

AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF MIGRANT 'ILLEGALITY' IN SWEDEN: INCLUDED YET EXCEPTED?

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Abstract: This article examines how migrant 'illegality' is experienced in the Swedish context. How do 'illegal' migrants manage work, housing, healthcare, safety and a family life in the absence of access to formal provisions? What are their survival strategies? I use direct quotations from undocumented migrants themselves to build a multifaceted picture of migrant 'illegality'. Following Willen's (2007) call for a 'critical phenomenology of illegality', I move beyond the socio-political situation of undocumented migrants to their embodied experiences of being 'illegal'. I conclude that undocumented migrants are not *excluded* but are *excepted*; they have not been thrown out, but neither are they considered participants. Undocumented migrants are included in society without being recognised as members.

Keywords: Ethnography, Sweden, undocumented migrants, vulnerability

Introduction

In a time of the increasing regulation of human movement across borders, those possessing fewer rights of mobility are forced to use irregular ways to move (Jordan and Düvell 2002). Irregular migration is thus a consequence of tighter restrictions on *legal* movement. People have moved irregularly across borders since the emergence of the modern border system (see Düvell 2006). Unauthorised border crossing, however, has expanded enormously in prevalence and spatial extension in recent decades, and has become a central issue in public debate in Europe. Sweden has historically not been a major destination country for irregular migration, because of its location and its strictly regulated labour market. Yet today Sweden is marked by the constant presence of undocumented migrants (see Hammar 1999). Like regular migration, irregular migration is

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structured and organised depending on the particular socio-political context. For example, while undocumented migration in Southern European countries mainly involves migrant workers, in Sweden most undocumented migrants are failed asylum seekers who have stayed (SOU 2004:110; KUT 2002; Malmberg 2004).

The condition of 'illegality' is produced not only by institutions like the police and the immigration authorities, but also by officials in education, health and housing and by private employers or landlords, who all verify migration documents. The exclusion of undocumented migrants from the Swedish welfare and administrative systems, forces people to circumvent 'legal' procedures to satisfy practical needs, such as work, housing, healthcare, safety and social or family life. Despite the protection of these rights under international law (see PICUM 2007; Weissbrodt 2008) this article shows that undocumented migrants are unable to access their rights in Sweden and are at increased risk of exploitation, illness, abuse, disrupted family life and ultimately premature death.

Methodology and Terminology in Researching Undocumented Migrants

Representation and terminology are part of a methodology yet also constitute an epistemological problem with ethical and political implications (Said 1989; De Genova 2002: 423). The term used to refer to undocumented migrants exposes a political stance on the issue. All actions and words concerning the legal status of the individual have political consequences (Coutin 1993: 89). Unlike Willen (2007), I reject the term 'illegal' for several reasons. First, its use risks supporting the discursive power of the authorities and immigration law. Second, it contributes to the reproduction of the criminalisation of migration (De Genova 2005: 2). Third, since undocumented migration to Sweden is closely linked to the asylum system, using the term would have implications for asylum seekers' credibility (cf. Düvell 2006). Fourth, (and most importantly) my informants found the term objectionable and humiliating. Instead I use the term 'undocumented migrants' to refer to those who entered and/or live in the country without authorisation. I therefore place the terms 'illegal' and 'illegality' within quotation marks. This describes the impact of labelling people as 'illegal' rather than their actual situation as undocumented.

This study is based on consecutive ethnographic fieldwork among undocumented migrants in Stockholm between May 2004 and December 2006. From my own experience of being an undocumented migrant in several countries in the late 1980s (see Khosravi 2007), I knew that isolated or occasional interviews would be inadequate. Migrant accounts change over time due to issues of trust and security. The life of undocumented migrants is unsettled, unpredictable, and erratic due to the condition of 'deportability' (De Genova 2002) frequent moves, different jobs, detention and deportation (Khosravi 2009). Therefore, to gain insight into the capriciousness of migrant 'illegality', it was important to follow the informants over a longer period. In addition to interviews,

participant observation of everyday activities gave me a better understanding. Allowing migrants to contextualise their accounts of the experience of everyday 'illegality' (cf. Jordan and Düvell 2002) helps us to explore abstract concepts of policy and law, and to translate them into cultural terms grounded in everyday life (see Marcus and Fischer 1986: 82). Ethnography focusing on the individual can also draw attention to the *implementation* of policy and law, which produces different insights from focusing narrowly on legislation and formal documents (cf. van der Leun 2003).

The Setting of the Research

My first field contact was made via a clandestine healthcare clinic for undocumented migrants organised by *Médecins du Monde* which opened one night a week and also offered legal services. The clinic was a social space for meeting other migrants and co-ethnics and for many it was the only place to come into contact with Swedes. It also offered a brief respite from the harshness of everyday 'illegality', a moment of homeliness.

I had no other choice than to use personal networks through the 'snowball method', i.e. being directed towards undocumented migrants by informants. Despite the initial intention not to limit the survey to any one ethnic group, due to language barriers the group came to be dominated by Iranians (see Appendix 1). For example, many Latin American migrants spoke neither Swedish nor English and I do not speak Spanish or Portuguese. I did not want to work with interpreters. Moreover, unlike failed asylum seekers who believed that going public might help their asylum-seeking process, other undocumented migrants (mainly from Central and South America) had no interest in coming into contact with researchers (for more on this group see Mattsson 2008).

Throughout the fieldwork, I worked with some 50 people. Although I met most of them regularly, I followed 33 longer and more intensively. In addition, I interviewed 10 undocumented Iranian families. I also obtained valuable information from the siblings, friends, and employers of the informants as well as from volunteers, Migration Board staff, police, and lawyers. The participants were not selected as representative, but as a specific group, whose experiences contribute to insight into the condition of 'illegality' as 'a mode of being-in-the-world' (Willen 2007).

My first informant, an Iranian-Armenian man who frequently visited the clinic, introduced me to a network of undocumented Iranian migrants and asylum seekers which was organised by the International Federation of Iranian Refugees (IFIR), an organisation affiliated with the Worker-Communist Party of Iran. I participated in their weekly meetings where the migration and asylum processes were discussed for several hours. Outside the clandestine clinic and weekly IFIR meetings, I usually met my informants in a modern shopping mall outside Stockholm, crammed with luxury boutiques and a huge

Table 1. Different categories of migration ‘illegality’

	Entry	Stay	Type
A	‘Illegal’	‘Illegal’	Personally financed and organised (e.g. through a smuggler)
B	‘Illegal’	‘Illegal’	Debt-based relationship for the purpose of exploitation with a smuggler or employer (<i>trafficking</i>)
C	‘Legal’	‘Illegal’	a) Overstayers b) Rejected asylum seekers
D	‘Illegal’	‘Legal’	Collective/individual legalisation; refugee status

international food court. The mall was located in a business area close to a poor neighbourhood inhabited mainly by unemployed and marginalised Swedes, new refugees, and undocumented migrants. Some of my informants worked in the mall. Around noon the food court was packed, mainly with dark-suited men who discussed business in English or Swedish, but by late afternoon the mall was full of migrants from poor surrounding neighbourhoods who strolled around killing time. The service sector – restaurants, bars, coffee shops, childcare corner, shoe repair shop, and barber shops – was run by migrants. Privileged members of the rich world with surplus mobility rights crossed paths with émigrés from the developing world who are frozen in immobility. These two groups do not represent two disparate realities, nor are they mutually exclusive categories; rather, they are parts of one system that connects them economically (see Chavez 1997), and their existence is interdependent, mutual, and symbiotic (Isin 2002: 267).

The Complexities of Migrant ‘Illegality’

Undocumented migrants comprise a heterogeneous category due to differences in the migrant’s mode of entry and the nature of their stay in the destination country (see Table 1 below). ‘Illegal’ migrants generally fall into three categories: 1) *overstayers* who remain after their visa expires; 2) failed asylum seekers who remain after a deportation order; and 3) people whose entry and presence in the country are unknown to the authorities. Members of the last category enter the country clandestinely and do not contact the authorities to seek asylum or for any other purpose.

In category A, the migration is usually organised by a smuggler in return for payment, or facilitated by a friend or relative. Category B can be classed as human trafficking for the sex industry or other industries, including domestic

work. 'Illegality' is not a static state and the boundary between 'legality' and 'illegality' is not always clear-cut. Migrants may go from a 'legal' position to an 'illegal' one (category C) or vice versa (category D). One can enter 'illegally' and seek asylum, which makes one legal until the application is rejected and one goes into hiding and becomes 'illegal' again. Of the 33 informants in my group, 24 entered Sweden 'illegally' and nine were overstayers. Of my informants, only four people had not previously sought asylum.

For obvious reasons, there are no reliable statistics on the number of undocumented migrants in Sweden. The figures provided by the police, authorities, and researchers are guesses or, at best, estimates. There is great demand among journalists, researchers, and, not least, politicians to know 'how many there are'. Sovereign authority needs and demands 'knowledge' in the form of numbers and statistics in order to have an idea of the extent of the 'problem' (Appadurai 2006). Counting here is a way to exercise power, to 'construct' and render visible 'illegal' migrants as a category (Inda 2006: 63–6).

Existence under the condition of 'illegality' is constrained by two main factors. First, the fear of being apprehended and deported pushes undocumented migrants into a clandestine life, trying to be invisible to authorities. This spatially embodied fear leads to a constant feeling of being under surveillance, which functions as a disciplining mechanism. The construction of 'illegality' demands unconditional submission and my informants took great care not to do anything 'wrong'. Undocumented migrants cannot afford to make mistakes (see Rouse 1991; De Genova 2002: 429). For example, my informants never used the underground without a ticket or leaned on cars for fear of the alarm going off. They did not object to their low wages. Ironically, the undocumented migrant exemplifies the impeccable citizen. The condition of 'illegality' results in such docility that, in the words of a young Bangladeshi man, one 'does not even dare to jaywalk'. Spatially embodied fear structures were also evident in the movements of undocumented migrants in public places. In an agoraphobic style, they stayed away from crowds and public places; all my informants avoided the city centre and places of entertainment, such as amusement parks, museums, discos, bars and large shopping centres. At night they stayed indoors, unless they had to go out for work, in order to minimise the risk of apprehension. Second, excluded from the regular labour market and all social welfare institutions and the social insurance system, undocumented migrants are forced into the informal sectors of the economy and become increasingly caught up in protracted destitution and isolation.

Work

Although Stockholm is not a global city as Sassen (1998) would define it, the middle classes increasingly consume comparatively cheap services, from housecleaning and child minding, cheap car washes and dry cleaning, to free

Table 2. Types of work mentioned by 27 informants

Work	Number
Restaurant/café/kiosk	15
Retail	7
Cleaning	7 (one of which was unpaid)
Advertisement distribution	5
Self-employment	4 (catering, hairdressing, vendor)
Construction	5
Hairdressing salon	3

home delivery of pizza (see Mattsson 2008; Calleman 2007). The service sector is usually driven by legal migrants working in marginalised and newly established businesses. The informal and formal sectors are mutually dependent. A labour force of undocumented migrants is vital for the shadow economy, which in turn provides crucial support for the expansion of the formal sector.

My informants usually found work in their ethnic communities through personal networks. For my Iranian informants, it was relatively easy to find work thanks to a well-established ethnic economy (see Khosravi 1999) and broad local media networks (see Graham and Khosravi 2002), such as local radio stations, an annual *Iranian Yellow Pages*, and popular local websites.

Almost all of my informants worked. Only two were out of work on an ongoing basis: one had become severely disabled after an accident and the other was tied to caring for his severely sick daughter. Table 2 shows the types of work my informants have been doing while in hiding. Many held down several jobs simultaneously.

Undocumented migrants are ‘ideal’ workers. ‘Illegalisation’ is a productive way of creating and maintaining a disciplined, docile, and cheap labour force (De Genova 2002: 440). They work longer and earn lower wages than others. In this context, the hierarchy at work is determined by a conjunction of nationality, ethnicity, gender, age, and legal status; if you lack ‘papers’ you are placed at the bottom. At the same workplace and for the same (informal) work, one of my informants received EUR 2.5 per hour while a legal migrant received EUR 4.2. In Sweden the lowest monthly net wage is scarcely EUR 1430 (around EUR 1000 after tax). In other words the lowest hourly wage after tax is EUR 6.2 (*LO-Tidningen* 27 October 2006). In May 2005, 18 of the 33 informants stated their wages, which averaged to EUR 3.5 per hour, broken down as follows:

- Over EUR 4.2/hour: four (the highest being EUR 6/hour)
- EUR 4.2/hour: eight
- EUR 2–4.2/hour: two
- Under EUR 2/hour: three
- One received only room and board as a maid.

Employment opportunities are often of short duration and dismissal without notice was a constant danger. This is a common tactic for employers to keep wages down while limiting the employee's possibilities to protest or to negotiate for better conditions.

Aref, a 36-year-old man from Iran, lived clandestinely in Sweden since spring 2001. He worked in various sectors, though mostly as a pizza cook, and described work conditions as follows:

If you open your mouth, your employer will throw you out. They say that there is an unlimited number of illegal migrants who want the job. They are right. Competition for undocumented work is hard. Russians and Afghans are prepared to work for EUR 1.5 or 2 per hour. They destroy the market even for us.

Aref's comment, confirmed by other informants, indicates that undocumented migrants constitute an army of reserve labour (Cohen 1987: 42). One restaurant owner in central Stockholm said that when he 'asked for one worker, 100 came'. On the difference between legal and undocumented migrants, he said, 'An illegal migrant has a red 'sale' sticker on him. Fifty per cent off'.

This puts in concrete terms how undocumented migrants are reduced to commodities exchangeable for other commodities. One characteristic of slavery is that the labour of the slave is owned by the employer (see van den Anker 2004: 17–18). Aref often compared his situation with slavery:

The employers think that we should be grateful to them for giving us work. They think they are doing a humanitarian action. They only want money. They are always after beginners so that they can pay the minimum.... They promise to raise the wage once you have learned the job, but they throw you out and get someone new.

Abbas, a 26-year-old Iranian man, clandestine since February 2005, worked for a cleaning company in Stockholm owned by a woman who (paradoxically or perhaps not) also worked at the Migration Board. He described the expected pace of work and the remuneration he received:

The boss says that we should clean four rooms in an hour. We can only do two in an hour. If I have to do 20 rooms today, she calculates five hours of work but I have to work twice as long to finish. All the same, I am paid for five hours. Sometimes she lends me out to a hotel. I do the dishes in the hotel restaurant. I am never told how much she gets from the hotel for my work, but what she gives me is the same EUR 4.2 per hour.

Being 'lent out' is not uncommon among my informants. The employer makes money on the difference between what the second employer pays and what they pay the worker. In one instance, an employer made EUR 4.2 per hour just by

selling the labour of another individual. On other occasions they may use the worker's labour for free. Jousef, a 25-year-old Iraqi man, worked in a kiosk: 'Sometimes the employer takes me home to clean. I also work in his home when he has parties. He doesn't pay me extra in either case'.

The undocumented migrants' precarious position in the labour market is un/wittingly 'sanctioned' by the authorities. First, informal work is criminalised in Sweden, so an undocumented migrant is vulnerable to detention and deportation if she or he turns to the authorities because of abuse by the employer. Second, the criminalisation of informal work means that migrant mobility in the labour market is restricted, so opportunities to change jobs to increase earnings or leave abusive employers are limited. Third, the presence of undocumented migrants in the labour market is seen as a threat by the trade unions, which argue that undocumented migrants' sub-market wages undermine collective agreements and are a threat to welfare. (*Arbetaren* 10/02). Trade unions have cooperated with the police for a long time, in efforts to catch 'illegal' migrants (see Zaremba 2006, *Dagens Nyheter* 9 October 2003, *Arbetaren* 07/02 and 42/03). In March 2005, *Byggnads*, the Swedish Building Workers' Union, frequently hunted down undocumented working migrants and reported them to the police. Despite an earlier criticism from the International Labour Organisation (ILO) for its collaboration with the police (*Dagens Nyheter* 9 December 2005), Sweden's largest trade union federation (LO) published a report in its newspaper *Alla* about 'illegal foreigners' cleaning the Stockholm Underground, which led to their discovery and arrest by the police. In defence, *Alla's* editor-in-chief argued that their strategy was to guard the collective agreement and 'clean up [my emphasis] the workplace' (*Arbetaren* 42/02). The categorising of phenomena as 'clean' and 'unclean' is a mechanism to maintain social structure and determine what is morally acceptable and what is not (Douglas 1966).

Women felt more vulnerable in relation to their employers than men did. Sahel, a young Bangladeshi woman, was the live-in maid of a family; she cleaned and cooked for room and board, but received no salary. Sexual harassment by employers or co-workers was also frequently mentioned by my female informants. A study among undocumented Mexicans in the USA confirms that sexual abuse of women in low-income service sectors is prevalent (Luibhéid 2002: 130; see also Anderson 2000).

Furthermore, many women found it difficult to compete with men for jobs, since employers believed that 'the work was [too] heavy for women'. The situation was worse for single mothers who had neither access to the day nursery system nor informal childcare while they worked. In the condition of 'illegality' motherhood as an impediment for employment becomes even more prevalent. The cruel paradox of many undocumented migrants' work is that they clean houses, cook food, wash dishes, and take care of other children while they have no home to clean and their own children are minded by others (cf. Chavez

1997: 151). Luna, a Mongolian woman in her thirties, exemplified this paradox. After her degree in civil engineering at Moscow University in the 1990s, she returned to Mongolia, got married, and, within a few years, had two children. In the early 2000s, divorced and unemployed, she left her country for a long 'illegal' journey, first to Moscow and later on to Stockholm in search of a job. Since 2003, Luna has worked as a housecleaner and babysitter. Her mother in Mongolia takes care of her nine and 11 year old, while she cleans and takes care of Swedish children. Luna sends money and gifts to her children every month and talks to them three times a week, but worries about their health and schooling. My field notes still convey her burden of longing and anguish at being unable to care for her own children.

Many of my informants (15 people) mentioned that, despite their low wages, they regularly remitted money to their families. Some of them had been able to repay the debts incurred, usually to a human smuggler, to cover the cost of emigration (cf. Ohlson 2006: 149). My informants never missed the chance to show their pride in working hard. They frequently mentioned their desire to be able to work in the formal labour market and pay taxes. They generally believed that hard work would increase their chances of eventual legalisation. The migrants' desire to 'work hard' and 'contribute' to a society that actually rejects any kind of responsibility for them indicates the paradoxical aspects of migrant 'illegality' in contemporary capitalism.

Moreover, working in the informal sector simply entrenches their marginalised status. Informal work means that undocumented migrants are generally isolated from the mainstream labour market and society. They usually work with co-ethnics and have no practice speaking Swedish, which increases their vulnerability since they have no way of knowing the actual worth of their labour (cf. Chavez 1997). Furthermore, their work experience is in the informal economy, undocumented and employers do not give them references. A main and widespread consequence is that undocumented migrants, even if they do become regularised, remain caught in the informal sector and fail to find regular 'legal' jobs.

Housing

Finding accommodation is a constant concern for undocumented migrants who are excluded from the governmental housing programme and lack resources and documentation to enter the regular private letting market. Accordingly, migrants are forced to sub-let housing, facing precarious conditions and short-term contracts. Short-term rental contracts allow landlords to renegotiate terms and increase rent frequently. My informants were always hunting for new places to move to, some even moving two or three times a year. In May 2005, I asked ten undocumented families about their housing situation since they had come to Sweden (see Table 3).

Table 3. Frequency of moving

Time spent in Sweden (years)	Children (number)	Moving (times)
6	1	5
4	3	6
9	1	4
6	1	3
4.5	1	3
7.5	1	11
4.5	1	5
7	1	4
7	3	10
11	1	4

As in the case of work, the ethnic network is the most usual channel for finding housing. Undocumented migrants generally live in less-attractive areas with huge concentrations of migrants from the same region. Only one of all my informants lived outside an ‘immigrant area’. Ethnic networks, however, do not necessarily mean ethnic solidarity. My informants lived in over-crowded conditions and paid unreasonably high rents. Moreover, they were sometimes not allowed to use the kitchen or bathroom and two even mentioned sleeping in the workplace. An informant once took me to an overcrowded immigrant neighbourhood where mattresses on the floor were ‘rented’ to people in hiding in basement rooms without windows, water, or ventilation; it was pitch dark inside due to lack of natural light and the light turned off automatically after a few minutes. For undocumented migrants who slept at work or shared with several others having access to water and personal hygiene was a problem. Furthermore, unable to pay rent for themselves, undocumented migrants usually lodge with other marginalised groups, such as the unemployed, asylum seekers, alcoholics, and drug addicts, and sometimes even with petty criminals such as drug pushers. Marginalised even in their own ethnic communities, undocumented migrants suffer from a double burden. Undocumented migrants are not only exposed to racism from the host society but placed at the very bottom of a hierarchy of suffering based on a ‘conjugated oppression’ (Bourgois 1989; Holmes 2007) in terms of citizenship, gender, class, and legal status.

Housing condition is tightly linked to other aspects of life-quality, such as health, sense of security, and sociability. The immediate consequence of the fugitive lifestyle is the absence of a stable basis for everyday life. Since undocumented migrants cannot remain in one place for long, they are unable to structure their lives or conduct long-term planning. Sporadic and unstable

housing situations primarily affect children, whose social connections and networks are locally formed. Frequently moving to another neighbourhood results in their isolation from other children of the same age. Lacking the right to attend school or kindergarten aggravates their social isolation. Sometimes school principals turn a blind eye to the status of undocumented children. Accordingly, every new move means negotiating with a new school principal. Some parents who fear being exposed do not allow their children to play outdoors, so the children spend all their time inside with their parents. One man told me that he did not allow his five-year-old son to run in the apartment so as not to upset the neighbours. Frequent moving also compounds the risk for people in hiding: they are always newcomers and neighbours are strangers who can call the police. 'Home' is commonly associated with safety whereas for undocumented migrants who live in fear of the police, home is infused with a frightening sense of penetrability, vulnerability and danger (Willen 2007: 24).

Healthcare

It is 16 May 2005. Ziba, who is 16, is driving north of Stockholm with her father in a rattling Honda her father has borrowed from his employer. In 2001, together with her father, mother, and big sister, Ziba fled Iran and applied for asylum in Sweden; they received their second rejection in 2004. The family chose to remain and to go into hiding. After several months, the mother left and returned to Iran. Ziba says that she could no longer stand life in hiding. The big sister also disappeared without a trace, to another city. Ziba's father worked in a garage in a suburb of Stockholm. Today they are on their way to see a friend in Enköping. Halfway, Ziba's father experiences chest pains. He has a heart condition, but his medication has run out and since he is in hiding he cannot get more. He pulls over, gets out, and lies down on the ground. Ziba starts to worry and gets out her mobile to ring for assistance. Her father stops her: 'If they come, they will take you with them'. He dies on the E18 motorway somewhere between Stockholm and Enköping.

Sweden is one of the most restrictive countries in the EU concerning access to healthcare for undocumented migrants (Picum 2007). Undocumented migrants are entitled to access to public health services only in cases of medical emergency and only if they pay the full price. Nevertheless, undocumented migrants do not seek medical aid even in emergencies because they fear arrest. Even undocumented minors, under 18 years old, are excluded from the healthcare system—except for the children of failed asylum-seeking parents.

A survey conducted by *Médecins sans Frontières* (MSF) of 102 undocumented migrants in Sweden in 2005 found that over 80 per cent experienced difficulties accessing healthcare and 67 per cent were afraid of being arrested at healthcare centres (*Gömnda i Sverige* 2005). Another hindrance is the high

cost of healthcare in Sweden. Visiting a doctor costs approximately EUR 210, childbirth costs EUR 2,300, and medication for an HIV/AIDS patient can exceed EUR 10,000 a year. Although it is available as a right in theory, fear and high cost make healthcare inaccessible. Accessibility of healthcare means that it should be non-discriminating, affordable, and that information about it is easily available (Romero-Ortuno 2004).

Testimony by medical experts indicates that these hindrances and the refusal of medical personnel to provide healthcare have resulted in death as well as devastating physical and psychological consequences for undocumented migrants in Sweden (Ascher et al. 2008). Life in hiding causes health deterioration. In the survey, 65 per cent of respondents asserted that their health had worsened while living clandestinely (*Gömda i Sverige* 2005). Everyday 'illegality' also causes enormous stress and psychological suffering, which for my informants led to sleep disorders and psychosomatic pain (see also Ohlson 2006). This particularly affects children, who risk missing out on their childhood and to whom life in hiding causes severe physical and psychological suffering (SoS-rapport 1999: 5). Furthermore, undocumented migrants often need medical treatment because of injuries incurred at their unsafe workplaces. The absurdity of the situation becomes clear in the case of one informant who, ironically, did not have access to medical services at the hospital he helped to rebuild in Stockholm.

However, in Stockholm and Gothenburg, Sweden's two largest cities, informal healthcare has been organised by *Médecins du Monde* and the Red Cross. Despite the hard work of the volunteers, serious medical complications can be caused by the informal healthcare system simply because their resources (e.g. medicines and equipments) are limited.

There are two strong reasons for anxiety concerning undocumented migrants' health. First, a common pattern among my informants was to ignore minor ailments, which might have led to more serious problems later on. Second, migrants may not receive a sufficient amount of medication from the informal healthcare system, or at least not in time. Consequently, ailments become lingering; chronic ailments and pain usually remain even after regularisation or deportation. Due to this delay in seeking and receiving help, cancer patients who could probably have been saved have died (see Ascher et al. 2008). A further reason for concern is that migrants in hiding may borrow someone's ID number for medical help, causing medical risks for both the migrant patient and the other person (see Ohlson 2006). Furthermore, medical experts warn that the control of infectious disease is compromised; this threatens not only the migrants themselves, but the healthcare system and the wellbeing of society in general (Ascher et al. 2008).

Exclusion from the healthcare system especially affects undocumented female migrants, who comprise 60 per cent of those using the informal healthcare system (*Gömda i Sverige* 2005); the main health problems they suffered were

gynaecological. In case of pregnancy, the lack of pre- and postnatal care can have serious consequences for mother and child. For instance, in the case of HIV-infected pregnant women, exclusion from the healthcare system means that the risk of infecting the child after birth increases almost 15 times (Ascher et al. 2008). Undocumented women's fertility is seen as a risk to the nation (Chock 1995: 137).

Denying undocumented migrants health care is an attempt 'to govern the reproduction of an undesirable population' (Inda 2007: 152). First, undocumented women are encouraged not to become pregnant. Many of my female informants told me how they were 'advised' by different actors, from Migration Board officers to lawyers and even NGO activists, not to have a child. Even asylum seekers were encouraged not to have children during the asylum process. In a conference in autumn 2006 in Gävle, an officer from Migration Board said: 'As asylum seeker one shall not marry. One should not fall in love. And it becomes awkward if one is going to have a baby with another asylum seeker. It is about controlling one's sexuality' (*Artikel 14* March 2006). Love, sexuality, and reproduction are not anymore private/biological issues but rather belong to the public and political spheres. Women's bodies are turned into a battlefield against immigrants. Denying them care is also a clear signal of discouraging pregnancy. The will of the authorities to control reproduction among undocumented migrants is manifested in allowing access to abortion but not to treatment of cancerous tumours (*Dagens Nyheter* 11 May 2008).

Second, the authorities justify excluding undocumented migrants from the healthcare system by arguing that inclusion would 'send the wrong signal' (*Dagens Nyheter* 11 May 2008) and could be a 'pull' factor for 'medical tourism' to Sweden (Ohlson 2006: 162). Another side of this rationale is that excluding this group from healthcare is a strategy to 'push' migrants to leave Sweden. Adding up both arguments, it is clear how denying healthcare is a strategy by the authorities to control the number of undocumented migrants and diminish their capacity to reproduce (cf. Inda 2007).

There are no indications of improvement of access to healthcare in Sweden for undocumented migrants in the near future. Conversely, in early 2008, the Swedish government presented a bill (*Lagförslag* 2007/08: 105) that would make this exclusionary policy into law. The bill was passed in May 2008, meaning medical personnel who help undocumented migrants have to choose between violating the law or their ethical principle that those in need of healthcare should be treated regardless of their legal status (Ascher et al. 2008). The UN Special Rapporteur Paul Hunt said the bill would 'legislate discrimination' and the UN criticised Sweden for adopting a policy that runs counter to their obligations under international conventions (Mission Sweden 2007). Early 2008 saw extensive protests organised by voluntary organisations and medical students demanding a more generous and humane health policy towards undocumented migrants.

Safety

Homa is a 13-year-old girl from the Kurdish part of Iraq who applied for asylum in Sweden with her parents and an older sister in early 1999. Evicted by Saddam Hussein in the mid-1980s, they lived in the outskirts of Tehran for thirteen years before they made it to Sweden assisted by a smuggler. Since their application was rejected a second time by the Alien Appeals Board in late 2000, they have lived in hiding in a suburb of Stockholm. They live in one room in a three-room flat, for which they pay in excess of EUR 320 per month (allowing the official tenant to live there for free). In the evenings, Homa's mother uses one section of the room to prepare sandwiches that Homa's father takes to cafés and stores the next day. In May 2005, Homa was brutally assaulted by a gang of girls and her new shoes were stolen near the entrance to her house. When they spotted some security personnel, both Homa and the gang fled the scene, as they all feared detection.

While citizens are identified as criminal due to their actions, undocumented migrants are seen as a criminal simply due to their undocumented existence, which renders them defenceless against the violations of others. Undocumented migrants are denied the right to security and protection from violence, which constitutes a central human right (Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 3). They are left vulnerable not only to the violence of the state, but also to the violence of ordinary citizens, without being able to protect or defend themselves (Rajaram and Grundy-Warr 2004: 57; Agamben 1998). Awareness of their vulnerability and powerlessness makes their lives distressing and anxiety ridden.

Mehrdad, a middle-aged man from Iran, lived clandestinely in Sweden with his wife and two sons since 2002 after their application for asylum was rejected. His sons, both teenagers, could attend school thanks to a principal turning a blind eye to their situation. In autumn 2005, a gang discovered the boys' 'illegality' and harassed the youngest one, turning into systematic bullying and assault. Unable to seek help from the school, Mehrdad experienced intense humiliation at his powerlessness to defend his child. He told me sadly how his relationship with his sons gradually changed and how he realised that his sons would never trust him again.

The vulnerability of undocumented migrants also exposes them to blackmail and sexual abuse. Bahman, an Iranian man in his late twenties, was forced to give sexual services to his landlady under the threat of being reported to the police. Another young and handsome Iranian man, Hamid, reluctantly had sex with his lawyer for one year for fear that she would otherwise diminish his chances of regularisation. Pari, an Iranian woman in her mid-thirties, hoped for regularisation through marriage; she entered a relationship with a man and would be 'with him' on the weekends for two years.

Undocumented migrants are also recurrently subjected to fraud and swindling by charlatans pretending to be 'lawyers' or immigration 'experts'. Another security risk for failed asylum seekers comes from conditions in their countries of origin, and some have been subjected to persecution and espionage even in Sweden. Sweden actually expelled several Iranian 'refugee spies' who collected documents and personal information about failed Iranian asylum seekers since the early 1990s, the last one in autumn 2007 (*Metro* 20 December 2006; *Expressen* 6 March 2008; *Svenska Dagbladet* 25 January 2007; see also the Interpellation (2006/07:237) submitted to the Parliament on 19 January 2007).

Social and Family Life

I first met Sahel, a young Bangladeshi woman, in March 2005 at the clandestine clinic where she waited to be given some calming medication by a retired psychologist who has more clients than anyone else at the clinic. She speaks slowly, with frequent long pauses, and a fellow countrywoman translates. Together with her two children, she was smuggled into Sweden in 2002 while her husband fled to India where he is an 'illegal'. The long period of uncertainty and the unknown fate of her husband pushed her into depression. Her condition became worse and social services placed her four and two year old with a foster family. In spring 2004, her application was rejected by the Alien Appeals Board and she went into hiding, losing touch with her children completely. They live with a Swedish family and go to a day care centre. Sahel used to phone regularly, but the children now only speak Swedish which Sahel does not understand.

A primary human right is the right to family relationships and to an 'ordinary' everyday life (Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 16), which undocumented migrants are deprived of. In the condition of 'illegality', social relationship and emotions are drastically distorted. Anvar, a 30-year-old Iranian man, lived with his sister before going into hiding in September 2004. He did not dare visit her for fear of the police. He met her and her children in a café or in a park: 'Meeting your sister in a park is not the same. It doesn't feel natural. I want to play with her children in their house'.

While separation from family is an expected consequence of migration, irregular migration imposes enormous distances between family members who may be dispersed between several countries. As a result of the irregularity, the migration journeys differ between family members, depending on the time, route, and how the migration was arranged. While one or more may arrive safely in Sweden, some are caught in the transit country, while others may still be back in the 'home' country. Failed asylum-seeking families mainly become split because of the Dublin Convention and the rule of country of first asylum, which restricts the mobility of asylum seekers between EU countries. One of my informants, a middle-aged Iranian woman, lived in hiding with one

son in Sweden, while her eldest son was still in Iran and her third son lived clandestinely in Greece. They had not seen each other in seven years and, since none of them could 'legally' move between these countries the prospects for getting together again in the near future were poor. Caught in a state of immobility, separation from one's parents, spouse, siblings, or children can last for years or even decades. Annual reports of the Red Cross's health programme for undocumented migrants indicate that up to one third of their patients were caught in such transborder family situations (*Årsrapport* 2006, 2007). For many undocumented women and men, protracted separation from their children is a challenge for the conventional notion of motherhood. Separation of family members imposes enormous emotional distress, particularly for parents who leave their children behind. Luna, who had left her two children with her mother in Mongolia, succumbed to the psychological pressure and sank into deep depression. Similarly, Sahel's inability to be with her children finally paralysed her psychologically and she became listless and unreachable.

The right to a family life is also impeded by the difficulty in starting a new relationship when undocumented. Anvar puts his view of 'illegality' this way:

In this dark life, you cannot even fall in love. How are you to get into contact with women? Not having residence permission is a personal disadvantage. Like being ugly. Nobody wants you. If you don't have money, you don't go shopping. If you are undocumented, you don't look for a relationship.

Anvar's anxiety at being 'defective' testifies how 'illegality' can become physically embodied, as it were, in the migrant and prevents relationships to form. The violence inherent in the condition of 'illegality' expresses itself in the internalisation of 'human inequalities' (see Holmes 2007). Official papers signify individuals' rights to resources, political rights, and social rights. However, having papers is assumed to be an essential 'quality' of a person as well. Eva, a Swedish woman, had a relationship with one of my informants for a while; when I asked her why she quit the relationship, she said, 'You cannot trust people without papers'.

As expressed by Eva, having or lacking papers is understood as an essential characteristic of individuals and how they are identified (cf. Bakewell 2007). Children's reactions to the disruption of their family life and the disconnection from other social relationships are even more painful and distressing. In autumn 2006, more than 400 children of undocumented migrants were diagnosed with pervasive refusal syndrome (PRS) in Sweden who developed a refusal to talk, eat, drink, and move over periods of months or even years (see Bondegård 2006; Tamas 2009; SOU 2006: 114). These children had become completely unresponsive and had to be tube-fed, explicitly demonstrating their refusal to live in hiding. In October 2004, Bahar, the seven-year-old daughter of one

informant, took refuge in a fantasy of being a dog, occasionally moving, eating, and sounding like a dog. As her father told me,

Bahar talked about how dogs in Sweden had a safe life, a better life than us. The dogs are not illegal. They have home and food. . . . She talked a lot about how dogs get attention on the street, but not her.

Like the comatose bodies of the children with PRS, Bahar's preference for being a dog rather than an 'illegal' human being, demonstrated how profoundly 'illegality' can be embodied and internalised. It also shows how disruptive the experience of 'illegality' is for family life.

Some Concluding Remarks

This paper has provided ethnographic glimpses into how migrant 'illegality' is configured in Sweden. Through narratives describing migrants' lived experiences of 'illegality' in everyday life, I have explored and concretised abstract and intangible notions of law, policy, deportability, and migrant 'illegality'. In a strong welfare state, like Sweden, where large parts of social life, such as the labour market, housing, healthcare, and education, are regulated through the state, migrant 'illegality' means an even harsher everyday life than in countries with weaker welfare systems. Paradoxically while undocumented migrants constitute a large share of the labour force in the informal economy in Sweden, they cannot even rent a DVD since they lack a social security number. The total absence of rights can be explained in terms of the temporality of migrant illegality. Undocumented migrants should not be 'included' *today* because they will be 'excluded' (deported) *tomorrow* (Noll 2008).

The condition of 'illegality' does not impose its effect merely by a simple process of excluding unwanted individuals; rather, it regulates and configures lives through 'inclusive exclusion' (Agamben 1998). Undocumented migrants are actively kept outside mainstream society, but are nevertheless part of society (Chavez 1997) through, for example, political and juridical processes, media coverage, academic research (such as this study), and not least the labour market (see Table 4). Undocumented migrants are situated on a 'threshold', excluded but at the same time included.

Undocumented migrants, thus, are not *excluded* but are *excepted*; they have not been thrown out, but neither are they considered participants. Undocumented migrants are included in society without being recognised as members. This 'inclusive exclusion' mechanism regulates, manages, and controls the lives of undocumented migrants. Ethnographic accounts in this article show how the private (love, safety, family life) and biological (sexuality, reproduction) life of undocumented migrants have become indistinguishable from the public policy. The dialectical principle of 'inclusive exclusion' makes it impossible to

Table 4. Inclusive exclusion mechanisms inherent in the condition of ‘illegality’

	<i>Excluded</i>	<i>Included</i>
<i>Law</i>	Deprived of legal protection	As objects of the exercise of the law
<i>Politics</i>	Not politically represented	As the focus of political debate
<i>Media</i>	Given no voice in the public debate	As sensational figures in news, reports, and documentaries
<i>Labour Market</i>	Outside the unemployment insurance system and trade unions	As cheap and docile labour in high demand
<i>Welfare system</i>	Deprived of all social welfare services	Through paying indirect tax as consumers

differentiate between membership and inclusion, between who is included and who is excluded, between rule and exception. Undocumented migrants, thus, are actively and formally kept outside the society in which they are already included.

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Appendix 1. Demographic profile of the reference group

Age (years)	Number
21–30	16
31–40	11
41–50	3
51–60	3
Sex	
Men	22
Women	11
Country of origin	
Iran	25
Bangladesh	2
Iraq	3
Kirgizstan	1
Guinea	1
Mongolia	1

<u>Clandestine (year)</u>	
< 1 year	11
1–2 years	4
2–3 years	10
3–4 years	5
> 4 years	3
Total	33

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