

# **Families in Flux: Intimate Relations, Love and Care in Refuge**

*Reorienting Integration &*

*MIAU – Centre for Migration and Integration research, AU.*

Moesgaard Museum, 12-13 December 2023

Registration: Please write to [mikkel.rytter@cas.au.dk](mailto:mikkel.rytter@cas.au.dk) if you would like to participate.

## **Programme**

### **Day 1: Tuesday December 12<sup>th</sup>, 11.30-17.45**

11.30-12.30: Arrivals and lunch

12.30-13.00: Welcome and introductions

#### **Panel 1: Family life and transnational ties**

- *13.00-13.30: Karen Fog Olwig: Multi-local perspectives on mobility, relationally and place.*
- *13.30-14.00: Jeanette Lykkegård: (Be)Longings: Nurturing home and long-distance family relations among Ukrainian refugees in Denmark.*
- *14.00-14.30: Emilie Lund Mortensen: Parenting in flux: An ethnographic exploration of resettlement through a focus on parenthood among single Congolese women and their children in Denmark.*

**14.30-15.00: Coffee and cake**

#### **Panel 2: Negotiations of love and care in refuge**

- *15.00-15.30: Marianne Holm Pedersen: Relations of Care: Expectations and obligations in close relations among volunteers and refugees in Venligboerne.*
- *15.30-16.00: Narges Ghandchi: Becoming mediators. Youth and children's carework in communication within and for Afghan-origin refugee families in Denmark.*

### **16.00-16.15: Short break**

- *16.15-16.45: Moa Nyamwathi Lønning:* ‘Even if they need my heart, I say here you are’: Romantic love, marriage, and care in young people’s trajectories of migration and asylum.
- *16.45-17.15: Abir Mohamad Ismail:* Challenging the Danish Model: Young People's Experiences of Providing Care for Elderly Family Members in Arab-Danish Families.

### **17.15-17.45: Summing up on day 1**

**18.00: Bus or taxi to town, dinner at 19.00**

### **Day 2) Wednesday December 13<sup>th</sup>, 9.00-12.30**

9.00-9.30: Soft landing and coffee

### **Panel 3: Family life and state interference**

- *9.30-10.00: Susanne Bregnbæk:* Ties that bind or pull people apart: The uncertainty of love in refuge.
- *10.00-10.30: Ditte Shapiro:* Fearing Family Dismemberment: The temporal governance of families with temporary protection status in Denmark.
- *10.30-11.00: Mette Lind Kusk:* The right (age) to care: young refugees and state interference in everyday care relations.

### **11-11.15: Short break**

- *11.15-11.45: Mette-Louise E. Johansen:* Securing safe relations in ‘dangerous’ families: An ex-gang member’s guide to surviving social death.
- *11.45-12.15: Amani Hassani, PhD:* Displacement, Community, and Agency: Narratives of Diverse Neighbourhoods in the Wake of the Danish “Ghetto Laws”. (online)

### **12.15-12.30: Summing up on day 2**

**12.30: Lunch and goodbye**

## *Abstracts*

### **Multi-local perspectives on mobility, relationally and place**

Karen Fog Olwig, Department of Anthropology, University of Copenhagen

The transnational perspective has created increasing awareness that migrants' and refugees' lives are not confined to the particular receiving country where they are living, and it has therefore offered an important corrective to the methodological nationalism that has characterized much research on voluntary and involuntary migration (Wimmer and Glick-Schiller). However, it remains largely focused on movements and relations across national borders and has not yet explored the host of local, regional, intra-national as well as transnational relations in which mobile people may be involved. The transnational approach therefore needs to be further elaborated and nuanced by applying a multi-local lens that can capture the more complex interconnection between mobility, inter-personal relations and place. Taking my point of departure in recent research conducted with Somali refugees in Denmark, I will show how Somalis have a long tradition for engaging in mobile practices of interaction, as they have nourished and drawn upon a variety of relations in different localities. These practices often involve intimate ties that have great emotional, social and economic significance to individuals and are shaped by, and shape, their broader notions of place. While the Somalis may be especially mobile due to their background in nomadism, I do not think they should be viewed as an exception, but rather as offering a particularly strong case pointing to the need for adopting a more multi-local approach in research on migrants and refugees.

### **(Be)Longings: Nurturing home and long-distance family relations among Ukrainian refugees in Denmark.**

Jeanette Lykkegård, Moesgaard Museum

This paper explores the ways in which Ukrainian refugees in Denmark nurtures and maintains their intimate relations to their family members left behind in Ukraine – and how this is an important way of practicing and creating home away from home. Since February 2022 millions of Ukrainians have fled Ukraine, and around 40.000 of these have sought refuge in Denmark. “Home is where the family is”, I have been told during fieldwork stretching from April 2022 till May 2023. But the family is not geographically together anymore, since all healthy men in their military age are forced to, or voluntarily, stay in Ukraine. This paper empirically unfolds microsituations in which family-nurturing becomes part of home-making practices in Denmark and discusses some of the potentials and implications of these in relations to the experience of belonging.

## **Parenting in flux: An ethnographic exploration of resettlement through a focus on parenthood among single Congolese women and their children in Denmark**

Emilie Lund Mortensen, Department of Anthropology, AU

Much research has demonstrated the ways displacement profoundly affects migrant women's connections with the children they care for (e.g. Coe 2013; Suerbaum and Lijnders 2023). But what happens to parenthood when women and children are resettled in a new country, like Denmark?

This paper introduces two Congolese women, Olive and Ruth, and their young children who, as UN quota refugees, have recently been resettled in Denmark from refugee camps in Rwanda. These women have been selected for resettlement as they fall into the UN category of "women at risk" that is, women with gender specific protection issues and no local protection provided by male family members. In this context, resettlement is considered the most durable solution and an assumed way of reducing risk and providing the women with a pathway to rebuilding their lives.

In Denmark, Olive and Ruth have however been struggling with a new everyday life, with loneliness, and with raising their young children on their own. Life in the camp was hard. There, they however lived with or near relatives and good neighbors, who assisted them with, among other things, childcare. Their "boyfriends" and the children's fathers, too, took part in raising the children and supporting the family financially when they could.

The paper takes a point of departure the paradoxical situation of these women who, in practice, have become single parents in Denmark. It shows their daily struggles as single parents as well as their attempts to include their boyfriends in the everyday. These boyfriends and fathers hence continue to shape present and future, as they play a significant role both in their absence and in their virtual presence among their loved ones. Focusing on parenthood in resettlement, the paper thus illustrates how the specific circumstances of resettlement in Denmark reconfigure parenthood and the dynamic of the resettled families.

## **Relations of Care: Expectations and obligations in close relations among volunteers and refugees in *Venligboerne***

Marianne Holm Pedersen, senior researcher, Royal Danish Library

When thousands of refugees came to Denmark in 2015 and during the following years, they were often welcomed by local groups of *Venligboerne* (VB), a non-formalised, civic initiative to receive refugees. The predominant "let's just do it"-attitude of the Venligbo groups differed markedly from the formalised procedures in established voluntary organisations. This means that Venligbo volunteers were able to become personally engaged in the lives of refugees to an unusual extent, not only helping with practical matters and interactions with the municipalities, but also becoming new families, extra parents and witnesses to life changing moments such as wedding or childbirths. While such relations of care between locals and

refugees generated many positive effects, they also involved obligations and expectations which some were not always prepared to handle. Moreover, while care is generally perceived as positive, it may also involve unequal relations of power and hierarchy.

This paper explores the kinds of relations developing over time between VB volunteers and refugees. Drawing on analytical perspectives of care and relatedness, it investigates which expectations and obligations that different relations involve, and how both volunteers and refugees negotiate these. On a more general level, these questions highlight different perspectives on intimacy vs. distance in the reception of refugees. While the paper focuses on relations of care mainly from the perspective of the volunteers, it sheds light on an important dimension of refugees' everyday life in exile and their possibilities for establishing close relations and senses of belonging to their new place of living.

### **Becoming mediators: Youth and children's carework in communication within and for Afghan-origin refugee families in Denmark**

*Narges Ghandchi, Department of Anthropology, AU*

Interdisciplinary research rooted in education, applied linguistics, psychology, anthropology, and sociology over the past three decades have investigated youth and children's mediating roles in the context of family life of migrants and refugees especially when the parents have less experience with using the socially dominant or international communication means. As one result of this still-flourishing field of research, known as *youth and child language brokering*, children are considered no longer as submerged within their families. In fact, their agency matters for the survival of the migrant families in making sense of myriads of social interactions with the families and in response to the larger society. Additionally, they are aware of such mediating roles within their families that enable them to fill interactional gaps between their family members and assist them to express themselves in the domestic sphere. Beyond discussing youth and children's agency, caring for each other among siblings count in creating balance between the familiar and the new trends of life inside the families. Based on longitudinal ethnographic research among Afghan refugee families in Denmark, the present study shows that siblings may act together toward an internal mobility within the family while challenging the families' predominant boundaries. Care for the entire family's social, economic, and educational mobility—namely those of all family members—and the individual aspirations of change are being discussed and presented through empirical data. Whereas care for the family as a whole is embedded in the Afghan family structure and the new generation is socialized into this virtue over time, care for the family member—namely, parents and siblings—is constantly experienced as well as communicated through internal mediating among the siblings and parents.

## **‘Even if they need my heart, I say here you are’: Romantic love, marriage, and care in young people’s trajectories of migration and asylum**

Moa Nyamwathi Lønning, Department of Anthropology, AU

This paper considers ambivalences and loyalties within narrative of romantic love, marriage, and care among family in a context of migration and asylum. I draw on research with young men from Afghanistan who arrived unaccompanied in Norway and Sweden as teenagers. There, some of the young people were granted international protection and were allowed to settle, while others were not and had fled to avoid forced removal or anticipate the possibility of doing so. The paper looks at ways romantic love, marriage, and care among family affect and direct feelings of hope and despair, and experiences of obligation and freedom, as part of the young men’s efforts and struggles to build meaningful lives and find safety for themselves and their loved ones. The paper draws on longitudinal research in countries of first asylum and later settlement elsewhere in the West, as well as fieldwork between 2022 and 2023 in countries where some young people moved on to and sought protection and refuge anew (mainly France).

## **Challenging the Danish Model: Young People's Experiences of Providing Care for Elderly Family Members in Arab-Danish Families**

Abir Mohamad Ismail, Institute for Culture & Society, AU

For decades, elderly care has been the responsibility of the Danish welfare state, with the family in the background. A reality that means that far fewer care tasks are taken care of by the family and in private homes. However, this reality is quite different in ethnic minority families. Recent research has shown that some ethnic minority families are relatively resistant to help from home care services and nursing homes but prefer to take care of the elderly family members themselves and in their own homes due to cultural and religious reasons (Rytter et.al 2021). Hence, the intergenerational relationship is crucial for understanding care in ethnic minority families. Relationships between generations are qualitative measures of the connection between family members of different age groups (Ismail, 2021). Ongoing negotiations occur between different generations regarding caregiving services. While the relationship between elderly care and adult children, including gender, kinship, connectedness, and family relationships, has received considerable attention in research, there is still a need for studies focusing on generational differences and how social, cultural, and demographic trends shape or change attitudes and approaches to elderly care and caregiving, especially among the younger generation. Based on 13 months of ethnographic fieldwork in Arab-Danish Muslim families providing care for an elderly family member, this paper focuses on the young people's relationship with the elderly and examines the significance of

their 'dual social capital' on their attitudes and approaches to elderly care in a Danish welfare context. The paper unfolds young people's narratives about their experiences of providing care for an elderly family member in need. The purpose is to draw attention to a clearly under-researched topic that may have implications for ethnic minority families' approach to elderly care and caregiving, but also challenge the "Danish model".

### **Ties that bind or pull people apart: The uncertainty of love in refuge**

*Susanne Bregnbæk, Københavns Professionshøjskole.*

Hannah Arendt famously argued that love is “anti-political”, clearly separating the domus from the polis (1958). For Arendt intimate life offered an “oasis” against the meaninglessness of the public sphere. At the same time, she regarded totalitarianism as the most excessive “organized loneliness” in which not only the public but also the private sphere of intimacy - to which friendship also belongs - is compromised or eliminated. Previously, I have examined parenting practices of refugees in Denmark as “states of intimacy” - situations where the state is experienced as a haunting presence amidst family life (Bregnbæk 2022). This paper looks more closely at how relations of love and care are affected by the stress and uncertainty characteristic of family life in Denmark for refugees who hold temporary residence permits. Through ethnographic accounts, I wish to explore: How are intimate family relationships affected when family members hold different residence permits? How is love between parents and children and between spouses transformed - for better and for worse - amidst forces that sometimes bind people together in relations of dependency and at other times threaten to pull families apart?

### **Fearing Family Dismemberment: The temporal governance of families with temporary protection status in Denmark**

Ditte Shapiro, AMIS and SAXO, University of Copenhagen

Since 2014, the temporal governance of refugees in Denmark has been intensified, e.g., by introducing a new, temporary protection status, a widened ‘cessation window’ and increased revocation efforts of the state (Tan, 2021; Jacobsen, 2022). This ‘turn’ towards temporary protection, including a heightened sense of deportability (De Genova) affects the intimate lives of refugees, and complicates family relationships. By applying a narrow, normative concept of family that ignores the co-dependency between family members beyond the nuclear couple and children living at home, these refugee policies create temporal dissonance in families and a well-founded fear of family dismemberment.

Drawing on 11 months of fieldwork and interviews with 30 refugees in Denmark, as part of the ‘Boundary work’ project, this paper applies a temporal lens to analyze how – mainly Syrian – families are affected by the temporary turn. The analysis shows that temporal governance spurs the three temporal modalities of *entrapment*, *acceleration* and *rupture*, that refugees in different generations and life situations engage with through different time tactics.

Following Ramsay's (2020) conceptualization of displacement as a sense of temporal dispossession, tied up with conditions of 'hyper-precarity' (Shapiro & Jørgensen 2021), we conclude that the temporal governance permeates the intimate domestic space where different temporal conditions and tactics complicate family relations, many of which are constructed as irrelevant by the politics of belonging and intimacy.

### **The right (age) to care: young refugees and state interference in everyday care relations.**

Mette Lind Kusk, Department of Anthropology, AU

This paper explores how young adults who have been resettled in Denmark as UN quota refugees from DR Congo experience and deal with situations where state actors interfere in how they exert everyday forms of care for the family members they have been resettled with. As has been shown by several scholars, the Danish welfare state interferes intimately in the lives of refugees and other minorities (see for example Bregnbæk 2022, Larsen 2022). In the case of resettled families, social workers may deem young individuals too immature to care for younger siblings, or elder relatives too demanding for young adults to take care of, regardless of practices prior to resettlement and individuals' own wishes to exert care. Consequently, some families are separated into different household units upon arrival to Denmark and thus, challenged in their efforts to build and practice everyday routines of care.

Everyday life is, according to feminist scholar Rita Felski, characterized temporally by repetition, spatially by a sense of home, and experientially by habit (ibid.: 81). To preserve everyday rituals and treasured ways of living can, in contexts of radical change such as resettlement, be viewed as important ways of reclaiming a sense of dignity and agency (ibid.: 84). Drawing on this notion, the paper asks how everyday care is exerted and how a sense of dignity and agency in everyday life is strived for in cases where young individuals do not share a household with their close relatives.

### **Securing safe relations in 'dangerous' families: An ex-gang member's guide to surviving social death**

Mette-Louise E. Johansen, Danish Center for Social Science Research – VIVE

Within the last decade, Danish urban security governance has increasingly been based on the criminalization of relations in 'too intimate and closely knit' migrant communities and neighborhoods. This implies, for instance, that migrant background youths who are related to 'risky' family members/families at risk, criminal offenders, gangs or parallel societies, are being monitored, registered and targeted on the ground of their relations rather than their (allegedly criminal) actions. Hence, the *relation* – and its intimate quality – now seem to constitute *the* problem and a threshold for interventions. This has opened up for new ways of enforcing order through practices of detachment, severance, cutting and 'knifing off' intimate others in migrant families and neighborhoods. However, such interventions introduce new and reinforced experiences of social death, given that they lead directly to isolation and



alienation in Danish society. Drawing on Strathern's (1995, 2020) notion of relations as reified self-organizing devices, this article explores how migrant ex-gang members seek to secure kinship ties and survive the lived experiences of social death in the context of the rising politics on proximity.

### **Displacement, Community, and Agency: Narratives of Diverse Neighbourhoods in the Wake of the Danish "Ghetto Laws"**

Amani Hassani, PhD, Leverhulme Early Career Fellow, Brunel University London

In 2018, the Danish government implemented urban policies aimed at gentrifying non-profit housing estates with a population composed of over 50% "non-Western immigrants and descendants." These policies sought to reduce the existing housing stock and potentially displacing up to 11,000 families. The policies have disproportionately impacted poor racialised residents, many of whom have experienced international displacement.

This paper presents emerging ethnographic data that centres on the lives and histories of residents in areas targeted by these policies, with a particular focus on the narratives of refugees. The paper juxtaposes the political discourse surrounding the 'unwanted racialised resident' with the narratives of community care and concern expressed by residents. The paper uses the state-led housing crisis as a gateway to explore broader themes of racialisation, displacement, and gentrification processes. Based on this, I argue for a longitudinal and localised perspective that enables us to acknowledge the rich community histories, solidarities, and support networks that the Danish 'ghetto laws' are dismantling.

The paper concludes by raising questions about the consequences when the rooted and the not-yet-rooted (potentially never-to-be-rooted) residents are no longer neighbours.