Abstract

This thesis concerns the involuntary loss of contact with family members of migrants residing in Denmark. The purpose is to study what has been referred to as ambiguous loss (Boss, 2004) - the situation of not knowing whether a relative is dead or alive, as well as to examine the coping strategies of migrants dealing with the uncertainty concerning the possible loss. Furthermore, the thesis investigates how mobilizing in diasporic networks relates to the coping of this loss, and whether these networks are of support for migrants dealing with ambiguity. A qualitative research method is applied, and qualitative, semi-structured interviews with migrants in Denmark have been conducted and lay the baseline for the empirical data.

The thesis begins with analyzing the target groups' premises for dealing with ambiguous loss, being refugees and asylum seekers. The period of time waiting for the asylum case to be resolved is characterized as a liminal one. Further, it demonstrates how the migrants deal with a double vulnerability, as they, in addition to struggling with living in exile, have lost contact with their families.

With the premises for dealing with the ambiguous loss in mind, this thesis sheds light on the impact of ambiguous loss, and how the informants cope with this loss. The continued ambiguity impedes the grieving process and leaves the informants in a limbo. When dealing with ambiguous loss, closure is unobtainable, and the aim is not to end the ambiguity, but rather, through different coping strategies, to accept the ambiguity. This study has revealed that religion plays an important role in the lives of our informants, and that usage of the church is a significant coping strategy. In addition, these churches serve as a place where they find comfort and social relations as well as a substitution for the family they have either lost, or still have to live in the absence of.

For the informants, the concept of family and religion is intertwined. The members of the migrant churches gather around a common understanding of culture and of adversities, as it consists of people from the same homelands and regions. This creates a space of mutual understanding and recognition and therefore these migrant churches can be conceptualized as diasporic networks. Our informants are mobilizing in these diasporic networks, seeking to recreate and uphold religious as well as cultural traditions as a way of creating meaning and familial bonds. This mobilization contributes to the creation of hope, which is an important aspect on coping with ambiguous loss.

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1 Introduction

Around the world, more than 45 million people are living as refugees, internally displaced people or stateless persons. Fleeing their home countries due to war, conflict or fear of persecution, the refugee experience involves different kinds of loss (Camino and Krulfeld, 1994). Apart from having lost their home and possessions and their social roles and identities, many experience involuntary loss of contact with family members. Some families flee together but are torn apart during their flight; some are deliberately separated and plan to meet up in a different country but lose contact along the way; some are kidnapped or taken by a militia or separatist group, others are torn apart due to sudden outbreaks of war or conflict in their home regions. Uncertainty about the faith of a relative is a devastating reality for countless refugees around the world, and re-establishing contact might be challenging for various reason (ICRC, 2007)

Currently, the situation in Syria and South Sudan as well as the recent floods in the Balkans, has resulted in hundreds of thousands of people gone missing, which makes looking into the situation of people missing family members highly topical. In such crisis or conflicts, the global Red Cross Tracing Service assists people in locating missing family members. As part of this thesis we have prepared a 'needs assessment' for the Danish Red Cross´ Tracing Service to evaluate this service. This evaluation inspired us to look deeper into the hopeless situation people find themselves in having lost contact with a family member. Regardless of whether one receives assistance from the Tracing Service or not, people live with the uncertainty and despair of not knowing the fate of a family member for years.

In this thesis, we study migrants residing in Denmark experiencing what has been referred to as *ambiguous loss* (Boss, 2004) - the situation of not knowing whether a relative is dead or alive, as well as examine the coping strategies of migrants dealing with the uncertainty concerning the possible loss. The fact that the beneficiaries of the Danish Red Cross Tracing Service are asylum seekers and refugees furthered our interest, and therefore we investigate whether missing a family member adds to the already vulnerable situation asylum seekers and refugees find themselves in. In relation to the coping strategies of migrants missing family

members we find it interesting to study whether diasporic networks is a source of support for this group of people.

Various studies have been prepared concerning the impact of transnationalism, where separated migrant families live apart but at the same time retain contact. On the other hand, there is little research on the impact on separated families not knowing the whereabouts of one another. Similarly, a number of studies have evolved around the ambiguity of not knowing the fate of family members, but only a few focus on the impact this ambiguity has on refugees. Although studies have been carried out on both the general impact of war on civilians and on families of the disappeared in particular, these have mainly focused on Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Although we can assume that many migrants must deal with ambiguous loss, we find that there is limited research combining the impact of the ambiguity of not knowing the fate of relatives, with the refugee and asylum seeker experience and how this group cope with this situation and find support.

1.1 Research question

On this basis, we have developed the following research question:

How does diasporic mobilization relate to the process of coping with ambiguous loss for migrants who have lost contact with a family member?

In order to answer the research question we have chosen these sub-questions:

- *How do family members of missing persons experience their situation?*

- *How does religion contribute to dealing with ambiguous loss?*

- *How do migrants having lost contact with family members use religious networks in seeking help and comfort?*

- *How do migrants who have lost contact with family members construct meaning and discover hope?*

In this thesis we will use the term 'migrant' when referring to the Danish legal statuses of both asylum seekers, refugees and to those holding a permanent residence permit. Common for our target group is that they have been forced to flee their home countries due to war, conflict or persecution, and somehow along the way have lost contact to a relative. When relevant for the understanding of our analysis, we will use the terms asylum seekers or refugees.

2 Structure of the thesis

In order to provide a sufficient overview of this dissertation, we will in this chapter account for the structure of our thesis. The issues analyzed overlap and relate to each other, however we attempt to maintain the structure throughout the thesis.

Our thesis started with an introduction to the field of study, where we elaborated on our motivation of wanting to explore the difficult situation of coping with ambiguous loss. We shortly portrayed the difficult situation refugees and asylum seekers missing family members find themselves in, as well as accounted for our interest in studying how migrants deal with the ambiguous loss and our interest in investigating where they might seek support.

In chapter three we will present a short description of the Danish Red Cross Tracing Service and of the needs assessment we have prepared for them. Here we present the background as well as the aim for preparing the needs assessment. We find this chapter relevant as the needs assessment furthered our interest of studying migrants missing family members.

Subsequently, in chapter four, we present our methodological approaches and choices for this thesis. It includes reflections on the hermeneutic phenomenological stance and its benefits when aiming at understanding the life world of our informants and how they have experienced and coped with ambiguous loss. Furthermore, we describe our epistemological stance applying the qualitative research method, herein presenting the application of methodological triangulation using interviews, observations as well as secondary data and the

processing of the collected data. In addition, we describe our access to the field of study, present our informants and ethical considerations as well as reflections on the target group. We have chosen to place our chapter on methodology before the theory chapter as most of the theories applied in this thesis have derived from our collected data.

The fifth chapter is our theory chapter, which explains and describes the theories applied in the analysis as well as defines why these theories are relevant for our study. We have chosen to organize the theories chronological to our analysis, thus we start with Victor Turner's and Liisa Malkki's views on the concept of *liminiality,* then we continue to Pauline Boss' theory on *ambiguous loss*, which is a recurring theory throughout the analysis. In the sections following, we explain relevant coping theories focusing on Boss' model of coping with *ambiguous loss,* Richard Lazaruz' *problem-* and *emotion-focused* coping strategies including *avoidance coping*, *religious coping* of Kenneth I. Pargament et al., and Aaron Antonovsky's theory of *sense of coherence.* Next, we portray different views on *diaspora,* primarily referring to James Clifford and Nauja Kleist, ending the theory chapter with Vincent Crapanzano and Darren Webb's theories of *hope.*

Our analysis extends from chapter six to chapter ten. In these chapters, we answer our research question and the four sub-questions combining our collected data and the chosen theories as well as secondary data in terms of other research related to the field of study. We organize our analysis chronologically by beginning with the moment our target group fled their countries and arrived in Denmark, through the experience of ambiguous loss by involuntary loosing contact with family members, how they consequently cope with the ambiguous loss and lastly, how they discover hope.

We start our analysis with chapter six, 'Refugees and asylum seekers - vulnerability and liminality' where we seek to obtain a better understanding of the situation of our target group as refugees and asylum seekers and their premises for dealing with ambiguous loss. The chapter consists of an analysis and reflection on the 'double vulnerability' our target group have found themselves in, being refugees and asylum seekers in exile and missing family

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members. Further, we take in the concept of liminality as a contribution to the analysis of the situations and conditions for refugees and asylum seekers.

In chapter seven on 'Ambiguous loss', we will answer the sub-question on how family members of missing persons experience their situation of not knowing the fate or the whereabouts of a relative. Using Pauline Boss' theory on ambiguous loss, we analyze the uncertainty and ambiguity our target group experienced when they had lost contact to family members. We will furthermore look into the situation of despair when family members cling to the hope that the missing person might be alive, while simultaneously being aware of the possibility that their family member is dead.

Chapter eight consists of five sections addressing the research question on the coping strategies adopted by our target group when dealing with ambiguous loss as well as the refugees and asylum seeker experience. Thus, this chapter combines coping strategies of ambiguous loss, emotional- and problem-focused coping strategies, avoidance coping, religious coping and sense of coherence, in order to analyze and explore the coping strategies of our target group. Additionally, we answer the sub-question on how the creation of meaning translates into the lives of migrants previously having missed relatives. Lastly, we look into their usage of the church as well as which role religion has in dealing with the loss of family members.

In the ninth chapter, 'Diasporic networks', we follow up on the analysis from the previous chapter on the meaning of religious networks by looking further into the usage of these and of the recognition members of the church obtain herein. We analyze whether the migrant churches can be viewed as diasporic networks, using theory on diaspora, thus answering the part of the research question regarding diasporic mobilization.

We end our chronological structured analysis with chapter ten on 'Discovering hope', as the creation and maintaining of hope is the overall aim of coping with ambiguous loss. The chapter relates to the sub-question about how migrants with missing family members create

hope and through different theories on hope, we analyze how our target group find hope during the time they did not know the whereabouts of their family members. Further, we look at which modes of hope our informants make use of and analyze the salience of religion in the maintenance of hope.

In chapter 11 we complete the thesis and conclude and summarize on our research question and our findings, as well as reflect on further research in the field of study.

3   Contextual background: Preparing a 'needs assessment'

Prior to this dissertation we prepared a need assessment for the Tracing Service (also referred to as Restoring Family Links) of the Danish Red Cross (DRC), which we will elaborate on in the following.

The Tracing Service is a worldwide network and is a cooperation between the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies around the world. The aim of the service is to locate missing people and restore contact with their relatives. Globally, this work includes searching for family members, restoring contact, reuniting families and seeking to clarify the fate of those who remain missing. The Tracing Services assist people who, due to conflict, war, manmade or natural disasters as well as other situations of violence, have lost contact to relatives. The most important tool for locating family members is the tracing request. The tracing request form contains detailed information about the person sought for, which is then matched with data registered by other Red Cross National Societies[1].

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[1] National Societies refers to the national Red Cross departments

3.1 The Danish Tracing Service

The Danish name for the Tracing Service is *Eftersøgningstjenesten*. Since 2008, the key activity[2] in the tracing service of the DRC has been tracing family members by opening and receiving tracing requests. There is one caseworker and ten volunteers managing approximately 700 new tracing cases each year.

The annual number of tracing cases in the Danish tracing service receives from other Red Cross National Societies is approximately 300. This number is roughly the same for tracing request opened by people residing in Denmark. Almost 95% of the tracing cases sent out to other National Societies are opened by asylum seekers and refugees.

3.2 The 'needs assessment'

The background for the preparation of a 'needs assessment', an evaluation, for the Danish Tracing Service is that one of the authors of this dissertation has done an internship in the Portuguese Red Cross Tracing and Migration Department and herein prepared a 'needs assessment'. Subsequently, we were inquired to prepare a similar evaluation for the DRC. Our initial aim with this cooperation was to combine the 'needs assessment' and our thesis, with the idea that the data collected for the evaluation would work as the empirical data in our dissertation. The DRC initiated the preparation of a 'need assessment' on the basis of a 10-year strategy adopted by the global Red Cross Tracing Network. The purpose of such an assessment is "*not to determine whether a given activity is possible, but rather to determine if it is needed*" (ICRC, 2010: 07) and to improve the routines and services provided by the Tracing Services in order to meet the needs of the beneficiaries. In order to achieve this, it was necessary to evaluate on the needs of existing and potential beneficiaries. We prepared the 'needs assessment' for the DRC over three months in the spring of 2014, supervised by Tracing Officer Amira Ajanovic, and Head of the Asylum Section, Anne Sander.

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[2] Other activities are sending and receiving Red Cross Messages, obtaining and forwarding documents relating to the Second World War as well as providing Attestations of Detention/Certificate of Detention, via the ICRC, for ex-detainees registered by the ICRC.

In the 'needs assessment' prepared, we identified and evaluated on the following six objectives (see Appendix I):

1) Present number and facts of the Tracing Service; 2) Determine the level of awareness of the Tracing Service; 3) Identify potential beneficiaries; 4) Evaluate on the use of volunteers; 5) Identify whether the Tracing Service meets the needs of beneficiaries and 6) Recommendations/proposals for action.

The 'needs assessment' will be used internally in the DRC as a tool for further development of the Tracing service. Additionally, it will function as an inspirational tool as well as providing knowledge of the Danish Tracing Service for the global Red Cross Tracing Network.

4 Methodology

The aim of this chapter is to clarify the methods and approaches applied in this research, in the attempt to answer our research question. We start out with our scientific theory positioning, secondly we present our choice of research method, clarify our approach to the data collection, as well as how we processed the collected data. Furthermore, we describe our access to the field and give a short presentation of our informants.

4.1 The philosophy of science

When studying the coping strategies of migrants who have lost contact with family members and their use of diasporic networks, we want to look into the lived experiences of this group, and at the same time interpret and analyze these experiences. Thus, we have chosen to take in hermeneutic phenomenology as the ontological stance in this dissertation as it is an "*attempt to unveil the world as experienced by the subject, but at the same time get beneath the experiences by interpreting them*" (Kafle, 2011: 186) and because they "*are both human*

science approaches and therefore reflective disciplines" (Wilson and Hutchinson, 1991: 265). The hermeneutic stance in this combination refers to the nature of hermeneutics as it is perceived by Martin Heidegger who finds that human existence is *being-in-the-world* (Lindseth and Norberg, 2004: 147). The phenomenological stance shares the view of Edmund Husserl who finds that *"as this world reveals itself in our consciousness it becomes a life world"* (Ibid: 147). We have chosen this combination as we wish to understand the perceptions of our target group and their life world, and at the same time identify, describe and interpret these experiences within their given context. In the following we will elaborate on the meaning of and importance of understanding our informants' life world.

4.1.1   Interpretations of the 'life world'

Our aim in this research is to understand the experiences of people missing relatives and their world pre- reflectively. Similarly, we aim to reproduce the stories of our informants as accurately as possible. When our informants expressed their lived experiences, we were not interested in looking at these experiences as something factual, but rather focusing on the *meaning* of these lived experiences. Seen through phenomenology, to reveal the essential meaning of the informants' experiences and to understand their life world, we have to be able to comprehend their meaning of the situation when analyzing it. Since our interest has been to gain an insight into the informants' *life world* experiences, phenomenology has been relevant as a basis for both data collection and analysis. Nonetheless, based on the way we relate to our prior understanding of the research process, we are also inspired by hermeneutics and are in this way not *"uncontaminated by interpretation"* (Lindseth and Norberg, 2004: 147). We are balancing between hermeneutics and phenomenology, as we do not take our pre-understanding of the studied phenomena for granted, but simultaneously attempt to take part in the experiences of our informants by narrating their stories and their perceptions. In other words, as researchers, we are aware of our participation and the fact that we produce a text that expresses its own meaning when writing down the informants' stories and experiences.

4.1.2   A circle of interpretation

In adopting hermeneutic phenomenology, we make use of the hermeneutical circle. We find it relevant to bring in the circle as it represents the interaction that takes place between the

whole and its parts when interpreting a text. Based on the realization, we cannot understand the parts without an understanding of the whole (Højbjerg, 2004 in Juul and Pedersen, 2012).

As mentioned, Heidegger (1999) claims that we can never be *outside* of the world we are studying, as we inevitably are a part of our field of study. We recognize that we affect the interview situation as well as the data we collect. This is the *hermeneutical circle* (Heidegger, 1999 in Juul and Pedersen, 2012: 128) According to philosophical hermeneutics, regardless of how hard one tries to prevent it, the researcher is present, and the questions the researcher asks the informant reflect a specific preconception or bias (Juul and Pedersen, 2012.). Thus we have chosen to work with the knowledge that our preconceptions are an inevitable part of us as researchers, and therefore a part of the research process. For instance, when asking our informants how they have coped with the ambiguous loss they have experienced, we assume that this has been distressing and traumatic. Prior to the interview we had an assumption of how this loss impacts the affected, however the informants gave us a deeper, personal and more contextual understanding of it.

There is no contradiction in viewing individuals as intentional and knowledgeable actors, who themselves interpret the world they live in (Flick, 2002: 12), and at the same time interpreting these subjective experiences further in order to understand the intended meaning. Following the hermeneutical circle in the interview situation, we have also been aware of the implications of *double hermeneutics*. When we ask our informants questions they might not have considered before, they have to relate and take a stand towards this immediately. The answers the informants give are once again interpreted by us, and therefore becomes a new reality (Juul and Pedersen, 2012).

Having described our ontological stance as hermeneutic phenomenological as we interpret the life worlds of our informants as well as reflecting on how we, as researchers, with our mere presence, have an impact on the field we are studying, we will now present our epistemological position.

4.2 Qualitative method

In order to study the life worlds of our informants and how they have perceived life without their family members it is, evidently, necessary to speak with them. Consequently, we have chosen to use the *"interpretative, naturalistic approach to the world"* (Guest et al, 2013: 3) of the qualitative research method when dealing with our primary data collection, which is a way to gain a coherent view of our field of study (Jacobsen et al., 1979). We are interested in understanding the meaning of migrants who have lost contact with family members, and how they make sense of their world and their experiences. Thus we find the qualitative method relevant for our project as the *"qualitative research is intended to reach the world 'out there' (...) and to understand, describe and sometimes explain social phenomena from the 'inside' (…)"* (Kvale, 1996: 10). The advantage of this method is its multiplicity regarding the use and form, and we find its epistemological character useful, because it ascribes conversation and the subjective experiences as a central significance and as a quality in relation to gaining knowledge. Using the qualitative approach, we have achieved a great insight to the life world of people who have lost contact with family members, as well as knowledge on their coping strategies. However, as Denzin and Lincoln argue, there is not an open window into the innermost of informants, as factors such as language, ethnicity and gender can be obstacles, that needs to be taken into consideration (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005).

Following this, it is important to take into account that the interview situation is a meeting between the informant and the researcher, and takes place in a social context where one has to be aware of the *context effects* of the interview (Burawoy, 1998). Burawoy presents four types of context effects, which we have taken into consideration when interviewing the informants. Firstly, there are the *interview effects* where race, gender as well as the form of the questions can affect the responses. This means that as our informants are refugees from Africa and Afghanistan as well as males and females, their responses might be influenced by these factors. Additionally, some of the interviews were conducted in English and some in Danish. None of these are the informants' native language, which might have affected the answers given. Thus the way our informants chose to express themselves and respond to our questions might have been different if they had the possibility to speak their own mother tongue. Secondly, Burawoy describes *respondent effects* as the complex uncertainty of the questions asked depending on the different worlds the respondents come from, and thus the different

ways a question can be interpreted. Consequently, the answer given relies on how the question was understood. Thirdly, Burawoy indicates that the responses may be different depending on the place and time of the interview, which he calls the *field effects*. Here, it is relevant to mention that our interviews have been conducted in various places; in an informant's home, at a café, and in an empty office space. Being in your own home might provide a more relaxed atmosphere, whereas others are more comfortable in a public space, not having to invite "strangers" into their home. Whether the informant feels comfortable or not could affect the answers given. Lastly, Burawoy presents the effects of the *situation*, which reflects the inevitable fact that if someone else conducted the interview, or if the interview were conducted at another time, it would yield different answers. This is by Burawoy viewed as a threat to representativeness (Burawoy, 1998). Consequently, we have been aware of the fact that we are not able to get a full insight into our informants, as there are a number of factors that cannot be controlled and inevitably will have an impact on the interview situation. One can merely attempt to take this into consideration and try to limit misunderstandings by e.g. asking open-ended questions and letting the informants tell their life stories, observing the field and applying relevant secondary data. This multiple data collection will be presented in the following.

4.2.1   Methodological Triangulation

While our research is based on the understanding of the subjective opinions of our informants, we find it of great value to support interviews with observations and secondary data, as a way of obtaining a broader understanding of our informants' life world and situation. Therefore, within the qualitative method we have decided to use multiple-methods when collecting as well as analyzing our data, as will be explained in the following.

Within triangulation, the main idea is to *"establish converging lines of evidence to make your findings as robust as possible"* (Yin, 2004: 9). The strategy of triangulation, then, can be seen as *"a strategy that adds rigor, breadth, complexity, richness and depth in any inquiry"* (Flick, 2004 in Denzin and Lincoln, 2005: 5). Two types of triangular methodology can be further categorized, namely the *within-method triangulation* and the *between- or across triangulation.* While between-or across triangulation combine quantitative and qualitative

methods, in this research we have employed the within-method triangulation as a data collection method, as we are using qualitative interviews, ethnography (participant observation) and analysis of secondary data from the qualitative method approach (Kimchi et al., 1991 in Thurmond, 2001). We find that the interviews we have conducted are in-depth and have provided us with substantial knowledge on migrants who have lost contact with family members. However, we find the method of within-triangulation useful, as applying multiple methods has opened up to a broader view on the situation of this group of people. In the research process as well as in the analysis, we have complemented the collected qualitative data with observations in Sandholmlejren[3] and in the Zion Temple Celebration Centre in order to fully understand the situation and coping strategies of the target group. Further, we have included secondary data in order to gain a somewhat broader view on how migrants missing family members cope with their situation and mobilize in diasporic networks. In the following, we will present the three data collection methods we have made use of.

4.2.2   Interviews

The first of the within-triangulation methods applied is interviews with migrants having lost contact with relatives. Additionally, we have interviewed a professional working with this group. We have conducted a total of eight interviews, each lasting approximately 1 ½ -2 hours. One of the interviews was conducted following a tracing consultation and only lasted approximately 10 minutes due to ethical considerations (see section 4.5). Each interview was recorded, one of us had the main responsibility of asking the questions, whereas the other took notes and observed. However, one informant did not feel comfortable about being recorded, here we took detailed notes during the interview, which the informant looked through subsequently.

The main qualitative method in this dissertation is semi-structured interviews (Kvale, 2007), which means that we have prepared an interview guides (see Appendix II and III), but have

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[3] Sandholmlejren, also referred to as Center Sandholm, is the largest asylum center in Denmark and is operated by the Danish Red Cross. The Danish Tracing Service offers tracing conversations every Wednesday from 5pm – 7pm. Here, asylum seekers can search for family members by opening a tracing request.

focused on allowing the interview to move according to the informants' responses. Additionally, we found it relevant to open each interview with asking the interviewee to tell us about themselves and their stories. These stories are interesting as the informant himself selectively create a meaningful story. The stories varied in length and detail; some informants were comfortable sharing many details about their lives, whereas others required us to ask follow-up questions to a larger extent. The interview guide, divided into themes, has been continuously revised and new questions have been added, while others have been deleted. Exemplifying this, we started out with fewer questions regarding religious coping and migration, but as we, early in the process, found these themes prevalent for the informants and their experiences, we chose to focus more on these during the interviews. However, all through the process we have maintained themes on the coping strategies of family members of missing persons and the importance of networks. The type of questions we posed can primarily be categorized as introducing questions, follow-up questions, specifying questions and interpreting questions (Kvale, 1996: 133-135). Most of the questions were of a rather personal character, for instance there were questions about how it felt not knowing where one's family members were, questions about their religious belief and whether they used their faith in dealing with distress and hardships. Additionally, we asked specifying questions such as where and when they lost contact to their family member.

Expert interview

In addition to conducting interviews with migrants who have lost contact with one or more family members, we found it relevant to talk to a psychologist from the DRC. All of the psychologist's clients are asylum seekers who require psychological support due to traumas. On top of that, the majority of the clients have lost contact with one or more family members. Interviewing a professional in the field is a way of getting a practitioner's view on the problem area and to gain knowledge on the field from a different perspective (Thagaard, 2004). The questions were open-ended which allowed the professional to contribute with new themes and issues. We found the interview with a practitioner within our field of study relevant, as she provided us with examples of personal stories and coping strategies of clients who are missing family members. This gave us additional insight to the desperate situation of this group of people. We have taken into consideration that the psychologist gave us her interpretation of the target group and that she, as a professional in the field, might be biased by her role as an experienced psychologists working with vulnerable refugees and asylum

seekers for several years. Furthermore, she is representing a large humanitarian organization basing its work on fundamental principles and values, which might affect her answers.

4.2.3 Observations

The second within-triangulation method we employ is participant observations. In connection with the needs assessment carried out for the Tracing Service of the DRC, we had the opportunity to do participant observations of the initial tracing consultations with beneficiaries of the Tracing Service, carried out by volunteers in Sandholmlejren. The ethnographical character of participant observations means *"being embedded in the action and context of a social setting"* (Guest, 2013: 76). These observations were predominantly done in order to evaluate on the initial tracing consultations as well as on the work of volunteers, but also to observe the beneficiaries of the Tracing Service. Additionally, we observed a Sunday service in the Zion Temple Celebration Center.

Participant observations *"connects the researcher to the most basic of human experiences, discovering through immersion and participation the hows and whys of human behavior in a particular context"* (Ibid.: 75). However, as for the interviews, we are aware that as researchers, we cannot be viewed as natural observers, but instead actively interact with the informants and thereby affect the knowledge that is being produced.

The observations in Sandholmlejren gave us an insight to the difficult situation the beneficiaries were in. Having recently arrived in Denmark and being without one or several family members can be a devastating issue to talk about, and words may not come easy. Observing the body language, appearance and behavior of the informants as well as asking a few questions to discover the meaning behind their behavior gave us a supplementary understanding of the experiences of this group of people. Additionally, the observations worked as preliminary research to this thesis, 0as it gave us a clear insight to the vulnerability of our target group and made us reconsider future interviews with migrants who are still in the search of family members (see section 4.5) The observations opened up for considerations on what questions made sense and were relevant to ask forthcoming informants.

The aim of observing a Sunday sermon in the Zion Temple Celebration Center was to gain an understanding and further knowledge about how the migrants use the church, and to capture the atmosphere. The observation gave us the opportunity to meet members of the congregation and to converse with them. Subsequently, we got the opportunity to interview one of the members from the church.

4.2.4   Secondary data

The third within-triangulation method used is the application secondary data, which we find has supplemented our own data collection.

 The secondary data applied in this thesis are several studies on the refugee and asylum seeker situation, ambiguous loss, family separation as well as studies on the psychological well-being of migrants as secondary data in the analysis. This has added value to our research as it has broadened up our field of study, underlined the statements of our informants and in this way provided us with a basis with which our collected data can be compared to. Nonetheless, we have been conscious of the secondary data applied in this thesis is collected by other researchers, who might have focused on different problem areas and thereby achieved different results. The reports all include a description of the data collection methods, however we still have to remain critical of this when using the data. Once in the analysis, we make use a secondary quote from an article on the ICRC 'Restoring Family Links' website, in order to analyze the ambiguous situation and the need for closure.

Having described the three within-method triangulation methods made use of in our research, we will in the following explain the way we processed the data we collected.

4.2.5 Processing the collected data

In the initial phase of analyzing our empirical data we found it useful to apply *Topic Coding* and *Analytical Coding* (Richards, 2005). The tool of coding is in line with the phenomenological hermeneutical approach and is in its form *"simply the process of categorizing and sorting data"* (Bryman and Burgess, 1994: 148) When reading through our collected data, primary as well as secondary, we used topic coding – where topics emerge when reading through the initial text (Richards, 2005: 7). This means we divided the data into topics such as the ambiguity of loss, coping strategies, religion as well as hope. Subsequently, when reading through the coded text, we applied analytical coding, as themes like guilt, and the asylum seeker/refugee situation arose and new theories emerged. This method is a process of the interpreting and reflecting on the meaning of the data to arrive at new ideas and categories (Ibid.: 9).

Our approach to the interplay between empirical data and theory is neither entirely inductive nor deductive. We find ourselves in a position between the two, using an abductive approach. We consider the analysis of the collected data as the central part, however we take into consideration that the theoretical position we as researchers have, might influence the way the data is understood (Thagaard, 2001: 181).

In our attempt to understand the life world of our informants, when processing the collective data we have been concerned about formulating the quotes from the interviews in a hermeneutic phenomenological way. Therefore, we have explicated the statements from our informants as close to their everyday language as possible. Exemplifying this, the interviews completed in English are not corrected in regards to grammatical flaws as long as it does not inhibit the overall understanding of the quote. However, in order to obtain a flow in the text throughout the thesis, we have chosen to translate interviews completed in Danish into English. Additionally, we have omitted pauses and interjections when transcribing the data, as we did not consider these a requirement for understanding the informants' perception and experience of things

In this section, we have introduced the epistemological position of this dissertation. We have presented the qualitative methods used, as well as outlined the within-triangulation method using interviews, observations and secondary data. Further, we have illuminated that when deducing the most important themes from the interviews and finding relevant theory to this study, the process of coding has proved effective. In the next section, we will outline how we located the informants of this study, the tools we made use of as well as the obstacles we faced during this process.

4.3   Access to the field of study

The needs assessment we prepared for the Tracing Service of the DRC was our initial access to field of study, and provided us with the possibility to reach our target group. In this section we elaborate on how we located informants for this thesis and consider the obstacles we faced along the way. Additionally, we present our informants and lastly we reflect on ethical considerations as well as the group of informants we have interviewed.

4.3.1   Locating informants

The Tracing Service primarily contacts their beneficiaries via letters, and in trying to locate informants we were given a selection of 60 beneficiaries from 2013. As the needs assessment was of a primarily quantitative nature, we decided to send out a questionnaire enclosed with a personal letter from the DRC and the signature of the caseworker of the Tracing Service as well as the head of department (see Appendix IV). The questionnaire focused on the needs assessment and not directly on our research for the dissertation, with questions regarding the level of assistance the users received from the Tracing Service, how long they waited to receive news from the Service etc. We did include a question about whether or not the beneficiaries would be interested in an interview with us. Consequently, our idea was that the questionnaire would function as a means of getting in contact with beneficiaries that we would subsequent contact personally. On the date the questionnaire was due sent back to us, we had received 11letters, but only one beneficiary wanted to participate in an interview. Therefore we decided to continue our search for informants outside the DRC.

When deciding upon preparing the needs assessment for the Red Cross, we were expecting that this would result in a direct access to a large number of informants for our thesis. For a number of reasons, this was not the case. Firstly, in hindsight, the communication between the Red Cross Tracing Service and us could have been more specific in regards to what both parts expected to achieve from this cooperation. Secondly, we have learned that locating potential informants does not necessarily result in an interview. Additionally, the sensitive character of our field of study can be an impediment to finding informants (see section 4.5).

When contacting beneficiaries of the Tracing Service, the personal letter attached was signed by the Tracing Officer and Head of Department, not by us as researchers. The letter attached with the questionnaire was twofold; in connection with the Red Cross celebrating their 150 year anniversary this year, the Asylum Department of the Red Cross had agreed to assist journalists in finding a few tracing beneficiaries who wanted to share their story. This was mentioned in the letter explaining the aim of our questionnaire. We were concerned that this twofoldedness of the letter might have confused the recipients, and that this could be an additional reason for the low number of respondents.

4.3.1.1. Diaspora organizations

In our search for informants, we considered different options as to where we could locate migrants who are, or at some point in their lives have had, missing family members. As our focus is on whether the migrants with missing family members mobilize in diaspora networks, we found it relevant to contact diaspora and minority organizations in Denmark. We e-mailed approximately 25 different diaspora and social network organizations. The few organizations who replied stated that their focus was on development projects in their countries of origin, and that they did not have any members who had lost contact to a relative.

4.3.1.2 Migrant churches

Continuing our search for informants having lost contact with family members, we were inspired Ida Marie Vammen's (2010) thesis on migrants participating in religious associations. On the webpage of the Intercultural Centre (*Tværkulturelt Center*), we found an

overview of all the migrant churches in Denmark[4]. We e-mailed approximately 50 pastors from migrant churches, both African and Middle-Eastern, respectively of various Christian faiths and Islamic communities, in an attempt to clarify whether the pastors knew of members in their congregations who were missing family members. Out of the 50 churches we contacted by e-mail and phone, 10 churches replied, and a few of these connected us with members of their congregation who previously had lost contact to a family member. The migrants we contacted and subsequently interviewed will be presented in the following section.

Retrospectively, and with the experiences from the observations at the Zion Temple in mind, a method that could have proved more successful when locating informants, could have been to access the field earlier in the process. We could e.g. have attended Sunday services in other migrant churches and thereby accessing the field more directly.

4.4   Presentation of the informants

Our search for informants resulted in eight interviews. We interviewed two pastors from migrant churches in Denmark, two members of different migrant congregations, three beneficiaries of the Danish Tracing Service, and a psychologist from the Red Cross Asylum Department. The informants are between 20 and 62 years old, and common for them is that they practice their religion, with the exception of the psychologist. Some of the informants have been given fictive names to ensure anonymity. It is important for us to mention, that none of the informants are missing a family member any longer. This will be reflected on in section 4.5.

Aubert

Aubert is from Burundi and is a member of the 'International Baptistkirke'. He fled Burundi in 1996 together with his family, but lost contact with his sister. They managed to get to

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4 Tværkulturelt center: http://www.tvaerkulturelt-center.dk/index.php/migrantmenigheder/70-migrantmenigheder/kortlaegning/416-kortlaegning-oversigt

Europe, but came back to Burundi in 2000. Unfortunately, Aubert was imprisoned and tortured, and once again had to flee his country. He came to Denmark alone in 2001, and lived in an asylum center for almost a year, before he was granted asylum. The rest of his family lives in Burundi, but he keeps in touch with them. Aubert kept trying to locate his sister when he came to Denmark by contacting refugee camps in both Kenya and Tanzania, but he had no luck in finding her. In 2009 Aubert received a call from a friend in Burundi, who had found his sister. She had been living in Tanzania, but was now back in Burundi. We got in contact with Aubert through the Pastor of the 'International Baptistkirke'.

John

John is a Missionary Priest in the 'International Baptist City Church' from Ghana. He was invited to Denmark in 2001 from the United Kingdom, where he had been living as a refugee, to be a pastor for migrants especially from Africa. John himself has not lost contact with family members, but has provided us with valuable information on how people who have lost contact with relatives make use of the church. John was one of the respondents to the e-mails we sent out to migrant congregations.

Leonard

Leonard fled the war in Burundi in 1995. When the war broke out, he was a university student in Kigali. His family resided in a compound close to the university, but when the university was attacked, Leonard had no choice but to flee alone. He went to the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo as a refugee, but when civil war broke out here as well in 1996, he fled to Congo Brazaville on foot. In 1997 he was once again forced to flee, this time to the Central African Republic. Leonard was enrolled in a program at the university in Bangui and managed to complete three years of studying before he was offered an interview with the UNHCR. In 2001 he came to Denmark as a UN refugee. For years Leonard thought his family had died due to the massacre in their compound in 1995, but in 2007 he learned that everyone had survived, with the exception of his brother. Leonard reunited with his family when he went to visit them in Burundi the same year. We established contact with Leonard while observing a sermon in the Zion Temple Celebration Centre.

Farima

Farima is an Afghani woman, whom we got in contact via the Tracing Service. Her family had been applying for asylum in Denmark, as they fled from Afghanistan when the oldest daughter had been kidnapped and killed, but the family was denied protection and was sent back to Afghanistan. Upon arrival in Afghanistan, the husband was kidnapped, leaving the mother and daughters with no choice but to yet again flee the country, this time without the husband. Farima and her two daughters have obtained refugee status in Denmark, after spending two years in a Red Cross asylum center. In April 2014 she learned through the Red Cross Tracing Service that her husband was alive. He is at the time of writing in Athens, waiting for his application for family reunion to go through.

Paul

We got in touch with Paul through the Red Cross Tracing Service, as he had responded to our questionnaire. Paul is a Congolese man, who arrived in Denmark in 2011 as an asylum seeker. Due to conflicts in the country, Paul fled from The Democratic Republic of the Congo to Rwanda with his wife and four kids, but lost contact with them and fled to Denmark alone. After he received asylum in Denmark, Paul opened a case with the Danish Tracing Service, and about four months later his family was located in Rwanda. His family came to Denmark in November 2012 and they are now living together in Denmark.

Pastor Tea

Pastor Tea was one of the respondents to the e-mails we sent to the migrant churches. He is from Burundi and fled the genocide in 1994. His parents had been shot in the family home and he fled to a refugee camp in Rwanda together with his siblings. His lost his brother during the flight and his sister died in a refugee camp in Rwanda. Pastor Tea came to Denmark as an unaccompanied minor in 1995, and lived in an asylum center for two years before he was granted asylum. He founded the migrant church the Zion Temple Celebration Center together with a few friends in 2004, and is now the chairman and pastor of the Zion Temple

Celebration Centre. Pastor Tea recently established contact with his extended family living in Burundi, after believing they were dead.

Yunis

At three occasions we observed volunteers of the Tracing Service conducting the initial tracing interviews with beneficiaries in Sandholmlejren. In the end of each interview we were allowed to ask a few questions, however only Yunis, from Nigeria, wanted to elaborate on having lost contact to a family member. He arrived as an asylum seeker in Denmark in February 2013 and is searching for his sister, whom he lost contact with when he fled Nigeria in 2012. His mother died around the same time and he has not had contact with his father since he was 5 years old. Due to the fact that our interview was in extension of an initial Tracing interview, and because he was affected by the circumstances, the interview with Yunis only lasted 10 minutes.

The above presented interview objects will throughout the analysis both be referred to as *informants* and the *target group.*

Mirjam Refby from the DRC

Mirjam Refby is a psychologist working for the Red Cross Asylum Department with whom we have conducted an expert interview. She works with asylum seekers from the Red Cross asylum center's around Zealand in Denmark, and mainly works with people who are missing a family member. She has extensive knowledge on the coping strategies of our target group. In the analysis, when we refer to the informants, Mirjam Refby is not included in this group, rather we will refer to her as *Mirjam Refby from the DRC*, in order to differentiate her from the target group.

Having presented our informants and Mirjam Refby from the DRC, we find it relevant to reflect on the ethical considerations we have been aware of and concerned about during our research process.

4.5 Ethical considerations

When interviewing our informants, we have been aware of the sensitive character of our research focus, as well as of the fact that our informants are refugees and asylum seekers. Refugee experiences can be described as vulnerable, as they can include experiences, which are of a particular emotional nature, and therefore the ethical dimension is especially important to involve when conducting interviews with this group (Jacobsen and Kristiansen, 2001: 51-52). We have asked our informants to open up for personal stories. Studies that seek to identify experiences of refugees may be related to the study of sensitive character because it includes research, which delves into vulnerable and personal experiences (Jørgensen et al., 2005: 236). These are all issues that we have given great consideration and which we have taken into account in the interview situation. We treated the informants individually and sought to act sympathetic, empathetic and attentive toward them, and to create a safe and open space for personal reflection. In the introduction of the interviews, we made it clear that the interviewee had the possibility to be anonymous in our dissertation and they themselves could decide what they wanted to share with us.

4.6 Reflecting on the informants: Expressing feelings retrospectively

As mentioned, our informants have all experienced having lost contact with family members. However, all of them have either re-established contact or found out that their relatives are dead, with an exception of Yunis. When interviewing our informants about their experiences of not knowing the whereabouts or fate or a family member, they are expressing feelings retrospectively. Hence, details about memories from when they were missing a family member might be blurred, or their recollections differ from what actually happened due to the time that has passed. On the other hand, talking about their situation in hindsight can also provide the informants with a greater overview of the situation and with the ability to better reflect on how they dealt with the ambiguity and uncertainty about their loss. Additionally, it might be easier to describe and put into words the impact of the situation of missing a family member, when one has distanced oneself from the experience.

Consequently, for this study we do not regard the fact that our informants are talking about their feelings and situation retrospectively as a disadvantage, but rather as something we have to take into consideration. It is worth mentioning that we have encountered how, for several of our informants, the impact of the time they were experiencing the ambiguous loss is still noticeable, and for some it continues to be a delicate subject to talk about. One example is Paul, one of our informants, who been reunited with his family after two years of not knowing their whereabouts. When talking about how it felt not knowing where they were, it was evident that he found it difficult to talk about. In general, the difficult situations described by our informants have clearly affected them as individuals, and continues to do so.

Furthermore, when studying whether our informants have taken part and found support in networks when missing a family member, we realized that for the group of people we interviewed, it was quite complex, as they are not reunited with family and continue to use these networks for support. Consequently, it can be difficult to distinguish how they used their network at the time when they were unaware of the fate of their relatives, and now, when they have located family members but still use the network as support.

By reflecting on the premises for the collection and processing of data, and thereby being transparent about the research process, we find that this chapter on methodology can contribute to strengthen our analysis. In the following chapter we will present the theoretical approaches we have made use of when analyzing the collected data.

5   Theoretical approaches

The aim of this chapter is to introduce the theories we find relevant to bring into play when analyzing the ambiguous loss of people who are missing family members and how they cope with this loss, as well as to investigate how they mobilize in diaspora networks as a way of finding meaning and discovering hope. Our theories are eclectic and derive from different disciplines, namely sociology, anthropology and psychology. As mentioned in the chapter on methodology, our theories are selected both prior to, and after coding the collected data.

5.1 Liminality

Our informants, being refugees and asylum seekers, have experienced having to flee their country of origin and waiting for an answer on their asylum applications in asylum centers in Denmark. When analyzing this situation, we have used the term "*liminality*", which originally was coined by Arnold Van Gennep in "*Rites of Passage*" (2010) as rituals – or a series of actions - that are thought to cause something new (Van Gennep, 2010: 3). Victor Turner (1969) developed the concept of liminality further and defined liminal beings as "*at once no longer classified and not yet classified…[they] are at the very least "betwixt and between" all the recognized fixed points in space-time of structural classification*" (Turner, 1969: 66). We use this concept when analyzing how our informants have been caught in a position of transition from the past to an unknown future at the same time as coping with the ambiguous loss of family members.

We have chosen to use liminality focusing on Liisa Malkki's (1995) use of the term. She interprets Turner's notion "*betwixt and between*", relating it to refugees, hence contextualizing it in the categorization of nation states. She claims that refugees are "*systematically invisible*" because they are out of "*a national order of things*". Due to their status as refugees, their sense of place and culture are taken away from them in this liminal position. (Malkki, 1995: 4-5). We adopt Malkki's interpretation that refugees fit into Turner's characterization of a liminal personae as a "*naked unaccommodated man*" or "*undifferentiated raw material*" (Turner, 1967: 98-99 in Malkki, 1995: 34). Malkki recognizes people "*(…) by virtue of their* refugeeness *occupy a problematic, liminal position in the national order of things*" (Malkki, 1995: 5). Even though liminality is originally a term of rituals with a knowledge of what *will* come, we argue that it can also be used when analyzing the double vulnerability we find our informants to be in as refugees and asylum seekers - being "betwixt and between" (ibid.) recognition.

Malkki, in her research paper on refugees, rootedness and territorialization of national identity, seeks to challenge the "*taken-for-granted ways of thinking about identity and territory that are reflected in ordinary language, in nationalist discourses, and in scholarly*

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studies of nations, nationalism, and refugees" (Malkki, 1992). When analyzing the informant's connection to the diaspora network we find it relevant to take in Malkki's reflections on rootedness and how this is not necessarily linked to a certain place in an arborescent form. Malkki challenges the territorialzation of kinship and homeland (Malkki, 1992) and argues that cultural and national identities are not inevitably perceived in territorialized terms, and that *"uprootedness also threatens to denature and spoil these"* (Malkki, 1992: 34) identities.

5.2   Ambiguous loss

When analyzing the stressful feeling of having a missing family member and not knowing whether the person is dead or alive, we find it highly relevant to apply the theory of *Ambiguous loss*. Regardless of what causes the separation, what is common for all cases is the ambiguity of the loss, as well as the uncertainty of the situation of the missing. Professor and family therapist Pauline Boss (2004, 2006, 2007, 2009) developed the concept of ambiguous loss in the 1970s, when she was working with the relatives of pilots who had gone missing in Vietnam and Cambodia (Boss, 2004: 556). A clinical theory on ambiguous loss has been developed in which the stress of ambiguity is seen to impact mental health and well-being, subject to the resilience[5] of individuals and families. The theory on ambiguous loss emphasizes the difficulties and the consequences of *not knowing.* It is a situation of *"unclear loss resulting from not knowing whether a dead or alive, absent or present"* (Boss, 2004: 554). A number of studies have indicated that situations of ambiguous loss often can be related to symptoms of depression, anxiety and family conflict (Robins, 2010).

Boss differs between two types of ambiguous loss – one where a loved one is physically missing, i.e. bodily gone, and one where the family member is physically present but psychologically absent, e.g. people with Alzheimer's or severe brain damages (Boss, 2006: 8). The focus in this research is, naturally, the ambiguity towards a physically missing person.

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[5] Resilience is *"a class of phenomena characterized by good outcomes in spite of serious threats to adaptation or development. It is characterized as the ability to bounce back and cope effectively in the face of difficulties, bend, but not break, under extreme stress, handle setbacks, persevere and adapt even when things go awry, and maintain equilibrium following aversive life events"* (Luther, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000; Masten and Reed, 2002 in Sossou and Craig et al, 2008). We adopt this definition of resilience and will use it when analyzing the coping strategies of the informants.

According to Boss, the basic theoretical premise is that *"ambiguous loss is the most stressful loss as it defies resolution and creates confused perceptions about who is in or out of a particular family"* (Boss, 2004: 553). Comparing to a situation where a family member dies "normally", she argues: *"With a clear-cut loss, there is more clarity- a death certificate, mourning rituals, and the opportunity to honor and dispose remains. With ambiguous loss, none of these markers exists"* (Ibid.). Boss claims that the irresolvable situation tends to block cognition, block coping and stress management and freeze the grief process (Boss, 2009). It is important to keep in mind that ambiguous loss is considered a relational phenomenon and therefore not an individual condition (Boss, 2007). The feeling of grief, ambivalence and despair is naturally individual, *"but the culprit lies in the context outside the individual"* (Ibid: 107). Hence, even though an individual experience, ambiguous loss is dependent on the disappearance of a loved one, without the person missing, the ambiguous loss would not exist.

When Boss first began working with families of the missing, she believed the therapeutic goal was to get rid of the ambiguity. She was soon to realize that this was impossible – as long as the family member remains missing, the ambiguity will continue to be a stressor. Only external circumstances could fully remove the ambiguity, hence Boss realized the goal was rather to understand how people live well with ambiguity (Boss, 2006). In relation to this she has developed six coping strategies, which we will elaborate on in the next section.

We find it relevant to give a brief explanation of the words *ambiguous* and *uncertainty*, as these nouns appear frequently in our analysis when describing the situation of not knowing the whereabouts or the fate of a missing family member. The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines ambiguity as *"a word or expression that can be understood in two or more possible ways"* and as *"something that does not have a single clear meaning"*[6]. In our case, the ambiguity is concerning the uncertainty about the fate of a missing family member - is the missing dead or alive? We also use the noun *uncertainty* is when relating the situation of a missing family member. According to Boss (2007), despite the similarities, she does not consider *uncertainty* and *ambiguity* synonymous (Boss, 2007: 108). More importantly, she argues that uncertainty has a literature and scale of its own which has a different meaning than

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[6] http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/ambiguity

that of ambiguity, as it is focused around illness diagnosis (Ibid.). Boss recommends using the word ambiguity to prevent confusion. We will in our analysis make use of both terms, as we see them as complimenting each other. While ambiguity specifically refers to the two or more possible scenarios for missing family member, uncertainty supplementary refers to the uncertainty of the situation people with missing family member find themselves in as a whole.

5.3   Coping

In order to answer our research question on the coping strategies of our informants we have, naturally, used different theories on coping. We have chosen to complement coping strategies of *ambiguous loss with problem-focused strategies, emotion-focused strategies, avoidance strategies* as well as *religious coping* in order to better understand how our informants deal with their situation.

As a concept, coping is defined as "*the person's constantly changing cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the person's resources*" (Folkman and Lazarus et al, 1986: 993). In the wide literature of coping, scholars have created numerous models to explain coping strategies (Folkman and Lazarus, 1986, Bond and Bunce, 2000, Pargament and Raiya, 2007, Pallant and Lae, 2002, Lazarus, 1999). The reasons for adapting coping strategies are very diverse. In this thesis, we do not distinguish whether the coping strategies of the informants are positive or negative; merely we want to demonstrate what strategies are used and the reasons behind. The following is an insight to the coping theories used in this dissertation referring primarily to the coping concepts of Pauline Boss, Kenneth I. Pargament and Richard S. Lazarus.

5.3.1   Coping with ambiguous loss

Given the characteristics of the ambiguous loss of our informants missing family members, inevitably, we find it interesting to look into how they cope with this loss and discover meaning. As ambiguous loss is our main focus and infiltrates the whole dissertation, we will analyze the coping strategies of our informants primarily using Pauline Boss' model on coping strategies of ambiguous loss. The model is based on clinical theory (Robins, 2010), is

developed as a practical tool in order to assist people suffering from ambiguous loss, and challenges an apparent need for closure (Ibid.). Boss views ambiguous loss as an extraordinary stressor that can produce anxiety and continuous stress, which can impede coping and meaning making (Boss, 2006: 11).

When working with the impacted of ambiguous loss, Pauline Boss operates with a resilience model, which consists of six coping strategies:

Finding meaning: Finding meaning is difficult while the loss of contact with a family member is ambiguous. According to Boss, finding new meaning in life is often relational and found when socially interacting with other people (Robins, 2010).

Tempering mastery: Trying to control the ambiguous situation can increase helplessness. Hence mastery must be tempered, that is, one have to try to accept that one cannot control the ambiguity (Boss, 2009).

Reconstructing identity: Ambiguous loss threatens the identity of the impacted, and provokes anxiety about the roles of those left behind (Carroll et.al, 2007 in Robins, 2010). It is thus important to re-define and reconstruct one's roles within the family, as a way to minimize the confusion /gap the missing family member has left behind.

Normalizing ambivalence: Boss stresses the importance of acknowledging the ambiguous feelings, and find ways to managing them in order to create meaning and in this way normalizing ambivalence (Boss, 2007).

Revising attachment: Revising attachment suggests remaining attached to a loved one, but at the same time not denying the loss of this person, and the fact that the loss might remain ambiguous (Robins, 2010).

Discovering hope: Discovering and remaining hope is the overall aim of the five therapeutic guidelines. Dealing with ambiguous loss demands realizing which hope to relinquish and which to pursue (Boss, 2006).

According to Boss, *"The goal* [of coping with ambiguous loss] *is to find meaning in the situation despite the absence of information and persisting ambiguity. Here, resiliency means*

being able to live with unanswered questions. Instead of the usual epistemological question about truth, we ask: "How do people manage to live with not knowing?" (Boss, 2007:106)

Boss proposes, that by adopting dialectical thinking – that is "both/and" thinking, one can learn to live with the ambiguity of both holding on to a hope that the family member might return, while at the same time moving on with life, hence strengthen resilience (Boss, 2007). She has defined resilience as an important coping strategy when dealing with ambiguous loss, as it is a way to "*regain one's energy after adversity drains it*" (Boss, 2006: 27 in McMichael, 2009: 204). Boss argues that coping with ambiguous loss has individual paths, but that religion and spiritual beliefs, as well as the ability to accept that there are circumstances we cannot control, proves to be particular effective when dealing with ambiguous loss (Ibid). In other words, to be able to cope with missing a family member one has to accept the ambiguity of the situation. Additionally, Boss stresses the value of close relations with family, friends and engaging in community settings when coping with ambiguous loss as well as moving on with life (McMichael, 2009). The aim of adopting coping strategies regarding ambiguous loss is not to analyze how the informants can free themselves of the ambiguity of having lost contact with relatives, rather the aim is to illuminate on how they live with it.

Given the stress and trauma associated with having lost contact with a family member, we could have investigated coping strategies connected to that of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). In fact, studies on families of disappeared have found indicators of PTSD useful when working with this group of people (Robins, 2010). However, given the fact that the trauma of losing contact to a family member is chronic and cannot be characterized as a single traumatic event, we have not found it useful to use elements of coping strategies of PTSD.

Boss' research on ambiguous loss is developed in a Western-context and a lot of her work is concentrated on the ambiguity in regards to Alzheimer's disease and Dementia. Her model on coping strategies of ambiguous loss is a practical therapeutic tool based on her own experiences working with families. We find that the theory lacks some empirical as well as theoretical underpinning, hence it is relevant to incorporate other coping strategies in order to

do an in-depth analysis on the coping strategies of our informants dealing with ambiguous loss.

5.3.2   Coping strategies

As a complement to Boss' model on coping strategies of ambiguous loss, in this section we will look into the more general strategies of coping. Richard S. Lazarus is a professor of psychology and probably the most prominent in regards to coping with emotions and stress.

Lazarus (1999) presents two coping strategies through which anxiety and stress can be reduced. Those are the *problem-focused strategy* – or *active coping* - and the *emotion-focused strategy* (Lazarus, 1999), the first *"which seek to identify and alleviate the stressors giving rise to strain"* (Bond and Bunce, 2000: 156) and the latter *"which target undesirable thoughts and emotions aroused by work stressors"* (Ibid.). When one adopts a problem-focused strategy one tries to change the troubled situation by identifying and changing the stressor or trauma one is in. This might be done by e.g. seeking help from professionals. On the other hand, when a person adopts an emotion-focused strategy of coping, he or she tries to change or control emotional reactions as a means to feel better, yet not solving the source of the distress.

Supplementary, we apply avoidance strategies as a means to analyze how this strategy is convenient for some of our informants in coping with ambiguous loss. Avoidance coping is a strategy within the emotion-focused strategy, and implies denying, minimizing or trying to forget the stressor, through e.g. prayer sleeping and reading (Schweitzer et al., 2007). This strategy is according to several scholars used by people who have been experiencing many negative events (Ibid.) and to Lazarus engaging in denial about the seriousness of a stressed situation allows people to cope in a better way than people who are being more realistic about their situation (Lazarus, 1999).

5.3.3 Religious coping

Given the fact that our informants are religious, we have chosen to use religious coping strategies as a means to analyze how our informants use their religious beliefs and the community of the church as way of coping with the absence of relatives as well as with their past.

According to the professor in psychology Kenneth I. Pargament et al. (2011) religion may serve important functions in helping people understand and cope with stressful life events by offering guidance, support and hope. Similarly, religious beliefs and practices may guide the individual in the process of selecting solutions to problems. Religion may also provide the individual with emotional support throughout the problem-solving process, particularly during stressful periods (Pargament et al, 2011). In their research on the psychology of religion and coping, Pargament and Raiya (2007) argue that religion regularly is linked to psychological goals *"such as anxiety reduction, personal control, peace of mind, self-development and the search for meaning"* (Pargament and Raiya, 2007: 744). Pargament and Raiya have defined religion as a *"search for significance in ways related to the sacred"* (Ibid: 743), which consists of a search for significance and a discovery of the sacred. This search can also be agreed as the various pathways *"people take to reach their goals and the goals themselves"* (Ibid.). In stressful events people seek toward various forms of significant points in life such as familiarity with others, emotional comfort, closeness with God, or personal growth.

Pargament et al. (1998) is concerned with the efficiency of religious coping, hence has presented both adaptive and maladaptive ways of using religious coping, and has done various studies on the so-called 'Wrong Roads' of religious coping (Pargament et al., 1998). Several concepts are introduced, but in this thesis we will merely adopt the concepts of *denial* and *passivity*. The former refers to a denial that a stressful event has had negative impact on one, whereas the latter is surrendering to God's will, leaving God with the responsibility with one's life (Pargament et al., 1998: 1338).

Pargament et al. has developed a model, which he refers to as 'Rcope', consisting of five main religious coping methods and 21 sub-scale measures of religious coping with major life stressors (Pargament et al., 2011). The religious coping methods are *"Coping to find meaning"; "Coping to gain control"; "Coping to gain comfort and closeness to God, herein we also make use of the sub-scale measure of"; "Coping to gain intimacy with others and closeness to God"* and *" Coping to achieve a life transformation".* In this thesis we will note include the 21 sub-scale measures as such, but instead analyze the coping strategies of our informants within the content of the five coping methods of the 'Rcope' model.

5.3.4 Sense of Coherence

When studying how our informants find meaning with the ambiguity, we apply Antonovsky's ideas on how a person finds meaning in a situation of despair through the salutogenic[7] model. Antonovsky's concept of 'Sense of Coherence' is a theoretical formulation derived from the salutogenic orientation, which provides a central explanation for what determines whether stress will cause you harm or not. In his formulation of sense of coherence, Antonovsky has three components:

Comprehensibility: a belief that things happen in an orderly and predictable fashion and a sense that you can understand events in your life and reasonably predict what will happen in the future.

Manageability: a belief that you have the skills or ability, the support, the help, or the resources necessary to take care of things, and that things are manageable and within your control.

Meaningfulness: a belief that things in life are interesting and a source of satisfaction, that things are really worthwhile and that there is good reason or purpose to care about what happens.

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[7] The salutogenetic approach focuses on factors that support human well-being and health, instead of focusing on factors that causes disease (Antonovsky, 1996)

We see the three concepts of the 'Sense of Coherence' model complementing Boss' component of finding meaning, thus we will incorporate both when analyzing how our informants find meaning.

5.4 Diaspora

When investigating how migrants take part and mobilize in migrant churches, we find it relevant to make use of theories on diaspora and diasporic networks. We consider theories on diaspora as contributing to the understanding of how the migrant churches might works as diaspora networks for its members.

Diaspora is often referred to as a scattered population with a common origin in a smaller geographic area (Clifford, 1994). Recently, scholars have distinguished between different kinds of diaspora, based on its causes such as imperialism, trade or labor migrations, or by the kind of social coherence within the diaspora community and its ties to the ancestral lands (Ibid.). We will focus on the latter as our informants, who have lost contact to family members are living outside their country of origin, as migrants in exile.

Diaspora is by some researchers, among others the anthropologist James Clifford (1994) as well as the sociologist Nauja Kleist (2007), seen as a *condition* for identification, which focuses on how experiences of displacement related to identity formation and diaspora networks are seen as a home away from home, and highlight identification, mobilization and belonging (Kleist, 2007: 48). James Clifford (1994) sees diaspora communities as *"mediate, in a lived tension, the experiences of separation and entanglement, of living here and remembering/desiring another place"* (Ibid: 311).

Kleist uses the adjective 'diasporic' to *"describe the aspirations and characteristics of persons or groups claiming or claimed to be 'a diaspora'"* (Kleist, 2007: 51). This view is, among others, based on anthropologists Brian Keith Axels' (2004) view on how the homeland is *not* what constitutes a diaspora, rather it is *"constituted by the people claiming it"* (Kleist,

2007: 50). Consequently, the attention is turned towards the processes of diasporic identification and mobilization, and to the question of *who* claims to be the subject of diasporas (Ibid.) Similarly, anthropologist Thomas Blom Hansen (2005) suggests that the concept of diaspora should function as a framework of interpretation of identity and links to the lost homeland. He follows Axel's focus on diaspora as a process of identification and mobilization. Kleist asserts that the diaspora is transformed from a category that says something about a population, to one that *"tells something about the mobilization processes, discourses, and identifications claimed by – or attributed to – groups who identify or are identified as 'a diaspora' or 'in diaspora'"*(Kleist, 2007: 50).

We follow the view of diaspora as identification and a mobilization process, and find the term *diasporic* relevant to apply to our research, as we want to investigate how our informants, with missing family members, mobilize and use their diasporic networks. Furthermore, we make use of Kleist's term '*Spaces of recognition'* (Kleist, 2007: 231), which refers to the social relations produced in relation to associational engagement, which *"enable, establish, or negotiate recognition"* (Ibid.) . Kleist underlines that it is not the associations themselves that form the spaces of recognition, rather it refers to the effects the engagement in these associations have.

Overall, we find that the concept of diaspora adds value to an understanding of how migrants gather in the churches, and that it furthermore can contribute to shed light on how these religious networks share similar attributes to that of a diaspora network.

5.5   Discovering hope

According to Boss (2009), people experiencing ambiguous loss can be caught in a situation between hope and despair, hoping their family member is alive but at the same time wanting to end the ambiguous state they find themselves in. Some hope to find their family member alive, whereas some are moreover just hoping to find the body of the missing, in order to have a place to bury and mourn for the dead. Discovering and maintaining hope is the overall aim of Pauline Boss' coping strategies (2009) in order to accept and live with the ambiguity.

When analyzing how our informants create and maintain hope, we will use various theories on hope.

In the literature, hope is often divided into *goal-directed* and *open-ended hope* (Webb, 2007: 69-73). We find it relevant to look into which modes of hoping our informants make use of when coping with ambiguous loss. According to senior lecturer in education Darren Webb (2007), who has done extensive research on hope, the goal-directed hope is classified into three modes, namely; 'estimative', 'resolute' and 'utopian'. Goal-directed hope is often taken to be a desire that is both significant to the one who hopes, as well as future-oriented (Ibid.:73). The open-ended hope is characterized as being an open-ended orientation towards the future, where one does not hope for anything concrete or determinate, one just hope. Open-ended hope is divided into 'patient' and 'critical'. Patient hope is according to the anthropologist Vincent Crapanzano (2003) experienced as *"taking patient refuge in oneself"* and is characterized as "*a sort of positive resignation"* (Crapanzano, 2003: 9). Webb argues that on the whole, patient hope is about taking one's time and await the unforeseen future (Webb, 2007). This we find relevant to connect when analyze how our informants find hope in the midst of the ambiguous loss.

As our informants are religious and all practice their religion in one way or another, we will in our analysis also connect religion and hope. Crapanzano (2003) reflects on how hope relates to religious belief. According to him, Christian evangelics distinguish between hope for salvation and the "petty hope" that characterizes everyday life (Crapanzano, 2003: 8). To them, true hope is not speculated on but rather believed in, through God's promises as they are manifested "through the correct reading of his word" (Ibid.). Many of our informants view hope as a part of their religious belief and hope, through God, for a better future.

In this chapter we have elaborated on the choice of theories and how we they are relevant for our field of study. We find that the presented theory lay the ground for obtaining an understanding of our target group and the situation of being migrants in addition to having lost contact to family members. As a final remark, we find it important to mention that our informants come from different backgrounds, hence have had, prior to their flight, different

resources. Some are from villages, some from larger cities, some are asylum seekers and others refugees, some have obtained a university or college degree and some hardly have any educational background at all. These factors, in addition to cultural issues, and gender (Renner and Salem, 2009), result in different predispositions for how migrants understand their overall situation, relate to other people, and deal with hardships.

In the next chapter we will commence on our analysis, which extends from chapter six to chapter 10. Our first chapter in the analysis reflects on the 'double vulnerability' refugees and asylum seekers might find themselves in.

6   Refugees and asylum seekers – vulnerability and liminality

Much has been written about the refugee experience being characterized as a liminal one (Malkki, 1995, Turner, 1999), as it concerns a state of being '*outside the national order of things*' and on the threshold of something new and unknown. Further, various studies have verified exceptional vulnerability among refugees and asylum seekers (Stewart, 2005) and it is similarly a known phenomenon that most international migration comprises some kind of family separation and loss (Hagan and Eschbach et al, 2008). In some situations this separation can stretch to a lifetime. For many, the separation from their families occurs in connection with conflicts and wars, which force people to flee their countries. For most of our informants, it was during this flight that they lost contact to their relatives. For others, separation has followed after being split in refugee camps in neighboring countries. At the same time as struggling with being without family members, our informants also have to cope with the difficulties associated with being asylum seekers and refugees.

In this first chapter of the analysis we find it important to elaborate on the "double vulnerability" our target group are in, being refugees and asylum seekers on top of missing family members. Furthermore, we will analyze how loss of control regarding time and space has affected two of our informants as well as whether they can be said to be 'liminal beings'.

6.1 Liminal beings

The period of time that our informants have resided in asylum centers, waiting for an outcome of their asylum case, varies from nine months and up to two years. They have described the immediate period of time after fleeing their countries as *"chaotic"*, *"hard"*, *"depressing"* and *"terrible"*. They particularly stress the difficulties they had to face after arrival in Denmark when they were waiting in asylum centers for an outcome on their asylum case, and assert that this waiting makes one *"crazy"*.

One of our informants, Pastor Tea, had to wait for two years for an outcome on his asylum case. He was aware of the fact that his parents had been shot in their home in Burundi and he had witnessed his sister dying of hunger and dehydration in his arms in a refugee camp in Rwanda. At the time he arrived in Denmark he was unaware of the fate of his extended family, though years later he learned that some of them in fact were alive. Pastor Tea described his perception of living in the asylum center and being without his family:

(…) Because when you are in the camp [asylum center] *you are going through the hard and depressed time, the lonely time, so many things happen to you. You feel yourself isolated from people, you are disappointed, you are discouraged. But as time goes on, you start thinking "how come do I not have a family here? How come I am alone?" That's when people get mad.* […] (Pastor Tea, 28.04.14)

Paul from Congo similarly experienced this waiting time. During the nine months he resided in an asylum center in Denmark he was concerned about the outcome of his case and did not have the surplus of mental resources to think about the fate of his family back in Congo:

"When I was in the Center, I was always sick, was constantly stressed out and that is why I stayed in my room. I had nothing meaningful to occupy my time with. It was hard to think about my life and family, because I was only thinking about the asylum case."

When at the asylum center, both Pastor Tea and Paul were incapable of thinking about the fate of their families while waiting for a response on their asylum cases. They describe the waiting time as distressing, lonely and isolating. The prolonged waiting time affected Paul and Pastor Tea's mental health and they became incapable of acting on any aspects of their lives, which made them vulnerable. With no resources at hand, one can assert that the two men had no control over their lives. Inspired by Turner (1974), what Pastor Tea and Paul refers to could be designated as being *"(...) betwixt and between the categories of ordinary social life"* (Turner, 1974: 53), situated in an anti-structure on the threshold to something else. In this way, living with the uncertainty of not knowing *when* or *how* their asylum case will be resolved, Pastor Tea and Paul can according to Turner's notion both be viewed as a "*liminal personae* [being a] *"naked unaccommodated man" or "undifferentiated raw material"* (Turner, 1967: 98-99 in Malkki, 1992: 34), existing between two positions. In the case of our informants, these positions can be articulated as being in or out of Denmark, and protected or unprotected by a nation state. Sociologist Kathrine Vitus (2010), in her study on waiting time and the de-subjectification of children in Danish asylum centers, argues that *"in Danish asylum centers children live neither in the present nor in the future; they live without a justified existence and thus in processes of de-subjectification"* (Vitus, 2010: 26). The statements of Pastor Tea and Paul demonstrate that the de-subjectification does not only account for children, this situation of a loss of control over most aspects of individual and social life is also one that Pastor Tea and Paul are experiencing.

6.2   Double vulnerability

"I were very afraid, because the rebels was behind us, there were somebody who haven't the strength to run, they were killed. And somebody were dying because of the hunger, diseases, tiredness. We leave them and we go." (Leonard, 31.05.14)

One of our informants, Leonard, came to Denmark as a UN refugee, and has not experienced the waiting time at the asylum center. Instead he emphasizes the particular distressing factor

of the memories of the traumatizing events during the flight and the fact that he did not know whether his family had survived the massacre in his hometown in Burundi. A research on the effects of migration underlines this, stating that the time immediately after one has arrived in the host country *"is a particular stressful time and one that requires increased moral and emotional support"* (Baldassar, 2007: 397). Further, the impacts of broken family ties are by Harrell-Bond described as the *"erosion of "normative social behaviour", "of mental illness", of "psychological stress", and of "clinical levels of depression and anxiety"* (Harrell-Bond, 1986, in Malkki, 1992: 33).

In a guide prepared by the 'Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture' (VFST) on working with young people who are refugees and have experienced trauma or torture, it has been discovered that a sense of control plays a key role in the rebuilding of a meaningful life among those who have survived forced displacement (VFST, 1996). This is due to the fact that the refugee experience, as well as the situation of asylum seekers, is fundamentally one of a loss of control over many aspects of individual and social life (Ibid.). Unfortunately, waiting in an asylum center and not knowing the fate of family members, as it has been characterized by our informants, is far from having a sense of control in the post flight situation. The refugee and asylum seeker experience, on top of losing contact with family members, can therefore be described as "double vulnerability". The situation, as is experienced by our informants, can be characterized as a liminal one due to the uncertainty of not knowing *when* or *if* they will be able to move on with their lives in Denmark – or whether they will be sent back to their country of origin. Our informants, being refugees or asylum seekers, are completely unaware of when, or even if, the liminal period will end.

In the coming chapter, we will look into the coping strategies of our informants trying to deal with the "double vulnerability" of having lost contact with family members as well as being refugees and asylum seekers.

7 The uncertainty of ambiguous loss

In the previous chapter we reflected on the 'double vulnerability' of our informants, as well as the liminal position they find themselves in being refugees and asylum seekers. Before we commence on studying of how this group of people cope with the ambiguous loss, we will in this chapter analyze the impact ambiguous loss have on migrants who have lost contact to a family member. Moreover, we will analyze how the ambiguity of not knowing whether a family member is dead or alive can leave the bereaved in an impeded grieving process, as well as how not finding the body of a dead family member might prolong the ambiguity. Questions arising here are of *how* the person died, *where* the body might be and whether one will ever be able to bury the body and consequently start the grieving process.

7.1 Dead or alive?

In her attempt to describe the situation of people dealing with ambiguous loss, Boss argues that the ambiguity and uncertainty even years later can still be overshadowing the family of the missing. She states that *"These people* [dealing with ambiguous loss] *are physically absent, but remain psychologically present. Even if they are dead their remains have never been found. Family members are preoccupied with the lost person, and think of nothing else, even years later."* (Boss, 2006: 8). Questions about whether the person is dead or alive leaves the family members of the disappeared in a constant turmoil, wondering whether their loved one is dead or alive. This effect of continuous uncertainty will be illuminated in this section.

As mentioned, there are two types of ambiguous loss, and we make use of the ambiguity of the situation when a loved one is physically missing. The person missing is, however, kept psychologically present, as the status of the missing remains unknown. Consequently, it can be difficult for the family left behind to know whether to *"close out the missing person or keep the door open for him or her to return"* (Boss 2006: 8), as without a certain answer, for many people a small notion of hope that their loved one might one day be found alive will still remain.

One of our informants, the Afghani woman, Farima, lost contact with her husband when he was kidnapped about two years ago. In April 2014 she learned through the Red Cross Tracing Service that her husband was alive and she let us in on how she felt during the time of not knowing:

"It was very hard not to know where he was. We couldn't sleep at night, and I couldn't stop thinking about the fact that I had lost my husband. I thought about him all the time, but I tried not to show my children that I was" (Farima, 22.05.14)

Farima elaborates on the feeling of not knowing the whereabouts of her husband. After he was kidnapped, she and her daughters were hoping they would see the father again, but as time passed, they started losing hope. The uncertainty about her husband was unbearable; it was overshadowing everything she did, even though she tried to hide it from her daughters. As time passed, she started to doubt that she would ever see him again:

"In the beginning, I did not think he was dead. But after six months passed, and then one year, I started thinking that he must be dead. Otherwise I thought he would have contacted us. My daughter was kidnapped and killed, so why wouldn't they do the same with my husband? I thought I would never see him again." (Farima, 22.05.14)

Although initially hoping that her husband was not killed, as time passed by Farima could see no reason for why her husband would not have suffered the same fate as her oldest daughter. Time seems to be a significant aspect here; as she asserts, she did not believe her husband was dead in the beginning, but after some months had passed she started to doubt that she would ever see her husband again. Another one of our informants, Paul, told us that the unknown fate about his family and especially his children, was unbearable:

"I knew my parents had been murdered. I managed to come to terms with this. Yet the problem was the uncertainty regarding the fate of my wife and children. Are they dead or alive? If they have been murdered, ok, I have no choice but to start a new life. It is the uncertainty that hurts the most" (Paul, 24.04.14)

Here, Paul illustrates the despair the continuous ambiguity leaves him in. He explains how he would rather actually want to know that his whole family was dead, than to be left in the limbo of constantly wondering whether they are dead or alive. If they were dead, he would have had the opportunity to begin *"a new life"*, as he sees it. But the fact that he finds himself in a continuous state of uncertainty wondering whether his family is alive or dead impedes his ability to move on.

Boss states that the ambiguity understandably encourages a denial of loss, as most people find it very difficult to take the decision that their loved one will never return and that the person is dead, when you have no proof of this (Boss, 2006). Regardless, the person remains missing. In the end, the chance that the person one day will show up will always be there. Even though Farima told us that she thought her husband probably was killed, she could never be completely sure. Whether one tries to come to terms with the fact that a missing person is dead or not, it seems impossible to fully escape the ambiguous loss. Here, it becomes evident that as time passes for family members of disappeared, there seems to be a diminishing focus of whether the person is found dead or alive, rather what becomes salient is getting an answer to the uncertainty and to be able to bring an end to the ambiguity. Boss asserts that it is not until one gets an answer that the family can start the process of grieving (Boss, 2006).

From the quotes above we can sense the strong need and wish to end the ambiguity, even if it means that the person is dead. Rather that, than to keep living in the uncertainty. Uncertainty about the fate of a missing person leaves family members in a constant unrest wondering what has happened to their loved ones, questioning the reasons behind the involuntary loss of contact. At the same time, they are torn between hope and despair, aware of the possibility that their family member might be dead, while simultaneously holding on to a fraction of hope that the missing person might somewhere, somehow, be alive.

7.2   The myth of closure

What adds to the stressful situation outlined above is the fact that the uncertainty is prolonged – there is no way out of the ambiguity unless the missing person is found. The need for closure, for ending the ambiguity and getting an answer to what actually has happened to the person, is what people with a missing family member are longing for (Clark, 2010). But without signs of life or a verification of death, the ambiguity remains open and naturally, one is unable to gain closure.

According to Pastor Tea, some people find it necessary to end the uncertainty and ambiguity by concluding that the missing family member is dead:

"An example is in a camp called Tingatinga in Congo, a lot of people died there, and then some of them disappeared in the bushes. And so people, if they cannot find somebody, they conclude that they are dead, if they have not heard anything [about the missing] *(...). Cause there is no resources, there is nowhere to mobilize or communication about where to ask. It is very difficult to think, ah, maybe they have been lost. Some conclude with the fact that are dead and go on with their life"* (Pastor Tea, 28.05.14)

Pastor Tea talks about a situation in one of the refugee camps in Congo, Tingatinga, where a lot of refugees from Burundi and Rwanda were living after the genocide in 1994. Allegedly, as Pastor Tea described, many people lost contact to their family members due to mass killings and consequent flights in this camp. For some of the remaining people, uncertain whether family members had gone missing or had actually been killed in the brutal massacre, they found it necessary to conclude that their relatives were dead. The task of trying to locate family member seemed too overwhelming, as there was nowhere to seek help.

To come to the conclusion that one or more family members are dead, when there actually is no certainty about the case, might seem like one is giving up and losing hope. However, for the people in question, it also seems realistic to come to such a conclusion in the light of the events. As Pastor Tea suggests, it was a necessary move in order to go on with their lives. How some migrants move on with their lives will be elaborated on in the chapter on 'Coping with ambiguous loss'.

Boss (2004) asserts that there seems to be a universal human need to honor and bury one's dead. But without closure, without a body, there is nothing or no one to bury, and the ambiguity is prolonged. Boss states that there is too much focus on gaining closure, and that, if missing a family member, one should not expect closure to ever come about (Boss, 2006).

The International Committee of the Red Cross (2006), states that *"When a missing person is believed to be dead, locating, recovering and identifying their remains is an indispensable component of the healing process (...)"* (ICRC, 2006: 14). This becomes apparent with the situation of the Georgian mother who lost contact with her son in the Georgian/Abkhazian war of 1992-1993, when she was forced to flee with her daughter. She was later informed that her son was dead, but his body was not found:

"*All that time, the thing I wanted most was to have my son's grave here, so I could grieve for him properly (...) Can you imagine what it's like when your dearest dream is to have your son's grave near you?"* (ICRC, 2013)[8]

For this mother, even though she knew that her son was dead, the fact that the body was nowhere to be found and she was unable to bury him was an impediment to her grieving process. She was desperate for gaining closure; for so many years, she has been waiting and wanting to find the body of her son in order to bury him. This is a good example of the fact that the ambiguity will continue, as long as the person remains missing. One can also

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[8] http://www.icrc.org/eng/resources/documents/feature/2013/08-08-georgia-missing.htm

question whether locating the body actually would end the ambiguity. Once the body is located, new questions arise: How did he die? Was she hurting? And was he alone when it happened?

Finally, in 2013, after 20 years, the body of the Georgian mother's son was found and she was able to bury him. Her wish of wanting to know where her son was, had finally been fulfilled. Boss stresses that without a body, people are confused about the loss, and risk being cognitively blocked. (Boss, 2004). For the Georgian mother, it was only after her son's body was found that her grieving process could start, and the healing process could begin. Her strongest wish was to find the body of her son, which symbolizes her need for finally ending the ambiguity she had been stuck in for two decades.

In the above we have analyzed how ambiguity and uncertainty regarding a missing family member affects the people involved, and how the continued ambiguity impedes the grieving process and leaves family members in a limbo. Boss argues that closure with ambiguous loss is a "myth" (Boss, 2004: 560). The inability to find closure is due to the relational phenomenon of the loss, as the defiance of the closure lies in the external situation (Ibid.). We can argue, on the basis of our informants' experiences, that even though one might get news about the death of a family, the fact that the body is still missing means that the ambiguity about what might have happened to the missing, remains unanswered. This prolonged ambiguity leaves the bereaved searching for closure, even decades later, which we saw with the case of the Georgian mother. How our informants cope with having a lost family member as well as with the prolonged ambiguity will be analyzed in the following chapter.

8 Coping and finding meaning

As mentioned earlier, having lost contact with a family member is a tragic circumstance which leaves people suspended in limbo suspecting their loved ones might be dead, yet they are unable to mourn. In the absence of proof of whether a person is dead or alive, family

members of the missing are constantly distressed by the possibility of regaining contact or to find closure. For some it does not happen at all, and for most it takes years to locate them or to re-establish contact (ICRC, 2007). In both cases, people are left in a state of ambiguity. For our informants, the ambiguity of not knowing is amplified by the fact that they are liminal beings due to the asylum seeker and refugee experience. The questions is how, if even, this group of people are able to find meaning in a situation that seems hopeless? Boss' premise for coping with ambiguous loss is to embrace it and accept it, but how do our informants cope with a loss that is ambiguous, and how do they move on with their lives?

In this chapter we illuminate and analyze the coping strategies our informants have made use of during the absence of contact with one or more family members, thus dealing with ambiguous loss. Additionally, we will explore how creation of meaning translates into the lives of people previously having missed relatives.

8.1 Coping with double vulnerability

As mentioned, our informants have all fled their countries due to war or conflict. Some of them have resided in refugee camps in neighboring countries, one has arrived as an UN refugee in Denmark and was directly allocated housing – others have resided in asylum centers for months and years after having arrived in Denmark.. In the chapter on 'Refugees and asylum seekers – vulnerability and liminality' we underlined the double vulnerable situation we find our informants to be in. This section aims to analyze the impact of the refugee and asylum seeker experience connected with the ability to cope with the ambiguous loss of not knowing whether their relatives are dead or alive.

As mentioned, our informants underline that being a refugee or an asylum seeker adds a challenging dimension when trying to cope with the loss of contact with family. Some emphasize the tough situation of living in asylum centers and the crises which is associated with this circumstance, as a hindrance of being able to cope and take agency of their own lives. Paul told us about how he found it difficult to act:

"If you have some problem to yourself [while at the asylum center]*, it is difficult to think about other things. It is like someone is sick, they want to do something but they cannot. When we are in the Centre we cannot change, we are like crazy (...)"* (Paul, 24.04.2014)

Pastor Tea shares the perception that when residing in an asylum center acting in one's life becomes difficult:

"When you come as refugees you don't have resources to ask for "where can I look for family members?". I stayed in asylum center for two years. People get mad, they get stressed, they are always in crisis… so many things happen. So when people they are out they can start to look for family members (…)." (Pastor Tea, 28.04.14)

Paul and Pastor Tea are both incapable of acting on their situations. Their continuing crisis, first of having to flee, later in the asylum centers, paralyzes them. The resources are sparse and none of them are able to try to locate family members. Pastor Tea particularly explains the situation in the asylum center as a continuing stressor, where people have no agency and where crises are never ending. The identities of Paul and Pastor Tea are threatened and put on hold, as they have to deal with the ambiguity of not knowing if they are still a father, a husband or a nephew to someone, thus coping with *reconstructing identities* becomes difficult. They want to *"do something"*, but do not have the power to because when waiting in the asylum centers, their agency and ability to act is decreased. As we illuminate in the chapter 'Refugees and asylum seekers – vulnerability and liminality', our informants, having experienced residing in asylum centers, are stuck in a temporary, liminal state, which for them have made it challenging to deal with ambiguous loss, the waiting time *and* the traumatic events of the past.

8.1.1 Tempering mastery

In her work with people missing family members in the aftermath of the 9/11 attack in New York, Boss found that migrants proved to cope better with ambiguous loss than those of

American origin (McMichael, 2009). Boss explains this with the fact that migrants have *"experienced living in circumstances that they could not control and* [consequently] *had no illusions about having complete control over their destiny"* (Ibid.: 204). One could view migrants as being used to a changeable environment where anything can happen and therefore are familiar with uncertainty and not having control or agency over their own lives. From this view, migrants might find it easier to accept that they are incapable of controlling the situation of ambiguous loss and adopting the coping strategy of *tempering mastery* (Boss, 2006). However, having experienced a myriad of terrible things does not necessarily lead to the conclusion that migrants have a better chance of coping with ambiguous loss than others who are used to being in control of their lives. One example is Leonard who articulates how the refugee situation affected him:

"(…) I have been through big problems, also because I not know about my family. I was in a sad situation because of what? The situation I have been through. You know, our brain is so small; it can't contain that many events". (Leonard, 31.05.14)

Leonard articulates that due to the many terrible things he has been through in the past, he has difficulties coping with it. When fleeing from The Democratic Republic of Congo to Congo Brazaville, Leonard constantly feared death, walking on foot through jungles and villages. He experienced the devastating event of having to carry on and leave comrades dying and suffering along the way. At the time, Leonard managed to cope with the traumatic events, while at the same time not knowing whether his family members had survived. In his struggle for survival, Leonard used a *problem-focused coping* strategy, not succumbing to fear and despair, but instead being proactive, taking action and trying to move on. In terms of coping with the ambiguous loss of not knowing about his relatives, during the flight, Leonard attempts to accept that he simply cannot know and instead struggles to move on. In this way, he is *tempering mastery.*

While Leonard managed to cope with the adversities he suffered during his flight, and with not knowing the fate of his family, he told us that after he arrived in Denmark, he was hospitalized and that he still struggles with his traumatic past. Refugees may be used to

changes, but when people like Leonard have been through so many hardships, it becomes difficult to cope. Underlining this is a study on traumatic events and refugees, conducted by Steel et al., which found that refugees having experienced more than three traumatic events *"had an eight-fold increase of mental illness"* (Steel et al. 2002, in Schweitzer et al, 2007: 283).

8.1.2 Asylum centers and refugee experiences – an obstacle for coping

Mirjam Refby from the DRC problematizes how, subsequent to their flight, people are placed in an asylum center. She described to us the double vulnerability and the difficulties of helping this group of people cope with their situation:

"What makes it difficult to help this group is exactly the fact that they are living in an asylum center. We know that what makes people stronger and able to cope in a crisis situation is normalization, but it simply cannot be obtained when living in an asylum center".
(Mirjam Refby from the DRC, 08.04.14)

Mirjam Refby asserts that the living conditions at the asylum centers make it extremely difficult for people to deal with the crisis of being without family members. She stresses that normalization is an important factor when trying to cope with adversities, but emphasizes that there is nothing normal about living in a center. People remain in a state of crisis because of the double vulnerability, which according to Mirjam Refby challenges the treatment of this group of people. Exemplifying this, she mentioned a former resident of an asylum center whom she wanted to help fight the traumas that resulted in continuous nightmares and no sleep. Even though the treatment of influencing his resilience and in this way enable him to cope was somewhat successful, the fact that the client resided in a four-person room with two roommates yelling and screaming in their sleep, meant it was exceptionally difficult to complete the treatment.

There might be a difference in the ability to cope for refugees and asylum seekers, respectively. The largest part of our informants has resided in asylum centers, and has experienced a state of liminality while waiting for the outcome of their case. In this way, they were subject to additional crisis, which resulted in a deterioration of the ability to cope. Examples of this are Paul and Pastor Tea, who both felt powerless and incapable of acting and *reconstructing identity* (Boss, 2006). According to a study by Rousseau et al. (2004) on the pre-and post-reunification experiences of 12 refugee families, the history of traumatic events can become "*the threat of continuity in a person's life*" (Rousseau et al., 2004: 1104) This also becomes apparent for Leonard who, despite of not having resided in an asylum center, has struggled with the refugee experience and continues to do so, which made him unable to find meaning with the ambiguous loss of being without family. The important issue here might not be whether refugees are able to cope with hardships and having lost contact with family members in a better way than asylum seekers, but rather that there are, in both situations, limitations to the traumatic events a person can take in.

8.2   Coping with disappointing family: avoidance and guilt

In contrast to their family members, our informants have survived wars and conflicts and have managed to flee their countries of origin, which has issued an opportunity to obtain what they all refer to as *"a better life"*. When dealing with the ambiguous loss, this opportunity has affected our informants in various ways. Some feel guilt for having survived or left family behind, others regard their survival as a sign from God. Yet others, who have left family behind and lost contact with them during the flight, fear that *if* they re-establish contact, they will disappoint their families. They worry they are not be able to provide them with the bright future the family members who have stayed behind might have envisioned. In this section, we will elaborate on coping strategies concerning disappointing family members and guilt in the post-flight situation. In this connection we will include statements from Mirjam Refby from the DRC.

As mentioned, Paul from Congo was unable to act on trying to locate his family, while he was residing in the asylum center. Another issue that took up his mind at the asylum center was that if he in fact was able to locate his family, what would he tell them? That he lived in what

he felt was prison-like conditions, sharing a room with five other men and getting sick from despair and loss of agency? In this regard, Paul stated the following:

"I could not contact my family if I don't have apartment for them to live in and can't take good care of them. So I try to forget. I could not disappoint them"
(Paul, 24.04.14)

For Paul, residing in an asylum center for nine months, it was not only the loss of agency in regards to waiting for an outcome on his asylum case, it was also not being able to cover the basic needs of his family that obstructed him from trying to locate his family. Paul was in fact aware of the DRC Tracing Service while residing in the asylum center, yet he did not start a search for his family. Paul uses *avoidance coping* and represses the possibility of trying to locate them and because he did not want to disappoint them, and instead avoids relating to the missing of his family. In an attempt not to be overwhelmed with the loss of contact, he finds reasoning and meaning in explaining it with the fact that he does not have a place for his family to live. One might say that when Paul deliberately does not try to locate family members, he himself prolongs the ambiguity of not knowing the fate of their relatives.

In connection to this, Mirjam Refby from the DRC told us about an asylum seeker from an African country, who did not want to re-establish contact with her own children before she had good news to convey to her family. The woman had left four children in a small village. Mirjam Refby tried to explain the woman that she also had to consider the needs of the children, but the woman did everything she could to avoid thinking about this. Eventually, she was so ashamed to regain contact because she felt she had failed as a mother and was also afraid that she would receive bad news about her children in return. Suppressing her own needs for knowing about the well-being of her children, the woman gradually became worse psychologically and was overwhelmed with guilt.

Another informant who was suppressed with guilt is Yunis, whom we met at Sandholmlejren during an initial Tracing interview with the DRC Tracing Service. Yunis had fled Nigeria two years earlier, and had left his sister behind:

"I feel really bad that I left my sister behind and I wish I can have take her with me. I thinking maybe there is something that I can have done. Maybe my sister will be here? Now, I don't know where she is or if she even is alive" (Yunis, 26.02.2014)

Here, Yunis clearly suffers from the guilt that if he had acted differently when he fled, he might have been able to prevent the loss of contact and his sister would be with him. Not knowing the whereabouts of his sister he feels guilty, even though one could assume, that he did not have any control over the circumstances of the flight. In order to cope with these feelings of guilt and ambiguity, Yunis actively tries to change the situation by tracing his sister and in this way, adopts a *problem-focused strategy* (Lazarus, 1999).

8.2.1   Avoiding issues from the past

Pastor Tea told us that in the church, they deliberately rarely speak about details on missing family members or any of the other horrible things people have experienced in Rwanda, Burundi and Congo as well as during the during their flight:

"Some people have got horrible stories. You know that maybe this woman has been raped, but you don't want to open the wound, you just want her to be happy now. People they have to feel belonging in the church, we know among ourselves what has happened. Only when someone go down, down, down, we talk about it. People just want to forget, you cannot forget your past, but put it somewhere in the back" (Pastor Tea, 28.04.14)

Pastor Tea explains that in the church the focus is not on the negative experiences of being refugees, asylum seekers or being separated from family and homeland, yet there is a strong consciousness about it. According to Pastor Tea, the terrible experiences and the missing of

relatives are not spoken about as such, as it is implicit. In the church, one can argue, they have built up a community with a common understanding of the tragedies of the past; hence there is no need to articulate it further. Not talking about it is in this sense a way of *avoiding* the traumas and minimizing the stressors (Schweitzer et. al, 2007). In fact, even though the members of the church do not share, their need to believe that they hold a collective view about past traumas appears to be strong. Another possibility worth taking into account in regards to not sharing stories is the political conflicts between Hutus and Tutsis. In the Zion Temple both groups are represented, and avoiding relating to and speaking about the past, might be a strategy used in order not to offend one another, thus demonstrating a mutual understanding for one another. Even though the avoidance might mean suppressing traumas from the past, avoidance as a coping strategy is positive in the sense that the members of the church, in the intersection of ethnic groups, seem to accept the situation and the hardships people have suffered, without having the need to talk about it (Lazarus, 1999).

Earlier, we have heard about Farima, who thought her husband was dead and had shared a similar fate as that of her daughter. Farima did not *know* that her husband was dead, yet one can argue that while struggling with uncertainty and ambiguity, Farima *chose* to believe that he was, in an attempt to end the ambiguity, find closure and move on. Farima was in fact aware of the Tracing Service of the DRC, but had given up hope a priori. Farima adopts an *emotion-focused* coping strategy, as she tries to regulate her emotions caused by the stressful situation, without acting and trying to change her reality (Lazarus, 1999). Farima might have a number of reasons for not trying to locate her husband and in this way adopting a *problem-focused strategy* (Ibid.). *Avoiding* taking action and allowing herself to try to get closure could also be culturally related. The breadwinner of the family has passed away, and Farima needs to look forward and move on in order to secure the future of herself and her daughters.

In this section we have analyzed on how our informants deal with guilt and fear of disappointing family members. In the next section, we will analyze the role of religious faith in the coping strategies of our informants.

8.2.2 Praying and coping

Not much research has evolved around the role of religion as a coping strategy for refugees (Pargament et al., 2003, Hollander-Goldfein, 2012) and researchers in the psychological field seem *"to neglect the role of religion and spirituality as a source of emotional and cognitive support"* (Gozdziak and Shandy, 2002: 129 in Hollander-Goldfein, 2012: 134) for this specific group of people. In his studies on interpretations and value of religion, Raymond Firth (1996) has argued that religion provides people with *"patterns for conduct in daily life and in times of crisis"* (Firth, 1996 in McMichael, 2002: 172), but it is not considered as something particularly applicable for refugees. Likewise, most research available in refugee studies has primarily concentrated on the role of religion in situations of conflict and war (Ibid.), the so-called 'religious wars' as we have seen it in the Israeli/Palestinian conflict as well as in Bosnia and in the Central African Republic, to name a few. Having located most of our informants in religious networks, it is not unexpected that religion is an important part of their lives. In this section we will illuminate the role of religion when coping with ambiguous loss.

For Pastor Tea, his faith in God should prove to provide the kind of support that he needed when dealing with having lost contact with family members in Rwanda on top of, as a teenager, having to deal with the struggle of adjusting in to a new country:

"For myself, when I came to Denmark in '94, I was 17, I came alone, (...) and I lived by myself. It was a hard time, it was winter time and at that time everybody was enjoying Christmas. When I came to Denmark I hated Christmas, Everywhere I see lights and Christmas songs, people shopping for gifts I hated it – from '94 and up to 2000. For six years I hated Christmas. I was missing family, I was feeling depressed. I went and closed the door to my room. I was isolated. As we were growing up our mother used to take us to Sunday school. You know, some people they go to psychology to you know…talk to somebody, to get some encouragement. But when we were young we go to Sunday school. Somehow I thought maybe I should start going to a church to hear what the bible says, to find support like that…[…]I thought maybe it could encourage me, motivate me, to feel maybe having something to do"(Pastor Tea, 28.04.14)

Pastor Tea describes how he felt lonely, isolated and depressed when he came to Denmark without his family. He longed for bygone days when his mother took him to the church together with his brothers and sisters and remembered the encouragement Sunday school provided him with. Through religion, he looked for something that could motivate him and bring together people in the same situation as himself, as well as to provide a distraction by seeking the company of others as an *emotion-focused strategy* (Lazarus, 1999). Pastor Tea founded the Zion Temple in 2004 together with a group of young Rwandans. Pastor Tea continues to stress that the church has helped him:

"When I first came here I was very frustrated. I did not want to talk with anybody, I did not want to have anything to do with the world. […] *The mood go up and down. But when you go to church also it's like a therapy. It was helping me very much"* (Pastor Tea, 28.04.14)

Pastor Tea turns to his faith hoping that this will help him through the loneliness and that it will occupy him as well as support in moving on with his life. Connecting this to Pargament, Pastor Tea is aiming to find "*significance in ways related to the sacred"* (Pargament, 1997 in Pargament and Raya, 2007: 743). Pastor Tea's search for significance through religion can be understood as a pathway undertaken in an attempt to find meaning (Ibid.). When talking about how religion has helped our informants in the particular difficult situation they were in not knowing the fate of their families, Aubert and Leonard share similar views:

"We African people (…) have experienced so many terrible things and it is only because of our faith in God that we have survived. It has helped many people. (…) I was imprisoned and tortured, lost contact with family… Still, I have never seen a psychologist. It is the faith in God that helps us". (Aubert, 29.05.14)

Leonard follows this, saying:

"I used it [the church] *like a place where you can recharge yourself, where you can say: "Thank you God for all the miracles you have done for me". When you are respectful to God you have to say thank you a lot. When you have problems you can always recharge yourself in the church."* (Leonard, 31.05.14)

From the three quotes it is clear to see that to Pastor Tea, Aubert and Leonard, religion has a significant impact on their lives and on their well-being. They all view religion as a kind of therapy when struggling with hardships, including the difficulties of dealing with absence of relatives. They obtain emotional support and solutions to problems and the way in which they use and turn to God works as a *problem-solving process* (Pargament et al., 1988). Perceiving religion as a form of therapy is an *emotion-focused strategy*, which provides our informants with meaning for those who believe in it and *"that push them beyond the capacity of their immediate resources"* (Pargament and Raiya, 2007: 756). Similar to this, Mirjam Refby from the DRC told us that she brings many of the residents of asylum centers to church in order to obtain personal comfort and peace of mind and provide drainage and breaks from misery, nightmares and thoughts. In her opinion, this is a way of achieving tranquility for people who have lost contact with family members (Mirjam from the DRC, 08.04.14).

8.2.2.1 "God created us with a purpose"

Leonard, having been separated from his family for more than a decade and believing that they had all been killed during the genocide on Hutus in his compound in 1995, does not question the role of God in saving his family. He goes on to explain that after the war the whole population of Burundi has become more religious:

"They [his family] *have been escaped by God. God has helped them because we pray. In my country now people have become very Christian. They survived the war and they have become the Christian because they say: "Okay, it's because of God we survived"*
(Leonard, 31.05.14)

Leonard believes that the faith in God has saved the survivors of the genocides in Burundi. By praying to God, people survived. Here, Leonard copes through religion in various ways and not only *finds meaning* and *gaining control,* but also to *gain comfort and closeness to God* as well as *achieve a life transformation* (Pargament et al., 2011).

Paul stresses that talking about the recent past where he did not have any contact with his wife and four children was painful. When we interviewed Paul in his home, he had been reunited with his family one and a half years ago and they were sitting next to him in the sofa in their living room. Nonetheless, Paul was evidently affected by the period of time when he was without them and also somewhat concerned about the future of his children in the foreign country. He told us that he found value in preaching about it in church and that he continues to do so:

> *"We* [Paul and other asylum seekers] *are Christian, and* (…) *we heard it from the church that other people had found family members. I am very active in my church with my family now. It is easy to talk in church, when you preach for someone, you can use yourself as an example and how you can feel when you have lost something"* (Paul, 24.04.14)

Being in church and finding comfort in the fact that other people had located family and reestablished contact with them, meant that Paul found value in telling his story, hoping to communicate advice to other people who had lost somebody. In this way, one can argue, that Paul has coped through religion and found meaning, as he has redefined *"the stressor through religion as benevolent and potentially beneficial"* (Pargament et al., 2011: 56). He finds that there is a purpose in preaching about his loss and that he subsequently can help others.

The church has made Pastor Tea motivated and willing to socialize. He has obtained a feeling of connectedness and it has made him cope in a better way. He turned to God for advice on every aspect of his life:

"Your life has got a purpose, and each state you go in your life there is a purpose. What you go through, it's a purpose. God created each and everybody with a purpose. God created us for a purpose, meaning that you might be going down and be discouraged, but tomorrow things will go better. Life is like stairs, it goes up and down, it's like that. If you believe in the two principles of God and work hard your life will be better" (Pastor Tea, 28.04.14)

For Pastor Tea, religion has served as a framework for understanding and accepting the hardships he has undertaken in the past and in this way serves as *"concrete manifestations of religion in difficult times and stressful situations"* (Pargament and Raiya, 2007: 745). He finds meaning through the confidence that God has a purpose and a plan for him and finds comfort in believing that God played a role in his survival and that this happened for a reason. Some researchers have argued whether putting your life in the hands of God is a disclaiming of agency and responsibility of one's life and that this should be considered as a warning sign of religious coping (Pargament et al., 2003). Pargament et al. describe this as *Religious Passivity and Denial* (Ibid.). Nevertheless, studies have shown that when struggling with a crisis, devotion to God has a positive outcome and provides people with optimism and the ability to cope (Paragment and Raya, 2007). In regards to the loss of contact with family members, for many of our informants religion may have served as a way of finding meaning with the separation. When coping with the hardships or *generalized resource deficits* (Pallant and Lae, 2001), of being without his family members, Pastor Tea uses the resources that he obtains in the church as a *generalized resistance resource* (Ibid.), and draws on his religious beliefs to find meaning with his loss. What has happened in the past for Pastor Tea becomes the will of God. Several of our informants shared the view that God must have had a purpose with what had happened to them, including surviving war and conflict as well as loosing contact with family members.

Our informants have all struggled to find meaning with the ambiguous situation of having lost contact with family members. In the analysis below, we will illuminate relations with other people and meeting in religious networks is an important coping mechanism when dealing with involuntary loss of family members.

8.3   Networks and sharing

All of our informants take part in some kind of network and have explained that these are of great support and value to them. According to Boss, maintaining attachments with the support of familial people, such as family members, friends and people in the community can help people cope successfully with loss (Luster and Qin et al., 2009). In this section, we will analyze how our informants find meaning through these networks when dealing with ambiguous loss.

Due to conflict in his homeland of The Democratic Republic of Congo, Paul lost contact with his wife and four children when fleeing to Denmark. During the time he was residing at the asylum center, not knowing the whereabouts of his family, Paul went to Trampolinhuset[9] every Friday. He talked about it as a place where he could socialize and through this establish something meaningful in his life in the midst of his distressing situation:

"Trampolinhuset has been good for me. Not just [for] *Africans, but all asylum seekers on Sjælland. We meet, everyone come here and talk to people, to feel free and to feel good. To forget the stress, not that you can forget the past, but maybe for a little bit. I come here to get help and be happy. Not that they could solve my case "* (Paul, 24.04.14)

Paul finds meaning in the activities at Trampolinhuset where he can connect with other asylum seekers, which provides him with a sense of clearance from the distressing life in the asylum center. Relating this to the components of Antonovsky's *sense of coherence* (Pallant and Lae, 2002), Paul *comprehends* and accepts that he cannot forget his past or put aside the situation that he is missing his family. Simultaneously, Paul *manages* to see the resources available to make him feel better, that is the sense of community. In the state of liminality. Paul strives to experience a sense of belonging in the absence of his family. In other words, Paul has adopted a strategy, which enables him to cope with his situation and *create meaning*, at least for a while (Antonovsky, 1996). Paul articulates that to him, it has never been of

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[9] Trampolinhuset is a non-profit, self-organized, user-driven culture house located in Copenhagen, where asylum seekers, Danish citizens and others can meet, share experiences, and learn from one another on equal terms. Trampolinhuset offers a series of services and activities as e.g. cooking, councelling, IT and hair salon.

significance to meet in migrant churches, even when he did not know the whereabouts of his family, but instead he has found value in socializing with other Christians, regardless of ethnicity.

8.3.1 Sharing stories

As opposed to what Pastor Tea told us about not sharing stories of the past in the chapter 'Coping with disappointing family: avoidance and guilt', Leonard told us, that he has found prodigious support and comfort in sharing his story with others, not only his network of Rwandans and Burundians in church, but also his psychologist and even us:

"I have had this hunger of speaking about what I have been through. Because every time I speak about this I was very relieved. Because sometimes I have been crying when I thought about this. When I see people who have died of hunger, by weapons, by tiredness. But when I have the opportunity to speak to somebody like this I feel very 'afslappet'. It is something like recharge. It's something which is in your brain everywhere and it's something which I can't forget. Sometimes I have to put out all the things I have been through and I feel relaxed and stronger. It is wonderful to find people whom you can share your experiences and problems with." (Leonard, 31.05.14)

Leonard is grateful that his relationships with others allow him to share his problems, and it is apparent that he uses his relationships to cope. Despite everything Leonard has been through he describes sharing his stories with other people as *"wonderful"* and illustrates the importance of sharing the difficulties of being without family collectively. According to Simon Robins (2010), who has conducted a study of the families of missing people in Nepal, constructing meaning is *"best achieved when talking with others in the same position"* (Robins, 2010: 261). In sharing and expressing his emotions, problems and stories, Leonard adopts an *emotion-focused strategy* as an effective response to his stressors of traumatizing events during his flight and of having lost contact with family. Leonard feels relaxed when sharing his stories and it makes him more resilient and stronger. Underlining this is Tedeschi and Calhoun (2004) who in their study on posttraumatic growth as the experience of positive

change, demonstrate that *"victims of traumatic events report improved relationships, new possibilities, a greater appreciation for life, and a greater sense of personal strength and spiritual development"* (Tedeschi and Calhoun, 2004 in Schweitzer et al., 2007: 283). In the case of our informants, Leonard is the only one who seems to find meaning in sharing his story about the past in details. To others, the value has merely been the unspoken common understanding they have felt towards one another and the sense of recognition they have found in their migrant church.

As this section has revealed, for most our informants it is of great importance to meet in networks, as it is a way of obtaining recognition, belonging and affiliation. In this manner, by finding substations for missing family members, the informants have found meaning with their lives and have attempted to cope with the vulnerable situation of being refugees or asylum seekers and with the fact that they have lost biological family ties. These networks are often of a religious character, are of continuous importance for most of them. For all of our informants, their most important relationships are with people from the churches they attend. In the coming section, we will illuminate on the religious coping strategies linked to these religious networks.

8.4 The value of the church

"Yes, the church is a family for me because I can find somebody who is my brother in Christ, sister in Christ and father in Christ. We are united by the word of God"
(Leonard, 31.04.2014)

This quote illustrates the perception of the church most of our informants have; namely one of a family. Leonard explained to us how the church connects him to people and provides him with a feeling of connectedness. While the previous chapter on religious faith was more of an analysis on how our informants use their personal faith in God in dealing with their situation, this section we will analyze the ways in which our informants find meaning through the congregation of the church and in this way cope with being without family as well as living in exile.

As mentioned, most of our informants find meaning in the close relationship they have obtained in their churches and through religion. Pastor Tea tells us that he encourages people to get involved in all kinds of activities in the Zion Temple, as he stresses that by actively getting involved in projects with other people, one will gain a feeling of belonging. Following Pargament et al. (2011), Pastor Tea encourages members of the congregation as a way to *"engaging in religious activities to shift focus from the stressor""* (Pargament et al., 2011: 56), and thereby assist the members in a search for *"comfort and reassurance through the love and care of congregation members and clergy"* (Ibid.). Pargament describes this as a religious method of coping in order to *gain comfort and intimacy with others as well as closeness to God* (Ibid.).

Through observations from a Sunday sermon in the Zion Temple, it became clear to us that religion and belonging are very much linked for members of the church. During the sermon, filled with music, joy and praise, the three preachers in the church indicated that the church members should consider each other family, while at the same time putting emphasis on informing people that everyone was welcome in the church. They stressed that God is for everyone and that He will always help and guide. From the observations it is apparent that the church becomes more than just a place of worship; it becomes a family and a place people can call "home". Behloul, having done research on Bosnian diasporas in Switzerland, asserts that immigrants often tend to be more religious, *"since religion plays such an important role in identity building, and leaving one's familiar environment definitely raises such issues"* (Behloul, 2004). Reasons behind this are connected with the challenges of arriving in a new country as well as providing the impacted with a link to the country of origin (Ibid.). Because of the fact that our informants are refugees, have experienced sudden flight and have lost contact with relatives, they are even keener to seek stability, comfort and social relations in the church.

8.4.1 Revising familial attachment

Leonard fled Burundi in 1995 and sought refuge in the Eastern part of The Democratic Republic of Congo. When conflicts arose here as well, he wandered on foot to Congo Brazaville. As mentioned earlier, Leonard came to Denmark as an UN refugee in 2001.

Assuming his family had died due to a massacre in the compound where they lived in Burundi, ten years after separation Leonard was surprised to learn that they had lived. He told us about how he had to look new family in the absence of his own:

"The worst thing when you lose contact to the family you have the pain, a very great pain, and when you think about it you think "perhaps I will be the last in the family to live. Perhaps my family didn't live anymore, they are died". And from that moment you say "ok, all the family is now (...) gone, all your family will never exist again" It like you don't exist yourself (...) It is a feeling which I felt that was very hard for me. This mean I have to find new family for support".

Leonard continues telling us about where he found this support:

"(...) When trying to look at how people live in Denmark and in Burundi and Rwanda it is very different. In Burundi and Rwanda they live different, they come to visit many times. They are close to each other and they share, with your friend and your neighbor. Here [in Denmark]*, it is something called "individualitet". It is not easy to find something to speak together with your* [Danish] *neighbor e.g. If we* [members of the congregation] *have something to eat, we share, to drink, we share. It is in the church where I find this."*
(Leonard, 31.05.14)

In the quote above, Leonard explained that without his family he had to reconstruct his idea of family as well as his own identity. Leonard elaborates on the pain he felt when thinking that he had lost his whole family and that he was all alone. He expresses that without his family, he himself did not fully exist - as if part of him had gone with the family. During the time of separation from his family, Leonard had a need for interacting with people from the same region as him, with whom he could have a familiar connection to. In the church, he asserts that he found mutual understanding and that he finds value of sharing. This, he states, he is unable to find outside the migrant church, due to differences in culture as well as perceptions of sharing. Not being close to his family implies losing a part of him and he has a need for

creating new ties and familial bonds. Here, the meaning of relational bonds becomes essential. The concept of 'family' no longer is a natural, given fact, and Leonard, as a coping strategy, substitutes his *"home environment family-based social support"* (Ryan et al., 2008: 13) with people from the church. Simultaneously, he is *revising attachment* by living with the loss of the close attachment with his biological family. Leonard is *reconstructing identity*, not within the family, as Boss suggests, but rather outside, as he changes the roles and boundaries of family (Boss, 2006: 120). Establishing bonds with people from the country of origin as a way of forming new family can also be interpreted as way of creating continuity and *"clinging to what used to be as though time, place and life itself had little or no effect (...)"* (Rousseau et al., 2004: 1103). This interpretation indicates holding on to a past, but the quote rather indicates that Leonard look forward. By living with *both* the memory of his family *and* crating new familial ties, rather than feeling divided between the two, Leonard, is looking to the future, trying to find meaning and coping with the ambiguous loss of not knowing whether his sister was dead or alive.

In his attempt to explain why he believes people turn to religious congregations when dealing with issues as ambiguous loss, Aubert states:

"It is mostly about the faith in God, but then comes the solidarity because we are human beings and in my culture there is a need to be together with people who are equal and know and understand each other." (Aubert, 31.04.14)

Later in the interview, Aubert elaborates on this:

"Many were not Christian when they came to the church. Even in my congregation we have people who were Muslims or who were not Christians before, but who are very engaged in the church now. I cannot tell you exactly why this is. There are many factors. As I said before, it is not easy to live in a country where you don't know anyone, everything is new, you have to start over, without friends, without family. I think a lot of people use the church as family and

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network. Some people don't have family and they use the church as family"
(Aubert, 28.05.2014)

It becomes apparent that the religious connectedness Aubert and other members of the congregation shares in the church expand further than that of religious belief. As Aubert emphasizes, people see the church as a *"family"* and a *"network"* where everyone is *"equal"*, despite the fact that they have various religious backgrounds. Analyzing this, Aubert views the members of the church as equals, because they are all migrants from the same region and therefore in the same situation. For the ones who are here without family or friends, the church becomes a space where people can create relationships with others and obtain spiritual support, comfort and reassurance. In this sense members of the church *gain comfort and closeness to God* as well as *intimacy with others* (Pargament et al., 2011: 56).

Other informants have similarly expressed a strong need for gathering with other migrants in the church. John, the Missionary Priest from Ghana, told us that apart from being a place of spirituality and religious praise, his church is also a place where people *"get happy when they see each other and are emotionally bound together"* (John, 29.05.14). According to Boss, it is exactly this positive contact with other people that makes relatives of missing people develop resiliency (Robins, 2010) and which enables people in *finding meaning* (Boss, 2007).

Another aspect of the migrant church, which our informants find salient, is that of language. It connects them with the word of God as well as to each other. Leonard elaborated on this:

"(...) in Zion Temple they speak my mother tongue there. I understand the word of God like in the very basic words and it's a very understandable from the mother tongue. It means a lot when I am down. (Leonard, 31.05.2014)

To Leonard, it is of significance that he can speak and hear his native language when he is in church. When he is distressed and feeling down, it helps him that he is able to hear the word

of God in his mother tongue, as it provides him with a deeper understanding of it. Additionally, hearing his native language contributes to a stronger connection to God, a deeper connection to his culture as well as reminding him of his family, with whom he did not have contact with for ten years and who is residing in Burundi. Following Pargament et al., Leonard, by virtue of hearing the word of in his mother tongue, he gains a deeper *spiritual connection* and thereby *gains comfort and closeness to God* (Pargament et al., 2011: 56).

In this chapter on 'Coping and finding meaning', we have illuminated the coping strategies of our informants. We begin the chapter with an analysis of the difficulties of coping with the double vulnerability of being a migrant in addition to having lost contact with family members. Next, we have analyzed how our informants struggle with guilt and fear of disappointing family members remaining in their homelands. Further, we have illustrated how our informants use their religion and the church as a means to gain support and comfort from others as well as achieving closeness to God. The coping strategies can be viewed as somewhat adaptive and maladaptive simultaneously, nonetheless they provide our informants with meaning.

The concept of family and religion is for our informants intertwined. In their respective congregations they socialize with people from their homelands in order to praise the word of God and find recognition and substitution for the family they have either lost or still have to live in the absence of. We can say that, religious practices have helped our informants to construct a social network by meeting others in the church.

The next chapter will be based around the same issues of obtaining connectedness and recognition in the church, but will look further into how these networks can be put into a diasporic framework.

9 Diasporic networks

In the section above we analyzed how our informants use the church to cope with the difficulties of being without family members in addition to being migrants. Furthermore, the fact that they are part of religious networks contributes to a sense of belonging and connectedness both through the word of God, but moreover it provides our informants with a familiarness towards other members of the congregation. In this section, we will look further into the way in which the migrants make use of and mobilize in the migrant churches, which are defined by countries and regions.

According to Leonard form Burundi, member of the Zion Temple, the fact that the congregation is comprised of people from the same region has a significant value to him:

"It means something that we are from the same region, because when you try to look at Rwanda for example, they are people with almost the same culture and the composition of the ethnic groups are the same … the language is almost the same and the culture. So, its, what can I say, very meaningful to meet each other outside and to be united." (Leonard, 31.05.14)

He argues that as Rwandans and Burundians share almost the same language, culture and ethnicity, they are *united* when they meet in the church in Denmark. In the framework of the church, the members connect through the religion but also through the notion of the lost 'homeland', or 'home region' (Hansen 2005, in Kleist 2007) Following Kleist's view on diaspora as a condition for identification (Kleist, 2007), the informants identify themselves with the other members of the church through the links back to the homeland by meeting in the church with people from the same home region and find a *home away from home* (Ibid.: 48) Our informants' partaking in their church can be viewed as a way of mobilizing in the network of the church, and that they hereby enter a *space of recognition*. Kleist, having done research on Somalis' engagement in associations in Denmark, asserts that achievement, agency and cultural clarity are recognized through engagement in associations (Kleist, 2007). We submit to the perception of Kleist and view our informant's mobilization in the migrant churches as comparable to that of engaging in diasporic associations, which *"enable,*

establish, or negotiate recognition" (Kleist, 2007: 231). We argue that for our informants, the recognition and familiarity they obtain when entering the spaces of the churches serve as a way of finding meaning.

9.1 A common understanding of adversities

Several of the informants stress how even though the main reason for coming to church is their religious faith, the social component is a significant reason for taking part in the religious networks. When asking Leonard whether he also attends church for social reasons, he replied:

"Well, initially it is about faith, but thereafter comes the community feeling. Because we are human beings, we have a need for it, and in my culture we have a need to be together with the ones we know and have an understanding for, and to try to be a part of a community. We have all experienced terrible things, and it is easier when we are together and share our experiences with the others." (Leonard, 31.05.14)

Leonard asserts that the most significant reason for coming to church is the religious faith. However, it is clear how he perceives his faith and his worshipping of God as bringing people together, and stresses the social factor of the churches. Leonard emphasizes the *understanding* the community in the church has for each other, and states that there are previous experiences they share in church with the comfort of knowing that others have been through similar hardships. This can be related to Clifford's (1994) view on diaspora, as he sees it as a " *signifier (...) not simply of transnationality and movement, but of political struggles to define the local, as distinctive community, in historical contexts of displacement (...) Diaspora is the product of violent processes of displacement (...)"* (Clifford, 1994: 308). Here, Clifford emphasized the significance of common experiences of displacement and violent processes, which is something the members of the Zion Temple share by virtue of them living in exile in Denmark. The importance of being together with people who has knowledge about the historical context and cultural background of his country of origin is clearly essential for Leonard.

Pastor Tea, who lost most of his family in Burundi, similarly illustrates the importance of being in a church with people from his own country:

"When you have experienced terrible things, it is easy when you are together with people from your own country (...) I think that helps in a way". (Pastor Tea, 28.04.14)

Pastor Tea describes the importance of interacting with people from the same country of origin as himself in the church, people who share a common history and culture. According to him, being amongst kinfolks one has a perception of being recognized, and additionally, it creates an uncomplicated environment for sharing. Using the Zion Temple as an example, there are migrants from Rwanda, Burundi and Congo. Still, Pastor Tea views his congregation as people originating from the same country. Hebdige (1987) has an interesting view on roots and places of origin: *"Rather than tracing back the roots . . . to their source, I've tried to show how the roots themselves are in a state of constant flux and change. The roots don't stay in one place. They change shape. They change colour. And they grow. There is no such thing as a pure point of origin . . . but that doesn't mean there isn't history. [1987:10, emphasis added]* (Hebdige, 1987 in Malkki, 1992: 37). Following this statement and similar to Malkki's view on roots and identities of refugees which has been analyzed previously in this thesis, we do not follow the assumption that refugees – and our informants – are rooted to a nation and a territory as such and as many scholars suggests (…). Rather, due to the familialness and connectedness that our informants feel in the migrant church, these churches can be viewed as diasporic networks, where the members are tied to a notion of homeland and home region.

Robin Cohen (1997) questions the above and rather views religion as something that can be *associated* with diasporas, but not to be considered as such. Cohen argues that this is due to the fact that religions often span more than one ethnic group, and many faiths have spread around the world. In this way, religions do not in the same way as diasporas seek to return to, or recreate, a homeland (Cohen, 1997, in Vertovec, 2000). While Cohen does not see religions constituting diasporas themselves, he claims they *"can provide additional cement to bind a diasporic consciousness"* (Ibid.: 10), hence viewing religion as something that can

strengthen and reinforce an existing diaspora. He claims that as religions often span more than one ethnic group, the notion of homeland and ethnicity is not existing and thus the factors that lay the ground for the diaspora is not prevalent (Ibid.)

However, as we analyze, our informants in the migrant churches gather with others around a shared homeland and are met with a collective understanding of the adversity many have suffered, and therefore the migrant churches in question can be viewed as diaspora networks. This is supported by Vásquez (2010), who argues that similar to being part of a diasporic community with unified ethnos, religion is *"expressed in collective representations and powerful shared rituals that create and sustain a moral community (…)"* (Durkheim, 1971 [1915] in Vásquez, 2010: 128). Hence, by incorporating an understanding of religious networks in the idea of a diaspora, one can open up and extend the concept and get a broader understanding of how migrants use and mobilize in diaspora networks.

In this chapter we have analyzed the role migrant churches play for our informants, as well as the salience of being able to meet with people whom they have a belonging to. Our informants have illustrated how they, as members of migrant churches, find and create ties towards notions of their lost homeland and region. Apart from serving as a place where they can gather around their religious beliefs, the migrant churches can in fact be perceived as diasporic networks. According to Doreen Massey (1992), network as a place is constructed out of a particular constellation of social relations, meeting and intertwining together around a particular focus (Massey, 1992 in Williams, 2008). Viewing the migrant church as a network, the obvious focus here is religion, but from our collected data, it becomes apparent that another focal point is the culture and traditions of the region in the congregation. The way the migrant church functions, and the ways in which the members of the congregation gather around a collective commonality of their countries of origin, has led us to consider that religious networks can in fact be seen as diasporic networks. Our informants can be seen to mobilize in these diasporic networks, where they seek to recreate and uphold religious as well as cultural traditions as a way of creating meaning and familial bonds.

In the next, and last, chapter of our analysis we will analyze how our informants find hope throughout the uncertainty and ambiguity regarding the loss of contact to a family member. Additionally, we will look at the importance of religion and religious networks in the creation of hope.

10 Discovering hope

Through the chapter of 'Coping with ambiguous loss' we identified various coping strategies of how our informants deal with ambiguous loss on top of being in a vulnerable position as refugees and asylum seekers. In earlier chapters, we have shed light on the fact that the loss remains ambiguous as long as the person is missing, thus, one is caught between hope that the person is alive, and the hopelessness of thinking the person might be dead. As time passes, what seems to be the main desire for our informants is for the ambiguity to end and to find closure. This, however, might take years, and in the meantime one have to find ways to cope with the situation. The overall aim of Pauline Boss' (2009) coping strategies is for the bereaved to discover and remain hope, and that home is a meaningful and positive outcome despite the ambiguous loss (Robins, 2010). In this chapter, we will analyze whether, and how, our informants discover or maintain hope when missing a family member.

10.1 Hope and waiting time

From the previous chapter we have seen how migrants with a missing family member can wait for years to hear any news about their loved ones. During this waiting time, some are paralyzed by the ambiguity and uncertainty revolving the missing person. Furthermore, asylum seekers waiting at the asylum centers for their future to be decided, often lack the agency to search for their family members. In the chapter 'The ambiguity of not knowing', we illustrate how the ambiguous loss can leave migrants in a constant despair wondering whether their loved one is dead or alive. With no possibility to predict the time frame for the waiting or the outcome of the wait, it becomes difficult to know what to hope for, or where to find hope. For Paul, hope about his family being alive sprung out from his own situation of obtaining asylum in Denmark:

"When I have been here, when I am here, something changes, security and war. I was not dead. So I was hoping they would also be alive. When I get protection here, I thought they would also be alive. The protection I had in Denmark gave me hope and the belief that my family might be alive. " (Paul, 24.04.14)

When asking Paul if he had any hope of seeing his family again, he responded that it was not until after he was granted asylum in Denmark he started thinking that they might had survived. As we problematized earlier, Paul was unable to think about his missing family while he was living at the asylum centre with his case still processing, or let alone find the strength to search for his family. But once he was given protection by the Danish state, his hope spurred. The fact that he had survived war and conflict as well as the flight, and now had ended up in security in Denmark, made him feel hopeful that the rest of his family might have sustained the same hardship.

Waiting is a central theme in research on hope (Lazarus, 1999, Crapanzano 2003, Webb, 2007). The ability to wait patiently is termed 'Patient hope' (Webb, 2007). It can be connected with Boss' premise about closure being a myth; she claims that in order to cope with ambiguous loss, people have to learn to *accept* and live with the ambiguity, rather than waiting for the ambiguity to end (Boss, 2006). As mentioned, as long as a person is missing, the ambiguity will inevitably continue. Accepting that one will remain in the ambiguity until the person or its body might one day be located is also a way of accepting Webb's 'unforeseen future', thus coming to terms with the fact that one cannot control what will happen in the future. This is by Waterworth (2004) seen as an active way of hoping, as one takes a decision to await whatever will come (2004: 43 in Webb, 2007) which by Dauenhauer (1984: 455-6 in Webb, 2007) argues requires boldness and courage.

According to Crapanzano (2003), the patient hope involves placing one's trust in the behavioral activity of someone, or something. This can either be through trusting the efficacy in the agency of another person, or through religious faith, putting the trust in the hands of

God (Crapanzano, 2003). Receiving asylum in Denmark was the external factor that made Paul hope for a better future, and for the hope that as he managed to live through the hardships, his family might have as well. In the next section we will elaborate on how many our informants put their trust in the hands of God (Ibid.)

10.2 Hope towards a better future

"Ohh, Because of the word of God I have said that perhaps God has escaped them. Perhaps but it's not sure. Because the quarter was very dangerous. They come with almost six tanks and a large number of soldiers to attack the compound. I'm thinking, "How can my family escape from these tanks and soldiers?" Small children and elder people cannot go to the mountains." (Leonard, 31.05.14)

Here, Leonard elaborates on the question of whether he believed his family was still alive after he had fled the quarters where he had been living with them. He thought it was unlikely that his family had survived such a massive attack. He says, however, that if they were alive, it was due to God's protection. He does not mention the word *hope*, rather he leaves it up to God, and maybe, if they had been lucky, God had spared them. Leonard is putting the fate of the family in God's hands, and makes use of a patient hope, where he leaves the destiny of his family in the behavioral activity of God (Crapanzano, 2003).

Similarly, Leonard connects God to his own survival. Throughout his flight to Congo Brazaville he circumvented militias and hunger and saw many people die. He states it was his faith and his daily prayers that gave him hope through the turbulent flight:

"For me, I was just having the hope in God. I have the hope in God. I had been running with my little Bible, the New Testament. Every day I was been reading it and concentrate myself and pray." (Leonard, 31.05.14)

The pocket Bible that Leonard brought with him during his flight gave him support to pray, and it worked as a positive abstraction from the stressful situation he found himself in. In this way, when he focused on the words of the Bible and on praying, he obtained a respite from the troublesome things he had to deal with on his way to Congo-Brazzaville. From what Leonard states, his hope was not for him to stay alive, or for his family to be alive, but rather he put his hope in God, trusting that God would do the right thing, without defining what he was hoping for. Leonard has a more general, open-ended hope in God helping him through his hard times, as well as hoping that God will spare his family. The act of praying is by Eugenè Minowski (1970) viewed as a way of looking into the distance, and of imagining the future one hopes for (Minowski, 1970 in Crapanzano, 2003). Minowski views hope as separating us from *"immediate contact with ambient becoming; it suppresses the embrace of expectation and permits me to look freely, far into lived space which now opens up before me"* (1970:100 in Crapanzano, 2003: 9). Through prayer, Leonard focused on his hope for a better future, which gave him motivation and strength to keep fleeing.

"I have to keep my faith in God and I know that he will support me and help me. It gives me comfort to believe in God. I know that everything will be alright, if I continue to believe in God"(Yunis, 26.02.14)

When asking Yunis, who recently arrived in Denmark as an asylum seeker, about what gives him hope in the difficult situation he is in, he states that if he maintains his belief in God, everything will be okay. Yunis hereby adopts an *open-ended hope* through his religious belief, as he hopes that his situation in general will improve. His hope is future-oriented without a specific object, thus leaving his fate in the hands of God, and knowing that his future will work out if he remains his faith in God, comforts him.

10.3 The fostering of hope

Within Christian theories of hope, open-ended hope is the only "real" hope, and one cannot hope for something specific, rather, one should hope for salvation and leave it up to God to define what the salvation will be (Crapanzano, 2003). According to Webb, this open-ended

hope it characterized by an openness of spirit with respect for the future, which casts a positive glow on life (Webb, 2007: 69). But when the waiting turns into months, and months into years and even decades, this patient hope could also contribute to paralyzing and leaving families of a missing family member in despair due to the prolonged ambiguity and uncertainty. According to Crapanzano, one could be so caught up in one's hope that one does nothing to prepare for its fulfillment, instead *"one hopes- one waits- passively for hope's object to occur, knowing realistically that its occurrence is unlikely, even more so because one does nothing to bring it about"* (Crapanzano, 2003: 18). However when it comes to ambiguous loss, it might be difficult to bring the hope of seeing your loved one again, thus doing nothing to bring it about is relative, as it depends what one hopes for. The question then, is not what people with missing family members can do to bring hope about, but rather to realize *where else* they can one find hope, and *what else* one can hope for. When asking Pastor Tea how hope is perceived in religion, and whether one can hope and pray for something specific, he replied this:

"The Bible says that there's a day and night. Everything has got its own time – time of crying, time of joy. If you are down now, you are not always going to down. We put hope with faith - hope cannot go alone. You have hope and faith that things will be better."
(Pastor Tea, 28.04.14)

Pastor Tea finds that hope and faith are connected, and that one cannot have hope without having religious faith. He believes there is a reason for everything that happens to us as human beings, and that one has to look towards the future and think that one day, one's life will be better. Thus, he does not see hope as a wish or desire of something definite, rather, as a way of looking forward.

According to Boss, people need hope despite the ambiguous loss (Boss, 2009), in order to keep strong. She claims that *"hope lies in discovering that suffering is more than an assault on our personal comfort"* (Ibid.: 144) Thus, if one can accept the pain the loss inflicts on oneself and see it as a part of life, one might be able to look beyond the suffering and discover

hope through different purposes. Boss asserts that even though hope can be found in numerous ways – e.g. through religion, prayer, worship, meditation, nature – it is more easily found in the company of others and she claims, that meaningful human community assists with imagining new hope (Ibid.). This can be related to how our informants take part in diasporic networks of the church, meeting with people and thus creating meaning. Viktor Frankl (1963) argued that there is "*no meaning without hope and no hope without meaning*" (Frankl, 1963 in Boss, 2009: 141). Following Frankl's words, when our informants mobilize in a diaspora and create meaning through the familial bonds they form in church, this contributes to the creation of hope.

11 Conclusion and reflections

In this thesis, we have studied the situation of migrants who have lost contact with family members and how they cope with the ambiguous loss that follows. We have structured our thesis chronologically according to the events our informants have gone through from the time they fled their countries of origin to waiting in asylum centers, through the experience of ambiguous loss to how they subsequently cope with the uncertainty of not knowing and lastly, how they discover hope.

Many of our informants have previously been residing at an asylum center in Denmark. We have found that the time they spent waiting for their asylum case can be characterized as a liminal one, due to the uncertainty of not knowing *when* or *if* they will be able to move on with their lives in Denmark – or whether they will be sent back to their country of origin. In this liminal state, they lack the agency to try to locate their relatives. Whether being an asylum seeker or a refugee, their experience is illustrated as having limited sense of control during the flight as well as in the post flight situation. As demonstrated in this thesis, our informants have to deal with a double vulnerability, as they, in addition to struggling with living in exile, have lost contact with their families. This situation of double vulnerability is not merely the reality for our informants, but is a known phenomenon for most people who have had to flee their countries.

In order to answer our research question, we have analyzed the impact of ambiguous loss and how this uncertainty regarding missing a family member affects the people involved. We have found that the continued ambiguity impedes the grieving process and leaves family members in a limbo. We have seen that for our informants, it is the uncertainty that hurts the most, and as a result many of them have a need to seek closure by concluding that their loved ones are dead. For many of our informants, the ambiguity has ended, either by re-establishment of contact or by proof of death. However, in cases where the body is still missing, the ambiguity is prolonged, and the bereaved are left searching for closure. Either way, we have found that when dealing with ambiguous loss, closure is a myth, hence the aim is, through different coping strategies, to accept the ambiguity.

Due to the fact that our informants are migrants and have experienced sudden flight in addition to having lost contact with relatives, they have made use of several coping strategies. As most of our informants arrived in Denmark alone, they have had to deal with the guilt of leaving family members behind and the fear of disappointing relatives when the better future that they hoped for has not been obtained. This has resulted in various kinds of avoidance strategies.

One might say that when some of our informants deliberately do not try to locate family members, they themselves prolong the ambiguity of not knowing the fate of their relatives. The coping strategies of our informants can at the same time be viewed as both adaptive and maladaptive, nonetheless they provide our informants with meaning.

Having located most of our informants in religious networks, it is not unexpected that religion is an important part of their lives. That being said, it is not given that religion is an important coping strategy for them. However, we have found that for our informants, their personal relationship with God is a significant part of the coping strategies they make use of. Their faith and trust in God as a source of support is unconditional and most consider their purpose in life and the events occurring, negative as well as positive, as an inevitable part of God's will. Migrant churches serve as a place of worship for our informants and also as a place where they find comfort and social relations. In the church, they cope with traumas and loss

of family by obtaining feelings of recognition, belonging and affiliation as well as closeness to God. In the case of our informants the ambiguity of not knowing the whereabouts of relatives has ended. As we have illustrated, our informants continue to use the church as a place where they find substitution for the family they have either lost, or still have to live in the absence of. Hereby, we have found that the concept of family and religion is intertwined. The members of the migrant churches gather around a common understanding of culture and of adversities, as it consists of people from the same homelands and regions. This creates a space of mutual understanding and recognition.

We view the migrant churches as diasporic networks, where the members gather around a collective commonality of their countries of origin. Our informants can be seen to mobilize in these diasporic networks, where they seek to recreate and uphold religious as well as cultural traditions as a way of creating meaning and familial bonds. None of the congregations consists of migrants from only one country, nonetheless the members have a specific belonging to the network within these churches. We found that the importance of connectedness in terms of family and recognition seemed to surpass that of a certain place and homeland.

When our informants mobilize in a diaspora and create meaning through the familial bonds they form in church, this contributes to the creation of hope. The open-ended hope for a better future is for our informants connected to the faith in God, and to the trust that through the belief in God, they believe that good things will come. For our informants, faith and hope is intertwined; as long as they believe in God, there is hope for a better future.

By forming relational ties and substituting families, the informants have found meaning with their lives, hence attempt to cope with the fact that they have lost biological family ties/contact as well as with the vulnerable situation of being refugees or asylum seekers. The shared experiences, understanding and emotional support obtained in the diasporic networks are most valuable when coping with ambiguous loss.

Reflections

As briefly mentioned in the conclusion, it was not unexpected that religion was a significant factor in the coping strategies of our informants, nor was the fact that they engage in religious networks. However, what we wanted to analyze was *how* our informants used religion as a coping strategy, and in what way. As stated, being religious does not necessarily mean that one uses religion as a coping strategy. Nonetheless, we found that for all our informants, religion played a significant role.

One can assume that if we had located migrants with missing family members elsewhere, the findings would have been of a different character. In relation to this, it could be interesting to investigate the field of study further and to do research in the asylum centers in order to study which coping strategies asylum seekers would make use of, as well as whether they find support in networks and in what kind. Similarly, an interesting focus would be whether migrants use and mobilize in the migrant church differently depending on whether they are, or have been, missing family members or not.

 In general, we find that there are surprisingly few studies conducted on families of people missing family members. Considering the amounts of people how are missing family members around the world, one would assume that researchers had explored this field of study to a higher extend. People go missing all around the world, and there are hundreds of thousands of people not knowing the whereabouts or the fate of a family member. The diversity of the bereaved is one of vast differences, from victims of natural and man-made disasters, to refugees who have lost contact to family members due to war or conflict. Thus, the topic is highly relevant for various kinds of studies, and should be subject to further and broader research.

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13 Appendices

Appendix I: Objectives for the needs assessment of the DRC Tracing Service

Objective 1) Present number and facts of the Danish Tracing Service:

In order to get an understanding of the Tracing Service, it was necessary to investigate the size of the service, the numbers of open and closed cases, the use of volunteers etc. This was achieved by collecting secondary data through Red Cross material and online resources as well as through informal meetings with the tracing officer of the Tracing Service. The facts and figures collected contribute to a factual and operational overview of the Tracing Service.

Objective 2) Determine the level of awareness of the Tracing Service

The Tracing Service is, naturally, depending on relevant actors knowing about the service, was important to determine to which degree relevant actors are aware of the Tracing Service and its purpose.

As Denmark is a relatively small country, compared to other Red Cross National Societies, it was considered possible to reach out to large parts of the country. Integration Departments in the 24 largest municipalities in Denmark were chosen[10], a number that should be representative for a general understanding of the awareness of the service. Questionnaires regarding awareness of Tracing Service and relevance in relation to clients of the municipalities were prepared. The plan was initially to distribute the questions via e-mail, but it was considered more efficient and effective to do a phone interview based on the questionnaire, due to the possibility of asking follow-up questions as well as the concern of actors not replying to e-mails. Naturally, all 14 asylum centers were contacted as well. This as to ensure that the Red Cross managed centers as well as the state managed centers all had knowledge about the service. A total of 38 actors were interviewed by telephone.

Other relevant actors working with refugees and migrants, such as 25 diaspora organizations and 50 religious congregations, including 3 Danish migrant priests, as well as a Red Cross

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[10]   There are 98 municipalities in Denmark, hence the number of contacted municipalities represent approximately 25% of the total of municipalities in Denmark.
http://www.dst.dk/da/Statistik/emner/kommuner-paa-landkortet.aspx Localized 01.04.14

Health Clinic, were also contacted in order to determine the level of awareness of the Tracing Service. A total of 71 actors were identified and questionnaires were distributed via e-mail.

Objective 3) Identify potential beneficiaries

It is in the interest of the Tracing Service to assist as many people as possible with tracing a missing person. Hence it was relevant to identify potential beneficiaries, as the Tracing Service might not be known to everyone that are in need of assistance of the service.

The objective of identifying the level of awareness of the Tracing Service and objective 3 about identifying potential beneficiaries are found closely related, hence objective 2 and 3 were combined when preparing questions for the questionnaires.

Objective 4) Evaluate on the use of volunteers

The DRC is largely depending on using volunteers in many of its initiatives. The Tracing Service have had assistance from volunteers since 2012, hence it was relevant to identify how the use of volunteers are contributing to the service, as well as getting the volunteers´ perspectives of the service. Additionally, using volunteers in assisting with tracing is not a strategy adopted by all Red Cross National Societies, which made it interesting to highlight the possible value of using volunteers. A questionnaire was prepared with questions regarding the volunteers´ perception of the tracing service and of their role in the service and sent out to the 10 volunteers of the Tracing Service. Further, three observations of the initial tracing interview done by volunteeers were conducted in order to valuate on the use of volunteers.

Objective 5) Identify whether the Tracing Services meet the needs of beneficiaries

It is of crucial importance to the Tracing Service to identify whether it meets the needs of its beneficiaries. Additionally, it is important to investigate the level of trust the beneficiaries have towards the Tracing Service. This trust is two-fold in the way that for the beneficiary, it is not only regarding giving personal data on the missing family member, but also about relying on the Tracing Service to assist them in finding the missing person. In order to identify these issues, a combination of both quantitative and qualitative data was deemed

necessary for various reasons but mainly for ethical reasons. The beneficiaries of the Tracing Service are in a very vulnerable situation, which needs to be considered at all times.

With assistance from the Tracing Officer it was decided to send out 60 questionnaires by mail to former beneficiaries who were still living in Denmark, some with closed cases and some with open cases.

Further, three observations of the initial tracing interview as well as subsequent short interviews with the beneficiary were conducted in Sandholmlejren.

An obstacle was met early on as it proved difficult to actually locate existing as well as former beneficiaries. This is due to the fact that a major part of the beneficiaries are asylum seekers who early on in their process open a case with the Tracing Service, but who later might be sent to an asylum center in another part of Denmark, returned to another country (due to the Dublin Regulation) or sent back to the country of origin. In addition, the sensitive character of the situation of the beneficiaries could result in them not answering a questionaire on the subject.

Objective 6) Recommendations/proposals for action

As mentioned earlier, the purpose of the needs assessment of the Tracing Service is to evaluate on the service as well as to determine the needs of beneficiaries. Recommendations and proposals for action based on an analysis of the data collected should be considered as an extension to the needs assessment in order to encourage concrete action on the established needs of the Tracing Service.

Appendix II: Interview guide informants

Introduction:

→ Introduction to us, our thesis etc.

→ Anonymity

→ Recording

Life story

1. Can you tell us a bit about yourself, how you came to Denmark etc.?

Loss of contact

2. How did you loose contact with your family member?

3. How was the feeling of not knowing where, and how, your family member was?

→ can you elaborate on this?

Hope

4. Did you think you were going to see your family member again? And keep the hope?

    → Why/how?

    → Did you think he/she was alive?

Coping

5. How did you find support during the time of not knowing where your family member was? (network, professionals, other family members etc)

→ was there something that made you think less about it?

→ did some things help more than others?

6. Was it important for you to talk to other people about not knowing where your family member was?

    → do you know other people who also were missing family members?

    →If yes, did you share your feelings and concern with one another?

7. Are you religious?

    → did religion and faith in God help you dealing with it in any way?

    → What does your religion mean to you?

Network

8. After you came to Denmark, was it important for you to be a part of a social network?

    →If yes, what kind of network? (religious, diaspora, social…)

Appendix III: Interview guide DRC pshychologist

1. **Hvad består dine arbejdsopgaver i og hvem er dine klienter/brugere/borgere?**
2. **Har du erfaring med brugere af Eftersøgningstjenesten i dit arbejde?**
   →Har du historier om enkeltsager, som du kan dele med os?
   →Er brugere af Eftersøgningstjenesten en gruppe du ofte har haft kontakt med?

3. **Henviser I nogen til Eftersøgningstjenesten, eller har de klienter som har mistet kontakt til familiemedlemmer typisk allerede en sag i Eftersøgningstjenesten når I taler med dem?**

4. **Kan du fortælle lidt om hvad der fylder mest hos brugere af Eftersøgningstjenesten?**

5. **Har du indtryk af om der er bestemte coping- strategier, som folk der har mistet kontakt med familiemedlemmer gør brug af?**

6. **Har du indtryk af, at brugerne bruger deres netværk til at håndtere deres svære situation?**
   → Hvis ja, hvilke netværk? (religiøse, diaspora etc.)

7. **Vi har talt meget om at man i kraft af at være asylansøger og samtidig har mistet kontakten med familiemedlemmer besidder en form for dobbelt sårbarhed. Er det en dobbelt sårbarhed, som I genkender, og kan du i så fald fortælle lidt om det?**

8. **Hvilke metoder bruger I i jeres arbejde med brugere af Eftersøgningstjenesten/mennesker der har mistet kontakt til familiemedlemmer?**
   → Gruppesamtaler? (evt. som nyt tiltag til Eftersøgningstjenesten)

9. **Kender I til Pauline Boss' teori om ambigious loss? Hvis ja, er det noget I har haft implementeret i jeres arbejde som psykologer for brugere af Eftersøgningstjenesten?**

10. **Vi har gennem interviews med kommuner og asylcentre fået et klart indtryk af, at brugere af Eftersøgningstjenesten har et stort behov for at få en tilbagemelding på deres sag ca. en gang hvert halve år. Tror du det ville give brugerne mere ro og håb, at få tilbagemeldinger på deres sag oftere?**

11. **Er der noget du tænker kunne gøres bedre i arbejdet med folk der venter på svar fra Eftersøgningstjenesten?**

Appendix IV: Letter and questionnaire to beneficiaries

Dear Sir/ Madam

It is important for the Red Cross that the Restoring Family links service (Eftersøgningstjenesten) meet the needs of its beneficiaries. Therefore we are currently working on a project to evaluate on the service. As part of the project we are colleting information on Restoring Family Links beneficiaries in Denmark. We feel that by hearing about your experiences we can learn a lot about how the programme could be improved.

We would be extremely grateful if you could spare about 10 minutes to answer some questions about your experience with the Tracing service. The information we collect will be used in the evaluation to consider whether there is a need to improve the Tracing Service programme. Please note that the information provided will be anonymous - we will <u>not</u> use any names and all personal data will be treated confidentially.

You can choose from two different ways to answer questionnaire:

1) Fill in the questionnaire attached to this letter, and return it by mail in the envelope provided. If you cannot fit all your comments in to the questionnaire, please attach a separate peace of paper with your comments.
2) Reply by e-mail: send an e-mail to <u>ama@redcross.dk</u> with the numbers of the questions and simply add your answer.

You may skip any question that you feel uncomfortable answering.
Further, two university are writing their master thesis about the situation for people who have lost contact to a family member. They are very interested in talking with beneficiaries of the Danish Tracing Service (Eftersøgningstjenesten). If you would like to share your story with them, please state this in the questionnaire, or contact Amira Ajanovic directly.

If you have any questions please contact Amira Ajanovic at <u>ama@redcross.dk</u> at 35 27 87 90.

<u>Please return your answers no later than Monday the 24th of March 2014.</u>

Thank you again – your help is greatly appreciated!

Best regards,

_____   _____

Anne Sander   Amira Ajanovic
Head of section   Tracing Officer

Questionnaire for beneficiaries of the Red Cross Tracing Service

1) **What is your home country?**

   _____

2) **When did you lose contact with your relative?**

   _____

3) **Where did you learn about the Red Cross Tracing Service/Eftersøgningstjenesten?**

4) **When did you contact Red Cross/Eftersøgningstjenesten requesting for help?**

5) **Is your tracing request open, or has it been closed?**

   Still open ☐   Closed ☐

6) **If your case has been closed, how long did it approximately take to receive a response on your tracing request?**

   _____

7) **Do you feel that you have received enough updates or information about the progress of the case?**

   Yes ☐   No ☐

   If no, what could have been done differently?

   _____

8) **Do you feel that you have received the necessary support from the Red Cross to deal with the situation of missing a family member?**
   Yes ☐   No ☐
   If no, what kind of support would you have wanted?

   _____

9) **Have you used any of the following actors to help you deal with the situation of missing a family member?**
   Psychological support ☐   Friends ☐   Religious group ☐
   Other organisations ☐

10) **Have you tried any of the following methods to search for your missing family member?**

   Internet ☐   Telephone ☐   Letter ☐   Talking to people from my home country living in Denmark ☐   Private Agency ☐   Other organisations ☐

   Other method ☐ (please describe) _____

11)Do you know any other organisation(s) that can help you restore contact with your family members?

Yes ☐   No ☐

If yes, what organisation(s)? _____

12) Do you think there are any reasons that may stop people from using the Restoring Family Links service?

Yes ☐   No ☐

If yes, what? _____

13)Do you have other family members who still live in your home country?

Yes ☐   No ☐

14) How do you stay in touch with family members who live in your home country?

Internet ☐   Telephone ☐   Letters ☐   Red Cross Messages ☐

I do not have contact to family members in my home country ☐

Other ☐ (please describe) _____

15) Do you find it difficult to keep in contact with family members who live in your home country?

Yes ☐   No ☐

I do not have contact to family members in my home country ☐

If yes, why? _____

16)Do you have anything else to add (good or bad) about your experiences with the Restoring Family Link programme?

_____

17) Are you interested in being interviewed by the two university students about your story?

Yes ☐   No ☐

If yes, please write your e-mail, address and phone number here

_____

_____

Please send this questionnaire in the envelope provided, before Monday the 24th of March 2014.

Thank you very much for your help!