes you observe that one.*

Ola both experienced and fought the exclusionary policies in several ways; he worked in the informal labor market where he had faced harsh conditions with too long working hours, low salary and no insurances; he constantly moved from place to place in the informal housing market; and he experienced himself as very lonely. I asked him how he coped with all the worries and problems he expressed; *I do not know. Very strong. [...] I pray and hope that nobody, no human being should be in this difficult situation. It becomes very difficult. It is big difference between the Norwegian society, normal, and these asylum-seekers that got negative answer and lived long time in Norway.*

7.3 “What We Will Tell About You”

When the participants talked about the benefits of doing volunteer work, about getting out from home and getting to know more people if there was often ambivalence attached to it. The huge wish and aim to be like anyone else, to join and do common things in society could be destroyed by facing commonly asked questions. The participants expressed the fear of becoming reminded of everything they do *not have*, and got feelings that there are things that they *cannot do*, and that there are characteristics that they *are not*, and how hard this was to deal with. Many talked about how much effort they did in order to avoid these questions, or prepared themselves to answer them when meeting with people at the place where the volunteer work was carried out. Tina explains:

(...) there was one lady that came, and then I experienced that problem (of explaining) you know. I just said that I have a secret in my heart, and I do not know if I can tell you because I heard that they do not have totally confidentiality. She came and insisted "why are you coming two days a week?" and the lady, who almost talks with me every day, she pointed at her arms and I know that proverb, saying that you should not sew pillows under the arms. And she thinks that I am going there only for receiving things and that I do not want to work, only receive money from the social service or NAV (...). It is about everything that I cannot tell; I have high education, I have driving license etc. but everything needs to be authorized. She said why? You do not have to just sit at home and... I said that I am very active, she says no you are not active, if you were active you would just... You cannot say it is a suffering, but it is a

like... not a good feeling. You know. It is like that. She does not know everything. How much active I am.

Another participant who does volunteer work at a place where people come for sharing lunch together tells of how challenging it can be to find good answers when facing commonly asked questions during the lunch.

Some of them (who are coming for lunch) they do not have friends, and then you just go to say hi, and then they are asking you about you, where you work and then this things. Sometimes you do not know really answer, which answer you will good for. Or which way you want to explain for them. They ask which country, did you work and how long you will be here. So these questions come and then... you know already. It will come when you work, at that time when you say I do not have work, why? There is question after that. So this one make you feel not good. You feel you are not good really.

The issue of presenting oneself and what it may imply if telling about being irregular is expressed as a challenge among the participants, particularly when doing volunteer work for people in the community. They reported several fears or worries regarding whether to tell about their status as irregular or not, and alternative consequences of that. One of the participants told me about the first meeting with the place she was supposed to work as a volunteer. She had chosen to tell the leader about being irregular and experienced that the leader did not know what it meant so she had to explain and heard the leader say: *But ok the people the one they come here, what we would tell about you?* The participant said that she was uncertain of how to answer the question, and continued to say:

When you [...] work voluntary, maybe if they know I am illegal maybe they do not feel comfort or maybe they are afraid (of) me. This is your feeling. Not people, your feeling, maybe they do not want me, maybe they do not like me, or maybe they are afraid me. I observed even the leader "what we will tell the people about you" you see. So there is something, you can make it question mark. What, what we will tell about you for the people...

Tina reported her strategies when facing questions from people who she meets when doing volunteer work in the community: *And yes, they are coming and asking. Do you work, or do you study or like that. I say for now I work voluntary. For now I say only. That is the only thing I can say...*

Sofia explained that it is negative view of irregular migrants in Norway and that she, by doing volunteer work, wanted to show that she actually wanted to work, and to help and do something good in the society. She informed me that she had met very many persons that,

when they got to know that she is irregular, reacted by asking why she is not returning to her home-country. She added that many believe that irregular migrants do not want to work, go to school or anything, and that they only want to receive money.

Unwrapping the participants' senses of security makes it possible to trace underpinnings of structural and institutional discourses which position irregular migrants in categories of "others" in the Norwegian society. It is thus fruitful to approach security as a *thick signifier*, including exploring the system of power relations that influence the discourse, sets categories and concepts, and who has the power to make it true. It was common reference to *them* as compared to *us* in the interviews, and the gap between. The *them* was as referred to persons with legal residency permission in Norway who the participants' consider having all the rights, opportunities and goods, now and for the future, while *us* share a common understanding and face similar difficulties, and experiences of being "in the same boat". Positioning *us* as lower down in the hierarchy of social positions and statuses affects feelings of self-identity. The sense of insecurity due to the experience of being defined as belonging to the category of "irregular migrant" and stereotypes attached to it which have been expressed by some of the participants, indicate that well-being has to be viewed as something more than fulfilling basic needs, which is also expressed in Chase's study (2013). The issue of *what we will tell about you* shows that the assigned label and identity as irregular affects agency. The label *irregular migrant* becomes more visible and superior over all other identities, and consequently other qualities become invisible. The feeling of self-identity in situations when doing volunteer work can so be seen in relation to the role and behavior the society expects irregular migrants to have; a role that gives limited room for making use of their own features and capabilities. These illustrations can be viewed in relation to Goffman's concept of stigma once the label is attached. The experience of self-identity is also closely related to ontological insecurity and security.

The findings also indicates some of the strategies the participants used in order to maintain their ontological security, by for instance using small lies or withholding pertinent information like Tina did. Such strategies are supported in Goffman's study of stigma (1963). Another strategy was explaining what it means to be irregular as reported by one of my participant. Moreover a strategy that some participants revealed was searching for attending activities particularly for irregular migrants with whom they may share similar experiences.

By doing volunteer work, the participants fought against ontological insecurity, including the stereotypes attached to the bad picture of irregular migrants as expressed by Sofia.

The following part of the chapter will describe and analyze how engagement in volunteer work may challenge and transform the participants' experience of belonging to the category of "others", and how this engagement relate to ontological security, improved well-being and shaping of identities.

8. The Helper

This part of the chapter will discuss how the participants by doing volunteer work may challenge the previous discussion of the complexity of being defined as “others” and experience of self-identity. It indicated that engagement in volunteer work may provide a base where previous experiences of self-identity can be reestablished and new, supplementary identities can be constructed which could bring hope and prospects for the future. An experienced narrow and thin identity related to the label of irregular migrant as discussed in the previous chapter can perhaps expand, become thicker and involve other parts of the individual’s characteristics. Thus volunteer work might improve the continuities in the biogeographically narratives; to be able to relate to past, present and future without the threat of losing the identity. The findings illustrates however that the wish to be a “helper” in a situation as irregular a Norwegian context has several reasons and several impacts, where even the appearance of “help” in itself does not always imply good outcomes. The findings and discussion are structured under the topics “I am a volunteer” and “help others and help myself” and these are much related to the participants’ experiences of the relation between volunteer work and health, well-being and ontological security.

8.1 “I am a Volunteer”

The participants have all come as asylum seekers. They have been emphasizing their need for protection and presented themselves as victims. They have not been believed. In their present situation, without the right to work and earn an income, they are depending on others for meeting their basic needs and have limited access to contribute or give something in return. When doing volunteer work the roles are shifting, they are no longer the one receiving help, they are the one helping others:

I want to be active and be fruitful in society, and I think that even though I am not allowed to work, but I know that every paperless are allowed to do volunteer work. Yes, it has several advantages, both for me myself, you know, and also for the others. And that is good. (Tina)

Tina said that the people she meet with when volunteering motivate her by giving her feedback on the good work she is doing and that she feel a sense of meaningfulness and importance: *And almost all (people that she helps), I became dependent on them, and them on me; when they see me they wave to me and say welcome, and welcome back. Yes, that gives a very, very good feeling.* She continued by saying: *You can show that you stand up for*

something, or that you are fruitful. It is somebody who is waiting for us. Somebody who cares about us. You feel positive. Yeah, like that.

By doing volunteer work, Tina experiences having regular social interactions with the same people, they recognize her and she recognizes them. She has been volunteering there for quite some time, two days a week. The predictability and attachment to the place and the people provide her a sense of safety; built upon the site of constancy and confidence, which are fundamental elements for an ontological secure person. Tina also experiences what she is doing as something meaningful; it has a purpose. The people she helped have been waiting for her and appreciate that she is there. That contributes to a positive sense of self and so ability to act.

Ola tells me how he experiences volunteer work as a way of helping and getting in touch with people and the society, and how it can give him a sense of worthiness. *I am glad to work voluntary when someone needs help; when they need help I can help some. [...] it can give me some energy too. I love it. I become very satisfied with it. That I for instance could do a good job, good things for example.* He continues to tell: *I liked the people very much. And usually, the people that we helped, were very happy, they smiled and served coffee and something else. And we were happy too, that was lovely.*

Thus participation in volunteer work provides a space for social recognition. By helping others, Ola interacted with the people he helped and got positive response on his job and himself as a person. He was someone who could help others; he could contribute with something that was meaningful. He also mentioned the element of voluntarism. The exchange of receiving and providing help voluntary; of own will without getting paid, gave a sense of satisfaction for Ola. By doing volunteer work, Ola got a good feeling and energy; it provided him with a positive sense of self, and a sense of agency.

The opportunity that volunteer work may bring concerning possibilities to show and experience positive sense of self is also expressed by one of the other participants: *Volunteer work, it is a very good way to communicate to the others, and it is not money that communicates everything. With volunteer work you are able to show your love. And to show yourself. Show that you are more aware and think about others.*

Lisa too reported her engagement in volunteer work as related to humanitarian work, which may be understood as connected to a positive sense of self: *I like to do some humanitarian work, I think a lot about that, and I like to do volunteer work.*

One of the participants had higher education and was able to utilize the skills and knowledge from the professional background when volunteering, something which the participants expressed pride and happiness about. She said: *Because I was loved in my work, therefore I went to* (place she was volunteering) *and said I want to work voluntary as* (her profession). When she is presenting herself for others she sometimes says *I am a volunteer*. I recognized that this role could help her to uphold a positive sense of self-identity. The value of volunteering with issues and concerns which one can identify oneself with is also recognized by one participant in Evans's (2013) study. As mental health is promoted by a work that matches one's skills (Burchett and Matheson 2010), it is possible to assume that the effect of volunteer work to some extent can depend upon the type of volunteer work one do.

All the participants expressed in a variety of ways good feelings they got by helping others. The next topic will explore these elements further.

8.2 “Help Others and Help Myself”

As the previous theme indicated; to help others brings good feelings. One of the participants said that: *We have two motivations of doing volunteer work; one is to help others and one is to help ourselves*. I believe those arguments are closely related. Knowing that irregular migrants generally are in a vulnerable situation due to restricted entitlements, structures and policies, the need of help is understandable. What “help” implies and consists of is shown to be composed of by several interconnected factors. As analyzed earlier; social recognition is an essential element. By feeling meaningful, fruitful and important for others is particularly important in a situation when much relying on others for fulfilling basic needs. Some participants expressed the good feelings attached to the ability to volunteer and give something “back” to places they have received help and support from. Similar experiences were found in Evans' (2013) study. The positive feelings are reinforced by experiencing the response; that the people you help appreciate it. Tina took contact with the place she is volunteering and offered her time and services. She said they appreciated it and experienced it as a good offer for them too, and explained how she got her own room there for carrying out her services for free. She tells: *There are many who are coming and they are satisfied, they*

become glad too, you know, when you experience others' happiness you yourself also feel happy.

Sofia said that the volunteer work she was doing made her feel good; *it is a way for feeling kind of valued. And to have something important to do.*

Several of the participants mentioned the limitations of feeling completely happy, and that the challenging circumstances in their everyday life were barriers for feeling whole and real. The quotation in 7.2 where one of the participants expressed the experienced gap between “us and them” and the differences when comparing with other volunteers, is also relevant here. As one of the participants expressed: *(...) the one like me, or undocumented, they go to help people they are happy, but other things when they need help that are not complete. [...] When I finish the work or when I am there, you go home you feel half happy. Not 100% you are happy.*

The feelings of what helping oneself implies can also be the appearance of fellowship. Several of the participants expressed the difficulties and loneliness related to lack of family and close friends, in addition to the exclusion from arenas of social interaction in the society. Ola does not have any family in Norway but he keeps contact with them through phone calls and internet. He informed me that he often tries to hide his difficult situation when he talks with his family since he does not want them to be worried. He used to say that he is doing fine, waiting for the residence, is working, having contact with friends and that he is happy and doing just fine, and he tells me: *But usually, I am very alone and lonely. Very lonely. It is tiresome.* He continues by saying that the engagement in volunteer work helped him since it made it possible for him to meet and interact with others: *I love to get to know people. To be in contact with people is a medicine for me. Then I think I am not alone (...)*

In addition to feelings of fellowship and belonging, the sense of help could also imply solidarity. One participant expressed for me how good she felt when they, at the place she volunteered, regularly used to gather in a circle, light a candle and pray for each other. She says that she does not understand everything due to language but she hears how the others say her name, and how she is enjoying those moments. She says that they also used to pray for her when she is not there, and how she use to think about that and how that makes her happy. The regular ritual provided her with a sense of recognition and self-esteem. It was a predictable and safe place, consisting of commonly the same people and the ritual was more or less the same every time. It can act as a safe space for sustaining hope and courage, important elements in order to feel ontological secure something I will discuss further later in the thesis.

Importantly too, is that the participants expressed how the positive moments they had when they did volunteer work could be re-experienced when reminiscing. In that way, they could actively use it as a strategy to cope with anxiety, hopelessness or other difficult emotions in their daily lives. Another participant also informed how she used to hear many humorous comments among the elderly at the place she was volunteering, and that she used to think about it the whole day and how that cheered her up.

Another perspective of “help” when doing volunteer work was to hear about other persons problems. To get to know that others also experience difficult life situations and need help, and could as one of the participants expressed *make your problem seems smaller*. Ola reported his experiences of helping others:

(...) It was nice, then I got a good experience, and it was lovely to work with people who needed help. Usually they did not have anyone to visit them or help them, and they couldn't trust other people that helped them, but they could contact the place where I was volunteering and that was better, more in peace to help them (...).

Some of the participant expressed that the need of help to meet basic needs such as food, shelter and healthcare, was the entrance to do volunteer work. By asking humanitarian organizations where to go for receiving help they also got in touch with places where they could do volunteer work. One of the participants revealed about her situation and reason for the first time to seek help at an immigration organization: *After my husband became sick and we almost had nothing to eat. And I had a child and I did not know how we could pay the rent....what we should eat and so on...*

She received some help, and later, when her husband felt better and could go back to work and her stress and concerns were reduced, she started to do volunteer work. This emphasizes that the ability to do volunteer work requires some capacity and resources. The fundamental necessities need to be realized. The need of finding solutions to meet basic needs in a position where several of the doors to legal incomes are closed, and at the same time wanting to work for free to help others is an understandable challenge. Very few of the participants received any supplies or financial goods when doing volunteer work. Two mentioned that they sometimes receiving food-bags from the place they were volunteering, one said she can pick clothes if available, one get something called “activity cards” which makes it possible for her children to attend some activities in Oslo for free, many said they could get lunch and a few reported of receiving gift cards at feasts, or things that the place they volunteered had received

and handed out sporadically. Two of the participants got travel tickets. The gifts, particularly travel tickets, could be necessary in order to be able to carry out the tasks as volunteer, something I will come back to later in the thesis. However, there were several factors that impact on the feelings of receiving something. The context in which it takes place; how it takes place and what it is to be given are just a few. Ola explained about his experiences when helping people in the community, and how good he felt by being invited to stay for some food in the peoples' homes: *They were lonely and that was tiresome. And then we talked with them. I remember one day when a lady was very satisfied with me and made waffles to me, and coffee, and we talked some together. And that was nice. That was lovely.* He continues by saying:

In my tradition, like I (in country), they want to help elderly people who have some problems. And respect them. And I loved to work voluntary and help the old people that needed help with cleaning, moving, for instance to carry the things. And it was for free, totally voluntary, no payment. Also I wanted to continue to learn Norwegian there but unfortunately, due to a tough job which was a night job, therefore I could not continue (...)

There were several examples of things material or nonmaterial that the participants reported, that they have received when volunteering. Learning was one important motive for doing volunteer work, and to take part in activities among several of the participants. It could also be learning behaviors, learning tasks or learning how to communicate. Several reported of how they experienced being denied learning in many other ways or arenas in their everyday life and emphasized the importance of therefore getting opportunities to learn quickly.

The data show that the experience of receiving something when doing volunteer work could contribute to increased self-esteem and feelings of worthiness. These positive moments and feelings were something some participants expressed as important memories they could think of later. Sofia received a card from a colleague at the place she volunteered, something I will come back to in chapter 9.3.

9. A Base to Escape

In the concept of ontological security a safe base can be viewed as a secure cocoon to which one can escape to in times of difficulties. It provides protection against threats, risks and helps to sustain hope and courage. It is also a place of maintaining identity, and where a positive-self is constructed. Trust and faith are fundamental elements that the secure base consists of, and can for instance develop by continuities and predictabilities in social interaction. It is a base where the individual can interact with others without the fear of losing his or her identity. This part of the chapter will examine if and then how the participants may experience volunteer work as a kind of safe and secure base to escape to when facing challenges in everyday life. It further tries to grasp understanding of the role volunteer work plays in their everyday life. “To forget”, “a mark in my empty calendar” and “to belong” are the topics in which this theme will be analyzed and discussed.

9.1 To Forget

One of the main motivations that the participants reported of for starting to engage in volunteer work was the opportunity to break or prevent isolation and to do something that could make them forget the problems and worries. As the next chapter will explore more in details; a matrix of reported mental health problems and concerns can both motivate and challenge the informants’ engagement in volunteer work. Like expressed by Tina: *If I was only about to sit at home, [...] and do not do anything, then you become only depressed, and think about an unknown future or so... then (when doing volunteer work) you will forget a little bit [...] you should not isolate yourself at home.* Maria also said she tried volunteer work as a strategy to find as she explained: *I want to run away from my problem, so I go that place to work voluntary. (...) You are hiding yourself that place.*

To do volunteer work was a good offer. Then I, in a way, got a chance to think about something else then the situation I am in [...] It was a way to keep myself busy, and since I had a very little network it was a very nice place to be, to get to know new people and to use my time. Use my time on something meaningful (Sofia)

This quotation indicates that volunteer work can be understood as a phenomenon that may increase ontological security in several ways; it provided a possible safe base to escape to in times of difficulties, where Sofia could forget some of the experienced problems in everyday life, and where she could utilize her recourses and do something meaningful which could

maintain a positive sense of self. By continuity interacting at the place she volunteered she built network and perhaps experienced an increased level of trust and faith.

Some explained how the “escape” from the difficulties did not only manifest at the particular time they did volunteer work, but also how they when remember and re-experience the good moments at other times could create an “escape-route”. One participant explained:

I was very happy because it was something I liked a lot, so it became like my hobby, to be with the elderly people. It was something that cheered me up. And it was not tiresome. Actually I would like it to be my work! I could forget much of the situation I was in.

Even though the aim is to be active with something else, the problems are hard to escape. The participants reported of different factors and events that reminded them, and particularly commonly asked questions by people they meet when volunteering. Maria problematized her experiences of this, and how different activities and volunteer work can imply different grades of opportunities to escape from her problems.

Yeah it depends, sometimes [...] your problem come to you, you are like this, [...] how long you will be like this, and then you think about your situation and these things. But even sometimes you are going in activity also [...] that thinking is coming to you, but more when you are at home. But this even you are in activity whatever but only my problem not come to me when I am (activities), because that time just I want to use the time, my time, and then if the people they do not ask me I forget. I observed this. Because I want to use the time you know. Before (activity) only 2 hours so I just I want to do all the (activity) and time also I am also always checking the time I did not think about my reason about my situation. And in (activity) also. Maybe I am too much interest in this one maybe if we are talking. So maybe I am interested so I just I forget. Maybe when we go home or when we take train or something it will come again to your mind.

She explained that it was easier to forget when doing practical work compare to only talking and socializing with people. It can thus be understood that by doing volunteer work which imply more practical work may increases the ontological security, since it may avoids some of the threats of losing one’s self-identity and being exposed to stigma. One participant tells about her experiences when talking to people at the place she is volunteering and how difficult it can be when they ask questions about her everyday life, and particularly about work.

I do not have... I do not have... I do not have right to work. If sometimes I say like that, there is again “why you do not have right”. Also you know this old people they want to more talk each other and this is not good feeling. To explain every time new. “Because of this one, because of this”... And when you start “because of this one”,

then you feel pain. You immediately going to your case, your reason capture your mind. When without you know how to explain for you and then the problem come to you, knocks your door and then “hey wake up” is here. Even you want to. So this... the bad side of volunteer work like undocumented people.

Peter talked about the difficulties he had in his situation as irregular and how he tried and often managed, even though he experienced a lot of stress, to go for volunteer work and how it helped him: *When it is difficult I do volunteer work anyway. Then I forget a bit, I have something to do. I have to think about something else. Then it is better. It helps.* Lisa too expressed of how her engagement in volunteer work could give her a kind of break where she could forget a little bit. She also said: *Sometimes I forget time when I do volunteer work. I and the one who is volunteering together with me can sit and eat and chat together and all sudden they came, point at the clock and tell us to hurry.* In this sense, volunteer work played an important role as both breaking situations of difficulties and improving dimensions of health by providing a base where the participants to some extent could forget some of their worries.

9.2 “A Mark in My Empty Calendar”

When I asked Lisa about her everyday life, what she use to do, she told me that if she had a calendar the only marks her calendar would have was the two appointments that she had for volunteer work. Peter tells me the same: that his calendar is nearly blank. The only appointments are commonly when he is volunteering. The importance of having appointments is something that all my participants talked about. It provides a sense of routine and stability in their everyday life which is often much unstructured. When life is unpredictable and consists of so much waiting, the volunteer work can be a way of structuring life as explained by Maria:

When you are sitting at home you have time but you are too much busy. With nothing. Nothing. Nothing only thing. Too much busy. But when you have something to do outside or training or these things, you are busy but still you have time. Because you make plan.

Sofia also talked about the lack of something meaningful and stable in her everyday life, and how volunteer work could add positive impacts and predictability in her situation. *The two days I did volunteer work I was very happy because I had something to look forward to. I felt like I had a place to go. The rest of the days I was mainly at home...*

To do volunteer work implies responsibility and obligations, to commit to the contract which was agreed upon together with the volunteer coordinator. Here explained by Tine: *I do not think about it as volunteer work, that I have to commit myself, when I am coming or leaving, and if I cannot come I have to inform. I am very precise when they, and I, when I am there, and I do the very best I can.*

Routine and continuity are relevant elements of ontological security. Doing volunteer work provided the day-to-day lives of the participants with a sense of stability and predictability which may contribute to experiences of increased ontological security.

9.3 To Belong

Can participation in volunteer work provide a sense of inclusion and belonging when exclusion and marginalization is experienced in so many ways at so many levels?

Sofia said that she felt welcome when she came to the place where she was volunteering. They had done a good deal so that she got coffee, tea and lunch for free. She explained that it was very nice to be there, that the people there were so nice and positive towards her. Every time she is coming they will introduce her to the others and tell that she is here today to help. That, she says, is really nice. Also Tina reported feelings of belonging and fellowship where she is volunteering: *I like it there, and also the others became happy when they meet me.*

Even though my participants expressed positive words about the people at the place where they were volunteering, it seems like none of them used to meet their colleagues outside. One of the participants mentioned for me an act by a person that had become very meaningful for her at the place she volunteered:

One of the persons that worked at the place I volunteer went on maternity leave and she gave me a postcard before she left. She wrote that she is going to come back after one year, and wished me all the best meanwhile. I have been thinking about her often, and thought of visiting her when she is back...

She reached for her bag and found the postcard and showed it to me. She had been carrying it with her for several months.

Lisa explained to me that she did volunteer work when she stayed in a reception center. She told me about her experiences and feelings of inclusion and belonging to the other staff at the center.

You know, what happened in the reception center was that I was treated like one of the workers in the reception center, because I was doing volunteer work there. So when it was Christmas gathering, I was invited. And when it was Easter holiday they used to take me with them when they traveled somewhere, going on a trip and like that. So I was like one of them, one of the employees.

She explained that there were a few more people who did volunteer work at the reception center, but that the staff used to always ask *her* if they needed help with something. She was very happy for being the one they asked, out of all who stayed in the reception center.

Lisa is currently doing volunteer work at place where people gather for lunch and she explain the atmosphere for me:

Everyone is very talkative, and everyone talks together. The one who sit next to you talk to you. [...] They ask you where you are from, what is your name [...] these kinds of questions. And they are very nice. Until now I have only had positive experiences of Norwegians generally actually, besides that they do not give legal permit.

She expressed that the language could be a challenge when communicating with others during the lunch, since she does not speak well Norwegian.

One of the participants reported of her experiences volunteering at places with several volunteers. She expresses her happiness to be attached to, and to contribute to these places: *I think it is very nice, it feels good to help others. It is not only the particular tasks, but you also learn a lot. Because I see how they who work there treat the people who are coming to receive help. And I learn a lot from that.* She emphasized the social interaction that was happening at the places where she was volunteering, and that she learnt from that. In that sense she experienced herself as belonging to the places and to the others who were working there. However, at the same time she reported a sense of exclusion in relation to the other volunteers as she expressed: *I wish I was like them and could do what they do.*

As mentioned earlier, since there are few places in Oslo who publically invite irregular migrants, the arenas where they can seek social recognition and belonging are limited. Several of the participants though expressed a sense of belonging to the Health Center:

Health Center is really specially for undocumented people, that is like home you know. For example [...] you have family or home what you need you have to ask you are not ashamed or you do not think they will not give me [...] Health Center like that; just we go and we are, we get help and we are very happy I think everyone the one who have this things.

The data indicates that some participants reported having few friends and small networks, particularly few Norwegian friends. Some said they had contact mainly with people of whom they shared nationality or residency status and that volunteer work could be a good way of meeting others. Some participants mentioned that the Diaspora networks were important for them. Two for instance told of being involved in meetings, demonstrations etc. and those provided a lot of practical help and emotional support. Thus the participants expressed several different experiences of inclusion simultaneously as reported feelings of exclusion. The place for volunteer work, Health Centre and Diaspora network could all in different ways contribute to experiences of belonging.

10. Volunteer Work and Health

The previous chapters have already come across several dimensions of health related to participant's experiences of doing volunteer work and there is little doubt that health aspects should be included and considered in the study. The participants mentioned several conditions that have huge impact on their everyday life as irregular and on their opportunities and experiences of doing volunteer work. They commonly spent time telling about dimensions and conditions of health before they were able to approach experiences of volunteer work, as expressed by one of the participants during the interview: *And then, NOW can we talk about volunteer work (laughing), because after a long story when I have sum-up, we were supposed to talk, but I had more to tell...*

The participants informed me about chronic diseases and the need for detailed follow ups by doctors, about pain and reduced mobility in limbs and about heart problems. Most of all they reported mental health problems such as depression, anxiety, and headache and sleep disturbance. Two of the participants reported of problems related to memory, particularly when experiencing high levels of inner stress. Several of these health conditions explained by participants can easily be interconnected to their irregularity, and sometimes understood as a condition caused by the difficulties they experience as irregular in Norway. Their conditions and experiences of exclusion and marginalization, and the constant stress and fear that the participants expressed, is often a direct effect of being irregular in Norway as Peter said: (...) *you do become sick in this situation.*

The waiting, a constant waiting, without knowing for how long, and the terrifying moment of receiving letters from the migration agencies is expressed by many as something that have a huge impact on their lives. The data indicates that their residency status prevents them to access services and exercise rights and that it has severe impacts on their health, well-being and ontological insecurity. These are some of the findings that in this part of the thesis will be drawn upon and linked to the need experience oneself and the world as real, alive, whole and continuous in time, space and context in order to realize a sense of agency. The first part of the chapter called "We have winter inside" presents some of the participants' reported health problems which do influence and are influenced by engagement in volunteer work, while the following "Challenging Fear" look into dimensions of fear and worries that participants face and fought in day-to-day life and when doing volunteer work. The chapter closes by presenting and reflecting upon the participants' everyday survival and whether volunteer work

can be a strategy to improve and maintain health, well-being and ontological security. I have named it “Sustaining of Hope and Control”.

10.1 “We Have Winter Inside”

There are several different ways of expressing experienced health problems that are found in the material. One example is Maria who said “we have winter inside” when trying to make me understand how she felt and experienced her health. I have heard participants telling of several conditions and factors that influence and are influenced by the experienced health, well-being and ontological security, and consequently the ability to engage in volunteer work. One of the participants had for instance thought of beginning to do volunteer work, but the answer from UDI influenced her health and ability to get involved at that particular time she got the offer.

(...) I remember I was invited (to do volunteer work) but that time [...] I was too much problem. I couldn't do that because UDI, always they give me negative answer. So [...] when the problem comes, until I forget that problem, [...] sometimes I cannot control myself. Too much stress and full of crying and then I miss my energy. And that time a lot of problem with me because, when I apply for family reunion they reject, when I apply OK voluntary return they reject. And they [...] they tell me OK we want to [...] expel your case. So these things make [...] me too much crazy, and then I was too much sick that time. I think because of that problem I have this, my (pain in a limb) yeah because that time, (year) it started.

The answer from the immigration authorities affected her health in a variety of ways and she continued by explaining how much these answers also affect her ability to continue to enjoy the good things she experienced when she participated in volunteer work and activities:

(...) sometimes when you hear these negative things, you become hopeless. When you are becoming hopeless you forget aaaall this good things. And then you miss your energy. Sometimes you want to stop, not going (to the place she is volunteering). Your mood immediately changes. You need that time [...] someone to help you to solve that problem, and just you want to go out from that problem. [...] I am looking way to out of that problem, but you cannot, you come again like circle you know, you come to that place again [...] You have to be too much strong to pass this, especially when you hear something that is worst time for you. Until you survive.

Her explanation of how the residency status affects her experiences of health and agency is supported by some of the other participants. I have also heard of similar expressions when interacting with other persons who are irregular at work. Five of the participants reported about seeking health care in order to get help and ease some of their worries and concerns.

Three of the participants explained that they experienced the help they got from the psychologist was a kind of kick-off for beginning with volunteer work. The importance of access to mental health care and the motivation and support given by psychologists as a kick-off for beginning to do volunteer work is also found in Evans's (2013) study. With limited entitlements and access to health care the Health Center is for several of my participants an important place. One participant expressed *you can say that it is like my permanent house. Always I have a lot of problems and then going there. Only by knowing that the Health Center is available and accessible could ease some of the experienced health problems like expressed by Maria: (...) If you do not have access to follow ups... even the stress makes you more sick. Now I know already I have somewhere to checkup [...] about my health so I am not so worried about this.*

Ola explained for me how he experienced his health and how it was related to the residency status and the conditions associated with it.

I got so many stressors and problems and difficult situations, and problems with work since I got negative answer and did not have working permit and did not have legal residency. Also I got psychological problems due to this situation I experienced. And at reception centers and after that I could not sleep. Usually I have problems with sleep, and sleep only 3-4 hours, sometimes 2 hours, sometimes only 30min and get up again, and sleep approximately 30min again. And it is burning in my whole body. And I have problems. Also I think many times that I should stop this life, and I am thinking of suicide.

Ola stopped doing volunteer work at a time when he experienced the health problems. He expressed that he wanted to be active because it helps him and makes him feel better, but how health influences his ability to engage in activities *(...) I couldn't do that. Not for example forget everything [...] it becomes difficult. When I see a picture at for instance at Facebook and TV I am in chock directly. I cannot control myself, I do not know why. I become angry immediately.*

Maria too, did not do volunteer work when she went through a period of overwhelming health problems: *Sometimes I just [...] cannot control myself, [...] I shake my body and then I feel like I am falling down. These things happen to me when I have too much problem and once I start crying I cannot stop.*

My data indicates that engagement in volunteer work requires a stage of stability and health conditions that provide the individual with a sense of agency. These finding are supported by

Evans's (2013, 15) study, as expressed by one of her participants: *It can be really difficult to volunteer if you do not have a settled life.*

The experience of a life on hold, consisting of unlimited waiting, is an obvious determinant on the participants' ill health. As expressed by one of the participants: *It is very hard to be undocumented. Very hard. And the problem: there is no limit how long...*

Another determinant having negative impact on health which I found in my material is the reported feeling of being a burden for others. One participant expressed: *with my husband also I [...] disturb him because always I am talking about my case and then, at home we do not have any good relation, not because of him but because of me. Because always I am crying.*

10.2 Challenging Fear

During all interviews the issues of fear has been mentioned in several ways. Fear and threats are embedded in day-to-day survival at multiple levels; of being taken by the police and sent back to their countries of origin, maintaining health, managing daily necessities, prospects for the future for themselves, their family and children, but also the fear for losing self-identity by being excluded, criminalized, de-humanized or attached to other stigmatizing characteristics. By being engaged in volunteer work, the participants challenge the different dimensions of fear. Their experiences indicate that the engagement can reduce experienced ontological insecurity, help them to maintain an ontological security, however it may also complicate and produce additional ontological insecurity. One of the reported fears was the fear for deportation, as expressed by Sofia: *I was very afraid of getting deported. I knew how hard it was to go to Norway. And if I was about to be deported I knew it should be very difficult. So whoever I met, both in public and private, I feared a lot.*

Another of the participants told me about her experiences during the first years as irregular when her husband became critical sick and refused to go to hospital:

(...) if we go (to hospital) they will report us to the police. I said when the life is in danger it is ok. But (he) said no, if we travel back (to country of origin) it is going to be the same. He was very worried for me too. [...] We had to wait until a doctor could take us in the night.

The data shows that fear was reported to be embedded and manifested in day-to-day life in several of the participants' situations. It influenced their choices of where and when to be and whom to interact with. It could for instance affect the searched for help as an example from one of the participants who reported of how it was to bring her child to the health clinic for children: *That we felt with fear, anxiety and fright. That was what we carried with us all the time.*

Ola also reported fear attached to so many things; the employer, his situation, difficulties with accommodation. About everything that he is thinking about; about helping his family and what is going to happen with his life in the future. Here he explains how the fear is constant and embedded in his body and mind.

Very afraid. [...] When I walk, I do not know why, I do not have stress but I think always I am afraid. Always in my life. When I was a child and it was war in my country; when I left my country; when I stayed in different countries; when I saw a policeman in for instance (countries), I was usually afraid. I do not know why. But I did not do anything for instance wrong. [...] now in Norway it is getting quite much. I walk and usually, except when I think about something, [...] I fear for police, and at once I start sweating and feel stress and walk faster but feel I become slower for them. And that I do not know, I haven't experience it at other places I stayed before I came to Norway. Usually when I walk at the street I get those stressors (...)

The constant worries and fear experienced by the participants in everyday life could be expressed and shown differently. The material indicates that fear could be triggered by watching TV programmes reporting from war and conflicts, or as expressed by Ola:

(...) when I see the children who are dying [...] or when I see a picture of people who suffering from lack of food or sleep, then I am getting nervous, angry, worried, at once. At once I become angry. But I do not like to say those things because when I say it I become angry actually. Very angry. But it is OK.

Several participants reported experiences of suffering from health conditions which consisted of a matrix of pre-, mid- and post migration experiences. One participant reported of dreams which reflect all these stages and the negative impacts on the experienced health and well-being:

So many dreams, weird and uncomfortable dreams, and I am afraid. For instance the police comes, or I am on my way to Europe, or I am at the mountain, or that they catch me and send me back to my home-country, or I have no place to stay for example. Or when I sleep and think that it will be a control at work, or like that. That happens often. (...) I have heart problems when I cannot sleep, and stressing, I couldn't breathe sometimes. And become totally, totally breathless, also I couldn't

move the arm or the body. It is very painful. And sometimes it is like a pen that goes in and stabs in my heart. During day, during night, both.

Another reported fear was the one of thinking or being reminded of the problem, a fear reported by all my participants. The problem was a complex combination of elements associated with pre- mid- and post migration experiences, the later reflecting limitations the residency status implies, including experiences of identity. The reported fears are for instance fear of others getting to the residence status and so fear that they may fear you or fear of not being good enough. As discussed in the previous chapter; volunteer work can be an escape-route, but it also involves a risk of an opposite effect since it entails threats to be reminded of experienced problems. This becomes particularly visible when meeting and interacting with people while volunteering and facing commonly asked questions, a challenge all participants talked about. The strategies participants reported were either to avoid questions that could remind them; make small lies when facing questions regarding it; or telling the true. Both Peter and Ola reported of strategies to avoid telling about being irregular and the reasons for that:

I don not want to talk about it. It is tiresome. I want to avoid it, to stop the conversation. Because I become very sad. It is hard to be reminded when people ask questions. I don not tell everybody. But when they ask where I am coming from, if I work and when I say no, why not and so on. I try to avoid. I never tell how I am doing. I just say it is OK. (Peter)

Ola explained:

I have never told anyone about my situation, just now a little bit to my, same as today, to my psychologist. I do not want to tell about my situation to people. (...) Usually when you meet new people they ask you how long time you have stayed here in Norway, if you go to school, what you work with, about school how many years you have been at school and so on. Then it is tiresome, and sad. I couldn't answer anything. Also I am not happy (...) Yeah. Automatically you get problems, psychological problems.

Tina often meets with new people when she does volunteer work and she faces questions which are difficult to answer: (...) *you see, you cannot say it you know. They say oh, you are working as volunteer and you come two days a week! Are you rich, are you a millionaire since you do not need money? Why are you working as volunteer? And I have nothing to say...* When I asked her of possible difficulties when doing volunteer work she said: (...) *it is just, the one thing you know; you might not get trust. I would like to have trust to the others and*

share with the others but no, I do not feel trust. That is the only thing you suffer from, that you cannot say everything to everyone (...)

The material indicates that it is not either or. The participants carefully choose when they tell about their situation as irregular and whom they tell. As exemplified by Tina: *But when they wanted to offer me, perhaps a permanent job, then I had to explain.* In addition several of the participants feared to lie, an element that complicates the wish to avoid telling, here expressed by Ola: *I do not have any choice, I always answer the truth (...) I do not like when someone who wants to know asks, but OK, it is OK, I say it. But it is very tiresome when you tell about your difficult situation.*

One of the strategies Sofia made use of in order to avoid being reminded was to refrain taking photographs. She said she did not want to take pictures since she do not want to remember this time. This statement points to a sense of discontinuity in biographical narratives which is a central element of ontological insecurity.

The participants explained to me how they challenged experienced fear and reported taking a lot of risks in their day-to-day life and when doing volunteer work. Tina explained how difficult it was to be irregular at the regular house-renting market: *I [...] also fear to rent accommodation, because it is very difficult when you do not have any paper. To sign a contract, we had huge problem.* Sofia, as several of the other participants, experienced fear related not being able to pay for public transport: (...) *Yes I took risks. I did not only take risks when I worked as a volunteer but also it was difficult when I did not have ticket. I did not want to sit at home. I wanted to be able to go out...* Sofia use to tell and encourage others to do volunteer work since she believes it is (...) *a nice thing to do.* She said: *The only disadvantage with doing volunteer work, if it was something I could change, it would be to receive travel tickets [...] there are many who want to do volunteer work but who are afraid since they cannot pay the tickets to go there and back.*

One of the participants expressed the dependency of the income her husband's work generated. He was also irregular and she reported of much fear and stress related to the conditions of his work, and the unpredictability attached to it. She said that he had no choice; he had to work even if he was sick and that he had no right to get sick-leave. She continued by saying:

(...) how can you... if you do not get any help from the public, and if you do not have a working permit, what shall you do? And always I am saying, black job means you are

not paying taxes, and that is illegal here in Norway. But if you only have little money, only to make living, then I do not think it should be called like this “black job”. Yeah. And my husband had to, since we were in a very stressful situation...

To work as volunteer when not having a permanent work is challenging. Travel expenses are something almost all participants expressed as a factor that were fundamental and that lack if it limits their ability to do volunteer work. Traveling without ticket was risky, and the fear for being caught in a ticket-control was high. A few of the participants had an option to borrow a monthly travel card from friend. Many of the participants said that they have not told or asked to receive anything, including tickets, at the place they did volunteer work. The needs include not only the basic substitutes, the scope of needs could sometimes be overwhelmingly, and the root of all needs could in several ways be tracked to the lack of legal residency. Tina told a colleague about her situation. The colleague expressed that she did not understand the rejection Tina got from the immigration authorities and stated that *they have to get permit*. Tina felt the support from the colleague but also the powerlessness of not knowing how one in her situation could be helped. *But I do not know how they help us. No, I do not know. It is like the only thing I can get from them is a certificate. Nothing more. And I do not receive any salary from there. Nothing. I get nothing. Nothing.*

Also Maria expressed the feeling of powerlessness: (...) *you do not know how to solve, that is why making you hopeless.*

10.3 Sustaining of Hope and Control

I have been to psychotherapist, and taken medicine. But after all this, it became much better, and after I begun doing volunteer work, see now I am in very good shape! Even though I have some like... due to this situation you know, it is not totally nice and good, but you feel much better than to sit at home and think about what will happen in the future and what we shall do etc. yes. So it is a good thing.

Tina's expression indicates that her engagement in volunteer work has positive impacts on her overall health and well-being. Hence it also touches upon the need of reaching a minimum stage of mental health before being able to do volunteer work, and the limitations of fully enjoying it.

There is no doubt that the exclusionary life conditions that irregular migrants share influence their capability to do volunteer work, which the thesis has several examples of. Like Peter for instance who talked with me about his daily life and the place where he does volunteer work.

He says that the days go up and down; sometimes it is a little bit better, but sometimes he does not have hope, and no strengths. And when he experience those difficult days, he says that the others will recognize it, that it is shown in his face. However, he has overcome the bad days and goes for volunteering several days a week. The data thus indicates that volunteer work may provide some strengths and hope. Lisa expressed how her engagement in volunteer work gave her hope and dreams for the future: *It is good. It is also psychologically satisfying. And the day I get legal permit, if I get it, then I am going to be like them, who give and who do volunteer work, but for my country.*

To sustain hope and control could often be a challenge, as Ola explained: *In so many years I have had a difficult situation here. I want to make a good life for myself in Norway; I want to experience a normal life, in my life, in the world (...)* He informed me that he had a lot of hope and energy when he arrived in Norway, but that it has decreases with time, and so had the dreams: *I had dreams but they are gone...*

Maria explained to me how she fought to keep control and autonomy, in a life situation which is consisting of regulations, limitations and restrictions:

You know always I want to control myself, always, I do not want to give up, always I want to control myself. Because I want to be ME, I do not want to give up, I do not want to become sick, I do not want to... I have to control myself by any means. As soon as I am alive (...). Because when you are thinking bad things you are missing the good things. So I do not want to miss my health.

Uncertain and unpredictable prospects for the future make it difficult to plan, imagine and think and about future. The participants reported the unpredictability as both related to their residential status and situation in Norway, as expressed by Maria:

(...) I have a plan to continue (doing volunteer work). Still I am ok I want to continue. But sometimes [...] without you knowing [...] if we hear from UDI when you get some rejected I think [...] until you forget that, it make you really difficult situation. (...) and then... again you survive. Until you hear something again...

But the uncertainty is also related to the situation in their home-countries. To return, to fight injustice, to contribute and to live home in peace were some of the reported dreams. Like expressed by Ola: *If my country was free...*

The data shows that there are several external and internal coping strategies which the participants tried to make use of in time of difficulties. Religion and faith in God was one

internal coping strategy which provided some of the participants with hope and courage. Ola explained to me that training was a strategy which could help him but that it sometimes was difficult to do it: *I think I must run or train some. If I could I should do that and not think. That's good for health, for everything; for not thinking for not getting psychological problems or sleep problems.*

10.3.1 November Trees



This is a November-Tree, without leaves and with no flowers. Without hope like us. We lose everything – school, work and all rights. As November-Trees we survive, and wait for the day we can bloom⁵

⁵ This picture is from the Facebook group and community organization called *Mennesker i Limbo*. It is a group of irregular migrants who are fighting for recognition and improvements of the situation for irregular migrants in Norway. They have allowed me to use it. I have translated the quotation from Norwegian to English.

11. Concluding Remarks

This thesis has examined irregular migrants' experiences of doing volunteer work in Oslo, Norway. As a researcher, but also a coordinator for a Mental Health Project at the Health Center for undocumented migrants in Oslo and an activist, I have entered the field with engagement, curiosity and pre-understandings. My position was an advantage in both approaching the field and gaining trust, and I feel it is somewhat like Erving Goffman wrote "To describe the patient's situation faithfully is necessarily to present a partisan view" (1961, 18) For this last bias I partly excuse myself by arguing that the imbalance is on the right side of the scale, since almost all literature is written by police, media and professionals who tend to represent irregular migrants in a dichotomous framework as either violators of Norwegian law or as victims of wars, famines, unscrupulous smugglers and exploitative employers of gross underpaid workers. By trying here to let irregular migrants represent themselves rather than be represented, I have tried to challenge this oneness. In so doing, my position has required me to think honestly and reflect critically on a range of ethical issues.

By utilizing in-depth interviews and participant observation I have learnt from participants' subjective experiences, thoughts and feelings attached to being engaged in volunteer work. I have gained insight how participation in volunteer work is experienced and perceived, what role volunteer work play in their everyday life, and how it influences and are influenced by their health, well-being and ontological security. I have made use of the concept of ontological (in)security to analyze, illustrate and understand the findings.

Positioned in the margins; territorially inside and simultaneously legally outside the Norwegian society; structural vulnerable, defined and constrained by control mechanisms at different political and societal levels; and in a situation described as one of *limbo*, irregular migrants live their lives and search for strategies to cope and to combat experienced deprivation of existing. With limited legal recognition in the Norwegian society, irregular migrants are partial invisible and their possibilities for social recognition are consequently restricted. By doing volunteer work, irregular migrants enter a space where they become visible and achieve social recognition.

The participants in this study are men and women who have come to Norway as asylum seekers but after being denied protection they are currently residing in Norway without a legal permission and as irregular migrants. They are everything except a homogenous group; rather they are individuals with different backgrounds, experiences and stories. Their present

situations, living conditions and health cannot fit in one single explanation nor do their engagements in volunteer work fit into one single pattern. However there are tendencies and patterns of themes in the material that are commonly illustrated by the participants, and there is no doubt that their engagement in volunteer work has an important role in the everyday life of the participants. None of the participants had experiences from doing work they defined as volunteer work before coming to Norway. In the Norwegian context they met with a sector enabling people to do volunteer work in a well-established system where volunteers are registered and provided with the title volunteer. This title seems important in several respects: it provides a supplementary label of experienced identity consisting of several elements such as being active, working, contributing and caring involving their own will which they can make use of when presenting themselves. For women and men accustomed to being defined by authorities and various bureaucracies, the experience of defining themselves as active agents has great significance. For each of these people, there is much pride attached in defining oneself as a volunteer. The interview data indicates there were two interlinked motives for doing volunteer work: one was to help others and the other, to help one's own self - two interlinked objectives. To achieve the aim of helping oneself was a complex process and *help* in itself often could be an unclear concept which seemed unreachable among persons experienced in feeling positioned in the category of "others".

The interview material made clear that engagement in volunteer work provided the day-to-day lives of the participants with a sense of routine, structure and predictability. It was a plan, a mark in an empty calendar. Without volunteer work their days consisted of tiny handful of routine elements but being "*too much busy with nothing*" as one participant put it. By doing volunteer work, the participants reported feeling that they did something meaningful. In day-to-day life they reported that they depended too much on others while experiencing that they had few possibilities to give something in return. This was reversed however when they were doing volunteer work: they were not the ones receiving, they were instead the ones providing. By being able to assist others who needed help and by providing something in return to organizations from whom they had gotten assistance, they were able to show for themselves and others that they had agency and were actors in their own lives. By helping others as volunteers, they helped themselves.

The interview data showed that volunteer work increased the participants' continuity in biographical narratives as they were able to utilize their skills and experiences which had been

disrupted by lack of both entitlements and abilities for visualizing and telling about their lives and themselves to others. This work, too, provided them with an opportunity to learn something new, which gave them courage, strength, hope and prospects for the future. Learning volunteer work could also be associated with a sense of an increased control in own life. The positive moments experienced when doing volunteer work were happenings they later used to remind themselves of in tackling new situations as a kind of internalized coping strategy. They reported of humorous stories, moments of shared solidarity, appreciation and praise which made them feel good. These features are closely related to an increased ontological security.

Health is indeed a crucial determinant which influences both the ability to engage in volunteer work and the outcome of doing volunteer work. Experienced health problems due to pre-mid-and/or post migration were obvious among all participants, particularly within mental health. Volunteer work was sometimes a difficult option which some participants reported as experiencing as increasing levels of stress and anxiety related to meeting basic needs or being denied a legal status. Seen from my experiential perspective, mental health problems appeared to represent a gigantic barrier for many irregular migrants wishing to participate in routine activities and volunteer work among the Health Center's patients. My findings indicate, on the other hand, that volunteer work is for some a useful strategy for overcoming mental health problems. Participants reported and explained how they felt better when doing volunteer work.

For some, this kind of work was described as something they could escape to and forget some of the problems, worries and concerns involved with frightening experiences and trajectories of their past, present and future lives. In this space of volunteering to which they escaped to, they reported experiencing it as a *secure base*, what Giddens calls a *protective cocoon* (1991:40). In the *secure base* they seem to be able to challenge the label of irregular migrants and the stereotypes that they felt were attached to them as *the others*. The base appeared to give them a space instead to construct and maintain a positive self-identity. This has to be viewed in relation to security, and security as the *thick signifier* enabling individuals to unwrap the structural forces defining and positioning them as irregular migrants impacting negatively on their sense of security. The different dimensions of security, insecurity and fear are embedded in the lives of the participants and are visible in a variety of ways in the material. Their constant fears of deportation and associated disrupted trajectories for the

future cause great distress and fears about everyday survival among them. Even stronger, however, were the fears of the participants reported of losing self-identity in interaction with others as well as being reminded of the label of irregular migrants. The data indicates that there is much ambivalence whether to join activities and do volunteer work for people in the community *or* for other irregular migrants. The search for belonging and inclusion in the community involves risks of being faced with questions that can threaten both the physical- and the ontological security. Engagement with people of which they shared a mutual legal status can on one hand entails feelings of inclusion but on the other hand jeopardize the experiences of exclusion, otherness and ontological insecurity.

The findings indicate that trust is an essential element of volunteering: one that has a key role as a determinant of their experienced health, well-being and ontological security. The participants informed how they gained a sense of trust, belonging and inclusion by routinely being at the same place, doing the same tasks and interacting with the colleagues, users and volunteers over time. In this sense, volunteering can be understood as a *secure base* to which one can escape.

Nonetheless, participants also reported that engagement in volunteer work is not always positive. Some expressed experienced ambivalence attached to social interaction when volunteering. Interaction with new people, for example, could disrupt biographical narratives and threaten self-identity and ontological security by innocently asked questions reminding participants of their problems, their legal status and the prejudices attached to the experienced category of “others”. In interacting with others, they reported sometimes being forced to lie in order to avoid insecurity at both a legal and ontological levels. At those times, the *secure base* they aimed to escape to seemed to become a threat inhibiting their ability to be a self-defining agency with an autonomous self. Despite these problems, participants persevered defying the pain and insecurity they might encounter in the hope that the positive elements in the long run would prevail. For the participants, volunteering seemed to represent a matrix of internal and external coping strategies such as attitudes and networks providing them with strengths, courage and hope - all contributing to increase their ontological security.

This thesis indicates that volunteer work has an important role in the everyday life of the irregular migrants who participated in the study. Engagement in volunteer work has several

positive impacts on their health, well-being and ontological security. Important though is that it is shown not to be either or, but in relation to a matrix of different factors that influences the experienced feelings of self-identity, belonging, trust and security when doing volunteer work. I believe that some of the findings in this study can be similar and transferable to experiences of other groups on the margins of society who engages in volunteer work, differently though is the extreme situation of irregular migrants due to limited rights and the real threat to their security; be deported.

There are several factors I was unable to explore in this thesis owing to space and time limitations which I would encourage researchers to examine further. One of the notable findings that would be interesting to explore further I got from the participants' reporting of doing volunteer work when they stayed at reception centers. That makes me curious about volunteer work opportunities and engagements among people staying at reception centers and the centers' recognition and facilitation of opportunities where volunteering can occur. This may be of particular importance in light of the findings of other studies indicating difficulties accumulating for asylum seekers experiencing unpredictable waiting periods at reception centers. I furthermore encourage practitioners to facilitate and arrange opportunities for irregular migrants to do volunteer work, and to pay additional attention and carefully following up due to the particular challenges but also opportunities that this study has learn from.

I will close this thesis with two quotations that explains some of the features of this thesis, and which shall be brought into future actions: As expressed by Burchett and Matheson (2010, 8): *The construction of a formidable set of barriers preventing refused asylum seekers from utilizing their energy and talents not only wastes qualifications and skills; it wastes lives.*

And as illustrated by one of my participants:

(...) try to best to go volunteer work. Yeah. Not stop, because if you are afraid some things and [...] because of that you miss the good things, that is bad. So even it hurt you, but do it. To go activity and volunteer is with our situation very important. Otherwise [...] we make it worse because [...] if you do not have anything to do, always you are thinking your problem. And this affect you, it affect your health if affect everything, with the people, everything. And then you miss always your dignity and your power and always like you are useless so it is not good for you, for undocumented people. By any means they have to make this volunteer work and activities.

Appendices

I. Request for interview and statement of Consent

II. Interview Schedule

Appendix I. Request for interview and statement of consent

Invitasjon om å delta i forskningsprosjekt som handler om papirløse migranternes erfaringer og opplevelser av å gjøre frivillig arbeid i Norge

Mitt navn er Linnea Näsholm, jeg er sosionom og studerer på Høgskolen i Oslo og Akershus der jeg tar en master i internasjonal sosial velferd og helse. Jeg skriver min masteroppgave om papirløse migranternes erfaring og opplevelse av å gjøre frivillig arbeid i Norge. Min motivasjon er å dokumentere og dele viktige fortellinger som mange ikke får høre om. Jeg ønsker å bidra til økt kunnskap og bevissthet blant organisasjoner innenfor frivillighetssektoren, politikere og andre som er i kontakt med målgruppen, slik at papirløse migranternes velbefinnende kan tas mer på alvor. Min veileder heter Michael Seltzer og han er professor på avdeling for samfunnsfag på Høgskolen.

Jeg ønsker å snakke med personer som er uten gyldig opphold i Norge og som gjør frivillig arbeid minst 1 gang i uken gjennom en organisasjon. Samtalen vil ta ca 1 tim og jeg vil bruke en semi-strukturert intervju metode. Det innebærer at jeg har noen åpne spørsmål, for eksempel hva som kan være fint og godt med å gjøre frivillig arbeid og hva som kan være utfordrende eller vanskelig. Jeg ønsker å fokusere på din opplevelse og knytte det til begreper som omhandler tilhørighet, identitet, velbefinnende og rutine. Jeg kommer å spørre deg om hva type frivillig arbeid du gjør og hvilke oppgaver du har, men ikke hvor du utfører det. Jeg vil at du skal fortelle med dine ord om hva som er viktig erfaring og opplevelse for deg når du gjør frivillig arbeid her i Norge. Samtalen skal handle om det du opplever her og nå, og ikke om din reise hit eller om din tid i andre land. Du bestemmer selv hva du vil, og ikke vil fortelle om. Du trenger for eksempel ikke fortelle hva du heter eller hvor du bor. Det er kun jeg og min veileder som kommer å ha tilgang til de personopplysningene du deler med meg og jeg skal oppbevare de utilgjengelig for andre. I oppgaven kommer du å være anonym, det skal ikke være mulig å knytte det du forteller om til deg. Jeg vil gi deg mulighet til å lese og kommentere det jeg skriver før jeg publiserer det.

Jeg vil gjennomføre samtalen på norsk eller engelsk, men hvis du ønsker å snakke et annet språk kan du om du vil ta med en du er kjent med som kan oversette i samtalen, eller kan vi bestille profesjonell tolk. Vi kan gjennomføre intervjuet på Høgskolen, men hvis det ikke passer for deg kan du få bestemme en annen plass vi kan møtes. Under samtalen kommer jeg å ta notater og bruke en lydopptaker som kan hjelpe meg til å huske nøyaktig det du forteller om. Prosjektet skal etter planen avsluttes innen september 2014, alle notatene og lydopptaket skal jeg da slette.

Å delta på prosjektet og snakke med meg er frivillig. Hvis du deltar kan du også ombestemme deg og trekke deg når du vil og du trenger ikke å oppgi noen grunn. Din deltakelse eller hvis du ombestemmer deg vil ikke påvirke forholdet mellom deg og meg. Det vil heller ikke ha noen påvirkning på ditt forhold til plassen du utfører frivillig arbeid på. Jeg utfører studien som student ved Høgskolen, og ikke som ansatt ved Helsesenteret for papirløse migranter. Ditt forhold med Helsesenteret og med min posisjon der vil derfor ikke heller bli påvirket. Jeg vil gjennomføre kun en samtale men hvis du i etterkant oppdager at det er noe du vil fortelle eller endre kan du kontakte meg. Jeg vil også spørre deg om jeg kan kontakte deg senere hvis noe er uklart for meg. Jeg har taushetsplikt og har ikke noen kontakt med UDI eller andre offentlige myndigheter.

Dersom du ønsker å delta setter jeg stor pris på det! Du kan ringe meg på telefon [REDACTED] eller sende en mail til meg på [REDACTED]

Studien er meldt til Personvernombudet for forskning, Norsk samfunnsvitenskapelig datatjeneste AS.

Samtykke til deltakelse i studien

Jeg har mottatt informasjon om studien, og er villig til å delta

(Dato og deltakerens signatur)

Appendix II. Interview Schedule

Interview Guide

(Themes and levels to involve. Semi-structured / in-debt interview)

Material: tools for recording and for taking notes

Intro

Tell about the study, about “volunteer work”, confidentiality, anonymity and involvement,

Basics

Age, gender, timeframe in Norway (when applied for asylum and when rejected?) family situation?
Where do you come from? Professional background?

Background

When did you start doing volunteering work?
How often do you work? How much time do you spend? Times and hours during the last month?
Why you start /what motivated you to start?
How did you get in touch with the field where you volunteer? Do you do it through an organization?
What type of organization?
Have you been doing volunteer work before?
Is it common with volunteer work where you have lived before?
What is volunteer work for you? What do you mean by volunteering?

Characteristic of volunteer work

What kind of volunteer work do you do? All different activities, the one you spend most time on first.
What do you do when you do your volunteer work?
Can you explain a common day, from morning to evening, when you do volunteer work? Is it like you expected? What is and is not like you expected?

The conditions

How do you get there?
How is the work environment? Look around... What would I see if I was a bird on your shoulder?
Do you receive or expect to receive anything in exchange for doing the volunteer work? If so, what?

Network

Are you the only volunteer there? (If yes, not too much to ask about network)
If no, how many volunteers are there?
How do you get along with them, and/or others at the place you are volunteering?
What do you tell them about yourself?
Do they know about your status as undocumented?
Do you meet other than at work?

Experience

What are the best things about being a volunteer? The worse things?
If you could decide, what would you like to change at the place where you volunteer?

Challenges

What are the possible risks and problems you may face when doing volunteer work?
What do you do with it? How do you solve/cope with it?
What influence your ability to do volunteer work?

Context

Do you have another/income generated job in addition?

How is the place where you stay? Stable?

Timeframe

Have you thought about how long are you planning to continue with volunteer work?

Is it anything I forgot to ask you / anything you want to add?

What about experience of more control, ability to influence etc?

Themes/Categories (not to ask) Belonging. Routine. Social inclusion. Identity. Safety

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