

TRANSNATIONAL PRACTICES OF IRREGULAR MIGRANTS AND NATION-STATE MANAGEMENT IN NORWAY

Abstract

Most research on irregular migrants in the Scandinavian countries takes an exclusive nation-state focus in the study of how irregular migrants' everyday lives are structured and shaped. In this article, I add a transnational lens and explicitly focus on how their irregularity shapes the transnational social fields that they make use of and transform. Including a transnational gaze draws attention towards how irregular migrants' agency in Norway is not merely defined by the state's various technologies of control. Transnational kinship and social networks facilitate and shape their continued existence as irregular migrants and profoundly affect decisions to stay, return or continue their migration. They open up possibilities and spaces in which the state is restrained in its potential for exercising power and control mobility and irregularity in its territory. At the same time, however, these transnational practices are structured, shaped and transfigured by the nation-states' management of migrants as irregular.

Keywords

irregular migrants • transnationalism • nation-state • kinship • social network

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Introduction

During the past 10 years, irregular migration has become a priority issue for European Union (EU) migration policy. The effort by the EU and its member states, including the European Economic Area (EEA) member state Norway, to control legal and 'illegal' migration includes laws and policies that restrict welfare provisions and rights (internal border control), Frontex border management and external management of borders pursued through policies targeting third countries, such as in the Return Directive (2008), and development policies. In the past decade, the Norwegian state has limited the rights and access to healthcare for irregular migrants, increased control of the labour market and developed various assisted return programmes (ARPs) in order to 'motivate' irregular migrants to return or leave the territory as soon as possible (Bendixsen, Kjærre & Ytre-Arne 2014; Strand *et al.* 2011). Together with the emergence of specialised detention facilities that expedite deportation and various deterrence campaigns that aim to make Norway less attractive to migrants, such practices are central in shaping the conditions of 'illegal' or irregular migrants.

One consequence of this reproduction and contestation of sovereign borders is that the migrants' long-held transnational practices, in particular material ones, are more difficult to pursue (Glick Schiller 2018; Nyberg Sørensen 2018). While the reproduction of border constructions affects everyone, citizens and non-citizens,

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migrants and non-migrants, they have particular effects on irregular migrants and their scope of action as they are in a more precarious situation for exploitation due to their (il)legal status, being to various degrees deportable and lacking certain rights.

Despite the Norwegian nation-state's intensified effort to expel them, irregular migrants continue to live in Norway. They continue to pursue transnational practices, even though the character of these practices might change. Research in Norway and generally in Scandinavia, however, has so far mainly approached the topic of irregular migration from an exclusive nation-state perspective, in the sense that the nation-state is viewed as *the* analytical unit. The emphasis of existing research is on how irregular migrants' precarious lives are shaped by laws, regulations, the welfare state gatekeepers' practices and the negative discourses that construct them as 'illegal'.

This article investigates how irregular migrants are involved in transnational practices in order to provide a fuller understanding of irregular migrants' everyday lives and scope of actions in Norway and the effects of the nation-state power. A transnational perspective in this field implies the recognition that a perspective on the national should always also be transnational. As some of the theorisation of transnational migration in the 1990s indicated (Basch, Glick Schiller & Blanc-Szanton 1994), transnational practices must be seen in relation to global capital, as well as in relation to the various efforts of the nation-state to control migration. Irregular migrants in Norway have so

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far mostly been studied from a 'victim of the state' perspective, which presents irregular migrants as victims of nation-state laws, policies and welfare state institutional mechanism and without much control over their lives or possibilities to improve their situation. While most of these studies to some extent recognise the agency of irregular migrants, their explorations overemphasise the power of the state and ignore how irregular migrants engage in transnational practices. The exclusive nation-state focus also contributes to an analytical polarisation of the national and transnational dimension instead of contributing to a broader understanding of the operations of power. Explorations of the dynamics of irregularity need to take into account national policies and transnational cooperation, links, treaties as well as practices. In this article, I seek to add a transnational perspective by examining the complex configuration of transnational grassroots practices and the nation-state's effort to control and manage irregular migration.

The following three research questions are here central: How are transnational practices shaped by the migrants' irregular status? What role do transnational practices play in the decision to either continue living as an irregular in Norway or to leave? In which ways does exploring the transnational practices of irregular migrants allow us to better understand the state's power, sovereignty and its limitations to control its borders? I draw from interviews and fieldwork with irregular migrants in Oslo and Bergen to answer these questions.

The paper contains three main parts. After a short discussion on method, the first part briefly discusses literature on irregular migration in Scandinavia in order to highlight the gaps in our understanding about the interrelation of irregular migration, transnationalism and the state. The second draws on ethnographic data on the transnational practices of irregular migrants in Norway to provide empirical support to begin addressing this gap. I focus here on transnational kinship and transnational social networks. Although their relevance and strength in everyday life changed over time, these relationships and interactions were of the most important kind among the irregular migrants I interviewed. The final part of the paper links these findings to the question of how the transnational practices of irregular migrants are complexly linked to the power of the state. It suggests how the transnational practices pursued by irregular migrants are affected, constituted and configured by the state.

Method and Sample

The data for this article is derived from fieldwork and interviews with irregular migrants living in Bergen and Oslo, Norway (2011–2014). During this period, I spoke with >80 irregular migrants, around 75% of them male, of various ages and from a variety of ethnic and national backgrounds, including Afghanistan, Iraq, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia, Sri Lanka and the Philippines. Generally, around one-third of the total asylum seekers in Norway are women (see www.udi.no), with gender differences according to the country of origin. Differentiating over time and depending on the country of origin, there is a tendency of a higher acceptance rate among women asylum seekers than men. Consequently, one can expect more men than women to end up as irregular.

Contacts with the irregular migrants were made in various ways: through the Healthcare Centre for Paperless in Oslo, approaching individuals at public demonstrations organised by irregular migrants, through voluntary organisations that were working for irregular migrants' rights as well as through reception centres and individual gatekeepers in ethnic communities. The semi-structured interviews

lasted from 1 hour to 3 hours. In focus were questions on their everyday life in Norway, including health, housing, family, economy and social relations. I met with some migrants several times. I also conducted fieldwork with irregular migrants who lived in a tent camp in Oslo city to demonstrate against the Norwegian government. There, I observed and participated in the demonstrators' daily life.

Among the irregular migrants I interviewed, almost all had become irregular migrants as a consequence of having their asylum application rejected and having not left Norway within the given deadline. Some had arrived in Norway alone, while others had arrived with their families. As the asylum process can take a relatively long time, a majority of the migrants had lived in Norway for >2 years before they were categorised as irregular migrants. Those I interviewed had lived in Norway between 1 and 20 years.

Estimates suggest that there are between 10,000 and 58,000 migrants living as irregulars in Norway (*Oslo Economics* 2014). 'Irregular migrant' is not a group-defining term but a legal category that affects people's lives differently. Their legal status may change: migrants may be regularised or also become irregularised due to changes in the law or personal status, i.e. marriage.

The category 'irregular migrant' also includes those who have overstayed their visa or entered the country illegally without a visa. The concept and experience of illegal immigration is multifaceted, experienced differently depending on gender, age, country of origin and ethnicity; it changes over time, and varies from one country to another. Living as an irregular migrant in Norway is different from living as an irregular in the USA or in Southern European countries, because the governments of these states operate differently. In many countries, such as Italy, Germany, France and the UK, irregular migrants are, to a certain extent, unskilled migrants who play an important part in the informal labour market and thus are economically needed but socially undesirable. Ethnographic studies suggest that living as an 'illegal' in an encompassing 'universal' welfare state such as Sweden or Norway is harder than in states with more extended parallel social services (Khosravi 2010). However, within the Norwegian nation-states, being an irregular is also differently composed depending on, for instance, access to social networks and relationships to kin, but it is also shaped by educational background, gender and language skills.

The Nation-State Frame of Studies on Irregular Migrants in Scandinavia

In Norway, as well as in other Scandinavian countries, a high number of studies on irregular migrants take the highly regulated welfare state as the starting point of their research, examining the consequences for irregular migrants' lives and agency resulting from the nation-states' practices of territorial sovereignty (Khosravi 2010; Sager 2011; Sigvardsdottir 2012; Thomsen *et al.* 2010). Notably, some research engages in a policy perspective analysis of irregular migration, examining policy content at national, Scandinavian, European and global levels (Jørgensen 2012; Jørgensen & Meret 2010; Kalm 2010). Here, I briefly discuss approaches to irregular migration that consider the various aspects of irregular migrant's lives, i.e. healthcare, living and working conditions, as well as survival strategies. In these studies, the lives of irregular migrants are analysed in a legally centred state approach, i.e. their authors examine how irregular migrants are excluded in the various Scandinavian societies because they lack rights, and how they have trouble accessing healthcare and welfare state services (Bendixsen,

Jacobsen & Søvig 2015; Karlsen 2015; Kjærre 2010; Sager 2011; Sigvardsdottir 2012; Thomsen *et al.* 2010).

Several of these scholars make use of the theorisation of the state of exception and the conceptual apparatus of 'bare life' – as developed by Giorgio Agamben (1998) – to cast light on how the excluded position of irregular migrants is a condition that is very much embedded in the modern liberal democracy (Jacobsen 2015; Karlsen 2015; Sager 2011; Sigvardsdottir 2012). These scholars show how the nation-state's way of dealing with irregular migrants living in its territory is entangled with its effort to control the borders and to discourage potential migrants from coming (Bendixsen, Jacobsen & Søvig 2015; Karlsen 2015). In these studies, irregular migrants are considered as precariously included (Karlsen 2015) or simultaneously absent and present (Sigvardsdottir 2012) in the welfare state because of the nation-state's legal and social construction of the irregular migrant.

Research has also discussed how the welfare states' gatekeepers, through restricting access to welfare services, are implicated in internal migration control, as well as in the production and safeguarding of state borders inside the nation-state's territory (Karlsen 2015). The Swedish and the Norwegian welfare states are universalistic, comprehensive and characterised by digitised administrative routines, and, in consequence, these societies are particularly difficult environments in which to be undocumented (Jacobsen 2015; Karlsen 2015; Khosravi 2010; Sigvardsdottir 2012). Scholars have also argued that the close relations between individuals, organisations and the state in Sweden and Norway make it harder to get by for those who are excluded from public welfare state arrangements, partly because there are not many parallel institutions that irregular migrants may use instead of the public services (Karlsen 2015; Khosravi 2010).

These and other studies on irregular migrants in Scandinavia have importantly contributed to denaturalising irregularity and drawn attention to how irregularity is constructed and defined by the nation-states' sovereign power, the law as well as the bureaucratic gatekeepers' practices. They have also explored what it specifically means to be an irregular in a Scandinavian welfare state. Nonetheless, they risk an overemphasis on the power of the nation-state in shaping the irregular migrants' lives and scope of action. While some of these works frame irregularity globally, transnationally and nationally, many of their empirical analyses focus mainly on irregular migrants' experiences in relation to state institutions.

The concept of transnationalism was formulated as going beyond the national lens in its research approach to migration, without denying the power of states on migrants' practices (Basch, Glick Schiller & Blanc-Szanton 1994). It emphasised how migrants are not 'uprooted' but rather embrace belonging and forms of loyalties that are not situated in one localised place that has typically been defined as 'home', thus challenging how we think about the configuration of geographic space and social identity (Basch, Glick Schiller & Blanc-Szanton 1994; Faist, Fauser & Reisenauer 2013; Glick Schiller, Basch, & Szanton Blanc 1995; Koser & Al-Ali 2002). Transnational migrants participate in the production of social fields that transverse geographic, cultural and political borders (Basch, Glick Schiller & Blanc-Szanton 1994: 7). Research on migrants and transnationalism in the 1980s and 1990s did include data on undocumented or irregular migrants and their transnational practices, yet their irregularity was not the focus of the analysis. This must be seen in light of the fact that the conditions of movement have changed: while borders were more porous during the 1990s, migration realities today are characterised by strict border enforcement and migration

policies, changing the conditions of transnational lives (Glick Schiller 2018; Nyberg Sørensen 2018). Migration control has expanded and become more intensive, and there is an increase in the use of deportation, detention, deterrence and returns in Europe and the USA. Yet, one should not overemphasise the extent to which EU migration controls migrants' ways of moving (Andersson 2014; Papadopoulos, Stephenson & Tsianos, 2008). How to be mobile spreads rapidly through social media (Bloch, Sigona & Zetter 2014). The digital age has changed both the potential of and the challenges to territorial power, as well as the way in which the various localities between which migrants move are connected. Further, Godfried and Broeders (2009) for instance, have showed how the Dutch state counters irregular migrant's strategies producing a constant struggle, in which irregular migrants and state actors respond to each other with different strategies.

In the next section, I discuss two types of transnational social fields among irregular migrants, which shape their lives as irregular migrants in Norway: 1) *transnational kinship groups*; and 2) *transnational social networks*. Each of these fields is characterised by different ties that bind people together across borders. While the migrants are part of other transnational social fields, such as political ones, I focus on these two types because of their relevance to how irregular migrants manoeuvre their everyday lives in Norway.

Transnational Social Fields

Transnational Kinship Groups

Past research has suggested how the family can serve as a protector against state policies, facilitating the survival of individuals in a transnational field (Basch, Glick Schiller & Blanc-Szanton 1994), and can also involve the obligations of remittances to or sponsoring of migration of relatives (Rubenstein 1987). Economic transnational practices such as remittances seemed to be relatively uncommon among the rejected asylum seekers I interviewed. The main reason was a lack of income. Many had only informal work (which paid little) or had no work at all, "because it is illegal" and it could hamper their possibility to receive a positive outcome to their regularisation process. Their survival economy was sometimes supplemented by their family members in the country of origin, who supported them financially during their time spent waiting for the outcomes of their asylum procedures, sometimes with the hope that once legalised, they would later be able to pay them back and that once settled, they would send remittances home.

Generally, transnational kinship relations were less about reciprocity and remittances and more about affective and psychological well-being. For most, the intensity, affection and meaning of social interaction with the family changed through the migration process. One male migrant expressed a yearning for his parents and village, explaining as follows: 'But actually, I love the smell of my mother'. This was also the case with many young Iraqi men I interviewed: some returned home through the governmentally funded ARP as organised by the International Organisation of Migration (IOM) when their close relatives were seriously ill, or because they missed their families after a long absence (Strand *et al.* 2011). One Afghan youth, Ghaffar,¹ had lived in Iran since he was a small boy; his parents were now dead, and he had no recollection of Afghanistan. He signed up with ARP because his sister, who lived in Iran, had convinced him that he should return to Afghanistan (which is where the Norwegian state would return him to) and then later travel to Iran to live with her.

“She says they will help me to get married and to find a job there”, he explained. To Ghaffar, his family links were his primary source of future orientation and reason to leave Norway, although no money flows existed between them.

Limited or no transnational social interaction with the family could, on the other hand, contribute to a decision to continue living as an irregular instead of returning or leaving Norway. For example, a wife and daughter had become a transnational family because the husband had returned to Russia through ARP. While the wife had planned to follow him with their daughter some weeks later, this plan changed after she lost contact with him in Russia. She worried that he had been arrested and about what would happen to her and her daughter if they returned. The uncertain situation she would face in the home city, in contrast to the daughter’s current and future educational possibilities in Norway, contributed finally to the mother withdrawing her ARP application. The lack of knowledge on her husband’s whereabouts and lack of transnational interaction with him increased the woman’s doubt about returning. She considered living as an irregular migrant as safer than returning.

In the Netherlands, van Meeteren (2012) argues that an irregular migrant’s aspirations (to be legalised, to settle or to return with economic investment possibilities) affect the trajectories of social interaction and collaborations in which he or she engages (see also van Meeteren, Engbersen & van San 2009). Strained relationships with family and friends in the country of origin can sometimes explain why migrants continue to live as irregulars, even if their living conditions appear to be less than optimal from the perspective of the host country’s residents. In my research, I saw that migrants’ aspirations sometimes changed with time, i.e. from seeking regularisation to signing up with ARP after they had lost hope that the government would change their legal status, the waiting time became too overwhelming, something unexpected occurred at home or they missed their families. One irregular migrant from Iraqi Kurdistan decided to return, he explained, because his mother had died 2 years ago, without him being able to see her one last time.

In contrast, irregular migrants who had no aspiration to become legalised but aimed to stay temporarily in order to earn money in Norway and work for upward social mobility in their country of origin were those who supported their families in the country of origin the most – either through sending regular remittances or by saving the money until they returned. For those few I interviewed with no intention of staying in Norway, but whose plan was to return to the family in the home country when they had acquired the necessary financial means for future investment in their country of origin, remittance to family was a key focus of life in Norway. For example, one irregular migrant from the Philippines had decided to sign up with ARP when he had fulfilled his main purpose of migration.² He had lived as an irregular migrant in Norway for 18 years, recycling bottles and sending remittances home. Through his one-man entrepreneurship, he had been able to finance his two daughters’ university degrees in the Philippines (Bendixsen & Lidén 2017; Lidén 2017). His transnational social relations and obligations had shaped his decision to stay despite the hardship as an irregular migrant. Now he was ready to go back to what he still considered as home – and he expected that because of his extensive remittances, his social position at home would have improved. He could use the assets and education that his children had obtained at home through his work in Norway to improve their class positioning back home. Such a moral economy defined by family values at home (also see Basch, Glick Schiller & Blanc-Szanton 1994; Glick Schiller & Fouron 2001; Olwig 2011) is not only the main reason for leaving the home country

but, in some cases, also an important part of migrants maintaining transnational ties so that they can go back.

Because of their illegal status and position, their opportunities to earn an income were limited to participation in low-paid informal labour. In some cases, this affected the transnational kinship relations. For many their contact with family was mainly affectional. Yet, this emotional contact with the family was also shaped by their irregularity: some avoided explaining their living conditions to family at home, because they were too ashamed or were afraid that their family would dismiss them as lazy or failures. For example, Abdullah, a 30-year-old irregular migrant from Palestine, told me that he limited his phone calls home because he was tired of his mother’s constant questioning as to whether he had finally married: “I am the eldest son, so she really wants me to get married. She always says that if I would just marry then she would not be that worried.”

Skype and social media were common ways for migrants to contact family or friends in their country of origin. In some instances, migrants’ ready access to the Internet did not facilitate transnational family connections: sometimes, family members were difficult to locate due to political persecution or war, while others were afraid that contact would put family members in danger. For Abdullah, the telephone calls home increased stress because he felt he could not live up to his mother’s expectations. As the calls did not provide any emotional support, he called home less frequently than his mother would have liked him to. He had also restricted his contact with friends and former co-students on social media (Facebook, etc.) because “they have come so far – work, house, marriage. And I have nothing.” As a consequence of his irregular status, his reduced contact with home and friends abroad increased his determination to not return but become legalised in Norway.

Migrants’ kinship relations shaped their decision either to continue an irregular life in Norway or another European state, or to return. Transnational kinship relations can take different forms, depending on migrants’ future aspirations, economic and structural opportunities, as well as emotional connections. Overall, the content of the transnational kinship ties were shaped by the migrants’ particular situation: those who invested in home with the aim of returning engaged more in economic transnational practices, depending on their economic situation in Norway, and those that sought to become legalised saved their meagre income for future survival.

Transnational Social Networks

The role of social networks as social facilitators and in overcoming the structural constraints of migration (e.g. Bakewell *et al.* 2016), including reducing the costs of migration (e.g. Castells 2010) and their relevance in the decision-making on migration moves (Marouf 2017), is unquestioned. Transnational social networks (including co-ethnics as well as non-co-ethnic employers, recruitment agents, etc.) play an important part in irregular migrants’ various survival tactics or practices (Bloch, Sigona & Zetter. 2014).

For more than a decade, network analysis has mapped relations of assistance (Lourenco-Lindell 2002), yet research frequently overlooks these networks’ complex mechanisms, purposes and limitations (Suter 2012). Structural constraints and internal power relations shape the resources that the various networks can offer, the complex character of social relations (exploitative, frail or supportive) within these networks and the various scopes of action that such networks facilitate (Suter 2012). Due to the irregular migrant’s precarious subject position as ‘illegal’, this also means that the

access to, as well as the use and potentiality of, a person's social network operates differently compared to those who have regularised their status.

Among the irregular migrants I interviewed, transnational social networks were important during their route to Europe (also see Bloch, Sigona & Zetter 2014), as they provided knowledge about where to apply for asylum, which routes to choose and how to move. For example, a Kurdish friend with a German passport once asked me to post a mobile phone from Norway to Brussels. He had received the mobile phone from a refugee living in a Syrian refugee camp in Iraqi Kurdistan, which he had visited for work-related purposes. The mobile phone was to be addressed to a Kurdish irregular migrant in Brussels who had left Iraq a couple of months earlier but had not wanted to bring his phone along on the dangerous journey.

Social networks also facilitate the mobility of young, irregular male migrants between Schengen countries in order to work or to receive papers in Italy – as this was long regarded as a country where obtaining papers was relatively easy (also see Bloch, Sigona & Zetter 2014). After having coffee with Hasan, for instance, we suddenly bumped into John, who had been in Italy for some paperwork and had then returned to work for a while in Norway. This was possible because of his extended network of friends and acquaintances situated at different locations in the Schengen area. 'Irregularity' is thus also constructed through networks and social movements of migrants – as well as citizens – assembled in Europe, sometimes through explicitly resisting or circumventing border control in nation-states and in the EU. In these networks, knowledge and information, for instance about the possibility to marry an EU or EEA citizen in Sweden and potentially move back to Norway after a period of 2 years as regularised, are widely shared.

Social networks might play a large role in providing information on and access to where to find work and housing. For example, Mongolian migrants had a generally well-established network of people in which family and friends facilitated their access to work, which was cleaning white, upper-middle-class homes in Oslo. The existence of informal labour markets and irregular economic migration to Norway from Mongolia drew on an available labour niche for this group. Such transnational labour recruitment networks, which connect employers and individuals of a particular migrant background, exist in most other European societies (see, e.g. Ambrosini 2013), as well as in the USA among farmers and undocumented farmworkers from Mexico and elsewhere. Through the use of transnational networks, some Mongolians in Norway have been able to circumvent the EU's and the Norwegian state's policies, which have, since the 1970s, complicated the legal entrance of economic migrants from third countries. Having no intention to apply for asylum, individuals in this group tended to return home when they had collected sufficient means, and a relative or friend from Mongolia would replace them. The irregular legal status of these workers shaped their working conditions and rights, made it difficult for them to establish a family while in Oslo and prevented their access to public healthcare.

Many irregular migrants from Iraqi Kurdistan, as another example, had a large range of work opportunities because they had an extensive social network in Oslo upon which they could draw. Their social relations to people in Norway were in some cases shaped by their family and friendship links in their home country. Migrants who re-returned from Iraq to Norway through irregular means (after having first returned through Assisted Return or forced return) again worked, for instance, in a brother's friend's restaurant.

Most migrants had developed a broad social network in the reception centre where they had lived. A social network facilitated to

move out of the reception centre, either after having been rejected – and thus fearing deportation – or because they wanted to start earning money.³ I asked one Ethiopian man, Daniat, who was very active in a church community, how he had come to know about this particular religious community. Daniat answered:

It's very normal, you know. When I came to my *mottak* [reception centre], I met a guy. He is from Ethiopia, he's Oromo [an ethnic group that has faced land confiscation from the Ethiopian government], he's a Christian. We just talked to each other. Where are you from? He said: 'I come from Ethiopia.' I asked: Are you Christian? He said: 'I'm a Christian. Yeah.' And then, you know, finally we know each other. And then we tried to pray together in the reception centre. And then when he got 'a positive' [answer], he got out of the reception centre – moved to the city. So we decided to preach the gospel in the town.

Another Ethiopian irregular migrant, Tadesse, moved from the reception centre, after having lived there for 13 months, to Oslo before he had received his negative answer on his application. I asked him:

Synnøve: And did you know anyone in Oslo?

Tadesse: Before me, my friends were here. We had met in the *mottak* [reception centre], we lived in the reception centre at the same time. And they came to Oslo before me to get a job and they got a job here. And I came here after that.

Synnøve: You heard that they had a job?

Tadesse: Yeah. I heard. And they had a house and I came here to stay with my friends. Also to find a job. And then after I find a job and I rent a house. I just start my life.

As long as the state did not deport them, the role of the social network, which in the case of Tadesse was partly formed in the reception centre, made it possible for many to continue living in Norway. While social networks enabled their lives as irregular migrants in Norway, many still experienced the sovereign border in their everyday lives, e.g. when they would be denied healthcare at the Emergency Care Unit and in terms of their fear of being deported (Bendixsen, Jacobsen & Søvig 2015). Additionally, their irregularity affected the formation of their social network as well as how individuals made friendships and maintained love relationships: some broke up with their girlfriends because "it could never be serious" as they could not marry before they were regularised.⁴ Some talked about having to lie to new acquaintances about their irregularity out of shame or of fear that the new friends would stop seeing them. One young Iranian man, Amir, mentioned being thrown out of bars or restaurants at night when out with friends because he did not have a valid ID proving that he was above the age regulations at any place that sold alcohol.

Some migrants argued that their illegal status made others uncomfortable, or expressed that because their asylum application had been rejected, while their friends' had been accepted, the relationships with these individuals had changed; their life directions had taken different paths, which made continued friendship unviable. For example, Abdullah, cited above, emphasised that he did not want to "marry for papers" but for love and had sought to find someone in the mosque who would accept him as a son-in-law. However, although he was highly recognised in that religious social space because of his higher education and pious behaviour (regularly visiting the mosque, praying and fasting during Ramadan, not smoking or drinking), no

one would marry their daughter to him because of his irregular status in Norway, according to him.⁵

A transnational social network defined on the basis of ethnicity not only represented opportunities but could also signify a threat towards irregular migrants' well-being and safety in Norway. Such threat or fear was linked to how that particular network in Norway was connected politically to their original state. For example, many politically active Ethiopians distrusted people in their social and political network, or segments thereof. Being convinced that representatives from the Ethiopian government participated in their protests in Oslo in disguise made several migrants worried, and it added to a lack of trust towards their co-ethnics. One man explained to me:

We know there are many people who work for the Ethiopian authorities here in Oslo. [...] But it is not written on their foreheads, so you have to be careful. We do not know who is. But the Norwegian police and Norwegian authorities have said that the Ethiopian people have spies.

Fear of transnational spies shaped how they behaved towards their co-ethnics in Norway, on decisions to mobilise politically and how they talked about personal issues, including return. This atmosphere of distrust also influenced the decision to not sign up with ARP because they thought other Ethiopians would consider them as spies and not 'real refugees' if they did so.

Consciously avoiding members of their ethnic group, some sought a different social environment, such as a church community or with Norwegian activists, because they felt distrusted or no longer accepted after their asylum application had been rejected. Embracing a social network that consisted of Norwegian citizens also made, for some, their struggle to have their asylum application reassessed and ultimately changed to positive more feasible. In addition to know-how and a social network of citizens, migrants with extensive Norwegian network also came to know Norwegian society better as well as the cultural and social content of what it would mean to be a 'good citizen', which they voiced in public demonstrations against the Norwegian government's treatment of them.

An irregular migrant's dependency on a social network, whether or not these connections were based on shared destiny or mutual benefit, carried with it vulnerabilities should the individual be exploited, sexually or in terms of dangerous and exploitative work by members of their network. My findings support past research that suggest that social relationships and social networks of the same ethnic group do not prevent mistreatment and abuse (see, e.g. Suter 2012). While some of these social networks can be understood as being transnational, others were more nationally oriented (existing inside Norway with few linkages outside that nation-state). Overall, their networks were shaped by the migrants' irregularity. Simultaneously, these networks played great importance in their decision-making in terms of which next step to take, for instance whether to return or continue living as an irregular.

The Nexus between Transnational Social Relations and the State

The practices performed by irregular migrants who risk deportation transcend national boundaries and demonstrate how perspectives on the nation-state must include transnational perspectives. By examining these practices, the limitation of the state to 'motivate' or

'push' migrants out of their territory through various technologies of control at the border, through deportation politics and ARP, as well as through welfare state bureaucrats, become more observable. While forced return is harder to avoid (some seek church asylum in order to avoid deportation, and, so far, the Norwegian government has largely respected this institution by not entering the church with police), it can also be counteracted by re-returning to Norway and finding work in the informal labour market through their kinship group or social network again, as some migrants did. Transnational families and social networks open up possibilities in spaces in which the state is restrained in its potential for exercising power and in its potential to control mobility and irregularity. These practices are neither anti-state nor anti-institutional forms of resistance nor are they necessarily part of negotiating or contesting the nation-state (see Garapich 2016 for a discussion on anti-state resistance through the transnational practices of Polish migrants): a majority of the irregular migrants seek to gain legal permission to stay in the Norwegian state. But as long as they are not granted this permission, transnationalism is a way to get by – to bypass the state's power – through which they are simultaneously becoming embedded in it.

To some extent, transnational practices are ordinary ways of being a family, friend and social person in a migratory situation. In the context of the increased enforcement of border regimes, irregular migrants' use of transnational practices and social networks challenge, directly and indirectly, the state's control of (ir)regularity. Keeping transnational relations through emotional contact, as well as through remittances, is part of many migrants' future plan to, at one point, return. For others, transnational practices are part of everyday survival in a nation-state where they are living illegally. For yet others, their transnational practices are part of an identity politics and facilitate the continuation of the political work that they did before migrating.

The configuration of transnationalism among irregular migrants suggests the role of the state in shaping such ties: ultimately, these are transnational ties that are produced and maintained not despite the state's productive force, but because of it, and the nation-state's governmentality affects their constellation and character. Moreover, these practices are very much situated within the state's configuration of power. Transnational relations as pursued by irregular migrants, be they affective, economic or in terms of access to labour, are shaped by the nation-state's power to define, govern and structure people who are irregular.

Conclusion

This article has examined how mobility, everyday life and return decisions by irregular migrants in Norway are pursued within a complex dynamic of affective, economic and social transnational connections, intersecting conditions both in the country of origin (or a third country) and the country of living. It has emphasised how the lives of irregular migrants and their transnational practices are intrinsically linked to the sovereign power of the nation-state.

Its transnational analytical approach has provided new insights into how irregular migrants' lives and agency are not only shaped by the state's efforts to control migration, but also by the migrants' capacities and opportunities to create or draw on transnational social links and networks. These transnational practices are embedded in the nation-state's technologies of control and governmentality. Irregular migrants' transnational social links and practices suggest how being an irregular migrant is not shaped only by their legal status

or by national policies, programmes and regulations. It suggests the limits of the government to pursue techniques and practices to shape, guide and direct the population's behaviour and actions in a particular direction (Foucault [1978] 1991: 102–103; Foucault [1982] 2000: 341).

The study of transnational practices among irregular migrants should be further pursued considering increasing surveillance and a global migration industry. That said, there is an ethical and moral implication inherent to a transnational approach when it comes to irregular migrants. Considering the politicisation of the transnational paradigm in terms of questions of loyalty, development and security, refugee and migrant regimes, as well as transnational practices (Isotalo 2009), if researchers investigate the maintenance of multiple ties across state borders, such research may be used as arguments against providing asylum to people with such ties, as these ties' mere existence could be used in delegitimising their asylum claims. Being an irregular migrant who pursues transnational practices may be viewed by some actors as counteracting their legitimacy as 'real refugees'. Such a political position ignores that transnational ties can also be about sustaining family relations and getting by – not an indicator that the individual has no need for asylum.

The efforts by the Norwegian state to govern irregular migrants through law, regulations and various policies and political practices (which are also transnational) are challenged, sometimes unintentionally, by migrants' ability to create and pursue transnational practices that change over time. Simultaneously, these transnational practices are configured by the state's effort to prevent the mobility practiced by some people, such as refugees (those fleeing from unliveable conditions). While migrants pursuing transnational

activities and networks in Norway and in EU countries can be considered as living their lives in an ordinary way across borders, at the same time, such everyday practices facilitate their continued lives as irregular and are efforts to circumvent the migration apparatus and the capacity of the Norwegian state to regulate its territory. When the state, with significant backing from the supranational EU, creates industries aiming to prevent some people from living ordinary lives, the state simultaneously creates a precarious subject position, which today has become if not naturalised, then at least a politically legitimated condition in the modern liberal democracy.

Notes

1. I have changed all names in order to ensure anonymity.
2. This interview was conducted by Hilde Lidén as part of project collaboration. See Bendixsen & Lidén (2017) and Lidén (2017).
3. Irregular migrants are allowed to live in reception centres. Moving out of the reception centre was also pursued by some because life in the reception centre is very slow and is characterised by waiting, which made some depressed.
4. According to the Norwegian Marriage Act §5a, both partners must have legal residence at the time of marriage in order to be able to enter into marriage in Norway.
5. He would not be legally allowed to marry in Norway as he was irregular. However, he could marry religiously in a mosque, and he could go to Sweden to marry legally there and, after a specific period of time, legally move back to Norway.

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