“What about tomorrow?”

Young immigrants and the politics of belonging in Norway

A dissertation presented

by

Hilde Kullerud

to

the department of Sociology

in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Science in the subject of Sociology

(word count: 10 000)

London School of Economics and Political Science

August 2012
Table of contents

Abstract .................................................................................................................. iii
Acknowledgements .............................................................................................. viii

1. Introduction ....................................................................................................... 1
2. Theories on migration and belonging ................................................................. 3
3. Methodology ..................................................................................................... 10
4. Everyday belonging ........................................................................................... 15
5. Conclusion ....................................................................................................... 31
6. References ....................................................................................................... 25
7. Appendices ....................................................................................................... 32
Abstract

The right to belong is for some the most natural in life. It is dynamic and rarely questioned by larger society. For others the story is quite different. Young immigrants are left to negotiate their right to belong in the midst of a variety of political and public discourses. This dissertation explores how young immigrants living in Oslo, Norway, negotiate their everyday belonging. Building on 11 semi-structured interviews it examines the ways in which political and public discourses on immigration and integration come to envelope the youth in their everyday lives. During the interviews the context of the labour market is used as a frame of discussion to bring to the fore the potential consequences of belonging to opportunities, self-esteem and identification.

The analytical framework of “the politics of belonging” has informed the inquiry. This framework emphasises how the construction of belonging involves the complex process of positioning oneself and others, the emotions invested in this process and the inequalities in power to define the value of the various positions. Particular attention has been given to the hierarchies of belonging inherent in debates on immigration and integration and how they come to condition the lives of young immigrants. Through integration politics inclusion is imagined as entailing a movement on the part of immigrants towards the unspecified national culture and morals. In the wake of neo-liberalism there has in addition been an increased focus on tradition and home which has lead to the boundaries of belonging being tightened. Immigrants are seen as in need to adapt and adhere while the discourses and practices of those in power, of those with the greatest opportunity to change the terms of inclusion, are to a less degree questioned. Against this it is here argued for the continued significance of social structures and dominant discourses. There is a need for more research on how the constructions of hierarchies of belonging, and in particular their institutionalization, create forceful norms for what it takes to belong which in turn impacts on individuals’ opportunities.
Acknowledgements

First of all I would like to thank the 11 young participants in this study who decided to trust me and share with me their struggles, fears, hopes, joys and everyday experiences. I learned something new in every conversation. Thank you.

I also want to thank the leaders of JobbX, Mona Mauseth Evensen and Karen Bøhle Aarhus, for their help in finding participants for the study and for their encouragement and interest in my project. It provided me with great inspiration and motivation.

I would like to thank the professors and other academic staff at LSE for their guidance and enriching insights. To my advisor Dr. Ursula Henz for her critical questions and explorations of unattended aspects of my topic. It made me think again and try again. To Dr. Paul Gilroy for his extensive wisdom and his willingness to share and discuss. To Dr. Koushik Banerjeea who also shared with me his in-depth knowledge and always took the time to exchange views.

My fellow students who helped keep the spirits up through long days and evenings in the library also deserve thanks. The open and social environment among the students in sociology has meant a lot, as well as interesting and often challenging discussions and conversations about the strange world we live in.

Finally, I want to thank my parents for all their support and encouragement.

London, August 2012.
1. Introduction

International migration is today a highly contested issue. In an era of celebration of tolerance, diversity is also seen as threatening and problematic. The extreme consequences national and ethnic protectionism can have were observed in the brutal attacks in Norway on 22 July 2011. In the name of racial and cultural purity 77 people, the majority young, were killed. This forcefully establishes that there is a need to critically address the constructions of hierarchies of belonging. The subject of this dissertation is the creation of the less visible hierarchies inherent in discourses and politics on immigration. Norway is an interesting case. The high ambitions for social equality, seen in the welfare state project, today also extend to the inclusion of immigrants. Simultaneously nationalism is strong and immigrants are expected to become integrated and adopt ‘basic Norwegian values’ (Gullestad, 2002). This creates forceful norms for what it takes to belong. It will in this dissertation be argued that if we are to create a more socially just and democratic society processes of boundary-making are in need of greater attention. The argument thus has a normative, although not very controversial, aspect as inclusion and trans-cultural conviviality are seen as goals.

A useful analytical approach for this purpose can be found in Nira Yuval-Davis’ theoretical framework of “the politics of belonging” (2006). Analyses of “the politics of belonging” looks at the power-dimension in notions of belonging, what John Crowley refers to as ‘the dirty work of boundary maintenance’ (Crowley, 1999, p. 15-41). The theory forefronts the connections found between macro-level processes and everyday social interaction. To capture this the dissertation builds on 11 qualitative interviews with young immigrants. The analysis attempts to suture the political practices and discourses of immigration and belonging with the youth’s everyday experiences. This does not that mean individual agency is forgotten but rather that the context of their actions is acknowledged. What is explored is the dual process of ‘self-making and being made’ (Ong, 1999). The research questions explored are:

- In what various ways do young immigrants experience, negotiate and challenge their positions in the hierarchies of belonging?
- How do their experiences connect with the macro-level politics and discourses of immigration and integration?
- How do the hierarchies affect the youth’s self-esteem, identity work and opportunities?
2. Theories on migration and belonging

“The multicultural question is whether it is possible for groups of people from different cultural, religious, linguistic, historical backgrounds, to occupy the same social space. In other words, how can people live together in difference? It is the underlying question of globalisation” (Hall, cited in Yuval-Davis, Sannabiran and Vieten, 2006, p.6).

The multicultural question accurately identified by Stuart Hall has been at the centre of theoretical debates and spurred a vast amount of research in the last decades. This section will focus on the debates in Norway, while recognizing that discussions there have developed in dialogue with discussions elsewhere. It will be argued for a multi-dimensional analytical approach where the constructions of macro-level politics of belonging are connected with everyday social interaction and practice. The framework of “The politics of belonging” as outlined by Nira Yuval-Davis will inform the analytical inquiry.

Class and culture

The traditional welfare state concern for economical marginalization has come to frame much of the discussions on migration and integration in Norway. The Norwegian sociologist Ottar Brox has been a significant figure. Brox warns against immigrants ending up in low-paid jobs with worse working conditions than the ethnic majority and that the influx of workers from the “Third World” will keep the general salaries low (1997, 2005). Brox connects this concern with arguments for the need to look critically at practices within minority aggregates. The attention to economical inequalities is thus coupled with an individualized perspective in which cultural practice become an important explanatory variable. Such arguments are framed more uncompromising in the works of the social anthropologist Unni Wikan. In an influential book from 1995, “Towards a new underclass”, she argues for the need to have higher expectations to immigrants. She rejects the idea of people having multiple cultural identities and proclaims that Norwegian authorities are foolishly naïve. In her view they provide welfare without expecting anything in return in the quest to treat everyone as equals. It is doing ‘evil in the name of good’ (Wikan 1995, p. 193). About Muslims she writes:

“When so many Norwegians – including myself – regard Muslims as a problem, there is a reason for this: Muslims in Norway are problematic in many ways: one has the impression that they distance themselves further from basic Norwegian values than do other groups. Many practice segregation.
Many oppose their children having Norwegian friends. This does not apply to all, but it applies to far too many” (1995, p. 52).

Wikan and Brox are correct in raising concerns about the marginalization of immigrants. Many immigrants are employed in low-paid jobs scorned by native citizens and migration does, although in different fashions, deeply affect both the country of origin and the receiving one. However, the arguments for immigrants to adapt and integrate essentializes culture and construct oppositional fronts of ‘us’ and ‘them’. Culture is conceptualized as the most central factor preventing immigrants’ inclusion in general society. As Arjun Appaduri writes, culture does in this perspective become ‘a jail or isolation’ (1988, p. 37). Simultaneously, the ways of the majority are dispersed from attention. Put bluntly, immigrants have culture but the majority has not. The homecenteredness of Scandinavians, discrimination or that ‘turning to one’s own’ could be an attempt to retain emotional support, dignity or self-respect is not considered (Gullestad, 2002, p. 52). The main problem is thus not that the perspective emphasises a need to critically look at the practices of immigrant communities. The problem is that it not also turns the attention the other way around, to the practices of the majority.

“Culture talk” is also observed in more recent research. In 2011 a comprehensive government report, written by eight scholars and economists, on the future of the Norwegian welfare model in light of migration was released (NOU, 2011:7). The report addresses marginalization of immigrants in a range of areas. In relation to unemployment the main means suggested are more means-testing and activity-requirements (f.ex job-training) in order to receive benefits. Discrimination or the ways of the majority are not considered central components. In response to the report the Norwegian Equality and Anti-Discrimination Ombud writes:

“We notice that when differences in values and attitudes are mentioned it is framed as if immigrants due to their ethnic and cultural background do not see the value of work”

“An analysis of structural barriers is missing” (2011, p.4 and 5).

The limited focus on power structures found in the report contrasts to the findings in this dissertation. These findings indicate that if changes are to be made there is a need to critically address the barriers to inclusion present in majority discourses and politics.


**Cultural recognition and hybridity**

An attempt to turn the attention to the power of the majority can be seen in “the politics of recognition”, described by Charles Taylor as a perspective foregrounding the importance of cultural identity:

“In modern societies it is perceived that identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence and so a person or group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves” (Taylor, 1992, p. 25).

Such a perspective has been central to promotions of multicultural theories and policies, as well as to anti-racist movements. John Rex has described multicultural policies as based on a perception of cultural diversity as enhancing and strengthening democracy (Rex, 1995). In Norway the social anthropologists Thomas Hylland Eriksen has been among those who have defended the relevance of ethnic discrimination to one’s opportunities. He has argued, against scholars such as Unni Wikan, for allowing immigrants to choose their ways, even if the choice is a conservative one (1996, 2007). The advantages of this perspective is that it pays attention to power hierarchies and challenges the taken for granted-ness of the nation. As such it can be seen as more sophisticated and productive approach to the quest for social inclusion than perspectives focusing on ‘the immigrant problem’. However, the perspective has also been used to promote specific rights or exceptions for immigrants, which ends up promoting an essentialized view of culture. The differential meanings of identities such as black become homogenized (Yuval-Davis, 2007, p. 566). Due to this multiculturalism has now lost favour among its previous promoters (Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1992, Parekh 2000).

The quest to critically analyse the acts and thoughts of those in power has however not lost force. In postmodern theories on identity there has been an increased interest in belonging in the form of hybrid identities, and youth with ethnic minority backgrounds have been at the centre of attention. The hybridity perspective denies the existence of authentic and originary identities, claiming identities are always in process and never complete (Grossberg, 1996, p. 89). The interest in hybrid identities can be seen in a range of research literature focusing on the positive aspects of being an immigrant youth. In the book “Global Youth? Hybrid identities, plural worlds” (2006) the focus is on: “Young people as creative social actors” (p.xi). There is a deeply optimistic undertone in many of the hybridity studies, emphasising the opportunities of resistance and the emergence of new, less conflict-ridden youth identities.
Studies on diaspora and fragmentation build on similar ideas (Grossberg, 1996, p. 90). Although allowing for an exploration of constructions of normality, a weakness is that the perspective tends to leave out any deeper analysis into the societal macro processes energizing marginalization (Andersson, 2003, p.76).

*The politics of belonging*

Research on immigration then faces the difficulty to combine a perspective that acknowledges the importance of macro-level inequalities as well as individual agency. As Mette Andersson writes:

“A challenge is to combine macro-perspectives on inequality in ethnic and racial terms with a sensitive approach to how marginalization processes unfold, are contested and/or reproduced in different arenas of everyday life”. (2003, p.79).

Perspectives focusing on both macro- and micro-levels of racial and ethic inequalities, as well as on intersectional processes, can be found in the work of such scholars as David Theo Goldberg, Stuart Hall and Paul Gilroy. In this dissertation the analytical framework of “the politics of belonging” will be applied to try to capture some of the complex and contentious issues of trans-cultural conviviality. Belonging will in particular be related to how humans are positioned differently through immigration and integration politics and how these hierarchies come to permeate everyday social interactions. Nira Yuval-Davis outlines an analytical framework for the study of politics of belonging in which she differentiates between three different analytical levels on which belonging is constructed (2006). The first concerns social locations. People are seen as situated in different social and economical locations that are positioned, at each historical moment, along an axis of power. One is positioned as man or woman, black or white, working-class or middle-class. These categories of belonging intersect and are dynamic. In this dissertation, the position of ‘the immigrant’ is in focus. This is seen to be a constructed category with racial, ethnic and cultural associations. In addition the position as ‘youth’ is important. Young people are positioned: “At the leading edge of many aspects of contemporary social change, and experience acutely the risks and opportunities that new social conditions entails” (Hall, Coffey and Williamson, 1999, p.501). To listen to the experiences of youth can thereby give an impression of current social developments with potential significance for the future. The position as immigrant youth is
then the main focus of this dissertation but it is stressed that this category intersects with those of gender, class etc.

The second analytical level identified by Yuval-Davis is that of identifications and emotional attachments to various collectivities and groupings. This is based on an acknowledgement that people desire attachment. The emotional attachments people have to communities are seen as important to the creation of its boundaries and borders. In the third analytical level this is then connected to power hierarchies: “Belonging is not just about social locations and constructions of individual and collective identities and attachments but also about the ways these are valued and judged” (2006, p.203). The politics of belonging involve what John Crowley calls ‘the dirty work of boundary maintenance’ (Crowley, 1999, p. 15-41). This also involves their contestation and challenge. To capture the three analytical levels outlined by Yuval-Davis, this dissertation will address narratives of belonging at both the macro and micro level. At the macro-level it will be looked at how discourses and policies of immigration and integration constructs relationships of ‘us’ and ‘them’ and normality/abnormality. This will then be connected to the micro-level through the narratives of 11 young immigrants. The narratives in particular revolve around experiences in the labour market. This serves to illuminate the concrete effects hierarchies of belonging can have to self-esteem, identity work and opportunities. The narratives do however have belonging in general as the main topic and as such also touches upon other social contexts than the labour market. The aim is not to identify specific factors immigrants might be struggling with in the labour market, such as language or application skills. Rather the aim is to illuminate how particular power hierarchies of belonging are constructed to particular collectivities and how this comes to affect people’s everyday lives.
3. Methodology

“The questions such as: ‘is it valid?’ ‘is it reliable?’ ‘is it Science?’ should be replaced by such questions as: is it interesting? Is it relevant? Is it beautiful? In other words, I suggest that social scientists enter into a double contract with their readers, fictional and referential: suspend disbelief, as I intend to please you, but also activate disbelief, as I intend to instruct you” (Czarniawska, 2004, p.136)

Czarniawska’s perspective on the narrative approach has informed this dissertation. It challenges an epistemological position in which objectivity and neutrality are seen as the core tenets of science. Traditionally, and building on the positivist traditions, a social science text was expected to demonstrate its validity – its’ correspondence to the world - and its reliability – that the same method would yield the same results again (Czarniawska, 2004, p.133). The narrative approach in contrast builds on an epistemological perspective in which knowledge is seen as constructed and dynamic. It originates in literary theory and the humanities while in social science it developed within the hermeneutic and phenomenological traditions (Czarniawska, 2004, ch.1). These perspectives see human interaction as an interpretative process and the social world as constructed through people’s constant dialogues and negotiations. The narrative approach attempts to elucidate these interpretive processes. The focus is on how one through social discourses construct a reality in which particular categories, such as ‘immigrant’, are given certain associations and how: “These categories carry with them stereotypical and one-dimensional images of sameness expressed in typified behaviours, values and preferences” (Andersson, 2000, p.60). Negative stereotypes work as barriers “hindering the stereotyped to show, through practice, their qualities, identifications and moral guidelines” (Andersson, 2000, p.60). The building of narratives that position others is seen as a performance of power: “This is what power is about” (italics in original text, Czarniawska, 2004, p.5). In the following analysis-chapter the first part will address the political and societal discourses enveloping young immigrants in their everyday lives. The aim is not to give an exhaustive analysis. Rather it attempts to illuminate some of the constructions of hierarchies of belonging found in integration and immigration discourses and politics and how this works to fix people in relationships of us/them and normality/abnormality. The approach builds on Foucault’s view of discourse as “practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak” (1972, p.49). Feminists have criticised Foucault for not paying enough attention to how individuals resist and maneuver the power of
discourse (Hall, 2002, p.11). This critique is taken into account here. The political and societal macro-level processes are thus seen as inflicting on subjectivities but not as determining them.

Interview

Following the section on the macro-level processes of politics of belonging, the findings from ten semi-structured interviews will be discussed. Young first generation immigrants between the ages of 18 to 28, seven girls and four boys, with different ethnic and national backgrounds have been interviewed. The variety in the sample was chosen consciously to elaborate the different experiences hiding within the category “immigrant youth”. The choice of interview as approach is informed by the view of knowledge as constructed through dialogues, as well an ontological perspective seeing thoughts, feelings, interpretations and subjectivity as foundational entities of the social world (Mason, 2002, p.14 -15). It also connects with the theoretical perspective of “the politics of belonging”. Central to the theory is that hierarchies of belonging come to permeate people’s everyday practices, thoughts and reasoning (Yuval-Davis, 2006). One way of exposing such hierarchies is thereby through an exploration of people’s narratives. The participants were recruited through a job-training program, JobbX, run by the Norwegian Centre against Racism in Oslo. An interview guide with nine questions was developed (appendices 1). In practice the guide worked as a checklist of main topics and the interviews took the form of conversations with the narratives moving back and forth in time and across various themes. In the first two interviews a more structured approach was attempted but this hindered the flow and dynamic needed to for an in-depth exploration of belonging. When in the next interviews a more open approach was used the participants displayed greater comfort with the interview-situation and the conversations flowed more naturally, which in turn provided more detailed information.

Characteristics of the interviewer, such as gender, appearance and manners, are of significance to what information is produced. During a couple of the first interviews participants asked me if I was Norwegian and seemed unsure about the room for critique and revelation of contentious experiences of belonging. In the last eight interviews I began by saying that “There are some studies that show that people with an immigrant background might experience discrimination, but some might not have any such experiences as well. This is one of the things I’m interested in discussing with you”. In these interviews none of the

---

1 One participant is born in Norway. She accompanied her friend to the interview and as she had an interesting story I chose to include her narrative. This is also why it is referred to 11 participants but only ten interviews.
participants questioned my position or intentions. Whether they believed there was discrimination or racism and how they made sense of experiences of being positioned however still varied from one to the next, which indicates that the approach was not too leading. This speaks of the importance of reflexivity in qualitative research.

During the interviews the context of the labour market was chosen as a frame of discussion to bring to the fore the potential consequences of belonging to opportunities, self-esteem and identification. It served as a good entering point to issues of belonging as it gave the participants concrete situations and experiences to talk about. The conversations were however not restricted to this specific context and associations to other contexts were raised in every interview. Each interview lasted from 45 minutes to one and a half hours. The setting for the interviews was in the offices of the Norwegian Centre against Racism. This was due to practical reasons as the offices are located in central Oslo and are easily accessible. All participants were however given the option to choose another location. It was also asked about the possibility of using a digital voice recorder, which no one objected to.

**Analysis and limitations**

All interviews were transcribed in full. It was then distinguished between central topics and experiences and the differential ways the participants interpreted them. Contradictions and the variety of narratives among participants have been emphasised. When events told about were of such a character that they could not be checked I chose to trust the participant’s stories. It is argued, following Nilsen, for the need to: “Give attention to ‘authenticity of meaning’ – that is, to see one’s primary goal as being faithful to the informants’ ‘truths’, to make efforts to understand the informants’ ‘definition of the situation’” (1992, p.106). The reality-claims are seen as important in their own right: “As giving central information about the informants’ construction of reality” (Andersson, 2000, p.79). Although some of the participants were not very concerned about anonymity, some had already been in the media, all of them have been anonymised. Norway is a small country, Oslo only has about 600 000 inhabitants, and the danger of identification and potential stigma is thereby great. Pseudonyms are therefore used and certain background facts are not mentioned. Only one participant contacted me after the interview with concerns about how the information would be used. This was discussed and resolved.

There are some limitations to the use of interviews as method. The process of belonging is here seen as extended in time and space. The use of interviews taking place at a
specific time and space can thus be seen to restrict the possibility of capturing the processes of belonging. The use of interviews however still serves to illuminate the theoretical argument of the significance of macro-level structures and their potential effects. It also allows for the participants’ own reflections and judgements as well as jumping back and forth in time. Another central issue relates to the representativeness and generalisability of the study. Most of the youth interviewed had voluntarily signed up for the job-training course from which I recruited them\(^2\). At one level this might entail that the youth are more resourceful and motivated than others. All but one has signed up for the course on their own. At another level the participation in the job-training course also indicates that the youth are among those that have struggled to get a job. This, as well as the number of participants interviewed, raises questions of the wider scope of the study. Worries about the relation between ‘facts, fictions and fantasies’ (Gabriel, 2000), is central to the discussion of quantitative and qualitative research. In her thesis on youth cultures in Oslo, Mette Andersson argues: “We cannot, as sociologists, aim at presenting “the one truth” about the reality out there. But we can aim at presenting an understanding that through a theoretically informed approach, tries to contextualise the life histories told to us” (2000, p.83). Demands of representativeness and generalisability would make researching less tangible issues such as belonging or discrimination impossible. The aim here is not to give a representative picture of the lives of young immigrants in Norway but to expose some of the workings of the politics of belonging and their potential on the ground consequences.

4. Everyday belonging

\(^2\) The course lasts for three evenings (9 hours all together). The first five participants that were interviewed for this dissertation were recruited by the coordinators of JobbX. For the next six I was given a list of all previous participants and then called them myself.
In the process of negotiating the terms of belonging a gradual closing down of the borders and boundaries of nation-states has occurred, what Geschiere so accurately describes as “the return of the local in a world that believes it is globalizing” (2009, p.1). There has been a tightening of borders and heightening of surveillance. And the discourses and policies of immigration have become culpable in the creation of inequities among people in terms of their right to belong (Back, Sinha, Bryan, 2012, p.141). The youth in this study are enwrapped by this context. Their everyday lives entail maneuvering through a society that renders their right to belong subject to social debate. This chapter will address the youth’s experiences of negotiating belonging, with a focus on the labour market. One narrative case study, that of “Shafiq” 18 years old from Afghanistan, will be given particular attention as it illuminates many of the project’s wider findings. Other participants’ stories will however also be addressed throughout the chapter. Before going into the participants’ narratives in more detail there is a need to address the current context of immigration debates in Norway.

The case of Norway

Modern immigration has since the 1950s changed the face of Norwegian society. Today 13 percent\(^3\) of the Norwegian population and 28,4 percent of the inhabitants in Oslo have an immigrant background. The majority has a background from Sweden and Poland, followed by Pakistan, Somalia and Iraq. (Olsen, 2009). Notions of “the immigrant” do however mainly revolve around people from the “Third world”. As early as 1985 political action was called upon to prevent social fragmentation and inequalities that were observed in the rest of Europe who had a longer history of immigration (NOU, 1985). Although immigrants generally do well in Norwegian society the marginalization was not hindered. More youth with an immigrant background drop-out of high school and they have significantly higher unemployment rates. The level of activity, defined by Statistics Norway as being in school or working, is at 65,2 percent among young immigrants (20 – 24 years old), 81,3 among Norwegian born youth with immigrant parents and 87,8 percent among ethnic Norwegian youth. There are however great internal differences. Youth with African backgrounds as well as women have the lowest participation (Olsen, 2009). The challenges of marginalization are mainly meet through the already established equality/inequality framework, focusing on economical inequality and gender, and the means of the welfare state. There has in particular been a focus on empowering immigrant girls. (Andersson, 2003). This is coupled with

\(^3\) 10,94 are first generation and 2,16 percent are second generation. In comparison the relative number of immigrants is in Sweden 14%, Germany 13,1% and France and the UK about 10%.
integration politics where the attention has been on measures meant to create national cohesion and strengthen the loyalty to ‘core Norwegian values’, in which gender equality is central (Gressgård, 2007, p.98). This is a development mainly driven by the Left-leaning parties as they have been in Government for the majority of the years after World War II. Constructing civic values and human rights as unifying principles can be seen as valuable and is no doubt to be preferred to forceful assimilation into the national culture (Yuval-Davis, 2007, p.570). The construction is however complicated by the notion of these values being framed as inherently Norwegian. Integration is imagined as a movement on the part of ‘new members’ towards the already established national community. The very construction of the community and how it might limit the possibilities of inclusion is to less degree questioned (Gressgård, 2007). This connects with Norway being imagined as a place of goodness. Norway has extensive social programs, it has played an important role in peace negotiations abroad, it’s rate of per capita expenditure on development aid is among the highest in the world and on top of this it was never a colonizer but instead a victim of colonization by Denmark (Gullestad, 2002 p.59). As the former Norwegian Labour Party Leader Gro Harlem Brundtland once said: “It is typically Norwegian to be good” (NRK, n.d). This creates forceful norms of what morals and manners are needed to fully belong. Several scholars have pointed out that nationalism is particularly strong in the Nordic countries (Gullestad, 2002, Goldberg, 2006, McIntosh, 2009).

The uneasy coupling of egalitarian ideals and nationalism is also observed in public discourse. One year after the terror of 22. July 2011 a memorial concert was held in Oslo. A love-rhetoric runs throughout the show, as it did during the rose ceremony held just days after the attacks. The host, herself a symbol of “the new Norway” with a dad from Gambia and mom from Norway, holds up cards made in the days after the attacks and reads out their messages:

“I love Norway, I love freedom”
“Remember that we can all be proud to say that we are from Norway”
“I am proved of my people … My city, Oslo. My country, Norway”.

The emphasis throughout the show is to establish that what we all have in common is belonging to the nation. The Swedish journalist Johan Croneman accurately comments: “It went on about our place, our country, our mountains, our songs. Our flag.” He then goes on by critically asking: “The nationalism of Breivik, is it best fought with more nationalism?”
The merging of nationalism and egalitarian ideals create a quest to recognize everyone’s sameness. A problem then occurs when people are in fact increasingly different. Respect and inclusion is promoted while simultaneously engaging in a battle to secure and defend society. The current Labour Government, which has been in power since 2005, proclaims that it wants to make Norway into “the most including society in the world” (Ministry of Children, Equality and Social Inclusion, 2010). Simultaneously it has increasingly tightened the immigration rules. The picture has been further complicated by the influx of neo-liberal ideas. Neo-liberalism and globalization can be seen to have created the new conjuncture of population mobility. The global economy is in constant need for greater mobility and cheap labour. (Back, Sinha, Bryan, 2012). The mobility is however closely monitored:

“[There has been] a surprising penchant of many advocates of neoliberal reform for “tradition” and belonging (…) They manage to combine the good old liberal principle of reducing the interference of the state as much as possible with a vocal appeal to the same state to exercise almost total control over society (mostly against suspect immigrants)” (Geschiere, 2009, p.20 - 21).

Neo-liberalism has not only contributed to a climate in which the invocation of ideas of incompatible cultures and anti-immigration sentiments has become legitimate. It has also come to define the semantic field and contributed to an increasingly polarized debate. (Andersson, 2003, p.82). In the summer of 2012 a heated debate about the presence of Romani people in Oslo erupted. Romani people, coming to Norway in increasing numbers, set up a tent camp outside one of Oslo’s churches protesting against harassment by the police. In response the leader of the anti-immigration Progress Party, Siv Jensen, stated on national news that: “These are people who cannot support themselves and who commit a lot of criminality. Enough is enough. Provide buses, send them out” (Solvang and Honningsøy, 2012). The discussion soon escalated in social media, with people calling the Romani trash, filthy and exploiters of the Norwegian welfare system. Against this the Labour Party and other left-wing parties called for a more respectful and decent debate. The Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg stated that: “Tolerance, diversity, democracy and openness are values that are firmly established in the Norwegian society and this makes it especially disturbing to see some of the characteristics and statements made about the Romani these days” (Heljesen and Svaar, 2012). As Marianne Gullestad points out the political and cultural elite often characterizes anti-immigration sentiments among the right-wing populists as ‘undercurrents’.
In opposition it is argued for the need for ‘decency’ and ‘tolerance’, which carries the promise of a more egalitarian way. This oppositional model however leaves “no room for self-criticism, no way to think about change” (Gullestad, 2002, p.18-19). The debate ends in static oppositions in which no movement forward is made. The polarization not only blinds us to the complexity of the issues at hand but also disables any attention to the construction of unequal us/them relations based on ethnic and cultural signifiers (Andersson, 2003, p.81). The debates revolve around the here and now rather than the why. These discourses have great potential effects on common sense attitudes towards immigrants (Maas and Arcuri, 1996). The discourses also affect the identity work among immigrant youth. The personal narratives of Shafiq and the other youth in this study reveal how the politics of belonging impact on the young people’s self-esteem, identity work and opportunities. The stories however also speak of a different development. Of resistance and formations of trans-cultural relations, which gives hope for the future.

Self as becoming

“When I started working I felt like a human. Like I also have rights, I live in Norway. I felt I was Norwegian, you know”.

Shafiq, 19 years old, arrived in Norway “on the 10th of October 2009, 11.55 am”. He fled with his mother and his two siblings from a war struck Afghanistan to Pakistan and from there to Norway as a UN refugee. He is one of the millions forced on the move in today’s world of interchange and confrontation. As Stuart Hall writes: “The impact of globalisation has been to drive people from their homes, wherever they are, into other people’s territory, to send them away” (Hall cited in Yuval-Davis, Sannabiran and Vieten, 2006, p.6). Upon arrival in the new country one is transformed into ‘an immigrant’. Paul Gilroy argues that ‘the figure of the immigrant’ provides an intellectual mechanism through which our thinking is held hostage (2004). ‘Immigrants’ are created as racially scripted forms of personhood “that comes to cover all other identities like a veil” (Alghasi, Fangen and Frønes, 2006, p.16). When arriving in Norway Shafiq is enrolled in an adult educational program for immigrants. To help his mom, who is alone with the responsibility of three children, he however also wants to get a part-time job. The search for work is to take longer than expected. Two years. Shafiq says he at first feels it was his own lack of skills that prevented him from getting a job. To improve his Norwegian and get to know the culture he joins a theatre group, he works unpaid as a DJ,
he gets involved in local politics and he volunteers. Still no reply. He starts to question if there is something inherently wrong with him:

“To learn to drive took a long time, to learn Norwegian too, it was difficult, but I managed. But to get a job, that was the worst experience in my life, it was the worst period I think. It was like, I’m healthy yes, I know some Norwegian yes, I am young yes, but I can’t get a job (2s) So it was sad, very sad (…) It’s the hardest thing I’ve experienced. I’ve experienced war but in war it’s not just you, it’s everyone, the whole city or the whole country”.

The quest for a job not only deeply effected Shafiq’s self-esteem but also his sense of belonging. As quoted in the beginning of this section he describes getting his first job as making him feel more Norwegian. For Shafiq belonging is conceived of as entailing a movement towards an unspecified Norwegian-ness. This can be seen to reflect how the state comes to dictate what are legitimate national subject statuses (Maira and Soep, 2005, p.11). In Norway work is given particular attention, as seen in the political projects of “The Labour line” aimed at getting everyone to work. Fulfilling this obligation thus becomes important to establish one’s right to belong to the national community. Shafiq’s wish to “fit in” and be accepted is further complicated by the material demands of capitalist societies. He says that: “When you live in a place and your friends or those you have contact with talk about money, cars and they buy stuff and they write about it on facebook (…) it feels sad”. In a capitalist society, Zygmunt Bauman writes, one’s social status increasingly depends on one’s ability to consume: “The roads to self-identity, to a place in society, to life lived in a form recognizable as that of meaningful living, all require daily visits to the market place” (2005, p. 26). Being denied a job thus entails a double alienation; it limits one’s participation in the material culture as well as one’s inclusion in the national community.

(Mis)recognition

Feelings of belonging are ambiguous. Norway is a country of great opportunities, Shafiq says, and he especially loves the quietness, individual thinking and that “there is no fighting in the street, in the school, nowhere”. Some Norwegians have become his friends and as he proclaims: “Actually, we can all learn something from them”. However, life in Norway has also involved scrutiny and feelings of being not quite right and different. He says: “People are not very open. There are things that still I’m not used to. It’s still a bit difficult for me. I’m not sure if they are scared or if it’s a fear of strangers or what”. Several studies looking at the
experiences of immigrant youth, as well as the second-generation of young people, have found that many feel they are, or that they are being seen as, different (see for example Andersson, 2000, Forman, 2005, Nilan and Feixa, 2006). One of the other participants in this study, “Julia” 21 years old from Eastern Europe, tells of being singled out during a group interview for a job as a waitress:

“I saw this job advertisement and she wrote that she needed three waitresses and good Norwegian. And I think I know Norwegian well, I’m not thaaaat good, but somewhat good. And she asks ‘yes, but are you foreign?’ And I was like ‘yes, yes (2s) yes’ [laughs] and she said ‘yes, ok, maybe we’ll call you some time’. But I don’t think she will call”.

The requirement in the ad to speak good Norwegian is during the interview coupled with a demarcation of non-belonging, of being foreign. The foreign status is fixed on the basis of language, as Julia does not have other significant markers of difference being white with a name common in Norway. This exemplifies that also white immigrants in certain situations are “marked out for distinction and differentiation” (Back, Sinha, Bryan, 2012, p. 141). Elin Ørjasæter, a profiled business woman, has expressed concern about unjustified language requirements in Norwegian job ads: “The impression from finn.no [online site for job ads] is that there swarms of unreasonable demands for Norwegian and that this in many cases is a masked way of keeping foreigners away” (2012). The Equality and anti-Discrimination Ombud has also expressed concern about unjustified language requirements in the labour market (2012). A recent study in addition finds that individuals with a foreign name have a 24.3 percent less chance of being called into an interview than those with a name perceived to be Norwegian (Midtbøen and Rogstad, 2012). Upon my probing of why Julia does not think the employer will call she answers that it is probably just because the employer does not have the time and then quickly changes the subject. Being young further complicates the issue, she says: “After you finish secondary school you are starting to ask for jobs, you don’t know anything about life and you just ‘can I please get a job?’ and they just ‘what? Do you have any experience?’ No”. Julia however has experience from her home country and she has worked in London for six months. Like Julia several other participants hesitate to blame employers or society for any difficulties they might have had finding a job. The issue of racism is especially contentious. Some point out that also “white Norwegian youth” have trouble finding jobs. Others blame it on the economical recession, although this has not hit Norway particularly hard. Shafiq states that he does not believe Norwegians are racists but
that they are not very open to difference either. Several studies have pointed out that individuals are reluctant to admit to experiences of racism. Also when simultaneously telling of situations that through the lens of the researcher are seen as just that (Sandbæk and Einarsson, 2008, Wilhelmsen, 2001). Such hesitation can be seen as reflecting the dominant conceptualization of “race” and racism. As Goldberg argues: “For Europeans, race is not, or really is no longer. European racial denial concerns wanting race in the wake of World War II categorically to implode, to erase itself” (2006, p.334). As noted earlier there has in Norway been very little debate on macro patterns of racism (Andersson, 2003, p.81). For some of the participants in this study the refusal or ambiguity of racism was in addition coupled with expressing a strong wish to be included in general society. Such a wish is also found in a study of Somali pupils in schools in the USA and Canada. The researchers argue that: “To belong, individuals embrace the dominant values and meanings of the nation while proving their worthiness (and personal worth) so that they will, in turn, be accepted into the nation” (Forman, 2005, p.11). Seen in light of Norwegian nationalism and the denial of structural racism the hesitation to criticise ethnic Norwegians can be seen as a logical strategy. When movement towards the majority is the goal: “The array of alternative strategies for recognition is limited to strategies which will not threaten the definitional power and authority of the ethnic majority members” (Andersson, 2000, p.250). One participant, “Amir” 19 years old from Afghanistan, goes a step further and proclaims that Norwegians are better people than foreigners. He in particular relates the assertion to an experience of maltreatment by a boss with a Pakistani background and good treatment by a boss with a Norwegian background:

“Norwegians don’t want to work with foreigners [foreign bosses], you know, I’ve never seen a Norwegian work with a foreigner because they don’t pay you enough. They say they will pay you black money [in the black market].

Interviewer: So you were asked to work without a contract?

Amir: Yes, without a contract, so it’s just shit (...) so I was just no, I have a residence proof in Norway, I have everything so why should I work in the black market? So he [the boss] said no. You are a paki, I said (...) There is a great difference between Norwegians and foreigners”.

Amir expresses much anger and frustration. He says he once was so frustrated that he challenged an employee to fight him. As Goldberg writes the response to homesickness: “Is often lashing out as a result of frustration, the non-acceptance of non-acceptance, of discrimination, and perpetuated exclusion” (2006, p.355). Amir, like the majority of the
participants, refers to himself as foreign. Simultaneously he describes foreigners as having low morals and worse behaviours than Norwegians. To proclaim the goodness of Norwegians seems a way for Amir to assert his difference from ‘all the bad foreigners’ and thus gain a foothold on the ladder of belonging. He however separates between labelling in the public and private sphere as he also calls his friends ‘paki’. His friends, he says, answer him ‘little Afghan’. This can be interpreted as a way of re-claiming ownership of labels that in the public are perceived as degrading. Amir’s narrative illuminates how quickly it is possible to be drawn into the ranking and positioning of people: “Others misrecognize us while we misrecognize others” (Back, Sinha, Bryan, 2012, p.149). The young man’s talk of ‘bad’ and ‘good’, ‘us’ and ‘them’, where his own background positions him on ‘the bad side’, allows an insight into the “insidious damage that these hierarchies of belonging do to social life” (Back, Sinha, Bryan, 2012, p.149).

Motivation talk

The politics of belonging not only affect everyday social interactions. They are also at work in the structures and functioning of state institutions. This can deeply impact on the lives of those who are implicated in them. Naomi, 28 years old, is caught in a state of limbo. Her Bachelor of Nursing from Somalia is rejected in Norway. To be accepted for Norwegian University, to take a new degree, she needs to get a Norwegian secondary school diploma. But because she has an education from Somalia, although rejected, she is not given the right to secondary school. Naomi’s inferior position in the institutionalized hierarchy of belonging thus en-fences her from active citizenship: “I gave everything for an education”, she says, “and now it is not worth anything” 4. Another participant, “Sonia” 23 years old, tells of declining aspirations and motivations as she faces exclusion at school. Sonia is enrolled in regular secondary school upon arrival in Norway. On question of how that experience was she answers:

“That was fucked. I was just like on the ground (…) You don’t even have any interest in going to school, you know, you don’t. It’s like if I go there no one is going to notice me, the teachers are like tatata, talking, talking, you understand all the words but you don’t get the point”.

Sonia says that her exclusion by ethnic Norwegian pupils was not taken seriously. Literature on Norwegian schools show that teachers often remain passive in the face racism and ethnic

4 This story has been verified.
discrimination among pupils (Høgmo, 2005, Spernes 2006, Seeberg 2003). Seeberg argues that Norwegian ideas of equality, linked with ideas of sameness, permeate the everyday life of schools with the consequence that teachers find it difficult to address differences. This is serious as through passivity exclusion is legitimized (Seeberg, 2003). When starting secondary school Sonia had the goal of becoming a doctor but her aspirations were soon adjusted to a career in the hospitality business. She proclaims this is a much better choice, as she now feels appreciated and valued at work. Her experiences of exclusion and its effects to self-esteem have however, the way I interpret Sonia’s story, had a direct bearing on her current job aspirations.

Other participants felt included at school but say they struggled with the language. Some point out that it was made particularly difficult by the fact that they did not know their first language well either. One girl says that: “If I looked up a word in the dictionary [in the mother tongue] it was often a difficult word to understand so I thought that no, there’s not much use in that either”. The social anthropologist Unni Wikan has argued that in Norwegian schools the various national languages of pupils have been paraded “under the banner of ‘mother tongue’” (1999, p.60). She believes teaching in one’s mother tongue shifts attention away from the ‘real’ problem, being a lack of Norwegian skills. Wikan’s claim that teaching in the mother tongue has been a main policy in Norway is hard to agree with. Out of the 22519 pupils with another first language than Norwegian enrolled in Oslo’s primary schools only 102 are today given the right to learn their first language (City of Oslo, n.d). This in spite of research as early as in the 1920s showing that the development of one’s first and second languages is mutually dependent (Øzerk, 1999). The limitations to teaching in first languages can be seen to reflect the underlying goal of integration. One is to create social cohesion through strengthening the loyalty to ‘basic Norwegian values’. The consequence is systems premised on the majority’s ways. Øzerk, professor in pedagogics at the University of Oslo, calls the limitations to pupils’ rights to learn their first language “an exclusionary paradigm” (1999, p.105). The taken for granted Norwegian ways are also seen in institution directly related to the labour market. People with an immigrant background are over-represented in job-training courses through the Social Welfare and Labour Service (NAV) but they are also the ones seen by caseworkers as the most difficult to find a relevant program for (Sanbæk and Djuve, 2012, p.58). One participant in this study was sent from NAV to JobbX, the job-training program from which the participants in this study was recruited, as his caseworker could not find an appropriate program for him at NAV. Another said she was placed in a job-training course with people of all ages and that she mostly sat in front of the PC being bored.
This alludes to a main controversy regarding employment; the issue of motivation. Some researchers point to youth’s lack of motivation as a main reason for their unemployment. In a study in which a fictional job-training course was created (as access to NAV was not granted) it is argued that: “The youth had a constant need to be pleased at all times. Many lacked a time horizon on what it takes to get a job and therefore lacked the ability to resist temptation and go through with plans for their own life” (Biniam, 2011, p.30). Such an individualized perspective is also increasingly found in Government policies. In a project looking at welfare policies over the past 15 years a main conclusion is that there is a development towards greater emphasis on means-testing and making the welfare benefits less generous (Hansen and Grønningsæter, 2010, p.9). About a Government report from 2004 (NOU 2004:1) the researchers comment: “It is primarily individuals who are to be stimulated to choose to work and therefore need incentives (…) It is taken as a given that everyone who wants a job, gets a job” (Hansen and Grønningsæter, 2010, p.18). There is no reason to doubt that many youth in fact seem unmotivated. But what is motivation? Where does it come from? In an evaluation of a job-training course through NAV the researchers ask: “To what degree are questions of what type of work and salaries the participants are likely to get brought into discussions on the motivation to work? To what degree is the quality of the programs and the likelihood that they will help the participants to get a job discussed in regards to the participants motivation to participate in the programs?” (Sanbæk and Djuve, 2012, p.55). ‘Motivation talk’ individualizes social problems and thus shifts the burden of social deviance onto the individual. It blocks further exploration of the underlying social structures and their potential significance to one’s opportunities.

New inter-ethnic alliances

The politics of belonging involves not only the maintenance and reproduction of the boundaries of the community by the hegemonic political powers. It also involves their contestation and challenge by other political agents. (Yuval-Davis, 2006, p.205). The founders and workers at JobbX, the job-training program from which the participants in this study was recruited, are among those fighting to broaden the terms of national belonging. The job-training course was established as a voluntary initiative in 2004. It was a response to what was seen as a lack of relevant and adequate job-training programs for immigrant youth. The leaders of the program say they have a conscious strategy of projecting diversity as inherently positive and to “contaminate” the youth with this attitude. Several of the youth
interviewed for this study say they did not think that speaking four or five, or in one participant’s case eight, languages was a strength when their Norwegian was poor. Or that experiences of being refugees or living in different countries could be used to promote oneself in applications. At JobbX they were told otherwise. The strategy of the course is based on an underlying awareness of structural patterns of racism and inequality and a political quest to create a more inclusive society. This contrasts to the findings of several studies on state institutions. In a literature review on research of young people and racism it is found that: “A lack of structural understanding seems to be a recurring topic in state institutions (...) this gives grounds to worry” (Seeberg, 2011, p.50-51). It has not been performed an analytical evaluation of JobbX for this dissertation. What can be said however is that none of the participants were willing to criticise the program, despite insistent probing on my part. This was not the case when talking about state institutions of varying sorts. One main reason seems to be that the youth experienced JobbX as a place where they were unconditionally accepted. Several said the course increased their self-esteem. This indicates that constructing spaces of inclusionary forms of belonging is highly possible if conscious efforts are made.

Also the participants themselves actively challenge the hegemonic truths of society. Shafiq states that: “No one is perfect. Norway is not perfect. I’m from another country and therefore do not get a job so Norway has to change the rules a bit”. Other participants were more outspoken in their critique. The youth objecting the strongest all came to Norway at a young age, one was born there, and described it as ‘home’. The feeling of homeliness might contribute to a feeling of entitlement to critique, the need to express one’s gratefulness is not as quickly accepted. Two girls with a Muslim background were among the most outspoken. One of the girls, “Aamira” 22 years old, started to wear the hijab (Muslim headscarf) only a couple of years ago. She says her employer was not pleased as this meant adjustments to the uniform. The employer’s reaction contributed to Aamira quitting her job:

Aamira: The boss didn’t like it and he told me in clear words that you need to take it off.  
Interviewer: Did he say that to you?  
Aamira: Yes, and I was really disappointed because I just thought that if I choose to wear a hijab or not is none of your business. It’s my decision and if I’m allowed to take it off I also want to be allowed to wear it, and if you say no and don’t accept it then I won’t accept working here either. So I just quit my job.

The literature review addressed research of the school, children services, police and the labour market.
The hijab has come to symbolize the threat of Islam to the secular democracy of the west, this in spite of the girls and adult women wearing them being a decidedly minority within diasporic Muslim populations (Scott, 2007, p.3). Aamira’s observance of racism and stereotyping of Muslim girls seem to have contributed to her decision to start wearing the hijab. She tells of being at a debate where one of the debaters argues that all girls in the audience wearing the hijab are brainwashed and how she felt solidarity with these girls. A number of studies argue that the Islamic headscarf is a modern, not a traditional phenomenon (Scott, 2007, p.5). It has, among other things, become a way for dominated groups to insist on the legitimacy of their religion (Scott, 2007, p.5-6). Aamira’s friends, “Nabiha” 20 years old, also strongly object to what she sees as harassment of Muslims. She feels the media and certain politicians are contributing to a hateful climate. Both girls are hesitant about admitting that the ‘propaganda against Muslims’ affects them and say they just laugh it off and that those calling them names are just ‘pathetic idiots’. This can be seen as a protest, as admitting to being affected would also entail giving power to the offenders. The girls however also speak of good experiences in which trans-cultural associations were forged. All of the participants have such experiences. For some the dominant experience of life in Norway is one of inclusion and of forging friendship with people with various ethnic and national backgrounds. This speaks of the possibilities of forging what Liz Fekete calls the formation of “new inter-ethnic alliances” (2009). People are seeking broad-based forms of associations which: “Have the potential to extend to a liberatory politics able to speak against the climate of fear and crisis (Back, Sinha and Bryan 2012, p.151). This gives hope to the promise of creating spaces of inclusion and acceptance rather than exclusion and enstrangement. For Shafiq what is at stake in this battle is clear. It is the future. The last words of this chapter are his:

I am going to study politics because we need to change the systems a bit. I am especially concerned about the young people. The adults they are now, but what about tomorrow? To change takes time and time is the youth. Today they are young or children. Tomorrow they are a new generation.

5. Conclusion
“Those that live in plentitude of belonging do not recognize it as such, it’s like the air they breath without thinking, it appears to be the most natural of things” – Renato Rosaldo⁶.

For some belonging is “the most natural of things”. They can move between places with their right to belong not questioned or put under scrutiny. For others the story is quite different. And as Anne Ríos-Rojas argues: “If our goals are to move towards a more democratic and socially just society it is critically that we consider the perspectives and voices of those for whom belonging is neither “effort-less” nor “invisible privilege” enjoyed from birth” (2011, p.304). Through the narratives of the participants in this study some of workings of the politics of belonging and their everyday consequences have been illuminated. One of the best things about getting his first job was that he felt a bit more Norwegian, Shafiq says. For him, as well as several other participants, belonging is perceived as entailing a movement towards an unspecified Norwegian-ness. This is coupled with a great desire to be included and feel accepted - “to fit in”. It reflects the inherent goal of integration politics where inclusion is imagined as entailing a movement on the part of immigrants towards the ways of the national community. These ways are loosely, and always in an unspecified manner, connected to notions of culture, ancestry and morals creating forceful norms of what it takes to truly belong. The emphasis on tradition and culture has been resurged in the wake of “the neo-liberal revolution” (Hall, 2011). There is an increasing “localization” taking place in Norway as well as in the rest of Europe in which the borders and boundaries of belonging are tightened and surveillance heightened. This greatly adds to the suspicion and fear against immigrants.

In such a climate one of the strategies utilised by the youth in face of their subjection is reluctance, and in some cases refusal, to criticise ethnic Norwegians and/or Norwegian society. The search for an explanation is in consequence turned inwards to one’s own skills, or characteristics such as young age, with potentially deep effects to self-esteem. Shafiq describes not getting a job as worse than being in war as he felt there was something inherently wrong with him. The construction of hierarchies of belonging are also observed in state institutions such as schools and job-training programs which impacts on individuals’ opportunities. It has for example been shown how Naomi was refused an education due to her placement in the institutionalized hierarchies of belonging. The participants’ narratives however also contain critical tendencies. Shafiq does not without question accept the ways of Norwegian society. His narrative moves from a focus on his own skills as the main obstacle

towards a recognition of the relevance of structural inequalities. For a couple of participants the dominant narrative was in addition one of inclusion rather than exclusion. They had many “Norwegian” friends and belonging seemed to flow quite dynamically. Furthermore, many spoke of a wish to help other young people and to work for a more inclusive society. There are also political agents such as the leaders of JobbX working for more inclusive forms of belonging. This speaks of the possibilities of forming “new inter-ethnic alliances” (Fekete, 2009).

However, the increasingly closing down of boundaries of belonging demonstrates that the creation of these alliances entails conscious efforts. A one-sided focus on the ‘immigrant problems’ and the need for immigrants to adapt and adhere lets the general society, those with the actual definitional power to change the terms of inclusion, off the hook. It fixes identity and social positions in static oppositions without the possibility of acknowledging how we are all multi-faced and complex human-beings. It leaves no room for self-criticism or of seeing trans-cultural conviviality as entailing a movement on the part of us all. Against this it is here argued for the continued significance of social structures and dominant discourses. It is argued for the need for more research on how the constructions of hierarchies of belonging, and in particular their institutionalization, impacts on individuals’ self-esteem, identity work and opportunities. This is necessary if we are to achieve the goal of ‘living together in difference’ (Hall, 2006) in the future.

6. References

Andersson, M., 2000. “All five fingers are not the same”. Identity work among ethnic minority youth in an urban Norwegian context. Bergen: Centre for Social Science Research, University of Bergen.


7. Appendices

Interview guide.

1. Maybe you could start by telling me a little bit about yourself? (Possible themes: What the participant is doing now (school, work, unemployed), why he/she came to Norway, the transition to living in a new country).

2. How did you experience the process of applying for jobs? (Possible themes: experience prior to applying (school, home country), experience of job interviews, racism/discrimination).

3. What difficulties did you meet in the transition to work? And why do you think you had these difficulties? (Possible themes: Racism/discrimination, self-blame, education).

4. What did/do you think about the possibilities of getting a job? Why? (Thoughts about one’s position in society, self-blame, perceived opportunities, previous experiences).

5. What made you to get involved in JobbX? (Possible themes: Formal skills, reasons for wanting to work, previous experiences).

6. How did you experience the program? (Other experiences with job-training programs?).

7. What do you want to do in the future?
(8. How do you think “immigrant youth” stand in the labour market compared to “native Norwegian youth”? (Possible themes: racism and discrimination). – This question was not asked in any of the interviews as the previous questions covered this).

9. Is there anything you would like to add that we haven’t talked about?

Background questions:

1.1 Age
- 18 – 20
- 21 – 23
- 24 – 26
- 27 – 29

1.2 Gender
- Female
- Male

1.3 Country of birth

1.4 Number of years lived in Norway
- 7 – 11 years
- 12 – 16 years
- 17 – 20 years

1.5 Ethnicity

1.6 Are you a student?
- Yes
- No

*If yes*: What form of education are you enrolled in?
If no: What is your highest level of education?

1.7 Are you working?

☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes: What do you work as?

1.8 How many hours do you work per week?