

Across the Divides

*An anthropological enquiry into the relationships between
Norwegians, Asylees and Refugees in a rural Municipality in Norway*

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Abstract

This thesis is based on six-months fieldwork, conducted on the Western Coast of Norway, where I looked at how Norwegians interacted with refugees and asylees, and how they experienced Norwegians in return. This has been done to answer the question of *how the experiences with the Asylum Reception Centres affected the way Norwegians and refugees in Fjord engaged in, and interpreted, the integration process.*

Addressing three “groups” as such, I have divided the empirical data into primarily three chapters. I begin by showing how my asylee informants struggled to cope with the Ordinary Reception Centre (ORC), their frustration with their passive lives and their expectations for the future. From this insight I continue to show how the Norwegians in Fjord experienced the asylees and the ORC and its management. I then discuss the relationships that formed and the structural challenges of having quickly established a Reception Centre. From the combined data of these two chapters, I go on to address how the same Norwegians and the refugees now living in Fjord acted towards each other.

In the discussion that follows, I argue that the Norwegians and asylees benefitted greatly from mutual friendships, but that the mismanagement of the ORC prevented several such relationships from forming. By having tried to accommodate the ORC and the asylees, however, the Norwegians were left with a sense of their hospitality being unreciprocated. This feeling was transferred to the refugees as well, constructing both the asylees and refugees as one generalizable group. From this reflection, I go on to problematize the “refugee” label and show that together with their perceived “otherness”, they struggled to adapt to Fjord.

I assert that most of the refugees and the Norwegians want to live as equals, but that achieving this goal is hindered by the different ways they approach it. Where the Norwegians want the refugees to learn their language and integrate through formal institutions, the refugees themselves want to socialize directly with the Norwegians. I then argue that the reasons why the refugees are unable to use the institutions like they are meant to be used, according to the Norwegians, is because they need them differently than the Norwegians intended. Taking these perspectives into account, I assert that a renewed focus should be placed on the everyday actors of the integration process, as their individual experiences and perspectives are the key to solving the misunderstandings between them.

Acknowledgements

From the first day of writing this thesis, to the day of delivery, I have been relying on my family and friends who supported me and kept me sane throughout this writing process, especially my fellow master students in Anthropology, my roommates Mathias Tømmervold and Signe Mikkelsen, and my partner Kristine Verlo. And guiding me through the many hurdles of this thesis, I offer my thanks to my mentor Nefissa Naguib, without whom this thesis would be unintelligible. On that note, I have to recognize the effort made by my English tutor, Richard Peel, who saved me from some embarrassing mistakes.

To be able to conduct the fieldwork for this thesis, I had to be granted permission by both institutions and individuals, and so to the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration (UDI), the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD), the National Committee for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences and the Humanities (NESH), I register my gratitude. For granting me a stipend, I thank the Ministry of Justice and Public Security. I also have to thank its representatives, Pia Buhl Girolami and Øyvind Jaer, for their advice before beginning my fieldwork.

In addition, to my informants in the UDI, the Directorate of Integration and Diversity (IMDi), the International Police Immigration Service (PU), and the Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (NOKUT), my message is that your expertise was invaluable to my understanding of the system that governed my other informants.

This thesis was written with the help of all my informants, who for reasons of anonymity cannot be mentioned by name, but I want to stress that they have not been forgotten. Their individual stories, the lives they have lived, their everyday struggles and their expectations for the future are all part of this thesis, implicitly if not always explicitly. Wherever they originated from, be it from East Africa, the Middle East, Central Europe, or Norway, it is hard to express my gratitude for how they included me in their lives and for the stories they were willing to share.

Though words are unable to aid you on your roads ahead, to my informants who were denied residence in Norway and who are still seeking a place to call home, I can but wish and hope that you find what you are looking for.

List of Abbreviations

| | |
|-------|--|
| CWA | Child Welfare Authority (Barnevernet) |
| IMDi | Integrerings- og mangfoldsdirektoratet (Directorate of Integration and Diversity) |
| NAV | Ny arbeids- og velferdsforvaltning (Social Welfare Service) |
| NESH | Den nasjonale forskningsetiske komité for samfunnsvitenskap og humaniora (National Committee for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences and the Humanities) |
| NOKUT | Nasjonalt organ for kvalitet i utdanningen (Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education) |
| NSD | Norsk senter for forskningsdata (Norwegian Centre for Research Data) |
| ORC | Ordinary Reception Centre (Ordinært asylmottak) |
| PU | Politets utlendingsenhet (International Police Immigration Service) |
| RCSMA | Reception Centre for Single, Minor Asylees (Mottak for enslige, mindreårige asylsøkere) |
| UDI | Utlendingsdirektoratet (Norwegian Directorate of Immigration) |

Contents

| | |
|--|-----|
| Abstract | III |
| Acknowledgements | IV |
| List of Abbreviations..... | V |
| Introduction | 1 |
| <i>Refugee to Asylee</i> | 3 |
| <i>Practicalities of the Ordinary Reception Centre</i> | 4 |
| <i>Asylee to Refugee</i> | 5 |
| <i>The Introduction Programme</i> | 5 |
| Chapter 1 Methodology and Ethics | 7 |
| Deciding on a Terminology..... | 7 |
| Preparation and Practicalities | 8 |
| <i>Getting Access to the Field</i> | 9 |
| <i>Anonymization</i> | 10 |
| <i>Settling In</i> | 10 |
| <i>Unforeseen Changes and New Themes</i> | 10 |
| Qualitative Methods | 11 |
| <i>Passive Observations</i> | 12 |
| <i>Participatory Observations</i> | 12 |
| <i>Recruiting Informants</i> | 12 |
| <i>Categorizing the Type of Informants</i> | 15 |
| <i>Interviews</i> | 15 |
| Ethical Considerations..... | 16 |
| <i>Positioning</i> | 16 |
| <i>Explaining my Intentions</i> | 17 |
| Doing Ethnographic Fieldwork in Norway | 18 |
| Chapter 2 Living in the Asylum Reception Centre | 21 |
| Practicalities of the Reception Centre | 21 |
| Go to School..... | 23 |
| Living without your Identity | 24 |
| Time and Limbo | 26 |
| Wear and Tear of Body and Mind..... | 27 |
| The Different Forms of Agency | 28 |
| <i>Staying Connected</i> | 29 |
| <i>Awareness and Rhetoric</i> | 29 |

| | |
|--|-----------|
| <i>Desperate Agency</i> | 30 |
| <i>Contextualizing Actions – Desperate Rationality?</i> | 31 |
| Old and New Identities..... | 33 |
| Police and law enforcement | 34 |
| Adapting to a New Country and Identity | 36 |
| <i>Internal Discord</i> | 36 |
| <i>A Shared Identity – A Shared Responsibility</i> | 37 |
| What Next?..... | 38 |
| Chapter 3 Interacting with the Reception Centre and its Residents | 41 |
| Concerns and Practicalities | 41 |
| <i>How One Thing Leads to Another</i> | 42 |
| <i>Consequences of a Remote Location</i> | 43 |
| <i>Discouraging Cooperation</i> | 44 |
| Formal Interactions..... | 45 |
| The Experiences of the Locals | 47 |
| <i>Reflections of a Cattle Farmer</i> | 47 |
| <i>Becoming a Family’s ‘Grandparents’</i> | 48 |
| <i>A Family’s Invitation</i> | 50 |
| The Unambiguous Nature of Reception Centres..... | 52 |
| <i>Saying Goodbye</i> | 52 |
| <i>An Investment Squandered</i> | 53 |
| A Necessary Reflection..... | 54 |
| Chapter 4 Perspectives of the Norwegians and Refugees in Fjord | 55 |
| A Situation to be Administered..... | 55 |
| <i>Varying Thoughts on Schooling</i> | 56 |
| <i>Struggling to Teach</i> | 56 |
| <i>A Following Error</i> | 57 |
| Participation and Loneliness | 58 |
| <i>Experiencing Social Distance</i> | 59 |
| <i>Socializing and adapting</i> | 59 |
| <i>Just Work Hard</i> | 60 |
| <i>Acknowledging the Importance of Language</i> | 61 |
| <i>Perspective of an Institutions</i> | 62 |
| Accepting not being Accepted?..... | 62 |
| <i>Forced into an Identity</i> | 62 |
| <i>Prejudice and Morals</i> | 63 |
| Social Control..... | 64 |
| <i>A Woman’s Choice</i> | 65 |

| | |
|--|-----------|
| The 17th of May, Attending or Participating?..... | 67 |
| Socializing Institutions | 68 |
| Adapting to Otherness? | 70 |
| Chapter 5 An Analysis of Social Interactions in Fjord | 73 |
| Socializing Through the Reception Centre..... | 73 |
| <i>Glimpsing the Life at the Other End</i> | 74 |
| <i>New Insight, Different Opinions</i> | 75 |
| <i>The Individuals of a Category</i> | 76 |
| Hospitality and Reciprocity..... | 78 |
| <i>Participation Through Membership</i> | 78 |
| <i>Reciprocating Goodwill</i> | 79 |
| <i>The Role of the Guest</i> | 81 |
| Generalizing Identity and Humanity | 81 |
| <i>Considering Symbolic Factors</i> | 82 |
| <i>Being Something More by Not Being Someone Else</i> | 83 |
| <i>Discussing the Label</i> | 84 |
| Socializing Institutions..... | 85 |
| <i>Where do we “Interact”?</i> | 86 |
| <i>The Many Needs for Social Networks</i> | 87 |
| <i>Transforming the Unknown</i> | 88 |
| <i>Equalizing the Refugees</i> | 88 |
| A Final Reflection | 90 |
| Conclusion..... | 91 |
| Footnotes | 95 |
| Chapter 2 – Living in the Asylum Reception Centre | 95 |
| Appendix | 96 |
| List of Informants..... | 96 |
| <i>Asylee Informants</i> | 96 |
| <i>Refugee Informants</i> | 96 |
| <i>Norwegian Informants</i> | 97 |
| References | 99 |

Introduction

“Refugees are the new oil.”

“We have to behave, this is your country.”

“I think refugees have it too good here.”

“You are treating us like livestock!”

“We condemn people to unemployment when they want to work”

Sentiments like the ones above were repeated throughout my fieldwork for this thesis. What will become clear as the chapters progress is how my informants’ opinions were as different as they themselves were. As being an *Asylee*, a *Norwegian* or a *Refugee* did not prevent my informants from maintaining their individuality. And it is this individuality, of both the people who came to Norway and of those who have been tasked to receive them, that has been challenged in the wake of the “Refugee Crisis” in 2015.

Within the year of 2015, 31145 asylum applications were filed and of which only 10,000 were processed (Østby, 2015). As people continued to cross Norway’s borders to seek asylum through this year and into the next, Asylum Reception Centres were organised and erected across the country. To meet this growing demand for housing, some smaller municipalities were given a larger responsibility than others, receiving so many asylum seekers that they constituted about ten percent of their total population. One of these municipalities, which I will for anonymization purposes refer to as “Fjord”, had in 2016 about 150 asylum seekers, while its original population was under 1600.

Wanting to better understand how Norwegians react to asylum seekers and to refugees settling into their communities, as well as how asylees and refugees experience coming to Norway and meeting Norwegians, I conducted fieldwork in Fjord and its neighbouring municipalities from 16th January to 6th June 2017. Based on this fieldwork, I examine the relationships between my Norwegian, refugee and asylee informants, looking at their individual perspectives and their experiences with each other.

The structure of this thesis is built up by the Introduction, four chapters based on the empirical data from my fieldwork, one chapter that discussed the previous four, and finally a

conclusion. As a part of the Introduction, I have chosen to add an overview of the asylum application and settlement process, to serve as a basis for greater understand of the situation my asylee and refugee informants were going through. After having done so, I continue to Chapter 1 to explain the methods that were used in my fieldwork, as well as how the ethical considerations I had to keep in mind influenced my research. Moving on to Chapter 2, I address the perspectives of my asylee informants and their impressions of Norwegians and the Ordinary Reception Centre (ORC). Building on these stories, I turn to Chapter 3 and examine the experiences of Fjord as a local community with asylees and Reception Centres.

After these observations in Chapter 2 and 3, Chapter 4 goes on to look at how the same Norwegians interacted with the refugees living in Fjord, and how these refugees experienced the Norwegians in turn. Chapter 5 then draws the many perspectives together in a discussion, comparing the different experiences and impressions of my Norwegian, asylee and refugee informants. This is done to identify the thematic conjunctions, creating a unified analysis of the situation from the views addressed in the previous chapters. The conclusion then draws the last reflections together to answer the research question of *how the experiences with the Asylum Reception Centres affected the way Norwegians and Refugees in Fjord engaged in, and interpreted, the integration process.*

At the core of this question lies the discussion of how the relationship between my informants suffered more from miscommunication and different expectations, than it did from any ill intent. To show this, Chapter 5 addresses several themes that recur throughout this thesis, among which there are three themes that I consider to be the primary ones. The first is the de-personification of the “refugee”, which I discuss in various instances by drawing on the social theories of Pierre Bourdieu (2000) and Giorgio Agamben (1998). The second is the reciprocity embedded in hospitality, conveyed through Didier Fassin (2012), Marcel Mauss (2002) and Apostolos Andrikopoulos (2017). And the third is the notion of equality as a prerequisite for socialization in Norway, explained by Marianne Gullestad (1989; 1992; 2002) and Marianne E. Lien, Hilde Lidén and Halvard Vike (2001).

The conclusion then shows that while both interest and effort were present among several of my Norwegian and Refugee informants, they engaged in the integration process based on completely dissimilar prerequisites. To better understand these prerequisites, I will now briefly explain the asylum application system and the refugee settlement process.

Refugee to Asylee

To begin, one must be aware of the legal meaning behind the terms “refugee” and “asylum seeker”/ “asylee”. After an individual flees his/her country of origin due to persecution, war, or violence, that person is a refugee according to the international community’s standards and conventions (UNHCR, 2017), but he/she is not any one nation’s responsibility. Crossing the border into Norway, by bike, train, bus or otherwise, an individual can then refer him-/herself to the International Police Immigration Service (PU) in Oslo and file an asylum application. At this point, the individual becomes an asylee. The beginning of this whole process was explained to me by one of the executive officers at the PU:

When the persons come here and applies for asylum, they either bring a note which says that they are filing for asylum, or they are able to communicate this themselves. Already at this stage do we ask them to hand over any identification papers, but there are very few who have these. – Madiha

After having confirmed which language they speak, PU call in a translator to assist them in conducting the interview. The process continues with a round of questions about where the person is from, why they came to Norway, and who they are. As soon as this is done, PU registrate the individual that very day as an asylee. “We are thoroughly questioning them about where they are fleeing from and the practicalities of their journey. Every case goes on to the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration (UDI), as we do not have any authority to decline a case.” – Madiha

And that is when the case proceedings really begin, because then we have mapped what the person asks for and needs, where they are from, etc. Then the process proceeds with the verification of documents, age, language analyses and other verifications about the information given under the interview. And then we will come to a verdict about whether or not they can stay in the country – Helga, Senior advisor at UDI

For many, however, this verdict does not come quickly, and the time asylees wait in the Reception Centres varies greatly between individuals. Depending on e.g. the country of origin, circumstances of their journey, and/or the identification papers they have brought with them, asylees might have to wait for an answer for anything between two weeks and seventeen years, as one of my informants had been. What was most common, however, for

my informants who had come during the fall of 2015, was to wait between 12-18 months for a definitive answer. In response to this, the UDI told me that it was no wonder it took so long, with their countries of origin being unable to confirm the asylees' identities. I was also informed by the PU that the asylees did not always have valid documents. This gave the PU's and the UDI's executive officers the task of reconstructing the asylees' identities from what they could piece together, based on their stories, documents, and their countries' official records.

Practicalities of the Ordinary Reception Centre

While staying in a privately run, Ordinary Reception Centre (ORC) with self-catering, which was the type of Reception Centre I visited during my fieldwork, the asylee is given the sum of NOK 2404 per month to cover all living expenses. An asylee can apply for a temporary work permit after he/she has been interviewed by the UDI, has a valid passport, and has not gotten a final answer about his/her application. This, however, effectively prevented all my asylee informants from working, as none of them met these requirements.

Living in a Reception Centre, the asylee was also not guaranteed any activities, although the UDI strongly recommended that Reception Centres should offer them. And as it is written on their website:

All Reception Centres offer various leisure activities, and the residents also organize more activities themselves. Many of the residents also participate in voluntary work in the Reception Centre. This can be, for example, participation in a janitorial service, being language assistants or organizing the use of the Internet or activity rooms. The Reception Centre often cooperates with the local sports team and other local teams and associations. Many participate in activities for children, they receive homework and participate in women's groups. (UDI, n.d. a [My translation])

Exactly what these "various leisure activities" entail is unclear and offering them is not a requirement by Norwegian law, rather it is part of the contract between the UDI and the Reception Centre operators. Similarly, schooling is also not something the municipality has to offer, but it is strongly recommended to do so as it is considered important that the asylee learns the Norwegian language at an early stage. The asylee is therefore offered a total of 175 hours of language classes while staying in the Reception Centre, as well as an additional 50

hours of tuition in Norwegian culture and society (IMDi, 2018a). Municipalities are reimbursed for the expenses of such tuition.

Asylee to Refugee

Going from an asylee to being accepted as a refugee in Norway, one must meet certain criteria according to Norwegian law (Utlendingsloven 2008, §28), and upon doing so, the asylee is granted a temporary residence permit in Norway. So, to sum up, “asylee” refers someone who await an answer on their residence application, while “refugee” refers to someone who have been granted temporary residence in Norway. Having been granted residence, the refugee is then settled in a municipality, a process which is administered by the Directorate for Immigration and Diversity (IMDi). This process was explained to me by the regional director of IMDi Mid-Norway, Rune S. Foss in my interview with him:

Right after a person has been given residence permit, are we given notice through the UDI data system. We then immediately send a message to the Reception Centre, where the individual is staying about the permit. First after we have been given updated information by the Reception Centre do we begin looking for a municipality for settlement. But it is so that when a municipality receives refugees they are to be integrated well. They have therefore a responsibility to develop those programs and services they need, especially through the first two years when the refugees are going through the Introduction Programme. – Rune S. Foss

The Introduction Programme

The Introduction Programme is fundamental to a refugee’s experience of living in Norway, lasting for the first two years after he/she has been settled in a municipality. It provides the individual with a salary of NOK 15.605,67 per month, an education in Norwegian society and language, and practice work, preparing the refugee for further education and professional work (UDI, 2018). In addition, as it says on the IMDi’s (2016) website, training and measures shall be described in an individual plan that has been prepared in conjunction with and adapted to the individual participant.

As education in language and society is considered the foundation that the refugee can build his/her life upon in Norway, there are strict sanctions, in the form of financial penalties, to encourage refugees to attend classes. NOK 101,23 is cut from the monthly salary for every hour the individual is not in school, and by not attending a whole day of school, NOK 520,18 is withdrawn (Introduksjonsloven, 2003). This system is meant to incentivize the refugee to

go to school and persuade those who would rather stay at home to participate, learn the curriculum and socialize. In addition to education, the refugees are provided with a practise job through the Introduction Programme. This job is intended to help them learn the language, get work experience, and, ideally, become better integrated in the local community.

The intention is that after these two years, the refugee has completed the prescribed 550 hours of Norwegian language classes, and 50 hours of social sciences, in order to pass exams in both subjects, achieving the lowest language level of A1 (CoE, n.d.). This is the minimum language requirement the refugee needs to apply for the permanent residence permit, which is something he/she can acquire after having stayed in Norway for three years, counting from the date he/she applied for asylum. The refugee can also apply for higher education in Norway after having completed the Introduction Programme, though he/she is then required to have achieved a level of B2 in both oral and written Norwegian (Samordna opptak, 2018).

Being an individual with a permanent residence permit, one is not considered “Norwegian” by the state, however, and so one is not allowed, for example, to vote during parliamentary elections or run for office. To be allowed to do so, one must be a citizen of Norway, which requires the refugee to have lived in Norway for a total of seven years during the last ten years, to renounce past citizenships, to pass the Norwegian citizenship exam, and having achieved level A2 in the Norwegian language (Statsborgerloven, 2005). Only then does the refugee “become” a *Norwegian* as a citizen of Norway, after a minimum of seven years.

Having addressed the application and settlement process the asylees/refugees have to go through, I now turn to Chapter 1. There I explain how I chose my field and my informants, as well as discuss the different challenges I encountered throughout my fieldwork, both methodological and ethical.

Chapter 1

Methodology and Ethics

Disclaimer: Stipend

As conducting fieldwork is expensive, I applied for stipends from the Institute of Social Anthropology at the University of Oslo and from the Ministry of Justice and Public Security. The Ministry had issued a grant that master students who were writing about themes connected with integration could apply for. My application was approved, and I received a stipend of 15,000 NOK. I was also interviewed and given some general counsel by two of the Ministry's representatives, Øyvind Jaer and Pia-Buhl Girolami, before starting my fieldwork.

Writing this thesis with the Ministry's backing, I am obliged to send them a copy, and I might also have to hold a brief oral presentation of my results. Apart from this, there are no other obligations I have towards this ministry, and as such they have not influenced my research. That being said, I am writing this thesis in such a way that it be comprehensible to them as well as my academic peers.

1.0 Deciding on a Terminology

Writing about forced migrants, I decided to use the same terminology as the Directorate of Integration and Diversity (IMDi). As I explained in the Introduction, the distinction between asylees and refugees, is that "asylee" refers someone who await an answer on their residence application, while "refugee" refers to those who have been granted temporary residence permission in Norway.

By using the terms "refugee" and "asylee", I do not try to suggest that either group is homogenous, but that there are specific challenges associated with being an asylee and a refugee. So, while my informants who were asylees all had unique identities, they were all residents in the same Reception Centre, going through the same application system. As such, they were given the same identity by that system. My informants who had previously gone through the asylum application system and been granted temporary residence, were given the status of "refugee". For these individuals, as explained in the Introduction, other rules applied

than for the asylees, and as such, they were treated differently by the system, as well as by the Norwegians.

Reducing such a diverse group of individuals to two categories, “asylees” and “refugees”, I intend to scrutinize the identities they have been given by society. As such, I am partly contesting Lisa Malkki (1995), who, in her article about the historical and discursive uses of the label “refugee”, states:

[...] the term refugee has analytical usefulness not as a label for a special, generalizable “kind” or “type” of person or situation, but only as a broad legal or descriptive rubric that includes within it a world of different socioeconomic statuses, personal histories, and psychological or spiritual situations. (p.496)

Where I stand in opposition to Malkki (1995) is that while one might discuss the *usefulness* of the labels applied to people, one cannot ignore the people using these labels. And the way my Norwegian informants approached these individuals was clearly affected by what they believed their identities as “asylees” and “refugees” to signify. In addition, the asylees and refugees handled and reacted to their given identities in different ways, both accepting and rejecting the different aspects that came with these identities.

Thus, the way I generalize my informants is not done to suggest similarity between the individuals themselves, but to analyse the experience of being an “asylee” and “refugee”, and to see this alongside an analysis of how Norwegians perceived them. This is the comparative element of this thesis, that by looking at how my informants perceived themselves, as well as how they were perceived by others, one is better equipped to understand how my different informants interacted with one another.

1.1 Preparation and Practicalities

Choosing the field for this assignment was a process that involved doing research on the many new Reception Centres that had been organised after the “Refugee Crisis” in 2015. My initial intention was to study the reactions of Norwegians towards the rapid construction of these Reception Centres. Therefore, I sought to find a relatively small municipality where this response would be easier to grasp, as my impression was that in the larger municipalities

Norwegians would be more accustomed to Reception Centres and asylees. As such, this thesis began by seeking to understand the more natal response towards Reception Centres and their residents, as well as these residents' early experiences and impressions of Norwegians.

1.1.1 Getting Access to the Field

I therefore decided to contact the management of a Reception Centre to get access to those working with asylees, and to be granted the necessary permission to recruit informants through, and conduct observations at, the Reception Centre. As a Norwegian myself, I knew that it would be more effective to recruit Norwegian informants through an institution. The reason for this is that Norwegian children and adults are to a large degree occupied with the institutions of work, education and organized activities, with little time left to spare. With modern Norwegian society being centred around such an optimized daily schedule, I had to fit into that schedule.

Moreover, to do fieldwork and collect data from a Reception Centre and its residents, one is required to get permission from the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration (UDI), the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD) and the National Committee for Ethical Research in Social Sciences (NESH). They in turn had to be assured that my presence had been accepted by a Reception Centre manager. I therefore felt it necessary to establish a direct contact with the manager of a Reception Centre, who could function as both a legal and a social gatekeeper to the field, allowing me access to both his institution and its social network.

These prerequisites for choosing my field, led me to an Ordinary Reception Centre (ORC) in a small, rural municipality on Norway's western coast, which I call "Fjord". To be allowed to conduct research at this Reception Centre, I was required to sign a non-disclosure agreement with its management. This was done to ensure I would not reveal anything that could jeopardize the integrity of the asylees, nor the operation of the ORC itself. By signing the agreement, however, I was not prevented from conducting observations or interviews, as this permission had already been granted to me by the UDI and the manager. And additionally, I was not paid for the work I did at the ORC, and as such I filled the role as a volunteer, not as an employee of the company owning it.

1.1.2 Anonymization

To appease my informants, as well as the UDI, NSD and the company owning the ORC, I have chosen to anonymize both the municipality and my informants from it. I have also had to partly anonymize the origins of my foreign informants as well, restricting myself to referring to regions, such as “the Middle East” and “East Africa” instead of the specific countries of origin. Though I would like to go into more detail throughout this thesis about who my informants were, the precariousness of their statuses as asylees or refugees has prevented me from doing so. I have, however, not anonymized the informants who were unaffiliated with Fjord and who wanted their names known. This I decided to do because their identities could not jeopardize the anonymity of my other informants.

1.1.3 Settling In

I needed to live close to the people I wanted to interview, and preferably in a place where I could feel the “pulse” of the local community, but the question was: Where? For a time, it seemed interesting to live at the ORC, but considering the strict regulation of the UDI, and bearing in mind that my thesis did not only concern asylees, I chose not to. Instead, I rented an apartment a few minutes away from the ORC, allowing me easy access to it. This also made it possible to visit Norwegians elsewhere in Fjord, as well as providing me with a space to write my fieldnotes and rest. Getting around required the use of a car as there was not any pavement for pedestrians along the road, nor any public transportation. I was able to borrow a car throughout my stay, but the need for a car in fact exercised a limit on my everyday interactions as I then primarily met people at their workplaces or at specific gatherings.

1.1.4 Unforeseen Changes and New Themes

Fjord was, at the time I planned my fieldwork, home to two Reception Centres, the ORC and Reception Centre for Single, Minor Asylees (RCSMA). As I arrived 16th January, I was told that the RCSMA had been shut down in December, having only been in operation for a year. And shortly after my arrival, the ORC was also given notice that its contract would not be renewed, being scheduled to closed 1st May, exactly one year after its contract began. As a result, the ORC did not receive any new asylees and began to send its current residents to other Reception Centres. This change affected my fieldwork greatly, and with my asylee informants being transported out of Fjord, and some of the workers having to find jobs in other municipalities, I had to adapt.

Having had several interviews with the Norwegians of Fjord up until this point, multiple themes had arisen that I had not originally intended to follow. These concerned the settled refugees in Fjord, who were often referred to when the Norwegians spoke of the ORC and what the municipality had done and was doing to accommodate it. Realizing that the average Norwegian did not necessarily distinguish between an asylee and a settled refugee made it interesting to interview refugees as well. These refugees had just gone through the asylum application process themselves, contributing further to my impression of life in Reception Centres.

Therefore, after having stayed in Fjord for the first two months, my study consisted of three “groups”: asylees, Norwegians and refugees. The fieldwork had started by addressing how Norwegians and asylees perceived each other in Fjord, to looking at how the same Norwegians treated the local refugees, and how these refugees in turn responded. With the combined stories of both the ORC and the settled refugees, my intention shifted its focus to looking at how the insight from the ORC could be used to analyse the integration process in Fjord.

As I had got to know several of the residents at the ORC before they were moved, I chose to visit them throughout my fieldwork in the five closest Reception Centres to Fjord. These informants served as gatekeepers to both the asylees and managements of the other Reception Centres, allowing me access to these institutions as well. In addition, I travelled to three other municipalities, where my informants had been settled after they got their residence permission, giving them the right to settle in Norway. The decision to travel to these municipalities and their Reception Centres was made to strengthen my understanding of the ORC in Fjord. It is therefore important to point out that while this thesis is written about Fjord, the reflections I make, and the discussion that ensues, are enriched by this additional insight.

1.2 Qualitative Methods

Conducting an ethnographic fieldwork, I applied various qualitative methods to extract the data I needed for my research. In the coming section, I will explain which methods I used and how I applied them.

1.2.1 Passive Observations

While staying in Fjord, part of my data was gathered by observing what was happening around me, through so-called passive observations. What this implies is that I would write down matters of interest in my fieldnotes based on what I saw in Fjord. This primarily proved to be of use in creating my interview guide, helping me form a better picture of what interested my informants. These observations gave me room to research certain topics while in my apartment, and to raise them during my interviews with both asylees and Norwegians.

1.2.2 Participatory Observations

As my fieldwork required me to spend an extended amount of time in Fjord, I chose to apply myself in the institutions where I collected most of my data and recruited several of my informants. As such, I worked at the ORC and the elementary school in Fjord, applying the Work-along version of participatory observation (Fangen and Sellerberg, 2011, p.132). What this method allowed, was for my presence to be naturalized, making me less of an anomaly, and more of an asset to the institutions. By doing this in the local school, the method provided me with an arena to recruit informants and to become more engaged in the local community, as well as helping me fund my fieldwork.

Conducting the same method in the ORC, I was awarded insight into how it worked, the system the asylees had to go through, and the tasks of the management. My volunteer role also allowed me to host various activities such as hiking, working out at the gym, and going out on fishing trips. The hikes proved very valuable as a walk-along approach to observation (Fangen and Sellerberg, 2011, p.134). During these hikes, the asylees would talk more freely, often influenced by the scenery or the activity we were doing. Where a cold, hard morning could provoke melancholy and homesickness, a sunny fishing trip might make them share their hopes for the future. And as a result I was rewarded with data from stories that would not have been shared, or at least not in the same way, had we only spent time within the ORC.

1.2.3 Recruiting Informants

As just mentioned, the participatory observations proved helpful in recruiting informants, as did the Manager of the ORC, functioning as my primary gatekeeper to the field. With access to the ORC, I was able to interact and spend time with the ORC workers, but also with the asylees living there. These residents were interested in spending time with me, hoping to learn

more about Norway and get their stories heard through this thesis. I got to know them by talking and spending time with them, relationships that often snowballed, allowing me to meet their friends as well. Of the almost one hundred residents, I was able to recruit twenty-five asylee informants, three of whom were women. The selection of these informants was partly random, as I started spending time with those who were interested in my company. This also resulted in most of my informants being in their mid to late-twenties and early thirties. Though this should also be seen in relation to the fact that this age group is overly represented among the refugees leaving coming to Norway.

In addition, those who I was able to become the most acquainted with were those who had either learnt some Norwegian or could speak English, resulting in many of my informants being well-educated, and often with liberal views concerning alcohol and religion. That said, not all my informants were of this character, as I got to know several other asylees through these informants. These asylees were not as proficient in English nor Norwegian, however, so the data they provided came through their friends' translations.

Recruiting asylee informants, I found that by spending time with some prevented me from interacting with others. This was not merely a time constraint, but a social one, where the friendship of one individual excluded the possibility of friendship with another. This could be due to individual quarrels, religious and political disagreements, or ethnic differences, but these factors did not always play a role. Several of my interactions with the asylees occurred with multiple ethnicities and nationalities present, which was made possible because they refrained from discussing politics and religion. But quarrels could still occur, and my presence was once the cause, where my informants argued about how to accommodate me best. But as I invited the residents to different activities, my attendance brought people together more than it divided them. The activities I hosted even formed new friendships between individuals who had not known each other prior to me coming to the ORC.

To adhere to the condition set by the NSD, as well as to limit the scope of my research, I chose to only include asylees and refugees above the age of eighteen as my informants. However, excluding children from my interviews did not remove them from my observations, as they played an important role in the daily life at the ORC and the Norwegians' responses towards it. Children are therefore referred to for this purpose, to highlight topics raised by other informants, but they are not to be considered as informants themselves.

Of the few women that were at the ORC, most were occupied with rearing their children, but three found the time to speak with me. One did not have children of her own, while the other one was especially outspoken, seeking me out herself to tell her story. As such, these two women, “Deeyah” and “Aida” steered our interactions, deciding when to invite me to the “Women’s Room” in the ORC for interviews. The third asylee woman I interviewed, “Soraya”, was older and had come with her husband and her two children. I visited this family in the apartment the ORC was renting for them.

As for the refugees living in Fjord, I got to know four of them through the local gym and in the Language Café, which became the places where we most often decided to meet, in addition to their homes. This also reflected their age, and my informants from this group were all, except for two, in their twenties. These refugees later introduced me to their friends, totalling my informant count in this group to seven men and two women. Two of these refugees, one man and one woman, I encountered in a neighbouring municipality to Fjord, where some of my other asylee informants had been moved. My interviews with them, as their stories are not from Fjord itself, are used to enhance the stories told by my other informants. It should be noted that my refugee informants were also contributing to my understanding of the Reception Centres as several of them had very recently been settled. Similarly, some of my asylee informants were settled during my fieldwork, and they were therefore able to tell me about their immediate experiences with that process.

Recruiting the local Norwegians of Fjord, however, required that I participated in events and institutions where I assumed I could interact with them, such as the school, in the ORC, or at their workplaces in the municipality. I also befriended Norwegian retirees through the Language Café, as this demographic was the one most often attending. What became apparent, however, was that the Norwegians who felt they had nothing to do with the refugees and asylees, were uninterested to talk about them. In this way, I built up a group of thirty Norwegian informants from Fjord, eight from various public and state institutions, and fifteen from five other Reception Centres. In total I interviewed fifty-eight Norwegians during my fieldwork. It should be noted that where I quote my Norwegian informants, I have translated their statements to English.

I have, in addition, not made any distinction between Norwegian men and women, as the importance of their insight has been based on the positions they held and the actions they committed, not on their gender. I recognize that there could be factors pertaining to their gender that influenced their behaviour and decisions, but as my informants did not express that this mattered, I have chosen to not pursue them in favour of concerning myself with the factors they did express, such as their collective Norwegian identity.

1.2.4 Categorizing the Type of Informants

With all of my eighty-seven informants, every one of which are listed in the Appendix, I have sought to create a *sample of representatives* (Weiss, 1994, p.18). This entails that their perspectives were interesting because they shared experiences directly connected to their group's identity as refugees, Norwegians, or asylees. This way of structuring informants stands in contrast to how twenty-two of my Norwegian informants were also included in my *panel of informants* (Weiss, 1994, p.17). Here I sought out individuals who had certain positions in the municipality of Fjord, in order to gain insight from those specific points of view.

The way my questions were posed addressed the personal perspectives of my *representatives*, and the professional views held by my *informants*. This helped create a varied selection of informants, who all proved valuable as I could cross-check statements made by them, based on the different roles they had in Fjord. In this way my dataset was continuously being tested and challenged with the introduction of new informants, making it possible to comparatively analyse the various statements of my informants with one another.

1.2.5 Interviews

Through my position at the ORC, I partook in many different interactions, some of which turned into informal interviews. Spending time with my informants, eating meals, hiking, etc. they would often start talking about the ORC and their experience with Norway. The nature of these interviews was that the informants talked about what they wanted to, without me steering the conversation in any direction. Such interviews became the most common ones I conducted with any group, allowing for the conversations to bring forth the topics my informant found interesting. Such interviews were exclusively limited to my *sample of representatives*.

For my *panel of informants*, however, I chose to conduct structured and semi-structured interviews, with a prepared set of questions. Whether or not the interviews became structured or semi-structured depended on the informants and their willingness to talk around the subject. Should they answer my questions schematically and briefly, I was required to let the interview progress according to the structure I had prepared. If the informant was more engaged in the interview, however, I allowed him/her to set the pace, and, as a result, asked more questions to follow up on the topics they raised.

Both these methods proved very effective, and, to preserve the fluidity in the interviews, I refrained from using a recording device for all my informal interviews. Where I found recording necessary in the formal interviews, I chose to do so with the technical nature of the interview and the likelihood of misunderstandings in mind.

1.3 Ethical Considerations

As mentioned above, I was required to obtain permission from the UDI, NSD and NESH to be able to conduct this fieldwork. What this permission entailed, was that they acknowledged that my research methods and the approach of my fieldwork were ethically salient and methodologically viable. Even so, I encountered several challenges pertaining to my role as a researcher and the situation of my informants that must be addressed.

1.3.1 Positioning

Being a male Norwegian in his early twenties, I was granted access to some groups and events, but prevented from attending some others. Doing fieldwork in my own country, I was easily accepted by other Norwegians, albeit as the “city-boy” from the capital. And to my asylee and refugee informants, I became the “friendly guy” whom they could ask about Norwegian society and people. It should be noted, however, that it is likely that being a Norwegian affected what my informants wanted to talk to me about. That being said, as I was told various stories, with positives and negatives highlighted by different informants, I choose to believe that the high number of informants I interviewed has granted me insight into the very topics and perspectives *some* refrained from discussing.

However, my age, gender and social status as single made some asylee and refugee women reluctant to spend time with me or to be interviewed. This scepticism towards my intentions, combined with a fear for their own reputation, prevented me from interviewing some of these women in Fjord. I was, however, able to interview five women, two asylees and three refugees, who were all interested in sharing their stories and experiences.

Another reason for it being difficult to find women interviewees was the simple fact that most refugees who came to Norway in 2015-2016 were males, so there were not many women “available”. Where I in this thesis address gender, it should be noted that the separation of men and women has been primarily done to explore the challenges one faces that are determined by one’s gender. By including both, I have been made aware of challenges pertaining to one gender through the insights provided by the other, which I believe has enriched my dataset.

1.3.2 Explaining my Intentions

When it came to interview asylees, I was required by the UDI to inform everyone that speaking to me would in no way be beneficial or harmful to their application status, nor to their stay at the ORC. In addition, all my informants had to know that the thesis would be printed and published through the University of Oslo, allowing anyone access to read it. Since most of my interviews were, as mentioned above, of an informal nature, I had to remind my informants at regular intervals of my role as a researcher.

When one of my informants relayed information I wanted to take a note of, for example in a heated or personal conversation, I had to ask my him/her for consent afterwards. This was done because I deemed it likely that my informant had, in the excitement of the moment, forgotten my role as a student conducting a fieldwork. My requests were most often met with a positive response by my informants, who told me that they trusted me to retell their story. Nevertheless, in some situations I was asked specifically not to write about incidents that had occurred, and I have respected that wish. However, while these specific incidents have been left out, their ethnographic value remains part of the thesis through the themes they brought up.

Being asked not to recount what I saw raises some questions as to my chosen method of working in the field with and for my informants. Maintaining this role, the asylees sometimes

had to be around me, such as when I drove them to the supermarket. Although it is my belief that those who did not want to talk to me refrained from doing so, my presence and observations could have caused some unintended distress among the asylees. However, as they could speak languages foreign to me, I choose to believe that my presence was not a problem for anyone who might have been sceptical of me, as they could converse with each other without me being able to understand what they were saying. In comparison, my role in the school was less that of a researcher, and more that of an employee, and as it was the principal who in our interview recruited me to work there; the staff was well informed of the details surrounding my stay in Fjord.

1.4 Doing Ethnographic Fieldwork in Norway

As mentioned, I carried out this fieldwork out in my home country, but not in my home town. This raises certain challenges of its own as it is a relatively new approach in the anthropological tradition to do fieldwork “at home”. The world of anthropology was first introduced to the idea of a native Norwegian conducting ethnography in Norway in 1984, with Marianne Gullestad’s book *Kitchen-Table Society* (Gullestad & Miller, 2001). Since then, other Norwegian anthropologists have sought to study Norwegian society from the inside.

Doing so, however, raises various methodological challenges, one of which is the idea that by being native, one is therefore a natural insider. Conducting ethnography requires one to “go native” as such, but to assume that one is positioned equal to one’s informants, even in one’s own country, is a faulty one. The reason for this is that by seeking to extract data from the people you interact with, your informants ascribe to you a particular role as an observer and an interviewer. Simply put, though a researcher has shared identity traits with his/her informants, he/she cannot ignore his/her identity as a researcher or any other identity that might construct him/her as an “other”.

Another challenge of doing ethnographies at home, as Cato Wadel (2014, p.27) states in his book about doing fieldwork in one’s own culture, is the possibility that several of *your own* culture’s traits and aspects are overlooked as they appear natural and unnoteworthy. Arguably, this gives the researcher insight into the situation he/she is studying based on the

mutual knowledge he/she shares with his/her research subjects, and not on academic insights. To overcome this challenge I have attempted to be aware of “normal traits” and my own assumptions by thoroughly taking notes before and after my interactions and interviews. This was done to help me remember what I thought I would encounter and compare that to what actually happened or was said.

In addition, I have also applied an analytical distance to Norwegians throughout this thesis, referring to them as just another group in my study, not as a group I am part of. This is shown in how I consistently do not use the term “we” when addressing Norwegians, referring to them instead as “my Norwegian informants”. With this approach, I recognize that researching a group of Norwegians in a certain municipality in Norway, cannot be representative of every Norwegian in Norway. However, it should be noted that this is not a limitation ascribed only to ethnographic studies of one’s own culture, but in every ethnographic study. Rather, as an anthropologist *at home*, I have been awarded a dual insight into the qualitative data of my chosen field. Gullestad states something similar in an interview conducted by Marianne Lien and Marit Melhuus, published in 2011, “Anthropologists who work ‘at home’ are in this way seldom just insiders, we are usually both insiders and outsiders to the people we work with.” (p.140).

Keeping this in mind, it is important to stress that while I was a Norwegian in Fjord, I was not from Fjord, and I was therefore unaware of the local history and concerns of the people of Fjord. As I have stated above, however, this “otherness” did not prevent me from interacting or participating in the community, and these reflections about my position in the field are not made to ascribe to me a *particular* difference. Rather, they are made to signify *awareness* of my difference and to emphasize that I did not assume that I possessed the same social, cultural or symbolic capital as my Norwegian informants by simply being Norwegian myself. By explaining the access my Norwegian identity gave me, I am showing the uniqueness of Fjord, while simultaneously de-mystifying it as a field. This I believe is particularly important in modern anthropology, because, as Raymond Madden (2010) reminds us, “Ethnographic fields *do not exist* beyond the imaginings of the ethnographer.” (p.38, emphasis in original).

Moving from the reflections above, I return to the “challenge” of doing ethnography at home, not in contrast to conducting one abroad but as another field that requires the same considerations to be made as in any other. Again, I choose to draw on Gullestad, who

proposed that “[...] we need to overcome the division between anthropology ‘at home’ and ‘abroad’.” (Lien and Melhuus, 2011, p.143). It is important to take into account that while I was “at home”, I was in a “foreign” municipality, looking not only at how my own countrymen perceived refugees and asylees, but also at how these forced migrants perceived the Norwegians. In a very real sense, the “abroad” is brought into the “home”, which is where the next chapter begins, with an asylee’s arrival in Fjord.

Chapter 2

Living in the Asylum Reception Centre

A taxi stops, out steps a new resident at the Ordinary Reception Centre (ORC), carrying two bags and a jacket under his arm. He carefully greets a couple of asylees in Arabic, who are standing by the front door smoking, before he turns to me and cautiously smiles. As he enters the doors of the abandoned school, now turned Reception Centre, he stops for a minute; I presume he asks the asylees where the management's office is, before he starts climbing the stairs to the third floor, entering the office. He is met with a busy management that quickly registers his arrival in their system, he shakes the manager's hand before he is shown to his room, which, to his surprise, he will be sharing with two other residents. This was the beginning of Hassan's stay in the ORC, arriving the same day as myself, 16th January 2017.

2.0 Practicalities of the Reception Centre

Driving on the highway to the ORC, one is met by the striking Norwegian nature; high mountains, long fjords, and very few houses. At one point the road diverges, and, taking the right-hand road, the ORC appears after a few hundred meters. Being set in a scarcely populated area, the ORC was neither close to any social gathering spots or centres of activity nor, apart from its few neighbours, close to any people. Though some asylees borrowed fishing rods from the ORC, going fishing became a difficult activity during the colder months of the year, like many other outdoor activities. And as there was no pavement or space for the use of bicycles on the highway, several of the asylees felt as if they were imprisoned in the ORC.

The asylees could get to a small convenience store that was a fifteen-minute walk away from the ORC, along the highway in the opposite direction. Should the residents have felt the need to buy anything else, or at cheaper prices, they had to be driven to the supermarket. To manage this, the workers at the ORC had a standard time for when they drove there: at nine o'clock in the morning. If the residents needed anything at any other time, they had to ask the administration to drive them, something which was not prioritized as they had other work to do.

While most expressed gratitude after being driven to the store, some would, after a while, experience it as a condescending act, akin to a child asking an adult for help, to always having to get permission to be taken there. This was made worse by the fact that they never knew how long they would have to stay at the ORC, having to reach out to the administration every day to see if there had been any progress in their application. This was rarely the case unless any final decision had been made by the UDI.

Living a temporary life, being given only vague estimates of when they might get an answer, such as “in a few months” or “it should be soon”, infuriated some, and frustrated all my asylee informants. Arnulf Kolstad and Silvia Thorud (2010, pp.160) propose in their article about the powerlessness of waiting in Reception Centres, that the uncertainty connected to the outcome of the asylum application increases the disempowerment of the asylee, placing additional strain on their situation. My asylee informants seemed to experience this, and it ties in with what Synnøve Bendixsen (2015) argues in her paper on the frustration of asylees, that “[...] the ‘punishing’ aspect of waiting occurs when a person is kept ignorant about the length of waiting (Schwart, 1975)” (p.293). What this shows is how waiting in a Reception Centre should be understood as something different from waiting in any normal everyday situation, as the time there is not merely time wasted, but a phase in which the asylees are unable to live their lives.

This is a point supported by Bendixsen and Thomas H. Eriksen in their contribution to the book, *Ethnographies of Waiting*, by Manpreet K. Janeja and Andreas Bandak (2018, p.89). Writing about the hope and expectations of irregular migrants Bendixsen and Eriksen go on to state, however, that asylees often break up the time of waiting with meaningful activities, such as childbirth or marriage. Similarly, my asylee informants were attempting to make their stay in the ORC better by dining and playing games together, as well as celebrating each other when possible. I was present during one such occasion, when about twenty of the asylees borrowed one of the classrooms in the ORC to throw a farewell party for one of their friends, this individual had been granted residence and was leaving the next day for his new municipality.

2.1 Go to School

Attempting to make use of their time spent waiting in the ORC, and to prepare them for a possible settlement, the Norwegian state offers asylees the option of going to school, as mentioned in the Introduction. Attendance at these classes varied between the individuals I encountered, however, and it is my impression that this was a recurring problem. The explanation given by those not going to school was that they were too tired from being unable to sleep due to nightmares and noise in the ORC. In addition to this, they talked every day about how exhausted they were from being stressed all the time, unable to stop thinking about their application, and their friends and family back home. Others pointed out how they learned more in previous Reception Centres, where they were closer to people and could practise their language more. After moving to Fjord, they felt their hard-earned language skills receding.

This feeling of not being able to learn, and as a result feeling “stupid”, was also a topic the men raised with regard to previous occupations and skills. They feared they would be less able to work after re-entering society, due to the passive and depressing life they lived in the ORC. Kolstad and Thorud (2010) argue that asylees are more susceptible to stressors than others. And as many come bearing traumas, they are vulnerable to experience anxiety and develop mental illnesses. The authors go on to show, through a comparison between their own study and those of others, that living in Reception Centres with few activities is deteriorating to wellbeing and mental health. They assert that this is something which only gets worse the longer one stays in a Reception Centre.

Feeling that they were unable to learn, and failing in their attempt to do so, several of the asylees would skip classes entirely, saying that things would improve when they were settled in their municipality. There they would be able to sleep and study at home, not disturbed by others, or fearing the result of their application. One of my key informants, an educated man in his mid-twenties whom I will call Ahmed, expressed this opinion often:

I want to study, I am trying to, but how can I? These guys here are dirty, loud, like he who lives with me, he will talk on the phone in the night, get up to make food, and watch TV, how can I study when I cannot sleep? But it will all change when I go to the municipality – Ahmed

Language acquisition is essential to be able to integrate and be accepted into a host society, and as an activity it provides the individual with both a sense of mastery and accomplishment that is beneficial to the asylee's mental health (Bhugra, 2004). In their article, Kolstad and Thorud (2010, p.161) argue that suitable activities and the teaching of Norwegian should be prioritized for the asylees to be able to socialize with Norwegians in the everyday. What they do not explain, however, is how this is to be achieved, as most of the asylees were unable to participate in school due to the stressors of being an asylee and living in a Reception Centre.

2.2 Living without your Identity

Living with these stressors, feeling unable to attend school, and failing at learning while there, my asylee informants felt hopelessly unmotivated. Being handed everything, not being able to work for their own food and education, my informants felt they were forced to live like beggars. This lifestyle was referred to as a dishonourable way of living, and my informants expressed a sense of shame at not being in control of their own lives, or those of their children. In this regard, the residents compared their lives to that of cattle, as Mohammed, one of my older key informants, stated:

We have a roof over our head and food to eat, we are grateful, but this is not enough for a human, for an animal yes, but not for a human. We need to work, to do something, to live our lives. Here we are nothing. – Mohammed

This feeling of living as animals, which is also noted by Bridget Haas (2017, p.85) in her article concerning the dual positioning of the asylee as both a potential citizen and a potential deportee, was presented in sharp contrast to how a human ought to live, which the residents would link to “the honour of men” and “respectful ways of living one's life”. They felt mistreated by the system, which they perceived as preventing them from living a decent, respectful life. “Respect” being a virtue sought after by my informants, they would talk about the lives they had led, and the status they had before. Going from a life of relative freedom and authority, to one where you shared a room with one to three others in a run-down school, with bedrooms made from old classrooms, many felt robbed of their identity and shameful at being so powerless.

On one occasion, I accompanied four asylees who were going to the dentist. As they arrived, they were met with very friendly employees, but when the asylees were to pay for the dental service, the whole atmosphere changed. The employees had been told by the ORC worker who had made the appointment, that the asylees would pay for the service at the dental clinic. The asylees, however, did not have enough money to pay everything at once, so they asked to make a down-payment over a few months. The employees were upset because should the asylee be deported, the payment would most likely not be met. After some hasty phone calls, the asylees were able to borrow money from their friends, resolving the situation. As they left the clinic, the asylees were disgruntled, and as one of them said: “We are asylees, if we could work we would, but we are kept here, and so we cannot pay for dentist or do anything for society.”

This feeling of powerlessness is a recurrent topic in studies about asylum seekers. Kolstad and Thorud (2010) state in their article that every one of their informants had work or school to attend in their home country. As a result, it was this transition from their previous active lives to the passive one in Norway that made their current situation so alien. “Everyone felt it was meaningless not to work when they wanted to. To receive money without working was shameful.” (p.159). The validity of this assertion was captured in one of the more intense conversations I had with Ahmed, who yelled out his frustration with a system that continuously made him feel like a child:

I am man, not animal, if you want to give me money, I say to you, NO. I will make my own. I am not child! They [UDI] tell me to visit my family elsewhere in Norway, but they do not allow me to move closer to them. And why would I visit, so I can live off their mercy? I AM NOT CHILD! – Ahmed

Building on this quote, as well as the discussion above, I choose to draw on the theory of Susanne Binder and Jelena Tošić (2005, p.617), who explore in their article the active role of the individual in shaping his/her identity as refugee and the consequences of past identities being incompatible with their present situation. They assert that because the refugees have lost their jobs, they lose their professional identity as well. Binder and Tošić go on to state that by being unemployed for a longer time, the male refugees are especially vulnerable to feeling the effects of unemployment. This, they argue, is most likely due to their previous identity being so closely linked to their role as fathers and husbands, providing for their families, and being figures of respect and authority. Therefore, to lose, or be removed from,

the role that makes up the position as head of the family, men with a traditional understanding of said role had a harder time adjusting to a life without it.

That being said, one ought to not reduce the asylee's experience of living in a Reception Centre, to one defined by their perceptions of traditional gender roles. The argument proposed by Binder and Tošić should instead be considered as an additional factor when trying to understand why some of my male asylee informants reacted the way they did to living in the ORC.

2.3 Time and Limbo

Another concern my asylee informants had about staying so long in the ORC was the sensation that their time was running out, something the younger men were especially vocal about. They stressed that they had to work to establish a life, gain experience and provide for their families back home. I was confronted with this by one of the residents, who demanded to know: "Who should take responsibility for keeping us here?! We want to work so we can send money back to our families. They are relying on our help, so who will take responsibility?". – Ali

This sentiment is reflected in what Haas (2017) writes about the lives of asylees, arguing that "The temporal state of limbo was made painful not only because of the existential insecurity it represented, but also because of asylum seekers' perceived lack of control over their situation.". She goes on to discuss the identity of the asylee, who she claims is, "[...] embedded in an institutional process of subjectification [...]" (p.77), leaving them feeling powerless in their predicament. This view ties in with what my informants experienced; that they were living a life that was in some way not their own, but one administered by the UDI.

Haas (2017) continues this reflection, stating that the *existential limbo* of the asylees prevented the present from becoming normal, rather, it was *hyperrealized*. The asylees' lives were as a result "[...] characterized by an 'enforced orientation to the present' (De Genova, 2002, 427). More specifically, asylum seekers were forced to live with a 'dual uncertainty of time' in which change was both absent and imminent (Griffiths 2014, 1)." (p.82)

Within this experience lies an important reflection about the power of the state apparatus, and the implications that follow the exercising of that power. Drawing on the concept of “biopolitics”, first envisioned by Michel Foucault (1978) as the way meaning and control are ascribed to people and their bodies, Giorgio Agamben (1998) makes a useful reflection. He asserts, in his book about the sovereignty of the modern state in defining the sacredness of humans, that biopolitics is the practice of treating life differently based on the social existence, or what he calls the “bios”, of the individual in question. This means that the individual is perceived by the state according to their social existence, which in the asylee’s case is yet to be decided.

In the system of the nation-state, the so-called sacred and inalienable rights of man show themselves to lack every protection and reality at the moment in which they can no longer take the form of rights belonging to citizens of a state. (1998, p.126)

What Agamben (1998) argues is that to the nation-state, the asylee is an anomaly which is not ascribed the same rights as those ascribed to the citizens of the state, and so he/she is reduced to something else, something lesser. And it is here he theorizes that, in the way the asylees are treated, they are stripped of their social existence, their bios, and reduced to what he calls “bare life”. Bringing to light the difference between birth and nation, the refugee causes the secret presupposition of the political domain – bare life – to appear for an instant within that domain.” (p.131). This reality was felt by my asylee informants who, during their stay in the ORC, felt powerless and continuously displaced after having fled their countries. One could say, that as they were separated from many of the factors that constituted their previous identities – personal and professional – they had become “bare life”, not defined by who they *were*, but rather as *merely* human.

2.4 Wear and Tear of Body and Mind

The experience of living in such a state, not being in control of either their present or future lives, was what discouraged most of my asylee informants. And after a while they would note how their bodies were beginning to take the toll from their stressed and lethargic lifestyles. Several of them would show me pictures of themselves, pointing out how they had gotten fatter, less healthy, drawing attention to their hair and facial features, commenting on hair loss, new wrinkles and sore, tired eyes.

Ahmed found these changes to his appearance discomforting, growing quiet and reserved when he saw himself in the mirror. His clothes would often be stained with sweat, to which he reacted with embarrassment, quickly changing or trying to cover it up. He would then start talking about the past, how he had lived a healthy and social life, accomplishing physical feats and caring for his body. Now, however, he became exhausted from doing small chores, trying to work-out was clearly taxing, and he would often refrain from participating when I hosted activities.

Haas (2017) notes how her informant Ruth showed similar reactions to the prolonged application process, and that she:

[...] complained of being “so stressed”, “confused”, and “depressed”, and she often struggled to move through the days. She developed somatic symptoms as well, sweating, reduced appetite, acute headaches, “paining all over”, and intense feelings of heat throughout her body. (p. 76)

Like Ruth, my own informants were also coping with what can be argued to be somatic symptoms, physical changes that manifest themselves as a result of mental stress and disorders. Through both observations and interviews, I was made aware of the ailments of my asylee informants. These could be physical pains like the ones my informant Ghufran described, struggling with a permanent limp in his left leg that the doctors were unable to explain. Or they could be changes to one’s appearances, such as the ones Ahmed spoke of, or in another of my informant’s, Raoul’s, case, blood veins in his left eye bursting, coating them red.

2.5 The Different Forms of Agency

As the asylees had to live from day to day within the confines of the ORC, there was little to take their minds off the changes to their body or the application process itself. Being “sentenced” to ponder their own physical and mental health, my informants did what they could to take their minds off their situation. Time consuming “activities” could be sleeping throughout the day, playing cards, going to the store, watching TV or browsing the internet.

2.5.1 Staying Connected

Living in waithood, feeling displaced and being inactive, the asylees spent many hours online, either for entertainment or to stay informed. With constant access to the internet, its news outlets and social media, the residents kept themselves updated. Reading about the conflicts back home as well as the situation in Europe, keeping in touch with their families and friends, they also had an idea of how asylees fared in other countries and parts of Norway.

Being able to contact family members and friends was not necessarily a comfort, however, as some expressed a great shame in not being able to enjoy their lives in a “better” country. Being asked questions from their family about when they would get a job, or why they had “not done anything for a year”, just added to the feeling of being powerless. Bendixsen (2015) noted a similar sentiment with her informants, stating that: “Social expectations from the family, which for some includes supporting those who remained, can be difficult and sometimes impossible to accommodate as an irregular migrant in Norway.” (p.298)

By staying connected, the residents would also know what other Reception Centres in the country were like, and through rumours they would get tips on how to affect their application or living conditions. One such rumour had it that after being moved from one Reception Centre to another, an asylee had been able to get a room for himself by arguing for a long time. Having a room for oneself was sought after by most asylees, but this rumour, and many others like it, was not true. Regardless, they ignited a rebellious attitude in some of the more disaffected asylees, which could cause confrontations with the management of the ORC.

On one such occasion, where I was present, “Ahmed” tried to chat, yell and plead his case for the possibility of a room for himself. He went as far as demanding the police should come, saying: “Put me in jail! At least I will have a single room there where I can sleep without being disturbed. If not then give me back my papers, I will go to another country!” While not a common occurrence, situations like this one go to show the frustration of the asylee, and the desperate attempt to recover the control over one’s life, one’s agency, in a moment of great disempowerment.

2.5.2 Awareness and Rhetoric

As for their friends and relatives experiencing Reception Centres in other countries, some asylees were told of how the situation was apparently better in, for example, Germany, and

how much quicker the asylum application process went there. This made them feel they either chose wrongly, or that Norway was somehow doing them wrong, making their depression and anger appear as something that could have been avoided. Elizabeth Mestheneos and Elizabeth Ioannidi (2002) were confronted with the same concern among their informants in their 2002 study on the integration of refugees into the European Union. And considering the progress made in communication technology the last fifteen years, it would be fair to assume that asylees are even more connected now than they were then.

This insight into the situation in other countries also fed into the rhetoric of some of the asylees. They expressed the opinion that their displeasure was something Norway wanted to provoke, a conscious policy meant to scare off other asylum seekers from coming to the country. This notion was strengthened by meticulously reading and translating news and information about Norway's immigration policy: an example of this was when Mohammed pointed out a statement made in an interview by the Minister of Integration at the time of my fieldwork, Sylvi Listhaug:

We shall not have physical high standards on the Reception Centres. It will be sober, but justifiable. In my opinion are there other prerequisites than the physical standard that is deciding for integration and health. Activity availability is for example more important. That is a correct signal to the residents and the local inhabitants that the Asylum Reception Centres are sober. (Amundsen, 2016 [My translation])

As Listhaug makes clear, consideration has to be given to how the Reception Centres appear both to asylees and to Norwegians, that living in them is neither to be sought after, nor a waste of resources by the state apparatus. This policy is reflected in another statement by an anonymous spokesperson in the government, telling the newspaper *Aftenposten* why it is important to cut the benefits. "To have large benefits compared to other countries is something that leads many to choose to travel to Norway" (Tjernshaugen, 2015 [My translation]). This rhetoric fits my asylee informant's narrative, that they felt used in a political play by the Norwegian government, making some see their suffering in the ORC as an unjustified sentence.

2.5.3 Desperate Agency

For those who viewed their lives in the ORC in this way, there was little reason to be grateful towards the UDI and the Norwegian state, leaving them with a sense of being made victims of

the country's politics. The asylees reacted very differently to such information, and to the ORC in general. Where most would express their frustration verbally through complaining, others might become violent, lashing out at the ORC by breaking windows, slamming doors or hitting the walls.

One morning I came to the ORC, one of the residents, Qismat, was speaking with the administration. Clearly shaken, with red eyes and a nervous twitching to his hands, he told us about the night's incident. As he had had kitchen duty the day before, supervising its cleaning, he went to it before going to bed. There he had seen smoke rising from one of the ovens and immediately rushed over to see what was wrong. Inside it he found some pieces of paper that had been lit and crammed in together with some clothes that were beginning to burn. Throwing it all into the sink, extinguishing the flames, he locked the kitchen and went to his room. Shortly after, three asylees knocked on his door, angrily demanding that he unlock the kitchen as they wanted to make food. Reluctantly he unlocked the kitchen and headed over to his brother afterwards.

Straight after being told this story, the management contacted the police for guidance, who decided they wanted to talk to those who came knocking on Qismat's door. From previous incidents, it was evident to the management and to Qismat and his brother that those three had tried to start the fire, but they could not prove it. Incidents as dramatic as this were not common, but unrest and unruly behaviour were. Examples like this helps not only to show the actions taken by those most frustrated and angry, but also to show what it was like to live in the ORC fearing such people. As Qismat noted, "There are a hundred people living here, women and children! If that fire had started they could all have died, how are we to sleep knowing this, how can we feel safe?!"

2.5.4 Contextualizing Actions – Desperate Rationality?

What it is necessary to learn from the stories above, of Ahmed demanding to be put in jail or residents attempting to start a fire in the Reception Centre, is that such acts should not be understood as rational decisions, but rather as desperate ones, made in desperate situations. Trying to better understand this, I choose to draw on Haas (2017), who claims that to understand asylees' "[...] everyday lives in limbo requires an understanding of agency as *'manoeuvring within a set of constraints'* (Coutin, 2003, 173)." (p.90, emphasis in original). This implies that where asylees demonstrate their agency, it should be interpreted by looking

at the *context* in which they act, not in the actions alone. However, this is not to say that the actions of asylees are to be excused regardless of consequence, for that would remove the agency from the action, but rather that to understand them it is necessary to consider the constraints the individual is fighting.

This fight became too much for one of the asylees, I was told, who tried to take his own life in desperation, by jumping out of the third floor of the ORC. From the injuries he sustained, he had to be taken to the nearest hospital two hours away. After he has been treated, he refused to be taken back to the ORC, yelling for them to take him anywhere else. But neither the hospital nor the ORC had that authority, so he was sent back to Fjord until the UDI could find another Reception Centre for him to stay at.

I was unable to interact with this asylee myself, but he was not alone in wanting to do something desperate to amend his situation. Ahmed was also growing frantic from waiting, but, as he told me, it was not the waiting itself, rather the feelings that arose from it, that tore at him. That no matter how many times he asked and probed for answers, he felt no one was listening. When he did get answers, the estimations or claims that “it will be soon, just wait one more month” gave him hope in the beginning, but after the months passed and he was given the same answer over and over again he felt deceived.

This made him feel treated as if he had done something wrong, like a criminal, making him more sad than angry, as he felt judged and accused for reasons he could not comprehend. He felt sick and tired, saying how he just wanted to be treated as a human, “Because I am human, not a refugee!” At which point he told me that if the state cared nothing for his life, condemning him to live at the ORC indefinitely, why live at all? With tears falling from his eyes, he explained in an even voice how he intended to take his life, seeming painfully relieved by talking about how the anticipation and the shame would finally end.

While Ahmed did not take his life that day, his frustration and depression did not end either. His life in a state of limbo, a place “betwixt and between” as Victor Turner (1964) phrases it, continued. Living as an asylee, however, his situation might therefore be “[...] best understood not as a time of transition but rather as a time of rupture [...]” (Haas, 2017, p.80). Ahmed knew the situation would one day end, but by not knowing *when* made the experience feel not like a phase, but one of indefinite suffering.

2.6 Old and New Identities

Thinking there had to be a meaning to the ordeal they were going through, as they were at least safe in Norway, while their friends and family were either gone or still living in fear, some of the asylees turned to religion. Haas (2017) discovered something similar, stating that “The uncertainty and indeterminacy of a state of limbo prompted an active search for meaning and for some sense of uncertainty. Religion was often mobilized to this end.” (p.90). This was the case for some of my informants, for whom religion became the example to live by, making them focus more on personal hygiene, stop smoking and drinking, respect Ramadan¹, and practise much stricter sexual morals. While traits such as these might come altogether, they were also adopted separately as people saw fit, with different consequences.

The more devoted among the asylees would, for example, often impose their sexual morality onto the Muslim women much more harshly than they did towards the men. Social sanctions such as comments, insults or simply ignoring the women, were employed to make them do as the men wanted, which could be talking less, wearing the hijab, or not drinking or smoking. I was granted limited insight into these sanctions, as I was only able to speak with three women who had experienced this. However, I could confirm and build upon what they told me by speaking with their male friends and the employees at the ORC, which helped me form a more complete picture of their predicaments. These women I interviewed, both the one who still lived in the ORC and the two settled in municipalities, spoke of hardships directly associated with being a woman.

As the constellation of genders in Reception Centres reflects the demographic makeup of the refugees as a group, there is a clear majority of men in most Reception Centres. As a result, living in a Reception Centre as a woman becomes a life of unwanted attention, sexual harassment, and fear for one’s own safety. This was acknowledged by the workers at the ORC in Fjord, as well as some of my male asylee informants.

Although two of the women were reluctant to talk about their stay in the ORC, expressing great displeasure when the topic was raised, another seemed to have been angrily awaiting the

¹ Ramadan - An Islamic ritual where Muslims fast from sunrise to sunset from the 27th of May to the 24th of June

opportunity. I was told of how unpleasant it could be to take a shower in the morning, having to walk from your room on the third floor to the shared bathroom in the basement, enduring the attention and comments of the men on the way there. One of my informants who spoke of this would stress the fact that she could not go without one of her family members accompanying her. And so, for the women living in the ORC, they felt their freedom, of movement and expression, limited by the presence of both religious and lustful men.

For these women, the identity ascribed to them by the religious men was one they had not chosen themselves. Although they were not thinking of committing apostasy, they wanted to redefine their religion, meaning that they all wanted to break away from the definitions of others, and practise it as they themselves wanted. Several of my male informants proposed the same sentiment, claiming they “had no religion”. Though similar to the women, it was evident that “no religion” did not mean non-believing, but that religion was not to decide or rule their lives like it did before. My informants’ reasonings for this varied, but it was a recurrent factor that many had fled persecution or religious conflicts. As one of my key informants, Hassan, an educated man in his late thirties with a family living outside Norway, said “Of course it is about religion. It is politics and economics and everything else, but I was a target because I am Sunni, that was all they could see when they saw me.” To these men and women, arriving in a country void of religious conflict, and no judicial restrictions on members of any religion, they expressed relief in being able to start a new life doing what their religious identity had previously prevented.

2.7 Police and law enforcement

This renewed sense of freedom tied in with their experience with the law enforcement in Norway. From their reception at the International Police Immigration Service (PU), to their interaction with the local police in the municipalities, most of my informants spoke of only positive experiences with these institutions. As Mohammed said while slapping his legs in laughter: “Your police does not even feel like police, where I come from they would have punched me first, demanded money, then asked why I was at their office!”. While a satirical portrayal, this sentiment was repeated both with and without humour by several of my informants, expressing their fascination with the Norwegian police. My impression is that

there was a calm respect towards the police officers, but an uncertainty towards the laws they were to follow.

A case where this became apparent, was when the ORC was visited by two young police students. They held a mandatory presentation managed by the UDI, called “Module 9 – Norwegian Laws and Regulations” (UDI, n.d. b [My translation]), through which the asylees were told of the laws of Norway.² The presentation was held in two sessions, one with an Arabic translator, and the other with a Farsi one. As the presentation was structured it systematically addressed the men as if they were potential criminals, going into how they would be punished if they committed certain acts, like domestic violence, sexual harassment, or driving under influence.

After the first session, one asylee raised his hand, asking: “Does this apply to women as well?”, earning him some nervous laughter from the other asylees. Looking taken aback, the police students replied that it did, making the residents visibly relax. And in the second session, another asylee asked whether women were allowed to hit members of their family. To which the police students again replied that they were subject to the same laws as the men.

These examples show how the asylees’ perceptions of Norway as a country where women have more freedom than men are reproduced in the lessons they are given by the UDI. Though debunked after the presentation, the male asylees were still left with the impression that they had to be especially careful. Applying Pierre Bourdieu’s interpretation of *habitus*, the idea that individuals and their thought patterns are shaped by their experiences with both the world and the people in it, one cannot help but question this message the asylees were given.

Being given the impression that they are perceived by the government as likely or potential perpetrators of crimes helps create a narrative where the asylees feel mistrusted and judged by merely being defined as asylees. Bourdieu (2000) explains in his book, *Pascalian Meditations*, how the individual’s sense of self is affected by the misrecognition of others, becoming “[...] a practical knowledge that does not know itself, a ‘learned ignorance [...]’.

² This was its name during my fieldwork, but it has now been changed to “Module 9: Crime and conflict management”

And as a result, the individual is likely to be “[...] mistakenly recognizing oneself in a particular form of representation and public enunciation of the doxa³.” (p.185), entailing that the male asylee is forced to consider himself in the same light as the state does.

2.8 Adapting to a New Country and Identity

In contrast to what everyone complained and spoke of, there were still many of my informants who were positively hopeful of the future, men as well as women. What these individuals had in common seemed to be their fascination with and fondness for Norwegian people and culture. And they would talk emphatically about Norwegian friends they had made in Fjord and elsewhere, and how they had been helped or guided by them. Kolstad and Thorud (2010, p.160) show a similar trend by drawing on other studies, showing that there was a general interest in getting to know the majority population, and a desire to establish friendships outside their own ethnic group.

2.8.1 Internal Discord

When asked about negative experiences with Norwegians, Hassan would tell me bluntly: “There are no bad Norwegians, you are all good.” And as the conversation continued, bringing forth themes of racism and the politics of restricted immigration, he said: “You are a good people, this is your country, we are the guests. If you do not like us, that is our fault. We have to learn your language, your culture, and fit into your society.”. This sentiment stands in clear contrast, however, to what Kolstad and Thorud (2010, p.160) were told by asylees in other municipalities, where they tell of discrimination and feelings of being shunned by the local community.

Though not a sentiment shared by everyone I encountered, it was an idea held to by the most optimistic men I met, like Saqib, a fully qualified civil engineer who had already learnt Norwegian, who stressed the importance of understanding that “*This is not Syria, and it will never be Syria.*”⁴ Saqib and his contemporaries would be keen to point out how those who did not adjust to the new country and culture were at fault, and not the majority population or the system. As they were doing this, they placed themselves in the crosshairs of the very

³ Doxa – the common belief / popular opinion

⁴ As Saqib spoke Norwegian I have translated all his statements to English

individuals who they criticized, being eyed suspiciously, and at times ostracized from the social groups in the ORC. Those who were more eager to, for example, learn the Norwegian language and adapt, would at times flaunt their opinions, as Hassan was adept at doing:

These guys [asylees] do not know how to behave, they will be disrespectful, throw trash on the floor, not recycle even after being told so many times, and never do as they are instructed. They are not all bad, but some of them are animals! – Hassan

However, Hassan and one of these “animals” had to socialize as they had mutual friends at the ORC, something they managed to do most of the time. Such discord between individuals could also be ethnically loaded, with Kurds and Afghanis often being at odds with Arabs from Syria and Iraq. But this was not always the case, as people got on each other’s nerves regardless of religion or ethnicity. At times it was due to being part of the same group that caused the most unrest and division, as some would “abandon” past traits or norms in favour of new, Norwegian ones. This could outrage those who defined themselves as more traditional, to whom the adoption of another set of values at the cost of the old was considered a grievous offence.

2.8.2 A Shared Identity – A Shared Responsibility

To Hassan, however, adopting the norms and following the social rules he was shown and told about, was the most logical thing to do. He would talk at length about how satisfaction with Norway and Norwegians was only strengthened by his frustration with the other refugees and asylees who took Norwegians’ kindness for granted. Recounting how things had been when he first came to Europe as a refugee, of being met with warmth and aid, he was ashamed by what had happened in the Paris terrorist attacks on 13th November 2015, and in the New Year’s Eve sexual assaults in Cologne on 31st December 2015. After such events, people changed their opinions, and rightfully so he claimed:

Why would they trust us? They opened their homes for us, and that is how we repay them?! It is up to every single one of us to prove that we are not like those criminals, you have already showed us trust and we broke it. You cannot do more. – Hassan

Saqib would also find himself at odds with his fellow asylees while he was staying at a Reception Centre. Due to similar concerns and opinions like Hassan, he would draw

comparison between his attitude and that of those who were more traditional, with their poor attendance in school, saying:

What you have to understand is that these guys who don't understand Norway, who don't go to school or seem to care, it was not like they were the best students in Syria either. They have never gone to anything more than elementary school, if even that, and now they are stuck in a country that demands of them what they never bothered doing back home. – Saqib

Here it is shown how both Saqib and Hassan distanced themselves from the “other” asylees, those who “would not behave” or “did not understand Norway”. They would associate themselves with them, acknowledging them as “fellow refugees” or “Syrians”, while at the same time marking their difference from them by designating in them traits of deviancy and ignorance. It is important to understand that my asylee and refugee informants were vividly aware that they would be judged by the actions of other refugees and asylees. They were all too aware as to why, seeing how they shared the same goal as others who had fled, struggling to achieve safety, prosperity, and a new life. Knowing the host society would be unable to discern which of the asylees to trust and not trust, many of my asylee informants did what they could to mark their difference.

It seems that men like Saqib and Hassan, who were more enthusiastic towards Norway and Norwegians, had more positive experiences with Norwegians in general. Why this was the case is debatable, but it would seem that already having a university degree, speaking English, and being more liberal towards e.g. alcohol, were lasting factors that helped them to get to know Norwegians. All in all, the effort made by asylees who, in their predicament of living in Reception Centres and not knowing when or if they will get residence permission, were still trying to fit into Norway, ought to be recognized.

2.9 What Next?

While my informants differed in their reactions to living in the ORC, they were in agreement in their hope for life to become better after they were to be settled in a municipality. As was shown, there were many opinions about what would change, how their lives would begin once they acquired the residence permit, and which municipalities they wanted to go to. Most believed that there would be more for them to do, that they could live close to friends and

family, or even close to Norwegian friends they had met while staying in other Reception Centres.

With all these expectations for the future, of how things were going to, or had to, change, Ahmed was sceptically awaiting life ahead. Knowing that he had at least two years of schooling and practice work to complete, hopefully achieving the language level of B2 so he could apply for university, he was looking at a time horizon of at least five years before he could achieve a bachelor's degree. Remaining unenthusiastic, he would return to the themes of growing old, wanting to start a family, and therefore he felt he had no time for the Integration Program awaiting him. His perspective of his own future was accordingly dampened, as it remained locked behind a wall of time and effort he felt unnecessary, seeing as he had already been a working man before.

In this chapter I have shown how my asylee informants experienced living in ORC, what they thought of Norwegians and the asylum application system, and how they coped with their situation. The discussion has revolved around how this can be understood through theories on life in Reception Centres, the creation of identity, and under which structures the asylees operate. I now turn to the perspective of the Norwegians in Fjord, how they perceived the Reception Centres, and their attempts at socializing with the asylees.

Chapter 3

Interacting with the Reception Centre and its Residents

Having addressed the perspectives of my asylee informants, of how they experienced the Ordinary Reception Centre (ORC) and the Norwegians in Fjord, it is important to better understand the perspectives of these Norwegians. Beginning this Chapter, I look at how my Norwegian informants felt about having to accommodate two Reception Centres, before addressing the interactions they had with the asylees living there. From there, I end by showing how they reacted to the closing of the Reception Centres.

3.0 Concerns and Practicalities

As stated in **1.1.4**, two Reception Centres were established in Fjord within the span of one year. As the first one to be erected was shut down within the year, I was unable to visit it for myself, but my Norwegian informants were more than willing to talk about it. This Reception Centre for Single, Minor Asylees (RCSMA), housed around thirty asylees, and as it was located close to a kindergarten, the RCSMA's administration wanted to rent some rooms from it, in which teaching for the asylees could take place.

Realizing that the asylees would be so close to their children, most of the parents objected, but with different concerns. Some feared possible diseases, while others speculated in what might happen should the asylees' application be denied, wondering whether any of them could become violent. After earnest talks between the Mayor, the parents, the neighbourhood, and the management of the RCSMA, an agreement was reached. The asylees were to be educated using classrooms in the kindergarten, but they would not be allowed to have recess at the same time as the other children.

The Kindergarten Manager and its Administrator both pointed out that no incidents occurred between the kindergarten and the RCSMA, and they recounted how the parents grew accustomed to it and its residents. A few of the neighbours were still annoyed with the asylees however, as some would walk over their fields, or take up space in the road where there was no pavement for pedestrians. They stressed that these annoyances were minor, however, and that the asylees learned to conform to their wishes after a while.

In May, five months after the first centre was opened, the ORC was established at the other end of the municipality, housing both families and single men and women. Since it was able to accommodate one hundred and twenty individuals, the locals living close to the ORC were concerned that the municipality would be unable to uphold its responsibilities towards the asylees living there. These concerns included the need for teachers to educate the asylees, Health Personnel to serve their potential needs, and the foreseen workload for the municipality.

What is interesting to note here is how the notion that the welfare state should cover for the asylees' needs is unquestioned in my Norwegian informants' perception of how the asylees were to be accommodated while living in the ORC. It is, as Marianne Rugkåsa (2012) asserts in her book about integration into the Norwegian welfare state, the ideology of the Norwegian welfare system that the Norwegian state provides for its citizens. And what my informants were quick to notice was how it did not seem as if the state, or in this case the municipality, was able to fulfil its obligation towards the people living in the ORC.

3.0.1 How One Thing Leads to Another

My informants recounted how, from day one, the ORC met several challenges that proved to be a headache for those working there. The management told me of how they had never worked in a Reception Centre before, and that they had not been trained by the UDI, which made them feel grossly unqualified. They also noted how the municipality did not have the necessary resources or time to give the asylees schooling just before the summer vacation, so they had to hire a couple of teachers to give Norwegian language classes at the ORC.

For some reason, however, these teachers did not get paid. And they told me that only after having threatened with a lawsuit did they receive their pay, three months later. However, these teachers were not the only ones who had problems with their salaries. The other workers at the ORC were also vocal about how they were not being paid for working overtime, and that some of the other employees would either rarely show up, or not do what they were supposed to while there.

I am not a stingy person, but I have to feed my kids, I can't go too long without my salary. What do you think it does to our motivation to do a proper job when we are not compensated? I've had to loan money from my mother-in-law for God's sake!
– Smith 1, Employee at ORC

These factors led to the daily management of the ORC being inefficient in many areas. This might also have prolonged some of the asylees' stay at the ORC, as applications and documents for Reception Centre transfers would disappear, causing much frustration and unrest. In addition, the asylees' monthly grants would not always arrive when they should, leaving them at times without money for food and basic articles for some days. This forced some to become dependent on loans from their friends at the ORC, and others to feel weary and afraid of what could happen if the money did not arrive.

Attempting to amend situations like this, some of the employees would work several hours overtime, exhausting themselves in the process. This led to two of the employees becoming sick from overwork, and another to quit, as he/she felt the asylees were being mistreated at the ORC.

3.0.2 Consequences of a Remote Location

In this situation, where the administration was without much experience or training, as well as often understaffed, the ORC suffered from a dysfunctional structure, ultimately affecting the asylees living there. This point was also raised by the Health Personnel, who in their sessions with the asylees were told of the ORC's defects: "Personal conflicts can quickly affect those living in the Reception Centre, such as being overlooked, noticing the irritation of the workers, or that progress at the Reception Centre stops and thus affects their daily lives." – Maja

And as mentioned in Chapter 2, the residents had to be driven by car should they need to get anywhere from the ORC, which was just as true for the children living there. They needed help to get to activities and events, such as birthday parties and football practice, but this help was not always forthcoming, as the Principal at the local school recounted during our interview:

Most obvious was it, when they were not able to pick up and drive children who were going to events, like this one time, where a small boy had to wait for almost two hours

outside to be taken to the Christmas Celebration at our school. In winter! And worst of all, the management never came for him, so he stood there waiting in the cold for nothing! – Karete

After I had been coming to the ORC for a couple of weeks, it became my unofficial responsibility to drive these children, as their parents somehow got hold of my phone number. At times I ended up taking families and other single residents to events I found out about myself, raising the question as to why the management had not informed the asylees themselves. Another example of such inadequate information was how the asylees did not know of the Volunteer Centre's Language Café, which existed for the sole purpose of giving the asylees and refugees a chance to speak and socialize with Norwegians.

This type of either deliberate or inconsiderate lack of information was something I witnessed throughout my fieldwork, which at times could prove rather embarrassing. One such case was when a concert was held in Fjord, which only two of the asylees had heard of. Arriving at the concert, however, the asylees were unable to get in, because the tickets for the concert were sold out, having been available for purchase online for a few months. The two asylees were left with no other choice than to go back to the ORC, disappointed and sad, as they had been eagerly awaiting this opportunity to forget about their lives for a while.

One of the employees did try to drive some of the residents to activities such as football and Taekwon-Do training, but because such activities had limited capacity, only a few asylees were able to participate. And as they had to be taken by car, it became something the management had to do after their working hours, which was a service few were able to offer. Having families and commitments outside their job at the ORC, the workers were prevented from spending more time with the asylees than they were paid to spend. And seeing as the ORC was a 15 minutes' drive (13km) from the gymnastics hall at the school, and about 28 minutes (27 km) from the closest fitness gym, not including the distance from the employees' homes to the ORC, driving became a costly affair.

3.0.3 Discouraging Cooperation

But transportation was only part of the problem, as the main issue the Norwegians had with the ORC was how much of a struggle it was to get in contact with it. This was made abundantly clear by the Daily Manager at the Volunteer Centre:

We do not have much to do with the Reception Centre [ORC], but the communication with it is horrific, and the way they follow up on agreements is very bad. We have tried many times to cooperate, but it so often ends up with a response on the first e-mail, but nothing afterwards. One case like that was the Christmas Present Event, where we wanted to give presents to everyone at the Reception Centre. We were so close to achieving this, but it fell short as the management did not follow through with the planning. – Trude

Private individuals also told of negative experiences with the management, as in one case where they had donated clothes to the ORC. A local recounted how she and her friend had been asked to just place the clothes in a corner for later distribution. But when they returned a few days later with more clothes, they saw how the clothes they had washed and folded had been tossed into large heaps. Taken aback, they offered to organize a system and sort the clothes out, but they were given a blunt “no” and shown the door. "Who is ‘the Reception Centre’? It may be the one you encounter when you enter. It's very random. " – Tyra, local in Fjord

Annoyance with the ORC was also very visible at the Emergency Room, which I often had to drive asylees to. The employees there frequently pointed out how they had not been sent updated lists of who lived at the ORC, nor their personal information, which they needed to process the asylees as patients. Becoming agitated due to the prolonged miscommunication, the employees vented their frustration at the asylees. In response to events like this and those discussed above, the Norwegians who tried to work with the ORC became annoyed and disheartened. And as communications so often fell short, trying to work on promises and deals that were never fulfilled, the interest of these Norwegians in working with the ORC faded.

3.1 Formal Interactions

As mentioned above, there were teachers working in the ORC, and the asylees had the opportunity to go to language classes to practise Norwegian. Four of the teachers I interviewed taught at the ORC, and they were very concerned about the asylees they taught. Recounting how most of their pupils often stopped attending classes, they recognized it as a symptom of depression and stress among the asylees, feeling powerless in trying to motivate

them. The teachers did, however, recognize the effort made by those who attended school, and as one of them mentioned:

Those who attend, they attend almost every single time, so here we are talking about specially interested guys. Some of the others are probably thinking that they have to start from scratch when they are settled in a municipality, if they ever are settled that is. – Geir

All the teachers I interviewed acknowledged that it was difficult for the asylees to get up in the morning, attend school and so benefit from that effort. They would stress that this made it no less important to do so, but they could not ignore the effects the ORC had on their pupils. “As a result of there being few activities for them during the day, there are no routines being created, and so they sleep a lot, and are awake in the night.” – Geir

This view coincides with what my asylee informants recounted in Chapter 2, that they felt it was impossible to learn the Norwegian language under the ORC’s conditions. This was a sentiment the Health Personnel agreed with, stating that:

When it comes to learning the language, then there are many who sleep during the day and report back to us about traumas and problems with unrest and nightmares. There is also much of the socializing that happens at night, so others complain about noise and how it prevents them from sleeping. Teaching then becomes nearly impossible, and we see a lot of depression, fear, subpar nutrition and as a result, little sleep. – Maja

Considering what the asylees had been through, the Health Personnel’s impression was that the ORC was a debilitating place for the asylees to stay, and they stressed that while their services were greatly appreciated, it was not common for other Reception Centres to offer the same. And as they saw their own efforts only cover a fraction of what the asylees needed, they found the prioritization of mental health to be severely inadequate, especially considering how the ORC lacked activities and social events.

We are so terribly frustrated by how little is done for the suffering and ailments of these people, and when there are not even activities or things to do, it only worsens the situation of those who are sitting all day in the Reception Centre. We ask ourselves if there are any sanctions against running a bad operation, having no training, lack of information or the like. Here is a neglected of human life and potential, should no one be held responsible!?! – Guri

Several of my Norwegian informants sympathized with this notion, and in my interviews with the Child Welfare Authority (CWA) in the neighbouring municipality, the manager shared his concerns:

If we were to follow up children in the Reception Centres as we do with Norwegian children, we would have to approach every single family in every Reception Centre we know of. Both the premises and the staff of the Reception Centres are inadequate compared to our standards. – Richard

What is shown in the examples above is how the Norwegians working with different institutions felt limited in their ability to intervene in how the asylees were treated. Some tried to argue with the ORC management, while others accepted that this was how the system worked. In contrast to this stands the actions of one member in the MA, who breached protocol to allow for the children living at the ORC to go to kindergarten. The computer system would not allow her to register these children without a social security number, something they did not have since they were asylees. Using a random number generator, she was able to bypass the computer system, allowing for the children to attend kindergarten. This action had profound consequences: not only were the children able to go to kindergarten, make friends and learn Norwegian, but their parents were also able to go to school.

3.2 The Experiences of the Locals

The case of the employees working administratively in the Municipality shows how the actions of one individual can have great consequences, but often actions carried out by people were not perceived by them to be of any importance. In the coming section, I take a closer look at the role private individuals played in relation to the ORC and its residents. While some older locals thought the asylees had too easy a life, wasting away their time in the ORC and not learning Norwegian, others sympathized more with the situation the asylees were in.

3.2.1 Reflections of a Cattle Farmer

The situation for the asylees seemed to be thought of by the people working with them as paralyzing, preventing their participation in class and condemning them to a life of depression. This impression is important to compare with the perceptions of the local

Norwegians who got to know the asylees personally. An example is one of the neighbours to the ORC, the cattle farmer “Synne”, who befriended the asylees. She told me that when the ORC was erected, she had thought she might need to stop leaving her keys in the ignition of her tractor and car, like she always did. She then told how several asylees had visited her to buy milk from her cows. They did not fancy the cheese sold in the supermarket, and so they sought her out to buy raw milk to make their own cheese.

She recounted how the asylees had started the conversation by assuring her that they were Christian and not Muslim, to which she had responded: “Uh. Ok. Don’t know if it matters, I guess we are nothing here. Hahaha”. She told me of their bewildered looks, joking about how they probably did not understand anything. But as she said, “Well they weren’t scared away at least, for they kept coming, and even more did as well after a while.” And as the asylees got to know her, she started joining them for dinners at the ORC, getting to know them personally. And soon enough she disregarded taking any precautions about the tractor, saying: “Where would they go with it, as if they have anywhere to go, they wanted to come here did they not? Ha-ha!” Hearing about this study she barked another laugh, saying: “First and foremost, a hundred guys in one abandoned school where they have to live together, three to four in a room, is not integration. And it won’t become it either, it is a hopeless subject!”

Her impression was that it seemed like the asylees went into hibernation while at the ORC, not wanting to go to school, or to do anything at all. She had tried to wake some up in the morning to get them to class, but they went right back to sleep when she left their rooms. Though she understood that some were waiting for their before investing time and energy in learning the language, she told me that, “The Syrians all get the residence permit, so they have no reason to wait,” stressing that they had to learn the language to get anywhere in this society. She recognized, however, that where some tried very hard, others did not seem to care enough.

3.2.2 Becoming a Family’s ‘Grandparents’

Some of the asylee families were placed in old houses around the municipality for various reasons, such as unavailability of rooms in the ORC or problems with the other asylees. I interviewed a retired couple, Leif and Hanne, who got one of these asylee families as their new neighbours. They had hoped that a family, not single asylees, would be living next door to them. And when the family moved in, Hanne emphatically recounted how she and her

husband had both rushed straight over with a cake to greet them. “We got a good tone going immediately, and I think it was partly because they saw us as grandparents.”

The relationship between them was further bolstered after the children of the asylee family went to school for the first time. Hanne, teary-eyed, would retell the story of how the parents had acted when their son and daughter got picked up for school:

When the children went to school for the first time, they [the parents] were very afraid their children might not return. And we watched as they stood by the road after the children had left just looking in the direction the bus had went. We invited them over for tea and cake, then we called the school and were told that the children had arrived safely, and you could see how relieved the parents were. They were so afraid of losing their children, and it was so very special to see that strong reaction, considering what they have been through. – Hanne

From this day onwards, they experienced how the family would trust and respect them in a whole new way, and together they would bake pastries, knit Norwegian ‘Marius-sweaters’, and dine and drink tea together. Remembering these interactions, Hanne briskly noted how she felt they could have been less picky about the food, feeling they were uninterested in trying food they did not know. She and Leif also thought the family could have tried harder to learn the language, and they felt the parents relied too much on the fact that their children, who both went to school, could translate for them. The father in the family was over sixty years old, and as such was exempt from the language requirements to get a permanent residence permit, so he felt neither incentivized nor obliged to make the effort.

These annoyances were, however, secondary to the friendship that formed between these two families, and when the time came for the family to be settled, they pleaded with the IMDi to be settled in Fjord. Hanne and Leif told of how happy the family had been when their wish was granted, though they were saddened that they had been unable to visit them in their new apartment now that they were no longer neighbours. They assured me, however, that they would be able to meet them regularly as soon as the family got a driver’s licence and car of their own.

3.2.3 A Family's Invitation

One Saturday during my fieldwork, I was invited to join a fishing trip with my landlady and her friends: one Norwegian woman, her three daughters, and four former residents from the RCSMA. The woman, Frida, told me of how she had met the youngsters during their stay at the RCSMA, which she lived close to. She retold the story of how she had, a year before, seen them walking along the road between the store and the RCSMA, and had decided to give them a lift. She continued to do so when she spotted them along the road, and, from these encounters, they had started visiting her at her home.

Having travelled to Lesvos with the Norwegian Women's Health Association, Frida had worked to help the refugees who arrived on the beaches and shore-line, dishevelled and scared. She brought these impressions with her back home, referring to them when talking about how she had interacted with the asylees. She recognized that it was not common for others to reach out a hand like that, and understood the scepticism felt by the neighbourhood. She was, however, exasperated with how some of the older farmers and demanding mothers had kept complaining about what she considered to be problems of no magnitude. Fearing that the asylees would be dangerous, disease-ridden, and deviant, these Norwegians were overdramatic in Frida's eyes. "Those who do not understand or want to understand those who are coming here have not been involved. It is clear that they [The Norwegians] do not know who they [The Asylees] are or why they came here."

Interacting with the asylees, Frida and her husband Knut would laugh about what they coined as "*crash courses in tolerance*", about how the asylees would ride their horses without any concern for their own safety, and be totally oblivious to Norwegian table manners:

And it's funny, when we got visits from the young asylees, it was full on with Afghan music on the TV, bread baking on the floor a few centimetres away from the cats' litterbox and eating with a great deal of gulping and slurping. It's amazing, I'm working in the barn, so I'm not a neat guy, but when these guys start eating, I'm this close to cover my ears. – Knut

In this scenario, where both Knut and Frida were shocked by the behaviour of the asylees, they were still able to laugh about it. Frida would point out how these youths were from poor, rural families, not having been taught similar table manners as their hosts. Having accepted

that fact, it was apparently easier for her and Knut not to hold the asylees' actions against them, knowing they meant no disrespect.

I choose here to draw on Pierre Bourdieu (2000), who states that to fit into a group, one does not have to bring the exact habitus of that group. But rather “[...] a habitus that is practically compatible, or sufficiently close, and above all malleable and capable of being converted into the required habitus, in short, congruent and docile, amenable to restructuring.” (p.100). And as seen here, with how Mette, Hanne, Leif, Frida and Knut socialized with their asylee neighbours, these interactions are not occurring between similar people. Rather, these interactions were occurring between people who wanted the same thing, friendships. These friendships were, however, built on the precarious situations of the asylees, which shaped the nature of the interaction. Therefore, it is important to reflect upon the possible self-interest of the Norwegians in these interactions.

As was explained, my Norwegian informants sought out the asylees, not necessarily across large distances, but within the local setting they occupied in their everyday lives. But in their willingness to engage the asylees, these Norwegians were themselves interested in the interactions for their own reasons. Lisa Malkki (2015) uncovers something similar in her book *The Need to Help*, where she states that “Giving is often styled as emanating from an abundance [...], but in the context I have described, *giving emerges out of a stark need.*” (p.64, emphasis in original)

And as I have shown, my Norwegian informants had their own motives for socializing with the asylees. Hanne and Leif were a retired couple wanting new friends, and Frida felt she had to do something for the asylees, as she had previously been to Lesbos helping refugees. By highlighting these possible reasons for helping, I am not attempting to devalue the intentions of the Norwegians. Rather, by pointing out the reasons for these interactions, the notion that the asylees are only receivers of help is altered to allow for them to be of help to the Norwegians as well. With that in mind, I turn to the next section of this chapter, where I will look at the responses of the Norwegians to losing the Reception Centres and, with them, their friends.

3.3 The Unambiguous Nature of Reception Centres

Up until now I have shown how the Norwegians reacted to the Reception Centres and socialized with their residents, but, as mentioned in 1.1.4, the Reception Centres closed down, the one after the other, the RCSMA in December 2016, and the ORC in May 2017. During their operation, moreover, asylees were occasionally evicted after having been denied residence, or moved to other Reception Centres. It therefore becomes important to address how the Norwegians of Fjord experienced the eviction of asylees and the closing of the Reception Centres.

3.3.1 *Saying Goodbye*

My Norwegian informants had to face the reality that the asylees they had come to know, as pupils, friends and neighbours, were leaving Fjord for other municipalities or to be deported from Norway. Their relations with the asylees varied, and so did their reactions to them being moved. Mette spoke about how her former students sent her messages, telling her how they missed her and their lives in Norway. They were now living on the streets of Paris, having fled from Norway after being denied a residence permit. Seeing them sleeping on the streets on the news, talking with them on the phone, and reading their text messages, Mette felt shaken by her own powerlessness to do anything for these men whom she had taught in Fjord just a few days earlier.

Frida and Knut were also at a loss as to how they should respond to the fact that asylees they had befriended at the RCSMA were now facing deportation. This feeling of not being able to comprehend the situation, not knowing what to do, was the case for their children as well. They had become friends with children of asylees at school and in the kindergarten, but these friendships were becoming painful now that their friends were being evicted. Frida recounted the evening when they were given the news that the family they had come to know were leaving in a couple of days:

They had decided to not tell anyone, not even their own children, and so suddenly we were in our living room, talking with this family. We were all crying, but not my eldest daughter. It was especially uncanny that she was unable to show any feelings back to her friend who had to leave. She was completely quiet after we had been told they had to travel. So, I told her “it is alright to be sad”, and she burst into tears, crying the whole evening. And so, the next day we visited the family and she got to say properly goodbye and give her friend her favourite teddy bear. – Frida

From this experience, Frida and Knut wondered how the Norwegians who were left behind should feel. They pondered how Norwegian children would start acting towards other children that made them think of the friends they lost, and if they would refrain from befriending them in fear of losing more friends. As for the asylees, they could not start to comprehend how they must experience being moved from one place to another. “These kids who have to go from place to place must start wondering why they should invest time and feelings in other children if it's just sad to let go of them after a few months.” – Frida

In another case, an asylee family was moving out of the apartment the ORC had rented for them, and as they were about to leave, the landlord rushed out to say goodbye, giving the family something to eat for the journey, and the kids some candy. He and his wife were upset because they had been given such a short notice of the asylees' departure. They were therefore dismayed about the fact that they had not been able to say properly goodbye, not having had time to invite the family over for a last dinner.

Form these experiences Frida conveyed her frustration to me: “Earlier it has been more understandable who was thrown out. Now, however, they throw out "everyone" for completely incomprehensible reasons. We do not see how they think at all.” This point was repeated by several of my Norwegian informants, who felt that while they could understand how the state acted before, they were now unable to comprehend how decisions were made.

3.3.2 An Investment Squandered

The closing of the Reception Centres proved problematic for other reasons as well. Fjord had invested time and resources into making itself suitable to accommodate the asylees, and had hired teachers and Health Personnel, and established new positions in the municipality to deal with the Reception Centres. Now the effort felt wasted, and the knowledge and experience they had built up felt superfluous. But possibly worst of all were the missing jobs, and the five employees at the ORC, including those working with it administratively in the municipality, had to either find new work or be assigned different roles. For those who lost their jobs, some had to leave the municipality to find work elsewhere, while others went back to receiving social benefits from the Social Welfare Service (NAV).

3.4 A Necessary Reflection

This chapter has looked at how my Norwegian informants in Fjord experienced the asylum Reception Centres and their residents. Going from being a municipality practically unbeknown to refugees and asylees, to one hosting two Reception Centres within the same year, Fjord's inhabitants could not help but be affected. Meeting new challenges and solving the problems that arose, both as individuals and as a municipality, my informants developed various relationships with the asylees. Where most felt sceptical and unnerved by the initial changes in 2015, my informants had come to their own understanding of the asylees, and their role in interacting with them.

These responses were as varied as the individuals I interviewed, with some preferring to mind their own business, while others tried to be of use to the ORC and its residents. There were also those who worked with the asylees as teachers, Health Personnel or in the management of the Reception Centres, and who developed close friendships with the asylees. For these individuals, the experience of having friends sent back to what they considered to be war zones, or to be forced to flee in the face of that probability, was a heavy burden to bear.

For the municipality, having established and lost two workplaces within a year became a sore topic, leaving many of my informants feeling they had been snubbed by the state. Indeed, some were left with the feeling that this was "the last time" they would ever accept a Reception Centre (although any such decision would be made by the state, not the municipality). Others felt that their hard-earned experience and the effort that had gone into accommodating the centres was to be wasted now that they were being closed.

It is sobering to reflect on how the people of Fjord's willingness to accommodate another Reception Centre became affected by their experience with the previous ones. This raises an important question for this thesis, concerning how this experience might translate into the Norwegians' attitude to, and actions towards the refugees being settled in Fjord. And with this question, Chapter 4 begins. Here I will show how the settled refugees of Fjord and the local Norwegians interacted with each other. Consequently, the narratives of Chapter 2 and 3 continues, combining the perspectives of the local Norwegians and the former asylees, to better understand the challenges of both "groups".

Chapter 4

Perspectives of the Norwegians and Refugees in Fjord

When the asylee is given a temporary residence permit, leaving the life in the Reception Centre behind, life as a settled refugee in Norway begins. One should not assume, however, that the life the refugee has led up to this point, with the fear of being evicted and the stressors of the Reception Centre, are forgotten. Neither should the experiences of the local Norwegians be ignored, as they are directly linked to the refugee's integration in society. With this in mind, this chapter explores the perspectives of both my refugee and Norwegian informants, as well as their expectations of each other.

4.0 A Situation to be Administered

Whereas the responsibility to accommodate the asylees was given the municipality as a decision by the government of Norway, the settling of refugees was something the municipality had more control over. And as the municipality's Treasurer explained to me, Fjord received funding from the government based on its population, which the settled refugees were now part of. Thus, as a growing municipality, Fjord was bolstered by the system of funding from central to local government, as well as receiving an additional "integration grant" (IMDi, 2018b). This was a compensation that would last for the first five years of a refugee's stay in the municipality, covering expenses such as schooling and social welfare. Should the refugee find or create a job, and start paying taxes like other citizens, the "integration grant" would not be affected, meaning that the refugee situation was economically beneficial for Fjord. All this was explained to me by its Treasurer.

Having decided that they would settle refugees, Fjord had to make accommodation for the Introduction Programme. This program was aimed at providing the refugees with a fundamental knowledge of Norwegian language and society and prepare them for work and further education (Justis- og beredskapsdepartementet, 2016). To achieve this, the refugees of Fjord had to attend school from Monday to Friday and had practice work some days of the week as well. I was told that the intention was for the combined effort in both school and work to help the refugee adjust to Fjord, and to get them to know Norwegians and learn the

language. The local Norwegians seemed content with this arrangement, and found it reassuring to know that the municipality provided the refugees with something “real” to do.

4.0.1 Varying Thoughts on Schooling

The idea that the life as a refugee would become better after coming to the municipality was shared by all my informants: Norwegians, asylees and refugees alike. And the Introduction Programme was one of the reasons why they believed this to be the case. Where schooling was optional for the asylees, this was not the case for the refugees, who now had to attend, or have their monthly grant cut, as explained in the Introduction. This economic incentive seemed to be appreciated by the refugees I was in contact with, as they claimed it gave them a real reason to get up early and go to school. However, the way they were being educated was not as well received, and it was a topic often raised. One of my key informants in particular, a man in his mid-twenties from East Africa, was very vocal about this:

I like to go to school, the teachers are nice, but why do we just write and write, and speak with the teacher? I want to make friends with Norwegians. To practise my language I have to use it all the time, not only at school. So why can I not go to classes with Norwegians, why only refugees? – Kit

The teachers I interviewed sympathized with this sentiment but argued that although the refugees should have been spending more time with other Norwegians, it was not simple to mix the classes. They claimed that, since age, skills and culture were so drastically different, placing refugees and Norwegians in the same classroom would impede the learning outcome of the Norwegian students. In addition, the teachers felt the refugees could be difficult enough to teach by themselves. Mette would point out how the “culture of learning” differed between her Norwegian and refugee pupils, and that the refugees had a different way of looking at what constituted “learning”. She was exasperated with how most of her refugee pupils sought to complete the assignments they were given, but that they were uninterested in actually learning why the answer they had given was the correct one.

4.0.2 Struggling to Teach

Mette and two other teachers also told how it had been especially difficult to teach the students who fasted during Ramadan and had therefore no energy to participate in class. This was, however, not the only consequence, as some of those who fasted were making it a point to call out those who did not, causing unrest and quarrels in the classroom. Concerning the

more religious students, Mette told of an incident where the school had gone for a trip to the closest city, prior to which some of the Muslim men had found out that there was a Mosque there. But when they got to the city, the Mosque was nowhere to be found:

They were so furious. I have to say that I am somewhat afraid of whatever it is about religion that burns so strongly. It is so incomprehensible to know what is important in another's religion. I see that it is extremely difficult to reconstruct oneself in a new culture. And it's probably easier to hold on something known, like one's religion. I guess it will be the 'only' thing that makes sense. – Mette

As they tried their best to accommodate the needs of their pupils, the teachers felt weary from experiences like the one above, feeling that some of the refugees acted ungratefully. This was a recurrent sentiment, and, as another teacher pointed out, while some refugees really made an effort in learning the language, others made much slower progress.

A lot is happening and being arranged, but very few, and at times none, join in. They themselves feel that it is not easy to get in touch with Norwegians, and we are left with the feeling that they do not use the opportunities they have to get to know us. But you of course have the individuals who seize every opportunity and clearly benefits from it by achieving a much better language than the others. – Gudrun

4.0.3 A Following Error

This notion, that the refugees did not participate as much as they could, was held by some of my Norwegian informants. They argued that at some point it was the refugees' own responsibility to integrate themselves by at least participating in the activities arranged for them. And as one of my informants who worked in the upper tiers of the municipality stressed, "I do not wish to sound like a racist, but I sometimes feel like a few of the refugees could do more, some are really taking their time learning the language."

Working with the programs designed to aid the refugees, she and the other bureaucrats, as well as the teachers, were especially aware of the difference between the individual refugees' efforts and results. This led these Norwegians to form stronger opinions of what the refugees should be doing, like participating in activities to learn the language and socialize and to find a real job in addition to the practice one. Seen in relation to the perspectives addressed in Chapter 3, one must be aware of the effort the municipality and its inhabitants made to accommodate the Reception Centres, when addressing their stance towards the settled

refugees. Because although the refugees settled in Fjord were not the same people as the asylees who had lived in the Reception Centres, they were still thought of as being part of the same *group*.

This perception was conveyed in the different stories told by the Norwegians during my interviews with them. These were stories of ingratitude, indifference, and even unnecessary extravagance. One of my informants told of such a story, of a refugee family who one day drove around in an expensive, new car. The reaction to which was that it felt odd, to the point of dishonesty, that a family who received help from both the Social Welfare Service (NAV) and private individuals would spend their money on such a luxury. Mette recounted another such story of displeasure with how the refugees seemingly responded to kindness offered:

There are completely different ‘codes’ for how they and we give and receive help. Or for example the understanding of what a favour entails, like when I offered to transport some firewood to a family’s home. After having agreed on the time we were to bring the firewood over, the family were not at home to receive it when we arrived. It all makes me a bit exasperated you know, because we don’t want to treat them like anything but friends, but when we do them a favour we expect some sort of recognition for that act. At the very least the respect of acknowledging the favour by being present at the time we agreed on, so that we don’t have to go more out of our way than we need. – Mette

4.1 Participation and Loneliness

However, one should not downplay the agency and effort made by the refugees, as Vijay Agnew (2005) reminds us in her book about the past and present identity of the refugee, that “[...] they are rarely, particularly today, mere victims who are acted upon by the larger society” (p.5). Because, although several of my Norwegian informants could experience the refugees as ungrateful at times, or as unwilling to participate as much as they wanted them to, many of my refugee informants were still actively attempting to do so.

This was the case for some of the refugees in their twenties, who joined the local football team, which was greatly appreciated by the Norwegians, who needed the additional players. Others would seek out more social gatherings, like the Volunteer Centre, and its Language Café, which it held once a week. Here the refugees were able to meet Norwegians, practise their language, and share their stories. But even though they enjoyed their time at these

gatherings, chatting and eating waffles, the men were unable to form close friendships with any of the Norwegian participants. And after both football training and meetings at the Language Café, the Norwegians would return to their families, while the refugees would go back home alone.

4.1.1 Experiencing Social Distance

Aliya Sorgen (2015) writes about a similar situation with her refugee informants, whom she recruited at a conversation club, who also experienced that the native population had “[...] ‘somewhere to go’, either home or work. In comparison, the refugees/asylum seekers are left to their own devices without the same sense of grounding or rootedness in a daily routine or a stable sense of place.” Although my refugee informants lived in their own apartments, these were often shared with other refugees, not necessarily family or friends, and so the experience of returning to it was not comparable to going *home*. “In this way, one’s deep sense of uprootedness (Gupta and Ferguson, 1992) is further exposed through seeing one’s own life in contrast to those in the host community.” (p.251).

This reality was more visible to the refugees than to my Norwegian informants, who, neither through ill intent nor indifference were unaware of the loneliness experienced by the refugees. Another factor was age difference, as seen in the case of the Language Café, where most of the participating Norwegians were retirees, and the majority of the refugees were in their twenties and thirties. Even where the age gap was not so big, however, the refugees continued to experience a social distance in their encounters with Norwegians, be it their neighbours, at the store or at their practice work. This feeling of alienation was captured in an outburst by one of my East African informants, who during one of our conversations about living in Fjord said:

Everyone knows me here, they say Hi, smile and nod, and they know my name, so why don’t I know anyone?! I don’t know their names, who they are or what they do, so how can I? I want to get to know them, but no one are interested, they just say ‘Hello’ and go away. How can I get to know them if I can’t talk with them? – Kit

4.1.2 Socializing and adapting

This quote brings up an important aspect of the new life some refugees confront after being settled, namely loneliness. Leaving their Reception Centre, heading to a new municipality they might never have been to before, the refugees meet the reality of having to move away

from their friends, as well as the area they have come to know. As was shown in Chapter 2, the asylees were unhappy with the Reception Centres, but even so, a few of my refugee informants would sometimes tell me how they missed the place where they stayed before. This sentiment is repeated by Anne-Marie Wallin and Gerd Ahlström (2005). They found in their follow-up study of 34 refugees 10 years after they had been settled in Sweden, that most were initially happy about getting their own apartment, but quickly became lonely and depressed. My informants who felt this way, realised that while the ORC might have been a dreary place, it did at the very least create a setting for socializing with someone, if not the Norwegians. And as a worker at the ORC told me:

It is no wonder they miss this place! This is where they have social and practical responsibilities, even if it is such a small thing as going by the office to check if you have gotten an answer from the UDI, it is something to do that requires your time. Never underestimate the importance of small, menial tasks. – Smith 2

4.1.3 Just Work Hard

The solution to this feeling of loneliness, the refugees were told, was to learn the language by going to school, join activities and get a job. Building on this idea was the Refugee Consultant, Astrid, who argued for the positive effects of Fjord's integration policy:

We see that there is often much impatience the first year, where they [refugees] don't always see the need for the thorough Norwegian tutoring, but they have to know the language pretty well to get a job. They of course want a drivers' license as well. We have therefore a large focus on getting them quickly placed in a practice job, something the Introduction Program is filled up with. And here we see that small communities and social arenas form at the workplace. This is what creates good integration, much better than having them cluster together in one place. So, this spreading as a result of the practice work is very successful. – Astrid

As explained above, however, while in school the refugees felt disconnected, and complained about never getting to interact with Norwegians. As for their jobs, the refugees were participating in practice work as a part of the Introduction Programme, where they met Norwegians and could practise their language. But it was not that simple, as Riad, a father from the Middle-East who had recently been settled in Fjord, told me. He had been working in the local supermarket for the past five months and would use any opportunity to speak to the locals in Norwegian, but things were not progressing as well as he had hoped: "I enjoy

this work, but it is too little. No one have time to talk, always busy busy. I would like to work here every day, but there is school, and even with both I am not learning enough. It is hard.”

This feeling of not understanding how Norwegians socialize, permeated most of the relations refugees tried to form with them. In, for example, the practice work done by refugees enrolled in the Introduction Programme, Riad stressed that while he enjoyed his time at the local supermarket, he did not learn as much of the language as he thought he would. Neither did he get to make any friends of the other Norwegians working there, feeling they were somewhat distant. They in turn recognized him as a hard-working and kind man, always ready with a smile, who had learnt much Norwegian since coming to Norway. Despite this, Riad longed for some real friendships, and felt his motivation for working so hard decline.

4.1.4 Acknowledging the Importance of Language

Sorgen (2015) writes about the challenges and importance of learning the host society’s language, and stresses that it is a “[...] learning process that carries immense social implications, depending on the success or failure of the language learner, and therefore can be a process filled with pressure and tension.” (p.244). This pressure was conveyed by my informants, who felt they should have learnt it quicker, knowing that they would be unable to participate and socialize fully without greater knowledge of it. In view of this, the refugees were frustrated with the time it took them to learn the language, as they were not able to participate in society without it, further prohibiting them from socializing and practicing the language.

Wallin and Ahlström (2005, p.136) points out that in addition to language being important for the refugees, their attempts at learning it was likely to be hindered by their social exclusion and depression. This experience is retold by Bonny Norton Peirce (1995) in her article about language and social identity, asserting that language is the tool used to establish an identity among people and that it is through language “[...] that a person gains access to – or is denied access to – powerful social networks that give learners the opportunities to speak.” (p.13). Similarly, not knowing the language well enough was a major issue for my refugee informants in Fjord, and although they might have a practice job, like Riad and Kit, they still did not feel part of the community.

4.1.5 Perspective of an Institutions

Administering the practice work was the task of the NAV, and during my interview with Kristian, its Senior Consultant, he recounted how the refugees faced challenges with the system. His view coincides with Riad, stating that the refugees seemed content with the work itself, but that they did not consider it to be enough. “What they want is more contact, mentors, people who can take them with them to do things.” His impression was that the refugees were new to both the country and the community, so they needed to be shown what they could do, where to go, and how to get around.

It was Kristian’s impression that while the practice jobs might give experience, the language-learning outcome was disappointing. They ascribed this to the education in the Introduction Programme, saying “Our appeal to the Norwegian education is that it is too standardized and little geared towards what you should be doing afterwards, like work.” Kristian and his colleagues could not, however, disregard that the academic competence of the refugees varied a great deal, from illiterate sheep farmers to educated computer engineers. And considering the advanced level of a standard education in Norway, Kristian recognized that many refugees would be hard-pressed to achieve the same competency as most Norwegians.

4.2 Accepting not being Accepted?

4.2.1 Forced into an Identity

While sentiments of not belonging to the municipality and feeling like an outsider was often expressed by my refugee informants, some would downplay and joke about the situations where they were treated based on preconceptions:

I was hanging out with some guys from my practice work one night, and since I am a Muslim they asked me to drive them all back after, because they were too drunk. Too drunk?! In my home town we drink and drive, no worries! Even the Muslims drink! I have never had to act like a proper Muslim before, but then I come to Norway and people act like my mother! – Saqib

He would tell me this while we both were drinking his homemade moonshine, laughing and eating with his Norwegian and Middle-Eastern friends. His story was one of success, where he and his female friend had both learnt Norwegian quickly and had been settled within a year in a neighbouring municipality to Fjord. During their time in the Reception Centre they were

staying in, they had both befriended one of the workers there, getting to know him and his wife. In this way they got a connection to the community and someone to practise Norwegian with.

They would go on to tell me of the challenge of being accepted, explaining how male refugees were met with a lot of scepticism and at times fear. Some of my refugee informants blamed it on other refugees who had given them all a bad reputation by committing crimes, while others blamed it on the media, arguing that this was just a sign of the times, and that people just needed to get to know one another. But they all agreed that it was very difficult to exchange more than a few words with Norwegians.

4.2.2 Prejudice and Morals

Ahmed would tell of a situation akin to these sentiments, of when he had been working out at a gym, trying to speak with a woman his own age. He explained how she at first was friendly, but when she found out he was an asylee, her whole attitude changed from being interested to being frightened. When recounting this incident, Ahmed grew quiet, saying: “I am not this, I am a refugee, but a refugee is not what I am, I am Ahmed!”. His outburst was layered by his distress at being judged by a label he could do nothing about. He knew he had fled from his home country and as such was a refugee, but he did not recognize it as anything to do with him as a person. He experienced the woman’s sceptical look as signifying this: that as a refugee he was to be sceptical of, and that she was right in distrusting him as a result.

Lisa Malkki (1992) addresses this issue in her article about the way national identity is connected to the territory of that nation, arguing that refugees are perceived as inferior moral characters due to their *rootlessness*. She asserts that this makes them appear to the native population as questionable entities in society. “The point to be underscored here is that these refugees’ loss of bodily connection to their national homelands came to be treated as *a loss of moral bearings*. Rootless, they were no longer trustworthy as ‘honest citizens’.” (p.32, emphasis in original). Similarly, Ahmed and most of my other refugee informants also felt there were barriers to their socialization with the Norwegians.

Kit would tell of a situation akin to Ahmed’s, of when he ventured out to the nearest city to drink and meet Norwegians, only to be ignored and rebuffed through racial comments and slurs. He explained that the discriminatory comments made him feel awful, and that they

demotivated him to try and socialize with more people. “You know, when I meet people and they say this and that, calling me names and telling me to leave, it is difficult to want to stay.” Kit was a very tall and muscular guy in his mid-twenties from East Africa, and he did not appear to be someone who was easily insulted, in fact, he could seem quite imposing. However, when talking about his experiences of being shunned when trying to socialize, his whole demeanour would change, exposing how vulnerable he felt.

This is not to say, however, that his whole life in Fjord was awful; he was working hard at both school and his practice job and had recently got a driver’s license. This was also the case for my other refugee informants, that while they encountered hardships when trying to integrate, they were still able to adapt to Norway and Fjord in many ways. It is therefore important not to perceive the challenges faced by men like Kit, Ahmed and Saqib as only negative, but to contrast them with their other achievements.

One should take note, however, of how they were still required to prove themselves to everyone they met, in spite of all they had accomplished. Be it for racial, linguistic or religious reasons, their “otherness” seemed to remain a barrier to their socialization with, and acceptance by Norwegians. Sorgen (2015, p.245) explains this situation by drawing on Warriner (2007), and states that by learning a host society’s language, one does not necessarily create a strong sense of belonging and membership to that society. This is because language, even though it is essential to be granted access to the host population’s social networks (Peirce, 1995), is in general not enough to experience belonging to a society.

4.4 Social Control

Through the interviews with my refugee informants about their interactions with Norwegians, I was made aware of a notion that was shared by both male and female refugees. Which was that they both experienced the male refugees to have a harder time being accepted by the host population than the women did. This point is repeated in the study by Arnfinn Haagensen Midtbøen and Hilde Lidén (2016, p.15) about *cumulative discrimination*, and in the doctorate by Monika Grønli Rosten (2015). In her thesis, Rosten explores how male immigrants are often discriminated against based on various assumptions regarding their behaviour and attitude towards women. Concerning my refugee informants, this reality did not mean that the

refugee women established friendships with Norwegians any easier, but that they felt Norwegians showed them less antagonism than they did towards the men. This was something Saqib and his friends made fun of, saying that: “We must be careful, because apparently women can do anything, while we will be thrown in jail for just talking to them!”

4.4.1 A Woman's Choice

However, both the men and women recognized that the women were met with much harder opposition and control by their own communities when they tried to adapt to Norwegian society. This was the case for Fatima, a woman in her early twenties who had been settled in a larger city after having stayed in the ORC in Fjord. She would tell me how she wanted to go out in the evenings to dance, hang out with her friends, and meet new people. Wanting to do this, however, did not go down well with her religious community, and although some would share her perspective, they would still talk behind her back and spread false rumours about her.

Consequently, while her family allowed her to do what she wanted, they did not want her to be disliked by their community, so she felt herself being judged by their looks and occasional comments. Nevertheless, she would go out and dress as she wanted, being very vocal about how her community would appear friendly towards her, but that they would talk behind her back. As a result, she felt that she had no real friends there. Similar to Fatima's story, Ripley Smith (2013, p.24) shows in his article about female refugees reconstructing their identities, how his informants experienced a new-found power and conviction in themselves. Some of my female informants, however, told me how they had been both resourceful and motivated before they fled their home country. They stressed that they had not had the same opportunities to express themselves before coming to Norway, but that they had been known to be outspoken and vocal about their opinions before fleeing.

This fervour proved important for Fatima's adaptation to society, because after having stayed been settled for a year, she helped found a social support group to aid women like herself to adjust. In our interviews, she would emphasize that her motivation and passion were nothing new. She had rebelled and stretched the boundaries when she was living in the Middle East as well, but now she felt the potential of doing so was much greater. All that was holding her back was her conservative community and their old ways.

What they have to understand is that we are in Norway now, things are different here, women don't have to do this and that, they are as free as men! If I want to go out and have fun I can, and the society will let me. They need to see this, that even though they have lived their lives having to do what they have done, that is not my life, and it will not be the life of any girl growing up in Norway. – Fatima

Elizabeth Mestheneos and Elizabeth Ioannidi (2002) repeat this sentiment in their article about refugees' perspectives on integration in EU member states. Some of their informants experienced having to distance themselves from their own ethnic communities, as they felt they prevented them from integrating and adapting to the host society. Fatima talked about possibly having to do the same, and at the time my fieldwork ended, her religious community played little to no role in her social network.

Smith (2013) debates whether connection to one's country of origin might be a barrier or an aid in integrating with the host society, stating that: "When the refugee is a female, the task of resituating or reconstituting identity is compounded by other social and psychological changes that result from newfound rights and privileges granted to women in their new host culture." (p.12). This resonates with all my female informants, who had to navigate a society that gave them the responsibility to decide which role they would play in it, though unaware of the consequences of that decision. As noted, Fatima experienced these consequences first hand, and in doing so she was appalled with the reasoning of her community, saying:

I find it disgusting that we should be friends with other families just because they are of the same religion as us. I want to be friends with others because they are human, because I like them. – Fatima

Again, Smith (2013) shows how the individual might distance herself away from her community as she does not recognize herself according to its standards and terms of conduct. She argues that adjusting to a new group "[...] involves a new self-categorization in which the refugee de-categorizes herself from affiliated in-groups and begins to perceive herself as more independent or aligned with alternative in-groups whose prototypes reflect more independence (Tajfel, 1978; Turner, 1985, 1987)." (p.24). However, attempting to adjust to a new community and country is a process filled with social and practical obstacles, as has been discussed above. The next section will therefore look closer at a case where the consequences of the social distance between the settled refugees and Norwegians became transparent. This case takes place during the Norwegian Constitution Day, the 17th of May.

4.5 The 17th of May, Attending or Participating?

On the 17th of May, Norwegians celebrate by dressing up in formal attire, like suits, dresses, or the national costume, the Bunad, and parading in the streets together. Parading is often done behind a banner of some sort, embroidered with the name and insignia of e.g. a school, local activity club, or workplace. In Fjord, the day began with a speech from the local priest, at the nursing home. Here I met some of the refugees, who in contrast to the Norwegians, had not dressed for the occasion. They were met with either passive looks or friendly handshakes from people who knew them, like teachers, managers from the practice job, or volunteers from the Language Café. Though not all the refugees understood what was said in Norwegian, they stood and listened to the speeches. They would, however, speak with one another during the speech, louder than Norwegians would, which earned them a few disapproving looks from the other adults.

After the speech at the nursing home, everyone gathered around the War Memorial, a stone slab with names of the local people who fell during the Second World War inscribed on it. Here, another speech was made, a lengthy one with different participants, the Mayor being one, who spoke of how Norwegians must remember the past, and be thankful and mindful of the peace and prosperity Norway has today. In this speech, there were hints at the unrest in the world which had brought the municipality new inhabitants, and how Norwegians should be able to reach out a hand to those in need. While the Mayor spoke, one of the refugees started talking on his phone, arguing loudly. Again, he was given stern looks, and seeing as the Norwegians did not say anything about it, I went over to try to make him lower his voice. But after a couple of attempts, where he smiled, nodded his head and continued talking, I gave up the effort.

As the parade began, walking the 700 meters from the War Memorial to the school, the refugees stayed behind. I signalled to them that they could join in, but they put up their hands and shook their heads. No one else asked them, and the parade marched over to the school where food was being served and activities were held for the children. Through my role as a casual teacher I had been asked to help with the activities, so I was stationed at one of them for the rest of the event. As the activities finished, the Norwegians went home to dine with their families. And as I confirmed the day after, my refugee informants were not invited

anywhere. They returned to their apartments and spent the rest of the day like any other, sitting at home watching TV, studying or sleeping.

In the example above, the refugees were unable or unwilling to grasp the social codes of the day, from talking during speeches, wearing informal clothes, and not joining the parade. While none of these social breaches were dramatic or especially severe, it contributed to cement their role as “others” in a setting where everyone else acted as equals. In such a situation, the relationship between the refugees and the Norwegians became transparent, and the degree to which the refugees were living on the outside of the local community was made palpable. For some of my informants, this was their second 17th of May celebration in Fjord, which raises the question as to why the situation for them had not improved enough to ensure their participation.

4.6 Socializing Institutions

Where I have addressed the interactions, or lack thereof, between the refugees and Norwegians in Fjord, it is necessary to include the perspective of the Child Welfare Authority (CWA). This institution acts out the Child Welfare Law (Barnevernloven, 1992), which aims to ensure that children and young people living under conditions that could harm their health and development receive the help they need. To uphold this mandate, the CWA must at times intervene in a family, and remove the child from his/her parents. While this is often an unpopular decision, the CWA experienced that some refugee families reacted differently than they were used to:

We have had challenging situations with refugees, but we see a different belonging that they develop towards us than the Norwegians do. Often, we can become like an extended family after taking over children and placing them in other homes. An example of this was a child who was placed with her grandmother as a result of childcare failure, where the mother of the child attached a strong relationship with us and our competence. She then began to turn to us for help and advice beyond our field of expertise – Heidi

Where the employees at the CWA were used to parents reacting angrily when they intervened in the integrity of their families, they were surprised by the understanding shown by certain parents. Heidi explained how this particular family agreed to the CWA’s decision, accepting

that they themselves were unable to care for their child as they should. The trust this family placed in the CWA shows how that institution gets access to an inner social sphere that few others do, and this allowed those working there to develop both an understanding and a relationship to the people whom they work with. "Other Norwegians do not see these reactions since they appear behind closed doors, and otherwise in the countryside refugees are becoming such a common sight that they [the Norwegians] do not think too much about their presence." – Heidi.

Heidi went on to relate an example where a family of two, a mother and a daughter, were moved from a Reception Centre to be settled in a new municipality. As the family arrived, the Municipality Officials had difficulties comprehending the mother's demands and apparent frustration. She claimed the house they had been settled in was too big and complained about a bad smell in the hallway. The municipality then got in contact with the CWA in the family's previous municipality, where they had stayed in a Reception Centre, who knew the family better and could explain their situation:

For this family, the size was a problem because the girl in the family was mentally ill, and thus her mother felt she needed to prevent her from hiding in the house. She felt she lost control of the situation, as they had previously lived in a single room [in the Reception Centre]. And the smell in the hallway they made them think there was something wrong or dangerous about it. They failed to convey this fear and concern to the new municipality, but to us, since we knew about their story, it made perfect sense.
– Heidi

I choose here to draw on the article by Elena Albertini Früh, Hilde Lidén and Lisbeth Gravdal Kvarme (2017, p.193) about the trust immigrant parents' have in welfare services and institutions. Früh et.al show, by drawing on other studies done in Norway and Denmark, that the impression immigrant parents have of the welfare institutions are to a large degree defined by the people who receive them, as well as the quality of the services they are provided. Considering then the trust that was placed in the CWA by their refugee clients, it is fair to assume that a good relationship had developed between them, allowing the CWA to become important factor in the lives of their refugee clients.

Früh et.al (2017) theorizes that trust and belonging to society can be categorized in two ways. First is the trust in institutions, the *vertical trust*, which they claim is essential for the recognition and acceptance of the state's taxation and redistribution policies. The other type

of trust, the *horizontal trust*, concern the trust between people in their everyday lives. Looking at how the CWA experienced their refugee clients compared to their Norwegian ones, the refugees seemed to express a high degree of *vertical trust*, adopting a much more personal relationship with the services of the CWA than the Norwegians did.

As many of my own refugee informants expressed great difficulty in establishing good connections and friendships with their Norwegian neighbours and colleagues, it appears that some of the refugees were able to foster a greater personal trust *vertically* with the CWA, than they were able to acquire *horizontally* with individual Norwegians. In this way, I will argue that institutions like the CWA became a replacement for the social networks these refugees had lost. Because where most refugees were unable to form such reliable, personal networks with the host population, they were able to do so with the public institutions. One could argue that this is what these institutions are for, to ensure that every member of society has a social network to turn to for help. However, the refugees differed in their approach to these institutions by perceiving them as less formal and more personal than the Norwegians did.

4.7 Adapting to Otherness?

By looking at the experiences of my refugee and Norwegian informants in this chapter, it is apparent that both *groups* had their own challenges. For the refugees, adapting to their new lives outside the Reception Centre, expecting to find work, have more freedom and start their lives, the reality was something else entirely. While encouraged by the economic incentive to go to school, they were quickly faced with the distance between them and the Norwegians, finding it exceedingly hard to get in touch with anyone. Although they lived next door to Norwegians, going to the same store as them, playing football together and practicing Norwegian at the Language Café, they still felt lonely and without any real friends in the majority population.

The shock of this reality, in stark contrast to the one expected, proved demotivating for several of my informants. Through their practice work, however, some made new acquaintances, but they still felt regarded as a “refugee”, not as themselves. The label of being an “other”, as well as occasional racism, followed them wherever they went, often preventing them from engaging in new social settings. Feeling trapped in a vicious circle of not learning

the language, thus not being able to socialize, which again prevented them from learning the language, some of the refugees gave up on trying to find Norwegian friends. Instead, they spent more time with other refugees, travelled to the closest cities and kept to their own apartments.

For others, however, like Hassan and Saqib, adapting to Norwegian norms and customs was much more effortless. They would attribute their success to their greater willingness and civility, claiming those who were unable were in fact unwilling to do so. Through my observations, however, I saw how my refugee informants strived to participate, work and get educated, gaining more favour with the Norwegians, but no new friends. And as Emma Stewart and Gareth Mulvey (2014) argues, based on their research on the consequences of citizenship policy in the United Kingdom, “[...] problems do not stop when individuals are granted refugee status and can begin to participate in society’s main institutions.” (p.1033). This assertion was repeated by my Norwegian informants as well, like the Health Personnel who told me that “One of the guys from [East Africa] who tried so hard to become Norwegian, got a lot of critique from the [Middle Easterners] for his attitude. As we saw it, he was bullied for trying so hard.” They, and some teachers, recounted how those who did the most to adapt, sometimes at the cost of past practices or norms, were socially sanctioned as a result.

The Refugee Service, whose role was to help the refugees adapt to their new lives, had a different perspective. Its Consultant told me during our interview that the process of adapting and integrating would take time, and patience was paramount in making it work:

It's a new thing, with all of this. From the fact that employees must use interpreters, to people having to think about their own role in the face of new countrymen. It's not just for people to accept new residents from other countries, things take time. Things will happen, conflicts arise, and it is up to the individual to reflect on the process. We cannot inform about everything, neither to Norwegians nor Refugees. – Astrid

Having addressed the many concerns and perspectives of both refugees and Norwegians in this chapter, it is clear that opinions vary, and mutual understandings are hard to come by. Bearing this in mind, I now turn to the final chapter, where the questions and themes raised throughout this thesis are analysed and discussed.

Chapter 5

An Analysis of Social Interactions in Fjord

Through this thesis I have addressed how my informants in Fjord perceived each other, and how they viewed themselves as a result. My asylee informants told of stressful days in the Ordinary Reception Centre (ORC) thinking about their application. And after having been granted residence permission, my refugee informants recounted how they struggled to adapt and participate in Fjord. The Norwegians in turn tried to accommodate the ORC, its residents and their refugee neighbours in their own ways. In this final chapter, I will show how my informants and their experiences are connected, and how their perceptions of each other can be better understood by comparing their different stories.

5.0 Socializing Through the Reception Centre

As became evident in Chapter 2, the asylees struggled with the harsh conditions of the ORC. Having nothing to do, being unable to work, and failing to participate in school, my informants felt depressed and ashamed of their situation. Trying to help make the asylees' stay at the ORC better, some of my Norwegian informants sought out the ORC, either in person or by contacting its management.

But as seen in Chapter 3, my informants who visited the ORC, delivering clothes and offering to be of service, felt rebuffed by certain members of its staff. And for the employees working administratively in the municipality and in the Volunteer Centre, when they experienced their attempts at cooperation falling short, with e-mails not being answered and appointments not upheld, their involvement with the ORC declined. The ORC's employees would themselves point out that they had not been trained by the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration (UDI), and often felt at a loss as to what they were supposed to do. All this weakened the ORC's position, and with its management lacking competence, as well as suffering from a dysfunctional operation, many interested parties were dissuaded from establishing contact with it.

Some of my Norwegian informants were able to develop friendships with asylees, however, and these asylees became more positive about life ahead in Norway, as well as more motivated to learn Norwegian. This sentiment was repeated by the asylees who had befriended Norwegians before coming to Fjord as well. They said that they had made a connection with the place where they had friends, wanting to settle down there should they be granted residence permission.

What the Norwegians they befriended had in common, however, was that their affiliation with the asylees was circumstantial, meaning that these Norwegians were teachers or Health Personnel who worked with the asylees, or neighbours to the centre. And as in the cases of Hanne and Leif, and Frida and Knut, who sought out the asylees themselves, they were able to do so because they lived very close to them. Pointing out the circumstances of these relationships is not done to lessen their importance, but to highlight an important consideration. That for the Norwegians interested in establishing contact with the asylees, a degree of accessibility was needed.

Another important factor at play here is the preference the Norwegians had in socializing with the asylees. Where Frida and Knut as parents of smaller children found it unproblematic to invite rowdy teenagers into their home, Hanne and Leif as a retired couple preferred to socialize with a family instead. As a result, these families were able to craft strong relationships that suited their preferences, inviting their chosen asylees to their homes, dining and spending time with them.

5.0.1 Glimpsing the Life at the Other End

The asylees who befriended Norwegians became especially interested in Norway and saw its population as kind and open-minded. Their sense of eagerness in getting to know Norwegians is reflective of these positive experiences, which was replicated in their friends as well. Seeing Norway as a neutral country, void of religious conflicts, these asylees expressed a hopefulness for their futures, which now held much more potential than before as they could participate regardless of gender, religion or social status. This was seen in my conversations with Hassan, Saqib and Fatima, who would talk about their expectations for the future, as they could now start their lives anew.

It appeared that to them a new type of freedom was within reach, and Norwegians were central in making that vision a reality as the gatekeepers to society. Because whereas their own ethnic groups might judge them, the Norwegians appeared to be unconcerned with the particularities of their ethnic and religious identities. And in contrast to their stories of oppression and strict moral codes, Norway represented possibilities and opportunities that to many of them had previously been unreachable. As was discussed in 2.6, Hassan believed his religious identity would no longer be a threat to his safety, and Fatima felt she could raise her voice, express her opinions and socialize with whom she wanted to. Both were thinking that they would be unhindered in their participation in society.

For some of my other asylee informants, however, this idea of a better life was more taunting than it was encouraging. Living in the ORC, dealing with the reality that it imposed, these asylees had a bleaker outlook on the future. This situation, where asylees could become more negative of Norway due to the harsh conditions of the Reception Centre is repeated by other studies as well. One such study, by Maja Korac (2003, p.62), shows how negative experiences of living in Reception Centres harmed the asylees' immediate perceptions of their host country, as well as their attitudes towards it years later.

For Ahmed, seeing how other asylees were processed faster than him, lead him to verbally lash out at me in desperation, demanding to know why he must be made to suffer the way he was. As was discussed in Chapter 2, his frustration only built up over time, and as he reached the point where he wanted to commit suicide, he removed himself from socializing with anyone at the ORC. Even so, Ahmed and all my other asylee informants had this in common: that they wanted to feel they belonged in Norway. Where they differed was in their assumption of whether this was achievable or not.

5.0.2 New Insight, Different Opinions

We see that having Norwegian friends became a great motivational factor for my asylee informants, helping them cope with their time in the Reception Centres. For my Norwegian informants, getting to know the asylees was for many a shift in perspective. And like Synne, who went from fearing that the asylees might steal her tractor to dining with them in the ORC, the initial impressions the Norwegians had of the asylees changed as they to know them. In this way the asylees went from being strangers to becoming "Fjord's asylees", whom the locals had a unique responsibility for.

This is apparent in the stories of the Health Personnel, the teachers, the ORC workers, as well as locals such as Frida and Knut, who were all appalled with how their friends, students and patients were treated. Having gotten to know the asylees, and being unable to aid them in their situation, these Norwegians felt powerless and frustrated with the system. This change in perception can be better understood by looking at the discussion in 2.1 about the biopolitics of the state. Following the reflections of Giorgio Agamben, the asylee is, through his or her displaced identity, reduced to “bare life”, being nothing “more” than human. It is in this devaluation of the asylee’s individual status that the biopower which is exerted upon them is made visible. This power, as described by Benjamin Muller (2004) in his article about the “biopoliticization of refugee politics”, stems from the biopolitics of the state, marking “[...] the modern move from the sovereign power over death, to the sovereign power over life, which is bio-power.” (p.52).

By including Agamben’s (1998) term *bios*, meaning the social existence of an individual, an important layer is added to this analysis. Looking at the Norwegians’ relationship with the asylees, I will argue that for both parties, their understanding of their own and each other’s *bios* was altered through these relationships. Whereas my Norwegian informants could accept that strangers were processed impartially, seeing their friends suffer and being sent away from Fjord caused them to question the system and the state itself. The same was true for my asylee informants, who found their own *bios* to be of greater value now that they had friends among the majority, feeling less out of place and experiencing a greater affiliation towards Norway and Norwegians. In view of this, I argue that the Norwegians sudden frustration with the system was a response to how the state’s biopower was applied to the asylees, a group who in my informants’ eyes had become more than the *bare life* they were treated as.

5.0.3 *The Individuals of a Category*

At this point, however, it is important to be reminded of the individuality of the asylees and the Norwegians. Because where this transition from *bare life* occurs, turning the asylee as an inferior person to a human deserving protection and kindness, it was a change triggered in individual asylees by individual Norwegians. What this implies is that while some of my Norwegian informants became more positive towards asylees in general, they cared for their friends in particular. Put another way, they acknowledged the greater *bios* of their friends, but not necessarily that of other asylees. These remained strangers still defined by the shared

identity of the “asylee”. And as one of the elderly locals of Fjord said: “We cannot accept everyone, and we must trust that those who are allowed to stay can do so for valid reasons, while those who are sent away do not need our protection.” – Bjørn

Though a statement some of the Norwegians argued about, the idea that those who were denied residence were less deserving than those who were granted it was held by most of my informants: asylees, Norwegians and refugees alike. What is made evident is that the trust Norwegians place in the system and the state, supersedes their initial response to seeing how the asylees’ are struggling. Believing that the state acts with good intent, working to secure both its citizens and its international commitments, it is ultimately forgiven for denying residence to some. And maintaining the notion that the system is designed with the best of intentions, the asylee is expected to be patient with it, and to adapt accordingly.

An example of this can be found in how my Norwegian informants often spoke of how important it was that the asylees attended school. However, while the importance of education was emphasized, there were only a few who knew of how the harsh conditions of the ORC affected the asylees’ participation. And even among those who were aware of this, there were even fewer who recognized the sheer force of the pressures that worked against, and in extreme cases prevented, the asylees from being able to learn anything. And consequently, the lacking attendance and effort of certain asylees and refugees were perceived to be a sign of their bad character. This sort of assumption, David Berreby (2008) states, “[...] is the perceptual difference that Lee D. Ross, a social psychologist, has called the “fundamental attribution error” – too much stress on supposedly unchanging traits to explain others’ behaviours, too little on situation.” (p.6).

This perception, which several of my Norwegian informants held, should not be considered as malicious, but rather as a real concern for the consequences of not attending school. This is because the Norwegians saw that while it might be difficult for the asylees to participate in classes and study, some were still able to do so. Therefore, they simply had to keep trying, as any and all Norwegian language skills would be beneficial to them.

5.1 Hospitality and Reciprocity

For the teachers, it was demotivating to see empty classrooms, and for the local Norwegians, it became an annoyance that the asylees did not learn the language. After having been granted residence, schooling became mandatory for the refugees, as explained in the introduction and in **4.0.1**, but some of my Norwegian informants still felt the refugees were not learning fast enough. They attributed this slow pace to the refugees' lack-lustre participation in activities, and their diminishing efforts in school.

5.1.1 Participation Through Membership

My Norwegian informants spoke of their combined efforts to accommodate the ORC, the asylees, and the refugees as a “dugnad”. Dugnad is a Norwegian term that encompasses the actions undertaken by a community to achieve a common goal. Such acts can be anything from helping clean the neighbourhood to constructing a playground for the children. The result might not be directly beneficial for everyone in the community, but one is expected to participate on the basis of being a member of that community.

The dugnad in this case is the total response of Norwegians in Fjord, acted as a community, to receiving the refugees and asylees. Being a member of a local community requires the average person to participate in a general way through paying taxes, which are, indirectly, the funds going into accommodating the asylees and refugees. Seen in this way, there is a very real way in which the locals of Fjord all participated in receiving the asylees and refugees, although that participation was neither physical nor social, but indirect and financial.

Consequently, some of my informants reckoned they did their part in contributing to the welfare of the asylees and/or refugees by virtue of the taxes they paid, seeing it as a “group effort” or collective dugnad. In addition, some of my informants added the actual social and physical effort of other Norwegians into this perceived “group effort”, imagining themselves as participants not through participation, but through membership in the same community as those who actually participated.

As the dugnad is a social event, however, where the participants show their commitment to the community by being present and participating directly in the collective effort, participating through membership is questionable. I would therefore argue that such “fiscal”

contributions cannot be seen as commensurate with one's actual presence in the *dugnad*, and therefore the idea of a group effort as described above becomes an *imagined dugnad*.

5.1.2 *Reciprocating Goodwill*

This leads to an important point, however, that the collective efforts made by Norwegians to accommodate the asylees and refugees, built relationships towards the groups as well as the individuals. This meant that, having helped a refugee or asylee, the Norwegians form their own expectations of that group. What one sees here, as Marcel Mauss (2002, p.55) reflects when discussing different gift exchanges, like the potlatch, is that there is a social power present in the gift exchange, reciprocity, which encourages the continued exchange of gifts. Similarly, the gift of hospitality, which was offered out of kindness and necessity by the Norwegians, bears with it the expectation of being reciprocated by the asylees through hard work and gratitude.

Continuing this narrative, I choose to draw on Didier Fassin (2012), who, in his book about the ambiguous nature of humanitarianism in the face of violence and inequality, argues that the act of giving aid is not to be problematized for the assistance offered, but because it damages “[...] the very conditions of the social relation between the two parties, which, whatever the goodwill of the agents, make compassion a moral sentiment with no possible reciprocity.” (p.3). Following this line of reasoning, the relationship between the Norwegians and refugees in Fjord was intrinsically linked to their opposing roles in society, as helpers and the helped. As such, the Norwegians became the benefactors to the refugees and asylees, who were perceived as displaced and helpless. What Fassin points to is that the reciprocity that this relationship creates is difficult to amend, because compassion has no clearly defined value to reciprocate.

This requires us, furthermore, to delve into the term hospitality itself. And as such, I choose to draw on the description of Apostolos Andrikopoulos (2017), who, in his article about hospitality in urban neighbourhoods in Greece, deconstructs the gift of hospitality as a power relation between the guest and the host:

The two-fold truth of the gift, and in the case of the gift of hospitality, is that on the one hand, the act of hospitality is experienced as an act of disinterested generosity and

on the other hand, guests are expected to return the gift or at least to grace their hosts and acknowledge their host's moral advantage. (p.288)

We see something similar in how the refugees are provided with education and practice work, as a token of Norwegian good intent and hospitality. In the case of the teachers, the difference between their refugee and Norwegian pupils is striking, because where Norwegians have to be in school as a matter of course, refugees are given that opportunity as a kindness. The need for basic language skills and knowledge of Norwegian society is evident, and so it is the intention of the Norwegian state as a good host to ensure that the refugees achieve them. Therefore, as a substitute for a job, the refugees are paid through the Introduction Programme to attend school and participate in the local community.

An unintended consequence of this, however, is that the additional time it might take for the refugees to complete these programs becomes an unnecessary and avoidable expense. And due to the nature of this expense, it is often experienced by Norwegians as a sign of ingratitude, making the refugee appear unsympathetic towards the efforts made to accommodate them. As a result, not participating in activities or being uninterested in class is seen as being rude and ungrateful, and not simply as being uninterested or demotivated. It follows Mauss's (2002) assertion about the unreciprocated gift, that it "[...] still makes the person who has accepted it inferior, particularly when it has been accepted with no thought of returning it." (p.83). And by looking at the Norwegians' impressions of the "lazy" refugees, to them the refugees appear as having no intention of returning the *gifts* they have been given. And in the light of this, the Norwegians perceive themselves to be right in judging these refugees for their lack of effort.

This assumption coincides with what Marianne Gullestad (2002) writes in her article about the invisible barriers preventing the acceptance of immigrants in Norway. These barriers are the perceptions the Norwegians maintain as hosts, which construct a situation where it is eligible to judge and socially sanction the guests who are not respecting the rules of the "home".

Given the everyday interpretations of the rights and duties involved, a host has the right to control the resources of the home, to decide on the rules of the visit, and, accordingly, to "put their foot down" when the guest does not conform. (p.54)

5.1.3 The Role of the Guest

And it is this relation that Fassin (2012, p.4) argues should be scrutinized, not to criticize the good intent of hospitality itself, but to question the unequal relationship it creates between the host and the guest. I argue, however, that one should be reminded of the fact that the host is as much a part of this power relation of hospitality as the guest. It would be incorrect to assume that by being the host, one is more aware of this unequal relationship, or able to break away from it. This is also pointed out by Pierre Bourdieu (2000), who defends the individual on the grounds of the unambiguous nature of one's habitus:

This must not lead us to say [...] that the agents choose (in 'bad faith') what determines them, since, while we can say that they determine themselves inasmuch as they construct the situations that determine them, it is clear that they have not chosen the principle of their choice, that is, their habitus, and that the schemes of construction they apply to the world have themselves been constructed by the world. (p.149)

Being unable to distance oneself from one's habitus, the question to be asked might not be how the host can act differently, but why the host-guest relationship seems to continue after the asylees have been granted residence and have become refugees. And in the context of Fjord's experience with Reception Centres and settled refugees, one could make the argument that the local Norwegians have not been able to be anything but hosts to the asylees and refugees. It seems to be, like Rosello (2011) argues, that the "[...] vision of the immigrant [refugee] as guest is a metaphor that has forgotten that it is a metaphor." (p.3). And, as is argued by Katerina Rozakou (2012) in her study of refugees in Greece, while hospitality is an act of including the guest in the social world of the host, "[...] one must stand ready to critique the power aspects of the relationship and the contemporary political production of the asylum seeker-refugee as guest." (p.574)

5.2 Generalizing Identity and Humanity

One of the primary reasons why this guest-host relationship requires closer examination is because it so often leads to a problematic generalization when the guest is constructed as a member of a generic group. What this generalization might lead to is the idea that the refugees and asylees are all part of the same group of "guests", which creates an insurmountable debt of unreciprocated hospitality that every member of that group are required to repay. Unable to appease their hosts, the refugees start their lives socially indebted, not only for the hospitality

offered them personally, but for the hospitality offered every other asylee and refugee in Fjord, if not Norway.

And so, while it was true that participating and learning the language would benefit the asylees and refugees, judging the achievements of one forced migrant in the light of another's continues this generalizing narrative. It is difficult to assume that these individuals would respond similarly to either education or social settings, seeing as they possess drastically different academic achievements and competencies, as well varying in age, gender and ethnicity. Effectively, by making such an assumption is to ignore the asylees and the refugees their individuality.

5.2.1 Considering Symbolic Factors

As Bourdieu (2000) argues, that granting “[...] ‘humanity’ to all, but in a purely formal way, is to exclude from it, under an appearance of humanism, all those who are deprived of the means of realizing it.” (p.65). Bourdieu’s thesis, on the level of asylees, refugees and Norwegians, states that the kindness implicit in the offering of education constructs a situation where it is the asylees and refugees fault that they are not learning the language, not the circumstances pertaining to their situation as forced migrants, nor to their individuality. “And, by a simple reversal of cause and effect, it is thus possible to blame the victims’ by making their nature responsible for the dispossession, mutilations and deprivations they are made to suffer.” (p.72)

What is at play here is the application of *symbolic violence* as Bourdieu (2000) phrases it. This is a *violence* that shows itself in how one is led to believe that the way people are treated and the possibilities available to them are explicitly tied to their imagined identity, in this case, as an “asylee” or “refugee”. These structures demanding the asylees and refugees’ place in the social and economic hierarchy appear as a naturalized part of the individual’s identity, becoming inherently inescapable.

Having a role or identity imposed on one is, in Bourdieu’s terms, a sign of symbolic power being exerted upon the individual. The ability to use this power is framed as one’s symbolic capital. This commodity is the total accumulation of the many capitals one might possess, be it cultural, economic, or social. What this implies, is that symbolic capital “[...] is not a particular kind of capital but what every kind of capital becomes when it is misrecognized as

capital, that is, as a force, a power or capacity for (actual or potential) exploitation, and therefore recognized as legitimate.” (2000, p.242).

This sort of power is reminiscent of the power relation between the Norwegians and the forced migrants, not only in their host/guest relationship, but in their statuses as well. And it becomes clear that it is the Norwegians who possess the power to define the asylees and refugees, and to ascribe them traits based on those definitions. However, one ought to be reminded that my Norwegian informants were not aware of this power. This point is also raised by Gullestad (2000, p.49) in her article about people being blind to their own prejudice, that Norwegians do not perceive their power as a majority to be anything other than natural and self-explanatory.

5.2.2 Being Something More by Not Being Someone Else

Being labelled as an “asylee” or “refugee”, unable to shed that identity, my asylee and refugee informants showed how they differed from others by speaking of them as deviant, ungrateful and uncivilized, as seen in 2.8. Drawing again on Bourdieu (2000), who theorizes that our identities are cast and moulded by our experiences of the world and people around us, it can be easier to understand why some of my asylee and refugee informants distanced themselves from other refugees. Because where people’s experience of the world shapes them, they are possibly even more shaped by the experience of others’ perceptions of them:

Each agent has a practical, bodily knowledge of her present and potential position in the social space, a ‘sense of one’s place’ as Goffman puts it, converted into a sense of placement which governs her experience of the place occupied, defined absolutely and above all relationally as a rank, and the way to behave to keep it [...] and to keep within it [...]. (p.184).

As is stated above, the individual is made aware of who they are in the eyes of others and which identity they are able to work within. Recognizing this identity, submitting to it, does not have to be a voluntary nor desired action. It is, as Bourdieu (2000) argues, nonetheless a fact inscribed by society upon the individuals living within it. He asserts that symbolic violence, be it sexual, ethnic, cultural or linguistic, is not necessarily imposed logically nor consciously. Rather, it lies within the structures of “[...] perception and appreciation which, below the level of the decisions of the conscious mind and the controls of the will, are the basis of a relationship of practical knowledge and recognition that is profoundly obscure to

itself.” (p.170). And it is within these obscure perceptions that our identities are presented to us, not as who we *are*, but as who we *believe* ourselves to be.

5.2.3 *Discussing the Label*

And it is here it becomes essential to scrutinize the very label “refugee”. Because even after they are granted residence in Norway, the former asylees continue to be defined as something different from the host population. And as Sewite Kebede (2010) claims in his Working Paper on the challenges of experience belonging to the host country: “Since identity is a sociocultural marker, when a person identifies him/herself as belonging to a particular group, he/she is also pointing out that he/she does not belong to the other group.” (p.11). This was seen in the example of schooling in 4.0.1, where the refugees are kept apart from the other students throughout the day, that they are firmly established as “others”. What could have been an arena for socializing and interaction, became one of segregation. Kebede goes on to argue, however, that this reflection should not be used to undermine or ignore the agency of the refugees as individuals, an agency they used to shape their lives and identities:

Thus, while acknowledging that people in general are architects of their own identities, I argue that certain labels affect the way people perceive themselves, and that being identified as belonging to a certain category such as a “refugee” may hinder their authentic and unbiased view of themselves. (p.16).

This notion, that the refugees are prevented from having an *authentic and unbiased view of themselves*, is vague in its assumption that anyone has an authentic and unbiased view of themselves. What it does rightly question, however, is the consequence of being someone apart from the indigenous population, not as a foreigner, but as a “refugee”, which in this case is a category with widely varying characteristics. And as argued by Susanne Binder and Jelena Tošić (2005), it diminishes the identity of the individual having fled his/her country to anything other than a personal experience. “Often, it is precisely this ‘fight’ against the personality-harming term ‘refugee’ that is much more difficult than the struggle for a human life in exile.” (p.610).

Binder and Tošić (2005) go on to assert that the “refugee” is made uncontrollable in its “uprootedness”. But as they argue that, depending on the audience, the impression of the “refugee” can take any form, be it the “[...] rising of empathy, fear of ‘refugee waves’ into one’s own country [...], condemnation of one of the conflicted parties (because refugees

cannot be the ‘culprits’), or even smug satisfaction with one’s own country [...]” (p.611). I would therefore suggest that one should not get lost in the uses of the word “refugee”, as it is interpreted so differently. Nonetheless, its importance was not lost on my informants, who struggled to adapt to their municipality, fighting this label when trying to socialize with Norwegians.

It should be noted, however, that trying to socialize with Norwegians was not only difficult because of the Norwegians. As seen in the cases of Hassan and Saqib in **2.8**, and with Fatima and one of the East African men in **4.4**, attempting to integrate and adapt to Norway could be met with harsh criticism by one’s own ethnic or religious community as well. Wanting to live like other Norwegians, some of my asylee and refugee informants were at risk of losing their social networks as they discarded previous gendered, religious or ethnic identities.

5.3 Socializing Institutions

Whereas opinions and perspectives of who they were was one obstacle to my refugee informants, they experienced another in the alien way Norwegians socialized. As shown in **4.1**, my refugee informants struggled to interact with Norwegians and to become anything more than acquaintances through their participation in activities. And although they were pleased with having achieved the right to settle in Norway, they still felt like outsiders in Fjord, unable to understand what they could do to bridge the social gap between them and Norwegians.

As seen in the efforts made by Riad in his practice work, and by Kit in school, their attempts at following the Introduction Programme were not, they felt, enough to be accepted in Fjord. The Norwegians appeared to them as kind but strange. Kit put it like this: “No one is meeting anyone here, you just go to school, go to work, and go back home. Do Norwegians ever visit one another?” Having never been invited home to any Norwegian, and never seeing people visiting each other, Kit and his friends had a bleak impression of the locals’ lives. Although not true that Norwegians never paid each other visits, the fact that my refugee informants believed this to be the case is a point worth reflecting on.

5.3.1 Where do we “Interact”?

Wanting to interact and socialize with their neighbours and the people of Fjord, my refugee informants were at a loss as to how they were to get to know anyone if they could never spend time with them. My Norwegian informants in turn felt they put in a lot of effort to aid the refugees, attending the Language Café, working as teachers, in NAV, or in the Refugee Service. Through my interviews with the employees in the municipality administration, I was told of the different projects and events they were developing to further contribute to integrating the refugees, hoping to make use of their skills and competencies. Concurrently, as was discussed in 5.2, these Norwegians felt the refugees might try harder to participate and adjust, since they themselves worked so hard to help them integrate.

However, where my refugee informants were provided with the services the Norwegians believed would help them in adapting to Norway and Fjord, they still felt lonely, wanting to befriend the locals. This interest in their friendship seemed to be lost on my Norwegian informants, who said that they wanted the refugees to become part of the local community of Fjord but delegated that responsibility to institutions such as the school, NAV, the Volunteer Centre and the Refugee Service. Though many of the Norwegians were participating through these institutions, there was only a fraction of them who ever spent time with the refugees outside them. As a result, it seems that the refugees built up a greater trust *vertically* towards the formal institutions than they did *horizontally* towards the people of Fjord, as shown in 4.6.

The consequences of this was that my refugee informants felt like strangers in Fjord, as seen in the case of 17th May celebrations in 4.5, where they were present for the festivities, but not participating in them. And even though some had been living in Fjord for more than a year, attending school and practice work, and playing in the local football team, they had still not developed relationships with the locals that were of the sort to get them either invited or included during this day. And as the refugees were either ignorant or indifferent towards the social norms and cues of the day, with, as was shown, some speaking loudly during speeches, and most not having dressed for the occasion, one is led to question the learning outcome of the Introduction Programme.

It might then be, as Sorgen (2015) theorizes: “The process of segregation based on linguistic competence and language one is speaking (Miller, 1999) can result in prolonged social exclusion and discrimination for those newly arrived in a host country.” (p.245). In hindsight,

the idea that social knowledge is acquired through formal education and institutions, and not through social interactions, becomes an issue that deserves closer scrutiny. And by looking at the data presented in this thesis, and the theories of Sorgen and her contemporaries (Westermeyer, 1989; Kebede, 2010), there is a question that begs to be posed: might it be the case that the linguistic and social barriers to participation actually increase the distance between the refugees and Norwegians over time, instead of these barriers growing smaller, reducing this distance? Although I am unable to answer this question in this thesis, it is nonetheless a point for further reflection.

5.3.2 The Many Needs for Social Networks

Moving from this question, however, it is necessary to look at the social networks of my refugee informant, and how these networks, or the lack of them, is connected to the refugees' continued social segregation.

Edvard Hauff and Per Vaglum (1997) argue, in their paper on Vietnamese refugees in Norway, that to establish “[...] oneself socially in a new country is a major psychosocial transition, particularly for forced migrants.”. This they assert by looking at how the refugees' former social networks have been decimated, and at how, in being unable to remake them, the refugees are often in dire need of social support. Drawing on Joseph Westermeyer's (1989) book on the mental health of refugees, they go on to state that rebuilding social networks in a new country is “[...] perhaps the most important effort that migrants can make to improve their quality of life and cope with the forced separation from significant others.” (p.408).

Working from this reflection, I would argue that the different interpretations and experiences of the formal institutions reflect the expectations one has for personal relations and social networks. As seen in 4.6, some refugees experienced the Child Welfare Authority (CWA), when it relieved parents of the custody of their children, more as an extended family than an institution. Looking at how these refugees accepted the CWA in another way than the Norwegians did, it is necessary to compare the Norwegians' approach to institutions such as the CWA to that of the refugees'. Because in trying to teach the refugees which institutions to use and how, it seems that one assumes that they would need and use them in the same way as the Norwegians.

It is then fair to claim, that what seems to be a factor not taken into account is that the social needs of the refugees are likely to differ from those of the Norwegians. Having discarded their previous social networks when becoming refugees, they used the formal institutions they encountered in Norway in another way than they might have been intended for. Undoubtedly, the way people used these institutions can be understood as mirroring their need for personal social networks of the same kind. Moving from this reflection, it becomes clear that my refugee and asylee informants wanted to befriend Norwegians as a response to their missing social networks. In contrast, most of my Norwegian informants already had sufficient relationships and obligations, and therefore were often uninterested, and even unable, to include the refugees in their social networks.

5.3.3 Transforming the Unknown

As I showed previously, for Norwegians to socialize with refugees there has to be an actual interest in getting to know them, but possibly more importantly, there has to be room in their social network to allow the refugees a place within it. My Norwegian informants were clearly reluctant to step out of their comfort zone and daily schedules to interact with the refugees, choosing instead to socialize with them through planned activities, such as the Language Café, local football club, or practice work. What is made evident here is how the Norwegians experienced it to be easier to socialize with the refugees through established institutions than in private.

And as argued by Lisa Malkki (1992) in 4.2.2, and further discussed in 5.2.3, refugees are also often mistrusted for their perceived *rootlessness*. And as a result, they “[...] have lost their identity, their value system and their culture. All these elements contribute to the fact that they become an ‘uncontrollable’, ‘irresponsible’ and even ‘pathological’ element in the host society. (Binder and Tošić, 2005, p.611). It could then be argued that some of my Norwegian informants preferred to socialize through formal institutions due to the controlled and safe environment they provided. However, where the refugees might be mistrusted for being strangers, my Norwegian informants’ efforts to include the refugees of Fjord should be considered as a conscious attempt at preventing them from remaining as such.

5.3.4 Equalizing the Refugees

Within this approach of including the refugees lies a core aspect of the Norwegian collective identity, the idea that, as theorized by Gullestad (1992, p.121), a harmonious society requires

its members to be in some ways equal. To achieve this equality, however, Gullestad proposes that Norwegians require to perceive each other as being similar. This does not necessarily mean similarity in all aspects, but that in approaching each other, Norwegians highlight what they have in common and downplay what separates them. When the differences are perceived to be too big, however, the interaction breaks down because "peace and quiet", avoidance of conflict, is also a central Norwegian value, according to Gullestad. Consequently, unequal parties are more likely to avoid each other than to confront one another's differences, which is what I have shown the Norwegians to be doing in their interactions with the refugees of Fjord.

Anne Sigfrid Grønseth points out something similar in her contribution to the book *Migration, Family and the Welfare State: Integrating Migrants and Refugees in Scandinavia* (Olwig, Larsen, Rytter, 2012, p.146), showing how Tamil refugees in Norway were more able to adapt when appearing to be more "equal" to Norwegians. This could entail things like wanting roughly the same things and accepting the same prerequisites for a "good life", and for what constituted as a "good Norwegian". This perspective is also supported by Marianne E. Lien, Hilde Lidén and Halvard Vike (2001, p.16), who argue that equality is an essential value for Norwegians, not because people necessarily are more equal in Norway than elsewhere, but because this notion is rarely challenged. They go on to state that equality can be both a *premise* for social interactions, and as a *governing principle* for the state's welfare institutions.

The attempt to integrate the refugees in Fjord was seemingly conducted along the *governing principal* of equality. Being processed through formal institutions and the Introduction Programme, the refugees were to be transformed from unknown and uncontrollable entities, into inhabitant of Fjord, and eventually citizens of Norway. And as a result, equality between Norwegians and refugees was to be achieved when the refugees were no longer perceived to be "refugees", but as fellow Norwegians. This also coincides with what Marta Kindler, Vesselina Ratcheva and Maria Piechowska (2015, p.6) writes in their Working Paper about social networks and integration, that there is a general preference to interact with others one feels similar to, called the homophily principle. It is therefore necessary to question if the majority of ethnic Norwegians will ever consider former refugees as truly similar, and eventually as equal. Because as has been shown in this thesis, the refugees were continuously defined as different, be it due to factors like skin colour, religion or social norms.

But here it again becomes necessary to address the individuals of this story, their perspectives and their agency. My core asylee and refugee informants told of their hopes of belonging to Norway, and for their children to become Norwegian. But not all of the expressed the same sentiment for themselves. As my informants were Syrians, Afghanis, Iraqis, Eritreans, Palestinians and Sudanese, they held on to identities more personal and different than their countries of origin could convey. When they spoke of Norway, my informants referred to it as the country of Norwegians, a country they had to fit into. To them, becoming Norwegian was not the same as becoming the same as a Norwegian. Their individual hopes for what they could achieve, who they could become, and what laid ahead in their lives were as varied as they were, but what they had in common was the vision that Norway could one day become, and feel like, their home.

As such, the seemingly Norwegian notion of “equality as sameness”, as phrased by Marianne Gullestad (1989, p.85), begs to be challenged in its apparent presence in the integration policy, of making the refugees similar to Norwegians. Because where my refugee and asylee informants desired equality, they sought it not through becoming the same as Norwegians, but through being treated equally to them. For my Norwegian informants, however, their perception of refugees as different remained.

5.4 A Final Reflection

This chapter has gathered the themes of this thesis to show how the relationships between my informants ought to be understood through the network of social relations that construct them. While not suggesting that this thesis has encompassed every factor pertaining to the processes and situations discussed above, it has been my intention to show how the different facets of my fieldwork influenced one another. With this in mind, I now turn to the conclusion, which draws the final reflections to answer the question of *how the experiences with the Asylum Reception Centres affected the way Norwegians and Refugees in Fjord engaged in, and interpreted, the integration process.*

Conclusion

In this thesis I have looked at how both asylees and Norwegians experienced the Reception Centres in Fjord, how attempts were made to accommodate the Centres and their residents, and how the Norwegians' impressions of both the Centres and their residents developed. I continued by addressing how the same Norwegians thought of and acted towards the refugees settled in Fjord, and how these refugees perceived the Norwegians in turn. From the combined insight of my various informants, the final chapter analysed their perspectives with one another, drawing on the returning themes and theories in this thesis.

As a result, it has become clear that the hardships and mismanagement at the Ordinary Reception Centre (ORC), in addition to its remote location, prevented the asylees from going to school and socializing with the Norwegians of Fjord. And from this situation, those with Norwegian friends appeared to handle the stressors of the application process and the ORC better than those without. For my Norwegian informants who got to know the asylees, they became less sceptical and more sympathetic towards the asylees' situations.

However, having received about one hundred and fifty asylees, working to accommodate both them and the Reception Centres, my Norwegian informants expressed a sense of exasperation with the asylees who were unable to make use of their efforts. And with the closing of the Reception Centres, the Norwegians in Fjord felt their hard work as a municipality overlooked. When refugees were sent from other Reception Centres to be settled in Fjord, however, my Norwegian informants continued to fulfil their obligations as good hosts to the refugees, introducing them to the formal institutions of Norwegian society. The refugees responded in turn by following the rules of the Introduction Programme, but even though they participated in the different institutions of Fjord, they found socializing with Norwegians difficult, feeling like outsiders in the community.

This feeling of alienation was made worse for some of those who tried the hardest to adapt to the local community, as this effort could be interpreted by other refugees, of similar religious or ethnic backgrounds, as an act of discarding their mutual heritage. And as a way of reprimanding such behaviour, my informants told of being berated, socially isolated, and even sexually harassed. This type of social control was experienced by both my male and female

informants, but as my informants of both genders expressed, the women were sanctioned the most.

Consequently, many of my refugee informants lacked social networks of their own, becoming more dependent than others on the formal institutions, using them differently than the Norwegians, which was representative of the different needs the refugees had to bolster their social networks. Going from that assertion, it appeared that Norwegians with fully developed social networks, comprised of families, jobs, hobbies and/or friends, often felt no need to seek out the refugees to socialize with them. Instead, this task was unofficially delegated to institutions like the school and the Volunteer Centre.

From these reflections, I propose that there is a factor that is often overlooked in trying to understand the relationships between refugees and the host population: the interest in, and necessity of, getting to know one another. Where the refugees had many incentives to befriend Norwegians, the Norwegians in turn often socialized with the refugees as an act of kindness. This caused their relationships to be of an inherently unequal nature, where the desired friendships of the refugees were not reciprocated by most of the Norwegians. They continued to see their interactions with the refugees as an act of compassion. But as shown with the Norwegians who socialized with the asylees, this perspective could be amended. Because to these Norwegians, the asylees went from being a faceless group to be a group of individuals. And through the asylees' empowered *bios* from having befriended Norwegians, they were no longer nameless guests, but friends, which was a status desired by all my asylee and refugee informants. Because to them, having a social network consisting of Norwegian friends was synonymous with feeling that they belonged to Norway.

In response to this thesis's study question, I argue that the location of the ORC, the experiences Norwegians had with it and how socialization was often done through formal institutions, helped create a host-guest relationship of unreciprocated kindness between most of my Norwegian and asylee/refugee informants. This relationship made the two parties inherently dissimilar and, following Gullestad's theory of "equality as sameness", it also made it exceedingly difficult to perceive the refugees as equals. However, by befriending the asylees and the refugees, they were no longer perceived as merely guests by my Norwegian informants, and their individual differences were recognized as exactly that, individual.

It would then appear that, in its simplicity, mutual friendships are the key to making refugees and Norwegians trust one another. Crafting these friendships remains an elusive task, however, as it appears that the notion of the refugee as first and foremost *a refugee* remains a social and practical barrier to their participation in, and adaptation to, Norwegian society. In addition, this perception seems to also affect the Norwegians' inclusion of them in social settings, as "the refugee" is often considered to be harder to socialize with, due to actual or imagined differences.

What has become evident through this thesis, moreover, is that adapting and integrating was also made more difficult because the refugees and Norwegians pursued it differently. Where the Norwegians expected the refugees to socialize and integrate through formal institutions, the refugees themselves wanted to befriend the Norwegians directly. Though neither group was directly opposed to the other's approach, it was clear that by not being in concordance, they experienced slow progress, leaving both Norwegians and refugees dissatisfied with the social outcome.

It is therefore my appeal that further research be conducted into this topic, where the outcome could allow for a greater understanding of Norwegian society as a whole, based on the perceptions of both old and new countrymen. And it is my impression that anthropology is particularly suited for this task, as it seeks to understand the entirety of the social worlds of its research subjects. Returning to the discourse on integration and the processes around it, I will therefore like to end this thesis with a proposition: that a renewed focus is placed on the individuals who the integration process is comprised of, as I fear for the public and academic debate's precision, should their perspectives be left out of the discussion.

Footnotes

Chapter 2 – Living in the Asylum Reception Centre

1. Ramadan - An Islamic ritual where Muslims fast from sunrise to sunset from the 27th of May to the 24th of June
2. This was its name during my fieldwork, but it has now been changed to “Module 9: Crime and conflict management”
3. Doxa – the common belief / popular opinion
4. As Saqib spoke Norwegian, I have translated all his statements to English

Appendix

List of Informants

Asylee Informants

Cited:

- “Ahmed” – Middle Eastern in his late twenties
- “Ali” – Middle Eastern in his late twenties
- “Hassan” – Middle Eastern in his late thirties
- “Mohammed” – Middle Eastern in his mid-forties

Other:

- “Abdullah” – Middle Eastern in his early forties
- “Aida” – Middle Eastern in her early fifties
- “Amir” – Middle Eastern in his early twenties
- “Asin” – Middle Eastern in his mid-twenties
- “Aslam” – Middle Eastern in his early twenties
- “Baz” – Middle Eastern in his mid-twenties
- “Deeyah” – Middle Eastern in her early forties
- “Faruq” – Middle Eastern in his early twenties
- “Faysal” – Middle Eastern in his mid-twenties
- “Ghufran” – Middle Eastern in his early twenties
- “Hadi” – Middle Eastern in his sixties
- “Idris” – Middle Eastern twenty-year-old
- “Ilyas” – Middle Eastern in his mid-twenties
- “Imram” – Middle Eastern in his mid-twenties
- “Jabir” – Middle Eastern in his mid-twenties
- “Najmudin” – Middle Eastern in his early twenties
- “Qismat” – Middle Eastern in his mid-twenties
- “Rafiq” – Middle Eastern in his late thirties, brother to Qismat
- “Raoul” – Middle Eastern in his late twenties
- “Shoaib” – Middle Eastern in his forties
- “Soraya” – Middle Eastern in her mid-thirties

Refugee Informants

Cited:

- “Fatima” – Middle Eastern in her early twenties
- “Kit” – East-African in his mid-twenties

- “Riad” – Middle Eastern in his mid-forties
- “Saqib” – Middle Eastern in his mid-twenties

Other:

- “Nariman” – Middle Eastern in her mid-twenties.
- “Abdi” – East-African in his mid-twenties, lived with Kit
- “Bisrat” – East-African in his mid-twenties
- “Dahlak” – East-African in his mid-twenties
- “Hamid” – Middle Eastern in his late forties

Norwegian Informants

Cited

- “Astrid” – Consultant of the Refugee Service
- “Bjørn” – Local in his late seventies, had lived in the municipality all his life
- “Frida” – Mother of three in her late thirties, lived close to the RCSMA, married to Knut
- “Karete” – Principal of the Elementary School in Fjord
- “Geir” – Teacher at the ORC and the school for both asylees and refugees in Fjord
- “Gudrun” – Teacher in the neighbouring municipality
- “Guri” – Health Personnel working with the ORC to aid the asylees
- “Hanne” – Local in her late seventies, married to Leif
- “Knut” – Father of three in his late thirties, lived close to the RCSMA, married to Frida. Worked as a cattle farmer
- “Leif” – Local in his late seventies, married to Hanne
- “Maja” – Health Personnel working with the ORC to aid the asylees
- “Mette” – Teacher for asylees, refugees and Norwegians in Fjord
- “Richard” – Worked as the manager of the CWA
- Rune S. Foss – The Regional Director of IMDi Mid-Norway
- “Smith 1” – Employee at the ORC in Fjord
- “Smith 2” – Employee at the ORC in Fjord
- “Synne” – Cattle farmer, neighbour to the ORC
- “Tone” – Senior advisor in UDI, worked in many different areas, took part in a group interview with Fez and Mari
- “Trude” – Daily manager of the Volunteer Centre
- “Tyra” – Teacher for asylees and refugees in Fjord

Other:

- “Anna” – Kindergarten Administrator
- “Björg” – Councilwoman
- “Fez” – Worked at the UDI with updating the Reception Centres and advising the reception municipalities, took part in a group interview with Tone and Mari
- “Heidi” – Lived in Fjord, but worked in the CWA of the neighbouring municipality
- “Julie” – Kindergarten Manager
- “Kari” – Worked at the NAV in a neighbouring municipality, took part in the same interview as Linn
- “Karl” – Worked in the police unit in Fjord
- “Kristian” – Senior Consultant at the NAV in Fjord
- “Linn” – Worked at the NAV in a neighbouring municipality, took part in the same interview as Kari
- “Magnus” – Financial Officer in Fjord
- “Mari” – Worked with UDI in the Vulnerability team, advised in the follow-up of the Reception Centres, took part in a group interview with Fez and Tone
- “Marius” – Advisor for NOKUT in the Department for Recognition of Foreign Education.
- “Nina” – Executive officer working in the UDI with the interviews of asylees
- “Oda” – Advisor for the development of new businesses and culture projects
- “Oddgeir” – Former police chief in Fjord before that the police station was moved to the neighbouring municipality
- Reception Centre A – Interview with five workers at a privately run Ordinary Reception Centre some of my informants were moved to
- Reception Centre B – Interview with six workers at a privately run Ordinary Reception Centre some of my informants were moved to
- Reception Centre C – Interview with the manager at a publicly run Ordinary Reception Centre some of my informants were moved to
- Reception Centre D – Interview with an executive at a publicly run Ordinary Reception Centre some of my informants were moved to
- Reception Centre E – Interview with two workers at a publicly run Integration Reception Centre some of my informants were moved to
- “Smith 0” – Daily manager at the ORC in Fjord
- “Smith 3” – Employee at the ORC in Fjord
- “Smith 4” – Employee at the ORC in Fjord
- “Trine” – Developer and teacher for NordicID
- “Truls” – Mayor of Fjord

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