



Minoritizing Processes and Power Relations between Volunteers and Immigrant Participants—An Example from Norway

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ABSTRACT

The voluntary sector is a strong pillar in Norwegian society and has in recent years gained increasing attention as an arena for integration. Though voluntary activities can be valuable door openers for (recently arrived) immigrants, they may, under certain circumstances, contribute to minoritization processes. In this exploratory article, I will investigate social connections and relations between (Norwegian) volunteers and immigrant participants based on a focus group with eight participants involved in a community centre in a Norwegian town through analysing the volunteers' ideas of how the voluntary sector can contribute to integration processes of immigrants. Special attention will be paid to some of the participants' behaviour towards the only immigrant participating in the focus group, as this behaviour may reflect minoritizing processes. This article aims to contribute towards a more nuanced picture of what voluntary activities may achieve in terms of integration processes and to bring to light potential risks of creating unequal power relations in the social connections between (Norwegian) volunteers and immigrant participants and facilitating minoritizing processes.

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The voluntary sector, or volunteerism,¹ is a strong pillar in Norwegian society and has gained increasing attention as an arena for integration (Kunnskapsdepartementet [Ministry for Education and Research] 2018a). Although often attention is paid to the participation of children of immigrants in voluntary activities, there is not much knowledge of what role the Norwegian voluntary sector plays in integration processes of adults. However, the Norwegian government has in recent years recognized the potentials of the voluntary sector in integration work not only for immigrant children and youths but also for immigrant adults (Kunnskapsdepartementet 2018b). In the Norwegian Strategy for Integration, which aims for immigrants' increased feeling of belonging and participation in social life, participation in the civil society and voluntary organizations is seen as a tool to counteract segregation and to further the understanding of core values and norms in the Norwegian society as part of the so-called 'Everyday integration' [*hverdagsintegrering*] (Kunnskapsdepartementet 2018b: 43). Here, voluntary activities hold a central position as these can become arenas for (social) integration because they create spaces for being social and being part of a community (cf. Haaland & Wallevik 2017: 184). Such an understanding can also be found in Ager and Strang's (2008) conceptual framework on integration, where volunteer activities are seen as good ways to establish social connections. These connections in turn are understood to play a fundamental role in 'driving the process of integration on a local level' (Ager & Strang 2008: 177).

This article's core is an exploratory study based on a singular incident: one focus group discussion with eight participants at a Norwegian community centre. I will explore social connections and relations between (Norwegian) volunteers and immigrant participants through analysing narratives of the focus group participants and their ideas of how the voluntary sector can contribute to integration processes of immigrants. Special attention will be paid to some of the focus group participants' behaviour towards Azmia,² the only immigrant participating in the focus group. I interpret this behaviour to reflect minoritizing processes, and I aim to show that social relations between volunteers and immigrant participants may exist along multiple axes with the potential to promote power imbalance and minoritization.

I wish to stress that although I critically examine relations between volunteers and immigrant participants, voluntary activities can be valuable to (newly arrived) immigrants. The case of Azmia will show that such activities can be a springboard not only to becoming involved in the voluntary sector and to getting to know locals, establishing a social network, and even finding accommodation and employment. Moreover, these activities are offered by volunteers who seldom are professionally educated in social work or adjoining fields.

As this study is exploratory, it puts questions forward rather than finding answers to what voluntary activities may achieve in terms of integration processes. It aims to contribute to a more nuanced picture of integration processes in and through voluntary activities and to bring into view potential risks of creating unequal power

1 The Norwegian term *frivillighet* (sometimes also *frivillig sektor*) can be translated to English as 'voluntary sector' or 'volunteerism'. In Norway, *frivillighet* is often used synonymously with *frivillig arbeid* or 'voluntary work' and encompasses organizations and activities which are unpaid and based on voluntary engagement outside of one's own home (cf. <https://www.frivillighetnorge.no/fakta/hva-er-frivillighet/>).

2 All data have been anonymized and names exchanged with pseudonyms.

relations in the social connections between (Norwegian) volunteers and immigrant participants that may allow minoritizing processes.

I will start by introducing central terms and concepts and provide background for the case discussed in this article. I will then present the focus group and analytical approaches before continuing to present and analyse the data from the focus group discussion. Along three layers—the individual incident, a need to help within voluntary activities, and structural traits—I will explore and discuss minoritizing processes and power relations between (Norwegian) volunteers and immigrant participants. As this study is exploratory in nature, I will not come with conclusions in the end but instead present a short summary and issues for further research.

FRAMING THE PROBLEM: INTEGRATION THROUGH THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR

INTEGRATION

The term ‘integration’ is a chaotic concept (Samers 1998: 128), or as Schinkel calls it: ‘a conceptual quagmire’ (Schinkel 2018: 2). Usually used in contexts around immigration, integration refers to processes of accommodation and settlement of immigrants (Ager & Strang 2008; Strang & Ager 2010). These processes can cover various aspects, from housing and health to employment and citizenship (Ager & Strang 2008), or more broadly speaking distinguished into several facets: social, economic, political, cultural (Rytter 2018). However, the term, and the underlying understandings and conceptual ideas, are highly contested—not least because it can refer to both a political idea and a theoretical concept (Simonsen 2017). Informed and used by both scholars, policymakers, and in a wide range of public discourses, its understanding is contextual and among others shaped by history, political ideas and ideologies, and policies. Therefore, integration is neither objective nor neutral (Gullestad 2002b) or innocent (Rytter 2018). In recent years, the concept of ‘(immigrant) integration’ and approaches to study it have been increasingly under scrutiny in academia because of its unclarity and ambiguity (see among many others Korteweg 2017; Rytter 2018; Schinkel 2018; Sjørlev 2011; Wimmer & Glick Schiller 2002). In this article, I follow Naguib’s example who chooses not to deconstruct the term (Naguib 2017). Instead, like Naguib, I will use ‘integration’ because it is the term the persons, I talked with, used. This does not mean that the term ‘integration’ is used without deliberation. On the contrary, discussions on integration and its meanings and implications are also carried out by those involved in the processes with some preferring the term ‘inclusion’. Yet, in a European context, it remains the most common term applied in debates on increasingly diverse and multi-ethnic societies and to describe settlement and incorporation processes of immigrants.

THE NORWEGIAN VOLUNTARY SECTOR AND (SOCIAL) INTEGRATION

In Norway, similarly to the other Nordic, and many western, countries, growing numbers of immigrants and descendants of immigrants have increased discussions about how to achieve integration. One aspect, the voluntary sector may contribute to, is lived democracy as one through volunteering participates in (democratically structured) organizations and learns democratic values (Haaland & Wallevik 2017; Hagelund & Loga 2009; Takle 2013; 2015). Other aspects of integration processes

are creating social networks, social cohesion, and achieving a feeling of belonging (Hagelund & Loga 2009; Karlsdóttir et al. 2020). As Ager and Strang (2008) point out, these processes are in particular located on a local level and in everyday contexts.

For newly arrived immigrants in particular, participating in the Norwegian voluntary sector is seen as an arena for getting to know the local community, neighbours, and to practice one's Norwegian skills (Kunnskapsdepartementet 2018a). Moreover, voluntary activities can provide a platform to establish social connections. This can happen in a circumstantial way, meaning that immigrants participate in activities that would happen anyway, such as helping in a *dugnad* (Eng. 'voluntary community work')³ and along the way meet people from the community and practice Norwegian. Alternatively, voluntary organizations can offer activities specifically aimed at (often recently arrived) immigrants. Such a targeted approach can result in one-off events such as presenting different organizations and activities. Another approach could be to offer specific targeted activities, such as tutoring, language learning, or regular events to introduce immigrants to Norwegian outdoor life. Sometimes, the target group are immigrants in general, sometimes families, and other times only adult men or women. Such activities share the idea of doing something *for* immigrants to support them in their processes to settle in Norway.

Another aspect of the voluntary sector's role in integration processes is that persons who are involved in voluntary activities or organizations can provide new residents with access to established social networks and to information which they then can communicate to new participants (Haaland & Wallevik 2017). Thus, volunteers may become door openers to the society for (newly arrived) immigrants as they 'can contribute to increased contact and understanding between newly arrived immigrants and the society they shall be integrated in' (Haaland & Wallevik 2017: 185, my translation).

MINORITIZING PROCESSES

When it comes to the concept of integration there is an implicit understanding of a 'majority' and a 'minority' that are supposed to merge somehow—namely 'the receiving society' and 'the immigrants'. Yet, the terms 'minority' and 'majority' imply a static relationship between two seemingly unambiguous entities. Consequently, using the terms 'minority' or 'majority' one favours a focus on numbers and a reduction of power relations to these numbers (Brah 1996). In contrast, the terms 'minoritization' and 'majoritization' encompass a dynamic and processual relation and allow an understanding of power relations that often run along multiple axes. As Gunaratnam (2003: 17) shows, "the term "minoritized" [...] give[s] some sense of the active processes of racialization that are at work in designating certain attributes of groups in particular contexts as being in a "minority"".

This understanding is supported by Gullestad (2002a: 100, my translation): 'The majority constitutes itself as the majority because of its power to simultaneously set the rules, be a fellow player, and function as judge'. Hence, an approach applying minoritization and majoritization processes not only acknowledges that 'majorities and minorities are constituted in relation to each other' (Predelli et al. 2012: 212) but also that

³ The concept of *dugnad* is an essential concept in Norwegian volunteering reaching back several centuries. Usually singular events, *dugnader* are aimed at a common cause serving a community. This could be cleaning and fixing things in a neighbourhood after winter or making waffles for a social event in schools or selling lottery tickets to raise money for sports clubs (cf. Great Norwegian encyclopaedia, <https://snl.no/dugnad>).

labelling of people as ‘majority’ and ‘minority’ is in large part determined by existing power relations and power differentials between different groups. Minoritization and majoritization processes occur through social relations that are shaped by power, resources, interests, language and discourse. (Predelli et al. 2012: 212)

Concerning the term ‘integration’ this begs the question of whether it is the ‘majority’—that is the receiving society—which sets the rules for what integration is (supposed to be). In addition, ‘integration’ is usually understood as a two-way process (see, e.g., Klarenbeek 2019) implying that the receiving society is a fellow player in integration processes. At the same time, the receiving society may also pose as judge of who is integrated, and who is not.

Social relations also within the voluntary sector—that is, between volunteers and participants—are shaped by existing power relations that manifest themselves among others in language and discourse. I will show that voluntary activities with immigrant participants may involve understandings of what integration is, who is in need of integration and how integration can be achieved. I will also address whether voluntary activities set the stage for unequal relationships between volunteers and (newly arrived) immigrants and aid minoritizing processes.

METHODS AND METHODOLOGY

THE FOCUS GROUP

This article is based on a focus group discussion that was conducted in spring 2019 as part of a larger research project.⁴ All ethical considerations have been coordinated in accordance with and approved by The Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD), and all data presented in this article have been anonymized. Although I only use data from that focus group discussion, this article is informed by the wider research project. The location for the focus group discussion was a community centre in a Norwegian town and the aim was to discuss the role of the voluntary sector in integration processes of immigrant women in Norway. The community centre was established in the early 2000s, aiming at creating a meeting place for people of various backgrounds. It hosts various organizations, coordinates activities, organizes social events, promotes work practice and business establishment, and in general, works on creating meeting places for everyone.

Initially, I established contact with the head of the community centre Rune via e-mail and informed him about the research project asking him for help to recruit people based on their experiences with integration processes of immigrant women and immigrants more generally. We agreed on contacting several people via Rune’s network whom he characterized as ‘knowledgeable persons’ [*ressurspersoner*]. With the help of Rune serving as door opener, I ended with a focus group consisting of three men and five women, who all had a connection to the community centre. **Table 1** contains an overview and short descriptions of all focus group participants.

In addition, a research colleague served as observer while I led the discussion. I used an interview guide with a few open questions to structure the conversation. These questions concerned among other the participants’ involvement in the voluntary

⁴ ‘Engaging Women in Integration: Exploring the Triangle Integration – Gender Equality – Civil Society’, 2018–2022; NSD project reference number: 61392.

NAME	DESCRIPTION
Anne	Woman in her sixties, retired, professional experience from refugee services and reception centre for asylum seekers
Azmia	Woman in her thirties, came to Norway from Syria three years before the focus group took place, trained teacher, now working with elderly and children, became involved at the community centre soon after her arrival first as a participant and later as a volunteer
Bjørn Arne	Man, middle aged, has been involved in the community centre as a staff member but also as a volunteer and a participant
Jan Olav	Man, middle aged, has been contributing to and working at the community centre for several years after not being able to continue in his profession
Malin	Woman in her thirties, an artist working at the community centre
Mette	Woman in her sixties, (retired?) teacher, has been involved in the community centre particularly in one voluntary organization but also other voluntary activities
Rune	Man, middle aged, head of the community centre, professional experiences from refugee services and child-care services
Wenche	Woman in her sixties, retired teacher, has been involved in the community centre for over a decade but has also been doing other volunteer work among others with immigrant women

Table 1 Overview over focus group participants.

sector and which role they think the voluntary sector has in integration processes. The focus group discussion lasted for 2.5 hours including a more informal part during lunch, which was provided by the community centre. The discussion was conducted in Norwegian, tape recorded and afterwards transcribed by me as closely as possible to the original.

THE EXPLORATORY APPROACH

To explore the data from the focus group discussion thoroughly and systematically, I used the qualitative data analysis computer software NVivo to identify recurring topics and narratives. In addition to the sound recording of the discussion, I used notes written by me and the observer.

This article is exploratory, not only because of the semi-structured interview guide with open-ended questions for the focus group discussion. A study can be exploratory from the onset, but at times the empirical data may make it necessary to apply an exploratory approach. In the case of the present study, the focus group discussion yielded rich and surprising empirical data going beyond of what was asked in the interview guide (Swedberg 2020).

Given the exploratory design of the study, the analytical approach has been strongly influenced by abductive reasoning. As Alvesson and Sköldbberg (2008) point out, '[abduction] means that an (often surprising) individual case is interpreted on the basis of a hypothetical overall pattern, which, if true, explains the case in question' (Alvesson & Sköldbberg 2008: 55, my translation). Generally, abductive reasoning is especially equipped 'to go beyond the data themselves, to locate them in explanatory or interpretive frameworks' (Coffey & Atkinson 1996: 156). Therefore, abductive reasoning and exploratory research complement each other well. For the case at hand, the data are analysed and interpreted in the light of potential (hypothetical)

overarching patterns. To strengthen validity and transferability, interpretations and possible explanations should subsequently be corroborated by new cases and new observations in further studies (Alvesson & Sköldberg 2008; Swedberg 2020).

Yet, '[a] story is always situated; it has both a teller and an audience' (Abu-Lughod 1993/2008: 15). In this case, the focus group is both context of a story—specifically Azmia's story—while also being worth a retelling in itself—namely an example of how an immigrant to Norway is talked with, talked to, and talked about. However, a focus group is not a natural setting but a staged gathering for interaction with the goal to gain information. Though the participants seemed to know each other to various degrees, the presence of two researchers presumably has influenced their contributions. Moreover, immigration, integration and volunteering are easily politicized topics, and the participants were likely trying to both show themselves in the best possible light and be 'politically correct'. Or as Brinkmann and Kvale (2015: 114) summarize: Interview '[...] subjects are often trying to act as “good interviewees,” according to what they guess is an appropriate way of “doing interviews”’.

The analysis process has also been influenced by my positionality: I am a young female researcher at a Norwegian institution though I am originally from another European country. My positionality has not only influenced the way I got access to the field and how the focus group participants interacted with me but also affected my vision of the case because it provides me 'with prototheories of the world, ways to “case” the phenomena in front of [me] that are already deeply ingrained in the ways we perceive the world' (Timmermans & Tavory 2012: 172f.). These aspects are part of the situatedness of the case and help understand the knowledge derived through abductive reasoning to be socially located and positional knowledge (Timmermans & Tavory 2012). I discussed my ideas and thoughts with the observer, whose perceptions of the case overlapped with mine thus confirming and validating my interpretations and analysis.

The following data presentation and analysis section are structured in a way to reflect on the recursive process between data and theory with the aim to make preliminary interpretations on what the occurrence may point towards.

THREE LAYERS OF ANALYSIS

Azmia recounted that shortly after arriving in Norway she had started to go to the community centre to meet and get to know locals and to learn Norwegian. She apparently started attending the community centre by participating in different events and activities, such as a knitting group for established and newly arrived residents organized by Mette. Subsequently, Azmia became more active in the community centre. By the others in the group Azmia was described as 'a great girl' (Wenche) and 'a fantastic woman' (Mette), 'like a daughter' (Mette), and not least praised as a 'splendid example for somebody who wants in into society' (Bjørn Arne).

Exploring how minoritizing processes and power relations may manifest themselves in language and discourse, I will look at the focus group discussion through the lens of three layers; I will firstly provide an in-depth presentation of the individual layer, formed around Azmia, her story and her social relations with the other participants in the focus group. The second layer is shaped around a critical examination of a seemingly 'need to help' (Malkki 2015) on the part of the volunteers and how this may affect minoritization processes in the given setting. The third and last layer is an

exploration and discussion of what factors may have shaped the two previous layers and what structural issues they point to that may serve as an explanation for the way Azmia and other immigrants are treated and talked about in the focus group.

FIRST LAYER: AZMIA

Introducing Azmia

I just ask myself: What can I do here? How can I do it? Yes, it is something I am not good at, but I shall try because I'm going to stay here [in Norway].
I don't want to say: No, I can't, I don't want to. I forget this word: I can't. I shall try. So now I have a good life here. (Azmia)

This quote illustrates my impression of Azmia as an outgoing, strong-minded and resourceful woman. I mean this in the sense that she appeared to be a person who takes the initiative and who wants to get engaged in the new place she has moved to. Located across the street from where she took Norwegian classes, she saw that there was a café as part of the centre and started going there. Eager to learn, she used the café and the community centre in general to talk to people and ask them anything—from bureaucratic challenges such as housing to taking a book or homework and ask for translations. From then on, she has been regularly at the community centre and getting more and more involved.

How is Azmia talked to and talked about?

Azmia is a splendid example for somebody who wants in into society. Well, with the way she worked when she came here and got engaged so much in everything and helped everyone. (Bjørn Arne)

Bjørn Arne points to Azmia as someone who launches herself into things. As the only immigrant participating in the focus group, the other participants often pointed towards Azmia and her story using her repeatedly as a positive example of integration. This shows that Azmia held—and perhaps to a certain degree was given—a particular role in the focus group.

Still, on several occasions, Azmia would not get the chance to finish a sentence. Instead, one of the others would interrupt her—often Mette or Wenche—and finish her sentences for her. For instance, when Azmia told about a mix-up regarding housing, which meant that she did not have a place to stay, she hardly got the chance to finish one sentence before Mette interrupted her. However, it remained unclear why Mette would repeatedly interrupt Azmia. One explanation could be that Mette had been involved in finding a new place for Azmia and drove her back and forth to the different offices and places during the day. She was thus part of the story Azmia was telling and therefore could supply information. Another possible reason for the interruptions could be that Mette wanted to strengthen Azmia's story and make sure that we others understood the severity of the instance and how it affected Azmia. Yet one could also wonder whether Mette thought that Azmia needed her help and did not trust Azmia to get the point across.

When the others described Azmia and her integration processes, they often pointed towards her personality and her motivation and engagement, as shown in the following quotes:

Not everyone has this sort of go-ahead spirit like you [Azmia]. (Mette)

Not everyone is like you [Azmia] and dares to go alone. (Anne)

However, these quotes also show that Azmia seemed to be perceived differently and set in contrast to something or someone 'other'.

She [Azmia] is unique when it comes to such things because she is good at launching herself into things. But think of those women who are stay-at-home mothers. They don't have the resources like Azmia who gets out and gets that contact. They stay there [at home]. (Mette)

Mette not only described Azmia as a positive example but contrasted her achievements with other immigrant women. During the discussion, it was implied on several occasions that Azmia was an exception among immigrant women who were described as not as integrated or as engaged as Azmia. One of the reasons specified by the focus group participants was that other immigrant women were often mothers, had several children and therefore were bound to the home. Azmia, in contrast, was married but had no children.

Azmia's background was another element being mentioned several times:

But you, Azmia, are a woman with perhaps a good background and you obviously also have a family who supports you. There are many kinds of women [...] with different backgrounds. Not everyone has it perhaps equally easy to get integrated or included. (Mette)

Azmia's apparently good background and the support she received from her family seemingly allowed her to integrate more easily.

With comments like these Azmia seemed to be talked about and presented as a contrasting (positive) example, a 'good immigrant' perhaps, who had mastered the challenges of integration, whereas the 'others' were not as good, as motivated, or as engaged as Azmia. Thus, Azmia was described as not being part of 'them'. Yet, at the same time it remained rather palpable that Azmia was not part of 'us', as illustrated by the following quote:

Those like her [Azmia], I take with me to knitting [events], take them home, and ... (Wenche)

Though it is not clear, who exactly Wenche meant by 'them', she considered Azmia part of 'them' and not 'us'. These narratives leave Azmia in limbo: she is neither fully 'them'—that is, 'the' immigrants who presumably struggle to integrate—nor is she fully 'us'. Through these narratives, Anne, Mette and Wenche remain in power to define who is 'us' and who is 'them' in certain circumstances, indicating minoritizing processes through language and discourse.

Neither 'us' nor 'them'

As shown by the examples previously, throughout the focus group the other participants ascribed certain attributes to Azmia. In terms of Azmia's integration process, she is often pointed out as a good example. Though on the surface the ascribed attributes seem mostly positive such as describing Azmia as resourceful, a person 'daring to go alone', from a 'good background', and with a 'supporting family', these descriptions are often used in contrast to something else, namely other

(female) immigrants who do not have these attributes. Being seen and described as a 'good immigrant' tend to make her 'other than' both other immigrants living in Norway, but also the (Norwegian) volunteers. Azmia is set into a limbo between being neither 'them' nor 'us'. The speakers not only seem to serve as judge over who is seen integrated, or who is doing well in integrating (cf. Gullestad 2002a). They, too, seem to be in a position of putting Azmia into a category that is not 'us' (the majority) thus minoritizing her. Yet moreover, the speakers imply through their language that Azmia is neither fully part of 'them' (the minority) either. Despite likely good intentions, the apparently unintentional choice of words and behaviour contributes to minoritizing. This may lead to a position for Azmia where she continues to be minoritized and exposed to a power imbalance.

SECOND LAYER: A 'NEED TO HELP'?

Passive or active?

I got more Norwegians to help me. I couldn't manage 20 participants over time. (Mette)

When Mette talked about the knitting café she organized for immigrant women, she explained that there were too many participants for her to manage. One could interpret the statement as the (Norwegian) volunteers being described as playing a more active part, whereas the (immigrant) participants needed managing. Such an understanding can leave immigrant participants in a passive position. This statement also raises questions about whether similar voluntary activities create spaces for where immigrants and long-term residents can meet on a level playing field when Norwegian volunteers are depicted as managers and immigrant participants as needing managing. Instead, language use like Mette's may point towards processes maintaining the divide of majority and supposed minority. A similar notion can also be seen in the following quote:

We are catalysts for coming in into the Norwegian society. We can teach them something. (Wenche)

Although Wenche's statement strengthens the argument of voluntary activities serving as door openers (Haaland & Wallevik 2017), it also carries an understanding of a 'us/them' divide, in which 'we'—that is, the (Norwegian) volunteers—help and guide 'them' during the processes of settling in the new country and society. One can argue that here, too, there is a narrative in which (Norwegian) volunteers are depicted as playing active roles in contrast to more passive (participating) immigrants. Though it may be true that integration is also about learning language, social codes and much more of the new place, a narrative in which immigrants are talked about as passive recipients of teaching may minoritize them. It may deny immigrant participants a story in which they are playing an active role in voluntary settings and integration processes in general.

Though Mette apparently was the only one who regularly organized a voluntary activity aimed at immigrants at the community centre in the form of a knitting café to bring local and immigrant women together, there were also other events targeting immigrants arranged at the community centre. There were, for example, tours, sometimes overnight, organized by among others, Jan Olav and Rune.

In the following quote, there are two aspects to be considered:

Anne: You, Azmia, are from Syria, but we had a lot of different ones. We had some from Somalia. We had all those – I was about to say – polite Tamils

Azmia: Afghanistan, Iraq

Mette: We had a group from Bosnia

First, it is interesting to see how immigrant participants of voluntary activities are talked about. This is just one instance of several where focus group participants would, by saying ‘we have’, display an almost possessive attitude. Through this narrative, one could argue that immigrant participants become a static, uninvolved feature of these activities enforcing an image of passive participants. Hence, these volunteers set the stage and the rules on which these activities are supposed to take place.

Another interesting aspect is which countries are mentioned when talking about countries of origin. Throughout the focus group discussion, the participants almost exclusively talked about immigrants from non-Western countries in context with potential participants for immigrant-targeted activities.

Throughout the focus group discussion, it seemed as if many immigrants—depending on countries of origin, if mentioned—were perceived as in need of support from voluntary activities. Such assumptions would point towards minoritizing processes when it comes to ideas of integration and the perceived role of the voluntary sector. This is because these assumptions would affect the way who is recruited for voluntary activities targeting immigrants, and how. Volunteers may despite good intentions enforce a divide between volunteers and participants, and between active and passive, thus favouring minoritizing processes.

The volunteers’ role

Another aspect to be considered is the role the volunteers in the focus group ascribe to themselves. Especially Mette would highlight her personal contributions to Azmia and the community centre throughout the focus group discussion. Mette made it clear on several occasions that volunteering meant a lot to her—also because she got something in return, for example, the friendship to Azmia, and, I would interpret, perhaps, a feeling to do something good. Beyond that, it seemed that her motivation to organize voluntary activities targeting immigrants came from her relationship to Azmia:

Azmia was the first [refugee/immigrant] I took care of. (Mette)

In addition, Mette claimed that Azmia was the first refugee woman at the community centre, which the other focus group participants vehemently contradicted. Maybe this means that Mette did not see or was aware of especially refugees at the community centre, and perhaps even in town, before she met Azmia, which roughly coincided with the so-called ‘refugee crisis’ in Europe in 2015.

The quote also shows Mette’s personal involvement in Azmia’s story. Mette seemed to be rather attached to Azmia, and the two women appeared to have a close and familiar relationship. Mette talked about Azmia as ‘like [her] daughter’ and seemed throughout the focus group to be concerned about Azmia’s well-being and that Azmia’s voice was heard. This resulted at times in Mette interrupting Azmia and not giving her the full room to tell her own stories. Mette’s behaviour can be interpreted as a form of protectiveness towards Azmia. This protectiveness was physically visible

throughout the focus group discussion, as Mette would occasionally stroke Azmia's arm or almost seemed to cuddle her though Azmia appeared at times to shrug her off. Although Mette's behaviour may not only be understood as perhaps unconscious seeking to be meaningful to someone, it may also be interpreted as mothering or even clucking and therefore infantilizing or minoritizing. One situation when this became visible was when Mette talked about how she and her husband helped Azmia to settle:

We [Mette and her husband] arranged an apartment for her, and my husband arranged a job for her in a nursing home.

I interpret Mette's behaviour as a way to show both her contributions, and herself, in the best possible light. Taking into account that volunteering is seldom absolutely altruistic but rather multi-layered (Malkki 2015), organizing voluntary activities for immigrants can also be linked to a 'need to help'. Through these activities, volunteers can get a connection to the 'wider world' (cf. Malkki 2015; Naguib 2017), based on the wish or neediness on the side of the volunteers to 'be a part of something greater than themselves' and 'to keep busy and useful' (Malkki 2015: 9f.).

The term 'need to help' was introduced by Malkki (2015) when she explored the motivations and desires of Finnish Red Cross workers and their engagement in humanitarian aid. She looks at both workers travelling 'out there' (doctors, nurses, and other specialists) and explores humanitarian aid work for the Red Cross 'from home', such as elderly women knitting and crocheting for the needy abroad. Malkki points out that it is not always clear who is in need of what and identifies throughout her book several kinds of 'need' and 'neediness' within a humanitarian aid context. The most straightforward kind of need here seems to be that of people needing humanitarian aid for instance because of war, genocide, or natural disasters. Yet, irrespective of whether professionals travelled abroad or non-professionals engaged in humanitarian aid work from home, Malkki's research 'revealed a coeval, co-present neediness on the other side, *the neediness of the helper, the giver*' (Malkki 2015: 8, emphasis in original). Common for both travelling and staying-at-home humanitarian aid workers and volunteers is that they wished 'to be part of something greater than themselves, to help, to be actors in the lively world' (Malkki 2015: 4).

The case discussed in this article falls somewhat in between the examples given by Malkki. It is neither a case of a professional 'going out' into the world to help 'there', nor is it a complete detachment of 'here' and 'there'. Rather the activities discussed here are examples of where 'there' comes 'here' and the two realms meet. The 'world' comes to the volunteers in Norway in form of immigrants, and the voluntary organizations strive to help where help is needed while the act of helping can also be a means in itself for some of the volunteers.

There probably is a mix of both altruistic and egoistic reasons for organizing activities for immigrants as seen here with Mette's behaviour towards Azmia (see also the study by Naguib 2017). The altruistic reasoning can be, as is the case with Mette's knitting café, to bring together (newly arrived) immigrants and long-term residents to give immigrants the opportunities to get to know locals and improve their language skills. At the same time, volunteers like Mette may get in return a feeling of neededness and purpose. However, it may be a thin line between seeing someone as in need of help and perceiving this person as passive thus denying them a say in how to organize these activities. This begs the question of whether, or perhaps rather to what degree, such activities may contribute to minoritizing processes.

THIRD LAYER: STRUCTURAL TRAITS

The aspects named previously, such as ‘a need to help’, the voluntary structures and assumptions of who may be in need of integration or specific activities to help with integration, may affect the relationships between (Norwegian) volunteers and participating immigrants. Ultimately, these factors may have the potential of resulting in a power imbalance and minoritization of immigrant participants. Yet, these aspects do not exist in an empty room and may be manifestations of larger, overarching structural issues.

Firstly, when it comes to the role of the voluntary sector in the integration processes of immigrants, the (Norwegian) voluntary sector finds itself in a difficult position. On the one hand, participating in voluntary activities and volunteering is seen as an arena for social integration. Actors within voluntary organizations can serve as door openers in particular for newly arrived immigrants (Haaland & Wallevik 2017). On the other hand, it remains unclear whether, or to what degree, voluntary organizations and actors in voluntary organizations are prepared to take on this role.

The second issue concerns an understanding in which potential immigrant participants are seen as in need of the help of (Norwegian) volunteers. Such an understanding can also be found in the Norwegian government’s Strategy for Integration 2019–2022: ‘The civil society and cultural milieu arrange for fellowship and diverse meeting places, and therefore constitute important arenas to better achieve everyday integration’ (Kunnskapsdepartementet 2018b: 46, my translation). In this statement, the role of the voluntary sector as being active is highlighted, whereas immigrants seem to be passive participants who through their participation contribute to everyday integration.

Thirdly, voluntary activities are based on structures affecting the ways in which relationships are formed. Many voluntary activities in general rest upon the idea of providing a form of offer or service, such as sports practice. This frame sets a stage in which volunteers may see themselves as more in charge, or even superior, compared to participants. Likewise, voluntary activities targeting immigrants tend to be structured in a way in which volunteers provide support that immigrant participants make use of—for example, in form of language training or providing arenas for socializing. Though one may be in need of help when making use of these offers, it is a thin line for volunteers and organizers between arranging these activities and perceiving participants as passive or not providing room for them to help shape the activities according to their needs. This begs the question of whether, or perhaps rather to what degree, such activities may contribute to minoritizing processes.

Fourthly, the volunteers have the power to define what to do, and how much they want to give or when to withdraw. Thus, though most volunteers wish to do good and to feel part of something greater, they may, unintentionally, amplify unequal relations between them and immigrant participants. Malkki (2015) describes, for example, a Finnish Red Cross service where ‘volunteer friends’ meet persons with few to no social relations, so-called ‘client-friends’ (Malkki 2015: 149). Already the wording creates distance between the volunteers and participants. The commitment of the volunteers is furthermore influenced by their life situation. Herslund and Paulgaard (2021) show for instance that in voluntary activities for immigrants, older volunteers more often focused on ‘hygge’—or cosiness—whereas younger volunteers were more likely to drop out after some time because of a feeling of too much responsibility or busy everyday lives.

Additionally, the volunteers are already settled in the locality where especially newly arrived immigrants aim to settle, too. Therefore, volunteers often stand with more knowledge, at least at first. This knowledge pertains a large variety of aspects, such as language proficiency, more knowledge about how things usually are done, in this case, in Norway. Volunteers can thus see themselves, and be seen by others, as guides for immigrants which in turn may lead to enforcing a passive/active divide. Furthermore, a guide is usually a person leading the way with a participant following and limited possibilities to affect the path to be taken.

The last issue to be addressed emerges when looking at the immigrant participants' countries of origin named during the focus group discussion which were predominantly non-European and non-Western, for example, Syria, Somalia, Bosnia, Afghanistan and Iraq. Though that may be because immigrants in the town were predominantly from these countries, it may also point towards an understanding of immigrants from predominantly non-Western countries as the target group for voluntary initiatives for immigrants. During the discussion, it was mentioned for example that Swedish immigrants would not need the same support. Though Swedish immigrants may have few things to adjust to when moving to Norway as language and welfare state structures are very similar, it begs nevertheless the question whether there seems to be an understanding of immigrants from non-Western countries being especially in need of help. For voluntary activities for immigrants, this would have consequences on not only who is the target group, but also what kind of offers are provided based on the ideas of what kind of help is needed. Picking up the understanding of Gullestad (2002a) of a majority having the power of setting the rules, being fellow player, and judge in one, volunteers and organizers of activities with immigrants and integration as the target group set the rules of what is considered both the aim of the respective activity and how the concept 'integration' can (should) be understood. They appear as fellow players as they usually participate in those activities, albeit often not actually on equal footing with participating immigrants as they are in a position in which they do this voluntarily always having the possibility to withdraw while participating immigrants perhaps hope to create lasting and deep relationships with the volunteers. Last, but not least, volunteers and organizers may hold the position of a judge evaluating whether participating immigrants fulfil the rules and criteria they have set for 'successful' participation and eventually integration. In combination, the issues mentioned previously may lead to an imbalanced relationship between (Norwegian) volunteers and immigrant participants, where volunteers create the frame and content for voluntary integration activities, define who can or should participate and how, and whether this participation is successful or not.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Based on one case in form of a focus group with volunteers at a Norwegian community centre, I have explored social connections and relations between (Norwegian) volunteers and immigrant participants through analysing narratives of the focus group participants and their ideas of how the voluntary sector can contribute to integration processes of immigrants. I have shown along three layers (individual, a 'need to help', and structural traits) that social relations between volunteers and immigrant participants exist along multiple axes. These axes are among others related to assumptions and ascriptions on the side of the volunteers regarding (potential) immigrant participants, the volunteers' motivation and perception of their own role, the role that may be ascribed to the volunteers and overarching structural

issues. These aspects have been shown to potentially favour minoritizing processes. However, in accordance with abductive reasoning further research is needed to validate the arguments and surmises presented in this article.

This article raises questions concerning for instance, the role of gender in minoritization processes within a (Norwegian) voluntary setting and whether women are in particular subject to minoritizing processes, especially when seen in light of intersectionality (see also Thun 2012a; 2012b; 2015). It remains to be seen whether a 'need to help' and minoritization may be amplified by an assumption of, for example, 'Muslim women needing saving' as proposed by Abu-Lughod (2002, 2013), see also Comim & Nussbaum (2014) and Nussbaum (2012). Lastly, further inquiry is needed to explore whether these social relations and power imbalances may reveal something about integration processes in the society at large.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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