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# Negotiating Survival Needs through Ontological In/Visibility: An Exploration of Irregular Migrants' Lawscapes

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This article explores how irregular migrants in/visibilise themselves in socio-spatial contexts in Finland. Drawing upon new materialist thinking, specific strategies of in/visibilisation are interpreted herein as fully part of irregular migrants' lawscapes, that is, of their ontological movements and the material interplays between laws and spaces, allowing bodies to create their own desired spaces of survival. This article is part of a larger research project using ethnographic methods and a new materialist approach to explore irregular migrants' everyday lives in Finland. It shows how law is embodied by individuals and, thus, materially influences and affects their movements and emotional activities. **Key Words: ethnography, Finland, invisibility, irregular migration, lawscape.**

The article explores irregular migrants' in/visibilisation strategies in socio-spatial contexts in Finland. The purpose of the article is to show how these tactics originate from bodies' ontological need to survive in environments they feel are hostile and unwelcoming. In this sense, in/visibility is an ontological emergence—a modality of being and becoming space(s), and of negotiating the body's survival with the law (Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos 2015). Bodies materialize their desire for in/visibility in different fashions through multiple actions, states, affects, emotions, thoughts, and gestures. In particular, for migrants whose stay in a country is considered illegal,<sup>1</sup> being and becoming in/visible is often a matter of survival. Like all individuals, these migrants embody different spatio-legal layers (Tedeschi 2021a): their country of origin's laws, the laws of the countries they have crossed before coming to Finland, and the Finnish laws. With them, they need to negotiate their survival (i.e., to in/visibilise themselves according to changing circumstances) to protect themselves and their desire to keep on being and becoming. Some bodies succeed in this negotiation, but some do not, with material consequences for the ways in which they come to terms with themselves and their precarious conditions, make ends meet on a daily basis, build social networks, and deal with the bureaucratic procedures required by the Finnish Immigration Service (henceforth Migri)—the institution that decides immigration-related matters in Finland.

This article is part of a larger study exploring irregular migrants' lives in Finland from a new materialist perspective. While my previous studies have approached migrants' lives from affective-ethical (Tedeschi 2021a, 2021b) and spatio-temporal (Tedeschi and

Gadd 2021) angles, this article focuses on the law's effects on irregular migrants' emotional lives and everyday routines. The research article is based on empirical material (e.g., ethnographic observations) and posits a theoretical argument that mainly draws on new materialist thinking, which characterises disciplines such as law (Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos and Brooks 2017), geography (Doel 1999; Popke 2009), urban studies (Amin and Thrift 2017), and the socio-political sciences (Coole and Frost 2010). In migration studies, the new materialism focuses, among other topics, on defining the identity of a migrant as a never fully completed body—a being always in-becoming, whose “borders” are continuously challenged in, through, and by the migrant's interactions with other bodies-in-space (Papadopoulos and Tsianos 2008; Tedeschi 2021a, 2021b; Tedeschi and Gadd 2021), and with the various international and national migration laws. This article contributes to this specific corpus of studies by taking a materialist approach to the law. A vast body of migration studies literature has explored how the law affects the lives of migrants via, for example, micro-practices of control (Bendixsen 2018; Könönen 2018; Pellander 2018; Tervonen, Pellander, and Yuval-Davis 2018), or in terms of how it actively produces irregular migration as a side effect, while trying to reduce or stop it (see, e.g., Düvell 2011). The new materialist approach herein highlights the ways in which the overlapping of contrasting regulations of different countries (e.g., the country of origin and the country of destination) is materially embodied by migrants and influences their daily micro-behaviours and emotional lives (excellent accounts of which can be found in the ethnographic work of Brown (2017) and Ong (2003)). A new materialist approach focuses on how the law is embodied by individuals and, thus, how it materially influences and affects their movements and emotional activities. Investigating the mechanisms of in/visibilisation is a way of considering these elements from a spatio-legal perspective.

The article aims to answer the following two research questions: how is the law embodied by migrants, and how do these mechanisms of in/visibilisation materially unfold in migrants' daily lives and emotions in relation to the law? Accordingly, it first discusses the lawscape, summarizing Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos (2015, 2021) theorization of the concept and its unfolding through mechanisms of in/visibilisation (taking examples from interactions between irregular migrants and other actors, such as the government and NGOs). Secondly, the article outlines the materials and methods used in the empirical work, referring specifically to the Finnish context. Finally, the article shows how the theoretical arguments manifest in the lives of irregular migrants in Finland. Cases of self-in/visibilisation and mechanisms of in/visibilisation in communities, in interactions with Migri, and in public spaces will be analyzed to show how the mechanisms of in/visibilisation adopted by migrants are closely entangled with their lawscapes (i.e., with their bodies' desires to create spaces of survival amidst the laws; Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos 2015).

## SURVIVING IN-BETWEEN ONTOLOGICAL IN/VISIBILITY

Extensive literature has explored mechanisms of in/visibilisation in general and relative to the law. I review this literature, while being aware that it is not possible to cite all the relevant works on the topic. In general, categories of in/visibility—political, social, and legal (Battistella

2017)—can be linked to irregular migration scholars' extensive work on in/exclusion (Ambrosini 2013), marginalization in society (Engbersen and Broeders 2009), vulnerability (Düvell, Triandafyllidou, and Vollmer 2010), exploitation (Salt and Stein 1997), and protection from deportation (Battistella 2017), to cite a few. Although local NGOs generally consider irregular migrants to have full rights to the city (Lefebvre 1968) and to legal and social visibility, the central government and immigration laws categorize them as illegal, with no right to the city, politically either invisible (Battistella 2017) or super-visible (Brighenti 2010), and liable to be expelled when they are denied asylum. On the other hand, irregular migrants may enter a narrow zone of legal and social visibility when practical issues such as access to healthcare and the education of children arise. Their tactics of social in/visibilisation might include, but are not limited to: becoming visible as active and pro-active people in such a positive way that local residents eventually fight for their active right to stay (which has happened in a few small villages in Finland); developing alternative ways for political action (Damery and Mescoli 2019), to legalize their stay in the country; negotiating temporary states of in/visibility with people they trust, within their communities or NGOs; dealing with the police by not creating trouble, so that they are informally allowed to stay; attending hospitals if and when anonymity is offered, enabling urgent care to be given without requests for further information; interacting with local municipalities to receive basic assistance to guarantee their survival (e.g., shelter from cold weather); enrolling children in schools because they are entitled to receive basic compulsory education. Many are too scared to adopt such strategies and, therefore, choose to remain hidden in an effort to become completely invisible. Although this offers protection from deportation (Battistella 2017), it also involves risks of exploitation, marginalization, and even serious health and security issues.

All these tactics of in/visibilisation have been extensively mapped by empirical studies, including in Nordic contexts (Leinonen and Toivanen 2014; Tervonen, Pellander, and Yuval-Davis 2018). More specifically, in/visibilities are sometimes understood as tensions “inherent to positions defined by migration control, including irregularity” (Sager 2018, 175). Sager pointed out that, in Sweden, the strengthening of social rights for irregular migrants coincided with their increased fear of using them (because of corresponding increased control and repression); thus, while the law offers irregular migrants the possibility of becoming more visible, the increased visibility causes them to go further into hiding to protect themselves. Other scholars have perceived invisibility and visibility as tightly linked with precise physical spaces, as in the case of Mazzara's (Mazzara 2015) description of migrants landing in Lampedusa, Italy. The migrants were invisibilised in that part of the island where, by law, they were numbered and then “stored” for an unspecified period, but the wealthy tourist part of the island (to which the migrants did not have access) perceived their presence and force; hence, although they were invisible, they were “visibly” felt as a menace.

Trying to bring more rigour to the confused study of visibility in the social sciences, Tazzioli and Walters drew on Brighenti (2007) to analyze the interplay of three different modes of visibility: “A social type of visibility (where visibility is tied to recognition, that is, the struggle to be seen and affirmed), a media type of visibility (where events, persons and happenings acquire momentary visibility in a flash-halo manner and are embedded in fields with their own media logics) and a control type of visibility (such as panoptical surveillance)” (2016, 446). They then applied this framework to the field of migration and its governance. In these contexts, they recognized how “techniques for controlling and containing migrant movements and the possibility

for migrants to escape mechanisms of capture often entail a struggle over visibility” (Tazzioli and Walters 2016, 454). In this sense, Chauvin and Garcés-Mascreñas paradoxically highlighted how the static pair invisibility-irregularity is easily contradicted by the observation that irregular migrants are highly visible when they arrive (media type of visibility), but those who become integrated ultimately manage to camouflage themselves—to become more invisible within a social type of visibility: “A situation of invisibility within visibility” (Chauvin & Garcés-Mascreñas 2014, 425)—to escape surveillance apparatuses. Indeed, from a political perspective, becoming invisible can be an effective way of resisting classification and the unwanted exercise of state and border power (the control type of visibility): “Becoming imperceptible is the most precise and effective tool migrants employ to oppose the individualizing, quantifying and representational pressures of the settled, constituted geopolitical power” (Papadopoulos and Tsianos 2008, 228–229).

Approaches to in/visibility in migration studies are thus various and multi-faceted. In all these cases, irregular migrants need to be able to navigate many socio-political narratives (of the government and their own communities and networks), trying to negotiate their in/visible status in an unwelcoming space with unknown laws (De Genova 2002). In a new materialist perspective, we could say that individuals *make* space on a daily basis, affecting and fighting for it and, in turn, being constantly reframed, redefined, and challenged (affected) by it. Space here is intended as a live process (Brighenti 2006)—a never-ending production of everyday spatial practices (De Certeau 1988) shaping individuals’ (in this case migrants’) lives. The law is here interpreted as “an apparatus of power that inscribes itself on the bodies” (Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos 2013) and can include immigration laws, local policies, religious rules, and even the moral values of a community. Is there a space without law? According to Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos, there is not, since “space without law is a fantasy of pure possibility, some utopia where everything is settled because there is no difference, therefore no conflict” (Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos 2021, 11). Similarly, “law without space is another fantasy of law as a universal, floating above spatial differences, obeying to some natural or theological necessity, but never really scooping down to apply itself to the situation in hand” (Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos 2021, 11). Law and space are thus, ontologically, a tautology, and form an indivisible continuum (the *lawscape*): they “are folded into each other: they are co-emerging, co-constituting and co-evolving” (Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos 2021, 11). Individuals are ontologically part of a *lawscape*, which they can redirect and break into a multiplicity of *lawscapes*. In other words, they inscribe their movements, thoughts, emotions, beliefs, gestures, and activities on the reality that law and space together co-constitute. In so doing, they seamlessly *lawscape* and, “depending on ... their ability to move and to mobilize ... have powers to negotiate in/visibilisation, to use or diffuse the law in their advantage, to spatialize or to despatialise according to their needs” (Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos 2015, 78).

In/visibility is thus an ontological, always situated, emergence where space and law—both of them outside but, paradoxically, already inextricably fully part of the body—enable the individual to negotiate the most effective survival strategies. These strategies do not follow any predefined direction, schema, or definition (Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos 2015). They move according to an individual’s desire to continue being and becoming within the *lawscape*, in pursuit of positive feelings, such as happiness, and to avoid negative ones, such as sadness, shame, or despair. According to Deleuze and Spinoza’s theory of affect (Deleuze 1988; Spinoza [1677] 2001), what increases an individual’s (in their terminology, a body’s) capacity (power) of acting/being acted upon is a good affect. Conversely, a bad affect is what harms and decreases a body’s

potential and energy. In this sense, everybody relentlessly seeks empowering affect and positive material combinations with other bodies and spaces, but simultaneously avoids negative affect (Deleuze 1988). To continue being and becoming is part of the inalienable desire of a body to create its own positive and empowering space of survival, negotiating its ontological in/visibility within the lawscape.

Within the reality of the lawscape, other conflicting, multiple lawscapes are created and inscribed on bodies; in the case of irregular migrants, laws and religious customs of their countries of origin; the different places where they have lived during their journeys to Finland; and all the different, yet fully material and spatial, narratives of governments, NGOs, and their own communities and networks. Bodies—not only those of irregular migrants, but also local municipalities, police, and NGOs—contribute to the overlapping, breaking, and seamless redefining of these (clashing and/or combining) lawscapes. Each body adopts different in/visibilisation mechanisms to reorient the lawscape to avoid spaces where their visibility might put them in danger (negative affect and power diminution). Conversely, they seek empowering spaces where they know that they are protected and safe (positive affect and power increase): “The process runs on a scale of in/visibilisation that changes constantly depending on the conative needs of the lawscape” (Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos 2015, 76). The degree of in/visibility is determined by the spatial affects that all the actors involved (including the government, local municipalities, NGOs, etc.) develop, combine, and materialize on the spot: “Each body ... that participates in the lawscape negotiates its movement and the space generated in relation to other bodies, and, depending on the conditions, determines (not necessarily consciously) the degree of invisibilisation” (Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos 2021, 12). Irregular migrants’ ways of surviving via in/visibilisation mechanisms depend on the actual (good or bad) combinations of bodies and spaces. When the central government tries to diminish their power of acting and being acted upon by denying their very existence, or when the police try to remove them from the country, irregular migrants need to renegotiate their survival by becoming invisible to both the government and the police. They might also find other specific means of survival, such as positively associating with local residents, their own networks, and some NGOs. Phrased differently, they reorient their lawscapes according to the new situations at hand. The interplay between the various lawscapes (of irregular migrants, the government, and police, to cite a few) thus produces different degrees of in/visibilisation.

In the following sections, I present the research materials and methods, with a short introduction outlining the general context of the research, and then explore some cases of ontological in/visibility as means of creating desired spaces of survival in the lawscape.

## CONTEXT OF THE RESEARCH

In 2015, the number of migrants entering Finland increased eight-fold compared to previous years. Consequently, immigration policies became stricter (Prime Minister’s Office and Finland 2015; Haas, Natter, and Vezzoli 2018; Bhatia 2020) and the number of negative Migri decisions on asylum applications grew exponentially (Saarikkomäki et al. 2018). The research focused on these “new migrants” who arrived in 2015 and, in particular, on the ones who failed to obtain asylum in Finland and were asked to leave the country (Migri 2022b). Even if the central government declares that they are illegal and should not remain in the country, in many cases they do remain,

even after their asylum applications are rejected by the Administrative and/or the Supreme Administrative Court (Migri 2022d)—to which they can appeal following the first negative decision from Migri (2022a)—and they become subject to denial of admittance decisions. Denial of admittance decisions are issued for example in the following cases: after the first negative decision from Migri (which might follow an obligatory face-to-face interview with the asylum seeker to assess the grounds for requesting asylum), if an appeal to the Administrative Court is not promptly presented (Lehtikunnas 2018); if the individual can be sent to another country where they have already received international protection or that can handle the asylum application according to the Dublin Regulation (Migri 2022c); or immediately after the second negative decision from the Administrative Court, if a “stop deportation” is not promptly issued. Indeed, if a second appeal is presented to the Supreme Administrative Court, the decision can be awaited in the country of origin, meaning that the individual can be removed from Finland at any time.

Some migrants repeatedly enter and exit the asylum process, making new asylum applications when their appeals are rejected. However, if Migri determines that the application provides no new grounds for asylum (i.e., if the asylum seeker does not give new information to Migri), the application is rejected immediately. Other migrants live in a limbo state (Yijälä and Nyman 2017), neither allowed to stay in the country nor removable from the country (e.g., if they do not have a passport, or claim to have lost it, or the embassy does not issue a temporary travel document; Ellermann 2010; Schweitzer 2017). Nevertheless, like other irregular migrants, they are not entitled to work. When they are outside the asylum process, these people have no access to public services, except for urgent healthcare and basic social services (Ministry of Social Affairs and Health and Finland 2021). To survive, they are forced to rely on their own networks (if they have been able to build any), on private citizens willing to help, and/or on NGOs. A growing grey market is currently providing the services they cannot find through official channels. Many of the ones who can be removed from the country go into hiding because they are afraid of being apprehended by the police, taken into custody, and sent back to their countries of origin (De Genova 2016).

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was conducted using participant observations and unstructured interviews (as this study is part of a larger research, more details about the methods and materials can be found for example here: Jauhiainen and Tedeschi 2021). Around 40 days or nights, once or twice per week, were spent with around 70 irregular migrants in urban areas in Finland, from April 2018 to January 2019, speaking with them, sharing their spaces and thoughts, and silently observing their bodies’ movements and reactions. They were mainly men, between 25 and 55 years old, from Iraq, Somalia, Afghanistan, and some North African countries, such as Morocco (Tedeschi and Gadd 2021). For ethical reasons, I could not request or demand that these people reveal places where I could meet more undocumented female migrants and/or provide better access to them (Jauhiainen and Tedeschi 2021). In most cases, it was more difficult to meet women than men. They remained more hidden, and asking about them, or where to reach them, would have been inappropriate in many cases, when our general approach was to be as non-invasive as possible and to avoid endangering them, their activities, and their families. This was why I met only few women. The majority of the people I met were men around 30 years old. With roughly 20 of

them, trustful relationships were built over the months. I did not pre-select the research participants; instead, I stayed in contact with gatekeepers who then facilitated the access to them. Initially, the communication with them was facilitated by gatekeepers, but after a while, when trust was established, I was able to interact with them directly. Of course, had I been able to reach out to women, or to different races and ethnic groups, the lawscapes described in this article would have been very different.

Ethnographic notes were taken after each day spent with the participants, but usually not in front of them, as this might have caused suspicion about my motives and whether I might be an undercover police officer. The notes resulted from chats with the participants, or simply from observations of their movements, their feelings, and the places they frequented. Generally, the participants were not asked specific questions. They were free to either talk if they wished or remain silent. There are no personal data, meeting places, or ethnic origins in the ethnographic notes so that no one could be identified from them. Consent was always requested from the research participants, although they were not required to sign a form. They were informed about the research and were free to withdraw from the research at any time.

The ethnographic notes were content-analyzed to identify in/visibilisation mechanisms relating to law, space, and how they were emotionally experienced by the research participants. The extracts from the ethnographic notes reflect the research participants' opinions and feelings as they expressed them. The veracity of the accounts could not be determined; thus, all the extracts should be treated as personal and subjective statements by the research participants.

## AN ETHNOGRAPHIC EXPLORATION OF IRREGULAR MIGRANTS' LAWSCAPES

This article examines the law in its manifold and material interactions with irregular migrants and their everyday affective and emotional lives. The mechanisms under investigation are self-invisibilisation, in/visibilisation by Migri, and in/visibility in (public) spaces. I will first illustrate the three studied mechanisms of in/visibilisation, and then provide the corresponding examples.

### Self-Invisibilisation

Self-invisibilisation (or self-dissimulation) is a mechanism of desire through which people invisibilise (layers of) themselves in different ways, using different strategies. To a greater or lesser extent, many irregular migrants try to dissimulate their current condition and to invisibilise themselves by redirecting their lawscapes—the lawscapes of their countries of origin with specific legal requirements and religious and moral values, the lawscapes of the transit countries they have passed through, and the Finnish lawscapes—to survive in Finland. As Brighenti beautifully expressed it: “The threshold between the visible and invisible is, ultimately, the threshold between object and environment: when we cannot yet (or can no longer) ‘visibilise’ an object, it means that it has ‘environmentalised’ itself: it no longer stands before us (‘ob-’) but rather envelops us (‘env-’)” (Brighenti 2014, 70).

By dissimulating themselves, or parts of their past selves, some irregular migrants strive not to stand out or “stand before” (i.e., by being hyper-visible as “different”) but, rather, to become invisible in Finland, in a new body, so to speak, that is ready to be materially absorbed by the



new environment (to be “enveloped” by it) and the new lawscape. This was masterfully exemplified by Papadopoulos and Tsianos, when they explain how “migrants connect to each other through becomings; through their own gradual and careful, sometimes painful, transformation of their existing bodily constitution, they realise their desire by changing their bodies, voices, accents, patois, hair, color, height, gender, age, biographies” (2008, 228). In our case, some migrants had a strong desire to dissimulate and forget parts of their pasts, on the one hand, and to be materially enveloped, absorbed by the new country, on the other. The two desires ran parallel and were accompanied by two different modes of dissimulation and in/visibilisation. An enlightening example here is the conflict between religious lawscapes: the religious lawscapes of the countries of origin, which some were trying to forget (dissimulate), versus the new, Christian lawscape of Finland. Invisibilisation regarding the former requires that the person strongly desire to forget about it, while concealing this desire from the peers; invisibilisation in the latter implies that the person strives to be enveloped and absorbed by it. Some migrants wish to invisibilise the religious lawscape of the country of origin and to become fully part of the Christian community, where they are actively involved (for a thorough account of the conversion process with cases from Finland, see Nikanne (2018). Literature on conversions in migratory contexts is vast; see, e.g., Stadlbauer 2019). However, as the examples will show, this may be a risky option. To become part of the new lawscape, converts often need to protect themselves by hiding this move from their peers, who might not agree with their choice for cultural and religious reasons (Jauhiainen and Tedeschi 2021). In other words, to protect themselves, some of those who decide to change religion (moved by either a genuine desire to become Christian or, in few cases, by the illusion of obtaining asylum more easily) conceal their new faith and apparently abide by the religious law of their peers, while their bodies are already abiding by a different law.

### In/Visibilisation by Migri

Conflicting in/visibilisation needs of the different lawscapes may generate stressful and unsettling situations, where the movements and activities of a person radically change depending on the space they inhabit. Such a stressful situation arises sometimes with regard to Migri (the institution that decides immigration-related matters in Finland). In particular, the Migri interview—which asylum seekers must undergo after submitting their asylum applications—was characterised as “very stressful” by the majority of the participants in the research. Some of the irregular migrants I met were already distressed and traumatised; thus, during their interviews with Migri, they said that could not present the details of their stories coherently, and even if they were in real danger in their home countries, could find it difficult to appropriately convey this to Migri (a situation common to many migrants; see, e.g., Gill et al. (2020) regarding “psychological absences” in legal hearings). Additionally, translation mistakes (from the applicant’s mother tongue to Finnish) can cause difficulties (Gadd and Lehtikunnas 2019), as can the tendency of officials to rely on denotational signs to determine asylum seekers’ credibility (Jacquemet 2015). In general, the law requires that migrant’s stories be coherent, linear, supported by relevant data, and narrated without faults (Herlihy, Jobson, and Turner 2012; Dahlvik 2018; Herlihy and Turner 2018). Some bodies therefore strive to deliver what the Finnish law wants, to obtain asylum, and to build desired spaces of survival. They desire to be enveloped by Migri’s lawscape—to become fully invisibilised there and accepted before the law. Whether their reasons are

genuine or not (it is not the purpose of this paper to examine the truthfulness of the migrants' intentions), they reorient their lawscape's in/visibilisation desires in many ways; for example, by showing Migri that they have actually changed their religion or they belong to a gender minority and would be in danger in their home countries (regarding asylum interviews with asylum-seeking Pakistani Christians in the UK, see Madziva (2018) and Madziva and Lowndes (2018)); by claiming the right to stay because of family ties; or by simply explaining the reasons for seeking asylum in a way that will convince Migri that protection is really necessary. If the lawscape reorientation is such that migrants fail to in/visibilise themselves as the body Migri's lawscape wants, the two conflicting lawscapes might not be able to find a compromise. In this research project, some asylum seekers who lived in this unsettling situation and failed to demonstrate that they had become Christian failed both the interviews with Migri and the subsequent appeals (Tessieri 2017).

### In/Visibility in (Public) Spaces

In general, irregular migrants are fully aware of the materiality of the law when they walk in public spaces or need to look for new places to sleep. They are aware of the fact that Finnish law surrounds them and that, to survive, they need to reorient the lawscape and become invisible-in-space. In other words, they need to become like all the other passers-by in public spaces—in the end, their desire is to “environmentalise themselves.” Many try to disappear and melt into the lawscape of the place where they live: “The urban space is full of no-go and limited access areas, curfews and borders invisible to ‘documented’ people. Undocumented migrants soon learn to be cautious, to navigate through the city without being visible, ‘to be streetwise’” (Sigona 2012, 56–57). Since they are unsure whether they will be singled out (i.e., easily spotted by the police or simply stigmatized by other people as “irregular”; Villegas 2010), and also run the risk of ethnic profiling (Keskinen et al. 2018), many try to be unobtrusive and abide by the urban space's laws. This is the main reason why many of them prefer to live in the capital (Helsinki): in the other, smaller urban areas in Finland, it is too easy to be spotted and singled out. However, in the capital, they can more easily mingle and invisibilise themselves in public spaces. They can find empowering spaces of survival where they do not risk being singled out and can become an invisible part of the urban lawscape, like normal passers-by.

### In/Visibilisation Examples

Following the explanation of the different in/visibilisation practices, I will now provide some examples according to the grouping mentioned above. In all the cases presented, a wide range of emotions emerged, from despair to fear and shame, from a desire for recognition to a desire to disappear and become invisible-in-the-environment. These varied emotional affects moved the lawscape, and the different degrees of in/visibility then adjusted accordingly.

Aabid seemed desperate to become accepted in Finland; thus, he was trying to dissimulate the lawscape of his country of origin and become fully part of Finland's lawscape:

You do not get killed here. It is enough to do what is right to be safe. It is not like this in my country. Respecting the laws does not keep you safe there. It might be the opposite in fact. I want to be safe and to follow the law here. I don't want to go back. However, it is true that the law in this "safe country" is trying to send me back to a place where I could be killed ... But I think that they are doing it so that the word will spread that Finland is not a welcoming country and people will stop coming here.

He arrived in Finland in 2015, because, he said, his life was in danger in his home country. The first thing he did was to give up on the religious lawscape of his country of origin to become Christian. Changing religion is considered by Migri to constitute a new ground for appealing against a negative asylum decision (Migri 2017), especially if the applicant can demonstrate that they could be prosecuted in their country of origin as a Christian. However, Aabid did not become Christian to appeal against a negative decision, claiming that he wished to become Christian immediately upon arriving in Finland. Despite this, his asylum application was rejected, but he still desired to be Christian; he wished to be a Finn and to speak Finnish. He had plans to go to live in the countryside (his desired space of survival), where (he believed) he could easily invisibilise himself and become fully part of the lawscape, especially if he spoke fluent Finnish (Jauhiainen and Tedeschi 2021). He did not want to live in a big city, where he could meet his peers, who want to talk with him in his language. Every time he talked with them, he was brought back to the lawscape of his country of origin, which he felt was negatively affecting him by reminding him of a place he wanted to leave behind.

On the other hand, his family, back in his home country, stopped talking to him when they discovered that he had changed his religion. This was against both the law of his country of origin and the family's moral values. Although he missed his brothers and his parents and regularly talked about them, it was more important for him to build his own space of survival (i.e., his future in Finland) and the safety and security he associated with it. His desire was to be protected by Finnish law.

Daud arrived in Finland in 2015, like many others, and attended Finnish courses. He had problems with both his friends in Finland and his family in his home country. Like Aabid's family, they disowned him when he became Christian. He explained that he was reading the Bible on his mobile phone, because reading on the phone was less obvious than using a book, which might make people wonder what he was reading and look at the title. Paradoxically, this need to hide a change of religion from the community of peers, because of the fear and shame of being judged by them, contradicts Migri's requirements. If asylum seekers want to demonstrate that they have changed their religion and become Christian (and could therefore be prosecuted in their country of origin if they returned), they are required to provide material, visible proof to Migri by demonstrating that they are going to church, attending religious services, actively participating in the Christian community, reading the Bible, and similar (Jauhiainen and Tedeschi 2021). The law requires that the person become completely absorbed by (and therefore invisible in) the Christian community, but this fact needs to be hidden from peers, as the case of Daud shows.

Faaris also arrived in Finland in 2015. When he received his first (negative) decision from Migri, he was not allowed to appeal to the Administrative Court, so he started a second asylum process from scratch, which resulted in a second negative decision: Migri claimed that he had disappeared (by not contacting a local authority) and had then "exploited the system" by starting a second asylum process. Apparently, during the second asylum interview with Migri, Faaris was not able to reply to the question: "With which local authorities have you been in touch?"

because he could not remember; therefore, Migri deemed Faaris to have disappeared (from the law and the police). In fact, this was not the case, since Faaris was in touch with his local municipality, but he could not recall which authority during the interview (Jauhiainen and Tedeschi 2021). What really mattered to him at that time was the lawscape of his country of origin, which led to him having flashbacks about being killed. He was completely immersed in and scared of it, which caused him stress, sleepless nights, and forgetfulness; thus, he failed to reorient his lawscape and invisibilise himself in Migri's lawscape by making his presence fully visible (visibility within invisibility) in the way the law required. Instead, he was mentally moving in the parallel lawscape of his own country, where the most important thing is to make sure not to be killed. He not only forgot which local authority he was in contact with, but was also unable to accurately describe to Migri why he might be killed in his home country; his stories were therefore incoherent and too short to be accepted (Graham, Herlihy, and Brewin 2014).

There are other cases where the law in the urban lawscape is so visible that, instead of reassuring migrants (as in the case of Aabid, who felt safe walking in the Finnish urban lawscape), it scares them, which is particularly likely to happen in small Finnish towns. Conversations with gatekeepers made it clear that some of these people felt humiliated and too ashamed to ask for public services or food vouchers. To do so, they would need to show themselves in a public space, as represented by a local municipality building (Jauhiainen and Tedeschi 2021). Their home-country lawscapes, which forbade them to look like beggars under any circumstances, deterred them from being (super)visible in local municipality buildings (especially in small villages), and shaped their movements accordingly; thus, they invisibilised themselves and relied on their local communities for help. The conflict between the lawscapes of the municipality, its civil servants, and the migrants redirected the migrants' desire for protection and recognition of their pride as human beings towards more affectively and emotionally empowering, positive spaces of survival. These migrants' spaces of survival were found within their own communities, which hid and protected them. However, in other Finnish small towns or villages, the lawscapes were redirected by local residents to such an extent that they became welcoming for irregular migrants. The local residents decided to accept the presence of these migrants and to "protect" them (Tedeschi and Gadd 2021). The latter were then absorbed and invisibilised in the public spaces, which allowed for dialogue between otherwise conflicting lawscapes.

Bader was another irregular migrant who arrived in the country in 2015. As with many like him, his asylum request was rejected, and he was considered to be living illegally in the country. Unlike Aabid, he was not trying to dissimulate his past and invisibilise himself by disappearing completely in the country. However, like Aabid, he sought safety. He was proud of who he was and indeed wished to remain himself while, at the same time, finding a compromise between the lawscape of his country of origin and that of the new country. Unfortunately, they appeared to be incompatible:

After I got the rejection of my asylum application, my lawyer told me that I had two options: either to become Christian or gay, so that, on these new grounds, my application could be re-evaluated by Migri. He offended me, and he was not being honest with me. I don't want to choose between these options: they are offensive and go against my values!

As Migri (2018) noted, "the new grounds that are given [for subsequent asylum applications] are most often that the applicant has converted to Christianity while in Finland or

that the applicant belongs to a sexual or gender minority.” While I do not know whether this is exactly what the lawyer suggested to him, what is apparent is that he was expressing a feeling of disappointment that the lawscape of his country of origin, which he proudly materialised in his values, quickly clashed with the lawscape represented by the lawyer, who he felt was mistreating him. Bader explained that he was proud of himself—of who he was—and even if the host country’s lawscape rejected him, he did want to compromise his own lawscape, but without losing his self-respect. Since he seemed unable to find an acceptable space of survival via the asylum process, his pride forced him to reorient his lawscape and try to find a compromise and more empowering affects in two ways: firstly, by going to school, where he managed to invisibilise himself and feel safe, at least for a few hours (Tedeschi 2021a), and secondly, by frequently changing the places where he slept, because he was afraid of being removed from the country by the police: “I feel safe at school, but when I am outside, I am afraid that the police will catch me. I always sleep in different places, for that reason.” In school, the law invisibilised itself, which made him feel more comfortable (i.e., he was positively affected by it). By contrast, he “felt” the law everywhere in public spaces and the places where he slept, to such an extent that he could find nowhere to hide from it. This scared him and hampered his movements in those spaces.

Ciro stood in a public space, casually looking at his mobile phone, and I was told that he was waiting for someone to arrive. I did not know why he was waiting, but he tried to concentrate on his mobile phone and appear “normal” (see also studies about the informal rules that regulate stranger interactions in public spaces, e.g., Goffman 1963 and Lofland 1998). His body desired to become part of the space in which he was standing, and he wanted to disappear—to fully invisibilise himself: “Many urban undesirables ... will (try to) benefit from the possibility to remain invisible in public space” (De Backer 2019, 310). There was something interesting about *Ciro’s* standing around, which I observed in some other cases. The law of this public space invisibilised itself to most of the passers-by, because that was what they wished for—to be freely able to come and go. They naturally abided by the law, the movements of their bodies unconsciously following what the law of the space required them to do. They were all well-behaved bodies. They mostly looked at their mobile phones or quickly walked to the places they needed to reach. However, *Ciro’s* invisibilisation in the lawscape was completely different. He was well aware of the materiality of the law surrounding the space, unlike the passers-by. Moreover, the presence of police officers in the vicinity made this awareness even more material and real: he was afraid of them. He knew that the law surrounded him and, to survive, he tried to become invisible in the space where he was standing. In other words, he desired to become like the passers-by, which is why he kept staring at his phone, like the passers-by. He needed to follow the rules of the place, of which he was well aware, but he did not want to be seen, so his bodily movements were carefully controlled to ensure that they abided by the law. He needed to invisibilise himself, since “the presence of the law forces the body ... to hide behind a perceived innocent stereotype” (Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos 2015, 101). The law mandating the denial of admittance or stay in the country of ex-asylum seekers made *Ciro* adapt and hide in the lawscape of the public space where he was standing. His body carried the law regulating denials with him, and it was this law that made him find ways to invisibilise himself in the lawscape, to feel safe. Here, at least two overlapping lawscapes are worth noting: the one of the public space and the one regulating denial of admittance or stay in the country. They were both inscribed on *Ciro’s* body, and on many other bodies like his, accordingly in/visibilising them.

## CONCLUSIONS

Processes of in/visibilisation do not follow predefined directions or rational choices but are rather built according to individuals' desire to continue being and becoming across various lawscapes. The individuals either visibilise or invisibilise themselves according to their affects and emotions within the ontological interplay between (tautology of) law and space (the lawscape). In this way, they create their own multiple lawscapes, which interact/conflict with the lawscapes created by other bodies (the government, Migri, NGOs, the community, etc.).

In terms of the empirical results of the research, the article widely confirms the general findings of other studies: the activation of specific mechanisms of in/visibility in the irregular migrants' relationships and in public spaces (Leinonen and Toivanen 2014; Damery and Mescoli 2019; De Backer 2019); in case of ex-asylum seekers, their noncompliance with asylum rules and procedures, especially when under stress or traumatised (Mueller et al. 2011; Herlihy and Turner 2018); the production of conflicting religious identifications (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh and Qasmiyeh 2010); and more generally, the poststructuralist adoption of a variety of "masks" (in the article referred to as different mechanisms of in/visibilisation) or multiple identities in response to the demands of a hostile, receiving environment (An Ghail, Brah, and Hickman 2000; Stewart 2005; Schweitzer 2017).

Of these empirical results, the concept of lawscape helps to unveil shades of irregular migrants' interplays with law and space. In particular, these interplays, or mechanisms of in/visibilisation within lawscapes, highlight the materiality of the law and how the latter, defined as an "apparatus of power that inscribes itself on the bodies" (Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos 2013), is enacted and materialised in the movements, choices, emotions, thoughts, and gestures of these persons. As research on irregular migration suffers from "endemic undertheorising" (Cvajner and Sciortino 2010, 389), the ontological content-reading of empirical work provided in this article may contribute to new materialistic thinking in migration studies and specifically facilitate a better understanding of the material unfolding of the law in irregular migrants' lives. It could also be applied more widely in asylum seeker and refugee studies, as well as in the study of other vulnerable and marginalised groups of people and their integration processes in host societies.

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## NOTE

1. From here onwards, I call them "irregular migrants," although the expression is controversial and attributes to them a generalised label that does not account for their peculiar everyday lives and conditions. However, it is

not the purpose of this paper to discuss the various legal and academic definitions of migrants whose permanent residence in a country is somewhat irregular according to the law. For more details, see, for instance, Jauhiainen and Tedeschi (2021) and Anderson and Ruhs (2010).

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