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Article

On the ethical dimension of irregular migrants' lives: Affect, becoming and information

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Abstract

This article operationalises Simondon's theory of becoming and Deleuze and Spinoza's ethics and unfolds their conceptualisations in the lives of a group of irregular migrants in Finland. From an ontological and ontogenetic perspective, individuals and their environment are always in a non-complete, non-linear and ethically affective state of becoming. In this sense, migrant bodies register the positive and negative affections accumulated over time, and, via information, make them a material, yet unfinished, and ready to be challenged again, part of their becoming. Applying these concepts to ethnographic fieldwork, this article highlights three dimensions of the observed irregular migrants' becoming: their relentless efforts of becoming themselves through hardships; non-linear tensions with disparate realities, such as the bureaucratic procedures, and the negative affections the latter entail; and the struggle towards positive affections in temporary stabilities (e.g. in community life). In focusing on the processual and ontological making of migrants in their environment, the article contributes to broader debates regarding the non-linear and ethical dimensions of their everyday lives, as well as their capacity of transforming themselves, and aims at opening up dialogues on the significance of an ontogenetic approach to the field of irregular migration and beyond.

Keywords

affect, becoming, ethics, irregular migration, information, Simondon

Introduction

> The subject is individual and more than individual; she is incompatible with herself
>
> (Author's translation; Simondon, 2005: 253)

The lives of migrants, especially irregular ones, are frequently characterised by a continuous change of condition. As Collins (2018) highlights, their lives are often unpredictable. This unpredictability is brought about by the continuous challenges they have to take on, as well as by the sudden changes linked with their undecided legal status when trying to settle down in a place (Hörschelmann, 2011). As Collins argues, migration is less about rationality and clear and linear decisions, and more about

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taking opportunities by following one's desire of becoming oneself. Thorough ethnographic studies have widely highlighted the non-linearity of irregular migrants' lives, such as the dramatic story of being and becoming an irregular migrant across the borders by Khosravi (2010). Scholars have examined the agency of irregular migrants and their active construction of subjecthood (Grønseth, 2013; Strange et al., 2017). Carling and Collins, in turn referring to Papadopoulos and Tsianos (2008), analyse migration aspirations and desire and highlight how the latter materially shapes individuals' lives to such an extent that it 'foregrounds embodied, affective and material components of becoming' (2018: 10). In a similar vein, Shubin stresses the importance of focusing on the processual dimension of migration: the migrants' 'journeying of becoming homely' (2015: 353). Mendoza and Morén-Alegret note how the becoming of migrants is materialised through the senses, which are often overlooked: 'Individuals look, listen, taste, smell and touch, and it is in so doing that they build their experience of the world' (2013: 762), and Campos-Delgado (2019) highlights how emotions are fully part of the space-making and becoming of migrants. Space-making is made of 'migrants' coping strategies, experiences and struggles' (Tervonen et al., 2018: 140) and everyday tactics (De Certeau, 1984) of survival, including in the Nordic countries (Bendixsen, 2018).

All these contributions, despite their different approaches, highlight with respect to irregular migrants' life: non-linearity; the importance of focusing on the processual (in-becoming) dimension of migrants' subjecthood; and the crucial role of affects, emotions, and desires in space-making. It seems to me that these facets could be united under a common theoretical endeavour. This article thus explores a theoretical approach aimed at giving an explicit ontological and ontogenetic foundation to all these different accounts of irregular migrants' subjectivities-in-becoming and related material manifestations of affectivity, emotions and desires. For this purpose, the article experiments with a non-categorical, in-becoming theory and language to reinforce and contribute to those geographical and migration works focusing on the non-linear, material, affective, and processual making of the individual-in-the-environment. It ontologically places the exploration of irregular migrants' survival strategies and related agency discourses in the materiality of their bodies (and spaces).

To do this, Gilbert Simondon's ontological and material theory of becoming (individuation) is adapted to migration studies. It is then used to explore the non-linear, ethical and affective movements of becoming in some of the lives and narratives of irregular migrants in Finland. The role of information in these processes of becoming is also highlighted. In particular, the research demonstrates how Simondon's thought can be made operational (Roux, 2002) in socio-spatial contexts where the living conditions are precarious and individuals heavily experience hardships in environments that often reject them. Simondon's scholarship has not been previously applied to the field of migration studies, though it has been used in the broader field of geography where it belongs to the geographical discussions of non-representational theories (Amin and Thrift, 2002), new materialism (Anderson and Wylie, 2009; Coole and Frost, 2010), and the ontological turn in socio-spatial sciences (Escobar, 2007).

By deconstructing predefined and preformed categories (that is, by overcoming the dualism individual/environment) (Popke, 2003), Simondon's approach focuses on the fact that the environment is always already ontologically and ontogenetically part the individual. Indeed, via non-linear flows of affect and information, the environment becomes an active, material 'layer' on the body (Barad, 2003; Simondon, 2009). For Simondon the individual can go as far as 'materially' modifying her own internal structure and her environment to solve the problems at hand (Voss, 2018). This is what he calls 'ontogenesis', a concept that distinguishes him from other thinkers, such as Deleuze. For the philosopher, the problems and incompatibilities with the environment (and the capacity to deal with them) are to be rooted in the very ontology of the individual.

In human geography, opening up to Simondon might enable building a third path between what Nieuwenhuis has identified as being the two major directions in the materialistic turn: the 'relational

ontologies of becoming' and the 'metaphysical analysis of the ontology of being' (2016: 300). The first one, following Deleuze, is critiqued by Nieuwenhuis for its lack of place, whereas the second one, drawing upon Heidegger, does not focus on relationality and ends up reifying place. Simondon offers the foundations of a material ontology of becoming that, while acknowledging the materiality of the environment, at the same time makes the latter ontogenetically part of the individual and of her relational capacity.

In migration studies, this approach broadens the discussion as to what migrants represent from an ontological and ontogenetic perspective: it radically questions what an individual is, and how she can materially transform her conditions of existence on the move (Corrado, 2004). In this sense, we may agree with Simondon that migrants' process of becoming moves via a continuous information exchange between them and their environment (Simondon, 1992). Here, information is the material, transductive force that circulates between individuals and their environment and makes them become. The information exchange might be materialised in positive (empowering, that is, ethically good, in Deleuze (1988) and Spinoza's (2001 [1677]) vocabulary) affections generated by the help of others in the community, as well as in negative (harmful, that is, ethically bad) affections brought about by the hardships they have faced. The latter are the result of a material overlapping of contradictory, disparate realities coming from different spaces and times, as Bailey et al. (2002: 128) highlight: 'The joint construction of daily life in multiple locations implies the juxtaposition of two, often contrasting systems'. The hardships might have to do with past traumatic experiences, the present and future cultural shock of living in a new country, (non)access to public services, bureaucratic procedures, instability, and fear of being deported or being caught by the police. Inasmuch as, via information, the migrants process and make all those affections part of their body, they modify their internal structure, keep on becoming, and relentlessly challenge and materially absorb and transform what the environment is offering them.

All in all, the individual is not a 'fixed' subject, but a being-always-in-the-making (Worth, 2009); that is, in the process of becoming-the-environment, seeking the good affections that can guarantee her survival. The link to an ethical dimension opens up to a new view of space as manifold matter(s) that, as such, is impossible to reduce to a single meaning (Doel, 1999) and is ontologically part of the individual, shaping her actions. It reminds us that there must always be a clear engagement with ethics, to such an extent that 'we must also reinscribe the social as a site of ethics and responsibility' (Popke, 2006: 510). Such ethics is not an abstract demand (Popke, 2007), but something very concrete and material, which could and shall become our 'accustomed place or dwelling', as the etymology of the word suggests. This engagement with ethics can find various expressions and is not 'simply, speculative activity, a narrative of thoughts and concepts about hypothetical situations' (Lo Piccolo and Thomas, 2008: 11–12): it can be a transformative ethics of care, whereby we might start viewing 'unfamiliar others . . . less as strangers and more as neighbors', as Conradson suggests (2011: 465); it is a research ethics that, especially when conducting research with vulnerable people, needs to be embodied by the researcher (Valentine, 2005; van Liempt and Bilger, 2012); finally, it is an ethics of affect emerging from the geographical effort of apprehension of 'spaces of embodied movement and practice' (McCormack, 2003: 488). In all these cases, ethics emerges as something that cannot be separated from 'worlding' (Barad, 2010), but is already ontologically fully part of that. In this sense, this article sets out an ontological and ontogenetic foundation to irregular migrants' 'worlding' or 'worldliness', to their being always incomplete individuals (Shubin, 2015), yet making this incompleteness the source of their becoming-the-environment, using the concepts of affect, ethics and information as theoretical tools to be tested in the field. In Simondon's words, ethics is an ontogenetic act of production and transformation of space itself, which, through affect and information, changes the individual's internal structures, for survival.

The article first discusses Simondon's ontological theory of becoming (individuation) and illustrates its connections with affect theory in Spinozan and Deleuzian ethics. After outlining the methods and the context of the empirical research, it then shows how specific steps in the process of individuation – the continuous effort of becoming oneself, the tensions between disparate realities, and the temporary stabilities – can be traced in the narratives and lives of a group of irregular migrants in Finland.

On Simondon's theory of becoming

> There is ethics inasmuch as there is information, namely a signification overcoming a disparatedness of elements of beings, and making it in such a way that what is interior is also exterior (Author's translation; Simondon, 2005: 333)

In many European countries, including Finland, what immigration policies, and especially the asylum process, require migrants to have is a clear-cut, rational, linear and coherent idea of the reasons why they moved to the country, and how they plan to carry on with their life there (Geiger and Pécoud, 2013). The inability to provide clear, organised and classifiable reasons could bring about the rejection of the asylum request, and, consequently, the irregularity status (Gill, 2016). The legal requirements of the asylum process and, more generally, immigration policies have built what Crawley and Skleparis (2018) call categorical fetishism, which often clashes with the real lives of migrants (Feldman, 2011): dramatic events, superposition of different and contradictory material layers coming from the past (e.g. the home country, the places crossed during the journey to Finland), non-linear decisions, incoherent actions and unsolved psychological traumas (Bustamante et al., 2018; Carswell et al., 2011; Silove et al., 1997). These aspects of the lives of irregular migrants in Finland are not one-of-a-kind, but are common to other experiences of irregular migrants living in other countries. Also, these experiences might share similarities with the ones lived by other individuals going through traumas, losses, violence and illnesses. In addition to this, irregular migrants have also crossed and lived in many (even radically) different countries for years before attempting to settle down in the country of destination. This is important to note because countries of origin are not left in the past, nor are they external to migrants themselves. To the contrary, from an ontological point of view, the past environment becomes an affective material layer in each body, and is made of a variety of complex and hardly generalisable trajectories and experiences, with which each irregular migrant needs to ethically negotiate his or her survival, along with the present and future layers coming from the country of destination.

Individual/environment

It is in this framing that Simondon's theory of becoming (or individuation) can be operationalised. Simondon analyses the being qua becoming of the individuals-in-their-environment: for him the environment is ontologically both inside (internal) *and* outside (external).[1] Similarly, Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos (2015) maintains that bodies are space and vice versa, whereby, according to him, there is no outside in the first place. Everything that happens inside is always already the outside, and vice versa. In the same vein, Brennan (2004) highlights how the environment is not something separated from the individual, and insists on the need to build a new paradigm, 'one capable of handling intentional and affective connections between and among the subjects and their environment'. Of space, Massey stresses it being incomplete, open, and beyond reach: 'The openended interweaving of a multiplicity of trajectories (themselves thereby in transformation), the concomitant fractures, ruptures and structural divides, are what makes it in the end so unamenable to a single totalising project' (2005: 100). In its openness and incompleteness, space always remains co-produced, entangled with society.

Even though these theoretical positions express different views, they all go in the direction of finding ways to overcome the dualism, the separation between individual and environment. Simondon conceives the latter as topological, whereby there

is no distance between inside and outside (similarly to Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos' troubled tautology between bodies and space) and 'all the content of the inner space is topologically in contact with the content of the outer space' (Author's translation; Simondon, 1995: 225). In this sense, the environment is the individual's surrounding element actively contributing to (and being material part of) her individuation by exchanging affect and information with her (Tedeschi, 2019). For Simondon, the environment, to which the individual is always associated, is the source, full of potentials, of the pre-individual: 'The pre-individual is both the reality preceding the genesis of the individual and, *at the same time*, the milieu full of potentials "associated" to the individual, once the latter has been generated' (original emphasis; Bardin, 2015: 36). Hence, the pre-individual can be seen as the potentiality of bodies-in-space to be always something more, that is to flee the status quo, transform their internal structures and become a new being.

However, in order for this to happen, the environment:

> cannot be a force field only: it is not only hodological. So as to make the integration of the elements into a new system possible, it is necessary that a condition of disparation exists in the mutual relationship between the elements [that is, the individuals and their environment] (Author's translation; Simondon, 2005: 210).

Therefore, conflictual situations (disparation) ontologically belong to the 'becoming-environment' ('ontogenesis') that the individual is. Hence, bodies navigate this ontological disparatedness and tend to move towards their own good/survival (that is, have the power to change their ethical direction): in Simondon's terms, they are intended as relative individuals, always in the process of becoming-being. As Shubin (2015) recalls, people are ontologically never completed. The individuals are themselves, and more than themselves, in a permanent, unsolved state of non-linear incompatibility with their environment (Simondon, 2005). In this sense, Conradson and McKay remind us that 'selfhood is . . . always a hybrid achievement, emerging out of a diverse range of connections' (2007: 167–168). Because of the pre-individual dimension, individuals are continuously 'falling out of step with themselves [*se déphaser par rapport à lui-même*]' (Simondon, 1992: 300), and information is the tension (exchange, conflict) that is ontogenetically generated by these non-linear movements of dephasing and disparatedness between the individual and the environment. This disparatedness, or metastability, must then be solved in order to bring the pair individual-environment to a new step of becoming (individuation), as well as to a temporary stability (in the case of irregular migrants, this can be translated into temporary relief from the hardships). The latter is then bound to be challenged again (for Simondon stability is always temporary), in a back-and-forth movement which is the becoming of the individuals – in the case of irregular migrants, movements between countries, hardships, unclear legal status, etc. All in all, the ontological incompatibility (disparatedness, metastability) between individual and environment is what generates and moves the ontogenesis/becoming and what, in this ontogenetic process, redirects affect and ethics.

Unstable becoming

However, in some cases, temporary stability is not (easily) reached, and the individual struggles restlessly to find a solution within herself. In this case, the philosopher explains, anxiety (*angoisse*) might be generated, when the individual 'feels her existence as a problem which has been posed to herself, and she also feels this division' (Author's translation; Simondon, 2005: 255) between her environment and her being individuated. Thus, *angoisse* hinders the connection between the individual and the environment, closing the individual in herself: it is the pre-individual *qua* environment that generates *angoisse* within the individual. In this sense, the individual perceives that she cannot permanently solve her state of disparatedness, incompatibility and metastability, so much so that her process of becoming is temporarily hindered and the new (unknown, fearful, and generating *angoisse*) levels of individuation cannot be reached. Here *angoisse* is an ontological condition generated by the temporary impossibility to solve the incompatibility between

the individual and her environment (and it fluctuates 'in-between' the two, there is no 'possession'); fear is the emotion that may be generated as a consequence. This state produces a loss of the sense of space and time: the individual has no direction, is at the same time here and elsewhere. She is lost in herself, perceives her being individual as an absolute, closed dimension, as if it were possible to find the re-solution of the incompatibility without relying on (and, in a way, risking to be plunged into) the environment. As a consequence, missing stable spatial and temporal reference points, the things (events, people, places) that are far away appear close, whereas whatever is close seems to be distant (Simondon, 2007). The individual refuses to accept the powerfulness of the pre-individual and environmental dimension, and, in so doing, her individuation is temporarily hindered (and, with it, the information exchange with the environment). This sense of being lost has been widely highlighted by migration scholars: to cite but a few, Shubin investigates migrants being lost in 'the objective structure of timespace in the host communities' (2015: 353); Gomez and Vannini (2017) stress the feeling of being torn between places, the country of origin and destination; Conradson and McKay recall how mobility might induce 'disturbing senses of rupture, loss and even failure' (2007: 169).

Nevertheless, despite her being torn between places, the individual remains a unity of information system (Adkins, 2007): when a point of the latter is *affected* (by a new place, or unexpected hardships, for instance), information is being spread throughout the whole organism and becomes a movement, which reorganises the individual and prepares her for the next level of individuation (Simondon, 2005). However, if the individual is submerged by *angoisse*, there is no movement and the affection does not produce any effect. Information is not transferred to the whole body, in the sense that the exchange with the environment (which is also the condition sine qua non of the access to the collective, 'socio-spatial' dimension of the individual, allowing for the transformation of the environment by the individual – Corrado, 2004) is avoided, feared and, consequently, materially blocked.

Affect and ethics

Similarly to Spinoza (2001 [1677]) and Deleuze (1988), Simondon places the actual experience of becoming/individuation at the affective-emotive level. Again, there is a vast literature on geographies of affect and emotions, and these concepts have been broadly explored by migration scholars as well. For instance, Thrift recalls how, for Spinoza and Deleuze, 'affect is the capacity of interaction that is akin to a natural force of emergence' (2004: 64). It is what emerges as a result of an interaction, and fluctuates between bodies/spaces. For Collins desire is a key aspect of migration. Following Deleuze and Guattari (1987), he defines desire as the energy drawing 'different entities – human, non-human, symbolic – into relation with each other' (Collins, 2018: 966), with affects generated as a result of this process. Not dissimilarly, for Simondon affect is 'the resonance of being with itself, and links the individuated being to the pre-individual reality, which is associated to it' (Author's translation; Simondon, 2005: 31). Scott well summarises Simondon's position in this sense:

> The level of the affective-emotive registers the tension active within the relationship of the individual and its associated milieu; and, subsequently, the subject acquires the capacity to orient itself to the world it thinks and within which it strives to exist (Scott, 2014: 82).

Furthermore, since 'affects are becomings' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 256), 'each phase of being is the *affective* becoming that is the operation of individuation' (my emphasis; Scott, 2014: 180). In particular, affect is the actual, material mediation between the individual and her environment (Shaviro, 2006). Affect is the in-between inside/outside element that materially *moves* the individual as a unity of information system. Simondon's conceptualisation of affect is very close to Spinoza, as well as Deleuze's interpretation of Spinoza's ethics (Combes, 2013; Deleuze, 1988; Scott, 2014, 2017; Spinoza, 2001 [1677]). According to them (Thrift, 2004), ethics is the production of positive (good) or negative (bad) affects, which are shared in-between bodies and space (in Simondon's words, the pair

individual-environment). Whatever increases and empowers a body's affective capacity (or power) of acting/being acted upon is ethically good. Conversely, what is harmful, decreases and constrains a body's potential and energy is ethically bad. Affects become affections when they are changed into layers piling up on one's body. For instance, this is how past time is conceptualised: as a collection (multiplicity) of spatial events (affections) that are not removed, but become material strata in the body, shaping its present and future time movements. In the same vein, Blazek et al. (2019: 66) define the present as 'a number of heterogeneous elements' thriving together and constituting 'a multiplicity of relations that give rise to the moments of becoming', when analysing the spatio-temporal relationships of a trafficked person's life.

Simondon's psychology eventually centres on the notion of desire 'to persevere in its being' (Scott, 2014: 104), to survive, to keep on being and becoming: 'Affectivity . . . belongs to one of the modalities of becoming of the living being' (Author's translation; Simondon, 2005: 260). For Simondon affects, which, according to Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos, 'are the connection between the body and the world' (2013: 39), constantly produce material effects on the actions of the individuals. They are always defined in becoming, as a generative trigger of the information produced in a situation of disparatedness (ontological incompatibility) between the individual and her environment: 'Information can be argued to operate as an organizing force at the level of affect' (Tucker, 2013: 36).

Affectivity that cannot be unravelled (Krtolica, 2009) – that is to say, which cannot bring the individual to a further step of becoming via information – might indicate an unsolved conflict between the individual and her environment. *Angoisse* could be considered one severe status of pending incompatibility and disparatedness. Or, if the individual's 'power' is temporarily decreasing, in the sense that, in Deleuze and Spinoza's words, her capacity of acting and being acted upon is significantly hampered, this might be the result of negative, bad affections materially conditioning and slowing down her information system. On the other hand, a good affect might trigger a successful resolution of the disparatedness: it might indicate a positive movement of the pair individual-environment (non-linearly) going towards the next level of individuation and temporary stability. In this sense, the affective level indicates the ethical direction which the individual as information system shall take. It is the one that, together with information, allows the individual to become, to avoid being fixed in one state, in a fixed reality: thus, the individual 'becomes what it can do: to affect and be affected – hence the ethics of the event' (Doel, 1999: 162). 'An event is both that which has happened (*absolute past*) and that which is about to happen (*absolute future*)' (italics in the original text; Doel, 1999: 165). All in all, ethics is the orienting force of the individual as information system, it is the sense of remaining in the incompatibility which then opens up to the possibility of being further individuated, to actively transform the environment, and to create new internal structures: 'Ethics is the sense [*le sens*] of an individuation . . . is the sense whereby the interiority of an act expresses a sense in the world outside' (Author's translation; Simondon, 2005: 335). By doing so, the individual ethically negotiates her survival with the past affective layers, which have already become material part of her body, as well as with future elements, through the metastable process occurring in the present and organised by information. As Grosz, paraphrasing and summarising Simondon, argues:

> The present can be understood as a movement of metastability between interior and exterior, between the past that constitutes the interior and the future which beckons from outside, in which the past helps select those elements of the future that may assist in the regulation of its present and the provision for future actions and relations. For Simondon, the future lies on the exterior of the membrane, the past on the interior of the membrane, and the living being is a manner of regulation of the interaction of the multiple points of the past with the impending actions of the future (Grosz, 2017: 186).

The focus on the stratification of disparate (past, present, future affective) material layers in the body and its organisation (by information) over time is particularly relevant if we look at irregular

migrants' lives, and at how they become-being in their environment from an ethical point of view.

Materials and methods

The theoretical path outlined so far cannot be built without a strong empirical basis. The tenets – affect, becoming, and ethics – are inductively derived from a constant dialogue with data (Brown, 2017). As Massumi (2015), referring to Deleuze, maintains, a concept that is not lived is nothing. Therefore, the current results are based on ethnographic research that I conducted in Finland. They are temporary results, in the sense that, according to Simondon's theory of becoming, the observation of individuals-in-becoming (Tucker, 2010) cannot provide general assumptions or categorisations (Darling, 2014), but can only take a dynamic picture (Mezzadra and Neilson, 2013) of the individuals' movements occurring when the fieldwork is being carried out. Everything can change afterwards, and contradictory states can overlap and mix: for instance, there is no such thing as a permanent state of *angoisse*. Negative affects can always be overturned. The new temporary stability can be challenged by sudden events. Both negative and positive affections can interlace, slow down and accelerate the information system at the same time – depending on the ethical direction the individual chooses and her openness to the environmental dimension. It is crucial to remember that the situations that are presented below can be synchronous and intertwined, and constitute material layers seamlessly piling up and shaping the movements of one's body.

The fieldwork was conducted with another researcher. We regularly met and spoke with around 70 irregular migrants, and, for 9 months (in 2018), spent days and nights in the places (in private and public urban contexts) where they gather, work, live and pass their free time. With 20 of them, a deep relationship of trust was slowly created over that time. However, the research results concern the whole group of migrants with whom we were in touch, not only this subset. There was no pre-selection of the migrants: indeed, after being repeatedly denied access to them (they were not easy to find, and mostly invisible, and the majority of gatekeepers were afraid of information leakage on our side), we finally found a person who trusted us, and gave us access. They had all received two or more negative decisions on their asylum applications, and they were not permitted to stay in the country. They were mostly men (in 90% of the cases) between 25 and 55 years old. We had the opportunity to talk with women; however, they often remained hidden, and it was more difficult to interact with them. This has to be taken into consideration when reading the fieldwork results below: the experiences mainly relate to the affect and becoming of a group of men, though there are some similarities with what the women told us. Anyhow, we must acknowledge that a study on women's becoming might produce very different results. The majority of the migrants with whom we spoke were around 30 years old. Some of them spoke decent English or Finnish; others did not, and in these cases the person who gave us access, and whom they trusted, helped with the translation. After building the necessary trust (after 4 or 5 months), we were able to communicate using online translators (for limited time and only short interactions, when no one was around to help translating), or with the help of the peers of the participants (speaking English and/or Finnish, for instance). The different contexts affected the dialogues: one-to-one dialogues (including the ones with the presence of the mediator, the gatekeeper translating the conversations) often went deeper, and revealed details that could not be shared with others (not even with the peers of the participants for security reasons). On the other hand, conversations in group tended to be more superficial, but still useful and informative, especially when the peers of the participants were persons fully trusted.

The main focus of the present work is to provide a reading of the lives of irregular migrants through the lenses of some theoretical concepts (affect/ethics, becoming and information). This cannot be achieved through mere interviews, but only by sharing a (small) part of life with the research participants, which ethnography enabled us to do. The research purpose was always thoroughly explained to the migrants, as well as their right to withdraw from the research at any time – but we did not ask

them to sign anything. Given their irregular status, this would have made them very suspicious. As the security, privacy and respect and sensitivity towards the feelings of all these people come first, their meeting places and nationality cannot be revealed. I do not want to run any risk of 'scapegoating, denunciation by subjects' peer group or wider society and enforcement actions' (Düvell et al., 201: 230). Given the sensitivity of the matter, I wanted to avoid this ethnography becoming a new kind of surveillance, 'effectively complicit with if not altogether in the service of the state' (De Genova, 2002: 422). This is also what we were implicitly asked by the various actors having to do with the research participants: as irregular migration is a phenomenon relatively new in Finland, and irregular migrants are only a few, compared to other European countries, we were asked to be extra-cautious with the collected data. I use fake names to refer to the people I talked to (in this respect the norms introduced by the new reform of EU data protection have been followed. See European Commission (2018)). In general, this research follows guidelines established by the Finnish National Board on Research Integrity (TENK). Here, both the ethical dimension of the research methods and the Deleuzian and Spinozan ethics described in the theoretical framework are rooted in the 'worlding' (Barad, 2010); that is, they are practices of ethical embodiment of the individuals' and their environment's becoming.

Apart from spending time with irregular migrants, I also carried out 20 informal interviews with NGOs volunteers, doctors (including a psychotherapist), police officers, and civil servants as background information mostly concerning the following topics: the everyday life of migrants; health and security issues; and legal struggles. These were all people involved, at least to some extent, in migration management. NGOs provided help in day care centres; doctors volunteered to help migrants who were afraid to go to the hospital; the civil servants were part of the immigration services of local municipalities; and the police officers were responsible for deportation, or were managing the relationships with the migrants after the termination of the reception centres' services. Newspapers articles, immigration laws and regulations, and NGOs' social media channels also constitute the research background information.

The data consists of ethnographic notes, taken after the observation. After the day(s) or nights spent with the migrants, I usually took some time to write down what I remembered about the dialogues (or non-dialogues), the atmosphere of the place(s), the objects, the events, the gestures and bodies' movements (Fox and Alldred, 2015). The length of the dialogues cannot be generalised: sometimes we talked for hours; sometimes we exchanged only a few words; many times we just remained silent. I often noted my own feelings as well. Indeed, I was observing my own becoming, in terms of affect and information as well, throughout the months, though this material is not used here. I never took notes in front of people as this would have had a negative impact on the trust I wanted to build with them, and may have made them relive the official face-to-face interview at the Finnish Immigration Service (Migri), which for many was a stressful and fearsome event (Gill, 2016).

The empirical data was collected and content-analysed, and from there the theoretical concepts of ethics, affect, and becoming inductively emerged. The interpretation of the quotes follows the theoretical framework in a way that, as Deleuze and Guattari (1987) would say, 'entails mapping and creating rather than tracing and representing' (Zhang and Guo, 2015: 216). Therefore, to a certain extent in a metaphorical way, the quotes are read through the lenses of Simondon's line of thought and Deleuze and Spinoza's ethics. While the empirical findings are confirmed by international literature and, as such, are not original per se, the theoretical approach allows for an experimentation of a different perspective and of a different, non-linear, non-dichotomous, and in-becoming language. The citations were selected when representative of the opinions, thoughts and feelings of the majority of the (70) participants – as I could not cite all of them in the article. Additionally, they come from the people I spoke most frequently with, and of whom I know the story, present conditions and aspirations for the future. Even though there is always the risk of having biased data, I tried my best to reduce this to the minimum: I rewrote the uttered sentences as

accurately as possible; I never forced the dialogue with them – rather, I would spend even days without saying a word; I always made clear that I was a researcher and that, therefore, I could not help them get international protection or residence permit in Finland.

The Finnish context

In Finland, as in many other European countries (Ambrosini, 2018; Düvell, 2006, 2011; Thomsen and Jørgensen, 2012), the phenomenon of irregular migration is very complex. Depending on the legal definition of 'irregular' (Triandafyllidou, 2016), there are different types of migrants who are not allowed to stay in the country, such as: EU citizens (mostly Bulgarian, Roma and Romanian people) who have overstayed their visa; migrants who received a temporary residence permit (B permit) which has not being renewed upon expiry; and ex-asylum seekers who have received two, three or more negative decisions on their asylum applications and are not allowed to stay in Finland and may be deported to their countries of origin at any time (Migri, 2018a). Here, the focus is mainly on a subset of this third group (ex-asylum seekers, mostly males), which grew considerably in Finland during the second half of 2015 (year of the so-called 'migrants' crisis' in Europe), when around 32,000 migrants entered the country (Jauhiainen, 2017; Jauhiainen et al., 2018). Compared to other European countries, this is still a small number. However, for Finland it meant that the number of migrants entering the country increased eight-fold on previous years (Yle.fi, 2017), posing a serious challenge to immigration officials and procedures. Finnish immigration laws have been tightened since 2015 (Saarikkomäki et al., 2018), thus producing an increase in the number of irregular migrants. Many of them saw their asylum applications rejected, and deportation orders issued. Still, they decided to remain in the country, again, becoming a challenge for the municipalities, which, in the majority of cases (Jauhiainen et al., 2018), still do not know how to deal with them to this day.

Asylum seekers might submit their application and live in reception centres for a certain period of time until they undergo a face-to-face interview with Migri officials and their request is processed and finalised. If the asylum request is rejected, they might be able to appeal, first to the Administrative Court, and then to the Supreme Court. If the appeal to the Administrative Court is rejected, they are normally asked to leave the country. They lose their right to stay in the reception centres, the monthly income they receive to survive, and the access to extended services. Moreover, the police can deport them at any time. After failing the claim for asylum, many then try to get a residence permit via work or family ties. Often these attempts do not succeed as Migri accuses them of having exploited the system, and in so doing, making their stay irrevocably illegal. For these reasons, many irregular migrants pass through different legal statuses, which might radically change their living conditions: they might work and have access to public and health services one day, and suddenly lose everything as soon as they receive the second negative decision from the Administrative Court. Moreover, many of them are dealing with dramatic experiences from their past, which overlap with and heavily condition their current life in the country. In the end, the majority of them go into hiding to avoid being apprehended by the police. How do they cope with the sudden changes in their life and their challenging past? What are the material consequences on their process of becoming? How and where do they find temporary stability? The next section aims to answer these questions, combining the theoretical framework with the field study.

Towards an ethical reading of irregular migrants' lives: An ethnographic exploration in Finland

> Individuation, which life is, is conceived like a discovery, in a conflictual situation, of new axiomatics incorporating and unifying all the elements of this situation in a system embedding the individual (Author's translation; Simondon, 2007: 20)

Becoming oneself

I was in one of the meeting places for irregular migrants when Ali – whose asylum request had already been rejected three times – described what he experienced after his arrival in Finland in 2015:

> When I was required to hand the documents about my past life over to the Finnish police to be evaluated I wasn't ready. I could not bring myself to trust them, because I was immediately brought back to my country, where I was escaping from the police. There, I had to conceal those documents to survive! So in the end I made this big mistake, I didn't give them the documents, and now I am stuck in this situation.

Here, the present condition of 'being stuck', the past traumatic events and places, and the future uncertainty are overlapping: thick, material layers from the past environment(s) (fear of the police that were trying to catch him, and that he could not bring himself to trust anymore, even in a new country) have been heavily affecting and, via information, redirecting his actions – his actual process of becoming in the present and the future environment. Those layers have shaped his body and indicated the ethical direction Ali has decided to take in the present in order to survive in the future, that is, not to give the relevant documents to the Finnish police in the first place. However, paradoxically enough, the fact that, as a consequence, his asylum application was rejected is not what bothers him the most. In fact, what he wants most of all is to get rid of his past:

> I am much stressed, and things from the past just don't go away. Now, even if I applied again and got a positive decision on my asylum application, ok yes, maybe a small piece of the whole puzzle would be in place, but all that happened to me won't go away, just like that. In that sense, it won't make any difference as I am still back there, where my colleagues got killed, and I then needed to flee. I don't know who I am, or where I am now.

Ali is materially in Finland, and, at the same time, in his country of origin. Ali, like many of the people whom I met, exerts this continuous effort of becoming himself, while at the same time maintaining thick layers of incompatible, non-linear difference and disparation (within himself), where a temporary stability cannot be reached. These migrants often have a history of dramatic and traumatic experiences. These experiences might not remain in the past though. There are cases where the past is so present and vivid in the body of the person that he relives it by seeming to see the actual space where the event(s) occurred ('I am still back there, where my colleagues got killed'), as well as smelling and touching it in the present. This is what many of the migrants revealed – that they were still 'physically' experiencing in the present events of the past (this was also confirmed by the psychotherapist and the doctors with whom I talked).[2] Phrased another way, some events become such a strong (negative, in this case) affection in the individual's body that they end up being materialised into a thick 'inner' layer (the layer of the past) on the body itself, while at the same time shaping the way in which the individual moves and feels in the present and the future (the 'outer' layer), that is, in the end the ethical direction he takes. Incompatibility is created within the individual at the moment of the event, and information is generated in order to reorganise the whole system, so as to make it move and evolve. However, since information is materially triggered by affects, and affects linked with those events are ethically profoundly negative, they might even hinder, block, or radically change, the process of individuation.

In these cases, the past becomes so thick and present that, even though the individual is trying to become himself by starting a new life in a new country, he is suddenly brought back to the country of origin ('I am still back there'), or to the places crossed during the journey to Finland. Here, information might not be able to solve and reorganise the situation of disparatedness within the individual. In fact, the metastability is always there, in some cases as dramatic as in the case of *angoisse*, whereby the individual is so afraid of the environment that his fear ends up blocking, or at least hindering, his process of generating a situation of temporary impasse. He tries to solve the incompatibility within himself, blocking any information exchange with the present environment. Therefore, when he is asked to

negotiate his survival with the material layers of present and future in a new country (the present and future incompatibilities) he does not do that – like in the case of Ali, who does not see the present and the future (the Finnish police and the fact that giving them the document might facilitate his asylum process), but only the past (the police in his home country). Therefore, to guarantee his survival, he changes his internal structure and transforms his environment accordingly: he chooses not to give the required documents to the Finnish police. The negotiations with the material layers of present and future do not even start, and temporary stability cannot be reached, because of the past, thicker environmental incompatibilities that information is not able to solve.

Omar, who was finally granted asylum after a period of irregular life in Finland, revealed that this change of legal status did not have any effect on his body. He is experiencing something very similar to what Ali is experiencing. His past is still there, always ready to take him back (Koikkalainen and Kyle, 2016). He cannot rest; sometimes he becomes so restless and stressed out that he has to go out, just anywhere: this is his current ethical direction, what he needs to do to survive. He cannot sit still. He cannot see himself in the place where he lives. He does not find himself anywhere. He seems to be overwhelmed by *angoisse*, and cannot see the future.

Fight against disparate realities

Hence, there are cases where the change in legal status does not have an actual influence on the process of becoming of the irregular migrants, or at least that influence is not immediately apparent, because of the *angoisse* temporarily trapping the individual in an endless loop of solipsism, and in the inner layer of the past environment, collecting fearful events. However, there are other individuals who heavily feel that their legal status, that is, their present layer and disparate reality of 'being irregular', and of the failed asylum process, are the reasons why they cannot become-who-they-are and realise their future aspirations (Carling, 2014; Carling and Schewel, 2018). Therefore, they are not trapped in the *angoisse*, but they open up to the environmental dimension and incompatibility by fighting their current status.

'I have lessons to attend, but the police want me to go there, I wonder what I should do', said Muhammad, when trying to make a decision as to what to do the day after. He came to Finland in 2015, and since then received two negative decisions and a deportation order. Even though he is afraid of the police, and can be deported at any time, he still wants to do things and keep himself active. For instance, he likes to go to school, because he feels safe there (he knows that the police won't look for him there). He is learning Finnish. 'I am a human being, and I am not and I don't want to become a criminal', he said, more than once, 'and I keep repeating that to myself, so that I won't forget, even if people [the lawyer, Migri, the social workers] treat me as an object, as a number without soul' (in this respect, see also Kathrani, 2017). He does not give up: for him, the ethical direction towards which he is moving consists of 'staying himself', taking care of himself, carrying out activities that positively affect him, becoming-being in empowering situations where he feels safe, and smiling as much as possible. 'Anyway, I cannot go back, so I have no choice'.

In the same vein, Emmanuel, who received many negative decisions, is so stressed out because of his precarious situation that he keeps forgetting things. He first tried to get international protection via an asylum application; when the latter was rejected – many times – he tried to get a residence permit via work, without succeeding. When he was asked about these bureaucratic processes, he replied that he had no idea: 'I don't know anything. I don't understand what they want. I don't understand the lawyer. Too much stress, too much trauma. I just want to work and live a normal life. I do not want to become a criminal. I am a decent person – why am I treated like this?' The immigration procedures require clarity of personal story, intents, and purposes that he does not have (Gill, 2016). Still, despite the circumstances, he keeps working, and he tries to support his family, which is his ethical direction, guaranteeing him survival. 'At the end of the day, I need to stay here', he said.

These men are trying to become themselves through the hardships, like Ali and Omar. However, in their case, the circulation of information and affect might work in a different manner. It has not reached the freezing status characterising *angoisse*, inasmuch as they are actively exchanging affect and information with the environment so as to keep on becoming. Their metastable situation is a mix of negative affections heavily conditioning the ethical direction of their life, and, in the end, their very movements. Those affections, again accumulating as material layers in bodies, come from a combination of past-present-future unknown bureaucratic procedures, incomprehensions with lawyers, unawareness of rights and possibilities, fear of being in public spaces (because of the police) – as well as from the many negative decisions on the asylum applications (or, in some cases, on the residence permit requests on the basis of work or family ties). All those disparate elements coming together from the environmental dimension trigger incompatibility within the individual in the present. Information is spread as a consequence, trying to solve this metastability. This constant tension might become apparent in various, conflicting ways. While their aspirations for the future are negatively affected and redirected, they might be, for instance, afraid of going out, getting caught by the police and then being deported. Nevertheless, they are still able to exchange affect and information with their environment, try to tolerate the situation and do things, because they know that in any case they cannot go back to their home country, where they will be killed – or just because this is what makes them feel *good and safe.* In other words, they try to build in the present material layers of positive, empowering affections on their bodies (new internal structures, in Simondon's words, compatible with the challenging environment), to try to counter the negative ones hampering their future and hindering their becoming-being.

Struggle towards temporary stability

Therefore, some irregular migrants do indoor or outdoor activities, exactly for this reason, to try to overcome the past, traumatic events, and their current irregular status, and build a future layer of temporary stability and keep on becoming. They practice sport; read; dance; walk; go to places that positively affect them, such as libraries, parks, gardens and (a few) the seaside; chat with peers in the community; participate in various activities, such as language courses; do occasional jobs, etc. (Sigona, 2012). They do so even when they are afraid of being on the streets or feel that all these activities will not change their current situation. However, these persons are trying very hard to fight the latter. It really seems that their process of individuation is not hindered by *angoisse*, and that they are actively exchanging information with their environment: in fact, they let positive affects in from the body's future membrane ('We have to remain strong, and believe that one day things will change'), even though the latter combines with past and present hard and difficult circumstances, and a country that in the end is rejecting them. They want to find their own temporary stability. They actively try to move towards it in fact, even if the incompatibility with the environment has not been solved. It is likely that their life would really change for the better (that is, that they would make the non-linear leap and reach a new level of individuation) and their aspirations for the future would be realised, were they to get asylum (or residence permit) and to become 'regular'. 'I will go out and walk on the streets only when I get my residence here', said Asad.

One day, Adam says that he feels awful: he has received the fifth negative decision on his asylum application, and now he has an appointment with the police. He is scared: he does not want to be deported to his home country, because, he says, there his life is in danger. I ask him whether he knows about the decision, if it has been issued by the Supreme Court, or the Administrative Court. He has no idea. In fact, he has been struggling with bureaucracy ever since: he got fined by the police twice because his ID (the one issued by the reception centre) had expired. Even when I met him the first time, he had no idea where his asylum process was. He knew that it had been submitted, but he did not know to whom, when and how. He does not understand the rationale behind those things. He regularly goes to a place where irregular migrants meet. He is trying to

follow his ethical direction and survive, to become, despite the fines, the expired ID, and the unknown asylum process. In other words, he keeps exchanging information with the environment, that is, with the disparate realities of police, Migri and the Courts. That information, through affect, became part of his body. He is negotiating his way out with it, in order to find a resolution of the problem and his future in the country. I met him again after a couple of weeks. The police did not deport him in the end. His situation had not changed a bit, but he was still able to smile. He was trying to find temporary stability with his peers. 'Despite everything, I cannot go back. We need to keep looking for people who are happy to help other people', he declared.

These are cases of irregular migrants who felt that their 'being irregular', as well as the asylum process' legal requirements (the past layer of rejection of the asylum application), are the main elements negatively affecting them in the present, and hindering them from becoming-who-they-are and from reaching a future layer of stability. Information managed to negotiate their 'being irregular' in the country, letting them find ethical ways to survive the 'everyday experience of incompatibility with a rejecting space' – for instance in the community, or through indoor and outdoor activities.

There are others whose affections indicated a different ethical direction in terms of survival. For them, receiving many negative decisions on the asylum applications (or residence permit requests on the basis of work, or family ties) means that there is no way they can legally live in Finland. After a while, survival-wise they realise that their being-illegally-in-the-country (part of the future membrane) is ethically worse than going back to their home country. So, even if they do not want to go back, in the end some accept the legal 'voluntary return', a programme specifically helping (both regular and irregular) migrants return to their countries of origin: the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) programme promoted and supported by Migri (Migri, 2018b). In their case, negative decisions have been accumulating as negative affections/layers in their body. However, their ethical direction tells them that they must conduct a legal life, wherever that is. Information is consequently spread throughout their body, negotiates its (current) way with the past and future membranes and in the end suggests that they try to find the future temporary stability in the decision of leaving Finland:

> I have received many negative decisions. I left my country of origin because I didn't want to put my family in danger: I am prosecuted by my tribe there. I only wanted to be safe in another country, but they don't want me here. Now I cannot work anymore because of the negative decision. There is nothing left for me. I have to go back even if I might get killed.

Davi said:

> When the first negative decision arrived, then my physical and psychological situation started worsening. After the second negative decision, they started telling me that I should leave, that I am not allowed to stay in the country anymore. But I didn't want to, so I kept applying against the negative decisions, even though I was under pressure. But now I have given up, there is nothing else that I can do, and I don't want to break the law and become a criminal. And I don't want to remain here and do nothing either: I want to be active and to work!

These people moved towards their own temporary stability, their next leap in the process of individuation through the 'voluntary return' programme. They had to come to terms with themselves, adjust their internal structure, transform their environment and decide their own ethical direction accordingly. Again, the incompatibility has not been solved, and in fact is quite 'high' and intense, but their affections have indicated to them the ethical way, and information has moved their body so as to make them keep on becoming. The 'voluntary return' programme assumes that the person would rationally choose to go back to his home country. However, it is rare that a person chooses this path. For many, this decision is linked with an affective, unsolved, unnegotiable and non-linear incompatibility between the body and the rejecting (present and future) environment.

Conclusion

> The living being solves the problems not only by adapting itself, namely modifying its relationship with the environment . . . but also modifying itself, creating new internal structures, completely putting itself into the axiomatics of vital problems (Author's translation; Simondon, 2007: 17)

Theoretically, this article aims to give a unifying and common ontological and ontogenetic foundation to those geographical theories focusing on the non-linear, processual making of the individual-in-the-environment. Specifically, it aims at opening up dialogues on the significance of such an ontogenetic approach in the field of irregular migration and beyond. It highlights the ethical value of each action, which is not separated from the materiality of space, but is, indeed, a creative act of production and transformation of space itself, and of the individual's internal structures, for survival. Additionally, it contributes to broaden the current open discussions about relational ontologies of becoming and ontologies of being in human geography (Nieuwenhuis, 2016). All in all, this article does not have the ambition to change irregular migrants' precarious situations, but, by challenging the categorical fetishism (Crawley and Skleparis, 2018) characterising most immigration policies, which are not able to capture the real life of these people, experiments with a non-categorical theory and language.

It does so by putting Simondon's theory of becoming and operational thought into practice in the field of (irregular) migration studies. As scholars highlight in the book edited by Roux (2002), Simondon's thought *can* be and become practical. Therefore, this theoretical-empirical experiment might be replicated in other social contexts in the fields of migration studies, human geography, urban studies, and sociology and can contribute to the new materialist social enquiry (Fox and Alldred, 2015) in such disciplines. In particular, his theory could be applied to the study of bodies-in-becoming (Tucker, 2010) in many empirical contexts, such as other vulnerable groups affected by conditions of physical and psychological precarity and insecurity. If further explored, this theory may provide a solid ontological and ontogenetic foundation to these studies.

While the empirical work's results presented in this article are widely confirmed in international literature, the theoretical reading roots them into the very ontology and ontogenesis of the individuals (the migrants) and their environment. In all the results, the materiality and 'worldliness' of the ethical dimension becomes apparent. Indeed, as Barad points out, 'ethics is an integral part of the diffraction (ongoing differentiating) patterns of worlding, not a superimposing of human values onto the ontology of the world' (2010: 265). First of all, as I clarified in the previous sections, irregular migrants often undergo many sudden, dramatic and non-linear changes throughout their life, and those changes can concern the legal, the psychological, and the social dimension, to cite but a few. These changes – coming from the past and the future membranes – occur both inside and outside the migrant, they are fully part of her environment, and it is in this sense that they are and become material layers in the body. The observation of irregular-migrants-in-becoming has unveiled how those spatio-temporal layers come together to affect them, and are then reorganised in the present by information in many different manners, so as to make the individuals go towards a situation of temporary stability (Papadopoulos and Tsianos, 2013), and keep on becoming. The ethical direction(s) are then shown as temporary, situated results – in terms of irregular migrants' actions/non-actions, decisions, movements, thoughts – of the processing, by information, of the incompatibilities between them and their environment(s). In migration studies and, more broadly, human geography, this result contributes to those theoretical debates investigating the everlasting relationship between space (inside/outside) and time (past/present/future), whereby Simondon brings to the fore the argument that 'topology and chronology are not a priori forms of the sensitivity, but the very dimension of the living being that individuates itself' (Author's translation; Simondon, 1995: 226). In this sense, they ontologically and ontogenetically '*coincide* in the individuation of the living being' (Author's translation, emphasis added;

Simondon, 1995: 226) by becoming material layers on her and (re)directing her ethical choices.

In the same vein, the research has also shown that irregular migrants do not move in a single environment: their body is made of a multiplicity (Mol, 2002; Papadopoulos and Tsianos, 2008; Tucker, 2006, 2011) of contradictory material environments (they have crossed different countries), in turn coming from multiple lines in time (Shubin, 2015), layered on their body. These layers, via affect and information, (re)direct migrants' decisions and actions. In the case of ex-asylum seekers, their non-linear process of becoming is in apparent contradiction with, for instance, the asylum process' linear and rational understanding (Gill, 2016; Shuman and Bohmer, 2010) of these spatio-temporal dimensions. The asylum process requires that the person be in the country of destination (in this case Finland), leave her past behind, as well as be able to put the latter into clear words. However, in the worst-case scenario, when the migrants are submerged by *angoisse*, it is impossible for them to think clearly and separate the many spatio-temporal dimensions: they struggle to be in the present because they are still submerged by their incompatibilities with the past. In this case, their ethical direction is just to survive, reducing their exchanges with the new environment to the bare minimum. As a result of not being able to rationalise the multiplicity that is their process of becoming, many of them end up becoming irregular migrants. Again, this highlights the materiality of the interconnected topological and chronological elements and the always-present challenge to render their synchronicity in migration research: the past/future membranes collapse in the present, which is the metastable dimension fluctuating between inside and outside, past and future (Simondon, 1995). This has practical consequences in terms of success and failure of the asylum interview, whereby the migrant is materially taken to another spatio-temporal dimension (his past), while required to be lucid in the present time.

A third finding is linked with how some of these people feel and become themselves by being in the community, and by being active and productive. This is how affect and information try to move them towards their temporary stability and negotiate the latter with the environment, that is, with the layer of 'rejecting space' that is part of the future (and sometimes the past) membrane in their body. Many are very willing to work, to help, to do just anything. They are the ones who have explicitly declared that they want to keep themselves active and do not want to sink into the criminal loop – which is the drawback of the increasing number of negative decisions in asylum applications (Saarikkomäki et al., 2018), and, as a consequence, of irregular migrants in the country. Their ethical direction is here to fight the negative affections, to find new positive ones and to remain in the country, despite everything. Here the pre-individual, environmental dimension is (at least partially) positively experienced as element ontologically, ontogenetically, and, in the end, ethically empowering the agency of the migrants despite the hardships they face in their everyday life.

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Notes

1. In this article, Simondon's theory of becoming has been simplified. Only the concepts emerging from the fieldwork are considered, analysed, and readapted accordingly. Secondary sources are used only when they summarise and simplify complex concepts that

would require a longer analysis, if only primary sources would need to be taken into consideration.

2. Many mentioned the crossing of the Mediterranean as such a scary event that they were still physically and materially reliving it, when, for instance, they happened to see the sea, or a lake, so much so that they would not want to be on a boat or close to water ever again. In Finland, this can be a serious problem, as the country is geographically surrounded by the sea (in the Southern and the Western part), and is called 'the land of a thousand lakes'.

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