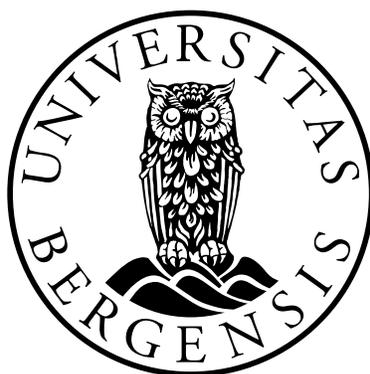


Expectations and Experiences:

Living with a negative in a Norwegian reception centre



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Contents

| | |
|---|-----|
| Abstract | iii |
| Acknowledgements | v |
| Introduction | 1 |
| Aim of thesis..... | 3 |
| Chapter 1: Terminology, Ethics, methodology and theoretical outline | 5 |
| The setting | 5 |
| Terminology | 6 |
| Living with a negative | 8 |
| The asylum system in Norway | 10 |
| Ethical Considerations..... | 13 |
| Methodology..... | 15 |
| Previous studies | 19 |
| Theoretical Framework..... | 21 |
| Chapter Outline..... | 25 |
| Chapter 2 – Gender | 27 |
| Introduction | 28 |
| Gender equality as Norwegian ideology | 30 |
| Gender policy at the reception centre | 32 |
| Lived realities | 35 |
| Appearance and social recognition | 37 |
| A film about “Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)” | 40 |
| Small problem, extensive research | 43 |
| ‘A space of our own’ | 45 |

| | |
|---|----|
| Concluding remarks..... | 48 |
| Chapter 3 - Religion | 51 |
| Introduction | 52 |
| The church as an arena for inclusion? | 54 |
| Inclusion and exclusion, religion and residency..... | 57 |
| Inclusion with staff through shared faith..... | 60 |
| Negative relations with staff through shared faith..... | 62 |
| Finding meaning in faith..... | 65 |
| When all that is left is faith..... | 68 |
| Concluding remarks..... | 70 |
| Chapter 4- Life | 73 |
| Introduction | 74 |
| 'This is no life' | 76 |
| Independence as dependants..... | 79 |
| Gratefulness..... | 81 |
| The time-frame perspective and unequal distribution of hope | 83 |
| The absence of normality and 'something to do' | 86 |
| Resistance in the everyday life | 88 |
| Concluding remarks..... | 91 |
| Chapter 5- Concluding Remarks | 95 |
| Bibliography | 99 |

Abstract

Within the context of the imagined Norwegian way of life, this thesis aims to explore the lives and experiences of female asylum seekers with a negative asylum application. My intention is to examine whether living in one of the most equal and wealthy societies in the world makes a difference in their lives. The concept of living with a negative will form the background of my analysis, in regards to how they experience life in relation to their expectations. Within this I shall look into whether living in a Norwegian reception centre creates a space for them influence their lives. Furthermore I shall look into the different arenas in which they hope to find inclusion, such as through shared faith or the church community. I also aspire to examine the importance of hope and social recognition in the everyday lives of these women. My aim is therefore to look into how living with a negative influences their lives and within this, the strategies they choose in order to deal with their situation. Most of all I aim to shed light on the relationship between the expectations the women had before arrival in Norway, and their experiences of living at a Norwegian reception centre.

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Introduction

It is mid-afternoon and still quite warm outside. I have just been invited into a women's house for the first time without a scheduled interview. At first, it is a little awkward regarding how to begin a conversation. A woman has offered me a cup of tea and I am waiting for it to finish brewing. The house I am in this morning is a private house rented by the reception centre; it is old but clean and tidy. The women take pride in keeping the house clean although they complain about the house itself. The living room is sparsely decorated with two sofas and a small living room table. The TV is old and the women bought it from a charity shop along with the sofa. They emphasise that they bought the TV themselves with their own money and find it difficult to see how they would cope without one. As Maria says, *what should we do without a TV, we have negative, we have no school, no money, no work, nothing*. Although it is a good TV, the women are disappointed that the reception centre does not give them more than the basic channels.

As I sit with the three women present in the living room, we start off by talking about how they find Norway compared to their expectations. All of them agree that they have a high amount of trust in the health system, the law and the police. Maria says that *Security is the only good thing in Norway. I feel safe and know that the police are not corrupt but here to help us and they treat everyone the same*. Two of the other women agree that they feel safe and secure knowing that the law is good and uncorrupted. However, Maria goes on to discuss her distrust with the UDI and asks why there is so little in the news about asylum seekers that die in reception centres. Hence, during their discussion I realize that although they have great respect and belief in the law, they consider the UDI to be a separate entity outside the law, which has little to do with justice.

The women I talk to this afternoon are all from the eastern part of Africa and are quite outspoken about their encounter with Norway. All of them came here because they felt they needed protection from bad situations that arose in their home country. They came here because they had heard Norway was a good country, Lisa explains *I have always heard of Norway as the freedom country, Norway is good here it is freedom*. However, Mona goes on to tell me that life in the house is sometimes difficult if the people have different legal status. She has a final

negative from UNE (utlendingsnemda, the appeal board), and therefore does not have the same rights as those living in the same house that are still waiting for UDI (utlendingsdirektoratet, directorate of immigration) to give a decision. The negative is especially important in regards to health care. Maria thinks that they do get good care when in hospital, although, the situations leading to being hospitalised can be difficult. *Here when I call an ambulance they ask so many questions that we do not know. Even if we live in the same house I do not know the person, they ask for age, health situation, how the breathing is and sometimes legal status. People can be dying while they ask for legal status.*

For Maria the three years she has been here have been a waste, *I am still young but I have wasted three years of my life, this has ruined me. I have a negative, but if I go back, I have no money and no security, my country has no money or no security.* Hence, for these three women present, the meeting with Norway has not been the best. They have been here for years and all three have a final negative. However, they have no return date and find it unlikely that they will be deported by force. Therefore, these women do not consider the negative as final, for them the main problem with the negative is a lowering of their income, although as I shall discuss below ‘living with a negative’ has many more consequences. The women live in sparse conditions with very little to do as they cannot work, go to school or fill their days with activities. Their expectations of the wealthy freedom country with equal rights for everyone has very little to do with their experiences at the reception centre.

Aim of thesis

Whilst I do not claim that all the women I spoke with have the same experiences. I did find that they had some shared ways of coping with everyday life. Living with the similar political, economic and cultural conditions in a Norwegian reception centre situation, meant that some of their feelings in regards to the relationship between expectations and experiences were the same.

The overall research question for this thesis has been what the relationship between expectations and experienced realities are, for the women living with a negative at a Norwegian reception centre. What I intend to examine through my paper is how the women experience life in Norway in light of the expectations they had before arrival. This thesis will have the women's experiences and thoughts as the foundation for the analysis. Whilst one can get the impression in public debate that female asylum seekers are merely passive victims that are acted upon, I intend to examine their experiences and which strategies they take use of in order to deal with their situation.

My aim is to look at their expectations of inclusion and a better life in Norway. Within this, I will also examine whether different barriers for inclusion in the Norwegian society exists, and how the women experience these. I shall endeavour to show what kinds of influence living with a negative has on their everyday life at the reception centre. Furthermore, I intend to investigate whether their expectations match their experience, and whether their expectations are achievable within the asylum context. In order to examine the relationship I shall start by looking into gender equality in Norway and if the strong emphasis on gender equality creates a space for the women to influence their own lives, or a space for social recognition. Furthermore, I intend to look into the women's religious belief and examine whether shared faith can lead to inclusion or social recognition in various arenas. Lastly, my aim is to go into the everyday life for the women and examine how hope is closely related to expectations and as such important in order to examine the relationship between expectations and experiences.

Chapter 1: Terminology, Ethics, methodology and theoretical outline

In this introductory chapter, the overall aim is to present the theme of the paper and the theoretical outline along with the context in which the women are situated. I will start the paper by briefly describing the setting of my fieldwork before explaining the terminology and my own specific choice of words when referring to my informants. From there I will have a brief discussion about living with a negative. Following this, I also present the asylum system in Norway to give some background of the structure in which my informants are a part of. Thereafter I will discuss some ethical considerations, and include how I conducted the research in terms of methodology. From there I will include a section with some of the previous literature from Norwegian and international studies regarding asylum seekers and irregular migrants both in and outside a reception centre context. I have also included an outline of the overall theoretical framework of my paper. Finally, I include a chapter overview.

The setting

From August 2013 until early January 2014, I conducted my fieldwork at a reception centre for asylum seekers in the western part of Norway. It is located in a medium sized town surrounded by a beautiful landscape. Although the town is slightly isolated, it is not very far away from larger cities. The reception centre is decentralised and consists of various private houses and a larger hotel like building. The main building consists of both small rooms with shared kitchens and, bathrooms and self-contained apartments. There separate women's houses in the town centre and housing for men only, further away there is an annex building for women only, situated opposite the bigger main building where mainly men and a few women live. Even further away is another complex of small buildings with mainly couples.

The reception centre office is situated separately in the town centre and is open during reception hours from 12.30-15.00, although staff are present between 8 and 4 for pre-arranged appointments. Most of the staff are normally at the office whilst there is one environmental

worker and a janitor that spends most of their day out visiting the different houses. The standard of the different houses varies although the women living in houses were happier with the more 'normal' standard of their living arrangements in private houses compared to the more institutionally centralised reception centres. However, there were issues regarding how old the houses were and slight bickering between those living in better kept residences and the ones in the older houses.

Terminology

Finding the right terminology for asylum-seekers who have received a final negative has been a challenging endeavour. In the Norwegian context, 'irregular migrants' have come to be thought of as a less politicised term and carrying less connotations. It is also thought of as a 'description of the individual's legal status in relation to a state, defined for instance through the rejection of an asylum application (Brunovskis and Bjerkan 2008: 33). Within this, it is important to note that in Norway most of the irregular migrants come through the asylum system and are former asylum-seekers (Düvell 2010).

Düvell used the term 'clandestine migration', although he place it within a very specific historical context and emphasised that it is only a concept because it is constructed as such by social, political and legal, structures (Düvell 2008: 493). Furthermore, he finds that there are six main expressions of clandestine migration in the academic field: 'illegal, unlawful, undocumented, unauthorised, and irregular migration' (Düvell 2008: 484). Whilst these are used in various contexts and often overlap, Düvell finds this 'inappropriate', and refer them to the reference point, they have within 'law, crime, identity documents or regularity' and how some terms are more specific to different areas (ibid). De Genova consistently uses undocumented migrants as a term instead of 'illegal', because of its political and legal connotations, and uses the quotation marks in order to show that they are produced as 'illegal'. He further avoids other terms such as 'extra-legal, unauthorised, irregular or clandestine' because he finds them to be 'problematic proxies' (De Genova 2002: 420). Khosravi (2010) points to the political stand one takes in choosing which words to refer to when talking about undocumented migrants. Khosravi rejects the term 'illegal' due to various concerns such as most undocumented migrants in

Sweden, like Norway, are former asylum-seekers and the term illegal could stigmatise or affect those in the asylum process (Khosravi 2010: 96). However, he also talks of failed or rejected asylum seekers as becoming undocumented migrants (Khosravi 2010: 98).

Willen (2007), on the other hand, talks about the ‘illegality’ but more in the way of how the irregular migrants experience their ‘illegality’ and the consequences it has on their lives, although she uses the term in quotation marks in order to problematize it (Willen 2007: 9). When looking at the legal aspect of forced return, Phuong (2006) uses the phrase failed asylum seekers in her search for a more humane and efficient way to carry out deportation in the U.K context. Furthermore, Blitz and Otero-Iglesias (2011) consistently use the term refused asylum-seekers in their investigation of the hardships experienced by these refused asylum-seekers in the U.K. Hence, as I have shown referring to irregular migrants is a challenging task, which one has to think through before taking a stand. The different terms brings with them different connotations and emotions.

Nevertheless, whilst there are convincing arguments for irregular, undocumented and clandestine migrants, each with its specific connotations I have chosen the term asylum-seekers with a negative or as living with a negative when referring to my informants. The reason I use this term is that this was how my informants would refer to themselves. When starting an interview or during a conversation most of them would utter that they had a negative, or lived with a negative. However, when referring to the social status in general or in the literature, I will use the term irregular migrants, but when talking of my informants and their specific experiences I shall use asylum-seeker with a negative or living with a negative. Whilst the vast majority of my informants that I spent the most time with had negatives, some were still waiting for an answer and a few had been granted positive. The non-negative legal status will therefore be mentioned when relevant.

Furthermore, the women who are part of my research lived in accommodation provided by the reception centre and received some financial contributions from the UDI. Therefore, it is hard to consider the ‘illegality’ (Willen 2007) of their position. Nevertheless, they have received negative decisions and are expected to leave Norway, although the majority of these women have spent years in Norway, and would be among those that are problematic to return (Phuong 2006). When considering their status, the women did not feel they were illegal, because they were

staying in official accommodation, and neither did they feel undocumented, because some of them had given both their full identity and passports to the UDI.

Most of all, I believe the women referred to themselves as asylum-seekers with a negative because they did not think of it as final, all of them were waiting for a positive answer and residency. Within this, we can see the waiting and their patience as a continuation of their journey to Norway. Whilst I did not ask about why they came to Norway or how they came here, because it was not part of my research, studies have shown the long and sometimes fragmented routes taken by migrants (Lucht 2012). Hence, the women might have spent a long time getting to Norway and might have stopped in different countries for some time before arriving in Norway. Therefore, their experience with the migration has been one with several obstacles and a lot of waiting, before arriving in Norway. Hence, it is likely that they see the second negative as another obstacle, which will go away with time. However, even though I will refer to the women as asylum-seekers with a negative they still share some of the same experiences as other irregular migrants as I intend to show with this paper.

Living with a negative

As discussed above my informants do not consider themselves irregular or illegal and the experiences of those with a negative at reception centres are not always considered when discussing irregular migrants. However, as De Genova writes: “Migrant ‘illegality’ is lived through a palpable sense of deportability, which is to say the possibility of deportation, the possibility of being removed from the space of the nation state” (De Genova 2002: 439). Hence, following this definition my informants do fit into the ‘illegality’ world of migrants as they are in danger of deportation although they do not believe this will happen anytime soon.

Nevertheless, living with a negative has consequences for the women such as differences in their legal status and structural framework. In order to introduce what ‘living with a negative’ means for the women and is experienced by them I will use Willen (2007) and her critical phenomenology of illegality. Willen sees ‘illegality’ through three levels, as a ‘juridical and political status’, a socio-political condition’ and ‘a mode-of-being-in-the-world’ (Willen 2007:

11). Willen also stress that being undocumented does not necessarily mean that all irregular migrants share the same experience of suffering, but that distress is a common feature in most stories (Willen 2007: 13). Therefore, I would like to emphasise that I am aware that the majority of my informants live in much better conditions than irregular migrants further south in Europe and that their suffering is relative compared to the stories one can hear from countries such as Italy and Greece. My aim will then be to examine the relationship between their expectations and what they experience at the reception centre, in order to see whether there is a discrepancy within this relationship that helps create their suffering.

In regards to my informants and the critical phenomenon of illegality in the juridical and political status, this becomes clear when we see how the authorities refer to them as persons with a final rejection, or those living outside the reception centres, as ‘illegally residing in Norway’ (Forfang 2014, my own translation). In regards to a socio-political condition, living with a negative has severe consequences for the asylum-seekers with a negative. Firstly they are told they are expected to leave and they have a ‘duty to leave Norway’ (UDI 2011: 14), and they will receive less financial contribution from the UDI (UDI 2013a). Moreover they lose the right to the 250 hours of Norwegian language school; they are only eligible for emergency medical help or medical care than cannot wait and children lose the right to secondary school (UDI 2011:15). Hence, the structures of their lives become considerably worse even if they can stay in the reception centre and receive some financial help.

We can also find how living with a negative produces the ‘mode-of-being-in-the-world’ as Willen (2007) describes. Within this, she looks at the subjective experiences of undocumented migrants in Tel-Aviv and how their illegality comes to show through embodiment, time, and space (Willen 2007: 11). Within the living with a negative for my informants, lies a connection with loss of hope, and meaning in the days, not being able to work or go to school diminishes the possibilities of finding meaning and social recognition in life. My informants explained that living with a negative was a non-life, almost like animals, we *sleep, cook and eat and that is all we do*.

Living with a negative produces a mode-of-being-in-the-world in the way that it creates a lack of meaning and feelings of emptiness. Although they live in the same house as before, the negative have completely changed their way of thinking about life and the future. Due to the

negative, many have trouble sleeping because they think about their case, others worry about the things they should have achieved by now.

In accordance with Willen and the mode-of-being-in-the-world' I have found that their lack of money, influence how they feel they should dress in order to feel like women and in this sense the negative becomes embodied for them because they cannot look the way they feel is expected and appropriate for women. I shall expand upon this in chapter two. In regards to time, the negative influence their 'mode-of-being-in-the-world' through increased lack of hope and withdrawal from the community. With the negative, time is experienced as wasted and becomes a motivation for staying because they have already wasted too much time which chapter three goes into in more detail. In regards to space, the living with a negative can become an influencing factor in regards to the house, and the ways they deal with their co-habitants. Relations become strained when one person in the house has a positive and others have negative or visa-versa. Moreover, the negative influences people's willingness to interact with others and often people lock themselves in their room or stay inside as much as possible so they do not have to face the outside world. Hence, living with a negative produces a variety of ways to deal with the outside world, especially in regards to withdrawal from the surrounding community.

The asylum system in Norway

In 2013 there were 11 983 registered applications for asylum in Norway from a total of 111 different countries (UDI 2013a). At the same time there were 12 583 decisions regarding asylum applications, of these, 3148 received a negative and 3600 were told that their application would not be treated in Norway (UDI 2013a). There were 16 300 people living at various reception centres in 2013, and 35% lived with a negative decision. Whilst the number of asylum-seekers with a negative that lives at reception centre is easily found, numbers for those with a negative living outside the system is difficult to obtain. Zhang, (2008) finds that the numbers of irregular migrants inside and outside of the system is likely to be around 18 361, but ranging from 10 460 up to 31 917. These are of course only estimates due to the challenges of measuring this group.

An asylum seeker is a person who comes to Norway by him or herself and requests protection. If the asylum application is granted the asylum seeker will be given refugee status and protection in Norway. However, if the application is rejected the asylum seeker can appeal the decision and will be given a lawyer. If the UDI does not reverse the decision, the application goes to the immigration appeal board (UNE). Then, if the appeal is declined the UDI will not consider the applicant an asylum seeker but as a person with a duty to leave. Until the asylum-seeker is deported or returns voluntarily, he or she can stay in a reception centre (UDI 2011: 15).

However, while the UDI is responsible for the asylum seekers and their applications, various contractors run the reception centres. However, the authorities still have certain guidelines the contractors must follow in regards to the running of the reception centres (Valenta and Berg 2012: 23-25). Still The UDI claims that this is due to the flexibility it requires, with the range of the flow in asylum seekers fluctuating extensively from year to year (UDI 2008a:5). Although, it is likely that the privatisation of reception centres is also due to economic reasoning, as the UDI can give short-term contracts to contractors and thereby save money without having to employ a set number of people., this does mean that there is a danger of losing valuable expertise when the number of employees fluctuates, as well of difficulties with stability and long-term planning (NOU 2011: 13). It is also in line with a specific neo-liberal worldview (Hage 2003: ch1) that requires the state to outsource services it used to run. Moreover, as we shall see through the chapters, the lack of both standardisation and definition of ‘sober yet prudent management’ (UDI 2010) creates diversity between reception centres and this can lead to tension when the women hear about better treatment at other reception centres.

I found it interesting how the women did not always differentiate between the UDI and the reception centre. They referred to them inconsistently, sometimes as the reception centre, sometimes the office and sometimes the UDI. Although, in regards to economic issues they often made a distinction and saw the UDI as the ‘good’ provider giving the reception centre money to distribute and the reception centre as the ‘bad’ one, deducting their money and not spending enough.

Furthermore, all asylum seekers that come to Norway for protection have to go through an asylum interview with a caseworker at the UDI, if needed the UDI will provide a translator. During the interview, the asylum seeker should bring forward the claim for protection and all

information that can be relevant for the case. Additionally, it is the asylum seekers responsibility to provide correct and thorough information regarding his or her claim for protection and the UDI consider it a felony to give false or untrue information (UDI 2013b)..

However as Mona explained, being told you can and should tell everything in an interview does not necessarily mean you think it is safe. She further explained that when she arrived she was quite young and did not speak much English and found it difficult to trust the translator. *How can I trust someone I just met, what if he uses the wrong words and does not like me? And after they tell me to sign, I cannot read this, how can I know it is right?* These kinds of questions came up frequently during my fieldwork. This shows the difficulty of trusting the translator and the difficulty in establishing a relationship between refugee and those that takes care of them and that it can create a mild distrust (Daniel and Knudsen 1995). Hence, the interview becomes a major issue, mostly because it is conducted quite early in the application period and the asylum-seekers are still unsure of what to do. It further becomes a defining feature, what you tell there is what your entire case is judged by. For Mona this was difficult. She showed me a huge pile of papers that she carried with her; it had all the documents from all her appeals, both from the UDI and her lawyer. Mona carried it like a baby and called it *my life*, even though she could not read a word it said.

Ethical Considerations

I conducted my fieldwork with a focus on female asylum seekers and their experience at the reception centre. Therefore, I always kept in mind that these women are in a particularly vulnerable situation. I tried my best not to overstep any personal boundaries or limits that would make my informants uncomfortable. Within this, I also explained that they did not have to talk in detail about why they came to Norway, the journey to Norway or the reasons why Norway became their destination. I explained that this was not part of my research, as it has been covered in many papers (Brekke et al 2010) and my main interest was the experiences of the women in regards to their lives at the reception centre.

Before every interview, I explained that if they wanted to stop talking they would not have to state their reason and I would stop my questioning. I also assured all the women I talked to that confidentiality and anonymity would be of highest priority throughout my fieldwork and the finished product as according to NSD regulations, ethical guidelines for the social sciences, and the Norwegian law. Hence, I would explain that I would not write any names, age or other details that could identify them in my final paper. Therefore, when necessary I have given some informants more names, added or subtracted years to their age and given them more or fewer children in order to secure anonymity. Some of my informants did tell me to put their names in the thesis and wanted their stories told. However, as advocated by Scheyvens et al (2003) I decided that even though they might want this acknowledgment, I chose to keep all my informants anonymous in order to secure the anonymity of everyone.

During my fieldwork, I did consider the power balance in the relationship with my informants. Within this I agree with Düvell, Triandafyllidou, and Vollmer, (2010) that the informants do have some sort of power in that they can decide what to tell and what to disclose. Furthermore, in line with Düvell, Triandafyllidou, and Vollmer, (2010), I considered the boundaries in regards to the relationship between my informants and myself. Whilst I could not help them with money issue or talking to the UDI about their case, I did explain that I would be happy to help them in regards to translations of official letters or general things they needed help with, or refer them to organisations that could offer help. I was often asked to translate official letters because the majority of documents from the UDI were written in a formal and complex

Norwegian. However, in order for our relationship to be reciprocal to some extent they always offered me food, and were very happy that I ate and enjoyed their hot and spicy food.

Nonetheless, whilst writing my thesis, validity and my own positioning both in the field and in the text have been important issues for me to address. In regards to validity, I do not make claims to be telling the 'truth' or to represent all women with a negative, or to have found causal links between their behaviour and the negative. I am aware that my limited fieldwork and limited network of informants would make it inappropriate to make such claims (Jacobsen and Landau 2003). Still, I do believe I am representing the women I have talked to and their experiences. Hence, my aim is not to make a complete ethnographic account of these women, but an attempt to understand certain aspects of their lives and meetings with Norway. In order to aim for the best representation of the women I often rely on quotes and excerpts from the interviews I have conducted, in order to express the women's views as well as my own interpretation. In regards to this, I should note that I have altered some of the quotes such as correcting grammar in order to present coherently what the women were trying to express. Whilst the vast majority spoke good English, some situations where they were tired, agitated or frustrated meant that their articulation sometimes varied. Furthermore, I see the importance of positioning myself, and my views and motivations for the different enquires I made (Sanjek 1990). However, I would also agree with Sanjek that 'the subjects of ethnography are more interesting than the authors' (Sanjek 1990, 413): Therefore I have not written myself into social settings unless it is necessary for the context, as my aim with this thesis is to acquire a better understanding of how the women experience the gap between their expectations and realities.

Within the line of positioning myself in the paper, it is important to note that I did not live in the same town as the reception centre was but commuted by car due to family circumstances. However, most of my informants preferred meeting during the day when they had little to do, before picking up children from kindergarten or cooking with friends. Nevertheless, I spent some evenings with my informants if there were social gatherings or they were celebrating birthdays. Moreover, questions about the drive to and from the women also served as a conversation starter most days and the fact that I had a car meant that I could drive the women places if they needed to be somewhere.

However, being a young, ethnic Norwegian, white female conducting my first fieldwork also means that I come from a certain viewpoint. I explained to my informants that I could in no way understand their situation, but that I would like to try and that was why I was conducting my fieldwork. Furthermore, because I did not dress or talk very professionally or formally, as advocated by Scheyvens and Nowak (2003), I was accepted into their sphere as a welcomed guest and not only a distanced researcher. One woman at the start of my fieldwork told me that she had been very nervous before the interview and afraid of how to say things. After a few minutes she told me that I was not as 'scary' as she had envisioned and she would not be afraid to decline my questions. Being a mother also meant that I had a commonality with some of the women although we were in very different life situations. Furthermore, because I am a young unmarried mother and a student without my own house, job or stable economy meant I was far from the 'middle-class ideal' the women had expected most Norwegians were. This meant that they could relate to me at different levels and served to make our relationship more easy going and equal because I did not have the 'authority' over them in all life situations.

Methodology

During my fieldwork, I have focused on the lives and experiences of female asylum seekers and I set out to observe and see the everyday lives as much as possible. However, the start of my fieldwork proved to be quite challenging. Due to the fact that it is a decentralised reception centre, there were few communal rooms where I could hope to meet people. Furthermore, a lack of organised activities also created few opportunities to meet people. Thus, I started sitting in the reception with the receptionist and handing out a brief information letter regarding my research interest and fieldwork with my contact details. However, after some time I acknowledged that this method did not work, I would meet many people but nobody would agree to a meeting with me or contact me. Therefore, an employee gave me an introduction round and we went to visit the women's houses. A week later, I also joined another employee to a house visit. Although this helped me find a way in it also meant I had to emphasise that I did not work for the reception centre and that some women were quite sceptical of me, believing I worked for the UDI and/ or the reception centre. Whilst I do not think I would have managed to find informants without the reception centre, I did not account for the scepticism some of the women with a negative had

towards the office. Although this do not hold for all the women, it did create problems in finding informants. However, I also managed to meet more informants by knitting in the reception. This intrigued some of the women and I started teaching some of them to knit.

My main method in the beginning started as formal interviews. I found that the more formal like arrangement worked better as a starting point, as it was slightly difficult explaining that I just wanted to take part in everyday life as a participant-observer along the traditional anthropological line. However, about half way in my fieldwork I was considered 'part of the family' in one house and a 'most welcomed guest' for my other informants. This meant that they relaxed more, opened up about trivialities and told me to come over without arranging interviews. I also came to realise that through opening up the interviews and sharing information about myself, I managed to create a setting in which the informants became more comfortable and opened up to me. These thoughts did however only come as my fieldwork progressed and my confidence grew along with my acceptance from the women.

Nevertheless, I in some of the interviews I did use a translator who was also a resident at the reception centre. I am aware of the ethical considerations in regards to a 'local' translator (Jacobsen and Landau 2003) such as biased information and not telling everything. Moreover, my translator was male, which brought another dimension to consider. However, one of the women I was interviewing brought him and asked if he could be a translator because she did not feel she had enough Norwegian or English skills. They were good friends and as I spent a considerable amount of time with them, we developed a more informal relationship. This meant that they would sometimes bicker and argue in front of me when it came to his translations being erroneous. This often happened if she complained about the reception centre and he felt she was exaggerating. Despite these differences, I am confident that I have heard my informant's story and her experiences, more so because she could understand Norwegian and English and therefore would object if he did not translate correctly.

It is also important to note that due to the confidentiality clause I signed with the UDI I have not used any information from the employees at the reception centre or observations in their employee resident relationship. It was also a wish by the reception centre, that I should not take notes outside of formal interview settings with them. Due to a busy working environment and my aim of spending as much time with the residents and not the office, I did not do more than a few

short interviews. Therefore, I have chosen not to use these due to anonymity, as it is a small reception centre. Hence, my information and data comes from the women I have spent time with and talked with, the observations and views uttered in this paper are a response to what the women have told me and how they have felt in regards to different episodes.

Nevertheless, the most important aspect of my fieldwork was to spend a considerable amount of time with my informants. Through helping them with cooking, shopping, translating and spending time at their house, I gradually gained their trust. This also taught me that what they said and meant in the first interview could change to what they expressed after spending more time with me. This is of course the main foundation for anthropological studies and fieldwork, the concept of the Malinowskian participant-observation, the 'methodological values' which allows the researcher to look into how people's understandings are contextual and what people say and do have to do with self-representation (Stocking 1992: 282).

Through spending time with the women, I also realised that their views and thoughts on different matters did not just change with time but also in regards to how they felt they treated in specific incidents. Hence, although the more formal interview method was preferred I would not have gained as much information by only arranging a few interviews. As an example, a turning point during my fieldwork was having my hair braided by one of the women. During this four and a half hour slightly painful session, she opened up about trivial everyday life details such as gossip and differences between people in the camp. Walking around with long Rasta braids for a few weeks also worked as a very good conversation and introduction starter with other women living in the reception centre. Therefore, I have seen the value of fieldwork and being able to see my informants in different settings. This leads us briefly to Jenkins and his emphasis on participant observation and how there is not just one 'truth' or view 'There is no single social order to be understood, only heterogeneous practices, including the knowledge they bear' (Jenkins 1994: 452).

Moreover, the field can of course be a contested space (Ferguson and Gupta 1997). In their examination of the 'field' Ferguson and Gupta finds that 'real fieldwork' is supposed to be conducted far away from one's own culture in a faraway place in order to be part of a 'rite of passage' into anthropology (Ferguson and Gupta 1997). 16). Hence, I am aware of the critiques that comes with fieldwork 'at home'. However, there were times where I definitely felt out of

place. Even though I know the Norwegian society, culture and norms, I did not know the workings of a reception centre or the norms that existed there. There were times I did not know how to greet people, where to sit or stand in a house, if I should call and arrange a meeting or simply show up and of course how to approach the issue of food, should I help cook, and how much (or little) could I eat without being impolite.

As mentioned, I used a translator for some of my interviews. As I will discuss below the majority of my informants are East African and speak some level of English. This was in some way related to language barriers; however, I spent a lot of time with Arabic and Somali women drinking tea and teaching them to knit. Whilst we could not speak together I learnt a lot just through observation and being there proving that sometimes observation is just as useful as listening, something Jenkins (1994) elegantly puts forward in his account of a French cattle market.

The majority of my informants are Christian east African women; this was not intentional but a consequence of my limited language skills and the lack of a translator. Although, there is a number of Arabic and Somali women at the reception centre I have focused on those women that spoke English. However, I do consider it an advantage to have women from similar kinds of backgrounds, such as in regards to Christianity as chapter three will consider. Moreover, getting to know the women and gaining their trust took time and was not established after one interview or an introduction. I spent a lot of time in the beginning introducing myself and trying to find women that would talk to me. Therefore having a more limited group of women as informants meant I could spend more time with each of them.

Previous studies

In an extensive report, Lauritsen and Berg looked into the living situations of asylum seekers in Norway, to find issues that contributed to either good or bad standards of living (1999). They directed their focus at families, married couples or single parents with children along with employees at reception centres and health personnel. One of their findings was how difficult it is to find what makes ‘the good life’ (det gode liv) in reception centres, and the importance of a timeframe. Newly arrived asylum seekers would more frequently express gratitude, satisfaction and optimism than those that had been living at reception centres for years. Hence, a person would experience the standards of living different in regards to different time frames, when newly arrived the most important factor would be the feeling of safety while after some time the feeling of living in temporality and the lack of normality would become major factors (Lauritsen and Berg 1999:21-22). However, after the issue of waiting for their asylum application to be treated, the study found that the economic situation was what occupied the asylum seekers the most. The asylum seekers saw not being able to work and provide for themselves as difficult, a few also specified that they were getting used to receiving benefits, something they found problematic. Furthermore, passivity, isolation and a lack of normality were the key findings in terms of the living conditions of asylum seekers at reception centres. In terms of gender, Lauritsen and Berg advocated separate housing for single women, they found that although women were a small group many expressed fear of assaults and being uncomfortable living amongst men.

In 2008, Skogøy published a report regarding violence against women in Norwegian reception centres, and concluded that the issue needed more attention in the future. It highlighted the difficult situation for women in reception centres and pointed towards the need to protect women in their private sphere in regards to being able to cook and use the bathroom without having to encounter men they did not know. Therefore, the report suggests that these communal areas should be removed so the women does not have to put themselves at risk in regards to abuse and dominance from men or lose status as honourable women (Skogøy 2008:36). It would appear that the UDI responded to this report by setting up various women’s houses or halls at reception centres because the regulation notes for reception centres now states that single women shall have living conditions that are physically separated from men (UDI 2008b). The Skogøy

report emphasise how the regulation notes at the time, only stated that the reception centres should facilitate that the women were protected against unwanted attention from men (Skogøy 2008:27).

Furthermore, there have been several international studies and reports, from countries with different asylum systems, in regards to the hardships rejected asylum seekers go through. Blitz and Otero-Iglesias (2011) investigate the lack of rights and make a comparison with statelessness, for refused asylum seekers in the U.K. Those who had lost the right to accommodation and financial assistance after the negative decision, were left ‘impoverished and exposed’ (Blitz and Otero-Iglesias 2011: 665), outside the protection of the state but exposed enough to be in danger of deportation.

Khosravi (2009) looks into the criminalisation of asylum-seekers and ‘illegal migrants’ in the Swedish context and the poor treatment which is happening at detention centres through the personal stories of detainees. Phuong (2006) on the other hand, considers the legal side of failed asylum-seekers in the U.K context, and calls the unwillingness to leave voluntarily a ‘mockery of the asylum system’ (Phuong 2006: 117). Phuong further takes for granted that those that receive negative do not deserve to stay. She therefore looks into how more failed asylum-seekers might opt for voluntary return if they knew rapid forced return would be the other option after receiving a negative (Phuong 2006: 118). However, she does argue strongly against not giving residency to asylum-seekers who cannot be returned due to safety issues, and finds that the government then ‘maintains them in illegality’ (Phuong 2006: 122). Overall, she finds that failed asylum seekers are not necessarily unproblematic to expel with force; therefore, states often opt for options such as limiting welfare benefits like financial help and accommodation. Within this, Phuong demonstrates how the U.K government attempts to ‘starve out’ the failed asylum seekers, ‘the distinction between voluntary and forced removals becomes blurred where incentives for voluntary return effectively amount to a threat of destitution’ (Phuong 2006: 129).

Valenta (2012) directs his attention towards the rejected asylum seekers in Norway and their incentives to stay after their negative, and their ability to cope with everyday life. He finds that for many it is the fear of what will happen if they return to their country that keeps them in Norway. Furthermore, Valenta finds that many rejected asylum-seekers have spent everything they had to get to Norway and when they receive a negative it is not understood as a final

decision, they still live with the hope of receiving residency. He also finds that those who choose to stay at the reception centre after their negative are those that are not easily deported and/or those that do not fear or believe they will be deported. He argues that their capability to survive everyday life depends upon the various resources they have at any given moment along with probability of deportation and ability to earn a living (Valenta 2012: 243).

Theoretical Framework

Throughout the chapters I will present the theoretical framework within the context, therefore I will here only briefly sketch out the overarching theoretical framework. Whilst I have already applied Willen (2007) and her theoretical standing, I shall also include Vigh (2009) and Hage (2003) within the context of critical phenomenology. Hence, my theoretical positioning will be in line with critical phenomenology in the way that I take my informants' experiences as the starting point. However, without taking these experiences for granted, I will try to understand them in light of wider social structures. I will apply the three authors, Willen, Vigh and Hage, throughout the thesis, due to their emphasis on connecting experience to social structures. Through Willen (2007) I have found that the 'illegality' of migrants produces a certain mode-of-being-in-the world, where we have to understand the migrants' experience, in relation to how they are produced as 'illegal'. By analysing my informants' experiences through Vigh (2009) I will look at how he takes the migrants experiences of life and connects it to imaginaries, how the migrants envision life elsewhere, because social structures do not let them carry out their normal lives at home. Hence, social structures shape the migrants' experiences both in their country of origin and during migration. With Hage, I will examine how the need for social recognition and societal hope shapes my informants experience of life. Within this, I will examine how the distribution of hope is crucial for how they experience their expectations in regards to life at the reception centre, and in living with a negative.

Nevertheless, it is also important to note that when I talk about my informants' expectations I do not believe they are uniform and shaped by specific incidents. I believe various meetings with different actors shapes the expectations they had of life in Norway, such as from life back home, through aid-programs, refugee camps, or other organisations or people they have

met. I find it likely that they have heard about the wealth in Europe in relation to global awareness (Vigh 2009: 93), I know they compare life at the reception centre with other asylum seekers they have met and that their expectations are shaped by what is possible at other reception centres. Furthermore, they hear about life in Norway through Norwegian classes and through information meetings at the reception centre. Hence, I believe their expectations are fluid in the way that they will change in the meetings with various actors.

In his article, Vigh (2003) investigates the consequences of migrants' imaginaries of life elsewhere. He finds that the classic push-pull theory by E.S. Lee (1968) reduces complex decisions, motivations and influences to economic motives (Vigh 2009: 92). Hence, Vigh finds that we need to investigate 'imagined places and spaces' (Vigh 2009: 93). He claims this is important in order to nuance our view of migration and the push-pull factor. Vigh further sees how migration might not only be motivated by economic means but also a motivation to escape 'social death'. Hage (2003) builds upon Bourdieu and thinks of 'social' death as a place where all possibilities or opportunities in life are non-existent (Hage 2003: 17). Moreover, Vigh stresses the importance of strategies and consequences within migration. "It shows how migration becomes a technology of the imagination, as an act through which people come to imagine better lives in other times or places as well as the tragic consequences of this imaginary bridging of severed points" (Vigh 2009: 94).

However, where Vigh looks at the discrepancy between the 'culturally expected and the socially possible' (Vigh 2009: 95) in their home countries as reason for migration, I will look at how this relationship comes to show through their expectations and what is socially possible in the asylum situation. Furthermore, whilst Vigh examines how his informants feel trapped and cannot perform the customs that are culturally expected of them, such as marriage back home, I will investigate how the women deal with not being able to follow a 'normal' life trajectory because they are living with a negative at the reception centre. Vigh also focuses upon how his informants' imaginaries of a better life elsewhere were often not realised, and they found themselves 'socially stuck' (Vigh 2009: 105) living illegally on the streets in Europe. Therefore, Vigh's concept of the 'culturally expected and socially possible' shall be employed throughout this thesis, as a framework for understanding my informants' expectations of Norway and the relationship between these expectations and the what they experience at the reception centre.

Moreover, by looking into Hage (2003) and his theorising in regards to hope, I find that hope is a concept linked to the social and society. Where Vigh (2009) sees that his migrants try to go elsewhere because they have no hope of leading normal lives, I find that hope also fuels their expectations in hoping for a better life. Moreover, where I link Vigh (2009) and his informants 'imaginaries' to expectations, I shall endeavour to link societal hope to expectations by applying Hage (2003) and his theorising. Hage finds that hope as a social category is associated with many other concepts, such as 'optimism, fear, desire, wishing, wanting, dreaming, waiting, and confidence' (Hage 2003:10), to name a few, and within all these categories, I believe it is closely related to expectations. Hage further goes on to explain how social hope has an ability to transcend the 'determining powers of the inequalities experienced within this present' (Hage 2003: 12). Moreover, he identifies 'societal hope' as the hope society distributes to its people and give them the possibilities, and maybe also the ability to fulfil their expectations of meaning and inclusion in society (Hage 2003:14-15). Within the social recognition that comes with 'societal hope' Hage builds upon Bourdieu (1989, 1990, 1998, 2000) and finds that 'being' or meaning in life depends upon the social recognition people receive. Without social recognition life becomes meaningless and without possibilities or opportunities. Hence, I will explore whether the women with a negative manage to find the social recognition they had expectations of, at the reception centre and as such meaning. Hence, hope is very much related to the expectations of a better life, which we found with Vigh (2009).

Chapter Outline

Chapter two:

In chapter two, I aim to find how the relationship between expectations and realities comes forward through gender. With this, I mean to look at how being informed and taught about the possibilities that exist in Norway, which builds upon a middle-class ideal, confirms the expectations the women had before coming to Norway. Furthermore, I will also examine the paradoxes inherent in the framework of informing the women about gender equality, whilst removing the conditions needed in order to experience this equality.

Chapter three:

Through chapter three, I hope to show how shared religion was a part of these women's expectations of being included in the Norwegian society. Therefore, I will look into whether or not religion serves as an inclusionary mechanism. Hence, I shall try to find what kind of role religion plays in the mastering of everyday life at the reception centre. Within this, I will give special attention to religion in regards to how the women deal with the context of living with a negative.

Chapter four:

With chapter four, I will attempt to find the various ways the women try to find social recognition and normality. Within this, the concept of 'living with a negative' comes more to the fore. I aim to show how the absence of normality brings with it various tensions in regards to the wish for work and being financially dependent upon a system that has refused them protection and residency. However, I also aim to look into whether the women manage to find their own space to influence their everyday lives.

Chapter five:

In chapter five I will draw a conclusion in order to tie together the three main chapters of this thesis. Here I will briefly discuss my main findings and whether the relationship between expectations and experiences are influential in living with a negative.

Chapter 2 – Gender

I did not choose to be born there. I did not choose to be born African or a girl, but I want to choose how I live my life'. One day we met up for coffee, Frida started to discuss the practice of FGC (female genital cutting) with me in relation to her expectations of Norway¹. For her, Norway is a place where she can decide her own life and not feel like half a person. 'Where I come from you move from your parents' house to your husband's house you cannot live on your own. Girls cannot decide nor have an opinion. First, the father decides what you can do, and then the husband decides.

Frida ran away from her family because she started questioning everyday life. Like many other girls in Africa she has been through FGC, and still suffers from it. During a trip abroad, she went through a minor corrective surgery in order to ease the pains, her parents found out and they disowned her. As she says, *'Girls do not have the right to open up or fix it; it is not our right but the great honour of the man'*. She is very nervous and uncomfortable as we speak about the topic; she seems very small and frail.

However, she brought up the topic during our coffee meeting because as she utters *'FGM is treated as personal and secret, nobody talks about it, and there need to be more attention about this'*. During our conversation, I sensed that she sees FGC as an integral part of her culture, as she herself is now disowned and considered dead to her family because she opposed the practice. If she has to go back to her country of origin, she has no family to support her and no means of supporting herself. Hence, Frida had high expectations of Norway as a country, which valued women's rights and could protect her. She had heard about gender equality and that it was a 'good' country.

¹ There will be a brief discussion regarding the terminology of FGC on page 43

Introduction

In order to look at the relationship between the female asylum-seekers expectations and realities, I aim to examine the Norwegian ideology of gender-equality. Throughout this chapter, I hope to examine whether Norwegian authorities inform and encourage gender-equality and influence at the reception centre. However, I also aim to investigate whether or not the women themselves manage to create strategies of their own, in order to achieve a space for gender equality and influence. Within this, I hope to examine whether barriers exist in relation to gender-equality for these women.

As I will show throughout this chapter, Norway tends to look at itself as ‘champion of gender equality’ (Danielsen, Larsen and Owesen 2002: 331). My aim will then be to investigate whether or not this ideology transfers to the women living with a negative, and in what ways. The main theme of the chapter will be how expectations and perceived ideology meets experienced realities, in the sense of how the women’s expectations about Norwegian gender equality compare to how they experience it at the reception centre.

Throughout the chapter, I will draw on Vigh (2009) and his ideas of the ‘culturally expected and socially possible’, as discussed in chapter one. I believe the concept of ‘culturally expected and socially possible’ will be useful in examining the women’s expectations and realities in relation to gender equality in Norway. However, the concept will mainly be used in order to show how the women experience living in a situation where what is culturally expected from them in their home countries, is also socially impossible when living with a negative

Discussing gender equality is difficult without also discussing equality in broader terms. In Norwegian, the word *likestilling* (equality/gender equality) normally points to gender equality, however, the word also encompasses different sorts of equality. According to Danielsen, Larsen and Owesen, *likestilling* has since the new millennia come to be about ‘integration, diversity, and inclusion in relation to other groups such as immigrants, homosexuals, disabled and ethnic minorities (2013: 22). Hence, it is the broader definition of *likestilling* I will use throughout the chapter when discussing gender equality.

Firstly, I shall start the chapter by briefly introducing the history and construct of gender equality in Norway. This part will highlight how the ideal of Norwegian gender equality is promoted and hence the ideas intertwined with them. Within this, I intend to look at how immigrant women are perceived in the promotion of gender equality. Thereafter the focus will be at gender policy at the reception centre. I shall examine how the women experience gender equality at the reception centre and what it entails. Here, I will look at the various requirements the UDI has in order to make sure the women can influence their lives. I will put emphasis on how they experience their possibilities of influencing their lives, which is an important issue within gender equality. An important aspect of this part is to look at how these requirements play out in the women's lives. From there I aim to look at how the ideology of gender equality fits with the women's expectations and ways of envisioning Norway. Moreover, I will draw upon Skeggs (1997) in order to find whether gender and appearance plays an important part in living with a negative. Here I will examine whether there are barriers in place that make it difficult for the women to take part in official ideology. Within this I will look into where gender gains importance in regards to living with a negative.

From there, the chapter will look into the practice of FGC starting with a film screening at one of the information meetings. I will examine the role of the movie and how the women experienced the screening, whilst briefly linking it to a discussion regarding the personal and the political. Furthermore, I shall situate the film in the Norwegian context and include a brief discussion regarding terminology. Thereafter, I will include a part where I aim to examine the different reactions the women had to the film screening and the dynamic between the reception centres strategies and the women's responses. Most importantly, this part will tie together the case and the broader theme of gender equality. Lastly, I will draw a conclusion by summing up the main findings of the chapter.

Gender equality as Norwegian ideology

In Norway today equality between people is seen as a core value, something very Norwegian and available for all in Norway (Lien, Liden, and Vike 2001). Within this concept of equality, gender equality is a cornerstone of the Norwegian society. In a recent book by Danielsen, Larsen and Ovesen (2013a), they find that gender equality has become an important concept for export, along with fish and oil. While gender equality is not a solely Norwegian concept, it is perceived as a defining Norwegian value and part of official ideology. However, it was not until the 1990s Norway started to stand out internationally as a land of gender equality. It is therefore important to highlight that there was intense debate regarding women's right to vote in the late 1890s and female participation was perceived as neither necessary nor welcomed. Furthermore, the women's movement was interestingly, thought to be an American idea (Danielsen, Larsen and Ovesen 2013a: 161).

The book gives examples in order to grasp how important the concept of gender equality is for the image Norway has created for itself internationally. Furthermore, the book examines how Norway's reputation as a nation that promotes peace abroad has become more intertwined with gender equality and women's rights. A project leader in the foreign department is quoted in the book stating: "if Norway participates in a debate in the security council it is expected that gender equality and women's rights will be brought up" (quoted in Danielsen, Larsen and Ovesen 2013a: 375, my own translation).

Whilst, it was not until the 1990s that gender equality appeared on the national agenda, it quickly became a core value for Norway. However, while gender equality gives increased attention to the high number of women in employment abroad, internally gender equality is used just as much to promote integration for immigrants (Danielsen, Larsen and Ovesen 2013a: 379). Nevertheless, the welfare state in Norway has progressed from a housewife norm where the women's domain was the private, to rely upon two-income families where both men and women are supposed to contribute to the workforce. Hence, gender equality is not just an ideological thought, but based on economic pragmatism where women should take part in the workforce in order to pay tax in order contribute to the welfare state and society. The emphasis of female employment is also connected to ideas in regards to economic independence for women as a

necessity in order to achieve gender equality. Although, it is important to note that whilst the official, gender equality ideology emphasises shared responsibility, there is still a gendered difference in regards to the family. The mother usually contributes the most at home and the father earns more money. Additionally, this is not necessarily just individual choices but consequences of state practices in regards to welfare benefits for families with children (Danielsen 2002).

Danielsen, Larsen and Owesen (2013) further sees how gender equality has become the norm in Norway and within this, the Norwegian society expects families with children where both parents work full time and the children placed in kindergartens or schools. This is further seen as a way to integrate immigrants and immigrant women in particular are encouraged to work in order to integrate (Danielsen, Larsen and Owesen 2013a: 348-350). During the 1990s immigrant women were particularly discussed in regards to employment as the most important tool for integration which would help the women become part of Norwegian society (Danielsen, Larsen and Owesen 2013a: 337, 348). In public debate gender equality, is often highlighted with praise of the high female participation in the general workforce and female employment is seen as vital to the Norwegian welfare model and gender equality.

Within this, it is important to note that the emphasis of female employment outside the house is a historic construct. The view of the housewife as unproductive and not as a contributor to society did not take place until the 1900s with the rise of capitalism (Folbre 1991). However, gender equality and especially female employment has become a necessary construct that fits in with other Norwegian values such as freedom, equality, egalitarianism and ‘imagined sameness’ (Gullestad 2002). Nevertheless, the perception that Norway is a country of equality and gender equality also means there is a template of how one should live one’s life and those that do not conform to this ideology are left on the outside (Danielsen, Larsen and Owesen 2013b). Within this, we see that gender equality through female employment and the joint-income family becomes a defining Norwegian value given the focus on how immigrant women do not always adapt to this.

Nonetheless, most of the women I spoke with during my research wanted to be part of the Norwegian society and conform to its norm. The women wanted to work in order to pay taxes and contribute to the welfare state. Many of them had heard of Norway as a place where people

were equal and there were women's rights. However, as Lina emphasis *we are not allowed to work, we want to, so we can contribute but we cannot work, we cannot go to school, we cannot marry, and we cannot have a normal standard because we have no paper.* For Lina having the right to be treated equal to men does not change the fact that she has very little money, no school, work or meaningful activities. Her experience of Norway does not live up to the expectations she had, and that are taught at the reception centre.

Gender policy at the reception centre

The policy in regards to gender equality at the reception centre is perceived as strong by the female residents I talked to, as I shall move on to examine. Nevertheless, UDI requirements state that reception centres shall make sure that women have a possibility to influence issues that concern them and within this encourage them to take part in cooperation councils and arrange for women's groups (UDI 2009). The staff informed me that in regards to gender they were going to start up information classes for parents in regards to parenting in Norway. They also offered a once a week swimming card for mothers and children. Furthermore, the staff explained that women in the building complex further from town had specific times for women only at the gym located in the building. Lastly, the municipality and a voluntary organisation organised a mothers group once a week.

The majority of my informants explained they mostly dealt with the office when they picked up their mail at the reception or had other requests. They further thought they were treated as equal to men and saw this as a good thing, compared to practices in their country of origin. Though it was difficult to make them reflect on what they meant in terms of 'good'. However, most of the women at the reception centre did wish for a woman's group where they could discuss different matters, or that there had been an employee responsible for the women. At the time of my fieldwork, there was a person responsible for mothers and children but the women felt that they could not discuss personal matters, which did not relate to their children. Yet, on a general basis, the women were happy with the way the office treated the residents, as equal. As chapter four, will examine closer, the fact they thought it was 'good' to be treated equally to men

did not mean they thought the treatment itself was by an acceptable standard. Those that I spoke with agreed that the reception centre had informed them about equality between the sexes in Norway and believed strongly in equality. They further said that the police informed them of the law that protected women and their rights when they first came to Norway. Additionally, most of the women told me they knew about gender equality from the information program.

The information program or the information meeting is a biweekly meeting led by the reception centre. The framework comes from the UDI and consists of different sessions intended to teach the refugees about the asylum process and Norway. Out of the thirteen sessions listed at the UDI pages, three relates to gender and gender equality². Therefore, I find it likely that the women learnt more in detail about the ideology of gender equality and the ‘Norwegian way’ at the information meetings. Within this, we see how the women uphold the view of Norway as a place of equality and rights, as the reception centre informs them about these ideologies at the information meetings. Hence, whilst in reality not every Norwegian experience gender equality, or share the same ideologies; it is the official view which is taught at the reception centre.

Nevertheless, in regards to influencing issues that concerns them, there were women present in the cooperation council but very few of those I spoke to knew much about what it did. As Tina put it, *‘the house council is just a name for me, I know there is one representative from each house, but I do not know what they do’*. Through the conversation, I learned that the house council had not been having meetings for around a year and had just recently started again. However, Wilma and Tina had been there for a while and could remember that the house council had meetings but did not see any results apart from that the house council allocated money to different ethnic celebrations. Hence, these findings correlate to a study of empowerment by Valenta and Berg (2010). In their study, they found that participation in cooperation councils could contribute towards empowerment for the residents, which relates to the desire for influence by my informants. Still, it is important to note that the study also found that empowerment initiatives such as cooperation councils could also be perceived as quite trivial compared to other issues in the residents daily lives (Valenta and Berg 2010: 490).

² UDIa, *Asylmottak, informasjonsarbeid for voksne*, available from: <http://www.udi.no/en/asylum-reception-centres/jobber-i-mottak/informasjonsarbeid-i-mottaket/informasjonsprogram-for-voksne/#link9> <accessed: 06.06.2014>

Moreover, if we twist Vigh's ideas about what is socially possible, we can apply them to the paradox of influence as stated by the UDI. Whilst they claim that they shall make it possible for the women to influence issues that concern them, they take away the conditions needed in order to have any real influence. The paradox becomes clear when we unravel how the UDI creates a possibility for the women to influence how their life is organised, but within a very limited space, which in reality makes them 'socially stuck' (Vigh 2009). Hence, the women cannot influence any of the issues that really concern them, such as the financial contribution, their application, or the right to work. This is also connect to how women's right to participation and influence over own life is very important issues within gender equality. Again, this view is taught to the women without letting them be a part of it.

Through the conversation with Wilma and Tina I sensed that they believed strongly in equality between the sexes and thought the reception centre treated everyone the same, although as mentioned, this did not necessarily mean they thought the treatment they received and their living conditions were by a good standard. In reality, they felt they had very little influence in matters that were of importance, similar to the findings by Valenta and Berg. Therefore, we could argue that Tina and Wilma agree the reception centre has taught them of how things should be and which values and ideologies are important in Norway. This could then be seen as how life in Norway *should* be, although for Tina and Wilma it would translate to how life *could* be, if they received a positive. Although they are happy that they are seen as equals to men, it can also be perceived that both men and women are stripped of most of their rights when they live with a negative and become equals through a lack of rights. Hence, their expectations of rights and influence are very different from the reality. Whilst the majority of the women did express a wish for more influence over their own lives, they did not feel this existed in regards to issues that concerned them. They often talked about how this was not how they had envisioned Norway. This can relate to how Vigh (2009) talks about being socially stuck and the tragic outcomes of migration. The women had clear expectations of a different life and are taught, that a different lifestyle does exist in Norway, just not for them.

Lived realities

Some say that in Norway first comes the woman, then the dog and lastly the man, Wilma continued to say that this was of course an exaggeration but summed up many peoples responses after hearing about official ideology in Norway. *It is difficult to explain, it is like two different worlds.* For Wilma coming to Norway had been based upon the hope of finding security and she had heard it was a good country. Wilma often express how much she supports Norwegian gender equality and believes she would have had a good life here with many alternatives to choose from if she had a positive. However, she has a final negative and therefore admits that she knows very little about reality. Whilst she does believe there are many opportunities open in Norway, she cannot use many of them, such as marriage, schooling, work or activities that require money. This is specifically related to Vigh (2009) and how migrants often imagine the pleasure of life elsewhere but find a harsh reality.

During a conversation, I sensed that whilst Wilma thinks gender equality is very good and important, adjusting to it is difficult. A friend of hers, Jonah, explains it in terms of culture and upbringing. *In Norway, men and women are equal by heart, in African culture women are told that only men can do what they want, the women cannot do anything, this, they learn from when they are born. So if there is sport activities, such as football at the reception centre, Norwegians think men and women can participate but the African women are weak and do not think they can do this.* I noticed that whilst Wilma agreed with Jonah in regards to cultural upbringing, she disagreed that they could not do sports. However, she did emphasise that it would require more facilitating from the reception centre.

Furthermore, we can find that barriers do exist at different levels that make participation in the norm of gender equality difficult. The norm of how gender equality should be performed is not clear for all Norwegian women either; it is based upon a white, middleclass ideal and more of an ideology than a set standard for all. Skeggs (1997) also exemplify this in her examination of respectability and femininity in white working-class women in North West of England. She finds that respectability exists because the middle-class classifies the lower classes as without it. Only by having a binary opposition, can norms such as respectability and femininity exist (Skeggs 1997: 13). Interestingly enough the working class women in Skeggs' study are taught about

respectability and femininity in special 'caring' courses almost in the same way my informants are 'taught' about gender equality in the information meetings. However, most of the working class women in Skeggs' study cannot reach the ideal of femininity and respectability because of their working class background. This clearly relates to how my informants are aware of the gender-equality ideal in Norway without any chance of reaching this ideal because of their negative. Whilst they expected to be part of the gender equality ideal and Norwegian society, what they experience is very different from their expectations.

There are also cultural barriers for gender equality, which are important in regards to what they are accustomed to from their country of origin. Football for example, is a very physical sport and requires a specific way of using one's body. The embodiment of gender equality then becomes important, and which backgrounds the women come from is important in how they can participate in the gender equality norm. It can be fruitful to have a brief look at MacCormack here: "The attributes we assign to gender categories are based upon our perceptions of what men and women can do" (1980: 13). Within this MacCormack critiques the cultural biases we have when talking about categories such as gender. She stresses that the attributes we assign to gender are not universal and should not be thought of as such. Hence, most Norwegian girls are expected at some point to participate in some sort of organised sports activity, such as football. Whilst they as a consequence learn how to handle their bodies in the certain ways the sports require, this is not necessarily the same for many of my informants. Within this, the Norwegian assumption that women can and should do sports is based upon a Norwegian perception that men and women are equal in every way, and also that sport and being active is a Norwegian characteristic of both genders. However, the equality assigned to the genders then becomes a cultural barrier for some of the women because it is not universal as MacCormack emphasise. Hence they might not have the bodily experience and cannot as easily find pick up the football available and start playing. Following the above comparison with Skeggs, the women cannot achieve equality through sports because they cannot transcend the embodied barriers.

Appearance and social recognition

Nevertheless, by participating and observing everyday activities over a longer period I also noticed the norms the women had in regards to how they should behave. The women would sometimes use their femininity to describe the problems with the low living standard. Lina expressed quite clearly that *we are women and we need many things. While we are in Norway, we deserve to have more*. In regards to this, we can see how Lina emphasises how women need more things than men do, due to their gender. She further explained how women needed to look good in order to put on a smile and face the world outside.

Appearance was very important for many of the women, they were aware that they had a very low living standard compared to most Norwegians and felt ashamed because of this. *People only see us when we are smiling because we put on good clothes and pretend we are okay, but we are not*. As mentioned Skeggs (1997) looks at how femininity is constituted partly through consumption. She looks at how clothes, make-up, style and things for the house, are all things that will judge whether a woman is respectable or not. Hence, as Skeggs argue, the practice of dressing up and looking good should not be judged trivial, for it can often be the very things the women see themselves through, whether they feel respectable enough or not (Skeggs 1997: 101). Within this, my informants thought it very important to look their best, even if they did not feel great. Moreover, Skeggs builds upon Bourdieu's social capital, and sees that femininity can become some sort of capital for the women, through the 'body as social product' (Skeggs 1997: 102). Hence, for my informants, looking good and wanting to be able to buy more things in order to become respected can be seen as a way of gaining social capital, through femininity, in order to receive respectability and social recognition (Hage 2003), as I shall examine more later. In a way, we could say that because they have so little compared to most Norwegians, femininity becomes an even more important tool in order to feel feminine and as respectable women. However, my informants do not have sufficient funds to buy the things they feel they need in order to be respectable women, and think of this as a culturally expected norm back home. Skeggs further found that even when using their body as 'social capital' her informants never managed to be completely comfortable or like 'respectable women' because of their working class position (Skeggs 1997: 162). Hence, like the working class women in Britain excluded from

respectability, my informants are excluded from the norms and ideology of gender-equality, and social recognition through consumption.

Additionally, living in a house surrounded by Norwegian people and Norwegian houses due to the reception centre being decentralised, also revealed the different living standards. Lina often told me how demeaning it was to always having to shop the cheapest groceries and find clothes in second hand stores. From their house, they can observe other families with full shopping bags containing lots of food and new clothes, a sort of lifestyle they cannot have. This again relates back to Skeggs' study of how the middle-class ideal becomes unachievable but still desired as 'the norm'. The trend with decentralised reception centres is often put forwards as a way of normalising life for the residents and a step away from the more institutionalised complexes. As mentioned, it is of course also cheaper and easier to expand or decrease number of residents with rented houses. However, the expressed goal of normalising lives can also mean that the gap between the Norwegian living standard and the standards at the reception centre becomes more visible. Whilst my informants expressed liking for having their 'own' house, I also saw how it also made their living standard more noticeable to them and all they did not have.

Nevertheless, the women took great pride in their cooking abilities and tended to joke that the men would starve if they did not have the women to cook for them. Whilst the women I spoke with lived in houses that were separate from men, there were always men coming over at meal times in order to be fed. The women put emphasis on how clean and neat their house was, compared to some of the men's rooms. Hence, they highlight their respectability as women through opposing it to the masculine that do not carry the same connotations in regards to cleanliness and hospitality. Therefore, we could say that in regards to the male residents at the reception centre the women managed to achieve some social respectability. Through the caring and feminine ideal Skeggs (1997) located within the respectability norm, we could say that my informants manage to get social recognition from the male residents at the reception centre by using their 'caring' as social capital. Still, we see how they get recognition from the male residents at the reception centre and as in the policy part are equally treated to them. However, which men one is equal to, is also an important issue in feminist writing (hooks 1981)

Whilst gender was not considered much of an issue by the women, having a negative decision from UDI was highlighted as more stressful for women than men. Lina summed this up

during our conversation, *I have wasted many years, and time is only about getting older, not younger. At my age, I should have been married and have a family, but all I do is waiting.* Concerns about time came up quite frequently during my fieldwork. Tina described the feeling of waiting in terms of fertility, *my time is going, my clock is ticking and we are all just waiting away.* Furthermore, a majority of the women also emphasis the amount of wasted time as to why they do not see voluntary returns as an option. For many, circumstances in their country of origin are still bad, whilst others felt they had wasted too many years waiting for residency and do not consider return an option, they have been here too long.

Again, we can see the relevance of Vigh (2009) and the gap between ‘culturally expected and socially possible’. The women often state fertility as to why the years of waiting are wasted, according to cultural expectations most of them should now have been married and raising children. Nevertheless, in a reception centre context, marriage is not an option and not a social possibility. Whilst children are born and raised, it is outside the standards of everyday life. Therefore, time becomes an important aspect and a reason not to return. Vigh (2009) emphasise that migration happens because it is not social possible to follow a ‘normal’ life trajectory in their countries. However, my informants have not been able to follow this trajectory with for example marriage although they migrated. Hence, they have not achieved what they think they should, and hoping that this can happen through residency is better than the realisation that all the years in Norway has been a waste. In comparison, to the women, men can still marry and reproduce in their country of origin upon return, for the women on the other hand these options grow smaller with each year that passes. Therefore, the discrepancy between the ‘culturally expected and socially possible’ is of great importance for those living with a negative. However, within the question of return, gender must be considered as a factor in seeing the women’s motivations for not returning. Hence, the expectations the women had and are informed exist, do not match their experience, and gender becomes an important aspect of life through issues of equality, social recognition, return and influence over their own life.

A film about “Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)”³

During one of the bi-weekly information meetings held at the reception centre a documentary regarding FGM, which was acquired from the UDI’s list of informative films was shown⁴. This module focused on what is legal/illegal and within this, the law against female genital mutilation and violence against women and in the family were brought up⁵. The screening of the film can also be part of the gender policy at the reception centre and a way of showing which rights women in Norway have.

The film lasted around half an hour and showed clips depicting girls undergoing FGM. It further had interviews with male and female health personnel and leaders of voluntary organisations emphasising the medical problems that arise after FGM. Additionally, it emphasised that women who have been through FGM can get medical help in Norway. The documentary was emotional and quite tough for me to watch. During information meetings, the residents are divided into three groups based on language and therefore both men and women were watching this together. As the movie showed interviews with both male and female people talking about the severe consequences of FGM, and why it needs to stop, I think the intention was to bring about a discussion between the men and women.

However, after the movie when people were asked to share questions and thoughts there was almost no response. Hence, whilst the reception centre promotes gender equality and the women learn a lot about this issue, cultural differences were not accounted for. Whilst the movie did show both men and women condemning the practice, having the women that have undergone FGC discuss it with men from their own culture, only produced silence. Within this, we can again apply Vigh (2009) and the idea of what is culturally expected and socially possible. In the

³ UD1c, *FGM-En film om kjønnslemlestelse UDI*, *FGM-En film om kjønnslemlestelse available from* <http://www.udi.no/en/asylum-reception-centres/jobber-i-mottak/informasjonsarbeid-i-mottaket/filmer1/fgm---en-film-om-kjonnslemlestelse/>

⁴ UD1d, *Filmer*, available from: <http://www.udi.no/en/asylum-reception-centres/jobber-i-mottak/informasjonsarbeid-i-mottaket/filmer1/> <accessed:07.06.2014>

⁵ UD1b, *Asylmottak, informasjonsarbeid for voksne*, available from: <http://www.udi.no/en/asylum-reception-centres/jobber-i-mottak/informasjonsarbeid-i-mottaket/informasjonsprogram-for-voksne/#link8> <accessed: 06.06.2014>

information-meeting context, discussion between both men and women was culturally expected in relation to gender equality and Norwegian norms. Nevertheless, this proved not to be socially possible, because of the intimacy and taboo connected with the topic. Whilst the women want to take part in the gender-equality ideology, it is not always socially possible for them to participate because of cultural differences. Hence, even if the women wanted to discuss and debate the movie and their experiences, the space they were given was too public. For many of the women I talked to, the shame and taboo were still present and emphasised that they needed a more private sphere with women only to discuss their experiences. In a way, the expectancy to produce debate in a way makes what is a private issue for the women, into a political discussion.

Additionally, we can see the movie as a making the personal political for the women, which of course is an important topic for feminism. Getting rid of shame and taboo in regards to violence and abuse of women has been a major issue for the women's movement. Within this, an important issue for Holst (2002) is the right to privacy. Whilst she still sees the personal as political, she looks into how the private sphere, or the right to privacy can be just as important as the public sphere. Nevertheless, it is important to remember that women have a right to a private space free of assault and abuse, if abuse in different forms happen there should be intervention in order to protect them (Holst 2002: 133). Holst also looks at how women have the right to withhold intimate information about themselves in the public sphere in terms of privacy or the private sphere. Drawing upon Solhaug's (1990) work, Holst examines how women are more often expected to share intimate stories of their life because they are associated with the female, the private and the intimate (Holst 2002: 135). Hence, the right to a private sphere is also about finding the boundaries for the public sphere. This relates to the discussion of FGC. Whilst it is an important topic worth discussing, we should also remember that it is real women that undergo this, and having them discuss it might be part of the discourse that expects women to share intimate stories. Therefore, the women that have been through FGC still have the right to privacy and not share their stories in the public sphere.

Nevertheless, during a conversation with Nina and Paula a week later the documentary came up. Whilst none of them had been present at that specific meeting, it became evident that the meeting had sparked discussion amongst the women. Both of them condemned the practice as an old tradition and felt it was an important topic, which deserved more attention. We had not

discussed FGC before this meeting and they seemed uncomfortable discussing this topic. Both Nina and Paula made it clear that if there had been a meeting for women only regarding FGC, they would have participated in order to share experiences and receive more information.

The vast majority of the women I spoke with were Christian women from the African continent, and I was surprised in the beginning when I realised they had gone through FGC, as public debate highlight the link between FGC and Muslims. However, as Fangen and Thun clearly emphasise, there is little or no justification for FGC in Islam (2007). Nevertheless, although research highlight that FGC is not a religious duty, most Muslims that do perform FGC do it because they believe it is a religious requirement (ibid). The women I spoke with, did not see it as a religious duty, only as a horror they had to go through because of their culture, this might also be related to their Christianity. Hence, they did not want to continue the practice on their daughters.

For Tina the horrors are still vivid in her memory. She has lived in Norway with her daughters for several years but has a final negative from UNE. Her daughters have not gone through FGC because they were born in Norway. Tina is very afraid that if she is sent back to her country of origin she will have to depend on extended family to survive. In this case, she is certain that they will perform FGC on her daughters. Tina has lived with severe complications after FGC and she says that she will do everything in her power to prevent this to happen to her daughters. Because this was also discussed in the interview with UDI, she is labelled as a resourceful woman who can prevent FGC happening to her daughters. However, as Tina makes clear, if she goes back she will be a single mother with no education and sees no other option than to seek out extended family and be dependent upon their good will, which most likely will come with conditions. *If I go back I need to make money and work, them my daughters will stay with other people, if they see they are not cut they will do it themselves as they did to me. It is not enough that it is illegal by law, it still happens.* It is interesting that resisting cutting is taken as a sign of resourcefulness and not the 'perfect victim'. This contradicts the findings of Oxford (2005) and her study of the gender regime in the asylum system in USA. Oxford found that female asylum seekers cases were often rejected when based upon political activity or torture. She further found that if female circumcision were mentioned it would almost always help the applicant's claim and lead to residency even though it was not the main reason for asylum (ibid).

Furthermore, Oxford also discusses another case in which a married circumcised woman with daughters, claims that she does not want to circumcise her them, although this is likely it will happen if they are sent back. However, unlike Tina, the woman in Oxford's case is granted asylum due to female circumcision (Oxford 2005: 28).

Small problem, extensive research

Whilst FGC is an important topic worthy of attention, there might have been a discrepancy between the amount of attention it has received in the Norwegian context and frequency of FGC in Norway. Moreover, a new report further finds that the policies are highly influenced by media coverage (Bråten and Elgvin 2014). With the rising number of immigrants from societies that practice FGC and increased attention towards the negative impacts of FGC, there has been a lot of research looking into attitudes towards FGC amongst immigrants in Norway and many policies in order to eliminate it. In regards to this, Gele et al (2012) found that attitudes amongst Somali's in Oslo were changing and a majority did not want to cut their daughters. There is also a wide range of academic and political literature regarding the highly charged topic. Since the 1970s FGC has become an important topic on the global agenda, such as debating how to see the practice itself, how to term it, and how to define it (Shell-Duncan and Hernlund 2000:3-7).

The UN and UNICEF currently use the term female genital mutilation/cutting in order to highlight the violation of human rights with this practice but also to try and be more sensitive towards those communities that still perform this practice (UNICEF 2013:7). The women I talked to did not see any extenuating circumstances that could justify calling the practice something else other than female genital mutilation, although they did refer themselves as being cut not mutilated. This contradicts other studies that have looked into the stigma of terming the practice FGM and the distress it causes (Foss and Iversen 2010; Abdullahi 2010).

Therefore, I find it likely that my informants have adopted the politically correct discourse of FGM through for example information meetings and/or campaigns in their country of origin (Talle 2010). I make this claim based on how they term the practice mutilation whilst referring to themselves as cut. They do make a separation between the practice and themselves at some point, showing that whilst they have adopted the political language they do not view themselves as

mutilated women. Therefore, I have chosen to call the practice female genital cutting because I feel mutilation carries too many strong connotations whilst I find female circumcision too weak a term. It is also important to remember the emotional side of FGC; it is difficult to speak of it without strong reactions. Especially in the Norwegian context it is not common to talk of FGC as anything else than a horrific practice and in terms of disgust. Whilst there are of course anthropological works which situates the practice in a cultural contexts (cf Boddy 1991) speaking without words of disgust in the Norwegian setting has according to Talle become taboo (Talle 2010:23).

The literature in regards to FGC is most often conducted with Somali informants, and there is not a lot of research done on other ethnic groups (Bråten and Elgvin). My findings in regards to FGC shows that my informants have adopted a more ‘activist’ stance and do not express ambivalence in regards to the positive and negative sides for cutting such as studies with Somali women do (Johansdotter 2003, Johansen 2002, Fangen 2008). However, Nina specified that whilst they opposed the practice, they were not looked upon as ‘proper people’ in their African countries unless they were cut. Furthermore, Tina was strongly against FGC when I talked to her, but she knew that it would happen to her daughters if they returned. Hence, my research does find similarities with Gele et al (2012) in the way that whilst my informants oppose the practice they see it as culture and tradition back in their country of origin and would most likely go back to the practice in order to follow society if they returned. Although, my informants seemed to be more influenced by the political language used by UN/UNICEF and the political correct discourse of FGM than what is often found in these studies. This also relates back to how much they support the Norwegian gender ideology and as I will examine later, feel more similar to Norwegians than the Somali are, and as such had expectations of inclusion.

‘A space of our own’

As I briefly discussed the issue of FGC is important in Norwegian public debate. Eliminating FGC has also been connected with better gender-equality for women and integration (Bråten and Elgvin 2014: 110) Nevertheless, as discussed previously it is almost paradoxical how the asylum system promotes gender equality whilst taking away the conditions that make this possible for the women with a negative. Additionally we can find a sort of paradox with how the women are supposed to oppose and influence the issue of FGC. Whilst they are not allowed influence within matters that are more important to them such as residency, work and finances, they are supposed to have an opinion and help influence the personal matter of FGC in a very public space with men present, in line with gender-equality and Norwegian cultural expectations. Hence the case of the movie screening enlighten us in how there is a very specific framework in regards to the influence these women have over their own life, in line with what the authorities frame important. FGC is of course an important topic for the women, as I shall move on to show, still, the framework around how the film was shown was very much based upon Norwegian standards of gender-equality where men and women can and should discuss private matters.

Nevertheless, at a later point I discussed the screening of the documentary with Frida, she was pleased that the movie had been showed at the information meeting. Furthermore, she was very supportive of the strong language in the movie and the way it spoke of mutilation and that there were steps that could be taken in order to reverse the procedure or open them. However, she was quite clear that the men and women should have been separated at that specific meeting. *It should have been our time to talk, get away from the shame and taboo of our culture. Some girls wanted to talk, but could not with men, it is shameful.* Although the women do not speak much of the subject, Frida was certain that if they had been a women’s only group more women would have found the courage to share their thoughts on the matter. Due to the private and intimate parts of the body that is involved none of those present at the meeting felt that they could share their experiences in the presence of men.

A few weeks after the FGM movie, I also met up with Leah for a coffee and she told me about a new project of hers. After the documentary, she had been thinking about the lack of

discussion and how many of the women had wanted to talk but felt they did not have a space of their own. During an appointment with the nurse in the municipality, she had brought up some ideas about forming some sort of a support group in regards to FGC where the women could meet and share their experiences. Even though there was no discussion after the screening, the movie did affect the women. Leah spent a lot of time and effort convincing other women to join the group and highlighting the importance of sharing experiences in order to bring attention to the matter and deconstruct the shame and taboo associated with FGC. During conversations with other women, I also found that while they saw FGC as a horrific practice none were very comfortable talking about it in detail, it was considered a private matter. However, for Leah this was very important and she managed to convince some of the women to go. After their meeting, she was very happy with what they had achieved. She claimed that many spoke about their experiences and expressed that it had been good to share and connect with others that had experienced the same.

Leah also informed me that their second meeting would have a doctor attending that would talk about corrective procedures that could reconstruct the genital areas and ease the problems some of them were living with. Leah talked in lengths about how pleased she was with this and that they would arrange for the women to go to a hospital in order to have consultations to see if anything could be done. While this was considered very good news, and there are good specialists that handle these kinds of procedures, (Sand 2010) there are other aspects to consider within this. While the group was seen as a good experience, it is important have in mind that some of the women that went to the support group have negative decisions from the UDI. Furthermore, the majority of my informants had expressed that while they did not support FGC they had not had a choice in regards to the practice. To recall Nina's words *if we are not cut we are not considered proper people*. The issue that then arises relates to how they will be treated if they are returned, or will this bring forward new evidence in their application for asylum? Whilst surgery would most likely improve these women's lives, it could lead to difficulties if they are deported.

Moreover, we also find an interesting dynamic in how the women were basically silenced by the not culturally sensitive framework around the film, yet they still managed to create a space of their own. It further shows the relationship between being told to discuss an issue by the

reception centre and instead creating a group on their own terms. In a way we can see that it was 'culturally expected' by the reception centre that men and women could discuss this matter, however, it was not 'socially possible' for the women due to feelings of shame and taboo, hence, discussion was silenced. However, the film did open up a space which made some of the women think about the issue and wanting to share their experiences. Therefore, we could argue that whilst it was 'culturally expected' to not talk about the experiences with the practice, being in Norway made it socially possible through collaboration with the nurse and a doctor. Hence, the emphasis put on FGC and the encouragement to share experiences and influence their own lives actually served to discourage the women to do so in the space given to them, it enabled them to create a space of their own. Whilst their expectations and belief in gender equality and the middle-class standard might not be what they experience, they did manage to find their own way in, and create a space of their own to deal with what is considered a private issue.

Concluding remarks

In order to come to some form of conclusion to the chapter I would argue that I have shown how gender equality does not mean the women are equal in all areas of life. I have examined how gender equality is perceived and presented as an inherent Norwegian value, and as such very much part of official ideology. I have also highlighted that gender equality is something constructed and important in regards to foreign policy and reputation. Whilst it is often perceived as a 'natural' Norwegian trait, I have also emphasised that the 'attributes we place on gender categories' (MacCormack 1980), such as being able to do the same is not universal but placed in specific contexts. Moreover, through Vigh (2009), and the 'culturally expected and socially possible' I have found that although the women are staying at the reception centre and do not consider themselves irregular or illegal; they have not found the justice and equality they thought they had expectations of in Norway. Being in Norway and having the right to be treated equal to men does not change the fact that most of the women have very little money, no school, work or meaningful activities. For the majority of the women life now consists of waiting and praying that they will receive residency. Their expectation of the 'imagined Norway' and its ideologies are very different from the realities they are living and what is actually possible to achieve within the strict framework.

Furthermore, through the chapter I have tried to show how equal treatment to men does not necessarily entail equality with Norwegians, or the life they had expected. Whilst they might be able to find social recognition from the men at the reception centre, this is done through 'female activities' such as cooking and cleaning, and as such, social recognition through their own cultural expectancies, not the ideal of economic independence from men, as Norway promotes. An important aspect of this chapter has been to look into how the women expected Norway to be because of the way it presents itself abroad. Nevertheless, whilst the women perceive gender policy at the reception centre to be good, this is only in the narrow sense as being equal to the men at the reception centre. However, the gender policy through the information meetings also serves to highlight their inequality in relation to the Norwegian middle-class ideal. Although I have emphasised that gender-equality is not clear for all Norwegians either, the women at the reception centre are being taught about the official gender equality ideology, which builds upon a middle-class ideal. Hence, as I tried to show through Skeggs (1997), the women try

to find respectability and social recognition in various ways, but because of their negative this is unachievable.

Moreover, I have also tried to show how the paradoxes in how the gender equality policies come forward at the reception centre through the case of FGC. I found that being treated the same as men, such as being in the same group, watching the same movie and being invited to offer opinions or comments, did not work due to cultural barriers. Whilst it is interesting that the space they were given to exert influence over issues that concerns them, is a very private and personal one for the majority of these women, they still managed to find a way to share their experiences outside the public sphere. However, they did not stay in the private sphere to discuss it, they organised a group and found their own space. By trying to bring forward gender policy the reception centre unintentionally curbed any discussion between the genders, although, it did open up another space for them to share their experiences.

Nevertheless, the most interesting point with the paradoxes we find within how gender equality is promoted to the women. Whilst requirements state that they shall have a possibility to influence issues that concerns them, this only goes as far as within the private and intimate context of the FGC they are given this chance. Hence, we can almost notice a line of thinking that sees these women as victims of patriarchal societies living in a gender equal society (Skogøy 2008). Within this, it is therefore possible that the UDI and its policies think of FGC is an important issue to address in order to empower the women and promote a norm of gender equality. However, as became clear giving advice in regards to medical help can create a difficult situation for the women because they have a negative and thereby a 'duty to leave' and return to their countries where they have to be cut in order to be what Nina terms *proper people*. Hence, even if it is socially possible to help these women, it is culturally expected to be cut in their countries of origin that they are told to return to.

Most of all, throughout this chapter I have tried to show the various ways the women are made aware of gender equality and their expectations in regards to this. I have found that the authorities might appear to promote gender equality through treating men and women equally, but this does not necessarily mean anything to the women. When the conditions for real influence or gender equality through independence are taken away, having as few rights as the men but not

less is a reality far from the expectations they had of Norway. Hence, there is a discrepancy between the expectations the women had, and what they experience at the reception centre.

Chapter 3 - Religion

We are good Christians, but the church in Norway is in ruin, no wonder people never go. For Hannah, religion is an integral part of her life, if today is a bad day she will thank God and pray that tomorrow will be better. However, she does not go to the local church near the reception centre. It is a beautiful church seen from the outside, and only a short walk from her house. I asked Hannah why she never talked about her time in the church, because I assumed she went every week since her faith seemed so important to her. However, my assumptions that she would go to church and pray just because her faith was strong proved to be very wrong. She explained that she had tried the church a few times when she was new at the reception centre. She and a few friends had dressed up in their Sunday clothes, hoping to take part in the celebration in church that she was accustomed to from home, but the church in Norway proved to be very different. *When we try to go the minister is on holiday or he is sick. A sick minister, how can that be!*

Throughout my stay, I also sensed that the closed doors of the church held a deeper meaning. Although she had gone to Norwegian classes, she was not fluent enough in Norwegian to carry out more than simple, basic conversations. A church service in Norwegian would therefore not make much sense for her. If we combine this with the low number of people attending church services, we get an understanding of how the church would appear as excluding. Hence, Hannah preferred to stay at home and say her prayers there. Whilst the Christian community is transnational in principle, there are other barriers such as language, culture, and traditions, which might cause exclusion instead of inclusion. Whilst she was used to the church service being a more celebratory event, the Norwegian church services were unknown and too quiet for Hannah. Therefore, the church appears excluding due to the different language, the closed doors, but also in regards to Hannah's own withdrawal after her negative.

Introduction

Throughout this chapter, I will aim to look at the relationship between expectations and realities by unravelling the meaning of religion for the women's experience of living with a negative. Whilst much of the literature within refugee research examines religion more through the role it has in conflicts (Gozdziaik and Shandy 2002) some research also note the positive effect it can have on mental health (McMichael 2002). However, religion is often considered a 'negative hope' which Hage (2003) finds is often interpreted as 'the hope to end up in heaven' (Hage 2003: 11). Within this he claims to follow Marx, and argues that the negative hope is often related to religious hope which works as disengaging people from their reality instead giving them hope in order to alter their situation (ibid). Hence, in his examining of social hope which I shall address later, Hage clarifies that he will look at the positive kind of hope, the one where people 'invest themselves in social reality', and not the negative religious hope, which involves passivity (Hage 2003: 12). Moreover, Porobic (2012) also finds that much of the literature highlights the passivity connected to relying on faith. Nevertheless, he also finds that we can interpret religion through its '*meaning-making significance*' (Porobic 2012: 204, author's italics). When researching Bosnian refugees who resettled in Sweden she found that religion had become of great importance for them in order to find meaning in their trauma and make sense of life. Through religion, they found a higher power and the comfort in believing God has a reason for everything. For Porobic's informants, religion then functioned as a way to make sense of their lives during the war and the flight but also in the new life as refugees in Sweden. In religion, they found a meaning to the suffering and help to remain mentally stable (Porobic 2012: 205). Moreover, she takes use of the concept of 'existential survival factor' within this she finds that religion can become an important tool in order to make sense of life and learning to appreciate life more (Porobic 2012: 207). Through religion, Porobic argues that her informants manage to put their suffering and trauma into a higher context and almost see the war as necessary in order to appreciate life. Hence, the 'existential survival factor' comes into play in order to make sense of what would otherwise be a senseless war.

Within this framework, my aim will be to examine the role religion plays in how the women deal with living with a negative. This also becomes important with the notion of expectations and experiences in regards to life at the reception centre. Whilst in chapter two, I

examined the role of gender equality and found that the women are informed about the ideal they expected but from which they are in reality excluded, this chapter will examine whether religion can become a mechanism for the inclusion they expected. Norway is often portrayed as a Christian country, where around 80% are members of the Norwegian church (Vassenden and Andersson 2011). Hence, as fellow Christians we might expect that shared faith in Christendom can serve as an inclusive mechanism into society and transcend barriers such as legal status. Additionally, Ong (2003) found in her study of resettled Cambodian refugees that the Mormon Church in California served as an inclusionary entity for the Buddhist refugees. Whilst they did not share the same faith, they had the same values and morale and the church provided help and support for the refugees, which contributed, to a number of Buddhist converting to Mormonism. Therefore, we could expect that the women with a negative might find the inclusion in the Christian community. While the women greatly support Norwegian ideology of equality and contribution even though they cannot take part in this due to the lack of rights, as I found in chapter two, shared faith, might serve as an inclusionary factor and create social recognition.

I shall begin this chapter by looking into the church as an arena for inclusion and investigate whether the women feel included, or if different barriers prove to be too high, as I found with gender equality in chapter two. From there I will discuss the issue of inclusion and exclusion in regards to faith at the reception centre. Here I will look into how the women perceive others who do not share their faith and culture, and whether or not they reproduce preconceived notions of otherness at the reception centre context. Moreover, I will move on to discuss whether shared religion can transcend the relationship between staff and residents. Within this, an important aspect will be if shared religion breaks down the barriers that come with living with a negative or if this can also cause more tension in regards to the resident-staff relationship. Furthermore, I shall aim to find what meaning the women find in religion and move on to discuss this in terms of Porobic's *meaning-making significance* (Porobic 2012: 205). Lastly before I reach a conclusion I will examine what it means for the subjective experience to live with a negative. I shall examine whether religion becomes a 'negative hope' or if faith can become a comfort without creating passivity, when there is nothing more to do with the asylum application. Hence, the overarching framework of this chapter will be what kind of role religion can have in the experience of living with a negative, and the relationship between expectations and

experience, whether it can be an inclusionary mechanism or a more private tool for dealing with their lives.

The church as an arena for inclusion?

Religion is in many aspects something including and social, a way to bring people of the same faith together. For Durkheim religion is ‘collective representations that express collective realities’ (Durkheim [1912] 2001: 11). Durkheim further unravels the different aspects of religion, and which elements that organise and makes up religion and finds that it often acts like a ‘glue’ that holds societies together. He draws the conclusion that one cannot separate religion from the church and that it is therefore something ‘eminently social’ (Durkheim 2001: 46). Whilst religion along these lines might be collective and bring people together with collective rituals such as going to church, we have seen that this does not necessarily hold for the women living with a negative. Faith and Christianity were very important to them and as such, they could be expected to feel included by the Norwegian church that belongs to the same religion, regardless of their residency status. Hence, the church community might be inclusive in having the same faith as my informants, although shared faith might not be the only factor that plays a part in whether the women felt included or not. Whilst the local community near the reception centre had a church and shared the same religion as her, Hannah experienced exclusion and not the inclusion she had expectations of.

In our country, the church is powerful, we hear about a powerful God and evil spirits. God can come down with fire and brimstones if he is not pleased. During a five hour long, braiding session of my hair Hannah spent much of the time talking about God, and how Norway and its people have forgotten all about him. During the session, Julia joined in and showed me YouTube clips of charismatic priests that engaged the audience. Hannah and Julia told me that in their churches in Africa, the priests would speak with authority and the audience would just listen to his words because they knew he spoke the truth. Compared to these church services I could see why they thought so little about the Norwegian church. The two women also spoke of how they missed going to these church services. Going to church had been a social and festive event where people would dress up in their finest clothes and join in with singing and dancing during

the church service, it had been a strong experience. They claimed to have witnessed evil spirits be washed away from people. For them God had been a very real presence in their lives and religion had been a collective mechanism, as we saw with Durkheim (2001). Additionally they expressed that they had been used to a close community around the church and a feeling of belonging. I got the impression that the part of belonging was what they missed the most, where religion acted like the Durkheimian 'glue'. Here, in a foreign country they feel they do not belong, not even in the church community of their faith.

Whilst the women did belong to different strands of Christianity, this was never an issue when we discussed Christianity or faith. In our conversations, the women would refer to themselves as Christian, not Catholic, Protestant or Pentecostal, etc. and they normally referred to the Norwegian Christianity as one entity. There might have been other reasons for this generalisation, but I believe it might connect to how they saw themselves as sharing the same religion as Norwegians and being in a Christian country where they could be included, instead of emphasising the difference. Another point is also that this might be a reason why they found the Norwegian church services unknown, and excluding, because it was different from their strand of Christianity.

Whereas some of my informants at the reception centre were part of a bible study group outside the church itself, many of my informants were not and felt excluded. I also sensed that living with a negative as discussed earlier played a part in their feelings of rejection by the Norwegian church. Within this the vast majority of those with a negative decision, would talk about all the questions in regards to their negative. Having to endure questions such as *how is your case going? Have you received an answer? Is there anything new in your case? Is it still a negative? Why are you not going back?* Although they did not believe people asked questions to bother them, but out of curiosity and interest, most did not like talking about their case, and these questions confirmed that they were living with a negative and should not be there. Within this, we can see that their mode-of-being-in-the-world (Willen 2007) is created by living with a negative and contributes to them feeling rejected by the Norwegian church. Hence, the church became an arena for the discussion of their unsolvable problems, instead of a place where they could relax, worship and shut off their outside worries with fellow believers.

Although she had a negative, Julia found it hard to accept that a Christian country like Norway could treat those in need like lesser people. As mentioned in the previous chapter, social recognition and appearance was important for many of my informants, they did not want to see themselves as lesser people. Within this, they applied a rights discourse where they complained about not having enough rights or a decent living standard by Norwegian perspectives. Whilst most of them had lived in poor countries and both experienced and seen suffering, they did not want to settle for less than the Norwegian middle-class standard they had expected in Norway. Hence, Hannah and Julia emphasise their low living standards and economic hardship. They often talked about how Christians are obliged to help others and care for them. They see Norway as a country that claims to be Christian but is not anymore. Before they came here, they had expected Norway to be a good Christian country with Christian values and morals. Therefore, they bring up the shared religious values and norms, which could have been a way for them to be included in society, but is in fact not. Moreover, Willen (2007) also finds this expectance to find inclusion through shared faith in her study of undocumented migrants in Tel Aviv. She found that many of her migrants had expected to find the 'holy land' and had high expectations that quickly vanished as they were struggling to survive in the harsh reality (Willen 2007:14). Whilst my informants do not suffer and struggle in the way Willen's informants do, the comparison between the expectation of finding a 'holy' or Christian country is interesting and supports Vigh (2009) claim that migrants make up many 'imaginaries' and expectations before arrival. We often talked about how they had expected better treatment from a Christian country. They find it appalling that they live in old houses with low standards and just enough money to get by. The image they had of Norway as good Christian people with values does not fit with what they experience. They had expectations of inclusion in a society that shares the same religious norms and values, whilst their experience is that the shared faith does not transcend barriers such as language, culture, tradition and living with a negative

Inclusion and exclusion, religion and residency

During my fieldwork, I realised that faith was a strong presence in most of the women's lives, and often served to include or exclude others. However, within refugee research there has been little emphasis given to religion, although, Shandy and Gozdzia (2002) emphasise that religion is very much a part of most refugees' identity. When I visited the women, they would thank God I had arrived safely and when I left, they would tell me to go with God. Whereas for my informants this was part of the conventional language, and not necessarily, a sign of religiousness, it was for me, and I became interested in finding out what role religion played in their lives.

Discussing religion was challenging in the beginning. I did not want to give the impression I did not believe, but neither the impression that I was a strong believer and I was open about not going to church or praying. I explained that I was baptised as a child and went through confirmation. Furthermore, I talked about how I chose to baptise my child and sometimes taking her to church for different happenings. Nevertheless, I emphasised that I was probably like most Norwegians, a little bit sceptic about Christianity, not a strong believer, but not entirely ready to denounce faith. In Norway, approximately 82% of the population belong to the state church (Vassenden and Andersson 2011:578). However, the society is highly secular and a European Social survey in 2006 found that only 5.5% of Norwegians attend a church service more than once a month (Vassenden and Andersson 2011:579). With their article, Vassenden and Andersson describes this in terms of cultural Christians, and examines how the majority of Norwegians will not call themselves religious or Christian but still hold on to Christian traditions in a cultural way, through church marriage and baptism (ibid).

It was important to me during fieldwork to be open and honest about my beliefs, and even more so because the women I talked to thought it was important to know whether I was Christian or not. When we had discussed my beliefs, they also opened up more about the importance of their faith. However, the biggest breakthrough in these discussions did not come until I opened up about my daughter. I told them how she has become quite religious and curious about Christianity over the past year even though she is quite young. I would talk about how I struggled to find adequate answers to her many questions. They would enlighten me with

Christian stories and offer advice on YouTube clips I could show her. They were very happy to hear about her and that I would take her to church occasionally. It seemed to be important for them to raise children as Christians so they became good adults. Hence, I came to realise that whilst faith was important to these women, it was just as important to establish what other people thought about Christianity.

Whilst Hannah saw Norwegian people as excluding and not accepting her because of her negative, she felt that Muslim refugees were a priority for Norway. Within this, she often talked about how Muslim people were given positive answers to their asylum application more frequently than Christian ones. She saw this especially with Somali people. During our conversations, she would emphasise that those that deserved to stay were not given a chance. She put emphasis on how Christian people wanted to work and better themselves whilst the Muslims were only receiving benefits and producing children. In her opinion, the Christian faith encouraged women to work and not hide behind the veil, which also connects with the Norwegian ideology of female employment. *We could work and contribute by taxes, not only producing ten folds of children.* She distanced herself from the Muslims at the reception centre and saw their faith as opposite to her own faith, and furthermore how their faith would give them the benefit of residency in Norway. Hence, for the women I spoke to there was a divide between Christians and Muslims at the reception centre, and they did not mingle. Whilst I was included because of my Christianity, others excluded due to a lack of Christianity.

However, I find it likely that my informants did carry with them preconceptions about Muslims from their country of origin, but also probably influenced by negative views of Muslims in Norwegian society (cf Jacobsen 2011). I was told that in the countries they came from, the split between Muslims and Christian was very real, and the migration context seems to reproduce their ideas with a twist. One aspect is the issue of residency; some of my informants for example, believe Norway is giving residency to Muslims purely because they are Muslims. I do not have statistics from the reception centre in regards to residency, and whether there really is a discrepancy between Muslims and Christians. Although, asylum seekers from Somalia are the group with the highest rate of positive answers from UDI, but they are also the group with the

most applicants⁶. However, my informants did not reflect much upon these thoughts, other than stressing that, too many Muslims got a positive and did not deserve it. Within this, they talk about how Muslims do not work as they would, and do not contribute to society but stay at home and receive benefits while producing children. Furthermore, I would also argue that it becomes more of a tension because the women expected to be treated better. They had heard of Norway as a Christian country and thought that they as Christian would be included in a community based on their faith, whilst this was not their reality. Hence, their expectations of life in a Christian country such as Norway are shattered and they feel Muslims get better treatment through residency than they do, even though this might not be the case

I also sensed that the belief that Muslims got residency because of their faith might be a coping mechanism to explain why their own answers from the UDI were negative. Whilst they already had preconceptions about Muslims being ‘others’ and not like them, within the reception centre context it also became intertwined in an ‘either us or them’ discourse. If the women have already divided the residents at the reception centre into Muslims and Christians, it becomes even more important when Muslims receive residency because it might mean that others, which are Christian, do not. Since many applications for asylum are rejected every year, it might be easier to cope with the thought that others received positives because they are Muslims. It might become a way of distancing themselves from the negative because it was not anything with their case but about them not being Muslim. However, it then also causes more tension because they feel betrayed by the Christian Norwegian state that should have included them as fellow Christians. Hence, religion ends up as a very important issue for my informants in regards to whether or not other people deserve their residency.

⁶ <http://www.udi.no/Global/UPLOAD/!%20Fellessider/Statistikk/Asyl/2013/Asylvedtak%20des%202013.html>.<accessed 06.02.2014>

Inclusion with staff through shared faith

Whereas the church did not become an arena for inclusion through shared faith, but more of a reminder of the women's situation and as such, felt exclusive, and created tensions with the Muslims in regards to residency, it did in some instances create a common bond between the Christian residents and staff. The residents were aware that some of the staff at the reception centre were Christians, and some would refer to them as good and honest people because of this. Sharing the same faith, meant that some of the residents claimed to trust the staff more and felt some sort of connection to the staff. However, it became clear during my fieldwork that the amount of time spent at the reception centre and whether they were living with a negative meant more than faith in regards to how the women perceived the staff. This issue will be expanded upon in chapter four through the concept of 'social recognition' and social ageing' (Hage 2003) Those new to the reception centre or with residency were more likely to bring up the shared faith in a positive way than those living with a negative. Hence, for those that were already positive about the reception centre and the staff, shared religion served as an extra common bond. Some of the women described it as transcending the barriers between staff and residents. Although it was still a formal relationship, some of the residents thought of staff as fellow Christians, and not only staff in charge of the reception centre. They would feel as if they had something in common that others did not, and emphasised that as Christians the staff would have higher morals, be aware that God will judge us all, and that a higher meaning exists. Furthermore, some of the women mentioned that as Christians the staff would be more likely to understand that we are all part of God's plan and would see the residents at the reception centre as fellow Christians, not only asylum seekers.

During an information meeting at the reception centre, we discussed marriage and common beliefs came forward. One of the residents asked if it was true that persons of the same sex can marry in Norway. It became clear that he was not a supporter of gay marriage, and found the acceptance of homosexuals hard to accept. One of the staff then explained that, being homosexual and same-sex marriage is allowed in Norway according to the law. The employee went on to clarify that whilst he did not necessarily agree with this law it was still the law and therefore legal. Hence, for me it seemed like the employee and resident could understand each other and shared the same viewpoint. The employee emphasised that whilst they did not have to

understand it they had to accept the law. However, this brief example showed that some of the residents and the staff might find a connection in shared beliefs that lies outside the public ideology.

Moreover, for Alma knowing that some of the staff was Christian meant that she felt safer and believed they were better equipped to take care of her. Christianity was very important for her and she spent most days in her room praying. For Alma life at the reception centre was difficult, she had few friends and preferred to stay in her room instead of going out. She would use prayer as a means to endure her suffering. Alma spent most of her time praying that things would get better. During our conversations, she expressed that she prayed all the time so that she would not have to think. Hence, for Alma, prayer functioned as a means to distract her from thinking about the outcome of her asylum application, and a way to give meaning to her days. She believed that thinking was what caused problems at the reception centre and made people apathetic. Therefore, she tried to spend as little time as possible thinking about her case and preferred praying as a way of killing time. Hence, we could argue that living with a negative has produced a specific mode-of-being-in-the-world (Willen 2007) in the way that Alma has withdrawn from the outside world because she cannot face thinking of her case, but rely on prayer. She emphasised that even though she had a negative she was relieved when she found out some of the staff were Christians. Within this, she explained that they would then understand that this life was only temporary and God would judge all action in the afterlife. Alma further emphasised how the staff would understand that there is a higher power that will decide what happens and that she could do nothing else than pray for her residency.

Negative relations with staff through shared faith

Whilst the women that had not been at the reception centre for a long time and had a positive were pleased with sharing faith with the staff, this was not always the case for those that had been there longer or had a negative. Those with a negative decision felt they deserved better treatment and better living standards; they were tired of never having enough money and always feeling excluded from society. It was interesting to see how they would appeal to universal rights such as the right to be treated as equals, and at the same time, combine it with more individual moral values in regards to religious identity. They would alternate between different moral discourses based upon equal rights and individual religiousness. Within this, they would find the system unjust and not the provider of the rights they felt they deserved and had expected, however, they further thought that the employees did not act accordingly to their individual Christian values, and could have done more. Hence, sometimes they saw the limits to the system as a source of their rights; then they blamed the individuals at the reception centre for not living up to their religious duty to provide a better standard.

One day when I came to visit Hannah, I could see that she was clearly upset. I asked if anything had happened and she explained that she would have to pay more expenses out of the money she received from the UDI, due to food expenses in kindergarten. Because Hannah has a negative, she already receives less money. Nevertheless, before my arrival, she had been out and bumped into one of the employees at the reception centre, and told him how difficult it would be to subsist financially after this. She explained that her child needed clothes and shoes because he was growing and how difficult it would be to have even less money.

According to Hannah the employee had told her not to worry, children did not need many expensive clothes, she could come to him, and he would give her shoes that his children had used because he had many. Hannah explained that she found this incident very upsetting. *Does he expect us to come knocking on his door as beggars? I am an adult and should be able to provide for my child. If we do not receive enough money to provide for our children, we should be allowed to work. We should not have to back down as beggars in order to survive. This is not even charity, it is demeaning, and it is giving us their second-hand used things they do not want. How can he claim to be a good Christian when he treats us like this?* One the one hand Hannah

contextualises and evaluates the offer in relation to a Christian idea of charity but on the other, she found it demeaning that she would have to resort other peoples used items in a more rights based discourse. Additionally, because the employee was a Christian but also part of the system that was responsible for her economic hardship, I find it likely that these two roles had an uneasy fit. Whilst, Hannah felt that the employee was offering her clothes and shoes as charity, in line with Christian tradition, she found the situation very tough and started to question the employee's faith. She claimed that she did not believe he could be a good Christian if he could deduct more money from her. She judged him not to be *a proper Christian*.

I was not present at the encounter and do not know if he termed his offer in religious terms or used the word charity. Throughout my stay, I did not experience that the Christian employees thought of the residents in terms of a shared religion. For me it seemed like all the employees treated all the different residents with the same professional relationship and without invoking religious terms. A reason for this can also be because to the staff, the status as an asylum-seeker or as an asylum-seeker with a negative might overshadow the Christian aspect. Hence, the women were primarily refugees, not Christians. Because of their negative, they cannot gain social recognition through such as for example faith or work. Hence, whilst the women had expected that a shared faith could transcend differences, their relationship with the staff was primarily based on their position as asylum-seeker with a negative.

Nevertheless, it would be interesting to compare Hanna's incident with Davis' (2000) and her writing about religion and gifts. Whilst this example is not similar or directly related, it raises some interesting issues. Davis looks at the gift in 16th century France and investigates the Christian aspect of gift giving. She finds that whilst charity as giving to those in need, was considered obligatory, charity could also be robbed by its 'virtue' (Davis 2000: 15). If a person gave charity without the intention of honouring God, or in order to receive praise, it would not be considered a virtue or a charitable gift (ibid). Hence the spirit of charity is in some ways similar in modern society as it was in 16th century France for Christians. Nonetheless, one can of course not know what the receivers intentions are and exactly what not honouring God or 'without the love of God' (Davis 2000: 15) means. Hannah interpreted the incident as an offer of charity, and rejected because he was not *a proper Christian*, if we compare it to the example in Davis case.

Hannah interpreted his offer in a religious sense as charity and claimed to reject it on this basis. In this situation, she appealed to a moral, religious registry rather than in terms of universal rights as she had before. Whilst she would often talk about the unjust system and the hardships, she encountered at the reception centre, she interpreted this encounter in a religious sense. She complained about the system not giving her enough money, but her main emphasis was on the religious morale of the employee. Here she did not talk about the system as not helping her, but an individual offering charity. However, because the individual offering help was also part of the system that she feels is rejecting her, she could reject his offer based on what she called his 'lack of Christianity'. Moreover, because the reception centre made the decision she could also interpret it more in terms of individual actions than the system. Hence, whilst she appeals to a discourse of equal rights in terms of the asylum system and the UDI, at the reception centre she would emphasise the individual's moral norms. However, as we shall see below, it is likely that Hannah rejected his offer on more than just religious grounds

When faced with representatives for the system that shared her faith she had expected them to meet her with more respect, and moral values that were like her own. When this was not the case she started to question the individual employee as a Christian and found him not worthy and thereby rejected his offer of help. She emphasised that she did not want his charity because she felt he was not a Christian and could therefore not offer charity. Instead, she rejected his offer because she felt it was demeaning and she claimed he made her feel like a beggar. In this sense, it became more of a feeling of not being equal, outside of the Christian paradigm the offer became a reminder that the reception centre had taken away her money and was responsible for her hardship. Within this, we might say that Hannah felt like a lesser person having to resort to taking gifts from the staff outside the system she felt had the responsibility to take care of her. Hence, the offer of used clothes then became a reminder that she is not equal to Norwegians and is dependent upon the reception centre and the UDI to take care of her. This notion was quite troubling for the majority of my informants, as I shall expand upon through the concept of reciprocity (Mauss ([1925] 1990) in chapter four.

Finding meaning in faith

Whilst there was little to do for those with negative decisions, they found strength and hope in their faith. Fiona, whom had not been at the reception centre very long preferred to stay in her room and pray instead of socialising. Fiona came to Norway from another European country and is therefore a Dubliner, which means she will be returned to the first European country she arrived in. However, she and her lawyer have appealed the decision and she lives in hope that the UDI will treat her case. Fiona spends most of the day praying that it will change and that she can get residency in Norway. She is a cheerful middle-aged woman but does not socialise much with other people at the reception centre.

The times that I visited her, she would spend a lot of time showing me YouTube clips with songs of worship. She explained that she played them every morning before she got out of bed in order to find the strength she needed to get through the day. For Fiona, studying the bible, praying with friends and listening to hymns is necessary to calm her mind and avoid thinking of her situations, which relates to research that highlight how faith can have a positive impact on refugees' mental health (McMichael 2002). In a new country with a foreign language and cold, dark weather, she feels scared and lonely. However, she always thanks God that she was able to come here and prayed that she could stay. *I do not need to go to church to find God. He is with me wherever I go and gives me strength.* Finding strength through worship and prayer is Fiona's way of coping. She often said she would not be able to keep her sanity alone in her small room with nothing to do, had it not been for her faith. She would often state that those residents at the reception centre with mental health issues were that way because they did not believe enough or thought about their case too much. Fiona's views here, correlates to a study by McMichael, of Somali women and Islam in Melbourne. One of her informants is quoted in regards to how important Allah is for her and her strength. For this informant, praying and faith is everything, she sees people committing suicides because they cannot cope with life, but she turns to Allah for help and strength in order to get through the days (McMichael 2002: 179).

Hannah saw God as the reason she could continue living. *There is nothing here to help us see life, all our hope and strength comes from God, without faith, there would be no reason to live.* Hannah, who has lived at the reception centre for years with a negative found her situation

hopeless, and she prays every day for a better tomorrow and finds her strength in religion. In God, Hannah found a reason to stay strong and fight for her cause. She thought she deserved better than the life at the reception centre and believed that God would make this happen one day. Hence, Hannah continues to live in what she terms bad living standard and economic hardship. She carries on living like this and hopes to receive a positive because she believes that God will reward her and interprets this as Norwegian residency. Hence, she refigured heavenly reward in her own way, into something concrete that she wants to see as within reach, even though she lives with a negative.

Moreover, at the reception centre there were always stories about asylum seekers who got residency after up to six negatives. These cases were often talked about as an act of God, where believing, praying and never giving up had finally helped. These stories served as a comfort for many of my informants, they would say that even though they had one or two negatives there would always be hope. Here we can briefly look into Hage (2003) which I will expand upon later. He draws on Bourdieu and sees society as the distributor of hope. Whilst society does not distribute hope equally, it distributes the idea of hope and especially within capitalism hope is distributed as a possibility to aspire (Hage 2003: 12-13). We can use this in order to see that whilst the asylum system does not actually offer these women hope of residency, through giving residency to a few with many negatives they are distributing hope in the form of ‘possibility’.

Nevertheless, with God, they found the hope and strength to get up in the morning and continue to believe that they would eventually receive residency. However, both Hannah and Julia made it clear that God would not just give them residency in Norway. In order to change their legal status they would have to continue fighting and finding relevant information and God would give them the strength to do this. Hence, their faith became a source of strength, and not the negative ‘religious hope’ Hage finds in faith, which encourages passivity (Hage 2003: 11-12). Hannah and Julia told me that the important thing was to do something, not just sit in their rooms, and cry because that was what broke people.

These findings correlate to Porobic’s study of religion amongst Bosnian refugees in a Swedish context (2012). She found that religion could become a very important factor due to what she terms its ‘*meaning-making significance*’ (Porobic 2012: 204). For Porobic’s informants, religion served as a way to make sense of their lives during the war and the flight but also in the

new life as refugees in Sweden. In religion, they found a meaning to the suffering and help to remain mentally stable (Porobic 2012: 205).

Furthermore, Porobic's informants emphasised how they turned to God in prayer and were able to find hope and some sort of acceptance of their new life-situations. This directly correlates to how Fiona sees prayer as a way to keep her sanity but also to give meaning to her days. It further connects to Hanna, in how she always has the hope that tomorrow will be better, and that they are enduring this life because they know they can rely on God. Porobic also sees religious faith as 'an existential survival factor' (Porobic 2012: 207). Within this concept, she talks about how her informants manage to make sense of their lives and find a meaning and the strength to endure the hardships and suffering they go through. Within this, I find many similarities between Porobic's findings and my informants. In both groups, religion has become a very important factor in dealing with life; it has become both comfort and a way of finding meaning. Moreover, Porobic also mentions how her informants turned to God even more so than before the war, in an effort to find meaning in a higher power during their suffering. Additionally, some of Porobic's informants found that religion had helped them appreciate life more, and therefore saw their refugee experience as meaningful and almost necessary in order to receive a spiritual lesson (Porobic 2012: 219). However, the two last findings do not correlate to my informants at this point. Mainly, because the majority of my informants had a strong Christian faith before they became refugees and talk of how they miss the religious community back home, hence, from what they shared with me, their faith has been a constant comfort not something they discovered during the refugee experience. Even though there were times when they found meaning to endure their suffering this was more related to receiving a reward (often interpreted as residency) than appreciation of life. Nonetheless, I find it likely that if my informants negative should change into residency their experiences would be similar to Porobic's informants.

When all that is left is faith

Whilst many of my informants use their faith in order to gather strength and find meaning in their days, others found that faith was all they had. Emma, like the majority of my informants lived with a negative and found it hard to cope. Where the other women in her house came together to pray and talk of how tomorrow would be better and what they could do, she spent most of her time in solitude in her room. She found it difficult to socialise and claimed to have no hope of a better tomorrow. During our discussions she talks about how there is no hope for her, she prays that these thoughts will go away but finds no answer. She talks about how she wants to go to church and relax but does not feel she can, but locks herself in her room only to find what she terms sadness. She told me her lawyer has contacted her to see if there is another way to file a complaint against her case, and that he thinks they can. However, Emma says she does not have the power to fight anymore. Most of all, she talks about how it is now in God's hands. If God wants it to happen, he will find a way for her negative to be changed, because she does not have the strength to do something herself. Hence, she does not find the strength in her faith to continue fighting although she keeps praying for a miracle. Emma finds comfort in her faith through praying but not the strength she needs to get through the days. This would therefore point to Hage (2003) and the notion of a negative religious hope mentioned earlier.

Likewise, Elsa kept to herself and spent her days in her room. During our conversations she did not talk as much of sadness and lack of hope as Emma. Instead Elsa would talk about how there was nothing she could do in order to change her case. After her negative, she did not contact a personal lawyer but said she knew God would help her. She had not given up hope but was strong in her belief that eventually she would be granted residency. She informed me that it was all in the hands of God, not in her hands or the UDI. Whilst Elsa would often talk about how UDI based her negative on wrong decisions, she had no desire to contact a lawyer and take further actions. Hence, she would find strength to go through the days with hope that things would get better, but not the strength to work with a lawyer and her case. For Elsa, her faith served as a way of finding hope but also as a comfort that made it possible to give up. She told me she had been going to conversations in regards to return options at the reception centre after her negative. However, she did not get anything out of it, because she was not in charge of her

life, everything was up to God. Hence, she could not explore other options such as, complaining to the UDI, considering return to her country of origin or a third country.

As these two examples show, faith does not necessarily bring meaning to the day itself. McMichael (2002) also found in her study, mentioned above, that for some of her informants Islam provided a 'framework for understanding their situation' (McMichael 2002:186). Some of McMichael's informants seemed to reach an understanding that everything was the will of Allah and that they had to accept this. Hence, they could leave responsibility for their circumstances to Allah and surrender to his will (ibid). One of McMichael's informants explains in the article that she copes by praying and trying to forget bad things, if she is sad she prays that it will go away (McMichael 2002:185). Hence, it shows how important religion is for women in a refugee situation, whether they are Muslim or Christian. Religion can also, as shown by McMichael be used as both a way of finding meaning but also as a way to surrender to God's will and leave the responsibility to him. Furthermore, religion can also provide comfort in accepting that they are surrendering to destiny and a higher power

However, we can also look at leaving everything to faith as a strength, in the way that it takes strength to stop trying to alter their cases. Whilst they have stopped trying to find solutions in bureaucratic or judicial ways, they sacrifice a lot in order to surrender to the will of God. When none of the bureaucratic or judicial ways has worked, maybe they can find a strength in surrendering to prayer and faith. Whilst they find little meaning in the days, it does not necessarily mean they have nothing to live for or giving up. Prayer has become the most important way to deal with their case. For Emma and Elsa there might be a comfort knowing that there is nothing else they can do, instead of feeling trapped in a place where giving up becomes impossible, maybe giving up and surrender to prayer is a sign of strength and realisation that what they are doing is not helping.

Relying on faith and prayer in hard times is often interpreted as passivity and avoidance of dealing with one's one situation, or apathy as Hannah terms it. However, Porobic refers to a study of Pargament and Park (1995), and how they found that reliance on religion in difficult times did not necessarily mean people became passive or empowered but often engaged in what they called a 'third way' where people interact with God (Pargament & Park 1995, in Porobic 2012:227). Porobic goes on to argue that this interacting means that the person and God work together to

solve the issue. In this sense, coping through prayer is not a passive activity but rather a way of using the religious resources available in order to make sense of it and to endure the situation (ibid). Therefore, we can see that whilst Emma and Elsa might appear passive and not dealing with the realities of their cases this is not necessarily so. Whilst Emma, talks of how everything is in God's hands and emphasises that she cannot do more, by praying to God she is doing that something and using the only resource she has, prayer. Although she does not have the strength to follow her case bureaucratically, she has not given up hope but carries on through prayer. In her own way she finds comfort that, a higher power is helping her endure everyday-life. Whilst their expectations of inclusion and a better life in Norway did not become reality they both find comfort and meaning through prayer to endure living with a negative

Concluding remarks

In order to conclude, I will briefly tie together the different issues I have discussed throughout this chapter in relation to religion and expectations and experience. As I have shown throughout this chapter, religion works in many different ways compared to what the women had expected. Whilst religion is often seen as a collective and inclusive mechanism and serving as a 'glue' in order to bind society together (Durkheim 2001), this proved difficult for the women with a negative. Whilst many of the other women, primarily those waiting or with a positive answer found comfort in a bible study group, those with a negative found the barriers too high. As we saw, well-meaning questions of interest became a constant reminder of their situation and that they are not supposed to be here. They had expectations of Norway as a Christian country where they would be included as fellow Christians, but instead they felt that their primary trait became one of asylum-seeker with a negative, not as fellow Christian. Hence, my informants do not feel at home in the Norwegian church, there were too many obstacles, which, proved to be stronger than a shared faith. Moreover, whilst they did not discuss this in terms of different strands of Christianity it might be a factor as to why they found the church too different. Where they were used to engaging priests that spoke with authority and church services as celebratory event, the protestant church might appear more sober and quiet. Additionally, without good knowledge of the Norwegian language, the service in itself does not make much sense and without the familiar structure to the church service, it becomes unknown and feels exclusionary.

I also found that faith becomes an issue between the residents at the reception centre, as I became more included and trusted after being open about my own beliefs, Muslims were excluded. Some of the women saw the Muslims as undeserving of residency purely because of their religion. They framed the Muslims and especially the women as undeserving and not worthy of residency because they did not work but stayed home with the children. This was quite interesting in regards to the gender equality ideology, which they would often invoke in terms of how they as Christians could contribute more through work. Within this part, I find that their expectations for a better life standard and Norwegian residency rested upon feeling more similar to a society, from which they experience exclusion. Hence, I sensed that their logic towards Muslims being prioritised residency purely because they are Muslim is more of a coping mechanism to deal with their own negative. It then becomes a way of dealing with the experience of exclusion from a society in which they had expectations to be included.

Nevertheless, I found that religion did not transcend the formal relationship as residents and staff. Whilst some of the residents, primarily those waiting or with a positive saw the shared faith as a positive addition and something they could relate to, this was not the case for the majority with a negative. The majority of my informants felt that their negative came first, and without other traits for social recognition such as for example work, their negative became their primary trait. However, as we saw in the case of Hannah, feeling unjustly treated by the reception centre also made her blame individual staff members for a lack of Christianity. Whereas the women would usually apply a rights discourse as to why they deserved better treatment, as seen in chapter two, Hannah appealed to a more religious moral registry in the specific incident. Whilst she claimed that because he was not a good Christian he could not offer charity, and outside the Christian paradigm it became an offer where she felt like a beggar, something I will examine closer in chapter three. Hence, shared religion became problematic because of the uneven relationship.

Towards the end of the chapter, I moved on to look at what role religion has in the women's experiences when it did not function as an inclusive mechanism. Within this part, I found that faith was of great importance to them in order to endure the days. Religion became especially important in the hope that residency was possible through prayer and not giving up. In a way, their belief that God would reward their suffering and hardship served as the 'existential

survival factor' Porobic (2012) recognised in her informants. Moreover, I also noticed the '*meaning-making significance*' religion had in the women's lives (Porobic 2012). Through their faith and prayer, the women were able to find some meaning in their situation and the belief that they would be rewarded one day. However, I also found that not all the women used faith and prayer as a way of finding meaning in their day, but more of a comfort that their lives were in the hands of God. I have interpreted this through Porobic (2012) as an interactive relationship with God and trying to change their situation with the help of God and not through judicial and bureaucratic ways. Hence, I do not see it as the negative religious hope Hage (2003) describes.

Lastly, through the chapter I have examined how religion becomes an important factor in how the women deal with their situation. To draw a conclusion, the chapter has examined the role religion plays in how the women deal with the situation of living with a negative. I found that whilst it did not overshadow their negative, it did become an even more important tool in dealing with their individual experiences of crushed expectations, and finding strength within themselves rather than as a part of an inclusive, collective and celebratory ritual.

Chapter 4- Life

It is a cold and rainy day and we are sitting inside the warm house drinking tea. I have asked a few of the women present if they could describe everyday life, and how they feel about their days. Sonia laughed a little in regards to my question, before she became quiet and answered. *Life is difficult. When living like this people should be free and have a life, even though they have a negative.* The phrase that they repeated the most throughout my fieldwork was that *life is difficult, or life is bad but what can we do.* Tara also started to laugh at my question because as she later explained, there is no word to describe this life. *If my country was a good place to be I would go back because this is no life, but I am still here, it is no life but I am alive.* Ania joined in with the others and shared her thoughts on everyday life, *I do not talk to many people about this, it is my life, my story, but it is not a proper life. I do not know when we will be happy, but I know this is not all there is in life.* She did however emphasise that she liked Norway and wanted to stay, but not the part of Norway she was living in now. *I like the city the camp is in but I do not feel I live here, or belong here, as long as I am in the camp. If I get a positive I will move, I do not want to remember this life, it is not my life.* Out of the four women present this afternoon, none of them thought they were living a life. Whilst they said they were thankful for the material things such as a roof over their head and the feeling of safety, it was a life without meaning.

Introduction

With this chapter, my aim is to examine how living with a negative influences the everyday life for the women at the reception centre, in regards to the relationship between their expectations and experiences. As the previous chapters have found, the negative greatly influence how they experience their situation in terms of gender and religion. Therefore, I shall look deeper into the everyday life in the absence of normality.

Within the concept of dealing with a negative, I will use Hage (2003) as I have briefly mentioned in the previous chapters, in order to look at the importance of social recognition. Hage identifies ‘societal hope’ as the hope society distribute to its people and give them the possibilities they need in order to find meaning and inclusion in society (Hage 2003:14-15). Within this he establish people as ‘hoping subjects’ and connects the amount of hope distributed to people with the ‘care’ they feel towards society (Hage 2003:). Within the social recognition that comes with ‘societal hope’ Hage builds upon Bourdieu (1989, 1990, 1998, 2000) and finds that ‘being’ or meaning in life depends upon the social recognition people receive. Without social recognition life becomes meaningless and without possibilities or opportunities. Hence, I will explore whether the women with a negative manage to find social recognition at the reception centre and as such meaning. As we saw in chapter two and three, they did not find social recognition through the teachings of gender-equality or within the church, although they did find meaning through prayer and individual belief in God. However, here I will examine the spaces they carve out for themselves in everyday life and what they think of their life. Within this, I will also discuss whether social recognition can exist for my informants with a negative.

As I briefly discussed in chapter two, the women are told about Norway as a society where women work and contribute to society. This notion rests upon a belief that everyone should contribute to the welfare state through taxes, but also the importance of women being economically independent from men. As noted in chapter two, the amount of financial contribution given to them will also play a part, especially within their chances of getting social recognition through consumption. However, I will continue to draw a comparison with Ong (2003) and the Cambodian refugees in America in order to find similarities or differences in how the women’s expectations differ from the realities they live in, and what is ‘socially possible’

(Vigh 2009) within their expectations. I shall look further into this notion, and into the incentives, the women have for working. From there I intend to draw briefly upon Mauss (1990[1925]) and his ideas of reciprocity, and the feeling of being grateful for the reality which is far from their expectations. Within this, I will try to highlight the unequal power relationship between the UDI through the reception centre and the women, and the tension this might create. The main issue will then be how the women experience being financially dependent upon a system they cannot reciprocate.

Furthermore, through Hage (2003) I will move on to examine the role living with a negative has, in regards to societal hope and caring for the reception centre. I will examine whether the negative plays a part in how they view their everyday life in the absence of normality at the reception centre. Here I will briefly look into the relationship and preconceptions the residents have towards each other, especially between those with different legal status and connect this to societal hope. From there I will relate the women's thoughts on what having a life means in relation to everyday life. Within this, I shall examine what the absence of normality means in relation to social recognition. I will also investigate the tension between the women with a negative and the reception centre further in terms of 'something to do'. This will also tie in with 'societal hope' in terms of the women's expectations towards the reception centre in what they offer the women and why the 'something to do', becomes so important in their experience of everyday life.

The last part will aim to examine if there is a space for the women to influence their own lives and the decisions that affects them. As I have discussed in chapter two, the possibility to influence their own lives is an integral part of the Norwegian gender equality, and stated in the UDI regulations. However, as we found, this does not apply to the overall structure of these women's lives. This also relates to chapter three where the women did not find the inclusion they expected in church, but dealt with their situation privately through faith. Therefore, I hope to examine how the women carve out their own spaces for influence or resistance within this limited framework. Whilst they experience a sense of powerlessness and as merely existing, I hope to show that they might not be merely passive recipients of decisions. Lastly, as with the previous chapters the overall framework will look at the relationship between the expectations the women had of Norway and what they actually experience in everyday life.

'This is no life'

Not having a life was what the women in the house mentioned above referred to after I asked questions about their day or everyday life. They seemed to separate having a life from being alive. In relation to this, they often speak of the dangers they believe they will face if they return to their countries of origin, such as being killed or becoming even more destitute. Hence, whilst there is no life as such at the reception centre, they are still alive. In our conversations regarding what it meant to 'have a life' the women described it as having a job, school, activities or 'something to do' in order to fill the days. Most importantly was the notion of learning and/or feeling useful along with earning money. The women further described life as something they were waiting for to happen, not as something that was happening now. They often related their thoughts on everyday life to waiting and passing time in order for something to start or to happen. Hence, it seemed as if only the granting of residency or a work permit, and nothing else could create a 'life' for the women. For them, residency or work have become the solution to all their problems. I believe this stems from the middle-class ideal they expect to achieve in Norway, and do not think of the hardships that many immigrants face after receiving residency. Ong (2003) in her study of Cambodian refugees in America examines the hardship they experience after being settled in dealing with welfare and minimum wage jobs, living in small and crowded apartments. Whilst the situation and structure of American and Norwegian society might not be comparable, I believe my informants' expectations are too high in regards to what will happen in regards to achieving residency and what would be the reality.

Within their views on 'having a life', we can look at Hage (2003) and how he uses Bourdieu to make the distinction between having a life and being alive. Hage has developed his discussions within a broader discourse than the migration/reception centre context. Therefore, although I cannot look into all his ideas; some of his discussions have proved to be very useful in order to highlight certain aspects of my informant's life. Hage looks at how Bourdieu defines 'being' as a life that is more 'meaningful, satisfactory, fulfilling, etc.' (Hage 2003: 16). He looks at this notion and how some people have more 'being' than others do, and that this is not circulated equally in society. Hence, people's lives do not hold any inherent meaning; their lives only acquire meaning when society gives them the possibility to create meaning. Moreover, following Hage's interpretation of Bourdieu, people then depend upon society to offer them the

chance of creating meaningful lives, without this chance, lives are not meaningful and they cannot acquire the social capital they need. Within this, society becomes a generator for creating life and being.

However, my informants are not entirely dependent upon society as such to offer them the chance of creating meaningful lives. Instead, we can see that they are at this point dependent upon the UDI as a substitute for society, to offer them a chance for creating meaningful lives through giving them residency. In other words, my informants first need the ‘social recognition’ from UDI through residency before they can get the chance of creating meaningful lives. Moreover, when looking at Bourdieu through Hage, we find the same distinction my informants have in the way they speak of the difference between having a life and being alive. Being alive is of course a good thing, yet it holds no meaning for my informants, they merely exist, and they do not have enough of Bourdieu’s ‘being’. We can also distinguish between legal and social, recognition. Within this, I could say that there is a sort of social recognition in the context of having legal residency. With legal recognition comes options for benefits such as residency, education work and money, which brings with them social recognition as something else than asylum-seeker with a negative. As we saw in the previous chapter, the church did not work as an arena for social recognition regardless of legal status because of the negative and the barriers my informants experienced. Moreover, we can also look back at chapter two where we find that because they do not receive enough financial contribution they do not have the means to better their appearance through consumption and find social recognition through their femininity in which they put a lot of emphasis. Hence, without the legal recognition from the UDI my informants struggle to find social recognition and thereby a ‘life’ with meaning.

Although my informants have a negative decision, they still have some rights in Norwegian society; they can stay in the reception centre housing until their return date, get some financial help from the UDI, as well as medical care if it is under emergency help (UDI 2011: 15). However, those of my informants with a negative decision would emphasise the things they did not have, and what they lacked in order to live what they would call ‘normal lives’. Hence, life would consist of passing time, through cooking, running errands, meeting friends and praying that tomorrow would be better. We then see that there is a major discrepancy between what the women termed as ‘having a life’ and what is ‘socially possible’. (Vigh 2009) to provide through

the existing framework of the asylum system. Hence, when the women complained about the office at the reception centre not providing enough for them they did not take into account the limits that exist. Because the Norwegian asylum system builds upon the principles of sober yet prudent management of asylum seekers, there is not a lot of space for the distribution of social recognition or 'being'. However, the financial help the asylum seekers get from the UDI is different from most welfare services given by the Norwegian state. Most social welfare such as sick leave, disabled allowance, maternity/paternity leave is tied into previous earnings, whilst the financial help the asylum seekers receive is not based upon income but upon a 'needs/must have' basis. Hence, my informants most likely base their want of living standard upon an imagined Norway and not the reality of non-middle class Norwegians or those living on welfare.

Whilst my informants feel they deserve a higher living standard as they imagine most Norwegians to have, they compare themselves with middle-class Norwegians and not those in the lower classes or those living on benefits. Hence, they very much base their comparison upon an imagined image of Norwegian lifestyle and not necessarily the reality, which they know little about. This is tied to the study by Ong (2003) of Cambodian refugees where she finds that refugees often have certain ideas of the destination country before arrival. She explains that the Cambodian refugees had been in contact with American relief workers and agencies. Through these people and agencies' promises of a better place the refugees created "unrealistic expectations" of life in the US, and strong imaginaries of how life would be once they were resettled (Ong 2003: 60). I find it likely that my informants have had contact with similar relief or charity workers (although not necessarily in refugee camps) who would inform about the goodness and wealth of the Norwegian state due to Norway's strong presence in African countries through NGOs or official aid programs. As mentioned previously, my informants had very strong notions of how they expected Norway to be. In a way, Norway's reputation as a caring and wealthy country made my informants realities a lot worse because they had expected so much more. Moreover, as discussed in chapter two, the information given to asylum-seekers, also promote these ideas. Especially in regards to how female employment is a major part of gender-equality in Norway and being economically independent of men. This would then serve to heighten the women's expectations of what is socially possible to achieve both within the reception centre context and through legal residency

Independence as dependants

When talking about life, work came up, as something that my informants believed would give them the possibility to have a life. Within this, they highlighted earning money in order to raise their living standard as the main factor, but also the independence it would bring them. In a study by McPherson regarding refugee women in Australia, the women saw the development of the self through education as vital (McPherson 2010: 560). The women in the study see education as important in order to better themselves and their families, but also in order to contribute to a better society (McPherson 2010: 562). This then further ties into Hage and his reading of Bourdieu, where education could act as a way of acquiring 'being' and/or social recognition for McPherson's immigrants. However, whilst my informants want something to 'do' during the day, and had enjoyed Norwegian classes, work was what they mentioned most often. Compared to McPherson's study this might be because she interviewed resettled refugees with residency, which would have the opportunity to work and earn money, and therefore could aspire to better jobs through education, whilst my informants do not have this option.

It often came up during discussion that the women felt bad or uneasy about receiving financial help from the UDI. Tara would often emphasize that she had two hands and two legs that worked and would have been happy if she could work and contribute to society through taxes as well as provide for herself. *If I work, I have money. I want to learn or work, I want to be useful, I can do many things but little by little, I lose them. I want to use my time not waste it. It is not easy this life with just sitting here.* From Tara's, we see that she wants to work in order to get money and better her life, and contribute to society. Nevertheless, as discussed in chapter two, the women are probably to an extent influenced by the Norwegian discourse of female employment and contribution to society as an important value. However, I believe that most of all Tara wants to work so she is away from the house and thus not waste her days by only sitting inside or spending too much time thinking of her case.

Nevertheless, it is important to note that whilst the majority of the women wanted to work in order to feel useful and gain more independence by not relying financially on the UDI and consequently on the reception centre, this meant that when they could not work, they expected more help. I do not know much about the women's thoughts on female employment as an ideal

before they arrived in Norway. Considering the countries the women were from, I find it likely that being financially dependent upon a husband or relatives is quite normal and not stigmatised. Therefore, I do not think they want to work only because of the Norwegian discourse, which consider female employment the only way for women to contribute to Norwegian society, and do not consider homemaking productive work.

Hence, we can draw upon the classic work by Mauss (1990 [1925]) and how exchanges and presents are given and carries with it an obligation to an obligation to reciprocate. Therefore, when people cannot reciprocate, it creates a kind of dependency relation, or a power imbalance. Consequently, not being able to reciprocate makes my informants 'inferior' in Mauss' words (1990: 65). With this in mind, we can see that the unequal power relationship between the women and the reception centre through the UDI can become challenging. Because the UDI does not allow the women to work, they are dependent upon the reception centre to provide for them financially. However, the feeling I got at the reception centre was that the majority of the women were happy to receive financial help from the UDI; the problematic part was the amount. Hence, throughout my fieldwork and conversations with the women I felt that the reason the majority of them wanted to work was because that would be the only way to earn money and be able to get a higher living standard. The women explained that they did not like being financially dependent in Norway, but because the UDI did not allow them to work they should make sure the women had enough to live a decent life. Within this, we can see that they might object to being financially dependent in the Norwegian context due to the discourse of female employment and contribution, however, the most pressing issue was the low income and living standard offered by this contribution. Hence, whilst they wanted independence and a way to influence their own lives by being able to provide for themselves, they were dependant on the reception centre through the financial help they got from the UDI. Therefore, because they could not work and provide for themselves and considered the financial contribution from UDI too low, it created a tension between the women and the reception centre.

The same kind of tension, although with a different twist, is also recognisable in Ong's (2003) study of Cambodian refugees in the US. Whilst the Cambodian refugees had work permits and could work, the jobs they had were low wage and the income they gained were less than the welfare they could receive without jobs. Hence, the Cambodian refugees preferred welfare to low

paid jobs, and relied on which would provide them the most income (although, both wage earning and welfare were not enough for a good living standard). Therefore, I think we can compare this to my informants, and maybe draw a conclusion that my informants would have been content with receiving financial contribution from the UDI, if it had been higher than what they could have earned through work.

Whilst the women knew that the UDI was responsible for the money they received, they also knew that the reception centre were responsible for the payment itself. This also meant that the reception centre handled financial sanctions, such as the one for not going to the information meeting. The reception centre would deduct 100 kroner every time a person did not meet at the bi-weekly information meetings without valid reason. The residents saw the financial sanctions as a way to make them go to the information meetings that were mandatory. Whilst new residents found the information meetings useful and informative, those that had been there a while emphasised that they already knew most of the things at the information meetings and only went so they would not lose money. Hence, whilst the women were dependent upon the UDI for financial contributions, they depended upon the reception centre for actually receiving the money in their accounts.

Gratefulness

The women were as mentioned unhappy with their situation and found it appalling that they would have to live with low standards and very little financial help. Because they felt they were fit to work but not allowed to do so, they felt the reception centre should take the role as the provider and care for them at a better standard. The women would often emphasise that if they could not help themselves then the reception centre was obliged to help them, and that was why the reception centre existed. I found it interesting how the women alternated between not wanting help from the reception centre and contradictorily complaining about not getting enough help, such as activities, money, and better housing. Hence, I find it likely that the women struggled with being financially dependent upon a system designed to provide a sober yet prudent standard so there will be no incentive for the asylum seekers to come. Within this, it is then not necessarily only the feeling of being dependent and at the weaker end of a power relationship, that is causing

the tension, but more how the women want a better life standard than the reception centre can give them. Again, this links back to the expectations the women had before arriving in Norway, and the realities they live. Whilst they receive benefits and financial help from the asylum system, created to be non-attractive and not a pull-effect. Hence, because Norway portrays itself as an attractive, caring and wealthy country abroad, there is a discrepancy between the asylum system and the general society, which my informants struggle to cope with.

However, this brought with it the feeling of having to be grateful, which was difficult. Whilst they felt they lived in low standards, they also experienced that they should be grateful for receiving housing and some money even though they did not have legal residency. Hence, they experience the help they receive as a one-way gift, which they cannot repay. This again relates back to Mauss and the feeling of inferiority (Mauss 1990:65). He notices that there is an obligation to reciprocate, and one will lose face if one fails to do so (Mauss 1990:42). Therefore, when people cannot reciprocate, it creates a kind of dependency relation, or a power imbalance. Whilst my informants emphasised that they were happy to be in Norway they felt that since they had negatives, Norwegian people and the staff expected them to feel grateful for being here because Norway was a good country. In this sense, they are not expected to reciprocate in money, but with 'voluntarily return' if they have a negative, and if they do not return, to reciprocate through gratitude. However, for my informants going back to their country of origins was never an option, and the majority of them found it unlikely that they would be deported. Therefore, they were living with negative answers to their asylum applications and disliked the obligation of feeling grateful. Most of all; they felt resentful towards the expectation to be grateful, because as they explained they had little to be grateful about. They are living in one of the wealthiest countries in the world and whilst they do have housing and some financial help, they do not consider it 'living' or a 'good life' as they envision the Norwegians have. Hence, it is not just the feeling of having to be grateful they dislike, but also the feeling of having to be grateful about something they do not consider deserves gratefulness.

Whilst my informants find themselves fortunate and safe in Norway, most of them do not live the lives they expected to have when they came to Norway. This expectancy is slightly different from the "ethnic succession" (Ong 2003: 3). This concept entails that immigrants start at the bottom and the next generation will reap the benefits and gradually be fully accepted by the

American society (ibid). However, in the US the American dream is of course a strong concept that would put hard work and starting from nothing as a basic value. Conversely, Norway builds upon more collective principles and a solid welfare system, which is supposed to ensure a good living standard for all. Hence, we should consider the differences between the two countries, in regards to the different expectations upon arrival. Vera put this feeling this way *we know we are refugees and do not have positive, we don't expect much, but sometimes even we feel things are bad*. Expressions like the one above came from several of my informants. I often felt that even though they were happy to be in Norway, they did not consider it a life. They considered living in the reception centre more of a non-life, likened more to a state of merely existing whilst they were waiting for the real life to come. In the meantime, they experienced life as dependants upon a system that does not want them to stay in Norway.

The time-frame perspective and unequal distribution of hope

The women here are lazy, there is no activities... it is not only the office; also the women are the problem. Ronja seemed to feel strongly in regards to activities at the reception centre. We had met up for a cup of coffee at a café, and our discussion revolved around everyday life at the reception centre. Ronja, who had been there for a shorter time was very positive in regards to the reception centre and felt they did the best they could. In regards to how many of the women considered their situation as not having a life, she explained it in terms of motivation. *It is a lack of motivation, they prefer to be home and be unhappy with their situation.* Maybe because Ronja was still waiting for an answer from the UDI and had not been at the reception very long she distanced herself from the other residents. She spoke of the women as a uniform entity and did not differentiate between their legal or civil status. For Ronja it seemed like the other women at the reception centre did not want to do anything with their day. She talked of how there was little activities at the reception centre and why the other women had not done anything with the present situation. Ronja was full of energy and high in spirit, she talked a lot about all the things she wanted to do when she got a positive. However, most of all she talked of how the other women at the reception centre had given up and just kept to themselves. For Ronja, life at the reception centre revolved mostly around trying to find people to socialize with and trying to find activities

she could join. Whenever we were meeting for coffee or tea, she was always coming from somewhere or on her way to something, in order to find some sense of normality.. There were always other people or new places to meet or see. Moreover, Ronja also mentioned the information meeting as something to look forwards to every second week. She emphasised the importance of getting information and being able to ask questions in an open forum. Ronja further talked about how important it was to meet the other residents and have a place they could hear about Norway and other useful information for the residents.

Nevertheless, as my fieldwork progressed she did modify her views. After some weeks she started talking about how everything cost money and that there was very little she could do without spending any money. In a way, it seemed like Ronja tried very hard to be positive and keep herself busy, her housing situation was quite bad and she did not live in town. In the beginning, she thought the women were lazy and that was why they lacked motivation, however after some time she realised that there were not many things available for them. Those activities that did exist were based in the local community and had membership fees, which were deemed too high for most of the residents. This is also consistent with what Lauritsen and Berg (1999) found in their study of reception centres. The time-frame perspective can be quite important for understanding residents. Those residents that have not been long at the reception centre are more likely to be more positive than those that have been there longer (Lauritsen and Berg: 21-22).

Additionally we can use Hage (2003) and his ideas of social hope in order to understand the detachment the women living with a negative feel towards the reception centre. In addition to seeing society as the distributor of social recognition as discussed above, he also sees society as a ‘mechanism’ for distributing hope (Hage 2003:9). Here hope also connects to expectations. If we look back on Vigh (2009) he sees how migrants leave because there is no chance of normality back home, hence, society does not distribute hope. However, as they migrate to Europe they have expectations of a better life, and a society that can distribute hope. Furthermore, Hage finds that because society distributes hope and possibilities of a better future it becomes ‘societal hope’ (Hage 2003:15), as we also found in chapter three in regards to receiving residency after many negatives. Hence, because ‘societal hope’ is connected to society as the distributor, having legal residency becomes a necessity for this hope as discussed earlier. Moreover, building upon Bourdieu, Hage use the concept of ‘social ageing’ where society distributes less and less

opportunities, until it culminates in ‘social death’(Hage 2003:17). Because society does not distribute social hope equally, the amount of hope society distributes is connected to the amount of care its residents feel about society (Hage 2003:3). Hence, we could see that those at the reception centre that have been there for longer will feel less and less hope as the time passes. In this regard, they will feel less care towards the reception centre. Living with a negative can therefore be experienced as a part of ‘social ageing’ towards ‘social death’ where the possibilities are few. The residents that have not been at the reception centre for long is more likely to possess ‘societal hope’ and try to find opportunities and things to do. This is clear with Ronja, and the way she still possesses some care towards the reception centre due to her hope of residency. However, as the months went by, she received her first negative from the UDI. Although she was still trying to fill her days and stay positive or ‘care’ for the reception centre, we can see how she found herself with less ‘societal hope’ and starting the ‘social ageing’ process as she realised that the expectations did not match her experiences.

Hage also makes an important distinction between hoping as a practice and hope as a possession (Hage 2003:10). Hence, as seen in chapter three, the majority of my informants are hoping for a better future to match their expectations but very few actually possess ‘societal hope’, because of their experiences. Hage further argues that societal hope does not have to relate to income but more in regards to an absence of possibilities (Hage 2003: 20). However, for my informants, I sensed that they still have some hope of residency, although as found in chapter three this is more in relation to a religious hope, but not necessarily the negative, passive hope Hage finds. Moreover, the women’s lack of societal hope as such relates to a lack of income and money that could have raised their living standards to their expectations. Whilst higher income would not necessarily bring more hope of residency or social recognition as they would still have limited rights, my informants that lived with a negative emphasised that money was the most important issue. Nevertheless, whilst my informants believe that money was the most pressing issue, it is a fact that in the present situation only residency would have given them more possibilities and thereby more hope. With residency they would have had a better chance at gaining social recognition and hence acquire being in order to ‘have a life’ filled with meaning. Whilst they do of course still hope and pray for residency, the importance of the ‘being’ or social recognition, and a raised living standard is believed to be found in work and money first, and secondly in residency. Which also brings us back to Willen (2007) in regards to how living with a

negative have produced a mode-of-being-in-the-world, so that the negative is foremost believed to be an obstacle to work

The absence of normality and ‘something to do’

Due to the thoughts the women had on life or non-life, I asked about organised activities in order to look for a place where they could find the social recognition they could not get through work or within the church. I quickly learnt that there were very little activities offered to the residents by the reception centre. There was one voluntary organization in the area, which offered some activities; however, most of these were annual, monthly or occasional events. Furthermore, as mentioned earlier, organisations requiring membership fees offered other activities or groups in the surrounding area, and the vast majority of my informants did not really consider them viable due to the financial implications.

Moreover, whilst Ronja claimed that the women were lazy and did not want things to do, Mona was clear that it was because there were no activities that they had nothing to do. She explained that if there had been activities they would attend and find some meaning in the days. Hence, the majority of my informants that were living with negatives did not prefer to stay at home because they wanted to but because they did not think they had another option. My informants explained that the voluntary organisation was very good and had many nice people; however, the arrangements were mostly in the evenings and not during the day when they needed to take their minds off things. Furthermore, my informants saw it as a responsibility of the reception centre to offer activities, because they were there to provide for them. Because the UDI did not let them work, the reception centre should organise something in the absence of normality. They often compared themselves with other reception centres and expressed that their lives should have been better. They often talked about friends who lived other places where the reception centre would offer courses and activities. Hence, as discussed in chapter one, the privatisation and lack of standardisation for reception centre might not always be beneficial and can create tension. In this example, many of my informants saw the lack of things offered compared to other places as a sign that the staff at the reception centre did not care about the residents. This then relates back to Hage (2003) in regards to when the UDI distributes less hope

the residents feel less 'care' and 'affective attachment' towards the reception centre as a substitute for the UDI.

In the absence of normality at the reception centre, the want for something to do becomes great. After two negatives, the UDI deport the majority of the asylum seekers to their country of origin or another European country where they are registered. However, for the ones like Sarah that stay at the reception centre there is very little to do during the days. She does not think the UDI will deport her, but it is not much of a comfort. *At least if we could work or go to school that would be better, only sleep and eat is no life. People could learn handiwork or school, which would be good.* Sarah believes that if she could work or learn something the days would have meaning and not so difficult. Therefore, she feels that the UDI or the reception centre could have provided them with something to do in order to live in a lifelike mode. I believe this is where their emphasis of the lack of activities come in. Whilst the majority of my informants might not be used to organised activities, it is almost the only option they have to live lives that resemble some normality. If activities existed, as they hear about from other reception centre it could help them take their minds off their misery for a moment. In this sense, the want for activities comes from an absence of normality and meaning in their lives. When they cannot go to work or church, as discussed in chapter three, something to fill the days becomes an important issue.

Nevertheless, a lack of meaning to life, or a not having a life as they termed it, is the reality for the vast majority of my informants. They emphasise the lack of influence they have over their everyday lives and hence the inability to live a real and fulfilling life. They would often compare themselves to animals, and the life as just consisting of eat and sleep. However, whilst their description might be comparable to Agamben's homo sacer and 'bare life' (1998), I found many ways in which the women were active participants in their own lives and not just powerless objects without agency, as I shall move on to explain

Resistance in the everyday life

Whilst my informants do not think they have any influence over their own lives I found many situations where I observed them trying to influence decisions made by the reception centre that would affect them. Hence, they might be in the process of ‘social ageing’ we found in Hage (2003) and consequently see life as without hope or influence, but they are not part of ‘social death’ which is no opportunities or influence (Hage 2003: 17). Although their efforts did not necessarily mean that they had any real influence, I noticed that they did not stop trying. One case was especially interesting in regards to how several of the mother’s at the reception centre came together in order to try to solve a problematic decision. In accordance with the UDI requirements, the reception centre offers a place in kindergarten for all children over two years. This might also be because there is no children’s room (barnebase) at the reception centre. Nevertheless, during my fieldwork the mothers at the reception centre received a text message that the reception centre would no longer pay for the food expenses in kindergarten and it had been a mistake paying for it so far. For the children with a full time place this would come to about 400 Norwegian kroner per month. As they already lived with less money compared to other residents due to final negative decisions from the UDI, they felt that having 400 kroner less per month was an impossible expense to live with. Ania told me the next day that she had tried talking with the receptionist. However, it was no help, she had not been given any answers apart from that this was a decision made at the reception centre, she did not know what to do or who to talk to. Furthermore, it was difficult for the women to see a solution, Ania had tried telling the office how she felt and how difficult it would be with the new expense but the reception centre had said they could do nothing. Later the same day, some of the mother’s went to the reception centre together in order to try to find out more. The encounter ended badly with raised voices and both staff and the women were visibly upset, in the end the reception centre staff told the women to leave the premises.

The next day I went to visit Sara and found her together with Sonia and Ania. The women were drinking tea and discussing the incident the previous day. They told me how they had experienced the encounter at the office and how upsetting it had been. Whilst Sonia made it clear that, she found it insulting that the staff accused her of shouting in the office and told her to leave, Ania and Sarah on the other hand, focused on how they had accomplished nothing. *We hoped*

that if we all went together we could solve it; maybe they could see that we cannot afford it. Ania emphasised that she thought people might have spoken too 'hotly' as she called it and that she knew this would not do any good but sometimes it was too difficult to keep calm. Sonia, on the other hand talked about how the staff did not seem to understand how bad the situation would be. *They told me they knew how we felt, that they also had to pay for many things, they said they could not afford new clothes or buy new things for their children that Norway is expensive and they know it is difficult.* For Sonia it was upsetting that the staff thought they knew how she felt. She emphasised that the staff might not have much money, but this would be due to their own priorities. Sarah joined in and talked more about how she would not complain about paying if she had a job and an income. *I want nothing more than to work; I have a negative so I cannot. However, I am here, I live in the camp, if I can live here but not work, they should provide for me.* For all of the women present, it had been very upsetting that the staff had try to explain the decision in terms of Norway being expensive.

Furthermore, in regards to the incident at the office I believe my informants again felt reminded that they did not contribute but only received benefits. Hence, when the staff emphasised that Norway was an expensive country and that they had to pay bills as well and could not afford many things, the women felt embarrassed and inferior as we saw earlier through Mauss (1990). On the one hand, they have very little money to pay for the expenses they do have, and 400 kroner less each month seemed impossible. On the other hand, they also felt embarrassed because they could not work and choose what they wanted to pay for as the staff could. We could say that it made the women feel even more unwelcome in Norway, and not allowed to take part in society or contribute.

Moreover, as mentioned earlier there was already tension between the reception centre and many of the residents with negative decisions, and this case did not improve the relationship. Sonia reacted quite strongly after being rejected at the office and asked to leave. She was quite outspoken about the issue and was wondering if it had been a mistake at all. For some time she would often ask where that money would go, as she explained, the women did not get an invoice from the kindergarten so how would they know if the reception centre did not just take the money themselves. A few of the women started to distrust the reception centre more and became more vocal in regards to the reception centre and financial issues. Whilst this incident might not seem

that important, it became a major issue for the women. In this one case, all the tensions they had with the reception centre came to the light. They felt like the reception centre did not see how difficult life was for them, and that they were just a burden on society and not contributing only receiving. However, being at the receiving end was also hard because they felt that since they were not allowed to contribute they should at least be taken care of to their expectation of the middle-class ideal. This also relates back to the feeling of having to be grateful and unable to reciprocate. I find it likely that the women felt 'inferior' to the staff when the staff reminded them that living in Norway was expensive and Norwegians could not afford much either. In this sense, building on Mauss (1990) the women felt inferior because they only received contributions from the UDI and could not reciprocate. This inferiority then also sparked anger because the women found it unfair that the staff compared themselves to the women.

However, what I found important with this case was the way the women tried to influence resistance and oppose an issue that concerned them and would make their lives worse. Whilst they often complained about their standard and the office at the reception centre, this was the first time I saw them actively trying to influence an issue. This also relates back to chapter one and the UDI regulations that stated that the women should have the possibility to influence issues that concerns them (UDI 2009). As we also noted in chapter two this possibility to influence comes within a strict framework. Within the framework of possibility to influence, we find that this regulation only gives the possibility to influence in the very small space of how to organise their lives inside of the bigger framework that actually concerns them.

Nevertheless, for Sonia, this decision served to worsen her relationship with the reception centre. A while after this she was informed that because her child was not yet four, she was not eligible for a 100% place in the kindergarten, the reception centre had covered it for her but could no longer do this, so her child would be offered a 50% place instead. Although, these financial decisions were probably due to economic concerns within the company, Sonia believed it to be punishment or a way to make their lives even worse. She did not understand how her child could first have a 50% place, then a 100% place and after some time go back to 50%. For my informants, it was very upsetting having what they thought of as rights, taken from them. As discussed through the chapters they often applied a rights discourse of universal rights that connected to their expectations of the Norwegian ideal. For Sonia, this insecurity due to the

financial decision made her not trust the reception centre and she questioned their motives to take money she felt was hers. Whilst she could not alter the reception centre's decision and get the full time place, she could withdraw her child completely from the system and raise him at home. Hence, although she could understand that it would be boring for the child to stay at home every day it was also her only way to show her opposition against the decision. When the reception centre did not give her a space to influence decisions that concerned her, she created her own. She claimed that the child needed routines and a sense of normality, which she could not give when his place in kindergarten was so unstable, how was she to explain to him why he suddenly could not go on certain days and therefore she decided to withdraw him completely from kindergarten. Hence, whereas her expectations of a good middle-class life in Norway is not what she is experiencing, she still managed to find a space of her own to influence an issue that concerned her. Even though it did not alter the overall situation, it still shows that she is not just a passive victim, who is acted upon.

Concluding remarks

Throughout this chapter, I have tried to show how the women's expectancies before arrival are still influential in their everyday lives. However, with this chapter I have tried to link societal hope to expectations. Both hope and expectations as concepts link to society, and how the women experience living with a negative. As I have shown through the chapters, the women had high expectations before arrival. Whilst they are, still hoping to fulfil these, both hope and expectations are diminishing with the experience of living with a negative. Because they expected so much, their lives are accordingly so much worse. I started this chapter by describing the women's thoughts on life at the reception centre. It became clear that they considered it a non-life and were still waiting for the life they had expectations of to happen. In order to interpret this I used Hage (2003) and his reading of Bourdieu and the lack of 'being' as connected to a lack of social recognition. Because the women do not have any opportunities for work or education and do not feel they belong in the church community, there are very few opportunities for gaining social recognition which was part of their expectations of life in Norway. Hence, when society does not give them the social recognition they want, their lives become meaningless. I also stretched Hage's interpretation and made the claim that in order to get social recognition from

society; my informants need the legal recognition from the UDI. Hence, their negative becomes of great importance in how they experience everyday life.

Furthermore, I examined the notion of wanting to work from chapter two further. Through Mauss (1990), I found that my informants do feel inferior to the reception centre, and that being at the weaker end of a power relationship makes receiving financial benefits challenging. However, I also noted that it might not be the dependency part as such that becomes the most challenging part, but that the money from the UDI does not meet their expectations. This was an interesting contradiction where the women claimed to want to provide for themselves whilst also wanting more financial help from the reception centre. Because UDI does not allow them to work and provide for themselves, they expect the UDI or reception centre to care for them to the middle-class ideal their expectancies rest upon. Hence, their expectations before arrival also becomes influential. However, as we have discussed in the previous chapter, expectations are not always 'socially possible' (Vigh 2009), and I highlighted the strict framework the reception centre works within. It is interesting to connect this with my findings from chapter two, where we see how the Norwegian discourse on gender equality emphasise the importance of women's work, both as contributor to society and for economically independence and autonomy. Therefore, I find that for these women residency becomes the only solution, and they hold a belief that with the residency everything will be better. Still, as I discussed earlier through Ong (2003) the expectations do not necessarily meet realities even with legal recognition. Although, as discussed in chapter three, I believe that my informants lives would become more meaningful and bring social recognition if they were granted residency.

Through the issue of time at the reception centre, I went back to Hage and discussed the lack of 'societal hope' due to the negative. I found that the amount of hope distributed directly connects to how the women experience relations with the reception centre, and looked into how 'societal hope' is distributed unequally in regards to their legal status. Moreover, I looked into how the absence of normality comes to show in the want of organised activities. Although I do not think, it is activities in themselves they desire, but more the need for normality, and something to keep them occupied or busy for some time. Hence, whilst the decentralised layout of reception centre might be more normalising than the institutionalised centres, they also highlight the absence of normality within a 'normalising' structure. Lastly, I tried to examine

how the women have their strategies of opposing the reception centre policy and hence influence issues that concerns them. Whilst the case highlighted the unequal power relationship and further emphasised the inferiority of the women in relation to the staff, it also shows how the women oppose decisions within a limited space. It is also important to note how the women did not believe that the staff at the reception centre could struggle with own expenses. Whilst a comparison between legal residents and those living with a negative might not be acceptable, it shows how much the women believe in the norm of the middle-class ideal. For the women the idea that Norwegians can struggle with expenses and money seemed impossible. Hence, their expectations of legal life in Norway does not necessarily always fit with the reality. However, they know little about this reality due to their limited lives at the reception centre where they imagine Norwegian life according to their expectations. The case also highlight that the women are not passive victims that will endure everything. Whilst they do struggle with everyday life they also carve their own space where they manage, oppose and come together in everyday life. Nevertheless, I believe the chapter has shown that there is a discrepancy between what the women had expectations of in regards to live in Norway and at the reception centre, and what they experience.

Chapter 5- Concluding Remarks

In order to draw this thesis to a conclusion I will tie together the different chapters and examine my findings. I intend to show how I have looked into the relationship between expectations and experiences through the categories of gender, religion and life. The conclusion chapter, will start by looking into what I have tried to accomplish through the chapters- I shall then move on to briefly discuss the theoretical framework that has been presented through the chapters. This part will not examine one chapter at a time, as I believe they tie together and should be examined as a whole. Lastly, I move on to discuss my main findings through the chapters.

As I made clear in the introduction, this thesis has not been an attempt to provide a full ethnography of women living with a negative, or to find 'the truth'. The thesis has used the women's experiences as they explained them to me, and presented their interpretations of living with a negative in a Norwegian reception centre situation. I would also like to highlight the importance the women placed on my research. Similar to what Ong (2003) found with her Cambodian refugees, the female asylum seekers with a negative wanted people to hear their stories. In regards to this sharing of stories, Ong quotes one of her informants explaining 'so that the Americans know we suffer' (Ong 2003: xvi). However, as with my informants, the woman quoted by Ong did not only mean the suffering from the war, but also the difficulties they had in being included in the American society (ibid). Hence, as I have shown through comparisons, there are similarities in the different ways the Cambodian refugees were trying to become 'good enough citizens' (Ong 2003: xvii) and the way my informants wanted to become included in the Norwegian society.

The theoretical framework of this thesis has drawn upon Vigh (2009) and his theorising in terms of the motivations migrants have, and how they often migrate because the discrepancy between the 'socially possible and culturally expected' are too great. He links this to situations of 'social death' in their home countries, and how their imaginaries of a better life elsewhere instead becomes a reality, as undocumented migrants on the streets of Europe (Vigh 2009). Whilst my informants are in a better situation than most irregular migrants in southern Europe are, their expectations have also been shattered. Although they receive some financial help and have a

place to stay, the life they experience is far from their expectations. Hence, as I explained through Willen, in the introduction, they do have a mode-of-being-in-the-world (Willen 2007), that connects to their negative. This mode-of-being-in-the-world have come to the fore throughout the chapters, in the ways they withdraw from society due to lack of hope and meaning. It further plays out in the ways they have come to believe that residency will solve all the problems because it is imagined in a specific way, and in the ways they perceive the reception centre compared to other residents without a negative. Moreover, this mode-of-being-in-the-world brings about it a line of thinking that sees their lives as non-lives, most of all their lives has come to consist of waiting for something to happen, or for someone to give them ‘something to do’. They liken themselves to animals and ‘bare life’ (Agamben 1998) and close to death. These thoughts correlates with Hage and his concept of ‘social death’, which is when possibilities and opportunities are non-existent (Hage 2003:17). However, as I shall move on to explain, the women at the reception centre still managed to create spaces of their own within the limited framework that existed for influence over their own lives.

What I also interpreted through Hage was the lack of social recognition as an explanation for the lack of meaning in life. We saw in chapter two that they are told about gender-equality but not allowed any real equality or influence, and did not have enough money in order to receive recognition through consumption (Skeggs 1997). In chapter three, I found that whilst they could have found social recognition within the Christian community they felt excluded due to their negative and withdrew from an arena that could have served as a place to find social recognition through shared faith. Lastly, I found that life becomes without meaning because they are not allowed to work and without legal recognition, there are no arenas where they can find social recognition in order to find the inclusion they had expected. Moreover, hope, have also been of importance in this thesis in order to interpret the women’s feelings towards life in their situation, but also in relation to how they act and think about the reception centre and the UDI. Where Hage finds that society distributes hope unequally towards its residents, I stretched this notion and saw the UDI as a distributor of hope for the women through the reception centre. Whilst I found that the women needed the legal recognition before they could aspire to achieve social recognition, they found hope of residency through UDI reversal of negative decision. Hence, the UDI as a distributor of hope then create new expectations and thoughts of hope with the women that residency is possible.

Nevertheless, I believe the main findings in this thesis are the way the women's expectations of life in Norway does not match their experience, and that there is a discrepancy in this relationship. Furthermore, I have highlighted in chapter two that their expectations rests upon a middle-class ideal that is not attainable for all. Especially within a reception centre context, these expectations are not socially possible. Their expectations are also promoted through the way authorities describes 'the Norwegian way', although this specific ideal is not the reality for all Norwegians either. Moreover, I found that the shared Christianity between the women and Norway became an important in how they had expectations of inclusion. Within this religion served to create Muslims as the 'other' unworthy of residency. Whilst shared religion with staff bettered the relationship between residents without a negative and staff, it could also be problematic for those living with a negative in terms of what a 'proper' Christian should do. However, the main finding in chapter three was seeing how shared religion did not become an arena for inclusion and social recognition, but a way for the women to deal with their negative individually through prayer. Furthermore, chapter four highlights the situation of living with a negative and how life becomes, when the women's expectations do not become reality. Here I found that life consisted of very little and was not considered as 'having a life' they felt powerless and let down by the Norwegian society.

However, I have found throughout the chapters, that the women have their own ways of dealing with their situation. Such as creating their own forum for debating personal issues when the space they got from the reception centre were not plausible. In addition, religion became important as a way to find meaning in life and the hope that they one day will be rewarded. Furthermore, their faith also served as a coping mechanism in enduring life by pointing to those that had received a positive after many rejections. Lastly, we have seen that even though the women did not have any real influence in decisions or issues that concerned them, they resisted and opposed through withdrawal, which is the only space they have. Hence, although there is a major discrepancy between their expectations and their experience, I believe I have shown that although the women are in a difficult situation they are still able to create a space of their own in order to oppose decisions that influenced their lives.

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