“Returning to 0”

A qualitative study on the impacts of uncertainty on Syrian refugee families living in Denmark

Master Thesis

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Abstract

On the 21st of February 2019, the Danish government in cooperation with Danish People's Party and with support from the Social Democrats passed its new Financial Law. A salient part of the law includes various measures to tighten up conditions for refugees living in Denmark and people seeking asylum. One measure here is a new focus on 'temporariness,' which stresses that refugees residing in Denmark are to consider their stay in Denmark temporary and are expected to leave once constitutional conditions permit. This initiative was put into effect before the hearing answer deadline, potentially circumventing scrutiny, and media debate has since then sparked as to the harmful effect such a focus on temporariness can cause for refugees.

In this study I research the impact of such temporariness and the uncertainty it brings for Syrian refugee families (parents with children) living in Denmark under the 7.1 status. I do this from a person-centric perspective, with a qualitative, inductive methodology that shreds light on their experiences, perceptions, and points of view through a series of semi-structured interviews. Analysing their statements for themes on overarching sentiments and drawing primarily on Honneth's theory of recognition and disrespect, I find that the families are impacted in the sense that they feel a sense of anxiety, loss, powerlessness, and injustice following the arrival of the new law. More specifically, they dread a possible future in Syria or outside Denmark, feel that they cannot plan stable life trajectories, be certain that they can realise their developmental ambitions, and worry about the effects on their children, who have come to feel a strong sense of belonging in Denmark. They perceive this as an injustice in regard to the efforts they have made to 'integrate' and establish themselves and feel that they given no rights, relegated to a state of powerlessness, in which their future is likely to involve a loss of acquired resources and potential danger. These findings at person-centric level allow for a subsequent discussion in which I contextualise the experiences related in the interviews to the policy change of the new financial law. Afterwards, I include the concept of human security to contrast and critique the law, based on these findings. This is due to human security obligating states to provide circumstances for its citizens and subjects to develop to their full potential, which I find that new financial law hinders, based on the interviews. Finally, in the conclusion, I point towards other areas related to this new shift towards temporariness calling for further research.

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Introduction

With the onset of the so-called refugee crisis, Europe has been posed with the challenge of either admitting or rejecting, including or excluding the increased amount of asylum seekers arriving at their borders from their war-torn country of Syria. This has ignited the question of national immigration policies and Europe's obligations as a political topic, which has provided fuel for various nationalistic, right-wing parties to flourish on the warnings of mass influxes (Castles & Miller, 2009) (Klandermans, Toorn, and Stekelenburg, 2008). As a result, parties opposing immigration from non-western countries like National Rally in France, Alternative für Deutchland in Germany, and Danish People's Party in Denmark have advanced in polls, impacting their national, political domains with stricter asylum legislation. This tendency is part of a general turn towards a security paradigm throughout Europe (Biehl, 2015) (Darling, 2011), and despite the UN 1951 conventions, many countries of the EU have increasingly shown less willingness to accept refugees for resettlement (Castles & Miller, 2009), which in the case of Syrian refugees has left Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey with the majority, while even more remain as displaced persons within the country.

This development is also seen in Denmark, where a recent political initiative from the government along with Danish People's Party, the "paradigm shift" of the 2019 Danish Financial Law, proposes a series new rules, tightening up conditions for refugees in the country as well as those seeking asylum (this initiative is elaborated on in more detail later). One point of the paradigm shift is the focus on "temporariness", with the intention of more refugees leaving the country again once their return is deemed safe (Korsgaard, 2018). The confirmation of the paradigm shift has been followed by some critique as the change was submitted before the period of hearing statements had run out. For instance, professor Peter Munk Christiansen from the Institute of Political Science in Aarhus expressed his disapproval regarding this move: "It sends a signal that they don't imagine or show consideration for the objections or remarks from the hearing parties that could lead the ministry to rework the law proposal before its political reading in the Parliament" (Khan, 2019). Yet, minister of integration, Inger Støjberg, stressed that this due to them wishing "to have the proposed changes put into effect as fast as possible" (Skærbæk, 2019). After this, much critique has been raised in the media regarding the potentially harmful effects of not knowing whether one's stay in Denmark will be temporary or not, and when one's life will be interrupted. For

instance, Politiken brings an article in which a 19-year old Syrian girl expresses that she has gone from a fulfilling life in Denmark to "a feeling of uncertainty," stating that "If I have to go back, I have to start over" (Kristiansen, 2019), and in another article, another refugee girl expresses the same sentiment saying: "I have done everything to become part of this country. I have my life under control. I have dreams… but when the politicians discuss, I'm a societal loser" (Hergel, 2019). Furthermore, in an article, Ken Roth, the executive director of Human Rights Watch, critiques the initiative as unrealistic considering the danger in Syria and deems it an unspoken act of political xenophobia (Hybel, 2019). This makes the human results of this new political focus on temporariness a topic ripe for inquiry, especially due to the disregard to hearing statements, in essence putting the law into effect to impact refugees' lives without the opinions of experts or the validation of research. Danish Refugee Council has conducted a study on this matter already, but their approach involved Danish volunteers as a source of data rather than the refugees themselves.

My own interest and concern in the topic were sparked during an earlier study, when a young Syrian man I interviewed would tell me of this suggested law that he had heard might be put into effect, despite the interview revolving around a different topic entirely. With great weariness and dissatisfaction, he would express how this law would make for a sense of uncertainty in his and other refugees' lives, which he predicted would affect his integration and his view of Denmark detrimentally. Now that this "paradigm shift" has been put into effect, letting refugees know that they must "travel home when possible - no matter if this happens voluntarily or by force" ("Finansloven for 2019", p. 27), I wish to investigate this uncertainty that my former interviewee predicted and its effects on Syrian refugee families living in Denmark. I choose to focus on families with children specifically as having children in Denmark may pose additional challenges and considerations in dealing with this uncertainty, making families an especially vulnerable group. Through an iterative, qualitative methodology of using semi-structured interviews with 15 individuals (representing 9 families), I intend to show the experience with a person-centric approach that illuminates the human impacts of such a law. In doing so, I work with the research question:

How does uncertainty about the future impact Syrian refugee families living in Denmark?

My interest in this questions does not just pertain to the lives of the families, but also what results Denmark can expect from the law – what kind of subjects they can expect these refugees to become if impacted by the law as well as how this aligns with the government's

goal for the refugees, and as such I will have the person-centred, qualitative data allow for a discussion at the political, systemic level. It should be noted that my interviewees all bear the 7.1 status or have been reunited with a spouse carrying this status (I elaborate on these statuses later). In basic terms, this means that their risk of being sent back is, for the time being, lower than those carrying the 7.3 status, but nevertheless, as will be seen, they feel a prominent sense of uncertainty. After all, the focus is set on the families' experiences and impressions, not whether they have comprehended all points of the law correctly or if their fears are justified by some measure or not. Furthermore, it should be noted that mentions of the paradigm shift have not been an explicit part of my interview guide itself (see Appendix B), meaning that the all statements about this political initiative happened naturally in the interviews.

I start out by including a literature review, covering research targeting refugees' uncertainty in situations of temporariness. Then, I include a chapter on my research process and methodological reflections behind, as well as the epistemological, ontological, and ethical considerations I have adhered to. Next is a chapter on the concepts and theories I apply to the data, and afterwards a chapter describing the political context of my research for contextualisation. Following is the chapter including my findings and analysis, also including a final discussion that contextualises my findings into the political domain, and finally, I conclude my research and suggest further topics for inquiry.

Literature review

In this chapter, I review previous research conducted on my topic of interest to allow for a synthesis of findings that can be related to my data and subsequent discussion. The literature I have considered as relevant to my research and findings regard situations of temporariness and feelings of uncertainty among people in refugee- and immigrant situations, as there may be conceptual lines to draw or juxtapositions to be discussed to my data. Although the research is drawn from a range of different global contexts, targeting groups in different situations, their findings may still be valuable in relation to mine in the search for an integrated understanding of uncertainty in refugee situations and the effects of temporariness. Starting off, I cover research conducted on refugees in transit situations such as placement in refugee camps, before moving on to research targeting refugees finding themselves in situations more akin to the situations of my interviewees. Finally, I look at a recent study conducted by Danish Refugee Council in a Danish context.

Research on refugees in transit situations

With the knowledge that repatriation or deportation is of high likelihood, the question could be raised if refugees receiving asylum may also see themselves in a sort of transit situation. Yet, in this segment, I use ‘transit situations’ to refer to cases where refugees have been placed to wait in a refugee camp or are awaiting processing, having sought asylum in a host country.

In a quantitative study, Afifi, Robbins, & Nimah (2013) target the feelings of uncertainty felt by Palestinian youths in refugee camps in Lebanon, and if this relates to a sense of hopelessness. Moreover, they seek to investigate how this is related to- or alleviated by maternal communication and support (although I will not get into that here). Their study has been conducted by distributing survey sheets to 162 youths to produce a representative sample, and they distinguish between “personal security” and “macrosecurity”. Personal security was measured through areas such as “your future,” “your safety,” “your health” (Afifi et al. 2013, p. 498), while macrosecurity was measured through the areas “the camp’s security,” “the camp’s future,” “Lebanon’s
security,” “Lebanon’s future” (p. 498). Afifi et al. (2013) find that there is indeed a high level of uncertainty among the youths, and that there is a stronger link between personal security and hopelessness than what was the case with macrosecurity issues, even as the youths seem

to be more uncertain about the broader macro-issues they are facing. Pointing out that refugees may develop coping mechanisms towards some types of uncertainty while others not, Afifi et al. (2013) suggest that “the apparent resilience to uncertainty about macrosecurity may spring from the perceived lack of control over such issues… a sense of inevitability regarding the uncertainty that may counter intuitively protect against its negative impacts” (p. 501). Concluding, they stress the need for further and expanded research targeting refugees’ experience of uncertainty: “Future investigations should offer a more complete examination of uncertainty experiences in refugee populations across a wider range of issues as well as an improved understanding of the shifts in their uncertainties across time” (Afifi et al., 2013, p. 501).

In a much more qualitative study, Biehl (2015) directs her attention at refugees’ feelings of uncertainty in Turkey. In her article, different refugees relate their experiences while waiting in the system of Turkey. Some await answers to their cases, while others have been dispersed and await other receiving countries to take them in. However, in Turkey’s system, they face an array of psychological issues affecting their lives. Looking at primarily in-depth interviews and findings from various participant observation studies, Biehl seeks to highlight two points: first, she states that “protracted uncertainty, associated in particular with indefinite waiting, imperfect knowledge, and the volatility of legal status, is a defining element of the experience of being an asylum seeker in Turkey” (p. 58). This is reflected in the interviews through statements such as "The temporariness, the uncertainty, these are what cause problems. I would have learned the language. I would have worked, made a life here. We thought it was temporary.” (p. 60), and “We have no rights here; we are useless, not human. We have forgotten our humanity here. I don't know myself here anymore. If they told us, 'You must wait one year or two years,' we would be OK. But the uncertainty, the fear of being rejected is tormenting” (p. 60). Secondly, inspired by Foucault’s concept of governmentality, she comments on how this situation attains a governing effect on the refugees in which they become demobilised, and in which their uncertain existence becomes normalised, that is, the unpredictability of their situation “is presented to them as a 'normal' aspect of displacement that they must cope with and get used to” (p. 60). On the other hand, the statements in her interviews also show signs of hope, motivation, and agency in relation to the future in what is phrased as ‘active waiting,’ which enables the refugees carry on with their lives, hoping for a better future. In the end, Biehl concludes that Turkey’s securitization approach to refugees has had a dismantling effect on their ability to gain a firm grasp on their

life-situations and options, while they are kept in check by the governmentality of hope and uncertainty – disciplined "to uphold and live by the subjectivity of proper 'refugeeness'" (p. 69).

Research on refugees having received asylum

In this segment I include research on refugees living in uncertainty, either because of them being granted only temporary asylum or because of likelihood of deportation from their host country. Again, these contexts differ significantly in terms of legislation and thereby the situations of the respective refugee groups, but the common element is the feeling of living in uncertainty about one's future.

In a quantitative study in Sydney, Australia, Steel et al. (2006) have distributed measures among 241 Mandaean refugees residing there. They have applied two symptom measures: the Harvard Trauma Questionnaire, which assesses exposure to trauma and PTSD symptoms and the Hopkins Symptom checklist which deals with depression and anxiety. Moreover, they have targeted refugees holding two different statuses in the Australian asylum system – refugees granted permanent residence and refugees granted temporary protection - to see if there is difference in the stress and maladies they face in their daily lives. Comparing the two groups, they have found that the temporary refugees report an array of problems and "living difficulties" to a significantly higher degree than the holders of permanent residence. The most salient of these include higher "fear of repatriation (96% vs. 2%), unemployment (85% vs. 22%), insufficient money (77% vs. 22%), loneliness and boredom (76% vs. 14%), communication difficulties (74% vs. 27), separation from family (66% vs. 12%), long-term health problems (66% vs. 6%), social isolation (65% vs. 11%)," (Steel et al. 2006, p. 60). Having found these tendencies, they go on to state that their study "suggests that both prolonged detention and temporary protection contribute substantially to the risk of ongoing depression, PTSD and mental health-related disability in refugees" (p. 61). More concretely, they find that the temporary protection status is associated with an array of daily stresses associated with work-life, language acquisition, education, and health. Having concluded this, they assert: "Countries considering the adoption of temporary protection regimes therefore need to consider how such provisions may undermine the sense of security that seems to be essential for refugees to recover from trauma-related psychiatric symptoms" (Steel et al., 2006, p. 63).

Once again, turning to a more qualitative undertaking, El Shaarawi (2015) has investigated how Iraqi refugees experience 'protracted uncertainty' in Egypt. As she states, it has been her goal to "I show how the hybrid and contradictory temporal experience of living in a temporary situation for an unexpectedly long period had effects on these refugees' well-being" (p. 39). As her methodology, she approached the study through 14 months of ethnographic fieldwork in Egypt along with interviews of 148 Iraqi refugees and local service providers such as physicians, psychosocial workers and legal advocates. She would conduct participant observation at local organisations providing services and counselling for the refugees. Although placed in Egypt, she found that the refugees conceptualised their stay there as an indefinite transit situation between past and an uncertain future. They would relate how they had imagined their stay in Egypt and how the reality of their exile situation there had proved different. As El Shaarawi (2015) states: "The experience of living in transit in Egypt was problematic because of the ways in which it constrained and disrupted Iraqis' expected and imagined life trajectories" (p. 45). This was shown to have ramifications in many aspects; education became complicated or put on stand-by, there was no development as the refugees did not dare to spend too much money investing in their futures in Egypt, and rules regarding their permission made their economic situation tricky. In addition, El Shaarawi (2015) found that the refugees linked their status as a cause to illness and health problems. This also extended to mental effects, as the instability of future conditions and broken life trajectories "led to tiredness, worry, sadness and other psychological and cognitive/emotional problems" along with "worrying" and "thinking too much" (p. 49). Despite this uncertainty, the Iraqis did find ways to cope and pursue strategies to alleviate their situation, such as searching for information, contacting aid organisations, and trying to carry on with normal lives, getting married and raising children although "the extra challenges associated with managing such life events and processes in difficult conditions imposed costs, which Iraqis often referred to as psychological and emotional" (p. 49). In the context of these refugees' experiences, El Shaarawi (2015) ultimately draws on the concept of 'social suffering' which places human suffering in political and social contexts in order to investigate what meaning the refugees attribute to their suffering. As she states: "In the case of Iraqi refugees in Egypt, uncertainty appears to be linked to suffering through a crisis of meaning. For Iraqi refugees, the inability to imagine the future as a result of the uncertainties of displacement and exile was an important cause of suffering" (p. 47). She also includes the concept of 'ontological security' to discuss how insecurity may stem from the experience of a life trajectory being disrupted. However, in the end she stresses that uncertainty must not

merely be understood in "the broad vagaries of globalization or neo-liberalism" (p. 53), but that we must seek to understand and analyse uncertainties in their particular contexts.

Switching the context from Egypt to the UK, Hasselberg (2016) investigates and discusses, through a series of interviews, how immigrants and refugees living in the UK react to their potential, prospects of deportation. Hasselberg both comments on how the prospect affects the immigrants (and their families) mentally, but also which coping strategies are being utilized in anticipation. These are not necessarily positive – In fact, they involve disassociating from family and friends in the anticipation of their loss, loss of sense of self in numerous factors, and establishing sometimes unrealistic cues about their situation. When it comes to mental effects, he mentions that many of his research participants spoke of "feelings of constant tension, of being consumed by persistent worry. Their lives are ridden with anxiety and even the most basic daily chores must be performed while thinking about their predicament" (p. 98). He also mentions how stress and long-term uncertainty becomes embodied, for many participants resulting in "appetite loss, binge eating, sleep loss, nightmares, headaches, migraines, exhaustion, depression, inability to concentrate, sadness, crying, loss of energy or drive" (p. 99). As mentioned, Hasselberg discusses coping strategies to these situations as well, and he identifies four:

Enduring uncertainty: As Hasselberg states "Uncertainty here is intrinsically related to waiting: time spent waiting for a hearing to take place, for an appeal to be decided, for a change in policy or new case law that may favour their odds of winning their appeal" (p. 102). Yet, waiting was not necessarily related as a passive mode of existence, and the immigrants told of various activities to spend their waiting time. Here spending time with family, saving as much money as possible, and volunteering was among the strategies used to pass the time and to instill a sense of purpose in their lives. For instance, Hasselberg comments about one refugee that "to work is what lifts her up, it is her way of enduring uncertainty and dealing with the sense of unworthiness that deportation imposes on her. Volunteering was vital to many as a way of being active, feeling useful and being distracted from deportation concerns" (p. 106). Yet, this time is not seen as a gift however, but as a period of "tiring and exhausting" non-existence in which time and lives were standing still without closure, leading to some preferring the thought of deportation to their uncertainty in the UK.

Vanishing of self: The refugees reported worries of how their lives would change if family members were deported. For some, this involved the coping mechanism of isolating oneself and distancing from family members to ease the pain of separation – "In their efforts to hide their anxieties, appellants withdraw and unavoidably become absent" (p. 108). Hasselberg continues: "By withdrawing and isolating themselves, they initiate the appellants' process of absenting" (p. 110).

Forming personal cues: While some respondents coped with uncertainty by actively working, most did not do anything to directly prepare for a potential deportation such as looking for vocational options and accommodation in their home country, since "To prepare for return is to take deportation as certain." (p. 115). As Hasselberg states: "Not making arrangements for deportation assisted migrants in coping with their undecided present and uncertain future, enabling them to hope for the best and cling on to the hope of better luck" (p. 116).

Re-imagining possible futures: The immigrants would conceptualize their possible deportations as exile. This was both suggested to be the case for 1.5 second generation immigrants as well as first-generation migrants; "they are being removed not just from their homes and families but also from the lives they have built and the future lives that they had planned." (p. 119). A coping mechanism here came in the form of disenchantment with the state that the immigrants could incorporate into their "imaginings of possible futures" (p. 121) and possible deportations. This did not mean that they wished to leave, but rather that they could imagine their resistance and displeasure with the UK into their narratives about their long-term futures. After all, as Hasselberg states:

"*taking the family away from the UK would be tantamount to giving up everything the family had accomplished since arrival. It would be to forget the future that the family in general hoped for, and which was envisioned for the children in particular, and to endure another new beginning*" (p. 123)

As seen, Hasselberg found that resistance and coping mechanisms could both have positive and negative outcomes, suggesting the complicated nature of how refugees may feel uncertainty in response to temporariness in various situations. In the next segment, I look at a recent study very close to my topic of inquiry in the context of Denmark.

Research in the context of Denmark

This segment looks at a recent study conducted by Danish Refugee Council (DRC). The study involved as series of quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews with Danish volunteers working with refugees in various branches of society. More specifically, the study included:

- Two focus group interviews with groups of five and six volunteers.
- Individual phone interviews with five volunteers
- A questionnaire survey distributed among 673 volunteers, which included the option to write answers freely, giving the survey a qualitative element.

The incentive of the study stemmed from Danish volunteers displaying concern over the conditions of refugees following the tightening of legislation related to refugees in various ways since 2015. One of the topics touched upon was the volunteers' impressions of the effect temporariness has on refugees' integration and general wellbeing in Denmark. This temporariness was widely linked to uncertainty felt in different ways observed and related by the volunteers. In the survey, 63 percent of respondents experience that the temporariness of the refugees' residence in Denmark challenges their wellbeing – either "somewhat", to a "high-" or "very high degree". In addition, a third of the freely written answers mention the legislation of temporariness and its effects on refugee wellbeing. As DRC (2019) writes, the volunteers generally voice that "uncertainty and lack of knowledge regarding the future affects motivation and the basis for learning, acting, making decisions about education, work, and being socially active" (translated) (DRC, 2019, p. 17). Difficulty with predicting the future moreover complicates decision-making such as whether to buy a house, have children, or pursue an education. One respondent states: "They simply lack perspective on their lives. They cannot plan ahead. For instance, they are unsure if they can take an education and be able to finish it" (p. 18). A salient point in the data, is uncertainty related to the prospects of one's children, which becomes the cause of fracture in the family. One respondent writes: "They worry about the future, primarily that of their children. It gives them insecurity and sleepless nights" (p. 19). This leads many families to think in two scenarios; they must both prepare their children for a potential repatriation to their home country, while also making sure that their motivation for development as people in Denmark continues. As a volunteer writes: "they must constantly prepare for a future both in Denmark but also away from Denmark. In particular, the children must master the language of the home country both

written and orally to prepare for repatriation" (p. 19). Closely linked to this, is the general question of motivation for integration in Denmark when repatriation is seen as being of high likelihood, and the qualitative data shows that the uncertainty leaves an impact in this regard. Some of the respondents write:

"*It very significant. Uncertainty and worries. They lack desire and motivation in finding a job and to integrate in the country and learn the language. There are lot of sickness absence in schools, at workplaces etc. They lack motivation in regard to wanting to partake in society and Denmark, and to form networks*" (p. 19).

While another volunteer adds: "It is pretty simple. If you do not know if you will be living here in a few years, it does not make too much sense to invest lots of time starting a life here in Denmark" (p. 19)

This lack of motivation is not the case for all refugee acquaintances of the volunteers. Some are seen to continue to chase their integration and life pursuits in Denmark, unaffected by- or despite the feelings of uncertainty. This tends to be the case with resourceful individuals with a particular mindset. For instance, a volunteer relates: "This man tries to push it out of his head and think in the short term. He is committed 100% to learning Danish and is generally very positive in mindset, which is quite inspiring" (p. 20). Moreover, some respondents tell that they are unsure whether their refugee contacts are even aware of the particulars of their situation and residence permit. In conclusion, however, there is general agreement among the respondents that the situation for many refugees is highly uncertain and unpredictable, which is a source of frustration for them as well, when they work with refugees, as they have to remain a source of positivity in regard to the goal integration in Denmark. A respondent concludes their answer with:

"*We are taking their dreams away from them. We put them on a shelf and tell them "now you won't get killed, so now you can sit there and survive for a few years, until we will send you back, but that is not how humans work…. How do we raise the debate about the fact that our negativity towards the people we have given residence destroys their life and option of becoming part of Danish society?*" (p. 27).

Review Conclusion

As seen above, research in temporariness and refugee uncertainty has suggested a range of negative effects linked to refugees' wellbeing and capacity to pursue meaningful lives. In general, the suggestion is that a sense of temporariness or uncertainty in refugee situations leads to incessant worry which has both further psychological ramifications as well as physical effects. Moreover, these effects are linked to an inability to pursue careers, education, or to establish a general sense of rootedness in life. These findings have constituted an academic foundation in the field for my research as a starting point. They have been a source of inspiration in determining my research area and interview guide, as well as which topics to touch upon and pay attention to. Moreover, while the contexts of the covered research differ widely, there may be analytical insights to suggest if it turns out that there are similarities between the uncertainty felt among refugees in transit situations such as refugee camp and the refugees having received asylum in Denmark – through the lens of different contexts, this may suggest the extent to which the Danish refugees are affected by their experiences of uncertainty under Danish legislation. However, while my study is in line with this previous research (especially the study conducted by DRC), the goal of my inquiry is to delve deeper into the experiences specific to refugee families in situations of uncertainty – especially since the livelihoods and future of the children may factor greatly in the families' overall experiences (this was certainly suggested in the DRC study). Thus, my study departs from previous research by homing in on Danish legislation change with a focus on refugee families' own experiences in the midst of the changing rules.

Methodology

In this chapter, I cover my methodological reflections behind my approach to the chosen research topic. Both my practical choices and considerations behind are explained in detail to give a sense of transparency and, hopefully, set the basis for possible replication (Bryman, 2016). For inspiration, I have drawn primarily from Bryman and Brinkmann, but I also draw in other literature that has inspired my approach and reflections.

Research design

For this study, I have opted for a person-centric, highly qualitative, iterative approach to my area of interest. In order to investigate experiences of uncertainty among my respondents, I have decided that a qualitative pursuit of deep, rich data, which the qualitive approach seeks to discover (Brinkmann, 2014), was appropriate rather than quantitative approach that may have offered me a solid basis for generalisability (Bryman, 2016), but may also have offered little knowledge in terms of how the intricacies of my respondents' experiences function, and the causal conditions behind. My approach has also been of an iterative nature, with the finding of my theoretical and conceptual framework being inspired by the initial coding of my data, while these emergent theoretical links in turn would go on to inspire the subsequent data collection and interview questions. This approach represents Bryman's (2016) definition of the iterative approach as "a weaving back and forth between data and theory" (p. 23), but it should be stated that the emergent theoretical perspectives never lead to major changes to my interview guide and the questions therein, and that the interviews remained open to the aspects that the interviewees found relevant to discuss (this is detailed below). Rather, the theoretical perspectives lead to a conceptual lens through which to discuss the tendencies recurring in the interviewees' experiences, and during later interviews, I would be more conscientious in pursuing these tendencies with follow-up questions, when brought up.

Epistemological and ontological considerations

My epistemological positioning for this research has been largely that of interpretivism, meaning that I have aimed for an understanding of my data away from positivistic terms. I have sought to gain an understanding of my interviewees' attribution of meaning to their worlds, actions, and things happening to them. This has involved the phenomenological goal of exploring the meaning of the respondents' behaviour and emotions through their point of

view (Bryman, 2016). In terms of ontology, my approach has been in line with constructionism, seeing the respondents as constructers and negotiators of their identities and their social reality (Bryman, 2016). However, I have not carried this positioning extensively to the point where I would rule out the possibility of referring to a reality external to our words, which both Bryman (2016) and Brinkmann (2014) warn against. This is especially relevant as this study considers the experiences of my respondents in a political context, and as such, their individual experiences, although narrated and constructed by them, are seen as tied to factors external to their lives and agency. Furthermore, in using qualitative interviews as my source of data, I have also heeded Brinkmann's (2014) warning about seeing the interview as an "unproblematic, direct and universal source of data" (p. 20). Epistemologically, I have kept in mind that my presence in the interview situation or the interview situation itself may have impacted the production of data, and to what extent this data could be considered an authentic window to the experiences of my respondents. Moreover, my interpretation may have been rooted in my own experience of the respondents and my presumptions about them. Hervik (2003) touches upon this potential issue when conducting ethnographies in foreign environments. He states that we must aim to reflect on "the mediated world between ourselves and other" (p. 164), and that we must seek shared social experience to gain a basis for a common reflexivity. As he states, reflexivity should not merely be added as a textual afterthought but must be carried out in the field as the data is collected. This consideration has inspired my approach, and I will return to this challenge of reflexivity in the later segment in this chapter.

Data collection

In this segment, I cover my data collection process chronologically as it happened as well as the rationale behind my techniques and choices.

Sampling process, gaining access, and setting up interviews

I decided early on to work with a set of criteria to my research participants; apart from being refugees in Denmark, they were to be of Syrian background and to be parents in a refugee family now living in Denmark. This would rule out other significant refugee populations in the country such as those originating from Eritrea and Iraq, but I deemed this the best choice as different backgrounds and different political situations in these countries could lead to different experiences and different prospects, making it difficult to settle on specific themes in an analysis. Moreover, talking to families, or more specifically parents, would allow me to

hone in on a set of specific complications faced by this group. Overall, this approach to sampling participants sought to target the impact of uncertainty on a specific group faced with specific issues, rather than attempt to establish a generalised view of refugee uncertainty in Denmark following policy change, which would most likely have required a much more sizeable amount of data.

In choosing specific families for the study, I approached my topic of interest with purposive sampling, following the criteria mentioned above. I would attempt to reach Syrian families through municipal workers, volunteers in organisations such as Venligboerne, and Syrian contacts I had garnered from earlier research and volunteer work. I hoped that they could serve as mediators, contacting families, explaining my purpose, and asking whether they would be interested, rather than myself calling them about the matter as a stranger. In this endeavour, I was conscientious of the impression I would give the contacts and various gatekeepers I sought, both when contacting them by e-mail or phone. I was aware that what I was asking could be seen as a sensitive matter, and I ensured them about the purpose of the study, the informality of the interview, the anonymity of the participants, and how I would not pressure them about topics or expect their Danish to be perfect. Even so, gaining contact proved a significant challenge. Some volunteers and municipal workers did provide help, but most of those I contacted did not wish to cooperate or felt unsure if it was in their right. Acknowledging the relevancy of the topic, most would politely decline. An example of a typical response I received was:

"*Thank you so much for your enquiry. It's a very relevant topic that you touch upon. Unfortunately, I must disappoint you when it comes to finding candidates for an interview. The families we are in contact with are generally very upset and frustrated at the moment. As such, I assess that they would not like to partake in an interview at this moment*" (translated by me)

Sentiments akin to this first of all reinforced my hunch that my topic of interest was indeed highly relevant to pursue and understand with possible gatekeepers considering the families so stricken that they felt the need to protect them. Secondly, I found it odd that they would feel the need to defend adults, who would be able to decide for themselves and may welcome the opportunity to share their thoughts. This also complicated my data collection to such an extent that a methodological change was necessary. As a response I eventually changed my strategy to snowball sampling – a technique that is useful if facing initial opposition to one's

research (Bryman, 2016). Families I interviewed would reach out to other families they had befriended or met in their asylum process. The benefit of this technique was twofold: first, it allowed me to get in touch with more families and secondly, it presented a non-intimidating, familiar introduction to my research for new contacts, as the families I had already interviewed would present my topic to their friends in Arabic and vouch for me as a person. To further ensure the respondents felt comfortable about the ordeal, I suggested that they choose the time and place of the interview. It was my hope that they would suggest their homes as this would most likely provide the most comfortable zone for them to share their experiences and thoughts, but I did not wish to pressure them into inviting a stranger home. Most did suggest their homes, but when not, I would propose the local library and make sure to book a room in advance to have a private area for the interview. Earlier research has taught me the importance of privacy and quietness during lengthy, qualitative interviews – when an interviewee is about to share an emotional or perhaps controversial opinion, a noisy library guest waltzing by is likely disrupt the whole thing.

My sample size kept increasing until it appeared data saturation was reached. As Bryman (2016) notes, potentially limitless themes can appear when doing qualitative, inductive research, and researchers are rarely transparent as to how they determined that saturation was reached. In my case, I noticed how the experiences of the families I interviewed were highly similar in many aspects without dramatically different points of view, and after this had been the case for several interviews in a row, I decided that I had enough data to propose an analytical interpretation of a tendency among Syrian refugee families living in Denmark. However, a possible selection bias should be noted here as the families I interviewed were of course those willing or confident enough to be interviewed in the first place, which may set them apart from less established families (I will return to this point in the segment on reflexivity). I chose to interview families of different areas (Aalborg, Sønderborg, Aarhus, Brønderslev, and Hjørring). This was an intentional choice - not to claim that my sample represents these areas as cases, nor to make this a comparative study between these areas, but rather to ensure that the experiences related were not heavily affected by their given local context. For example, there could be factors in Aalborg giving refugees a specific experience differing those in Sønderborg, and conducting my interviews in different settings would at least make this local tendency apparent, so as to not lead to faulty generalisations.

Interviewing individuals and interviewing families

My interviews were in most cases carried out with both husband and wife, although there were exceptions. In two cases, I interviewed men individually, in one case, I interviewed two women at once from two different families, and in one case, an adolescent son took significant part in the interview with his parents as well. This presented a series of different interview situations. When interviewing two (and in one case three) people together, the interviews could be said to resemble the nature of group- or focus interviews, but not quite in Bryman’s (2016) distinction where the goal is “the way in which individuals discuss a certain issue as members of a group rather than simply individuals” (p. 501). I was interested in the interviewees’ individual accounts, but their accounts had to be taken in the context of their family. However, as Bryman (2016) also states as a benefit, the interviews with two or more interviewees did offer the interviewees the chance to collectively make sense of their meaning and experiences. Another useful aspect of this approach involved the families helping each other in expressing themselves in Danish. This could also prove a potential limit though (I will discuss this in the reflexivity segment). For several interviews, small children and toddlers were present, and this would often mean that one parent would be occupied for a sizeable portion of the interview. It also sometimes meant that the interview or a conversation would be temporarily interrupted. Respecting the interviewees lives and schedules, I took no issue with this, and as mentioned in the chapter on ethics, their comfort was my highest priority. Insisting upon a specific interview set-up could have complicated the relation to the interviewees and their willingness to participate. Åstedt-Kurki and Paavilainen and Lehti (2001) further discuss the methodological challenges to interviewing families. As they state, it is problematic to view the individual’s experience as a window to the reality of the whole family, but on the other hand, “one family member may also more openly express the feelings, perceptions and family secrets than the whole family unit” (Åstedt-Kurki et al. 2001, p. 290). While conducting my interviews, I did not find the individual accounts to differ drastically from the interviews with both parents, but it is possible that the individual interviews lead to views in family members that would not have been confided otherwise (This is also discussed further in the reflexivity segment below).

Interviewer role

As mentioned, it was crucial that the interviewees felt comfortable about the interview situation and talking about their experiences. I aimed to show openness and attentiveness as well as practice attentive listening, which Kvale (2003) describes as "the interviewer showing interest, understanding and respect for what the subject says, and with an interviewer at ease and clear about what he or she wants to know" (p. 57). The interviews thus took on a conversational and informal nature

and while I tried to make questions clear I would also allow the interviewees to finish their point when they trailed off track from my topic of interest; here it was my goal to allow for freedom that may lead to points found relevant by the respondents, rather than me controlling what was deemed relevant to talk about. Prior to the interviews, I made sure to inform them about the anonymity of the interview and its non-structured nature, but at the same time I did not wish for the interview or my presence to seem too formal and perhaps remind the respondents of past interviews with immigration officials or municipal workers. It was my hope that they would eventually forget the situation as an interview and more in line with a conversation. Moreover, I wished to avoid them striving to become 'good interviewees (Bryman, 2016) (Brinkmann, 2014). As Brinkmann (2014) notes, interviewees will sometimes try to deliberately give the interviewer what they think he or she is searching for, which ""may paradoxically block the production of interesting stories" (p. 33). Although these points were my goal all along, my demeanor gradually changed from a more controlled, passive interviewer as I got more comfortable with the questions and emergent themes, and as I experienced the interviewees responding better to a less controlled and more informal approach. This involved me eventually no longer bringing the interview guide and being more willing to share my own experiences as well, when it seemed the interviewees had shared personal sentiments and opinions. This was inspired by Hervik's (2003) suggestion about reflexivity in the field, which is discussed in more detail below. I sought to challenge my presumptions while in the interview, and I would admit ignorance when I was unsure I had interpreted a point correctly. While informal and conversational, I remained open and non-confrontational about opinions and views, as a more confrontational approach may have affected their subsequent answers (Bryman, 2016), and as Brinkmann (2014) notes, one of the goals of qualitative interviewing is to leave as little trace on the interviewees' versions of their reality as possible. Furthermore, I followed Kvale's (2003) guidelines on 'active listening' which also entails paying close attention to salient points that attain significant

meaning to the interviewee and knowing when to follow-up or when to remain silent to signal the interviewee to continue. I made sure to show the interviewees that I was listening closely, keeping eye-contact and make acknowledging sounds to signal comprehension.

Questions and approach to interviewing

I chose semi-structured interviews as my approach due to the openness this would allow. As Brinkmann (2014) states, semi-structured interviews tap into the "knowledge-producing potentials of dialogue by giving a much higher latitude for pursuing angles that are interesting/important" (p. 39), and allows "interviewers to glean research participants' perspectives on their social world (Bryman, 2016, p. 469). Although the interviews were relatively open-ended, I did utilise an interview guide (APPENDIX B) to function as a sort of skeleton for the themes to covered, and to help me move on if the interviewee appeared to have reached the extent of a topic. However, this guide was quite short, only containing a few open questions, and these were prone to change throughout the process. As mentioned I eventually did not feel the need to bring the guide with me anymore, and I found that not carrying a piece of paper with me, made for a better flow and presence in the interviews.

As Bryman (2016) and Brinkmann (2014) propose, I would start out with a general open question, in my case prompting the families to talk about their life and thoughts in general. This ensured a natural arrival at my area of interest, as all the families had indeed thought extensively about their future recently in connection with the new regulations and policy change in Denmark. Using this question as a point of departure, I would add follow-up questions, probing questions. Before moving on to a new question, I would usually summarise the experiences related as I had understood them to the interviewees to ensure I had the right interpretation.

Transcription and coding

Having collected my data, I first familiarised myself with the corpus, reading through it all to memorise narratives and relations. The rationale was to not fragment the data for the analysis (Bryman, 2016), for while the next step involved separating statements into differentiated codes based on themes, I wished to still make sense of the respondents' statements as coherent conversations during the analysis, rather than separated bits of data bound by themes. This was also vital during the interpretation of the text as memorizing an individual respondent's overall sentiments and dispositions helped me rule out faulty interpretations

about single bits of data. For coding, I was inspired by Kvale and Brinkmann's (2014) guidelines on 'meaning condensation' in the sense that I started by coding for general, overarching areas that the respondents spoke about – in this case impacts on life, considerations about children, and thoughts about the future. Within these overarching areas, I would then code again for themes within with these becoming the subheadings of the analysis, and within these themes I would finally code for repeated tendencies and sentiments. As such, my coding process involved multiple assessments of my data, allowing me to build a grasp of the interconnectedness of the themes for the analysis. In addition, I would start initial coding early on (before all data was acquired), and following my iterative approach, my applied theoretical framework was chosen based on these early coding sessions.

Ethical considerations

As mentioned, I found it crucial to ensure that the interviewees felt comfortable, and that they felt my intention behind the research was transparent to them, which Bryman (2016) stresses as an ethical need. I told them of the general point of the interview, its free nature, while not phrasing my goals and presumptions in overly specific terms, lest the interviewees become 'good interviewees' as explained above (Brinkmann 2014). Rather, I informed them of my general interest, and how I did not wish for them to talk about anything in particular, and definitely not experiences they did not wish to share. The result was that I would sometimes not pursue topics if it seemed intrusive or that they had reached the point where they wished to move on to a new topic, even if further elaboration could have possibly let to relevant insights. After all, their willingness to engage with me in dialogue depended on them feeling comfortable with my presence and intentions. Moreover, I informed them of the anonymity of the research and ensured they had understood their role as participants, but I refrained from creating a GDPR form for them to sign. As mentioned, informality was a goal, and I found that a lengthy written form in Danish to initiate the ordeal would be unlikely to send this signal.

Compelling refugees to sharing personal experiences and perhaps sensitive information was an ethical consideration as well. Duncombe and Jessop (2012) point out how there may be problematic ethical aspects in presenting a friendly demeanour and encouraging the interviewee to reflect on and share past events or emotions that the interviewee may not have wished to re-engage with in the first place, much less share with a stranger. As they state, the

interview situation can present a seemingly safe setting, in which the researcher engages with them almost as a therapist, leading them to share deep details. Interviewees may feel they shared more than they wished to in hindsight, while they practically receive nothing in return from the researcher, leaving them in a vulnerable spot. As mentioned, I was mindful about telling the interviewees beforehand that I in no way expected them to divulge sensitive information. As interviews went along, conversations prior to the interviews would grow longer as well, and I would share more information about myself, my goals, and my life if the respondents were interested. This was not to suggest that they received anything in return by this, but to ensure the families had a better idea of my background before we initiated the interview.

Reflexivity and possible limitations

In this segment, I reflect on aspects that could affect my data and interpretations and certain limitations that must be taken into consideration when looking at my findings.

The epistemological question of interviewing families

As mentioned above, I considered how receiving individual accounts of the family’s condition, and especially the condition of the children may present an epistemological issue. As Åstedt-Kurki et al. (2001) state, “one respondent is usually not enough to describe the whole family unit” (p. 290), but they also add that the researcher may approach the data with the view “that family health is the sum of the subjective views of each individual family member” (p. 291). Related to this, another aspect to consider is how the concept of intersectionality may play a part in the related experiences of the interviewees. As Glavind Bo, Christensen, & Lund Thomsen (2016) remind us, interviewees may talk from different I-positions such as that of a mother, a Muslim, a refugee, a woman etc. and these positions may intersect. In the case of my interviews, the context of the situation could have led the interviewees to choose different positions based on whether they were with their family or away from them during the interview. For instance, as individuals the fathers I interviewed may feel compelled to talk more of themselves as individuals with specific ambitions for themselves and more as fathers while in the presence of their families, and the same could be said for the mothers. This was a possibility, but I add it here only as a caveat, as I did not find it useful to ruminate deeply on what side respondents had shown of themselves for this study other than the side natural to them. I do consider the experiences related by individuals to shed some light on a reality for the family. Epistemologically, I consider the political context

to have an external impact on the families' experiences, and as parents I do see the interviewees' individual experiences as being worth considering in relation to their family. While the points above must be considered as possible factors in my data, I maintain that my data does provide valuable insights into the family experiences of Syrian refugee families in Denmark.

Reflexivity and researcher background

Hervik (2003) calls for shared social experience as a "means of access to the reflexivity of other people" (p. 165). He argues that shared social experience:

"*implies more than mutual presence, interaction, and common interpretation. It requires that we attend to people's multiple, simultaneous, compelling concerns and to follow them, as they move, bridging scenes and encounters, if we are to grasp what is at stake and how they, people in various positions, feel-think and act. We cannot separate emotional and mental involvement in or relations in the field*" (p. 179)

I will not venture to say that I have reached this ideal in this study, which would allow me to understand my respondents at this level. Hervik argues for this level of reflexivity in the context of ethnographies, and I did not have the opportunity this method brings to get this close to my respondents. However, I did seek to gain as positive a connection as I could with the families. As mentioned, this involved allotting time before interviews to chat and for me to present myself and answer their questions. On several occasions I stayed for several hours following the interview, and we had several conversations both related and unrelated to my topic of interest beyond the interviews. Moreover, Hervik (2003) stresses the need to practice reflexivity while in the field rather than just during the textual phase of research, as the understanding of a situation is predicated on the researcher's experience in the moment, and that the researcher must additionally self-scrutinize and reflect on preconditioned assumptions:

"*only by working through our subjectivities and deconstructing the cognitive cultural framework in which we usually posit ourselves as the prototypes of humanity – they are more like us, than we are like them – can we embody the habitus, reflect upon it and the cultural constructions of other people, and abandon Western society as the yardstick for the rest of the world*" (p. 188).

During the interviews, I made sure to reflect on my own possible biases throughout and maintain an open mind to new impressions. With my political background and personal rationale for conducting this research, I strived to avoid going in with presumptions of my respondents' identities as being inherent victims and powerless individuals with nothing else to relate than narratives of vulnerability. Instead, I allowed myself to have my perspective expanded to narratives about agency, power, and different ways of experiencing their situation. I thus considered inherent power relations in the interview situation and attempted not to construct essentialised ideas of an 'other' with the interviewees. As Berger (2015) states:

"*Reflexivity helps maintain the ethics of the relationship between researcher and research by 'decolonizing the discourse of the 'other' and securing that while interpretation of findings is always done through the eyes and cultural standards of the researcher, the effects of the latter on the research process is monitored*" (p. 221)

Furthermore, social research often involves a political positioning (Bryman, 2016) – it has moreover been my goal to present the political context objectively as possible. Yet, when considering my findings, it must be noted that I come from a prior position of scepticism in regard to the new legislation regarding refugees in Denmark.

Possible selection bias and language barrier

A point to mention is the possibility of my responding families being a certain type of family. As mentioned, I was denied access to families who potential gatekeepers described as "very frustrated and upset". Emotions like these were also generally voiced by my respondents, but they had the will and confidence to partake in the first place. The families I interviewed all seemed highly resourceful, pursuing education, vocational opportunities, and what they would refer to as 'integration' while their experience was often that other families had not maintained the same level of motivation. While I do not pretend to offer a general/representative view of Syrian families in Denmark, it should be noted that my findings may only reflect the experiences of highly motivated, resourceful, and adaptable families, while others remain unheard. Even so, these experiences are no less relevant when considering the ramifications of policy change on refugee families.

Another final caveat is the impact a language barrier may have had on the interviews. The interviews were conducted in Danish, and while all of the respondents had learned the

language well enough to partake in an interview (sometimes aided by their spouse through translation), some points and intricacies may have been missed. However, bringing a translator would have posed the problem of having the experiences translated through an external source rather than offered directly to me. Another potential limitation related to language was that one parent would usually dominate the interview somewhat by having attained higher Danish proficiency. In most but not all cases these were the men, as they had arrived first and been reunited with their family later, therefore having had more experience with Danish. I attempted to counter this by often turning the attention to the less proficient respondents, but this is another point that may have impacted the data somewhat.

Theory and concepts

In this chapter I include my applied concepts and cover the theoretical framework that I correlate to my data in my analysis. As mentioned, I established my theoretical framework based on early interviews and initial coding, fitting my iterative research approach. It was clear already then that there were salient tendencies in the data, and these tendencies became the foundation for the theories I will apply.

Concept of Human Security

In this study, I include human security as a concept to discuss the experiences of the interviewees in the context of Danish society and policy change. This segment both includes a definition of the concept that I will be following, a short discussion on its critiques and application, and how I intend on using it in relation to my data.

What is human security?

The UN introduced the concept of human security as an approach through the 1994 global Human Development Report (Gasper & Gomez, 2013). Since then, there has been frequent academic discussions as to its exact definition, applicability, and usefulness (Shinoda, 2004) (Hailu, 2016). At its core, the concept proposes a reprioritisation and reconceptualization of security for national governments and supranational unions. As Shinoda (2004) notes, security has historically been thought of primarily in national and militaristic terms, that is, security against threats to the nation as a whole, such as war or terrorism. However, as he argues, the emergence of international agencies like WHO, WFP and UN’s different branches has set the stage for a concept such human security to appear as a new proposed, global obligation, in which social security and economic development of especially developing nations becomes the responsibility of the rest of the world. As Shinoda (2004) states: “Now social security is not an exclusively national term; it has international dimensions” (p. 9). He continues that the concept could be conceived of adhering to four characteristics: “universal concern, interdependent, ensured by early prevention, and people-centered” (p. 9). Thus, the concept of human security has global dimensions and must be thought if beyond national boundaries. As Hailu (2016) states, the objective in using the concept is to gain an understanding “to uphold global security and international cooperation” (p. 21).

Individual security and development

While the global dimension is a salient feature of human security, its perhaps most defining trait is its reprioritisation from national security to security for the individual – "people-centered" as mentioned. On what this entails, UN offers an overarching ideal of "freedom from fear' and 'freedom from want'" (Gasper & Gomez, 2013, p. 2), while Shinoda (2004) offers an expanded description of the concept as:

"a process of widening the range of people's choices." And human security means "that people can exercise these choices safely and freely - and that they can be relatively confident that the opportunities they have today are not totally lost tomorrow." The latter is "a critical ingredient of participatory development." If given the opportunities to meet their most essential needs and to earn their own living, people will set themselves free and ensure that they can make a full contribution to developments of themselves, their local communities, their countries and the world." (p. 9)

In this lies the goal and assumption of the human security concept. Security and confidence in one's situation and circumstances for development, without the threat of sudden harmful upheavals of daily existence (Hailu, 2016) (Shinoda 2004). This stresses the concept's link to development, as the concept can be conceived as people's feeling that their freedom, choices, and opportunities will be protected – that is, their ability to develop and flourish as people (Gasper & Gomez, 2013). The UN lists a number of areas such as food, housing, and protection from discrimination that may be considered in relation to people's feelings of human security. However, they assert that "This list is neither comprehensive nor definitive, and the UN Charter refers more flexibly to 'fundamental freedoms'" (Gasper & Gomez, 2013, p. 2) and that "human security is a flexible approach and can be tailored to different contexts and topics, according to the specific context" (p. 2). This flexibility is also tied to the criticism human security has received, however.

Criticism and applicability

In his article, Hailu (2016) reflects critically on the usefulness of human security as a concept, when considering different characterisations and arguments for or against the concept. He identifies that the most common criticism of human security is that it is too ambiguous and all-encompassing as a concept. In this argument, the flexibility of concept allows anything to be conceived as a potential threat and thus fails to offer meaningful

specific solutions or lay the foundation for actual policy change. Yet, despite these criticisms, Hailu (2016) stresses human security as overriding these potential issues through its use as an alternative concept that challenges traditional concepts, such as national security, territorial integrity and state sovereignty (p. 10) by “placing the individual at the receiving end of all security concerns, and also becomes a potent impression that promotes and sustains stability and progressive integration within their states, societies, and regions” (p. 10). Furthermore, he argues that, unlike traditional approaches to security, human security sees it vital to understand specific people’s vulnerabilities from their own perspectives – “the core of human security is viewed as the vulnerability of individuals” (p. 13). This is clear in the UN’s (Gasper & Gomez, 2013) own description as well:

“No matter which topic is addressed, a guiding principle of the human security approach is that it requires understanding the particular threats experienced by particular groups of people” (p. 2)

Using human security in this study

As just mentioned, a guiding principle of using human security is to seek understanding of threats to groups of people through the people’s own experiences, whether real or imagined. This will make it possible to identify the obstacles they perceive to hinder their development or threaten them. Hailu (2016) notes that human security, having many uses, may be thought to impose an obligation on states “to provide a facilitating environment for equality and individual participation” (p. 18). In this study, I do not seek to argue sternly that Denmark is obligated to adhere to UN’s proposal of human security as a new approach to security. Rather, the concept offers a frame through which to discuss the refugees’ experiences in terms of what causes them uncertainty and to what extent they find they have the preconditions, safety, and freedom for prospective development, both in Denmark or, as the case may be, upon returning to Syria. This follows the people-centered approach suggested above wherein individual growth and safety from fear and sudden upheaval is the focus. Thus, while I do not assert the fulfilment of this focus as an obligation for Denmark, looking at refugee experiences with the tenets of human security in mind enables a discussion of the effects of the Danish policies as felt by the interviewees. Following the global, universal principle of the concept, the refugees’ thoughts and fears about returning to Syria are furthermore relevant because global effects and circumstances for development must be considered as well as national circumstances for development. In conclusion, while I draw on

human security as guidance in my data collection and analysis, it is also a concept I will keep in mind upon discussing the policies of the Danish government, the interviewees and how they view their conditions in Denmark.

Refugee Uncertainty

In this study, I will frequently refer to "uncertainty". As such, it is necessary to elaborate on how I treat this term as a concept in the analysis. Here, my conception leans closely on the critique and suggestions of Schiltz, Vindevogel, Derluyn, and Vanderplasschen (2018) regarding how refugee uncertainty has been generally treated in academic literature and research. Schiltz et al. (2018) main critique revolves around what they see to be an essentialist narrative of refugee uncertainty having become a tendency in research. As they state, researchers rarely define or situate uncertainty in their work and it becomes rather vague how the term is then meant to be understood or taken for granted. As they state: "The result of such narrative is that uncertainty is not only assumed to be inherent, constraining, and radical in refugee situations but also appears to be inevitable—a condition that cannot be solved but needs to be dealt with" (p. 4). By being taken for granted as inherent, uncertainty furthermore becomes poorly contextualized and used as an explanatory mechanism in refugee situations. What Schiltz et al. (2018) propose is that "we explore the links between uncertainty as "lived experience," and the actual situation or condition that gives rise to such experiences. As such, we aim to provide possible pathways for future research on uncertainty in refugee situations" (p. 4). To this end, my person-centric approach can provide the data to better understand the particularities and intricacies of these situations of uncertainty and what gives rise to them. This is important to challenge the assumptions about uncertainty below, and necessary if we are to consider social and political actions to alleviate this uncertainty and empower refugees, following solutions actually rooted in the sources of uncertainty rather than the assumptions about it.

Schiltz et al. (2018) arrive at their list of assumptions based on a collected synthesis of literature focused on refugees, which they critically analyse. This results in an outline of three key assumptions about uncertainty that they find to permeate literature and research on refugees, limiting our view of the concept. These are as follows:

Uncertainty is a natural and inherent part of the refugee situation

This assumption is that refugees will feel uncertain no matter what because of their status. This leaves out contextual factors and forms an essentialist perspective:

"*references to uncertainty in the reviewed literature are often disconnected from the social and political realities which may shape and produce experiences of uncertainty. As such, experiences of uncertainty appear to be an individual matter, rather than a possible product of the complex and layered realities of refugee issues that are highly social and political*" (Schiltz et al., 2018, p. 4)

Instead, Schiltz et al. urges us to discuss the context and how this is referred to by the refugees to gain an understanding of the factors that specifically lead to their sense of uncertainty. Thus, we may see that uncertainty is not necessarily inevitable in refugee situations but have specific contextual roots that can be changed.

Uncertainty is negative and constraining

Refugees are generally spoken of as unfortunate victims, immobilized and made passive by their situation. However, in their changing lives, it is necessary for them to make choices and to change their outlook on their future and plans. As Schiltz et al. suggest "A more helpful question may be to ask what kind of experiences (and subjects) are shaped by what kind of circumstances rather than to presume that contexts of displacement are constraining or productive per se" (p. 6). Once again, contextual factors matter on how refugees make sense of their situation, and if this leads them to passivity or agency – researchers need to base their observations on "on real encounters rather than intuitively logical assumptions" (p. 6).

Uncertainty seen as radical and abnormal

Situations of displacement and movement are often seen as a severing of people's usual lives, when it may in fact be their norm. Thus, the experience of being a refugee may not be experienced as being as abrupt as assumed, and uncertainty may stem from other causes. Instead, specific situations in the refugee experiences may cause uncertainty rather than lives on the move. Schiltz et al. suggest that uncertainty may be "characterised by limited resources for action, and that dealing with uncertainty is also an attempt to make more secure rather than more certain" (p. 7). In response to this issue, they add:

"*This in turn stresses the interrelatedness of experiences of uncertainty with the way displaced people are managed and looked at but also to how the situation they are fleeing from (the "normal" situation to which they are supposed to return to) may also be characterised by insecurity. The way to take such considerations into account when studying uncertainty is to take seriously the stories of refugees themselves and make these central to our research.*" (p. 7)

In my analysis, I keep these suggestions of Schiltz et al. in mind when referring to the uncertainty related by my respondents. Instead of approaching my data with a normative understanding of what refugee uncertainty looks like, I acknowledge that uncertainty is highly contextual, that it does not inevitably place refugees in a passive role, and that refugees may perceive uncertainty from other factors than the temporariness of their situation. Brashers (2001), writing about the "nature of uncertainty", similarly suggest that research should abandon narrow conceptions of the what is a highly variable concept. As he states:

"*Uncertainty exists when details of situations are ambiguous, complex, unpredictable, or probabilistic; when information is unavailable or inconsistent; and when people feel insecure in their own state of knowledge in general … Because it is primarily a self-perception about one's own cognitions or ability to derive meaning, a person who believes himself or herself to be uncertain is uncertain. Lacking knowledge is somewhat independent of self-assessment about one's state of knowledge … I even may have all the information that is currently available, yet I still may feel uncertain*" (Brashers, 2001, p. 478)

These are my guiding principles when discussing uncertainty. As mentioned, what is crucial is that the person-centric approach allows the stories of the refugees themselves to take center stage, and thus my use of uncertainty will be highly contextualized to their experiences and perceptions. This is in line with my epistemological approach and approach to the concept of integration – that is, based on the refugees' interpretive meaning of their situation.

Theoretical frame

In this research, I draw on the theoretical ideas below as a conceptual lens on my respondents' experiences. As is the case with my treatment of uncertainty as a concept, I do not wish to approach my data with a normalised, theoretical view that will limit their experiences to essential categories. Even so, my data pointed me towards the ideas below,

and they provide a way of interpreting my data and making analytical sense of the experiences. My person-centric approach has allowed me to see how these ideas at the normative level apply to the actual experiences of refugees, although the correlation can only be suggested through my subjective interpretation of the data. In this segment, I outline these ideas that I apply to my data in the analysis and discussion (although some proved more relevant than others).

Ontological security

An early inspiration in conceptualising uncertainty for my study was Giddens’ (1991) ideas on ontological security, although this term originally stems from Laing (1959). Here I use Dupuis’ (2012) understanding of Giddens’ ideas. Dupuis (2012) states ontological security as “the confidence that most people have in their ongoing sense of identity, a sense that others are reliable and constant, and their material environments secure. Put simply, ontological security involves a sense of the reliability of people and things” (p. 156). This security is an inherent psychological need for individuals - the trust that they live in a “constancy of surroundings” in which their self-identity may continue to develop continuously (Dupuis, 2012). Problems of the self occur if an individual’s imagined life trajectory of the self (Giddens, 1991) becomes broken, and the ontological security can be seen as a “a response to the world as it has presented in the past and the anticipation that it will continue to present in the same way in the future” (Dupuis 2012, p. 156). This seems immediately relevant to the experiences of my respondents, since their dilemma can be seen as the lack of trust in constancy of their surroundings and lack of ability to imagine a dependable life trajectory. However, Giddens attributes challenges to people’s ontological insecurity to great societal changes in modernity such a globalisation: “ontological security in the modern world is more fragile and tenuous. This is largely due to the changed nature of the modern world’s trust mechanisms.” (Dupuis 2012, p. 156). In this study, I argue that attributing the experiences of my respondents merely to macro-societal change in modernity would fail to hone in on- and analyse the specific, contextual factors and aspects of their uncertainties. As El Shaarawi (2015) also states while touching upon Giddens’ concept, experiences of refugee uncertainty “cannot be reduced to the broad vagaries of globalization and neo-liberalism, despite associations with these processes.” (p. 53), but we must instead acknowledge “the importance of analysing the ways in which uncertainty is experienced and expressed in particular local contexts” (p. 53). Along the same lines, William and Balaz (2014) argue that risk does not have the same meaning to all migrants, but that it is “contested, shifting, incorporated into

narratives about destinations and home, and transformed by the migrants' own narratives (p. 115). As such they stress that "the meaning of risk and uncertainty are highly contextual" (p. 124). Keeping these arguments in mind, I will not be relying on ontological security heavily as a framework to understand my data. Yet, conceptualising uncertainty as the experience of an unstable environment, breaking the imagined life-trajectory of one's self-identity is still pertinent to my data in several regards.

Disrespect and recognition

I found that my respondents' statements could be interpreted to often resonate with Honneth's (1992) ideas on disrespect and recognition. In Honneth's view, recognition from an individual's surroundings is vital for the developing a positive understanding of self, and it he suggests recognition as "the prerequisite for human integrity" (p. 192). The opposite, disrespect, thus not only constrains the individual, but also "impairs these persons in their positive understanding of self – an understanding acquired by intersubjective means" (p. 189). As such he argues that "the experience of disrespect poses the risk of an injury that can cause the identity of the entire person to collapse" (p. 189), and he distinguishes between three forms of disrespect and three juxtaposing forms of recognition. The first relates to physical disrespect, which involves the deprivation of physical freedom – the control and right on one's body. This form of disrespect is not relevant to my data, so I will direct my attention at Honneth's two latter forms:

Disrespect of rights

This form of disrespect involves feeling structurally excluded from certain rights granted to full-fledged members of society. These rights can be conceived as whatever the individual expects his or her hosting society to provide to its members. If the individual feels these rights are denied him or her "the implication is that he is not deemed to possess the same degree of moral accountability as the other members of society" (p. 191). This typically leads to a loss of self-respect and the ability to look at oneself as an equal partner in interaction with other individuals. Recognition in this regard is felt when the individual "learns to see himself from the perspective of his partners to interaction as a bearer of equal rights" (p. 194), and the effect is that the individual will come to see him- or herself as an active, equal subject in society.

Disrespect of individual character

Honneth's last conceptualised form of disrespect has to do with the feeling of lacking recognition related to one's way of life, self-realisation, and group belonging. As he states: "Once confronted with an evaluation that downgrades certain patterns of self-realisation, those who have opted for these patterns cannot relate to their mode of fulfilment as something invested with positive significance within their community" (p. 191). This is likely to lead to a loss of self-esteem – the feeling that the individual "is no longer in a position to conceive of himself as a being whose characteristic traits and abilities are worthy of esteem (p. 191). In other words, it robs them "the potential for taking a positive view – in the sense of social acceptance – of the abilities that they have acquired in the course of their lives" (p. 195). On the other hand, recognition in this respect involves the acknowledgement of the person's individual traits and their skills formed by their specific biographies.

Honneth specifies these three forms of recognition as the "moral infrastructures that a social life-world must exhibit if it is to be able to protect its members" and that the integrity thus reached is predicated on the subject regarding "society as supporting him over the entire range of this practical relationships to self" (p. 196). As mentioned, Honneth's ideas provide a conceptualised way for me to look at my respondents' experiences – a perspective through which to interpret them. It is thus a way of labelling real world phenomena into perhaps limiting theoretical categories, when it comes to describing the complicated nature of social life. However, looking at my respondents' experiences through Honneth's ideas enables me to offer analytical proposals, which may allude to what disposition refugees' experiences in the Danish system leaves them with. Again, the person-centric approach allows the closeness to their experiences that may show the described theoretical social phenomena working at the practical level, while Honneth's ideas may in turn expand the way to make sense of the refugees' experiences analytically.

Capital

Lastly, a final theoretical idea I find pertinent to apply to some extent is Bourdieu's (1979) theory of capital, although here I draw on Anheier, Gerhards, and Romo's (1995) outline of the theory. In this theory, 'capital' is not limited to an economic resource but can also "assume monetary and nonmonetary as well as tangible and intangible forms" (Anheier et al. 1995, p. 862). A distinction exists here between three forms of capital, and they are as follows:

- Economic capital, which refers to financial resources and income.
- Cultural capital, which may refer to "formal educational qualifications and training" (p. 862). In the case of immigrants, I see "education" to also extend to language acquisition.
- Social capital, which "is the sum of the actual and potential resources that can be mobilized through membership in social networks of actors and organisations" (p. 862).

I only include these theoretical capital somewhat and do not discuss the ways in which people may try to convert or invest certain capital to gain more capital in other areas or "symbolic capital" (Anheier, et al., 1995), which is an integral part of the theory. However, the concept of capital can be used to create an analytical frame for the respondents' uncertainty and fear of loss – that is, fair of loss of the position they have achieved in society and the capital they have obtained thereof. As such, this usage becomes an analytical means of discussing loss of various resources or positions in society. Again, forcing this perspective on uncertainty to only revolve around the loss or maintaining of these forms of capital would present a narrow view, and thus it is not a salient factor in my analysis. However, as Schiltz et al. (2018) suggested above, uncertainty may be conceived as trying to make more secure rather than more certain, and considering how my respondents show worry over their security in terms of life opportunities if they are to leave, Bourdieu's capital provide an analytical tool of discussing their specific thoughts on what is at stake for them in society.

The political context

In this chapter, I cover the political context that this study finds as its raison d'être, that is the transition to 'temporariness' rather than 'integration'. I establish an overview built from the government's (the coalition of Venstre, Liberal Alliance, and Konservative) own constructions and various statements made by politicians, for to understand the context of my respondent families' experiences, it is also vital to understand which statements and constructions are out there to be interpreted and what signal the government sends. By this I mean that following my ontological positioning, I regard the government's descriptions of 'integration' (and its "failure") as a construction rather than an objectively described phenomenon happening in society. In turn, my data may then tell of how these constructions are interpreted by the families and how they see them affecting their lives. In addition to understanding what is meant by 'temporariness,' I include a discussion of "integration", put in quotation marks here as this has become an overly fuzzy term in the Danish political- and media-landscape, which nevertheless still impacts the discussions and political initiatives targeting refugees (Rytter, 2018). Moreover, to not confuse with immigrants, the refugees I refer to in this study are people following the description of the 1951 Geneva convention (UNHCR, 2019).

The "paradigm shift" to temporariness

The so-called "paradigm shift" ("Law 140) is part of the 2019 Danish financial law, proposed by the Danish government in cooperation with Danish People's Party. A salient part of the law regards immigration policy and here the paradigm shift refers to a series of new law initiatives tightening up conditions for refugees in Denmark, with the rationale being that Denmark will attract less asylum seekers, leading to more means being allotted to the "core welfare and safety in Denmark" (Finansloven, 2019, p. 26). A core principle of the paradigm shift is the change from a focus on integration to temporariness for refugees in Denmark, that is, refugees are to consider their stay temporary. The document reads:

"*Temporariness is to be a central and general factor in the different conditions and services that meet refugees staying in Denmark. There cannot be the least doubt – not with authorities, the refugees or the reunited family – that they are to travel back home when*

possible – no matter whether this happens voluntarily or by force" (Finansloven for 2019, p. 27)

They elaborate further:

"*Residence permits for refugees and reunited family members must thus reflect this temporariness. As such, refugees and reunited family members will be met with this framework already from day one: A stay in Denmark is temporary, and you are to return home as soon as the option exists*" (Finansloven 2019, p. 27)

As they state, residence permits will be taken away as soon as possible according to Denmark's international obligations, and the government is willing to "go to the very limit of the conventional obligations when making a decision on terminating a residence permit/denying its extension" (p. 28). In this regard they state that connection to the job market, participation in associational life, and Danish proficiency is to impact the decision as little as possible, that is, having found a foundation in Danish society and being self-sufficient is to play only a miniscule role or none at all. Moreover, children's own connection to Denmark is to factor minimally as well, and children under the age of eight are not to have their connection to Denmark considered at all in a decision. The law further stresses that the new initiatives cover all refugees and reunited family members, and not just the specific group of refugees having received temporary protection status – refugees under the § 7.3 status. Thus, the main point is that refugees are to return and "rebuild their country" (p. 26). The paradigm shift was passed on the 21th of February 2019 and became effective as of March 1st the same year (Ingvorsen, 2019). The sentiment is that certain areas may be sufficiently safe for refugees to return, although this is in the wake of Al Jazeera recently reporting the questionable safety and conditions of various "safe zones" in the war-torn country (Wilks, 2019). Despite the moniker of 'paradigm shift,' this is not the first time Denmark has stated its protection of refugees as being only temporary. During the Yugoslav Wars of the early 90s, Bosnian refugees were likewise granted temporary protection, although many eventually remained in Denmark and re-established themselves successfully, the initial "waiting" experience impacted many of them in terms language acquisition, education (Dmitruk, Hadzic, & Sherman 2005). They did not expect to stay, and the government did not wish for them to "integrate" through schools or work, giving them "false hopes" thus barring them from such options (Dmitruk et al. 2005). However, this past experience seems to have not factored in the decision.

The future of refugees in Denmark

The preamble in the integration law is no longer to include the text “the law has as its final purpose to ensure that newly arrived foreigners are aware that successful integration is precondition for permanent residence permit.” (Finansloven 2019, p. 29). This, and the goal of eventually sending refugees back, raises the question of refugees’ position and transitory future in Denmark if they are to leave. What role do politicians intend for them to take on in the months or years before their return? The document reads that “the point of departure is for new arrivals to provide for themselves while in the country” (p. 30), and a lowering of their support (which is now to be called “home-return benefit”) is supposed to encourage them to work. However, although the intention is still to have refugees work, provide for themselves, and pay taxes, this new focus presents a departure from the goal of integration – at least this is stated explicitly. Even so, the Danish government’s website still lists integration as a goal for refugees and immigrants. The site reads “Denmark shall remain a country for those who can and will” (Regeringen.dk, 2019), and continues with:

“*The government wishes for Denmark to be open for qualified foreigners, who arrive with willingness, skills, and motivation for making a positive difference. We must attract foreigners – especially youths – who want to learn things, accomplish things, create things.*

The government believes that globalisation is a profit for the individual and our community. Denmark achieves, when ideas, labour force, and wares cross country borders. We develop as people and as a society. Growth is facilitated by looking forward and by meeting challenges with a positive and open response.” (Regeringen.dk, 2019)

Under the topic of “Integration,” the site states “active participation in the Danish labour market as the way to successful integration in our common society” (Regeringen.dk, 2019), and the focus is to be on facilitating refugees’ way to the labour market. Even so, they are also expected to leave again, once deemed acceptable. The loss of labour force this will result in is mentioned in an article from Denmark’s Radio, and especially the hotel-, restaurant-, and cleaning- companies show concern over the prospect of losing workers, but Støjberg maintains that “there is a difference between coming to Denmark as a refugee and coming to work” (Jensen, 2019). Thus, while integration is still listed as a goal, integration is then to happen only during the refugees’ stay in Denmark and is not to lead to permanent residency (the requirements for permanent residency have been tightened as well). Furthermore,

emphasis in this integration is no longer placed on factors such as language-acquisition and social- and community involvement but seems to be based merely on the ability to sustain oneself through work while in Denmark. This marks a transition from Prime Minister Lars Løkke's discourse of "holes in the map of Denmark" discourse of his 2018 new year's speech in which he problematised poorly integrated immigrants and refugees living in "parallel communities" and called for more cultural cohesion, stressing that Denmark "should be open to those who can and will" (Løkke, 2018). Now this sentiment seems, at least from the government's statements, to have changed, putting emphasis not on making refugees more like Danes, but on making sure that they provide financially for themselves and then leave. This begs the question of what 'integration' is to mean in the Danish context.

The 'integration' word in Denmark

In discussing the use of 'integration,' I look to Rytter's (2018) critique of the term in the Danish context. He warns that normalised, categorical conceptions of the term have split from social scientific understandings (emic and etic ideas of the term), and that we must reflect on this fact when using the word in research. As he states:

"Embedded in specific Danish social imaginaries about the nation and the welfare state, selves and others, us and them, the concept of integration is not innocent, but simultaneously reflects and promotes specific constructions of social problems and solutions and an asymmetrical relationship between majorities and minorities" (p. 2)

Thus, the concept of integration is not to be approached uncritically with the assumption that its definition is a given, for in doing so our analysis may "become an active element in the stigmatisation of vulnerable ethnic and religious minorities" (p. 1). For as mentioned, Rytter (2018) mentions the Danish usage of the term as fuzzy, referring sometimes to social integration, economic integration, political integration, cultural integration, and others, while always constructing an implied Danish norm to which the newcomers must assimilate. If quantitative surveys show that they are closing the gap, the immigrants are said to be becoming integrated, but usually they are bound to fail as the fuzzy integration term can be bended to point out other parameters in which they are still different, and as "integration talk is always pre-emptive and a means to avoid latent catastrophes. In this respect, integration becomes a specific kind of 'problematisation" (p. 8). According to Rytter (2018) the Danish concept of integration rests on- and promotes three specific scenarios: immigrants as not

earning or contributing to their welfare, immigrants as being guests that will never completely belong, and Danes as the true and worthy indigenous inhabitants of Denmark. Of course, the new law explicitly signals a departure from integration as a political goal, but that does not mean that these constructions of the concept change. Rytter (2018) urges a more critical view when engaging with the term (or to stop using the term at all), and to "to open up to a plurality of conflicting voices and positions within the analysis" (p. 13). As he asserts we must:

"take responsibility for the concept of integration, which has had many unforeseen consequences and effects since it was de-territorialised from social theory. Integration is not the solution, it is a significant aspect of the problem, and therefore more talking, thinking and 'writing against integration' is needed" (p. 15)

Thus, when using the word "integration" in this study, I do so away from preconceptions of what it is to mean – especially away from the way it has been categorically constructed in the Danish contexts. Still, the respondents used the term numerous times – it had clearly attained significance to them - and my use of "integration" is based on their statements.

Findings and analysis

In this chapter, I present and analyse the findings yielded through my data. After this, I include a discussion segment, in which I expand upon the meanings I have interpreted from the data and its ramifications for the refugees. In the discussion segment, I also discuss implications in relation to Danish policies and the concept of human security included earlier, and finally, how my findings relate to other research on the topic of refugee uncertainty. Below, I shortly discuss the structure of this analysis (the rationale behind setting up my analysis chapter the way I have), and then include an overview of interview participants for reference.

Analysis structure

During my coding process, I distributed statements about experiences into three overarching topics relating respectively to impacts on life, considerations about children, and thinking about the future. This was no arbitrary selection as these reflect the overarching themes that the respondents would tell of but also due to my research question seeking to investigate how the refugees experience uncertainty in their lives (the effects), about their futures, and how this is impacting them as families with children specifically. That is not to say these themes are epistemologically separate and in no way interconnected. For instance, the theme relating to children is in no doubt linked to the families' general worries about the futures, and a source of anxiety impacting their everyday lives. However, given that having children posed special considerations and was mentioned as a salient factor by all the respondents, I found it appropriate to separate it into its own category to expound on the specific considerations families have to deal with on top of their thoughts about their own lives. Moreover, I distinguish between ways that the uncertainty has concrete impacts on the refugees' lives in the present and how they are uncertain about their futures, both insights I seek as part of my working research question.

The overarching themes became headings for a series of salient tendencies within each theme, and these function as the subheadings of the chapter. Again, there is no doubt that these tendencies are often interconnected, but to enable a usable, meaningful analysis, I have indexed them into separate segments.

Participant overview

In total, 15 people participated in the interviews, representing 9 families (although the epistemological considerations with having individuals represent their families were discussed earlier). All names have been changed into pseudonyms to ensure anonymity, and the transcripts I include below have been translated from Danish to English by me. Included below is a table of participants for reference:

Interviewee family/name	Age	Residence	Children and family	Time in Denmark
Abdel	40	Sønderborg	A girl, 14 years old, a boy, 12 years old, and a girl 10 years old. Also has a wife who was not present	About 4 years
Reem	33	Sønderborg	3 boys, one 12 years old and twins, 6 years old. Also has a husband who was not present	Almost 7 years
Uri	40	Sønderborg	Two children, 14 and 12 years old	5 years
Miran and Aseel	37 and 27	Aalborg	A girl, 2,5 years old and a boy, 5 months old	5 years and 3 years
Tarek and Haya	34 and 30	Nørresundby	Two boys, 9 and 6 years old	3 years and 2 years
Mohammad	40	Hjørring	Three children, 8, 7, and 3 years old. Also has a wife who was not present	5 years
Akram and Qamar	42 and 32	Hjørring	A girl, 8 years old, a boy, 5 years old, and a boy, 3 years old.	5 years and 3,5 years
Nizar and Rasha	41 and 34	Brønderslev	A boy, 13 years old, a girl. 10 years old, and a girl, 5 years old	3,5 years and 2 years
Burhan, Souzan, and Zain	44, 35, and 17	Aarhus	5 children. A boy (Zain), 17 years, 2 teenage girls (I did not get their age), and two small boys, 4 and 3 years old	4 years and 2,5 years

Impacts on life

The respondents frequently tell of the effects their uncertainty regarding the new temporariness focus has on their lives – both psychologically, physically and in terms of ambitions. This was by far the most discussed topic in the interviews and the majority of this chapter elaborates on these findings. This segment outlines these effects under three subheadings, although as mentioned, the effects are usually interlinked.

Experience of psychological effects

With no exception, all the families mention the feeling of “stress” having become an incessant factor in their lives, following the presentation of the new financial law. This “stress” is usually linked to them constantly thinking about future scenarios that they cannot confirm or rule out, and scattered thoughts about their remaining options or lack thereof. Abdel tells how he is afraid: ”my children say: “dad, we are going back to Syria?” and I say no, but I’m afraid. In my heart I’m afraid. Maybe we are going back tomorrow” (See Appendix A, l. 18-19). He describes how his wife is “like a balloon that has lost its air”, and how it is difficult to escape the thoughts that tire him:

> ”*From 6 in the morning till 7 in the evening I hear them. I drive the bus always. I say now, if they want to send us back then that is how it is – I don’t want to think about it all the time. Because thinking like that makes you tired. In the evening you can’t sleep, because you always think. You think “have I made a mistake by fleeing to Denmark?*” (l. 235-238)

Both Reem and Uri also tell of stress and describe in which way this has impacted their husbands. For Uri, her husband has developed unhealthy eating habits, and Reem tells of her husband becoming discouraged:

> “*Reem: Yes, well, before my husband liked going outside with our children. Going for walks and such. Right now he just says he doesn’t feel like it. But he tries, but still, it is not as it was before. And he smokes too much at home.*
>
> *Martin: Why?*
>
> *Reem: I think he thinks too much about going back. He thinks: “what will happen to the children?” Yeah, so ”next day we are homeless in Syria*” (laughs a bit).” (l. 458-463)

The habit of thinking too much is also described by Miran, who with his with his education and two small children feels he has a lot of significant life choices to make: “*There is much stress and sometimes I just sit at home and think: “what should I do? How can I act?” Yes, it’s very tough*” (l. 619-620). He illustrates his scattered thinking process:

> “*What should I do? Should I stay in Denmark or should we leave for another country? Should I apply for asylum again? Am I going back to Syria – I can’t. What*

> *about my family, my kids, my friends in Denmark?" … my job and education… yes, there is a lot like that.*" (l. 799-801)

Mohammad mentions a "lack of stability" permeating his family's life constantly throughout our interview, and he says that he is in a state of "speechlessness" due to the new laws, not knowing what will happen to him and his family. Like Miran, his thoughts about his life trajectory are scattered and he states that "now he has a bad situation psychologically" and thinks that he might be headed towards a depression. When asked about his wife's disposition (she did not feel like partaking in the interview), he relates that she is on strong medication three times daily now, but that this is not going to make her forget their situation. Nizar states that the interview processes he has been called to decide whether his residence permit in Denmark will be extended has made him unable to sleep many nights, and him and his wife's thoughts right now generally revolve around the answer they are awaiting from Sandholm in Copenhagen. Burhan, also expresses how stress and inadvertent thinking has become a constant factor in their lives: "*We are stressed. To a high extent. We can't figure it out. Always confused – we cannot forget it or keep from thinking about it – we have to think about it*." (l. 2212-2213). His son, Zain, who wanted to share his thoughts as well adds:

> "*When I'm with my friends, they try to talk about something else. Then I can forget it somewhat you could say. I have some good friends. But still, we think about it almost all the time. Sometimes it's the last thing I think about before I go to sleep – I think "ok, what the hell should I do*?" (l. 2215-2218)

These statements suggest that a constant sense of anxiety has come to impact the families, never giving them complete respite, creating a kind of mental exhaustion, which also affects them physically. During the interviews, this was obvious, as almost all of them would immediately tell of these tendencies upon being asked the open, beginning question of how they were feeling and what was on their minds these days. In many cases, it was also noticeable on their tone and demeanour in the interview situation. Although a matter of interpretation, many families seemed quite demoralised or tired in their tone: they would often sigh or trail off in their sentence once they reached decisive matters in their lives that to them seemed especially uncertain. At times they would laugh somewhat despondently when discussing their dilemma, at other times sardonically at the position they feel they have been forced into. Some, like Abdel, would reach points where he appeared genuinely outraged, maintaining eye-contact and speaking loudly, while Mohammad and Burhan seemed to relish

the opportunity to have someone listen to their qualms, often passionately going off for rants several minutes long. In contrast some would appear quiet to begin with but ease up and share numerous details - presumably once they had gained an impression of the interview situation and my intentions. These impressions suggest the genuineness of the anxiety described, an anxiety they feel has been subjected on them from external factors outside of their power. Moreover, this constant anxiety is related to uncertainties and obstacles that the families perceive impacting their ability to realise themselves in Denmark – realising the trajectories they had envisioned - and in the following segment, I elaborate on these specific challenges they perceive.

Experience of impact on goals, motivation, and options

A common topic in the interviews is ways in which the new focus on temporariness has created uncertainty in terms of their educational- and vocational plans and ambitions as well as how motivation in these regards has been impacted. The respondents generally feel anxiety about how their careers and educations will pan out and some relate how they have had to opt for alternative, backup plans to prepare for the future away from their intended, imagined life trajectory – sometimes with a worst-case scenario in mind. Moreover, some of them voice other ways they feel their options in Denmark have decreased, and how they have questioned whether they should continue struggling to learn Danish. These are factors that the respondents often relate to "integration", suggesting that they see their integrational options and motivations impacted as well.

When it comes to educational ambitions, several respondents feel uncertain about what will happen. For Reem, who worked as an English teacher in Syria, has completed language school, and the Danish 9th and 10th grade, the focus on temporariness has led her to a different education than planned to make it more likely she will finish:

> "*Reem: That's why I've changed my education from SOSU-assistant to SOSU-helper – because I think it'll change – ok, it takes one and a half year as helper, and if I work 5 years and I can get permanent residence, I may be able to continue as assistant, and afterwards the education. It takes 5 years, so 6,5 plus 2, that is 9 years.*
>
> *Martin: That's a long time*
>
> *Reem: And I'm almost 34 (laughs a bit)*." (l. 306-311)

As seen, she feels that she will have to spend a lot of her life on an ambition that she sees may be in jeopardy. When talking about the possibility of not being able to finish her education, she continues:

> "*Sometimes you just laugh – ok, I have started this and I've built my dream around it, but there comes a point, when you have reached all the way up here (marks a high point with hand), you're only one minor step from your dream and then it all falls down. What happens?*
>
> *Martin: What do you think of that?*
>
> *Reem: It's a catastrophe. Complete catastrophe*". (l. 437-441)

Aseel worked and studied to become a pedagogue in Syria, but as she is under the 7.3 status, she is not allowed to pursue further education. Instead, she says that she is looking for work in restaurants and the like. Her husband, Miran, who is currently studying a master's degree and has taken up a part time job as a dishwasher at a restaurant in a neighbouring town explains that if they are to gain permanent residency according to the rules, they may have to abstain from pursuing educations as "this is best for our children". Mohammad is in a similar situation. He studied Arabic literature in Aleppo and worked as a carpenter, then a shop owner there after a slipped disc. In Denmark he wishes to become a social and health care assistant or a carpenter again. However, during to the uncertainty of his application, he does not know if this is feasible, and to prepare for a potential move from Denmark, he has started working evenings at a pizzeria, although unpaid and illicitly:

> "*During the evening, I've begun in practice last week at pizzeria. I have to learn – Maybe one day Denmark will tell me (snaps fingers) "gone!" And in that case I'll be able to cook. I'll be able to something. It's fast, learning how to run a pizzeria – one month if you go for 5-6 hours. I work unpaid. Even if it's illegal, ok?*" (l. 1499-1502)

Qamar worked as a math high school teacher in Syria and wishes to pursue further education in Denmark. She has is currently attending UCN on a course in a preparational course for immigrants and refugees that can give access to further education. She did this mostly for learning Danish, which she speaks fluently. However, when asked about what has been on her mind recently, she mentions the uncertainty regarding her hopes for education in Denmark: "*Well, I'm completely pressured now cause I think "oh, will I have enough time to get pass my Upper Secondary School Leaving Examination and maybe start in university*

before my permit changes” (l. 1624-1626). She states that she has put a lot of effort into getting where she is, and that she is uncertain what will happen in the future regarding this:

> ”*Qamar: Yes, and I was in practice in elementary schools twice to see how the system works in Denmark, the school system, yes, to decide if I should pursue a career as a gymnasium teacher again or change to working with small children. Yes, and now – I think a lot if I will get to work with something like that in the future or if I should just stop… and then what?”*
>
> *Martin: So it is hard to know what will happen in the future. Is that because you’re worried your permit won’t be extended?*
>
> *Qamar: Yes, or if something changes. Because there is a lot of talk now that everyone will become like 7.3, where you wont get to study in university, or have to pay for at least*.” (l. 1629-1637)

This has impacted her motivation for continuing:

> ”*When I came to Denmark, I got very motivated – that was what made me think that now I should just learn the language fast, so I can continue and find a job, yes, but now… for the last three months where the rules have started changing, you get a little (puts her hands to her head to signal pressure)*” (l. 1665-1668)

Her husband, Akram, was an Arabic teacher at a high school, but has taken up a job as a shop owner in Denmark in a neighbouring town to Hjørring, where he drives every day. When asked about this he bluntly states that it was not something he wished for, but that their economic situation would not allow for him to pursue an education in Denmark. Zain, although only being 17 years old, also states that he has had thoughts of whether to continue his education, despite him doing exceedingly well in school (although his parents did not voice support for this):

> “*I do want a good education, but if I’m accepted and then have to go home after a month… my mom’s friends – when I heard they had received a letter, I actually became afraid. Then I wanted to tell my parents directly that I didn’t want to go to school anymore – just search for a job. Because if I go back, I just have to start over – then it doesn’t matter*”. (l. 2115-2118)

When it comes to learning Danish and focusing on their education, some of the respondents also relate having felt a lack of motivation or that the anxiety has impacted their ability to learn. For instance, Uri tells that her husband has stopped language school because he questions the use if he is to return. Tarek momentarily thought that if he were to return after "*3-4 years, why should I attend language school? Maybe I should learn English instead? That might help me more, if I were to end up in another country than Syria*" (l. 912-913). Talking about his friends at his workplace, he says that this is a typical sentiment among refugees:

> "*But some ask "why?" There is a lot of impact on the ambition – on the ambition to develop. If you are to develop, you have to… be happy, yes… if you are not happy or have stress, you can't do anything*". (l. 917-919)

Mohammad tells that the anxiety he experiences has disrupted his ability to learn the language, despite having had a flair for it before, as if he has gone back instead of forward:

> "*Mohammad: My teacher told me he wanted to talk to me. "Mohammad, last year when you wrote a page in Danish, you got 1-5 things wrong… but now, a lot of mistakes! Most people move forward, but you, you move backwards". For the last half year, I haven't learned anything, I don't understand anything, no new words in Danish. I cant. I'm in doubt...*
>
> *Martin: Why?*
>
> *Mohammad: My brain is closed – I think in other ways. The first five months in Denmark, my Danish friends told me: "Mohammad, you have been here 5 years?" No, just 5 months. People who had been here 5 years were at the same level. They told me I learned fast*." (l. 1540-1547)

Along the same lines, Nizar also relates feeling that his ability to study has been impacted by the anxiety's embodied results he experiences related to the new focus:

> "*Martin: Is it difficult to work and learn Danish and such when you think about this?*
>
> *Nizar: (sighs)... yes, it's a little hard. After the interview, I had a test at VUC. I flunked it. It was math – I also flunked Danish – it wasn't like that before in 9th and 10th grade. Then I got 10 in Danish and 7 in Math – right now it's 00.*

> *Rizar: Because he thinks a lot.*
>
> *Nizar: Yes, I think a lot, and I can't really comprehend new things. I understand what it is… but I think… yes, I have forgotten many things… And my teacher asks now "Nizar you do know what this is. Why can't you figure it out later?" Because I'm nervous! I can't remember anything! "Yes, I know it! But I can't remember"... now I try to move back up, but little by little*" (l. 1933-1942)

As seen, the anxiety about the future can prove a demoralising and distracting factor when learning Danish. Yet, the respondents do not generally express that they have decided to abstain from learning the language despite the thought that their stay may be temporary. Moreover, when asked about jobs and vocational ambitions, the respondents do not feel demotivated to the extent that they have lost the will to work or pursue careers in Denmark altogether. In fact, as I will show later, they seem to have developed motivation to work towards their goals as a way of coping. However, they do relate the anxiety through their uncertainty of the future as having caused them and people around them certain issues. Both Abdel and Mohammad mention that their wives (who were not present for the interviews) are unemployed and too sick or discouraged to do anything but stay at home. In both cases, they relate the new rules as a major factor of this situation. Tarek, who had an education in law and worked as a lawyer in Syria, works as a taxi driver in Denmark – a vocational transition he remarks on with some sarcasm in his voice. He mentions that the new focus made him consider quitting his job, but he ultimately decided against it:

> "*I drive my cab until 5 in the morning. I thought why should I leave my family at this hour and go away… if I'm going back? I could do other jobs? Perhaps part time? If I have to go back anyway. BUT afterwards, I thought it is probably good for me to continue here, if the government changes its mind*" (l. 1156-1159)

These momentary doubts are also expressed by Rasha, Nizar's wife:

> "*Nizar: (translating for her) she is very happy to have a job, because it is difficult in Denmark to find work. She looks to the others and think: "I am like Danes – I work like them," but every day she thinks about maybe being sent back.*
>
> *Rizar: I'm afraid, and I think a lot.*

Nizar: She thinks: "why work then? If I'm going back to my country. Why? But we think: "ok, we MUST work" and we do it. But every day the thoughts come back.

Rizar: It's a little hard."(l. 1947-1953)

Lastly, while the new focus impacts the families' choices about whether to pursue education or work to ensure their financial situation, some of them also tell of other ways in which thoughts about the shift has made it harder for them to plan ahead and make choices with their funds. These concerns are often linked with the other points of the new financial law, lowering their integration benefit (now to be called "home-sending benefit"). Abdel tells that him and many others are considering selling their homes or cars. He goes on:

"*Should we save money? If we are going back to Syria, we have no money, nothing. Nothing. We never buy anything because we try to save money, but we can't really do that in Denmark now, because we need all the money from work. I can put aside maybe 1000 kr, and that is nothing after all. You have to save 100.000 to 200.000, then maybe it would be ok – then you could build a house or buy something, start a company – you can do something. But 2-3000 does nothing. So we are always afraid, we always talk*" *(l. 148-153)*

Uri also tells that her family's plan to purchase a home has been disrupted by the doubt of their presence in Denmark and their financial situation:

"*Uri: Yes, my husband has been very happy with his life here in Denmark. He has also thought of buying a house here in Sønderborg, but now all is… gone… yes, like gone (laughs a bit quietly).*

Martin: Why does he think that? That he can't?

Uri: Because if he buys a house and the politicians say we must go back to Syria, then yes (laughs)… yes, then he'll lose that money. A lot of money" (l. 484-488)

For Tarek, a goal has been paying to- and becoming a member of an unemployment fund (a-kasse) through his job. This is due to him wishing to obtain permanent residency, and membership in a fund would ensure him meeting the employment requirement, even if he was to be out of work for a month or two. Yet, as he sees it, the rules constantly change, and now this option is unavailable to him, hindering his way towards permanent residence:

> "*I cannot get permanent residence. If I could get a-kasse in 2-3 months and find a new job, I would still have the chance. But if I stop now and after a month go to the municipal office and receive aid for a month or two – then my papers will be sent, and then they will say: "no you received aid for two months". THEREFORE, if I had a-kasse, it would be ok, because I wouldn't be given money from the municipality or… but they say: "no, you must wait 5-7 years to get a-kasse" (makes exasperated noise*)" (l. 1051-1056)

All these experiences point to an uncertainty that impacts the families' feelings of having options available to them in Denmark, of being able to reach their intended life goals, and security regarding their educational and vocational ambitions. Moreover, some have opted for alternative vocational options that will momentarily give them financial security, when their educational prospects are in jeopardy or restricted, and some feel they cannot make investments out of financial uncertainty about the future. This predicament is summed up in Burhan's wife and Zain's mother, Souzan's experience:

> "*We are confused – we cannot figure out whether to continue or what. We are standing in a dilemma. Now I'm at Danish 2, module 4 – should I continue? Should I work instead? No. What if I must go back? Should I speak Arabic – should I teach or children Arabic? We are completely confused and don't know what to do. That is the biggest problem. We cannot focus on anything. We can't get a real education, nor a real job – we don't know if we should learn the language, no. Should we find a new home*?" (l. 2107-2112)

This suggest a lack of security in their material environments – they are in no way seen as stable and secure and the result is confusion and lack of direction, which furthermore adds to their overall anxiety. The confidence in the "constancy of surroundings" for an ongoing sense of identity, which constitutes a sense of ontological security (Dupuis, 2012), is completely disrupted in the families' experiences, as they do not know if they will be able to fulfil their ambitions and goals or if these will be hindered down the road – as Mohammad states there is little "stability". As seen from their various professional backgrounds, fleeing has inevitably involved a loss of both economic, cultural and most likely also social capital. Their efforts through education, language acquisition and work, efforts that in their view constitutes a significant part of their 'integration', can be seen as their attempt to regain these forms of capital in their new environment. However, the new rules have created an anxiety related to a

new feeling of loss that relates to their current acquired capital. This feeling of loss is both felt in the narrowing of their options and pre-emptively about a future scenario in which they may lose all they have struggled to establish in Denmark. Furthermore, in the families’ view, the new focus on temporariness creates uncertainty about- and in some cases obstructs their rebuilding of these capital, especially cultural capital in the form of attaining education. Their plans have been made on the assumption that Danish society would offer them certain rights and options for development such as education as it does Danes. The anxiety they experience whether this will remain the case – if they will be able to rebuild their capital and develop their identities in Denmark – shows a feeling of disrespect in terms of rights. This is because the families experience the focus on temporariness and the uncertainty it brings as a lack of acknowledgement of them as equals with equal degree of moral accountability, which stifles their potential for development of identity. This leads to feelings of being subjected to an unjust treatment, which is the focus of the following segment.

Experience of injustice through lack of recognition

As mentioned, the uncertainty the families feel about their prospects for developing personally in Denmark manifests itself in a feeling of injustice, and lack of recognition in the Danish system. The respondents state that they have made efforts to ‘integrate’ through education, language acquisition, work, paying taxes, and participation in various activities. Their feelings of anxiety stem from the notion that the new financial law could create numerous, unpredictable difficulties in their personal lives in the future, but to a high extent there is also a salient feeling of injustice due to the sentiment that they have earned their right to stay and develop their identities in Denmark through their ‘integration’ efforts. In the data, the expression “starting from 0” appears on numerous occasions (both Abdel, Reem, Uri, Miran, Aseel, Tarek, and Nizar use this expression), both in relation to the experience of coming to Denmark in the first place and to the thought of losing the foundation they have found in their new society. The respondents feel the new laws as a total lack of acknowledgement in regard to their narratives of struggle leading to a hard-fought foundation in Danish society. With great exasperation in his voice, Abdel tells me how he has struggled and spent much of his life finding a footing in Denmark: ”*If I have to move in 5 years, I will be 45 years old, and then I have to learn a new language, find a job and such. Right now I know the system*” (l. 113-114). He continues:

> ”*Nobody helped me, I learned it all myself. I have learned the language – a little, not that much, but I know all about it. I don't need an interpreter, when I go to the bank or municipality services. There is no need. Here I know about it. If I'm going to a different country, I'm back to 0 again – it is completely new. No house, family, car, nothing. No language also. Everything is new and must be learned again*” (l. 116-120)

Reem also talks of this struggle to find a footing in Denmark:

> “*When we started here, we started from 0. Right now, we can see, ok, we have a foundation somewhat – we have begun, and it is ok. It was hard to get accustomed to Denmark, life here, especially with the weather, and also the culture and social life*” (l. 378-380)

When she arrived, she felt judged as a refugee and that people assumed certain traits about her such as being unemployed:

> “*When you looked at other people, you could tell that they looked at you – "ok, who the hell are you? You're a refugee, you have come to take or taxes – we pay taxes for your pay!" – ok, I pay tax too. I'm getting practical training, I study, I'm doing something! It is not fair that we have been treated this way.*” (l. 405-408)

She continues:

> ”*We have started our education and we work. Ok, if we sat around doing nothing, but we actually try, and take educations and try to find our… selves? Find ourselves again. And to stand on our legs again, but the problems is… ok, we try, but the rules we hear about every day or wait on.*” *(l. 388-391)*

She thus expresses the injustice she feels as a lack of acknowledgment of their efforts. As she states further on they had a good life in Syria, and coming to Denmark was a difficult change, but they work hard to learn the language, get an education, and work – “*we do our best to become like the Danes*” (l. 416). Uri also expresses a feeling of injustice at what she sees as a sudden change:

> “*But I don't feel that Denmark has the right to say NOW we should travel back. Because, from the start they should have told us we could not come in. NOW, after we have come in, have studied Danish, started our lives, NOW you must go back, NOW*

> *Denmark says you must go back. I think that, no, it's not fair. From the start they should say no, but not now*" (l. 561-564)

Mohammad also expresses injustice at what he sees as a misrepresentation of his and other refugees' efforts in Denmark:

> "*It doesn't fit me. WE find work – we are quick to learn the language – we are good at getting to know people, even if our cultures are different. We understand each other. We have experience from our careers. Lots I know have certificates from home – from university like my friend Miran for example. We have come to work – not to just wait and wait and be on social security. No, we must work. In Syria, we work 6 days a week, often 10-12 hours a day.*" (l. 1329-1334)

He goes on to express that his anxiety also revolves around him potentially wasting a tremendous amount of time and loss of the foundation he has established:

> "*Mohammad: It's just... a waste of time. Time they have given me, but now I have spent 5 years of my life here. 5 years. That's a high percentage of my life. When I move to another country and wait 5 years to find the language, find a footing, find education, find a job, no, where is my life?*
>
> *Martin: You've established a lot here – you have you life here.*
>
> *Mohammad: Yes, now I think Hjørring is like Aleppo to me. I know every street, every building.*
>
> *Martin: You have... you know the word "roots"?*
>
> *Mohammad: Yes, I know it. And I know a lot of people here in Hjørring. It's a small place. If I'm going away, the last 5 years and all the people and things here will vanish. No. It is tough. It is tough." (l. 1579-1586)*

Qamar similarly expresses this feeling of having exerted an effort and wasted time if it was all for naught, saying she has "struggled for three years now" to get to level of Danish proficiency and to pursue her hope of either becoming a teacher again or work with children. Along the same lines, Burhan puts a lot of emphasis on him and his family's efforts. Throughout the interview he continually refers to how he owned a successful cab- and bus company in Syria, has taken up numerous courses to develop professionally in Denmark, and

how his children achieve top grades in school. He states that their success in their 'integration' is not a coincidence as they come from an open society like Denmark, and that they pay for others through taxes now just like Danes – "*It is so smart, and we are proud about it*" (l. 2087).

These experiences of injustice along with the general feelings of anxiety are furthermore linked to an impression of negative representations surrounding refugees in the Danish political sphere and to a sense of powerlessness within the Danish system following what the families see as an excessive political- and media focus on their presence in Denmark. These impressions have impacted their view of Denmark and made for more anxiety as to how the political approach to refugees will develop in the country, that is, they feel powerless as to the unpredictable nature of how rules will form their opportunities in the future. Moreover, for some, it has changed their view of Denmark as an encompassing and liberal country with potential for personal development. For Abdel, these perceptions are clear when he states:

> "*Before we came to Denmark, we heard it is a nice country where they really take care about people. But after we've moved here, it has changed a lot. It's not as we heard. It is very hard, and we are quite scared like when we were back in my home country. EVERY DAY there is new rules*" (l. 13-16)

Reem links her feeling of injustice in the lacking acknowledgement of her efforts to a general change she perceives in Denmark – a change away from rights and opportunities:

> "*Of course there is a lot of propaganda, and they exclude us completely psychologically – they crumble us down – they just (sighs)… when I read on Facebook – we have some WhatsApp groups, and when we sit with others in the car or at the SOSU school – all talk about the rules. Ok, what will happen? It is not fair actually- I know Denmark is a country, where there are rights for people, democracy and all that. But the last 5-7 years, I want to say that it has changed quite a lot. It has gone backwards. It is not the Denmark I heard about. When I came here it was much different. It is not the same*" (l. 391-397)

Tarek also expresses anxiety, because although he has the 7.1 status, and he knows that he is not the immediate target of possible repatriation, he feels as if "*they talk about us like we are all one. We are close to the situation, we talk with each other*" (l. 941). As he states:

> ”*it affects me a lot when I see things on the tv or through other media, gives me stress. That’s why I don’t watch tv or follow the media anymore, for they talk a lot and pressure a lot – it creates stress. Even if I can’t do anything about, I feel it. We just wait.*” (l. 944-947)

For him and his colleagues, this has created nervousness that rules could change further and that the future is uncertain for refugees with the 7.1 status as well. He states that even with his background as a lawyer, he is perplexed as to what will happen, which rules will apply to him, and where to find answers. As he remarks, even officials from his local municipal seem unable to give him assurance about his conditions:

> “*They don’t know all the rules either, cause they always change. They say “I don’t know”. Yes, it also changes for them. They can’t read it all and keep an eye on it, they have to ask others, a boss – “what does it mean?” or “what rules apply in this situation*?” (l. 1064-1066)

Mohammad is also confused and frustrated at the state for first accepting him and his family and now changing the circumstances to place them in their current situation: “*The government has said ”yes, we want Mohammad.” Why do they want me? When I get to Denmark, you say I must go (claps hands). “YOU have to go.” YES, they’ve changed it*.” (l. 1315-1316). He uses the metaphor of Tom and Jerry, with Tom being the state, and refugees being Jerry to illustrate his situation and how he sees it as pointless to play with people’s lives like this: *“It is like Tom and Jerry. Tom can eat Jerry, but he won’t. He just wants to tease and play with him, but afterwards what should we do? We are told “afterwards you must go home*” (l. 1322-1324). This powerlessness and lack of acknowledgement is linked with his view of how Danish media generally represents refugees:

> “*When we watch the media – I don’t like the media. It’s the same. They always talk about... when they spend money there is always enough if it is for a firm or such, but if it’s about refugees: “MILLIONS OF KRONER!” they say. It quickly becomes the thoughts of people: ”wow, millions of kroner?*” (l. 1326-1329)

Qamar also feels a developing negative representation of refugees and Muslims specifically: ”*and you become very shocked, for when you think “this is a democratic country without racism,” but now it becomes about Muslims – they are after them a lot*” (l. 1670-1671). Nizar shares the sentiment that the focus is heavily on refugees: “*They say all kinds of things. Right*

now its only talk about refugees, refugees, refugees – they could be talking about many other things." (l. 1963-1964) and his wife, Rasha, adds:

> "*In all of Europe there are lots, and we don't have that many in Denmark. But here there are always new rules for refugees. Always something new we have to do. "We must stop them from entering our country" – the politicians say this. But maybe Danes don't think this way.*" (l. 1989-1991)

Likewise, Burhan feels that there is an inordinate focus on the negative in regard to refugees and a lack of acknowledgement of those who manage: *"Many immigrants have made companies, opened restaurants. Why do they always think about the bad!? Focus on one or two, when there are 10.000 positive next to them? Aren't you surprised about this? Haven't you asked yourself about it*?" (l. 2142-2143). With the political focus on refugees and changing laws, he feels that his family are no longer the deciders of their futures. They feel as if they are having their autonomy and rights compromised:

> "*and do you know what the biggest issue is, Martin? We cannot feel… that we own our lives now. We cannot control what happens, we cannot decide anything. We feel as if we are a game of chess right now, and the state controls the pawns. But hello, what about us? We also have feelings – we are people and not animals… maybe some Danes don't feel this, but to us it feels like this now – we can't decide anything! It is so poor I think!*" (l. 2119-2123)

This ultimately led to a lack of solid foundation and a changed perception of Denmark:

> "*Martin: You talk about having moved a lot – have you been chasing a solid life? I mean a life where you didn't have to live different places all the time?*
>
> *Burhan: Yes, we are very upset about that actually. Because we had not imagined Denmark would look at it like this. If we knew Denmark would have looked like this, with always varying rules, we wouldn't have chosen Denmark. If we knew, we would probably have chosen Germany, Sweden, or Norway. Denmark has the worst treatment of immigrants.*" (l. 2278-2283)

As stated the financial law has impacted the families in the developmental options they perceive as open to them and they have little confidence in the stability of their surroundings, which has factored in their choices and ambitions. In Honneth's (1992) terms, this, to them,

could be said to constitute a lack of recognition in rights, especially as they experience the change as a loss of control of their lives in a system they had assumed would grant them the right to develop personally to achieve their ambitions - as it does its citizens. However, the expressed lack of acknowledgement in terms of struggle and achievements also points toward a perceived lack of recognition of individual character. As seen above, the families mention efforts to attain education, work, acquire the language, and pay taxes in juxtaposition to the new rules to point out what they see as unjust treatment and evaluation of them as people. They do not feel that their individual struggles are being recognised by the Danish state and see the financial law as an act of individual disrespect, attributing no value to their individual development in Denmark. This lack of recognition is thus seen as apathy towards the capital they have established – their self-realisation - and in turn, apathy towards them as people. This feeling is exacerbated by the general representation of them as a group in the political- and media sphere. Here the inordinate focus on them as a problematic factor is at odds with their self-image of hard working and ambitious people. However, unlike Honneth’s (1992) suggestion that this feeling that disrespect will lead to a crisis of identity and a negative understanding of self, the families do not seem to have lost self-esteem and confidence in their value as people. Instead, as I will show later, they retain their ambition to develop as a sort of coping mechanism and protest towards political treatment that seems unjust to them, although their motivation has been impacted somewhat as seen above. Yet, in Honneth’s (1992) words, they have lost the view of Denmark as a society supporting them in their relationship to self, and instead see themselves engaged in a political, meaningless game of cat and mouse (as mentioned by Mohammad) or as pawns on a chessboard (as mentioned by Burhan).

Considerations about children

All the families express that considerations about their children’s lives factor to a great extent in their sense of anxiety. Some state that this is their major concern, and that while they imagine themselves eventually re-establishing their lives somewhere else, it would prove more problematic for their children – as Miran states: “*NOT for me, but for my children. For them it is best, it is best for me. I need to be COMPLETELY certain of my children’s future*” (l. 609-610). In general, the data suggests that the families see their uncertain situation as more problematic because of their children.

The children's reaction to uncertainty

The different families have been posed the question of whether to discuss their situation with their children and risk the uncertainty they feel to affect their children as well. For the families with small children and toddlers, this is of course out of the question, but with older kids and teenagers some effects have been felt by the parents. Abdel tells that the knowledge of the new focus on temporariness has impacted his children's motivation in school. Knowing the changes, they cannot concentrate, and although he urges them to continue, stressing the importance of learning Danish while in Denmark, they question the use: "*He says: "I speak Arabic the best – should I become Danish and then back to Arabic? Why?*" (l. 82)). As he states: "*They sit at school and always think… they're asked "hello, are you not here!?" They think all the time "I'm going back to Syria, I'm going back to Syria – I learn Danish, but why?*" (l. 154-155). Abdel adds that this lack of focus continues at home where his children will drift off on their phones for the entire day. In contrast, both Reem and Uri have made the conscious decision not to inform their children of the changes. They are biding their time as circumstances may change, and wish to protect their children:

> "*Martin: You don't talk with your children about it?*
>
> *Reem: No, not about going back. Not right now. For I have heard that other kids who've been told have started crying and not wanting to go to school – stay at home and start to feel really, really bad psychologically. So that experience we don't want to give our children*" (l. 327-329)

They remember how fleeing affected their children. Stating that "safety is an important thing in life", they do not wish for their children to revert to that state:

> "*Uri: Yes, psychologically it impacts them. Really hard.*
>
> *Martin: How?*
>
> *Reem: I don't want to think about it actually, cause my son had a really bad experience when we moved from Syria to here. He was 4 and a half, but he can still remember how it was when the war broke out.*
>
> *Uri:… bombs and dead people on the streets and that we had to hide… so if this happens again – if we have to leave again, what happens to a child's psychology?*" (l. 548-554)

Tarek and Haya have also decided not to discuss the changes openly at home for the sake of their children. It was tough for their oldest son, Sayid, to be separated from his father for two years and then fleeing their country. Haya does not wish for him to be worried again:

> "*If they hear us discuss it and ask, we usually say: "no, you shouldn't worry about it." What I'm afraid of is that my son will revert to the same state as when we fled our home country. He couldn't speak with others and didn't eat anything. I'm afraid of that for him… I'm afraid that will return, if we talk about it. We try just to play with them and watch movies and such. We are afraid to talk with them about it*" (l. 1247-1251)

Tarek also fears the way this knowledge could impact their social lives with Danish friends:

> "*It affects the children. They have Danish friends, and if a border is created between them and their friends here, if they think "ok, we have to go back and they will continue here," yes then, there will probably be a border between them*" (l. 1189-1191)

Even so, Sayid has heard of the changes through television and school, and he was upset when it turned out that one of his friends may be sent back. This has made him worried about their future:

> *"Haya: When the oldest hear what happens or what may happen, he becomes afraid. He says "mom… we are going back. I'm afraid about it." I tell him "no, it isn't us." But he sees other friends, so he says "no, but others are. I'm worried about them – that they're going back." But in the beginning he was very scared of us going back, and I said no. I'm worried about him, because he thinks a lot… yes*" *(l. 1106-1110)*

Along the same lines, Burhan and Souzan do not discuss their concerns in front of their children, and they do not wish these to impact them:

> "*Burhan: We talk... we can't assess… what they will decide. We discuss not too much in front of the kids. We say they shouldn't worry, and that they should just study, study – they should pay the rules no mind, because we don't want them to stop. We want them to have good futures. It must not break their social contacts here*." (l. 2201-2204)

As seen, the families see the uncertainty of their situation as potentially impacting their children, and this contributes to the disturbance of their intended life trajectories they had planned for them and their families, fearing that their children will lose motivation, friends, and psychological well-being as a result of the rules. Furthermore, they see their children as having established a strong sense of belonging in Denmark that will be severed if they are to leave, and this is the focus of the next segment.

Belonging in Denmark

More so than their own foundation in Denmark, many of the parents stress that their children have reached a strong sense of belonging in Denmark. This is first of all due to some of them being quite young when they arrived (some having been born in Denmark), but even the teenagers, who are able to remember their old lives in Syria clearly, are stated as having tied bonds to the country in various ways. These include their Danish proficiency surpassing that of their parents and in many cases their Arabic proficiency. Moreover, the parents mention that they have established strong social ties to friends through schools, clubs, and various activities. Beyond these developments in life (and perhaps as a result of them), the children are expressed as feeling as a bond to their new place of residence, conceiving it as home, and this is the reason that the thoughts of leaving scares them, and why the prospect of how they will fare if removed from their location again causes their parents anxiety. As Reem states:

> "*There is a lot of uncertainty for… when we came, I think my oldest was 4 and a half. He stayed in Syria till then, and now it's been almost 7 years… it is very hard, this, for now he is more Danish than Arabic. He can't explain or express himself with Arabic words. He talks to his brothers in Danish. And the two youngest ones were born here. If we are going back, what are they to do? They don't know the language – cannot read it and such.*" *(l. 299-302)*

Uri adds that this is the same with her children: "*They can't explain themselves in Arabic. They don't have a future in Syria or in other countries, for their culture and thoughts are that they are Danish*" (l. 318-319). She continues:

> "*Uri: My children can't even think of us moving from Sønderborg. If I ask them, they say: "no! We love Sønderborg!" What would they say if I told them we have to move from Denmark (laughs)? It is very difficult, yes. When we go away, they always ask:*

> *“mom, when will we be back? When are we going back to Sønderborg? We miss our friends and football, and... everything.” Yes, their lives are here.*
>
> *Reem: Yes, Denmark has become their home country – their mother country*” (l. 541-545)

They add that they feel it is unjust that their children be treated differently than ethnic Danish children, and that their children should have the right to feel Danish as well:

> “*Reem: There cannot be anything like “ok, you have dark hair, slightly darker skin, brown eyes.” Still, you live in Denmark – you’re bornhere, but still you’re not Danish? Danishness isn’t just about blond hair and blue eyes... Our children have the right to stay here, have a life, and continue their educations, and to be…*
>
> *Uri: Danish citizens...*” (l. 446-450)

Miran and Aseel, whose two children were both born in Denmark also worry about their futures upon a sudden move from the country;

> “*Miran: but my children, if they start speaking Danish – and a little Arabic… they’re in day care all the time, and she (the oldest) has friends there, so she becomes integrated very fast and starts to only speak Danish… but in the future, if she only speaks Danish and moves to another country like Syria… if her future has to begin there, it will be very difficult for her*” (l. 610-614)

Tarek and Haya tell how their children have found many friends in Denmark and gotten accustomed to life there: “Tarek: They create contacts with others fast here. They can speak Arabic of course at home, but sometimes Danish is easier for them than Arabic” (l. 1227-1228). They tell a story of how their children would yearn back to Denmark when once they went on a trip outside the country, although only having spent one year in there. Something else they note is how their oldest son has grown used to the freedom of expression in Denmark and to expect certain rights – he wants to discuss politics and questions their circumstances in every regard. A worry they have is how he will adjust if they are to move back: ”*THAT’S WHY I’m also afraid of how it will be for my children, for they can’t change their mentality after 2 years: “now you can never again talk about something like this*” (l. 960-961). Akram and Qamar state that their 8-year old daughter is aware of why they had to

flee in the first place, but that she will most likely be confused as to why they would have to move again. As Qamar tells:

> "*if we tell her she has to go back to Syria, she will definitely say no… yes, she experiences Denmark like her own country, as her native country, and she has not gone to school in Syria. She was 5 when we came here.*" (l. 1710-1712)

Her and her husband have considered going back as they think the recent treatment they have received in Denmark has been poor and disruptive, but they believe it will be difficult for their children to have to move again:

> "*Qamar: No, well, if the rules change and the government and we get to stay, we would rather that. Because our children have started here, and it is much easier for them to continue here to get a good life here… rather than us moving again and starting over again. Yes, that is also hard. It wasn't so easy for us.*" (l. 1739-1742)

Nizar and Rasha also express that their children have gained a strong local bond through language and friends. They do not imagine that they would welcome removal from their location:

> "*Nizar: The youngest, she doesn't know Syria at all… Kurdistan. She only knows Denmark and says that's her country. My son and older daughter, they're older, they understand – they remember some things from Syria. But they don't want to go back either. They have friends here and not there.*
>
> *Rasha: If, for fun, I tell my boy we have to move to another town, maybe Copenhagen, he say "noo, I have to stay here in Brønderslev." There are many friends here.*" (l. 1876-1880)

Lastly, Burhan and Souzan express that a return to Syria would mark a loss of progress for their children: "*Our children are really language-savvy. Good students. If we are going back to Syria, are they to start again there? That is the biggest problem for us*" (l. 2051-2052). Like Tarek, Burhan also states that he appreciates the personal freedom Denmark has given his children, and he would not like this to change:

> "*We are happy about things here in Denmark – nobody gets to decide if my daughters are to wear scarves for example. My daughter, she has chosen not to. She is 15 now –*

> *she is waiting till she grows up to decide herself. BECAUSE, my wife has already decided that she'll wear it. Nobody has told her*." (l. 2225-2228)

As seen in the statements of this segment, the families' worries about their children's response to a possible departure from Denmark adds another dimension to their anxiety about the future in the sense that their children may be psychologically impacted and have trouble re-establishing themselves in a new location. Thus, in their eyes, facing the effects of the new financial law is more problematic when considering the raising of children. The concern is that the children will lose cultural capital (language and school) and social capital (friends, clubs, activities), which will be hard to reclaim when suddenly in a different country. This is also due to the strong sense of belonging that acquiring this capital has involved for the children – according to the parents, the children have formed close bonds to their current locations, and some state that their children feel "as Danes," seeing Denmark "as their country". As such, the parents fear the psychological consequences of losing this through removal and liken such a removal to their first experience of exile. The lack of recognition they feel in terms of individual efforts can be seen extended to their children, as their language acquisition, education, and social ties are not seen as acknowledged through the new laws, and they this feel that the future of their children is disregarded.

Thinking about the future

When asked about their futures, the families are first of all uncertain, as has been shown above. They feel powerlessness, lacking agency in deciding their fates as these are felt as predicated on developments in Denmark rather than actions they can make. In this final segment I delve into their thoughts about potentially returning to their home country, what they hope for, and how they cope with the anxiety they feel when powerless to change.

A return to Syria (or somewhere else)

When it comes to the prospect of leaving Denmark, either for Syria or somewhere else, all but one of the families express the thought of this possibility with unwillingness and a sense of dread. As seen, they feel they have achieved and found a foundation as individuals and as families in Denmark and thus a returning to Syria would equate "returning to 0". Beyond having to start over this way, most also talk of the direct danger and poor conditions they would face, even if war is no longer a direct threat. Overall, the belief is that there is very little for them to return to in Syria and some mention trying out other countries for asylum

although they are aware this would be complicated by the Dublin Regulation. The dread they feel is then created from a sensation of feeling confined to a future that may arrive in several years but will nevertheless mark a tremendous rupture in their lives and perhaps danger. Abdel strongly asserts that he has no house, land, language, money, or family to return to as all this exist outside Syria now. He also doubts him and his family's safety: "*If I go back to Syria as a Kurd, it'll be my last day*" (l. 24), and with a sigh and a despondent laugh he later continues: "*buut yes, so as I said, maybe we have a chance. If not here, maybe another country. I'm not going to Syria. Even if a soldier put a gun to my head, I wouldn't*" (l. 164-165). He is highly against returning and sees it as a non-option, but he also states that he would rather want a decision to be reached now rather than in "3-4 years". When thinking about a future in Syria, Reem follows her expression of "starting from 0" with the belief that "*of course we won't be able to find work or a place to live either*" (l. 305). Uri tells that she has breast cancer and lymphoma, but adds that her sister has a more severe form of cancer, and their fear of return revolves around how the conditions of their treatment will change without the resources they had before and if medicine will be available at all:

> "*So she is always afraid of what will happen, if she is going back to Syria: "how will I get this medicine?... maybe I'll die the moment I travel?"... There are a lot of things, not just one. Also, we don't have a house - a place to live. It is hard. We've lost everything in Syria*." (l. 371-373)

Like Abdel, both tell that they have no family in Syria as these are scattered over Europe and other parts of the world. Miran and Aseel repeat the same concerns about returning to Syria:

> "*Miran: Everything is destroyed. I don't have a home, not a house. My whole family have fled. All my brothers are in Denmark also, and I have 4 sisters in Lebanon and Jordan. If I'm going back to Syria, I am alone and wanted as well*" (l. 627-629)

He continues:

> "*Miran: and many people I knew are dead. The house and home are completely destroyed, so where should one live? Where should we stay? It is very hard.*
>
> *Martin: So it is not something you want to go rebuild? Not to take that side (laughs a bit)*

> *Miran: Nah... the children... also, how is one to find a job there? It is obliterated – no work!*" (l. 811-814)

Aseel adds that she would not be able to use her education upon returning to Syria, as she lost all her documents during her flight. Although she would retain her knowledge, educationally she would be "starting from 0" again. Both say that they would want to visit Syria again if possible, but they doubt that this will happen anytime soon, and by then their lives will be even more connected to Denmark, and Aseel expresses that she does not believe there will be "safety in Syria again like in the past". Like Aseel, Tarek states that his education in law would be invalid upon returning to Syria:

> "*I can't work as a lawyer there either anymore since I've been abroad for 5 years and have not payed contribution to a union in Syria. When I haven't paid for the last few years, I have to start over again. You have to start from 0 with interning, so I can't use my education there. It will take two years to become a lawyer again. It'll be difficult to me, for 5 years have passes, and I have forgotten many things*" (l. 1203-1207)

Moreover, they see the country as too dangerous, with no home or opportunities waiting for them:

> "*Martin: If we talk of Syria again… if you had to go back, would you be able to have as good a life?*
>
> *Tarek: No! Because we have no home now… because maybe our… we don't know what has happened.*
>
> *Haya: No, I don't know about our home. There is war at home. My home.*
>
> *Tarek: It is dangerous – there are checkpoints there. They always bomb, so there is great risk to have it destroyed. Therefore, we have no home, and I cannot work there. It's a dangerous area.*" (l. 1198-1203)

However, they do state that they could see themselves going back if Syria became a "normal" country again, which would have to involve "EVERYTHING changing – not just the government" as Tarek says. He adds that it is not realistic to believe this will happen in just a couple of years – "*when people have been sitting with the same in 30 years, 50 years, and get told: "ok, you must change your mind now." They can't*" (l.1090-1091). So, while they are

open to the thought of a future return in theory, moving from Denmark would spell a tremendous loss of capital for them and an uprooting of their children’s lives, and it is not something they can conceive as a positive change in their lives in the near future. In Mohammad’s eyes, the thought of going back to Syria is not a realistic option as he was forced to sell their house to bribe soldiers, although he is not happy with his treatment in Denmark. Chuckling a bit, he says that his plans for the future are ever changing day by day: ”*One moment it’s: ”we HAVE to leave Denmark” and the next it’s: “No, we won’t*”” (l. 1604-1605). The fear of ending up in an asylum center again is a clear factor, and Mohammad doubts that his wife would cope well:

> ”*Yesterday, she said: ”Mohammad, I will not go back or move again. I’m sick. I can’t stay at an asylum center for a year – with a shared bathroom and toilets – I cannot!”… and I said, no, she was right. I have stayed at an asylum center alone for 4 months – it didn’t matter*” (l. 1556-1559)

Akram and Qamar are also unhappy with their treatment in Denmark as of late, and initially say that they would hope for a return to Syria. However, it seems that they are ambivalent about this as they also state Denmark as being the best place for their children, and that they hope to stay:

> “*Martin: Can you imagine moving to a different country like for instance Canada and live there?”*
>
> *Qamar: No… it is very tough, but if it becomes relevant… we comfort ourselves with the fact that we’ve lost our native country, so it cannot get worse than that. If we move to another country. But we would very much like to stay in Denmark, because we’ve learned the language and we think Denmark is a good country – for children especially - the school system, justice*” (l. 1743-1747)

For Nizar and Rasha, the thought of returning is frightening and not an option. Nizar shows me a scar on his forehead from a club beating during a demonstration. He says that even if the war was to end, the conditions and treatment for them as Kurds in the system of Syria “would be like a prison” to them and perhaps dangerous. Right now, he fears that his residence permit will not be extended, but if that is the case, they will attempt to move to another country rather than Syria:

> "*Nizar: but I don't know what will happen in the future – what happens afterwards. I'm not thinking of me or my wife – I think of my children.*
>
> *Martin: What do you want for them?*
>
> *Nizar: They cannot return to my country. If Denmark tells me bye, we must move to another country. Germany, or I don't know... I can't return to my country.*" (l. 1838-1843)

Burhan states that the thought of returning to their former lives is nice, but that it is unknown how conditions are now or if they have anything left of their former wealth. Together with Zain, he shows me a recording they took before leaving of what used to be their home, a very large apartment in Damascus, now completely obliterated with holes, concrete, and dust everywhere. Zain points out where his room used to be, and in what corner he used to play videogames. In contrast, they now live 7 people in a three-bedroom apartment, a change Burhan notes, but he says they appreciate it enough. What they also fear when it comes to returning is that ISIS may still be present, which will threaten the family's way of life. Burhan is sceptical about the reported safety:

> "*Burhan: Nobody knows it know. Even though the television says "NOO, we have everything under control now," but nobody has, nobody knows. There are no rules – it is like a forest, no rules.*
>
> *Zain: The strong animals eat the small ones… we expect that if the war ends now, Syria needs more than 10 years to become normal again, because EVERYTHING is destroyed*" (l. 2237-2241)

They also doubt the life conditions one can expect in Syria now, and we talk about this for several minutes. Souzan have strong concerns about this:

> "*Will we live in a tent? In a trailer in a camp? The war is not just bombs and rockets – there is no electricity, water, no aid… we've heard about many who cannot travel outside Syria, so they live poorly, have poor lives, and this continues. They live in ruins – they have some nylon here and some fabric there to cover the holes*" (l. 2246-2249)

As mentioned, most of these statements show a sense of dread related to a possible future in Syria. In the families' conceptions, such a return would mean a loss of safety and loss of the

capital they have built in Denmark – a "return to 0" as they say. Moreover, they doubt their conditions for re-establishing their lives once in Syria again as their economic capital, in the form of their home, wealth, and income, their cultural capital, in the form of education and membership of organisations, and social capital, in the form of family, friends, and colleagues, have all been lost, destroyed, scattered, killed, or made invalid. By this, their flight to Denmark has involved an immense loss – it constitutes a major turning point in their lives from which they had to "start from 0," and in their conception a return back would constitute a similar kind of loss – a forceful removal from their established lives that they have no power over. The sense of anxiety they feel is then not just rooted in their doubts of the reports of relative safety in Syria, but also that they see the lack of means for further life development in Syria or elsewhere. This is linked to the experiences lack of recognition in terms of rights and individual efforts – there is a sense of injustice felt in relegating them to such a future outside their agency, after they have struggled to 'integrate' as they say and developed their identities in Denmark – especially the identities of their children. for some, this has made them contemplate leaving Denmark although Syria would not be their intended destination. Although they feel powerless in this dilemma and tell of effects on motivation, it is not to say that they are hopeless, completely in despair, or without will to work towards hopes and goals, and this is the focus of the next segment.

Hopes and coping with uncertainty

Overall, all families retain some hope that the future will go in another direction than their departure from Denmark. They hope that there will be a political change in the country, and that the political- and media representation of them will be less negative, no longer depicting what they see as a negative image of their group. Moreover, this hope is expressed through their continued efforts to develop in Denmark. This continued effort can be seen as a way of coping with their uncertainty, giving them some feeling of agency in their fates, although as the law states, this is to factor as little as possible in deciding whether a family should be returned. Instead, for many of the respondents their continued efforts are a counter-response to the representation they perceive of them or as a protest to the political treatment of them. For others it is a way of preparing for a potential future outside of Denmark, while some carry the hope that maybe they will get to remain or obtain the permanent residence status eventually. Reem asserts that even if their time in the country is temporary, they will work hard not to leave a bad impression and to give something back:

> "*We live here and we must do our best… we have to give something back. It isn't enough for us to sit at home and get our social security. We must work… we are not people who expect others to pay for us*" (l. 498-500)

She continues:

> "*So we have done what we could. Then maybe they will be able to think back and remember that Syrian refugees were good at taking educations, work, and pay taxes (we all laugh). That is the most important thing (laughs some more)!*
>
> *But still, yeah, they must not remember us as a black dot on a white page… that's an Arabic expression – if a page is clean – if for instance Denmark is very pure country, we do not want to be this dot*" (l. 502-507)

Thus, her efforts are her way of contesting the inaccurate representation she feels exists of Syrian refugees, and the reason we all laugh in the transcript above is due to the insinuation of paying tax being the prime marker of being Danish. This is the way of maintaining her self-image to not match the "black dot" as she says. Miran and Aseel also wish to keep exerting themselves to 'integrate', and Miran phrases this as their "fight":

> "*Miran: But now I will finish my education and get a good job I hope. I must fight... the new rules and the new law.*
>
> *Martin: How will you fight?*
>
> *Miran: By integrating in society. Get a job, complete my education and help my family integrate as well and forget all the rules – just work and work. Learn Danish, have contact with people. Keep in touch with tradition, culture, and such.*
>
> *Martin: So that is your fight. Do you think that as well (to Aseel)?*
>
> *Aseel: Yes… we have no other choice – you understand?*" (l. 815-822)

Much along the same lines, Tarek and Haya wish to push out the rules that cause anxiety and focus on their development in Denmark. Tarek wishes to pursue permanent residence: "*I really want to. If you ask me if I have a plan of what I want to do – I want to continue here*" (l. 1079-1080), while Haya states: "*Yes, integration. I also hear it. I'm afraid of it. I work fast and I work to learn Danish myself and search for work… but maybe we are going back*" (l. 1178-1179). She adds that if they are to return, her struggles will be in vain, but continues:

"*but I MUST!... but if I think about the future here and job here, then I'm happy to learn more*" (l. 1182-1183). Mohammad doubts that there will be much political change, even if the coming election will bring about a change of ministers. Instead, he hopes that "Danes" will change their outlook on refugees:

> "*Mohammad: I can't talk about the future, because I know nothing. Maybe if I got the message that we were to live here for 2 more months, my children would still go to school until the last day. Because, we have a hope – we have a hope*
>
> *Martin: What do you hope for?*
>
> *Mohammad: The Danes – that they find out why. We look to the future, but we cannot see it. We dream of the future, but now we lack stability. I say that all the time. If you lack that, you don't have a life.*" (l. 1532-1538)

Nizar and Rasha state that they feel as part of Denmark now and that they wish to continue developing there despite their possible prospects:

> "*I think that right now I think that Denmark, that is my country. I have to be here and get educated, work, and pay tax. My children should also grow up and get educated here. Yeah… but I think like that, what should I say? Now Denmark is my country, and Syria is no longer my country*" (l. 1847-1850)

Meanwhile, Burhan ultimately says that despite their uncertainty, anxiety, and feelings of powerlessness, it would not make sense for them to stop their efforts:

> "*Burhan: It is also bad if we stop. If it turns out after two years we are not going to Syria, it would be bad if we stopped. What should we do then? We have to continue our educations and jobs until the last day. I have worked as a mechanic – I got a job fast…*
>
> *Martin: So you hope that the rules will changes?*
>
> *Burhan: Yes, because right now it is not so good for us*" (l. 2205-2210)

He continues:

> "*Burhan: BUT, we have made the optimal decision of continuing like we are now till the last day in Denmark.*

Martin: And then you hope…

Burhan: Doesn’t matter, but it is also just stupid to stop now. Too stupid. It will be worse, if we do – what if we get to continue.” (l. 2265-2269)

These statements show that despite the anxiety, feelings of powerlessness, potential loss, and injustice the new financial law creates in the families, they have for the most part not lost the motivation or ambition to develop personally within Danish society, mostly due to the hope that circumstances could change or due to the urge to contest the political lack of recognition they feel as people. As such, their continued efforts are predicated on a hope, meaning that they have not accepted their futures as necessarily involving a departure from Denmark, as well as on their continuous sense of self-worth in the face of Danish political disrespect. In contrast to Honneth’s (1992) idea that lack of recognition will lead to a decrease in self-worth and integrity, this seems to not be the case with these families, who have reacted to this perceived lack of recognition with the conviction that continued efforts to ‘integrate’ is the way to retain some form of agency, preparing for whatever may happen by salvaging some capital that may be utilised elsewhere and proving to Danes (or perhaps themselves) that they are not as prophesised in the law. Yet, this is not to suggest that the financial law has proven a motivational component for them to struggle harder, and if so, it is for questionable reasons. Firstly, the other segments above detail how an overall feeling of anxiety, powerlessness and loss attributed directly to the new laws, have proved a crippling and controlling factor in the families’ lives, making them doubt or in some cases redirect their life trajectories away from their ambitions no longer deemed available. Furthermore, this factor has distracted and disturbed both parents’ and children’s minds and made them consider the usefulness of learning Danish. Secondly, the families mention that they generally see other refugee friends and colleagues impacted heavily on their motivation by the new rules – this was also the impression I received from the various municipal workers and volunteers I contacted, who mentioned their acquainted refugee families as too “sensitive” for an interview. Here, it must be remembered that my sample of families may represent more resourceful individuals than the average, and thus they may be more resilient to the negative effects described. Despite these effects, they have retained their motivation for development in Denmark, but whether this will remain the case is uncertain as their circumstances may change.

Discussion

In this segment, I conclude my findings, answering my research question and discuss these findings as well as their ramifications for refugees and Danish society.

The impact of uncertainty

Having delved into the experiences above using a person-centric approach, I have shown that uncertainty about their futures has impacted the families, instilling sense of anxiety, loss, powerlessness, and injustice, all interlinked, as a direct impact from to the new laws focusing on temporariness. In this regard, their overall sense of anxiety is directly phrased by them as "feeling stressed" and "always thinking", but more specifically it is expressed through them describing how they cannot find peace of mind, have a hard time planning ahead and making choices, and carry a constant sense of dread about the future. As mentioned they cannot establish a sense of ontological security as their planned life trajectories cannot be made secure – their planned vocational and educational ambitions, their investments, their engagement with society, and their children's upbringing are all vested in them having some sense of security in the belief that their conditions will not suddenly change, and that their efforts to establish their identities in Denmark so far have carried meaning. In their experience, this is now uncertain, and while they are anxious about the dangers that a future in Syria may involve, their anxiety is expressed more saliently through a feeling of loss. As they state, their flight has involved a tremendous loss in the form economic, cultural, and social capital, and their residence in Denmark constituted complete re-establishing of these capital, which will be in vain if they are to leave again. This is more so true for their children, whom they express have formed a strong sense of belonging through language, friends, and activities. The families feel completely powerless in deciding their fates, feeling as if the state is playing with their lives, and they feel grossly misrepresented through these new policies. This links to the sense of injustice in them being subjected to the laws, having their lives potentially changed dramatically outside of their agency. They believe that they have exerted a solid effort to "integrate" through learning the language, finding work, paying taxes, and including themselves in various organisations and activities. The injustice is thus their sentiment that the rights they ought to have in a country like Denmark – that is, their right to realise their ambitions, live in security, and the freedom to decide their fates - are not being recognised, nor their individual efforts since arriving. As stated, this, to them constitutes a political disregard for the value of their efforts and them as people. While for most, this has

not hindered their motivation to continue seeking personal development in Denmark, the sense of anxiety in all the areas above has become a crippling and disturbing factor in their lives now. How it will continue impacting them remains to be seen.

Contextualisation of this uncertainty

Having reached these findings, I return Schiltz et al. (2018) and their suggestion to situate and contextualise uncertainty when studying refugees. This has been my exact goal through this person-centric approach, seeking to avoid pre-existing, normative understandings of how refugee uncertainty functions and assume that it is a given in refugee situations rather than formed by specific conditions. In this segment I will discuss my findings in relation to Schiltz et al. (2018) identified three assumptions about refugee uncertainty. Firstly, it has been shown that the families’ uncertainty is specifically tied to the temporariness focus of L140 proposal of the new financial law (along with its other points targeting refugees). From my findings, we can see that the discussed impacts on their lives above is not an inevitable result of their refugee status, but of the unpredictable changes they are anxious will meet them in the future due to the new rules. Specifically, it is worth noting that the law mentions that all refugees should regard their stay as temporary (Finansloven, 2019). Although the families I interviewed were primarily under the 7.1 status (usually with the father carrying 7.1 status and the rest of the family with the 7.3 status) and are thus not as likely to be sent back soon as the 7.3 refugees are, the message they interpret is still that they should consider their time temporary, even if it may be many years before conventions actually allow Denmark to return them. Doubts as to how the law will apply to them and if it will change further is at the core of the families’ uncertainty (as Tarek stated, not even his contacts at the municipal office could give him a clear answer). As such, they may dread a future back in Syria, but the lack of clarity that the new law offers them in terms of what they can expect to happen for their specific family is ultimately what renders them unable to conceptualise stable life trajectories. Secondly, as Schiltz et al. (2018) stress, we must not “presume that contexts of displacement are constraining or productive per se” (p. 6). As shown, exile from Syria has involved a huge loss of capital for the families, but their continued anxiety about further loss has little to do with their past and more to do with their continued treatment as a group in the Danish political system. As shown above, they all state that they have built a foundation in Denmark, and their feelings of loss is now purely predicated on the new laws threatening to make their efforts in Denmark invalid and to force them from the capital they have acquired in their new country. Lastly, the anomality they currently feel in their situation is not due to their exile in

Denmark. While they relate their flight to Denmark as constituting an enormous change in their life requiring much personal and cultural adjustment, we have seen that they have at this point reached a feeling that they are "integrated" and that their children, especially, feel a strong sense of belonging in the country. Thus, politically conceiving a return to Syria as a return "home" may not be a discourse reflecting reality, and to the families, may be more akin to an experience of exile once again. These insights show that the uncertainty experienced by the families is indeed highly contextual and specific to the political sphere of Denmark, directly predicated on the law changes. The next segment discusses the findings in relation the political context

The counter-intuitive nature of the temporariness focus

Through the person-centric approach in my analysis, we have seen the personal consequences as experienced by the families. Pulling back the perspective to the political, societal sphere, it is now possible to discuss these experiences in contrast to the government's rationale and what they suggest about the ramifications of the political changes. Here, two critical points are immediately relevant to discuss.

Firstly, the government's departure from integration as a goal. As Rytter (2018) stated, the 'integration' term is fuzzy in the Danish context, and in this study, I have sought to base the term on the families' as well as the government's stated descriptions. The government intends for refugees to provide for themselves until their return, while still perpetuating the notion that Denmark should be open to motivated, resourceful foreigners. They state: "The government wishes for Denmark to be open for qualified foreigners, who arrive with willingness, skills, and motivation for making a positive difference. We must attract foreigners – especially youths – who want to learn things, accomplish things, create things (Regeringen.dk, 2019) While the families state that they have not lost motivation in trying to pursue opportunities and establish themselves further in Denmark, their potential for development is stifled. If they end up remaining, their trajectories will have been altered to fit an uncertain future, rather than to build towards their intended long-term ambitions. If Denmark is a country open to those foreigners who wish to contribute, a law like L140 that has been suggested here to directly limit individuals' and families' range of options must be assessed. In other words, if Denmark is open to- and acknowledges motivation and integration through work effort, why implement a law that limits motivated refugees to vocational short-term options and casts doubts about them and their children's educational

choices? Here, I wish to draw contrasts to the concept of human security. As Shinoda (2004) described it:

"a process of widening the range of people's choices." And human security means "that people can exercise these choices safely and freely - and that they can be relatively confident that the opportunities they have today are not totally lost tomorrow." The latter is "a critical ingredient of participatory development." If given the opportunities to meet their most essential needs and to earn their own living, people will set themselves free and ensure that they can make a full contribution to developments of themselves (p. 9)

Throughout the analysis, I have commented on the families' feelings of having the freedom and circumstances for development. The experience is that these feelings are highly limited now. If we consider human security a global obligation for countries to facilitate an environment for its citizens to develop, it is in opposition to the L140 changes – at least when looking at the results it has attained at the person-centric level of these families. In juxtaposition, the new rules are an example closer to that of a national security paradigm, that is the rationale for the law is to defend "the core welfare and safety in Denmark" (Finansloven, 2019, p. 26). An area for scrutiny moving forward must be where this prioritisation leaves refugee families who remain in Denmark for the years to come – especially if their sense of anxiety, loss, powerlessness, and injustice continues to define their lives in the country as it does now. How will they develop in such circumstances provided by the state, and can they be expected to develop into productive, thriving members of society or, indeed, integrate?

The second point regards the law's notion of sending refugees back "to rebuild their country". If considering the L140 changes as a political move of national security, it is at the same time a departure from the suggestion of human security to consider security as an international, universal goal rather than just a national endeavour. This is due to the families' well-being and circumstances for development being disregarded by a return to Syria, even if conventions allow for it - at least in their perception. As seen, the families consider the chance of them leading good lives upon returning unlikely. They doubt that they will be able to find security and develop as they have before, having had their homes destroyed, family members scattered or killed, and documents made invalid. As they stated, this would mark a return to 0 for them, making their developmental efforts and lives in Denmark futile, which they see as an injustice in terms of their rights and struggles. This is highly exacerbated by

their children in many cases "feeling more Danish than Syrian," having fostered a strong sense of belonging in Denmark, and the parents' worries revolve around how a move to Syria may have serious consequences for their children's lives and development. Thus, through the lens of human security, the notion of sending refugee families "home" must be scrutinised as well, as a forced change of their lives in this way may both constitute an upheaval from their current development in what they have come to see as their "home" now and relegate them to a situation where development is unlikely.

With these insights, one may critique L140 as a political failure to acknowledge these families' specific vulnerabilities and efforts, with the focus on temporariness causing an arbitrary upheaval in their lives when they were actually becoming 'integrated' as they say. A point for further research could look to how these experiences of uncertainty and the new laws behind them are at odds with the UN's Declaration of Human Rights, especially articles 3, 22, and 26, which include the rights to security, social security, realisation, and education (UN Human Rights, 1948), for as shown above, the families' experiences suggest a lack in these regards. Instead it has been shown that overall feelings of anxiety, loss, powerlessness, and injustice are resultant of the paradigm shift, which defines their experience of uncertainty in this particular context. In the next segment I discuss the contribution of my findings in relation the other research in the field.

Contribution and comparison to other literature on temporariness and refugee uncertainty

This study has partly been the response to earlier literatures' suggestion that more research is needed from the perspective of refugees in regard to studying their experiences of uncertainty (Afifi et al., 2013) (El Shaarawi, 2013) (Schiltz et al., 2018). My interviews have yielded a lot of similarities to previous research on the topic of refugee uncertainty in situations of temporariness. Most saliently, the refugees in this particular context showed anxiety, loss, and powerlessness, which is akin to the feelings of 'worrying', incessant thinking, and passive waiting without developmental opportunities that other literature has pointed out in different contexts. This is noteworthy since the context of this study is vastly different from many of these other earlier inquiries. When noticing likeness to the effects facing refugees in for instance transitory situations in Turkey or refugees facing deportation in Egypt, this could suggest the relevancy of discussing these issues in the Danish political context, especially in a country considering itself a welfare society and especially as the political assumption seems that paradigm shift will have little societal consequences, with refugees still exerting

themselves to integrate. Regarding the DRC study, the research closest to my inquiry, my findings have also been shown to align with- and support their suggestions. A minor difference is that my respondents seemed to have retained more motivation for continued efforts than the volunteers and workers perceived in their contacts, and here my research contributes a perspective closer to the subject matter discussed. This could also be due to my potential selection bias however. Overall, my findings contribute a person-centric, contextualised addition to the ongoing research on refugee uncertainty and its consequences and impacts on refugees in situations of temporariness.

Conclusion

In this study I have utilised a qualitative, iterative methodology through semi-structured interviews to answer my research question. I found that the refugee families' uncertainty about the future has led them to feelings of anxiety, loss, powerlessness, and injustice. Their situation is exacerbated by them having children, which extends their uncertainty about the future to anxiety about their children's development and mental well-being. Moreover, the parents' neither perceive that their intended ambitions are available as they find educational and vocational options closed to them or unpredictable, nor are they able to imagine a future back in Syria as anything but a tremendous loss of hard work and resources, not to mention a potential danger to them and their children. In deciding these outcomes and their future lives, they feel completely powerless, and they see this as an injustice - a political lack of recognition of their efforts to integrate and the rights they thought Denmark would grant them as people. While they retain motivation to work and pursue education, both to cope and to prepare for whatever may happen, their sense of stability is shattered, and as Mohammad states: "*if you don't have that*, *you don't have a life*" (l. 1532-1538). These impacts are directly linked to the political new focus on temporariness. Even if the notion of "integration" is to no longer be a priority for refugees in Denmark, the government may want to consider what the alternative to integration then is; where does it leave refugees as subjects in society, temporary as their stay may be? As Steel et al (2006) stress countries granting temporary statuses must "consider how such provisions may undermine the sense of security that seems to be essential for refugees to recover from trauma-related psychiatric symptoms" (p. 63). When policies impacting the lives of vulnerable groups are pushed through without scientific validation or expert opinions, more research is needed to study the effects of such policies over longer periods (with the L140 change still being a relatively recent development at the moment of writing). Moreover, effects on different groups may vary. For instance, this study has specifically targeted Syrian families with the 7.1 status, who could be said to experience a more nebulous uncertainty about their futures, as they are presumably not likely to be sent back soon due to Denmark's conventional obligations. In contrast, families carrying the 7.3 status may feel a more urgent form of uncertainty and impact on their lives in Denmark, which makes them an essential target for further research. What is more, refugees of other ethnic backgrounds such Somalians and Eritreans may face different prospects, resulting in different impacts on their

lives and on their development in Denmark. Different fields may also probe this issue of uncertainty caused by temporariness; for instance, psychological inquiry may investigate the manner in which refugees suffering from trauma and PTSD are impacted by such temporariness. In any case, more research is needed on the effects of this political focus on temporariness and deprioritisation of ‘integration’ and its impact on refugees’ lives and developments in Denmark. In this research, it is crucial to allow for a plurality of voices to illuminate the refugee perspective affected by the changes. After all, in research and policy change on the conditions of refugees, a crucial voice must be that of the refugees.

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