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Publication date:
2010

Document Version
Early version, also known as pre-print

[Link to publication from Aalborg University](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Kristensen, N. N., & Solhaug, T. (2010). Discovering the Political in Non-Political Young Immigrant Identities. Paper presented at THE IPSA RC 21/29 Conference "Citizenship education: Democracy, Culture, Socialization, Media, Aalborg, Denmark.

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Discovering the Political in Non-Political Young Immigrant Identities

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ABSTRACT

The theme of this paper is the political participation and political involvement among migrant youth in Denmark. It is well documented (Kulbranstad 2009) that second-generation immigrants possess poorer skills than their school fellows with an ethnic Danish background. These pupils in general start out with a lower average, and when they leave the school they are also behind. Especially, the Danish language skills often place them in a worse situation in the lessons as well as in the public life. From a political resource perspective it could easily be argued that such conditions lead to a situation with less possibilities for a democratic citizenship. But how do these second-generation immigrants orient themselves politically and democratically? How are their political affiliations? And how is their sense of citizenship?

Defining the problem

Immigrants are provided with specific rights of citizenship, but at the same time they are met by demands of certain legitimate obligations like taking part in the political institutions of the receiving country. The claim that participation makes better citizens is an old one in political science dating back (although sometimes implicit) to Aristotle, Machiavelli and Rousseau. Many, e.g. John Stuart Mill or Carole Pateman, have argued for the educational effect at the individual level of social and political participation. Still, it's hard to establish the proof that links participation to democratic prosperity (Mansbridge 1999). It seems, after all, much

easier to make the opposite claim: Lack of participation provide less learning opportunities for citizens and has negative effects on democracy. Immigrants in Denmark increasingly in this respect disband democracy: In 2009 the ratio of nonvoters at the local elections in the major cities was as high as 63 pct., stating a serious democratic problem - and perhaps even pushing a negative spiral of socialization in a situation where immigrants associate with only other immigrants, who do not vote either.

Members of a political community are constituted by all the people, who are affected, and included, by political decisions (Habermas 1995, Togeby 2003). Therefore, everyone should participate in the political processes according to a “principle of inclusion” (Dahl 1989). In the most general sense citizenship is about group membership and political community, but citizenship sometimes balances between a series of rights and social and political inequality in the execution of these rights. The rupture between equality and difference perhaps represents one of the greatest challenges to citizenship today (Delanty 2000). Much mainstream debate on citizenship has been premised on the assumption that citizens are fully formed individuals able to express their interests in the public domain. But not many studies take a closer look at the processes involved in *becoming a political citizen*. The level of education and the knowledge of the Danish language are empirically important determinants for political engagement among second-generation immigrants in Denmark (Togeby 2003). A resource–model typically looks at resources which are “brought along” – like parents’ education, age at arrival, as well as the individuals’ education, place of living, state of marriage, knowledge of language, social resources (Danish friends, membership of organizations, etc), and political affiliations, etc.

The aim of this study is the subject of political participation and social commitment of immigrant youth. Erik Amnå and his colleagues define this (Amnå et al. 2010:48), as:

- Interest in politics and societal issues
- association's work
- anticipated commitment and political participation

To be a citizen is about having certain rights and obligations and about political participation. It is also to a great extent about being part of a political community. Political identity is about

belonging or identification with political, cultural and religious communities. And the question of to what extent in-/exclusions of such communities are perceived is a matter of political identity. Different groups and individuals have various identities, skills and requisites – and their participation and means of participation are also different.

Studying such preconditions in a context of upper secondary schools is important, as the school represents one of the parameters stimulating political participation. In this pilot study, which is preceding a larger study to be conducted in Norway and Denmark, we interviewed 8 students at a Danish secondary school near Aarhus. The school is an important case study, as this school has been a successful one, when it comes to the integration of second-generation immigrants – pointing to the role of the specific institutional setting. The social life of the school is also a crucial basic socializer that aids to provide second-generation immigrants with basic tools in order to identify themselves in relation to the political system. Political identity is also an important field of inquiry as it – to a large extent – deals with the subjective understanding of oneself and as it motivates the possible political participation of second-generation immigrants and provides means for the understanding of themselves as political actors. We take on a qualitative analytical approach and focus on political participation and political reasoning and how it relates to specific identities. This includes individual as well as collective forms of involvement, societal engagement and political participation. Research show that the socio-economic resources of the parents have a great impact on the citizenship competencies of the pupils, and that children of highly educated parents generally perform better (Almgren 2006; Togeby 2003). The context of the school, however, has an individual significance on the results of the pupils - which points to the fact that institutional determinants (both ex- and internal) must be taken into consideration. Of particular interest from a civic education point of view, are the forms of initiatives created by school students, first of all in school but also in their out of school life.

A question may be how these practises are interrelated and how knowledge and experiences in one arena such as school is made relevant in out of school arenas such as home, clubs, among mates etc. These initiatives are part of practices and constitute citizen identities. An approach to the study of citizenship and democratic learning is therefore to approach citizen practices as performing identities. We want to stress a dynamic perspective to the phenomenon of political identity and to place a special focus on political participation and the forms of practice related to the role of democratic citizen, and how the respondents

understand themselves as citizens and political actors. This also includes aspects as social citizenship, religion, etc., which is made relevant based on participation.

The research questions in the study are as follows:

A: What characterizes the political citizen identities that can be described among immigrant youth at the school?

B: What are the similarities and differences in the political citizenship profiles among the immigrant youth?

Theories of citizenship, participation and identity

More than anyone else in modern times it was T.H. Marshall, who – in his classic essay *Citizenship and Social Class* (1950), fundamentally set the agenda for later citizenship discussions. A major part of Marshall's essay was dedicated to a debate concerning the question of, whether capitalism and democracy make out as compatible formats. Citizenship in this essay was defined as a comprehensive set of rights: civil, political and social rights. Many scholars have argued, however, that in 21. Century, citizenship, as accounted for by T.H. Marshall, does not give a comprehensive theoretical framework for understanding, what it means to be political in an age characterized by globalization, culturalization and post modernity (Delanty 2000, Benhabib 1996, Kakabadse et al. 2009, Turner 1993). The issue of modern citizenship is marked by significant transformations. We face post modern politics in which distributional struggles linked to wealth, have been replaced by conflicts founded in status and access or in matters concerning race, ethnicity, sexuality and ecology, etc. as central constitutive elements of identity work (Isin & Wood 1999).

In Marshall's analysis, social class has the tendency to countervail the formal universal citizenship and only the extensive use of social rights would be able to outweigh, although insufficiently, the inequalities inherent to a capitalist society. Moreover Marshall argues "that citizenship itself becomes, in certain respects, the architect of legitimate social inequality" (Marshall, 1950 p.7). What Marshall here already takes as an underlying premise is that the universalistic notion of citizenship is in an intrinsic interdependent relationship to societal inequality and stratification. This is also the background of David Lockwood's article on

“Civic integration and Class Formation” (Lockwood 1996). Although Lockwood’s subject is the impact citizenship exhibits on social integration and cohesion, his article also offers an argument for the problematization of citizenship under conditions of modern society. To understand the problematic consequences of this immanent tension between universal citizenship and inequality one has to take into account some basic conditions. Firstly, as Lockwood pinpoints, are power relations in societies today more institutionalized than it could be said about hierarchical status. Also, extensive bureaucratization, e.g. in the private and the public employment sector as well as in other institutions of the market and the government, safeguards foremost system integration, but also to some extent social integration (Lockwood 1996).

Many scholars have pointed that modern citizenship is comprised by new divides like gender, religious beliefs, etc. (Young 1990, Lister 2003), while others have pointed at the emergence of a cosmopolitan citizenship (Kymlicka 2005). These changes do not replace traditional distinctions e.g. in relation to social class, but they supplement these with new ones. An overlapping understanding of additional dimensions of identity and their interrelated dynamics is a necessary requirement in order to comprehend modern citizenship. The basic of citizenship is ultimately the recognition of the autonomy of the *person* – and therefore it presupposes the reconciliation of self and the other. We believe, that the unfolding of the identity dimension is crucial to the uncovering of the basic elements of modern citizenship and we want to give the notion of identity a cultural addition – demarcating from e.g. communitarian positions, that stress primarily (though also highly relevant) civic duties and moral values. It makes no sense, however, to speak of citizenship as if it was just one single model as in the communitarian traditions. Postmodernists argue that the terms “individual” and “society”, the basis of citizenship, have been displaced by new cultural forces.

“Citizenship has declined because the social has been sublimated by culture. The individual subject in the discourses of modernity has been decentred and fragmented. Autonomy can no longer be taken for granted in what is for postmodernists an endlessly fragmenting world, and we can no longer take for granted the idea of an underlying universal human nature” (Delanty 2000: 74-5).

It seems, based on such arguments, necessary to recognize two fundamental aspects of citizenship: citizenship as *status* (without status modern individuals cannot hold civil, political and social rights) and citizenship as *practice*. Citizenship is not only linked to status and the maintenance of certain civic rights. The individual understanding and internalization of such

rights becomes similarly important as an object of study in the form of specific practises and citizenship identities. Rights often first arise as practises and then become institutionalized and embodied in the law as status. Citizenship is, therefore, neither a purely sociological concept nor purely a legal concept, but rather a relationship between the two (Isin & Wood 1999). A central problem in theories of citizenship is that liberal and communitarian, as well as civic republican, traditions assume that citizenship is simply the expression of already autonomous citizens - and it is constructed on the ideal of a homogeneous society (Delanty 2000). Contrary, feminist theorists, especially, have argued, that the citizen is not an already autonomous being (Siim 2003). Autonomy should be seen a project, not a given condition, as it is for liberals and communitarians. Citizens are “made”, not “born”.

As also Seyla Benhabib highlights was the “normative discussion, primarily about the duties of democratic citizenship and democratic theory, (...) carried out in sociological vacuum. Political philosophers paid little attention to citizenship as a sociological category and as a social practice that inserts us into a complex network of privileges and duties, entitlements and obligations.” (Benhabib 1996, 160/61) As a sociological category citizenship has to be linked not only to group identities and democratic participation, but also to social stratification, integration and class. And although Marshall’s concept of social citizenship seems to address exactly the problems related to different social and cultural resources, the concept is yet too narrow to understand the interdependencies between the welfare state, the status as citizen and the actual execution of citizen rights.

Social and collective processes have lead scholars to describe democracy as more than decision-making procedures like John Dewey’s (1938:101) definition; “...primarily a mode of associate living”. In this perspective, democracy is about shared concern. This leads to an understanding of a *democratic* citizen as someone having certain attitudes, values, obligations, competencies as well as being able to perform practices which makes him/her a part of life in a democracy. The intelligence at stake here is the conditions that shape ones subjectivity and awareness in a larger collective. However, subjectivity may be understood as individual attributes located inside the individual (Dewey 2000) as well as interrelational in the social context of the individual (Arendt 1998). Arendt’s concept of action is interrelational and social. Humans are subjects as they act, and it’s in the initiatives to act that they manifest themselves as subjects.

Understanding participation includes considering the means of individual and collective political mobilization (Verba, Nie & Kim 1978). Individual political mobilization builds on social resources like time, knowledge, money, social contacts, motivation and psychological power (Togeby 2003). We want to apply a broad understanding of political participation. Therefore, we will focus on political participation – in relation to e.g. elections, grassroots participation and participation in ethnic organizations. Historically, the concept of political participation has been subject of great attention and various definitions have been applied to it. The classic studies of participation Lipset (1959), Almond & Verba (1963), Milbrath (1965), Verba & Nie (1972) were narrowly conceptualized more or less as participation in elections and the selection of government personell. Later studies took on broader definitions, defining participation as activities directed toward the political sphere (Parry, Moyser and Day 1992); towards political outcomes (Brady 1999); or towards societal power brokers (Teorell et al 2007). Amnå et al. are close to Teorell et al. in definition, but they want, nevertheless, also to include activities oriented towards a more general societal level. with the focus on "participation", rather than on "political". Amnå et al. themselves distinguish between political participation (formal as well as extraparliamentary) and social commitment – defining the latter as activities aiming to influence non-private matters, including the writing of letters to newspaper editors, pro-environmental sorting of waste, donations to charity organizations or simply just following up with the news.

Design and method

The methodological design is based on a qualitative case study of immigrant youth in a Danish educational institution. We regard the study as a pilot study, as we believe in the importance of doing introductory studies in order to expand our base of evidence: are there differences/commonalities – which could be further explored?

Our unit of analysis are the political identities of young immigrant adolescents as it is presented in interviews. Such identities have multiple dimensions. Our first aim is to analytically describe the similarities and differences in political identities as they emerge in school and the civic education classes.

The study will be done in a Danish upper secondary school near Århus, which is famous for its work on integration. The school could be seen as a "best case" – or a "paradigmatic case". It has 750 pupils with 39 different nationalities; two thirds of these are multi-linguistic from

the Århus. The area is known for high crime rates. A proof of the successful work is a low dropout rate reaching only 7%.

In this pilot study we have so far interviewed 8 students. The selection of the students has deliberately been to maximise variation except for keeping religion constant. The selection is displayed in table 1.

Table 1 Selection of students

ID	Nnk1	Nnk2	Nnk3	Nnk4	Ts1	Ts2	Ts3	Ts4
origin	Pakistan	Egypt/ Palestine	Palestine	Iraq Kurdistan	Afghanistan	India	Somalia	Syria/ Palestina
Gender	Boy	Girl	Girl	Boy	Boy	Boy	Girl	Girl
Citizen- ship	Danish	Danish	Danish	Iraq	Danish	Danish	Danish	Danish
National ID - subjective	More Danish	90% Palestinian	50% Palestinian 50% Danish	60% Kurdish		More Danish	Split between Somalia and Denmark	More Danish
Age	18		16	18		18		

Students were interviewed on the same day in the beginning of June 2010. The interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed by a master student in Denmark.

The interviews were then coded according to relevant information – the coding scheme is presented in the appendix. The interview guide is tentative in the sense that interviews were carried out relatively open ended. This means that most of the questions were asked to the students, but we also tried to adapt to the students peculiarities when exploring their political orientation.

All interviews were coded in a parallel coding-scheme which were used to focus the analysis on the contradicting voices in their political orientation and interest. The scheme also focused on related orientations such as religiousness, membership in organization, attitude to Danish society. See appendix. The analytic procedure started with reading all interviews with the attempt to focus the paper. The analysis focused on various statements in participation and attitudes to politics with an attempt to find similarities and differences in the respondent's orientation. Groups were made from similarities and differences in political orientation. The

final step in the analysis has been to identify how the different political orientations relate to varieties in related aspects of their identities that the data has provided us with.

Empirical results

We will present the results in three groups of students according to how they show similarities and differences in their political orientation.

At first we want to focus on two female students in different classes and from different origin expressing strong religious (muslim) identities. Although they come from countries like Egypt and Somalia their religion seems to guide their life. The former Egyptian student (later referred to as R1) expresses strong ties to her national roots (90%) and seems to feel only 10% Danish. The latter Somalian girl (R2) feel more split between the Danish and the Somali society. They have both attended a private Arabic school and started in the Danish school in their lower secondary. They explain how religion is important to them:

R1: Actually, I use it (religion) everywhere, in school, on the street, at home everywhere in every minute. There is a set of rules everywhere, which guide my behaviour, how to act, how to speak to people, to respect my parents, when I can show my anger and in what situations, so I use it continually.2nnk2

R2 Yes I'm a muslim, religion means a lot to me, its in religion I have my basis. Thesedays I have become very interested in religion, I plan to read and study it in depth this summer 3ts3

What these two students have in common is that religion is a belief system, a set of values, a worldview as well as a practical guide to their life. Norms and values derived from religious faith or from reading religious texts also transfer into their approach to politics. Student R1 particularly comment upon the fact that Danes describe themselves as Christians but don't seem to read, know or express themselves as religious (2nnk5) She is rather explicit on the link between religion and her social and political orientation. "It is important, considering our religion, to have knowledge of our society. Most important is to be socially and politically aware of whats going on, and not just sleep." (2nnk9) The former R1 student is also one of few who express political interest.

Yes, I am interested in politics, but not in all kinds of politics. I like to read about parliament and parties, but I have to do this because I like to know something about the country I live in and how it works. I like best to read about democracy and the constitution – what one is supposed to do and not supposed to do here in Denmark.(2nnk6)

Later the student explains that she is not so interested in political parties and society in general. When asked about her seemingly contradictions in interest, she explains a greater interest in natural science. However, her political interest and religious faith and orientation seems to transfer into political participation in several ways. First, she “of course” intend to vote – “to have someone who can represent me and get some influence” (2nnk7). Second she has taken initiatives to mail Mohammed cartoon-artist (Kurt Westergaard) a homemade cartoon-like drawings of him. She wants to limit the freedom of expression that might be offensive to religious groups and particularly refer to the Mohammed cartoon case. She participates in demonstrations like a local gathering the night before the interview – a protest on the Israeli attack on Gaza support ship. She also reads newspapers and watches news on tv regularly.

The Somalian girl (R2) is less interested in politics, she expresses; “they (politicians) all say the same...” She considers herself having an interest in society but rejects any interest in politics (3ts13). Still, she thinks that one should vote. She also emphasizes her responsibility to voice her opinion when she feels offended or when she has particular interests. She expresses: ” Yes, when something really is of my interest I can’t just sit there and let other people make choices on my behalf.” Particularly one should unite to take action in important situations.

The two girls have the strong religious faith and identity in common. Their readings and interpretations of texts provide guidance for daily life, particularly opinion formation, participation and judgments. Although none of them are dedicated to politics, they display strong responsibilities for political action partly derived from their religious orientation. The religious orientation may thus be a mechanism (Elster 1999:1)¹ which explains participation beyond disinterestedness. Their religious faith also guides their orientation towards integration in the Danish society. The girls may be named “religious participants” pointing at the close connection between religious faith and political orientation.

Second, two of the respondents in the study **insist** that they are not interested in politics. One of them is a boy with Indian background who describes himself as a “modern muslim”. “I

¹ ...mechanisms are frequently occurring and easily recognizable causal patterns that are trigged under generally unknown conditions or with indeterminate consequences Elster, J. (1999). Alchemies of the Mind. Rationality and the Emotions, Cambridge University Press.

don't follow muslim rules except that I don't eat pork". The other student is a Muslim girl from Palestine, who believes in god, tries to live by the religious rules, she sometimes goes to the mosque, but she doesn't wear a hijab. She describes herself as trusting.

The Indian boy expresses that he tries to avoid politics actively. He adapts to the rules of society (2ts8). When he watches news, he "closes his eyes" when it comes to politics. The boy is rather insistent in his negative attitude to politics and sounds more or less apolitical. He expresses some general distrust in people, and finds it hard to really devote himself in social relations. When asked about trust in politicians he responds: "I feel that I have to" – Actually, I don't trust any of them". He sees himself as passive and adapts to the expectations and demands of society. On the one hand the boy displays very disinterested and negative attitudes to politics. However, there are numerous signs of participation in his expressions also. First he *of course* intends to vote (2ts10). He emphasizes that voting is a duty, but to find out how to vote "is just something I have to do". He reads newspapers sometimes, watches tv, but avoids politics. However, when faced with issues that he considers important, he sees himself capable of participating. "If I really try my best I believe in myself" .participating.. He emphasizes that social and political involvement is a responsibility. Despite his hostile attitude to politics he feels that he should participate and on rare occasions take action also. The feeling of duty or responsibility despite disinterestedness seems to guide his thinking of future political participation. However the source of this duty may be religion as well as tradition in the Danish society.

The Palestinian girl also insists that she doesn't discuss politics, "not at all" she says, but her parents do discuss sometimes. When asked about intentions to vote she is positive.

Yes I think so. I think I will devote some more time and prepare myself, but at the moment it doesn't mean much to me because I don't have a say anyhow. If there is something on tv I only "zap" away (change channel), so I am not that interested at the moment. 6

She continues to tell that politics doesn't seem to affect her situation and that is partly why it seems uninteresting to her. She also points out that participating in society is important, but she finds it difficult. A normative voice is apparent in her following statement when she comments upon what she considers important in democracy:

Actually, I don't know much about this (democracy), so I can't really tell, when I am not (active), but one certainly should be more active than I am. (12)

Furthermore, she reads some newspapers and watches news on tv sometimes. She also participated in the local demonstration against Israeli actions on Gaza support ship 2010. She comments upon her reasons for participation in the demonstration this way:

It is because I think it is important, and now Gaza and Israel has been going on for such a long time and I think one should express that enough is enough! Then my mother and sister went over there (demonstration) and they asked me to join and I of course wanted to show that I agree.

She believes also that the demonstration might have an effect and she actively informed people (friends) on sms.

Despite her rejection of any political interest, we find participation at different levels among these students. The intention to participate or actions itself seems to be fuelled by feelings of responsibilities and obligations on the one hand, but also emotions evoked by issues that affect particularly the female Palestinian student. Although the disinterest and non-participatory attitude is prevalent, participation is also a part of their political orientation and identity.

A Pakistani Muslim boy also insists that he is not interested in politics. He is a Danish citizen and considers himself as more Danish than Pakistani and a rather secular Muslim. He tells about how he discusses politics with his father (4).

Well, I discuss much with my father. Particularly when something is going on in Pakistan we in fact sit and talk over this. For example when Bhutto died there is a lot of talk in the family on what is going on. Every evening, we sit and watch tv-channels, and often when there are suicide bombers, we sit and discuss who has done this. So, it is a part of my life. (Innk4)

He seems to live in a rather political environment despite his claim of non interest in politics. Furthermore he attended in the above mentioned Gaza demonstration. When asked about voting he is more uncertain. He claims his disinterest in politics once more and is rather negative to the prospects of voting. “Yes (confirming negative to vote), or if my mother should find something to vote for, I might also vote for the same as her?” Families seem to be very important also for the choice of political orientation and probably more so in Muslim families than in Christian?! His political identity is dominated by non-interest, but he certainly involves himself in political participation in particular issues. He is thus far from apolitical.

These three students, the Indian boy, the Palestinian girl and the Pakistani boy, all have strong political disinterest in common, but may still turn to political participation on rare occasions.

They might be termed “the withdrawn participants” which point at their disinterest and the seemingly paradoxical orientations.

The three remaining students, an Afghan boy, a Syrian/Palestine girl and a boy from Iraq (Kurdistan) all report on a modest interest in politics. Besides this they display a variety of political orientations. Starting with the Afghan boy he describes his political discussion this way:

We discuss sometimes when there are new events which everybody talk about. Mostly it is in school we talk. He elaborates: ...for example the case of Mohammed cartoons, which really everyone talked about, we hear about this and talk about it.

His description of political involvement in the discussion leaves an impression of open mindedness on one hand, but not that he is particularly active on the other. When asked about the demonstration against Israeli aggression on Gaza ship, he did not participate. However, when asked about whether he perceives himself as active or passive, he describes himself as active 1ts12. He watches news and reads newspapers. When asked about what issues may be of particular interest he replies:

For example the Israeli Palestine conflict, there has been a lot of talk about this issue. He continues. Yes you could say that (I'm interested), people talk about it, not just in the news but here also. (1ts11)

When asked about the Danish involvement in the war in his home country he replies:

That is fine, it (Danish involvement) is a support for Afghanistan, they help Afghanistan. (1ts11)

It seems quite clear that the Israeli/Palestine conflict is quite a trigger for political involvement, discussion and other forms for activism, particularly in the Muslim population. This is also the case for this Afghan boy as well as other participants attending the demonstration described above. The conflict generates news and talks events, display attitudes and feelings and generate knowledge and involvement for all participants in informal or formal political affairs. No wonder that the conflict has been nick-named the “mother of all conflicts in middle east”. The boy is strikingly positive to Danish war involvement in his home country. Coupled with support for the Danish political system the boy shows high levels of trust in both the political system and the governmental explanation for the Danish war-involvement.

Two students voice their reflections upon their social and political orientation more than rest of the group. One of them, a girl with Syrian/Palestinean origin describes herself as a

moderate Muslim and more Danish than Syrian/Palestinian ID. The other is a male student of Iraq (Kurdish) identity.

We start with the girl from Syria/Palestine. She describes herself as an active citizen like this:

As active citizen? At the moment, no I am not a member of any organizations. No, I have my opinions, but i rarely share them with others. I am not that active now. I may consider to be more active in the future. ...I do not like to participate in classroom discussions. (4ts9)

Politics is particularly for immigrants a contested field. On the one hand it may be important to their situation as immigrants in a new country. Some issues may also affect them deeply like in this case the Mohammed Cartoons issue or the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. On the other hand, to voice opinions may cause unexpected reactions from the immediate political environment. Consequently many immigrants and this girl also, hesitate to expose themselves politically. When asked about her political trust she elaborates her withdrawal of trust like this:

Because politics is just talk (pjat) I think. Politics, there is a lot you really can't trust. Politics, there is not much ideology left in it, it is more populism. Politicians don't stick to their opinions, you never know when they change their opinions. Politics is much about getting peoples trust, then manipulate them and people's brains and I dislike that.

The girl does display a lot of reflections on politics and how she perceives the field as stripped from ideology. The sudden changes of opinions among politicians are a problem to her as well as many others who voice this rather common viewpoint. It certainly also is a problem to politicians, since their job is to find solutions and compromises on contested issues. Her attitude certainly reflects some nature of political youth and their need for reliability and predictability. To separate good compromises from plain political populism hunting for voices takes political experience and is usually very difficult. However, her distrust may not be referred to as political cynism, but rather political scepticism. This becomes clearer when she elaborates her political interest:

It depends, I do not dig very deep into political matters. I am interested in political parties and such issues – and democracy, freedom of expression is of my interest – but I don't go deep into these issues – that is not me....however I share opinions with friends on news and resent events.

Later she elaborates her activism and passivity in politics.

I am passive in politics. I am active in the sense that I have some knowledge, I have my opinions which I hold on to, but I am not active in the sense that I go out and voice my viewpoints, and do something about it.

She also emphasises that in certain situations she might turn to political activism, but she has to have very good reasons to do so. It is quite clear that the student on the one hand is politically informed, but on the other is somewhat ambivalent to politics. She did not participate in the above mentioned demonstration. Despite the fact that she speaks good Danish, she finds it difficult to participate in discussions in school and has difficulties in expressing herself. On the other hand she is well informed, analytical and quite reflected on some issues. However, she takes a spectator position to politics and avoids displaying her political positions.

Like most of the other students she is opinionated on how to be a good citizen.

A good citizen should work, support oneself and contribute to society, if one is capable of doing so – that's a good citizen. The handicapped and the elderly are of course exceptions but – as a good citizen one should help as much as one can, because this is a society. (4ts20)

She also stresses that she dislikes people who deliberately try to make a living on public support when they don't really have to. Later she also points out that a good citizen should also vote, and she herself intends to vote, despite distrust in politics. To summarize, she is a knowledgeable and reflected young woman who may be termed "the latent participant". Several of the other students are also in some respect latent participants, but this student seems more politically aware and reflected. Despite being ambivalent to politics and participation, she is quite clear when it comes to her duties and responsibilities as a citizen.

The Iraqi boy is about to obtain Danish citizenship after 8 years in Denmark. He is going to have the language and social studies test soon. He describes himself as a moderate Muslim who never goes to the Mosque for both religious and personal reasons. He consciously seeks friends among Danish as well as other immigrant groups. "Getting to know people is the best way to avoid having prejudice against particular social groups" he claims. He does not discuss politics much at home but sometimes he voices his opinion:

Sometimes I do discuss. I may ask my mother not to talk the way she does over the Left party or Danish Peoples Party, because in Iraq there would also be parties talking unfavourably of immigrants. But she (the mother) only gets annoyed about my comments. (4nnk8)

His strong opinions over prejudice and discrimination also seem to be part of the familiar discussions. Besides this he claims that he is not particularly interested in politics. This means that he is going to vote and he has also decided which party to vote for. These

seemingly contradiction between not being politically interested on the one hand, and decisions on what to vote for on the other is commented upon like this:

Well you have to vote, if you do want to have a government and any vote counts, so one has to vote..!

A mixture of political obligation and responsibility is apparent in this student's reflection also together with political rationalism. He also sees getting a good education as something a good citizen should do. He elaborates on his choice of political party this way:

I believe that they (Socialist left party) show great interest in young people and their wishes, for example the State education grant and such things. ... Or I may vote for the Social democrats, because I believe my parents vote for them. (4nnk12)

When asked to elaborate his reflections on party choice he repeats that politics is of no interest to him. He explains this by his perceptions of the politicians.

... everyone (politicians) have their personal attitudes, then they (politicians) claim they will do this and that. Most of their claims on what to do is not carried out in practice – it is only to get votes, be popular.

This statement is quite familiar with the expressions from the Syrian/Palestinian girl above. However when he is asked about opinions of the Danish democracy and the political system, he claims it is very good. It is of course perfectly possible to value the system positively while being critical of the politicians. Furthermore, the boy is not member of any organization, but considers being an active supporter of poor children in a developing country. Also, he might consider being active if there is particularly important issues to fight for. In some ways he believes that his action might make a political difference, but usually there needs to be a large group to really change matters.

This Iraqi student shows some of the reflective as well as contradictory attitudes of non-interest and participation as the Syrian/Palestinian girl above. They both may be termed “latent participants” despite their somewhat critical attitudes of politicians.

Summary and discussion

The analysis has so far pointed out three different political orientations, “the religious participant”, “the withdrawn participant” and “the latent participant”. All these students have somewhat mixed feelings of politics. They clearly differ in their willingness to participate and the participatory mechanisms (what seem to evoke willingness to participate) seem somewhat different. As pointed out, religiousness seems to guide participation for two

students. These students have in common that religion represents a set of values, a worldview as well as a practical guide to their life. Norms and values derived from religious faith or from reading religious texts also transfer into their approach to politics. Among the withdrawn participants, passion for issues and political obligations may be the decisive mechanisms in their rare turn to political participation. The third group of students, “the latent participationists”, reflects openly on values which seem to play an important role along with passion for issues as well. Their open reflections and knowledge of society and politics distinguish them from the withdrawn participationists. However, both groups of student’s orientations toward political participation may be termed latent in the sense that all students might be politically active at some point. The cognitive awareness of political ideology and issues makes us expect that the group named “latent” will participate more than the “withdrawn group.”

Looking at the eight students as a whole, a major group appear to be not interested in political parties and society in general. Still, they show support for the Danish political system and high levels of trust. Many express that one should vote, and though often rather insistant in their negativeness to politics, they also emphasize that they have a responsibility to voice their opinions when they feel offended or when they have particular interests at stake. Though the respondents in general express high commitment to obligations of e.g. voting, they nevertheless distance themselves from politics and political parties. Still, there seems to exist a high-level potential and reservoir for political mobilization among the youth.

A considerable preparedness exists among the respondents for articulating political opinions and values. There seems to be a significant reservoir of participation and mobilization potentials. Politics may be absent at the manifest level, but is clearly present at the latent level.

The aparent ”internal discourse” over self and political involvment seem to tak place in most of the students. The discuccions, reflections, uncertainty and contradictions may be looked at as a document over the process of becoming political. In their ”political life” the students seem to experience a mixture of own feelings, parental voices, influence from friends as well as information from school and media sources. To many this might be a confusing and sometime conflicting situation. The many sources of influence also illustrate the process of political development and come to terms with ”the political self” among young adolecents.

Conclusion

The political identities that are displayed by these eight students are characterized by a relative lack of political interest on the one hand but also a variety of participatory orientation on the other. Participation may for some be a result of religious beliefs. For other, more secular Muslim students, the feeling of political obligations, passion for issues, friends as well as parents orientation may be important for their desire to vote or take part in political events.

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Appendix

Coding scheme.

Social participation
Social relations
Social trust
Participatin new media
Integration
National identity
Organisational participation
Social studies – school contribution
Good citizen?
Political engagement - participation
Political identity
Political skills
Political values Freedom equality
Political trust
Self-efficacy
Political system
Rights and obligations
Democracy – Danish society