

METTE LIND KUSK¹

”I’ve Fought for My Future but Suddenly, I Can Get Rejected”: Young Refugees’ Future Orientations

Abstract: In Denmark, restrictive integration politics position young refugees holding a temporary residence permit in a difficult dilemma when they finish lower secondary education and begin to orient themselves towards their future. If they aim for further education, they can improve their chances of secure employment long-term. However, this will also postpone their chances of achieving a permanent residence permit. If they aim for employment, they may improve their economic situation here and now, as well as their chances of living up to the requirements for achieving a permanent residence permit, but this entails a precarious position at the job market and compromises with regards to their educational aspirations.

Through the story of Adnan, a 23-year-old man with a refugee background holding a temporary residence permit, the article explores how participation in upper secondary education is experienced in a context of exile, prolonged uncertainty, and shifting experiences of (un)belonging at school and in society at large. Employing concepts of belonging and discussing ideas of proper youth transitions, the article adds to our understanding of how participation in education is affected by experiences of (un)belonging at different levels.

Keywords: young refugees, politics of belonging, psychological belonging, education, temporality, transitions

¹ Mette Lind Kusk is a postdoctoral researcher at Aarhus University, Department of Anthropology, Denmark. Email: melk@au.dk

»Boril sem se za svojo prihodnost, a me lahko nenadoma zavrnejo«: pogled mladih beguncev v prihodnost

Izveleček: Na Danskem restriktivna integracijska politika mlade begunce z dovoljenjem za začasno prebivanje, ki končajo nižjo sekundarno izobrazbo in se začnejo usmerjati v svojo prihodnost, postavlja v težko dilemo. Če si prizadevajo za nadaljnje izobraževanje, si lahko izboljšajo možnosti za dolgoročno varno zaposlitev, vendar s tem odložijo možnost pridobitve stalnega prebivališča. Če si prizadevajo za zaposlitev, si lahko izboljšajo svoj ekonomski položaj kot tudi možnosti za pridobitev dovoljenja za stalno prebivanje, vendar jim to prinaša večjo negotovost na trgu dela in od njih terja kompromise glede njihovih izobraževalnih želja.

Skozi zgodbo o Adnanu, 23-letnem beguncu z dovoljenjem za začasno prebivanje, članek raziskuje, kako je moč doživljati srednješolsko izobraževanje v kontekstu izgnanstva, dolgotrajne negotovosti in spremenljivih izkušenj (ne)pripadnosti šoli in družbi nasploh. Z uporabo konceptov pripadnosti (*belonging*) in razpravo o odraščanju mladih članek prispeva k razumevanju medsebojnega vpliva in povezav med izobraževanjem in izkušnjami (ne)pripadnosti na različnih ravneh.

Ključne besede: mladi begunci, politika pripadnosti, psihološka pripadnost, izobraževanje, začasnost, prehodi

Introduction

It's hard, you don't know... I don't know if I'm here in Denmark in ten years. It's really... I have to say difficult. Now I've been here for five years, I've studied, I've worked, I have fought for my future, but suddenly, I can get rejected (...). Actually, people [with a temporary permit] are worried about this, and I think a lot of people lose energy to work, due to those things. Because they don't have any hope. When people don't have any hope, they can't fight for anything at all.

Adnan, age 23

Individuals who are granted asylum or family reunification in Denmark² inevitably face many years of temporary protection, where they only know that they have the right to stay in the country one or two years ahead in time. Like Adnan describes in the above quote, to live with such outspoken uncertainty about the basic premises of one's future can be difficult. It challenges one's ability to stay hopeful when working towards establishing a life in exile.

During recent years, immigration policies in Denmark have become increasingly restrictive, and temporality and repatriation have become explicit, political goals since the so-called 'paradigm-shift' in 2019 (Shapiro and Jørgensen 2021, 173). In more tangible terms, this means that individuals who have been granted asylum have to apply for renewal of their temporary residence permit every one or two years (rather than prior to 2019, when temporary residence permits were typically given for four or five years at a time). While this change in frequency may seem like a symbolic, bureaucratic exercise at first glance, the fact that hundreds of Syrians had their applications rejected, peaking in spring 2021 (Bendixen 2021, 1), makes it clear that the protection granted is indeed meant to be temporary. When Adnan describes how people worry and lose energy due to the fact that they do not know for how long they will enjoy protection in Denmark, it should be seen in light of these events.

A recent change in the legal landscape surrounding individuals with a temporary residence permit in Denmark is that, in addition to several other requirements, three and a half years of full-time employment is required to apply for permanent residency status, and since 2016 education has no longer been considered equivalent to employment (DRC 2021). This puts individuals who have

² I use the terms 'young refugees' or 'individuals with a refugee background' to cover individuals who have been granted asylum in Denmark as well as individuals who have come to Denmark through family reunification.

come to Denmark as big kids or teenagers³ in a disadvantaged position. Individuals in this stage of life will often have many years of education ahead of them. Regardless of whether they have attended school in their countries of origin before flight, young refugees have a lot to catch up on with regards to learning a new language, and their educational aspirations are often high (Lynnebakke and Pastoor 2020, 3-4). Furthermore, getting an education is considered a central element in a 'proper' transition process for the youth in Denmark in their movement from childhood towards adulthood (i.e. Frederiksen and Dalsgaard 2014, 2-3).

However, the employment requirement creates a dilemma once young refugees graduate lower secondary school: Should they aim for further education, improving their chances of secure employment in the long term and realizing their educational aspirations, knowing that this will postpone their possibilities for applying for a permanent residence permit? Or should they aim for employment as unskilled labourers, improving their economic situation here and now as well as their chances of living up to the requirements of achieving a permanent residence permit, knowing that this entails a precarious position at the job market as well as a compromise with regards to their educational aspirations? Once the choice to go on with upper secondary education (or higher education) is made, this dilemma does not entirely disappear. Doubts about one's choice or considerations about leaving when experi-

³ In this study, I focus on individuals who arrived to Denmark when they were between 12 and 22 years old. For children who come to Denmark as refugees or through family reunification before they turn ten, there is an opportunity to apply for permanent residence status when they turn 18 without fulfilling the employment criteria. But for children who are granted asylum after their tenth birthday, three and a half years of full-time employment is required (Danish Immigration Services 2022).

encing exclusion or facing academic challenges may be enhanced due to the uncertainty built into a temporary residence permit.

This article explores how participation in upper secondary education is experienced in a context of prolonged temporality, and it considers the connections between experiences of (un)belonging on different levels and varying degrees of motivation for and doubts about education. Based on a qualitative, ethnographic study carried out in a Danish municipality in spring 2021, this article seeks to answer the following research question: how is participation in and motivation for upper secondary education affected by temporality and experiences of (un)belonging at different levels?

The above question is explored through the story of Adnan, who is one of the 13 young refugees who participated in this study. Through Adnan's narrations it will be shown how motivation for participating in education varies across time, depending on experiences of psychological (un)belonging in educational settings and in relation to what Yuval-Davis terms the politics of belonging (Moensted 2020, 271-273; Yuval-Davis 2006, 198-99).

Young Refugees, (un)Belonging and Education

In refugee and migration studies, several scholars have dealt with the concept of belonging (see for example Larsen 2022, 2018; Moensted 2020; Verdasco 2019; Katartzi 2017; Wernesjö 2015). To experience a sense of belonging to groups and places outside the immediate family is considered a critical and essential human need that is particularly outspoken during youth (Moensted 2020, 270-271). To focus on belonging allows for a recognition of people's interconnectedness as well as their active work towards creating and upholding connections to people, places, and identities (ibid.). In the following, I highlight the central points from recent studies on migrants, refugees, and belonging carried out in a Scandinavian context.

In her work, Birgitte Romme Larsen (2022, 1-2) unfolds ethnic minority families' everyday strategies, in the form of the quotidian management of time and money, to ensure the next generation's future belonging in Denmark. To focus on the families' practices and descriptions of their everyday actions allows for an analysis that centres on their own perspectives on life in Denmark. This, Larsen argues, offers an alternative to the much-used, and much criticized, integration perspective, which often entails an implicit majority perspective, conceptual unclarity, and a tendency to spur divisional thinking in categories of 'us' and 'them' (Larsen 2022, 2; see Rytter 2019 for a more detailed critique). Another study that deals with belonging and refugees is Andrea Verdasco's (2019) ethnographic study on unaccompanied minors. Verdasco shows how temporary relations with volunteers, peers, and others, what Verdasco terms 'anchoring points', enable her interlocutors, who occupy extremely insecure positions in changing institutional settings, to develop much needed communities of belonging. Verdasco highlights individuals' agency and ability to create a sense of belonging to the immediate surroundings despite living with protracted temporariness and legal uncertainty regarding their national belonging (*ibid.*). Moreover, she emphasizes how the sense of belonging, though temporary and shifting, supports the minors during the difficult and long-drawn process of applying for asylum and waiting for answers. In the Swedish context, Ulrika Wernesjö (2015) shows how young refugees placed in collective housing in a rural village are challenged in their attempts to create a sense of belonging to their surrounding neighbours, as they experience social exclusion and othering in the village. Additionally, Wernesjö shows how the young refugees' sense of belonging to Swedish society is conditional on their acceptance by young Swedes (*ibid.*).

The above research considers the interplay between belonging on different levels: to immediate others, as well as to more abstract institutions such as the nation-state. The literature agrees that the sense of belonging is essential for young individuals living in exile, but the dynamics between (un)belonging at different levels is not explored sufficiently. This article contributes to the emerging field of research on the role of (un)belonging in the lives of young refugees by focusing attention on the dynamics of (un)belonging at different levels in the context of upper secondary education in Denmark. As shown by Lynnebakke and Pastoor (2020, 2-3), a supportive environment is important for young refugees' educational aspirations, wherefore a combined focus on experiences of belonging and educational processes is argued to be relevant. The authors show how study participants turned more indifferent about school and education in periods marked by great uncertainty about the future – for example during the asylum-seeking process (ibid.). In a Danish context, the temporality built into the residence permit could have a similar effect as it creates a comparable uncertainty about the future.

Further, the Scandinavian research project *Coming of Age in Exile (CAGE)* shows how children and youth with a refugee background achieve upper secondary education to a lesser extent than the majority population (Dunlavy 2020, 25-27). The tendency is clear in all participating countries – Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Denmark, but most outspoken in the latter, which is also characterized by having the most restrictive immigration policies. While close to 80 percent of the majority youth in Denmark have graduated from upper secondary school when they turn 25, this only applies for 37 percent of young people with a refugee background if they arrived to Denmark at the ages of 15-17 (ibid.). There is a correspondence between age upon arrival and educational achievements: The older upon arrival, the less is the likelihood of achiev-

ing upper secondary education. The gap between majority youth and refugee youth is smaller when it comes to higher education (ibid.). The drop-out rate from upper secondary education among young individuals with a refugee background is almost three times as big as that of the majority youth. At the same time, CAGE shows that there is a correspondence between the achievement of upper secondary education and employment on a permanent basis at the age of 30 (CAGE 2021, 11-13). This emphasizes the importance of upper secondary education as a prerequisite for obtaining a stable position in the labour market in a Danish context. In this sense, the lack of upper secondary education among young refugees increases risks of extensive social marginalization and add to the likelihood of being in precarious positions long-term. However, there is a lack of qualitative research about how upper secondary education is experienced and handled by young refugees. This article provides a move towards filling this gap.

To clarify the concept of belonging, I lean towards Yuval-Davis' (2006, 199-206) distinction between 'psychological, emotional belonging' and 'politics of belonging'. The former refers to the experience of emotional attachment and a personal, intimate feeling of being at home and being safe, for example in the class room and during breaks when attending school. The latter is about specific political projects that construct belonging in particular ways to particular collectives, for example in terms of the legal status of refugees in the host country. In this article, both concepts are relevant when seeking to understand how Adnan, and others like him, works towards experiencing psychological belonging with peers and teachers in the educational contexts he engages with, how experiences of psychological (un)belonging changes over time, and how the politics of belonging, in the form of his temporary residence permit and recurrent applications for renewal, affect participation in education.

Methodology

A broader, qualitative interview-study underpins this article. It was carried out independently by the author, supported by the Research Program for Everyday Life Studies and Extended Education, VIA University College. The overall research question of the study was: How do individuals aged approximately 15-25, with a refugee background, experience everyday life and future possibilities in Denmark in a context of protracted temporality, and which role do social workers, teachers and other professionals play in their navigation? Thus, the overall interest was to develop an understanding of the social consequences of the current political focus on temporality and repatriation for young refugees, as well as various professionals' involvement in supporting young refugees' social navigation in everyday life and in relation to their futures⁴.

The fieldwork was carried out in spring 2021. Three days of participant observation in a school for recently arrived foreigners in the age of 14-22 provided a platform for inviting pupils with a refugee background to participate in interviews. The days at the school provided a chance to talk informally with pupils during breaks, with staff after school, and it provided me with a common reference point in later interviews. Besides recruiting participants at the school, a youth consultant put me in touch with former students. Being aware of the possible biases involved when relying on a gatekeeper (O'Reilly 2006), this also allowed me to talk to individuals with a more long-term experience with life in Denmark who had engaged in upper secondary education, further education, and various forms of employment. The interview material consists of

⁴ As shown elsewhere, restrictions and prolonged temporality create a grave sense of insecurity, which can undermine a social workers ability to offer relevant support to and add to the precarity experienced by young refugees (Kusk and Jessen 2022, 20-24).

13 transcribed, semi-structured interviews, lasting 30-150 minutes, with young individuals with a refugee background who held a temporary residence permit at the time of the interview. As is shown in the overview below (Table 1), study participants were between 12 and 22 years of age upon arrival to Denmark, and they have lived in Denmark between three and 16 years.

Table 1. Overview of study participants

	Gender	Occupation	Age at the time of interview	Age upon arrival to DK	Number of years in DK	Household
1	Male	Fulltime employment (upper secondary education on hold)	31	21	10	Partner and one child
2	Female	Upper secondary education	29	22	7	Partner and three children
3	Male	Jobseeking (graduated higher education)	32	16	16	Alone
4	Male	Jobseeking (graduated higher education)	31	15	16	Alone / part-time with four children
5	Female	School for recently arrived immigrants	21	17	3½	Partner and one child
6	Male	School for recently arrived immigrants	18	13	5	Parents and siblings
7	Female	School for recently arrived immigrants	24	20	4	Alone
8	Female	School for recently arrived immigrants	18	14	4	Parents and siblings
9	Female	Higher education	28	17	11	Partner
10	Female	Upper secondary education	18	12	6	Parents and siblings
11	Female	Higher education	30	14	16	One child / husband abroad
12	Female	Fulltime employment (graduated higher education)	24	15	9	Parents and siblings
13	Male	Upper secondary education	23	17	6	Partner

Nine participants had finished or were in progress with upper secondary education. During the interviews, participants were asked to elaborate on their experiences since arrival to Denmark, and topics covered everyday life and social relations, experiences with education and/or employment, knowledge about one's legal status and rights, experiences with teachers and social workers, as well as their future orientations and the role of the temporary residence permit.

A limitation of the study is that each participant has only been interviewed once. It would strengthen the 'thickness' (i.e. Geertz 1973) and depth of the narratives if follow-up interviews were made or if a more longitudinal research design (i.e. Neale 2020) was employed. This could have provided an opportunity to follow participants over time and to trace experiences of (un)belonging as they play out. This would strengthen the more snapshot-character of a single-interview research design. However, the quality of the interviews was strengthened in a number of ways. Participants were encouraged to provide detailed examples of their past experiences; space was left for participants to add their own topics and questions were formulated to be as open-ended as possible; interviews were conducted in places preferred by the participants (in the local library, at school, in their homes, or during a walk); thorough introduction and debriefing as well as updates on the project with possibilities for inputs has been offered continuously.

The analysis unfolded below is a biographically structured case-analysis (Brøndum 2018) in which Adnan's narrative of his educational trajectory unfolds over three themes. The three themes are: the process of settling down in exile; the role of peers and teachers; and the role of the temporary residence permit. Even though these themes are recurring across the overall in-

interview material, structuring the analysis biographically around Adnan's story makes it possible to unfold how experiences of (un)belonging are narratively connected by Adnan with his motivation for continuing his upper secondary education. Thus, to structure the analysis biographically allows the subjective experiences, interpretations, and narrations of an individual to be unfolded in detail, which adds to our understanding of how events are interpreted and how they inform particular choices made by the individual (i.e. Brøndum 2018, 116-17), in this case related to education. In this sense, the analysis is inspired by ideas within a narrative analysis first developed by Paul Ricoeur (1984). Furthermore, by dwelling on one individual's narrative makes it possible to show the dynamic and interacting character of experiences of (un)belonging and motivation for education.

To Settle Down and to Plan: From Psychological Unbelonging to a Sense of Belonging

Adnan is a 23-year old man. He came to Denmark in 2016 through family reunification together with his four younger siblings. Adnan has been living in Denmark a little more than five years when we meet for the interview. When Adnan arrived to Denmark, he immediately started school. He joined a class in a school for newly arrived foreigners in the ages between 14-22. In one year, he completed the 9th grade. He explains how hard it was, but also how it felt as a necessity:

Adnan: I had to study, I had to learn. The first six months, I cried every day. It was too hard on me. [...] You know, in the beginning, when you come to a new country [upon flight], you are so happy, because you've left that...

I: Insecurity?

Adnan: Yes, that insecurity which was the reason you fled. But after a while, you fall down. Deep down. Because you don't have any friends, it is not your language, so sometimes I thought, 'what am I doing here, I would rather go back' even though I knew it wouldn't be safe. So yeah, that took six months for me, but I spent them well. Learning the language.

Adnan describes here how he interprets the sadness he experienced during the first months as caused by the lack of friends and the lack of language skills. To feel alone, unable to speak the language, created a sense of psychological unbelonging in him. This resonates with findings from other studies focusing on the importance of psychological belonging felt by young refugees (Verdasco 2019; Wernesjö 2015). In spite of this sense of unbelonging, Adnan managed to spend this time learning Danish. After the first six months, he began to meet more friends, his teachers motivated him, and he found a spare time job to save up for a driver's license. After graduating 9th grade, he was motivated to continue in 10th grade⁵. However, after a while he found it too difficult:

After six or seven months, I thought 'Adnan, stop! I won't go any further'. One of my teachers [from 9th grade] called me every day, 'Adnan, you skipped class again, why?', 'but it is difficult'... [...] So I began to work full-time for a while, I needed an income. And I began to consider what would be better for my future. What do I like, what don't I like, what am I good at, what am I bad at, what can I manage? Yes. So, I realized that I wanted to be a mechanic. I love cars, since I was little, and I was good at it, and I've worked with it before. Why not?

⁵ 10th grade is the last grade of lower secondary school. It is not mandatory to complete before commencing upper secondary school.

Even though he found himself more at home in 10th grade socially, the school work challenged Adnan, and he spent some time thinking about his future. As Moensted shows, individuals attach their own biography to how they come to participate in a program and make it a marker of belonging (Moensted 2020, 272). Likewise, Adnan adds meaning to his choice of becoming a mechanic to a long-term passion for cars, which becomes a marker of belonging and identity. After improving his grades in the required classes, which did not feel as tiresome as 10th grade, Adnan began his training.

I: Were you happier about school then?

Adnan: Yes, I was motivated now. I had a plan, a route to follow, before I had no clue. I began straight on the basic course two because I had prior experience. And I got a nice grade, I got 12 [the highest grade possible].

The grade added to Adnan's motivation and his feeling of psychological belonging; the school seemed like the right place for him.

Peers and Teachers: Sources of (un)Belonging

I: How was the change, from the first school you attended in Denmark to this school for car mechanics? Has it been challenging?

Adnan: Alright, let me... let me be honest, I sometimes get such a negative feeling. I was young then, 18 or 20, and in that age, you need friends, it means a lot... I didn't [have friends in school]. [...] If you don't approach them [peers], they don't approach you, so it wasn't easy.

Adnan expresses here the essential need for experiencing belonging with peers when you are young, and how he found it difficult to create friendships at school. That friendships with majority peers and a sense of psychological belonging is experienced as

an essential need, yet a need that is difficult to achieve in exile for young refugees, resonates with Wernesjö's study (2015). Adnan's strategy was to be patient and observe how his peers, most of them majority Danes, interact before daring to approach them. Gradually, he made friends in his class and thus, he was able to affect his own sense of psychological belonging in the school setting.

Another source of psychological (un)belonging, which Adnan describes as central for his motivation to carry on with his training, are the teachers:

Adnan: In the school for mechanics, they [the teachers] were really... it was not fun, it was really hard. When you are on the talent level, you can't ask about things. I couldn't get any help from the teachers, and I understand that. But when your Danish peers who are on the same level and supposed not to ask questions either – if he asks and get help from a teacher, then I can too, right? But when I've asked, they have told me 'no, I can't answer'.

I: You felt you were being treated differently?

Adnan: Yes. It was actually hard in school sometimes. And I would begin to question everything. Why am I doing this? I could just stay at home and get my educational support, why should I do anything with my life, for society, why this, why that. I could just become someone who sat at home and received economic benefits. Just study upper secondary school for four or five years...

Adnan narrates about a critical point in his educational trajectory, where he was on the brink of quitting the program because the teachers did not support him as he felt they supported his peers. He describes how he experienced a lack of motivation and a sense of indifference due to the teacher's unwillingness to help him. This highlights how educational aspirations and motivations varies over time and depend partly on a supportive environment (Lynne-

bakke and Pastor 2020, 2-3, 7). Adnan experienced the teachers' attitudes as unjust:

Adnan: They [the teachers] didn't motivate you. I had been in the country for three years, and then they didn't help me [...].

I: And was it because you hadn't been here for so long that you needed help?

Adnan: It was with language. As a mechanic, I know everything about cars. But it was a bit difficult. [...] For example, if I showed him [the teacher] a picture and asked 'what is the name for this in Danish?', then he would answer 'I don't know'...

However, Adnan describes a turning point that enabled him to overcome the sense injustice and demotivation. The arrival of a new teacher with a different approach was central in this regard:

Adnan: But I didn't stop, I told myself, one or two people shouldn't make me think negatively about everything. And a new teacher came who motivated me a lot [...] I began to love school because of him. He really motivated me and he helped me a lot with everything. How I could find an internship, and how it works with salary, he showed me everything [...] all those things that I didn't know about. I had to start an internship in a mechanic's workshop but I didn't even have a CV, I had no clue about how it all worked...

Here, Adnan highlights the importance of getting support to figure out the practicalities and the requirements connected to the internship. Upon meeting a supportive teacher and finding a mechanics workshop where he could do his internship, his motivation for education raises again. To apply for internships involves many things majority youth take for granted, which individuals who are new in Denmark do not have a chance of knowing:

I: So getting support to find a place for the apprenticeship is actually important?

Adnan: It is VERY important. Young people who commence education can't see the road ahead of them. So, it is very important that they can get help. For example, with me, I might have dropped out, dropped becoming a mechanic if I hadn't found a place for my internship. I know people like me who has done that, and I asked them why. And it was because they couldn't find an internship. They got a place through the school, if you say no to that, you have to find a place yourself. But one of them didn't have a driver's license, what should he do? He can't get up at 5AM every morning to work and get home at 7PM.

To know how to write a CV, how to apply for internships, and how to convince them about your personal and professional skills often requires support and explications or translations of knowledge that is tacit in character (i.e. Polanyi and Mukerji 2014, 349-350). Tacit knowledge addresses how to act in the world, and which steps to take in order to have an activity 'work' (ibid.). In this sense, it contrasts with the formal knowledge required to become, for example, a mechanic, which is explicated and has to be demonstrated in tests or exams. Despite its implicit and informal character, tacit knowledge is of great importance. Regardless of how well Adnan demonstrated his mastering of the formal knowledge, tacit knowledge needed to be explicated for him to move forward with the program, and the supportive teacher becomes central in this regard.

In this sense, through the interaction with a supportive teacher and the gradual development of friendships, Adnan experiences psychological belonging in the school, and he describes how he is highly motivated. However, the politics of belonging create

an ambiguous awareness of unbelonging on a national, societal level, which will be unfolded below.

Temporary Protection for an Indeterminate Period of Time: Political Constructions of Unbelonging

In the quote introducing this article, Adnan expresses how challenging it is to live with a temporary residence permit for an indeterminate period of time, when you work towards future goals through participation in education. The temporary character of the protection offered to refugees in Denmark relates to what Yuval-Davis (2006, 204-208) terms the politics of belonging. Through the temporary residence permit and the requirements for permanent residency, individuals who are granted protection in Denmark as refugees or through family reunification are constructed as a group who do not belong to the society and the state at large with the rights, recognition, and security that comes with it. The deliberate creation of unbelonging on the political, national level through the explicit discursive and practical focus on temporality and repatriation forms a general backdrop for young refugees' lives in Denmark. Adnan elaborates on how the temporary residence permit challenges his ability to stay motivated throughout his studies:

What happens after two years? We don't know. We will only know when we receive something in E-Boks⁶ from the Danish authorities, that we are approved for two more years [...] I can study for ten years if you motivate me. But if you don't motivate me, then I won't do anything. Then I don't have anything to fight for, any hope.

⁶ E-Boks is the electronic postbox Danish authorities use for written communication.

Adnan emphasizes how the lack of future security in relation to very basic questions – where can I live in two years and with whom? – discourages his efforts to stay hopeful and motivated. Even though he still has a clear idea about what he hopes his future looks like in five years, this future scenario is closely related to what he fears his future could look like:

I: What do you hope your life looks like in five years?

Adnan: Education – I'll have my own mechanic's workshop. In five years, I have been in Denmark ten years, so I have applied for a permanent residency. And then I've married my girlfriend [laughs].

I: Yeah, so that would be the best-case scenario?

Adnan: Yes. And the worst would be if I were back in [country of origin], where I don't know where I would be, if I would be put in jail, sent to war, I don't know... it's been so long [...]. In five years, you change as person, I'm different now and I wouldn't be able to take it.

Adnan cannot eliminate the worst-case scenario as long as he lives with a temporary residence permit. Other study participants explain how their studies have been interrupted due to the frequent and protracted process of applying for renewal of the residence-permit, and how the stress and fear connected with not knowing what answer one will receive undermines their well-being and their ability to participate in everyday study activities as well as social activities. Others, who have lived with a temporary residence permit around 15 years, emphasize how it creates a basic sense of exclusion from mainstream society despite feeling Danish. Others again try to find employment and struggle to keep their positions, adding to the precarity they experience in everyday life.

Discussion: Possibilities for Proper Youth Transitions?

In the introduction to the anthology on youth and temporality, Frederiksen and Dalsgaard (2014, 3) write:

Youth is often temporally defined as a transitory period between childhood and adulthood, and hence, young people are often forced to reckon with the future in relation to their present social position (cf. Cole and Durham 2008). Ideas of proper and improper transition dominate much thinking about youth.

Young people are expected to be in a *proper* transition that is future oriented and progressing towards adulthood. An important, related point is that societal ideals of what constitutes a proper, or an improper, transition may be challenging to live up to for particular groups. Expectations of how young people orient themselves towards the future may, as is the case in Recife in Brazil, be influenced by middle-class lifestyles, which make it challenging for youth from low-income families to move forward as expected (*ibid.*).

In Denmark, young people's education is a highly prioritized political goal. Education is viewed as a central part of a 'proper' transition from childhood to adulthood in this context, whereas dropping out of school early is considered an improper or failed transition. The lack of education is in general viewed as problematic. The Ministry of Children and Teaching (2022) has stated that by 2030, 90 percent of all 25-year-olds should have achieved upper secondary education. This goal underlines the centrality of education in relation to young people's transitions in a Danish context.

For young refugees in Denmark, however, it may be challenging to live up to this ideal of a proper transition through the achievement of upper secondary education due to a number of factors highlighted in the analysis, which will be discussed

here. To settle down in exile is, as shown through Adnan's narrations, a process that can be marked by initial relief followed by 'exile stress' (i.e. Lynnebakke and Pastoor 2020, 2). As Adnan describes, he experienced an overwhelming sense of psychological unbelonging due to language barriers and the lack of social networks and friends during the first six months he lived in Denmark. The experience of unbelonging may affect motivation for and the ability to engage in education. However, in Adnan's case, he managed to focus on language despite feeling 'deep down', and this enabled him to develop new relations and enhance his sense of psychological belonging. This underlines how psychological (un)belonging is a dynamic process, which changes over time as new friends are made and language barriers are gradually overcome with strong support from teachers. This carves out new space for hope for the future and motivation for education. In this sense, challenges and future hope can co-exist and take up varying degrees of space during the period of resettlement (i.e. Lynnebakke and Pastoor 2020, 11).

Critical Stages in Education, Tacit Knowledge, and (un)Supportive Teachers

When entering an ordinary, upper secondary educational program, as Adnan has chosen to do, particular challenges may come about at certain moments for recently arrived refugee youth. Being relatively new in Denmark and not having an elaborate social network to support them, can put them in a disadvantaged position compared to their peers. What may seem self-evident for majority youth, may prove challenging for recently arrived refugees.

To find an internship was highlighted by several participants in the study as being a critical stage in their educational trajectory. They described the process as challenging and foreign to

them, while also vital to be able to move on with their studies. In Adnan's case, a teacher from within the educational system provided support and articulated the tacit knowledge about internships. When provided, such support can enhance the experience of psychological belonging and of being in the right place, capable of living up to the requirements in the program. On the contrary, teachers who are approached but refuse to answer questions that arise among this group of students can be a source of demotivation and add to experiences of psychological unbelonging to a degree that makes dropping out seem like the best option.

As Qvortrup and Lykkegaard (2022, 31) show in their literature review of drop out research in the context of higher education, the decision to drop out is rarely made spontaneously on the basis of a single event. Rather, it is a processual decision and often the outcome of prolonged decision making, accumulation of problems, and a conflation of personal, financial, and other drivers (*ibid.*). For young refugees, failure to find an internship – which is often difficult for majority students as well – may be experienced as an accumulating factor if coinciding with experiences of unbelonging in class caused by teachers or peers, or with experiences of exclusion from society due to the temporary residence permit. Qvortrup and Lykkegaard (2022, 42) highlight three loci or levels of particular influence when decisions to drop out are made: the social (peers, study groups etc.), the institutional (classes, teaching, teachers etc.), and the psychological (individual motivation). When we seek to understand dropout and participation in upper secondary education among young refugees holding a temporary residence permit, I suggest adding a political-legal locus, considering the role of the rules and politics young refugees are subjected to.

Conflicting Requirements: The Politics of Belonging and Proper Youth Transitions

While there are political ambitions and strong encouragements to ensure that young individuals engage in education, young refugees living with a temporary residence permit face a conflicting message: whereas engagement in education spur an orientation towards long-term future goals and requires expectations of predictability, the temporary residence permit reminds people that they are supposed to be in Denmark temporarily, that they should not plan more than one or two years ahead in time, and that repatriation, not inclusion in society, is the political end-goal.

Further, the fact that three and a half years of full-time employment is required to apply for a permanent residence permit creates an incentive to work rather than engage in upper secondary education. This challenges the young refugees' possibilities for living up to ideals of proper youth transitions and creates a dilemma between seeking to achieve one's educational aspirations and moving closer to a sense of future security. In this sense, what may be experienced as an almost naturalized flow of timely progress and educational achievements for majority youth in their late teens and early 20s⁷, may be experienced very differently for young refugees.

Political intentions notwithstanding, to discuss the possible effects of the current immigration policies in Denmark is relevant. The results from this study show that the current focus on temporality and repatriation risks undermining otherwise resourceful and motivated young individuals' participation in upper secondary education, their daily well-being, and their motivation for and ability to take part in society at large. When young individuals like

⁷ This is not to indicate that majority youth do not experience educational challenges. The point is to highlight the explicit incentive not to engage in education that the employment criteria creates for young refugees.

Adnan move on with upper secondary education, it often becomes a moving on *despite*; despite political incentives to find employment, and despite a feeling that the requirements are unjust. To experience everyday psychological belonging may then become even more vital to counter the politically imposed exclusion.

Concluding Remarks

This article has shed light on the research question stated in the introduction: how is participation in and motivation for upper secondary education affected by temporality and experiences of (un)belonging on different levels?

Through Adnan's narrative, this article has aimed to unfold how (un)belonging in institutional educational settings interact with experiences of (un)belonging to the state and society at large, and how these experiences in turn affect young refugees' future orientations and motivation for education. The article thus provides a contribution to understanding why young refugees to a much lesser extent than majority youth achieve upper secondary education. In Adnan's narrations, there is a close link between experiences of belonging and motivation (and unbelonging and a lack of motivation) for participating in education, and his experiences highlight how both vary across time. Both the affective dimensions of psychological (un)belonging as well as the politics of belonging are experienced as important in relation to educational motivation and participation.

To understand the interplay between belonging on different levels and educational motivation and achievements better, more qualitative research is needed. A longitudinal research design to follow recently arrived refugee youth who enter upper secondary school would provide a relevant approach to the central questions that need answers if more individuals with a refugee background should be able to achieve upper secondary education: what makes educational achievements

possible, what challenges these achievements, what makes individuals leave, and what can be done to offer better support?

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank colleagues from the Research Program on Everyday Life Studies and Extended Education and the Department of Social Work, VIA University College, as well as the two anonymous reviewers for useful critique and feedback when revising the article.

Bibliography

Bendixen, Michala Clante. 2021. *Status på syriske flygtninge, flygtninge der har mistet deres opholdstilladelse i Danmark*. Access: http://refugees.dk/fokus/2021/oktober/status-paa-syriske-flygtninge-der-har-mistet-deres-opholdstilladelse-i-danmark/?fbclid=IwARoPZDgoHu7C4PZxoqOR1ici92q6eW_-R-tL7lmhaATgvhxVn-1H2Em7rRSw (1 October 2022).

Brøndum, Tine. 2018. Narrativ analyse - lærerstuderendes skoleerindringer og selvfortællinger som eksempel. In: *Kvalitative analyseprocesser med eksempler fra det pædagogisk-psykologiske felt*, eds. Louise Bøttcher, Dorte Kousholt and Ditte Winther-Lindquist, 111-131. Copenhagen: Samfundslitteratur.

Coming of Age in Exile (CAGE). 2021. *Hvordan går det unge flygtninge i de nordiske velfærdssamfund?* Copenhagen: Nordisk Ministerråd. Access: <https://www.norden.org/da/publication/hvordan-gaar-det-unge-flygtninge-i-de-nordiske-velfaerdssamfund-coming-age-exile-cage> (20 October 2022)

Danish Immigration Services. 2022. *Apply for a permanent residence permit as a young person*. Access: <https://www.nyidanmark.dk/en-GB/Applying/Permanent%20residence%20permit/Persons%20between%2018%20and%2019> (31 October 2022).

Danish Refugee Council. 2019. *Til flygtninge i Danmark. Information om ny lovgivning*. Access: https://flygtning.dk/media/5307344/lovgivning_flygtninge.pdf (1 June 2019).

Dunlavy, Andrea 2020. Educational Outcomes among Refugee Children in the Nordic Countries: A Comparative Quantitative Overview. In: *CAGE. Coming of Age in Exile. Health and Socio-Economic inequalities in Young Refugees in the Nordic Welfare Societies: Final Report*, 22-29. Copenhagen: University of Copenhagen, Department of Public Health. Access: <https://nordicwelfare.org/integration-norden/en/fakta/coming-of-age-in-exile-health-and-socio-economic-inequalities-in-young-refugees-in-the-nordic-welfare-societies/> (1 April 2022).

Frederiksen, Martin Demant and Anne Line Dalsgaard. 2014. Introduction: Time Objectified. In *Time Objectified: Ethnographies of youth and temporality*, eds. Anne Line Dalsgaard, Martin Demant Frederiksen, Susanne Højlund and Lotte Meinert, 1-21. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Geertz, Clifford 1973. *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*. [New York]: Basic Books.

Katartzi, Eugenia 2018. Young migrants' narratives of collective identifications and belonging. *Childhood* 25(1): 34-46.

Kusk, Mette Lind and Anna Jessen. 2022. At være ung på midlertidigt ophold: midlertidighedens sociale konsekvenser. *Udenfor Nummer: Tidsskrift for forskning og praksis i socialt arbejde* 21(44): 14-25. Access: <https://socialraadgiverne.dk/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/44-UdenForNummer-1.pdf> (20 October 2022).

Larsen, Birgitte Romme. 2018. Riding along in the Name of Equality: Everyday Demands on Refugee Children to Conform to Local Bodily Practices of Danish Egalitarianism. In *Egalitarianism in Scandinavia: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*, eds. Synnøve Bendixsen, Mary Bente Bringslid and Vike Hal-

vard, 247-267. London: Palgrave Macmillan. Access: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-59791-1_11 (20 April 2022).

Larsen, Birgitte Romme. 2022. When Welfare State "Integration" Becomes an Intimate Family Affair: Ethnic Minority Parents' Everyday Orchestration of Their Children's Future Belonging in Denmark. *Genealogy* 6(2): 42. Access: <https://doi.org/10.3390/genealogy6020042> (20 April 2022).

Lynnebakke, Brit and Lutine de Wal Pastoor. 2020. "It's very hard, but I'll manage." Educational aspirations and educational resilience among recently resettled young refugees in Norwegian upper secondary schools. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies on Health and Well-being* 15(sup2). Access: <https://doi.org/10.1080/17482631.2020.1785694> (20 October 2022).

Moensted, Maja Lindegaard. 2020. Nearness and distance: the doublesided nature of belonging for young refugees in Australia. *Social Identities* 26(2): 270-285. Access: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13504630.2020.1761316> (20 October 2022).

Mukerji, Chandra. 2014. The cultural power of tacit knowledge: Inarticulacy and Bourdieu's habitus. *American Journal of Cultural Sociology* 2: 348-375.

Neale, Bren. 2020. *Qualitative Longitudinal Research - Research Methods*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc.

O'Reilly, Karen. 2006. *Ethnographic methods*. Oxfordshire: Taylor & Francis Ltd.

Qvortrup, Ane and Eva Lykkegaard. 2022. Frafaldsvalgets loci og tidslighed - belyst gennem nyere frafaldslitteratur. In *Frafald fra de videregående uddannelser: Forklaringer, mekanismer og løsninger*, eds. David Reimer and Ida Gran Andersen, 23-52. Aalborg: Aalborg Universitetsforlag. Access: https://vbn.aau.dk/ws/portalfiles/portal/460468329/E_pdf_Frafald_Paa_De_Videregaaende_uddannelser.pdf (20 October 2022).

Ricoeur, Paul. 1984. *Time and Narrative*. Vol. 1. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Rytter, Mikkel. 2019. Writing Against Integration: Danish Imaginaries of Culture, Race and Belonging. *Ethnos* 84(4): 678-697. Access: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00141844.2018.1458745> (10 October 2022).

Shapiro, Ditte and Rikke Egaa Jørgensen. 2021. 'Are we going to stay refugees?': Hyper-precarious processes in and beyond the Danish Integration Programme. *Nordic Journal of Migration Research* 11(2): 172-187.

The Ministry of Children and Teaching. 2022. *Den Uddannelsespolitiske Målsætning*. Access: <https://www.uvm.dk/forberedende-grunduddannelse/skoleudvikling/baggrund-for-fgu/den-uddannelsespolitiske-maalsætning> (1 May 2022).

Verdasco, Andrea. 2019. Communities of belonging in the temporariness of the Danish Asylum System: Shalini's anchoring points. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 45(9): 1439-1457.

Wernesjö, Ulrika. 2015. Landing in a Rural Village: Home and Belonging from the Perspectives of Unaccompanied Young Refugees. *Identities* 22(4): 451-467. Access: <https://doi.org/10.1080/1070289X.2014.962028> (20 October 2022).

Yuval-Davis, Nira. 2006. Belonging and the politics of belonging. *Patterns of Prejudice* 40(3): 197-214. Access: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00313220600769331> (1 April 2022).